

**ENTERTAINMENT OR PROPAGANDA?**  
**Cultural Cognition: Implicit Stereotypes in Historical Film**

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# ENTERTAINMENT OR PROPAGANDA?

## Cultural Cognition: Implicit Stereotypes in Historical Film

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the intersection of culture and cognition, presenting an investigation into how implicit bias may be propagated through representations of antiquity in Hollywood historical film. These biases often align with the binary framework of Orientalism, critiqued by Edward Said, which positions Middle Eastern geopolitical entities and peoples as one monolithic “Oriental Other”. Historical films portray this stereotypically exotic, oppressive, and backward “Orient” as an archetypal component of the ancient world, defined by its enmity with the “West”. By contributing to the cultural narrative presenting a historical divide between a monolithic “Eastern” and “Western” world, cinematic depictions of antiquity may further propagate implicit stereotypes concerning the Eastern “other”. This process may in turn influence the perception, and practise, of contemporary international relations. In order to elucidate the mechanisms of implicit bias propagation, cognitive psychological frameworks were applied to this analysis. Tversky and Kahneman’s cognitive heuristics of “availability” and “representativeness” were contextualized within Perry Hinton’s argument of implicit bias arising, not from individual cognition, but rather from prevalent stereotypical associations within culture, i.e., the “culture in mind”. This multidisciplinary paradigm was used to analyze specific stereotypical tropes fitting the Orientalist framework within thirty-five, predominantly Hollywood, historical films. These tropes encompassed geopolitics, race, appearance, visual setting, disability, gender, and sexuality. The discussion suggested that historical films indeed present an implicit argument, associating the ancient Middle East with a homogenous and stereotypical contemporary “East”, one fundamentally opposed to “Western” liberty and morality. Examples such as the release of Zack Snyder’s *300* during the Iraq War were examined, demonstrating how cinematic representations of antiquity may propagate an implicit perspective that the “clash of civilizations” between “East” and “West” is timeless, rather than a hyperreal Orientalist construct.

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## **Chapter 1: Culture and Cognition**

### **1.1 Introduction**

How do stories shape our reality? When I was eight years old, a school assignment required that we dress up as a historical or mythical character for “Greek Day”. This led to my first contact with ancient Greece, initiating a lifelong fascination with everything from Greek gods to Alexander the Great. The Greeks were “cool”, they represented an ancient heritage to be proud of. Yet, as I read children’s books on Greek history and myth, one word repeatedly appeared. The “Persians” were referenced time and time again as the arch-enemy of Greece. I had only encountered that word once before, in a conversation some years prior with my mother after we first immigrated to England from Iran. Upon discovering that countries have different names in other languages, I inquired as to the English name for Iran. She replied “Iran. But sometimes Persia”. I did not encounter that word again for years, until that book about the history of the world’s coolest people. There, I suddenly learned I was apparently descended from the enemies of these heroes.

This had not been my experience of life until that moment. I had never even conceived of myself being on the side of “the bad guys”, even though I was very acutely aware of the existence of “bad guys” through exposure to media, primarily film. Yet, movie villains were cartoonish and sinister while in this book of Greek history, these Persians were simply “enemies” in “war”, similar to what I would randomly hear on the news my parents watched. That’s all they were, enemies, nothing more. There was no further exploration of Persians in children’s books, no mentions in class, no “Persian Day” to inspire further research, and no broader cultural references in a pre-social media age. If I wanted to learn more about Persia, I’d have to go

looking for it in the “boring section” of the library. That was, until the second time I encountered the word.

Later in that same year, when switching channels, my television remote lagged briefly and I heard a few seconds of the program. It was a film critic show, and I immediately clocked the word “Persians” and something about the “Spartans”. I got excited, to both hear more about “Persians” and also, recognizing the Spartan name, experience more Greek history. The show cut from the critic talking at his desk to a clip of a film, depicting what looked like a Greek warrior from my books, and another man standing in front of a bottomless pit. The warrior, who referred to himself as a Spartan, labelled the man a “Persian” and chided him for rude and hostile behaviour, threatening clear punishment. Yet, though I did not understand all the words at the time, all I could think was this “Persian” looked nothing like me nor any Persian I had ever seen. I was far too young to realize just how exaggerated the Persian messenger in Zack Snyder’s *300* (2006) was (*Figure 1*), but even then, I felt this representation was more in line with the uniform Persian enemies mentioned in my ancient Greece children’s books. If this hyperbolized appearance, and repeated positioning as the enemy was not enough to convey a message, then the fate of the emissary sealed the deal. After labelling him a threat and declaring that his insults against Spartan land, his people, and his queen warrant punishment, the heroic Leonidas proclaims “This is Sparta!” and kicks the Persian messenger into the abyss. As the program cut back to the critic praising the film’s action scenes, I walked away with two thoughts; “I need to see that movie right now” and “so I guess we were the bad guys”.



**Figure 1.** The Persian messenger dispatched to threaten Sparta. *300* (Warner Home Video, 2006) Digital Enlargement.

Throughout the history of film, the ancient world has repeatedly proven itself to be a subject worthy of cinematic representation. As a result of this, many historical depictions produced by Hollywood have become cemented within popular culture. Through the process outlined in this thesis, they have contributed to mass perceptions concerning world history and international politics, with an emphasis on portraying the divide between “East” and “West”. This project sought to examine historical film for prevalent stereotypes pertaining to popular cultural sentiment regarding interactions between the Middle East and the West. This in turn brings into question the films’ depictions of historical international relations, and by extension, their implicit commentary on modern global affairs at the time of production. As a result of their impact within popular culture, cinematic historical depictions may have contributed to mass



perceptions concerning world history and international politics, with an emphasis on portraying the divide between “East” and “West”.

It has been demonstrated throughout the history of media that cultural productions are often influenced by the political sentiment at the time of their production. When considering media depictions of historical international relations, the concept of “moral geographies”, explored extensively in Chapter 2, is utilized to connect ancient narratives to those of modern global affairs. Historical films can thus be framed as a vessel through which we may examine the propagation of existing perceptions, themes, and biases regarding a particular region and its “people”. By depicting themes including moral disparity and ideological rivalry as timeless characteristics of an East/West dichotomy, modern political actions framed using similar rationale may be perceived as historically justified. A civilization-defining battle pitting a “free” Sparta against the “oppressive” Persian Empire can consequently be used to justify current American interventions in Iraq, symbolizing the contemporary conflict as a continuation of the West’s eternal fight against Oriental tyranny.

The intersection of history, Hollywood cinema, and international relations presents an ideal opportunity to examine how a “Western” hegemon represents itself culturally, not only regarding its own position on the global stage, but also concerning the role of regions such as the Middle East. The prevalent implicit associations in these productions, formed as a result of previously accumulated stereotypical knowledge about the “Orient”, combine with contemporary global events to transform each historical film into a snapshot of the culture during its production. By examining these cinematic portrayals using frameworks such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, one can elucidate biases and stereotypes concerning the “Other” which have come to exemplify the discourse of current international affairs. In order to discern the historical

foundations of these persistent biases, it is important to analyze cultural representations within media, connecting modern international relations with the ancient world through historical film.

Unlike other forms of critical historical exposure such as academic textbooks, news sources, and authoritative perspectives, historical films have a unique power due to their nature as not only artistic, but, visual imagistic representations. This affords them an advantage in communicating resonant narratives by relinquishing them from the need for objectivity. Artistic representation entails the ability to depict ideas subjectively, imbuing them with emotional impact. Through artistic media, the use of analogy and symbolism can leave a lasting impression, creating disillusionment with ideas presented by “logical” points of view, such as news and academia. Furthermore, as explored throughout the next several chapters, it has been established through academic scholarship, including cognitive psychological literature, that imagery and visual media possess an inherent capability of imbuing content with emotionality.

In his work investigating the psychology of film, Jeffrey Zacks discussed the link between an increase in a film's visual emotionality and the ability to convey implicit messaging more effectively, due to viewers incorporating the film's messages as part of their own personal experience (Zacks 2014, 102). Additionally, films are consumed faster compared to alternative artistic media, (*e.g.*, novels), while also activating multiple sensory modalities as both auditory and visual experiences. Indeed, Zacks describes a controlled study where subjects read accurate historical essays, and watched (inaccurate) clips from Hollywood movies about the same topics. He remarks that a significant amount of “distortions” remained with viewers when their memory was tested, “even though they had read the right answers in the essay” (Zacks 2014, 96). Compounding this, Tversky and Kahneman concluded in their seminal research on the cognition

of judgement that narrative storytelling can bias one's perception to the point of misjudging probability (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983).

Films are built on narrative storytelling, which may precipitate biases, so it is important to understand a framework of bias perpetuation, such as the propagation of implicit stereotypes. Due to films being cultural productions powered by narratives, it is important to consider cultural elements of cognition, such as the framework of implicit stereotype propagation which psychologist Perry Hinton labels the "culture in mind" (Hinton 2017, 2). When considering the establishment, maintenance, and propagation of implicit stereotypes, Hinton questions whether they should be viewed as individual biases, or if they are a byproduct of the most "prevalent, stereotypical associations within [one's] culture" (Hinton 2017, 2). To this end, he postulates that culture is the vessel through which implicit stereotypes are propagated; and this paradigm has been adopted for this project's exploration of historical film and implicit bias perpetuation. When considered in tandem with the inherent biasing power of narrative storytelling, as demonstrated by Tversky and Kahneman, the narratives depicted in historical film may facilitate a prime environment for the propagation of implicit cultural stereotypes, including the perception of a historically perverse Middle Eastern "Other".

## **1.2 Objectives and Significance**

By combining scholarship concerning cultural representation with multidisciplinary perspectives encompassing cognitive psychology and international relations, my goal was to answer the following fundamental **research questions**:

- How have the perceptions of "historical" stereotypes in film been used to make implicit arguments (regardless of filmmaker intention) about modern international relations?

- (e.g., Eternal geopolitical role of the “West” compared to the “East”)
- How could implicit stereotypical associations impact the perception of cultural geographies, and “monolithic people”, through the medium of historical film?
  - (e.g., Stereotyping of Middle Eastern people)
- What broader effects could these media potentially have on their audience?
  - (e.g., binaries such as Orientalism, presented through visual media, contributing to a hyperreal world in which the stereotypical perception is perceived as more representative of the “real” than reality)

From these questions, the following specific **research objectives** were derived:

### ***1.2.1 Research Objectives***

The primary objective of this research was to view historical films in order to elucidate cultural stereotypes concerning the “Orient”. These general stereotypes were quantified into a list of specific stereotypical tropes, consisting of prevalence, prototypicality, and examples of occurrence. The third research objective was the novel application of a psychological paradigm connecting cultural studies and international relations with cognitive psychology, through the study of Orientalist film. Finally, this data was utilized to explore how historical films provide a cultural vessel through which cognitive heuristics may be exploited to bias non-specialists’ understanding of modern international relations.

### ***1.2.2 Justification and Significance***

There are already substantial literary, historical, ontological, and philosophical analyses of popular culture which exist in relation to this topic; however, perspectives focusing on

cognitive psychology, specifically heuristic analysis, are absent from the literature. By exploring these films through the combined lens of cultural studies, international relations and media psychology, I elucidate how the propagation of implicit Orientalist stereotypes, often using moralistic portrayals, reflects the balance of political power within the international arena at the time of their production. Furthermore, I investigate how biases in audience perception may be used to (even unintentionally) transform seemingly benign entertainment features into powerful, yet subtle, tools of propaganda.

### **1.3 Overview of Chapters**

In addition to investigating the films themselves, as well as the relevant international political sentiment at the time of their production, this paper shall also provide an analysis of pertinent academic scholarship. Due to the nature of this undertaking, the literature review shall be thematic, and split across two corresponding chapters. Summaries of these works will be compartmentalized according to subject matter, with cultural studies and international relations in Chapter 2 (*e.g.*, Said, Huntington, Gregory), and cognitive psychology in Chapter 3 (*e.g.*, Tversky and Kahneman, Zacks, Hinton). Some of these works cannot be cleanly placed into a single category, therefore their most relevant points will be reviewed across different chapters. However, a standalone summary for each piece of scholarship exists within the most relevant chapter, regardless of whether they are used in multiple chapters. Observations regarding concepts relevant to my study in each field shall be explored, providing a clear framework concerning the academic context within which this research shall take place.

The review of scholarly publications dealing with cultural representation (Chapter 2) shall primarily focus on the discourse surrounding Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). This

discussion regarding ontological examinations of cultural representations involves an explanation of “imaginative geographies” and “moral geographies”, as present in Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (2005). In this section, relevant frameworks exploring the cultural relationship between the global East and West shall be discussed, concentrating on the idea of a voiceless East that is continually represented by the West. Further complementary texts, such as Derek Gregory’s *The Colonial Present* (2004) are referenced for their analysis of American foreign policy along frameworks of Said’s theory. Gregory’s discussion of “architectures of enmity” indeed expands on the aforementioned “imaginative geographies”, critiquing the practice of imperialist and Orientalist international relations. To further contextualize Said’s argument within international relations theory, the controversial, and oft-criticized, work of Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1997) is used to demonstrate the Orientalist understanding of global affairs. Though reductive and erroneous, Huntington’s framework is important to this study as it demonstrates many of the stereotypical themes which are not only critiqued by Said, but also reflected in historical film.

Chapter 3 contains the cognitive psychological discussion of my analysis, with a literature review focused on chronicling the research surrounding heuristic models of decision-making, first posited by Tversky and Kahneman in *Heuristics and Biases* (1974). Cognitive **heuristics** are, in essence, mental shortcuts which expedite judgements and decision-making. Within the context of the aforementioned Orientalist literary themes, heuristics such as **availability** and **representativeness** are primed to bias individuals into perceiving the entire Middle East through a particular lens, one that makes cooperation seem improbable and hostility appear inevitable. In this framework, “availability” refers to how mentally accessible a

concept is, (i.e., the ease with which it comes to mind), while “representativeness” refers to how prototypical it is, (i.e., how similar it is to a known prototype / stereotype). Events and concepts which may activate the availability heuristic include the prevalence of images depicting Middle Eastern aggression and instability, while simultaneously showcasing a noble and free “West” combating a reprehensible and tyrannical “East”, displayed in historical films such as *300*.

Representativeness may empower prototypical perceptions, such as those related to terrorism by facilitating the “image of a terrorist”, linking modern media depictions of Islamic fundamentalists to the symbolic “Oriental” villain historically threatening the West in film. As detailed by discussions of the “Linda conjunction fallacy” in Chapter 3, the representativeness heuristic may indeed even be capable of biasing an individual’s sense of probability, producing the perception that a combination of events is more likely to occur than each event occurring by itself (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983). Connecting this discovery with Hinton’s theory of stereotype propagation as a result of “cultural cognition”, this thesis explores the cultural environment which may facilitate a stereotypical perception that it is more probable for a bearded, brown man in an airport to be both an “Arab” *and* a terrorist, rather than just an “Arab” (or even just a Middle Easterner). This representativeness may indeed be the same type of implicit, yet cultural, stereotypical association that cultivates perceptions such as Saddam’s Iraq being more likely to support Al-Qaeda, and therefore be complicit in the attacks of September 11, 2001, than being a rogue Arab state unaffiliated with Osama Bin Laden.

When considering films released during this time period, such as *300* (2006), and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), this project investigates how depicting historical cultures of opposition between “East and West” perpetuates the stereotype of a timeless clash between the monolithic East and West. Discussion of the “heuristic feedback loop” in Chapter 3 details a

novel application of cognitive heuristic frameworks to historical film. Using the dynamic interaction between the availability and representativeness heuristics as a foundation, a positive feedback loop mechanism is posited which may bolster the cycle of implicit stereotype perpetuation through continual reinforcement of both heuristics. Regardless of intention, even when filmmakers aim to critique imperialism, these portrayals may propagate the stereotype of a timeless clash between the monolithic East and West, thereby cognitively “justifying” Western interventionism in the monolithic “East”, including invasions of sovereign Middle Eastern nations.

The films explored in the following sections were selected due to their alignment with the aforementioned themes, each contributing to popular culture through portrayals of history which reflect the international political sentiment at the time of production. This process of film selection, along with the specific methodology utilized for heuristic film analysis, is discussed in Chapter 4. Although the “clash of civilizations” between the monolithic “East” and “West” serves as a core theme for many, it should be noted that not every film featured focuses geographically on the Middle East (Huntington 1997, 6). Motion pictures such as Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000) and *Quo Vadis?* (1951) are relevant to this discussion due to their commentary regarding imperialism and the broader geopolitical role of the “West”. This chapter also includes an explanation of core methodological issues which needed resolution for the completion of this thesis, including concerns over conflicting authorship and the intentionality of filmmakers.

Chapters 5-7 contains the cinematic analysis itself, consisting of three core categories. These include geopolitical and ideological commentary in Chapter 5, visual commentary (race, appearance, and dress) in Chapter 6, and personification (gender, embodiment, and sexuality) in Chapter 7. The discussion in Chapter 5 focuses on the cinematic application of the framework



outlined in Chapter 2, as historical films were analyzed for general geopolitical tropes aligning with Said's commentary on imaginative geographies in *Orientalism*, his later critique of Huntington's "*Clash of Civilizations*", McAlister's discussion of "moral geographies", and Gregory's conceptualization of "architectures of enmity" in *The Colonial Present*.

Chapter 6 continues this cinematic investigation, with an emphasis placed on prototypical visual tropes, including physical appearance, race, dress, and geographical settings. This aspect of the analysis was considered fundamental as, according to Zacks, "visual impressions" are among the most important elements for imbuing films with persuasive messaging (Zacks 2014, 101). Tropes concerning the personification of the Orient (*e.g.*, embodiment, gender, sexuality) were explored in Chapter 7, offering an additional perspective into cinematic Orientalism through critical theory frameworks including disability studies and queer theory.

Finally, in addition to summarizing the analysis, the concluding chapter discusses further implications, exploring how repeated media representations of the monolithic "Orient" have contributed to a culture where, as Said explains, cultural representations of the East no longer reflect the authentic, nuanced aspects which comprise the monolith. This "departure from the real" is the foundation for Chapter 8, as Jean Baudrillard's concept of "hyperreality" is applied to Orientalism within the framework of historical film (Baudrillard 1981, 1). Furthermore, the potential propagandistic consequences of "simulating" reality through stereotypical performances are argued, not only in the context of historical film, but also emergent, non-traditional methods of communication. These include synthetic media, which can utilize artificial intelligence to generate false representations of reality in a historically unprecedented manner.

Within this context, the inherent persuasive power of vivid, emotional imagery is considered alongside the cognitive heuristic feedback loop and Hinton's theory of implicit stereotype perpetuation through cultural prevalence. This discussion indicates some concern for a future in which visual media can be generated completely artificially; for example, regarding implicit, stereotypical political messaging which exploits existing Orientalist cultural sentiment. However, the broad scholarship forming the bedrock of this project indicates the solution to this quagmire may lie in the very cultural and cognitive mechanisms which underlie the processes of implicit stereotype propagation in historical film.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Orientation - Cultural Studies and International Relations**

### **2.1 Moral Geographies, Orientalism, and the Cinematic “Clash of Civilizations”**

*Orientalism*, Edward Said’s seminal conceptualization of cultural representation, functions as the literary backbone for this thesis. Said’s commentary of the “East”, or “Orient”, being continually represented against its will by the “West” as a consequence of imperialism’s power over culture provides an excellent lens for assessing the role of historical films. At the core of his argument, Said posits that the central ideas concerning the Orient, and indeed the “Orient” itself, are not an “inherent fact of nature”, but instead entirely Western inventions resulting from European imperialism (Said 1978, 17). This biased characterization of the Orient is an “imaginative geography”, which presents monoliths of “East” and “West” as existing not only geographically, but culturally. Both geographical blocs are thereby imbued with a set of characteristics that are seen, incorrectly, as objective “knowledge” about the category. Due to the profound implications concerning the formulation of entirely synthetic Orientalist biases pertaining to particular regions within international relations, Said’s paradigm was instrumental for the analysis of historical films within this thesis.

When examining the relationship between historical films and perceptions of international relations between “East” and “West”, another essential framework to consider is the idea of “moral geographies, cultural and political practices that work together to mark regions, states, cultural groupings, and ethnic/racial territories” (McAlister 2005, 4). The “moral” aspect of this concept intersects geography through what McAlister details as the construction of “moral positions” by “mapping stories onto a geographic fetish” such as “saving countries from Communism” or “protecting the Holy Land” (McAlister 2005, 20). This moralistic angle is applied to the physical territories, spaces, and peoples which have become conceptually

synonymous with East/West interactions, often represented cinematically in historical film. Building on Said's foundations, this concept is explored extensively by Melani McAlister throughout her investigation of the relationship between U.S. foreign policy and Western cultural representations of the Middle East. In her foundational work, McAlister asserts the importance of cognitive elements underlying mass perceptions of moral geographies. As moral geographies define the parameters used in depictions of international relations, understanding their influence on cultural representations provides insight into how historical films reflect perceptions of contemporary global affairs.

McAlister thereby explores how film may be exploited as a tool of propagating interventionist US foreign policy, by creating symbolic meanings about Eastern regions. Utilizing the cultural mapping of historical stories onto locations with geopolitical significance ("moral geography"), Western cinematic productions situate the Middle East as a space of eternal moral, religious, and political significance. It is often compared with the West in binary notions, (e.g., "good versus bad", "modern versus backward", "civilized versus barbaric"), with this simplification amplifying broader ideas regarding American exceptionalism and a divine international mandate (McAlister 2005, 39). These moral geographies transform perceptions of the Middle East from a place of proxy war and petroleum politics to a religious battleground for "good US diplomacy" versus "bad tyrannical Middle Eastern regimes". McAlister argues that this Western cultural interest is far from neutral, and has led the US to perceive (often through film) the Middle East through a lens of crisis and instability, or through an exotic and romanticized vision akin to Said's ideas in *Orientalism*.

Ultimately, these cultural representations of the Middle East's moral geography contribute to the facilitation of imperialist foreign policy by reducing American interventionist

politics to a simplified, moral plane. The construction and maintenance of these imaginative and moral geographies are therefore instrumental, according to Said and McAlister, for understanding American cultural (and subsequent) political engagement with the seemingly monolithic Middle East. These geographies thereby connect media (cinematic) representations, religious narratives, and foreign policy to “justify” US interventionist foreign policy in a simplified, moralistic paradigm.

## ***2.2 Orientalism – Said***

In his landmark work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said discusses the very concept of the mysterious “Orient”, exploring attitudes concerning the lands lying east of the Mediterranean, stretching from Anatolia to India. Specifically, Said argues that the central ideas concerning the Orient, and indeed the Orient *itself*, are an entirely Western invention resulting from European imperialism, and not an “inherent fact of nature” (Said 1978, 17). He postulates that centuries of imperial and colonial interactions which primarily benefited Western powers led to the establishment of academic dogma and broad economic practices regarding how to “deal with” the Orient. This has culminated in a systematic construction of the “Orient” as the moral and cultural “Other” to the West through academic, cultural, and literary representations. These depictions often portray the East as exotic, backwards, and irrational, contrasted against a modern, superior West. Western academics and imperialists adopted an approach focused on the collection of specialized knowledge and physical resources, which combined with popular literary and cultural sentiment regarding the broader “East” to produce a collective idea of the Orient as a playground for the West. Indeed, Said encapsulates this with his use of a quote from former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, succinctly claiming “The East is a career” (Said 1978, 14).

The significant academic consequence of this generalized acceptance concerning the role of the East, argues Said, is the degree to which an inherently imperialist, domination-centric methodology for East-West interaction was accepted within academic institutions as the objective framework with which to approach *all* areas concerning the East. Gradually, imperialist thought combined with popular culture, driven primarily by the work of prolific Western writers, to become the dominant discourse concerning understanding of the Orient. An important conclusion of Said's is that the collective practices of Orientalism not only constitute a body of knowledge, but more significantly a power structure facilitating imperial control, one continually showcasing the East as incapable of self-maintenance and in need of benevolent Western stewardship (Said 1978, 18). Within this paradigm, cultural representations encompassing literature, art, and of course cinema play an important role in perpetuating these stereotypes. The consistent cinematic messaging within historical and Orientalist films portrays the monolithic and barbaric "East" as a threat to "Western" values of liberty and civilization, thereby framing Western intervention as a moral necessity (and often, an inevitability).

However, according to Said, this framework "is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient" (Said 1978, 18). Orientalist ideas may therefore be perceived as offering a misleading sense of objectivity concerning the Middle East, yet this very facade of veracity is a construction of the West representing the East. As imperial investment into the Orient continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries due to its significant financial productivity, Orientalism became "an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture" (Said 1978, 19). This displays the reciprocal relationship between

tangible, material returns from the Orient and the academic strengthening of Orientalist thought. Simply put, the dogma of Orientalism provided an academically justified context with which the West could continue to exploit, and misrepresent, the East.

This practice of misrepresentation has persisted to the modern age as exemplified by “historical” films depicting the Near and Middle East, exhibiting implications for the propagation of stereotypes and biases regarding international relations. These misrepresentations, fuelled by imperial benefit, have been impactful in Western popular culture. Already propelled by the statements of early writers from the fledgeling days of Empire, the cultural reservoir continually expanded with Orientalist perspectives depicting the East within a consistent, stereotypical framework. Ironically, this cultural fervour surrounding Orientalism produced an environment, which argued by Said, contextualized the discipline of studying the “East” as having much “less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world.” (Said 1978, 20). Indeed, the study of how imperialism permeated culture, specifically by assigning certain attributes as definitively “Oriental” and others as “not Oriental” (or Occidental), is a key locus of Said’s argument.

To understand the multitude of ways in which Orientalism manifests itself, it is imperative to first explore the foundations which, according to imperial powers, justified its rise. As elaborated on by Said, the chief principles upon which the imperial argument for dominating the “East” rested were the vast knowledge and irrefutable power the Orient was purported to contain. According to the dominant European thinkers of the time, this placed imperial powers, such as the British Empire, in a position of not only geopolitical hegemony but also academic, cultural, and moral superiority. The mindset concerning knowledge is encapsulated by Lord Balfour’s 1910 speech which not only glorifies the British subjugation of Egypt, but also

dismisses any legitimate criticism regarding the derogatory imperial attitude concerning superiority and inferiority. He exclaims, “I take up no attitude of superiority. But I ask...who has even the most superficial knowledge of history...We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately; we know more about it...Do not talk about superiority or inferiority” (Said 1978, 32).

This domination is indeed justified by previous knowledge of the Orient, and with it, comes the inevitable conclusion that for both the benefit of the imperial power and the colonial subject, Orient must be controlled by Occident. As Balfour saw it, with great knowledge came responsibility and this entailed stripping the Orient of its autonomy, since “we know it and it exists, in a sense, *as* we know it” (Said 1978, 33).

Said’s logic here is that:

England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows; England knows that Egypt cannot have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt; for the Egyptians, Egypt is what England has occupied and now governs; foreign occupation therefore becomes "the very basis" of contemporary Egyptian civilization; Egypt requires, indeed insists upon, British occupation (Said 1978, 35).

This circular reasoning is the bedrock of Orientalism, and through the practical powers of imperialism, its consequences have infiltrated many instances of interaction between East and West.

Orientalists are indeed perceived as a subservient race, dominated by powers that understand them and what is best for them better than they could possibly comprehend themselves. For many, their heyday is understood to have long passed, while the few that are capable of contributing to the current age have been guided by “powerful and up-to-date empires” which “effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated residents of productive colonies.” (Said 1978, 37). Amid the myriad of



nations affected by this Oriental logic, Egypt stood as the model example for its justification. Explained by Said as being the “vindication of Western imperialism” and referred to as an “almost academic example of Oriental backwardness” before its annexation by England, Balfour vocalized the Empire’s pride concerning this success, claiming that “England raised Egypt from the lowest pitch of social and economic degradation until it now stands among Oriental nations, I believe, absolutely alone in its prosperity, financial and moral.” (Said 1978, 38).

Said attributes the results of Egyptian affairs to a single, general theory applied both academically and practically in everyday matters of imperial management. This theory was resoundingly successful in the first decade of the 20th century and was remarkably simple to both understand and employ. “There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.” (Said 1978, 36). Said then explains that the ease with which imperial officials such as Balfour and Lord Cromer, Egypt’s master, could reduce humanity to its mere racial essences should not be taken as commentary on their individual ruthlessness, but rather on the efficacy of a streamlined Orientalist doctrine.

While Balfour preoccupied himself predominantly with the justifications presented by knowledge of the Orient, Cromer’s experience as a colonial overseer made his statement much less abstract. Commenting on his experiences in India and Egypt, the importance of knowledge and power was emphasized, arguing that it simplifies the management of a country. These approaches cultivated a tribal, “us” versus “them” dichotomy, established by the powerful, who are in positions to produce knowledge. Said states that this division of reality into clearly different structures is the basis of the “main intellectual issue raised by Orientalism.” (Said 1978,

45). In those cases where dichotomy arises, Said questions whether it is possible to avoid the “hostilities expressed by the division” into Westerners and Orientals, or rather, “us and they” (Said 1978, 46).

Using archival documents, Said presents how the terms of Orient and Orientalism have a historical basis in literature. This forms a core component of his argument that Orientalism was formed from previously conceived definitions and established understandings concerning a specific group of people, generalized under the single term of Orient. By examining both Balfour and Cromer, Said demonstrates how in the case of two starkly contrasting Orientalists, one being distant from the East and the other directly involved in its everyday management, the accepted ways in which to discuss the Orient remained identical. The misrepresentation of the Orient became cemented when academic study of the modern Orient gained momentum, argues Said, and Orientalists began to construct "imaginative geographies," dividing East and West. In order to describe this process, Said turns to Claude Levi-Strauss' argument concerning the mind's tendency to create order through representative categorization. This is done in an attempt to organize (and make sense of) our surrounding environments better and more efficiently. This aspect of Said's argument is crucial for understanding the degree to which Orientalist sentiment permeated popular culture through literary and other artistic works. As the mind has an innate capacity for grouping together similar information when repeatedly presented with it, this creates an opportunity for "imaginative knowledge," or the idea that through the construction of categories, these groups are infused with a set of characteristics that are seen, incorrectly, as “knowledge” about the category. This mechanism both creates and reinforces stereotypes and thus, “the Orient was something more than what was empirically known” (Said 1978, 55).

Indeed, dramatic works have long utilized this moral geography as a narrative foundation, as demonstrated by examples from the outset of classical theatre. When considering early Orientalist works, Said employs two ancient Greek plays, *The Persians* and *The Bacchae*, to argue that the dichotomy between "Orient" and "Occident" is artificial and serves only to reinforce the divide between the two groups. Due to their role as dramatic representations of encounters between East and West which employ stereotypical tropes, these plays may be perceived as progenitors of modern Orientalist film. These seminal works were instrumental in generating central motifs of European imaginative geography concerning the East that would persist for millennia. A line is drawn in both plays between two continents. Europe is strong and vocal while Asia is forlorn and in dismay. The Occident undertakes the role of expressing, and speaking for, the Orient, with Asia being represented by Aeschylus as Xerxes' mother, the wizened Persian queen. In addition to the sense of woe permanently attached to the Orient, there is also a foreboding sense of danger associated with the region, as reflected in *The Bacchae*.

A false assessment of the god Dionysus' power by a Greek king facilitates a catastrophic outburst of that power, destroying the king in the process. As encapsulated by Said, "Hereafter Oriental mysteries will be taken seriously, not least because they challenge the rational Western mind to new exercises of its enduring ambition and power (Said 1978, 57). As demonstrated by these examples, it is a critical component of Said's thesis that from its inception, Western understanding of the Orient was not obtained *from* the people, but rather, is an impression *about* the Oriental people, founded on cultural characteristics concerning their "imaginative geography". As a result of this, the Orient is incapable of projecting its own voice to the West, being at the mercy of whichever way the Occident may choose to represent it. Once again, the same impulses permeating modern Orientalist films exhibit themselves as being present in 2,500

year old plays. Indeed, according to Said, the nature of representation, including Orientalist representation, is at its core theatrical and performative:

Orientalism has to be seen as a "cultural repertoire" through which, by the nineteenth century, "the Orient" becomes a stage for European theatre whose audience, manager and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe (Said 1978, 71).

Throughout this process, it remains a hallmark of Orientalism that the authentic voice of the "Orient" is omitted from all cultural representation.

Continuing to the early modern period, Said provides examples showcasing the "progressive" Western advance on the East. Islam enters the Oriental conversation and provides a new perceived threat for the West, serving as another avenue for the confirmation bias regarding Oriental danger that has persisted since the time of Aeschylus. In addition to the military threat, Said argues that initial Orientalist attitudes were influenced by concern for Islam's spread in the region, hastening a European need to document portions of the Orient's authentic history, and narratively link it with Europe. Early Orientalists including Simon Ockley and William Jones constituted this group, and thus provided the academic and cultural justification for Napoleon's Egyptian enterprise. Unlike earlier expeditionaries, Napoleon prepared extensively prior to his Oriental travels, consulting works such as *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* (1783). Napoleon consequently arrived in the Orient flanked by Orientalist academics with specific designs for the domination of Egypt. His goals included documenting everything "seen, said, and studied" in the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809), in a way that highlighted the Orient's timeless link with Europe (Said 1978, 84). The prevailing idea during this time was that once Egypt had been liberated from the barbaric squalor that had befallen it, other Oriental nations would follow its example as a European client.

Said claims that at this point, the West undertakes a role of “creation”, as evidenced by the construction of the Suez Canal, justified as being passed on to people who "could never have done for themselves.” (Said 1978, 90). Prior to coming into direct contact with the Orient, consultation of the early texts constituted the majority of possible preparation for an expedition. As a result of this, the concern regarding Islam was never mitigated. When Europe began to project its power over the East, Napoleon connected it to a "distant European past,” situating the Orient’s history and current affairs as innately subservient to the West (Said 1978, 86). According to Said, this began to finally wear down the influence of Islam within the region.

Another major consequence of Napoleon’s journey, claims Said, is that it "destroyed the Orient's distance," best symbolized by the aforementioned Suez Canal (Said 1978, 92). No longer regarded as the distant “Other”, the Orient was now able to be directly physically influenced by the West. Said notes, however, that despite these evolving relations with the Orient, the foundations of knowledge remained the same, ensuring the tropes of Orientalism endured relatively untouched since their inception. Thus, the dichotomy of East and West continued to generalize the entire Orient into a singular category without addressing the nuances between different nations and peoples. This knowledge is innately textual, and a “textual attitude” is essential for comprehending its ability to shape reality, such as through the creation and maintenance of artificial dichotomies. An understanding of Orientalism must therefore consider the degree to which an individual’s perspective on any aspect of reality is formed by what they have read (and consequently, what is available for reading) about that given reality. As highlighted in the earlier discussion on Levi-Strauss, the mind arbitrarily categorizes its surroundings into “imaginative knowledge”, and in the case of the West’s approach to the Orient, this includes perceiving it as a region worthy, and *deserving*, of domination.

While the conditions created by Orientalism have fundamentally remained the same for centuries, the specific branch of Orientalism practiced evolved over time. Its foundations shifted from being primarily religious to more secular in nature throughout the 18th century. Said observed this secularism occurring as a result of conquest “beyond the Islamic lands” in the East, combined with a perceived historical linkage between East and West, as well as “the impulse to classify nature and man into types” (Said 1978, 119). Modern orientalism was born from these secular structures, and employed them readily as tools of imperialism and colonialism. In order to understand the transition to this mentality, Said argues that the historical context of Orientalism must be examined to elucidate how its core ideas were forged, eventually culminating in European imperialism and colonization of the Orient. While the Orientalist narrative has always focused on a Western “hero rescuing the Orient from obscurity, alienation, and strangeness”, the conceptualization of these figures shifted from divine and Biblical agents to now being steeped in the “power that dwelt in the new, scientifically advanced techniques of philology and of anthropological generalization.” (Said 1978, 121). This perspective centered on secular knowledge bolstered the Western sense of authority over the Orient, and it, along with hegemonic power, would form the foundations upon which Orientalists such as Balfour would later build their imperial arguments.

To build this repertoire of perceived knowledge regarding the Orient, the two dominant disciplines of philology and anthropology contributed their frameworks, primarily concerning categorization and claims of scientific authenticity. Said argues, however, that this categorization is inherently biased as its classifications are a result of historical and textual generalizations about the Orient. This transition to philological and anthropological interpretations of Orientalism is crucial for comprehending its role throughout the 18th century. This period is

often colloquially referred to as the Age of Reason or Enlightenment, yet as criticized by Said, Orientalism failed to change substantially within this transition. The basis for its arguments transformed, but the fundamental traits of Orientalism remained unchanged, a testament to its robustness and a key reason for its persistence to the present day. Concepts such as the authority and ability of Orientalists to categorize “vast geographical domains into treatable, and manageable, entities”, have never wavered from being hallmarks of Orientalist thought (Said 1978, 115).

Adaptability is necessary for survival, and Orientalism has consistently proven itself as a framework that can stay relevant in the domains of academia and public policy, adjusting itself based on the zeitgeist but never sacrificing its core assumptions. As Orientalism moved into the 19th century, it became increasingly influenced by the perspectives of European travelers. Said maintains that, due to the vast degree of travel to the Orient at the time, Orientalist descriptions of the Orient evolved, enriching the existing Oriental lexicon. *Modern Egyptians* (1860) by Edward Lane is highlighted, especially Lane's lack of narrative and commitment to circulating information in rigorous detail, thereby dehumanizing “Orientals” by presenting them as mere gatekeepers of vital historical and cultural information, which must be accessed by the “West”.

A great focus is placed on “popular stereotypes” which represented the East as intellectually subordinated to the West (Said 1978, 152). Presenting arguments from Karl Marx as being inherently Orientalist in nature, Said showcases how even theories displaying “humanity” and “sympathy” concerning the galvanization of economically oppressed individuals revolve around a notion of Oriental submission to England. This innate Orientalism occurred once again, argues Said, as a consequence of the continual synthesis of knowledge and sustained practice of Western power over the East. In this framework, authors such as Lane were able to

produce their own knowledge about the Orient, in lieu of an accurate portrayal, consequently becoming authorities on the subject. Through this process, Orientalist knowledge was cultivated and “specialized” (Said 1978, 176). This practice involved eschewing accurate representation of the individuals and moral geographies associated with the “Orient”, instead favouring a “re-presentation” of the region to align with its role as the submissive and exotic Other.

By re-presenting the “Orient” in this simplistic and dichotomous paradigm, texts such as Lane’s aimed to justify the exploitation of the region as a historical responsibility of the benevolent West. These specialized texts have therefore contributed to the Western cultural and intellectual canon concerning perceptions of the Middle East for centuries. Whether through direct re-presentation of the “Orient” as a barbarous wasteland, or through an indirect positioning of the West as more advanced and/or dominant than the East in order to present other arguments, the East cannot escape Western re-presentation. It is because of this ability and tendency of the West to systematically remake and construct the history of the Orient that one of Said’s fundamental arguments is that Orientalism has far less to do with the “Orient” than it does the West.

When considering depictions of both stereotypical Orientals and Occidentals, Said pays particular attention to the style and vision of these portrayals. Referencing Rudyard Kipling’s 1899 poem *The White Man’s Burden*, Said discusses the archetype of a learned European destined to help the “coloured races” (Said 1978, 226). Possessing knowledge unknown to the Orient itself, the “White Man” not only held power over it, but was *responsible* for the Orient. Individuals are not considered and are instead combined together in the larger category of Oriental, with the sole purpose of representing them as the “Other”. Indeed, the archetypal Oriental was “first an Oriental and only second a man” (Said 1978, 231). Due to the pervasive



frameworks that had endured both within Orientalism and surrounding disciplines like philology and biology, there existed an inability to argue with these stereotypical and false classifications.

Said then describes how in the early 20th century, this "knowledge" of the Orient was used to fuel political activity directly. Following World War I, British archaeologist T. E. Lawrence discussed a restoration of the "Orient", but only in line with a "White Orientalist" perspective. Said declares "the Arab Revolt acquires meaning only as Lawrence designs meaning for it" (Said 1978, 242). This advanced Western interests but did little for the actual needs of the Orient, transforming the Orientalist into the "representative Oriental", speaking for a group who have had their own voice withheld (Said 1978, 242). Curiously enough, the Orientalist perceives himself as a bridge between Occident and Orient, when in actuality, he is merely propagating the ideals of Orientalism. Indeed, this paradox is Said's ultimate argument, the observation that the Orientalist perspective "retards the process of enlarged and enlarging meaning as it pertains to the Orient" (Said 1978, 254).

In the concluding chapter of *Orientalism*, Said turns the spotlight onto the most recent hegemon to become embroiled in Orientalist practices, the United States of America. Chronicling Orientalism in the post World War II period, Said demonstrates how America has replaced England and France as the major Orientalist nation. Charting a different course from its predecessors, however, America asserted itself over the Orient not in a literary manner, but in a foundation built on "facts" and the social sciences. Focusing on the world's increasing demand for oil in the wake of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war along with the "lurking menace of jihad", American scholars utilized "objective expertise" and "science" over philological texts to exercise their method of Orientalism (Said 1978, 327). In the practice of hegemonic and quasi-colonial

resource extraction, however, they argued the same baselines as previous Orientalists concerning domination of the Orient, which Said posits is the very nature of Orientalism.

At the core of his conclusion in *Orientalism*, Said posits that "Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience." (Said 1978, 328). By dehumanizing the Orient, stereotypes were cultivated and propagated both as a measure of scholarly expertise and imperial practice. The Orientalist framework has become so ingrained that it is often accepted as fact, with attempts to challenge its assumptions being dismissed outright, as showcased by Lord Balfour's flippant demeanor towards questions of assumed Western superiority or Oriental inferiority. By the time of the United States' emergence as a global power, Benjamin Disraeli's words had become cemented as the accepted norm for any Western hegemon. The East was indeed perceived as an irrefutable career, and to question the imperial and colonial practicality of Orientalism appeared illogical.

Yet this East, as methodically demonstrated by Said, was no more than a creation of the very West that sought to exploit it. Using imaginative geographies constructed through countless biased interactions rooted in disproportionate power and knowledge, the idea of an Orient eternally subversive to the Occident was cultivated. Infused with an air of mystique, this submissive Orient was portrayed as representing all that is antithetical to the West, a genuine "Other" awaiting unchecked exploitation. As Said argues throughout his text, however, the very generalizations that led to the stereotypical framework of Orientalism are the key to reversing this process. By observing the individuality of elements in the East instead of using singular, general descriptions for describing cultural groups, a genuine understanding of religious, ethnic and social context can be cultivated. It is important to obtain this holistic understanding before advising policy regarding a particular region, as the alternative relies on providing advice based

solely on common, biased assumptions. Over time, this biased path results in a product, both academic and political, which effectively silences the authentic voice of that region, replacing it with whichever representations the dominant power deems suitable, as encapsulated by the legacy of Orientalism.

The binary worldview presented by the moral geography of Orientalism contributes to the public perceptions surrounding the Middle East, especially in its interactions with the “West”. In reducing the “East” and “Easterners” to a monolithic “Other”, cultural representations including historical and Orientalist films may contribute to a zeitgeist in which “Western” intervention in the region is justified as benevolent hegemony. Orientalist cultural productions therefore sustain the power imbalance between “East” and “West” through the framing of Western imperialism as an organic consequence of a natural world order. Through these representations, the dominant cultural reservoirs in this paradigm become replete with stereotypes perpetuating the implicit biases that these monolithic moral geographies are ingrained, ancient, and diametrically opposed to each other.

### ***2.3 Epic Encounters – McAlister***

When considering the foreign policy of the United States of America, few global regions have matched the importance of the Middle East since the conclusion of the Second World War. As the international order progressed through periods of bipolarity, multipolarity, and eventual unipolarity, the Middle East remained a consistent focal point of U.S. interest. While the literature is dense with analyses regarding purely geopolitical or resource-centric explanations of this persistent international focus, fewer scholars have highlighted the reciprocal relationship between Middle Eastern cultural representations and foreign policy. To this end, Melani

McAlister's *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East since 1945* serves as a seminal text for understanding this constantly evolving framework.

Pivotal to McAlister's thesis is the idea of "moral geographies", an extension of Said's model, discussed by Michael Shapiro. These are "cultural and political practices that work together to mark regions, states, cultural groupings, and ethnic/racial territories" (McAlister 2005, 4). In his paper on the ethics of post-sovereignty, Shapiro asserts that borders and political spaces have become more than mere physical constructs defining a state, and are imbued with moral and ethical connotations (Shapiro 1994, 482). Shapiro's core argument is that modern sovereign states enforce certain moral geographies, forming how we understand and conceptualize "identity, belonging, and morality" in relation to spatial boundaries (Shapiro 1994, 484). Extending Shapiro to Said's articulation, the boundaries of the monolithic "West" may carry with them a collective ethical and moral connection, such as associations with being perpetually "outside" of civilization (Shapiro 1994, 484). Indeed, both Shapiro and Said posit the necessity of challenging these rigid and ingrained moral geographies, which have accumulated through cultural productions such as historical and Orientalist film, linking morality with territorial boundaries.

Drawing on similar threads between Said's "imaginative geographies" and Shapiro's "moral geographies", McAlister investigates the cognitive element embedded within the perception of moral geographies. In addition to impacting political, spiritual, material and ethical understandings of a particular region, moral geographies have the ability of influencing one's holistic perception. This in turn catalyzes biases and attitudes which are more nuanced and less readily apparent to conscious analysts than realpolitik and economic concerns. The mass cultivation of these current perceptions regarding the Middle East, argues McAlister, is heavily

influenced (and perhaps driven altogether) by cultural representations of this particular moral geography, including novels, films, theatrical productions, religious iconography, and museum exhibits, among a plethora of others.

McAlister highlights the importance of “politics of culture”, highlighting that political meanings occur at the intersection of politics and culture (McAlister 2005, Preface XIV). She postulates that multilayered investments in the Middle East have been motivated by different factions in the US, an important distinction from the common perception of policy set by a single “monolithic, manipulative ruling class” (McAlister 2005, Preface XIV). A multitude of factors comprise this investment, yet four components form the core of U.S. Middle Eastern interests since 1945, which have in turn influenced cultural representations ranging from the rise of 1950s biblical epic cinema to the “King Tut” craze which swept the U.S. in the 1970s. These four key US concerns in the Middle East consist of (i) its strategic geopolitical value, (ii) religious value, (iii) Israel’s value as a representative pillar and extension of American ideals (both ideological and political), and (iv) the importance of commodities, chief among them being access to oil (McAlister 2005, 32-35).

Representations of the Middle East made the region and its denizens both readily accessible and “meaningful within the cultural and political context in the United States” (McAlister 2005, 2). In McAlister's words, “the Middle East was not immediately available as an American interest; instead, it had to be made interesting” (McAlister 2005, 2). The cultural representations that helped accomplish this task include historical and Orientalist films, which she argues exploit the depicted moral geographies to facilitate further Western interest in the East. Contextualizing this within the psychological plane of this thesis (discussed further in Chapter 3), it is through cultural productions such as historical and Orientalist film that the

Middle East was made both “available” and “representative”. Crucial to this perception was the relationship of the Middle East with the United States, which is highlighted by a high degree of American influence within the region. She highlights this as a relationship of both “benevolent supremacy” and “imperial stewardship” (McAlister 2005, 41). With the US posed as a harbinger of liberation for oppressed colonial peoples following the UN Charter’s declaration of self-determination, the discourse of America’s role in postwar Middle East shifted to overtly supporting independence, while guaranteeing it would be the first in line to reap the rewards from the grateful and newly independent sovereign states around the world (McAlister 2005, 45). With this model, the U.S. could avoid the messy and globally repugnant image of colonial imperialism while guaranteeing itself the benefits that any imperial overlord would extract from a client state.

This representation of a noble Western saviour was mapped on to various biblical epics of this time, with McAlister presenting *Ben-Hur*, *Quo Valdis*, and *The Ten Commandments* as prime examples. She argues that these films all depict a discourse of benevolent anti-colonial US supremacy; “from liberation to US-dominated liberty” (McAlister 2005, 45-46). When considered against the Cold War backdrop during which they were produced, these epics presented a stark contrast between the homogenized Soviet hordes waiting like automaton slaves to obey the General Secretary’s (or Pharaoh’s) commands without question, versus the “free” peoples of the West. As the U.S. worked to liberate those like Nasser’s Egypt from the colonial tyranny of British late-imperialism in the 1956 Suez Crisis, (securing significant economic benefits and international prestige for itself in the process), it simultaneously sought to create a bulwark against the perceived oppressive menace of the Soviet Union. Denouncing the former colonialist, preventing the emergence of new “enslaving forces”, and creating media

representations of this righteous effort became the *modus operandi* for the U.S. during the immediate postwar era.

McAlister then proceeds to highlight the impact these representations had specifically in the realm of African-American cultural politics. The Suez Crisis, in particular, is positioned as an event which catalyzed a perceptual reversal regarding the conception of Israel among African Americans. Once hailed as a beacon of independence against tyranny, (and indeed a model for Black Americans to emulate for their own plight in the Civil Rights Movement), Israel's invasion of the Sinai led to a turnaround in its public perception amongst Black Americans. The Crisis was considered by many to be a wanton violation of Egyptian (and African) sovereignty by a colonial client state, thereby positioning Israel as a pawn of imperialism rather than a champion of liberty. This, combined with "increased Arab and Muslim visibility in Black American culture" cultivated a moral geographic association resulting in a rise of Black support for Arab nationalism. (McAlister 2005, 87). This Islamic connection was reflected in representations such as the play *A Black Mass* (1966), while others like *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) defended the richness of Egyptian culture and portrayed it "not as an Islamic (or Christian) monolith", but rather as containing a uniquely black African heritage (McAlister 2005, 118).

Next, when considering the role played by the commodification of resources, McAlister draws a comparison between the King Tut mania that swept 1970s America and the public concern with oil during the 1973 OPEC Oil Embargo. The Middle East is positioned as a place of "both great instability and increasing strategic value to the West—a place in which American interests were vital but by no means secure" (McAlister 2005, 125). By severing its economic arteries, the Middle East deprived the U.S. of its petroleum lifeblood, forcing it to acknowledge the existence of a multipolar order controlled by various important organs. The Tut tour

meanwhile exemplified the significance of cultural exchange as an instrument in international relations, involving not only the export of U.S. cultural products but also the strategic mobilization and display of cultural imports (McAlister 2005, 127). This logic highlighted the concept of U.S. imperial stewardship, “as with benevolent supremacy, imperial stewardship depended on combining universalist rhetoric with a presumption of American and Western superiority so profound that it remained unspoken.” (McAlister 2005, 129). As implicit connections between oil as a world commodity were drawn with the wealth of Tut’s commodified display, the US acted as a custodian for global shared heritage, purely by virtue of its hegemony even in a multipolar system.

Finally, through her further analysis of the rise of terrorism and the role undertaken by Israel as a symbol of US power after the failings of Vietnam, McAlister underscores that the shared cultural relationship between the United States and the Middle East is dynamic. The U.S. must consistently find ways to adapt to developing situations such as the Iranian Revolution which not only cost it an economic and geopolitical pillar in the region, but birthed an ideological rival through the rhetoric of the 1979-80 Hostage Crisis. This event, along with the aforementioned rise of terrorism such as the Munich Massacres, increased the importance of live television broadcasts as a form of cultural exchange, contributing to an “extraordinary visibility of the production of “media terrorism”” (McAlister 2005, 201). These series of events combined together to galvanize American evangelicals into “the good fight” as argued by McAlister. With a military comprised disproportionately of evangelical Christians, cultural representations of the Middle East coincided with terrorism and interpretations of perceived moral victories such as the 1967 Six Day War, effectively framing American operations in the Middle East as a modern crusade.



The “Christian mission” was mapped onto historical film with the Biblical and historical epics which dominated the 1950s and 60s, permeating the “Western” cultural reservoir with repeated instances of the Middle East depicted as a region not only essential to American geopolitical interests, but also of moral and cultural significance to evangelicals. Securing the Middle East militarily became associated with grand moral purpose. Once again, an aggressive imperial foreign policy is exerted on the Middle East through the lens of a simplified moral perspective applied to geography. Regardless of the medium, McAlister showcases that the American relationship concerning its Middle East interests has been approached through careful manufacturing of cultural relationships through various media, including historical films. When a nation has particular aspirations which require the people’s will to be accomplished, the greatest asset is guaranteeing that public opinion indeed matches the nation’s goals.

#### ***2.4 The Colonial Present – Gregory***

Building on Said’s work, Derek Gregory frames the subject of Orientalism specifically within the realm of American foreign policy following September 11, 2001. Drawing on the idea of imaginative geographies in particular, Gregory highlights the *Colonial Present*, establishing how the Western Coalition of the Willing’s actions in the Middle East are not just echoes of colonialism in a “post-colonial” age, but rather a direct continuation of the West’s colonial (or Orientalist) approach to the region. Gregory sets out “to show that 9/11 had a complex genealogy that reached back into the colonial past and, equally, to show how it was used by regimes in Washington, London, and Tel Aviv to advance a grisly colonial present (and future)” (Gregory 2004, 13).

The central theme of an Eastern “Other” being culturally represented by the West continues, as Gregory highlights that culture goes beyond mirroring the world. He remarks that

“culture involves the production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world (Gregory 2004, 8). Cultural practices are never pure reflections, they enter into formation and the cultural practices of Orientalism are created by the “constellations of power, knowledge, and geography that...continue to colonize lives all over the world”, thereby contributing to what Gregory coins the *Colonial Present* (Gregory 2004, 9).

From this subjectivity surrounding the practice of cultural representation, and its inextricable relationship with power, comes the creation of distinct dichotomies. This “Othering” positions one side of the binary as a benevolent, moral, civilized, West and the other as the cruel, deceptive, and barbaric East. As elaborated on previously by McAlister, the moral angle is applied to geography in order to simplify aggressive imperial and colonial foreign policy. Simply put, an Anglo-American invasion of Afghanistan, the Iraq War, and repeated Israeli incursions into the West Bank and Gaza following 9/11 were all framed in the zeitgeist of their time as acts of “good versus evil”, a war on terror (Gregory 2004, 11). The righteousness of the collective West is consequently mapped on to historical cinematic equivalents such as the ancient Spartans’ resistance against the tyrannical Persians at Thermopylae in *300* (2006), once again displaying the “historical” significance of these films.

This encapsulation of global powers situating themselves within moral geographies is further explored by Robert Burgoyne, particularly in the context of the resurgent popularity of comparisons in media between ancient Rome and the modern United States at the turn of the 21st century. Focusing on misconceptions regarding the Roman Empire, along with broader concepts of imperialism and empire, Burgoyne highlights how cinematic media such as Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* may be perceived as articulating the perpetuation of American unipolar power.

Furthermore, he utilizes projection theory to explain how the image of America was combined with that of Ancient Rome; not only projecting the U.S. as an inheritor of Roman hegemony, but also dividing the world between Rome/America and the other, or “othered” (Burgoyne, 2008). As a result of rooting contemporary moral geographies in false historical conceptions, current geopolitical actions become associated with ancient ones.

Perceptions founded in a historical cycle of misrepresentation (i.e., stereotypes), often catalyzed by the intersection of culture and imperialism, such as Orientalism, may then influence interpretations of modern political events. The message is communicated that these dualistic moral geographies have existed for eternity and therefore the modern imperialistic actions of Western superpowers in the Orient are “historically” justified. These discourses contain many representations of “good versus evil”, ranging from the stereotypical physical appearance of an “evil terrorist” to the consistent depictions and references to Oriental backwardness (leading to malevolence) compared to Western modernity. These stereotypical discourses appear throughout many cultural representations, and are particularly common when analyzing historical and Orientalist film.

Yet the question remains, how did we arrive at this particular act, the *Colonial Present*, within the broader timeline of Orientalism? Gregory focuses on three narratives to situate the War on Terror in the colonial present, to explain how the “performance of space” within them highlights not only imaginative geographies, but the continuation of colonialism itself. This essentially frames the foreign policy of the great Western powers in the early 2000s as inherently Orientalist (Gregory 2004, 15). As explained by Gregory, “the War on Terror is an attempt to establish a new global narrative in which the power to narrate is vested in a particular constellation of power and knowledge within the United States of America” (Gregory 2004, 16).

When considering the implications of Hollywood film (which is exported and consumed globally), one must explore these constellations of power which underlie the systems and individuals that produce American representations of the East.

He first explores the trajectory of America's involvement in the very formation of the nation of Afghanistan, chronicling it from the Second World War through the Soviet invasion and the late 20th-century guerrilla wars which culminated in the rise of the Taliban and its awkward accommodations with Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda at the close of the twentieth century. Of course, the post-2004 history of Afghanistan, including the Taliban reemergence, is absent from Gregory's work. However, his writing consistently remarks that the notion of a uniform, monolithic Afghanistan is one of Western design. It should therefore come as no surprise to any observers of Orientalism, "moral geographies", and the colonial present, that this state experienced further fragmentation from within even after America's "victory", once again culminating in the dominion of a group the "West" considered unlikely to succeed.

Gregory next focuses on the history of European and American designs on the Middle East, specifically highlighting how Israel positioned itself throughout the late 20th century as "being lockstep" with America's self-interest "in its security to license successive partitionings of Palestine" (Gregory 2004, 15). Lastly, Gregory turns to the continual Western interest in Iraq, chronicling British and American investments in the region. He traces its imperial history and colonial present, from the inception of a state carved out of Ottoman territory and the international regime of sanctions and inspections that succeeded it, and finally to the 2003 invasion which appeared to be "another front in the endless and seemingly boundless "war on terror"" (Gregory 2004, 15). He combines all three facets into a grand "architecture of enmity" posited by the United States to be accepted by the global community (Gregory 2004, 28).

Gregory's writing is essential to this thesis due to his focus on the significance of cultural representation for the maintenance of the *Colonial Present*.

The colonial present is not produced through geopolitics and geoeconomics alone, through foreign and economic policy set in motion by presidents...the state, the military apparatus and transnational corporations. It is also set in motion through mundane cultural forms and cultural practices that mark other people as irredeemably "Other" and that license the unleashing of exemplary violence against them (Gregory 2004, 16).

This captures the importance of film and other cultural productions, *300* and *Alexander* may be just as impactful for Othering the "East" into one collective oppressive entity as Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech. Gregory further reviews Said's imaginative geographies and how they serve to "demarcate "the same" from "the other". At once constructing and calibrating a gap between the two by "designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'". "Their" space is often seen as the inverse of "our" space...because "they" are seen somehow to lack the positive tonalities that supposedly distinguish "us"" (Gregory 2004, 17). Furthermore, they are seen as being "far from us". However, distance from the self (like difference), he continues, is not an objective certainty, but rather given meaning through cultural practices. To this end, European and American "imaginative geographies of "the Orient" had combined over time to produce an internally structured archive in which things came to be seen as neither completely novel nor thoroughly familiar" (Gregory 2004, 18). Orientalism is, at its core, performative, as it "produces the effect that it names" (Gregory 2004, 18). Building on his idea that the nature of representation is theatrical, Gregory quotes Said's aforementioned declaration directly, proclaiming "Orientalism once again has to be seen as a "cultural repertoire" through which, by the nineteenth century, "the Orient" becomes a stage for European theatre whose "audience, manager and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe." (Said 1978, 71). As highlighted by an exiled Iraqi director, the

theatre is where "one can perform this dividing line between fiction and reality, present and future (Gregory 2004, 18).

To this end, as Gregory explains, the actions in Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, though egregious, violent, and wasteful, were ultimately meant as performances. Performances of power, performances of normativity, performances of the colonial present, but performances nonetheless. Yet in order to understand how performances on screen elicit bias, it is important to consider how the performances in the streets of Baghdad and Kabul were built on, and facilitated, further Orientalist biases at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. As stated by Said and reviewed by Gregory, the audiences, managers, and actors are all “Western”, and the fundamental idea behind what the Middle East represents (whether on or off the screen) runs deep within the fabric of dominant cultural productions in the “West”.

Expanding on this, Gregory quotes Michael Shapiro on the inextricable link between geography and the architecture of enmity. In a succinct line capturing the essence of Orientalism, he notes “territorially elaborated collectivities locate themselves in the world and thus how they practice the meanings of Self and Other that provide the conditions of possibility for regarding others as threats or antagonists” (Gregory 2004, 20). Extending this idea of moral geography to film, one can almost always ascertain where the heroes and villains of a Western-produced historical film will hail from. It is simply what sells because it is what people have come to know and accept through a continuing tradition of Orientalism in cultural productions, not as an objective fact of reality. This importance of cultural representation should not be ignored as trivial, as elaborated on by Gregory, it can be directly linked to the thought process behind “just war”. Citing James Der Darian, he writes “People go to war because of how they see, perceive,

picture, imagine and speak of others: that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representation” (Gregory 2004, 20).

Following the history of Hollywood film, a clear trend can be noted that in times of international conflict, major blockbusters featuring historical clashes tend to focus on the same type of enemy. The most notable representations are that of a Soviet tyrannical force in the Cold War and a menacing Arab terrorist in the wake of 9/11. The surprising nature of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center compounded perceptions that this foe was deceitful, immoral, and cowardly, one that would attack civilians when their guard is down. This is in stark contrast to righteous Americans who are seldom depicted as engaging in sneak attacks in historical and Orientalist cultural representations, though the U.S. has historically orchestrated many covert regime change operations, several within the Middle East.

Considering this, it is important to note the degree to which media, such as historical film, aids in culturally exporting this constructed trope of the “historically honourable West” beyond the constructed borders of the “West”. Joseph Nye’s theory of “soft power” in international relations posits that one of the core facets of geopolitical hegemony is the ability to “influence through appeal rather than coercion” (Nye, 1990). Unlike “hard power” ideologies focused on military intervention or economic sanctions, soft power instead highlights the impact of cultural influence, including through artistic productions. Broadly stated, a power which makes itself attractive to the world is less threatened by hostility than one which engages in repeated militarism (Nye, 1990).

Nye therefore contextualizes the vast influence of Hollywood, and by extension, the United States, by elaborating on the intrinsic power associated with the ability to export one’s culture across the globe. This culture, particularly within the domain of historical film, has

portrayed a recurrent theme that the “West” honourably faces its enemies in battle, while the dishonourable “East” favours sneak attacks. Of course, this notion fails to take into consideration American drone strikes raining down from previously clear skies in Afghani villages on unsuspecting shepherd boys (Gregory 2004, 172). This ability to represent entire regions as cultural monoliths is the true detriment of Orientalism, the mechanism by which a binary “Other” is constructed and exported, relegated to just enemies both in war and entertainment.

Indeed, the post-9/11 colonial production of imaginative geographies was characterized through the repetition of a single question: “Who hates America?” (Gregory 2004, 20). Citing Michael Binyon’s London Times article on September 13, 2001, “What peoples, nations or governments are so twisted by loathing that they can concoct such an atrocity, plan its execution and dance in jubilation at the murder of thousands?” (Gregory 2004, 20).

Yet as explained by Gregory, “responses “on the street” are not in the same category as the planning and execution of acts of mass murder, and there is an important difference between those responsible for the attacks, and the infinitely larger (and poorer) audience for their actions, “most of whom were surely horrified at the deaths of thousands of innocents” (Gregory 2004, 21). As Said initially posited, “Orientalism fundamentally failed to identify with human experience...failed to see it as human experience” (Said 1978, 328). By boiling down human experience into false dichotomies of “Us” versus “Them”, one may miss the fundamental question of what drives individuals to “hate” the United States beyond a simple “that’s their problem” answer. It relegates the problem with “them”, dismissing entirely the “foreign policy adventures of the USA”, and shifting the focus to the perceived “chronic failure of Islamic societies to come to terms with the modern” (Gregory 2004, 22).



Connecting this to the tangible consequence of the colonial present, Gregory highlights that even “Muslims who disagreed with Bin Laden and condemned what happened on September 11 are incarcerated with the terrorists in a monolithic super-organic “culture” that serves only to reinforce “hostility, distrust and hatred of the West” and to “fuel fanaticism.” (Gregory 2004, 22). This Otherized culture (which is to say "their" culture) is represented as closed and stultifying, monolithic and unchanging, a fixity that is at the very heart of modern racisms, whereas "our" culture (it goes without saying) is open and inventive, plural and dynamic.” (Gregory 2004, 22). He then outlines how imaginative geographies (using perceptions of 9/11, but tapping into far older biases, such as the free democratic West inherently despised by the angry Muslim East) solidify architectures of enmity which galvanized people in some places against people in other places, via the concrete foreign policy vessels of invasion and warfare (Gregory 2004, 28).

First, an architecture of enmity is created, in which campaigns against Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan all blend together to form one enmity; an Othered “East”; backwards, cowardly, and Muslim. This imaginative geography is framed as diametrically opposed to freedom and modernity. Second, the constructed architecture of enmity becomes “forwarded through the actions of America, Israel, and Britain”, representing their opponents in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq as “outsiders”, occupying a space outside modernity (Gregory 2004, 28). Third is the “extension of global order (through an asymmetric system of power, knowledge, and geography)”, which coincides with a projection of the colonial past into what Gregory deems the “colonial present” (Gregory 2004, 28).

Indeed, he exclaims that Iraq, the United States, Israel, Afghanistan, Britain, and Palestine are all “cover terms” for “complex networks that spiral through state and para-state, military and paramilitary apparatuses” (Gregory 2004, 28). Through this logic, Gregory implies

that the complex nature tying these entities together is not limited to the bounds of their physical geography or “statehood”, once again invoking the notion of a moral or imaginative geography. These “cover terms” are used to homogenize physical spaces into particular moral geographies, yet going further, Gregory elaborates that the foundations of these networks are normal everyday individuals. In order to therefore deconstruct the monolithic perspectives which have gradually transformed the physical geographies of the Middle East and the United States into the moral geographies of the Orient and Occident, it is important to “reveal just what it is that these cover terms cover”, weakening the monolith in the process (Gregory 2004, 29). As these cover terms predominantly take into consideration the producers of both cultural media and interventionist politics, the key to “revealing what they cover” lies with the “consumers”, or everyday people (Gregory 2004, 29). By exploring the nuanced individualities that exist beneath these “cover terms” which constitute the “Us versus Them” mentality, monolithic stereotypes may not be perpetuated as efficiently as in a monolithic world and the “architecture of enmity” may be exhausted. This of course reflects Said’s ultimate proclamation that “Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to *see* it as human experience.” (Said, 1978, 328). Indeed, Said and Gregory’s perspectives appear to align with cognitive psychological perspectives considering the academic scholarship surrounding the formation of implicit biases, a framework which is explored at length within the next chapter.

Almost immediately after 9/11 President George W. Bush proclaimed that "barbarians had declared war" on America, commenting that the “civilized world” must rally to the American flag in a “crusade” against transnational terrorism (Gregory 2004, 47). This choice of words, as Gregory says, was “revealing”, voicing the core mentality underlying East/West foreign policy. Furthermore, it was noted that America was in "a war to save civilization"

(Gregory 2004, 47). The moral absolutes were clear: good against evil, “either you are with us or you are with the terrorists” (Gregory 2004, 48). Exclamations of "the Evil One" and the "evil-doers" became commonplace in American foreign policy, and harkening back to President Reagan's characterization of the USSR as an "evil empire," Bush announced the "axis of evil" made up of "regimes that sponsor terror" (Gregory 2004, 48).

Indeed, the Cold War mapped a series of boundaries between “civilization” and “barbarism” whose “inscriptions had performative force” (Gregory 2004, 48). They conjured up not only an architecture of enmity but what Campbell calls “a geography of evil” (Gregory 2004, 48). With evil drawn along cartographic lines, ideals of colonial power were set in motion once again by imaginative geographies to separate its "others" from the situations and circumstances that shape their dispositions, once again contributing to the monolith of the Other. Theological imagery was often invoked, presenting the colonial present as it “oscillated between light and darkness, between the visible and the invisible” (Gregory 2004, 49). These motifs were extended to the Middle East following 9/11 and the area was generalized to conform to the evil empire.

This generalization required a key performative step, identifying Al-Qaeda with Afghanistan so that all Eastern enemies would be one and the same. Even though the hijackers were Saudi, Egyptian, Lebanese, and UAE nationals and the fluid network of Al-Qaeda could not be folded into the visibly bounded space of Afghanistan, the generalization of the East through Orientalism dictates that evil Eastern enemies are one and the same. By associating Al-Qaeda with Afghanistan, conventional warfare could be used against a nebulous enemy, now bound to one physical space which could be invaded and controlled. Gregory aptly summarizes this with a quote from William Pfaff, “Afghanistan has been substituted for terrorism, because Afghanistan is accessible to military power, and terrorism is not”. (Gregory 2004, 51) With

Afghanistan labelled as the first target, there was little doubt that Iraq would be the second. A territorial logic, what Neil Smith would call the “raw geography of the American Empire”, was not incidental but integral to the historical horizon of the Project” (Gregory 2004, 51). This connection between Afghanistan and the transnational terrorist network indeed set a precedent for the even stranger Orientalist association during the later Iraq War between Ba’athist Iraq and Islamist Al-Qaeda. Gregory exclaims that:

saturated aerial bombing in Afghanistan . . . is a new Orientalism, the perceptual apparatus by which we make the eastern Other visible. Afghans are being held accountable for the hidden histories and hidden geographies that are presumed to have assaulted America on September 11 (Gregory 2004, 51).

Once again, the monolithic presentation of the “Orient”, one uniform in its barbarism and inherent duplicitousness, does not allow for any nuance or what Said labels “human experience”. The *Colonial Present* functions as a result of generalization, which lays the foundation upon which stereotypical perceptions concerning the binary nature of the world are formed, from which the “architecture of enmity” Gregory has described may be built.

## **2.5 Huntington and *The Clash of Civilizations*: an Orientalist Myth**

Invoking the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, Gregory describes how one has to “schematize” the logical figure of the Enemy, providing it with the “concrete features which will make it into an appropriate target of hatred and struggle” (Gregory 2004, 56). Of the various schematics of international relations, one framework which encapsulates the Orientalism critiqued in this project is Samuel Huntington’s controversial and often lambasted *Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Huntington’s reductionist schematic provides essential insight into the intersection of Orientalist binary logic and Western superpower foreign policy, and serves as an exemplary framework of international relations theory through which to demonstrate the perpetuation of stereotypical bias

in film. In addition to his alignment with the monolithic framework critiqued by Said, Huntington also embodies the inextricable link between imperialism and orientalism, best exhibited by the *Clash of Civilizations* being published in the Journal of Foreign Affairs rather than solely academic journals. Despite facing criticism within academic circles due to its Orientalist foundations, Huntington's perspective was evidently considered valuable by the foreign policy analysts of the dominant international hegemon.

This dualistic foreign policy paradigm once again framed monolithic cultural and religious identities as the primary drivers of conflict in the post–Cold War world (Huntington 1997, 67). Huntington extends this logic to the idea that different civilizations formed out of cultural identity, as opposed to nationalist tendencies. He thereby posits an inevitable “clash of civilizations” between incongruent cultures as the dominant paradigm for understanding conflict in a unipolar world. As revealed by his postulated geopolitical paradigm, Huntington actualizes the Orientalism critiqued within the preceding sections. One major limitation of his, as with many scholars in the Orientalist canon, is neglecting cultural diversity within the “Other”, eschewing it instead for monolithic blocs (*e.g.*, the West, the Islamic world, and Confucian Asia).

Furthermore, Huntington's perspective has been thoroughly critiqued by many of the scholars whose work forms the bedrock of this thesis including Edward Said, Michael Shapiro, and Derek Gregory. It is due to these glaring pitfalls of Orientalism that my work utilizes the *Clash of Civilizations* as a key tool for understanding the intellectual traps inherent within Orientalist logic. By investigating a framework such as Huntington's, one can elucidate how cultural media may propagate this constructed “clash” even further by perpetuating the socially constructed binary between East and West along with its associated stereotypical biases.

Gregory explains that due to the supposedly secular world of modernity reaping the whirlwind of "God's revenge" in the form of a global religious revivalism, Huntington concluded that the "overwhelming majority of fault-line conflicts have taken place along the boundary looping across Eurasia and Africa that separates Muslims from non-Muslims" (Gregory 2004, 57). This derived from what Huntington saw as "the Muslim propensity toward violent conflict", essentially concluding that Muslims cannot live peacefully with non-Muslim neighbours (Gregory 2004, 58). The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism," Huntington declared. "It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power." (Gregory 2004, 57).

As Gregory points out with reference to Said, this is dangerously reductive thinking. Culture, as Said has reminded us, has always been syncretic. "What culture today has not had long, intimate, and extraordinarily rich contacts with other cultures?" (Gregory 2004, 57). Claims like Huntington's are also dangerous because, in theorizing that the world is split into rival blocs, they participate in a "word politics" which in turn "prepares the ground for the construction of its architecture of enmity as material fact" (Gregory 2004, 58). This is further elaborated on in Chapter 3 (the cognitive psychology of implicit bias formation), as the factionalization of the globe into ethically opposed cultural blocs (moral geographies) may be a potentially important step in the perpetuation of stereotypes concerning the cultural monolith of the "Orient". As noted by Gregory, that is why these claims are so often activated in moments of crisis: "they enable the state to construct "the worlds of danger to its coherence, " to conjure a menacing Other that requires its own consolidation as a unitary and cohesive master-subject" (Gregory 2004, 58).

In a scathing critique of Huntington's theory, Edward Said rebuts the idea of the *Clash of Civilizations* as reductionist, incendiary, and little more than the worst aspects of Orientalism strung together. This response further solidifies the international relations framework of this thesis, as it showcases the lack of theoretical force Huntington's ideas have, upon which the bulk of Hollywood film portraying encounters between East and West are built. Note that I am not positing that screenwriters were directly influenced by Huntington as they wrote *Alexander, 300, or Kingdom of Heaven*. Rather, this highlights how the ideas Huntington discusses from my above summary have become solidified within the popular culture of the "West". Of course, this does not mean that everyone in the West thinks this way (such notions would be as monolithic as Orientalism itself), yet as outlined below by Said, there are those who purport to speak for entire cultures. He labels them as "official representatives of that culture who make themselves into its mouthpiece [and] assign themselves the role of articulating 'our' or for that matter 'their' essence." (Said 1998, 7). Included in this designation are often an "official culture, a culture of priests, academics, and the state" (Said 1998, 7). These groups are dominant voices, and as one of the leading voices behind exporting American culture throughout the world via film, Hollywood may indeed be characterized as a "mouthpiece" of the West (Said 1998, 7). The "official" representatives of culture may not be monolithic, but they are indeed prominent.

Said begins his *Myth of the Clash of Civilizations* (1998) by emphasizing Huntington's harmful significance of reducing the entire Middle East to Islamic fundamentalism, and phrasing an entire geographical region as being diametrically opposed to the "Christian West". In Said's words:

A great deal more attention, hostile attention, is paid to Islam than to any other civilization including the West. The core of Huntington's vision...is the idea of an unceasing clash, a concept of conflict, which slides somewhat effortlessly into the

political space vacated by the unremitting war of ideas and values embodied in the unregretted Cold War (Said 1998, 2).

He continues that the *Clash* is a recycled Cold War framework where “conflicts in today's and tomorrow's world will remain not economic or social in essence but ideological.” (Said 1998, 2). For Huntington, the ideology of the West remains the central locus around which all other civilizations rotate. In essence, this presents the Cold War as continuing, but “this time on many fronts, with many more serious and basic systems of values and ideas like Islam and Confucianism struggling for ascendancy and even dominance over the West.” (Said 1998, 2).

Said states that it is far from shocking that Huntington concludes his essay with “what it is that the West must do to remain strong and keep its opponents weak and divided” (Said, 3). Agency is ascribed not to the East (even a purportedly monolithic and united East), but rather the West. The West must decide, and the West must act, as the responsibility and capability to safeguard the world does not fall with the East, but with the West. Said quotes Huntington’s argument verbatim: “The West must exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests. To strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate western interests and values, and to promote the involvement of nonwestern states in those institutions.” (Said 1998, 3). As Said states, this is a “very interventionist and quite aggressive attitude towards other civilizations to get them to be more western.” (Said 1998, 3). Indeed, Huntington is not only advocating for Western intervention, but also the timeless colonial attitude of divide and conquer.

Said then initiates his rebuttal with first framing Huntington’s opinion as “misleading” (Said, 3). He criticizes Huntington’s understanding of culture as reductionist, proclaiming that it fails to take into account “our concrete understanding and theoretical understanding of how cultures work. How they change, and how they can best be grasped or apprehended.” (Said 1998,



3). Said attributes this to Huntington's sources, suggesting that "journalism and popular demagoguery are his main sources rather than serious scholarship or theory" (Said 1998, 3). With this, he references Bernard Lewis (who coined the term "Clash of Civilizations"), discussing how Lewis proclaimed that Muslims "are all enraged at western modernity." (Said 1998, 4). Said ridicules this, "as if a billion people were really only one person and western civilization was no more complicated a matter than a simple declarative sentence." (Said 1998, 4). His comments echo Michael Shapiro's critique of Huntington within the same year, which positions the *Clash of Civilizations* as reinforcing the rigid and binary moral geographies which link political conflict with monolithic cultural boundaries. Shapiro exclaims that:

Nevertheless, the "reality" that Huntington assembles in his West versus the rest mapping of the globe constitutes a moral geography, a security-oriented ethico-political initiative aimed at protecting an enclave whose civilizational integrity is a more a function of the way he tells the story of modernity than it is of stable cultural or civilizational difference (Shapiro 1998, 4).

Said continues that this is classic Orientalism in two parts. First, the idea that "civilizations are monolithic and homogeneous" and second, "the unchanging character of the duality between us and them." (Said 1998, 4).

Said argues that Huntington reduces Islamic civilization down to mere "anti-Westernism", identifying it as the foundation of an entire religion and its adherents (Said 1998, 4). With a dry wit, he comments that "it doesn't matter to (Huntington) that Muslims have other things to do than to think about the West with hatred. But you get the impression that that's all they are thinking about is how to destroy the West, bomb it and destroy the whole world really" (Said 1998, 4). He then asks if "this the best way to understand the world we live in? Is it wise to produce a simplified map of the world and then hand it to generals and civilian lawmakers as a prescription for first comprehending and then acting in the world? Doesn't this in

effect prolong and deepen conflict? What does it do to minimize civilizational conflict? Do we *want* the clash of civilizations? Doesn't it mobilize nationalist passions and therefore nationalist murderousness? Shouldn't we be asking the question, why is one doing this sort of thing? To understand or to act? To mitigate or to aggravate the likelihood of conflict?" (Said 1998, 4).

These questions run at the heart of why I have analyzed the contributions of Hollywood films to a cultural reservoir consisting of Orientalist perspectives of the "Other". Said comments that "labels that collapse particular religions, races and ethnicities into ideologies (the West, Islam, Confucianism, the Jews, Slavic culture, etc.) are considerably provocative", and these reductions into group identity are often used to facilitate a "whole slew of rhetorics justifying...the right to plunder...and colonize others" (Said 1998, 5). One salient example of this is the French Civilizing mission (*la mission civilisatrice*), "a notion underlying which is the idea that some races and cultures have a higher aim in life than others. This gives the more powerful, the more developed, the more civilized, the higher, the right to colonize others, not in the name of brute force, or plunder, both of which are standard components of the exercise, but in the name of a noble ideal." (Said 1998, 5).

In response to Huntington's reductionist logic, Said argues that two things occur. The first is that "competing imperial powers invent their own theory of cultural destiny in order to justify their actions abroad" (Said 1998, 5). Examples of this were present in Germany, Britain, and the notions of American Manifest Destiny. These paradigms give credence to the practice of "competition and clash", whose true purposes are self aggrandizement, power, conquest, treasure, and unrestrained self-pride." (Said 1998, 6). The second consequence is that the so-called "lesser people, the objects of the imperial gaze so to speak; respond by resisting their forcible manipulation and settlement." (Said 1998, 6). Said highlights the active resistance to

European settlement in Algeria, East Africa, and India, among others, mentioning that the initial resistance was followed by secondary resistance. This secondary resistance involved political organization and cultural movements targeted at achieving independence from the imperial yoke. Said notes that at “precisely the moment in the nineteenth century that among the European and American powers a rhetoric of cultural self-justification begins to be widespread, a responding rhetoric among the colonized people develops, one that speaks in terms of African or Asian or Arab or Muslim unity, independence, self-determination” (Said 1998, 6). In India, this took the shape of political parties organizing to convince the Indian elite that “only by supporting Indian languages, industry and commerce could political freedom come” (Said 1998, 6). Indeed, indigenous aspects of the colonized culture become hailed as authentic, “ours and ours alone”, and only by supporting “our world against theirs can we finally stand on our own” (Said 1998, 6).

This showcases the self-fulfilling nature of the *Clash of Civilizations* which Huntington misrepresents as an inherent and natural divide. Any animosity from Eastern groups towards the colonial West is not eternal. It is created as a direct consequence of Western imperialism and colonialism. Without the French Civilizing Mission which justified the conquest of “Oriental” spaces, there would be no Oriental hatred of the Western other. This is not the same as saying there would never be conflict between Eastern and Western groups, but rather that there would be no organized, monolithic Eastern movement to resist an equally monolithic West. The hostility is not innate, it is a manufactured response. Meanwhile, the very perception of cultural monoliths also occurs as a consequence of both the initial imperial incursion, and the subsequent response.

Harkening back to Said's point of official mouthpieces speaking on behalf of entire cultures, he notes that what is missing from Huntington's work is the presence of counter-culture. Said proclaims that "in addition to the mainstream or official culture, there are dissenting or alternative, unorthodox, heterodox, strands that contain many anti-authoritarian themes in them that are in competition with the official culture. These can be called the counterculture, an ensemble of practices associated with various kinds of outsiders, the poor, immigrants, artistic Bohemians, workers, rebels, artists." (Said 1998, 7). It is from this counter-culture that "critique of authority" comes from within, attacking views seen as "official and orthodox" (Said 1998, 8). He posits that:

No culture is understandable without some sense of this ever-present source of creative provocation from the unofficial to the official. To disregard the sense of restlessness in the West, in Islam, in Confucianism, within each culture and to assume that there's complete homogeneity between culture and identity, is to miss what is vital and fertile in culture (Said 1998, 8).

This misrepresentation is the core of why Huntington's ideas are fundamentally reductionist, monolithic, and incomplete. To further cement the importance of perspectives which counter the dominant culture, Said summarizes Arthur Schlesinger's critique of American history which he frames as historically being "the history of Bancroft and Adams and so on" but which is rapidly evolving to consider counter-cultural perspectives (Said 1998, 8).

New groups in American society want the writing of history to reflect not only an America that was conceived of and ruled by Patricians and landowners, but an America in which slaves, servants, laborers and poor immigrants played an important, but as yet unacknowledged role. The narratives of such people, silenced by the great discourses whose source was Washington, the investment banks of New York, the universities of New England, and the great industrial fortunes of the middle and far west, have come to disrupt the slow progress and unruffled serenity of the official story. They ask questions, interject the experience of social unfortunates, and make the claims of lesser peoples, of women, Asian and African Americans, and various other minorities, sexual as well as ethnic (Said 1998, 8).

This is once again central to this thesis, as the following chapters demonstrate how the “claims of lesser peoples, of women...and various other minorities, sexual as well as ethnic” are absent from the dominant culture of Hollywood film, particularly as it pertains to depictions of East/West encounters. Instead, they are dictated by cultural clashes the likes of which Huntington frames as dictating international relations. Conflict supersedes cooperation and there are scarcely instances showcasing cultures (especially “opposing” ones) as non-monolithic. We frequently observe dissent in the Western blocs of these films (such as the treasonous Ephialtes who betrays the noble Spartans in *300*), but there are no “honourable” Persians who dissent from Xerxes’ tyranny within the same film. Even in *Alexander*, though Alexander the Great derides the Greeks for their xenophobia (portraying him as enlightened), we see no examples of Persians, Indians or Bactrians “thinking differently” from their monolithic cultures.

Indeed, as Said reiterates, the aforementioned aspect of counter-culture showcases that most people and cultures are not monoliths. Huntington, however, skips this notion entirely in favour of the *Clash of Civilizations*. Said notes that to theorists like Huntington, “civilization identity is a stable and undisturbed thing”, and to “emphasize the differences between cultures is to completely ignore the literally unending debate about *defining* the culture or civilization within those civilizations, including western ones.” (Said 1998, 9). Furthermore, by paying attention to the *Clash*, Said exclaims that one completely “obliterates” the history of cultures having “intimate and extraordinarily rich contacts with other cultures” (Said 1998, 9). The spirit of cooperation is missed entirely when one proclaims an “undying clash between cultures” (Said 1998, 9). Instead, it contributes to the “discourse of Orientalism, a construction fabricated to whip up feelings of hostility and antipathy against a part of the world that happens to be of strategic importance for its oil” (Said 1998, 9).

Said notes the significant difference between Indonesian Islam and Egyptian Islam, as well as the plethora of secular aspects of the “Islamic” world, from Egypt to Iraq. In a world such as this, it is far from accurate to argue Huntington’s paradigm which labels “the world of Islam” as “all terrorists and fundamentalists”, while emphasizing “how different and irrational they are compared to us” (Said 1998, 9). Said concludes that the “weakest part of the clash of cultures and civilizations is the rigid separation assumed between “civilizations” despite the overwhelming evidence that today's world is, in fact, a world of mixtures, of migrations and of crossings over, of boundaries traversed (Said 1998, 9). Indeed, the presence of sizable minority communities such as North Africans in France and Indian populations in North America (themselves often portrayed as monolithic), serves as evidence against the notion that civilization is purely “one thing”, a homogenous monolith (Said 1998, 10). Some migrant communities retain more traditionalist aspects of their cultures, some assimilate more directly into the cultures of their new host countries, and many find hybridized approaches of integrating their various cultures. Regardless of outcome, it is clear that culture by its very nature is protean. It can be many things, but a monolith is not one; therefore, the *Clash of Civilizations* is moot.

Despite its reductionist and disputable nature as a framework of international relations, however, Huntington’s ideals have become commonplace among the foreign policy of countries like the United States. Said wonders if this is why the *Clash* was published in *Foreign Affairs*, and not academic journals. Huntington’s perspective favours policy makers who crave a new paradigm by which to extend the mindset of the Cold War to a new space for a new audience, far more than it does cultural and political theorists. Said posits that “efforts to return the community of civilizations to a primitive stage of narcissistic struggle, need to be understood, not as descriptions about how in fact civilizations behave, but rather as incitements to wasteful conflict”

(Said 1998, 10). In addition to foreign policy, this attitude is abundant in Hollywood films portraying encounters between “East” and “West”, which either start off confrontational or devolve into conflict due to Eastern aggression, indecency, or malevolence. In order to understand why so many Hollywood films utilize this formula in their dealings with the “Orient”, it is crucial to not only analyze the underlying theme of the *Clash of Civilizations*, but also the profound critique of its theory from the theorist who critiqued Orientalism itself.

Following 9/11, Huntington’s imaginative geography could be used to rally the “West”, as an attack on America was indeed perceived as a fundamental “Clash of Civilizations” (Gregory 2004, 58). Others used Huntington’s representation of Muslims and the Islamic world to essentially degrade the very idea of Islam as civilization, relegating it to a singular degenerate “throwback to feudalism”, thereby incapable of being accommodated by the modern, and prototypically American/Western, world (Gregory 2004, 58). This was Orientalism with a vengeance, a progressive “West” set against an immobile “Islam” that was, “if not a barbarism, then the breeding-ground of barbarians” (Gregory 2004, 58). If Huntington was not enough, Gregory highlights that military historian John Keegan took this argument to new heights, proclaiming that:

Westerners fight face to face, in stand-up battle, and go on until one side or the other gives in. They choose the crudest of weapons available, and use them with appalling violence, but observe what to non-Westerners may well seem curious rules of honour. Orientals, by contrast, shrink from pitched battle, which they often deride as a sort of game, preferring ambush, surprise, treachery and deceit as the best way to overcome an enemy (Keegan, 2001).

In Keegan’s perception, 9/11 was nothing new, “Arabs, appearing suddenly out of empty space like their desert raider ancestors, assaulted the heartlands of Western power in a terrifying surprise raid and did appalling damage.” (Gregory 2004, 59). Essentially, Muslims will play (and have always played) dirty. This of course extends to cultural depictions, including historical and

Orientalist cinematic representations, exhibited by the threat of poison awaiting *Alexander* (2004) in Babylon and the suicidal pyromancers utilized by the Persians at Thermopylae and Salamis in *300* (2006) and its sequel.

As mentioned earlier, this monolithic approach not only disregards the varying Middle Eastern cultures and individuals which do not conform to this stereotype, but also fails to regard how American drones and missiles raining from the sky upon unsuspecting civilians are perceived by Easterners. As Gregory highlights throughout his work, many words may be used to describe these present colonial actions, but “honourable” is rarely one. Once again, this difference in disposition of warfare is rooted in imaginative geography. Keegan insisted “peoples of the desert and the empty spaces” do not exist on the same “level of civilization” as those of the West and, even as he protested that he was not deploying stereotypes, he drew a grotesque distinction between the “predatory, destructive Orientals” and the “creative, productive” peoples of the West (Gregory 2004, 60). Fareed Zakaria took it even further with “[t]his is the land of suicide bombers, flag-burners and fiery mullahs” (Gregory 2004, 60). In one reductionist statement the various, vibrant cultures of the region were replaced with a monolithic diabolical enemy. As Gregory notes, by this logic “one might just as easily (and accurately) say that America is the land of serial killers, neo-Nazi militias, and Christian fundamentalists” (Gregory 2004, 60).

By framing this conflict as a chapter of the “clash of civilizations”, it served to confirm that America was engaged in a “holy war against its enemy” and to imply that, as geographer John Agnew put it, “vice and virtue have geographical addresses” (Gregory 2004, 61). These representations of vice and virtue were then able to be mapped onto cultural media, including Orientalist film, thereby propagating stereotypes of the dichotomous geographic monoliths



throughout the cultural reservoir. Gregory captures the danger of this sentiment brilliantly, by invoking Agnew's characterization of a monolithic holy war as being a mirror image of Bin Laden's own jihad. Gregory cites Agnew, stating "Bin Laden's is a cultural war, not an economic one" (Gregory 2004, 60). He continues:

He does not worry about the starvation of the Afghan masses among whom he lives. The economy of the Middle East is definitely not his priority...His writings and pronouncements do not give pride of place to the Palestinian struggle. . . . Bin Laden is the Samuel Huntington of the Arab world. . . . He offers a mirror-image security mapping of the world to that offered by Huntington and other prophets of the "clash of civilizations" (Gregory 2004, 60).

Through Agnew, Gregory highlights how, just like Western pundits, Bin Laden merges ontology with geography, the foundation of the modern geopolitical imagination (Gregory 2004, 61).

These representations serve the same need, each "perpetuates the anti-modern impulse of aggression and reinforces the stubborn nature of cultural opposition." (Gregory 2004, 61).

Indeed, since the Iranian Hostage Crisis of 1979, a conjunction between Islam and terrorism has become established within American public culture (Gregory 2004, 77). As my work in Chapter 4 will highlight further, mental conjunctions can exploit cognitive heuristics so that the probability of two events occurring together (Muslims are terrorists) becomes more salient than either of its options existing alone (Muslims are Muslims / terrorists are terrorists). This conjunction fallacy runs at the heart of the "Clash of Civilizations", which, by the time Gregory writes in 2004, had come to power imaginative geographies set in motion by the Bush administration which "not only have performative force, they also have extraordinarily destructive power" (Gregory 2004, 75).

Throughout Gregory's work, certain Orientalist themes present themselves with relation to foreign policy. The air of mystique and uncertainty which pervades "the Orient" appeared to render Palestinian towns and cities as "impenetrable, unknowable spaces" whose close quarters

were beyond "the three-dimensional gaze of the IDF's high-technology surveillance systems." (Gregory 2004, 108). Keegan's claims of desert people having different, dishonourable warfare became rooted in their imaginative geography, "they" come from unknowable desert spaces. Time Magazine enlarged a sense of urban warfare threat in a graphical illustration of "The Perils" of the Iraqi city, showcasing an exaggerated Orientalized street (Gregory 2004, 202). This was a stylized "Oriental" street, hardly modern Baghdad, with "Iraqi soldiers disguised as civilians," "Iraqi soldiers faking surrender," tunnels and sewers "conceal[ing] Iraqi soldiers and arms," and "mosques, hospitals and historic buildings that the US would prefer not to demolish [but] could hide soldiers or munitions" (Gregory 2004, 202).

Gregory details that the Orientalist imagery here was more than mere scenography. This was a "city in which nothing was as it seemed, where deceit and danger threatened at every turn" (Gregory 2004, 202). And yet with the right tools of modernity one could reveal every aspect of the hidden, exposing all the traps, and "lifting the Oriental veil", as it was in the magazine's print edition with a bright circle surrounding "Baghdad", suggesting the powerful effects of night-vision goggles.

## **2.6 *Homo sacer***

Furthering the concept of the civilized fighting the barbarous, Gregory observed a series of parallels between the "imaginative geographies deployed by America in its military assault on Afghanistan and those deployed by Israel in its military operations in the occupied territories of Palestine." (Gregory 2004, 117). Afghans and Palestinians were reduced to targets, barbarians and *Homo sacer*. This concept, with its etymology taken from Ancient Rome, denotes a certain type of individual who is outside of Roman law, essentially banned from civil society. One who can be legally killed by anybody but is unfit to sacrifice in any religious ritual. This framework is

of immense use when analyzing the wanton destruction which the West wrought on so many individuals, as they were never truly perceived as real people, but rather *Homo sacer*. Rarely were there reports of Iraqi teachers, Afghan shopkeepers, Palestinian artists; ordinary men, women, or children. Instead, the phrase most commonly used for casualties were “fighters” (Gregory 2004, 234). Once again, the monolith of the Other presents itself. When America is perceived as only fighting waves of “Iraqi fighters” with no individuality, any action against them could be sanctioned. Once again, this evokes Said’s powerful quote about Orientalism’s erasure of the lived human experience. There is no lived human experience within the nameless “fighter”.

Exploring a cinematic connection, this uniformity is reminiscent of *300* where King Leonidas questions the fighting prowess of the Athenians by asking their occupations, to which they respond, “painters, smiths, and sculptors”, while the Spartans respond with a warlike scream when asked their occupation (*300*, 28:40, 2006). Like the Spartans, the “Orientals” are uniform. Yet the crucial difference is, unlike the Spartans, they have no individuality. Each Spartan is named, has familial bonds depicted, and is given an identity outside of their warrior status. Through this cinematic enterprise, Greece itself is given a heterogeneous identity, composed of Athenian artisans and Spartan warriors. Its citizens are therefore unique individuals, even if they belong to “guild-like” groups. The Persian enemy however, gets no such treatment in *300*. They are merely slaves to Xerxes, nothing more, nothing less. The entire Orient is reduced down to “slave” and “slave-masters”, with the masters being slaves to their own temptations as Aristotle proclaims in *Alexander*. In short, no one in the East is truly free or has their own individual identity, therefore no one in the East truly lives. So there can be no true crime in killing them, *Homo sacer* to the core, as demonstrated cinematically in the emotionless slaughter of Persian

soldiers in 300, repeatedly characterized as nothing more than the servants of an immoral, enslaving emperor. Individuality is afforded only to the Western protagonist, just as in interventionist Western foreign policy operations. To further solidify this, the same imaginative geography may be observed at work when, in January 1996, Bush's former National Security Adviser affirmed that “a thousand Iraqi lives [are] equal to one American”, and in May of the same year when Madeleine Albright was asked about a report that over 500,000 Iraqi children had died as a result of sanctions. She replied: “We think it's worth it.” (Gregory 2004, 175).

When Israel was described as "a villa in the middle of the jungle" and "a vanguard of culture against barbarism," it was not only degrading Palestinian culture and belittling its civil society: it was also “rendering its spaces primitive, outside the space of Reason” (Gregory 2004, 120). Gregory emphasizes the impact of these representations by remarking again that “representations are not mere mirrors of the world. They enter directly into its fabrication” (Gregory 2004, 121). By combining the logic of impermeable, unknown, and primitive Oriental spaces with that of *Homines sacri*, “from whom rights and protections of international law could be systematically withdrawn”, the United States, Israel, and Britain’s offenses were designed to turn Afghans, Palestinians, and Iraqis not only into enemies but “into aliens, placing them outside the modern, figuratively and physically” (Gregory 2004, 121). Even though differences between the Islamist Hamas and the secular Palestinian Authority are profound, this did not matter to the same force of imaginative geography which lumped the Taliban and Al-Qaeda with Ba’athist Iraq (whose main victims were not “Westerners”, but rather Shi’ite Muslims and Kurds). The monoliths of foreign policy in the wake of 9/11 needed no logical justification other than Orientalism and imaginative geography.

Gregory then dives into the embodiment and animalization of these *Homo sacer*, by quoting first hand accounts following the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait after its short-lived invasion. He connects this pre-9/11 event to the current situation through the use of imaginative geographies. After being routed by U.S forces, the order was given to stop Saddam's front line troops (composed mainly of ill-equipped young conscripts) from withdrawing back into Iraq (Gregory 2004, 164). They were cut down as they attempted to flee with no chance for surrender. Air Force Colonel Dick "Snake" White remarked "it's like someone turned on the kitchen light late at night, and the cockroaches started scurrying. We finally got them out where we can find them and kill them" (Gregory 2004, 164). According to John Balzar of the Los Angeles Times, infrared films of the United States assault suggest "sheep, flushed from a pen, Iraqi infantry soldiers bewildered and terrified, jarred from sleep and fleeing their bunkers under a hell storm of fire. One by one they were cut down by attackers they couldn't see or understand" (Gregory 2004, 165).

The Iraqis were mostly fleeing in commandeered civilian vehicles, but "even Iraqi tanks were flying white flags and riding with their turrets open" (Gregory 2004, 165). Still, coalition forces continued the assault. It was "like a giant hunt," one journalist traveling with the US army noted, in which "the Iraqis were driven ahead of us like animals" (Gregory 2004, 165). Gregory highlights how:

these bestializing metaphors - reducing people to "cockroaches" and "sheep," and elsewhere to "sitting ducks," "rabbits in a sack," and "fish in a barrel" - reached their ugly and only too physical climax in the "turkey shoot" on February 26 (Gregory 2004, 165).

He recalls the account of journalist Robert Fisk, who witnessed a camera crew filming wild dogs savaging the corpses of Iraqi soldiers: "every few seconds a ravenous beast would rip off a decaying arm and make off with it over the desert in front of us, dead fingers trailing through the sand, the remains of the burned military sleeve flapping in the wind." (Gregory 2004, 167). Yet

he knew that the footage would never be shown. Quoting Fisk, Gregory remarks that for casualties to be shown on screen, if they were shown at all:

it was necessary for them to have died with care, on their backs, one hand over a ruined face . . . benignly, and with no obvious wounds, without any kind of squalor, without a trace of shit or mucus or congealed blood”, so that their bodies were romanticized and their audience anaesthetized. The watching, and, in their way, devouring, public had to be shielded from the vile sights that Fisk witnessed. They were protected by military and media censorship and by what he called “war's linguistic mendacity” (Gregory 2004, 168).

Throughout these sanitized portrayals of U.S foreign policy, perceived enemies of the collective “West” were depicted as mere *Homo sacer*, who perished in orderly fashion against the military superiority of the West.

Journalistic accounts are not alone among cultural media for displaying these dehumanizing representations, as historical and Orientalist films often convey identical themes. This visual culture evoked through events such as the Gulf War “turkey shoot” may be directly associated with the analyzed films, as the same “bestializing metaphors” pervading the political sentiment surrounding the U.S. perspective on the Gulf War occur throughout these depictions. One particular historical event which is consistently reduced to a spectacle of “Individual Heroes” versus *Homo sacer* in each of its cinematic interpretations is the Battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.E), which is framed in historical and Orientalist cinema as not only a significant battle within the broader Greco-Persian wars, but rather a pivotal milestone defining Western courage, capability, and liberty. The reporting of Iraqi casualties, reduced to animals with no concept of individuality or even collateral damage, mirrors the dehumanizing methods in which the *Homo sacer* Persians are portrayed being dispatched in *The 300 Spartans* (1962), *300* (2006), and (though focusing instead on The Battle of Salamis and framing it as possessing similar moral geographical significance to Thermopylae), *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014).

This imagery must be kept in mind when recalling Keegan's earlier commentary of deceitful and cowardly Oriental warfare which is inherent to dishonourable desert folk. Once again, the wholesale massacre of fleeing Iraqi conscripts certainly evokes many words, yet one would be hard pressed to include "honourable" among them. Ironically, "barbaric" may align better. Yet harkening back to Keegan's comments following 9/11 that the "perpetrators appeared suddenly out of empty space, without warning or provocation was barbaric, uncivilized, and a hallmark of the Orient", it is important to recall the aforementioned American missile strike which killed an innocent Iraqi shepherd boy coming home from school. It appeared without warning from a previously clear sky, leaving an innocent boy with "most of his head torn off, the white of his robe stained red." (Gregory 2004, 175). It should be noted that this event occurred while the Twin Towers still stood in 2000. This reality is uncomfortable, as there are no cartoonish blocs of good and evil on different sides of the world. Yet, dehumanizing the victims (both as animals and *Homo sacer*) goes a long way in justifying this kind of aggression.

In its strategy of presenting the United States as synonymous with the "modern world", the Bush administration continued applying the framework of Orientalism. By alienating its enemies as outsiders, fundamentally opposed to the universal nation (the U.S), the "war on Iraq became another front in the continuing fight against "the enemies of civilization": terrorists, tyrants, and barbarians" (Gregory 2004, 195). Invoking religious imagery further allowed Bush and his colleagues to model the conflict as another round in Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (Gregory 2004, 196). Indeed, the Iraq War's positioning within Orientalist rhetoric is clear when considering Thomas Friedman's argument that "the shock of the war on Iraq to the Arab world could be compared only with the Israeli victory over the Arab armies in 1967 and Napoleon's

invasion of Egypt in 1798.” (Gregory 2004, 196). Once again, the theme of fundamental opposing blocs engaged in a timeless clash presented itself.

This would be incomplete without a statement from John Keegan (by this point labelled “indefatigable” by Gregory), stating that resistance to occupation is no more than mere “Oriental outrage at western military superiority” (Gregory 2004, 195). Keegan preaches that:

Islam's subsequent decline (since Ottoman days) embittered Muslims everywhere, but particularly those...in the Middle East. Muslims, convinced of the infallibility of their belief system, are merely outraged by demonstrations of the unbelievers' material superiority, particularly their military superiority...Western civilization, rooted in the idea that the improvement of the human lot lies in material advance and the enlargement of individual opportunity, is ill-equipped to engage with a creed that deplores materialism and rejects the concept of individuality, particularly individual freedom. The defeat of Saddam has achieved a respite, an important respite, in the contest between the Western way and its Muslim alternative. It has not, however, secured a decisive success. The very completeness of the Western victory in Iraq ensures the continuation of the conflict (Gregory 2004, 195-196).

Of course, this encapsulation of the Orientalist ideal would not be complete without Middle Eastern lamentation at their very representation being continually juxtaposed against America’s “modernity,” thereby leading to false and simplified conclusions drawn about civilized people and barbarians. Following America’s invasion of Iraq, a Baghdad primary school teacher told one human rights worker “we are the oldest civilization, but we are presented to the world as terrorists” (Gregory 2004, 214). She continued “only people who fight with small guns are called terrorists. Bush, who bombs us with cluster bombs and strangles us with the embargo, is a ‘civilized man’” (Gregory 2004, 214).

While the imaginative geographies existed far before September 11, they were revitalized and connected to “performances of space” which Gregory argues have been continually deployed in the years since (Gregory 2004, 248). Essentially, colonial logic became tied with a particular



physical location because of the cultural history associated with it and ascribed to it by the West. This practice of Orientalism allowed for large-scale opposition, “mobilizing a largely cultural register, in which antagonism was reduced to a conflict between a unitary Civilization and multiple barbarisms.” (Gregory 2004, 249). America, with its proxies and allies, answered the valiant call against the gathering forces of darkness. Agents of evil such as Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein became “doppelgangers, inversions of the face of Goodness reflected in the White House mirror, with fateful consequences for the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, while fundamentalists on both the Christian and the Zionist right saw the dispossession of the Palestinians as fulfilling God's ultimate purpose” (Gregory 2004, 249). Through this supposedly Manichean confrontation, the insidious methods of colonialism were reformed and “rehabilitated in our own present” (Gregory 2004, 251).

In observing Michael Ignatieff's remarks following 9/11, Gregory notes how a call for renewed imperialism and colonialism is evident. Ignatieff comments:

America has now felt the tremor of dread that the ancient world must have known when Rome was first sacked. Then and now an imperial people has awakened to the menace of the barbarians. Just beyond the zone of stable democratic states...thanks to modern technology, they are able to inflict devastating damage on centres of power far away. Retribution has been visited on the barbarians, and more will follow...Terror has collapsed distance, and with this collapse has come a sharpened focus in imperial capitals on the necessity of bringing order to the barbarian zones (Gregory 2004, 251).

Gregory highlights Ignatieff's remarks as championing “hegemony without colonies” through a unified global sphere of influence, which served as a cautionary tale when contrasted with Veenas Das proclaiming “the distinction between an 'inside' in which values of democracy and freedom were propagated, and an 'outside' which was not ready for such values and hence had to be subjugated by violence in order to be reformed” (Gregory 2004, 255). He continues, “this

marked the rhetoric and practice of colonialism and its deep connections with Western democracies” (Gregory 2004, 255).

This practice, designating inclusion through the existence of exclusion remains at the center of imaginative geographies, and their extension into models of international relations (i.e., Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations) and foreign policy that fits within these models (Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan). The colonial present is built on, and empowers, these models, to the detriment of those on both sides of the dichotomy, but is particularly harmful to those relegated to the “outsiders”. Indeed, as Gregory notes, throughout the non-Islamic world Arabs and Muslims have been made desperately vulnerable by these identifications, and Huntington himself cites a passage that speaks directly to these issues (Gregory 2004, 260). He remarks “there can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are” (Gregory 2004, 260). Huntington described this as “an unfortunate truth”, as though it were somehow inscribed in the nature of things (Gregory 2004, 260). In constructing multiple others as “Other,” and in assenting to these constructions and impositions, we not only do this to others: we do it to ourselves (Gregory 2004, 261).

Our powers of perception are often far stronger than we give them credit, and they can be mobilized to unify, just as much as they are to divide. Gregory’s conclusion echoes Said’s ultimate sentiment, that the fundamental failure of Orientalism is its failure to identify with lived human experience. In order to move past Orientalism, the “Clash of Civilizations”, and the “Colonial Present”, it is important to situate ourselves not in imaginative geographies, but rather expand our “geographical imaginations” with care, concern, and humility (Gregory 2004, 262). Situating this understanding within the greater paradigm of implicit cognitive bias perpetuation through Orientalist cinema, it is probable that the consistent monolithic ways in which certain

regions, ethnicities, and physical attributes are visually represented in film contribute to the propagation of negative stereotypes. By replacing monolithic stereotypes with expanded cinematic “geographical imaginations”, various lived human experiences among historical cultures could be visually represented, aligning with Gregory and Said’s considerations. Producers of historical films could thereby still communicate narratives concerning the Middle East or portray interactions between East and West, while avoiding the sole reliance on monolithic Orientalized stereotypes.

With a cultural studies foundation established concerning the significance of moral geographies, such as the Orientalist perspective of the “Eastern” world, it is important to now consider how implicit bias is perpetuated throughout media. The next chapter investigates the mental processes underlying these biases, which may potentially facilitate the propagation of Orientalist stereotypes within historical films, echoing themes reminiscent of Huntington’s “clash of civilizations”. Regardless of intention, historical films may therefore serve as vessels for the perpetuation of Orientalist stereotypes and implicit biases. In order to elucidate this possibility, a psychological perspective focusing on the cognitive mechanisms underlying stereotypes, judgement, and the propagation of implicit biases is explored in the following pages.

### **Chapter 3: Cognitive Psychological Theoretical Orientation**

The next step in contextualizing how historical films may perpetuate implicit Orientalist stereotypes to their audiences, is the exploration of cognitive psychological research. This chapter contains the discussion of two psychological research paradigms, which are fundamental to this study of cultural cognition considering the propagation of implicit stereotypes. The first is scholarship on judgements and decision-making, which yielded the discovery of cognitive heuristics by Tversky and Kahneman, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The second is Perry Hinton's "culture in mind", a model of implicit stereotypes being a result, not of individual bias, but of the most "prevalent, stereotypical associations within [one's] culture" (Hinton 2017, 2). Indeed, as a result of the mechanisms explored in the following sections, the narratives portrayed in historical film may facilitate an exemplary environment for the propagation of implicit cultural stereotypes, including the perception of a historically tyrannical Middle Eastern "Other".

#### **3.1 Literature Review: Mechanisms of Bias Formation**

The human brain is designed to take regular cognitive shortcuts when processing information for decision making, referred to as *heuristics* (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973). Heuristics are responsible for decisions being made efficiently. Without them, the brain would be overwhelmed by its need to determine which information is relevant to the decision before being able to decide (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In everyday situations where time and knowledge are limited and constrain decision making, heuristic processing is an essential cognitive tool (Bilek, Nedoma, & Jirasek, 2018). Indeed, the robust empirical body of work on cognitive heuristics demonstrates that they simplify human decision-making in economic situations,

providing the advantage of efficiency at the cost of risks arising from a lack of information, creating room for cognitive errors and biases (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973).

In addition to the work of Tversky and Kahneman and scholars such as Schwarz *et al.* whose work on heuristics forms the psychological bedwork of this project, an essential component of this chapter, and indeed, this thesis, is the work of Perry Hinton concerning implicit stereotypes. Exploring the impact of culture on cognition, Hinton postulates that implicit stereotypical associations are picked up by an individual throughout their life and are reflections of the most prominent associations within their given culture (Hinton 2017, 3). These prominent and prevalent cultural associations are what Hinton labels the “culture in mind”, which, he argues, is of critical importance if one aims to comprehend the foundation of implicit stereotypes (Hinton 2017, 3). To this end, Hinton’s analysis of how associations are communicated within social networks is key to understanding how Orientalist stereotypes may be perpetuated through historical film. As an extension of the “culture in mind”, the existing pool of prevalent implicit stereotypical associations itself will often be referred to throughout this thesis as a “cultural reservoir”. Examples of this include the cultural reservoir of Orientalist stereotypes in “Western” film, which contribute to the broader and more sweeping implicit cultural associations within the “Western” culture in mind concerning the Orient.

These prevalent cultural associations, the “cultural reservoirs” which comprises Hinton’s “culture in mind”, may indeed contribute to not only a biased and stereotypical narrative of history, but one which may be used to justify contemporary geopolitical actions aligning with Orientalist perspectives. However, due to this cultural component of Hinton’s model of stereotype perpetuation, it is important to first establish the relationship between implicit biases and mass propaganda. Before exploring the cognitive psychological research on heuristics or

Hinton's cultural model of implicit stereotypes, the work of Edward Bernays, the "Father of Propaganda", is discussed in the section immediately following this. Finally, the concluding section of this chapter connects the established discussion on cognitive heuristics, and the implicit stereotype model of the "culture in mind", with Jeffrey Zacks' research on the psychology of film.

### ***3.1.1 Edward Bernays - Propaganda and the "Father of Public Relations"***

Before progressing further into the cognitive psychological paradigm of this thesis, it is helpful to examine the significance of propaganda by observing how implicit biases may be manipulated at the mass level. To demonstrate how cultural representations found within visual media, including historical film, may exploit heuristic biases to formulate propaganda, an excellent starting point is the work of Edward Bernays. His seminal 1928 book, *Propaganda*, demonstrated the effectiveness of public campaigns and highlighted how communication between groups and individuals can be exploited to convey particular messages (Bernays, 1928). Bernays incorporated the literature from social science and psychological manipulation into an examination of the techniques of public communication aimed at mass audiences. Bernays postulated that "invisible" people who create knowledge and propaganda rule over the masses, and have a monopoly on cultivating thoughts, values, and citizen response (Bernays 1928, 26).

One thing to note is Bernays' arguments for the "merit" of propaganda, positing that "engineering consent" of the masses is vital for the survival of democracy (Bernays 1928, 114). When considering these statements, it should therefore be noted that Bernays' analysis was conducted while employed as director of both corporate and government public relations campaigns, including designing advertisement campaigns for the American tobacco industry. In one particularly salient example, Bernays was tasked with increasing the rates of women

smoking within the United States. During the 1920s, smoking was regarded as inappropriate for women, relegated to an activity for “fallen women” and prostitutes” (Bernays, 1928, 34). In order to transform this perception and increase tobacco sales, Bernays opted for a public relations campaign designed to exploit first-wave feminism and women’s aspirations for equal treatment. Framing cigarettes as “Torches of Freedom”, Bernays marketed the act of smoking as a method by which to truly emancipate oneself from patriarchal constraints on an individual level. The results were historic. After demonstrating the “Torches of Freedom” during the Easter Sunday Parade of March 31, 1929, cigarette smoking became not only normalized among American women, but also encouraged (Brandt 2007, 84-85).

This example highlights the importance of implicit messaging, a process which is rife in all media - especially film. Extending Bernays to the Orientalist principles established within the discussions of Said, McAlister, and Gregory in the previous chapter, by positioning implicit messaging in a way that appeals to one’s “emotions, thoughts, and values”, the “citizen response” can be manipulated into results which the propagandists desire. Just as Bernays exploited the movement for women’s equality to the tobacco industry’s benefit, a rise in genuine reactive patriotism may also be leveraged for imperialist and corporatist benefit through media propaganda. By tapping into the implicit idea of a perceived “historical” clash between a monolithic “East” and “West” following the attacks on September 11, 2001, cinematic media portraying these ancient clashes, such as *300* or *Alexander*, could potentially bolster American support of ventures such as the Iraq War and the “War on Terror”, by perpetuating implicit Orientalist stereotypes, as functions of this perceived historical clash.

Through this logic, Huntington’s aforementioned *Clash of Civilizations* may indeed be characterized as an example of Bernaysian propaganda, though its intentionality cannot be

ascertained. Indeed many directors of films portraying clashes between “East” and “West” during the early 2000s, including Ridley Scott and Wolfgang Petersen objected to the geopolitical actions of the Bush administration. Regardless of intention, however, the weight of implicit messaging is crucial to exploring the ability of all media, including historical films, to function as vessels of Orientalist propaganda. Bernays’ work therefore provides an unparalleled account of how subtle messages can be sewn into public campaigns and spectacles, thereby influencing thoughts and behaviors amongst individuals which they themselves may not always be privy to.

### ***3.1.2 Heuristic Processing and Biased Judgement***

Now that the groundwork for the significance of implicit messaging has been laid through Bernays, an exploration can begin into the inner workings of cognitive psychology - particularly considering heuristic processing. As previously mentioned, heuristics are a method by which the human brain employs shortcuts when processing information for making judgements (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). There are two core cognitive heuristics which this thesis focuses on, that of **availability** and **representativeness**. These are among the oldest and most robustly established heuristic types, discovered by Tversky and Kahneman in 1973, and each supported by a wealth of empirical data from the last fifty years of psychological research. The availability heuristic is the tendency to use information that comes to mind quickly and easily to make a decision (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Alternatively, the representativeness heuristic is a mental shortcut for estimating probabilities, used to assess how similar a situation is to an existing mental prototype, thereby judging its likelihood of occurrence (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

One way to differentiate the two heuristics can be found in two everyday analogies. The analogy which best encapsulates the “availability” heuristic is “*when you hear hooves, think*



*horses - not zebras*”, as the prototype of “horse” often comes to mind quicker than zebras when conceptualizing hooved animals, therefore being more “available”. As for “representativeness”, the essence of this heuristic is conveyed with the analogy “*if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck*”. In this case, because the subject in question matches the stereotypical features of another “representative” prototype, it must thereby match the prototype itself. Indeed, these heuristics are responsible for many curious everyday behaviors which contradict probability.

An oft-cited example from introductory psychology courses is our tendency to say remarks such as “Have a safe flight!”, “Let me know when you land”, etc., when dropping loved ones off at the airport. All of these are essentially code for “I hope you don’t die in a plane crash” as plane crashes have been made highly relevant throughout media. The same people saying these goodbyes will then get into their cars and drive home on the highway without a second thought, even though the probability of getting into a car crash far exceeds that of plane crashes. That paradox is the bias producing capability of the availability heuristic.

Another example of this heuristic as it pertains specifically to film occurred in the summer of 1975, when an increased fear of beaches, oceans, and all things aquatic were reported following the release of Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*. The “Jaws effect” is a well documented case of “irrational fear”, much to the chagrin of marine biologists and ocean conservationists (Neff, 2014). Yet this fear may not be so irrational after all, as it is very likely a manifestation of the availability heuristic. In both examples, media representations increase the cognitive “availability” of scenarios such as plane crashes or shark attacks. By effectively raising the speed with which they are mentally accessed, probability is eschewed in favour of the availability heuristic when calculating outcomes.

In order to demonstrate the impact of the representativeness heuristics on cognitive bias formation, a seminal demonstration from the work of Tversky and Kahneman shall be used as an example. The following excerpt is a verbatim extract from Tversky and Kahneman (1983):

Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations. Which is more probable? Option 1: Linda is a bank teller. Option 2: Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement. The majority of subjects chose option 2. However, this is a logical fallacy, as the “probability of two events occurring together, (in “conjunction”), is always *less than* or *equal* to the probability of either one occurring alone. (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 298).

This particular resulting bias is labeled the “conjunction fallacy”, and the impact of this research was significant. The implication of the conjunction fallacy is significant for cultural studies as it may contribute to the aforementioned statement from Chapter 2. By empowering prototypical perceptions, such as those related to terrorism by facilitating the “image of a terrorist” - linking modern media depictions of Islamic fundamentalists to the symbolic “Oriental” villain historically threatening the West in film, it may be perceived as more probable for a hook-nosed, bearded, Middle Eastern man in an airport to be an Arab *and* a terrorist - rather than merely an Arab (or even just a Middle Easterner).

Of course, the very perception of the untrustworthy Middle Easterner is a biased prototype in of itself, but one that has been reinforced throughout media, particularly in Orientalist film. Through repeated representation, cinematic tropes including deception, malice, or outright terrorism have become stereotypical Middle Eastern character traits, thereby depicting the immorality of the East repeatedly throughout Orientalist film. This in turn has bolstered the availability heuristic, creating conditions for which the most immediate perception recalled upon seeing a Middle Easterner or traveling to the Middle East is one of danger, caution,

and treachery. To explore how this heuristic biases us into fallacies just like representativeness, Tversky and Kahneman designed several studies. In the most frequently cited of these studies, subjects were read two lists of names, one presenting 19 famous men and 20 less famous women and the other presenting 19 famous women and 20 less famous men (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1127). When asked, subjects reported that there were more men than women in the first list but more women than men in the second list, even though the opposite was true, by a difference of 1 (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1127). In a related study subjects were found to overestimate the number of words that began with the letter r but to underestimate the number of words that had r as the third letter, due to the ease with which one recalls the first letter of a word as opposed to the third letter (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1127). These examples of logical fallacies based on immediacy highlight the significant biasing effect the availability heuristic exerts on the average individual.

Representativeness and availability continue to bias individuals in various ways, demonstrating a consistent countering of probability and logic. Tversky and Kahneman discovered that representativeness has an inherent insensitivity to sample size, or in their own words, “to evaluate the probability of obtaining a particular result in a sample drawn from a specified population, people typically apply the representativeness heuristic” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Applying this to a particular experiment regarding average male height, they found that the “similarity of a sample stat to a population parameter does not depend on sample size. If probabilities are judged by representativeness, then the judged probability of a sample stat will be independent of sample size” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). This is relevant to the cinematic perpetuation of stereotypes, as the representativeness heuristic does not take sample size into consideration, facilitating the oft-quoted “bad apples” analogy regarding stereotypes.

Therefore it does not matter if there is a group of 10, 100, or 1000 Muslims, there must be some “bad apples” (terrorists, misogynists, savages, anti-Westerners, etc.). When subjects assessed the distributions of average height for various sample sizes, they produced identical distributions. For example, the probability of obtaining an average height over 6 ft. was assigned the same values for a sample size of 10, 100, and 1000 men (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Once again, this disregarding of sample size as a consequence of the representativeness heuristic could indeed fuel stereotypes regarding the consistent presence of a few Eastern “bad apples”.

Furthermore, subjects failed to appreciate the role of sample size even when it was emphasized in the formulation of the problem. This was evident in the following example where a certain town is served by two hospitals. The study was framed to the subjects as follows: “In the larger hospital about 45 babies are born each day, and in the smaller hospital about 15 babies are born each day. As you know, about 50 percent of all babies are boys. However, the exact percentage varies from day to day. Sometimes it may be higher than 50 percent, sometimes lower. For a period of 1 year, each hospital recorded the days on which more than 60 percent of the babies born were boys. Which hospital do you think recorded more such days?”

- a) The larger hospital (chosen by **21** subjects)
- b) The smaller hospital (chosen by **21** subjects)
- c) About the same - that is, within 5 % of each other (chosen by **53** subjects)

Indeed, as observed by Tversky and Kahneman, most subjects judged the odds as being equal, with this option being chosen by more than twice as many participants as options (a) & (b), because these events are described “by the same statistic and are therefore equally representative of the general population” (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1125). However, this contradicts sampling theory which entails that the “expected number of days on which more than 60 percent of the babies are boys is much greater in the small hospital than in the large one -

because a large sample is less likely to stray from 50 percent” (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1125). As summarized by Tversky and Kahneman, “this fundamental notion of statistics is evidently not part of people's repertoire of intuitions” (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, 1125).

Tversky and Kahneman discovered that significant violations of the conjunction rule occurred in the realms of social stereotypes and what Perry Hinton calls “person perception” (Hinton, 2017, 2). Naturally, they wondered if a higher degree of expertise in the relevant subject matter may inoculate against this fallacy. This would also be of significance to this study of stereotype propagation within historical and Orientalist cinema as it may indicate that, unlike non-specialists, experts in cultural studies, history, and international relations may be shielded from these biases. To test this, a study focusing on probability judgement in the medical community was designed. The rationale not only considered the expert knowledge of physicians in their respective domain, but also previous findings that intuitive judgements often play an important role in medical decision making (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 301).

The problem involved ranking the order of a list of medical scenarios in terms of the “probability that they will be among the conditions experienced by the patient (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983, 301). The physicians were told that the patient could potentially experience more than one of these conditions. The listed symptoms included one option, marked “B”, which was judged to be unrepresentative of the patient's condition by itself, as well as an option which included the conjunction of “B” with a highly representative symptom known as “A” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 301). The subjects were then asked to rank the likelihood of choices by the degree to which they best represent the patient’s clinical condition.

The design was essentially a mirror of the Linda study, and indeed, the results also matched the previous findings on the conjunction fallacy:

The conjunction of an unlikely symptom with a likely one was judged more probable than the less likely constituent. Incidences concerning violations of the conjunction rule in direct tests ranged from 73% to 100%, with an average of 91% (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 301).

The odds of “A” and “B” occurring in conjunction was perceived as more probable by the physicians than “B” by itself. It was concluded that evidently, “substantive expertise does not displace representativeness and does not prevent conjunction errors” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 301). This work was corroborated by Fernandez-Aguilar *et al.* (2022), who found that in 49.6% of cases, the confirmatory diagnosis in their tests coincided with the “initial diagnostic impression” (a prototypical diagnostic), suggesting the use of the representativeness heuristic in the diagnostic decision process (Fernandez-Aguilar *et al.* 2022, 138). In 82.3% of cases, the confirmatory diagnosis was among the “three diagnostic hypotheses that were first identified by the general physicians” (more readily available for mental recall), suggesting a possible use of the availability heuristic (Fernandez-Aguilar *et al.*, 2022, 138).

As with Tversky and Kahneman (1983), the results of Fernandez-Aguilar (2022) suggest “an extensive use of heuristics by primary care physicians” (Fernandez-Aguilar *et al.*, 2022, 139). In almost half of the observed cases, the initial diagnostic impression coincided with the Confirmatory Diagnosis - before the occurrence of any clinical intervention. As noted by Tversky and Kahneman (1983), it has been established that physicians generate their diagnostic hypotheses very early in the diagnostic process and that “even this decision prior to gathering more information is associated with greater diagnostic accuracy” (Fernandez-Aguilar *et al.*, 2021, 139). Fernandez-Aguilar *et al.* (2022) notes that, even in a profession entailing significant expertise, this finding demonstrates the tendency to predetermine the decision regarding the problem afflicting a patient before relevant information is gathered. The implications for this thesis are crucial, as this showcases that even experts in history, cultural studies, film, and

international relations can fall victim to these biases, let alone non-specialists. A security guard who has educated themselves on biases and the stereotypical depictions rife in Orientalist film could, indeed, still fall victim to the conjunction fallacy described above regarding the Middle Eastern man.

Furthermore, in assessing the connection between heuristic bias and expertise, the direct impacts of heuristic processing on political decision-making were studied by Lau and Redlawsk (2001). Their work is important to this project, particularly concerning the degree to which the complexity of an international relations issue influences how its perception may be manipulated. Specifically, Lau and Redlawsk may dictate the ease with which its perception may be manipulated via heuristic processing and implicit biases. Their findings challenged previous prominent assumptions that cognitive heuristics actually improve the decision-making abilities of average voters (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). The potential benefits and costs of five common “political heuristics” were examined, and this study demonstrated how heuristic processing generally increases the probability of a “correct” vote by “political experts”, but decreases the probability of a correct vote by “novices” (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). In this context, a correct vote is described as being “in accordance with what the participants’ fully informed preferences would be” (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). This finding highlights that cognitive heuristics are at times employed by almost all voters, but that they are particularly activated when the choice facing voters is complex. When considering associations between Orientalist films and perceptions of modern international relations, this would imply that the more complex a matter of global affairs is, the easier it is to manipulate its perception using heuristic biases, particularly for non-specialists.

Building on the work of Lau and Redlawsk (2001), Stolwijk (2019) discovered that the representativeness heuristic occupies another role in the simplification of political decision making. This study was built on the question often asked by political scientists; namely how people make political decisions when lacking even basic knowledge about politics (Stolwijk, 2019). According to the analysis of Stolwijk (2019), voters do not need to be aware of all actions and opinions of a political candidate running for office. In order to decide who to vote for, they can rely on cues that represent the performance and issue position of candidates, including their party, ranking in the polls, and the appearance of being presidential. The resulting bias stems from a situation of low information rationality which inversely biases voters into being more confident with their decision. This situation, dubbed the “Illusion of Validity” by Tversky and Kahneman, will be explored in detail later in this chapter. In essence, it exploits heuristics such as representativeness to allow relatively uninformed individuals to act confidently as if they were well informed.

Tversky and Kahneman acknowledged that many of their results might be explained by mere misunderstandings of the word “probability”. To investigate this hypothesis, they tested the conjunction rule in the following decision problem, which incentivized participants to choose the most probable event, without explicitly mentioning the word probability (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 303). It is important to note this experiment within the larger scope of my project, as it demonstrates the robustness of the conjunction fallacy and how this representativeness heuristic byproduct is not limited to language. If the word “probability” itself, or a verbal misunderstanding regarding the rules of probability, was responsible for catalyzing the conjunction fallacy, its uses for a visual medium such as film would be limited. However,



Tversky and Kahneman empirically showcased that this fallacy is not restricted to a verbal misunderstanding of probability or likelihood.

The experiment involved rolling a regular six-sided die and selecting one sequence of possible outcomes from a list of three, with a financial reward for selecting the most accurate outcome. These outcomes involved the colours of the die faces (four green and two red). In the listed outcomes:

“Sequence 1 - RGRRR” could be obtained from “Sequence 2 - GRGRRR” by deleting the first “Green” face (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983, 303). By the conjunction rule, one cannot obtain Sequence 2 without first obtaining Sequence 1, therefore, Sequence 1 must be more probable than Sequence 2. It should also be noted also that all “three sequences are rather unrepresentative of the die because they contain more Rs than Gs. However, Sequence 2 appears to be an improvement over Sequence 1 because it contains a higher proportion of the more likely colour (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 303).

A group of 50 respondents were tasked with ranking the events based on the previously stated incentives - 88% ranked Sequence 2 highest and Sequence 3 lowest (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 303). Sequence 2 was therefore found to be favoured by the representativeness heuristic, although it contains Sequence 1. As predicted, “it is apparent from these results that conjunction errors are not restricted to misunderstandings of the word “probability”” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 303). The subjects still followed the representativeness heuristic with no mention of the word, or any chance for verbally misinterpreting the rules of probability, even in choices involving substantial tangible rewards.

Another domain in which the conjunction fallacy of the representativeness heuristic rears its head is that of evaluating scenarios. Scenarios are common in the context of planning and forecasting future situations, often regarding significant decisions including criminal law and political analysis. The conclusions drawn from these experiments regarding the robustness of the

conjunction fallacy in the context of narrative scenarios is essential to understanding how Orientalist stereotypes could become so ingrained in the “culture in mind”. Tversky and Kahneman therefore studied “whether the forecasting or reconstruction of real-life events is subject to conjunction errors” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 307). Their analysis suggested that a scenario including both a possible cause and an outcome could appear more probable than the outcome by itself. This was tested on two populations: statistically naive students and professional forecasters. One half of participants evaluated the probability of “a massive flood somewhere in North America in 1983, in which more than 1000 people drowned” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983, 307). The other half of the subjects evaluated the probability of “an earthquake in California sometime in 1983, causing a flood in which more than 1000 people drowned” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 307).

As predicted by the previous findings on conjunction fallacies, Tversky and Kahneman state:

estimates of the conjunction (earthquake and flood) were significantly higher than the estimates of the flood. Thus, a reminder that a devastating flood could be caused by the anticipated California earthquake made the conjunction of an earthquake and a flood appear more probable than a flood (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 307).

The same pattern was observed in other problems relevant to geopolitics. One hundred and fifteen participants from the Second International Congress on Forecasting held in Istanbul, Turkey in July 1982 were tested for their susceptibility to the conjunction fallacy. As described by Tversky and Kahneman, most of the subjects were professional analysts, employed by “industry, universities, or research institutes”, who had used forecasting scenarios in their work (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 307). Once again, the previous research design and response schematic were applied. One group evaluated the probability of: “a complete suspension of diplomatic relations between the USA and the Soviet Union, sometime in 1983” (Tversky and

Kahneman 1983, 307). The other respondents evaluated the probability of the same outcome embedded in the following scenario, “a Russian invasion of Poland, and a complete suspension of diplomatic relations between the USA and the Soviet Union, sometime in 1983” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 307). This was a clever manipulation of how expertise can bias ratings of probability. As noted by Tversky and Kahneman:

Although suspension is necessarily more probable than invasion and suspension, a Russian invasion of Poland offered a plausible scenario leading to the breakdown of diplomatic relations between the superpowers. As expected, the estimates of probability were higher for the conjunction invasion and suspension than for suspension (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 308).

An important caveat declared by Tversky and Kahneman was that the subjects do not intentionally adopt this interpretation; rather we propose that the “higher conditional estimate serves as an anchor that makes the conjunction appear more probable” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 308). Therefore, the use of scenarios to assess probability is considered to be particularly vulnerable to conjunction errors. Slovic, Fischhoff, and Lichtenstein (1976) discovered that a detailed scenario consisting of “causally linked and representative events may appear more probable than a subset of these events” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 308). This effect contributes to the appeal of scenarios and to the illusory insight that they often provide.

Tversky and Kahneman demonstrate how this effect may manifest in other aspects, suggesting that the “attorney who fills in guesses regarding unknown facts, such as motive or mode of operation, may strengthen a case by improving its coherence, although such additions can only lower probability” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 308). A political analyst may be vulnerable to the same pitfalls by adding plausible causes and representative consequences to improve the perceived validity of a scenario. Curiously enough, Tversky and Kahneman quote Pooh-Bah from the Mikado to summarize these findings, declaring that additions provide

"corroborative details intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative" (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 308). This operative quote captures the essence of Tversky and Kahneman's work on the conjunction fallacy and connects it directly to the presentation of perspectives such as Huntington's purported "clash of civilizations" within Hollywood film. It demonstrates how the cultural reservoir accrued through media productions including Orientalist historical films perpetuates the stereotype of a tyrannical, Eastern "Other" that is "historically" more likely to embrace conflict with the West rather than cooperation.

The illusory insight provided by the rampant stereotypes in these historical films contributes to an Orientalist "culture in mind" in which the conjunction of "East" and "West" as diametrically opposed cultural monoliths is perceived with a higher probability than them just being separate groups. This extends past the perception of geopolitical blocs, and bleeds down to stereotypes regarding ordinary people from the Middle East. As stated previously, the conjunction of "Muslim" & "Hostile" is perceived as higher than just an ordinary man because of the various depictions in film of Muslim/Brown/Oriental people attacking the West dishonourably throughout history.

Therefore, I posit that a cultural reservoir of implicit stereotypes has accumulated containing many similar prototypical depictions of the "Orient" and the "Oriental" (representativeness), which in turn increases the ease with which they may be recalled (availability). This cultural reservoir is the central focus of this chapter, and contributes directly to consequences such as the conjunction fallacy and implicit biases. Cognitive heuristics and cultural environments facilitate this accumulation of stereotypes, what Hinton labels the "culture in mind", and this specific interplay resembling a positive feedback loop may indeed be

responsible for the propagation of Orientalist stereotypes from media productions such as historical film into the cultural reservoir.

Furthermore, Tversky and Kahneman discovered that conjunctions favour stories and narrative scenarios, and film is indeed constructed around a narrative story. They conclude that the representativeness heuristic has an affinity for outcomes that make good stories or good hypotheses. The conjunction of being both a bank teller and a feminist is “perceived as a better characterization of Linda” than the bank teller alone, and the diplomatic crisis appears to be a more acceptable narrative when preceded by a Russian invasion of Poland (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 311). This implies that narratives such as Orientalist film, regardless of intentionality, exploit conjunctions in stereotypical and representative ways, thereby increasing the availability of these portrayals in public perception. This point in particular is of great significance considering the overall consequences of stereotype perpetuation throughout the cultural reservoir via narratives. As availability increases in public perception, a stereotype may become bolstered. This may then increase the degree to which the conjunction of a Middle Eastern man behaving in accordance with Orientalist stereotypes is perceived as more probable than not, due to it being representative of a “good story” as in historical Orientalist cinema. Once again, the interplay of the availability and representativeness heuristics combines with the narrative favouring power of conjunction fallacies to saturate the cultural reservoir with Orientalist stereotypes.

Before moving on to other concepts and theorists, Tversky and Kahneman’s seminal work on the gambler’s fallacy should be explored as it pertains to the representativeness heuristic. This particular aspect of representativeness is significant for studying stereotype perpetuation in Orientalist and historical film as it demonstrates that patterns have the ability to

produce false perceptions regarding stereotypical probabilities and outcomes. In their seminal research, it was discovered that after “observing a long run of red on the roulette wheel, most people erroneously believe that black is now due, presumably because the occurrence of black will result in a more representative sequence than the occurrence of an additional red” (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, 1125). Chance is therefore commonly viewed as a self-correcting process in which “a deviation in one direction induces a deviation in the opposite direction to restore the equilibrium” (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, 1125). This false perception can be applied to the previous example of the suspicious Oriental-looking villain in the airport. From the perspective of a security officer who has consumed Orientalist media including movies which prototypically and prevalently feature deceitful, immoral, and sneaky Muslims, if there have been twenty non-suspicious Muslims in the airport in a row, it can be perceived as very likely that the next must be plotting something. Perhaps random selection is indeed not so random, it is merely representative of the prototype.

Extrapolating from Tversky and Kahneman, such biases are the consequence of intuitive judgments regarding probability. (Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1128). “We know” that the roulette wheel does not always end on red, and “we know” that Muslims have a history of attacking the West, therefore “we” must be vigilant against this particular prototype. This extends beyond the individual and applies also to the perception of Middle Eastern countries acting aggressively towards Western countries, if a decade has gone by without an incident, the West must be due for another incident soon because how much longer can the roulette wheel continue landing on red? Once again, this is reminiscent of flawed perspectives justifying a “historical” and unceasing bout between East and West, akin to Huntington’s “clash of civilizations”, this time perhaps as a result of our implicit cognitive heuristics of representativeness and availability.

Tversky and Kahneman's work on heuristic processing and judgement may indeed demonstrate that, due to the perception of a "historical" divide between East/West recognized as both prevalent and prototypical, media which conforms to this Orientalist stereotype, including most historical films, will be readily accepted by one's cognitive systems. Additionally, these films also satisfy the expected Orientalist narrative, which further empowers both their acceptance by the representativeness heuristic, and susceptibility to the conjunction fallacy, as per Tversky and Kahneman. All of this combines into a model which suggests that, as outlined throughout the preceding sections, historical film may be used as a vessel to portray current imperialist actions as continuations of a purportedly historical and Orientalist clash between civilizations, rather than the mere result of great power politics within the international system.

### ***3.1.3 Illusion of Validity***

Another issue that arises with these biased heuristic perceptions - particularly regarding how they are compounded by media depictions such as film, is what Tversky and Kahneman coined the "illusion of validity". This refers to the tendency "to experience much confidence in highly fallible judgments" (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249). It was discovered that the more consistent informational data is, the higher its predictive accuracy is perceived as being. The illusion of validity therefore refers to the tendency of perceiving such consistent information as credible, and experiencing a boost in predictive confidence when it is indeed often fallible. This false confidence boost facilitated by stereotypical information is essential to understanding how historical and Orientalist cinematic media may act as vessels for perpetuating implicit biases throughout the cultural environment. Through a series of studies, they demonstrated that "consistent data and extreme scores generally increase our confidence in our predictions, even though they are frequently negatively correlated with predictive accuracy" (Tversky and

Kahneman 1973, 250). This itself can be seen as a manifestation of heuristic biases, primarily representativeness. It was stated that “one predicts by selecting the outcome that is most representative of the input” and “thus, people are prone to experience much confidence in highly fallible judgments, a phenomenon that may be termed the illusion of validity. (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249). To explore this boost in confidence from consistent yet unreliable information, a fascinating experiment was designed utilizing correlated and uncorrelated tests.

Tversky and Kahneman proposed that a major determinant of representativeness is the consistency (or correlation) of the input. To demonstrate this effect, subjects were required to predict grade point average (GPA) on the basis of two pairs of aptitude tests. Subjects were informed that one pair of tests was highly correlated, while the other pair was not correlated whatsoever. Furthermore, they were told “all tests were found equally successful in predicting college performance”, implying that, due to the redundancy of information in correlated tests, a higher predictive accuracy can be achieved with the uncorrelated than with the correlated pair of tests (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249). If Test A and Test B are highly correlated, much of the information will overlap, and a high score on A almost guarantees a high score on B. Therefore the correlated combination has less value in predicting GPA than an uncorrelated combination. It was found, however, that subjects were more confident in predicting from the correlated tests than the uncorrelated tests, over the entire range of predicted scores. Indeed, the subjects were more confident in a context of “inferior predictive validity”, showcasing the illusion of validity (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249).

Tversky and Kahneman remarked that this “shows that the factors which enhance confidence, for example, consistency and extremity, are often negatively correlated with predictive accuracy” (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249). They continue, “one predicts by



selecting the outcome that is most representative of the input, and...consequently, the more consistent the input, the more representative the predicted score will appear and the greater the confidence in that prediction” (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249). Once again, this illusion of validity is a trick of the representativeness heuristic as the correlated tests form a stronger and more robust prototype due to their consistency. The result is increased confidence in predicting outcomes, even though these outcomes have decreased validity. As concluded by Tversky and Kahneman, the empirical discovery that “people are prone to experience much confidence in highly fallible judgements” as a result of consistent information is crucial to consider in the context of cultural studies and the impact of Orientalist film on the biased perceptions of East and West (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 249).

The illusion of validity has the effect of biasing individuals to perceive every new person they meet of a particular ethnic persuasion as conforming to stereotypical ideals exemplified through cultural media such as film. As the bulk of popular cinematic depictions portraying historical encounters of East and West (both in terms of nations and individuals) are Hollywood productions which employ Orientalist logic, a particular consistent profile becomes ingrained within popular culture. This archetype consists of a mysterious, exotic, and hostile East, and dubious, morally ambiguous Easterners capable of deception. Extending Tversky and Kahneman’s illusion of validity, individuals will be far more confident mentally assimilating anyone they meet that resembles this prototype into the existing perceptions they have of them. The logic of probabilistic fallacy is not taken into consideration, nor is any uncorrelated data (such as the multitude of ways an individual differs from existing preconceptions). As summarized by Tversky and Kahneman, when you use highly correlated inputs, you are relying on similar information to make your judgement. This similarity does not improve your prediction

much as you essentially receive the same message twice; yet it paradoxically boosts your confidence in predictive judgement. In contrast, uncorrelated inputs each provide different information, which allows for a better prediction, because each input adds something unique, increasing the overall accuracy of the prediction (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973).

Tversky and Kahneman's conclusion echoes Said's sentiment that "Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience." (Said 1978, 328). Indeed, the process by which an entire population is othered into a monolith revolves around the very disregarding of lived, human experience. Perhaps the illusion of validity may therefore explain the cognitive mechanism behind Said's lament, as confidence increases with the decrease in validity that comes from erasing "human experience" and lumping individuals into groups via Orientalist logic. Orientalist cinema can therefore be framed as a massive collection of correlated inputs, stripping individuality from the equation and positioning groups as monolithic, thereby increasing the confidence in predicting the behaviour of these monolithic groups (and individuals belonging to them). This homogenization occurs at the cost of actual validity regarding the individuals and the complex and nuanced structures that comprise their collective culture. The illusion of validity dictates that the more consistent and stereotypical the information, the more confident one is in their judgement of it.

As another example of this illusion of validity in action, one area where the biasing effects of heuristic processing may be observed on individuals tasked with important judgements is the domain of decision making by legal laypersons. Indeed, much of the foundational logic of heuristic processing which biases jurors in the experiment below may be present within the circuitry of stereotype and implicit bias propagation within historical and Orientalist cinema. Curley *et al.* (2022) discovered that jurors exhibit biases related to the representativeness

heuristic in times of low cognitive elaboration. In conditions where no judicial instructions were provided and a “continuous scale rather than a dichotomous choice (*e.g.*, guilty/not guilty)” was presented, Curley *et al.* detected a “small but reliable racial bias” in cases concerning various ethnic minorities (Curley *et al.*, 2022, 209).

These biases were then stated to influence the interpretation of novel information and subsequently, the final verdict delivered by jurors. Furthermore, cognitive processes and pre-trial attitudes also “interact with defendant and victim characteristics to further amplify the effects that bias has in the courtroom” (Curley *et al.*, 2022, 209). Indeed, the condition of low cognitive elaboration (reduced information) aligns with Tversky and Kahneman’s findings regarding the Illusion of Validity. The less instruction provided, the more confident the jurors are in their decisions founded on representativeness. One cognitive process that was specifically cited by Curley *et al.* (2022) was the representativeness heuristic, noted as influencing legal decision makers to “equate the similarity between a description and a possible outcome with the likelihood of that particular outcome being correct” (Curley *et al.*, 2022, 209).

If a decision description was therefore seen as having a higher probability of explaining an outcome, the decision makers would then report a higher likelihood by which they would judge that outcome to be the correct one. Curley *et al.*, continues this “then leads decision makers to ignore base rate statistics and be subjected to the representativeness bias (*i.e.*, stereotyping)” (Curley *et al.*, 2022, 209). This led Curley *et al.* (2022) to conclude that the combination of the representativeness heuristic and previous knowledge (*e.g.*, pre-trial bias or attitude) concerning “stereotypical actions of out-groups can lead to biased and erroneous decision making” (Curley *et al.*, 2022, 209). This combination may then result in injustices when

applied to juror decision making. Indeed, the same foundational logic of heuristic processing which biases jurors in Curley's work may be present within historical and Orientalist cinema.

Historical film may, therefore, provide a cultural medium through which representative biases concerning stereotypical behaviour can be perpetuated, similar to the propagation of stereotypical representative biases in juror decision making. As will be elaborated on by Perry Hinton's studies in the later sections of this chapter, stereotypes do not materialize out of nowhere, nor are they innate. They are learned through culture (of which film has been an instrumental part throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries) and the cinematic cultural reservoir regarding East/West encounters and Middle Eastern individuals has largely consisted of Orientalist frameworks. Factoring this into Curley's studies, one can extrapolate that the stereotypes found within works such as *300* may contribute to biases regarding Middle Easterners that could in turn affect courtroom rulings featuring defendants of that ethnic persuasion.

#### ***3.1.4 Availability versus Quantity***

To extend the connection between the availability heuristic and the importance of these cinematic depictions, the work of Schwarz *et al.* (1991) provides compelling evidence regarding how perceived frequency of an event is determined via availability and not the mere quantity of examples. The conclusions of Schwarz *et al.* are essential for the heuristic model of this project, as they demonstrate the ease with which one's "self-perception" (how one views themselves and their own characteristics) can be manipulated via heuristic biases. Indeed, if the same were to be true for the perception of stereotypical characteristics in media and the biasing effect they have over everyday events in reality, the implications of this for media which depict stereotypes (including film) would be profound.

Schwarz and his colleagues designed a study around individual's perceived levels of self assertiveness, where subjects were asked to report a certain number of examples of recent self-assertive behaviour. They remarked that:

Presumably, reporting these behaviors would increase their cognitive accessibility in memory, making it more likely that these behaviors come to mind when the people are later asked to evaluate their own assertiveness. As a result, one should find that people who had to report assertive behaviors report higher assertiveness than people who had to report unassertive behaviors (Schwarz *et al.*, 1991, 2).

This builds on the work of Tversky and Kahneman, and reflects that the previously reported examples resulted in a biased sample of relevant behaviors. However, an important caveat is that this previous work only considered the quantity and content of what subjects recall, not the subjective experience surrounding the recall itself. In this model, the more examples subjects have to report, the more pronounced this effect should be. Schwarz *et al.* posited, however, that the difficulty of recall would affect the availability of one's self-assertiveness beyond mere quantity.

To test this, Schwarz *et al.* asked subjects to describe either 6 or 12 examples of very assertive or very unassertive behaviors in which they had engaged. Previous tests stipulated that most subjects could “easily generate 8 or 9 behaviors but found it very difficult to generate more than 10” (Schwarz *et al.*, 1991, 3). However, when the recall task was difficult (recalling 12 examples), their self-rating was opposite to the implications of recalled content, despite the fact that more examples had been recalled (Schwarz *et al.*, 1991, 4). Even though more examples of self-assertive behaviour had been recalled by the 12-example sample, these participants rated themselves as less assertive than those in the 6-example group, as, due to the difficulty of recalling 12 examples instead of 6, they perceived themselves as falling short of the required 12 examples to identify as assertive. Ease of recall, therefore, appears to have a significant impact on the availability heuristic.

Schwarz *et al.* showcased consistent evidence for the assumption that the “implications of recalled content may be qualified by the ease or difficulty with which that content can be brought to mind”, further confirming the power of the availability heuristic (Schwarz *et al.*, 1991, 8). An important element which built on Tversky and Kahneman’s studies was considering the “alternative interpretation that manipulations that affected the ease of recall could just as well affect the content of recall” (Schwarz *et al.*, 1991, 8). This had previously opened up the question that just because one remembers an event more often, it does not mean one is remembering the incident correctly. However, Schwarz *et al.* operationalized their experiment so that ease of recall could be manipulated but the content stayed accurate (instances of assertive behaviours).

All that mattered in the end was whether one met the criteria of 6 or 12 recalled examples, and it was reliably found that if one failed to hit the quota they associated less with assertiveness. This finding once again demonstrates the primacy of the availability heuristic over common probability, logic, and simple quantities. It does not matter if there are more examples of an event that exist in the world, what matters is the ease with which they come to mind. Once again, the implications of this for media which depict stereotypes (including film) are profound. It does not matter if far more examples exist of Middle Easterners not being terrorists in reality, or Eastern countries actually cooperating with the West. What matters is which examples can be recalled easily. Movies (and other outlets such as news, social media, etc.) can selectively prime individuals by showcasing instances of the biased situation (hostile East and aggressive Easterners), and the majority of films produced in the dominant Orientalist canons of Hollywood adhere to these stereotypes. Connecting this with the work of Schwarz *et al.*, the primacy of the availability heuristic has demonstrated that a lower quantity of examples could be made more salient to one’s recall than a greater quantity of the exact same examples. Therefore, if one’s

perception of their own assertiveness can be manipulated so easily via heuristic biases (as per Schwarz *et al.*), then it stands to reason that the same principle may apply to stereotypical characteristics in media and the primacy they have over everyday events.

In this paradigm, cinematic instances of the East cooperating with the West (or objective facts such as the Middle Eastern coalition against ISIS) are perceived as less frequent compared to the ease of recall associated with *300*, *Alexander*, and *Kingdom of Heaven* (against the backdrop of events such as 9/11). It is these stereotypical events which are used to fuel future judgements due to the ease with which they come to mind. Furthermore, when considering film, it matters little if there are a numerically greater number of films which depict cooperation between the West and the Eastern “Other” (such as foreign films, indie films. etc.). As emphasized throughout this thesis, both revenue and viewership have demonstrated Hollywood’s supremacy in the international film market (Davis *et al.*, 2015).

Hollywood blockbuster epics therefore remain the most dominant way to access depictions of East/West encounters within popular cinematic culture. It does not matter if there are far more examples of Middle Easterners not being terrorists or Eastern countries cooperating with the West. In reality, what matters is which examples can be recalled easily. Movies (and other outlets such as news, social media, etc.) can selectively prime individuals by showcasing instances of the biased situation (hostile East and aggressive Easterners), and the majority of films produced in the dominant Orientalist canons of Hollywood adhere to these stereotypes.

These films tend to favour Orientalist foundations, focused on the binary divide between monolithic cultures when dealing with cross-cultural encounters, thereby contributing to the bulk of depictions that people have seen and remember. This framework indeed lies at the intersection of Middle Eastern stereotypes, Orientalist foreign policy, and historical films. It is through the

primacy of this Huntingtonian historical film paradigm that the availability of these Orientalist stereotypes (often falsely perceived as historically accurate) is bolstered, thereby biasing the viewer through what Perry Hinton calls the “culture in mind” (Hinton 2017, 2).

### **3.2 Culture in Mind**

In exploring the impact of cognitive heuristics and their potential to influence perceptions of the world to match those found in Orientalist film, the work of Perry Hinton provides an essential framework to consider. This revolves around stereotypes, and how they are not merely biases in individual cognition, but rather products of culture (Hinton 2017, 7). This work is imperative to understanding the cultural aspect of heuristic formation, which bridges the gap between cognitive psychology and cultural studies. Hinton grounds his work in the study of implicit stereotypes, using the Implicit Associations Test (IAT) as a yardstick to understand how stereotypes go beyond the explicit framing of racism, sexism, etc. He makes it evident that cognitive biases should not be viewed as inherently negative (in fact he makes his distaste of the term “bias” clear), but as a consequence of the human brain’s interactions with relevant culture. His work thereby demonstrates the importance of being aware of these implicit biases, particularly as they pertain to the cultural ethos which produces them, including Orientalist cinema.

Hinton argues that “implicit stereotypical associations (like any other implicit associations) have developed through the ordinary working of the predictive brain” (Hinton 2017, 2). According to Hinton, the “predictive brain” develops “associations through experience of their prevalence in the social world of the perceiver” (Hinton 2017, 2). Considering this, stereotypical associations would not be picked up if they did not represent the state of the world



to some extent. Crucially, however, “people are born into culture, and communicate within social networks” (Hinton 2017, 3). These implicit stereotypical associations are therefore picked up by an individual throughout their life and reflect neither an innate cognitive bias nor an objective state of reality, but rather “the associations prevalent within their culture” (Hinton 2017, 3). This serves as evidence of what Hinton calls “culture in mind” (Hinton 2017, 2). Therefore, Hinton argues that to understand implicit stereotypes, research should focus more on “the way associations are communicated within social networks rather than focusing exclusively on an implied cognitive bias of the individual” (Hinton, 2017 1).

This rationale is why film cannot be overlooked in favour of “objective” media such as news sources, as film constitutes a fundamental pillar of culture throughout the 20th and early 21st century. Implicit associations and stereotypes are not innate, they are learned, and by exploring the plethora of representative and available stereotypes portrayed in Orientalist cinema, the ways in which film may contribute to this stereotypical learning become evident. Essential to this concept of historical and Orientalist film potentially facilitating the propagation of implicit biases and stereotypes is the narrative character of cinema itself. Harkening back to Tversky and Kahneman’s study concerning perceptions of diplomatic fallouts which violated the conjunction fallacy, the better a story is, the more power it potentially possesses via the representativeness heuristic. Fictionalized Orientalist film, imbued with quasi-historical narratives exploiting stereotypes which have persisted in Orientalist entertainment for centuries, is thereby poised, whether intentionally or not, to utilize the connection between enforcement of the representativeness heuristic and narratives. Connecting this to Hinton, the robustness and inherently exploitative nature of narrative itself is why fictionalized film, such as Orientalist historical film, may indeed propagate implicit biases and stereotypes as products of culture.

Hinton describes how the notion of implicit stereotypes is built on two key theoretical concepts: associative networks in semantic (knowledge) memory and automatic activation (Hinton 2017, 2). Considering semantic memory, Hinton cites the work of Collins and Loftus in which:

Concepts are assumed to be linked together in terms of an associative network, with associated concepts having stronger links, or are closer together, than unrelated concepts. Thus “doctor” has a stronger link to “nurse” (or viewed as closer in the network) than to unrelated concepts, such as “ship” or “tree”. Related concepts cluster together, such as hospital, nurse, patient, ward, and so forth, in a local network that is sometimes referred to as a schema (Hinton 2017, 2).

This may seem rudimentary at first, and indeed Romin Tafarodi, a Professor of Media Psychology at the University of Toronto once astutely proclaimed during a lecture that “half of psychology is over-explaining the obvious” (R. Tafarodi, personal communication, 2018). From this obvious foundation; however, complexities arise containing powerful implications. Activation of one concept (such as reading the word “doctor”) spreads to associated concepts in the network (such as “nurse”) making them more easily accessible during the activation period. This increase in accessibility triggers both the availability heuristic through increased prevalence, but also the representativeness heuristic through its activation of a healthcare prototype.

Employing these theoretical ideas, Hinton argues that “a stereotypical association (such as “Black” and “aggressiveness”) might be stored in semantic memory and automatically activated, producing an implicit stereotype effect” (Hinton 2017, 3). This was demonstrated by Patricia Devine in 1989. White participants were asked to provide the features of common Black stereotypes, and also answer a prejudice questionnaire, leading Devine to discover that “both low- and high-prejudiced individuals were aware of the characteristics of the Black stereotype” (Hinton 2017, 3). In the next phase of the study the participants were tasked with rating the hostility of a person only referred to as Donald, described in a brief paragraph as performing

“ambiguously hostile behaviours such as demanding his money back on something he had just bought in a store” (Hinton 2017, 3). Before the description, words related to the Black stereotype were rapidly displayed on the screen but too briefly to be consciously recognized.

The results on the perceived hostility of Donald were striking, as the “automatic activation of the stereotype” impacted the judgement of Donald’s hostility by both groups of subjects (Hinton 2017, 3). The participants were then asked to list their own, anonymous, opinions of Black people. Low-prejudice subjects provided more positive statements and more beliefs than traits, (*e.g.*, “all people are equal”), whereas high-prejudice participants listed more negative declarations and traits, such as “aggressive” (Hinton 2017, 3).

Hinton summarizes Devine’s explanation that during socialization:

Members of a culture learn the beliefs existing in that culture concerning different social groups. Owing to their frequency of occurrence, stereotypical associations about people from the stereotyped group become firmly established in memory (Hinton, 2017 4).

Extrapolating this to the widespread existence of stereotypes in society, “more-or-less everyone in the culture, even the non-prejudiced individual, has implicit stereotypical associations available in semantic memory” (Hinton 2017, 4). The powerful implication of this is that, regardless of the individual’s level of prejudice, the stereotype is activated involuntarily in the “presence of a member of the stereotyped group”, and possesses the ability to influence the perceiver’s thoughts, judgements, and behaviour (Hinton 2017, 4).

However, this is where the difference between differing levels of explicit prejudice come into play. Hinton remarks that, as observed in the ratings of Black people in Devine’s experiment, people whose personal beliefs reject prejudice and discrimination “seek to consciously inhibit the effect of the stereotype in their thoughts and behaviour” (Hinton 2017, 4).

Yet, unfortunately, as described above, conscious processing requires active attention, therefore Hinton continues:

The influence of an automatically activated stereotype may only be inhibited if the person is both aware of its potential bias on activation and motivated to allocate the time and effort to suppress it and replace it in their decision-making with an intentional non-stereotypical judgement (Hinton 2017, 4).

In essence, despite the differences in the active categorization of Black people by the two groups, both groups judged Donald as being more hostile when the stereotypically “Black” associations were flashed before the description of his behaviour.

Additionally, Hinton mentions that some studies following Devine’s (Macrae *et al.* 1997) found that implicit stereotypes are only automatically activated when the group member is perceived in terms of a particular social meaning. Therefore, automatic activation is not guaranteed on presentation of a group member. In the context of cinematic biases, these social contexts entail environments and situations most familiar with the stereotyped subject. Considering the stereotypically deceitful Easterner perceived as hostile to the West, but more willing to engage in surprise attacks causing mass casualty (characterized in both John Keegan’s post-9/11 articles, and *300*), the places particularly primed to activate implicit stereotypes are perhaps those associated with historical examples of terrorism, including airplanes, transit terminals, and large crowds. This was further supported by Wittenbrink *et al.*, (2001), as well as Devine and Sharp (2009), who found that social context can also influence automatic activation so that, in the context of “prisoners” there is a Black stereotype bias (compared with White) but not in the context of “lawyers”.

Indeed, with regards to these automatic associations, Hinton remarks that Barge (1999) was less optimistic than Devine in the ability of individual conscious control to suppress automatically activated stereotypes, and proposed that the “only way to stop implicit stereotype

influence was through the eradication of the cultural stereotype itself” (Hinton 2017, 3). Indeed, in a 1983 study by Gaertner and McLaughlin, Hinton remarks that although participants scored low on a direct self-report measure of prejudice, they still “reliably reacted quicker to an association between “White” and positive attributes, such as “smart”, compared with the pairing of “Black” with the same positive attributes” (Hinton 2017, 4). Thus, it was concluded that the indirect reaction time measure was identifying an implicit stereotype effect.

In addition to these findings on implicit associations and reactivity, previous discussions on availability and representativeness heuristics have highlighted their role in perpetuating biases via the medium of Orientalist film. Harkening back to the Linda conjunction fallacy being mapped onto the stereotypical Middle Easterner, one can now observe how these stereotypical connotations in particular social contexts can affect real life behaviour. The security guard at the airport might belong to the low prejudice group and indeed may consciously strive to be as egalitarian as possible, yet implicit biases may still lead to them perceiving a Middle Eastern man in the security line as more threatening than others. Tying this to Hinton’s “culture in mind”, the role of Orientalist film is once again implicated due to its foundational role in popular culture, through which these stereotypes may be further built and perpetuated. Thus, the conjunction fallacy that it may be more likely for a Middle Eastern man in an airport to be perceived as hostile, as opposed to just an ordinary man, is compounded once again, through the combination of implicit biases, social context, and heuristics within the cinematic cultural reservoir.

To further demonstrate the subliminal power of implicit stereotypes, the IAT was designed to reveal biases, particularly in individuals who described themselves as egalitarian and averse to overt prejudices such as racism and ageism. It revealed that the majority of

experimental participants displayed implicit biases in support of stereotypical associations, such as “young/good and “old/bad”, indicating evidence of an implicit age stereotype (Hinton 2017, 3). This was done with the aforementioned response time operationalization, as young/old can be sequentially paired with good/bad, to gauge if reaction times are reliably quicker than alternative pairings, and indicative of an age-centric implicit stereotype (Hinton 2017, 3).

Hinton remarks that as a universal technique, “the IAT can be applied to any word pair combination and as a result can be used to examine a range of implicit stereotypes”, from ethnic to gendered stereotyping (Hinton 2017, 3). The results have been nothing short of illuminating. As noted by Greenwald *et al.* (2015), repeated uses of the IAT have consistently yielded implicit stereotyping for a range of different social categories, particularly regarding gender and ethnicity (Hinton 2017, 3). As a consequence, Payne and Gawronski (2010) noted that implicit stereotyping is now considered as an “aspect of implicit social cognition that is involved in a range of social judgements” (Hinton 2017, 3).

This model of implicit stereotype bias provides a distinct challenge to the idea of the individual as being the core cause of their thoughts and behaviours. In a landmark study of over two hundred thousand participants, all American citizens, Axt *et al.* (2014) utilized the IAT to examine implicit bias in the judgement of significant group categories, including ethnicity and religion. Whilst in-group favouritism was a consistent factor among all participants, a startling pattern of consistent hierarchies among social groups emerged in the response times (Hinton 2017, 4). For ethnicity, Whites were highest in terms of positive evaluation by subjects, with Asians, Blacks and Hispanics following in order, “with the same order obtained from participants from each of the ethnic groups. For religion, a consistent order of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam was produced” (Hinton 2017, 4). These findings of implicit biases are

consistent with the themes echoed throughout Orientalist cinema, and once again align well with the idea of “culture in mind” influencing individuals to subliminally agree with themes perpetuated regarding the perceived historical divide between East and West. Factoring in the availability and representativeness heuristics, a clear model emerges in which the most readily accessible and most prototypical examples of these social groups become continually reinforced through “culture in mind”, thereby contributing to an overall perception that culminates in an implicit hierarchy of desirable ethnic and religious traits among individuals.

The concept at the core of this thesis, culture and cognition, is precisely what Hinton argues is missing from all the aforementioned data gathered on implicit biases. The majority of researchers, from Tversky and Kahneman (1973) to Axt (2014) have focused on individual cognitive bias. Hinton (2017) explores the broad socio-cultural background of “culture in mind”, while this thesis focuses on Orientalist film as a microcosm of the larger impacts of culture on cognition. Hinton grounds his rationale by arguing against the aforementioned use of the word “bias”, noting that a biased view has often been one that, at its core, differs from the agreed position of a powerful group in a society. In many cases throughout history, dissenters (such as heretics or dissidents) have been severely punished, imprisoned and put into “psychiatric” institutions, for their unconventional “biased” views”. He concludes that this renders the very term “cognitive bias” problematic when it is universally applied, particularly as it contains the implication of an unconscious cognitive “failing” of the individual, which challenges the framing of an implicit stereotype as a cognitive bias (Hinton 2017, 4). While this logic is sound, Hinton’s bias towards the word “bias” poses no direct challenge to the contents of this thesis. My use of the word “bias” is a semantic choice, not meant to imply a predetermined and innate condition of the individual. Rather, it refers to implicit stereotypes catalyzed by learning and exposure to what

Hinton describes as the “culture in mind”, specifically pertaining to Orientalist cinema and its influence on our perceptions of the world.

Focusing on “culture in mind”, Hinton rebukes the “model of the person emerging from the implicit stereotyping research” such as that of Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier, and Todd *et al.*, (2012), which presents a view of the everyday individual as rational, yet in essence, cursed with implicitly biased cognitive processing (Hinton 2017, 5). Hinton proclaims that the cultural norms of our society are learned through socialisation and daily communication with other members of the culture. Indeed, the broad spectrum of “semantic associations we learn in our culture can successfully guide our judgements from what to wear at a job interview, which side of the road to drive on, and how to talk to the boss” (Hinton 2017, 5). He continues “we may not approve of all aspects of our culture (and indeed might strongly object to some) but cultural knowledge—just like other knowledge—is crucial to our pragmatic functioning in society” (Hinton 2017, 5). This once again implicates the role of Orientalism when considering the cultural knowledge of the “East”, as Edward Said argued robustly that the imaginative geography of the Orient (as produced by the “West”) has come to dominate representations of that region. As a consequence, this influences cinematic depictions, and through the psychological mechanisms of cognitive heuristics and implicit bias, Orientalist cinema further molds how individuals perceive both the geographical region of the Middle East as well as the beliefs, behaviours, and dispositions of individual Middle Easterners.

With this in mind, Hinton argues that “in order to change the specific set of implicit associations which we find consciously objectionable, it may be better to explore ways of changing the culture to undermine these specific associations, rather than focusing on the inferred “bias” of human cognition” (Hinton 2017, 5). This is the locus of what I have also



concluded after analyzing the 35 historical films which will be elaborated on in the following chapters. When considering methods to avoid cinematically biasing audiences towards accepting fundamentally Orientalist frameworks of the world as historical and/or inevitable, the thought processes of individuals should not be the focus. In order to stem the propagation of these purportedly “historical” implicit biases and stereotypes, the Orientalist nature which pervades the production of historical films will need to be addressed. As long as Orientalism itself persists as a dominant cultural paradigm, these biases can be formed, and maintained, within our cognitive processes. As Hinton notes, human cognition is “functionally driven to pick up regularities and develop implicit associations from the world around us” (Hinton 2017, 5). In Chapters 6-8, it will become exceedingly evident which regularities are found within Orientalist cinema regarding the behaviour, appearance, and nature of the “East” and Easterners, and how these depictions continue to perpetuate implicit associations from “the world around us”.

Hinton remarks that “perception operates by employing prior probabilities that are efficiently deployed to reduce the processing requirements of treating each new experience as completely new” (Hinton 2017, 5). He mentions that this was also argued by Clark (2013) as applying to social perception, while Otten *et al.*, (2017) found it applicable to social knowledge. In this paradigm, “perceiving is predicting” (Hinton 2017, 5). With regards to social perception, one can ask: “what is the probability of this man being a basketball player given that he is a tall, Black professional sportsman? This likelihood is based on prior probabilities, which come from experience or knowledge of the culture, so the likelihood could be judged differently by a person from the USA compared with a person from Kenya” (Hinton 2017, 5). This once again demonstrates the importance of culture with regard to implicit associations. The psychological

mechanisms of implicit bias and cognitive heuristics may be universal, but the biases themselves are rooted in social perception, itself a product of “culture in mind”.

To further elaborate on the “efficiency” of stereotypes, Macrae, Milne and Bodenhausen (1994) provided a model of “stereotypes as energy-saving devices” (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994, 37). Phrasing individuation as a cognitively timely affair, they explained that “we are exposed to so much information that we must in some manner simplify our social environment...for reasons of cognitive economy, we categorize others as members of particular groups, groups about which we often have great deal of generalized, or stereotypic, knowledge” (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994, 37). The crucial finding here, which corroborates the *Illusion of Validity* and the paradigm of increased confidence during low information is that stereotypes activated during social perception occur under taxing or resource-depleting conditions (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994, 37). Indeed, Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen (1994) cite a multitude of studies regarding the general idea that “people will fall back on their stereotypic preconceptions whenever they lack the ability or motivation to think more deeply about members of stereotyped groups” (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994, 37). The message emerging from this research is indeed robust: When the processing environment reaches a sufficient level of difficulty, and perceivers’ resources are correspondingly depleted, stereotypes are likely to be activated and applied in judgmental tasks.

This applies directly to films as I posit that they exploit both the lack of ability and motivation through their complex modes of delivering information. Considering ability, as viewers are bombarded with sights and sounds at a rapid fire pace (e.g during battle scenes which are replete in Orientalist film), the cognitive resources one may use to critically analyze the movie in question are quickly depleted. This is corroborated by the work of Jeffrey Zacks, a

psychologist specializing in the intersection of cognition and media, including how the brain interprets film. Zacks notes that due to the tremendous amount of information our cognitive systems must filter, the information that gets through is “radically reshaped, so that what our brain represents is... something much more modest and much more useful” (Zacks 2014, 198). He highlights that these cognitive mechanisms evolved to deal with complex sensory stimulation in real life, and are thereby “hijacked” by movies, “taking advantage of the shortcuts that our perceptual systems use in order to control where we attend, what we see, and how we remember.” (Zacks 2014, 198). Indeed, one can ascertain how this overload of information primes the brain for the perfect environment to resort to stereotypical processing, as per the “energy-saving device” model of Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen (1994). This is excellent ground for the representativeness heuristic to be activated, as the reduced cognitive ability leads our perceptual circuits to quickly accept (and even anticipate) another bearded, savage, Arab villain.

Next, considering motivation, films are almost universally regarded as a passive leisure activity during which one can “turn their brain off” and enjoy the entertainment. This is built on the anecdotal (but safe) assumption that, with the exception of critics and film scholars, the majority of non-specialists do not sit down at a movie theatre ready to actively resist the information they are being presented. In this framework, the difficulty of processing a film involves elements such as keeping up with the plot, remembering characters, etc. As we are preoccupied with the surface level cinematic elements, the decreased motivation, as per Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen’s (1994) model, dictates that one is not engaged in scrutinizing whether the clothes of the character we are watching commit a stereotypically “Islamic” suicide charge is contributing to our general biases of Middle Easterners.

Zacks corroborates this in his discussion by invoking the spotlight model of attention. He posits that “if the director can predict where you are attending, they can focus resources on making sure the attended part of the frame looks perfect and not worry so much about the rest” (Zacks 2014, 200). This “attended part of the frame” becomes the main cinematic focus, thereby diverting motivational attention away from deeper analysis of the scene. Again, this trick of cleaning up the frame via attention can be indirectly helpful for heuristics processing as the same mechanism that keeps our attention on a particular frame may keep our cognition from thinking critically about any stereotypical features within the scene. The attentional spotlight is on the turbaned Persian warrior getting served justice at the end of a Spartan spear, not on irrelevant portions of the frame (and likely not on the geopolitical implications of dressing a group that did not historically wear turbans with the hallmark garb of Orientalism).

Furthermore, attention will likely be drawn to the most stereotypically Orientalist elements as they often comprise the most central parts of a scene, such as the monstrous Persian immortal in *300*, or the parade of Nubian “savages” carrying the White Queen atop their shoulders in *Cleopatra* (1963). Considering the paradigm of energy-saving stereotypes in times of reduced cognitive motivation and ability, the viewing of Orientalist films would indeed serve as an example of a situation utilizing this framework. The representativeness heuristic quickly scans for matching prototypes, while availability heightens the ease of recall for prevalent stereotypes. Therefore, the processing environment can be posited as reaching a higher level of difficulty (low motivation and ability), and one in which the Illusion of Validity is triggered by low amounts of information but high confidence (as the stereotypes conform to previous expectations, akin to confirmation bias). In this environment of the “culture in mind”, stereotypes can not only be evoked easier, but also be perceived (with little resistance) as being accurate,

especially considering Tversky and Kahneman's (1983) discoveries on the heightened believability of narratives that rely on stereotypical information, regardless of conjunction fallacies.

Building on this cultural-cognitive model, the findings of Rothbart *et al.* (1977) also have particular relevance for understanding the effects of the mass media on stereotype formation, an important facet of Hinton's "culture in mind". Focusing on news media, they emphasize it as a vessel which filters a significant amount of "our information about minority groups", and "since the information usually defined as newsworthy represents extreme forms of behavior, repeated exposure of extreme individuals will lead to an over-representation of extreme behaviors in our images of these groups" (Rothbart *et al.*, 1978, 254). This makes extreme media depictions ripe targets for the representativeness heuristic regarding cultural stereotypes. Rothbart *et al.* (1978) commented that "overestimation of extreme instances may interact with ingroup or outgroup status, since extreme instances of ingroup behavior may be counterbalanced by all the other information we have about our ingroup", whereas the outgroup is relegated to being perpetually and explicitly perceived in the extreme (Rothbart *et al.*, 1978, 254). Additionally, it has been suggested that negative behaviors are more likely than positive behaviors to be over-represented in the stereotype of the out-group (Rothbart *et al.*, 1978, 254).

This finding can be mapped directly onto film, as most cinematic depictions of East/West contact revolve around Orientalist stereotypes which utilize the extreme to represent the "Orient". These employ themes often portraying not only a perceived historical and everlasting conflict between blocs, but also the purportedly deceptive, dubious, and hostile nature of individuals from the opposing geopolitical bloc. The predominant Eastern character is often either an outright villain (often a slaver or immoral tyrant corrupted from within), or if they

occupy a positive role, it often involves a buffoonish, savage, unserious, backward, lazy, cowardly, or otherwise unfavourable nature when compared with the righteous, noble, and (almost always White) protagonist. Once again, the prevalent implicit associations, or “culture in mind”, concerning Orientalist stereotypes presents itself as being consistent with the academic scholarship on cognitive heuristics, stereotype formation, and implicit biases, while also aligning with the dominant medium of Hollywood film.

One key point to note here is that the predictive brain operates on the state of the world as it is experienced and not on the state of the world as we believe it should be. When considering the representative associations between “engineer” and “man” in the United States, Hinton argues that the probabilistic association of “engineer” and “man” is an accurate reflection of the “true” state of the USA in 2012, as referenced in Crawford (2012), where 80% of the recruits to the profession are men (Hinton 2017, 6). Indeed, cognitive heuristics and implicit biases are not normative, they adhere (and are fuelled) by the norm. However, I posit a way by which to reconcile Hinton’s argument with Schwarz *et al.*, which bears significant impact on this project. This reconciliation is centered on the idea of cultural norms provided in media such as historical and Orientalist film being more salient than examples existing in the real world. Indeed, this cultural reservoir of historical stereotypes concerning the exotic and nefarious “East” may be perceived as the foundation for the “true state of the world”. Extrapolating from Schwarz *et al.*, the mind can be biased into interpreting the events from films as more representative of reality.

Factoring in Tversky and Kahneman, this then implies they can be recalled easier than the alternative perception, as well as being more prototypical than the alternative perception. This creates a situation in which the availability heuristic trumps examples which are more plentiful with respect to ease of recall (Schwarz *et al.*, 1991, 3). In addition, the

representativeness heuristic is activated due to the prototypicality of the event (i.e., the hostile, bearded America-hating Middle Eastern villain). Combined with the perceived historical characterizations of these villains, the availability and representativeness heuristics likely facilitate a perception that, while peaceful resolution is the surface level message of these films, the “reality” is that the “Orient” has been historically embroiled in turmoil, either waging dishonourable war on the West, or awaiting another Western crusade.

Consequently, the “true state of the world as it is experienced” is then perceived as conforming to the media representation of it, successfully bolstering the implicit stereotype in the process through the “culture in mind”. There are numerous examples in Hollywood films which pertain to Orientalist stereotypes, as a significant amount of East/West encounters in film revolve around outright hostility and conflict. Even in situations of overt cooperation such as Sheikh Idarim’s benevolent character in *Ben-Hur*, the surface level message is accompanied by an inherent White saviour character such as Judah Ben-Hur. Often, the context is akin to *Lawrence of Arabia* where the cooperation (while framed as principally benefitting the Oriental group) is underscored by inherent Western superiority, either in terms of military, economics, or the content of character.

Hinton elaborates that “as long as the things people talk about reflect the relationships of those things in the external world then the semantic relationships learnt will reflect the meanings present in the external world” (Hinton 2017, 6). Any knowledge concerning the relationship between concepts will therefore be cultural, gained from the “meanings communicated by others” (Hinton 2017, 6). Harkening back to Said’s arguments, the prominence of Orientalist cinema demonstrates that these traits are so embedded within the broader culture that stereotypical depictions of the “Orient”, consisting of implicit cultural associations (i.e., “culture

in mind”) have perhaps become more influential than objective reality through their repeated cultural propagation.

Drawing from the academic scholarship in the previous chapters, in combination with the psychological mechanisms underlying heuristic processing and implicit biases, I believe there is sufficient evidence to support this claim. In essence, Orientalist media (including films) have come to represent what Hinton labels “the external world” concerning the imaginative geography of the Middle East. In Said’s own words, this paradigm of representing a dichotomy between a dominant and righteous West juxtaposed with a subservient and untrustworthy East became “an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness”, with the end result being “statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture” (Said 1978, 19).

Hinton and Said align regarding their perceptions of culture, as Hinton argues that “the process of picking up associations probabilistically is happening unconsciously throughout a person’s life within a culture. Yet culture is neither monolithic nor fixed and unchanging” (Hinton 2017, 7). He asserts that people are “active” in constructing their social and media environments, and the “extent to which individuals share implicit associations will depend on the hegemonic social representations within the society across cultural groups” (Hinton 2017, 7). With respect to this, Hollywood film indeed leans towards a hegemonic ideal regarding its portrayals of East/West encounters, one reinforcing the perception of an allegedly historical East/West binary, adhering to the tropes of Orientalism.

Furthermore, the role of stereotypes in narrative communication within a social network was demonstrated by Kashima et. al (2013) in their research on the serial repetition of stories. Their crucial discovery showed that “stereotype-consistent information was emphasized” and that “stereotype-inconsistent information...was not necessarily passed on. Thus, stories became



more stereotypical and consistent in serial retellings” (Hinton 2017, 8). Hinton explains how Kashima and Yeung (2010) argued that “stereotypes can be thought of as significant cultural resources that help us to transmit cultural information” (Hinton 2017, 8). This implies that within a social network, common understandings are developed via the use of stereotypes. Connecting this to Orientalist cinema and the repeated use of tropes concerning Middle Eastern geographies and characters, “members of the culture assume a knowledge of the stereotype in other group members, which facilitates social interaction, but potentially also helps to maintain the stereotype, even in the face of inconsistent information” (Hinton 2017, 8).

Not only does this directly support the central idea of this thesis by showcasing how stereotypical information is more readily propagated through narrative media, it coincides with two previously discussed facets of Tversky and Kahneman’s research. The representativeness heuristic is bolstered by the stories, and stories are found to be more readily acceptable the better they adhere to stereotypes. Consider the earlier example of a hypothetical breakdown in US/Russia diplomatic relations being perceived as more probable following a Russian invasion of Poland, rather than just happening by itself, because of the very fact that it was perceived as a “better story” (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 313). Once again, this resulted from the conjunction fallacy. Stereotypes have therefore been showcased as empowering stories, leading to repeated instances of representativeness which in turn add to the accumulated pool of stereotypical stories, thereby reinforcing availability and the ease of recall for future stories.

Within this paradigm, one can extrapolate a clear scenario of how Orientalist cinema draws from the existing reservoir of stereotypes, leading to those stereotypical narratives of East/West encounters being accepted more readily by audiences than non-stereotypical ones. These narratives then bolster the stereotypes (with implications in the real world such as the

conjunction fallacy of the Middle Eastern terrorist), and remain in the reservoir for future narrative use. Indeed, this process resembles a positive feedback loop, in which the available stereotypes lead to strengthened representativeness. This in turn facilitates the creation of more productions utilizing the same prototypical stereotypes, thereby bolstering their availability. In its entirety, this process primes these stereotypes for easier recall the next time an Orientalist film is to be produced (or consumed).

The crux of this framework is that heuristics and implicit associations are not innate, they are enforced and enriched through what Hinton describes as the “culture in mind”. As the culture changes, then so will the implicit stereotypes of its adherents. Perspectives such as the one presented within this thesis are, therefore, important as they provide a lens through which to thoroughly understand the nature of how these biases form, along with their implications. The following chapters contain the analysis of specific stereotypical Orientalist representations of culture in historical film, performed using this established framework of cognitive heuristics and implicit bias perpetuation. This was accomplished with the goal of elucidating the potential impact of culture and cognition on audiences enjoying the entertainment provided by historical Orientalist cinema.

### **3.3 *Flicker*: The Psychology of Film**

Now that the connection between culture and cognition has been established, it is important to consider the psychology of film itself. Jeffrey Zacks, a psychologist specializing in the intersection of cognition and media, including how the brain processes film, has contributed important insight concerning this field. Zacks discusses how the brain “constructs models of a story’s events” which serve “as a representation of what the situation is about, not of how you learned about the situation” (Zacks 2014, 27). He refers to these constructions as “event models”,

and implies that information learned within a film versus learned from “objective” perspectives, such as news media, may be interpreted using similar cognitive processes. Indeed, throughout Zacks’ arguments, it becomes evident that representational information learned from film can be just as influential; if not more, than textbooks and newsreels. Zacks argues that if accumulating information “leads to model building, and model building depends on the same (mental) maps as perception and action, then what we are reading about should directly influence our perceptions and actions” (Zacks 2014, 44). Within the paradigm established throughout this chapter, heuristics can then be framed as strengthening the models that utilize mental maps, both via availability and representativeness, thereby influencing our perception and behaviour.

In a conversation with Peter Guber, the former CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment, Zacks discusses what, in Guber’s opinion, is a potential rationale behind the human desire for narrative stories. Although non-academic and hypothetical in nature, Guber’s argument suggests that:

When our species started having oral language, we sat around the campfire and we passed down the rules, values, and beliefs of the tribe, which held it together...it was all through stories (Zacks 2014, 50).

While this is once again a pseudo-academic and anecdotal explanation of our drive for narrative, the concept of a primordial narrative culture nonetheless aligns with many of the concepts discussed in this chapter. From Tversky and Kahneman’s finding of the higher rates of conjunction fallacies centered around stereotypical elements in stories, to Hinton’s elaborations on implicit biases emerging not innately, but through the “culture in mind”, Guber’s assertions may indeed be grounded in empirical reality. The psychological literature aligns well with the suggestion that the mechanisms by which prototypes become stereotypes are imbued within the very fabric of film-making and film-watching. This may be a result of film being one of the latest evolutions in what Guber frames as a primordial culture of human narrative storytelling.

Considering this potential power of film, Zacks implores the reader to beware the ways in which event models can be hijacked, as the “model-building mechanism grabs information from lots of different sources” (Zacks 2014, 92). He continues:

The same machinery can combine what you see with what someone tells you to build a model of an event. That machinery is perfectly happy to operate on stuff from your life, from a movie, or from a book. I think that is a big part of the appeal of narrative films...they appeal to our model-building propensities (Zacks 2014, 92).

These models are precisely what representativeness and availability are built upon, and Zacks alludes to the very point that underlies the core of this thesis. When the models become so robust that “we can’t separate facts we learn from the real world from fictions we learn from the movies, we may find ourselves victims of distortion and propaganda.” (Zacks 2014, 94). He begins this exploration with “distortions that are probably not meant to deceive, but come about because a filmmaker is trying to tell a good story” (Zacks 2014, 95). Utilizing *Three Kings* (1999) as a case study, he describes how this film offers “rich vivid impressions of a place most viewers would have learned about from newspaper stories and news broadcasts but not visited directly” (Zacks 2014, 95). He then postulates whether one may incorporate their depictions into models of historical events.

In order to answer this, Zacks dives deeper, asking what occurs when a “movie presents itself as history but plays fast and loose with the facts. If I am trying to learn real history, does an inaccurate “true story” movie help or hurt?” (Zacks 2014, 95). He summarizes research by Andrew Butler which tasked people with reading accurate historical essays and also watching clips from Hollywood films about the “same topics that contained inaccuracies” (Zacks 2014, 95). These historical periods ranged from the early 17th century (*Elizabeth*, 1998) up to World War II (*U-571*, 2000), and the clips all contained historically inaccurate information which was inconsistent with the essays. Indeed, many of the films contained “Americanizations” of history,

such as crediting the U.S with capturing the Enigma coding machines (accomplished in reality by the British and Australians). Zacks cites this as a frequent occurrence with Hollywood films, such as *Argo* reducing the historical role of Canadian diplomats who facilitated the rescue of six Americans trapped in postrevolutionary Iran (Zacks 2014, 95). Butler's research found that a significant number of these revisions remained with viewers when their memory was tested after the fact.

Even though they had been exposed to the correct history in the essay, the viewers were still willing to accept roughly 40% of the distortions as true (Zacks 2014, 96). This is an important finding, showcasing empirically that films can absolutely bias individuals' perceptions of history. Furthermore, a follow-up experiment was designed where students were specifically tasked with detecting the historical fallacies. However, this intentional focus on recognizing inaccuracies did not help the successful detection rate whatsoever (Zacks 2014, 96). Of course, Zacks astutely comments that even though 40% is already significant, these studies likely still underestimate how influential incorrect information in historical film can be, because "most of the time when you watch a history flick you do not read an accurate history just before or after (Zacks 2014, 96).

While Zacks reiterates that film-makers such as those behind *Elizabeth*, *U-571*, and *The Last Samurai* only intended to entertain with their revisionist flair, he argues that "the same techniques are used deliberately in propaganda" (Zacks 2014, 98). He elaborates that "one flavour of propaganda presents factual material, but manipulates its presentation to sway opinion", as exemplified by the *Why We Fight* films released in the U.S. during World War II (Zacks 2014, 98). These were "designed to convince military recruits and civilians of the government's case for going to war", and simultaneously "a group of researchers was doing their

part by trying to work out how to make these movies as persuasive as possible” (Zacks 2014, 98-99). This group, headed by Carl Hovland, utilized many of the techniques discussed by Edward Bernays in establishing many of the basic principles of how mass media influence opinion and behaviour (Zacks 2014, 99). They discovered that in some cases, the films’ propagandistic effects peaked early on, but most became more pronounced over time, a result dubbed the “ sleeper effect” (Zacks 2014, 101).

This was found to be rooted in visual impressions and emotional intensity, which convinced the individual that they themselves had experienced the events. The mechanism behind this is the aforementioned “event model”, as the subject builds a “rich model while watching the movie” consisting of their memory of the events and themes depicted on screen (Zaks, 2014, 101). During this process, the vividness of the mental imagery may even facilitate the perception of having experienced the cinematic events oneself. Over time, however, one may lose significant information about the source of the event model in question. While the source is dissociated from the message, the vividness of the imagery is retained within the viewer’s perspective. As the brain gradually forgets that a propagandistic message came from a film yet retains the message itself, the “ sleeper effect” is produced. Ultimately, the film’s propaganda becomes more pronounced as the individual forgets the source, but retains the message. This discovery alluded that the more vivid and engaging the propaganda films were, the more likely Hovland’s recruits were to later accept its messages as part of their own personal experience (Zacks 2014, 102).

This is a powerful implication, particularly given the psychological literature discussed throughout this chapter. Not only will the heuristics of availability and representativeness be triggered alongside implicit biases, if one is able to make the content emotionally engaging, then

the content of the Orientalist film can be perceived as reflecting one's own experience. The biases towards Middle Easterners may then be perceived not only as prototypical narratives, but personal ones. To this end, Zacks moves past documentary propaganda films and focuses on fictional films which try to influence opinion. An example he cites is Alfred Hitchcock's *Saboteur*, in which a Nazi blows up an American airplane factory before framing an American who must confront him (symbolically on top of the Statue of Liberty).

As Zacks explains:

The events are clearly fictional, but the movie had a real-life agenda: to convince Americans to be vigilant against potential sabotage. The filmmakers clearly intended to convince viewers that events *like* these were going on around them, and that they had to watch out (Zacks 2014, 105).

This is the type of scenario which may be extrapolated on to Orientalist film, in a post-9/11 world perceived as existing within the inherently Orientalist “clash of civilizations” framework that Huntington posits as dictating foreign policy. Persian marauders may not be invading Sparta in 2007, but one can interpret from *300* that the freedom of the Western world has “historically” been at stake from Eastern aggression; and only honourable soldiers, united in their stalwart defiance, can protect the West. A crucial point is these films need not be explicit propaganda to perpetuate these effects. Indeed, this often appears to be the case, as exhibited by the absence of any data implicating *300* director Zack Snyder in anything more than making an entertaining film. All that matters is viewers “integrating models of events in the film with their models of events in the world, then they will use the events in the film as the basis for modifying their behaviour in the future” (Zacks 2014, 105). When considering Hinton's “culture in mind” and the mechanisms of cultural cognition such as implicit biases and representativeness heuristics, it is likely that these systems combine to have a robust impact which influences their viewers' judgements (and subsequent behaviour) towards Orientalist stereotypes.

To this end, Zacks cites the work of Marsh and Fazio investigating whether “people *could* keep incorrect “factual” information in a fictional story separate from facts they had learned elsewhere” (Zacks 2014, 107). Participants were provided a set of stories and instructed to watch out for distortions of actual facts within the fictional narratives (Zacks 2014, 107). Some stories also contained true statements, and after reading several of these stories, participants took a general knowledge test on the facts mentioned in the narratives. Marsh and Fazio utilized tests that people would “normally get right about 66% of the time based on prior information” (Zacks 2014, 107). When participants read a story containing a true statement, their performance improved to approximately 75%, however, when they read a story with the bogus statement, their performance dropped to 50%. As remarked on by Zacks, “whether true or false, readers incorporated information from the fictional story into their fact base” (Zacks 2014, 107). This demonstrates that narrative stories can indeed influence our factual repertoire, whether positively or negatively. Zacks comments that this is exactly what anyone lobbying Hitchcock to make *Saboteur* would love to hear. These findings demonstrate that “audience members may well pick up the events and facts from the film, making them more vigilant in watching out for real sabotage” (Zacks 2014, 107). Indeed, this may be applied to films that portray themselves as historical but in actuality merge historical fact with an Orientalist bias (often eschewing historicity altogether).

The consequence of this is that when we experience narratives, we must do extra work to *not* assume the narrative is in line with objective reality, especially with purportedly historical Orientalist films. Zacks notes that instead of “needing will to suspend disbelief, we have to engage in a willing construction of disbelief in order to keep the story world from infecting our real-world beliefs and attitudes” (Zacks 2014, 108). To actively fight against heuristic bias



involves knowledge that we are constructing a fictionalized reality, otherwise by the very nature of implicit biases strengthened by the prevalent stereotypical associations (i.e., “culture in mind”) these biases would extend into our current reality. Harkening back to his earlier example, Zacks proclaims that the key locus of control, when seeking to avoid the influence of false information embedded in narratives, is keeping track of the information’s source:

For example, say you think back to the first Gulf War and remember that a group of Shi’ite prisoners escaped through Iran with the help of renegade American soldiers. If you can remember that the source of this event was not the evening news but was the ending of *Three Kings*, you could decide not to treat that as a fact (Zacks 2014, 109).

Overall, Zacks’ commentary is important for this thesis as it contextualizes how cinematic narratives may influence perceptions of our objective reality. His framework of film being exploited for propaganda connects movies to the cognitive psychological scholarship concerning heuristics, implicit biases, and energy-saving stereotypes. This interplay is significant when considered alongside prevalent associations within culture which may perpetuate implicit stereotypical biases, what Hinton calls “culture in mind”. Indeed, he proclaims that “if you can program event representations into me by telling me a story (or showing a movie), then that saves you the trouble of hiking me up over the hill” to observe the reality (Zacks 2014, 109). By living vicariously, we can construct memories on the cheap that we can use to get around in the world. However, it is important to explore the ways in which our representations functionally bias us into believing the likelihood of false events occurring over objective ones. That is precisely the goal of this thesis, and to this end, the following chapters contain an examination of the reservoir of stereotypical data across thirty-five Orientalist historical films. This analysis applies the nexus of cognitive heuristics and implicit biases as they pertain to frameworks such as Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, in order to explore how the purported historicity of these films may perpetuate a very particular and stereotypical “culture in mind”.

### 3.4 Conclusion: Heuristic Feedback Loop

The process of interaction between the availability and representativeness heuristics in the context of stereotype reinforcement appears cyclical in nature, resembling a positive feedback loop. As particular characteristics accumulate across media, it becomes mentally easier to recall these characteristics, readily triggering the availability heuristic. This then strengthens the perception of a certain type of attribute as being a prototypical characteristic, activating the representativeness heuristic in turn, for both filmmakers and the audience (*e.g.*, turbaned, hostile, brown people). These prototypes in turn become more plentiful and easier to recall (*i.e.*, availability), and as availability increases, the most easily accessed info on the “Orient” continues to be biased (*i.e.*, representative) prototypes, consisting of stereotypical assertions such as “they are all hostile, turbaned brown people”. Persisting due to Orientalist cinema’s position as the dominant framework of historical Hollywood films featuring encounters between “East” and “West”, this positive feedback loop continues in a robust cycle.

Evocative of the oft-repeated adage regarding the chronology of “the chicken or the egg”, the origin point of this cycle is not of particular importance for this project and its implications. It may have been initiated with specific early Western prototypes of the “Orient” such as the days of Herodotus’ chronicling of the Persian Wars, or Aeschylus’ plays depicting *The Persians* (*i.e.*, representativeness), or perhaps it is the very process of accumulation itself which reinforces it over time, increasing the ease of recall (*i.e.*, availability). What matters most is that by the time of Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt, a milestone for Orientalism in the “modern” world, there exists a robust sense of representativeness (the Orient looks, sounds, and behaves this way), and availability (abundant mental evidence for the Orient looking, sounding, and behaving this way).

In summation, extrapolating from Tversky and Kahneman (1973; 1974; 1983), the prevalence of stereotypical characteristic examples increases the ease with which they are recalled, due to the availability heuristic. This then strengthens the perception of these characteristics as valid prototypes, due to the representativeness heuristic, thereby increasing the likelihood that these characteristics will be used again in future judgements. Once again, this primes the activation of the availability heuristic, ensuring the preservation of the cycle. This positive feedback loop is continually reinforced with new examples within cinematic media, in addition to other sources such as news and social media. Indeed, if a stereotype is prototypical enough, it may successfully trump probability in order to be mentally accessed, satisfying the conjunction fallacy of Tversky and Kahneman (1983).

It is also imperative to consider the crux of this framework, that heuristics and implicit associations are not innate, they are enforced and enriched through the “culture in mind” (Hinton 2017, 2). At this stage, the foundational elements of this thesis have been fully established, encompassing cultural studies, international relations, and cognitive psychology. Before proceeding with the cinematic analysis results, however, the specific methodology for investigating the historical films is discussed within the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Film Analysis Methodology**

Throughout the preceding chapters, a multidisciplinary framework of analysis has been established encompassing perspectives from cultural studies, international relations, and cognitive psychology. This was accomplished in order to explore historical cinema as a medium for propagating Orientalist stereotypes concerning encounters between the Eastern and Western world through the exploitation of cognitive heuristics and implicit biases. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the methodology employed for this analysis is primarily descriptive due to the qualitative nature of this project. Examinations focused on an analysis of concrete stereotypical examples from films, particularly as they pertain to perceptions of certain individuals, groups, and regions as the “Other”. In the preceding chapters, the relevance of these stereotypical examples was grounded in academic scholarship to facilitate a discussion regarding the importance of international political context at the time of production. Furthermore, these occurrences of common themes are situated within the framework of cognitive psychology models, namely those of heuristic processing, and the cultivation of a reservoir of implicit stereotypical associations prevalent within culture (i.e., Hinton’s “culture in mind”).

### **4.1 Cinematic Analysis**

This analysis of historical film consists of examining key representations and stereotypes (e.g., “Orientalist” tropes), with an emphasis placed on their **prevalence** (availability) and **prototypicality** (representativeness). These tropes are then explored considering their correspondence with international political sentiment at the time of the film’s production. As this project explores how the historical film comments on contemporary international relations issues, it is critical to consider the cultural zeitgeist during which each film was produced.

Narratives concerning international relations are influenced by the cultural and political context of their time, with Orientalist productions made in a Cold War setting contrasting in their presentation of certain tropes compared to those released during the War on Terror. For this reason, these films have been analyzed within the historical context of their initial release. With some exceptions, the bulk of these films indeed straddle those two key sociopolitical cultural periods, the Cold War and the post-9/11 age. However, both periods utilize elements of Orientalism to communicate strong messages regarding the Western fight against tyranny, juxtaposed with the innate corrupt, totalitarian and oppressive nature of the Eastern “Other”. The goal of this analysis is to contextualize the numerous examples of Orientalist tropes within the respective “culture in mind”, or prevalent stereotypical associations, pervading the zeitgeist at the time of each historical film’s production. These films were categorized as follows:

#### Cold War

Biblical Epics:

*Samson and Delilah* (1949), *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), *The Bible: In the Beginning* (1966)

Historical Drama / Sword-and-Sandals:

*The Egyptian* (1954), *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), *Helen of Troy* (1956), *Spartacus* (1960), *The 300 Spartans* (1962), *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964)

## 21st century and post-9/11

Biblical Epic:

*The Passion of the Christ* (2004), *Exodus:*

*Gods and Kings* (2014), *Noah* (2014)

Historical Drama / Historical Action:

*Gladiator* (2000), *Troy* (2004), *Alexander*

(2004), *300* (2006), *Agora* (2009), *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014)

## Outliers

Pre-WWII: *The Sign of the Cross* (1932)

1980s Biblical Epics: *King David* (1985), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988)

Mythological: *Hercules Unchained* (1959), *Clash of the Titans* (1981), *10,000 BC* (2008), *Clash of the Titans* (2010)

Satirical: *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979)

Historical, but not the ancient world: *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005)

Many of the films produced during the Cold War harbour anti-Soviet sentiment, with some, such as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) being explicit with its intention. Historical films of this time focusing on the ancient world were largely comprised of biblical epics, and a combination of historical dramas, and sword-and-sandal pictures. Some of the 1950s and 60s biblical epics, such as *The Robe* and *Samson and Delilah* were rather overt with their presentation of anti-Soviet imagery, even if the intention was not as explicit as DeMille's films. As for the sword-and-sandal epics, while these do not (usually) reference the Gospels, they exploit non-specialists' understanding of history in order to make the same moralistic claims concerning the contemporary climate of the Cold War. Examples of this include *The 300 Spartans* and *Cleopatra*, which clearly present dichotomies regarding Western

freedom and Eastern tyranny. This breakdown is largely mirrored in the 21st century and post-911 cultural context, with biblical epics remaining present, (e.g., *Noah*, *Exodus*), alongside historical dramas and historical action, sword-and-sandal's less "campy" replacement (e.g., *300*, *Alexander*).

One notable exception within these films is *Lawrence of Arabia*, as, although historical, it does not focus on the ancient world. It is, however, a representation of exemplary Orientalist cinema. Analyzing the egregious presentation of Orientalist tropes within this film was therefore important for this project, considering Said himself referenced the historical T.E Lawrence as the quintessential Orientalist. This textbook depiction of the Orientalist dichotomy is also why *Kingdom of Heaven*, the second film not based on the ancient world, is featured. Although the film serves as a critique of American interventionism in the Middle East, director Ridley Scott nonetheless fails to avoid perpetuating the same Orientalist tropes that he, to some degree, criticizes cinematically. Mythological films were not only selected for their presentation of Orientalist tropes and Cold War imagery (e.g., *Hercules Unchained*), but also for the potential of perpetuating pseudo-archaeological stereotypes, as portrayed in films such as *10,000 BC*.

Considering the remaining outliers, *Life of Brian* provided a satirical perspective on Orientalism within historical and biblical narratives, while *The Sign of the Cross* offered an important (and largely intentional) perspective into pre-war, anti-fascist cinema. Finally, although the Cold War still persisted throughout the 1980s, the two biblical epics from this period, *King David* and *The Last Temptation of Christ* do not reflect the explicit anti-Soviet messaging of the 1940s-60s epics. This does not make them exempt from propagating Orientalism through perceptions of antiquity, however, as these films perpetuate Orientalist tropes in more subtle ways than their cinematic predecessors.

While the timing of release is indeed an essential consideration for how international politics at the time may have influenced cinematic perspectives, chronological examination is not the primary mode through which the actual analysis chapters are organized. Instead, prevalent and prototypical tropes relating to the “Oriental Other” are categorized along thematic groupings. These consist of three core categories, geopolitical and ideological commentary in Chapter 5; visual commentary (race, appearance, and dress) in Chapter 6; and personification (gender, embodiment, and sexuality) in Chapter 7. Additional significant elements (*e.g.*, music) are sorted into their most relevant chapters on a case-by-case basis. In order to connect the assorted tropes with the aforementioned cognitive psychological models, these chapters contain a detailed analysis of the aspects of heuristic and implicit bias best pertaining to each trope. At the end of each chapter, a comprehensive explanation of how the examined reservoir of Orientalist tropes may potentially bias viewers into perceiving historical, and modern, interactions between the “Eastern” and “Western” world as aligning with Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* is presented.

The sample size of motion pictures for this project is thirty-five. These thirty-five films have all been produced within what the discipline of Orientalism would consider “The West”, with, all but two, being Hollywood productions. This consists principally of historical epics featuring stereotypical clashes between “East” and “West”, exemplified by films such as *Alexander*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, and *300*. Aside from historical fiction, a variety of other genres utilizing Orientalist tropes are incorporated into my analysis. These include (but are not limited to) Biblical and mythological epics. All thirty-five films were selected due to their alignment with Said's framework in *Orientalism*, particularly pertaining to foreign policy implementations, as evidenced by Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, and Gregory's discussion of the Middle Eastern “architecture of enmity” within *The Colonial Present*. Each have been analyzed for the



ways in which they may contribute to the prevalent implicit stereotypical associations within culture, (i.e., Hinton's "culture in mind"), through portrayals of history reflecting the international political sentiment at the time of production.

Although the "clash of civilizations" between "East" and "West" serves as a core Orientalist theme, not every film featured is geographically focused on the Levant and Middle East. Motion pictures such as Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* and Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* are relevant to this discussion due to their commentary regarding imperialism, geographical "othering", and the broader geopolitical role of the West at a time when it was experiencing unipolar hegemony. Upon analyzing a variety of Orientalist films, patterns regarding biased conceptions of East and West begin to emerge, demonstrating an analogous relationship between cinematic depictions of history and narratives concerning contemporary international relations.

The analysis in chapters 5-7 assessed the Orientalist tropes of each film, utilizing Tversky and Kahneman's cognitive psychological models of availability, and representativeness, heuristics in the context of prevalent Orientalist stereotypical associations within culture. This entails comparisons between concrete examples from film (e.g., repeated representation of "evil Eastern features" as in *The Ten Commandments*, *300*, etc.) and salient cases from cognitive psychological literature (e.g., the conjunction fallacy). Building from this foundation, the analysis discusses extrapolations such as the potential of viewers being biased to perceive a higher probability of scenarios where "Oriental" individuals are opposed to the "West", rather than situations in which "Eastern" individuals behave similarly to their "Western" counterparts.

## **4.2 Film Studies Perspective**

In order to contextualize the original contributions of this research within the domain of cinema studies, it is important to explore the existing film studies scholarship relevant to this

project. Though this thesis is a novel contribution due to its incorporation of a cognitive psychological angle, it is crucial to note that it is built upon an existing body of work considering Orientalist tropes in film. These include the seminal work of Bernstein and Studlar (1997) in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, which explored the “infiltration” of film by Orientalism throughout the 20th century (Bernstein and Studlar 1997, 4). Starting their critique with *The Sheik* (1921), Bernstein and Studlar noted how this framework of filmmaking dominated various genres, from film noir to spy thrillers such as the James Bond series. They comment that Orientalism remains a “pervasive term in the vocabulary of Western filmmaking”, citing the “Nazi-Arab villains” in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the “Chinatown mobsters” of *Year of the Dragon* (1985), the antagonists of *Jewel of the Nile* (1985), the “street urchins” of *Aladdin* (1992), the “power-mad leader of the Crimson Jihad” in *True Lies* (1994), Middle Eastern extremists in *Executive Decision* (1996), and even the “absurd scenarios of American cops beating up Arab dictators and terrorists” in the *Naked Gun* (1988) (Bernstein and Studlar, 1997, 4). Indeed, Bernstein and Studlar’s commentary demonstrates the multitude of ways in which Said’s paradigm aligns with common practises in contemporary film.

Paying particular attention to race, ethnicity, and gender, Najat Dajani (2000) also explores how “literary depictions of the 'exotic and barbaric' progressed onto the big screen” in the context of *Arabs in Hollywood*. Dajani proclaims that the “birth of the cinematic image did not bring with it new portrayals, but breathed life into those already existing in books, novels and paintings. Such creations were inspired by early travellers and visitors venturing into lands east of their own, and attributed to the writings and translations of these so called 'Orientalists', in their attempts to gain control over the East and...literary depictions of the 'exotic and barbaric' progressed onto the big screen (Dajani 2000, 9). She echoes Bernstein and Studlar’s comments

that it is “not surprising that films like *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (George Fitzmaurice, 1926) present the Arab as a barbaric savage, not yet cultured by civilization, a naive being, requiring the assistance of the 'modern Westerner' to bring him/her to his/her senses” (Dajani 2000, 9).

An important aspect of Dajani’s work is tracing the trajectory of Arab representation in Hollywood, from one of “desert romances”, portraying Westerners flirting with the exotic, mysterious, and hyper-erotic East in the 1920s, to one revolving around the threat of Islamic militarism and Arab nationalism by the 1960s (Dajani 2000, 27). She contextualizes this within the political climate of the period, citing the 1967 Six Day War and heightening Israeli/Arab tension over Israel/Palestine, which increased the visibility of Arab nationalism within American culture. She continues, “though not actively taking Israel's side in the war, America nevertheless was providing backing and support to its Middle Eastern ally. Incapable of facing its military might, Palestinian Arabs initiated guerrilla warfare tactics against Israeli targets, by setting off bombs and hijacking planes, in order to draw attention to their cause. These political events had a great influence on Arab screen depictions. Hollywood's policies mirrored those of the American government; the aim was to highlight the plight of the Israelis fighting for a Jewish homeland, and their struggle in dealing with barbaric elements, in the form of Arab terrorists killing innocent women and children” (Dajani 2000, 27).

These examples constitute some of the extensive stereotypes which have been explored in the medium of film studies, and upon which this thesis expands by introducing a novel application of cognitive psychology. By building on previous cinema studies scholarship, my project continues to investigate the infusion of Orientalist elements with cinema and its contribution to prevalent stereotypical associations within culture, (i.e., the “culture in mind”),

particularly concerning perspectives echoing Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. In addition to the existing frameworks described in previous chapters concerning the intersection of cultural studies and international relations, an established foundation can also be observed within the discipline of film studies upon which to build my cognitive psychological analysis of Orientalist cinema.

### 4.3 Data Collection

Historical films were examined to investigate the aforementioned **prevalence** and **prototypicality** of stereotypical Orientalist tropes, contrasting between the perception of “Eastern” and “Western”:

- Geopolitics (binary ideology of tyrannical, inferior East and free, superior West)
- Visual Imagery (race, appearance, setting)
- Personification (embodiment, gender, sexuality)

The specific method of analysis includes documentation of the stereotypical trope, a timestamp of its occurrence within the film, and a descriptive examination of both prevalence and prototypicality. Prevalence is determined with the quantity of occurrences throughout the thirty-five films. This is then incorporated into a descriptive extrapolation of how these common instances affect the availability heuristic through ease of recall. An important caveat concerns the findings of Schwarz *et al.* (1991), who noted that availability concerns the ease of recall, not necessarily the rote quantity. However, the proliferation of such stereotypical examples within popular culture may potentially outweigh the high quantity of non-stereotypical examples found outside of popular culture.

This is due to Hinton's discussion of implicit stereotypical associations being a reflection, not of an individual's cognitive bias, but the "associations prevalent within their culture", which he labels the "culture in mind" (Hinton 2017, 2). Prevalence is therefore not considered in a vacuum of film, but rather in the context of an abundant cultural reservoir of stereotypical events contrasted against a larger world of non-stereotypical events. Situating this within the findings of Schwarz *et al.* (1991), despite a higher quantity of behaviour existing which does not conform to Orientalist tropes, the stereotypical events in films may be recalled more often and more robustly. This extrapolation runs consistent with models of the availability heuristic discussed in Chapter 3, including the plane crash paradox, Tversky and Kahneman's experiment regarding famous names, and the "Jaws effect".

Prototypicality is assessed based on how similar the instances of stereotypical events are to a core prototype. This prototype is determined retroactively. By analyzing the list of accumulated stereotypes across the thirty-five films, an essential quality becomes apparent concerning categories of key stereotypical events. This core essence forms the foundation of the prototype, through which all stereotypical events of that category are examined regarding the degree to which they either adhere to, or differ from, this essential quality. The end result of this process is a descriptive, yet analytical, framing of which characteristics contain the highest likelihood of triggering the representativeness heuristic, and subsequent biases such as the conjunction fallacy. The actual process for this identification of prototypical tropes is as follows.

First, the entire pool of data from all thirty-five films was categorized according to its contents. After being colour-coded, this data was sorted into chapters concerning geopolitics, appearance, and embodiment (5, 6, and 7). From here, the data was sorted into a 2-column chart. When analyzing the collected data, I noted many of the similar characteristics between the

various emerging stereotypes and from this, a list of core prototypical tropes were produced. This trope list became the left column of the chart, with each row containing a different prototypical trope. The right column contained relevant examples of each trope selected from the aforementioned categorized data.

While prototypicality is used to ascertain an idea of representativeness, availability is determined through prevalence. The examples column for each row of prototypical tropes was the key measure for determining its prevalence. The examples in each row were counted, and sorted into four categories of prevalence

- 5 occurrences and under = low prevalence
- 6 - 9 occurrences = average prevalence
- 10 - 19 occurrences = high prevalence
- 20 occurrences and over = very high prevalence

With both the availability and representativeness heuristics operationalized, these prevalent and prototypical tropes have been analyzed to elucidate potential implicit bias and stereotype formation within the paradigm of the aforementioned psychological methodology.

#### **4.4 Role of Conflicting Authorship**

One aspect that must be taken into particular consideration is the problem potentially posed by conflicting authorship on a project. As films are the product of a combined artistic effort, it can sometimes be difficult to associate a certain area of a production with a particular individual's contribution. However, in some cases, such as Stanley Kubrick's 1960 film *Spartacus*, the various contributors bring starkly contrasting perspectives to the creative table. By using *Spartacus* as a case study on the role of authorship within my analysis, this example explores to what degree production conflicts, such as those involving an ideological writer

blacklisted for communist associations working alongside a director who prefers morally grey characters, influence the perpetuation of biases.

Just how significant is it for the audience (who is being potentially biased) that General Crassus was originally written as more dictatorial, while Rome was overthrown by rebels who were portrayed with overtly Marxist characterizations? Or that, as discussed by Kevin McGeough, Stanley Kubrick wanted to explore how “power corrupts revolutionary movements” (McGeough 2022, 122). As this project focuses entirely on how the final product may perpetuate biases within the audience, the key work lies in analyzing how the audience is perceiving the final result on screen. Therefore, it is only significant that the dictatorial Crassus is ultimately portrayed as an un-American villain and Spartacus’ rebels are iconic Western heroes idolized without a trace of any Kubrickian conflict of character. The clash of authors behind the scenes, though pivotal to creating the final product, does not directly impact how an audience member perceives the final product.

While the role of conflicting authorship is certainly significant in other areas of cinematic analysis, it does not play a core role in this particular project as presented through the *Spartacus* case. This is evident when comparing a work such as *Spartacus* to Zack Snyder’s *300*, as the latter is a far more homogenous production in terms of its principal contributors’ perspectives compared to the former. Yet despite their vast difference in authorship style, this bears no significant impact on my analysis as the effects on screen are perceived in the moment. The average, non-specialist viewer of *300* in 2007 is not likely to be considering whether it was Zack Snyder or Frank Miller who decided to give the Persian executioner bone-saws in place of arms. However, it is likely that many American viewers in the middle of the Iraq War would perceive

Persians (and by extension, Iraqis, Arabs, Brown People, “Towel-heads”, all Orientals, etc.) as being descendants of literal monstrosities.

Similarly, the average, non-specialist American viewer in 1961 is also not likely to be actively considering whether screenwriter Dalton Trumbo or Kirk Douglas was the individual behind Spartacus announcing, “Death is the only freedom a slave knows. That's why he's not afraid of it. That's why we'll win” (*Spartacus*, 1960). More likely, these viewers, while first watching the film, will be considering how these rebels are moral heroes facing insurmountable odds as they revolt against tyranny. From there, the perception may then be extended to themselves, righteous Americans emerging from the Second World War as liberators, inheritors of the Romans’ most noble attributes.

Once again, this analysis considers the perspective, and consequently the perception, of the average, non-specialist viewer, one who, even in 1961, would have been rather oblivious to production minutia including author quarrels. Within this perspective, *who* they are watching does not have the same impact as *what* they are watching. Audiences watch the movie play out on screen and whatever biases are propagated arise in that moment. Though the product facilitating the cognitive biases was conceived in the writer’s room and potentially privy to authorship conflicts, the biases that are the focus of this project do not become propagated until they are projected from the screen.

Even in the case of a monumental sociocultural event such as Dalton Trumbo (blacklisted for harbouring Communist sympathies) being credited in the film’s production, this would likely not eclipse the impact of quintessentially American Kirk Douglas portraying a character who matches all the values of the Judeo-Christian postwar U.S., which by association includes enterprising capitalism. Trumbo may have written and received credit for it, but the very postwar



1950s American presence of his main star dwarfs any Marxist messages he had hoped to convey. Ultimately, I believe that while authorship is essential to how a work is created, it is not central to analyzing how a movie may bias its audience. It is indeed the film itself that is biasing viewers more than either author or director, as the whole in this case is certainly greater than the sum of its parts.

Analyzing authorship is, once again, crucial in order to understand *why* the film is made the way that it is (and consequently how it may bias the audience). However, it is not necessary for understanding what is biasing the audience within a particular moment in the film. The principal factors necessary for analyzing the potential for heuristic bias are related to perception (not intention), understanding the political climate during production and a thorough examination of the final product itself.

#### **4.5 Significance of “Historical” Film**

It has been established that historical films portraying encounters between ancient empires and cultures draw sharp distinctions between the “Eastern” and Western” world. These Orientalist tropes are reflected with the biblical epics from the 1930s-60s, in which moralistic tales such as *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956) utilized mythical tropes within their presentation of absolute (Western) good versus absolute (Eastern) evil. It should be noted, however, that historical films were not the only motion pictures produced during the Cold War which espoused anti-Soviet sentiment. Why is it then, that the focus of this thesis is on historical film, when plenty of cinematic entertainment has been produced, in both the Cold War and post-9/11 periods, which may have potentially perpetuated implicit stereotypes, as well as Orientalist rhetoric, about the foreign, monolithic “Other”.

In essence, this is due to the potential ability of historical films to make implicit arguments about the contemporary world. Cinema (and broader visual media) transform history into a commodity, no longer anchored in reality but rather in a manufactured “hyperreality”, with the potential to have subtle, implicit effects on its consumers’ perceptions. If the clash between “East” and “West” is perceived as timeless, then the release of *Alexander* (2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), and *300* (2006) during the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan may be implicitly interpreted as confirming this reality. The accumulative, propagative nature of this narrative becomes further evident when analyzing the rather overt proclamations regarding free nations standing against evil, tyrannical empires, such as in *The 300 Spartans* (1962), released during the height of the Cold War. Even a film like *Kingdom of Heaven*, which claims to strive for resolution in the Middle East, ends with a quote declaring “to this day, peace remains elusive in the Kingdom of Heaven” as Richard of Lionheart marches towards the Holy Land, years after the film's protagonist has returned from his own crusade (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005).

This is precisely why the historical aspect of film is important, otherwise the filmography may have included Cold War pictures such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *The Iron Curtain* (1948), or various post-9/11 films exploiting Orientalist stereotypes, including *American Sniper* (2014) and *The Kingdom* (2007). Given the heuristic feedback loop of availability and representativeness, in connection with the implicit stereotypical associations prevalent within culture, (i.e., the “culture in mind”), it is probable that viewers walk away from historical films with a particular implicit understanding. This perspective about the contemporary world, facilitated by mythical historical narratives including those in cinema, argues that although the “West” seeks peace in the Middle East, the “fact” remains that the “East” is a moral geography historically associated with chaos, awaiting endless invasion, intervention, and confrontation.

These implicit associations may then form the perceptual bedrock upon which modern imperialistic foreign policy, such as the War on Terror, is justified as mere continuation of the historical norm of a clash between civilizations.

#### **4.6 Perception, Not Intention**

As mentioned by Jeffrey Zacks in his discussion of propagandistic cinema, one crucial component to consider is that not every director or producer of Orientalist film intends to create propaganda through the medium. This methodological issue must therefore be reconciled before examining any specific films, as it must be clarified whether these productions are intentional propaganda or simply meant to generate revenue and entertain the masses. This question of intent is similar to the preceding concern of conflicting authorship; however, it remains a methodological concern with even a single author. The framework adopted throughout this thesis to resolve this issue is one of “perception, not intention”.

In essence, the bulk of these releases are not interpreted as intentional propaganda, as the goal of this thesis is not to glean into the personal psychology of filmmakers, but rather to explore the propagation of implicit stereotypes. Indeed, there are some exceptions to the case, including films made by outspoken individuals, such as Cecil B. DeMille. This may also apply to cinematic adaptations such as *300*, based on the graphic novel by Frank Miller, who espoused well-publicized conservative stances, though characterizing himself as a Libertarian. Despite these literary origins, however, one cannot insinuate any intentionality regarding the adaptation by director Zack Snyder, due to a lack of references regarding Snyder’s own political psychology. There are also certain periods (i.e., “Red Scare” Hollywood during the 1950s heyday of McCarthyism) during which intentional propaganda was certainly more frequent.

Once again, however, the focus of this work is not a judgement of whether the majority of Orientalist films examined, ranging from 1932-2014, functioned as overt propaganda. Indeed, for the non-explicit examples, each film's propaganda may or may not be intentional. Rather, it is the propagation of implicit stereotypes through audience perception, by way of the heuristic feedback loop discussed in Chapter 3, that is essential to this analysis of historical film. Even in a post-9/11 context, films such as *Alexander* and *Kingdom of Heaven* were not designed to be propaganda, and indeed functioned as critiques of imperialism. Yet, that does not stop them being perceived as such by the viewers, through the activation of cognitive heuristics and culturally prevalent implicit stereotypes. It is therefore more robust to focus the cognitive psychological angle of this methodology on factors which may bias the perception of the audience, not the intention of the filmmakers.

Regardless of intention, the cognitive mechanisms of heuristic processing, and cultural framework of implicit stereotype propagation, remain intact. Whenever the issue of intentional propaganda is indeed applicable, it is treated on a case-by-case basis within the relevant proceeding chapters. When the intention is clear (i.e., DeMille), films may be viewed as explicit propaganda. When the intention is vague (i.e., Snyder), films may be viewed as entertainment, or "implicit" propaganda. Implicit propaganda still contains the potential ability to facilitate biased perception through the activation of availability and representativeness heuristics, along with implicit "energy-saving" stereotypes derived from prevalent cultural associations, (i.e., the "culture in mind"). In conclusion, this methodology does not concern itself with the production of intentional propaganda, but rather the perception of implicit biases and Orientalist stereotypes which may be interpreted through cognitive mechanisms and the "culture in mind" as implicit propaganda.

## **Chapter 5: “Us” versus “Them” – Geopolitics and the “Other”**

The most fundamental geopolitical theme that pervades historical films is a binary narrative which positions a noble, Western protagonist against a tyrannical, Eastern force. The ensuing conflict is often framed as a battle between good (often representing Western, democratic, or Christian values), and evil (often symbolizing Eastern, Communist, or totalitarian forces). This larger theme of a foundational duality breaks down into specific prototypical tropes which are explored below, as well as specific instances of their appearances within Orientalist historical film. These tropes have been selected for “prototypicality” after an extensive analysis process described in the preceding methodology chapter.

When analyzed according to the historical context of their release, films demonstrate a range of prototypical tropes reflecting Said’s imaginative geographies, often utilizing historical international relations in order to frame the East as a counterpoint to Western ideals. The ideological struggle between a “free and democratic” capitalist West and an “evil”, totalitarian, communist East may be perceived in historical films produced during the Cold War, with modern politics mapped onto historical authoritarian regimes such as ancient Egypt and Achaemenid Persia. At the core of these portrayals are themes of liberty versus tyranny, with Western characters depicted as morally superior champions combating the repressive East. The pursuit of liberty provides the “West” with its moral imperative, driving it to resist any force which seeks to subjugate and oppress, a force which, across Hollywood historical film, is most often embodied by the monolithic “East”.

Western intellect and strategy routinely outmatch Eastern “savagery” and brute force, reinforcing the perception of Western cultural, militaristic, and ideological dominance. Furthermore, the East is denigrated as deceptive and treacherous, in contrast with the moral and

virtuous West. These depictions thereby justify Western interventionist agendas and validate “civilizing” missions enacted by Western moral justice. In this paradigm, portrayals of the East as “barbaric”, inhuman, and inferior contribute to a perceived dichotomy of civilization versus savagery which both reflects, and bolsters these Orientalist biases.

Indeed, whether through Cold War-era concerns of authoritarian expansion or post-9/11 narratives regarding the “War on Terror”, Hollywood films have frequently framed the West as a necessary and beloved saviour, juxtaposed against an eternally unstable and tyrannical East. Combining heuristic processing models with Hinton’s paradigm of implicit bias propagation through prevalent and stereotypical cultural associations, (i.e., the “culture in mind”), these core tropes can be identified as contributing to a cultural reservoir of Orientalist stereotypes.

| <b>Stereotype</b>                                                | <b>Number of Occurrences</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Freedom vs Tyranny                                               | 124                          |
| “Liberation” and the Moral Imperative                            | 20                           |
| Consent and Agency                                               | 21                           |
| Western Legacy: “A Civilized Beacon” against “Eastern Barbarism” | 49                           |

|                                                         |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----|
| “Eastern Oppression” versus “Western Virtue”            | 24 |
| Symbolism of Salutes and Fascistic Imagery              | 8  |
| The “East” as Deceptive and Treacherous                 | 11 |
| Descent into Nihilism and its Consequences              | 3  |
| Internal Weakness within a Righteous Empire             | 10 |
| Necessity of Unity and Vigilance against Tyranny        | 15 |
| “Western Heroes, Beware the Corrupting East!”           | 10 |
| Portrayal of “Eastern Cowardice” and “Western Courage”  | 6  |
| Western “Civilizing Mission” and “Oriental Inferiority” | 28 |
| “The Oriental Monolith: Exotic, Chaotic, and Arcane”    | 23 |

|                                                               |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| “Active” versus “Passive” Agency in the “East/West” dichotomy | 4  |
| Superior Western Intellect and Ingenuity                      | 6  |
| Technological Superiority of the West                         | 4  |
| “One Westerner is Worth Many Easterners”                      | 9  |
| Musical Orientalism                                           | 12 |

### 5.1 “Freedom” versus “Tyranny”

The first of the prototypical tropes is concerned with the representation of “Freedom versus Tyranny”. Throughout these productions, the theme of a binary geopolitical and cultural divide existing between East/West is presented, via “Oriental” characters and the “Orient” itself. This constitutes what Said, McAlister, and Gregory would label a (cinematic) performance of space, utilizing imaginative geography to facilitate an implicitly stereotypical perception of the “Eastern” world. The films produced during the Cold War are influenced by the ideological clash between the United States (and its Western allies) against the Eastern bloc of the Soviet Union. In this framework, the United States is represented by the purportedly historical, but largely Orientalist, conception of the “West”, while the Soviet Union satisfies the “Eastern” other’s role within the framework of Orientalism. Therefore, the stereotypical core tropes of freedom versus



tyranny, Western moral superiority, and tyrannical collapse within the context of the “East/West divide” play out against the backdrop of Cold War anxieties about the spread of communism. *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *The 300 Spartans* (1962) all serve as excellent examples of this.

A quintessential starting point for this analysis is Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* (1956), often regarded as one of the most overt pieces of cinematic propaganda due to DeMille’s stated intentions of producing anti-Communist content. The film indeed starts with an unorthodox addressing of the audience by DeMille, in which he exclaims:

The theme of this picture is whether men ought to be ruled by God's law, or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator, like Rameses. Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956).

At the height of the Cold War, embroiled in a politically motivated quarrel with fellow director Joseph Manckiewicz over the leadership of the Directors Guild, DeMille contributed to the McCarthyist investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

Alongside attempting to institute a “Loyalty Oath” within the Directors Guild, which would have restricted production of content with left-leaning sympathies, DeMille spearheaded the DeMille Foundation for Political Freedom. His organization compiled information regarding potential leftist affiliations from screen directors, then forwarded this data to the HUAC (Ulmer, 2011). Within this context, DeMille’s films must be interpreted as explicit propaganda, and they are indeed rife with tropes concerning the representation of freedom versus tyranny.

As a Cold War cinematic moral, Moses’ liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage is therefore a direct allegory for the fight against (Eastern) tyranny. Joshua’s declaration “is life in bondage better than death?” (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956) captures the universal desire for freedom at the center of the film. The Egyptians’ hoarding of food symbolizes the

oppressive control of resources, which would have been a key criticism of the USSR at the time (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956). The film continually asserts that God's laws of universal freedom apply to all, not just the Hebrews. American values are characterized as universal, putting them into direct opposition with Eastern/Communist ones. Sephora's speech about the importance of formerly colonized people (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956) further contextualizes the role of the Middle East in this historical depiction, drawing attention to it as a place of contention in need of liberation throughout history (as depicted in film). This aligns with the U.S.'s self-perception as a champion of the oppressed during the Cold War, such as in its support for decolonization movements.

In *Samson and Delilah* (1949), the titular biblical hero personifies freedom, while the oppressive Philistines represent totalitarianism. Samson's destruction of the Philistine temple symbolizes the triumph of freedom, aligned with true faith, over tyranny, represented by idolatry and oppression (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). This prototypical trope also often emphasizes the power of individual heroism and moral righteousness in overcoming oppressive forces. It celebrates the capacity of exceptional individuals to challenge and eventually defeat tyrannical regimes, often highlighting the contrast between the valour of the individual and the cruelty or corruption of oppressive systems. In *Samson and Delilah*, a young Saul exclaims his defiance, "[s]omeday we'll show the Saran that stones can fly just as straight as Philistine spears", communicating the belief in the individual's ability to triumph over even technologically superior oppressors (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). Samson's personal strength and faith are portrayed as powerful enough to defy and defeat Philistine imperial might, symbolizing the triumph of individual courage and righteousness against tyranny, regardless of how imposing.

The metaphorical ascent of Marcus and Mercia after death in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) represents the idea that acceptance of Christ and moral righteousness can conquer even the fear of death and the power of tyrannical regimes. This suggests that ultimate victory lies in spiritual redemption and moral fortitude rather than temporal power. In *The Robe* (1953), Demetrius' adamant rejection of Marcellus and the Roman Empire after witnessing the crucifixion of Christ at Marcellus' hands highlights the triumph of moral and spiritual resistance over imperial tyranny. By denouncing Rome as "thieves, murderers, and jungle animals" (*The Robe*, 1953), Demetrius demonstrates the trope of individual moral awakening and revolt against oppressive tyranny. Emperor Tiberius himself provides the tyrannical perspective on this, exclaiming:

When it comes, this is how it will start. Some obscure martyr in some forgotten province; then madness. Infecting the legions, rotting the empire. Then the finish of Rome...this is more dangerous than any spell...it is man's desire to be free. it is the greatest madness of them all. and I have sent the most effective physician I have (Marcellus) to cure it. I have sent a madman. (*The Robe*, 1953).

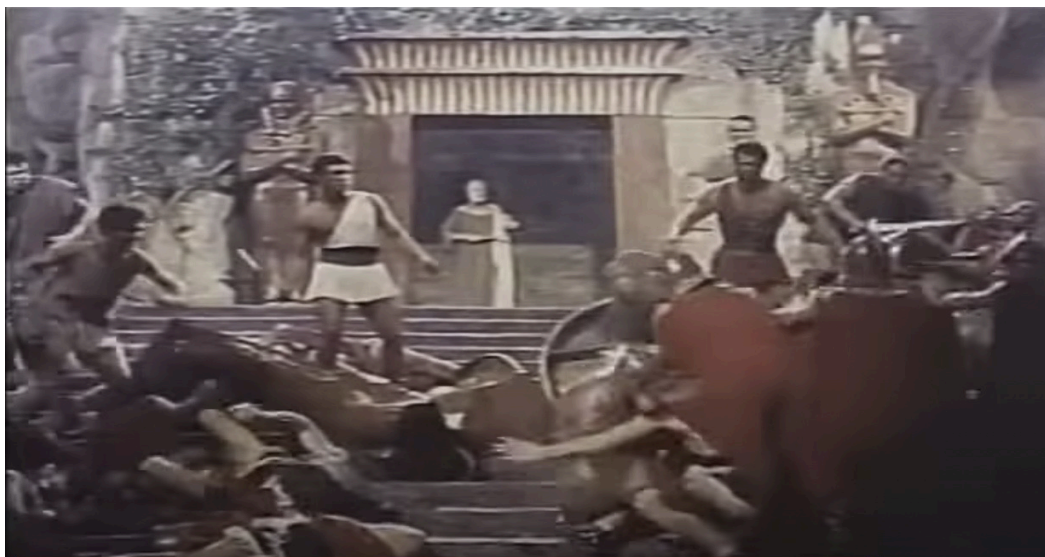
Tiberias' fear is the very prototypical trope that has become strengthened within implicit stereotypical associations, (i.e., the "culture of mind"), through its high degree of representativeness and availability. There is no tyrannical force (i.e., Soviets) which can keep the free people down (innocent Christians). The only hope of autocrats who wish to continue exercising their tyranny is attempting to suppress freedom itself. However, in the process of this repression, they remain fearful of those selfsame free, (and usually Western), forces.

The Cold War context is very apparent in the Italian *Hercules Unchained* (1959), where Hercules prevails over oppressive soldiers clad in red. His singlehanded victory over this "Red Army" symbolizes the perceived strength of Western ideals over Soviet tyranny during the Cold War, as depicted in *Figures 2 and 3*. Hercules' strength and heroism are portrayed as superior to the collective might of the oppressive (Red) forces, reflecting Cold War-era beliefs in Western

superiority and the power of individual heroism. In *The 300 Spartans* (1962), the Spartan defense against Persian slavery highlights the contrast between a free, independent and democratic Western force and a persistent threat from a force of enslaved Easterners. This trope reinforces the idea that the West is on the “right” side of history, justified in its actions due to its perceived inherent benevolence.



**Figure 2.** Omphale’s guards, garbed in red uniforms, attack Hercules. *Hercules Unchained* (Alpha Video Distributors, 2002) Digital Enlargement.



**Figure 3.** Hercules single-handedly defeats Omphale’s “red soldiers”. *Hercules Unchained* (Alpha Video Distributors, 2002) Digital Enlargement.

Examples of this occur in *David and Bathsheba* (1951), where David's repentance and eventual victory over his adversaries are framed as divinely ordained, bolstering the moral superiority of the protagonist (*David and Bathsheba*, 1951). This perhaps reflects the postwar feeling of "moral victory" pervading the zeitgeist, which McGeough remarks as characteristic of 1950s Biblical epics, capturing the culture of veterans "readjusting to civilian life, especially the opening sequences which portray a bored David risking his life rather than being at home with his family" (McGeough 2018, 24).

Individual heroism and the enduring Western spirit of freedom extend into the post-9/11 culture of implicit geopolitical stereotypes further with *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). Balian's acts of mercy, including sparing his Muslim opponent and offering not only mercy, but also freedom, demonstrates the nobility of Western ideals in contrast to the perceived cruelty of opposing forces (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). His behaviour emphasizes the theme that individual acts of mercy and righteousness are powerful and transformative, challenging the norms of tyranny and oppression. Furthermore, many of these films suggest that the liberating force is often supported by a divine mandate and is indeed morally justified in their actions against the tyrannical force.

*Alexander's* (2004) campaigns are depicted as a mission to civilize and liberate the East, echoing the Orientalist trope that the West's divine mandate is to spread its values. Even the tyrannical Saran of the Philistines in *Samson and Delilah* (1949) admits that he admires Samson's bravery but insists on punishing his revolt, revealing his envy of Samson's connection to his people. His remark about Samson having the "strength of a God", as the hero razes Dagon's temple, underscores the idea that the liberty and moral righteousness of the West are divinely supported and indomitable (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). Indeed, throughout the history of Orientalist film, the prototypical theme of freedom versus tyranny has often been determined

by a battle between the noble individual and his tyrannical oppressor, after which oppressive rule is replaced by the strength and virtue of democratic values.

A powerful narrative device with a very high degree of prevalence (over 20 instances), this trope is likely a major source of influence in the cultural reservoir of tropes, which fuels implicit stereotypical associations, or the “culture in mind”, concerning the East/West divide. Once again, this is the result of the availability heuristic as postulated by Tversky and Kahneman, increasing the ease of recall for this particular trope. This prototypical theme showcases the strength and righteousness of individual characters in overcoming oppressive regimes and whether in Cold War or post-9/11 context of production, reflects the geopolitical considerations and cultural attitudes of the time concerning the free West and tyrannical East.

However, this trope of freedom versus tyranny extends past explicit propaganda and into the implicit. In both *300* (2006) and the *300 Spartans* (1962), the Battle of Thermopylae serves as a clear metaphor for the West’s resistance to the tyrannical barbarism of the East. This takes the form of a “Soviet-like” Persian empire in the Cold War era epic, with everything from its soldiers to its pavilions adorned in red. In the adaptation produced during the War on Terror; however, the Persians are clearly inspired by the “Orientalized” Middle East in garb and appearance. Across these depictions of the Battle of Thermopylae, the West is portrayed, not only as defending its borders, but also defending the free world against tyranny, (either communist or Islamic).

Tyranny in these depictions often falls through internal contradictions, doomed to collapse under the weight of its own oppression (along with the help of a morally righteous force). This trope entails that tyranny, represented by Eastern or tyrannical regimes, is inherently unstable and doomed to implode. Examples of this include the aforementioned temple collapse in

*Samson and Delilah* (1949), as well as Akhenaten's prophecy in *The Egyptian* (1954).

Akhenaten's prediction of a true God arriving reflects the belief that tyrannical systems will eventually be replaced by more just and moral societies rooted in Christian values. Indeed, the final message of the film flashes over the screen before the credits so that viewers who have just seen Pharaoh forewarned about the collapse of tyranny at the hands of a just, divine force then see "these things happened thirteen centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ" (*The Egyptian*, 1954).

Furthermore, the red tyrants portrayed as being the descendants of Cain in *The Bible: In the Beginning* (1966) reflect the perception of a homogenous and oppressive force contrasted against the noble and free Noah. This oppressive force then collapses under its own failings, namely invoking the divine retribution of God through the great flood. Militaristic action carried out against the homogenous, tyrannical force garbed in red may then be perceived as moral, and being in accordance with divine justice.

Films produced after the events of September 11, 2001 often reflect prevalent implicit stereotypical associations, (i.e., a "culture in mind"), concerned with terrorism, the War on Terror, and what Huntington framed as the potential "clash of civilizations" between the West and the Muslim world. Orientalism pervades these films, imbuing them with the inevitability of conflict and the moral justification for Western intervention (framed as liberation) within the Middle East. In addition to the aforementioned *300* (2006), *Alexander* (2004) also fulfills the narrative of liberating the East from tyranny, released at a time during which the Bush administration deployed similar justifications for extended Middle East intervention. Just as Alexander extends his conquest of Persia into Bactria, so too does "The Coalition of the Willing" add Iraq to its list of targets after the invasion of Afghanistan. It should be noted that director

Oliver Stone himself is critiquing the imperial overreach of both Bush, and Alexander; however, once again he uses the, purportedly historical, imaginative geography of an “Orient” endlessly at odds with the “West” to portray his criticism.

In a similar instance of social commentary nonetheless perpetuating Orientalism, Ridley Scott’s own phrasing of “nearly a thousand years later, peace in the Kingdom of Heaven remains elusive” is telling of the attitude concerning the region (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). Though this film attempts to balance portrayals of East and West more than the standard Orientalist Hollywood film by showcasing honourable Muslims and dishonourable Christians, it is still underscored by the same fatalistic perception of the Middle East, depicting it as the imaginative geography at the heart of perspectives such as Huntington’s “clash of civilizations”. These examples demonstrate how the cinematic propagation of implicit biases may not always require explicit intention. Indeed, the trope of “freedom versus tyranny” may imbue historical settings with imaginative geography, through which implicit commentary on contemporary issues is interpreted. As a result, the prevalent stereotypical cultural associations, what Hinton labels the “culture in mind”, continues to be filled with portrayals of the Middle East as a region responsible for, and forever embroiled in, battles between a tyrannical East and egalitarian West.

## **5.2 “Liberation” and the Moral Imperative**

A core aspect of these films is not just the divide between tyranny and freedom, but rather the prototypical trope of freedom as a moral and ethical pursuit. Contrasted against an oppressive East, this trope reflects the Western commitment to liberating people from various forms of subjugation, emphasizing the nobility and righteousness associated with the free people of the West. This particular prototypical trope has deep connections concerning the geopolitical contexts of the films, for both Cold War and post-9/11 productions. During the Cold War, films



which often depicted freedom and moral righteousness as opposed to tyranny reflected on the ideological struggle between a democratic West and communist East. The emphasis on liberation and moral superiority was thereby used to justify and support Western interventions and criticisms of totalitarian regimes. Freedom was framed as a central imperative, a universal right that people must be assisted in obtaining if they cannot obtain it themselves. Following the September 11 attacks, this prototypical trope was employed to justify military interventions and the War on Terror. Films from this period, such as *300*, connected contemporary military actions to historical narratives of liberation and moral duty. By building on existing heuristics of representativeness and adding to the available tropes concerning the War on Terror to previous instances of Western liberation, the existing cultural reservoir of stereotypical associations could be bolstered, thereby further enriching the existing pool of stereotypical perceptions regarding East and West. Once again, this symbiosis of Tversky and Kahneman's findings with Hinton's model of stereotype perpetuation demonstrates how historical film could serve as a theoretically ideal environment for the propagation of implicit biases.

By producing these films, the United States also engages in the exercise of exporting its culture. Through positioning Western characters as noble liberators aligned with American interventionist ideology concerning "Eastern aggression", historical films such as *300* (2006) may facilitate the perception of complex geopolitical situations (i.e., the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan) as more justified due to their cultural connection to history. This is an example of soft power and cultural diplomacy as tools of Western influence; one that may not be intentionally designed as propaganda, but which nonetheless bolsters the same representative and available tropes which potentially enable the war-centric implicit biases and stereotypes that fuel paradigms such as Huntington's "clash of civilizations". Examples of these films include

assertions that “Christians want to save the world by making it spiritually free” as proclaimed in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), followed with Mercia risking her life to protect the Tribune Marcus, despite his previous attempts to harm her (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). The mercy and benevolence of Christians is indeed a foundational aspect of Western liberation. In addition to the Midian Sheikh’s discussion of “universal freedom”, Sephora’s aforementioned speech in *The Ten Commandments* (1956) highlights the importance of previously colonized peoples and implies moral superiority of the liberated people over the imperialists, emphasizing Western (and American) ideals of liberation and righteousness (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956).

*Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) continues this trend with an American journalist describing his nation’s sympathy for the liberation of a fellow “colonial people”, as Lawrence asserts that emancipation from oppression is his sole motivation for assisting the Arabs (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). In the War on Terror context, *Alexander* (2004) and his fight for the “freedom and glory of Greece” reflects a narrative of Western moralism and the pursuit of freedom, mirroring American ideals of interventionism and liberation, while his warm reception in Babylon may be perceived as analogous to American expectations of being welcomed as liberators in Iraq (*Alexander*, 2004). Themistocles’ dedication to a “free Greece” in *300: Rise of an Empire* mirrors Alexander’s aspirations while the Persian menace in *300* (2006) is seen not only as a geopolitical threat, but more importantly, a moral one that cannot, and should not, be reasoned with (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014).

Indeed, the decision to connect Thermopylae and Salamis within the same *300* franchise is curious as the historical Salamis is not directly linked with the 300 Spartans, other than the battle itself being a military consequence of Thermopylae. Yet, Themistocles’ story in *300: Rise of an Empire* is presented as a sequel to Leonidas’ story, implying that Western resistance to

Eastern aggression is a long-running narrative within the Western canon of historical stories. Aligning this with Derek Gregory's analysis highlighted in Chapter 2, Easterners (such as the Persians) often occupy the role of *Homines sacer*, nameless enemy fighters, within these cultural representations. As the "Orient" continues to be portrayed as an entity fuelling tyranny using anonymous "fighters", the stereotypical association between the West and its commitment to emancipation, often through military intervention, is reinforced.

### **5.3 Consent and Agency**

Another prototypical trope of very high prevalence (over 20 occurrences) revolves around consent and agency, or rather, the lack thereof within the tyrannical empire. In many of these films, the tyrannical power assumes entitlement to all entities (be they countries or individual people). Many characters have their oppressive viewpoints compounded by the lack of attention given to consent when pursuing their goals, usually relations with women or imperial conquest. Furthermore, in many of the historical and Orientalist films explored, sexual violence and the disregard for consent are central motifs tied to the portrayal of tyranny and Eastern cultures.

The East and other tyrannical regimes which oppress "The People" are depicted as inherently sexually depraved, where rape, coercion, and non-consensual seduction are used as instruments of domination and oppression. The violation of consent is equated with the broader themes of conquest and subjugation, where the East (or oppressive force) is not only morally corrupt but also seeks control through the exploitation of bodies. These films reinforce the West as either resisting or overcoming the sexual deviance and violations of consent perpetrated by the East or tyrants, which in turn others the East as inherently immoral, primitive, and dishonorable.

Consent, or the lack thereof, becomes analogous for political and cultural subjugation, where the power dynamics of rape and coercion mirror the broader narrative of imperial domination.

In both Cold War and post-9/11 contexts, the theme of consent and agency underscores the tension between power and individual autonomy, reflecting broader geopolitical concerns about control, freedom, and human rights. The Cold War focus on democratic and authoritarian regimes is reflected with films of the era highlighting the struggle between freedom and tyranny through the lens of losing individual agency. The imposition of power and disregard for consent displayed by these authoritarian characters parallels the global concerns about totalitarianism and human rights violations. In the post-9/11 era, films addressing the prototypical trope of consent and agency often focused on themes of imperialism and the effects of military power on personal freedoms. By focusing on personal agency, these films can be seen as a commentary on the ethical violations of tyranny and the impact of global power dynamics on individual freedoms and rights. Through situating many of these stories within the Middle East, the imaginative geography comes to be associated with the violation of personal rights, often concerning sexual consent. Even if the perpetrators are not always “Oriental”, they are practising tyranny in the “Orient” and further contributing to the stereotypical implicit associations, (i.e., “culture in mind”), regarding the geopolitics of the region as it relates to consent and personal agency.

In *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), Marcus the Tribune demonstrates his tyrannical attitude asserting to Mercia “you must like me, in such things I always have my way” (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). Throughout the film, he pursues Mercia, showcasing his nonconsensual lustful desire as analogous with a lack of belief in the Christian God (especially alongside his Emperor Nero’s wanton sexual hedonism). Mercia’s resistance to Marcus’ advances and her subsequent fate (a death which she embraces with religious zeal) showcase both the tyranny of the forceful

oppressor and the courage provided by Christianity in the face of ruthless physical oppression. Mercia's pious and demure attitude and its analogies with geopolitics are matched by Moses in *The Ten Commandments* (1956), who refuses to use Princess Nefretiri of Egypt as a footstool, demonstrating his respect for personal agency, and embodied sense of freedom (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956). Both of these characters represent people who will not be conquered, nor conquer others. They are symbols for the Western audience to aspire to. This theme of dismissing consent and violating personal agency is highly prevalent in these films (over 10 instances), hinting to a high degree of availability in addition to its prototypical representativeness.

The violation of consent is portrayed in its most extreme form in *The 300 Spartans* (1962), as Xerxes orders his soldiers to commit mass rape against Spartan women as revenge for his brother's death. This explicit command demonstrates the Eastern ruler's complete disregard for consent, portraying rape as a tool of conquest and revenge. The scene reinforces the East as barbaric, using sexual violence to further embody Eastern rulers as morally bankrupt and devoid of empathy, while simultaneously elevating the Spartans as more virtuous and righteous defenders of honour (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). Caesar forces himself upon Cleopatra after she first protests, "Do as you say? As if I were something you conquered." (*Cleopatra*, 1963). In another instance, *Cleopatra* (1963) is berated by Caesar, who exclaims "you are what I say you are and nothing more" (*Cleopatra*, 1963), while Lucifer tempts Christ with an offer of imperial power, proclaiming "you can have any country you want" (*The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988).

Whether through Caesar's dismissing of Cleopatra's personal agency, or Lucifer's imperialist disregarding of sovereignty, historical films consistently associate tyranny with the violation of consent. Cleopatra's initial resistance and eventual submission to Caesar's sexual advances symbolize the East as both resistant to, and yet ultimately subjugated by, Western

power. This particular type of violation, where Cleopatra relents but does not truly consent, serves as a metaphor for the West's imperial conquest of the East, reinforcing the idea that the East is complicit in its own subjugation (*Cleopatra*, 1963). In a similar situation, Alexander the Great's sexual domination of Roxana, after she initially fights him, may also be seen as analogous to Western conquest of the East through the dismissal of consent (*Alexander*, 2004). Roxana's eventual submission to Alexander's advances is framed as symbolic of the East "relenting" to Western domination, reinforcing the idea that the East is ultimately complicit in its own subjugation. The scene therefore portrays a dynamic where consent is eroded through persistent coercion, mirroring the broader themes of imperial conquest and domination (*Alexander*, 2004).

The violation of consent is indeed tied to fascist regimes and their inherent moral corruption. The portrayal of the Roman Empire and Eastern forces as sexually depraved and unconcerned with consent reflects Western fears of authoritarianism during the Cold War. Rome, in particular, is framed as a fascistic force whose disregard for personal autonomy mirrors the West's anxieties about totalitarianism and the erosion of civil liberties under oppressive regimes. Furthermore, the violation of consent by Eastern characters reflects post-9/11 Western anxieties about the "East" as a dangerous, sexually deviant, and morally inferior "Other." These depictions concerning the tyrannical breach of consent are often set within the Orientalized imaginative geography of the Middle East. The combined availability and representativeness of this prototypical trope may then indeed contribute to implicit biases and Hinton's "culture in mind" concerning a region of the world perceived as inherently less consensual and more prone to violations of personal agency.

#### 5.4 Western Legacy: “A Civilized Beacon against Eastern Barbarism”

A prototypical trope with very high prevalence, (over 20 occurrences), arises from the perceived barbarous nature of the East, contrasted with the apparent moral superiority of the civilized West. This trope emphasizes not only the barbaric East, but also the necessity of Western leadership, heroism, and often, military intervention in order to protect the “free” world, while civilizing the “savage” world. Furthermore, this civilized “West” is also tasked with preserving the legacy of civilized (“Western”) ideals. The geopolitical contextualization of this prototypical trope, where Eastern societies are portrayed as savage and/or primitive, compared to their advanced and civilized Western counterparts, is essential, as many of these films were produced during the cultural climate of the Cold War. Films such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *The Robe* (1953) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) reflect this by portraying the legacy of historical Western influence as necessary for shepherding the “less civilized” parts of the world towards freedom and democracy.

Depictions of Roman legions guarding the “boundaries of civilization” demonstrate this in *The Robe* (1953), and referring to conquered lands as the home of slaves demonstrates the racial hierarchy of the era (*The Robe*, 1953). Rome itself is depicted as the pinnacle of civilization, while the inhabitants of its conquered territories are dehumanized. Palestine is referred to as a “pest hole”, reinforcing the Orientalist sentiment that Eastern regions are backward and troublesome (*The Robe*, 1953). The consistent contrast between the ideal of peace and brotherhood associated with Christianity versus the “aggression and slavery” of the Roman Empire highlights the moral and civilizational supremacy of the West over its tyrannical opponents (*The Robe*, 1953).

In *The Robe*'s sequel *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), the titular protagonist's condemnation of gladiatorial combat as inhumane reflects the moral superiority of Christian values over the perceived savagery of the Roman Empire, which is characterized as a place where "men kill each other like animals" (*Demetrius and the Gladiators*, 1954). The Roman socialite Messalina's insistence on the Greek Demetrius' status as a slave further showcases the racial and social hierarchies that persist even in the context of perceived moral superiority (*Demetrius and the Gladiators*, 1954). An early scene in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) features a British colonel dismissing the Bedouins as a "nation of sheep stealers", reflecting colonial attitudes that perceive Eastern people as not only inferior, but lawless (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962).

The view of the Middle Eastern theatre of World War I as a "sideshow" compared to the Western front reveals the fundamental Orientalist belief in Western supremacy and the inferiority of Eastern engagements (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Auda's act of scalping his enemies further reinforces the idea of native savagery in contrast to Western civility within the Orientalist production (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Finally, the double standards are apparent in the treatment of Eastern versus Western characters, as Lawrence's Hazemi guide is shot by an opposing tribe member, Sharif Ali, for drinking at his well but he tells Lawrence he is welcome to drink. This once again emphasizes the "imaginative geography" of the Orient, a region framed as being simultaneously plagued by inherently barbarous tribal conflict, while serving as an ideal playground for privileged Westerners (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). In *Cleopatra* (1962), Pompey the Great's decapitation and butchery is an act of barbarism from the Egyptians which does not please Caesar as Pharaoh Ptolemy had hoped, but instead demonstrates the East's lack of honour (*Cleopatra*, 1962).



The representation of Persians as “barbarian races” and depictions of Eastern forces as disorganized and inferior in *Alexander* (2004) reinforces the narrative of Western superiority over the East, now in the post-9/11 age (*Alexander*, 2004). There is a clear sense of discipline within the Western forces which is not present in the rabble-like horde of Persians (*Alexander*, 2004). Furthermore, the analogy in *300* (2006) of Leonidas baiting a wolf into a narrow crag symbolizes Western triumph over the Eastern “beast”, depicting the Persians as a marauding and animalistic force against which the noble West must defend itself. This “beast” is shown as ready to “devour Greece”, reinforcing the implicit stereotype of a historical clash between Eastern savagery and Western civilization (*300*, 2006). The visualization of violence is highly dichotomized between the Eastern and Western forces, clearly depicting the Spartans as being more virtuous than the barbaric Persians. In their first encounter with the destruction wrought by Persia, the 300 observe a tree “decorated” with Greek corpses. This cements Persians, and Orientals by extension, as not just a territorial threat but a barbarous and uncivilized one engaged in the vile and reprehensible, serving as a warning not only to Greeks, but the broader West (*300*, 2006).

This perceived inherent barbarism of the East recurs in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), as Pontius Pilate’s attempt to find a reasonable way out of condemning Jesus to death is contrasted against the emotional and unreasonable demands of the Jewish mob. It should be noted that this particular depiction of Western rationality and Eastern barbarism is likely contextualized within anti-Semitic tropes, interpreted from the Gospels by director Mel Gibson, including frequent derogatory references in the Gospel of John to “the Jews” and their opposition to Jesus. The fantastical, and pseudo-archaeological, *10,000 BC* (2008) depicts savage “four-legged demons”, which are revealed to be individuals wearing stereotypically Eastern garb

(turbans and veils similar to Xerxes' troops in 300). This further reinforces the representativeness of the trope concerning Eastern savagery and the barbarism of non-Western people. Tubal-Cain's Easterners in *Noah* (2014) further contribute to this highly representative and available prototype of Eastern barbarism by engaging in human trafficking (*Noah*, 2014). The most striking image, however, is that of *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) which showcases Emperor Marcus Aurelius giving a speech at the hinterlands of the Empire. While professing the Roman desire to bring unity and peace to “diverse peoples”, he nonetheless proclaims that “hatred” and “palisades” are all that await at the borders of Rome, chiefly Persia and Germania (*The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1964). Throughout these Orientalist films, the ancient world therefore consistently communicates that Western societies are the epitome of civilization and morality, while Eastern societies are savage, oppressive, and/or primitive.

As mentioned before, one side of this trope establishes Eastern barbarism as a historical threat which must be countered, while the other focuses on the Western cultural legacy as a beacon of “civilization”. In *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), a striking visual (*Figure 4*) of unused European howitzers is contrasted with Arab cavalrymen charging victorious through the streets of Aqaba, following their surprise attack on the Ottomans, suggested by Lawrence (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This symbolizes the futility of technological prowess without the leadership exemplified by Lawrence, a Western figure, as what initially made the Ottomans, an “Oriental” force, threatening was their European weapons. However, the presence of Lawrence, a civilized Westerner proved that, in spite of the Turks' advanced Western arsenal, the competence of the “West” lies in its people.



**Figure 4.** An Ottoman howitzer sits unused as the victorious Arab tribes charge through the streets of Aqaba. *Lawrence of Arabia* (Sony Home Pictures Entertainment, 1962) Digital Enlargement.

With the “barbarous” tribal Arabs united under his guidance, Lawrence’s influence and eventual victory suggest that Western leadership is essential for progress. Indeed, Lawrence states before he sets up the Battle for Damascus “the best of them won’t come for money, they’ll come for me”, referring to the Arab tribes he has united (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). By the end of the film, Lawrence has realized his importance as a civilized, Western leader, indicating that without his influence, the tribal Arabs would be lost. This once again reinforces the narrative of Western indispensability in global affairs, bolstering it within the cultural reservoir of stereotypes that may bias individuals via availability and representativeness.

Western legacy is further discussed in *Troy* (2004), when Odysseus comments “let them say I lived in the time of Hector...and Achilles”, proclaiming this can be seen as a reflection on how Western actions are not just concerned with immediate outcome, but shaping global perceptions and future narratives, especially considering their potential ability to bias individuals through heuristics and prevalent cultural stereotypical associations (*Troy*, 2004). Aristotle proclaims that the benefits of competition justify Western imperialism as a force for good in

*Alexander* (2004), mirroring the rhetoric used during both the Cold War and its own post-911 context, where Western actions are framed as necessary to protect and strengthen the state against tyranny (*Alexander*, 2004).

This core theme of a righteous Western force is retained within historical films released during the War on Terror, portraying the “West” as the last remaining bastion of freedom, fighting against overwhelming odds to not only defend the civilized world, but also preserve the legacy of Western ideals. “Oriental” cultures were often portrayed as barbaric or inferior, and this theme resonated with ongoing concerns regarding the Middle East and terrorism. This geopolitical context further contributes to the bolstering of stereotypes and implicit biases justifying Western dominance over the Eastern “savage”.

Indeed, before the heroic last stand between Persians and Spartans in *300* (2006), Leonidas, before marching to his doom, voices that the West perceives itself as a defender of freedom and democracy (*300*, 2006). He commands one of his generals back to Sparta, in order to immortalize their sacrifice as a grand historic tale, suggesting that Western values are both worth dying for, and vital to preserve. Just as Joshua tells Moses in *The Ten Commandments* to stand on a rock so that he may be seen representing “hope for the Hebrews”, the West must be visible, and lead by example, shepherding people into a perceived historical resistance against the tyrannical, monolithic, Eastern empire (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956). Once again, the prevalent implicit stereotypical associations within culture facilitate the perception, not only of a “barbarous East”, but a “civilized West” whose righteous legacy has become immortalized as a result of its unwavering resistance to, and domination of, the Orient.

## 5.5 “Eastern Oppression” versus “Western Virtue”

Moving forward, the next prototypical theme in Orientalist films is the depiction of Eastern societies as not only authoritarian, but also brutal and sadistic in their oppression. Contrasted with the morally upright and just nature of the West, this theme highlights the East as a realm of inhumanity and cruelty, while the West is portrayed as fighting against this tyranny with moral righteousness and justice. Those films produced in the Cold War are marked by ideological confrontation between Western and Eastern blocs, reflecting the desire to reinforce the moral and ethical superiority of the West over the evil Soviet empire in the East. The moral high ground of the West is crucial to these themes, and at the heart of this particular prototypical trope. Films produced after 2001 often reflect contemporary concerns about Western military interventions and the brutality of Eastern regimes. The depiction of Eastern figures as not only tyrannical, but sadistic and oppressive aligns with post-9/11 narratives about the need for Western intervention and the moral righteousness of Western actions.

In *Samson and Delilah* (1949), Samadar the Daanite’s death symbolizes the lack of humanity within the Philistines, who represent tyrannical powers such as the USSR (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). Samson’s vow to return “fire and death” for what he has suffered (the death of his lover) reflects the idea of Western justice being reactive in nature, enacted in response to Eastern tyranny (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). The film therefore frames the West as being morally justified in its actions against a sadistic East with little regard for human life. In Cecil B. DeMille’s *Sign of the Cross* (1932), the propaganda used by Emperor Nero to incite hatred against the Christians is itself emblematic of the film’s own critique of fascist tyranny. Nero states “if the populace could learn to hate them, they might destroy them”, which considering DeMille’s objective desire to create explicit moralistic propaganda, may be seen as exactly what

DeMille hopes to accomplish with regards to authoritarian regimes. In *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), the transformation from pyramid builders singing while they build to languishing under the “drum and whip” contrasts Egyptian oppression with the perceived moral superiority of the Western characters, further emphasizing the brutal nature of Eastern rule.

In *Hercules Unchained* (1959), soldiers wearing red armour are depicted mercilessly striking down helpless civilians (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959), while *The 300 Spartans* (1962) demonstrates Xerxes’ brutal treatment of his own troops telling his generals to “whip them on if they are slow” (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). Furthermore, in both the 1962 and 2006 versions of this narrative, Xerxes orders his soldiers forward with reckless human wave attacks depicting the Persian ruler as not only a tyrant, but one who disregards human life (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). To drive the message home in *300* (2006), he proclaims “imagine what fate awaits my enemies when I would gladly kill any of my own men for victory” to which Leonidas responds “as I would die for every one of mine.” The juxtaposition reflects both Cold War and post-9/11 sentiment about Western intervention (along with its moral high-ground) being required to stymie Eastern oppression and cruelty. The destruction of cultural artifacts by the Romans in *Cleopatra* (1963) further highlights the harsh nature of fascistic, imperial rule while Saul in *King David* (1985) remarks that only impious individuals commit mass murder, associating oppressive tyranny with those lacking moral or religious integrity (which can then be mapped on to Easterners/Soviets).

King Darius of Persia enslaves his own men in *Alexander* (2004), reinforcing the idea of a morally and ethically corrupt East, which occurs again (in a more hyperbolic manner) in *300* (2006) under a different Persian king, Xerxes. Shifting from the historical to the mythological, Roland Emmerich’s *10,000 BC* (2008) showcases just how crystallized these Orientalist tropes

have become. When villains are needed to raid the Neolithic European settlement from which the protagonist hails, they are portrayed as barbaric and oppressive individuals wearing turbans, once again stereotypically Eastern garb (*10,000 BC*, 2008). Their actions in the protagonist's village mirror the razing of Athens by Persia as depicted in *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014). Though based on the historical Persian sack of Athens following the Battle of Thermopylae, the visuals are emotionally charged and visceral. Harkening back to Jeff Zaks' comments about emotionality facilitating greater attention (and therefore a higher possibility for implicit bias), the intense depictions of Persian barbarism (i.e., murder, rape, arson) portray this sack not as a militaristic event, but another consequence of the East's inherent malice (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014).

Serving as the opening scene of the film, it immediately contrasts the noble and moral Western protagonists against the broader theme of Eastern savagery versus Western virtue. Building on these examples, the descendant of Cain in *Noah* (2014) is depicted as leading an empire of corrupted industry within the East, which "spread wickedness, devouring the world" (*Noah*, 2014). His descendant, the antagonist Tubal-Cain commanding his soldiers to "feed only those who fight" portrays Eastern tyrants as cruel, inhumane despots who only view their subjects as a means to an end. As showcased by these highly prevalent instances (over 20 occurrences), the immorality inherent within Eastern society is indeed a core prototypical trope of Orientalist film, one that is balanced by a morally righteous West.

## **5.6 Symbolism of Salutes and Fascistic Imagery**

A less frequent, but still important prototypical trope concerns the appearance of "Roman salutes" and fascist symbolism throughout these films. While the Roman Salute is a potentially historical gesture, the use of it in cinematic depictions (particularly in postwar era films) is purposefully evocative of fascism and Nazism. The salute, displayed in *Figure 5*, likely

possesses a high degree of both availability and representativeness, as, for a Western 1950s audience, it has been robustly associated with a historical context of totalitarian rule and tyrannical oppression. In *Helen of Troy* (1956), the depiction of Trojans using Roman Salutes places them as the Other, while the salutes in *The Robe* (1953) are used to emphasize the tyrannical nature of Rome's rule (*The Robe*, 1953; *Helen of Troy*, 1956). In *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), the Egyptian salute to Khufu mirrors the Nazi / Roman salute while Anteocles' depiction as a tyrant in the Italian *Hercules Unchained* (1959) would resonate with audiences recently liberated from fascism (*Land of the Pharaohs*, 1955; *Hercules Unchained*, 1959). Caesar's Roman salute in *Cleopatra* and his declaration as "dictator for life" build on these direct allegories between imperialism and fascism (*Cleopatra*, 1963).



**Figure 5.** Julius Caesar greets the Egyptian delegation of Pharaoh Ptolemy with a “Roman salute”. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.

This trend continues in *Quo Vadis* (1951), where the film's use of Roman salutes reinforces the association between ancient Rome and modern fascist regimes (*Quo Vadis*, 1951). Released during the Cold War, this imagery resonates with anxieties concerning totalitarianism



and ideological control. The use of Roman salutes and fascist imagery in historical and Orientalist films is an immediate tool for evoking associations with tyranny and totalitarian rule. Found primarily in Cold War era productions (and with a rating of 8 occurrences, average prevalence), these symbols reflect anxieties about authoritarian regimes, both communist and fascist. It is important to note that these ideologies, though both authoritarian, are diametrically opposed on the political spectrum, one being an extreme left-wing, class-based framework while the other is nationalist and far right-wing. However, to American audiences, both would have served as the symbolic foreign, totalitarian enemy during a certain period of history, a threat to liberty. Therefore, even though ideologically communism and fascism could not be further apart, the representativeness heuristic may be utilized to associate a fascistic and authoritarian Roman (Nazi) salute from a film made at the height of the Cold War with America's communist authoritarian enemy.

Harkening back to Tversky and Kahneman's demonstration of the robustness of prototypical narratives, it should be noted that this same logic which conflates communism and fascism into an authoritarian monolith may be akin to the process of Orientalism, eschewing nuance in favour of perceiving authoritarian regimes as a singular entity. This is indeed reminiscent of the Orientalist foreign policy discussed by Gregory in which Ba'athist Iraq was equated with Islamist Al-Qaeda during the War on Terror (Gregory 2004, 51). Both examples of political conflation are likely facilitated by the perpetuation of implicit biases through the availability and representativeness heuristics. Building on the ideas of Tversky and Kahneman, the highly prevalent depictions of totalitarian regimes may not only bolster the availability heuristic but, due to satisfying perceived "logical" narratives, may also strengthen the representativeness heuristic, thereby raising the likelihood of conjunction fallacies. This fallacy

could indeed facilitate the perception of it being more probable for two authoritarian regimes to have identical political ideologies than not, as well as associating two antithetical Muslim organizations being allies.

By drawing parallels between ancient despotism and modern totalitarianism, these films contribute to the prevalent stereotypical associations within culture concerning the clash between tyrannical and free powers. The actions of these tyrannical empires are perceived as analogous to the actions of modern tyrannical empires, therefore the historical imperial force may act as a representation of the modern evil empire (i.e., the Soviet Union). Through these representations, a moral cinematic lesson may be perceived regarding the nature of East and West as a result of the implicit biases concerning fascism and tyranny pervading culture.

### **5.7 The “East” as Deceptive and Treacherous**

Another common trope embedded in these films is the depiction of the East (often characterized by Egypt) as deceptive and treacherous. This portrayal emphasizes the idea that Eastern characters or societies are inherently deceitful, relying predominantly on trickery to undermine the morally and intellectually superior West. This trope could potentially reinforce the cultural reservoir of prevalent stereotypical associations with implicit perceptions of the East as duplicitous and untrustworthy. Cold War portrayals reinforced Western stereotypes about the Eastern "Other" and served to justify Western dominance and intervention. This depiction fits into the broader narrative of the Cold War, positioning the West as the virtuous and rational force in contrast to the dubious and deceptive East.

Similarly, the post-9/11 geopolitical landscape of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East reflects contemporary concerns about deceit and manipulation from the Eastern foe in wartime. The depiction of Eastern figures and societies as deceptive and treacherous aligns with post-9/11

narratives, where the West's moral and strategic superiority is emphasized, even amidst depictions which often provide a surface-level critique of Western imperialism and manipulation. These films, therefore, use the trope of Eastern deceitfulness to underscore Western righteousness and justify Western actions. Notable examples include *The Egyptian* (1954), where Nefer's reputation as a "Babylonian trickster" illustrates the trope of Eastern characters being deceitful and morally corrupt upon introduction (*The Egyptian*, 1954). Nefer's role as the sole Babylonian in the film reinforces the portrayal of Eastern societies as inherently treacherous, contrasting sharply with the West's assumed virtue. In the Italian *Hercules Unchained* (1959), Egyptians are relegated to being immoral sorcerers, referenced with the sorceress Omphale's quote "You Egyptians are so clever, that even certainly you'll find the way of preserving life" (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959). Omphale's quote underscores the Orientalist trope of Eastern cultures as not only deceitful and corrupt, but dabbling in arcane arts perceived as perverting the natural world.

This is further referenced in both *300* (2006) and *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), where pyromancers utilize firebombs to confront the Spartans instead of facing them in dignified battle. This symbolizes a deeper contrast between Persia and Sparta as unlike honourable Western warfare, the East utilizes unconventional weapons, deception, and shock tactics (*300*, 2006). These weapons are clumsy and have little martial value, serving mainly to cause chaos. Conversely, the West routinely employs strategy and wit to combat the East's simple yet brutal tactics. As established by the aforementioned opening scene with Leonidas' triumph over the beastly wolf, the Orient may be larger and fight unfairly, but the West can always outsmart it. These supernatural combat depictions of dishonourable, explosive warfare can be seen as symbolic representations of modern stereotypical methods attributed to Middle Easterners, such

as the use of suicide bombing in Islamic terrorism. The “West” perceives the Orient as fighting deceptively, immorally and unconventionally, often relying on numerical force and an inherent element of cheap surprise in lieu of complexity. This “West” is therefore committed, whether as Sparta or the United States, to combating it with tactical maneuvering and innovation. The fantastical elements of Persian combat in *300* are therefore not merely stylistic, but represent the type of atypical, “terror-inducing” martial tactics associated with the Orient, not only at the time of *300*’s production, but throughout much of its historical relationship with the West.

*Alexander* (2004) maintains this theme with Ptolemy’s narration about Persian kings bribing Greeks to fight each other and create disunity within Greece (*Alexander*, 2004). Immediately before Alexander’s suspicious death, it is mentioned that his army now has “10 Asians for every Macedonian” (*Alexander*, 2004). As the monolithic “Asians” are perceived as inherently more treasonous than the Westerners, this declaration may imply that, (if Alexander was indeed betrayed), it was likely an Easterner who was instrumental in the deception, aligning with the broader theme of Eastern societies as untrustworthy and manipulative. Furthermore, *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) frames deceitful behaviour as inherent to the imaginative geography of the Orient. In addition to the closing statement by Ridley Scott regarding peace remaining elusive in the Middle East, the cynical yet just Tiberias comments that this conflict is driven by wealth and land, rather than religious motives (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). This reflects the sentiment in *Helen of Troy* (1956), where the Greek kings are outraged at Ulysses mocking their concept of “defensive aggression” as pretext for invading the sovereign Eastern nation of Troy. This satirization of the justification for expansionary war is well aligned with the often contradictory and self-serving rationalization for intervention in proxy wars, such as those of the Cold War (*Helen of Troy*, 1956). Though Scott’s depiction again criticizes Western imperial

motives for the horrors of the Crusades, it nonetheless maintains the trope of the Middle East being a geographic setting for deceptive and morally complex conflicts.

This trope is also reinforced in the 2004 retelling of the Iliad, *Troy* (2004), despite its overt anti-imperialist sentiment. Director Wolfgang Petersen openly stated:

Just as King Agamemnon waged what was essentially a war of conquest on the ruse of trying to rescue the beautiful Helen from the hands of the Trojans, President George W. Bush concealed his true motives for the invasion of Iraq...People are still using deceit to engage in wars of vengeance. [...] It's as if nothing has changed in 3,000 years" (Rothstein, NY Times, 2004).

However, once again, the site of this deceitful conflict is the East (Anatolia in *Troy*; the Levant in *Kingdom of Heaven*). Even if "Eastern" people themselves are not always the duplicitous ones, Petersen once again demonstrates how the region they come from is perceived as an imaginative geography associated with deceptive conflict.

This is cemented even further by Egyptian derision at the Hebrews in *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), demonstrating colonial attitudes towards oppressed groups, perceiving them as inherently savage, and being a "conniving, combative people" (*Exodus: Gods and Kings*, 2014). However, it should be noted that, though this framing aligns Hebrews with the "Westerners" along Orientalist perspectives for the viewers, the "conniving, combative" Hebrews would very much represent the "Eastern" other from the Egyptians view. This in-narrative perspective is important to note, considering McGeough's remarks on the contemporary connotations of Moses' actions in *Exodus*. Commenting on direct intentionality, McGeough writes that director Ridley Scott and actor Christian Bale associated the "historical verism of their version of the story with the acts of violence perpetrated by the Hebrews" (McGeough 2016, 45).

This therefore caused the Biblical protagonist to exhibit the very same terroristic traits characterized by the likes of John Keegan as prototypically "Oriental". The American hero is thus presented as the Oriental terrorist, while simultaneously displaying "noble" Western ideals.

It is indeed an interesting choice on Scott and Bale's part to ground this Orientalist "Western" force in the deceitful tactics outlined by Keegan, and critiqued by Gregory, as representative of the Orientalist "East". Indeed, Bale directly described Moses as:

a freedom fighter and the Egyptian empire would have considered him, no doubt, a terrorist. They certainly would have attempted to discredit him as such. And then just talking hypothetically, if the Egyptian empire had the technology we have today, they wouldn't have sent chariots; they would have sent drones (ABC News, 2014).

This is certainly a departure from previous binary presentations of the Exodus story, including DeMille's perspective. McGeough notes intentional decisions made throughout the film to distance this representation from the former Biblical, and by extension, Cold War Orientalist perspectives, such as beginning with "a historical battle that has little to do with the traditional story of the exodus, using violence to signal to the viewer that the genre of this film is the secular historical epic" (McGeough 2016, 18).

While the critique of US imperialism accomplished by equating Moses with Middle Eastern freedom fighters is evident, it nonetheless perpetuates a perspective of deceitful Oriental terrorists, operating from a geographic hotbed of instability, fundamentally opposed to the monolithic "West". Even if they are (occasionally) framed as being on the moral side, they still remain Eastern conspirators. In most cinematic cases, it falls upon the noble individual Westerner (Achilles in *Troy*; Balian in *Kingdom of Heaven*) to reconcile the imperial overreach of Western leaders with the inherent goodness and moral righteousness of the West itself, in order to save the East (and the West) from deceitful chaos. In other examples such as *300* and its sequel, the tropes are much less nuanced, The East is deceptive and the West is honourable, echoing Derek Gregory's presentation of how American troops were perceived during the Gulf War (Gregory 2004, 165). This trope of Eastern societies (both in terms of individuals and geography) being sources of deception and treachery potentially reinforces implicit biases and stereotypes. Due to

its high degree of prototypicality and prevalence (over 10 occurrences), this trope influences the representative and available perceptions regarding the region and/or its people pertaining to geopolitical contexts such as the Cold War and the War on Terror.

### **5.8 Descent into Nihilism and its Consequences**

A less prevalent but still important prototypical trope concerns the embrace of nihilism as a pathway leading to submission and tyranny. Many of these films depict how the loss of hope and belief can drive individuals towards oppressive ideologies and tyrannical regimes. Cold War portrayals of the abandonment of moral and religious principles in favour of a life without meaning reflect the anxieties surrounding ideological submission and the manipulation of populations by totalitarian regimes. It is important not to lose hope, as this may lead to the acceptance of oppressive ideologies (such as Communism). This continues into the contemporary age, as the idea of tyranny being propagated through a lack of belief and purpose remains relevant in cinematic portrayals throughout the American unipolar moment through to the War on Terror.

Upon losing his lover in *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), the formerly devout, Christian Demetrius declares “there are no Gods. There is no past. No future. There is only now,” reflecting a profound nihilism (*Demetrius and the Gladiators*, 1954). This ironically leads to him becoming a servant of Caesar, the Emperor responsible for his lover’s death, demonstrating how doubt and denial of God leads to the support of tyrannical regimes. The loss of faith is therefore consolidated as facilitating the embrace of tyranny, emphasizing the destructive path caused by losing meaning in life. In *The Egyptian* (1954), Sinuhe’s statement “I believe in nothing” before offering his medical services only to the rich, regardless of their moral standing, demonstrates the individual susceptibility to exploitation and manipulation by tyrants through the path of

nihilism (*The Egyptian*, 1954). Though both characters eventually seek redemption, their initial loss of faith still facilitates a descent into tyranny around them, demonstrating how nihilistic pitfalls threaten more than just the individual.

Senator Gracchus in *Gladiator* (2000) observes that Rome is “the mob. Conjure magic for them and they’ll be distracted. Take away their freedoms and they’ll still roar,” drawing a parallel to the contemporary state of unipolar America during its release just before 9/11 (*Gladiator*, 2000). As long as the people are fed and entertained, (satisfying the old Roman adage of “Bread and Circuses”), individual rights may be carefully dismantled while a tyrannical landscape is introduced. The erosion of freedom as a consequence of nihilism can be the result of a society losing its moral and ideological bearings. Though the prevalence is low (3 instances), the portrayal of these themes underscores the peril of losing hope and belief, highlighting the connection between nihilism and the rise of tyranny. Within the cultural reservoir of implicit stereotypical associations (i.e., the “culture in mind”), there exists a robust connection between historical/ Orientalist film and portraying the dangers of nihilism, demonstrating it as one of the principal pathways into being passive in the face of tyranny and oppression.

### **5.9 Internal Weakness Within a Righteous Empire**

The next prototypical theme explores the idea that even the most righteous or powerful empires face the threat of internal corruption. This focuses specifically on individual weakness and moral failings which undermine the strength and capability of otherwise heroic (and usually Western) figures. This trope often appears as a cautionary tale about the dangers of internal division, moral compromise, or hubris. In short, even the West must always be on guard for treason. It was a powerful trope within the Cold War context of the Biblical epics which



reinforced themes surrounding the anxiety of internal weakness within a righteous American empire, including divisions of ideological purity, sedition, and outright treason (such as espionage).

*Samson and Delilah* (1949) demonstrates this with the character of Lesh Lakish, a Daanite who represents how even righteous societies suffer from internal flaws (such as individual greed). This is reflected with the proclamation after his betrayal of Samson when it is said “Why will men always betray the strongest among them?” (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). These words indeed reflect the sentiment Judas invokes to Demetrius following his betrayal of Christ, exclaiming “why must men betray themselves with their doubts?” (*The Robe*, 1953). Lesh Lakish and Judas represent the same prototypical trope, a historical figure who has always served as the West’s Achilles Heel by placing their own selfish desires over the collective West. Lesh Lakish perceives himself as practical, not evil, and it is precisely this which weakens the otherwise dominant West. In the *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), Judas criticizes Jesus for his pacificity, hinting at the internal strife which undermines the unity and effectiveness of even the most righteous of groups. For American audiences, this would be a robust representativeness heuristic embedded within the culture of mind, advising caution in the maintenance of faith, integrity, and loyalty to the West even in difficult times.

Cecil B. DeMille articulates this further in *The Ten Commandments* (1956), where Dathan betrays the Hebrews and attempts to halt the Exodus in order to maintain the benefits he receives under Pharaoh’s rule (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956). This is compounded when he manipulates the Hebrew people’s fears regarding Moses’ potential death into worship of the Golden Calf, reflecting the dangers of internal corruption and exploitation of the “People” by those in power (*The Ten Commandments*, 1956). Furthermore, the ephors lack of action to defend

Greece in *The 300 Spartans* (1962) may be seen as analogous to the hesitation of certain Western powers in fully confronting the Soviet threat, such as France lessening its commitment to NATO in 1966 (History on Screen, 2016). Internal indecision or a lack of unity can indeed weaken even a mighty and moral force, and this example adds to the reservoir of stereotypical cautionary tales reflecting concerns about preserving Western moral and political integrity in the face of corrupting influences. This is also demonstrated in *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) with the Senator's comment that "the words of Greeks, Jews and slaves" are irrelevant when contrasted with the perceived strength of Rome (*Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1964). This may indeed be critical of the McCarthyist rhetoric which had dominated the previous decade, serving as a cautionary tale regarding the ease with which moral decay can infect the political landscape.

Within the post-9/11 context, these films reflect contemporary concerns about internal division, greed, and hubris as a concern for Western nations when facing Middle Eastern threats. Portrayals of internal weakness and betrayal resonated with the War on Terror paradigm of increased surveillance, growing global conflict, and increasing concern surrounding surprise attacks. This Orientalist trope is reflected well within the prototypical example of Ephialtes' betrayal of the 300 Spartans, in both versions of the story. In Zack Snyder's adaptation, the hunchback Ephialtes demonstrates not only betrayal motivated by Eastern temptation, but also represents the Orient's negative qualities, including weakness, perversion, corruption, deceit, and subservience. Initially wishing to join Leonidas' force, he is refused a combatant role due to his disability preventing him from contributing to a Phalanx formation (*300*, 2006). The phalanx is representative of Greek unity, contrasting the reliance on brotherhood inspired by a nationalistic love of Sparta against Persian disjointed fighting tactics stemming from a slave's survival instinct. Spartans fight to protect, while Persians are forced to fight.

As Ephialtes' inclusion in the Phalanx would ruin the cohesion of this army, it implies that what he represents is entirely not welcome in Greek or Western society. This is not only an indictment of his physique, but also of his personal character as being unworthy of Sparta. This aspect is cemented when, instead of embracing the non-combatant role Leonidas offers him in lieu of outright rejection, he chooses instead to betray Sparta. Confirming that he sought to fight only for himself and not Sparta, Ephialtes aligns his character naturally more with the cruel, conniving, and dishonourable Orientals. He acted selfishly instead of collectivistically, proving himself more worthy of disorganized Persian combat than membership in a phalanx, where a "Spartan's true strength is the warrior next to him" (300, 2006). This portrayal of internal weakness and betrayals resonates with the post-9/11 context of heightened scrutiny on internal politics and morality, within a cultural milieu concerned with surprise attacks and betrayals.

This continues in the sequel *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), as Queen Gorgo initially refuses Themistocles' request to support the united Greek effort, symbolizing how Western hubris and division can hinder the fight against tyranny. Her eventual change of heart after recognizing the need for unity demonstrates to the audience that one must overcome internal disagreements to effectively confront external threats. As a foil to Queen Gorgo, Artemisia represents true Western treason, similar to Ephialtes. Her vow to return to Greece only when she can "watch it burn" serves as a warning that the greatest threats often come from within, and can be fuelled by the West's own actions. This prototypical trope of internal weakness within the righteous empire occurs 10 times throughout various narratives, making it a highly prevalent trope. Through a consistent stereotypical reservoir portraying how internal flaws and corruption undermine the most noble entities, implicit cultural associations of both the Cold War and War on Terror periods may contribute to the perception of a West that is only as strong as its weakest

link, one which may be exploited by Eastern corruption, thereby culminating in the proliferation of tyranny throughout the free world.

### **5.10 Necessity of Unity and Vigilance Against Tyranny**

Another key prototypical theme focuses on the importance of unity among democratic and free societies in the face of external threats and internal disunity. It also highlights the necessity of perpetual vigilance to counteract and defeat oppressive regimes. Cold War era films reflect concerns about maintaining peace and security in the face of an oppressive evil Eastern empire. They highlight the importance of constant vigilance and unity in the face of expanding totalitarian threats and internal divisions. *Helen of Troy* (1956) depicts the citizens of Sparta as carefree and enjoying peace as though it would last forever, serving as a cautionary reminder about the fragility of peace to the Western postwar audience. *The 300 Spartans* (1962) conveys the need for constant Western vigilance by positioning the Persians as an inevitable threat. “At last, we are in Europe” announces Xerxes at the opening of the film, hinting at the East’s pervasive expansionist desire to assert mastery over the West (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). The film’s emphasis on unity among Greeks symbolizes the need for Western unity against totalitarian regimes (i.e., Western versus Eastern bloc). Leonidas’ insistence on defending Greece as a whole, not just Sparta, highlights this prototypical trope of unity as a necessity when facing external threats.

In the wake of 9/11, these sentiments regarding vigilance, unity, and sacrifice focused on Middle Eastern locations and antagonists, reflecting contemporary geopolitical concerns while contributing to the stereotypical reservoir concerning Orientalist views of the region and its people. The responsibility of the West to remain vigilant and counter the East is reinforced by Dilios’ speech in *300* (2006) about the approaching Persian “beast”. As demonstrated by these

observations, these tropes have contributed to the perception of a beast that “will not stop until the only shelter we will find is rubble and chaos” (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). It is therefore the duty of Western societies to unite and confront and resist oppressive forces, and the threat of tyranny must be met with undivided courage and constant vigilance. As Marcus Aurelius remarks in *Gladiator* (2000), released one year before 9/11, “there is always someone left to fight” and even in total victory, the West must maintain a vigilant stance in spite of its unipolar victory (*Gladiator*, 2000).

The prototypical trope concerning the necessity of a united, vigilant West poised like a sentinel against Eastern tyranny has likely contributed to the cultural reservoir concerning how East/West relationships are perceived through film. This reinforces the importance of collective action (such as the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq) and relentlessness when confronting oppressive regimes. Prototypical cinematic examples of this have bolstered representativeness, while the prevalence is significant (over 10), indicating high availability for this stereotype. The geopolitical context of these films highlights the persistent need for unity among democratic, Western societies and through this cinematic presentation of East/West encounters, the cultural reservoir is further enriched with this prototypical trope.

### **5.11 “Western Heroes, Beware the Corrupting East!”**

This next prototypical trope centers mainly on Western protagonists, specifically their interactions with the corrupting influence of the East, and how these protagonists deal with self-doubt. During the Cold War, Western films often depicted Eastern influences as corrupting forces that led to the downfall of otherwise noble and moral Western figures. This could be mapped on to the geopolitical layout of the world at the time, with narratives emphasizing the inherent moral and cultural superiority of the West over the communist East, but advising caution

to individual Westerners who could fall victim to the temptations of the East. Outside of film, this seductive power of the East had become an established and recurrent trope, with classic texts such as Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* emphasizing the allure of Eastern "corruption". Cinematically, Western heroes were portrayed as being tainted or weakened by Eastern experiences and influences, as a reflection of the inherent dangers of Communist ideology for Western democratic values. Films bolstered the idea that while the West might face internal moral challenges, it remained fundamentally superior and virtuous compared to the East.

This can be observed in *David and Bathsheba* (1951), when David's guilt over his sins leads to drought and famine in Israel, reflecting his growing tyranny and internal moral decay (*David and Bathsheba*, 1951). In *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), Lawrence's self-doubt about his role and identity in the Arab Revolt is contrasted with Ali's encouragement that personal limitations need not be permanent nor inherent (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This emphasizes a dynamic where the Eastern figure must remind the Western hero of his purpose and capability, despite his own reservations. However, Lawrence goes too far and becomes corrupted by the East following his capture by the Ottoman Turks, driving him to massacre Turkish troops fleeing from him before the capture of Damascus (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). The "Orient" is therefore depicted once again as both a source of corruption and a catalyst for the Western hero's ultimate return to nobility, showcasing a complex interplay between Western moral integrity and Eastern corrupting influences.

In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) Mary Magdalene's portrayal as hyper-sexualized with a scarlet dress (representing adultery but curiously also the colour associated with Soviets) connects her hyper-femininity with sin and decadent corruption in the East (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965). The red dress is intertwined with tyranny, and her transformation is

accompanied by her shedding it in favour of robes resembling Christ's, signifying repentance (akin to Westernization), underscoring the theme of moral redemption and transition from corruption to purity, if one does not succumb to the dangers of temptation (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965). However, Marc Antony's abandonment of his men for *Cleopatra* (1963) reflects a Western hero's susceptibility to Eastern temptations, portraying the East as seductive but ultimately corrupting. Cleopatra, embodying Eastern allure, leads Antony to his downfall, culminating in his personification of Western fears concerning being overtaken by Eastern decadence (*Cleopatra*, 1963).

Following 9/11, this theme was maintained as Western films portrayed Eastern influences as corrupting and weakening Western heroes, reflecting anxieties about Middle Eastern cultures and their impact on Western values. These films may have contributed to prevalent stereotypical associations within culture, by reinforcing the implicit biases towards Eastern societies as inherently corrupting influences, requiring Western intervention to restore order and virtue. The depiction of Eastern temptations and corruption served to rationalize and support Western military and political actions in the region, maintaining a narrative of Western moral and cultural superiority. *Alexander's* (2004) transformation from liberator to tyrant after crossing the Hindu Kush demonstrates the Western hero's fall into imperialistic behaviour. This narrative highlights the corrupting influence Eastern conquests have on Western ideals, perpetuating a cycle where the liberator becomes a tyrant, echoing historical and contemporary concerns about imperialism, which further bolsters the cultural reservoir surrounding this prototypical trope.

The distinction between the braggadocious, boisterous Roman soldiers and their more moral and reserved officers in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) suggests a critique of Eastern corruption spreading to the West, afflicting those who inhabit the Middle East first, before

spreading to Rome (*The Passion of the Christ*, 2004). This depiction implies that the moral degradation perceived in historical Eastern figures is contaminating Western forces, emphasizing the idea of Eastern influences leading to Western moral decline. This is a highly prevalent trope (occurring over 10 times), and can therefore be seen as having high potential representativeness and availability. Through the intersection of stereotype perpetuation via Hinton's "culture in mind" and heuristic processing, the trope of Eastern influence corrupting noble Western protagonists cements itself as a rampant and purportedly ancient stereotype.

### **5.12 Portrayal of "Eastern Cowardice" versus "Western Valour"**

The next prototypical theme is that of Eastern cowardice contrasted with Western valour, which often serves to highlight the inherent inferiority of the former. During the Cold War, the portrayal of Eastern leaders as craven was part of a broader ideological battle between the West (led by the United States and its allies) and the Eastern bloc. The cinematic depiction of Eastern figures as weak and the West as strong may have aided in the justification of Western policies and interventions by framing the West as a bastion of virtue and strength against a weak and corrupt Eastern enemy. Similar themes were apparent in Hollywood portrayals in the wake of 9/11, reflecting the geopolitical climate of the War on Terror. Films continued to depict Eastern leaders and forces as weak or cowardly, reinforcing stereotypes that supported Western military interventions in the Middle East. Depictions of Eastern characters as ineffective and dominated by Western values aligned well with justifications used for military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Furthermore, enemies of Christians are also portrayed as cowardly, as depicted by Nero's indecision in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), which hastens his downfall when contrasted with the resolve of the Christians. Cowardly un-Christian empires are therefore perceived as being



doomed to fail (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), King Herod fears the “child of imagination”, representing the general tyrannical fear of potential uprisings (once again situated within the imaginative geography of the Levantine East). Fearing people’s belief in something as powerful as God speaks to a narrative where the East’s vulnerability is linked to its inability to counter Western ideals. Cowardice, therefore, ensures the enemies of the Christian West will always remain vulnerable.

These narratives contribute to the implicit stereotypical associations portraying the vulnerable and cowardly East as incapable of self-determination, at least without endangering the West, thereby potentially rationalizing and legitimizing Western intervention. Across both geopolitical contexts, these films perpetuate a dichotomy where the West is portrayed as the courageous, superior force, while the East is portrayed as weak, cowardly, and in need of Western intervention or control. The Persian king Darius, retreating before the Macedonian forces at Gaugamela, is indeed historically accurate, yet the focus on his cowardly flight in *Alexander* (2004) emphasizes the Orientalist stereotype of Eastern leaders as weak and incapable compared to their Western counterparts (*Alexander*, 2004). Due to the film being released during the War on Terror, Darius’ actions may have been perceived as analogous to Saddam Hussein’s efforts to evade capture during the 2003 American invasion.

Once again, prevalent stereotypical cultural associations, or the “culture in mind”, are bolstered with imagery concerning cowardly Middle Easterners rooted out by valiant Westerners. Indeed, commentary on the Macedonians invading another sovereign polity is negligent compared to that given to the cowardice of the “Orient”. *300* (2006) pans away from the bravery of the Spartans to highlight the collateral slaughter of Persians, portraying the Eastern forces as expendable, potentially further reinforcing implicit biases via the “culture in mind” concerning

Western superiority. When King Leonidas of Sparta throws Persian emissaries down a well, all that remains visible between the stereotypically “Oriental” grab of turban and veil are the emissary’s fearful eyes, communicating to the viewer both a distinct Oriental “look” and the inherent cowardice associated with it (300, 2006). This is contrasted with the Spartans who exude masculinity and strength while sporting unwavering bold gazes, showing resolve even in the face of death. In the sequel, a Greek captive insults the Persians “you Persian men take your orders from a Greek woman?”, deriding the Orient as weak and negatively feminized with a statement that aligns with Said’s critiques of Orientalist frameworks. (300: *Rise of an Empire*, 2014). These statements, combined with repeated portrayals of clumsy, terrified Persian generals eliminated by fearless Athenians, convey the prototypical trope, (6 occurrences; average prevalence), of craven and ineffective Eastern tyranny breaking when countered with Western noble resolve.

### **5.13 Western “Civilizing Mission” and “Oriental Inferiority”**

This next prototypical theme is a fundamental one, as many of the previously mentioned tropes are associated with it. This exceedingly prevalent theme revolves around *Orientalism*, particularly how Western (often American) figures and ideals are portrayed as superior, rational, and orderly compared to the exotic, chaotic, and backward East. The Western characters, often depicted as "saviours," are shown to be the only ones capable of uniting, civilizing, or saving the Eastern people, who are portrayed as unable to achieve these goals on their own due to ingrained tribalism, emotional volatility, or inherent inferiority. Orientalism in these films can be contextualized within both the Cold War and post-911 eras, periods during which Western powers, especially the US, often justified their global interventions as efforts to civilize or democratize “lesser” nations.

Throughout the Cold War, Western-produced films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Cleopatra* (1963) reflected and reinforced the West's self-cultivated image as the protector and "civilizer" of the world. The East, cinematically depicted as being historically primitive, backwards, and tribal, was seen as a region that needed to be organized and shepherded by Western rationality to prevent it from falling into chaos or communism. Moving into the post-9/11 context, films such as *Alexander* (2004) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) were produced in the era of the War on Terror, where the U.S and its allies justified military interventions in the Middle East as necessary to bring democracy and freedom to the region. This framework aligns with the Western civilizing missions apparent in historical and Orientalist film, and the emphasis placed on creating a "better world" through Western-led efforts mirrors the narrative used by the U.S. government to justify its actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

One archetypal example of the West perceiving itself as more civilized occurs in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), where Lawrence's Bedouin guide is possessed with a childlike awe when encountering Western technology, such as pistols (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This infantilizes Eastern characters, portraying them as primitive and unable to grasp modernity without Western intervention, such as in *Figures 6* and *7*, where Prince Faisal struggles to outrun strafing Ottoman planes on his camel while waving his scimitar (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962).



**Figure 6.** Arab tribesmen cower as Ottoman aircraft perform strafing runs. *Lawrence of Arabia* (Sony Home Pictures Entertainment, 2002) Digital Enlargement.



**Figure 7.** As bullets strike around him, Prince Faisal waves his sword and attempts to rouse his Arab cavalry into mounting a defense against the strafing aircraft. *Lawrence of Arabia* (Sony Home Pictures Entertainment, 2002) Digital Enlargement.

This echoes the trope of the noble savage, who is endearing but fundamentally inferior to the Western man. Lawrence's frustration with Arab tribal conflicts reflects a common Orientalist stereotype: that the East is mired in petty squabbles and incapable of uniting without Western leadership and/or incentive. There is a clear takeaway that the tribalism holding the Arabs back can only be overcome through the logical, disciplined intervention of a Western figure such as Lawrence (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Jenkins, another British officer, comments that the Arabs need training more than they need guns, suggesting that Arab interests align with British ones. His overt colonialism is critiqued by the perspective placed on Lawrence, and yet this critique of colonialism still indulges in Orientalism by portraying the Arabs as helpless without constant Western oversight (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Faisal's critique of Orientalist attitudes is aimed at Lawrence, accusing him of seeing Arabs as "little people" (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962).

This serves as a direct commentary on Orientalism; however, the film itself does not escape this critique, as it ultimately portrays Lawrence as the hero who rises above these colonial attitudes to "save" the Arabs, reinforcing the very tropes it critiques. Lawrence also takes the law into his own hands to prevent further tribal violence, demonstrating another fundamental

Orientalist notion that only Westerners can impose true justice on the East (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This then suggests that Eastern societies are incapable of self-regulation and require Western intervention to maintain order, which is reinforced when the Arabs are incapable of governing Damascus following their capture of it. The city descends into chaos and is only rescued by the arrival of the Red Cross, representing Western (and Christian) humanitarianism, coming to restore order (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). As asserted earlier concerning *Lawrence of Arabia*, the historical Lawrence's actions cement his status as the quintessential Orientalist through whom, according to Said, "knowledge about the Orient" was "translated into public policy" (Said 1978, 246). He is, in a way, the most representative archetype of this trope concerning the Western civilizing mission and Oriental inferiority.

In *Cleopatra* (1963), Caesar's commentary on the internal conflict in Egypt and his role as a "guardian" on behalf of Rome reflects the Western justification for interference in Eastern affairs (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Cleopatra urging Caesar to take up Alexander's unfinished mantle of conquest symbolizes the continuation of Western imperial ambitions (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This scene encapsulates the Western desire to dominate and civilize the East, yet framed as a noble mission which brings peace and unity. One can observe this desire from Alexander's own cinematic portrayal in *Alexander* (2004), where his speech about bringing change to the East reflects the Orientalist belief in an inherent Western sense of superiority. He claims to free the Persians and Babylonians from "their own savagery", presenting the West as a force of enlightenment and civilization (*Alexander*, 2004). While Alexander rejects Aristotle's aforementioned explicit racism to justify imperialism, he still embodies Western expansionism by asserting his right to rule and improve the East (*Alexander*, 2004).

This is reflective of a more subtle form of Orientalism, where the West's cultural and political dominance is justified as benevolent rather than oppressive. Ptolemy's final remark that "before Alexander there were tribes...and after him the world was possible" hints at the Oriental civilizing mission, proclaiming that Alexander's conquests facilitated the first unified world (*Alexander*, 2004). This further bolsters the idea that the West is destined to lead and organize the world, echoing the justifications used for colonialism and modern military interventions, and further perpetuating the cultural reservoir of implicit, stereotypical associations concerning the Orient. Once again, it is important to note that, as remarked by Gary Berkowitz, director Oliver Stone himself "argues that his *Alexander* is not meant to parallel contemporary events, but instead more generally reflects the conflict between East and West that has persisted throughout history" (Berkowitz 2007, 108).

Yet, in spite of this social commentary, Berkowitz notes that Stone's Alexander is still very much reminiscent of an American leader. Words such as "freedom" are just as much part of Alexander's rhetoric as they are of Bush's" (Berkowitz 2007, 110). Stone indeed admits "it's an amazing coincidence that George Bush has invaded Iraq and Afghanistan," and contrasts Bush's "disbanding of the Iraqi army" with Alexander "often returning territory and including the armies of those he conquered" (Berkowitz 2007, 110). This demonstrates that, although Stone indeed critiques U.S Imperialism, as with Ridley Scott and Wolfgang Petersen, he nonetheless experiences the pitfalls of Orientalism, perpetuating both the myth of an endless historical clash between East and West, as well as the trope of historically benevolent Western imperialism.

These films collectively propagate the Orientalist narrative that the East is a place of chaos, disorder, and backwardness, requiring the intervention of the rational, disciplined, and civilized West. Either through cultural enlightenment, moral guidance, or military conquest, the

West strives to be depicted as the rightful leader of the world, with a destiny to bring order to the supposedly inferior Eastern societies. This trope of very high prevalence (occurs over 20 times) aligns with the geopolitical tensions of both the Cold War and the post-9/11 era and reinforces Western attitudes towards the East, which may then perpetuate implicit biases through the reservoir of cultural narratives utilizing these stereotypes to tell historical stories. This particular trope gets at the heart of perpetuating the Orientalist mindset, which sees the West as the rightful ruler and civilizer of the East since ancient times.

#### **5.14 “The Oriental Monolith: Exotic, Chaotic, and Arcane”**

Building off the previous theme, this prototypical trope is focused once again on the portrayal of the East as exotic, chaotic, and inferior compared to the rational, orderly, and superior West. Western characters are often depicted as saviours or heroes who bring civilization and order to the chaotic and mystical East. This theme manifests through various stereotypical representations of Eastern societies as decadent, mystical, and barbaric, contrasted sharply with Western values of rationality, heroism, and civility. During the Cold War, Western media often depicted the East as exotic and inferior to justify Western political and military interventions. During the War on Terror, media representations continued to emphasize Orientalist themes in relation to the Middle East. Portrayals of Eastern societies as monolithic, mystical, barbaric, and in need of Western intervention reinforced the narrative of the West as a saviour and stabilizer in the face of Eastern instability.

*Cleopatra* (1963) depicts Eastern decadence through lavish and exotic imagery, juxtaposed with Western order and nobility, highlighting the East as excessively indulgent and gaudy (*Cleopatra*, 1963). The Egyptian mysticism used to predict the future of Rome and Egypt

illustrates the exotic and enigmatic nature of the East which the Western characters must navigate and interpret (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This is intertwined with perceptions of Western rationality versus Eastern mysticism. Cleopatra's parade combines elements of exoticism, eroticism, and decadence, depicting Eastern culture as a spectacle of sensuality and excess (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This portrayal aligns with Orientalist tendencies to depict Eastern cultures as hyper-sexualized and decadent, in contrast with Western restraint and moral superiority. In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), the wise men are portrayed as visually different and exotic, highlighting their otherness compared to Western figures (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965). This is further acknowledged through (albeit satirically) in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), where a comical mention of "Oriental fortune tellers" highlights that the stereotype of Oriental mysticism is so crystallized within culture that it can be used as a satirical reference point (*Life of Brian*, 1979).

In *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), Sybilla declares that "in the East, between one person and another, there is only light" is used to contrast her personal freedom in the East with supposed constraints in Europe (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). This portrayal suggests that the East offers an exotic escape with emotional and personal freedoms unavailable in the West, reinforcing the notion of the East as a place of permissiveness and emotional liberation, but only for Westerners. The reference to "demons" which are then revealed to wear stereotypically Eastern garb in *10,000 BC* (2008) highlights their otherness and supernatural qualities, reinforcing the mystique and prevailing threat of the East (*10,000 BC*, 2008). Furthermore, the revelation that White overlords built the Egyptian-looking pyramids reinforces the idea of Western superiority in architectural and technological achievements, while Eastern figures are treated as less capable (*10,000 BC*, 2008).



This trope is itself a cinematic extension of derogatory, pseudo-archaeological narratives, exemplified in works such as Erik von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968), which often portray indigenous, and explicitly non-Western, people as incapable of such feats without external intervention. Even though this film is mythological and not historical, the appearance of this popular pseudo-archaeological trope demonstrates that it has likely become cemented within cultural stereotypical associations, thereby potentially perpetuating implicit Orientalist biases. This reflects both Cold War and post-9/11 Orientalist narratives that emphasize the potential for Western achievements over Eastern capabilities. In *300* (2006), Eastern combat is portrayed as deploying unconventional and fantastical elements, such as pyromancers and mutant executioners, while the West only engages in honourable combat (*300*, 2006). This exotic and cowardly combat reflects a perception of Eastern tactics as brutal and unorthodox (akin to the surprise attacks of September 11, 2001 and the comments of Sir John Keegan from Chapter 2), aligning with views of the East as being unconventionally threatening.

Elephants and rhinoceroses are utilized in battle to showcase the foreign nature of combat employed by the Oriental "Other"; however, the animalization of the Persians signifies more than mere Oriental exoticism and brutality. These are not only foreign and alien beasts, but once again also represent the perceived Oriental tendency to employ dishonourable fighting tactics, as purported by the likes of John Keegan. Instead of relying on honourable combat using reliable, steadfast soldiers, "demonic" beasts subjugated through torture are forced to suicidally charge the Spartan forces. In addition to this animalized combat, particular attention must be given to the pyromancer alchemists. Their use of firebombs symbolizes a deeper contrast with Sparta as unlike honourable Western warfare, the East utilizes unconventional weapons, deception, and shock tactics (*300*, 2006). These weapons are clumsy and have little martial value, serving

mainly to cause chaos. Conversely, the West routinely employs strategy and wit to combat the East's simple yet brutal tactics.

This is reinforced in the 2014 sequel, when Artemesia's personal guard engage in an explosive suicide attack, mirroring the previous film's depiction of Eastern forces employing dirty and dishonorable tactics. This portrayal reinforces the stereotype of the East as using terrorism and unconventional warfare, contrasted with the honourable methods of the West (300: *Rise of an Empire*, 2006). Indeed, her very manipulation, and eventual dominion, over Xerxes highlights the theme of Eastern characters as both manipulative and prone to manipulation (300: *Rise of an Empire*, 2010).

The fantastical elements of Persian combat in 300 are therefore not merely stylistic, but represent the type of atypical, "terror-inducing" martial tactics associated with the Orient, not only at the time of 300's production, but throughout much of its historical relationship with the West. The contrast with Western (Spartan) strategy and valour emphasizes the perceived moral and tactical superiority of the West over the East. This trope reoccurs in *Clash of the Titans* (2010), when the aforementioned "Oriental" Djinn depicted as undead sorcerers and cutthroats highlights the theme of dehumanization through Oriental stereotypes (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010). The Djinn's eventual alliance with the Greeks, while still depicted with inherent dubiousness, reflects the stereotype of the Orient as unreliable and treacherous. In *10,000 BC* (2008), the aforementioned "four-legged demons" are dressed in prototypical "Oriental" garb when committing their atrocities, potentially using the identification with the fundamental "Other" to aid in the communication of their immorality (*10,000 BC*, 2008).

This prototypical theme addresses how Eastern characters are visually and narratively presented in a way that emphasizes their exotic nature and unfamiliarity compared to Western characters. The Hittites in *The Egyptian* (1954) are depicted with East Asian features, neglecting both their Indo-European linguistic heritage, as well as their credible historical Syrian and Anatolian appearance. This visual choice serves to exoticize and dehumanize them, making them appear as a distant and unfamiliar "Other" rather than a relatable group (*The Egyptian*, 1954). In addition to the Djinn's aforementioned stereotypical Oriental garb, they are depicted as "desert conjurers" and "cutthroats", reinforcing the idea that they (and by extension, the East) are fundamentally different and inferior (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010).

The description of their magical practices as treacherous, and their alliance with Perseus as a necessity despite their inherent mistrust, highlights their status as the exotic "Other". Perseus comments on their inhuman nature, referring to Sheikh Suleiman as "whatever the hell you are," (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010). This is further emphasized by the Djinn Sheikh's ability to resist Medusa's death stare, hinting that the Oriental Other is not only magical and eerie, but inherently inhuman (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010). The inhumanity, deceptiveness, and fatalism of the Djinn is best encapsulated with their final act of suicide bombing to aid in the defeat of Medusa (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010). Paired with the Djinn laughing, this depiction is a stark portrayal of the only stereotypically Eastern characters in the film acting out of pure fanaticism. This reinforces their role as the dehumanized "Other," illustrating the Orientalist trope of Eastern characters being fundamentally alien and threatening.

Furthermore, the malfeasance perceived as being inherent to the decadent and exotic East is often depicted on screen, adding to the cultural reservoir of stereotypes concerning an indulgent, mysterious, and morally corrupt East contrasted with a disciplined and virtuous West.

The East is often depicted as a land of excessive luxury, sensuality, and mystical allure, often with a racial hierarchy that places whiteness at the top. In *Hercules Unchained* (1959), Omphale's comment of "you Egyptians are so clever, that even certainly you'll find the way of preserving life" reinforces the stereotype of Egyptians (and by extension, the Orient) as cunning and not afraid of resorting to perverse means to accomplish their ends. Cleopatra's manipulation for power is centered on her willingness to sell out her country for personal gain, highlighting the stereotype of the corrupt Eastern ruler who prioritizes personal ambition over patriotism (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Both her bathing and court scenes utilize her licentiousness to portray excessive natures of Eastern opulence, reinforcing the image of an extravagant but wasteful "Orient" (*Cleopatra*, 1963).

One of the great consequences of Orientalism is the monolithic attitude towards the East, the same trope satirized in *Life of Brian* (1979). Further satirical commentary demonstrates this reductionist view of Eastern groups as interchangeable and monolithic, when a Jew is mistaken for a Samaritan, and indignantly proclaims "this is supposed to be a Jewish section" (*Life of Brian*, 1979). To this, a crowd member retorts "it doesn't matter, you're all gonna die in a day or two" (*Life of Brian*, 1979). This exchange provides an ideal satirical reflection of how Oriental groups are indeed perceived as one and the same, just one exotic Eastern "Other". When not satirized, it can be observed in the Parade of Nations in *Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), where the Roman Tribune's legitimate confusion between different Eastern regions leads to him confusing Syria with Egypt. Despite his experience, the persistent Orientalist attitude of lumping diverse Eastern cultures together won over the Tribune, highlighting the perceived homogeneity of the East.

This trope has very high prevalence (over 20 occurrences) at the heart of Orientalist cinema, and has the potential of perpetuating this implicit bias concerning the exotic, monolithic East that must be liberated or countered by the diverse and free West. As with the other tropes, the historical angle of the films reinforces the seemingly attested reality concerning the East's homogenous nature. When historical films continually represent the East as a monolithic, exotic, mystical, and unstable force, the perception of these ancient stereotypes may indeed facilitate the perpetuation of contemporary implicit biases regarding the Orient.

### **5.15 “Active” versus “Passive” Agency in the “East/West” dichotomy**

One specific facet of cinematic Orientalism is the portrayal of Western figures as rational, decisive, and active compared to the Eastern (often Middle Eastern) characters, who are depicted as lazy, unambitious, and passive. This theme underscores the idea that the West is characterized by self-determination and progress, while the East is portrayed as stagnant and prone to superstition, sloth, and fatalism. An excellent example of this occurs in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) when Lawrence defies the Arabs and returns for Gasib, a tribe member lost in the desert, actively resisting the Arabs' resignation to fate (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Lawrence's choice to utilize his personal resolve highlights a perceived Western rationality and active decision-making in comparison to the Arabs' (almost mystical) fatalism, where Lawrence's goal-oriented mindset is perceived as starkly different to the “wait and see” attitude of Arabia.

Lawrence's success in rescuing Gasib, despite the Arabs' doubts, reinforces the Orientalist notion that Western perseverance and willpower can achieve whatever Eastern characters view as impossible (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). His agency is therefore demonstrated in stark contrast to the “Orientals”. Proclaiming that “nothing is written”, Lawrence claims to shape destiny through will and action, rather than accepting predetermined fate (*Lawrence of*

*Arabia*, 1962). Indeed, his rejection of determinism conflicts with the common Arabic expression “*inshallah*” (“if Allah wills it”). This utterance is heard often throughout the Middle East at times of decision making, to account for the possibility of “fate” intervening with one’s plans. Rather than sage wisdom, however, this fatalistic approach to one’s agency is perceived akin to indifference within the paradigm of cinematic Orientalism. Indeed, for Lawrence, there is no “*inshallah*”, only “Western” self-determination.

In *Cleopatra* (1963), this Western trope of taking action when the East would remain passive is demonstrated in Julius Caesar and Cleopatra’s conversations. When Cleopatra comments that Caesar’s one-year dictatorship means he can “make time stand still”, it demonstrates an Orientalized perspective on how Easterners perceive time (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Time in the East is perceived as static or leisurely, while the West places emphasis on efficiency and action. Cleopatra’s comment and Caesar’s dismissal of it highlights the perceived dynamic nature of the West against the static, less productive nature of the East, and highlights the Orientalist Western view of Eastern cultures as antiquated or stagnant. Though the prevalence for this is relatively low (4 occurrences), this trope nonetheless perpetuates a more subtle theme of Orientalism by contrasting Western rationality and effectiveness with Eastern mysticism and stagnation, consistent with the geopolitical and cultural attitudes of their times.

### **5.16 “Superior Western Intellect and Ingenuity”**

The next prototypical geopolitical trope found across the films is the idea that Western intellect and cunning are innately superior to the brute force or perceived oafish incompetence of the Eastern “Other.” There are various ways in which this trope manifests itself across the films produced in the West. In Cold War contexts, the battle between the West (capitalism, democracy)

and the East (communism, authoritarianism) takes center stage, and the trope of Western intellect is used to reflect Western ideological supremacy. By presenting itself as the rational side within this duality, the West cultivates an image as the guardian of freedom, rationality, and strategic brilliance against the perceived irrationality and tyranny of the Eastern bloc. The cinematic emphasis on intellect over brute force mirrors the ideological struggle, where Western values and strategies were depicted as not only morally superior but also more intelligent and effective.

*Samson and Delilah* (1949) portrays a game of riddles between Samson and the Philistines, symbolizing a battle of intellect, where Samson (representing the Daanites and by extension, the progenitors of the West), demonstrates superior wit (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). The Philistines, portrayed as oppressive oafs, are unable to match Samson's mental prowess, reinforcing the idea of Western intellectual dominance. In *Helen of Troy* (1956), Ulysses remarks that "so dies Greek courage...but not Greek cunning" (*Helen of Troy*, 1956). Focusing on Western military success hinging equally on intellect and strategic cunning as it does heroics, this moment suggests that the Greeks' (Westerners) ingenuity and ability to outwit their enemies is key to their superiority over the Trojans (Easterners), who are depicted as lacking in intellectual competence. *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) further encapsulates this with Lawrence's proposal of a land attack on Aqaba, described as something the "Turks would never conceive of" (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This accentuates the notion that only a fearless, free-thinking Westerner like Lawrence could imagine and execute such a plan, demonstrating the West's intellectual superiority once again in terms of grand vision and strategy. Caesar's deployment of the turtle formation against a bumbling Egyptian force in *Cleopatra* (1963) further emphasizes this point. By demonstrating the superior Western military acumen, it reinforces the trope that Western

intellect and strategic planning cannot be rivalled by their primitive Eastern opponents (*Cleopatra*, 1963).

In the post-9/11 era, the War on Terror provides the backdrop for Western intellectual superiority. *300* (2006) portrays Leonidas and his Spartans using their intellect to outmaneuver a much larger, tyrannical Persian “horde” (*300*, 2006). Furthermore, the metaphor of luring the Persians into the narrow “Hot Gates” exemplifies how Western cunning outsmarts the sheer numbers of the Eastern force (*300*, 2006). There is an emphasis placed on Spartan warriors fighting “first with the head then with the heart”, once again highlighting the idea that Western warriors possess a strategic and intellectual advantage that cannot be anticipated or equalled by their eternal Eastern foes (*300*, 2006). This resonates with the post-9/11 narrative of Western nations deploying superior strategy, intelligence, and moral clarity to defend against perceived Eastern threats. These perceptions focus on asymmetrical warfare and present claims through seemingly historical film that smaller Western forces are experienced in engaging with, and triumphing over, numerically superior but less sophisticated, authoritarian enemies.

This trope of Western intellect and cunning being superior to Eastern buffoonery is indeed a constant theme across Orientalist historical film. Due to its medium prevalence (6 occurrences) and prototypicality, it may carry enough potential representative and available weight to bias viewers into a perspective of the West as more inherently intelligent than the East. The trope reflects the historical geopolitical environment of its production and its prevalent stereotypical associations, or “culture in mind”, often concerning the Cold War and post-9/11 periods. The West is therefore potentially perceived through heuristics and implicit biases as not only morally and physically superior, but also intellectually dominant, capable of outwitting the East as it has stereotypically done countless times throughout history (or rather, historical film).



### 5.17 Technological Superiority of the West

This theme, somewhat an extension of the previous trope, highlights a clear and prototypical narrative of Western superiority in terms of organization, technology, and military prowess. During the Cold War, Western nations often depicted themselves as technologically and morally superior to the Eastern Bloc. Films reflecting this era often portrayed Eastern forces as technologically inferior or morally lacking, reinforcing the notion of Western superiority. Examples of this can be seen in *Cleopatra* (1963) where a Roman general comments on the speed of Octavian's ships compared to the "Egyptian tubs" (*Cleopatra*, 1963). After 9/11, there was a significant focus on conflicts involving Middle Eastern countries, and this period saw a continuation of themes portraying (Middle) Eastern military forces as inferior or less sophisticated compared to Western forces. In *Alexander* (2004), the Persians are depicted as disorganized in their charge compared to the orderly Greek march (*Alexander*, 2004). This emphasizes a lack of military discipline and effectiveness in Persian (Eastern) forces compared to the highly disciplined Greek (Western) troops. The Indians fought after the Persians are also portrayed as having weaker weapons (crude axes and spears) in contrast to the well-armed Greek hoplites (*Alexander*, 2004).

This suggests a technological and tactical disparity, with the Eastern forces once again relying on less advanced weaponry compared to the Greeks. To further cement this, a Persian arrow disintegrates against an Athenian shield in *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), showcasing the inferior craftsmanship and effectiveness of Eastern weaponry compared to the superior Western armor (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). Though the prevalence for this trope is lower, (4 occurrences), these depictions serve to bolster a cultural reservoir where Western powers are seen as technologically advanced, organized, and superior. This culture may then implicitly bias

individuals through the cognitive mechanisms of the representativeness and availability heuristics into perceiving a genuine dichotomy regarding the potential technological capabilities of East and West.

### **5.18 “One Westerner is Worth Many Easterners”**

This next prototypical theme highlights the perceived superiority of Western individuals over their Eastern counterparts, emphasizing that it takes many Easterners to match (and even then, often fail to match) the strength, valour, and moral righteousness of a single Westerner. This makes Westerners more valuable to the world than the “Oriental” Other. In a Cold War context, the portrayal of Westerners as superior to Easterners reflects the geopolitical tension between the West (largely the U.S) and the Eastern bloc (USSR). This context often included emphasizing individual Western moral and physical superiority over Eastern forces, often enslaved to fight and not even remotely a match for their Western counterparts.

In *The 300 Spartans* (1962), the Spartan scout endures torture from the Persians, simultaneously demonstrating the resilience and strength of the Western individual and the depraved oppression of Eastern individuals (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). Spartans are further confirmed as being superior on an individual level than even the best Persian warrior when the Spartan King collaborating with Xerxes bests the Persian King’s best bodyguard in single combat. Even a treasonous Westerner is still superior to a Persian thug (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). This is bolstered by Leonidas’ later declaration that “Xerxes has men in millions, but we have Greeks!”, emphasizing how the Western warrior is worth many Eastern drones (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1962), ten of King Herod’s soldiers are required to subdue John the Baptist, underscoring a theme that it takes many heathen Eastern adversaries to overcome one noble Western figure (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1962).

Departing from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke which highlight John's moral defiance of Herod with no mention of physical resistance, the Baptist is represented akin to a quintessential Western action hero. Analogous to this "action hero" (whether modern or historical such as 300's Leonidas), John the Baptist physically combats the corruption and villainy of the East, fending off many immoral foes before being captured (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1962). In his discussion of violence in biblical cinema, McGeough comments on this perspective of biblical characters as Americanized action heroes, remarking that in director Darren Aronovsky's *Noah* (2014), the titular Biblical hero first appears as a child, only to watch his father murdered by a descendant of Cain, (Tubal-Cain), solidifying his life as a revenge story, reminiscent of an "American cowboy" (McGeough 2016, 7). As an adult, when questioned by attackers from Tubal-Cain's tribe, representing the barbarous East, about what he "wants", Noah proclaims "justice". McGeough argues therefore, that "Russel Crow's Noah is presented as the prototype of the conflicted American hero, highly skilled at violence but not wanting to use it unless necessary" (McGeough 2016, 7). His ability to outwit and outmatch numerically superior opponents demonstrate Noah's role as not only an American hero, but an archetypal protagonist from the Orientalist "West", resisting the Eastern hordes.

In both moral and physical terms, this prototypical trope maintains the superiority of individual Western characters. This perceived superiority in Orientalist thought is spelled out plainly within the betting scene in *Ben-Hur* (1959). The legionnaire proclaims: "4 to 1; difference between a Roman and a Jew...or an Arab" (*Ben-Hur*, 1959), providing commentary on the difference between a Roman and a Jew and/or Arab presents a clear Orientalist attitude of viewing Westerners as being simply worth more than Easterners. Although director William Wyler is indeed critiquing imperialist attitudes, the Roman's derision once again generalizes

Arabs and Jews into one Oriental monolith that is mocked, controlled, and represented by the uniform, imperialist West.

Within the post 9/11 world, themes of Western heroism and individual superiority over Eastern adversaries resonated with the contemporary geopolitical landscape. The depiction of morally and physically superior Western forces aligned with the War on Terror narrative of the West's struggle against perceived threats from Middle Eastern foes. Once again, this contributed to a cultural environment in which Huntington's framework of the "clash of civilizations" was reinforced within Orientalist film. One clear example of this is *300* (2006) in which contemporary concerns about Western military engagements and portrayals of Eastern adversaries are mapped on to the historical Spartan engagement at Thermopylae. The theme of Westerners being more "valuable" than Easterners runs dominant with the Spartans, as Queen Gorgo tells the Persian messenger "only Spartan women give birth to real men", implying that, at the most fundamental level, individual Western lives are "worth" more than individual Eastern lives (*300*, 2006). During a battle sequence, wounded Persians felled as cannon fodder are contrasted with Leonidas's emphasis on preserving every Spartan, reinforcing both the "Western" value of individual life and the treatment of "Easterners" as collateral damage.

Xerxes' willingness to sacrifice his troops wantonly, compared to Leonidas's dedication to protecting every Spartan, symbolizes the idea that Persian (Eastern) lives are seen as expendable compared to Spartan (Western) lives (*300*, 2006). Later, descending from his throne on a staircase of slaves to intimidate Leonidas, Xerxes is met with defiance as the Spartan king exclaims, "you have many slaves but few warriors. It won't be long before they fear my spears more than your whips" (*300*, 2006). Leonidas then confirms the importance of his story for Western history, remarking that "the world will know that free men stood against a tyrant. That

few stood against many” (300, 2006). Once again, the motif of a small group of free Western men defending their world from centralized Eastern tyranny continues to be utilized in historical film. 300, and its sequel, indeed portray how decisive and efficacious Western strategy is over Eastern brute force.

In *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), Greek defenders are once again portrayed as being “outnumbered three to one”, yet still holding the ground until victory is attained (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). Each Greek soldier being worth three Persians continues the motif of individual Western strength prevailing over the hordes of Eastern oppression. This echoes Samson’s attestation exclaiming “One Daanite is worth thirty Philistines” (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). Furthermore, the demoralization of Persians compared to the renewed vigour of their Spartan adversaries portrays Persian forces as being of a weaker constitution than their Eastern adversaries. Indeed, Leonidas summarizes the above themes succinctly when stating “wave after wave of Persian attack will smash on Spartan shields” (300, 2006).

This core theme, reflecting the perceived general inadequacy of Easterners, resonates with post-9/11 narratives, contrasting Western strength and moral justification with the barbarism and inferiority of Eastern forces. Balian’s successful defense of Jerusalem with inferior numbers in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) showcases Western military superiority and strategic brilliance, as well as bolstering the narrative that one Western hero can overcome many Eastern opponents. As Balian exclaims, “every Christian knight you kill will take 10 Saracens with him”, demonstrating that even a noble knight opposed to Western imperialism acknowledges the inherent superiority of the West (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005).

These examples showcase the prototypicality of this theme, with its prevalence being 9 (average prevalence). While this may be a lower rate of occurrence, it is still significant enough

given the findings of Schwarz *et al.* (1991) on the availability heuristic. Given their discovery that one's perception of self-assertiveness can be manipulated through heuristic biases to perceive a lower overall quantity of relevant memories as being easier to recall, it stands to reason that the same principle may apply to stereotypical characteristics in media and the primacy they have over everyday events. Due to this trope fitting a satisfactory and representative narrative, this is likely a significant enough prevalence to still be a highly "available" trope, meaning it is easier to recall, despite the plethora of information in the world which should theoretically oppose this stereotypical trope. Yet, just like the subjects in Schwarz *et al.* (1991) rating themselves more assertive if they were asked to remember 6 instances of assertive behaviour as opposed to 12, it is the ease of recall which makes this trope so robust, not the sheer quantity of occurrences itself.

The theme "One Westerner is Worth Many Easterners" is a prevalent motif in these films, emphasizing an inherent superiority Western individuals possess over Eastern forces, which may reinforce implicit biases concerning individual Western strength, valour, and moral righteousness in contrast to Eastern oppression and inferiority.

### **5.19 Musical Orientalism**

One important prototypical aspect concerning Oriental cinematic representations of the Middle East focuses on the use of music. Western films use certain musical motifs and visual elements to portray the East as exotic, mysterious, and often inferior or threatening. These sonic elements reflect broader Orientalist attitudes that shape Western narratives about Eastern cultures. Through their repeated use in scenes concerning the Middle East, these musical motifs have cultivated both representativeness and a high degree of availability (over 10 in prevalence). Examples include *Helen of Troy* (1956), where stereotypical Middle Eastern instrumentation

playing upon Troy's introduction to the audience immediately contextualizes it as an exotic, foreign land (*Helen of Troy*, 1956). The musical choice reinforces the Orientalist trope of viewing Eastern cultures as fundamentally different and otherized, with this instrumentation choice being apparent throughout a plethora of historical fiction and Orientalist productions. In *The Robe* (1953), upon the introduction of Jerusalem, the music transitions from heavy Roman brass sections to Oriental woodwinds resembling the classic Arabian "snake charmer riff" (popularized at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair). This hints at Jerusalem's (and the Orient's) exoticism and otherness, making it fundamentally different from the Western, Roman world (*The Robe*, 1953). The 1954 sequel to *The Robe*, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, continues this tradition of representing the imperialistic and tyrannical Romans with sharp brass and screeching horns, while softer music is used for the free people, highlighting a sonic perception difference between the oppressive and democratic forces.

Elements of East and West are fused into the overture of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), which captures the essence of Orientalist perceptions of the Middle East with its blending of Arabian melodies and Western instrumentation. The music and sweeping desert visuals evoke the allure of an exotic and alien land in the East (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This trope is cemented within the reservoir of stereotypical cultural associations (i.e., the "culture in mind"), with mythological films such as *Clash of the Titans* (1981) exploiting the Arabian riffs when Perseus encounters characters with "Oriental" features in the Joppa marketplace (*Clash of the Titans*, 1981). This musical cue reinforces the exotic and mysterious qualities of Eastern settings and their inhabitants, to immediately signal to the viewer they have been cinematically transported to the imaginative geography of the "Orient".

*The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) uses Arabian flutes to situate Jerusalem within the exotic East, and the initial desert visuals of the Persian Empire in *Alexander* (2004) are accompanied by the Orientalist soundtrack trope of wailing women (*Alexander*, 2004). This adds to the film's portrayal of Eastern settings as culturally distinct and "otherized". In *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), stereotypical Arabic tribal music is once again used when Jerusalem is mentioned or depicted, further highlighting its exoticism and separation from the West. When Balian and Sybilla begin their affair, it is immediately accompanied by Arabic tribal music, used to evoke a sense of freedom, exoticism and mysterious allure available to the Western adventurer in the "Orient" (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). These sonic perceptions can even extend past music, as the introductory narration of the mythological *10,000 BC* (2008) is voiced by Omar Sharif, using a voice culturally associated with "Orientalist" tone to evoke the exotic nature of the setting (*10,000 BC*, 2008).

The use of prototypical music reinforces the idea of the East as a monolithic force, which is useful for both Cold War and post-9/11 contexts. Indeed, it does not matter if Jerusalem is under the control of Christians or Romans during the narratives of these films, the sounds we hear are usually, without variation, stereotypically Middle Eastern, influenced by Orientalized conceptions of Arabic music. Orientalist music and imagery is used to depict Eastern adversaries (both the Soviet Union and Middle Eastern Islamists) as one cohesive bloc, contributing to the cultural perception of a fundamental divide between the Western "free world" and the Eastern "totalitarian horde". This portrayal of Eastern cultures as exotic, threatening or primitive may be used to justify military interventions or other security measures, and it starts with the perception of a fundamental dichotomy. Musical imagery often accompanies scenes of perceived Oriental barbarism and exoticism, usually with distinct stringed and woodwind instruments, as well as the



aforementioned chorus of “wailing women”. By incorporating this trope during most instances of the Middle East being featured in Orientalist film, the dichotomy between East and West continues to be sonically portrayed and reinforce implicit biases and stereotypes concerning this perceived duality.

## **5.20 Cultural Reservoir of Stereotypes**

By analyzing these prototypical tropes, one can visualize the stereotypical inputs feeding prevalent stereotypical associations within culture, (i.e., the “culture in mind”), concerning the idea of an eternal dichotomy between East and West. The previous pages have demonstrated a robust set of stereotypical tropes which contain high degrees of both prototypicality (high representativeness) and prevalence (high availability). Using this as a foundation, these stereotypes are then extrapolated as being present within the “culture in mind” concerning Orientalist historical cinema, the cultural reservoir of information from which implicit associations (such as stereotypes) are formed.

When enough information concerning high representativeness exists, it can influence perception to the point of biasing probability, as exhibited by the Linda conjunction fallacy demonstrated by Tversky and Kahneman (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983). Connecting the conjunction fallacy to this, the stereotypical tropes listed in the previous pages may therefore have the potential of eliciting stereotypical perceptions of the East which are perceived as having a higher chance of existing than non-stereotypical perceptions. It may be perceived as more likely for the “East” as a monolithic geopolitical bloc to engage in militarism because it is corrupt, barbaric, and oppressed than for just reasons. Individual Easterners may thereby be perceived as having a higher likelihood of being threatening than just being Easterners.

Of the nineteen tropes explored throughout this chapter, it should be noted that one far surpasses all others in its prevalence, and is indeed the most commonly occurring trope throughout this entire analysis. With over one hundred occurrences, the trope of “Freedom versus Tyranny” serves as the archetypal foundation upon which almost all the other Orientalist assumptions emanate from. From these tropes, the preceding discussion concerning cinematic depictions of Orientalist geopolitics evolves around this ideal of a hegemonic, Western “liberator” whose imperialism is justified as humanitarian intervention.

Due to the high degrees of prevalence for most of these prototypical tropes, the feedback loop detailed in Chapter 3 could potentially become bolstered and perpetuate these stereotypes to all viewers of historical films, who then have to actively engage with their biased perceptions in order to not become susceptible to implicit biases concerning the fundamental dichotomy of East and West. In the next chapter, further findings of this cinematic analysis model are discussed. Differing from the geopolitical examination within this chapter, Chapter 6 focuses on the visual aspects of Orientalism in historical film, including stereotypical depictions concerning race, garb, visage, and geographic scenery, which may contribute to prevalent implicit biases within culture.

## **Chapter 6: Visualizing the “Other” – Race, Appearance, and Setting**

This chapter continues the investigation of pervasive prototypical stereotypes concerning the dichotomy between East and West in Orientalist film. Within the reservoir of cinematic stereotypes contributing to culturally prevalent implicit associations (i.e., the “culture in mind”), the noble Western protagonist and the tyrannical, Eastern force are represented in a particular visual pattern time and time again. By focusing on the visual appearance surrounding this dichotomy in this chapter, stereotypical depictions concerning race, dress, visage, and geographic setting shall be discussed.

Imagistic components surrounding the visualization of the aforementioned characteristics were of particular importance to this project, given the academic scholarship regarding the role of “visual impressions” in providing films with persuasive messaging (Zacks 2014, 101). Race, visage, attire, and geographic setting were isolated for their potential immediacy in evoking emotional visual imagery, and this imagistic stereotypical data has been used to further elucidate how viewing historical films may bias individuals. The theme of a battle between good (often representing Western, democratic, or Christian values), and evil (often symbolizing Eastern, Communist, or totalitarian forces) may be propagated cinematically via the cognitive mechanisms of availability heuristics, representativeness heuristics and implicit biases, all accessed through an, often visual, “culture in mind”.

As elaborated on by Hinton, stereotypes are not mere biases in individual cognition, but rather products of culture (Hinton, 2017, 7). By exploring the cinematic medium within popular culture, depictions which could potentially contribute to the formation and maintenance of these stereotypical biases were examined and broken down into core prototypical tropes. Once again, as with the examples centered on geopolitics in the previous chapter, these prototypical tropes

are explored below. The historical connotations of these films are essential to consider within the broader geopolitical narratives outlined in Chapter 6, including the Cold War and post 9-11 era, as the biases may then potentially become associated with an enduring conflict between East and West (i.e., Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*). This could then contribute to a particular cultural perception, such as the War on Terror ethos that terrorists on TV resemble evil soldiers in historical films, so perhaps the Western fight against Eastern terrorists is historically justified.

The methodology for this analysis of visual tropes remains the same as Chapter 6, (and Chapter 8), and will therefore not be elaborated on to avoid redundancy. Once again, with both the availability and representativeness heuristics operationalized, these prevalent and prototypical visual tropes have been analyzed to elucidate potential implicit bias and stereotype formation within the aforementioned cognitive psychological paradigm. Through the lens of Hinton’s model of culturally perpetuated implicit stereotypes (or “culture in mind”), and cognitive frameworks involving stereotype formation via heuristic processing, these core visual tropes can be explained as potentially contributing to the cultural reservoir of stereotypes available for perception concerning common visual representations of East and West.

| Stereotype                                                                           | Number of Occurrences |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| “Heroic Whiteness versus Sinister Otherness”: Visual Dichotomies in Orientalist film | 51                    |

|                                                                             |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Dichotomy between “White Nobility / Power” and “Black Servitude / Savagery” | 25 |
| “Oriental Subservience”, “White Saviour” Complex, and “Western Supremacy”   | 32 |
| Stereotypical Oriental Dress                                                | 35 |
| Cold War Symbolism and Anti-Communist Imagery                               | 5  |
| “Western Civility” versus “Eastern Barbarism”                               | 11 |
| The “Exotic, Decadent, and Monolithic Orient”                               | 18 |
| Desolate Landscape representing “Oriental Otherness”                        | 5  |
| Animalization of “East and West”                                            | 8  |

### **6.1 Heroic Whiteness versus Sinister Otherness: Visual Dichotomies in Orientalist film**

One of the principal visual features pervading Orientalist themes and offering a stereotypical visual representation of East and West is that of certain racial, physical, and facial features used to contrast heroic Western figures with villainous or morally ambiguous (and often immoral) characters. This leads to certain “types” being frequently used for antagonistic roles while others are commonly associated with heroic roles. Within these typical associations of “this is the face of a good/bad guy in movies”, one can observe a high prevalence of stereotypical associations when exploring films focusing on encounters between East and West. These films often meet the criteria for many tropes of Orientalism, and indeed offer an Orientalized vision of the East founded not on authenticity of the East, but rather the West’s perception of whatever is deemed authentic to the East. As such, historical films often take the perspective of a Westerner having to halt the advance of a barbaric, malicious, and deceitful East. The “East” is often portrayed by “Easterners” with appearances common to particular ethnicities associated with the region (usually formed into racial monoliths such as “Brown” or “Arab-looking” people). This image may then be perpetuated over time, (*e.g.*, through the accumulation of representative and available examples resulting in biases such as the Linda Conjunction Fallacy), contributing to the cultural perception that those with stereotypically “Eastern” features may be more capable and/or likely to act barbarically, malignantly, or deceitfully.

One prominent visual feature is that of heroic whiteness versus sinister Otherness, presented through a recurrent “noble Western face” and the “wicked Eastern face”, which enforces a visual dichotomy in Orientalist film. Examples of this include the *Sign of the Cross* (1932) where Mercia remarks that Marcus doesn't have a “wicked looking face” despite rumours

(*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). His strong Western features (played by Frederick Marsh), clean-shaven, strong jawline, contrast with the more “decadent” and villainous figures like Nero, who possess a hook nose and gluttonous appearance, or Tigellinus, who is depicted with distinctly “evil” Oriental facial features (sharp brow, downturned eyes, beard). This contrast between noble Western faces and sinister Eastern features reinforces the theme of moral superiority. The clean-shaven archetype continues through the Cold War Era with *David and Bathsheba* (1951), where Goliath is portrayed not only as a hulking giant, but one with common “savage Middle Eastern” features, including an unkempt beard, hook nose, and furrowed brow (*David and Bathsheba*, 1951).

Visually, this presents an immediate and fundamental dichotomous challenge to the righteous David (played by Gregory Peck, clean-shaven, strong jaw, aquiline nose). Without dialogue, David is positioned with the “West” and Goliath is othered with the “East”. In *Cleopatra* (1963), a heavily Orientalized vision of Ancient Egypt is observed as the Queen of Egypt who rules the “Orientals” is herself White (*Cleopatra*, 1963). While Elizabeth Taylor’s Cleopatra is also used to embody the feminized Orient, portraying it as deceptive and acquiescent to Rome (i.e., the “West”), it is her whiteness which reinforces the idea that Western traits may be inherently associated with leadership and power, even in Eastern settings.

Darker-skinned characters are subservient to the cinematically fair, but historically Mediterranean Cleopatra, who bows only before the might of Rome (represented by a White, Western man). Power is not the only implicit association conveyed by prototypically “Western” cinematic features, however, as morality and divinity are also implied by this visage. In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1964), Jesus is depicted with piercing blue eyes, creating an immediate connection to the West, signaling that even divine figures are portrayed through a Western lens of

heroism and righteousness (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965). The heroic blue-eyed saviour appears throughout these films, prominent in *Alexander*'s titular protagonist (2004) and *Troy*'s Achilles (2004). In addition to this visual cinematic hallmark of the "West", the Persians in *Alexander* (2004) are depicted with turbans, beards, and the prototypical facial structures aligned with the "Other".

Turbans in particular are an important aspect of this monolithic visual Othering, and will be explored more extensively in the "Stereotypical Oriental Dress" trope section. The hook-nosed, furrow-browed, bearded enemy presents itself in opposition to the clean-shaven, blonde protagonist who treats his soldiers far better than his Eastern counterpart. Western civility and Eastern barbarity are often associated with these traits, as observed in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), where the clean-shaven Romans are contrasted with bearded Jews. The Romans are thereby distanced from the barbarity of Christ's execution, and portray the Jews as having more responsibility (*The Passion of the Christ*, 2004). Achilles combines many of these tropes together, (blonde hair, blue eyes), in *Troy* (2004) not only to serve as the epitome of Western heroism, but also distinguish him from the Eastern foe (*Troy*, 2004). The Westernization of his appearance, presenting him as an "Americanized" version of the hero (as with Alexander and Cleopatra, the historically Mediterranean Achilles would likely not have been this blonde and fair-skinned).

These portrayals are, of course, countered by a prototypical "Oriental" villain face, such as the Persian General Kashani from *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014). This antagonistic Other is bearded and hook-nosed, with soulless eyes. The scene following his scowling at the Western hero Themistocles features the hero declaring "Fear the Greek fighting man...but most of all fear his freedom" (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). This once again contributes to a visual dichotomy



between the “freedom-loving, White Western hero” and his “tyrannical, Arab-looking Eastern foe”.

These examples reflect a deeper cultural pattern where visual markers of race, facial features, and physical appearance are used to create a stark moral dichotomy between the West and the East. The “clean-shaven, blue-eyed, blonde” hero represents righteousness, leadership, and freedom, while the “bearded, hook-nosed, wild-haired” villain symbolizes tyranny, barbarism, and deceit. These representations reflect the geopolitical anxieties and cultural biases of their respective times, from Cold War fears of the Eastern Bloc to post-9/11 anxieties about the Middle East, contributing to the visual dichotomy perhaps serving as a method of reinforcing geopolitical stereotypes. The repetition of these visual binaries in post-9/11 films serves to reinforce Western audiences' perceptions of Middle Eastern countries as threatening and backwards, a reflection of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and the War on Terror. Once again, the ostensibly historical nature of the films is important to note, as they are perceived as visually echoing modern political narratives that contrast Western ideals of freedom and democracy against the perceived tyranny and fanaticism of the East. This extremely prevalent prototypical theme of “Heroic Whiteness versus Sinister Otherness” reverberates throughout Orientalist historical productions (over 50 occurrences), demonstrating a strong likelihood of contributing to stereotypical perceptions of Easterners/Westerners within the cultural reservoir.

## **6.2 Dichotomy Between “White Nobility / Power” and “Black Servitude / Savagery”**

Another common prototypical visual trope in historical orientalist films revolves around the representation of darker skinned individuals. The racial hierarchy in Biblical and historical / Orientalist films portrays a clear visual dichotomy between white nobility / power, and black servitude / savagery. This reinforces the stereotypical Orientalist framework of Western

superiority and Eastern inferiority. Throughout the films, the presence of black or darker-skinned characters is consistently associated with servitude, savagery, or hostility, while white or fairer skinned characters (even in tyrannical roles) are associated with power, civilization, and nobility. This visual pattern not only reinforces racial hierarchies but also creates an “otherness”. This visual coding not only reinforces racial hierarchies but also creates an otherness that aligns with geopolitical concerns, especially in the Cold War and post-9/11 era, where the East was often depicted as barbaric, mystical, and a threat to Western values.

Examples of this include the primary introductions of black and darker skinned characters in many of the films. Many occur in servile positions, such as *Samson and Delilah* (1949), where the first black characters are introduced as servants, immediately positioning them visually as subjugated and inferior. While both the Philistines and the Danites are portrayed as white, the black servants are relegated to the lowest social strata (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). Garmiscar, the wrestler, is a darker-toned character with a wild black beard, representing a stereotypical “foreign savage” that reinforces the trope of Eastern villainy. His more “savage” features set him apart from the white protagonists, aligning darker skin with brute strength and moral depravity, just like Goliath in the previous trope (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). In *David and Bathsheba* (1951), Bathsheba’s maid is black, reinforcing the association between darker skin and servitude (*David and Bathsheba*, 1951). Historically, there would have been a range of skin tones within ancient Israel (for both nobility and servants), but the choice to portray the maid as black reinforces a simplistic racial hierarchy where “whites rule and blacks serve”, mirroring many norms surrounding American race relations prior to the civil rights movement.

This trope continues in *The Robe* (1953), when the black “Lycon the Nubian” represents those faced with a choice, to either fall under tyranny or embrace the West’s freedom (often

combined with Christianity). Much like the prominent non-aligned movement of states, (commonly referred to as the “Third World”) during the film’s time of production, Lycon’s neutral, yet “savage” position underscores the idea of non-Western people as “uncivilized but potentially redeemable” through Western influence (*The Robe*, 1953). The Ethiopians in *The Ten Commandments* (1956) are depicted as subjugated colonized hordes, showing loving affection toward their “benevolent” colonizers, which reflects a broader theme of imperialism. This is particularly ironic given Ethiopia’s historic resistance to colonization, yet the film reflects contemporary Cold War ideas of black/African loyalty to Western power. Egypt is once again the backdrop for this prototypical trope in *The Egyptian* (1954), as while the Egyptians are shown as fair-skinned, their servants are all black Nubians, reinforcing the binary of white civility and black servility. Once again, this is historically inaccurate, due to the aforementioned issue concerning Egypt’s slave hierarchy not being racially coordinated. This depiction, therefore, further perpetuates a visual distinction that plays into racialized power dynamics and Orientalist views of ancient societies. In *Hercules Unchained* (1959), the first black people seen are slaves in a tiger pit, reinforcing the notion that blackness is synonymous with subjugation.

The visual coding continues to link dark skin with a lack of autonomy, contrasting sharply with the heroic white/olive-skinned characters (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959). Once again, black characters appear as servants throughout *Cleopatra* (1963), though all the advisors are white (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This deliberate primacy of white power over darker-skinned individuals underscores the Orientalist narrative that the East, even in its glory, was only civilized under white dominion. Additionally, the historical element of these films may contribute to the normalization of a historical perspective in which black subjugation and white domination was an attested norm until recent times. In the most egregious instance of this trope playing out yet,

Cleopatra's parade in Rome presents blatant depictions of savage, darker-skinned shamanistic tribespeople, furthering the idea that the East is both primitive and exotic (*Cleopatra*, 1963). The darkest characters are positioned directly under Cleopatra, illustrating a hierarchy where whiteness dominates and controls the exotic, servile East. In the satirical *Life of Brian* (1979), the only black member of the comedic Wise Men trio is the one to announce "We have come from the East," playing into the comedic yet Orientalist trope of the mystical East, represented by dark-skinned individuals. Even in satire, the East is known for being stereotypically prone to mysticism and otherness (*Life of Brian*, 1979).

Further examples of this trope occur in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), where the first slaves to appear are once again black, and Jesus follows a very "Oriental-looking" man into a brothel, filled with stereotypical "lecherous Orientals" (*The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988). This scene combines Arab and Indian influences and plays heavily into monolithic Orientalized tropes, with sitar music and turbaned men ogling Mary Magdalene's sexual exploits, reinforcing ideas of Eastern moral depravity. *Alexander* (2004) reinforces the visual contrast immediately between the Western Ptolemy and the Oriental black Egyptian servant, once again portraying Eastern effeminacy and servitude (*Alexander*, 2004). This introduction offers an immediate positioning of the East as a weak, conquered land under the dominion of superior Westerners. By 2014, when the first black people in *Exodus: Gods and Kings* were introduced in servile positions, this trope had likely become cemented in the cultural reservoir of stereotypes (over 20 occurrences), making it highly prevalent (*Exodus: Gods and Kings*, 2014).

The visual and thematic portrayal of racial hierarchies in these films, especially the contrast between white protagonists and darker-skinned servants or villains, is deeply connected to Western geopolitical anxieties and imperial legacies. These depictions reflect the Cold War

power dynamics and the shifting global order following the post-9/11 war on terror, where the East is often framed as servile, exotic, dangerous, or in need of salvation. Through the lens of these films, Orientalist portrayals serve to reassert the dominance of Western values, using racial coding to reinforce a sense of civilizational superiority and maintain ideological divides between the West and the so-called “East” or “Third World. Many Cold War era films emphasized the importance of aligning with Western values (often symbolized through Christianity or European civilization), portraying darker-skinned characters as inherently subjugated or savage, awaiting Western liberation or domination.

Coming off the heels of decolonization, Cold War era depictions of perpetual black servitude may still be seen as an extension of colonial narratives in these productions. The portrayal of darker-skinned characters as servants or slaves in these films reflects an enduring legacy of colonialism, where the West’s relationship to Africa is defined by its historical oppression of it. Even as these films ostensibly focus on historical or Biblical narratives, their depiction of race often mirrors the real-world racial dynamics between the Western powers and their former colonies. Throughout *Cleopatra* (1963), black characters are consistently shown as slaves or subjugated peoples, even though historical Egypt was much more racially diverse. The decision to depict black slaves pulling Cleopatra’s chariot reflects a deeply ingrained colonial mindset, where the darkest characters are (literally) placed under the feet of their white rulers, even in an Oriental setting (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This visual motif of racial hierarchy mirrors Western imperial narratives, which view Africa as a source of raw labour and servitude, both historically and in contemporary settings. It is therefore evident due to both the robust prototypicality and high prevalence of its occurrences that this racial trope is indeed a significant visual hallmark within historical, Orientalist film.

### 6.3 “Oriental Subservience”, “White Saviour” Complex, and “Western Supremacy”

This prototypical theme focuses on how films use white characters as saviours who intervene in Eastern settings, reinforcing the idea that only Westerners have the inherent capability to lead, rescue, or redeem the “exotic” and “inferior” Orient. This recurring trope, commonly referred to as a “white saviour”, emphasizes the idea that only Western figures (or sometimes Westernized Easterners) can bring order, progress, or salvation to the chaotic and barbaric East. Furthermore, the most powerful, knowledgeable, and/or noble individuals in the East have some connection with the West, with a white complexion being among the most frequent visual features. This is a reflection of Western imperialist ideology, where colonial powers saw themselves as the bearers of civilization, a notion that persisted through the Cold War and post-9/11 era. Harkening back to Said’s reference from Chapter 2, the learned European in Rudyard Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden* best encapsulates this particular trope (Kipling, 1997). Aligning with this perspective, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) depicts an egregious white saviour, who treats the East as a playground, while realizing his destiny to help liberate it. Though the film takes point to criticize imperialism, it nonetheless utilizes many tropes of Orientalism, including an orderly, masculine, scholarly Westerner to liberate the feminine, mystical, chaotic East.

This is due to the East fundamentally being perceived as unable to help itself, requiring perpetual guidance. Furthermore, Alec Guinness’ portrayal of Prince Faisal in brown-face highlights the Orientalist trope of Eastern leaders being somewhat Western if they have true power (i.e., *Cleopatra*). Faisal may be wisest among the Arabs, but he also has a British accent (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). His comments on the need for European officers due to European guns underscores the idea that Eastern societies cannot manage their own affairs without Western

intervention. This highlights the Orientalist belief that only Westerners can organize and lead in the East (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Finally, Lawrence's identity crisis and self-doubt facilitate his ultimate return to the Orient in order to satisfy his personal hero's journey, illustrating the White Saviour complex in full. Despite doubts from all, Lawrence's role as the saviour emphasizes the necessity of a white figure for resolving Eastern conflicts and challenges (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). He therefore embodies the Orientalist character who perceives himself as a bridge between East and West, but in actuality propagates the biases pertaining to Orientalism.

In *Samson and Delilah* (1949), the description concerning the "whiteness" of Delilah's skin and her being "fairer than Samador" reinforces the idea that even within Oriental settings, Western attributes are idealized and desired (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949). Cleopatra being both the Egyptian queen and white once again demonstrates the Orientalist trope that authority in the East must be represented by the West, and often white figures (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This trope reinforces Western dominance and the idea that Eastern rulers must align with Western ideals to be effective. Indeed, as discussed by Priscilla Indrayadi, Cleopatra as a historical figure has been repeatedly represented this way, with Israeli actress Gal Gadot's recent casting as the Egyptian queen being the latest instance of Hollywood Orientalism "whitewashing ancient civilization" (Indrayadi, 2021). Yet the contrast between the semi-Egyptian and completely Western Caesar (both white), combined with the collective depiction of Eastern characters, emphasizes the hierarchy and centrality of white and Western figures (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Cleopatra's overall corrupting influence on Caesar highlights the Orientalist view of the East as morally corrupting and dangerous (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Thereby the film may help perpetuate an implicit bias that only Western characters can resist or overcome the negative influence of the East.

A powerful aspect of this trope is the consistent portrayal of Eastern characters as subordinate to Western figures across various films. Whether through direct submission, servility, manipulation, or treachery, the trope of “Oriental” subservience to the West highlights a racial and cultural hierarchy that positions the West as dominant and superior, while the East remains in a subordinate and often villainous role. After an elaborate Oriental procession showcases the decadence and exoticism of the East in *Cleopatra* (1963), it culminates in the East symbolically bowing before the West via Cleopatra and Caesar (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This exemplifies the trope that despite the grandeur of Eastern culture, the East ultimately submits to Western authority. Throughout the film, Eastern historical characters in ubiquitous turbans are demonstrated bowing before white, Western historical characters including Caesar, Antony, and Cleopatra (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Artemisia’s manipulation of Xerxes in *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014) and her portrayal as a white figure controlling the Eastern forces reinforces the White Saviour complex (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014).

Though she is not a “white saviour”, the depiction of Eastern rulers as not only weak, but manipulated by white characters highlights the theme of Western superiority and control. Furthermore, the depiction of Eastern soldiers as cowering or being manipulated by their leaders contrasts with the resoluteness and bravery of their Western counterparts, reinforcing the notion that Eastern characters lack the virtues and qualities associated with Western heroes (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). In *Kingdom of Heaven* (2004), these visuals are observed in the depiction of servile Orientals in the Westerner Balian’s hostel. Characterized solely by their fascination with Balian, this reflects the stereotype of Eastern characters as deferential and subordinate to Westerners (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2004). Once again, the white and Greek Artemisia’s control over Xerxes in *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014) demonstrates the ease with which the West may



manipulate the East (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). This portrayal of Artemisia as the true dominant force behind the Persian Empire aligns with the cinematic prototypical trope of Oriental subservience to the East.

As evidenced by these examples, historical cinema may indeed contribute to implicit stereotypes prevalent within culture, including this Orientalist trope of representing white “Western” individuals as the necessary saviours, leaders, and redeemers in “Eastern” settings. This reinforces the Orientalist notion that the West is superior and essential for managing, controlling, or saving the Orient, while Eastern figures are depicted as inferior, corrupt, or in need of Western intervention. Occurring more than 20 times, it is a prototypical trope of very high prevalence, thereby potentially hinting at its ability to perpetuate implicit bias through cultural productions via the availability and representativeness heuristics.

#### **6.4 Stereotypical Oriental Dress**

A cornerstone of Orientalist historical film is the recurring and stereotypical costume ascribed to Oriental characters. Clothing is an important visual element, and certain elements are utilized to create a visual monolith out of various Eastern cultures. Turbans serve as the greatest example of this ubiquity, being worn by Persians in *Alexander* (2004), *300* (2006), and *Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964). Historically, turbans were not associated with Persian Immortals (who would have worn a light helm) and in turn, the “Persians” more closely resemble Mughal Indians. In Orientalist film, however, the East is the East. Films employ specific visual elements, such as turbans, beards, and exotic garb, to create and reinforce stereotypes about Eastern characters. These visual cues often signify inferiority, hostility, or exoticism, contrasting with heroic or noble Western figures.

This is seen in *The Robe* (1953), where a visual shift to Oriental music and garb is used to introduce a cultural and “civilizational” gap, reinforcing the notion that Eastern attire signifies a less advanced, “backwater” culture (*The Robe*, 1953). The Amorites’ colourful Oriental clothing appears exotic but non-threatening, subtly implying their difference from the familiar Roman characters (*Land of the Pharaohs*, 1955). In *The 300 Spartans*, a Persian character with Oriental features and black dress is immediately depicted as ignoble, emphasizing the visual contrast between Eastern enemies and Western heroes (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). Oriental characters wear traditional garb in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), emphasizing their exotic and subordinate roles compared to the Western hero (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Hostile Eastern characters in black robes contrast with friendly Arabs in white, reinforcing the stereotype of the East as a place of hostility (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Lawrence is also gifted white “Chief” robes to symbolize his elevated status while integrating into the “Oriental” world, maintaining a visual distinction from the typical Eastern dress worn by the other Arabs (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962).

Sharif Ali snidely chides Lawrence, “in Cairo you will put off these “funny clothes”, you will wear trousers and tell stories of our quaintness and barbarity” (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This is more than just a self-referential nod to the Orientalist trope (both within film and broader society) to ascribe civilizational value based on clothing. It also references “Oriental” awareness and fears concerning Western expansionism and imperialism. Ali’s awareness of the satirical commentary around him, his very awareness of Orientalist tropes is centered on his comprehension of the difference of their garb. This interaction underscores the fundamental degree to which perceptions of being “civilized” are connected with clothing and appearance. King Mithridates in *Cleopatra* (1964) is depicted with a beard, flamboyant clothing, a golden crown-turban, and other “Oriental” features, visually categorizing him as an Eastern leader with

no words spoken by him, (or about his kingdom's location), whatsoever (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Mithridates' stereotypical Oriental appearance emphasizes his difference from Western characters, reinforcing the visual binary.

The use of turbans to signify the subservience of Eastern figures occurs when Egyptian nobles appear before Cleopatra to swear fealty (*Cleopatra*, 1963). In *Alexander* (2004), the aforementioned Mughal-appearing Persians are contrasted with the clean-shaven Greeks (*Alexander*, 2004). However, it should be noted that this particular depiction is rooted in historicity as Alexander the Great did indeed mandate shaving in his troops. Still it reinforces the visual binary that these two sides are different at their core, and have always been different throughout history. The bearded Persians are depicted as somber and menacing, while the clean-shaven Greeks appear heroic and zealous (*Alexander*, 2004). Arabs in traditional Orientalist garb appear once again in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2004), though this is also another less historically exaggerated case of Eastern garb depictions, considering Crusader Arab dressing habits (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2004). Saladin's appearance, in particular, emphasizes his status as the "formidable Other" (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2004). The depiction of Arabs in Orientalist attire (though rather historical) once again highlights their antagonistic role, reinforcing stereotypes about perpetual Eastern hostility.

This extends to mythological films, as the Djinn in *Clash of the Titans* (2010) are immediately reminiscent of "Orientals", despite exchanging no direct dialogue with the main characters. Supernatural beings originating from the Pre-Islamic Arab mythological world, the Djinn's garb separates them from other mythical forces, in particular, the "Greek" gods and their traditional Western raiment. Aside from being undead sorcerers who speak in a guttural unintelligible language, it is their choice of classic Oriental attire (turbans and flowing robes)

which adds to their association with a menacing and different “Orient” (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010). This is even further demonstrated when the lead Djinn is credited as “Sheikh Suleiman”. While mythological and not historical, the film itself is not an accurate retelling of Greek mythology, and the Arab-resembling Djinn, borrowed from Arabian mythology, are an original addition to the myth of Perseus. As with *300* (2006) and *10,000 BC* (2008), the supernatural force is instantly “Otherized” by associating it cosmetically with the East through clothing. Even in a mythological version of historical Greece, there exists a mystical, turbaned “Eastern” people which pose a threat to the Greeks.

Assassins in *Noah* (2014) are the only characters depicted as turbaned, despite the various range of attire portrayed in the film. The stereotype persists that if a character is evil, he will likely be dressed this way (*Noah*, 2014). This persists in *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), as the assassins sent to kill Moses are also depicted as turbaned and garbed in classic Orientalist attire, embodying the trope of Oriental treachery (*Exodus: Gods and Kings*, 2014). Once again, *300* (2006) is rife with this imagery, such as the Persian emissary’s stereotypical attire (combining Arabic, Persian, and Indian elements) and fearful expression contrasting sharply with the bold, resolute Spartans (*300*, 2006). The film utilizes both visual effects and dialogue to establish a moral dichotomy between the two characters. The emissary and his fellow envoys gallop into Sparta, bearing hostile expressions astride diabolical black steeds. In a single sweeping shot, the Persians are depicted as inherently savage before a single word is spoken. Once the conversation begins, the emissary is revealed to be crass, misogynistic, and aggressive – traits which are extended beyond him as characteristics of the entire Orient. This diplomatic mission culminates in the emissary’s execution as the entire Persian party is hurled into a well, seemingly justified by their verbal transgression.

During this scene, a shot of particular value for this analysis occurs, highlighting a visualization of extreme fear from a Persian envoy dressed in highly stereotypical garb. All that remains visible between turban and veil are the emissary's fearful eyes, communicating to the viewer the aforementioned distinct Oriental "look" and the inherent cowardice associated with it (300, 2006). This is contrasted throughout the film against the Spartans who exude masculinity and strength while sporting unwavering bold gazes, showing resolve even in the face of death. Furthermore, Persian soldiers in black robes, turbans, and silent demeanour are depicted as menacing, aligning with the stereotypical image of Eastern enemies (300, 2006). In the 2014 sequel, Xerxes initially appears less traditionally "Oriental", with a more noble appearance, but his transformation into an effeminate, demon-like figure reinforces the stereotype of Eastern decadence and menace (300: Rise of an Empire, 2014). These scenes demonstrate how historical films could potentially utilize stereotypically Orientalist garb to perpetuate biased associations by contributing to the cultural reservoir of stereotypes. This is especially worth consideration with the heuristic model (and especially the Conjunction Fallacy), as many of the characters garbed in traditional "Oriental" attire act aggressively and/or immorally. It is a very highly prevalent trope (occurring over 30 times), which could aid in the perpetuation of heuristic fallacies, such as being biased to perceive turbaned and bearded individuals as more likely to be aggressive than not.

## **6.5 Cold War Symbolism and Anti-Communist Imagery**

This theme focuses on how films from the Cold War era use visual and narrative elements to depict oppressive and tyrannical forces as being symbolized, in particular, by the colour red. As discussed in Chapter 5, the association between these forces and the "communist hordes" of the Soviet Union would likely have propagated throughout the cultural reservoir of implicit

stereotypes, with Orientalist films serving as historical precedent for present actions against tyrannical regimes. Adding to the previous discussion, it is important to also consider how anti-communist imagery is perpetuated through visual elements, particularly that of costume design. By using red imagery and clothing wherever possible regarding “evil empire”, this particular trope is represented throughout Cold War era historical and Orientalist film. In *Hercules Unchained* (1959), soldiers garbed in red mercilessly strike down Omphale’s previous lover. The use of red clothing for these soldiers likely symbolizes a connection to Communist or Soviet forces, reflecting anti-Communist sentiments by associating red with villainy and brutality (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959). The first visual of the Persians in *The 300 Spartans* (1962) shows them adorned in red and black, with the red symbolizing Soviet aesthetic.

Their portrayal as soulless, drone-like soldiers underscores their dehumanization and aligns with Cold War-era fears of Communist forces as oppressive and unfeeling (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). The bulk of the Persian army is dressed in red, visually reminiscent of a “Red Army.” This trope extends to Biblical film as tyrannical forces descending from Cain are depicted wearing red, continuing the theme of associating red with evil and tyranny (*The Bible: In the Beginning*, 1966). The identical appearance of these forces, including their baldness and broad shoulders, reinforces their dehumanization and aligns with Cold War-era fears of a monolithic, oppressive Communist regime.

Furthermore, red is the colour of sin, as Mary Magdalene, the first hyper-sexualized character in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), wears a scarlet dress. While thematically associated with sexuality and adultery, the prototypical trope of the colour red associated with sinful tyranny is also present. This is further reinforced by her switch to white robes (and acceptance of the West) upon her repentance and covenant with Christ (*The Greatest Story Ever*

*Told*, 1965). The use of red to signify tyranny and dehumanization throughout historical film is only of average prevalence (with 8 occurrences). However, it should be noted that all were concentrated within the Cold War era films. The films use these visual elements to contrast Western values of freedom and individuality against the perceived threat of Communist oppression and uniformity, thereby contributing to the Cold War cultural reservoir regarding stereotypes of Red Communists and the West's duty to confront them.

## **6.6 “Western Civility” versus “Eastern Barbarism”**

One core prototypical theme across the entire spectrum of historical, Orientalist films is the stark visual binary of the civilized West and barbarous East. This theme is reinforced by contrasting the inherent nobility and superiority of Western characters with the primitive, savage, and inferior portrayals of Eastern characters. It underlines a narrative of Western moral and civilizational superiority, whether in the context of heroism, virtue, or even strategic prowess. Eastern characters frequently have an emphasis placed on their barbarism, savagery, and technological or cultural inferiority, while Western characters are depicted as noble, honourable, and technologically or morally advanced. This trope is apparent in *The Robe* (1953), where Marcellus proclaims his disdain for Jerusalem and its inhabitants as a "stiff-necked" people, voicing the perceived barbarism of the Levant (*The Robe*, 1953). Marcellus' ignorance about Jerusalem's location and his father's derogatory remark about Palestine, calling it a "pest hole", exemplifies the Orientalist view of the East as a place of inherent backwardness, rebellion, and barbarism, fitting into the mid 20th-century geopolitical context where such views were prevalent (*The Robe*, 1953). This reinforces the binary of the civilized West versus the savage East, presenting the Levant as a chaotic and unruly region that contrasts with the order and righteousness of the Western protagonists. This aligns with the theme of Western superiority by

contrasting the 'savage' nature of the East with the civilized nature of the West. In *The 300 Spartans* (1962), the portrayal of the Persian army as "fierce, savage, bloodthirsty, and merciless" emphasizes their barbarity. This description underscores the stark contrast between the disciplined, honourable Spartans and the unruly, cruel Persians (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962).

This perceived barbarity is highlighted several times throughout *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), where the initial mistreatment of Lawrence and his Arab helper reflects Western prejudices towards Arabs, viewing them as inferior and primitive (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Once again, though not dealing with the ancient world, T.E Lawrence's historical role as the quintessential Orientalist cited by Said warrants *Lawrence of Arabia's* inclusion. Lawrence's defense of the Arab boy introduces a complex narrative of racial hierarchies but ultimately reinforces the Western perspective of Arabs as "barbaric" despite their capabilities. The American journalist's reaction to the use of a sword highlights the shock of encountering Arab barbarism, emphasizing a divide between the "civilized" West and the "savage" East (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). This scene underscores the prevailing stereotypes of Arabs as primitive. Indeed, Lawrence realizes that he is alienated from British society upon returning to his post, demonstrating once more the deep-seated divisions between Western and Eastern identities. The squash courts which Lawrence no longer has affinity for symbolize the Western "civilized" world that Lawrence no longer feels comfortable in after his experiences with the Arabs (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962).

In *Cleopatra* (1963), Pompey's severed head is presented to Julius Caesar, and Caesar's reaction highlights the barbarity attributed to Eastern characters, with the act of deception and decapitation denounced on-screen as savage and dishonourable (*Cleopatra*, 1962). The involvement of Nubian servants further associates savagery with darker-skinned characters,



reinforcing racial hierarchies. In *Alexander* (2004), Aristotle's comment about the Persians being an "inferior race" despite their vast control reflects entrenched Western prejudices concerning the barbarism of the Eastern other (*Alexander*, 2004). The film's portrayal of Persians as cowardly and inferior, juxtaposed with Alexander's heroism, reinforces the notion of Western superiority over Eastern cultures.

Similarly in *300* (2006), the Spartans, and by extension the Greeks, (and the entire West), are shown as morally obligated to defend against the Persian expansion, exaggerating the Orientalist theme of Eastern barbarism representing a threat to Western liberty. With regards to "submission to the will of Xerxes", the portrayal of Persia as a force demanding submission reinforces the Orientalist stereotype of Eastern rulers as tyrannical and aggressive. This supports the narrative of Western resistance against Eastern oppression, presenting the Persian aggression as emblematic of Eastern barbarism and the Western struggle as a fight for freedom and justice (*300*, 2006). The monstrous Persians are further showcased as adorning trees with Greek corpses, reinforcing the moral and cultural superiority of the Western Spartans, once again depicting the Persians as not only a military threat, but also a moral one (*300*, 2006).

Though mythological and not historical, *10,000 BC* (2008) taps generously into the cultural reservoir of Orientalist stereotypes and utilizes immediate visual associations to reinforce the idea of Eastern barbarism. The reveal of the "4-legged demons" being stereotypical garbed Easterners who participate in barbarism against the White protagonists' tribe exemplifies the Orientalist trope of Eastern "savagery" and Western "purity" (*10,000 BC*, 2008). This prototypical trope indeed appears to have become well cemented within the cultural reservoir, as it has a high degree of prevalence (over 10 occurrences), therefore it can be seen as possessing high representativeness and availability. By portraying the East as barbaric, Western actions

against it may be perceived as more historically justified, reinforced through the prevalent stereotypical associations within culture, concerning the civilized West and savage East.

### 6.7 “The Exotic, Decadent, and Monolithic Orient”

Expanding on the discussion from section 5.14, this prototypical trope focuses on how historical films use stereotypical visuals, concerning race, dress, and setting, to emphasize the land of mysticism, ostentatiousness, and exoticism that is the “Orient”. Serving as an important set piece in *Cleopatra* (1962), the parade in Rome is laden with egregious Orientalist imagery, emphasizing exotic eroticism and lavishness (*Figure 8*), darker-skinned individuals in ceremonial roles, reflecting the stereotype of Eastern savagery contrasted with Western civilization (*Figure 9*); mysticism and minstrelism, with black jesters (*Figure 10*) performing in an exoticized manner (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Elements of sorcery and supernatural portrayals (*Figure 11*) are fused with exorbitant wealth and ostentatiousness (*Figure 12*), while elements of hyper-femininity and elegance (*Figure 13*) follow the decadent displays (*Cleopatra*, 1963).



**Figure 8.** Egyptian dancers during Cleopatra’s Roman parade. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.



**Figure 9.** Shamanistic Egyptians representing “Eastern” occultism. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.

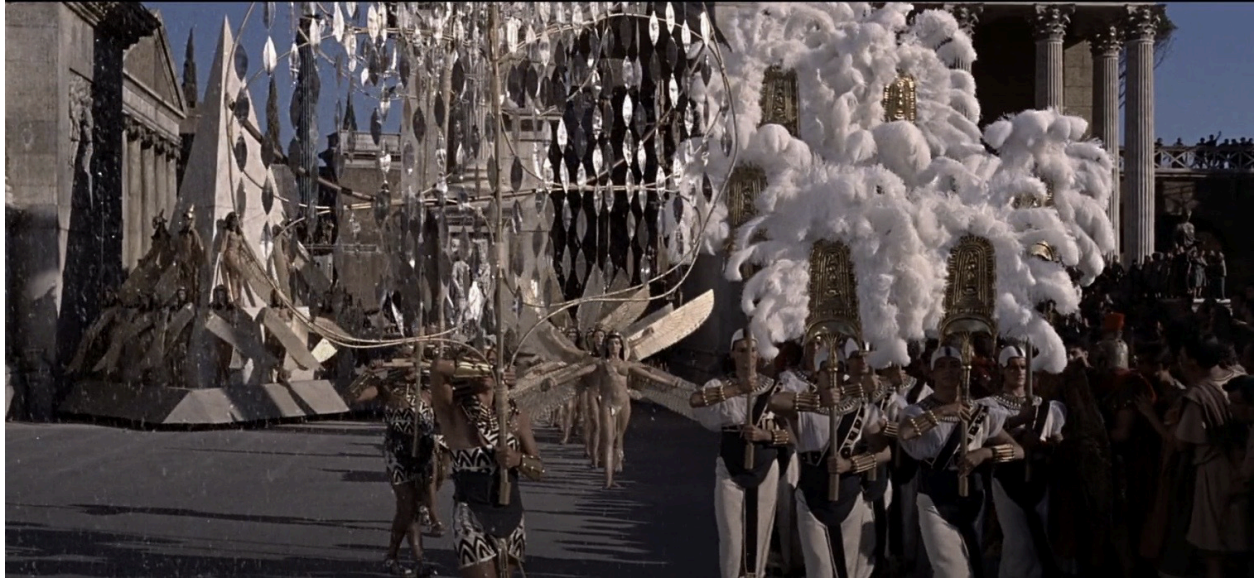


**Figure 10.** Egyptian “jesters” performing for a Roman audience. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.



**Figure 11.** Further displays of Egyptian mysticism and magical ritualism. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.





**Figure 12.** The opulence and lavishness of Egypt on display before all of Rome. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.

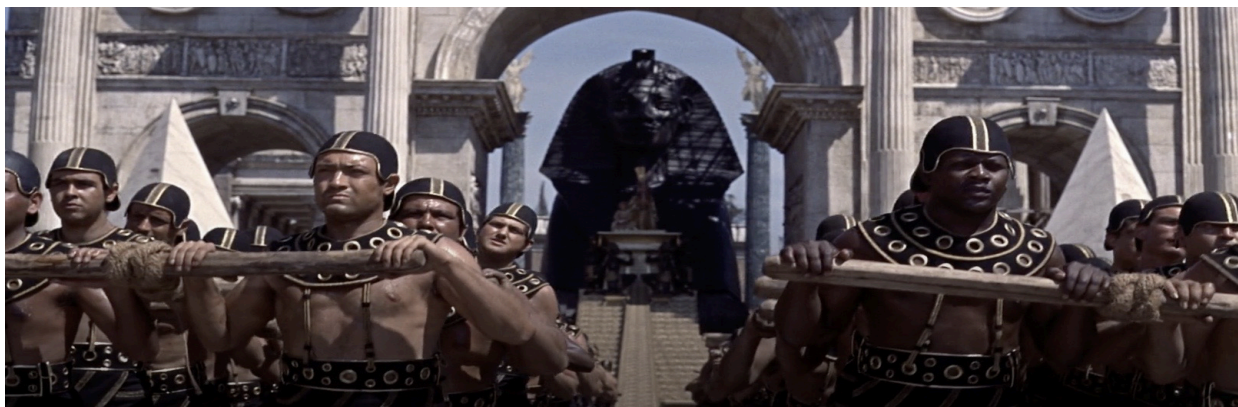


**Figure 13.** Golden dancers portray the combined representation of Orientalist Egypt as hyper-feminine and ostentatious. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.

Finally the darkest-skinned individuals are positioned directly under Cleopatra, with some raising her up, (*Figure 14;15*), illustrating a clear visual racial dichotomous hierarchy within the East (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Cleopatra's parade encapsulates the visual stereotypes consistent among historical and Orientalist films, and cements the perception of an exotic,



decadent, and barbaric “Orient”. Indeed, this was foreshadowed by Cleopatra’s introduction, smuggled into her own palace inside an Oriental rug. Furthermore, her East Asian food taster is portrayed as treasonous, reinforcing the notion of deceit being inherently associated with the East (*Cleopatra*, 1963). The symbolic nature of Oriental deception and exoticism, combined with the portrayal of women manipulating through seduction, plays into stereotypes of the Orient as decadent and duplicitous compared to Western standards.



**Figure 14.** Darker-skinned slaves physically haul Cleopatra through the parade. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.



**Figure 15.** Cleopatra and Caesarion hoisted up by the darkest-skinned members of her entire entourage. *Cleopatra* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013) Digital Enlargement.

In addition to the exoticization and displays of wasteful decadence, the East is often interpreted and depicted as a monolith. This singular, exotic and subordinate entity has its diversity and complexity diminished in favour of reinforcing Western superiority and control. This occurs in *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), when during the “Parade of Nations”, a variety of Eastern nations are mistaken for one another by the main protagonist in a way that conflates their distinct cultures into a single, indistinguishable group. The bureaucratic confusion between Syria and Egypt reflects an Orientalist perspective that treats the East as a monolithic entity rather than a region with diverse cultures and histories (*The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1964). The portrayal emphasizes the exotic and perceivably inscrutable nature of Eastern nations, perpetuating the broader theme that they are too complex or chaotic and must be subdued by Western control.

These perceptions extend to the realm of Orientalist Biblical cinema. One particular depiction of a robed and turbaned character sitting in a brothel, while sitar music plays in the background, accentuates the stereotype of the East as a place of moral corruption and sensuality (*The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988). The exotic, decadent, and monolithic Orient therefore showcases itself to have very high prevalence (over 20 occurrences) in historical and Orientalist film, portraying Eastern characters and tactics as barbaric, supernatural, and dishonourable. Orientalist films may therefore perpetuate this implicit bias through the cultural reservoir via availability and representativeness heuristics, using these exaggerated visual stereotypes to emphasize a perceived moral and tactical superiority of the historical “West”, while highlighting the “Eastern Other” as a fundamental threat.

## 6.8 Desolate Landscape Representing “Oriental Otherness”

This next visual prototypical trope is focused on the geographical imagery invoked by Orientalist and historical film. Tying the moral geography of the Orient to a particular stereotypical visual setting is very effective for providing the audience with quick mental access to narrative themes associated with the location. When one observes desolate desert in *Alexander* (2004), it is an immediate cue that the setting has shifted to Persia, even though Ancient Persia had a wide range of geographical scenery other than desert available for potential depiction (*Alexander*, 2004). By depicting Eastern lands as inhospitable, barren, or otherwise undesirable compared to the lush, civilized West, the desolate landscape acts as a metaphor for the perceived barbarism and hostility of the Orient. Stereotypes concerning Eastern visual, geographic environments are reinforced and the cultural reservoir is potentially bolstered yet again with another prototypical example of the entire Middle East being a monolithic desert.

This desert (and anyone from it, dressed as if they are from it, or looking as if they are from it) is perceived as hostile, and the clash between East and West is often symbolized through striking contrasts on desolate, desert battlefields as in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2004). The barren landscape underscores the perceived harshness and hostility of the East, contrasting with the more developed and culturally advanced West. The use of desolate terrain as a backdrop once again reinforces the binary opposition between the civilized West and the barbaric East (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2004). *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) evokes a particularly mystical, exotic, and romanticized notion of the East with sweeping shots of the desert supported with an Orientalist score combining common Arabian musical patterns (riffs) and Western instrumentation. This combination represents an older world, one full of unknowns and mystery, where its inhabitants are just as dubious, captivating, and difficult to trust as the desert itself

(*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962). Furthermore, McGeough comments that deserts in ancient epics often function as liminal spaces “outside of society”, where “cultural norms no longer constrain behaviour” (McGeough 2022, 147). For Lawrence, this perception insinuates ultimate freedom, while simultaneously reinforcing the audience’s Orientalist notions concerning the primitiveness of the Arab tribes he galvanises into action.

In *Noah* (2014), the portrayal of Cain’s descendants inhabiting the scorched Earth desert area, along with the visual overlay mentioning Cain’s cities being in the “East”, further emphasizes the desolation associated with the Orient. The contrast between the lush land of Noah and the scorched land of the East reinforces the stereotype of Eastern lands as harsh and destructive, while also portraying Eastern figures as monstrous and threatening (*Noah*, 2014). This prototypical trope of utilizing desolate landscapes serves to depict the Orient as inhospitable. *Alexander* (2004) and *Noah* (2014) portray Eastern lands as barren and hostile, potentially contributing to prevalent implicit stereotypical associations within culture (i.e., a “culture in mind”) of the Orient as a harsh and unwelcoming environment. Conflict is directly symbolized with references to desert territory, as apparent with the mythological Djinn being “desert cutthroats” (*Clash of the Titans*, 2010). *Kingdom of Heaven* (2004) and *Alexander* (2004) both symbolize the inherent opposition and hostility between East and West, emphasizing the perceived barbarism of the Orient via visual references to the desert. This prototypical trope occurs 5 times (average prevalence), depicting desolate landscapes and environments to reinforce the Orientalist view of the East as fundamentally “Other” and often hostile to the West.

## **6.9 Animalization of “East and West”**

The final prototypical trope which occurred a significant number of times throughout the collected films was the bestialization of both the East and West, each with their negative and



positive connotations, respectively. The archetype of the East as a “primitive beast” features prominently in historical and Orientalist film, depicting Eastern characters and cultures as primitive, irrational, and animalistic. This trope reinforces Western superiority by contrasting the supposedly civilized and heroic West with the barbaric and monstrous East. By portraying Eastern cultures as hostile, chaotic, and sub-human, these narratives perpetuate colonial attitudes and justify Western dominance. In contrast, Samson’s strength is compared to a lion, with his unarmed defeat of the beast symbolizing the divine right to overcome violent, oppressive forces (*Samson and Delilah*, 1949).

In *Alexander* (2004), the initial comparison of Indian monkeys to primitive humans reinforces the animalistic stereotype. Although satirical, this scene still references the common trope of dehumanizing Eastern peoples by equating them with animals, demonstrating stereotypical notions of Eastern primitivism (*Alexander*, 2004). This is further exacerbated with Alexander’s Macedonian soldiers referring to Indian kingdoms as “crazy monkey tribes”, emphasizing the irrationality and savagery of the East, once more aligning with the representative notion of Eastern cultures as primitive and chaotic (*Alexander*, 2004). The Persians are animalized even more directly, when a lion’s roar accompanies Alexander raising his sword for the assault on Darius, while a fly is heard buzzing as the camera pans to the Persian forces (*Alexander*, 2004). The auditory cues evoke a sense of savagery and irritation, contributing to the portrayal of the East as primitive and pestilent.

This negative bestialization is reminiscent of the experiences of journalist Robert Fisk in the Gulf War, cited by Derek Gregory. As discussed in Chapter 2, Fisk recalled American journalists describing the assault on nameless Iraqi “fighters” as a “giant hunt”, in which “the

Iraqis were driven ahead of us like animals” (Gregory 2004, 165). Indeed, frequent analogies reduced Iraqis to “cockroaches”, “sheep”, “sitting ducks”, “rabbits in a sack”, and “fish in a barrel”, demonstrating the persistence of the animalization trope in Orientalist rhetoric. As remarked by Gregory, these metaphors reached their climax in the “turkey shoot” in February 1991, where, maintaining the theme of dehumanization, Fisk recalled witnessing a camera crew filming wild dogs ravaging the corpses of Iraqi soldiers (Gregory 2004, 167).

Returning to *Alexander*, the animalized binary of East and West itself is best encapsulated in one particular frame (*Figure 16*). Depicting Alexander embroiled in his Indian campaign, this shot is particularly emblematic of Orientalism due to the stark visual contrast it presents. East and West are dichotomized not just through race, gender, or garb, but through bestial representations. In the direct confrontation between horse and elephant, the familiar Western hero faces the exotic unknown (*Alexander*, 2004). The Indian animal is perceived as not only monstrous, but symbolic of the Eastern titan which must be conquered by the West. Although Bucephalus, Alexander’s horse, is smaller and less threatening, his courage in standing up to the colossal brute representing the East is characteristic of Western fortitude. Animalization is therefore utilized to portray an effective visual binary concerning East and West, perpetuating a consistent Orientalist stereotype in the process.



**Figure 16.** Alexander the Great, astride his horse Bucephalus, confronts an elephant-riding Indian commander during the Battle of the Hydaspes. *Alexander* (Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2014) Digital Enlargement.

Finally, in *300* (2006), the “beast metaphor” discussed throughout Chapter 5 is used to animalize the Persians as a force ready to “devour Greece” (*300*, 2006). Depicted as a beast threatening Western civilization, the Persians (and broader East) are embodied as an existential threat which must be defeated to preserve Western values (*300*, 2006). As proclaimed by the narrator Dilios, “Now as then a beast approaches. This beast is an army of slaves, vast beyond imagining. Ready to devour tiny Greece. Ready to snuff out the world's one hope for reason and justice” (*300*, 2006). Yet despite its immense size which dwarfs the Greek force, the Persian beast can be defeated in a similar manner to the aforementioned wolf. Leonidas utilizes his cunning to lure the wolf into a small passage where its size is rendered useless before dispatching it. This metaphor is then applied directly to the Persians, as Leonidas outwits Xerxes by luring his army into the pass at Thermopylae where “in that narrow corridor, their numbers will count for nothing” (*300*, 2006).

Facilitated by the potential effects of representativeness and availability on implicit

stereotype perception, the audience may indeed perceive the Persians as monstrous and sub-human. In contrast, the heroic, rational Greeks must defeat the threatening Beast of the East. Leonidas' strategic victory over the massive Persian army in the narrow pass of Thermopylae symbolizes the triumph of Greek ingenuity over the brute force of the "beastly" Persians. This example of an Eastern bestial portrayal once again cements the primitive nature of the Eastern forces as a prototypical, and rather prevalent (8 instances of occurrence), trope within the cultural reservoir of stereotypes (300, 2006).

#### **6.10 Cultural Reservoir of Stereotypes (Visual Tropes)**

Just as in the previous chapter, through analysis of these prototypical tropes, one can begin to visualize inputs feeding prevalent implicit stereotypical associations within culture, (i.e., Hinton's culture in mind), concerning the narrative of an eternal dichotomy between East and West. Stereotypes concerning prototypical visual tropes were focused on in this chapter, encompassing physical appearance, race, attire, and geographical settings. These tropes again contain high degrees of both prototypicality (representativeness) and prevalence (availability).

While there are many active elements, visual information is the most readily passed data during films (one "watches" movies), and thereby the significance of visual stereotypical data in particular has been emphasized throughout this chapter to elucidate how viewing historical and This underscores the importance of observing how stereotypical tropes could potentially be perpetuated through culture by way of heuristics, including representativeness and availability.

Nine tropes were analyzed throughout this chapter, and the most prevalent was the notion of a consistent visual dichotomy between heroic whiteness and sinister "Otherness" associated with "Oriental" facial features and darker skin. This central visual trope influences other elements of Orientalist historical film, such as depictions of the intersectionality between power,

politics, and race. Alongside stereotypical Oriental attire, dramatized desert settings, and the animalization of “historical” figures, these visual tropes are utilized to portray the Orient (and “Orientals”) as exotic, barbaric, and, consequently, easily identifiable and distinct from the West.

It should indeed be noted that the implicit biases, which result from these visual stereotypical tropes, are likely not limited in their effect to perceptions of individual “Easterners” or “Westerners”. Instead, these biases reflect the imaginative geography associated with the broader “Orient”, thus, the cultural reservoir of stereotypical perceptions concerning the Middle East could have potentially profound geopolitical implications.

## **Chapter 7: Personifying the “Other” – Embodiment, Gender, and Sexuality**

This chapter concludes the analysis of prototypical tropes concerning encounters between the “Eastern” and “Western” world in historical film, cliché characteristics which often adhere to a fundamental Orientalist paradigm. This investigation has once again been performed within the framework of a “culture in mind”, in which implicit biases are perceived as being transmitted through cultural media such as cinema, as opposed to inherent predispositions to prejudice (Hinton 2017, 7). Within this cinematic paradigm, the noble Western protagonist is morally superior and righteous, displaying control and virtue. The East, however, is deviant, decadent, and tyrannical, actively oppressing that which Melani McAlister refers to as “The People” - “Western” individuals or the progenitors of Christians (McAlister 2005, 4). The sweeping Orientalist narrative pervading these films is, whether intentionally or not, reminiscent of perspectives such as Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* in which a monolithic, authoritarian East threatens the free, democratic West.

To this end, the prototypicality and prevalence of common tropes regarding an antithetical East/West dichotomy were investigated once again. In addition to the geopolitical focus in Chapter 5 and the discussion of visual tropes in Chapter 6, this chapter explores various critical theory perspectives to address stereotypes concerning embodiment, gender, and sexuality. This is significant, as homosexuality in historical film is often associated with moral corruption, while femininity and disability are linked with treason and deception. These personified tropes are rooted in a foundational perception of Eastern “deviance”, and contribute to an implicit cultural understanding of the “East” as devoid of heteronormative masculinity. This chapter demonstrates how implicit biases associated with embodied stereotypical tropes concerning

gender, disability, sexuality, and queer masculinity may further propagate the historical characterization of the “East” as alien, feminized, and inept.

The methodology remains the same as Chapters 5 & 6, this time yielding six prototypical tropes of high prevalence. As with the previous chapters, these prevalent and prototypical visual tropes have been analyzed to elucidate potential implicit bias and stereotype formation within the aforementioned cognitive psychological paradigm. These core tropes may therefore be explained, using heuristic models, as contributing to the cultural reservoir of stereotypes available for perception concerning representations of embodiment, gender, and sexuality relating to the East and West. This cultural reservoir of stereotypes may then perpetuate implicit biases concerning the West and the (Middle) East through the medium of historical and Orientalist film, once again demonstrating the significance of Hinton’s “culture in mind”.

| <b>Stereotype</b>                                                             | <b>Number of Occurrences</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| “Deviant Sexuality” as a Marker of Decadence, Tyranny, and Oriental Otherness | 24                           |
| Queer Masculinity and Homonationalism                                         | 12                           |
| Embodiment and the Spectacle of “Deformity”: Demonizing the Disabled          | 21                           |
| Feminization of the East                                                      | 12                           |

|                                                                   |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| “Women, like the East, seduce and corrupt Men”                    | 11 |
| “Civilized versus Barbarian”: Sexual Exploitation and Moral Decay | 13 |

### 7.1 “Deviant Sexuality” as a Marker of Decadence, Tyranny, and Oriental Otherness

The first core prototypical trope revolves around deviant sexuality, often portrayed as a symbol of moral decay, oppression, and the feminization of the Orient or tyrannical regimes. Depictions of sexual deviance are commonplace in historical films, even amongst Hays Code productions, when this trope would not have been easy to portray on the Hollywood screen. Historical films, however, were often afforded greater license due to the depicted lewd acts being perceived as factual, many of which adhered to Orientalist frameworks. Throughout many of the 1950s and 60s-era historical and biblical Orientalist epics, coding of these themes had to remain subtle, with lasciviousness often implied instead of being outright displayed. In recent decades, however, themes associated with the trope of deviant sexuality have come to be portrayed much more openly in Orientalist historical films.

In these films, decadent rulers and Eastern cultures are depicted as sexually perverse, indulgent, and morally bankrupt, contrasting with the supposed purity, virtue, and restraint of Western/Christian civilizations. This trope reinforces ideas of the East or oppressive powers as sensual, tyrannical, and hedonistic, while the West or righteous forces are characterized by moral superiority, control, and virtue. Women, homosexuality, and sensuality are often associated with the downfall of oppressive and “barbarian” civilizations, all while depicting decadent rulers who



embody sexual excess and moral decay. Tyrannical nations are often eroded from within as the ruthless elite occupy their time with salaciousness, blind not only to their own moral corruption, but also the deterioration of their empire.

Core examples of this are found in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) where Empress Poppea bathes in asses' milk (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). This scene establishes the sexual decadence of the Roman elite, with Poppea bathing in milk while common people struggle for basic necessities. The luxury and indulgence symbolizes the moral corruption of tyrannical rulers. The milk, a sign of excess, also serves as a marker of gendered hedonism, with Poppea embodying the “dangerous, sexualized woman” (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). Further examples of the oppressors performing “deviant” sexuality occur after Poppea commands her maid Dacia to strip and join her in the bath, while the camera pans to show two cats licking the milk (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). With the cats representing the Empress and her maid in the bath, animalization is used to imply Poppea and Dacia’s lesbian behaviour, thereby establishing a powerful association between same-sex attraction and corrupt Roman power.

The nature of homoeroticism is perceived as “deviant” because of its very link to being practiced by those seen as persecuting “The People” (such as Nero and Poppea in *The Sign of the Cross*). The connection between depraved sexuality and fascistic violence is further explored when Mercia’s parents are described as having been burned as torches at Nero’s orgy (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). The burning is both a violent spectacle and an indulgence of Roman cruelty. Meanwhile, Poppea’s remark about a “Christian wanton” connects Christians with sexual depravity, weaponizing sexual insults from both sides, but primarily showing Romans as, (not only sexually), but morally corrupt (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). Further connections between homosexuality and sexual depravity (and in turn, decadent tyranny) are inferred during the

“Dance of the Naked Moon” performed to seduce Mercia by the Roman Ancaria (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). The more tyrannical the people, the more willing they are to engage in “deviant” sexuality, including homosexuality. In contrast, Christianity is portrayed as the only defense against both this deviant sexuality, and the corrupt tyranny it insinuates.

Ancaria employs lesbian lasciviousness as a tool of the empire, with the goal of corrupting Mercia; however, the Christian hymns drown out the seductive Roman music. This not only cements the association between homosexuality, sexual deviance, and imperial tyranny, but also symbolizes a broader battle between virtue and sinful lust where Christianity’s moral purity overcomes Roman decadence (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). As an ironic twist, it should be noted that, outside of the film, the HUAC also sought to omit the “Dance of the Naked Moon” for its lewdness. After the film’s initial release, and following the introduction of the Motion Picture Production Code (i.e., the “Hays Code”), which mandated censorship of films, Ancaria and Mercia’s lesbian sequence was among several scenes deemed too deviant, and therefore cut retroactively from the film for any subsequent re-releases.

Homosexuality is further linked with deviance and oppression when Nero’s feminine, scantily clad young male slave gazes longingly at the Emperor as he eats a rose petal while watching Christians fed to lions (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1939). The Roman gladiatorial arena is a common place for depicting this sexual deviance and oppressive decadence, as the Christian’s enemies are often shown to enjoy viewing violence against Christians with a lustful vigour in the gladiatorial arena. In *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), the sexualized nature of the gladiator fight represents violence as sexual gratification for tyrants like Messalina who are clearly seduced by the spectacle of brutality (*Demetrius and the Gladiators*, 1954). This scene reiterates the theme of a sexually depraved Roman society, using sensuality as a means to control and

corrupt the pure. Roman decadence is further emphasized by lustful dancers seeking to pervert the virtuous Christians, who (of course) resist temptation (*Demetrius and the Gladiators*, 1954). Sexuality and violence consistently converge, linking power, oppression, and sexual excess. In *Hercules Unchained* (1959), lesbianism is once again implied (this time with swans) in the witch Omphale's pool scene (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959).

Femininity is not just tied with homosexuality, but with a dangerous and perverse kind of deviance involving witchcraft, reinforcing the trope of corrupted sexuality. The foreign, Eastern woman is a lesbian and a witch, so once more homosexuality, mysticism, and perversion are tied with the Orient. This is also connected with the broader Orientalist feminization of the East which is explored as its own prototypical trope in later pages. Indeed, homosexuality and femininity are often both noted as leading to corruption and deceit. The sexual depravity of decadent rulers is once again displayed by Herodias' seductive dance following the announcement of John the Baptist's execution (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965). She represents the dangerous and sexually corrupt nature of Oriental women in power.

Furthermore, Mary Magdalen's initial hyper-sexualization (as well as her aforementioned scarlet dress with Cold War connotations) is a clear symbol of sinful femininity and deviance (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965). Her visual transformation in wearing white robes after converting to Christianity symbolizes her repentance and return to virtue, also coded as Westernization (purity, morality, restraint).

In *The Bible: In the Beginning* (1966), Sodom and Gomorrah once again fulfill their roles representing the foundational archetype of Biblical hedonism, debauchery, and sexual depravity. Orgies on demonic idols once more showcase sexual depravity as an important component of

tyrannical civilizations (*The Bible: In the Beginning*, 1966). Furthermore, Eve's temptation of Adam into biting the Forbidden Fruit is depicted as highly sexual, once again reinforcing the idea of women's sexuality as corruptive and deviant (*The Bible: In the Beginning*, 1966).

Aristotle's assertions in *Alexander* (2004) align with Orientalist stereotypes of portraying the East as sexually deviant, including mentions of "barbaric" homosexuality (*Alexander*, 2004). He proclaims that the "Oriental races are barbaric and castrate boys for sexual pleasure" (*Alexander*, 2004). Easterners are once more immoral, cruel, and sexually deviant, which plays into post-9/11 fears of the East as a site of danger and corruption. Darius' effeminate eunuch Bagoas embodies another representation of the hyper-sexualized East straying from Western (Christian) sexual norms, framing the eunuch's sexuality as aberrant by nature. As a slave of the Persian king Darius, framing Bagoas as deviant reinforces the otherness and weakness of the Eastern tyrants. Alexander's own relationship with him is therefore contrasted against his earlier implied homosexual affection with Hephaestion. Bagoas represents deviant, lustful homosexuality, while the relationship with Hephaestion is framed as one of virtue and knowledge (*Alexander*, 2004).

This dichotomy of virtuous, male, same-sex relations based on love, and "deviant" homosexuality based on physical lust is referenced by Angelos Chaniotis. He discusses Oliver Stone's acknowledgement of not visually depicting intimate relations between Alexander and Hephaestion, framing their same-sex relationship as one not rooted in physical sexuality (Chaniotis 2008, 195). According to Stone, "it need not be homosexual in that sense of the word. It's men loving other men. And that was more important than men having sex with other men" (Chaniotis 2008, 195). McGeough further comments that Stone wished to portray the kind of "brotherly love" that is historically associated with the Greek world, "without forcing that

relationship to be...consistent with contemporary models of male relationship” (McGeough 2022, 286). This fraternal homosexuality, “when men lie together and knowledge is passed between them” is referenced by Aristotle as “pure and excellent” in contrast to the deviant homosexuality of the “barbaric Oriental races” who “castrate boys for sexual pleasure” (*Alexander*, 2004). Once again, this trope yet again illustrates the duality between a Western world, where intimate actions are imbued with inherent virtue, and a lecherous East, where homosexuality is synonymous with physicality, and therefore, deviant lust.

Deviant sexuality is used to further identify the already turban-clad “four-legged demons” as Orientalized Easterners when their stereotypically Oriental leader seeks to claim sex slaves (*10,000 BC*, 2008). This Eastern association with sexual slavery and immorality is emphasized further in *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), when a captive Greek refers to Artemesia as a “whore from the Eastern Seas” (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). Despite her Greek heritage, it is her Easternness that is insultingly associated with her perceived deviant sexuality. Indeed, to cement the point, she decapitates this captive and kisses his severed head, demonstrating her deviant, violent sexuality (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). As showcased by the various examples, sexual deviance as a hallmark of corrupt tyrannical powers has been a consistent prototypical trope throughout historical and Orientalist film.

Cinematic depictions of decadent, immoral, and sexually deviant tyrants have very high prevalence, (occurring over 30 times), thereby potentially contributing to the cultural reservoir of stereotypes and perpetuating a biased perception regarding the moral, virtuous West and the deviant, sinful East. Through this association, the contemporary Christian, (and American), “West” is therefore implied to be the inheritor of the same historical virtue which withstood the oppressive, and sexually perverse, forces of tyranny. As a consequence, hyper-sexuality and

non-heteronormative behaviour, such as Empress Poppea's implied lesbianism, become affiliated with moral decay; therefore, these implicit associations within historical films likely propagate biases concerning modern participants of these behaviours sharing the East's perceived sinful and perverse nature.

## **7.2 Queer Masculinity and Homonationalism**

As explored within the previous trope, a distinction is often drawn between male same-sex relations in the East and West, framing Western queer masculinity as righteous and indicative of progressivism, while Eastern homosexuality revolves around lust and barbarity. This trope aligns with Jasbir Puar's concept of "homonationalism" in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), demonstrating how queer identity may be co-opted into nationalism and imperialism, resulting in the othering of both domestic and foreign entities seen as incongruent with a given nationalist project. Puar highlights how dominant heteropatriarchal powers, such as the United States, situate their actions against Middle Eastern and Islamic terrorism within the framework of being perceived as a moral force for good. In her paradigm, American moral superiority has come to frame American actions as exceptional due to their inherent benevolence, exhibited by the purportedly progressive "Western" attitude towards queer rights.

Homonationalism is built on the generalized and reductive framework that "Western" (e.g., American) queers are themselves a monolith, symbolizing the modernity and progressiveness of the Western "moral geography". Within this paradigm, the focus is placed on "barbaric" and "backwards" regions such as the Middle East where LGBTQ individuals would be outright oppressed, while the marginalization of American queers is not considered. As a

result, American moral imperative is used to justify imperialistic behaviour on the world stage, such as invasions of sovereign Middle East nations, which, as per Derek Gregory's "architectures of enmity", have been framed as part of a uniform monolithic enemy within the War on Terror (Gregory 2004, 28). Puar describes a paradigm in which dominant, heteropatriarchal, imperialist powers co-opt queer movements into supporting nationalist projects, essentially perpetuating a message that "our invasion is justified because these terrorists are also killing "the gays", and we have "the gays" fighting them with us".

In *300* (2006), Leonidas' remark about Athenian "boy lovers" mustering the courage to face Xerxes' army is reminiscent of Puar's *Homonationalism*, as it communicates a hierarchy of cultural and sexual behaviour (*300*, 2006). Mocked relentlessly by the Spartans for their lack of dedication to militarism, the principal axis upon which the Athenians are ridiculed is their supposed feminine character and homosexuality. However, this "deviance" is used to further consolidate the West in a binary against the East, with Leonidas remarking derisively that, "if those philosophers and boy lovers have found that kind of nerve to fight", then Sparta must fight considering its reputation (*300*, 2006). Young male viewers are therefore presented with an implicit historical message; although traditional heteronormative masculinity is still a societal preference, not fighting the (Eastern) enemy is what makes you, in the derogatory sense, "gay".

To further demonstrate homonationalism in practice, Puar highlights a pertinent example when chronicling demonstrations at a 2005 "Free Palestine" rally in London. She describes signs carried by a queer activist group, OutRage!, proclaiming "Israel: stop persecuting Palestine! Palestine: Stop persecuting queers!" (Puar 2007, 17). While this may initially appear as neutral messaging criticising both sides of the conflict, it is very similar to Oliver Stone's critique in *Alexander*, as it once again perpetuates the notion of a backwards and repressive Oriental

monolith which oppresses queerness. In Puar's words, this proclamation "unfortunately reaffirms the modernity of Israel and Judaism and the monstrosity of Palestine and Islam" (Puar 2007, 17). Queer rights can therefore become co-opted to legitimize Israeli violations of human rights, sending an implicit message that "as long as Palestine (the East) oppresses queers, Israel (the West) can be expected to respond". Puar continues that:

Delineating Palestine as the site of queer oppression, oppression that is equated with the occupation of Palestine by Israel, effaces Israeli state persecution of queer Palestinians. This dialectical analogy, whereby the persecution of Palestinians by Israel is "like" Palestinian persecution of queers, does a tremendous disservice...and indeed refuses that one form of oppression might sustain or even create the conditions of possibility for the other (Puar 2007, 17-18).

Homonationalism therefore serves as a bridge which implicitly, but directly connects support of Israel with one perspective of queer activism.

Yet, curiously, since the onset of the ongoing Gaza War, another prominent association has been documented between queer advocacy and support for Palestine, often including Palestinian extremism. Movements such as "Queers for Palestine" have often puzzled observers, being likened sarcastically to "Chickens for KFC", and eliciting questions as to how ideologies this (seemingly) paradoxical could even arise (Abualsaud, 3). However, Puar indirectly provides a potential answer, as "Queers for Palestine" may be a reaction to, and a rejection of, the association between queer activism and imperialist foreign policy (i.e., homonationalism) in the "West". OutRage!'s homonationalism and the reactionary "anti-homonationalism" of "Queers for Palestine" are both grounded in a common association, built on queer identification with systems of oppression. However, they differ in their considerations of Orientalism.

The former aligns with Orientalist rhetoric, while the latter applies Said's critique, (albeit often to an extreme, militant level), by associating the imperialist forces which depict the East as



a monolithic, backwards, “Other” with the same heteropatriarchal systems that generalize queer individuals. Queer rights is positioned on the same continuum as Palestinian liberation, which frames imperialism, settler colonialism, and interventionist militarism as upholding collective systems of oppression. Palestinian persecution of the LGBTQ community is not denied by the movement, rather, the challenges of queer individuals within Palestinian communities are addressed within the context of broader colonial oppression. Harkening back to the discussion of McAlister in Chapter 2, this shift in “queer discourse”, away from the homonationalist rhetoric of 2005, may echo the realignment of African-American opinions on Israel following the Suez Crisis, coinciding with the broader American civil rights movement (McAlister 2005, 118). The willingness of “Queers for Palestine” to support more militant approaches to tackling perceived systems of oppression may therefore be analogous to the growing popularity of combative “Black Power” movements (i.e., the Black Panthers) throughout the Civil Rights movement. Thus, an understanding of homonationalism, as exhibited by the Athenian soldiers in *300*, and the co-opting of queer advocacy, proves useful for contextualizing the alignment of queer activism with emerging geopolitical movements.

Returning to homonationalism, queer individuals fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan are not only protecting the security of the United States (i.e., “The West”) from Islamic terrorism (i.e., tyranny), but are also defending the bastion of egalitarianism, including queer rights. However, this incorporation of American queers into the nationalist agenda further “others” the very Middle Eastern queers which imperialistic homonationalism claims to protect. By further perpetuating the Orientalist trope of a monolithic East which must be coerced into liberating its queer citizens, Afghan and Iraqi citizens, including queer individuals (likely already facing oppressive challenges) are subjected to violent imperialism which claims to only target the

Middle Eastern terrorist. Furthermore, Puar comments on the selective inclusion of homonationalism, remarking that, in the American context, for example, queer, Middle Eastern asylum seekers must often conform to “Western norms of queerness” (Puar 2007, 19).

When considering the continually evolving broad Western cultural sentiment regarding the LGBTQ community, it is important to acknowledge the impact which release date bears upon depictions of queer characters in historical films. To illustrate, Alexander the Great and Hephaestion’s “noble” homosexual relationship in *Alexander* (2004) is implied rather blatantly, while his sexual behaviour with Bagoas is depicted outright. However, in *Ben-Hur* (1959), the subtext of Roman tribune Messala’s unrequited romantic desire for Judah Ben-Hur is presented with a much higher degree of subtlety. As discussed by McGeough, even Charlton Heston, who played the titular character, was unaware of the queer connotations to his character, according to screenwriter Gore Vidal (McGeough 2022, 144). This information was intentionally withheld from him by director William Wyler due to concerns that the conservative Heston may object to this characterization (McGeough 2022, 144). Indeed, this example demonstrates the evolution of queer character portrayals across nearly fifty years of historical film development. Whether overt or subtle, the presentation of Western homosexuality as rooted in excellence, while Eastern homosexuality arises from deviance, is a frequent distinction throughout historical films. This further signifies the East/West divide and may potentially perpetuate biases which justify conflict within the cultural reservoir of stereotypes based on a perceived defense of human liberty via sexuality.

The aforementioned homoerotic implications between Alexander and Hephaestion in *Alexander* (2004) suggest a nuanced view of Greek queer masculinity compared to the explicit negative depiction of Eastern homosexuality (*Alexander*, 2004). Indeed, when asked why the

Persians are “so cruel”, Christopher Plummer’s Aristotle responds that “the Oriental races are known for their barbarity and slavish devotion to their senses which are so dull they castrate young boys for their sexual pleasure”, directly associating Eastern homosexuality with maleficence (*Alexander*, 2004). Furthermore, Alexander’s own homosexual tendencies are met with disgust in India, reflecting the repressive yet hypocritical attitudes of the “Orient” towards “noble” Western queer masculinity, while Easterners engage in “devious” acts as evidenced by Darius’ harem of men and women (*Alexander*, 2004).

Building on the discussion from the previous trope, Alexander’s actions in *Alexander* (2004) are framed as arising from liberty, constituting an honourable homosexuality which Aristotle differentiates from the perceived Oriental queer licentiousness. While mentoring a young Alexander and his future satraps, Aristotle states “When men lie together in lust, it is a surrender to the passions and does nothing for the excellence in us. But when men lie together and knowledge is passed between them, that is pure and excellent” (*Alexander*, 2004). It is from this former “lustful” homosexuality that the hypocrisy and judgement of the latter “pure” homosexuality arises, as demonstrated by the derisive treatment of Alexander in India. This portrayal once again reinforces the notion of “Western” moral and cultural superiority over the “East” within the paradigm of homosexual depictions.

In *300*, the feminized and “homosexualized” Athenian troops embody Puar’s arguments regarding the concept of homonationalism within American biopolitics. This creates an embodied dichotomy pitting the American, free, liberal queer against the fundamentalist, terrorist, Muslim (queer). Leonidas’ exclamation regarding the Athenian “boy lovers” therefore aligns with this context of homonationalism, demonstrating the Athenians as embodying the broader West within the West/East binary, via homonationalism in Ancient Greek biopolitics.

This solidifies the argument that gender and sexuality are continually applied to embody and perpetuate the socially constructed dichotomy between East and West, in an attempt to justify imperialism and moral intervention from a masculine, dominant, and free West against a feminized, submissive, and subjugated “Orient”.

Just like the free Greeks in 300, the heteronormative Spartans (who historically practised homosexuality, particularly in the military) lead the charge, while the “boy-loving Athenians” lag behind, yet still answer the call to fight. This is analogous to the American application of homonationalism to exploit its queer citizens, presenting itself as an inherently moral and progressive, (yet, at the executive level, heteronormative), force. In stark contrast, the Persian leader Xerxes is depicted as stereotypically effeminate, and sexually ambiguous, yet with hints of implied (“deviant”) homosexuality or bisexuality. From the top down, compared with Leonidas’ traditional masculinity, the Middle East is “homosexualized” as a monolith, much like it was previously “feminized” by Orientalists.

Homonationalist commentary is not limited to post-9/11 contexts, as Horemheb in *The Egyptian* (1954) voices his disdain for “mincing perfumed idiots who carry sun shades and twitter like birds” comprising the ranks of Pharaoh’s army (*The Egyptian*, 1954). The derogatory language used to describe these men emphasizes the cultural superiority of the Western (Egyptian) characters, yet still frames them as necessary for upholding the imperial mandate. This prototypical trope of queer masculinity and homonationalism is highly prevalent (occurring over 10 times), demonstrating itself as cemented in the cultural reservoir of stereotypes considering the deviant East and noble West. The continued emphasis on these themes underscores a persistent cultural narrative that utilizes dynamics concerning homosexuality and

perceptions of queer individuals to assert Western dominance and highlight the perceived shortcomings of Eastern cultures.

### **7.3 Embodiment and the Spectacle of “Deformity”: Demonizing the Disabled**

For this next prototypical trope, depictions of disability were analyzed to establish an embodied theme of demonization and societal hierarchies. This trope reflects how individuals with disabilities or perceived abnormalities are marginalized, dehumanized, and subjected to violence or exploitation. It should be noted that this trope consists of two complementary aspects. First, historical and Orientalist films use the spectacle of deformity to emphasize differences between the “normal” and the “other”, often portraying those with disabilities as less deserving of empathy or respect. Paradoxically, demonization of the disabled is also seen as archetypal of tyrannical forces, often the East or authoritarian enemies of “The People” such as Rome. On the surface, these dual facets may appear contradictory, one rooted in the perception of disability as inherently wicked, while the other highlights derogation of the disabled as a marker of tyranny. However, both are founded on the perceived embodied “Otherness” of the disabled. Whether used to depict villains or victims, ostracization of the disabled is the broader theme from which these twin contradictory aspects of this trope emerge.

This is further intertwined with power dynamics, and the brutal treatment of disabled characters or those with perceived abnormalities is presented as both a reflection of their social status and a tool for furthering the narrative of superiority and dominance. The brutal depiction of disabled and “deformed” individuals as objects of spectacle or violence can be seen as a metaphor for Western fears about totalitarian regimes that devalue and oppress those who do not conform to the state’s ideals of normalcy and productivity. The amphitheatre scene in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) demonstrates violence against those labelled “deformed curiosities” by the

Roman Empire, portraying decapitations of dwarves and “Amazons” (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932).

The marginalization of the disabled is reflected by the audience’s diminished empathy for characters who are seen as part of a “freak show”. This violence demonstrates the Roman’s tyrannical Otherness and establishes a connection between the dehumanized disabled and the Christians who are fed to lions afterwards (*The Sign of the Cross*, 1932). The most flagrant version of this is connected with the facade of egalitarianism in *300* (2006), where disabled individuals are discarded as “deformed or disfigured” (*300*, 2006). This paradox highlights the hypocrisy of Spartans boasting about their free society, while simultaneously underscoring how disability is used to justify exclusion and violence. The Spartan ideal of physical perfection is juxtaposed with marginalization of those who do not fit this standard, reinforcing the theme of embodiment and the exploitation of deformity.

Slightly different from previous representations involving an oppressive entity bullying the disabled, the treatment of the “deformed” in Sparta aligns with another common aspect of the trope concerning disability, vilifying the disabled and associating them with a negative Other. This particular trope often associates bodily differences with evil intent, hyper-sexuality, and untrustworthiness, particularly in opposition to Western ideals of strength, purity, and honour. This portrayal reflects a deep cultural anxiety toward the "Other", those deemed physically or morally unfit within a strict hierarchical, militaristic, or patriarchal society. Embodiment of deformity or disability is often equated with treachery and a natural alignment with tyrannical Eastern or despotic figures. For example, In *Hercules Unchained* (1959), the giant Antaeus presents an obstacle to Hercules, embodying the link between physical abnormality and inherent evil (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959). Depicted by an actor with gigantism, not only is he portrayed

as a sexually deviant bandit, but serves as a hyper-violent representation of what was seen in mid-century Western cinema as the dangerous, animalistic “Other.” He is depicted as brutish, lacking any moral complexity, and exists only as an obstacle to the heroic, able-bodied Hercules. This suggests that those who deviate from the normative physical body are unfit for society and morally corrupt, aligning with the Western portrayal of antagonistic “Eastern” forces as inherently flawed.

Calibos in *Clash of the Titans* (1981) serves a similar role, transformed into a demon by the Olympians and inhabiting the “Eastern swamps”, with his physical deformity acting as both a punishment and a signifier of his shameful, corrupt character (*Clash of the Titans*, 1981). The language used, considering him “reduced to a shameful mockery” ties his physical embodiment to his moral downfall (*Clash of the Titans*, 1981). He is depicted as hyper-sexualized and coveting Andromeda, representing the twisted desires of the physically malformed villain, a recurring trope. It should be noted that his unbridled lust is a direct result from the loss of Andromeda, promised to be his bride until his transformation. However, as his marriage was terminated as a result of his new disability and “deformity”, the deeply implicit associations between disability, rejection, and being a “mockery” are once again reinforced through Calibos. This ostracization then leads to corruption and duplicitousness, thereby confirming the very moral downfall which purportedly underlied his disability.

Even after being spared by the righteous, able-bodied Perseus, Calibos resorts to treachery, highlighting the deceptive and untrustworthy nature of the “crippled” villain. His attempt to murder Perseus, after being shown mercy, represents the West’s view of Eastern despotism; despite attempts at diplomacy or kindness, the Orient will always betray because treachery is an innate part of their character (*Clash of the Titans*, 1981). The Stygian witches

continue this theme of physical deformity as indicative of treachery and moral untrustworthiness (*Clash of the Titans*, 1981). They are marginalized, living in isolation, and are used to suggest the dangers of those who exist outside the normative societal structures. They reinforce the trope that physical disfigurement is linked to an alignment with corrupt, occult, and ultimately evil, forces.

Deformity and disability are prominent themes throughout *300*, yet crucially are not limited to “Oriental” individuals alone. As with the multicultural component of the Persian force or the homonationalism embedded within the Greek army, deformity and disability are embodied with a degree of nuance yet ultimately serve to further precipitate the binary between East and West. Deformity is initially showcased as being a hallmark of the demonic Persian army, replete with supernatural creatures that represent hybrids of human and beast. Meanwhile, disability transcends racial lines and marks Spartan traitors, cementing their cooperation with the “Oriental” foe through physical embodiment and solidifying the East/West binary as an eternal divide where the unfit disabled naturally fall on to the side of the deformed “Orient”.

As elaborated on by Said, the Orientalist framework uses mental categories known as “imaginative geographies” to reinforce perceptions of an “Oriental” other (Said 1978, 55). Imaginative knowledge is readily influenced by stereotypes and the glaring absence of historicity created by personifying the Persian army as inhuman reinforces existing stereotypes concerning the reprehensible nature of the East. These examples include Xerxes’ Immortals being depicted as ghoulish creatures with black blood as opposed to representing their historically accurate human counterparts, hulking trolls employed in battle, and executioner demons with saws for limbs (*300*, 2006). These depictions ultimately culminate in an imaginative and embodied geography of Persia and the Orient that is not only supernatural, but inherently deformed and as a consequence, evil.



Mel Gibson utilizes this same trope in portraying a disabled Jewish man with significant facial abnormalities laughing at the condemnation of Christ (*The Passion of the Christ*, 2004). This once again reinforces the association between bodily deformity and moral depravity, and the juxtaposition of physical impairment with gleeful participation in the death of a righteous figure draws on the established link between disability, fundamental evil, and the corrupt East. To further cement this theme, Phillip of Macedon's missing eye in Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004) is emphasized during scenes portraying his moral corruption and lasciviousness. Stone's depiction of Phillip's physical disability is indeed historically accurate, whereas other portrayals have often failed to depict this wartime injury. However, this factual disability is once again utilized to communicate embodied malice, with the film focusing prominently on his missing eye during scenes of him sexually assaulting his wife and attempting to rape one of his bodyguards (*Alexander*, 2004).

Finally, this trope is best embodied in Ephialtes, the ostracized Greek who betrayed the Spartans in *The 300 Spartans* (1962) and *300* (2006). The historical Ephialtes was not documented as having any significant disabilities, yet both films take liberties with his embodied presentation, with the Cold War epic depicting him as a gargantuan dullard and *300* portraying him as a malformed hunchback. In *The 300 Spartans* (1962), Ephialtes is aligned with the marginalized figures of society who are easily corrupted by external forces, in this case, Persian gold (*The 300 Spartans*, 2006). His simple-mindedness and exclusion from Greek society set him up as a perfect candidate for betrayal, an embodiment of the idea that those on the margins of Western society can be easily turned against it. This is further explored in the 2006 retelling, when upon his rejection from the Spartan military for his physical disabilities, Ephialtes' desire

for a uniform and status drive him to betray the Spartans for a position in the Persian army (*300*, 2006).

As elaborated on in Chapter 5, the hunchback's unfitness within Western society is further characterized by his symbolic rejection from the Greek phalanx, due to being physically "stunted" (*300*, 2006). As his inclusion in the phalanx threatens the cohesion of this army, it once again implies that what he embodies is not entirely welcome in Greek or "Western" society. His deformity thereby marks him as unworthy of the collective strength and brotherhood of Sparta, and instead, he becomes a traitor by aligning with Xerxes. In this case, physical disfigurement is linked to an alignment with corrupt, occult, and ultimately evil, forces. The tyrannical empire is showcased as being justified in its derision of the disabled, as Ephialtes demonstrates himself to be nothing more than a treasonous pawn of the East. By the time Ephialtes is brought before Xerxes in *300*, he has already been depicted as the embodiment of moral corruption, a physically deformed monster with no place in the organized and robust Spartan army. Devoid of the "heroic masculinity" associated with Western forces in Orientalist productions, the hunchback of Thermopylae is used as a placeholder for exploring the perverse, yet alluring nature of the East.

However, in addition to the significance of his dismissal from Leonidas' phalanx due to his symbolic abnormality, as well as his embodiment of the East's general depravity, there exists another element of Ephialtes' character which must be considered when analyzing the impact his actions have on the viewer. This aspect is ingrained in disability theory, specifically focusing on the intersection of sexuality and disability. During the enticement scene in Xerxes' brothel, Ephialtes is surrounded by courtesans and tempted to betray the Spartans, not just for material gain, but also sexual satisfaction. When analyzed through Tom Shakespeare's lens of disability studies, this scene is interpreted as conveying a profound sense of disgust as disabled people are

considered “sexless” (Shakespeare 1996, 12). Ephialtes not only betrays the gallant forces because he is disabled, he betrays them because he falls fundamentally short of being a “real” man. This depiction not only cements his own personal emasculation, but also personifies the Persian force which he joins as being equally unmanly. To be disabled is to be sterile, impotent, and above all, inadequate. It is this inadequacy, rooted in sexuality, that helps motivate Ephialtes to betray the noble West.

When considering the established link between sexlessness and disability, Shakespeare’s *Sexual Politics of Disability* (1996) offers valuable insight into the history of this connection. Stating that “images of disability and sexuality either tend to be absent”, he highlights that disabled individuals are most often “presented as asexual, or else perverse and hypersexual” (Shakespeare 1996, 9). Indeed, the historical perception of sex and disability has been overwhelmingly negative. As noted by Katherine Quarmby, this pattern is apparent from ancient myths such as the Greek god Hephaestus being scorned by Aphrodite due to his impairment, to “Chatterley Syndrome” in modern literature, a reference to *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* where the eponymous character seeks a more potent lover following her husband’s disability (Quarmby 2015, 3).

Shakespeare adds that disabled men are perceived as unattractive and vulnerable due to their condition, and are therefore easy targets for mockery and exploitation. Indeed, this is best summarized by the quote often attributed to Cicero, stating “In deformity and bodily disfigurement, there is good material in making jokes” (Quarmby 2015, 3). By reviewing Shakespeare, one can therefore understand how powerful representativeness and availability heuristics have likely formed in the media zeitgeist concerning disability and (the lack of) sexuality. Ephialtes embodies this stereotype, implying to viewers that something is inherently

amiss regarding his interactions in the Persian brothel. The unease conveyed through a “sexless” character being persuaded by sex to betray his countrymen is not only powerful, but also rooted in a sense of fundamental perversion.

It is not only wrong, but also despicable and immoral, just like the “Orient” itself. It is therefore difficult for the viewer to rationalize this treason, as they are likely to be thoroughly disgusted by it. Whatever pity one initially feels for the hunchback is overwhelmed by the knowledge that a “sexless” character committed treason for sex. Ephialtes represents the embodiment of the disabled individual within Western heteropatriarchy, a monstrous figure who is not only perverse, but perceived as fitting the “Oriental” side of the simulated binary more than any role they may have in the West. Orientalist logic takes this idea of ostracization further, implying that due to their physical abnormality, disabled individuals have the highest likelihood of also being ideologically aberrant.

In *300*, it is apparent that Ephialtes represents a person with almost no redeeming qualities, with the viewer being guided to interpret his betrayal as a direct (and inevitable) consequence of his disability. Through his portrayal of the sexless Spartan “cripple” being seduced by Persian courtesans, Ephialtes comes to personify not only disability, but also corruption in his defection to the “Orient”. He demonstrates once again how cinematic Orientalism is used to perpetuate the constructed East/West binary by portraying it as a natural consequence of embodied history. His character represents not only physical imperfection but moral weakness, reinforcing the trope that deformity signifies a deeper, inherent corruption.

Ephialtes’ actions demonstrate a willingness of the “cripple” to betray Greece (and the West), signifying how those who are physically disabled are seen as being easily swayed by corrupt, Eastern temptations, whether gold, women, or status. Whether the implicit stereotype

perpetuated is antagonization of the East, or sympathy with the West and “the People”, these portrayals echo a prototypical and very highly prevalent trope (over 20 occurrences) of embodied social status via disability associated with demonization. The performance of “deformity” therefore facilitates an implicit association of disability with tyranny, and hyper-sexuality, particularly in scenes involving bodily dominance and power.

#### **7.4 Feminization of the East**

Another hallmark of Orientalism which pervades historical film is the portrayal of weak and morally corrupt Eastern characters and cultures as effeminate, compared to the strong, virtuous, “masculine” West. It emphasizes stereotypically female characteristics, themselves potentially a result of another cultural reservoir of stereotypes regarding traditional binary masculinity and femininity. These traits, including passivity, subservience, and sensuality, are embodied by Eastern figures, regardless of gender, reinforcing stereotypes of Eastern femininity and the perceived strength of masculine Western cultures. In *Cleopatra* (1963), the chamberlain of Ptolemy is depicted with effeminate qualities, such as being soft-spoken and lacking masculine strength (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This portrayal aligns with the Orientalist trope of Eastern figures as weak and overly feminine, contrasting with the supposed strength and heroism of the West.

Indeed, Cleopatra herself may be perceived as embodying the feminized East, attempting to manipulate the West into doing its bidding before ultimately causing its (her) own downfall. Although Cleopatra’s example may seem initially contradictory to the aforementioned “weakness” of Eastern figures, this is not the case, as stereotypes differ between traditionally male and female characters. Due to the perceived inherently feminine nature pervading the “Orient”, other stereotypically feminine traits such as deception and promiscuity are empowered

in Eastern characters. As a result of this inherent femininity of the “Orient”, Eastern men are perceived as not only weaker than Western men but also Eastern women. Oriental women are indeed powerful (dangerously so), and often present a challenge, especially to Western men, as bastions of corruption, immorality, and enticement.

A comment by Philip of Macedon in *Alexander* (2004) regarding the “dangers of women” is followed by a slithering snake, once again animalizing the already feminized East to solidify its association with deceit and corruption (*Alexander*, 2004). The “Orient” is perceived as feminine, and if femininity is viewed as serpentine, then the East may therefore also possess the deceitful qualities thematically associated with snakes. Balian is greeted by servile “Orientals” in his Jerusalem hostel, reflecting classic Orientalist stereotypes of Eastern cultures as submissive and compliant (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). This in turn highlights their feminized and exotic qualities in contrast to the nobility and strength of the Western characters. Sybilla, although white, embodies Orientalist qualities through her exotic and sensual nature. This portrayal suggests that true virtue and wisdom are Western traits, while Eastern femininity is exotic and (as a result of her infidelity) less virtuous (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). Furthermore, many “Oriental” male characters exhibit some degree of stereotypical homosexual coding in order to accentuate their “Eastern feminization”. Examples range from subtle to blatant, including the Edomite King Herod in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Ptolemy’s chamberlain in *Cleopatra* (1963), and the Persian King Xerxes in *300* (2006).

From his elegant adornment to his helplessness, Xerxes’ appearance and behaviour thoroughly embody traits that Western, heteropatriarchal societies have traditionally associated with femininity (Puar 2007, 17). Just as Leonidas embodies a perceived masculine Western liberty, Xerxes represents the personification of feminized bondage, thereby presenting the

perpetuated binary as being concretely embodied in the leaders of each side. While Leonidas and the Spartans are portrayed as explicitly and exclusively heterosexual, Xerxes' sexual identity is implied to be ambiguous and likely not heterosexual. In his meeting with Leonidas, Xerxes assumes a sexually suggestive position when standing behind Leonidas, complete with "placing his hands gently on Leonidas's shoulders, whispering and tempting him to surrender" (Oh and Kutufam, 159). Xerxes and the invading Persians therefore represent an additional sexualized threat on top of the already mentioned racial and gendered binary, embodying the fear of Western emasculation through feminized behaviour, feminized appearance, and suggestive homosexuality.

In *300* (2006), Xerxes is feminized utilizing a delicate contouring of the face, application of cosmetics, and manicured fingernails all while adorned with jewelry across his body. His garb is elegant, composed of ornate golden chains and rings spread across a lean bare chest (*300*, 2006). In contrast, Leonidas is portrayed as a man at the peak of physical fitness, boasting adamantine abdominal muscles along with an imposing musculature throughout his body (*300*, 2006). As elaborated by James Kendrick's work on cinematic embodiment and the composite body, this image is designed to inspire emulation in portraying the ideal masculine figure (Kendrick 172, 2019). His figure, while imposing, is simple, devoid of any adornment or ostentatious jewelry, with his only significant garb consisting of a glorified leather loincloth and a flowing red cape, with the addition of an iconic Spartan officer's helmet when engaged in battle. Seldom seen without his spear and shield in hand, the image of Leonidas emanates hyper-masculinity and organized militarism. As opposed to the passive, feminized Xerxes, this is a man who not only leads others into battle, but is also capable of fighting his own battles.

Xerxes' transformation into this effeminate form is depicted in the 2014 sequel, further highlighting the feminization of the East. His portrayal is described by Artemisia as "smooth, glabrous, and red-eyed", being representative of the ultimate femininity, corruption, and mysticism of Easterners (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). This trope occurs several times throughout this film, including when a Greek captive derides the Persian soldiers. He chides them for, in his words, "taking orders from a Greek woman", once again demonstrating the perceived weakness and submissiveness of the East (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). It emphasizes the notion that Eastern cultures are dominated by women and thus perceived as incapable of standing up for themselves, reinforcing their inferiority compared to the West.

This is ultimately embodied by the "sex battle" between Themistocles and Artemisia, in which Western dominance over the East is personified by Artemisia's acquiescence to Themistocles (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). Throughout these portrayals, this prototypical trope demonstrates the East as feminized, and therefore submissive and subservient to the West. Due to its high prevalence, (occurring over 10 times), it can be inferred that this cinematic trope reliably propagates a perception, not only of women as weak and subservient to (Western) men, but also of a West whose "role" it is to dominate this feminized Orient. Through Hinton's framework of the "culture in mind", it may therefore be viewed as an implicit and culturally perpetuated stereotype, suggesting that stereotypical conflicts in the ancient world may be used to potentially legitimize contemporary imperialist and interventionist Western foreign policy in the Middle East.

### **7.5 "Women, (like the East), seduce and corrupt Men"**

The next prototypical trope focuses on women in historical and Orientalist films being depicted as manipulative figures who use their sexuality and cunning to deceive, corrupt, and



control men. This trope is often tied to broader themes of moral and political corruption, portraying women as central to the moral downfall of men and embodying deceit and moral ambiguity. Crucial to this is the inherent feminization of the East within Orientalist media, which connects the deceptive female manipulators with the “Orient”. The use of the geographical settings of the Middle East, within a time of contemporary moral concern in the West, further establishes this region as historically fraught with manipulation and corruption. In *David and Bathsheba* (1951), Bathsheba’s deliberate act of bathing where the married King David could see her is framed as a manipulative move, reinforcing her role as an Eastern seductress (*David and Bathsheba*, 1951).

The prophet Nathan’s condemnation of Bathsheba for bringing divine wrath upon Israel emphasizes the notion that women must bear the blame for moral failings, highlighting the trope of women as sources of sin and corruption (*David and Bathsheba*, 1951). Interestingly, David himself is exempt from this punishment, as McGeough highlights that the “great king gets away with murder and adultery” (McGeough 2022, 125). Although this is attributed to the Hays Code ensuring that immoral characters got their comeuppance, McGeough remarks that the same code ensured that biblical stories remain unaltered (McGeough 2022, 125). This allowed for a convenient situation in which the seductress Bathsheba is insinuated as initiating David’s immorality, and, though his kingdom suffers a drought as divine retribution, he himself is largely exempt from punishment.

In *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), Messalina’s attempt to seduce Demetrius is portrayed as a threat to his Christian values, linking her role as a temptress to moral and spiritual corruption (*Demetrius and the Gladiators*, 1954). Similarly, in *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), Nelofar’s characterization as a seductive, sex-centric figure aligns with the trope of Eastern

women as corrupting influences. This is further emphasized with her use of a snake to murder the Queen of Egypt, underscoring her deceitful nature and the broader dangers of Eastern, female manipulation (*Land of the Pharaohs*, 1955). Akin to Nefar, Nefer in *The Egyptian* (1954) displays her treachery as an Eastern seductress, having explicitly remarked earlier that “we women of Babylon have such a bad reputation” (*The Egyptian*, 1954).

Hercules is deceived by the Eastern witch Omphale in *Hercules Unchained* (1959), personifying both Eastern deceptive femininity and the inherent exoticism and mysticism of the “Orient” (*Hercules Unchained*, 1959). In *The 300 Spartans* (1962), as well as *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), Artemisia of Caria is depicted as a traitorous and manipulative figure, with her gender amplifying her role as a deceitful character. Furthermore, it is proclaimed that her “ferocity was matched only by her beauty”, emphasizing the trope of women as malicious and deceitful (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). Her attempts to seduce Xerxes are framed as a betrayal and manipulation, reinforcing the theme of women corrupting men’s judgment (*The 300 Spartans*, 1962). When not outwardly seducing him, she is portrayed as manipulating and controlling Xerxes, reflecting the stereotype of women as powerful yet dangerously deceptive figures (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014). Furthermore, the captive Greek’s comments about the “Greek woman” Artemisia controlling “Persian men” underscores the theme of an East which is not only feminized, but also perceived as more subservient to manipulation as a consequence (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014).

This trope is highlighted once again in *Cleopatra* (1963), when Cleopatra’s control over Caesar and her assertive actions reflect the trope of Eastern women using their sexuality to dominate and manipulate Western men (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Her decision-making is portrayed as emotionally driven and rash, reinforcing stereotypes about the inherent instability and danger of

women's (and the East's) judgment (*Cleopatra*, 1963). Sybilla embodies the Oriental seductress once again in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), where like Cleopatra, the combination of her White and Eastern identity personifies the "Orient" as both exotic and seductive, but also accessible to the West. This prototypical trope concerning the deceptive nature of women is cemented with Satan herself appearing as an androgynous woman in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), reinforcing the association between corruption and femininity (*The Passion of the Christ*, 2004).

By feminizing the Eastern world, Orientalist media thus portrays the "Orient" as thereby "embodying" deception. This trope is highly prevalent (occurring over 20 times), and contributes to a cultural reservoir of stereotypes concerning female deceit and manipulation, which may be connected with broader themes of moral and political corruption. It can be inferred that this trope reliably propagates the perception, not only of women as seductresses, manipulators, and "femme fatales", but also of the East as embodying these stereotypically "feminine" characteristics. This embodied gendered framework is contextualized alongside Keegan's post 9/11 remarks concerning "Orientals prefer[ing] ambush, surprise, treachery and deceit as the best way to overcome an enemy" (Keegan, 2001). Indeed, it demonstrates how cinematically propagated stereotypes may utilize gendered connotations to convey contemporary Orientalist foreign policy as continuing the practice of "historical" vigilance against the untrustworthy "East".

## **7.6 "Civilized versus Barbarian": Sexual Exploitation and Moral Decay**

The final prototypical trope is one that has recurred throughout Chapters 5 and 6, demonstrating it to be a hallmark of Orientalist film, and indeed Orientalist thought at a broader level. This trope once again concerns the contrast between a "civilized" West and "barbarian" East, and its inclusion in this chapter is necessitated due to the prolific ways this trope is used to

convey sub-themes of sexual exploitation, impurity, and moral decay. The East is embodied as inherently barbaric and morally corrupt, while the West is personified as civilized and superior. This dichotomy is reinforced by how Eastern cultures are shown as degenerate and deserving of Western intervention or dominance. Sexual exploitation and moral degradation serve as metaphors for the broader depiction of the East as backward and inferior. The films use the concept of embodied barbarism to justify Western superiority and control, positioning Western civilization as both superior and justified in its actions against the East.

In *Quo Vadis?* (1951), Marcus's disdain for barbarian women and his comments about them adorning themselves with "deer fat" illustrate his belief in Rome's civilized superiority (*Quo Vadis?*, 1951). His entitlement to dominate, including his imperialistic views on gender, reflects the film's broader narrative of the West's moral and cultural superiority over the East. Julius Caesar's desire to have his enemy Pompey "purified" after he is decapitated by Egyptians suggests a debasement inherent to the East, which must be cleansed (*Cleopatra*, 1963). This reflects the narrative of the East as barbaric and uncivilized, requiring Western intervention to restore purity. Alexander the Great's marriage to the Bactrian Roxana is also framed as a civilizing mission, in which Roxana the "barbarian" must be integrated into Greek civilization (*Alexander*, 2004). Her portrayal in Oriental dress reinforces the white saviour complex within Alexander, and the idea that the East is in need of Western control and reform to become civilized.

This trope is reflected further in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), when it is stated that in the East, "there are no civilized rules" (*Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005). Although this line is uttered by the immoral Westerner, Guy de Lusignan, the quote nonetheless again displays the existence of

an Orientalist attitude towards the civilized West and barbaric East. This portrayal positions Eastern societies as chaotic and lacking the civilized norms of the West, justifying Western actions as necessary for maintaining civilization. The tree of corpses in *300* (2006) is another excellent embodied visual example of this dichotomy, symbolizing the inherent savagery of the Persians (*300*, 2006). The film uses this brutal imagery to depict the East as inhuman and morally degenerate, reinforcing the narrative that Western intervention is necessary to combat this barbarism. Its 2014 sequel continues this trend, by depicting Xerxes defiling Leonidas' body by decapitating it after death (*300: Rise of an Empire*, 2014).

Through this highly prevalent trope (over 10 occurrences), moral corruption is once again enhanced in the tyrannical, Eastern other and the need for Western intervention is emphasized. As with its other manifestations, through the domains of geopolitics and visual stereotypes, the West's positioning as the inheritor of "civilization" in historical film may propagate an implicit ideal. This stereotypical association, (i.e., Hinton's "culture in mind") may imply to audiences that whenever purportedly monolithic Eastern barbarism, (e.g., Gregory's "architecture of enmity", which the U.S. used to associate Saddam's Iraq with Al-Qaeda), is perceived as threatening the civilized West, interventionist action is, "historically", justified.

### **7.7 Cultural Reservoir of Stereotypes (Embodiment, Gender, & Sexuality Tropes)**

Throughout this chapter, a series of prototypical tropes were once again analyzed in order to elucidate the stereotypical inputs feeding prevalent stereotypical associations within culture concerning the idea of an eternal dichotomy between East and West. Discussions from previous chapters concerning the perception of "Easterners" as being more likely to be deviant, deceptive, or threatening, (rather than just being "Easterners"), were further analyzed in this chapter through various critical theory perspectives. These methods of analysis encompassed disability

studies, gendered frameworks, and queer theory, exploring stereotypical associations of disenfranchised and non-heteronormative individuals within the East/West dichotomy.

In addition to geopolitical and visual elements, perspectives on embodiment, gender, and sexuality further contextualize this paradigm, considering the degree to which the East has been historically feminized, infantilized, and personified as “aberrant”. Deviance is often perceived as a foundation for homosexuality within historical and Orientalist film, while Eastern behaviour itself is observed as deviant, therefore the (already feminized) East may be seen as “homosexualized” via associations within Orientalist media. However, queer identities ascribed to the East in historical and Orientalist film are often contrasted with a more logical, “masculine”, Western variation (i.e., homonationalistic behaviour), yet again demonstrating the perceived divide between “Orient” and “Occident”.

This ultimately emphasizes the significance of observing how stereotypical tropes may be perpetuated through culture by way of cognitive heuristics, including representativeness and availability. Indeed, as elaborated on in the preceding chapters, the implicit biases resulting from these embodied stereotypical tropes concerning gender, sexuality, and queer masculinity may contribute to genuine cultural biases which influence geopolitics, while simultaneously exploiting popular perceptions of queer individuals, women, and disabled peoples.

## **Chapter 8: Hyperreal Imagery and the Oriental Simulacrum**

### **8.1 Film Analysis Conclusion**

Throughout the analysis of historical films in the preceding three chapters, pervasive Orientalist tropes have been documented as contributing to the reservoir of implicit prevalent stereotypical associations, (i.e., the “culture in mind”), surrounding the perception of an eternal dichotomy between East and West. This analysis has yielded three robust sets of stereotypical tropes containing high degrees of both prototypicality (representativeness) and prevalence (availability). General geopolitical tropes, aligning with Said’s commentary in *Orientalism*, his later critique of Huntington’s “*Clash of Civilizations*”, McAlister’s discussion of “moral geographies”, and Gregory’s conceptualization of “architectures of enmity” in *The Colonial Present*, were analyzed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 focused on prototypical visual tropes, encompassing physical appearance, race, dress, and geographical settings, as, according to Zacks, “visual impressions” are among the most important elements for imbuing films with persuasive messaging (Zacks 2014, 101). This significance of visual stereotypical data in particular may be used to elucidate how viewing historical and Oriental films could bias individuals into interpreting a certain appearance as having a higher probability of being associated with threatening behaviour. It may be perceived as more likely for the “East” as a monolithic geopolitical bloc to be not only aggressive, but for “othered” individuals to have stereotypical visual (*e.g.*, racial, appearance, etc.) cues associated with their threatening nature.

Finally, Chapter 7 utilized various critical theory perspectives to address stereotypes concerning embodiment, gender, and sexuality. Homosexuality is often framed as a general “sexual deviance” signifying moral corruption within historical and Orientalist film, while

femininity is linked with deception and treason. Building on existing perceptions of Eastern deviance, implicit stereotypical associations perpetuate a cultural understanding of the East as lacking heteronormative masculinity, personified derisively as either feminine, effeminate, or queer. However, it should be noted that deviant queer personifications of the Orient in historical film are often contrasted with a more logical, “masculine”, Western queerness, (i.e., effeminate Xerxes; homonationalistic Athenian soldiers in *300*), once again demonstrating the perceived divide between “Orient” and “Occident”. The implicit biases potentially resulting from these embodied stereotypical tropes concerning gender, disability, sexuality, and queer masculinity may further perpetuate the historical personification of the East as aberrant, feminized, and infantilized.

As exhibited throughout Chapters 5-7, the core theme around which most prevalent and prototypical tropes revolve, one argued ideologically, presented visually, and embodied by various characters, concerns Eastern tyranny threatening Western liberty. Whether represented through animalization, racial imagery, derogation of disability, Cold War symbolism, “deviant” homosexuality, or manipulative femininity, this implicit, cultural stereotype concerning the oppressive and regressive “Oriental Other” is conveyed cinematically. Harkening back to Said’s conclusions, however, the process of Orientalism paradoxically reveals more about the “West”, in its attempt to represent the East, than it does the “East” itself”. This “Western Self” is defined, not only through its opposition to the “Eastern Other”, but, crucially, through its dominant, imperial, and/or colonial power over it.

This “Other” is perceived as savage, exotic, dubious, primitive, turbanned, bearded, brown, desolate, lazy, Arab, misogynistic, dirty, Muslim, crass, craven, buffoonish, barbarian, malevolent, lecherous, mysterious, deceptive, hostile, sadistic, immoral, and repressed. It is



defined by its fundamental opposition to the enlightened, tolerant, noble, white, egalitarian, just, advanced, Christian, intelligent, cultured, peaceful, organized, benevolent, logical, unblemished, clean, brave, refined, honourable, capable, honest, civilized, and free West. These prototypes have become ingrained in Orientalist cinema and, through the cognitive mechanisms discussed throughout this thesis, have been cemented as prevalent implicit stereotypes within culture. Due to the high degree of availability (prevalence) for many of these prototypical tropes, the heuristic feedback loop detailed in Chapter 3 may become bolstered and perpetuate these stereotypes to audiences of historical films.

Viewers may then have to actively engage with their biased perceptions in order not to become susceptible to implicit, and representative, perspectives concerning the fundamental nature of “East” and “West”. As exhibited by Tversky and Kahneman, when enough information concerning high representativeness exists, it can influence individuals to the point of biasing perceptions of probability (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983). Considering the results of this analysis within the context of my proposed framework, historical films indeed appear to provide an environment through which a robust array of implicit Orientalist stereotypes can be culturally propagated, potentially biasing viewers' perspectives regarding the monolithic “Eastern other”. This may therefore perpetuate “historical” stereotypes about the East, which are perceived as a more probable reflection of reality than non-stereotypical perceptions.

Films are also imbued with the power of narrative storytelling, which Tversky and Kahneman noted as bolstering the representativeness heuristic and its resultant conjunction fallacy. The ability to bias perspectives using narratives (Tversky and Kahneman, 1983), combined with the potential power of cinema regarding implicit messaging (Zacks, 2014), facilitate a prime environment for the propagation of stereotypes via cognitive heuristics and

implicit cultural associations (i.e., Hinton's "culture in mind"). Not only do these Orientalist tropes sustain a continued stereotypical cultural understanding of East/West relations, but, due to the films' purportedly historical nature, the broader theme of "Western liberty resisting Eastern tyranny in the ancient world" may engender the perception that Western intervention in the monolithic Middle East is not only justified, but historically inevitable.

## **8.2 Hyperreality and the Binary**

The cinematic analysis completed within this thesis has been rooted in the false perception of a dichotomous East and West. Throughout his work which formed the bedrock for this project, Edward Said maintained that the "Orient" is a "Western" construction, produced from a cultural reservoir of literary knowledge accumulated across centuries, if not millenia. By categorizing cultural geopolitics along binary lines, the practice of Orientalism has ensured that representations of the "Eastern" world, including cinematic ones, forego nuance in favour of assimilation within a stereotypical and monolithic Orientalist paradigm. Indeed, as contextualized in Chapter 2, this framework has much "less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" (Western) world" (Said 1978, 20). Extending from this manufactured East/West binary, the stereotypical and monolithic Orient has come to permeate popular culture, often being substituted for, (if not outright replacing), any discourse concerning the authentic nature of the "Eastern world". In Said's own words, "Orientalism acquired the Orient as literally and as widely as possible...it domesticated this knowledge to the West...all of which together formed a simulacrum of the Orient and reproduced it materially in the West, for the West (Said 1978, 166).

Said's evocation of "simulacrum" is illuminating, considering his chronicling of the fabricated East/West binary through which the Eastern world is made "real" to the West. Originally attributed to Plato's *Sophist*, the idea of "simulacra" (plural) first arose from the

discussion of the “two kinds of image-making – the art of making likenesses, and phantasms or the art of making appearances” (Plato 360 B.C.E [1901], 52). This “phantastic image-making”, the production of semblances, or “appearances” of images, are the foundation upon which Jean Baudrillard’s philosophy of hyperreality is constructed (Plato 360 B.C.E [1901], 51). Baudrillard refers to these phantasms as simulacra, derived from the Latin “simulare”, meaning “to pretend” (Baudrillard 1981, 6). Indeed, within Baudrillard’s philosophy, simulacra are images which have, through their representative capability, come to replace reality itself.

It is often referenced within current popular culture that the world in which we live may be entirely simulated. On the surface, this statement is often dismissed, interpreted as implying that nothing is genuinely “real”. However, when considering Baudrillard’s logic, the implications become far more insidious as the phenomenon of simulation in the current world represents more than a mere departure from the “real”, it signifies an entry into the “hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1981, 1). As vocalized in his seminal treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), in the postmodern age “simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1981, 1). While the act of simulation initially bears some semblance to reality, the current hyperreality is facilitated by simulacra, depictions which do not represent reality, in which signs of the real have replaced the real itself. In essence, simulation is the act of imitating real world processes, facilitated by systemic copying, while a simulacrum is a “copy of a copy” (Massumi 2021, 2). The current media landscape, including historical and Oriental films, must therefore be regarded as operating within the domain of hyperreality, devoid of objectivity, with a prolific output of “copies of copies”, further propagating the prevalent stereotypical associations within culture.

The gradual development of Orientalism as a cultural and literary paradigm may be contextualized as beginning with a process of simulation, arising from interpretations rooted in the exploration and exploitation of a genuine, geographical East. Over time, however, as cultural knowledge concerning this “East” accumulated, it was transformed into the “Orient”, replacing physical geography with moral geography. By the time Said wrote his book, conceptualizations of the Orient itself had long passed the initial point of simulation, and had become firmly entrenched as a simulacrum within “Western” culture. As explored in Chapter 2, the binary worldview presented by the moral geography of Orientalism contributes to the public perceptions surrounding the Middle East, especially in its interactions with the “West”.

By reducing the “East” and “Easterners” to a monolithic “Other”, cultural representations including historical films may contribute to a reservoir of associations prevalent within culture (what Hinton refers to as the “culture in mind”). Situating Said’s argument within Baudrillard’s framework, just as “Orient” and “Occident” are themselves simulacra, the hyperreal binary resulting from this artificial divide must then also be pure simulacrum. This simulacrum then becomes the foundation for many cultural productions replete with stereotypes, which may then perpetuate implicit biases concerning a supposedly monolithic moral geographic dichotomy. As a consequence of this hyperreal cultural representation, “Western” intervention in the Middle East may often be justified as benevolent hegemony, while wariness of Middle Easterners is framed as pragmatic.

Within this paradigm, “never again will the real have the chance to produce itself” (Baudrillard 1981, 2), thus enabling hyperreality to permeate our current world, and in the case of communications media, hijack it to a degree. In an age of social media, cinema rooted in computer generated imagery, internet memes, and commodified news sources, the hyperreal has

become the economy within which the currency of attention is manipulated. This final chapter therefore focuses on how hyperreal simulation empowers simplified viewpoints which are disseminated (and accepted) more readily than nuanced perspectives. Furthermore, the visual and imagistic element of historical cinema is explored, as it pertains to the social construction of binaries which may function as tools of propaganda.

### **8.3 Propagating the Binary**

Binaries may be manufactured and maintained en masse through hyperreality, allowing them to become the principal method of understanding the world for many people. Binary perceptions rely heavily on the power of imagery, consistently representing (or rather, “re-presenting”) reality in a way that eschews nuance in favour of simplistic, dichotomous explanations. The difference between genuine representation and re-presentation is, in essence, analogous to Plato’s discussion of the contrast between the “imitative art” of producing appearances, and “phantastic image-making” (Plato 360 B.C.E [1901], 50). While representation is concerned with faithfully capturing the “proportions of the original”, re-presentation contains within it a “certain degree of deception” (Plato 360 B.C.E [1901], 50). Narratives which reduce complex realities, (*e.g.*, the cultures, peoples, and nations of the Middle East, India, etc.), into dualistic frameworks (*e.g.*, Orientalism) therefore employ the practice of re-presentation, foregoing the aforementioned nuance of authentic representation. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, these socially constructed binaries may be particularly insidious. Through the aforementioned psychological mechanisms including cognitive heuristics and implicit biases, the re-presentation of rigid binaries such as East and West may contribute to a reduced ability to imagine the world outside of this dichotomy.

The constructed binary is indeed an example of hyperreality, a condition in which real and fiction blend together flawlessly, obscuring “any distinction between the real and the imaginary” (Baudrillard 1981, 3). Within this hyperreal domain, binaries therefore serve as ideal tools of propaganda, reducing reality down to base dichotomies and utilizing imagery to re-present complex spectrums of existence as nothing more than simple dualities. Orientalist representations of the East may therefore be interpreted as “re-presentations”, produced utilizing a hyperreal paradigm which “is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient” (Said 1978, 18).

Orientalism thus functions as a textbook example of binaries produced out of the hyperreal, a simulation which re-presents an entire region of the world in order to benefit the dominant powers which are politically and economically involved with it, through imperialism and colonialism. Central to the propagation of this binary is the aforementioned tendency for Orientalist cultural productions to accumulate over centuries, consistently reinforcing the same themes about the region, thereby distancing these depictions from reality and rooting the portrayal of the “Orient” in simulacra. As discussed throughout this text, this accumulation bolsters the stereotypical associations within culture (i.e., Hinton’s “culture in mind”) concerning the Eastern world. While the Oriental simulation grows, a greater amount of information concerning the stereotypical East becomes readily accessible for the availability heuristic. Harkening back to the feedback loop discussed in Chapter 3, this may in turn strengthen the prototypicality of these stereotypical tropes by way of the representativeness heuristic. Consequently, this interaction of cognitive heuristics and cultural representation produces a purely hyperreal model of the Eastern world, the “Oriental” simulacrum.

This cyclical “re-presentational” process is discussed by Baudrillard, who refers to these hyperreal products as “a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference” (Baudrillard 1981, 6). This process is the crux which separates simulation from representation, for “whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (Baudrillard 1981, 6). Where representation seeks to showcase the real to some degree, simulation propagates, and consequently bolsters, the socially constructed and hyperreal binary by re-presenting reality as simulacra.

The Oriental simulacrum therefore exists as a hyperreal copy which utilizes images to perpetuate a constructed binary between East and West. When contextualizing this within Baudrillard’s four phase model of simulation, the “Orient” can be understood as approaching the final stage, with the East/West binary then being consequently extrapolated from this result. Baudrillard explains this model as such, “first, it is the reflection of a profound reality; (second) it masks and denatures a profound reality; (third) it masks the absence of a profound reality; (fourth) it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard 1981, 7). Indeed, as demonstrated by Said, the rigid and culturally monolithic East/West binary has, at best, only a tenuous connection with reality. Yet this construct endures as a hyperreal re-presentation, continually reinforced by textual and visual imagery (all of which are simulacra, not authentic representations). The practice of Orientalism is therefore a microcosm of what is being argued throughout this chapter, that binaries are constructed and propagated using images (simulacra), which thereby contribute to hyperreality and may be exploited for propaganda.

#### **8.4 Emotional Imagery and the Binary**

One specific element of binary perception which strengthens its efficacy for propaganda is its potential ability to manipulate one's perception in order to decrease conceptions of the world existing outside of the specified duality. In a hyperreal world where a culturally monolithic East/West dichotomy has been reinforced through Orientalist cultural productions (including historical films), the mere idea of this binary being constructed may initially appear farcical. However, when focusing on the imagistic quality of media such as film, the reinforcement of this binary is likely connected with the same force driving propagandistic effects such as the aforementioned "sleeping effect", the emotional appeal of visuals. Harkening back to Zacks' discussion of the sleeping effect, it was discovered that the propagandistic effects of fictional war films peaked early on, but most became more pronounced over time (Zacks, 2014, 101). This was once again found to be rooted in visual impressions and emotional intensity, which convinced the individual that they themselves had experienced the events (Zacks, 2014, 101).

Building on Baudrillard, the work of Lisa Stevenson further investigates this imagistic component. The idea that desires, feelings, and experiences are perceived as "images", rather than simple "fact" is central to Stevenson's writing (Stevenson 2014, 45). Yet it is this very power of emotionality which transforms images into ideal simulacra for propaganda, and consequently the vessel of a hyperreal simulation focused on depicting the world as composed of binaries, including "East" and "West". Therefore, hyperreal imagery may be used to produce perceptions which are not only dichotomous, but obstruct the individual from considering possibilities outside the realm of the binary, perpetuating continual implicit biases through repeated activation of the availability and representativeness heuristic feedback loop. In the case of the East/West dichotomy, the prevalence of media which reinforces this distinction between



global forces (textual, social, cinematic, etc.) facilitates an endless tide of simulacra, which according to Baudrillard, replaces truth (Baudrillard 1981, 2). Once this step is accomplished, all subsequent creators of images and cultural productions will be motivated to mold themselves to it, and subsequently perpetuate hyperreal binaries.

Propaganda benefits from this as its goal is to persuade, but subtly. As elaborated on by Edward Bernays, ideal propaganda is often undetectable, relying on delicate messaging which reinforces previously held notions (Bernays 1928, 68). Images are extremely proficient at this task, infiltrating the mind with an emotionality and efficacy that facts are incapable of. As elaborated by Stevenson, “a feeling is imagistic, and being attuned to the world is pictorial...psychic life can only be captured on the page imagistically, in word or visual images” (Stevenson 2014, 45). It is important to note that images themselves are not inherently designed as tools of propaganda, and this psychic power of the image may be used beneficially, as explored by Stevenson in her discussion of the Canadian Inuit.

In her ethnographical chronicle of the Inuit during the 1940s-60s tuberculosis epidemic, Stevenson explains how “facts” fail to capture the human experience of the individual. This is exemplified by the use of a death certificate as the sole representation of an Inuit woman’s death. Given to her son by the government after her demise, with no other descriptions of his mother’s final experiences, it reduces her passing to numbers, expunging the stories and emotions which accompanied this tragic event. When contrasted against the image described by a relative of her sailing away on a government ship, never to return, the death certificate falls short at conveying the gravitas of her life, journey and ultimately death (Stevenson 2014, 36). This is not to say that the death certificate is not real, for it certainly captures a degree of reality, and from a bureaucratic perspective, is a more concrete representation of reality than the image of the ship.

Yet the psychic power of imagery persists with the ship and not the death certificate, for its inherent ability to instill an emotional connection to the story communicates more about the woman's reality than representation purely through facts. Both the death certificate and the described image may be considered simulacra, signs which are substituted for the life and death of the woman. However, the image possesses an emotional power which Zacks alludes to in his discussion of cinematic propaganda.

Once again, this emotional power harkens back to Said's central conclusion concerning Orientalism, that it "failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience." (Said 1978, 328). By ignoring her lived experience, the death certificate relegates the Inuit woman to another case of *Homo sacer*, akin to "Iraqi fighters" in the Gulf War and the tyrant hordes of Xerxes' army in *300*. Imagining the visual of the ship, however, evokes the same imagistic emotion which Gregory alluded to concerning the Gulf War's "Turkey Shoot". Perhaps this is why cameras panned away from the very real images of defiled Middle Eastern bodies and those who had, in the words of journalist Robert Fisk, "died without care" (Gregory 2004, 168). As discussed in Chapter 2, the hyperreal simulacra presented to the American audience instead consisted of "bestializing metaphors, reducing people to "cockroaches" and "sheep," and elsewhere to "sitting ducks," "rabbits in a sack," and "fish in a barrel" (Gregory 2004, 165).

The goal of this selective, hyperreal journalism was the same as with the Inuit woman in Stevenson's account: the erasure of human experience in favour of a simplified, often binary narrative encompassing "civilization/savagery", "East/West", and ultimately, the "Self/Other". For the Inuit woman, an omission of imagery removed the emotionality of the story required to maintain, and represent, her lived experience. For the Iraqi victims of the Gulf War, however, this same goal was accomplished with an abundance of hyperreal and dehumanizing imagery.

Regardless of the medium, both cases demonstrate the visceral, resonant quality of emotionally charged images. This is the inherent power of visual simulacra, imbuing imagistic media with “psychic life”, which may therefore be exploited for propaganda (Stevenson 2014, 45).

Throughout modern media including historical film, images are co-opted to align with particular narratives, being identified, for example, as conveying something explicitly liberal or conservative. There is no middle ground left for nuanced interpretation in the world of the hyperreal. Intricate issues such as immigration, environmental concern, economics, international relations, and public health are consistently re-presented in imagistic format, reduced to simulacra, stripped of all complexity and molded to fit on one side of the ideological and political binary. Just as the “Orient” was othered with no possibility for union with the “West”, “liberal” and “conservative” are propagated as diametrically opposed monoliths, via the power of images. The political arena thereby becomes a simulation rife with simulacra, structured to maintain the binary divide. As dialogue dies, combativeness rises, and the hyperreal world plunges further into the trap of dichotomy, benefitting the propagandist at the cost of diminishing access to reality for most individuals.

This process is inherently difficult to combat as it requires the work of alternate imagery to overcome, with logical and factual arguments falling short due to lacking the aforementioned psychic life. This is a fundamental reason for this project’s focus on historical film, as it represents the nexus of history (a seemingly “factual” process) bisecting the emotional quality of visual simulacra. When history is made emotional, supposedly historical narratives will be more impactful on their audience, and the implicit messaging will be harder to combat due to the aforementioned heuristic processing. If the historical cinematic story of the “West” is interpreted as constant vigilance against the “Eastern” menace as demonstrated through the preceding

chapters, then one may conclude that consumers of these films may be implicitly more negatively predisposed towards the dubious nature of Easterners, and perhaps ultimately willing to militarily continue “the good fight” against them. This does not imply that Western historical films make their audiences more racist or xenophobic. Instead, it suggests that the inherent emotionality tied to these cinematic simulacra may facilitate implicit biases, such as the conjunction fallacy of perceiving a higher likelihood for a bearded, turbaned man in an airport to be both Middle Eastern and a security threat, as opposed to just Middle Eastern.

Indeed, this heuristic could contribute to the perception of a Ba’athist Iraq understood as being both opposed to the United States, and a supporter of Al-Qaeda. Although Saddam Hussein’s government had been embargoed by the United States since the Gulf War, the international community has long criticized the UN presentation given by Colin Powell implicating the secular Iraqi regime in the events of September 11. However, there is a strong possibility that the representativeness heuristic would make audiences susceptible to accepting this conjunction, (even though it is both a logical fallacy and ideologically incongruent), as the overtly “anti-West” entity must indeed also be the Islamic terrorist. When hyperreal news coverage coincides with hyperreal imagery, as in historical film, the results may indeed perpetuate implicit biases. Yet once again, “as images are translated into more “complete” forms of consciousness (unraveled or unwrapped into a series of facts, say, or decoded into a list of meanings), they lose their affective hold” (Stevenson 2014, 45). This is precisely why debating constructed binaries using logical arguments and facts often falls short of dismantling them, particularly in the political arena. This binary hyperreality was not constructed using facts, it was facilitated by the psychic power of the image. Whether it is the conservative nationalist imagining hordes of immigrants pouring across the border, or the liberal environmentalist

envisioning flooded cities due to rising sea levels, the strongest political messaging appears to be presented in the form of visual imagery.

In the age of hyperreality, commodified media sources including films, news, and social media hijack this imagery to perpetuate binaries pitting “West” against “East” and “Conservative” against “Liberal”, always an extension of the Self/Other binary propagated through hyperreal and emotionally charged visual simulacra. This is one of the mechanisms by which seemingly unrelated political positions align across an axis of ideological acceptance, creating a binary approach towards politics in which case by case assessments of issues are eschewed in favour of monolithic partisan perspectives. As an example, environmental advocacy is associated with unconstrained immigration policy, while one’s stance on LGBTQ+ rights is perceived as indicative of one’s perspective on vaccinations. This monolithic generalization of domestic politics stretches to the international arena, with constituents supporting or challenging military action based solely on its pertinence to party lines. Once again, the heuristic tendency to defy logic using prototypical thinking was demonstrated best with Linda’s description leading participants to assume it is more likely for her to be both a feminist and a bank teller rather than just a bank teller (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 311). There is no room for nuance, no chance for dialogue, only the imposition of the socially constructed binary. In the hyperreal world, it is black or white, in or out, and “us” versus “them”, the ideal environment for implicit propaganda. This is indeed an arduous media landscape within which to incorporate the lived experience of individuals, an element which Said, Stevenson, and Gregory all agree is essential if the goal is genuine representation, rather than hyperreal simulacra.

## 8.5 Persuasive Cognition and the Hyperreal Binary

As mentioned earlier, one particular factor which makes the binary such an efficacious model of propaganda is its ability to impair the potential for imagining reality outside of the constructed dichotomy. Once a duality is accepted, it is likely much simpler (and less mentally taxing) for the individual to cognitively assimilate everything into the binary, than to imagine an entirely new model of social existence. This process is once again rooted in the feedback between the availability and representativeness heuristics, particularly as they relate to culture. The more prominent the dichotomy, the more available it is, thereby reinforcing the binary prototype, which consequently remains the most available model for future judgements. Harkening back to Hinton's "culture in mind", in which a reservoir of associations prevalent within culture forms stereotypical perceptions towards certain groups and individuals, the binary itself may then be seen as crystallized within the "culture in mind". How is an individual expected to introduce nuance into their perspective of East and West if there are few cultural representations to draw inspiration for this nuance from?

This is especially true when that same individual is bombarded with images and surrounded by simulacra, which Baudrillard identifies as inescapable in the postmodern age (Baudrillard 1981, 17). The emotionality of the image combined with the cultural power of the binary in a hyperreal world may catalyze an insidious form of propaganda that ensnares the individual and bolsters their opinions through the feedback loop of the availability and representativeness heuristics. Consequences such as confirmation bias and logical fallacies are then likely to arise from this simulacra-fuelled media landscape. However, this process may go beyond judgements and implicit biases, perhaps connecting with the psychological scholarship on persuasion.

One particular model, known as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) yields an insightful finding concerning this issue of propagating falsehoods. This includes further elucidating the power of imagery, with regards to persuasion, and its potential effect on the perpetuation of constructed binaries. By employing this perspective in tandem with the established heuristic processing framework, one may ascertain how images facilitate persuasion in certain individuals, while simultaneously exploring the reason for a decrease in the efficacy of “facts” within the persuasive process.

In essence, the ELM proposes the existence of two major cognitive pathways used for persuading individuals: the central and peripheral paths (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, 2). Within this model, the central path is described as relying on logical arguments and reasoning in order to successfully persuade, aligning it with Stevenson’s description of facts, being “decoded into a list of meanings” (Stevenson 2014, 45). Conversely, the peripheral path relies on superficial, imagistic cues in order to convince the individual of the inherent “authority” of an argument and is aimed at producing a more visceral, emotional response, alluding to Stevenson’s “psychic life” of the image (Stevenson 2014, 45).

An example demonstrating this revolves around the acceptance of medical information. When applying the central path, the quality of the message itself is rationally considered, regardless of the messenger, while the peripheral path solely considers the superficial “image” of the message. Therefore, a regularly dressed individual with a sound, rational message could convincingly argue for a particular medical perspective using the central path. By activating the peripheral path of persuasion, however, anyone wearing a white laboratory coat could be perceived as more convincing than the plain-clothed person, regardless of their medical message.

The central path considers the message itself, while the peripheral path considers the white lab coat a sign of medical authority and therefore associated with the stronger message.

Both of these paths may be equally convincing, yet in entirely separate circumstances. According to empirical research performed by Petty and Cacioppo, the central path is triggered when there is both a high degree of motivation and ability to process the persuasive method logically (Petty and Cacioppo, 6). Motivation is chiefly modulated by self-relevance, while ability is a combination of information complexity and the “opportunity to concentrate” (Petty and Cacioppo, 6). If the persuasive message is not entirely self-relevant, too complex, or presented rapidly without sufficient processing time, the peripheral path of persuasion will automatically be activated. This in turn prioritizes the imagistic quality of the message over its actual reasoning, and as long as the messenger “looks the part”, the superficial message will be successfully received, and the recipient likely persuaded. This has dramatic implications for the hyperreal world. In the current hyperreal culture saturated with social media, imagistic distractions, and infinite simulacra consistently vying for mass attention, it can be argued that a majority of the population often fail to meet the requirement of “opportunity to concentrate” and may only be convinced of new ideas through the peripheral path.

Motivation and ability being key determinants of the activated persuasive path harkens back to the findings of Macrae, Milne, and Bodenhausen (1994) concerning the model of “stereotypes as energy-saving devices”, detailed in Chapter 3. They discovered that “people will fall back on their stereotypic preconceptions whenever they lack the ability or motivation to think more deeply about members of stereotyped groups” (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen, 1994, 37). The essential component combining the ELM with energy-saving stereotypes is that when the processing environment reaches a sufficient level of difficulty, and perceivers’



resources are correspondingly depleted, stereotypes are likely to be activated and applied in judgmental tasks.

Connecting this to Baudrillard, the hyperreal media landscape is by its very nature convoluted, and provides few “opportunities to concentrate” on the many implicit messages which may be contained in a cultural production, such as *300*. The binary may therefore be enforced through the peripheral route of persuasion, as depictions of turbaned Persians will not be questioned, since the peripheral system likely associates turbans with all “Orientals” (just as it does lab coats with medical professionals) through constant reinforcement of the availability and representativeness heuristics. As reiterated by Jeffrey Zacks, these cognitive mechanisms are the evolutionary result of a brain adapted to constantly filter complex sensory stimulation in real life. However, this machinery may be “hijacked” by hyperreal cultural productions including the simulacra of historical film, “taking advantage of the shortcuts that our perceptual systems use in order to control where we attend, what we see, and how we remember.” (Zacks, 2014, 198). Once again, these are prime conditions for the representativeness heuristic to be activated, as the reduced cognitive motivation and ability leads our perceptual circuits to quickly accept (and even anticipate) another bearded, savage, Arab villain.

Indeed, in this context, Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) findings with the ELM are reminiscent of Tversky and Kahneman’s (1983) “Illusion of Validity”. The peripheral pathway is triggered by low amounts of information but high confidence, as the stereotypes conform to previous expectations, akin to confirmation bias. In a hyperreal environment which contains a reservoir of prevalent cultural associations (i.e., the “culture in mind”), stereotypes can not only be evoked easier, but also be perceived (with little resistance) as being accurate, especially

considering Tversky and Kahneman's discoveries on the heightened believability of narratives reliant on stereotypical information.

By following this progression, it becomes evident that a significant degree of individuals are primed for the peripheral path of persuasion, which may be exploited through various imagistic media, from commodified news sources to social media and cinema. Conversely, the central path may be utilized within echo chambers which are often populated with individuals who perceive their messages as self-relevant, simple, and easy to concentrate on. Extending this beyond historical films, one may observe an alarming environment in which individuals are primed to interpret messages which "logically" reinforce their existing perceptions through the central path (confirmation bias), while simultaneously rejecting opposing messaging as they are not motivated or able to process them centrally.

Hinton (2017) also remarked on this when discussing the cultural root of implicit stereotypes and the predictive brain. He comments on the expansion of new media, citing prolific media outlets and the rise of social media. In Hinton's perspective:

while this offers the potential for people to engage with a diversity of representation and counter-stereotypical information, it also allows people to remain in an ideological subculture, communicating with like-minded people where specific representations of cultural others are constantly being circulated unchallenged within the social network (Hinton 2017, 8).

In this siloed and hyperreal landscape, concerns abound regarding the implicit associations developing from the consistent messages people receive in their everyday lives, (i.e., the "culture in mind").

"If certain implicit stereotypes are deemed unacceptable", continues Hinton, "it will only be when people experience consistent counter-stereotypical information over a long period of time that these associations will be probabilistically undermined" (Hinton 2017, 8). To accomplish this, everyday media experiences must include "exposure to alternative

representations and counter-evidence to these specific implicit stereotypes (Hinton 2017, 8). Connecting this with Stevenson, Gregory, and Zack's commentary on the power of images, these alternative representations should also be imagistic in order to harness the same emotional power through which stereotypes are propagated. However, if the current trend of exposure to echo chambers continues, along with the production of simulacra which re-present social groups in monolithic dichotomies including "Eastern" and "Western", then this hyperreal "bubble" will likely be exacerbated. These cultural associations, the "culture in mind", may then persist, utilizing the peripheral path of persuasion and the heuristic feedback loop of availability and representativeness to propagate implicit biases corresponding to these monolithic binaries.

As a result of the interplay between culture, cognition, emotional imagery, and hyperreality, simplistic visual messages which perpetuate dualistic perceptions of the world grow more efficacious than ever before, while dialogue and nuance between seemingly "opposing sides" becomes unsustainable. Just like the peripheral path of persuasion which relies on external cues and imagistic components rather than logical arguments, stereotypes appear to be activated with limited motivation and ability. It may then be inferred that stereotypes themselves utilize this peripheral path of persuasion, accessing it through emotionally charged imagery when individuals have low motivation and ability to counter stereotypical information, such as while viewing historical films.

Emotionality is therefore tied with peripheral persuasion, making it an essential component of influencing an audience without requiring logical arguments. As elaborated by Zacks in his aforementioned discussion of the "sleeper effect" in propagandistic war films, the vivid visual imagery and emotional intensity of films essentially may even facilitate the perception of having experienced the cinematic events oneself (Zacks, 2014, 101). Over time,

while the cinematic source of the images is dissociated from the message, the emotional imagery is retained within the viewer's perspective. While the brain gradually forgets that a propagandistic message came from a film, yet retains the message itself, the "sleeper effect" is produced.

As previously stated, implicit bias propagation likely utilizes the peripheral path of persuasion, not only due to the emotionality of the imagistic message, but also the low motivation and ability scenarios during which most non-specialist audiences view films. During this process, the availability heuristic may become bolstered with more accessible stereotypical information, while the representativeness heuristic may be reinforced through the perceived confirmation of its prototypes. Taking historical films as an example, the Orientalist perspective of a monolithic "East/West" binary is strengthened through repeated productions employing the same cinematic tropes analyzed throughout this thesis. This in turn leads to a further accumulation of stereotypes within the most prevalent associations of popular culture, what Hinton labels the "culture in mind". The result is a cultural reservoir of stereotypes which feeds with the heuristic feedback loop of availability and representativeness, and is perfectly aligned for quick acceptance through the peripheral route of persuasion.

Audiences are in essence implicitly persuaded, through constant reinforcement, to view the nature of historical encounters in the ancient world as aligned along a perpetual East/West binary. This can be used to implicitly argue that the current geopolitical reality also revolves around this binary, connecting films such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *300* with the timeless struggle between Western liberty and Eastern tyranny. Once again, this demonstrates the substitution of the hyperreal for the real, as these films re-present complex geopolitical histories as simplified binary simulacra. Both the "Orient", and the films which "represent" it are indeed

simulacra, copies of copies, which utilize the emotionality of images to perpetuate the implicit biases associated with an East/West binary.

Situated within Baudrillard's ideas regarding the replacement of reality with hyperreality, this cognitive psychological model demonstrates that hyperreal binaries may increase susceptibility to confirmation bias while simultaneously increasing resilience against opposing ideas. Both the ELM and the proposed heuristic feedback framework demonstrate how the further an individual gets from "truth", the easier it may be to convince them of constructed "truths" which align with their existing perceptions, while incongruent "truths" are pushed further away. This cognitive foundation may indeed be responsible for the public acceptance of political phrases such as "alternative facts" within the age of hyperreality, statements which would have seemed ludicrous during times of representation (or even early simulation). The end result is a social atmosphere of prevalent cultural associations (i.e., a "culture in mind") in which binaries such as "East/West" dominate, fuelled by emotional images in the form of simulacra, thereby producing a popular culture teeming with vilification of the "Other", or rather, the othered.

## **8.6 Historical Film and the Oriental Simulacrum**

It has been established throughout this thesis that historical films portraying encounters between ancient empires and cultures draw a sharp distinction between the "Eastern" and "Western" world. Once again, although the physical geographical reality of Persia being located east of Greece cannot be dismissed, it is the moral geography associated with the monolithic binary presentation of "East" and "West" which lies at the heart of Orientalist historical cinema. It is not only the distinction between "East" and "West" that matters, but the lack of nuance within the monolithic "East", one portrayed as savage, exotic, inferior, mysterious, primitive,

barbarous, tyrannical, oppressed, and malevolent. As encapsulated by Said, this monolith is defined by its fundamental opposition to the civilized and free “West” more than any individual distinction which arises from the “East” itself. This othered representation by the “Western” world is the very crux by which the “Orient” was transformed from a depiction of the physical reality of the “East” to a simulation only somewhat resembling reality in the early days of Orientalist thought. Transitioning further, the ultimate stage of this Oriental monolith is endless simulacra, consisting of “re-presentations” bearing little semblance to the original reality of the East, the Near East, South Asia, or the Middle East.

However, just because a depiction is rooted in the hyperreal, it is no less powerful as an agent of cultural representation than reality itself. Said comments that in the wake of Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt, chronicled in *Description de L’Egypte* (1809) which “displaces Egyptian or Oriental history”, Egypt is instead identified “directly and immediately with world history, a euphemism for European history” (Said 1978, 86). This may be perceived as the point in which simulation is fully underway, facilitating the rise of hyperreal simulacra concerning the “Orient”. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2, Said posits that “out of the Napoleonic expedition there issued a whole series of textual children”, such as Lane’s aforementioned and highly eurocentric *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1871). He continues that what connects these representations together is “not only their common background in Oriental legend and experience but also their learned reliance on the Orient as a kind of womb out of which they were brought forth” (Said 1978, 88).

This confirms the hyperreal nature of these representations, as they were not born from any physical or geopolitical reality within the “Eastern” world, but rather arose as cultural byproduct of the broader cultural production, the Oriental simulacrum. Said elaborates on this

hyperreal nature, postulating that it, in no way, weakens the cultural puissance of simulacra, nor the process of Orientalism, itself:

“If paradoxically these creations turned out to be highly stylized simulacra, elaborately wrought imitations of what a live Orient might be thought to look like, that by no means detracts either from the strength of their imaginative conception or from the strength of European mastery of the Orient” (Said 1978, 88).

It is curious, yet practical, then, to observe this cultural presentation bleeding from the literary foundation of Orientalist chronicles into the cinematic world of historical film. Indeed, Baudrillard comments on the infusion of “mythical” history and film, tracing the “trajectory of cinema” as moving from the “most fantastic or mythical to the realistic and the hyperrealistic” (Baudrillard 1981, 49). Baudrillard proposes that in turbulent periods of history defined by violence, including the World Wars, interwar era, and the Cold War, “myth invades cinema as imaginary content” (Baudrillard 1981, 45). He argues that due to the real violence of history, mythical tales featuring legendary and heroic representations find refuge in the world of cinema.

This indeed coincides with the dominance of biblical epics from the 1930s-60s, in which moralistic tales such as *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956) utilized mythical tropes within their presentation of absolute (Western) good versus absolute (Eastern) evil. Baudrillard remarks that due to the profound “violence of history” during this time, mythical content of “deposited and legendary resurrections” must “find refuge in cinema” (Baudrillard 1981, 45). The audience craves cinematic myth, which is imbued with emotion due to its imagistic quality, perhaps leading it to be perceived as lived experience, particularly when associated with moral themes. Commenting further, Baudrillard argues that during the hyperreal age in which he writes, “it is history itself that invades the cinema according to the same scenario” which previously facilitated viewers’ desire for mythological film (Baudrillard 1981, 45).

History is presented akin to myth through film, re-presented using simulacra in the hyperreal medium of cinema, devoid of any foundation in the real. Baudrillard posits that the root of this is that “the historical stake (has been) chased from our lives by...peaceful coexistence on a global level” (Baudrillard 1981, 45). Referring to this history as a “lost referential”, he postulates that its absence provides an arena through which it may be “resurrected in force on the screen, according to the same process that used to make lost myths live again” (Baudrillard 1981, 46). As historical cinema undertook a mythological quality throughout the 1960s, the Oriental simulacrum was further perpetuated along the sharp East/West binaries portrayed in films such as *The 300 Spartans* (1962) and *Cleopatra* (1963). Although a perspective of modern mythological history as opposed to ancient, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) demonstrates an archetypal example of how historical cinema is used to elevate the mythos of the Orient and the benevolent European hero’s mastery of it, facilitated once again along the dichotomy of a monolithic East and West.

This illusory perspective of history, driven by the “impression that history has retreated” in which the hyperreal generation no longer experiences “the march of history” (i.e., expectations of wars, revolutions, etc.) therefore occupies this void filled with “phantasms of a past history” (Baudrillard 1981, 46). This vacuum of historical reality continues to be filled with hyperreal historical film, utilizing ancient history to present arguments about the present which (whether intentional or not), perpetuate implicit biases concerning binaries including the simulacra of Orient and the Occident.

Extending into the 21st century, films including *300* (2006), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), and *Alexander* (2004) demonstrate the continuation of the hyperreal historical cinematic age. Curiously, however, this world is no longer devoid of overt violence like the post-Cold War age.



The post-9/11 reality demonstrates that “history” as referred to by Baudrillard has reentered the public consciousness, with genuine concerns regarding terrorism, war, and ideological conflict. And yet, the hyperreal binary of East/West persists in historical film. It is important to note that these binaries now not only re-present history, but, as highlighted previously, also offer implicit arguments about the nature of modern international relations. If the clash between East and West is timeless to the point of exhibiting mythological quality, then the release of the aforementioned films during the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan may be interpreted as confirming this hyperreality as reality. Myth becomes interpreted as history, and history stands in for the current reality, in an inversion of the process described by Baudrillard.

Indeed, this full-circle loop would indicate that just as simulating reality results in hyperreality, so too then does the performance of hyperreality result in our perceived reality. While binaries such as East/West are, at their core, cultural constructions, they have become so firmly entrenched within popular discourse that opinions related to policy are formed around them as if they were very much real. Even a film like *Kingdom of Heaven*, which claims to strive for peace in the Middle East, ends with a quote declaring “to this day, peace remains elusive in the Kingdom of Heaven” as Richard of Lionheart marches towards the Holy Land, years after the film's protagonist has returned from his own crusade.

This is precisely why the historical aspect of film is important, otherwise the filmography for this project could have been expanded to the multitude of other anti-Soviet films such as *Walk a Crooked Mile* (1948) and *My Son John* (1952), or the plethora of films centered on contemporary Islamist violence, including *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Sicario: Day of the Soldado* (2018). *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) remained the sole “modern” exception, due to its aforementioned exemplary alignment with almost all aspects of cinematic Orientalism, imbuing

it with the mythic quality of which Baudrillard speaks. Given the heuristic feedback loop of availability and representativeness, it is probable that viewers walk away from Orientalist historical films with an implicit understanding that, while resolution is ideal, the “fact” is that this region of the world is historically embroiled in turmoil, awaiting endless crusades. Combined with the commodification of media, which Baudrillard argues is the core driver of hyperreality, cinema (and broader visual media) transform history into a commodity, no longer anchored in reality but existing in a hyperreal space which manufactures its own reality, with the potential to influence its consumers’ perceptions and behaviour.

### **8.7 Hyperreality and the Performance of Destruction**

Although Orientalism originated in the “West”, this performance of hyperreality is not limited to it, as groups associated with the monolithic “East” have learned to capitalize on the simulacrum through which they are viewed. In an article describing the Islamic State’s (ISIS) media savvy approach to expansion, Ömür Harmanşah demonstrates how the public Western perception of the group as barbarous, primitive savages may have been of startling benefit to ISIS. Recounting the tendency of ISIS to record their acts of violence and destruction of archaeological artifacts, Harmanşah details how quickly these images spread across social media (Harmanşah 174, 2015). Harkening back to Stevenson, Gregory, and Zack’s commentary, the emotionality imbued with these images likely provided a “psychic life” which stirred audiences into sharing the videos, horrified by the atrocities committed by the supposed barbarians. Harmanşah argues that this proliferation of terrorist media was not a consequence, but rather the intended result ISIS sought with their destruction of cultural heritage. He notes that “ancient statuary” was chosen in a “calculated manner...fitting for the historicized enactment of idol

destruction and not any of the hundreds of other smaller antiquities present in the Mosul Museum” (Harmanşah 174, 2015).

It is therefore evident that these acts were performative, exploiting the “consumerism of visual media” (Harmanşah 174, 2015). What happened may have been “real” in its physical destruction of artifacts, but the motive behind it was “completely staged”. These were not primitive barbarians who were accidentally filmed destroying cultural artifacts (Harmanşah 175, 2015). They were highly media-savvy individuals who utilized the “super-modern phenomenon” of commodified hyperreal media in their efforts to intentionally create content disseminating terrorism across the world, with the goal of recruiting additional terrorists through the visceral emotionality of imagery. Contrary to the reputation of ISIS as a “medieval entity”, the “production of the show”, according to Harmanşah, was their desired result (Harmanşah 175, 2015).

Under the guise of “authentic” savagery, ISIS effectively demonstrated a performance of modernity to export their message globally. By satisfying the expected stereotype of crude Middle Easterners, they mesmerized the world through horror perceived as implicitly congruent with their identity. What was interpreted by many as horrific demonstrations of the perceived ancient trope of Oriental barbarism and iconoclasm was then shared vociferously, finding its way to fringe online corners of the “Western” world. This in turn facilitated the ideological capture of individuals who, ironically, would have been beyond ISIS’ reach were they truly a primitive and technologically inferior organization.

This phenomenon encapsulates the real-world threat of the hyperreal, particularly as it relates to binary conceptions of “Us versus Them”, including “East versus West”. Underlying the hyperreal performance of ISIS was most certainly an understanding that the “Islamic world” is

once again crippling the forward progress of society. A trope repeated so often throughout media that it had become a norm for the heuristic feedback loop was exploited to the actual, physical detriment of both the “Eastern” and “Western” world. Referring back to the ELM, visceral reactions to ISIS’s heritage destruction and beheading videos were facilitated by the peripheral path of persuasion, often resulting in individuals reactively sharing the video, exactly as ISIS desired. This is the primary hazard of hyperreality and the power of imagery in a time of new media. Propaganda can be spread without intention, but is no longer limited to established content producers, such as filmmakers or news media corporations.

The power to spread, or halt the spread, of hyperreal, performative propaganda now rests in the hands of everyday people browsing social media. While cultural heritage is being destroyed, hyperreal representations are being created. In popular culture, far too much focus has been placed on the former, while the latter has often been ignored, likely due to the cognitive mechanisms outlined throughout this thesis. As stated by Harmanşah, characterizing the actions of ISIS as a mere continuation of historical iconoclasm, without considering what is created in the wake of their destruction, would be unwise. The foundation of commodified, digitized heritage destruction is not an “anachronistic religious phenomenon”, but the very “dynamic culture of our super-modern moment” (Harmanşah 176, 2015). Indeed, the actions of ISIS may be more reminiscent of content creators and social media influencers (*e.g.*, Youtubers) than that of historical iconoclasts. Only through critical engagement with this supermodernity can a phenomenon like ISIS be dealt with, and the first step is awareness, not only of the hyperreal, but the binary simulacra it so often perpetuates.

As the capabilities of generative artificial intelligence improve, one must consider how the potential capabilities of hyperreality change with the rise of synthetic media, including

doctored images and “deepfakes”. Fake visuals of Islamist terror attacks can likely be manufactured with ease, and individuals privy to the prevalent cultural associations, or “culture in mind”, depicting Muslims as a barbarous threat to the West may fall victim to these false productions. Conversely, in the event of genuine terrorism, AI can be employed to exaggerate realities, facilitating the proliferation of misinformation, if not outright disinformation. Additionally, while awaiting confirmation of the motive and suspect, implicit associations concerning aspects such as the stereotypical method of attack (hijacking, car ramming, etc.) may fuel judgements biasing individuals to presume it is indeed Islamic terrorism. As evidenced by the nonsensical association of Ba’athist Iraq with Al-Qaeda, any prototypical violent action by a Middle Easterner may be equated with Islam, and vice versa.

In their rush to publicize breaking news as fast as possible, commodified social media news sources may forgo fact-checking entirely in favour of the most sensationalist clip, which may be constructed with nefarious intent for deliberate dissemination such as ISIS videos, as well as being entirely artificial in its nature. If a video circulated on Instagram, X, or TikTok depicting ISIS-style beheadings in London, how many people would stop to verify its veracity before being overwhelmed by their cognitive heuristics and peripheral persuasive pathways concerning “Oriental” tropes, and subsequently sharing the video? What if deepfakes of a Middle Easterner went viral, alleging that a major attack somewhere within the United States is imminent? While this in no way dismisses the reality of terrorism, including Islamic terrorism and attacks committed by those of Middle Eastern descent, it begs the question of how implicit associations may be used to influence the public into thinking (and behaving) reactively towards people perceived as belonging to an othered, monolithic group.

## 8.8 Artificial Reality

Representation, or rather “re-presentation”, is the root of implicit bias in the hyperreal world. It is the vessel by which cognitive heuristics, which evolved to simplify our judgements and decision-making abilities, may be hijacked to spread propaganda without people realizing. The mechanisms behind implicit bias perpetuation in historical cinema may have profound human and cultural consequences, as they catalyze a tendency to respond viscerally to content itself, rather than questioning why the content was made or is being displayed at that particular moment. Throughout this thesis, the psychological and cultural mechanisms underlying the propagation of biases have been discussed at length, and one finding remains evident. Whether intentional or not, the principles of perception remain the same. Regardless, it has been elucidated that an honest effort to entertain audiences may have the unintended consequence of biasing, (or rather, further biasing), viewers’ perceptions of certain groups, relegated as the “outgroup”.

For the purpose of this thesis, the focus was placed on Orientalism; however, this model of monolithic othering can be applied to any group of people which are associated as prototypically belonging more to “each other” than to “us”. Any individual’s human experience can be stripped away through binary representation as Said described, generalized into simulacra, and depicted as the hyperreal “Other”, relegated to monolithic groups such as “indigenous people”, “queer people”, and “immigrants”. Through the emotional power of imagery, narratives can be constructed which silo individuals into prototypical communities with no nuance, creating an ideal ground for visual propagandistic manipulation, be it intentional or not.

Yet, if one indeed desires to utilize this environment for intentional propaganda, then it would be more difficult to combat than implicit biases, as the message can be communicated

emotionally by exploiting cognitive wiring through emotional imagery, rather than appealing to logic. Many individuals may not realize they are being influenced, and, due to the availability and representativeness heuristics, may accept propaganda willingly as these heuristics fundamentally bias the mind not to reject agreeable information (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 7). In essence, the proposed heuristic feedback loop creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that propagandists can effectively abuse. Considering this in tandem with the “appeal to emotion” of the ELM’s peripheral route, a clear picture arises in which the individual appears helpless against implicit propaganda in the hyperreal age.

Extrapolating this lack of nuance to its most extreme level, one can envision a society in which counter-stereotypical concepts, such as “moral Orientals”, are perceived as having a low probability of existence, even though this has no basis in reality. In this paradigm, our minds have been programmed, using their own biases, to reject reality as it has become fundamentally dissonant with what we want to believe, and what we are shown to believe. Meaning itself is then derived from these biases, considering both how well they fit with our pre-existing notions (representativeness) and the sheer accumulation of bias-enforcing content (availability) made more readily accessible than meaning derived from “reality”. In such a landscape, concepts such as “moral Orientals” may become perceived as unicorns, deemed mentally extinct as a result of endless cultural reinforcement of biases.

Of course, this is the most extreme level, yet the “historical march” Baudrillard speaks of has demonstrated just how severely relegation to a subhuman Other can occur. One need only observe Nazi concentration camps, the treatment of political prisoners in Gulags, and the internment of Japanese-Canadians to understand the degrees to which individuals can be othered into monolithic, and vilified, groups. More recently, the broader anti-East Asian sentiment

arising at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, associated with the virus' Chinese origin, demonstrates the speed with which implicit bias perpetuation may occur during the social media age. The interconnected nature of the digital age, combined with the emotional power of images propagating on visual social media, almost guarantees universal reactionary measures to global events at an unprecedented pace.

Before any facts emerge, collective opinions have been formed. This phenomenon itself may not be new, but has never before intersected both a global connective technology, and the ability to generate entirely fraudulent media which can be interpreted as real. Though it may appear similar on the surface, this differs starkly from the 1890s era of "Yellow Journalism" in which sensationalist headlines were fabricated and disseminated across the country through newspapers. Yellow Journalism was limited to the fabrication of narratives, and opinions about reality, in order to influence the public. When considering the sinking of the USS Maine, the *New York Journal* and *New York World* were able to construct propaganda blaming the Spanish government, due to the ship having indeed actually sunk. Traditionally, for this type of propaganda to work, foundational events need to occur within real life. However, in the hyperreal age, "reality" can be fabricated, and factual events do not need to occur in order for propaganda to be constructed based on them. If late 19th-century American propagandists wanted to instigate a war with Spain using today's hyperreal technology, a video of the USS Maine could be generated by artificial intelligence, complete with fraudulent news coverage with AI newscasters, witnesses, etc. By the time reputable channels notified the public of the fabrication, the intended effects of propaganda may already have taken root in the form of accusations and scapegoating.



What started with its foundations in reality, (genuine confrontations between various forces from the geographic East and West over geopolitical strife), then became a simulation, (perceiving East/West as opposing monoliths rooted in Napoleonic-era Orientalist thought). Representations (or rather, “re-presentations”) of the “Orient” persisted, reaching their current form as simulacra, a hyperreal understanding of the world where East and West are eventually seen not only as an eternal dichotomy, but one with no resolution, eternally built upon, and copied from previous interpretations. This is the stage during which commodified visual media, including historical films, are produced, utilizing layers of stereotypes, exaggerations, and misconceptions, until no semblance of the original geographical and historical prototype remains.

However, this is just the beginning of hyperreality. We have successfully been brought, (but also brought ourselves), to the point of plentiful simulacra through our heuristics and conventional media alone. Indeed the bulk of this thesis was built upon analyzing films made before the advent of the Internet. Yet, even in media now considered archaic by many, the tropes remain pronounced, with high prototypicality and prevalence, demonstrating what Baudrillard calls the “precession of simulacra”, or the ability of simulacra to precede reality (Baudrillard 1981, 18). The heuristic processing which readily accepted, and further regurgitated these tropes, is ill-equipped for the world of synthetic media, one in which truth can be manufactured through doctored images and deepfakes at the whim of technocrats, and readily accepted by a mass audience as reality. This, in no way, advocates for censorship of the Internet or any social media. Far from it, freedom of speech is a bulwark against totalitarianism, and the current freedoms of the Internet should not be restricted. Yet, when considered through this paradigm of hyperreality, implicit biases, and emotional imagery, a time may come when the current unrestricted freedom

of the Internet itself becomes history, remembered akin to the comparatively relaxed nature of airports before September 11, 2001.

## **8.9 Entertainment and Propaganda**

At its core, the idea of East and West as opposing blocks is itself a construction, a hyperreal simulation rooted in representing, describing, and interpreting the “East” as merely the opposite of the “West”. As expressed by Said, this is not about the “Orient” at all, but rather a “Western” effort to understand itself, and, as encapsulated in the majority of the analyzed films, “what unites a people more than a common enemy?” (*Troy*, 25:56, 2004). Aligning Baudrillard with Said, Orientalism is essentially the “West” simulating the “East” through othering. Historical film is teeming with Orientalist simulacra, copies of copies perpetuating the same narrative and implicit biases, just as *The 300 Spartans* did for the Cold War, and *300* did for the “War on Terror”. These symbols, or simulacra, will continue to propagate along the hyperreal landscape, ensuring the simulation of reality becomes more available and representative of reality, than reality itself.

The root of this may indeed be implicit biases facilitated by our cognitive heuristics, powered by stereotypical associations prevalent within our culture, which Hinton described as the “culture in mind”. These biases started forming millenia ago, likely originating from a feedback loop of availability and representativeness as the Ancient Greeks came into contact with the Achaemenid Persians, before evolving through eons into the tropes of Orientalism described by Said. Propagation continued throughout the textual age, intensified, and was further capitalized on for entertainment within the motion picture industry, producing the historical films analyzed throughout this project. As the tropes continue to persist throughout the hyperreal age

of film and other commodified visual media, it is crucial to remember that “people are active in the construction of both their social world and their media environment” (Hinton 2017, 7).

The analysis of cinema has demonstrated how the construction of our historical world is indeed connected to our perceptions of the present. Historical arguments for modern geopolitical action can be deduced through heuristics, framing actions including the Iraq War, and the War in Afghanistan as continuing the timeless norm of West defending itself from East as evidenced in *300* and *Alexander*. Of course, this practice was also present in the Golden Age of Hollywood, where the historical arguments revolved around a Soviet menace rather than an Islamic one. Yet the duality of the tyrannical East and free West presented itself in films including *The Ten Commandments*, *Samson and Delilah*, and *The 300 Spartans*. Indeed, as long as these historical tropes continue to be accepted by our cognitive heuristics as reflecting modern reality within any broader culture, individuals may continue to perceive a world built on binaries including East/West, now supported by the performative and hyperreal tools of artificial reality.

Hypervigilance, however, is not necessarily the way out of this quagmire, as evidenced by Zacks when discussing the findings of Marsh and Fazio (2006) concerning learned errors arising from fictional stories. As discussed in Chapter 3, Marsh and Fazio discovered that “whether true or false, the readers incorporated information from the fictional story into their fact base”, once again demonstrating that narrative stories can indeed influence our factual repertoire, both positively and negatively (Zacks 2014, 107). Yet Zacks asks if, once we are aware that we “import information from unreliable sources”, we may become more vigilant about “keeping important factual information separate from fiction and resisting propaganda” (Zacks 2014, 108).

However, Marsh and Fazio also showcase the drawbacks of this constant vigilance. Within their experiment, readers were given explicit warnings that authors may twist facts and

present false information within their narratives. In essence, this made readers “paranoid – but not better at telling fact from fiction” (Zacks 2014, 108). After receiving these warnings, readers tended to answer “no” to all the knowledge questions, “rejecting true answers just as often as they weeded out the fakes” (Zacks 2014, 108). Extending this to the age of hyperreality and synthetic media, paranoia and hypervigilance serve neither the individual, nor their society, as they amount to the metaphorical withdrawal into a protective shell. This withdrawal does not reduce exposure to hyperreality, but may actually eliminate any contact with the remaining real itself. Hypervigilance cannot be the antidote to hyperreality, as the stifling of human curiosity and interaction with our environment will not aid in overcoming our implicit biases, but instead render us inert. However, it is critical that we strive for objectivity and authenticity. Addressing the drawbacks of fixation on source reliability does not mean individuals with subject expertise, such as academics, should embrace pessimism and not contribute their perspectives. On the contrary, in a hyperreal age, it is imperative that subject matter experts actively provide their opinions on bias propagation as society faces an increase in artificial stories built on stereotypical perceptions.

One potential solution lies in the very source which propagates the implicit binary, according to the conclusions of this project. These are the repeated and prevalent stereotypical associations most common in popular culture, that which Hinton labels the “culture in mind”. Regardless of how one chooses to inoculate themselves from hyperreality, binary imagery, and stereotypical media, the foundation of this propagated binary is cultural. As elaborated on by Hinton, models of the predictive brain point out one stark conclusion; “when the culture changes then the implicit stereotypes of its members will change (albeit slowly for some associations)” (Hinton 2017, 8). This culture consists of countless prevalent and prototypical associations, (i.e.,

a cultural reservoir of stereotypes), created through the accumulation of tropes within media such as historical films. The visual nature of film affords it the inherent emotional appeal of imagery explored by Stevenson, which may be exploited to catalyze and reinforce constructed, hyperreal dichotomies, such as the Orientalist view of East/West, thereby implicitly perpetuating division along binary perspectives. All of this takes place within the context of a simulated world in which culture is driven principally by simulacra, as the real has been all but eliminated from everyday discourse. This lost and forgotten reality is the nuanced nature of existence which exists along complex continuums, but is now often preceded by socially constructed binaries, through which the cultural reservoir of stereotypes is enriched.

Within the context of this project, the oft-repeated words of Edward Said once again resonate not just as commentary, but perhaps as a recommendation for how to apply Hinton's conclusion about cultural change to the hyperreal world in which Orientalism thrives. At the root of all the tropes observed throughout historical film, is the understanding that "Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience" (Said 1978, 328). More examples of lived human experience may be the key requirement for any cultural reservoir to expand beyond the current stereotypical associations concerning the constructed dichotomy of East and West. By considering the historical element of these films, through which the past is used to present implicit arguments about geopolitical realities in the present, perhaps an expansion of perspectives within these films would gradually alter the cultural reservoir through the same mechanisms by which it accumulated, the heuristics of availability and representativeness.

By actively choosing to not re-present the same hyperreal tropes expected of the many aspects of the East/West binary discussed throughout Chapters 5-7, filmmakers can create new

examples from which to draw inspiration from, directly contributing to novel prototypes which may over time naturally rise in prevalence. This is not to say that film should solely strive to capture the real, as Baudrillard highlights this misguided striving for reality in cinema as a banal enterprise for the prospect of art and entertainment itself. In his critique of the cultural obsession with realism (which ironically perpetuates implicit biases), Baudrillard exclaims “cinema...is getting closer to the absolute real, in its veracity, in its boredom, and at the same time in its presumption...no culture has ever had toward its “signs” this paranoid vision” (Baudrillard 1981, 49). This commodified obsession with realism not only contributes to the hyperreal, but is also culturally destructive, for often the reality sought after is itself constructed, akin to the Oriental simulacrum. Indeed, this enterprise is just as culturally fruitless as the hypervigilance Zacks cautions against.

The issue is that so often, “cinema plagiarizes itself, recopies itself, remakes its classics, its original myths...the cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent” (Baudrillard 1981, 50). This is best observed in narratives such as the Battle of Thermopylae, deeply embedded within the “Western” historical cultural reservoir, and possessing both a high degree of availability, and representativeness. Evoking this historical narrative cinematically may therefore communicate implicit messages concerning the geopolitical sentiment at the time of release regarding cultural associations about the tyrannical East and free West. It transcends its historical root with an almost mythical status, becoming a locus of re-presentation in cultural media, easily accessible during both the Cold War and War on Terror as a tale which depicts Western heroism against Eastern barbarism. This hyperreal reference point almost guarantees that the simulacrum of the 300 Spartans will be re-presented again through visual media in the future, and it is this precise environment which

must be considered when incorporating Said and Hinton's ideas regarding cultural change and human experience.

One additional aspect of this historical cinematic process which should also be considered is that the industry of cultural production belonging to any hegemonic country has the potential for global export. As argued by Joseph Nye, within these productions, cultural ideology itself is exported as a form of "soft power". Throughout the last century, cinema has been one of the dominant forms of cultural production, and Hollywood has, by way of American imperial hegemony, enjoyed a lofty position as the world's leading producer of film, including historical representations. Once again, the process of Orientalism demonstrates an inextricable link between cultural representation and dominant power structures, particularly imperialism. However, Hollywood may not retain its cinematic throne in perpetuity. India, China, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka all have noteworthy film industries, many featuring an abundance of historical stories not conforming to Orientalist stereotypes. Of these countries, China and India in particular are poised for potentially greater geopolitical hegemony in the future, through which they may also achieve cultural and ideological hegemony via cinematic exports, or perhaps the next emerging dominant form of hyperreal media.

This may also occur with the continuing trajectory of the American film industry conforming to the tastes, and cultural/political considerations, of foreign markets. The latter point is evidenced by the dominance of Marvel films in China, a market which has been cited as directly influencing artistic decisions. This includes cases such as altering the comic book origin of Doctor Strange's teacher, having her portrayed by Tilda Swinton instead of a Tibetan to avoid upsetting Chinese political censors, and/or audiences, over the status of Tibet (Rosenberg, 2016). The soft power of these cultural productions, replete with novel stories grounded in different

historical human experiences than those presented by Orientalism, could indeed therefore catalyze the very cultural changes Hinton speaks of when referring to the gradual alteration of implicit stereotypes (Hinton 2017, 8).

Yet even within the current Hollywood-centric environment, small pockets of nuanced representation occasionally present themselves. Among the historical films analyzed, this was best represented within the Spanish film *Agora* (2009). Unlike almost all other films analyzed, *Agora* stood out as if it were an intentional effort to make a historical film devoid of Orientalist tropes. Set in Roman Alexandria during a period of political and religious turmoil, almost none of the prevalent or prototypical tropes apparent in other historical films were depicted, even though the film had many opportunities to indulge in them. *Agora* features moral Romans, immoral Christians, wise women, deceptive men, and at no point perpetuates any binary division between East and West. While certainly historical, it is the lone example from the analyzed “Western” films which cannot in any way be labelled an Orientalist production.

For this reason, it is likely viewed from a novel cognitive perspective, as opposed to one reliant on the heuristic processing of availability and representativeness. This allows it the opportunity to not only present a fresh narrative defying anticipated tropes, but also remain genuinely entertaining the way any film is when one feels they are experiencing something they have never before seen on screen. The nobility of Christians from the biblical epics are inverted, notions of total Western superiority are challenged with moral ambiguity, and the female protagonist champions scientific progress over religious, cultural, or nationalist values. This novel approach to historical film is best encapsulated by Roger Ebert who proclaimed “I went to see *Agora* expecting an epic with swords, sandals and sex. I found swords and sandals, some unexpected opinions about sex, and a great deal more” (Ebert, 2010).



Novel stories such as *Agora* demonstrate how alternative human experience can be incorporated into the cultural zeitgeist through representation in historical cinema. Perhaps the very nature of *Agora*, focused on the clash between science and tradition, as opposed to a clash between “Eastern” and “Western” civilizations, is what catalyzed this mass omission of tropes. This would align with Baudrillard’s perspective that it is not the real which must be captured by cinema, but rather narratives of a mythological quality. Filmmakers need not try to actively avoid Orientalist tropes if they avoid myths which rely upon telling Orientalist narratives. This very practice could inject new associations into popular culture, expanding what Hinton refers to as the “culture in mind”, and potentially limiting the perpetuation of certain implicit biases.

Above all, however, films must remain entertaining in addition to offering an expansion of representation and narratives. *Agora* succeeds precisely because of this, as its critical and popular reception demonstrates that the novelty of its narrative does not detract from its engrossing nature. As a result, the efficacy of binary propaganda within the hyperreal paradigm need not engender pessimism. The power of simulation and re-presentation may function bidirectionally and by utilizing the very technology which has been exploited to perpetuate binary propaganda, novel narratives falling outside the historical dichotomies of Orientalism may be represented as Baudrillardian myths. With regards to artificial reality and the issues it presents for the hyperreal world, it is my personal belief that cultural and technological adaptations will pave a way for future generations to decipher their reality.

Adaptation to synthetic media will take time, and the first few generations dealing with artificial reality may be inundated with propaganda akin to the American women targeted by the “Torches of Freedom” campaign of Edward Bernays. Yet, just as the general public eventually realized the health risks of cigarette smoking, the audiences of artificial reality will likely adapt

to their media environment enough to discern entertainment from propaganda. Adaptation, however, requires time, particularly the kind required to influence the representativeness and availability heuristics, as well as their potentially interactive feedback loop. As we enter what has been often labelled the “post-truth” age, it is crucial to remember that implicit biases do not arise from any faults of individual cognition, but are the cumulative result of the stereotypical associations most prevalent in culture, i.e., the “culture in mind” (Harsin 2018, 2).

For the first generations to be immersed in the artificial reality of post-truth, awareness of this popular “culture in mind” is the most important tool when attempting to understand our own biases. Propaganda, whether intentional or not, builds on implicit bias, and is therefore contingent on the stereotypical associations prevalent within one’s culture. That is why it is critical to be aware of both the cultural and cognitive mechanisms which help construct our reality within the post-truth age. For in the hyperreal world, the only true reality is human experience.

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