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Audience Reactions to Orientalist Stereotyping in *I Dream of Jeannie.*

by: Katherine Bullock │ August 2015

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About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

Most Muslims in the West blame media representations[1] for perpetuating societal prejudice against Islam and Muslims, and they often express optimism that once audiences are educated to recognize negative stereotyping at work, then hatred, discrimination, and prejudice towards Muslims would disappear. Gottschalk and Greenberg define stereotypes as "descriptions of a group by outsiders using characteristics understood both to be shared by all members and to define them as different from 'normal' society."[2] In their analyses of media representation of Muslims, scholars from a variety of disciplines confirm that, be it in print, on television, or in movies, a staple set of negative stereotypes about Arabs/Muslims is prevalent in Western societies,[3] including the familiar "veiled oppressed Muslim women" or "violent barbaric terrorists."[4]

Yet there is a difference between media representation and its influence on people's actual attitudes. In order to find out if negative stereotypes of Muslims in media are indeed connected to widespread societal Islamophobia, we need empirical research that uncovers how audiences react to such portrayals. The connection between the media and what people think, believe, or do is much less obvious than one might surmise, and there are many competing theories on media influence. Much attention in the field of audience studies focused on the relationship between media violence and violent behavior, or the impact of news coverage on voting behavior. The portrayal of minorities as influencing racist attitudes has been less studied,[5] and an exhaustive literature search on the impact of negative media representation on peoples' attitudes towards Islam/Muslims only turned up seven studies.[6]This paper presents the results of my focus group discussions of the 1960s American sitcom, *I Dream of Jeannie*.[7] My research hypothesis was that *I Dream of Jeannie*, as a popular television series replete with Orientalist imagery, had contributed to widespread negative Western stereotypes of Islam and Muslims.

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[1] This is one of the most consistent themes in my interviews with Muslim youth as well as in the self-reflection essays I have required of my third year students taking a political science course in "The Politics of Islam."

[2] 2008, p.63.

[3] Edwards, 2000; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Karim, 2003; Michalak, 2002; Said, 1979; Shaheen, 1984; Stockton, 1994.

[4] Dakroury, 2012; Hirji, 2011; Karim Karim; Said, 1979; Shaheen, 1984.

[5] Fujioka, 1999; Jhally and Lewis, 1992; Park et al, 2006.

[6] Abdalla and Rane, 2007; Andersen, Brinson, and Stohl, 2011; Cinnirella, 2012; Dekker and van der Noll, 2012; Poole, 2002; Rane et al, 2014; Zapata-Barrero and Díez-Nicolás, 2012.

[7] My deepest gratitude to an anonymous reviewer for comments that helped sharpen the focus of this paper and to Yuliya Barannick for expert editing of an early draft.

My investigation is grounded in the field of critical cultural studies, an approach that recognises, in Jhally and Lewis's (1992) words,

> that that the significance, or meaning, of television in popular culture is a product of the interplay between a television program and the attitudes the viewer brings to it. We accept, therefore, that television is influential. But we also accept that the precise nature of its influence is unpredictable: it will depend upon viewers who have thoughts, interests, and opinions before they sit down in front of the screen (p.9).

As we will see, my interviewees' widely differing responses to *I Dream of Jeannie* reflects the multiplicity recognized in this approach.

I Dream of Jeannie

I Dream of Jeannie is an American sitcom conceived of by Sidney Sheldon for Screen Gems (a branch of Columbia pictures) for NBC in 1965.[8] Jeannie is from 64 BC Baghdad. After she refuses to marry an evil blue jinn, he turns her into a genie and traps her in a bottle. 2000 years later, Jeannie is accidentally released by an astronaut, Major Tony Nelson, who finds her magical bottle on a desert island. Jeannie immediately falls in love with her new "master" and follows him despite being set free. Jeannie appears as a stereotypical harem girl, dressed in skimpy rib-high top, see-through bloomers, and a pink gauze veil floating down from a bun on top of her head.[9] The comedy of the show usually revolves around Jeannie trying to convince Tony to marry her, or mix-ups caused by Jeannie's misunderstanding of the modern world. *I Dream of Jeannie* was never a smash hit, but it was popular enough, and has remained so during re-runs.[10] The show made the top 30 on Nielson ratings twice,[11] was nominated for an Emmy in 1967,[12] and even warranted two reunion movies: *I Dream of Jeannie: 15 Years Later* (1985)[13] and *I Still Dream of Jeannie* (1991)[14]. The show appears to still be well-liked, judging by keen interest in the DVD sets on Amazon,[15] positive consumer comments online and a robust trade in Jeannie

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[8] Cox, 2000, p.27.

[9] This is her costume in every episode, although when Jeannie appears 'in public' she dons Western clothing. Interestingly, the modesty requirements of the time meant that, even in her harem outfit, Jeannie was not allowed to show her navel.

[10] According to the creator and executive producer, Sidney Sheldon, at the end of season 4 an NBC executive insisted that Jeannie and Tony actually marry – and this "destroyed" the show (Sidney Sheldon, The Other Side of Me: A Memoir, New York: Warner Books, 2005, p.346).

[11] Brooks & Marsh, 1999, p.1249.

[12] Sheldon, 2005, p.342.

[13] "I Dream of Jeannie: 15 Years Later placed a close second to a World Series game that night and ended up as the eleventh-highest rated TV movie that year (Cox, Dreaming of Jeannie, p.198)."

[14] Eden, 2011, pp. 201, 233. Released, unsettlingly, the same year that the first Gulf War ended.

[15] In a special interview for the 40th anniversary, Sheldon said that the show was number two in the UK (IDJ 2013, disc 4).

artefacts.[16] Moreover, *I Dream of Jeannie* spawned such spin-offs as Jeannie slot machines, board games, a porn film[17] and a cartoon series.[18] Thus, while not a blockbuster, *I Dream of Jeannie* remains a much-loved show with an enduring cultural influence for millions worldwide.

ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATION and the "INSTANT TV ARAB KIT"

In the late 1970s Edward Said aimed to explain the persistence of *Orientalism*, which he (re)defined as prejudice masquerading as a Western system of knowledge that constructed phantasms about a geographic region labelled as "the Orient," or "the East." Said demonstrated that Orientalism was a constellation of discourses produced by academics, scientists, travel writers, novelists, and other "experts" in concert with material power – empire builders and functionaries. Orientalism embodies a sense of timeless European superiority over the "Orient," a host of fantastical stereotypes (such as exotic women in the harem and men as "camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers"[19]) and a vision of an East ripe with exotic pleasures and treasures.[20]

Said notes that

> "[o]ne of the aspects of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforce-ment of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the me-dia's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of 'the mysterious Orient' (Said, 1979, p.26)."

I Dream of Jeannie emerged as the first (in fact, only) television show based *entirely* on orientalist representations. It inherits from a stream of movies like *The Sheikh* (1921), *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924), *Kismet* (1944), *The Brass Bottle* (1964) and countless more,[21] a standardised oriental-ist *mise-en-scène.* The settings include deserts, domed buildings with arches, bazaars, camels, donkeys, and tents filled with luxurious, colourful décor. The stock characters include submissive, sexualised harem women in belly-dancing outfits and barbaric men in turbans, either bare-chested in bloomers, bolero jacket, waist sash and scimitar, or in long flowing robes resembling striped nightgowns. Standardised orientalist dialogue is sprinkled with terms like "Allah," "salaams," "ef-fendi" and "infidel." Any diversity inherent to the geographical region of South West Asia is obliter-

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[16] Grandinetti, p.2005.

[17] Eden, 2011, p.259.

[18] Brooks & Marsh, 1999, p.477.

[19] Said, 1979, p.108.

[20] Nance, 2009.

[21] Edwards, 2000; Michalak, 2002; Shaheen, 2009.

ated by orientalist tropes, which are more fantasy than ethnographic reality.

The orientalist *mise-en-scène* described above is the foundation of a more recent pattern that Shaheen describes as "The Instant TV Arab Kit." [22] This Hollywood "toolkit" perpetuates the same old negative stereotypes about Arabs/Muslims: the men are violent, uncivilised and misogynistic (with money-squandering opulence added post the 1973 oil crisis), and the women are submissive and obedient to their men. Only the visuals have shifted slightly to include "headdresses (which look like tablecloths pinched from a restaurant), veils, sunglasses, […] oil wells, limousines and/or camels."[23]

I Dream of Jeannie was part of a cycle of sitcoms known as the "fantasy sitcom,"[24] where supernatural creatures were employed to tackle gently the rise of the feminist and civil rights movements without the risk of alienating their overwhelmingly white, middle-class audience and sponsors.[25] In *I Dream of Jeannie,* the Cold War "space race" is represented by the NASA astronaut Tony, whom Sheldon chose as a scientific, rational protagonist most likely to be "befuddled" by a genie with magical powers.[26] The use of orientalist representations in *I Dream of Jeannie* was not considered problematic.

FOCUS GROUPS

The participants in this study were divided into five focus groups.[27] Group One consisted of three Muslim convert women: Fatima (French-Canadian, 65), Sommayyah (Anglo-Canadian, 48) and Mona (Spanish Canadian, 63). Group Two consisted of one non-Muslim woman: Caroline (Anglo-Canadian, 53). Group Three consisted of three non-Muslims: Wendy (French-Canadian, 42), Frank (Anglo-Canadian, 73) and Angeline, (Jamaican-Canadian, 23). Group Four consisted of four Arab-Canadian women: Aisha (34), Zainab (29), Amal (28) and Shahina (58). Finally, Group Five consisted of three non-Muslim women: Margaret (Anglo-Irish-Canadian, 45), Sally (Anglo-Irish-Canadian, 50) and Francine (Anglo-Canadian, 59).

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[22] 1984, p.5.

[23] Shaheen, p.5.

[24] This cycle also included Bewitched, Mr Ed, and The Munsters. Mittell, 2010, p.251

[25] Mittell, 2010, pp.320-21

[26] Cox, 2000, p.58

[27] Names have been altered for confidentiality purposes.

EPISODE SUMMARIES

The following three episodes of *I Dream of Jeannie* were shown to the focus groups in this study:[28]

"My Hero" (Season One, Episode Two), watched by Group One.

Tony jumps to Jeannie's defence after she complains of being slapped at the market, and is promptly transported to BC Bagdad where he is threatened with torture and sold on the slave-market to a capricious princess. Jeannie rescues Tony and whisks him straight to a wedding banquet. Tony, however, refuses to marry her. An upset Jeannie sends Tony back to a prison dungeon, but then relents and returns him safely to 1960s Florida.

A complete orientalist *mise-en-scène* in this episode includes the bazaar in Bagdad (full of donkeys, camels and unkempt men in cloaks and turbans), the giant, barbaric antagonist Ali (bare chested in bloomers, sash and turban), the opulent "oriental" wedding, and colourful dialogue with lines like "May Allah bless you."

"How to Be a Genie in Ten Easy Lessons" (Season Two, Episode Eight), watched by Groups Two and Three.

Tony decides that Jeannie needs "genie training" and orders her to study *The Arabian Nights* book, which he assumes is about her "hometown." Jeannie refuses, as the book teaches genies how to harm their masters. Tony insists, and suffers the consequences. Meanwhile, Roger (NASA colleague and friend of Tony) tries to lure Jeannie into his service, and is later punished by being blinked[29] to an iceberg.

In this episode, *The Arabian Nights* references the mysterious and barbaric "Orient," and Tony endures exotic tortures (including hanging from his arms over a crocodile river and lying on a bed of nails).

"Please Don't Feed the Astronauts" (Season Three, Episode Twenty), watched by Groups Four and Five.

Roger, Tony and Commander Porter are on a survival exercise in a remote location. Jeannie tries to ease their plight by blinking up a "friendly native village" on their path. Porter takes this Arabian village for a mirage, and is unfazed when Hamid, Jeannie's cousin, threatens to execute him. Jeannie intervenes, and Porter is released and rewarded for his "courage" in the face of death with "clothes of Hajji Baba" (a garment reminiscent of a Gulf Sheikh). Ultimately Porter, Tony and Roger all return

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[28] Ideally all focus groups would have been shown the same episode, but a technical difficulty prevented the first episode screened from being shown again. Subsequently, the second episode, shown to two non-Muslim groups, did not elicit reactions to its orientalist stereotypes (an unexpected response which is detailed in my discussion of audience responses). Therefore, the third set of groups were shown a third episode, which included even stronger orientalist stereotyping. This method mimics the arbitrary showing of re-runs, so I accepted the data from all sets of groups.

[29] Jeannie uses her magic by crossing her arms at the elbows in front of her, blinking, and nodding her head. Actress Barbara Eden came up with the nod, director Gene Nelson with the blink move (Eden, 2011, p. 121).

safely to their Air Force base.

The Arabian village in this episode is a fantasy of domed cloth tents, one of them full of girls in belly-dancing outfits. Oriental barbarism is embodied in Hamid, with his curved scimitar and an outfit similar to Ali's in "My Hero." Hamid ties Porter to a pole, calls him an "Infidel dog!" and attempts to behead him for "desecrate[ing] the tents of the women."

AUDIENCE RESPONSES

Jeannie, a Muslim?

The first theme that stood out from my interviewees' diverse responses was that none of them thought of Jeannie as a Muslim. Their mental image of a Muslim woman was someone "covered up" – not dressed in an exotic, revealing harem outfit. However, when discussing stereotypes in the show, a split became apparent: while arguing Jeannie is not portrayed as a Muslim, the Muslim converts and Arab women were able to recognise orientalist stereotypes, whereas the non-Muslim interviewees had not heard of orientalism, and did not see it in the show.

The non-Muslims recalled being fond of the show as children. "I'd forgotten she wore that cute little outfit," said Sally. Francine recalled wanting to be like Jeannie when she was a kid and to have an outfit like hers. They understood Jeannie's costume as that of a belly dancer, without necessarily connecting it to the harem.   Like the pre-Muslim me, many had not really thought of Jeannie as coming from any particular region or religious/cultural background. Some were quite adamant that Jeannie's world was a magical, fairy-tale place, unrelated to any world region.[30]

The converts had two levels of reactions to the show. Fatima in particular had loved the show as a child and like me, had that pleasant memory disturbingly upended watching the show again as an adult Muslim. Both the converts and the Arab women quickly pointed to Jeannie's outfit as a manifestation of a negative stereotype of Muslim/Arab women.

We discussed why Jeannie was played by a blond, blue-eyed actress, as opposed to a Middle-Eastern looking one.[31] There was a near-unanimity among the interviewees that the context of the show's production required Jeannie to be blond. Sommayyah mentioned the tendency to cast white actors in leading, heroic roles (including portrayals of Jesus as blond and blue-eyed). Fatima agreed, branding it "a Hollywood thing." Sally and Angelina noted that the preferences of a middle-class, white American audience at the time would have dictated Jeannie's appearance. Others

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[30] I invited a white, non-Muslim female acquaintance with a background in media studies to host a showing of I Dream of Jeannie and to lead a discussion on my behalf in order to prevent my hijabi presence influencing participants' answers. She believed my ideas about the show to be very much off, and related similar incredulous reactions from friends she was recruiting for the study. The consensus seemed to be that there is nothing to indicate that Jeannie was written as a Muslim character. To quote Frank before the screening: "Jeannie is a magical fairy tale character… why would she think that has anything to do with Islam?"

[31] Barbara Eden, who plays Jeannie, wondered about this herself (Eden, 2011, pp. 1-2).

highlighted a comedy stereotype at work: the idea of Jeannie as a "dumb blonde," bumbling and scatterbrained. Frank actually referred to Jeannie as a "bimbo."

The Arab women's assumptions about the choice of a blond actress was particularly interesting:

Amal: "Because Arabs like blonde girls…"

Shahina "But Arab are not blonde..."

Amal: "they *like* blonde girls"

Shahina: "maybe, they like blonde girls"

Zainab: "Even the Americans, they like the blonde…."

Shahina: "but the Arabs yes, it's a good point, they like blonde, blue eyes or green eyes…"

Amal: "they *love* blondies"

Aisha: "But it's an American show"

Amal: "…no but, they have her as an Arab…"

In this exchange, the women interpret Jeannie's blondness through their experiences of beauty standards in their own Arab community. While aware that the show is American, their interpretation of Jeannie as an Arab character influences their reasoning as to why a blonde, white actress is "playing Arab."[32]

Stereotypes in Action

When asked if *I Dream of Jeannie* contained any stereotypes, non-Muslims' spontaneous answers focused on the sex-role stereotype: Jeannie as subservient housewife to her "master."[33] On the other hand, the Muslim converts, while also acknowledging the sex-role stereotype, were nevertheless more struck by the orientalist stereotypes: the clothes, the bazaar, the barbaric men and exotic harem women. Fatima, even as she examined Jeannie in the context of 1960s Canada - recalling how her Catholic mother used to serve her father in a similar, obedient way - made a connection between that image and the stereotype of a submissive Muslim housewife. On the other hand, Frank identified a similarity between Jeannie and the image of a Muslim woman as subservient to her husband *only when prompted* about a possible connection between contemporary stereo-

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[32] Nance's study of orientalism in the US from 1790-1935 demonstrates that whites 'playing Arab' has a long and discreditable history (2009), as does Hollywood for having whites play blacks and other ethnicities.

[33] A couple of interviewees pointed out that since Jeannie was a "genie"' she did not really have a choice in the matter of "obedience" to her "master," and so for them, she did not qualify as that housewife stereotype. Interestingly, one woman pointed out that, in reality, Jeannie had the upper hand in the show, as she was able to use her magic to her advantage (and usually to Tony's inconvenience).

types of Muslim women and Jeannie. Similarly, two non-Muslim women, tipped off by my role as the researcher and the direction of the interview questions, cited a couple of oriental stereotypes.

The Arab women's discussion, again, went in unexpected directions. While they all recognised orientalist elements in the show, Amal, a young unmarried woman, took extreme offense to the sex-role stereotype, which for her connected to an uneasy lived experience with the cultural expectation placed on Arab girls, trained to dutifully cook for their husband and family. Zainab insisted on making a distinction between Arabs and Muslims with regards to sex-role stereotyping, praising the position of strength given to women in Islam. Amal argued that "we're not talking about Islam […] we're talking about how people, *Muslims*, in general, people who are religious, or not, how, what they do." Amal did, however, wish to see more nuanced portrayals of Muslim women that pointed to culture rather than Islam for gender inequality - a distinction rarely captured in media.

When I asked my interviewees whether they would show *I Dream of Jeannie* to their kids,[34] their differing understanding of stereotypes in the show was again evident. Angelina, deeply offended by the sex-role stereotyping, was firm about not exposing her kids to the show. For the same reason, Caroline admitted she "wouldn't want a steady diet of it." Fatima was adamant about not showing *I Dream of Jeannie* to her granddaughter, due to *both* the sex-role and the orientalist stereotyping. Orientalism was Aisha's primary concern, while Shahina was more laid-back about its effects: "It's nice […] It's just something funny… [the kids] they have already seen that - their cartoons. Aladdin and … every cartoon, there are some things like that..."

So while many Muslims and non-Muslims cited the sex-role stereotyping of Jeannie as something they would not want to share with their kids, only the Muslims invoked reasons related to orientalism.

Muslims in Contemporary Media

The final contrast emerging from my data revolves around perceptions of contemporary representations of Muslims in the media. Rane *et al* found a marked difference between non-Muslim and Muslim interviewees in their audience study of responses to media coverage of the tenth anniversary of 9/11. While some non-Muslims were aware of sensationalism and negative stereotyping, many felt that the media coverage of Islam/Muslims had improved over that decade. On the other hand, the Muslim interviewees blamed the media for its negative portrayals of their community and saw it as a direct cause of the discrimination they experienced.[35]

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[34] My own children, boys between the ages of 7 and 11, had watched a few early episodes of I Dream of Jeannie with me. The youngest became somewhat distressed after watching "My Hero." "Why are they showing a man about to be hurt when Muslims are good people? How do they even know about Allah?" he asked. The eldest had a better grip on the plot but was not able to explain the representation of Muslims. I tried to explain the nature of Hollywood stereotyping of Muslims/Arabs, but the phenomenon was difficult for them to grasp; they did not feel any better for my explanation, and neither did I.

[35] Nance, 2014, p. 171.

A similar bifurcation played out with my interviewees. All the Muslims commented that contemporary media show Islam/Muslims in a "very bad way." Shahina felt that "they don't like our religion." Sommayyah said she avoids media because "it's always very painful." On the other hand, when asked how well the media was covering issues involving Muslims, the non-Muslim responses ranged from Caroline's "probably not particularly well,"[36] to Frank's "better and better."

Francine found the question confusing: she associated news media simply with "information," and asked me if I thought the media was "biased." When discussing entertainment, a co-interviewee pointed to *24* as an example of a show that contained negative representations of Muslims as terrorists. Francine, again, proposed it is a matter of "perspective." She argued that shows like *24* or *Homeland* (which she praised highly) were not really examples of negative stereotypes:

"If the fact that they're trying to fight terrorists is negative, then, I don't particularly think it is… [Arabs and Muslims are the bad guys] that's what […] the situation is about, like you know if you watched the Americans, they're talking about the Soviet Union during the 60s and you know that would be a negative […]. It just depends on […] who the bad guy is in the show."

For Francine, since Muslims are currently the terrorists, it was natural for contemporary-set TV shows to cast them overwhelmingly in a negative light.

Sally embarked on a self-reflective learning curve during the discussion.[37] She started with reflections on how media coverage of "barbaric" honor killing and stoning in South West Asian countries made her appreciate the rights of women in North America. Later, however, she recognised that Muslim men were frequently the media "bad guys" since 9/11, and wondered if "it's like any news… only the bad news […] get published, you don't hear the good news stories about anyone." Angelina, who watches a lot of TV, observed that she couldn't think of a single entertainment show (including those aspiring to be "all inclusive") that feature a contemporary Muslim-American character, and that "you don't see a lot of women in *hijabs* on TV… […] in just like a regular sitcom situation." This resonated with Gottschalk and Greenberg's (2008) study of political cartoons, which found that while Muslim men were featured regularly as negative stereotypes, Muslim women were more notable for their absence.

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[36] Caroline's skepticism of media coverage, however, was not Muslim-centered, as she suggested the media "probably don't do a good job with Christian issues [or] political issues" either.

[37] Sally's response, I believe, is an example of how a particular kind of interviewer's presence (in this case a Muslim woman in a headscarf) can influence the subject's perceptions.

DISCUSSION

Based on the diverse responses to *I Dream of Jeannie* in my audience study, I can safely conclude that my original hypothesis was not supported by the data. None of the interviewees thought that Jeannie was portrayed as a Muslim. The non-Muslims did not recognise Jeannie's outfit, or other *mise-en-scène* elements from the "Instant TV Arab Kit," as related to negative stereotyping of Muslims/Arabs – only the Muslim viewers did. At the same time, Muslims viewers were quite aware that these elements were not intended as authentic markers of religious identity, but merely standard Hollywood tropes employed for entertainment purposes.

Just as the adult non-Muslims, who had not made connections between the show and Islam/ Muslims (their own, contemporary images of Islam/Muslims being very unlike this 1960s version), the Muslim converts are unlikely to have been impacted by the show growing up, as far as their perception of Islam/Muslims is concerned.

The Arabian Nights was once one part of the "common literary stock of education people."[38] From at least 1790 – 1935, Nance argues,[39] *The Arabian Nights* widely inspired imagination, individualism and consumerism in the United States: elite men dressed up as "wise men of the East" in Shriners clubs, élite women decorated a corner of the house in "oriental" décor, and many, irrespective of class, enjoyed watching belly dancers or Arab male acrobats. These audiences would have recognised Jeannie instantly. Yet Nance's work alerts us to an important power dynamic embedded in this fascination: although many consumers (including Western academics at the time) interpreted *The Arabian Nights* through a lens assuming authentic representation, the orientalist markers - the costumes, the language, the exaggerated violence - were essentially props in a show. Westerners felt they had the right to dress up and play-act as "oriental" subjects - just as they did with blackface – without feeling shame. Edward Said also pinpointed this phenomenon of play-acting (and its positioning as 'representational') as a sign of Western discursive power over the "Orient."[40]

The Arabian Nights are much less known in our post 9/11 era - all that remains is Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). The props of that world have been disconnected from widespread cultural knowledge of the West's discursive "Orient." Even the term "Oriental" itself for my non-Muslim interviewees, invoked something from China and Japan rather than Arabia.

There are firm continuities between the orientalist image of a Muslim barbarian and the contemporary Muslim terrorist, but as far as Muslim women are concerned, the continuities are so subtle as to be generally unnoticeable. The contemporary stereotype of a Muslim woman is one that is veiled, silenced and oppressed – far from a bubbly, blonde, seductively dressed genie. Only schol-

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[38] Irwin, 2010, p.10.

[39] Nance, 2014, p 11.

[40] Said. p.55.

ars trained to look for orientalism can identify negative stereotyping of Muslims/Arabs[41] in *I Dream of Jeannie*. In the only trade book written about *I Dream of Jeannie,* Jeannie is merely a "genie" among other "genies" in Hollywood,[42] without any awareness of orientalism. Jeannie is seen as pure fantasy, like a unicorn – nothing more.

A similar paradigm shift is found in Kahf's study (1999) of Western literary representation of Muslim women in the transition from Medieval to Enlightenment works. In the former, Muslim women were usually a powerful presence with considerable agency - a Queen or noble woman who became en-amoured with the Christian hero, betraying her Muslim kingdom and converting to Christianity. The oppressed woman of the harem is introduced around the eighteenth century (p.6), and for the next couple of hundred years, she is the eroticised *odalisque*. This is the cultural knowledge *I Dream of Jeannie* draws on, but towards the end of the twentieth century, the *odalisque* largely disap-peared from the common cultural stock of Western audiences, replaced by the image of the veiled woman.[43] This is why my non-Muslim viewers did not recognise Jeannie's outfit as referencing the harem.[44] It is important to recognise, however, that while Western cultural representations of Muslim women have had a couple of paradigm shifts over the centuries, there is nevertheless a constant thread running through these portrayals: the Muslim woman as Other, both different and inferior.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores *I Dream of Jeannie* as a case study of the link between popular culture and contemporary negative stereotypes of Muslim women, through an audience study of seven Muslim and seven non-Muslims. While the research did not support my initial assumptions, it revealed something potentially more important and unnerving: a significant bifurcation of media interpretation between Muslim and non-Muslim viewers, to the extent that by and large non-Muslim viewers were unable to recognise Shaheen's "Instant TV Arab Kit" and its stereotypes, while Muslims did – and most felt offended by them. While more empirical work must be done to establish concrete links between media representations and Islamophobia, this study's contrasting results are concerning. If North American society is to move beyond Islamophobia and towards building bridges, tackling systemic discrimination, and integrating Muslims into wider society, it would require a much greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, the prevalent negative stereotypes of Arabs/Muslims, and the dis-comfort and distress they cause to Muslim minority communities.

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[41] Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Shirazi, 2001.

[42] Cox, 2000.

[43] The strident images of Muslim women in veils as part of the 1979 Iranian Revolution have likely played a key role in launching this shift.

[44] The harem girl image has not completely disappeared from popular culture. The sci-fi series Stargate SG1 (1997-2007) sometimes mobilised the erotic nature of face veiling for its female character Nirrti, an enemy of the show's 'good guys.' Also, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, many feature films from the U.S. with Middle Eastern settings still resort to the scene of men, usually white and Middle-Eastern, gazing on the spectacle of the dancing Middle-Eastern woman, scantily clad and eroticized for their amusement and titillation.