Saving Other Women from Other Men:
Disney's Aladdin

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Figure 1: Aladdin and Jasmine on their magic carpet ride over Agrabah
[source: toonpaperszone.blogspot.com]

In academic writing and journalism about the colonization of the Arab-Islamic world, European law is typically referred to as "civil law," and the replacement of Shari'a (Islamic) law by "civil" law is almost always assumed (by Euramerican writers) to be a positive social reform, especially for women.[1] In the Victorian period the British colonial establishment in the Islamic and Asian worlds used the language of the early movement for women's suffrage to criticize the religion and culture (and particularly the religious culture) of non-European men.[2] In the Islamic colonies it was the appropriation of the feminist platform which gave the colonial presence the moral justification to substitute European law and its attendant family and kinship structures for the Shari'a and local, Islamic kinship pattern.[3] Disney's 1992 animated film Aladdin uses the same strategies, updated to reflect the socius of twentieth-century American coupling, to disparage and dismantle Islamic culture.

Widely praised as an adventuresome and voluptuously exciting film, Aladdin is one of the most profitable films in Disney history.[4] Visually mesmerizing, Aladdin's seemingly innocuous cartoon medium combines literary and filmic genres (formula hero film, full-production Broadway musical, fairy tale, and fable) into a bigoted and quite traditional European reading/writing of the medieval Persian story.[5] Aladdin has also been widely criticized for its racism. In an unprecedented gesture, Disney agreed to change two lines of the film's opening lyric, though the essential message-Islam's "barbarity "-- was retained.[6] It is worth recalling that *barbarikos* is an ancient Greek word which originally referred to what the Greeks perceived as the child-like speech of the Persians-it meant "foreign (not-us, and therefore inferior, uncivilized)." It is precisely this sense of barbarity which is played out so richly in Aladdin.

Aladdin's screenwriters "streamline the traditional Aladdin story into a contest between the boy and a towering vizier-wizard named Jafar, Aladdin's rival for the hand of the Sultan's daughter, Princess Jasmine."[7] Aladdin is turned out in "native dress" -- though at first it is not clear to what land he is native. Soon it is evident that he is a

thinly disguised American entrepreneur: he meets Jasmine, his Arab future wife, in the marketplace, dazzles her with magic wealth and a movie-star smile, and frees her from Arab men, Arab (Islamic) law, and Arab culture. In the bargain, Aladdin/America becomes the heir designate to Agraba/Arabia and its marketplace. Disparaged Islam, manned by Jafar and the daffy Sultan, becomes the wholly unsympathetic antagonist in its own land. Jasmine, the Arab woman, is the locus at which the colonial catalysis occurs, through whom the narratives of naive individualism, romance, and secularism pass into and unravel the fabric of Islamic culture. To save Jasmine from her own culture, Aladdin dismembers that culture and replaces it with ours.

While the racist aspects of Aladdin have been the subject of some attention in the media, little has been said about the conception of gender figured in the film. The discussion in the press of Aladdin's bigoted depiction of the Arab Islamic world has turned on the term "racism," and has been carried on primarily between Arab-Americans and Disney.[8] It is not, in fact, appropriate to discuss the millennium and a half of cultural confrontation and coexistence of Europe and America with Islam strictly in terms of race and ethnicity. The terms of the historically strained relationship between Europe and Islam have turned more closely on matters of religion and class, accented heavily by the tones of conquest and colonization.[9] Euramerican discussion of Islam in the media and elsewhere has been disabled by the Orientalist academic and aesthetic tradition, which has not tended to distinguish adequately between the marked variety of Islams and their respective cultural constitutions. It is Orientalism which provides the mythographical topos in which Aladdin is set, and which seems even in its fabulous strangeness so familiar and appealing to the Euramerican viewer. As I have already suggested, gender constructions are intimately important to both anti-Islamic and anti-Arab arguments, though these should not be conflated or confused.

The discursive intersections of race, gender, class, and culture are complex but enduring, and the system of stereotypes about gender patterns in Islam have hardly gone unremarked. Edward Said, in his now-classic work *Orientalism*, returns again and again to the recurring patterns of sexuality and gender which make the bed on which so much European scholarly activity lies at one time or another. Said himself, however, never fully confronts the problematic which Muslim women embody in the Euramerican figuration of the "Orient": "Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate."[10] One source of such suggestions is the twinned project of cultural and

material domination, which the academic discipline known as Orientalism funded so richly with information. Orientalism, rooted in the early Enlightenment, involves an unaccountably broad field of scholarly energy whose view takes in, like a wide-angle lens (and with the same distortion) everything from Morocco to China. Until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Orient (the "East") included Greece and the Holy Lands, the great pilgrimage centers of Judaism and Christianity. The "Orient" is not, of course, a geographical location, but a relative location: "east" of Europe, i.e., not-Europe. Significantly this "East" included North Africa, but not Russia, which was traditionally Christian. The East was Islam, and beyond that was the "far" East: cultures not even remotely related to Abrahamic monotheism. The Orient was and remains in Euramerican discourse an ideological construction, the quintessential Other.

The field against which *Aladdin* is acted out is just such a weirdly trans-cultural, trans-geographical amalgam of Oriental tropes. Venal vendors, half-dead hash-smokers, sword swallowers, veiled women, nearly naked veiled women, belly-dancers, acrobats, camels, elephants, Bengal tigers, cobras, Arabian steeds, desert, garden, scarab, fez, turban, khufiyyah, pyramid, pagoda, Taj-Mahal, suq, classical ruins, Allah, the djinn, and the Chinese New Year are fused to represent the Orient created by the European academy. By combining this material undistinguished into one field, the distinctive signatures of these cultures (China, India, Arabia, Morocco, et al.) are erased and replaced by a familiar ideological configuration (the Orient). At the same time the whole field is consigned to an exotic Other position: it is all the Orient, it is not-us.[11] In the Disney-Orient Arabia, China, India and the rest are more similar in their otherness than their cultural systems are distinct from one another.

In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, particularly, the Orient seemed to the modern European eye an inexhaustible opportunity for scholarly, sexual, and academic conquest.[12] All of these projects require, at some level, the reduction of the field (of research, of sexual or colonial expansion), the body, or society in question into a dumb entity -- both mute and unintelligent. The desired object of any such inquiry is passive, yet open, lush, and undemanding. We find this same combination of features in the field of aesthetic endeavor coterminous with academic Orientalism. The romanticized Oriental woman of Flaubert, Balzac, Nerval, Burton, and others is wordless and mindless, endlessly sexual, yet undemanding. The Oriental landscapes of the period are empty of local inhabitants, or locals are dwarfed by the immensity of vacant land or classical ruins which represent openness to agricultural cultivation or the richness of the archaeological field

for the cultivation of *European* identity. Colonial European foreign policy configured undifferentiated "Oriental" social structures, portrayed as non-rational, uneducated, cruel, inconsistent, and fanatically religious. It is interesting that such physical and structural emptiness at once suggests open, available land and population at the same time that the cultural discourse (foreign policy) suggests a moral challenge to the Protestant ethic to make land productive and to impose ethical/politica1 structure on the very inhabitants who were (apparently) absent from the (apparently) empty land. These discourses together amount to an invitation to settlement and missionary ventures, which were the practical results and strategies of European colonization.

Aladdin updates the colonial discourse of the Orient to reflect more accurately American interests in the Middle East. The abundance of natural resources which drew French and English settlers here becomes the marketplace of Agrabah. *Aladdin*'s missionary project replaces Islamic Law, social codes, and local aristocracy with American individualism, romance, and the aristocracy of wealth. The film's opening lyric ("Another Arabian Night") suggests that Agrabah is Arabia. The landscape outside the palace is demarcated into trackless waste and marketplace -- we see not a mosque, farm, or residential district separate from the marketplace. The sole exception is the oasis created by the Genie, which is the venue for the production of the magic wealth by which Aladdin initially gains access to the palace. From the outset Aladdin dreams of being Sultan, and imagines the Sultanate in terms of wealth. When he wishes the Genie to transform him into "Prince Ali," the transformation is accomplished with material goods (transportation, clothes, servants, sacks of gold). Though Aladdin at the end of the story frees the Genie and seems to imply that wealth does not make him the man he wants to be, it is signal that he retains the wealth he has gained by becoming Sultan: in fact, he has become Sultan *by means of that wealth*. Agrabah is not just a locale, it is a market. The missionary field, the ideological marketplace once tantalizing to Christian Europe, is Islam -- but *Aladdin* replaces Protestantism and Catholicism with the American secular ideology of individualism/freedom (for men) and romance (for women).[13] Romance and freedom are the motive themes of the film, and we will return to consider them in some detail presently. It is in these narratives that Jasmine becomes the legal tender, the currency traded in the economy of male relationships.

It is worth pointing out that at no time in the modern period has the unrestrained conquest of the Euramerican sexual, cultural, or market places been thought to be morally uncomplicated. Land in our ''own" world is owned, even when it is apparently empty of inhabi-

tants. Women were until recently sexually inaccessible unless owned or contractually obligated by marriage. Potential sexual partners are frustratingly often enwebbed in cultural relationships which deny one unrestricted sexual access to them. The "free market'' is notoriously tangled by trade restrictions and labor complications. Part of the joy of the Orientalist task was its lack of moral obligation to the geography it penetrated. There is real benefit to believing a geography simple. This is not to say that the erection of European cultural institutions in those geographies was not at times presented as a moral obligation; as I have just noted, the apparent moral and geographical emptiness of the Orient carried with it just such a challenge. But, as I have also pointed out, the Orient does not exist. The various and complex cultures of which the Orient is constituted in the European imagination were strategically lumped into one colonial and academic discipline: to acknowledge rationality and moral complexity in the colonial subject is to complicate those sexual, cultural, and market places in the same way ours are complicated. Such an acknowledgement would also sidle us up so close to the subject that we would have at least to consider drawing analogies between ourselves and the colonized.

Aladdin runs no such risks. Exaggerations of physical difference are conventional marks of the Other: the caricatured physical appearances of the heavily populated film carry its ideological agenda. The central characters in *Aladdin* are Aladdin himself and the famed Genie, the Sultan of Agrabah and his daughter Jasmine, and the Grand Vizier of Agrabah, Jafar. Aladdin's character is the only clean-shaven male in the movie. His headgear is almost invisible, his skin is light, and he flashes a big, boyish smile. He and Jasmine are the only human beings with American accents and without conspicuously aquiline noses. A theme is established early in the film that Aladdin is a "diamond in the rough," an urchin whose real worth as a human being is concealed by the circumstances (poverty, low social status) in which he finds himself "trapped. "

Every other male in the background or foreground of Aladdin has facial hair, traditionally associated with power and sexuality.[l4] The Genie, formless from the waist down and as smoothly amorphous as a eunuch, has only a token squiggle of black beard. The Sultan and Jafar both have abundant and distinctive facial hair. Jafar, the leading antagonist, is described early in the film as "a dark man . . . with a dark purpose": his color is identified with his moral character. Jafar's accent is recognizably Anglo-Arab. He is tall, with an exaggerated, camel-like nose. He is exquisitely evil; Jafar's great passion is raw power. Edward Said, writing about popular American racial imagery, sums up characters like Jafar's:

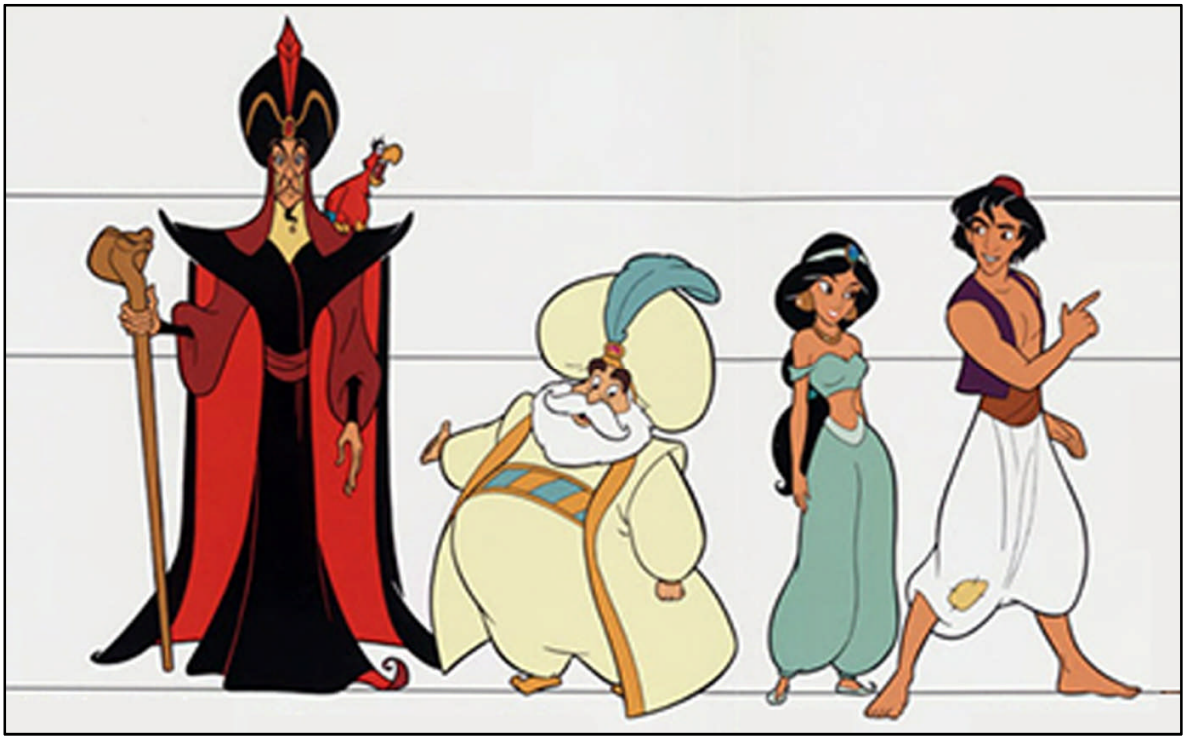

Figure 2: (left to right) Jafar, the Sultan, Jasmine, Aladdin
[Source: Library of Congress]

Figure 3: "Al" (left) and Jafar with parrot Iago (right).
[Source: Al: dettoldisney.wordpress.com; Jafar: disney.wikia.com]

> clearly “Semitic”: their sharply hooked noses, the evil mustachioed leer, … obvious reminders (to a largely non-Semitic population) that “Semites” were at the bottom of all “our” troubles. . . . The transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same.[15]

The Sultan, on the other hand, is “race-neutral.” He is a benign buffoon with a vaguely dotty, vaguely British accent. He is short, round, and virtually covered with fluffy hair -- all white. Twice the Sultan is shown playing with toy models of Agrabah, and he is generally obtuse to the motives and emotions of Jasmine, Jafar, and Aladdin. Jafar manipulates him easily, and the Sultan is unable to interpret or affect the Law of his kingdom until the final scenes. Both the Sultan and Jafar have truly spectacular hats. The rest of the males in the cast of thousands are nameless caricatures: salesmen (disingenuous, dirty, suggestive, aggressive, or brutal), palace guards (toothless, half-clad, murderous), and a weird array of self-mortifying ascetics, thieves, and addicts. The hordes complete a stock depiction of Arab Islam.[16]

Against this backdrop of familiar Orientalia plays out a cultural and political conflict equally recognizable to the American audience. The Sultan represents benign, or friendly, Arab power. Soft and senile, such rulers are easily manipulated by their less amicable Arab allies, represented by the megalomaniacal Jafar. The unsuspecting benign power only recognizes the malign when he is informed by Aladdin, the prototype of the American “good guy.” Even aware of the danger in his own house, the Sultan is powerless to save himself and his kingdom from the Islamic threat. The Sultan’s political power -- like his mind, his sexuality, and his haircolor -- is a thing of the past. The worthy but hitherto unrecognized American saves the Sultan from Jafar, and rescues Jasmine from a loveless union with the vicious Arab. Throughout, there exists not one meaningful social interchange between the palace and the hordes outside. Aladdin, who has lied about his identity to everyone in the palace, is eventually transformed from “street rat” to “prince,” and promised the Sultanate. He finally removes his last mask when Jasmine says, “I choose you -- Aladdin.” He replies, “call me Al.” Aladdin never did look like the rest of the Arabs in the movie, and by the end of the movie he’s not even Aladdin anymore -- he’s just a normal American guy with a normal name.

There are perhaps twelve seconds of film which contain images of women besides Jasmine. Early in the film we meet a few female cartoons, all in *hijab* except for a lip-smacking, lewd woman and an ugly mother in her home. *Hijab* refers to the customs both of “veiling” and “seclusion,” its two most common English translation.[17] Veiling might be

better rendered "covering," since it refers to the Qur'anic exhortation to modesty (in both men and women), and need not in most cases hide the face.[18] Seclusion refers, of course, to the segregation of the sexes – not to isolation or imprisonment, as it appears in *Aladdin. Hijab* as a social code becomes nonsensical in *Aladdin*: the curvaceous daughters of the barefaced, ugly mother themselves wear small, transparent face-veils, though they are in their home, and despite the fact that their bodies are ridiculously uncovered. The motif of veiled face/revealed bodies is repeated when the Genie produces first dancers in bikinis with transparent "veils" on their bottom halves, then full-breasted dromedaries in bikinis with face-veils. The parades of voluptuous female dancers and acrobats who announce Aladdin's arrival at the palace as Prince Ali are barely dressed, though their male counterparts are fully covered -- the women perform a seductive "veil dance" in the streets. Without exception, the characters whose breasts are most bulgingly exposed wear transparent, brightly colored, handkerchief-sized face-veils in place of any of the traditional styles of *hijab*. In this presentation of hijab the veil is an erotic prop for American fantasy, rather than a recognizable system of social order. "Veiling" in Aladdin is reduced to coquetry: it signals beauty and promises to reveal, not to cover.

Jasmine herself is peculiarly isolated: she lives "alone" in the palace (except for Jafar and the Sultan, and perhaps the palace guards, who seem to know her). She has "never been outside the palace walls," her mother is inexplicably absent, and she has no female companions. The situation suggests the many problems with the common use of the word "seclusion" to denote the custom of sex-segregation. Jasmine is indeed "secluded": but she is -- often egregiously -- exposed to the opposite sex. Properly speaking, *hijab* may refer to the seclusion of women from the public, male eye -- but Jasmine is at once "secluded" (isolated) and yet within public view, that is, the view of Jafar, at the very least. The viewer (of Aladdin) is asked to sympathize with Jasmine in her seclusion. "I've never done a thing on my own," she complains. "I've never had any real friends. I've never even been outside the palace walls." *Hijab*, in Jasmine's case, is solitary confinement. Writing of the frustrated gaze of the Euramerican toward women who do not share our traditions of revealing ourselves, Algerian commentator Malek Alloula observes:

> if the women are inaccessible to sight (that is, veiled), it is because they are imprisoned. This dramatized equivalence between the veiling and the imprisonment is necessary for the construction of the imaginary scenario that results in the dissolution of the actual society, the one that causes the frustration.[19]

Such a presentation encourages us to “free” her from the Arab-Islamic social order -- though that order is hopelessly scrambled here. Indeed, Aladdin seduces Jasmine by offering to show her “a whole new world” on his magic carpet ride.

The first remark we hear about Jasmine presents her as an object of social exchange -- “good luck marrying her off.” We are thus introduced, ostensibly, to the main problem of the plot. Jasmine must be married before her birthday, which is three days away, and she must be married to a prince. This is prescribed for her by “the Law,” though the Sultan assures her that he is primarily concerned that she be “taken care of and provided for” when he dies. Hitherto, no prince has been able to win Jasmine’s hand. “I hate being forced into this,” she objects. “If I do marry, I want it to be for love.” Jasmine’s ideological position is also carried in her physical presentation. An Arab Barbie doll in a belly-dancer costume, Jasmine comes complete with stupendous hair, minuscule feet, and virtually no nose at all. She is trapped, as she later tells Aladdin, in the palace -- her pets are her only friends. At the end of her first scene she throws open the doors to the dovecote and frees the birds, after whom she gazes longingly. That night Jasmine sneaks out of the palace to “freedom”-- here and elsewhere figured in terms of consumer goods -- to the suq, or open marketplace. Innocent of the ways of the free market, she takes an apple from a fruit vendor to give to a child. Caught “steal-ing,” she almost loses her hand as punishment. Aladdin saves her from the consequences of the “Law,” as he will save her from political assassination and “forced” (i.e., arranged or political) marriages four more times before the film is over.

Jasmine’s encounter with Aladdin in the marketplace initiates the main action of the film: the narrative toward the consummation of American style coupling which will “free” her from her lonely entrap-ment and transfer the Sultan’s power to Aladdin. Aladdin and Jasmine escape briefly to his hideaway, which has a magnificent view of the palace. It seems that Aladdin has vague designs on the Sultanate already -- he feels he is somehow cut off from his true destiny as he ogles the palace. There ensues a conversation at cross-purposes, in which Aladdin dreams of the material wealth he would enjoy at the palace, and Jasmine complains of “people who tell you where to go, and how to dress. . . . You’re not free to make your own choices.” Here we are introduced to the signal themes of Aladdin: individualism and freedom.

A version of the Orientalists’ ideal female repackaged for American consumption, Jasmine has a veneer of feistiness. Her refusal to be “forced into marriage,” and her spirited wilfulness pass superficially

as “conviction, intelligence, and confidence.’’[21] The visual text, however, directly contradicts the verbal one. In the marketplace Jasmine acts thoughtlessly at best, and has to be rescued by Aladdin. Alone with him, she vaults from one building to another rather than accept the proffered helping hand. “Heeeyyy,” answers the ever-lascivious Aladdin. “I’m a fast learner,” Jasmine responds suggestively, with a sidelong glance his way. This exchange establishes a pattern according to which Jasmine’s displays of precociousness elicit either male lust or faint embarrassment, though she intends to invite neither. Jasmine’s moments of self-assertion are always ineffectual, and frequently contradicted altogether.

While the dialogue occasionally suggests that we are to accept that Jasmine is intelligent, the immeasurably more impressive pictures and action suggest the opposite. Jasmine’s denseness is actually necessary to move the plot forward. Until Jafar exposes his identity, Jasmine never fully recognizes that Prince Ali is really Aladdin. At one point she seems to have him cornered: “You are the boy from the marketplace!’’ she accuses. “Did you think I was stupid? That I wouldn’t figure it out?’’

“I – I hoped you wouldn’t,’’ Aladdin admits. He then lies to her again about his identity, gaining her sympathy by saying he is royalty escaping from his confined palace life, disguised as a commoner . . . and Jasmine accepts this explanation. When Jafar exposes Aladdin near the end of the film, Jasmine is shocked, and Aladdin has to apologize to her for lying. Here the text is clear: Jasmine asks if we think she is stupid, that she wouldn’t figure out Aladdin’s disguise. She doesn’t figure it out, even after broad hints. While Jasmine is called “smart” twice by the Genie and Aladdin, it is her beauty -- not her brains -- which propels the love affair.

The male responses to Jasmine register the real weight of her statements. When Jafar’s henchmen capture Aladdin in the marketplace, Jasmine whips off her veil and commands, “Unhand him! By order of the Princess!” Though the guards bow and apologize, they arrest Aladdin anyway -- on Jafar’s commands. When “Prince Ali” arrives at the palace, the Sultan is deeply impressed by his wealth and his parade, and delighted to deliver his daughter to such a suitor. Jasmine, listening in the background, exclaims hotly, “I am not a prize to be won!’’ and abruptly leaves the hall. Jafar, the Sultan, and Aladdin are perplexed and slightly embarrassed by this display, but the Sultan murmurs reassuringly to Aladdin, “just give Jasmine time to cool down.” Indeed, Aladdin “wins" her hand, as he has just assured the Sultan he would. Jasmine’s actions and reactions are not to be taken seriously. Her “spirited” demeanor is part of the stock

set of lively, and therefore challenging, female objects of male desire -- Jasmine is a shrew to be tamed.

The viewer, as Said says of Nerval, "is predisposed to recognize that the Orient is '*le pays des reves et de l'illusion,*' which, like the veils he sees everywhere . . . conceal a deep, rich fund of sexuality."[22] Apart from the twelve seconds of background characterization, virtually all the A(g)rabian women practice some form of *hijab* while simultaneously revealing bare, luxuriant flesh. Jasmine's tangled personae epitomize the confused Euramerican interpretation of *hijab* as imprisonment by Muslim men, even as it is entertained as a challenge, even an invitation, by Euramericans. Jasmine herself is intended to be attractive to the American eye -- indeed, as the story tells it, only Aladdin/America can tolerate her, or she him. She is too "assertive" for Arab men, who are confused or annoyed by her.

Jasmine is considerably more than a love interest -- she threatens to dominate the whole film. While the story becomes one of individual upward mobility and cultural hegemony, Aladdin is more than simply a rags-to-riches story or a Star Wars battle cartoon. Jasmine plays, for example, a far more visible and motive role in Aladdin than Princess Leia did in Star Wars, or than any of Jasmine's counterparts do in other versions of the Arabian Nights. Princess Jasmine is, in fact, a centerpiece of the Orientalist and imperialist modes of cultural representation, as "possession of Arab women came to serve as a surrogate for and means to the political and military conquest of the Arab world."[23] The racist depictions of the male characters in Aladdin turn significantly on their roles in relation to Jasmine. The discourse of power in which the A(g)rabian men participate is relayed through Jasmine. Power in the Disney Arab world is transferred with the ownership of Jasmine: Aladdin/America becomes ruler of Agraba/Arabia by saving the Arab woman from marriage to an Arab man, and by changing the laws that stipulate that she marry within her culture and class.

Jasmine is seduced by Aladdin in his disguise as "Prince Ali." He finally entices her with a ride on his magic carpet: escape from her loneliness, a wild mounting ride through the heavens, a "whole new world" complete with the thunder of galloping hooves, better with every breath, the song tells us, afterglow, and fireworks at the end. Once she has been "educated" by this mysterious foreigner, she is coupled -- hopelessly in love. The Sultan, however, under the Grand Vizier's spell, informs her upon her return from the magic ride that she will marry Jafar. "You're speechless, I see," comments Jafar. "A fine quality in a wife." Jasmine responds that she will "never marry Jafar," and Aladdin arrives again in time to rescue her from marriage

to the bad Arab. Jafar steals Aladdin's lamp, however, and finally gains power over the palace. He recaptures Aladdin, and Jasmine is chained up as a servant and object of Jafar's affections. Her change of status is signalled by her bad hair-do and a red interpretation of her signature blue belly-dancer outfit. It is worth taking a moment to examine the contrast between Jasmine's union with Aladdin and that with Jafar.[24]

As noted earlier, Aladdin looks and sounds like the boyish American, Jafar like the cartoon-Semite. With Jafar, Jasmine wears bright red instead of her usual madonna blue. She is chained, although her bonds drop magically in case of emergency. Though no one else wants to listen to Jasmine either, Jafar is crass enough to say so. Jasmine and Aladdin both warn the Sultan of the fact that Jafar has been manipulating him, lying to him, using magic to gain power over him. Jafar wants to marry Jasmine only to gain political power and, as we already know, power is associated with darkness, it is the "dark purpose" of the malign Arab -- the benign Arab is legally and practically powerless. The Genie's power, when it is directed by Jafar, is destructive. Jafar in fact ultimately destroys himself by wishing the Genie to give him a Genie's ultimate transformative power -- which dooms him to ten thousand years in lampdom.

Make no mistake: Aladdin wants to marry Jasmine, he wants a Sultan's wealth, he lies, and he uses magic to manipulate both the Sultan and Jasmine. But Aladdin wants to marry Jasmine for love. He wants wealth, which is always portrayed positively in the story, instead of power, which is bad. Aladdin's magic, the Genie, is a sympathetic and relatively complicated character. Himself trapped in the lamp, the Genie is enslaved first by Aladdin -- a master/slave relationship portrayed as compatible and mutually beneficial (if Aladdin keeps his promise to free the Genie with his third wish). Under Aladdin's command the Genie is productive. He produces goods and services (money, real estate, female dancers, waiters, clothes, transportation, and so forth), and his power is powerfully creative -- the one real delight of the film. But the Genie's magic is limited: he can't raise the dead or make anyone fall in love. He says he can't kill anyone, but clearly he can make Jafar powerful enough to do so. The only really grandiose wishes left (besides world peace or simple happiness, which interest neither Jafar nor Aladdin) would be wealth and power. Wealth is never identified with power, and especially not destructive power: it is always delightful, always innocent, always friendly. Jafar's desire for political power is evil, and it leads to the enslavement of Jasmine and the Genie, and the probable death of Aladdin and the Sultan -- or at least their impoverishment. Aladdin's desire for love and wealth, on the other hand, is good, and leads to the destruction of Jafar, the "freeing" of

Jasmine and the Genie, and the successful transfer of political power from the Sultan to Aladdin. Love, American style, justifies in Aladdin the same actions condemned in Jafar. While the desire for political efficacy is totally destructive, romantic love frees all but Jafar to find their true selves -- or at least to find the selves true to Disney tales.

Once Jafar is disposed of, the denouement is swift and telling. When the destruction wrought by Jafar has been magically undone, and the palace restored to its glory over the town, Aladdin apologizes to Jasmine for his duplicity: "I'm sorry I lied to you."

"I know why you did," replies Jasmine gently. After soulful looks, Aladdin hangs his head -- ''I guess this is goodbye." Jasmine tosses her head and stamps her little feet. "Oh, that stupid Law! -- I love you!" Aladdin has only the one wish left. The Genie, however, urges him to use it to change himself back into a prince, in order to marry Jasmine. "This is love," after all, explains the Genie. He makes it clear that the couple's love is more important than his freedom: it is, he says, worth "ten thousand years of servitude" in the lamp. Aladdin responds that he "can't go on being something he's not," i.e., a prince. Suddenly the Sultan discovers his own authority. Now that the evil Arab is destroyed, he can change the Law and give his daughter and the kingdom to Aladdin. "You've proven your worth as far as I'm concerned," he says to Aladdin. "It's the Law that's the problem," he declares. "Am I Sultan or am I Sultan?! From this day forward the princess shall marry whomever she deems worthy." Jasmine, who has been standing with her father, runs into Aladdin's arms. "I choose you. I choose you -- Aladdin," she coos.

"Call me Al," he replies, and they kiss.

The Genie is freed, and he spins off like a deflating balloon into the distance, hollering, "I'm history! I'm mythology! I'm freeeeeee! " The magic rug sex theme, "A Whole New World" swells to a climax, and the handsome boy with the big American smile rides off on an oriental rug with his Arabian prize to "a wondrous place for you and meeee" -- the last words of the story. Or almost. The couple disappears into the full moon, which then begins to giggle triumphantly. The Genie's face pops out of the moon and cracks, "made you look!"[25] And indeed we have looked: Aladdin's glamour and cartoony beauty have captivated us all for exactly ninety minutes.

Aladdin's foreign policy is crude, but predictable. In sum, only identification with the Euramerican world can save "good" Arabs (i.e., Arabs with lots of money, who are no real political or military threat) from bad Arabs. Bad Arabs want political power, and are willing to use force to get it. It is worth noting that the "good'' Arab, the Sultan,

is royalty. The "bad" Arab, Jafar, makes no aristocratic claim to power, but has apparently attained his position of influence through shrewd politicking. Aladdin/America seems to combine and attenuate both claims, to claim aristocratic or noble "worth" and humble, proletariat origins at the same time: he is a "diamond in the rough."[26]

Aladdin proves his worth by freeing the Sultan and Agrabah from Jafar, freeing the Genie from servitude, freeing Jasmine from the palace and a forced marriage. Freedom is the insistent theme of Aladdin, and freedom is to be understood in terms of what I call "naive individualism."[27] To be "free" is not only to "do what you wanna do," but to "be who you are." The long alliance of Enlightenment philosophy, Protestant doctrines of innate grace, and crude social Darwinism has crafted for Americans the deep sense that, like Aladdin, our worth as humans may be quite different from what either our circumstances or our actions indicate. In this view, aristocracy is no guarantee of nobility: only the strong and smart (but not "too smart for their own good"), only those who can compete in the open marketplace, will prevail over their fellow beings. Like any good American boy, Aladdin is sure that all that stands between him and the palace is wealth. Again the film's verbal text belies the visual narrative. Aladdin's apology to Jasmine and his humble surrender to the Genie ("I can't go on being something I'm not") are disingenuous. He has had ambitions toward the palace from the start, and all it takes is word from the Sultan to convince him. Aladdin's early remark that he is "trapped," which first endears him to Jasmine, betrays this sense of frustrated autonomy: if only he had wealth, he could rule Agrabah. In point of fact, it is the other way around. In Agraba/Arabia he needs to rule the palace to rule the marketplace. In truth it is this course that the visual text pursues. By the end of the movie Aladdin is not merely wealthy -- he rules Agrabah, and he has enslaved his indigenous opposition for 10,000 years.[28]

The question of freedom rings throughout the story. Will Jasmine be able to free herself from the palace? From a "forced" marriage? Will Aladdin ever be free to discover his true worth? Will the Genie be freed from the lamp and eternal servitude? Will the world be freed of the threat of Jafar's power? All because of Aladdin, the answer is yes -- everyone is "free" at the end of the movie, except Jafar. In keeping with the interests of the discourse in which we are engaged, we are never asked to consider whence they are freed, and into what? To Aladdin, freedom is wealth and political power over the Arab hordes (read marketplace). The "world," the sultanate of Agrabah, is freed from bad Arab power to be ruled by Aladdin/America. Jasmine is finally freed by the Sultan to choose a husband. And she chooses Al. Her choice gives Aladdin the sultanate. For Jasmine, freedom is figured

in terms of romance. Aladdin, like Jafar, leers at Jasmine, mocks her, deceives her, and schemes for her fortune and her hand in marriage, but he is preferred over all her other princely (and apparently Arab) suitors, because he offers her "freedom." And yet in the final scenes freedom is explicitly demoted to second place in favor of love.

Romantic/erotic love is the privileged narrative of Aladdin for the same reason Jasmine is its motive character. The love and rescue of the Muslim woman serves as a mystification and moral justification of the power relationships in the story. Jasmine's social dilemma is *hijab* and the kinship system of her culture. *Hijab* and marriage systems -- polygamy, father's-brother's-son marriages, arranged marriages -- have long furnished the centerpiece of the Euramerican critique of Islamic culture.[29] Using the strategy of romance to free Jasmine does not free her to do whatever she wants to do. She is free to marry in the accepted American manner -- that is all. She is not freed to be Sultana and to contract her own, politically advantageous (i.e., arranged) marriage alliances, or to choose not to marry at all. Disney-freedom liberates Jasmine "out of" Islam and "into" American coupling systems. By the end of the film the romantic pursuit of Jasmine has freed her from Islamic Law and from Arab suitors. Jasmine's marriage to Aladdin displaces her own aristocratic lineage, and replaces Arab political power (Jafar and, eventually, the Sultan) with American wealth (Aladdin).

Jasmine is "freed into" a romantic/erotic couple -- the American version of the Victorian ideal. While the Victorian couple presented to the Arab Islamic world by Europe was "contained" or "nuclear" in its family structure, and therefore quite different from the complex and populous extended family structures of Arab Islam, the focus of the marriage was similar at least insofar as separate spheres of activity were prescribed for men and women, and children were the focus of the marriage itself. Stephanie Coontz notes: "In the absence of a consumer culture and modern mass media, the Victorian domestic family was much more resistant to materialism, consumerism and sexual eroticim."[30] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries separate gendered spheres of activity extended beyond the workplace (domestic and otherwise) in a consistent way, right to the hearts of the couple themselves: husband and wife were never expected to sate totally each other's intellectual, social, sexual, or emotional hunger.[31] The later twentieth century has seen a gradual (if incomplete) dislocation of the "separate spheres." Rather than freeing women into social and sexual relationships as diverse as their intellectual and labor opportunities, however, that dislocation has tended to blur the identities of the couple into a

passionate, erotic, all-fulfilling ideal which, to quote Coontz once again, "made an unsatisfactory relationship increasingly unbearable."[32] So, too, for Jasmine, we might well imagine.

Unlike the implications of freedom for the male characters, there is no interest paid in Aladdin to the realization of Jasmine's "true self." Whereas romance is a means to other ends for Aladdin, for Jasmine "freedom" is romance. It is possible to cull from the narrative a sense of what the creators -- and, presumably, the viewers -- of Aladdin imagine she gains with her freedom. Jasmine, by way of complaint, lets us know that she wants to go outside, she wants to travel, make friends. She wants to wear whatever she wants to wear, and marry for love. In none of these desires does she seem much different from an American teenager. What is interesting about this list is that it reveals what Americans imagine Arab Muslim women cannot do, but wish to. Jasmine expresses no desire for children, a mother, or motherhood -- the most powerful loci of influence in Arab society. She apparently has no family, nor does she want one; nor does she desire the plentiful possibilities of autonomy -- public political power, economic power, independent mobility, asceticism… Jasmine is captured by the American romance of coupling. In the process of capturing her for his own, Aladdin/America begins the dismantling of the basic patterns of Islamic social order.

The reason Jasmine is so important to Aladdin's ideology is that we as a culture continue to criticize Islamic gender codes as a means of generating moral justification for changing Islamic culture. Put another way, we feel it is permissible to "educate," "intervene," and "legislate" against another culture in order to save their women from themselves and their men. At the very least it is clear that we do not expect Jasmine and her cultural kin to act effectively on their own behalf. As Muslim women are increasingly reassuming forms of *hijab* as a gesture rejecting Euramerican values and gender codes, images like those in Aladdin refigure these gestures into images intelligible to Gulf War America. Aladdin offers up, in the character of Jasmine, a pseudo-feminist image in service of a deeply racist film, a film which animatedly reinscribes at least two American cultural strategies. The first is a domestic strategy which shapes gender conceptions: the mystification of power through romantic love, and the packaging of romantic love as freedom for women. The second is foreign policy: Aladdin's political strategy protracts the complex American metaphor of a "free" marketplace, pure of political intent or impact, where wealth and opportunity are the birthrights of "free" individuals. In that ideological marketplace, Muslim women *are* prizes to be won.

Figure 4: Aladdin and Jasmine, coupled, fly off together.
[Source: http://toonpaperszone.blogspot.com]

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Priya Kapoor for her invaluable discussion and criticism.

1. *Shari'a* refers to any of several systems of Islamic law based in the Qur'an, the revealed sacred text of Islam, and in the sunna, the precedent acts of Muhammad and the early Muslim community. The Shari'a, and through it the interpretation of the Qur'an and early Muslim history, has influenced Islamic political history in overt and significant ways. For Islam the relationship between this-worldly history, politics, and religion is intricately tensile, as the fiction of the separation of church and state has never attained the status of natural law in the way it has in the European West.

2. Historian Leila Ahmed points out: "Broadly speaking, the thesis of the discourse on Islam blending a colonialism committed to male dominance with feminism-the thesis of the new colonial discourse of Islam centered

on women-was that Islam is innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies. Only if these practices 'intrinsic' to Islam (and therefore Islam itself) were cast off could Muslim societies begin to move forward on the path of civilization." Women and Gender in Islam (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 151-152.

3. Barbara Harlow, in her introduction to Malek Alloula's photo-essay, comments that "the imposition of the Western couple as the model for family relations on a society that depends for the strength of its fabric on kinship and an extended family network serves, as [Alloula's] commentary maintains, to 'break up the very kernel of the resistance to colonial penetration: the traditional family."' Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986).

4. Michael Stragow, "Free Spirits," New Yorker 68 (30 Nov. 1992): 163-64; Jonathan Confino, "Aladdin Set to be Disney's Biggest Ever Moneyspinner," Manchester Guardian 6 Jan. 1994: 1. 12. 6.

5. A full discussion of the many recensions of Aladdin is beyond the scope of this paper. It only reinforces my arguments here, however, to point out that the Disney version is quite different both from the Arabic versions and the Euramerican translations. What Disney has created is undeniably its own: "whether through a series of fortuitous strokes or mighty shrewd calculations, [Aladdin] comes out right on target, like a vision in some funky crystal ball." Stragow 164.

6. Howard Ashman's original lyric read, "I come from a land/from a faraway place/where the caravan camels roam/ where they cut off your ear/if they don't like your face/it's barbaric, but hey, it's home." The fourth and fifth lines were changed to read, "where it's flat and immense/and the heat is intense." The sixth line was retained. Dick Cook, president of Disney's distribution, explains that "'barbaric' refers to the land and the heat, and not to the people." David J. Fox, "Disney Will Alter Song in 'Aladdin,"' Los Angeles Times 10 July 1993: F1.
For an overview of the controversy: Boston Globe 12 Jan 1993: 71, 73; Los Angeles Times 21 Dec. 1992: F3; 17 May 1993: F3; 10 July 1993 F1; New York Times 11 July 1993: 1. 16. 4; 14 July 1993: A18; Washington Post 22 Dec. 1992: C7; 10 Jan. 1993: G1.

7.Stragow 163.

8. Aladdin was, however, actually withdrawn from the Indonesian market -- where most viewers would be Muslim -- until changes were made. Leslie Felperin Sharman, "New Aladdins for Old," Sight and Sound 11

(Nov. 1992): 13.

9. The threatened and threatening tones of conquest and colonization have flowed in both directions: first in Arab Islam's conquest of the Byzantine Empire, and later in the conquest of the Mediterranean and Central Asia by Europe. North America has only lately inherited the long undoing of these sad relations. Our interface with the Islamic world is further complicated by our expensive commitment to Israel.

10. Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 188.

11. "In the depths of the Oriental stage stands a prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world. . . settings, insane cases, names only, half imagined, half known; monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires." Said 63.

12. "Just as the various colonial possessions -- quite apart from their economic benefit to metropolitan Europe -- were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or travelled in the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest." Said 190.

13. Sociologist Stephanie Coontz marks out the development of the romantic ideal during the Enlightenment period in Chapter Three of The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (New York: Basic Books, 1992) 42-67. Of particular interest is her account of the intimate co-development of liberal ideology-individualism, Protestant ethical doctrine, and "free market" capitalism-and the cult of domesticity. "The precondition for 'freeing' men from traditional obligations, hierarchies, and interdependencies to become individualistic economic and political actors was a magnification of women's moral obligations and personal dependencies, both in the family and beyond it. . . . The liberal theory of human nature and political citizenship did not merely leave women out: it worked precisely because it was applied exclusively to half the population. Emotion and compassion could be disregarded in the political and economic realms only if women were assigned these traits in the personal realm. Thus the use of the term individualistic to describe men's nature became acceptable only in the same time periods, social classes, and geographic areas that established the cult of domesticity."

14. Given the exaggerated character of the male noses in Aladdin, it is interesting that there has been a persistent association between penis and nose-an imagined correlation of length-drawn from medical

thought as recent as the early twentieth century, and persisting in popular humor and Freudian psychology [Sander Gilman, The Jew's Body (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 1881. It is also interesting that there are almost no children in Aladdin: indeed, nowhere do we encounter a coherent family, much less the complex extended family structure which is such an important feature of Arab Islamic social culture. The only two children we see are apparently orphans. Said explains: "If Arab society is represented in almost completely negative and generally passive terms, to be ravished and won by the Orientalist hero, we can assume that such a representation is a way of dealing with the great variety and potency of Arab diversity, whose source is, if not intellectual and social, then sexual and biological. Yet the absolutely inviolable taboo in Orientalist discourse is that that very sexuality must never be taken seriously." Said 3 11.

15. Said 286.

16. "What is the nature of Arab presence in mythic discourse about him? Two things: number and generative power." Said 31 1.

17. Hijab, like most Arabic words, has a rich constellation of meaning and nuance: cover, wrap, drape, curtain, woman's veil; screen, partition, folding screen; barrier, bar; diaphragm; amulet. The verb from which it derives includes such polyvalent senses as hide, veil, shelter, seclude, eclipse, outshine, vanish, cease publication-among many others. In practice, "veiling" in Islam may be as simple as wearing a scarf in the mosque or in public; it may, in some contexts, mean covering one's entire body, including the face; it may equally indicate every gradation between these extremes, depending on context.

18. "Tell the believing women to lower their eyes, guard their private parts, and not display their charms except what is apparent outwardly, and cover their bosoms with their veils and not to show their finery except to their husbands or their fathers or fathers in law, their sons or stepsons, brothers, or their brothers' and sisters' sons, or their women attendants or captives, or male attendants who do not have any need (for women), or boys not yet aware of sex." Surah 24 An-Nur 31; verse 30 addresses men. Al-Qur'an, trans. Ahmed Ali (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984).

19. Alloula 21.

20. I am intrigued that the two reviewers who focus on Jasmine describe it as a "long straight nose" (Peggy Thompson, "Disney's Come A Long Way, Baby," Atlanta Jotrrnal Constitution 13 Dec. 1992: Fl), or, alternatively, "a nicely downturned little Semitic nose" (Joan Juliet Buck,

"Tales Retold," Vogue 183 (Jan. 1993): 54). Both writers interpret Jasmine's look to be appropriately "ethnic" (Thompson), but her nose is oddly petite when compared to the gigantic, luxurious, scrolling noses of the Arab males in Aladdin. While Jasmine is perhaps spared the racial stereotyping which shapes the male noses, hers looks to me remarkably like the object of zealous cosmetic surgery.

21. Thompson F1. Of over 250 articles and reviews surveyed, only two focus on Jasmine. Both are written in palatable feminist rhetoric, and both are positive in their evaluations of Jasmine's character.

22. Said 182.

23. Harlow in Alloula, Colonial Harem, xv. Said notes that concomitant to the exploration of the sexual field came "a flourishing knowledge industry. . . . Great numbers of texts were being produced, and more important, the agencies and institutions for their dissemination and propagation were everywhere to be found." Said 190. The "field" of Orientalism which grew out of the Enlightenment conquest of the Arab world by Europe eventually became "area studies" in the US -- the organ which supplies the information underpinning the aggressively imperialist American foreign policy.

24. It is curious that Jafar's right-hand parrot is named Iago. In one of the traditional versions of the Aladdin story, the wizard through whom Aladdin finds the magic lamp, ring, and genie (there are many) is identified as a Moor. In this account, Jafar is a Grand Vizier whose son is betrothed to the Princess Badr al-Budur. Disney's account has conflated Jafar, Jafar's son, and the sorcerer -- the Moor. By association it would seem we are to identify the Disney-Jafar with Shakespeare's Othello, the dark Moor whose "wild suspicion and homicidal jealousy" drive him to strangle his lovely young wife, who "has no conception of his real nature and no suspicion of the existence of wild passions lying concealed under his dark southern skin." Oscar James Campbell, ed. The Living Shakespeare (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949) 813, 817. This doesn't make much sense, if Iago is understood to be Othello's enemy -- if our parrot-Iago is supposed to suggest that Aladdin is Othello, one fears for Jasmine.

25. A great deal might be said about the way that the home video version of Aladdin is framed. The two ads that run before the "feature presentation" are for the new Lion King and the video release of Pinocchio. The thrust of the ad for Lion King is its realism: squads of artists are shown "drawing from life" on location (unspecified) and from live animals in the studio. Pinocchio is promoted as a "classic," a "masterpiece," "unforgettable," treasured by viewers "the world over." The

titles for Aladdin then appear following the familiar rubric, “A Disney Classic.” The authority of these classics is drawn from their realistic representations of the world or their classic, treasured tradition: they are history or myth-or, in Aladdin’s case, both.

26. The genie that transforms America from street rat to prince, from rough to polished, is material wealth. In short, newly rich America swoops to the rescue of a silly royal regime, and succeeds in saving it from a crazily menacing, power-hungry Arab maniac. While this caricature of the Gulf War is interesting, it is not our central concern here.

27. “Increasingly,” writes Stephanie Coontz of the development of Enlightenment individualism, “freedom was defined negatively, as lack of dependence, the right not to be obligated to others. Independence came to mean immunity from social claims on one’s wealth or time. Sociologist Robert Bellah and his collaborators analyze the dilemma that was inherent in the new ideology and that has become increasingly severe as traditional community counterweights to individualism have disappeared: ‘Freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value. . . . Yet freedom turns out to mean being left alone by others, not having other people’s values, ideas or styles of life forced upon one.”’ Coontz 3 7-3 8.

28. As the Genie hurls Jafar -- now an “all-powerful Genie” entrapped in his own (black) lamp -- out of the palace, he taunts, “10,000 years in a Cave of Wonders oughtta chill him out!!”

29. Leila Ahmed details the combination of the old Orientalist narrative, the narrative of European cultural superiority, and “finally and somewhat ironically, combining with these to create the new centrality of the position of women in the colonial discourse of Islam was the language of feminism.” Ahmed goes on to point out that “Colonized societies, in the colonial thesis, were alike in that they were inferior but differed as to their specific inferiority. Colonial feminism, or feminism as used against other cultures in the service of colonialism, was shaped into a variety of constructs, each tailored to fit the particular culture that was the immediate target of domination.” Ahmed 150-51. It is worth noting that the recent feminist narrative against Islamic kinship systems shapes clitoridectomy into this kind of construct, though clitoridectomy is hardly universal (or exclusive) to Islam.

30. Coontz 43.

31. “Victorian middle-class families were not the centers of male-female intimacy that twentieth-century commentators generally imagine. They were built on passionate female bonds that frequently took precedence

over relations within the nuclear family. While the husband-wife relationship was often conventional and reserved, people routinely endorsed intimacies among women that would be thought scandalous by many in today's supposedly more broad-minded society." Coontz 65.

32. Coontz 66.

33. Images in the original article (not reproduced in this version) courtesy of *Aladdin* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1992).

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Image links for this version:
[all accessed 29 December 2011]

Figure 1: source: http://toonpaperszone.blogspot.com/2008/10/mickey.html

Figure 2:
http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/musicandanimation/aladdin/ExhibitObjects/SizeComparisonChart.aspx?Enlarge=true&ImageId=171ea898-70e5-4907-9155-4bb86da4c8cc%3A8da1f4e0-8020-4a48-8080-7a343375dee1%3A5&PersistentId=1%3A171ea898-70e5-4907-9155-4bb86da4c8cc%3A2&ReturnUrl=%2FExhibitions%2Fmusicandanimation%2Faladdin%2FExhibitObjects%2FSizeComparisonChart.aspx

Figure 3:
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Jafar: http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Jafar

Figure 4: http://toonpaperszone.blogspot.com/2008/10/mickey.html