MUSLIM CULTURES AND THE WALT DISNEY WORLD THEME PARKS: 
THE SPREAD OF RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS IN A GLOBAL MARKET

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF 
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2009
To advisors, colleagues, family, and friends who made this milestone possible
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the chair and members of my committee for their support and guidance throughout this writing process. I thank my family for their encouragement and motivation.
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The purpose of this study is to understand the misrepresentation of Muslim cultures and subsequent perceptions at the Walt Disney World theme parks in Orlando, Florida. Walt Disney World has created its own misrepresentation of Muslims, rooted in Orientalism, by emphasizing a West versus East relationship between Muslims and the Western world. At the theme parks, Muslims are generally portrayed as individuals associated with peddler or market culture, violence, and a Bedouin lifestyle. These images are presented throughout the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, and Disney’s Hollywood Studios parks in the rides, visual attractions, costumes, architecture, art, and music. This research demonstrates how Disney has used these representations and incorporated them through theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and emotional labor. However, these elements are not restricted to the theme park space. Walt Disney World has become a global enterprise through its use of merchandising. On a global scale, Disney provides both a hybridized and homogenized theme park experience. Muslim cultures and their misrepresentations are a noticeable and influential part of this process. This study suggests that in order to truly understand the complexity and true nature of the Muslim cultures and Islam, it is necessary to acknowledge and critique the negative representations of
Muslim culture in the theme parks. This study encourages an open discussion in the Muslim, Disney, and global community about the depiction of various Muslim cultures in popular public spaces. Future research may provide more insight into the repercussions of Disney’s representations in the Muslim community.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards - the things we live by and teach our children - are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings.

–Walt Disney

Much of the current scholarship and popular media focus on Islam in America focuses on issues of terrorism, assimilation versus isolation, or issues of Christian-Muslim relations. Exploring these topics sometimes contributes to the general understanding of how Islam is changing the understanding of religious practice and perception in America. Many times, issues that are considered “hot topics” in Islamic studies, such as terrorism, globalization, or women’s issues often distort the general non-Muslim’s understanding of these topics in the grand scheme of the religion. The terms “Islam” and “Muslim” are casually used in reference to religious and cultural identities of various peoples. In popular culture scholarship, Islam and Muslim cultures have often been lumped into one general category. Studies of popular culture show how religion is essentialized or watered down into a fixed set of terms or images. Islam is practiced by a diverse and complex population, spanning multiple countries and cultures. This research is an attempt to explain how various Muslim cultures have been portrayed as one signal homogenized group through some of the most prominent forms of popular culture available in the United States. The Walt Disney Theme Parks, specifically Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, is a center of cultural and pop cultural production and exchange. In this research, I break down the evident and obscure interpretations and stereotypes that are often associated with Middle Eastern countries, and Arab and Muslim cultures. The theme parks at Walt Disney World represent these generalities within its park attractions without clearly stating the origin of their images. While previous scholars have addressed misrepresentations of religious culture within the Disney theme parks as Middle Eastern or Arab, I focus on how these images and attractions also misrepresent
Muslim culture. I also explicate the broader ramifications of such representations through the use of globalization theory as it applies to the cultural elements of the Disney market.

This paper attempts to explain how Disney impacts external perceptions of Muslim or Arab cultures on a local and global scale based on information about the Walt Disney theme parks and observations and analysis based on the theme parks. I also focus on how globalization shapes commercial and academic ventures as they pertain to the Disney franchise. If Disney continues to portray and utilize Islam in its theme parks, there should be a heightened awareness that religious perceptions may be affected and internalized beyond the park visit. Walt Disney World portrays a certain amount of information about Muslim culture through expressions of folklore, film, and geographical culture including food, dance, and art. These specific images and stereotypes are discussed and analyzed in order to better understand how and why Disney portrays Muslim culture through these elements in each park.

Information is provided about the importance of understanding popular culture studies as they relate to religious studies. Much of my research is based on the observations made by Edward Said in his groundbreaking research on Western misrepresentations of Islam and non-Europeans in his work on Orientalism. The concept of Orientalism, as defined by Said, posits that Western scholars of “the East” created a dichotomy between the East (including Muslim culture) and the West in terms of advancements in culture, technology, and efficiency in providing goods and services. The East, as it is understood by those outside of it, is seen as the “other” that is inferior, exotic, riddled with excesses and violence and an authoritarian rule which prevents it from adapting to or assimilating to “Western” standards. Said’s work provides the

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groundwork for this study as it allows for a clearer understanding of what Disney is representing in its attractions. In a post September 11th America, many non-Muslims have questions or misconceptions about Muslims living in the United States or abroad. Religion scholars are responsible for addressing and educating the public on the issues that arise from such incidents, as they shape perceptions of religious groups. By showing that these problematic images exist within the Disney theme park space, scholars have an accessible venue to educate and moderate. The Orientalist images that are presented through various media outlets are maintained in the Disney theme park space. This research is a valid case study of stereotypes and misinformation. However, it is also accessible beyond the localized research. It provides insight into how Orientalism is created and viewed on a daily basis. These images and their impact on park visitors become encounters of culture, where individuals of various cultural and religious backgrounds exchange become commodities consumed by visitors. This research taps into media studies, issues of tourism, and the controversial nature of cultural space and exchange between individuals. In the Disney theme parks I explore the significant Orientalist concepts that are evident through issues of the singular and static nature of how the East is perceived, the lack of emphasis on the individual, the exotic and fantastical nature, the gender discrimination, the underlying images of violence, and the dichotomy between images of primitivism and decadence versus the Western understand of wealth and luxury.

I include background information on Walt Disney himself and his underlying intentions for creating the theme parks. In addition to drawing on my observations and analysis of the theme park, I ground my analysis in the film *Aladdin* (1992), which is represented in the theme parks. Disney’s *Aladdin* has also generated controversy with regard to its misrepresentation of Muslim individuals, that provides a strong framework and precedent for understanding issues within the
theme park. My analysis of the distortions of Arab/Muslim culture by Disney is also based on the work of George Ritzer and the concept of McDonaldization as it pertains to the effects that consumerism has on global relations and cultures. Ritzer provides significant insight into the success of the Disney theme parks by explaining McDonaldization as “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurants are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world.” McDonaldization is the process that allows homogeneity, sameness, of commodities wherever the item is distributed and consumed. Ritzer emphasizes McDonaldization as a social process brought on by rationalization, or the general control and efficiency, of creation and distribution of good. I have updated and revised Ritzer’s findings to suit the Disney model through the concept of Disneyization, as developed by Alan Bryman. Disneyization contributes to the explanation of why Disney is able to be successful and influential in the marketplace by distributing a hybridized product. In other words, Disney seeks to create “variety and difference… It exchanges the mundane blandness of homogenized consumption experiences with frequently spectacular experiences.” This research will show that in reality, this unique experience has now been homogenized by the Disney enterprise. As Disney continues to grow in the global market place, this process will continue and repeat itself.

The framework of this paper is based on a step-by-step analysis of the Magic Kingdom, Hollywood Disney (formerly MGM studios), and EPCOT. With each individual park I analyze how Muslim/Arab culture is portrayed, the accuracy of the portrayal, and the overall message

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4 Ibid., 1.

5 Ibid., 16.


7 Ibid., 4.
being generated to park visitors. I describe each park and explain its use of theming, hybrid
consumption, merchandising, emotional labor, and a controlled environment and how each of
these represents Muslim culture. In my view, this framework is useful in understanding the
relationship between Disney and Muslim cultural representations on a global scale. In this paper,
I also explain the underlying meaning or message about Muslims and the associated Middle East
as it is demonstrated by each park. This study concludes with an analysis of implications based
on these observations, as well as suggestions for future research that can be conducted by
religious scholars, or scholars of other disciplines, that may generate more accurate
representations of various Muslim communities and cultures within the Disney community and
beyond.

This research makes a significant contribution to the study of religion and popular culture
because it addresses how a signature institution deeply rooted in American popular culture
misrepresents a religious group. The Walt Disney World theme park has borrowed images,
myths, and cultural artifacts from Arab/Middle Eastern cultures and origins and given them a
Disney “identity” for the purpose of entertaining visitors and promoting consumerism at its
theme parks. Disney blurrs the lines between cultural and religious identity in order to create a
consistent and simplistic reality of an exotic and faraway land, which in this case appears to the
general American public as a place where Muslim and Arab cultures meet and blur. Practitioners
of Islam are diverse and dispersed. Most do not identify with the stereotypical Middle Eastern
identity or with the cultural images associated with the Disney representations. As Carolyn
Fluer-Lobban emphasizes, “There is a tendency in the West to homogenize the East and lump
together Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners. Islam is a global faith with most of its 1.2

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8 Bryman, The Disneyization of Society, 2.
billion practitioners living in Asia.”

Generalized images of all Muslims as Arabs or Middle Easterners involve problematic representations of what it means to be Muslim today. In the case of these distinct Muslim cultures, Disney World provides a significant amount of fluctuating and inconsistent examples throughout its park system, which adds to a confusing image of Islam for park visitors who may have little knowledge about the diversity of Muslim culture or the religion of Islam as it is practiced by its adherents.

There are many ways in which perceptions of religiously associated cultures are developed and represented in the American public sphere. Yet, the concept of the theme park is unique from other public areas because it provides goods and services that no other space offers. Walt Disney World offers guests the ability to experience its representations of twelve countries in a matter of several hours just by visiting a specific area of the park. Visitors are also able to participate in the making of their favorite Disney movie, by learning about the skill of animation and acting involved with the project. While these park and film experiences are invented and recreated for the park visitor, they are presented as real and authentic. For this reason it is important to understand Disney as a driving force of popular culture and consumerism. It is important to understand Disney’s role in the development of American popular culture since Walt Disney World is a microcosm of Americanized symbols and ideas. It is a unique company since it has the ability to combine distinct franchises, or distinct elements of culture, merchandise, and fantasy all in one established space. Disney is the ultimate example of the McWorld, a globalized space controlled by the market place, since it is driven by the popularity of the product it produces. Benjamin Barber, a prominent political theorist who focuses on the


11 Barber, Jihad vs. McWorld, 97.
prominence of culture in the global and political sphere, believes that, “McWorld is an entertainment shopping experience that brings together malls… theme parks… fast food chains, and television into a single vast enterprise that, on the way to maximizing its profits, transforms human beings.”12 In the theme park experience, the relationship between religion and culture, and the consumer experience becomes blurred, and the importance of the theme park in American culture is heightened. Barber describes the concept of the theme park as a general space where the elements of McWorld can be experienced. The capitalist ideas represented by the theme park have moved beyond the actual park space, such as Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Chain companies such as Starbucks or extensive malls such as the Mall of America can be understood as theme parks due to their business model. This is why the study of Disney’s representations of Arab/Muslim culture is applicable beyond the Walt Disney theme park space, since other companies have borrowed Disney’s tactics and applied them to their own products and services. This case study of Muslim culture at Walt Disney World is an appropriate place to start understanding how influential theme parks are in the global space. As Barber explains, “Walt Disney World is McWorld’s front parlor.”13 While Walt Disney World will continue to be a powerful example of this phenomenon, it also inspires and creates new and reinvented theme parks, which represent and influence culture.

Studying Disney theme parks in terms of religious studies is significant since Walt Disney World is openly and actively portraying elements of Arab/Muslim culture or representing fantastical images and attractions as part of that culture. This portrayal is made available to thousands of individuals every day. In 1971, its first year, Walt Disney World welcomed ten

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13 Ibid., 134.
million visitors, replacing several popular vacation destinations including the United Kingdom, the Great Smokey Mountains National Park, and Gettysburg. By the 1980’s, Walt Disney World was a more popular vacation destination than the Eiffel Tower or the pyramids in Egypt. It is evident just by looking at the number of yearly visitors that visiting and experiencing the Disney Parks has become a part of the American (and global) way of life. However, how does this connect with religion? In God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture, Eric Mazur and Tara Koda tackle this issue and its impact on American culture. Both scholars believe that “In contemporary America, many consider all elements of life, even intangibles, as things that can be bought, and religious leaders now find themselves financially burdened competing for congregants’ attention.” As religious institutions suffer financially due to congregant attention to tangible goods, they attempt to adopt the Disney market model by making the religious space an attraction to its members. Walt Disney World has become a business that has the ability to market religiously based symbols in the United States and beyond. The Disney World experience has been compared to a cultural ‘mecca’ or ‘hajj’ experience by scholars. These associations show the Disney theme parks as not only facilitators of religious representation, but also a powerful and life-changing experience or practice for park visitors.

An even more powerful connection between religion and the theme park establishment is the relationship between Walt Disney World and sacred space. Emile Durkheim explains the concept of sacred space and its relevance to the individual are humanly constructed. Durkheim


16 Ibid., 300.

17 Ibid., 301. Both the hajj and Mecca are significant in the practice of Islam. The hajj is a religious pilgrimage to Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, and is experienced by most Muslims at least once in a lifetime.
emphasizes the sacred as the real element constructed by the social networks that influence the individual, meaning as society evolves, so do religious rituals and beliefs.\textsuperscript{18} The Walt Disney World parks and the experiences they orchestrate can be understood as a religious space where the extraordinary occurs through human construction. Scholars have even compared the function and independency of the theme park as equivalent to that of Vatican City.\textsuperscript{19} While using Durkheim’s idea of sacred space is useful in acknowledging the diverse role of theme parks, this concept is only the start. In this research, I utilize the concept of the sacred space and apply it to the relationship between the Walt Disney World theme parks, the local park setting, and the global expansion of the theme park because of Disney’s use of religious elements in a non-religious space.

Jean Baudrillard has commented on the Disney model saying “what attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleasures of the real America, of its constraints and joys.”\textsuperscript{20} The relationship between tourism and the religious experience have paralleled each other in the tourist’s search of the authentic experience. Those who make the journey to visit the Disney theme parks are seeking out an experience that transcends the everyday practices. Disney offers a fulfilling encounter that offers a return to childhood, a element of innocence, or a space free of worry or despair. While most scholars take this idea for granted when attempting to understand what makes the theme park desirable to tourists, others have applied it to their understanding of the connection between religious sacred space and tourism.


\textsuperscript{19} Eric Michael Mazur and Tara K. Koda, “The Happiest Place on Earth,” 305.

Thomas Bremer, in *Blessed with Tourists*, outlines the relationship between tourism and religious practitioners and the behaviors associated with being a tourist in sacred and non-sacred spaces. He supports the interest tourists have in maintaining attachment to sacred space, the search for the authentic, the issue of commercialization, and personal identity in relation to the space. While Bremer focuses his research on the Alamo in Texas, these elements of tourist desires are evident in my breakdown and analysis of representations of Muslim culture in the Walt Disney World theme park. This study of the Disney theme park takes important elements found in the study of religion and popular culture and shows their use through commercialization, authentic versus inauthentic representations, and the park visitors’ relationship to the space. Due to the condensed and direct nature of the theme park, representations of Arab/Muslim cultures are noticeable with in the space. Those seeking an authentic experience of Muslim cultures or of a true religious experience may expect to find elements of it at the theme parks, but in reality they find a misrepresentations of Muslim cultures which are depicted as homogenized versions of these cultures through art, architecture, food, and customs. This study identifies the false impressions Disney attractions create at the theme parks and provides evidence for the role these attractions play in the globalization of culture.

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CHAPTER 2
FOUNDATIONS OF THEORY

When discussing the issue of “Muslim cultures” and their representations at the Walt Disney World theme parks, one must start with the early misconceptions by Westerners about Islam and the people who practice this religion in the Middle East. The issue of stereotyping Muslims has been discussed in detail and included in many controversial topics such as religion, gender, and ethnic identity. In order to understand the repercussions of Disney’s representations of Muslims, there needs to be an emphasis that the stereotyping of Muslims and their culture at the parks is detrimental to non-Muslim’s understanding of Islam and the Muslim community. Observations and analysis made by Edward Said in his Orientalism and other writings have shown his readers the problem of the misrepresentations of the “Other” (non-Europeans) in popular culture and helped them understand the origins of stereotyping. While Said offers explanation for the misrepresentation of Islam in the media, it is also essential to acknowledge the role that popular culture has also played in fostering such ideas. When one understands the versatility and role of popular culture in American societies, the relationship between Disney and Muslim culture can become clear. Walt Disney World, as a driving force in the media, creates popular culture as a form of cultural representation of various people and groups. Finally, these theories come alive when they are applied to the idea of globalization. For the purpose of this research, the idea of the McDonalidization of culture provides a clear insight into the relationship between globalization, the market place, and religion. Walt Disney World theme parks are a strong example of this relationship between Orientalism and McDonaldization.

Islam and Orientalism

In Covering Islam, Edward Said explicates some of the common clichés directed at the Muslim community living in the United States and Europe, including the issues surrounding
stereotypes of the exotic “other”. These misconceptions established by the media regarding Islam are repeated by Walt Disney World. The conceptions associated with Islam, Muslim cultures, or Arab cultures have not changed greatly over the years. Said makes it clear that the term “Islam” used today is a fictional concept that has little relationship with the religious practice of over 800,000,000 followers.¹ It is important to understand that any individual who uses the term “Islam” to vaguely describe individuals from the Middle East or of Arab descent is already inaccurate. This also applies to the concept of Muslim culture. When I describe Disney’s representations of “Muslim cultures” in this research, I mean representations of Arab and Middle Eastern culture that is associated with Islam, since this is what Disney is portraying in the theme parks. However, Muslim culture is not a definable concept due to the vast array of cultures and religious divisions that make up the Muslim identities. It would be nearly impossible and irresponsible to categorize multiple cultures and geographies under one term. However, this has been the case with Disney’s representation of “Muslim culture” at the theme parks and in Disney films. Said explains that Islam has been a unique case in the trend of generalizing since it has been critiqued in ways different from other cultures.² Interpretations of Islam have been critiqued for the need to modernize, and the religion as some non-Muslims have understood it, has also been perceived as a serious threat to those outside of it. It has also been used as a scapegoat by other cultures. Said explains that, “For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; and for the center, a kind of distasteful exoticism.”³ Each of these is problematic in its own right, and each misrepresentation is evident in the realm of the Disney theme parks.

¹ Said, Covering Islam, 1.
² Ibid., lii.
³ Ibid., lv.
Said questions the scholarship on Islam and believes that there is a serious need for a deeper academic discourse that goes beyond dealing with the issue of power and politics. In the case of Disney, there is a need to understand the relationship between the representation of Muslims and the park visitors’ understanding which reinforces their erroneous generalized knowledge of Islam. At this point, this error is no longer a problem just within the Disney theme parks, but with the American understanding of Islam. Said suggests that in order to correct such issues there needs to be a distinction between Islam the religion and Islam the image. Disney is preoccupied with image, imagery, and illusion. How much of Disney’s representation of “Muslim” culture is image and imagination and how much is religion? An explanation of this relationship is rooted in Orientalism. This underlying drive to divide “us” and the different “them” provides an assortment of associated images that are based in difference and fear. This division is rooted in the sheer size of “them” (the East or the non-Western world) and the underlying power that it possesses. The challenge given to Christianity by the expanding “other” also increases conflict and misinterpretation that leads to a split mentality. While Said argues that the media facilitates this constant split between Islam and the West, Disney is also responsible for exacerbating this divide by allowing an Orientalist view of Arabs and a generalized Muslim culture to be a major factor in its theme park attractions. By analyzing the underlying motivations of the theme park and the exact methods of representing Islam, clear observations can be made about Disney’s exact message and stance on Orientalism in terms of Muslim culture.

4 Said., Covering Islam, lviii.
5 Ibid., 4.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
Said emphasizes the issue of stereotyping; however, he also breaks down the issue of labels and the need to acknowledge the stereotypes represented through the media. It may be easy to visit Walt Disney World and respond to the attractions as fantasy and dispel meaning from them. However, Said warns, “For that reason, we must take the labels seriously. To a Muslim who talks about ‘the West’ or to an American who talks about ‘Islam,’ these enormous generalizations have behind them a whole history….”8 Powerful emotions can either generate or extinguish the “us” versus “them” mentality. When presented by images of Muslim cultures in a space such as Walt Disney World, the individual is provided with an opportunity to hold onto any previous misperceptions or to reconsider and shift them. This is the power of a Disney attraction and for this reason Disney’s theme park system should be taken seriously. Said supports this by explaining the daily interaction of representations of Islam and the American public. He qualifies by explaining that most Americans do not encounter the real Islam (multiple groups, races, ethnicities, and religious beliefs), and deal mostly with the image of Islam (a singular understanding).9 This suggestion supports the idea that a level of ignorance allows a distorted image of Islam to continue through the media. This leads Said to the critique of the scholar, who, as he notes, is responsible for providing insight into the real Islam, which until recently they have not done. Said also notes that even when scholars rebut these false ideals, it is often to no avail as media images travel faster than expert opinions. There was a denial of coeunalness between the scholar and the media message, since previously most scholars of Islam were still attached to the idea of classical Islam.10 What Said presents by using a denial of coeunalness is to show the amount of distance and perspective between the scholar and the media;

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9 Ibid., 13.
10 Ibid., 19.
the two are on opposite sides of the spectrum. Additionally, Said emphasizes that the scholar is
distanced by time, since the approach to scholarship in Islam is based on an old paradigm: the
classical Islam. Thus, the denial of coevalness adds distance through time and theoretical
approach between scholar and the media. However, scholarship today has shifted and there are
scholars of Islam who focus on Muslims living in America and the repercussions of media
involvement.

Therefore, significant responsibility has been placed on scholars studying Islam today. Due
to media involvement, political conflict, and the “us” versus “them” divide “the image of Islam
today, in every place that one encounters it, is an unrestrained and immediate one.”¹¹ As Said
notes there needs to be an increased level of awareness of Islam in all of its permutations in
every facet of American culture, including the Disney parks. He calls for this based on several
powerful assumptions: firstly, the idea that Islam is confrontational to American values; and
secondly, the perceived cultural norms associated with Islam are also easily recognizable to the
outsider, which is believed go against the American norm. Such distorted representations of
Islam and Muslims are readily available to the American public in places like Walt Disney
World. These reductive claims have lead to many issues that scholarship is attempting to change
today. In popular culture representations, only one specific image of Islam is available and the
general religious message of Islam itself has been stereotyped.¹² Such trends make it difficult for
non-Muslims to learn about the various practices and cultural differences, since those reach
beyond the scope of most media sound bites.


¹² Ibid., 44.
Islam continues to be delivered to the American public through various cultural venues such as television programs, magazine articles, books, and film. However, these are humanly constructed items existing beyond the control of the individual. They are man-made and thus need to be treated in a subjective manner. All media representations are closely associated with popular culture. These venues will continue to shape perceptions about cultural identities, including religious ones. Thus, there needs to be a greater understanding and awareness about the interaction between religion and popular culture in the way that it shapes cultural norms and individual identity.

**Popular Culture**

John Fiske demonstrates the impact of popular culture and its relationship to capitalism on American identity. The relationship between the commercial and the popular is evident not only at the Disney theme parks, but in the general media as well. Fiske gives the example of jeans and their impact on American identity. While jeans were originally identified with blue collar workers, today most individuals either wear jeans on a daily basis or own at least one pair of jeans. The role of the product and its identity has shifted to become more acceptable to the general public. They are a commodity that has changed because they are no longer a generic no-label item. Popular culture, through media influence, has created a new identity for jeans which are now found in most closets, spanning cultures, socio-economic status, age, and gender. Religion, as it has been displayed by Disney, has experienced a similar transformation. As analysis of each park will show, culture (specifically Muslim culture) is not treated as a generic

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entity. It is treated like a unique commodity used as a marketing tool in the effort to sell “authentic” artifacts that represent Islam and “Muslim culture” to the public.

That which is connected to popular culture is also related to power. Fiske notes that popular culture is always part of power struggles between the dominant and subordinate groups.\textsuperscript{16} That which becomes more “popular” will succeed within the power struggle and become an element of everyday life. However, in order to win the power struggle, the item must also be desirable and marketable to the public. It must be a commodity that can benefit from the capitalist ideal. Disney, as a popular culture icon and facilitator, is successful because it generates high demand in the market place. Fiske explains that, “Popular culture is not consumption, it is culture- the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling…” because it is an active and changing process.\textsuperscript{17} For this reason, Disney is an expansive and viable form of popular culture. It shapes consumerism and is also driven by consumerism.

Jack Shaheen highlights the significance of film and its use of representation of Arab and Muslim culture. In his book, \textit{Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People}, he argues that popular culture has the ability to shape perceptions and identities of a group. Shaheen analyzes over 900 films, including films by Walt Disney. According to him, Hollywood and popular culture adopt an Orientalist view of the “other” for the purpose of creating a dichotomy between the hero and the villain.\textsuperscript{18} Arabs, Muslims included, are represented as murderers, religious fanatics, and rapists who are visualized in “black beard, headdress, dark glasses…” in sharp

\textsuperscript{16} Fiske, \textit{Understanding Popular Culture}, 19.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 2.
contrast to the Western hero. This portrayal of Arabs and Muslims has been consistent in film and is evident in the Disney theme parks to a similar extent. This image is especially focused on Muslims. Shaheen explains that, “Islam, particularly, comes in for unjust treatment. Today’s image-makers regularly link the Islamic faith with male supremacy, holy war, and acts of terror, depicting Arab Muslims as hostile alien intruders.” While Shaheen directs the concept of image-makers to filmmakers, this also pertains to Disney creators in the theme parks since their responsibility is to create images that attract public attention and sell a general product to park visitors. Disney, like any form of the media, is responsible for the images it presents to the public. Shaheen notes this idea and adds that, “creators of popular culture form their opinions of a people, in part based on what they read in print, hear on the radio or see on television… they are inundated and influenced by a continues flow of … headlines and sound bites.” Disney creators are individuals that carry the same misconceptions about Muslim culture as any other individual outside of a relevant field of study. However, they are in a position to choose to represent these images, which makes them accountable for what they portray. This paper hopes to assist both park visitors and park creators in understanding the self-perpetuating cycle of popular culture and its ability to reinforce powerful negative images and stereotypes. Since repetition is essential to education, stopping this cycle can contribute to the efforts of religion scholars and others who attempt to correct misconceptions of Muslim culture as it is often presented in the media today.

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20 Ibid., 9.
21 Ibid., 28.
22 Ibid., 1.
There is no simple relationship between popular culture, religion, and consumerism. Each element contributes to the decisions made by individuals, and it is the individual who also shapes each of these concepts. The concept of McDonaldization provides insight into how a company such as Disney can be influential to the point where it becomes a part of the American cultural identity. It also shows how images associated with stereotypes of various Muslim cultures can become one homogenous cultural representation that eventually becomes a part of the American cultural understanding. These theories are applicable on the global scale, which significantly adds to the need for an understanding of Islam and Disney, as will be explored in this research.

**McDonaldization**

Since Walt Disney World is a global corporation, it is important to understand it in terms of the market place. One of the strong starting places for this theoretical background is George Ritzer’s concept of McDonaldization. Ritzer uses an analogy of the assembly line mentality to explain American culture.\(^2\) He uses the example of Walt Disney World, among other popular culture icons, to support his interpretation of the social construction of American culture. Ritzer’s *The McDonaldization of Society*, breaks the concept down into several elements. McDonaldization, or the homogenizing of culture, is made possible through the creation of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control of an entity.\(^4\) While these elements can be viewed as having positive and negative perspectives, Ritzer also critiques the concept and reality of McDonaldization for its extreme rationality (which leads to irrationality) and its lack of meaning.

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McDonaldization affects all elements of society on a global scale. Its success is visible by the availability of product around the world and by active global recognition. The idea of McDonalds being available around the world is the essential concept within this theory. Yet, it goes beyond the basic availability of a product. The product, the space, employees, packaging, and purpose should be similar no matter where the product is located. McDonaldization points to the homogenization of culture and the McDonalds experience includes reliable distribution and a uniform experience anywhere in the world where McDonalds is offered. Ritzer identifies McDonalds as the basis for McDonaldization because of the emphasis the use of quantity of the product provided over quality of the product provided.

Ritzer demonstrates how Walt Disney World fits within the realm of McDonaldization. For Ritzer, places of McDonaldization are essential to the idea of consumer religion. He explains that such places become sacred institutions and that Walt Disney World, “has been described as the middle-class hajj, the compulsory visit to the sunbaked holy city.” The consumer participates in the process of McDonaldization just as he or she may practice or participate in a religion or religious ritual. Ritzer applies efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control of an entity to the theme parks and their structure since these qualities allow the theme parks to succeed. Efficiency allows McDonaldization to be successful since it provides the consumer with quick gratification and a well-organized experience. In this same vein, Walt Disney World has created a system of highways, underground tunnels, and conveyor belts to quickly move trash, cars, and people throughout the theme parks. The key of efficiency is to not allow park guests to see the

26 Ritzer, *The Reader*, 16.
28 Ibid., 51
work and manual labor that is needed to make the system function. It allows for the Disney “magic” to occur by allowing visitors to forget about the reality waiting beyond park walls.

The concept of predictability also significantly shapes the success of McDonaldization. McDonald ensures that the food a consumer gets will always be identical to the previous meal. This sense of stability allows for the consumer to be comforted and secure in their purchase no matter the time of year or location of their meal.29 Walt Disney World is also able to create this sense of predictability for its visitors. The constant state of orderliness and cleanliness is an expected part of the Disney experience. There is an absence of any loud speaker announcements or external stimuli. Disney also attempts to keep its employee’s identical in behavior and appearance. With the strict code of behavior and cleanliness required of every employee, Disney is able to control the actions and appearance of every area of the park.30

While these elements of organization, control, and efficiency do allow for a care free vacation environment for park visits, they are not met without critique. Each of the McDonaldized elements allow for smoother company operation. However, there is detraction from basic human interaction and sincerity within the theme park. Ritzer warns that such behavior leads to dehumanization of the employees, visitors, and the ultimate Disney agenda.31 Instead of being a place of creativity and expression of the human experience, Disney represents an, “uncreative, unimaginative, and ultimately inhuman…” homogenous experience.32 While most park visitors desire a safe and clean vacation environment, at some point these components become excessive. Yet, they continue to be a consistent draw for the consumer. Accepting the

29 Ritzer, The Reader, 17.
30 Ritzer, The McDonaldization of Society, 93.
31 Ibid., 138.
32 Ibid.
underlying consumer-based motivations behind the Walt Disney parks and its relationship between religion and consumerism will aid in this paradoxical relationship. Understanding the elements that create the McDonaldization of the theme parks allow for a critiqued understanding of the Walt Disney World phenomenon. It also allows for precise deconstruction of park elements. It is also easier to see how much of an impact the process of McDonaldization has on shaping or constructing the American identity in terms of popular culture. However, this is just the starting point. Ritzer stops short of applying Disney’s true potential as a global project. Disney’s predictability and homogenized nature can be questioned when Muslim culture becomes the focus of study. Updated scholarship on the theme parks provides more in-depth analysis of Walt Disney World’s motivations and goals within the theme park.
CHAPTER 3
DISNEY BASED THEORY

Walt Disney World as Education

While scholarship focused on popular culture and the marketplace attempts to show the impact companies like Disney have on the greater community and cultural identity, it is still difficult to ascertain how and why Disney is successful. When I am approached about my decision to focus on Disney as a research topic, most individuals wonder why I chose to analyze it. The common reaction is that Disney engages in fantasy and is not to be taken seriously by educated Americans. However, popular culture studies have shown us the exact opposite. Disney has become part of the popular discourse that shapes American cultural identity. Understanding the motivations and means behind Disney’s success is critical if scholars are to understand how consumers of Disney’s perceptions of Muslim cultures and globalization are affected by its representations of Arabs and/or Muslims in the theme park system.

Recognizing Disney’s role in the proliferation of images and representations on various topics justifies a close analysis of the theme parks’ representation of Islam. Since the Walt Disney World theme parks became successful and Disney films were being viewed by generations of children, some scholars have questioned the motivations behind Disney’s message. While there are many myths about Walt Disney and his vision for the corporation, most scholars agree that the Disney enterprise should be acknowledged for its impact on American identity. One such scholar, Henry Giroux, explains that “media conglomerates such as Disney are not merely producing harmless entertainment, disinterested news stories, and unlimited
access to the information age; nor are they removed from the realm of power, politics and ideology."¹ In other words, Disney is a viable agent for shaping images and ideas about culture.

Giroux believes that in order to understand Disney one must first understand how Disney is able to draw the attention of both adults and children. He believes that for adults, Disney is an escape from reality and an excuse to create a new sense of agency based on self-satisfaction and child-like appeal.² This is especially true for baby boomers who are rediscovering the nostalgia of their youth. Giroux believes that, “Disney’s power lies, in part, in its ability to tap into the lost hopes, abortive dreams, and the utopian potential of popular culture.”³ This correlates with earlier associations made by Baudrillard and Ritzer that Walt Disney World may fill the void of neglected religious practice, or may itself be a religious foundation for many individuals. While this is a fascinating approach to understanding the relationship between religion and cultural practices, it is only the start of understanding how Disney shapes Islam in the minds of park visitors.

Not only is Disney creating an alternative reality, it is expressing that reality as truth. Giroux believes that Disney plays a significant role in shaping public memory, national identity, gender roles, defining the idea of an American, and shaping American consumerism.⁴ Significant exposure to Disney creations, such as the films and the theme parks, does have an impact on how children perceive and shape their world. Giroux quotes Benjamin Barber saying, “It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not schoolteachers or university professors but

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² Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared*, 5.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 10.
filmmakers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors. Disney does more than Duke…”5
While, according to Giroux, these issues are not specifically targeted at Islam or Muslim culture, it show how Disney’s misrepresentation of Islam and various Muslim cultural practices can be stereotyped or utilized in terms of education. The way Islam is portrayed by Disney can affect the understanding non-Muslim individuals have about the religion and its practitioners. Park visitors are able to see expressions of gender roles, cultural exchange, or the relationship to the American identity. These individuals are then able to draw conclusions about Muslims and their culture in the way Said argues; this form of misrepresentation portrays Muslims as the “other” for Americans or non-Muslims.

**Disneyization**

While the Walt Disney enterprises’ role as an educator of the American public is apparent, it is important to understand how the Disney franchise is able to achieve its power and influence over American identity formation. Ritzer has provided an analysis of the efficiency and predictability which makes the Disney model of business functional and expandable. However, Ritzer realizes the limitations that the concept of McDonaldization: it presupposes that marketing means meaninglessness for the consumer. Because the product is almost identical at every location, there may be a level of boredom or indifference towards the product. The latter does not offer something new and exciting for the consumer. There is disagreement about this issue. Mazur and Koda believe that, “Disney provides a system of meaning that orients the consumer- albeit mythically, commercially, and with a very American product- to the larger world of consumer capitalism in which they live, whether or not they are Americans.”6 Disney sends very

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5 Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared*, 63.

strong and specific messages to its audience. Meaning is applied and created, which allows the consumer to experience something unique. This argument moves from Ritzer’s original concept of McDonaldization and is picked up by Alan Bryman in his theory of Disneyization.

Bryman provides an in depth analysis of the theme park system, how it functions, how it facilitates the Disney experience, and how it affects globalization. Disneyization is a theory that supports the relationship between the Disney theme parks and their effect on global economics and consumer culture.\(^7\) The Disney attractions, specifically the theme parks, change the social world and are a way of understanding the “nature of modern society” through consumption and globalization.\(^8\) Bryman roots his ideas in the concept of the *systemscape*, which contributes to the idea of standardization that is accomplished by theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and performative labor.\(^9\) Bryman suggests that it can be understood in terms of Arjun Appadurai’s “scapes”, or the movements of goods, peoples, and ideas.\(^10\) Appadurai’s focus on the movements of people, technology, capital, information, and ideas.\(^11\) While Disney ideas, representations, goods, and services move in each of these elements, it is unique because it provides additional service that other scapes do not provide. Disneyization is considered under the term of *systemscape*, because it is a “non-machine technology for the delivery of goods and services, a technology that can be transferred across the globe”.\(^12\) The concept of *systemscape* facilitates the understanding of how Disney functions successfully on a global scale. It works by

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\(^7\) Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society*, 12.

\(^8\) Ibid., vii.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid., 161.


\(^12\) Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society*, 161.
creating an open and consistent flow of services that is not dependent on borders or national identities by basing its success on material consumption.

The concept of Disneyization is a parallel process to McDonaldization. While McDonaldization focuses on the homogenization of its product, Disneyization focuses on consumption which provides a unique experience.\textsuperscript{13} It is this reason why depictions of a mythical Islam or Arab/Muslim culture has proven to be a successful venture for the Disney enterprise. It thrives in the controlled and predictable McDonaldized environment, yet it provides a unique experience for Disney visitors. This unique portrayal of the created or stereotyped Muslim culture facilitates consumer spending, which only makes Disney more successful. Bryman’s ideas of theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and performative labor become central to understanding how Disney accomplishes this and has enabled it to become a global phenomenon.

Each of these elements is significant in understanding how Disney uses its representation of Islam which can be physically experienced by touching, tasting, purchasing, or observing. They are not theoretical concepts about the theme parks, but viable objectives for the way Disney functions as a successful corporation. The idea of theming is based on the idea of shifting consumer drive from goods to service. Bryman explains that the idea of theming provides “meaning and symbolism” which makes them more attractive and interesting to the consumer.\textsuperscript{14} The focus is on allowing the underlying myths, which Disney has created, to become a realistic experience at the park. While the idea of McDonaldization focused on the product (like the McDonalds hamburger) Disney is focused on providing a service to the consumer (the vacation experience). Thus, theming becomes essential to creating the physical environment needed to

\textsuperscript{13} Bryman, \textit{The Disneyization of Society}, 4.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 15.
deliver the service. Disney uses the concept of cues throughout the park for this purpose. Cues can include concepts like time, place, music, film, fashion, architecture, literature, and morals. Disney utilizes several of these cues when attempting to theme Islam throughout the park system. Overall, Disney uses the idea of the overarching narrative (the magical World of Disney) and sub-themes (Tomorrowland, the Worlds Showcase) to create more specific environments within the park. Finally, Disney relies on its own reputation and own creativity to make the parks successful. Their own creations (movie characters and their merchandise) are only available in the park, which makes them more desirable.

The idea of hybrid consumption is the “general trend whereby the forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres become interlocked with each other and increasingly difficult to distinguish.” The idea of hybrid consumption is used for the selling of goods and services. However, it openly depicts the difference between McDonaldization and Disneyization. The idea of the hybrid enterprise is what allows Disney to provide a unique product. While it is still standardized and controlled (homogenous) it also provides the illusion of uniqueness, which in reality is a Disney interpretation. The most effective example of this is the World Showcase at EPCOT. Each country is reduced to several landmark visual representations, one or two eateries, and several shopping spaces dedicated to selling merchandise unique to that country. The items selected and the manner in which they are presented are optimized for each country. The purpose of visiting each country in EPCOT is to facilitate the shopping experience, which is unique but still based on Disney standards. This concept also applies to the

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 57.
representation of Muslim culture at the Morocco showcase in EPCOT and throughout the Disney parks.

The idea of hybrid consumptions feeds directly into the idea of merchandising. The merchandise available at Walt Disney World is directly created for park profit and vice versa.\textsuperscript{18} Films and rides are meant to instigate the purchase of items at the gift shop; however, the items purchased are also meant to later facilitate the desire to return to the theme park. This allows for the all-encompassing experience at Walt Disney World. Merchandise is the central element in Disneyization, since it is one of the strongest elements that exists beyond the parks boundaries. Merchandise, and the ideas and images each item carries with it, become part of the global space and American identity. Items that are associated with the religion of Islam through actual religious use (such as calligraphy and Qur’an cases) and items associated with Muslim culture (such as daggers and swords) are distributed and represented in the same manner, which lead to more complex implications of the hybrid experience.

The concept of emotional labor is also central to the all-encompassing experience at the theme park. Emotional labor is based on the display of positive emotion.\textsuperscript{19} Workers must feel good about the work they are doing at the park. While this can be seen as always “acting” for the customer, the purpose of the service is to facilitate a magical environment for guests.\textsuperscript{20} This correlates with the creation of the controlled environment previously described by Ritzer since it provides a consistent experience throughout the park under a controlled environment. The idea of constant surveillance and control of workers, visitors, and attractions is meant to facilitate the magical space, which promotes positive emotional reactions. This control is not limited to

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{18} Bryman, \textit{The Disneyization of Society}, 82.
\item\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 104.
\item\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
workers and facilities, but also to the constant surveillance of guests. If there are no outside
distractions for park visitors, they will easily flow within the Disney experience. Ideally, this
promotes a rise in consumer consumption of foods and merchandise while also facilitating the
myth which supports all elements of consumerism at the parks.

Each of these elements comes together to create the process of Disneyization. Bryman’s
explanations for how Disney facilitates a homogenous and hybrid experience will be useful in
understanding how representations of Islam are developed and presented to visitors through the
Disney theme parks. It will also be useful for understanding the implications behind Disney’s
work, including broader ramifications for the global market. These generalized implications will
focus on the cycle that flows from Disney through consumption, and into the global space. The
concept of McDonaldization and Disneyization can work together to bring a general
understanding of how the Magic Kingdom, EPCOT, and Hollywood Studios (formerly MGM
studios) represent Islam to the global audience.
CHAPTER 4
ALADDIN

The basis for the portrayal of Islam in the Disney theme parks is founded on the 1992 Disney film *Aladdin*. The film has been a popular case study for many academics attempting to understand the relationship between religion and Disney. It has also been a popular example Muslim groups have used to show the impact of stereotyping on Muslim Americans. This high profile film is controversial for both Disney and the Muslim community. The film has significant implications for this study due to its portrayal of Islam, its roots in Orientalism, and its presence at Walt Disney World. In a post 9/11 America, implications of this film become even more powerful. The film is a constant reminder of the lack of sensitivity and the stereotyping surrounding Muslims relations.

In the early 1990’s, Disney shifted its course in the film industry. It focused on the creation and interpretation of the exotic, starting with its release of *Aladdin*, followed by *The Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*. The drive to present something new to film audiences was meant to boost interest in Disney as a company. The films broke box-office records, were nominated for Academy Awards, and were considered successful commercial and artistic ventures.\(^1\) Most importantly for the concept of consumerism, this undertaking was spurred on by the need to produce new films for the home video revolution.\(^2\) Disney had reached its limits in audience growth and decided to expand their storylines and product lines into Africa, Arabia, and Asia cultures, which lead to creation of exotic characters.

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Aladdin was the first venture into creating this updated exotic storyline in a Disney film and Aladdin was the first non-white leading character created since The Jungle Book. Based on the story found in The Book of One Thousand and One Nights, Aladdin was recreated by Disney writers. Disney created the tale of a young peasant boy named Aladdin (described in the film as a street rat), who finds true love with the runaway princess Jasmine he meets and saves in a marketplace. The princess is recaptured, returned to her father the Sultan, and expected to marry a prince by her next birthday. In the mean time, the Sultan’s advisor Jafar, is attempting to take control of the palace by overthrowing the Sultan. He can only do this by using the Genie found in the magic lamp. Jafar discovers that only Aladdin can recover the lamp, since he is considered pure at heart. Jafar manages to lure Aladdin to the cave where the lamp is held. Aladdin successfully finds the lamp, but is trapped in the cave, when Jafar attempts to steal the lamp and leave him for dead. Aladdin’s monkey keeps the magic lamp which releases the Genie. The Genie grants Aladdin three wishes, the first of which is to become a prince so that he can marry Jasmine. As the disguised Prince Ali, Aladdin courts Jasmine, but is eventually is found out by Jafar. Jafar attempts to take control of the magic lamp and the Genie, but Aladdin manages to save the day. The Sultan, seeing the error in only allowing a prince to marry a princess, changes the law and the two are married. Aladdin uses his final wish to set the Genie free and decides to go see the world on his own.

While Disney supposedly hired a variety of expert advisors in the development of the script for the film, problems with the movie are evident from the opening scene, including the controversial opening lyrics. Despite claims made by Disney, there are significant issues of

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3 Ginneken, Screening Difference, 23.

4 One Thousand and One Nights is a collection of folk stories that are dated to ancient and medieval Arabian, Persian, and Indian folklore.
misinterpretation and stereotyping evident throughout the film. The song “Arabian Nights” established the storyline of the film, facilitated the exotic, and created uproar about racial stereotyping. The original lyrics were released for the film’s theatre version:

Oh 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
When the wind's from the east/And the sun's from the west/And the sand in the glass is right/Come on down/Stop on by/Hop a carpet and fly/To another Arabian night
Arabian nights/Like Arabian days/More often than not/Are hotter than hot/In a lot of good ways/
Arabian nights/Neath Arabian moons/A fool off his guard/Could fall and fall hard/Out there on the dunes

The controversial image of cutting off a person’s ear outraged the Muslim community. Due to the lyrics, the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, or ABIM) urged the Malaysian government to ban the film within the country. While the film was never actually banned, many Muslim groups throughout Southeast Asia, did protest the film, the opening lyrics, and the underlying message of exoticism and violence in Aladdin. Disney executives were asked by the media why they chose to include the opening lyrics. Apparently, according to later interviews, Disney writers did not think that the lyrics would remain in the film. Mark Pinsky, a writer for the Orlando Sentinel, has published The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust, and Pixie Dust. Pinsky noted that Dick Cook, Disney’s vice president for distribution, decided to change the lyrics of the song once complaints from Arab American and Muslim American groups did not decrease. Subsequent theatre releases and video releases

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8 Pinsky, The Gospel According to Disney, 149.
changed the words to: “It’s flat and immense, and the heat is intense/ it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.”

While this was progressive for Disney, it was still not an adequate change. The song’s lyrics provide the stereotypes consistent with Orientalism, evoking a sense of the “other” as being barbaric, exotic, and distant from the Disney viewer. The singer of the song, a merchant who appears on a camel as he rides through the desert, makes this Arabian location appear harsh and dangerous.

However, the song is not the only problem with the film, although it is the one that received the most attention from Disney film viewers. Most of the major characters in the film were stereotyped for their appearance. The films animated characters were sketched to appear Arab in appearance. While there is no defining “Arab” look, the characters in the film range from Caucasian in appearance to more stereotypically Arab in appearance. The hero and heroine of the film are distinctly more Caucasian in appearance than the villains. Disney animators openly created the character of Aladdin as a sketch between Michael J. Fox and Tom Cruise.

Aladdin’s main character has more common Caucasian features, rather than what are imaged by many Americans to be Middle Eastern features. Jasmine is given large dark eyes and dark hair, but otherwise appears Caucasian. Both of the main characters speak with American accents. The castle guards and background characters appear more like the stereotypical Middle Easterner than these main characters, with darker complexions and some with “Arab” accents. Jafar, the villain of the film, is the most stereotypically “Arab” in appearance. Although he has a British accent in the film, he is described as being a “dark man with a dark purpose” dressed in black robes and drawn with facial hair.

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11 Eleanor Bryne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney* (London: Pluto, 1999), 76.
While none of the characters make direct references to Islam, the Sultan makes several references to Allah. Often he is heard exclaiming: “Allah forbid” or “Praise Allah’ in the same vein as the word “God” might be used as an American colloquialism. This film is set in a mystical and imagined Arab land called Agrabah. A village and market place, complete with sword swallowers and snake charmers, is set against the backdrop of a large palace. The large palace appears to be a cross between the Taj Mahal and Cinderella’s castle. This city is set in the desert, complete with camels and an oasis. The imagery is a powerful portrayal of the exotic.

The most powerful implications of the “us” versus “them” mentality is evident in the portrayal of Sharia, the Islamic law. While the film never directly names it Sharia, many references are made to “the law” as it constrains the people of Agrabah and princess Jasmine in her life in the castle. Aladdin, Jasmine, and the Genie are not able to make choices about their life because of the rules established by the law. The law does not allow Jasmine to marry the person of her choice. It also depicts the punishment for stealing as the amputation of the thief’s hand without trial or conviction. This same law does not allow Aladdin to advance from his peasant status. In order to achieve happiness, each of these characters needs to break away from the law, which is in direct conflict with their own freedom. This idea climaxes with the song “A Whole New World” which is meant to portray the love between Aladdin and Jasmine. Aladdin takes Jasmine away on the flying carpet to see the world beyond Agrabah. She is taken to other countries to experience new customs and traditions. Aladdin reminds her that the new


world is “a new fantastic point of view.” It is only the new world, shown by Aladdin, that can free her from arranged marriage and the law. Once Jasmine sees her life from a global perspective, she can be liberated from the life she lives in Agrabah. However, according to the film, only the Sultan is able to change the law, and he does so only after he realizes that the law is wrong and not his daughter. This deviation for actual practices of Shari’a law demonstrates how Disney creators have been able to take traditional religious practices and restructure them for the purpose of their storytelling. Disney openly reconstructed the practice of law-making and made it part of their own imagined time and space, while still making it part of the non-Muslim understanding of how Muslim cultural and religious practices are carried out.

Despite the problematic portrayal of Middle Eastern characters, their language, the judicial system, and the basic architecture and landscape, Aladdin holds the record for the best selling video of all time. Aladdin has also become a popular element of the Disney theme parks. However, the Muslim public has noticed the problems with the film and have spoken out. They facilitated change with the lyrics. Yousef Salem, a past spokesman for the South Bay Islamic Association, made it known that because of such images of Arabs in film his family was embarrassed to be called Arab. These images are still being prominently shown today throughout the parks, with little to no change. While many scholars have discussed the implications of created films like Aladdin, they do not openly discuss the transition this film has made to the theme parks. While problems with the movie have been openly acknowledged by

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16 Bryne, Deconstructing Disney, 73.

17 Giroux, The Mouse that Roared, 104.
Disney representatives, no changes that I am aware of have been made with the park representations. It is important to understand the relationship between the film and the theme parks. They share in the profit, advertisement, and success of the product. Disney is openly representing Arabs and Muslims through *Aladdin* everyday, through viewing of the film and daily exposure at the theme parks.
CHAPTER 5
THE THEME PARKS

Studying the Walt Disney World theme parks can be a complex and involved process. While the theme parks present a strong message to park visitors, there are many factors that contribute to the overall meaning (theming) of each park. To simplify matters, I am focusing on the Walt Disney World theme parks relevant to Islam. This includes the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, and Disney’s Hollywood Studios. During my research, in order not to invade the privacy or space of employees and guests, I did not interact with any individual beyond the means of a typical visitor. Employees were only asked questions when prompted or appropriate. For example, the Treasures of Morocco tour conducted daily at the Morocco Pavilion is open to all visitors. Each visitor is given a tour of the space and allowed to ask questions about Morocco or the Disney pavilion. Employees are encouraged to answer these questions openly and choose to contribute their own outside knowledge about Morocco to facilitate the tour experience.

Unless noted, I simply observed the Disney theme parks and did not direct my attention towards guests. My interest was in the space and attraction created by Disney. Photography was taken only where photography was permitted. No compensation was provided for purchasing park admission. By visiting the park as any other tourist, I was able to immerse myself in the Disney experience in the way each park visitor experiences it through theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and emotional labor. My conclusions are based on my observations and the information Disney provided, and not my personal opinion of the theme parks. It is important to note that these visits were conducted during two separate trips. I visited the Magic Kingdom and Epcot in July 2008 and Disney’s Hollywood Studios was visited in February 2009. Walt Disney World is constantly changing and recreating itself to provide a service to its visitors. For this reason, the merchandise, displays, or basic attractions may vary overtime. At the time of
this study descriptions were provided in the most updated version possible. However, it is important to acknowledge that ultimately there may be discrepancies with some specific attractions within the theme park.

The Magic Kingdom

The Magic Kingdom is the first of four Disney parks studied at Walt Disney World. It is the classic example of Walt Disney World, and is most often associated with the various Disney films for its multiple rides dedicated to classical animation. The park is divided into several different “lands,” each of which has a different theme to offer visitors. The first is Main Street U.S.A. which is the first to be experienced by park visitors as they enter. It ends with Cinderella’s castle. The park then works in a circle with multiple lands branching off and returning to Main Street U.S.A. These lands include Liberty Square, Tomorrowland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Adventureland, and Mickey’s Toontown Fair. The land of interest to the study of Muslim culture and representation is Adventureland, which is sub-themed into the Arabian village and Caribbean Plaza. While merchandise associated with Aladdin is available throughout this park, the highest concentration is found in this area. Adventureland develops seamlessly out of Frontierland and brings visitors back to Main Street U.S.A., meaning that most visitors walk through this section at some point. There is a seamless transition from the Arabian village into the Caribbean Plaza. The Arabian village is a circular pavilion. Half of the pavilion is dedicated to Africa and the other half to the Middle East, based on the architecture and merchandise provided in each section. There is no definitive identification of where in Africa or the Middle East these sections are meant to represent. Walt Disney World chose to name this section of its park the Arabian Village, while creating a vision loosely associated with imagery recognizable to the individual as being African or Middle Eastern.
The center of the Arabian Village is dedicated to the Magic Carpets of Aladdin ride, where visitors can board magic carpets and “fly” around a golden magic lamp. The ride is based on the film, with the movie’s Genie decorating the rides main tower. Two large golden camels surround the ride, spitting water at unsuspecting guests as they walk by. Walt Disney World describes the attraction

Soar around a giant genie bottle on your very own magic carpet! This exotic adventure is geared toward younger kids who love to make their carpet go up and down, or pitch forward and back. Be sure to watch out for the camel facing the ride who occasionally spits water at the carpets passing by. But don’t worry. It's very unlikely you'll get even a little wet.\(^1\)

The African section of the pavilion is dedicated to a food court, hidden under thatched roofs and tribal masks. The Middle Eastern portion is decorated as a market place with colorful flags, carpets, machete sword details, and gold and jeweled railings and ropes. There are two separate open-air markets in this pavilion, one named Zanzibar and the other Agrabah Bazaar. Both are dedicated to selling Disney souvenirs, specifically merchandise from the film *Aladdin*. Zanzibar is geared towards selling clothing and safari-type plush toys and children’s items, but they also include hats, shirts, and misting fans. Agrabah Bazaar is mostly dedicated to the film. The most common items based on the film are plush toys and figurines of Aladdin and Jasmine, along with some children’s dress up costumes based on Jasmine’s character. The interior of the marketplace is decorated to look like an Arabian bazaar. It is filled with rugs, weaved baskets, golden lamps, brass goblets, leather slippers, rubber snakes, and colorful fabrics. None of these items are for sale, and are simply meant to create the illusion of a non-specific Arabian market.

In the Adventureland section of the park all Disney workers have a specific type of uniform. This includes a multicolored tunic and a pair of wide leg pants. The uniform is the same for both male

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and female employees and is a non-specific interpretation of Middle Eastern or African traditional clothing.

When seeing this display of merchandise and attraction, there are no direct representations of Islam in the Arabian village. The village is evoking a consumer driven image of a non-specific Middle Eastern city or village, which is evident in the décor, name of the space, and the merchandise and attractions associated with *Aladdin*. There are a few prayer mats displayed on walls and balconies, but the Arabian village is dedicated to selling merchandise and keeping the film of interest to viewers. Meanwhile, the image of Edward Said’s Orientalist Middle East is more visible. This stereotype has been put through the process of Disneyization and is evident through the elements of theming, merchandising, emotional labor, and controlled environment, as discussed by Bryman.² Theming, as will become evident through the description of each park, is the most powerful format for Disneyization of Middle Eastern culture. There is a definitive demonstration of service as goods as visitors are able to experience the ride attraction, food, and merchandise in one small isolated space. No longer are the specific items for sale the only desirable selling point of the theme parks, the services (including these cultural demonstrations) are what brings tourists and their desire to purchase Disney merchandise. Several specific cues help accomplish this theme. The most powerful cue is architecture, since it sets the stage for the visitor. With the change in architecture from Frontierland, the visitor knows that there is a change of mood and setting. This is enhanced by the increased amount of foliage around the ride and the dramatic use of color. Red, gold, blue, and sandy brown prevail in this area. The role of time and place are significant as well. As the visitor realizes that the area is based on adventure, as represented in its name, he or she is also transported into a space that is vague in time. There

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² These elements of theming, merchandising, emotional labor, and controlled environment are the basis of Disneyization, as explored in-depth in Chapter 3.
is no evident incorporation of technology, except for the mechanical use of the flying carpet ride. The architecture itself is not futuristic, but something expected from the setting of *Aladdin*. The land is also ambiguous since it blends from an African themed space to a Middle Eastern themed space. However, there is no mention of what portions of countries are represented in this space and *Aladdin* itself took place in an indistinct imagined land. The unknown within this theme is what drives the myth behind it. Finally, film is a significant cue within the Arabian village. Without the film *Aladdin*, there would be no underlying theme for the Arabian Village. The ride itself is the main attraction, drawing the visitors, and allowing them to experience the other attractions placed there. All of these elements placed together create a very specific theme for the Arabian village. It is an ambiguous place, decorated with color and greenery, and placed there to provide hybrid consumption rooted within film and visitor curiosity of what they might believe is a representation of the Middle East.

The shopping sections of the Arabian Village are geared to sell items for adults and children, mainly based on *Aladdin*. While most of the items that are sold in the Agrabah Bazaar and Zanzibar are available in other parts of the park, they are highly concentrated in this place. The items being sold directly correlate to the attraction being presented. While there is no specific Middle Eastern food being sold in this area, the general consumption is directed toward having an exotic experience in a small place. This includes eating American food in an exotic setting. While Disney appears to be offering something unique to the visitor, it is actually a standardized experience throughout the park system since most of the food and merchandise sold in the Arabian Village is available in each them park.

The merchandise is the most evident attempt to increase revenue at the park while still providing a theme that portrays the Middle East. Jasmine is central to the merchandising at the
marketplace. Most of the items are geared toward young girls through costumes based on Jasmine, including ceramic figurines, t-shirts, and several various plush dolls. The different merchandise is also providing a hybrid experience. While the articles being sold are meant to represent a Muslim and/or Middle Eastern individual, they are distributed through American-based and American-created merchandise. The figurines and dolls themselves are toned-down. Some barely resemble the characters in the film, who were already Americanized versions of individuals meant to portray a non-specific Middle Eastern character. These changes may have been created in order to increase general appeal.

Finally, the labor involved in this area of Adventureland is also standardized. Each person who works in this section wears the same tunic and pants set, which resembles a men’s Kurta shirt. The pattern is also difficult to identify in terms of origin or theme. While it contains a colorful array of yellow, blue and orange, the pattern could be associated with various cultures or counties. Against the backdrop of the Arabian village, costumed workers dressed as Aladdin and Jasmine often visit for autographs. These Disney employees are meant to resemble the characters from the film and wear similar costumes, wigs, and makeup. These workers facilitate the theme of *Aladdin* in this portion of the park.

It is evident that the Magic Kingdom is not dedicated to accuracy. The underlying theme for this portion of Walt Disney World is to convey the uniqueness and exotic nature of the Disney vision of the Middle East, while still providing visitors with a comfortable setting. The flying carpet ride and the shops are meant to facilitate each other’s interest by connecting their purpose back to *Aladdin*. By keeping time, place, and architecture ambiguous, Disney is able to have more creative freedom with this portion of the park. It is meant to create a fantasy
environment for visitors, which is propagated by the merchandise available and the setting created for employees and visitors.

**Epcot**

Epcot, derived for the acronym Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, was widely understood by the Disney community, to be a planned utopian neighborhood created by Walt Disney himself. Today, Epcot is dedicated to educating visitors about technology and international cultures. While the planned community Walt Disney imagined was not created, the underlying intentions for EPCOT have been instilled in the Epcot visited today. With a World’s Fair theme throughout the park, it is divided into the Future World Pavilion and the World’s Showcase. The Future World Pavilion includes rides and attractions based on technology sponsored by companies such as General Motors and Kodak. The World’s Showcase is dedicated to representing eleven different countries: Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, America, Japan, Morocco, France, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Both Norway and Morocco were added after the park opened, and several lots are still available to add more countries to the showcase. At this point only Morocco is a country-funded attraction, while private companies sponsor all of the other showcases. Each of the countries provides at least one dining and shopping opportunity based on the country of origin. Some include rides, performances, or additional attractions for guests. Each showcase has employees from the countries of origin actively working at the restaurants, shops, and attractions.

For the purpose of understanding representations of Islam, Morocco is the general area of interest within this Disney Park. This pavilion includes a high concentration of food, music, dance, and craft inspired by or from Morocco. The Morocco pavilion is open for exploration by Disney visitors, with many employees waiting to answer questions about the space. Employees will inform visitors that the space is inspired by Fez, Marrakech, and Casablanca. Many plants
from these respective regions are planted throughout the pavilion as an example of Moroccan agriculture. The space is divided into the old city and the new city with a replica of the Bab Boujeloud gate in Fez. However, the most evident symbol of Islam is the minaret, inspired by the Koutoubia in Marrakech. The prayer tower is visible from across the lake in the Future World Pavilion and from other countries in the showcase. The Morocco pavilion stands apart from the other countries in Epcot because it was funded by King Hassan II of Morocco. He sent workers to keep the Islamic artistic tradition alive and evident in the building of the space. There are no artistic representations of living things within the walls, floors, and ceilings of the buildings. Authentic tiles and geometric patterns are found throughout the pavilion. Disney has also been consistent with respecting Islamic traditions in the Morocco showcase. While Disney illuminates all of the countries nightly with an event called IllumiNations, they have respectfully not draped the Koutoubia replica in string lights, and Morocco remains dark on the horizon.

Each section of Morocco is a representation of the country and in turn, Islam. There are more evident connections to religion visible for park visitors at the pavilion. The minaret is visible from all directions. For those who are aware that this is a prayer tower, it serves as a constant reminder of how central prayer (and Islam) is to the inhabitants of the country. Disney promotes the Morocco pavilion:

A realistic Koutoubia Minaret leads the way into this faraway land of traditional belly dancers, intricate Moroccan architecture and swirling mosaics made by native craftsmen. The Morocco Pavilion has 2 fascinating sections: the Ville Nouvelle (new city) and the Medina (old city). Discover a bustling plaza with a variety of shops and be on the lookout for some familiar Arabian Disney friends throughout the day.3

Disney actively portrays the exotic nature of the space, while still connecting it to traditional experiences still associated with the attraction of something literally distant yet recreated for

visitor education and enjoyment. Disney emphasizes the unique nature of Morocco. However, it stresses the comfort of having familiar elements along with the exotic.

Disney guests are able to experience the most “exotic” part of the Morocco pavilion right when they enter the showcase. A small museum, called the Gallery of Arts and History, is hidden behind heavy wooden doors. Inside, genuine artifacts from 17th and 18th century Morocco are on display. This includes pottery, brass items, musical instruments, and jewelry. The most interesting display case contains a silver and jewel-adorned Qur’an case, a dagger, and a sword also encased in silver and jewels. While these items are closely connected to Moroccan history, the museum display does associate these historical artifacts with religious practice. Disney’s placement of these three items in the same case is an interesting association, which becomes part of an underlying theme for the pavilion. This theme, while not opening stating a violent relationship between Morocco and modern or ancient Moroccan/Muslim practices and Qur’anic text, it does create an underlying image that connects back to violence, barbarianism, and Orientalism.

Passing through the Bab Boujeloud gate, visitors enter the shopping streets. To the left, there is another gallery, designed to represent an authentic Moroccan home. Half of the home space contains a small fountain, mosaic work, and some small artifacts. The second part of the space is connected with the neighboring shop and is decorated in merchandise from the store. The elaborate décor includes several carpets, which have been hung on the walls, jeweled and patchwork pillows, dark mahogany and carved seating, tea sets, and more rugs folded and ready for sale. Directly across from one shop is another souvenir shop. This one prominently displays a rug, which is not for sale, in front of its entrance. This wool rug looks like it is still being constructed on a loom, yet the image is complete. This tapestry shows the picture of, presumably
a Moroccan, on horseback with his right arm raising a gun. This tapestry also has a dagger, similar to the one displayed in the gallery, on the top right section of the piece. This rug is being displayed as an authentic piece of work. Once inside the shop, some pieces for sale are made in Morocco and include brass pots, rose water, small wooden chests and children’s toys. It leads out into a small walking street, which leads to another shop. This connecting shop sells clothing, including the popular red fez, women’s belly dancing tops and skirts, authentic Moroccan t-shirts, and several types of tunics and leather sandals. A popular image on many items is that of a Moroccan dressed as a Bedouin in an indigo blue cloth including a turban that covers everything except his eyes. There are magnets and t-shirts available with his image, either as a picture of his head or of him against a desert background. When asked, employees at the Morocco pavilion stated that the image was consistent with that of men found in the Sahara region. This shop also has a display case in the center of its space, which contains not-for-sale antique Moroccan guns and swords. One of the guns is almost identical to the one found on the not-for-sale tapestry. These shops provide items which come mostly from Morocco and there are no Disney souvenirs sold in the showcase. Each space sells similar or overlapping items and it displayed in a way to emphasize the feeling of an open-air marketplace. There are several Disney employees, all from Morocco, working in this space. All of the employees are dressed in identical navy and white linen striped tunic tops and billowing white linen pants.

The feeling of the space in the Morocco pavilion has an overriding theme of authenticity. While not considered a modern representation, it might be similar to what a visitor might expect Morocco to look like in the 1942 film Casablanca, or generally sixty years earlier. While the shops do their part in facilitating this experience, the restaurants do so as well. The pavilion has two places to eat, a small outside cafeteria and Restaurant Marrakech. This restaurant explains
that it serves traditional Moroccan food including lamb, chicken, couscous, and Moroccan coffee, mint tea, and Moroccan wines. While the Magic Kingdom, for example, does not serve alcohol throughout the park, the countries in the World’s Showcase, including Morocco, sell a variety of alcoholic beverages. Since Morocco is a Muslim country, the issue of providing alcohol would seem contradictory because Disney has attempted to respect the religious practices of the country. However, the argument could be made that alcohol is available in Morocco as well, theoretically only to non-Muslims. While food has a traditional Middle Eastern flair to it, Morocco pavilion employees say that the spiciness has been decreased over the years to meet the tastes of visiting tourists. These subtle changes show the relationship between the claimed authentic experience and the American/Disney interpretation of the Moroccan reality. The highlight of eating at the restaurant is the belly dancing show, which displays the cultural representations of Morocco during a short segment of educational belly dancing. The restaurant has an open dance floor where several women dance in beaded bra tops and skirts, using hand cymbals and a small orchestra for musical support. Guests are invited to learn how to dance during their meals. Matching belly dancing costumes are available for purchase in children and adult sizes in several of the shops outside of the restaurant. No other extensive cultural demonstrations are available for visitors to participate in while at the Morocco pavilion.

Even with the elements of genuine artifacts, dress, merchandise, and food creating a Moroccan theme within the pavilion, Disney does not forget to associate it with Aladdin. The pavilion makes time and space available for visitors to have autograph sessions with Aladdin and Jasmine in the same manner as in the Magic Kingdom. There is a special room within the intertwined shopping market dedicated to the film as well. The room includes an open storybook with pictures of the film characters and quotes from the movie. The room also has a photo
opportunity set up. A huge wall mural of the imaginary city of Agrabah is decorated with palms, rugs, and Moroccan pillows. Visitors can sit down and take a photo with the customized cartoon background. While the Disney theme is not predominant in the Morocco pavilion, it is available if the visitor looks for it.

The general theming for the Morocco pavilion is powerful in terms of its cues. Most cues are used to facilitate a sense of being in another world, one very different and exotic from the rest of Walt Disney World. The cues of place and time work together to make a realistic environment. While most people might not believe that the Morocco pavilion is modern-day Morocco, it is practical to say that it is a representation of Morocco. By surrounding visitors with no external cues such as television screens, telephones, stroller parking, visible restrooms, or information counters, the visitor can focus on the space around them. Just like in the Magic Kingdom, the cue of architecture is the most significant factor in making time and place believable. With the contributions from actual Moroccan artisans, the level of authenticity may be validated. The use of the natural world, or the foliage set against the dry sandy brick work, also facilitates a more exotic space. Fashion in the pavilion is more consistent with traditional Moroccan clothing, and is in sharp contrast to the colorful tunics in Magic Kingdom. The theme of the Morocco pavilion is still lavish and elaborate, but more understated by the subtle use of color and tone. The sub-themes of merchant and Bedouin cultures are prevalent with the overabundance of merchandise. The subtle display of weapons throughout the shops is surprising when found amongst the fez caps, rose water, and children’s toys. While these items are either displayed through and as art, or as artifacts, they are placed in visible areas and surprisingly low to the ground. When a store employee was asked about the display case of guns and daggers, he explained that they are traditional pieces similar to a display of Japanese samurai swords. While
the Japan pavilion also had a display of swords, it was not as abundant or available as the Moroccan antiques. Finally, the image of the Bedouin dressed in blue is found on many of the souvenirs. This image, complete with desert dunes and camels, is another cue facilitating the feeling of a distant time and place.

General themes of the Morocco pavilion are still rooted in the Orientalist approach. There are undertones of violence, prompted by the subtle positioning of guns and swords without providing any explanation for their placement. Nestled among other Moroccan antiquities, they represent a part of Moroccan culture and history. However, their placement with a Qur’an case and on tapestries displayed prominently where visitors walk, seem like strange choices in the general scheme, especially against the backdrop of a family-friendly theme park. While the Magic Kingdom creates a theme of fantasy and fun with its rides and Disney merchandise, the Morocco pavilion creates the feeling of authenticity. This is mostly achieved with merchandise, since it plays the role of the entertainment for this portion of the theme park. This pavilion does not offer rides or additional shows that may draw guests. Most individuals are drawn to the marketplace atmosphere and have the ability to search for items that are unique and not available anywhere else in the park. The overarching message for the visitor is that Disney is able to create an authentic experience which includes education, shopping, and dining. Disney provides education through its free Treasures of Morocco tour, where I was encouraged to ask Moroccan Disney employees any question I had about the country and the creation of the pavilion at Walt Disney World. While at this pavilion, Disney’s goal is to have the visitor forget they are in a theme park. Since the pavilion is representing itself as an authentic creation and acknowledges Islam as a part of Moroccan culture and history, it should take responsibility for the representations of Islam and Muslim culture in the Morocco showcase.
Visitors leave with a new sense of understanding about what it may be like to visit Morocco’s larger cities. However, as previously discussed, they have experienced it through Bryman’s hybrid consumption. One purpose of having the pavilion is to educate the public about various countries and how they differ from the United States. It also offers visitors from other countries a perspective on how the United States interprets or presents other cultures. However, an underlying motivation is to sell the merchandise being presented in the shops. By creating an “authentic” Moroccan experience for the visitor, he or she may be more likely to purchase items that come from Morocco. This situation is no different from other countries in the pavilion where Disney attempts to represent their cultures through merchandise, nor is it any different from Disney’s attempt to create a unique experience anywhere in the park that prompts the purchase of merchandise. By appearing to sell a service (the exclusive representation of Morocco), Disney is creating a general trend to sell goods. This image of a homogenous experience masked by a unique display is inflated by the strong emotional labor. The use of employees in the facilitating of the authentic experience is more evident in the Morocco pavilion than any other park attraction connected to Muslim culture. The employees working in the section are mostly young Moroccans representing their country to tourists visiting Disney. They are given the task of selling items, serving food, or guiding tours of the pavilion. While they are expected to follow the conduct and expectations of Disney they are also Moroccan citizens. During the Treasure of Morocco tour they have the opportunity to educate visitors when they explain why the galleries do not have any pictures of living beings. Their ties to religious practices become more evident with they explain the use of the minaret replica and why the pavilion is not lit at night or the presence of prayer rugs and Qur’an cases in the gallery exhibits.
These educational moments lead to positive representations of Islam, while still maintaining the imagery of violence, Bedouin lifestyle, and belly dancing attire for women. This is also without considering the subtle use of Disney characters and representations of *Aladdin* in certain areas of the pavilion. While visitors may not make direct connections between the information and the image, it provides a hybrid experience for the visitor. What information remains with a guest as fact and how much information can be separated from its Disney connection is only something that the individual can know. This is a significant factor to understanding the relationship between the Disney park visitor, the information and impressions relayed to the visitor by the park, and the visitor’s overall understanding and interpretation of this information. While I am not aware of any research done about the impact of Disney’s representations of Muslim culture on the park visitor’s understanding of Islam or Muslim culture, this is an issue I explore in the concluding chapter.

The Morocco exhibit still provides a homogenous and hybrid representation of Moroccan culture and Islam. While the space could be considered less over-the-top or dramatic that the Magic Kingdom exhibit, there are still elements of violence, gender difference, and fantasy actively shaping the experience. Visitors are presented an experience that is meant to be unique and exotic, something set apart from the rest of the Walt Disney World experience. The pavilion is considered a success if a visitor forgets that they are no long in Walt Disney World. However, the Morocco pavilion has a similar set up to the rest of the pavilions in the World Showcase. Three major cities in Morocco are melded together in a relatively small space, and there is little reference to show the observer what makes each city unique. After walking through the shops and entertainment opportunities of eleven different countries, the experience is homogenized. Each country still has the same standardized elements, all of the food still comes from the same
catering facility, and all merchandise is still put into Disney shopping bags. In essence, the more a guest experiences each country, the more desensitized he or she becomes to the unique experience. Once the guest leaves the World Showcase they realize they are still on Walt Disney World property, and the journey they went on was controlled the entire way. Disney allows the guest to experience exactly what they present and nothing beyond that. What this means for a visitors understanding of Islam is that he or she may realize that religion has a direct connection to life of people living in Morocco. However, the relationship between these two is confusing and never directly addressed in the galleries or by the employees. There is nothing directly inaccurate about Islam in the way it is portrayed by the theme park. Yet, the frame of reference due to time, place, architecture, and addition of Disney elements may leave visitors unsure about the reality of religion and culture in Morocco today.

Disney’s Hollywood Studios

Disney’s Hollywood Studies, formerly Disney-MGM studios, is the third park built in the Walt Disney theme park franchise. This park is dedicated to unveiling the Disney “magic” to its visitors. It accomplishes this by setting up various behind-the-scenes and behind-the-animation attractions. The park is not focused on creating the fantasy or exotic experience in the same manner of Epcot or the Magic Kingdom. Disney’s Hollywood Studios makes the understanding of creating the fantasy part of the attraction. The park is significant for the representation of Muslim culture because of the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular! and the Walt Disney: One Man’s Dream gallery, which provide insight into how the theme parks create the representations of culture. This theme park provides additional explanation into how the Magic Kingdom creates its representations of the Arabian Village, and how these elements have been adapted into other Disney theme parks.
The Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular! is a re-enactment of scenes from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The purpose of this performance is to explain to the visiting audience how many of the stunts in the movie were completed. However, the show dedicates a large portion of its time turning audience volunteers into Arabs and demonstrating sword fighting skills from men dressed as Egyptian villains. The stunt show starts with a Disney employee “auditioning” visitor volunteers. These individuals will be acting as extras on the imaginary *Indiana Jones* movie set. The show proceeds with a sequence of a stunt actor dressed as Indiana Jones escaping a rolling boulder. The scene opens to the Cairo marketplace, mimicking the *Raiders of the Lost Art* scene where Indiana Jones and his female companion fight Egyptian swordsmen. There recruited audience members come on stage dressed as Egyptians. These visitors are dressed in oversized tunic tops which more closely resemble bath robes or bed sheets. Some of the visitors are dressed in turbans, while others have white linens tied around their heads. Men and women are dressed in identical forms of the costume. The volunteers are told to act like a cheering crowd, jumping up and down, screaming, and waiving their arms. They are instructed to make themselves a part of the Cairo marketplace set, which closely resembles the Arabian village at the Magic Kingdom. The set up buildings used in the background is draped in colorful fabric, embellished with gold plates, rugs, and various garments that hang from open windows. While the volunteers pretend to shop in the marketplace, Cairo swordsmen emerge and begin to do flips and various demonstrations with the swords. They pretend to attack Indiana Jones, who then confronts a swordsmen dressed all in black. He stands on a pile of rugs as he waves his sword in the air. The Indiana Jones actor shoots him, a direct reenactment from the film.

The theming for the stunt show is rooted in the audience participation and the facilitation of the experience by the Disney employees. While the show is meant to explain how stunts are
done and how movies are filmed, it still creates an illusion for the observer. There is still a transformation of time and space, the common influential cues throughout the theme parks. While the element of stunt and film are demystified, the Orientalist representation of Muslims and Middle Eastern culture is not. The architecture in the space still follows the same format as that of the Arabian Village and the Morocco pavilion since it creates the illusion of the exotic East that has no similarities to modern Middle Eastern structure. The marketplace is set during WWII, when Indiana Jones is escaping from Nazis who are seeking the same treasure he is after. The theme of the marketplace is present with the flood of rugs, gold treasures, and vendor stands created in the background. However, the most powerful agent is the audience participation, since they are utilized as emotional labor. By having the visitor take on the role of an employee (cast member) they participate and become more involved in the Disney process. By having the audience members put on clothes that resemble some form of Bedouin attire, they are transformed into Egyptian city shoppers. There is a strong transformation of the individual as the volunteer is asked to act as part of the collective identity. During the show, individuals are told to cheer on the villains in the scene. These swordsmen are dressed in black, red, and white draped Middle Eastern-style clothing. Each individual is wearing a turban and the majority of the face is not visible. While the purpose of the swordsmen is to demonstrate their stunt skills, they are still represented as the “dark” villain. When the Indiana Jones actor shoots the lead swordsmen, there is a reinforcement of this dichotomy. The only other villains in the show are the Nazi soldiers, who Indiana Jones fights after he escapes from the Egyptian swordsmen. During the 25 minute show segment, Muslim culture is represented through the Egyptian marketplace, a screaming crowd dressed in loose sheets, and a group of violent Cairo swordsmen. The stunt show appears to create a unique experience for park visitors by giving them an opportunity to participate in and
view a different interpretation of film. However the representation of Muslims is similar to other representations shown in the theme parks.

The merchandising for the stunt show is only found outside of the stunt show at the Indiana Jones Adventure Outpost. Here, more representations of Middle Eastern Muslims as villains are available for purchase. Several different types of children’s action figures based on the swordsmen in the show are on display. Each is based off of characters from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The first is called the Monkey Man, and he is a dark skinned Egyptian dressed in long stripped robes with a turban. He has an eye patch, facial hair, a dagger in one hand, and a monkey on his shoulder. Then there is an action figure called the Cairo Swordsman, which is the same one who is shot in the stunt show. He is holding a machete, has dark skin, facial hair, and black clothing. There figurines have the same dark skin, facial hair, and stereotypical Middle Eastern features of Jafar from *Aladdin*, who has been described as the villain in the story. These action figures are placed along the wall with several different types of Indiana Jones action figures. The contrast between Indiana Jones and the villains emphasizes the difference in race and culture by highlighting physical features, clothing, and facial expression. The theme of violence being associated with Muslims is strongly evident here, and more problematic than in the Morocco pavilion, since it is actively demonstrated to park visitors. What adds to the authenticity of this space is that there is no association with Walt Disney World or *Aladdin* characters. This section of the park is dedicated strictly to its association with the Indiana Jones franchise. By keeping the environment controlled in such a manner, Disney is able to keep a contrast between hero and villain, and promote the merchandise unique for the space.

While the stunt show attempts to reveal the behind-the-scenes elements of filming action sequences, the *Walt Disney: One Man’s Dream* gallery is meant to educate visitors about Walt
Disney, his intentions for the theme parks, and how his visions became reality. The gallery is located in Disney’s Hollywood Studios because it is part of the behind-the-scene education that the park promotes. However, it is mostly a glimpse at the creation of the Magic Kingdom and Epcot, and how Walt Disney envisioned the parks. The gallery provides evidence that Disney’s original vision was greatly fulfilled in these two parks, and that this vision was still rooted in an Orientalist perspective of the world. It provides some closure as to why the parks may chose to represent Muslim culture in a manner that evokes the exotic, the past, and the dangerous elements of a culture associated with Islam. Disney’s vision, as displayed at *One Man’s Dream*, also supports the hybrid global image central to understanding the muddling between Muslim culture, the non-specific Middle East, and Western perceptions of both.

*Walt Disney: One Man’s Dream* is a gallery of collectables, replicas, and artistic renditions of Walt Disney’s hopes for what the theme parks would look like. One of the earliest representations of Adventureland, from the Magic Kingdom, is on display in this small museum. The replica was created by Fred Joerger in 1954 and represents Disney’s vision for the area, which included a jungle cruise and the Arabian Village. According to information on the display, Disney’s goal for Adventureland was to present the “unexplored jungles of the world” to park visitors. This early replica already includes the circular space for the bazaar. Even though there is no space for the Magic Carpet ride based on *Aladdin* (since the film did not exist at this point), the plans for an Arabian themed shopping space were already evident in the mid 1950’s. This layout from the space has not changed in over fifty years of the parks vision. Placing the *Aladdin*-themed merchandise and attraction into this space was an afterthought (or a convenience) since Disney’s desire to represent the Middle East at Walt Disney World was already in place. The original replica shows a more simplistic form of architecture. The original
plans included thatched roofs and some wooded beams supporting the structures. While this is still in place on the African side of Adventureland, the Arabian Village is currently more glamorized. While the general concept has not change, Disney did update the vision by making a more colorful, mystical, and exotic tone for the exterior decoration.

Walt Disney: One Man’s Dream also includes interpretations of Epcot. According to the gallery displays, Walt Disney explained that Epcot was, “a community that will never be completed, and will always be a showcase to the world for the ingenuity and imagination of American free enterprise.” While Disney’s original plans for Epcot included the building of a pre-established residential community, these ideas were never fulfilled. However, his vision of the expression of multiple cultures in one space did become realized in the World Showcase. It is in this interpretation of motivations that Disney’s desire for a homogenized and hybridized community becomes clear. Many of the artistic renditions of Epcot in the gallery are of individuals from multiple cultures, dressed in their traditional clothing, visiting the park as a family. While this utopian image of families from different countries walking side by side and exploring the park is idealistic and part of the Disney fantasy, the reality is that Disney attempts to create this feeling by hybridizing each country and placing it in the homogenized space of the theme park. The general theme of the space is cued by time and philosophy, since it evokes the original thoughts and dreams of Walt Disney. By surrounding the visitor with specific images of film and art (much of which most visitors have grown up with) the environment is meant to evoke emotional reactions. The space is also meant to educate the visitor on the realities behind the theme parks. It is meant to explain to visitors why they see the attractions in specific places and how the original dreams transformed into the spaces visitors see today. However, this is still a controlled environment, and visitors are only shown small elements of the larger picture.
The visitor leaves Disney’s Hollywood Studies with the understanding that Walt Disney wanted to create a space of cultural encounter. He wanted to show visitors “the other” by experiencing it through the many spaces created in the park system. Based on original replicas, this “other” and the vision surrounding it has not gone through extensive change or updating. In other words, the gallery supports the idea that visitors are experiencing the Muslim culture that was the predominant mindset of the Orientalist perspective. The Morocco exhibit, the stunt show, and the Arabian village all revisit the images of the imagined Middle East, and in turn, Muslim culture as it was understood over fifty years ago. While this image is problematic even if just understood in the realm of the Disney theme park, it becomes even more evident once it converges with the global space. Disney is not an isolated creation, and the visitors who interact with it are part of the greater global audience. For this reason it is important to understand the broader ramifications of Disney’s representation of Muslim culture and its effect on globalization.
CHAPTER 6
GLOBAL RAMIFICATIONS

By understanding the attractions and events provided at the Walt Disney World theme parks and by uncovering their underlying themes and motivations, I have been able to describe and evaluate the evidence of misrepresentations of Muslim culture. These misrepresentations are most evident through the muddling of Middle Eastern culture, Muslim culture, and Western Culture. By adding elements of Islam in places where religion may not be clearly defined or expressed, Disney provides mixed messages about what Muslims may practice. The undertones of violence, emphasis on the exotic and the other, and the general creation of Muslim/Arab culture being different or “other” from the park visitor all support misrepresentation. These elements are enhanced by Disney’s use of merchandising and emotional labor. However, these misrepresentations are not limited to the park system. They are expressed on a global scale and negatively affect the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim cultures through the merchandising and imagery provided by Disney. Globalization, an “objective, empirical process of increasing economic and political connectivity, a subjective process unfolding in consciousness as the collective awareness of growing global interconnectedness, and a host of specific globalizing projects…”¹ shapes the relationship between Muslim culture and Disney’s representation of Muslims. In other words, Disney is part of the active globalization process, due to its economic and popular nature, and cannot be excluded from an understanding of how culture is shaped and altered by goods and services. Disney is not an isolated space, but an enterprise which distributes its goods and services across the globe. Individuals from all over the world travel to experience what Disney has to offer. By understanding this relationship, there is a

heightened importance in acknowledging the negative impact that the misrepresentation of Muslim cultures by the Disney theme parks has especially on Westerners.

Bryman acknowledges the importance of understanding the global ramifications behind Disney’s theme parks. He expresses the relationship between Disneyization and consumption as a ‘globalizing force’ that shapes cultural expression. In essence, the relationship between Disneyization and consumption can shape the general public’s perceptions and create impressions of Muslim culture that extend beyond the park, as the Disney corporation expands beyond park walls and reaches to the general population through other media such as film, merchandise, and a general attitude towards “the other” in its goods and services. The nature of globalization is hybridized since it melds elements of Muslim culture and Western culture to create a unique service (the Disney franchise) that meets the interests of the public consumer as it subtly propagates these misrepresentations. However, globalization in the Disney system is still homogenous since it remains consistent throughout the Disney process. In terms of culture, hybridization is “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombined with new forms in new practices.” Through Disney, elements of Western culture and Disney culture meet Muslim culture, creating a new representation of something understood as a form of Muslim culture. Here Muslim culture can easily be synthesized with Islam, without providing an appropriate means of educating or defining difference. This form is being expressed globally as Disney expands and expresses itself in various countries. Because so many elements are coming together while still being part of the Disney franchise, some cultural forms or expressions are watered down or lost in translation. No theme park element can absolutely

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3 Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture*, 64.
present Muslim culture and Disney culture at the same time. These Disney transformations impact the larger social process because while they are linked through loose associations in the Disney park grounds, they are later distributed globally.

Disneyization is a process that travels beyond national boundaries and provides a diffuse mode of providing goods and services on a global scale. Disney starts on a local level, but by providing a unique and popular experience, such as the theme park visit, it is able to create a consumer good. This consumption expands beyond the park and moves to a global scale. This process returns to Disney on a local level with the establishment of Disney services somewhere else in the world. This cycle repeatedly facilitates the drive for consumerism and expansion on the global scale. Again, this cycle is both homogenous and hybrid. While the elements within the park are universally creating a hybridized understanding of culture, the experience is homogenous since each park or Disney service is standardized across the globe. By acknowledging the flows of culture, services, and goods on a global scale, the reality of Disney’s impact across cultures and countries becomes evident. These impressions are not limited to Orlando visitors; globalization theory has provided insight into how this process flows internationally or globally and functions with and for Disney theme parks.

While this process is occurring within the Disney theme parks in general, it is also specifically noticeable in the way Disney represents Muslim and Arab culture within the theme parks. No element in the theme park system is isolated since the park itself flows from one attraction into another with little information or line of demarcation. While there is no direct research currently available on how the representations of Muslim culture affect or are affected by globalization, there is evidence of the Disney theme parks affecting global audiences on a

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general scale. The Global Disney Audiences Project, as published in *Dazzled by Disney?*, is a project funded for the purpose of showing the reception of Disney across the globe. The Global Disney Audiences Project focused on “understanding the implications of the expanded global distribution of cultural products” by studying twelve countries and their reception of Disney products and services.\(^5\) These scholars validate their research on the grounds that Disney is significant in terms of understanding global culture and cultural consumption. The Global Disney Audiences Project stresses that globalization has tightened the interconnectedness and interdependences of social life, and hence significantly encourage the growth of media and media representations of culture.\(^6\) This project emphasized the relationship between the imperial nature of the Disney-based United States versus the savage world (third world) that Disney often identifies in its cultural representations. In essence, Disney prides itself on being technologically superior and up-to-date on trends and current visitor desires and interests, while dedicating most of its attractions on less technologically advanced times and places. Since globalization has become significant in shaping Disney, this relationship between cultural imperialism and global expansion is gaining significant attention and criticism. One of the primary themes that the research identified was the portrayal of the Third World, or the “noble savage” who was represented as being backward, or primitive.\(^7\) While Disney theme parks are still a powerful force within the Disney enterprise, the attention on the global market has become a primary focus of the Walt Disney Company. In 1999 CEO Michael Eisner explained that, “Disney is in the ironic position of being one of the best-known brands on the planet, but with too little of its


\(^6\) Wasko, Phillips, Meehan, *Dazzled by Disney?*, 8.

\(^7\) Ibid., 10.
income being generated outside of the United States. The U.S. contains only five percent of the world’s population, but it accounts for eighty percent of our company’s revenues.” Since then, Disney has worked on expanding into the global market and continuing to facilitate the cycle of consumerism and shaping of cultural representations across the globe.

Due to current trends in global consumerism, the Global Disney Audiences Project studied twelve countries including: Australia, Brazil, Denmark, France, Greece, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Norway, South Africa, United Kingdom, and the United States. While none of the countries selected were majority Muslim nations, the project still provides insight into the global Disney impact. Individuals from each of these countries answered questionnaires and participated in interviews about their attitude and interest in Disney. Generally, the project concluded that Disney successfully expanded internationally, with most countries having a love-hate relationship with Disney. Even responders who claimed they did not like the company stated that they linked Disney with childhood memories, ritualized activities, and family. The project also concluded that Disney was not always associated with Americanization, but was understood as a part of a “growing global culture, often strongly influenced by American products and values,” which contributed to a “cultural standardization or cultural hybridity.” This research did acknowledge the problematic attitude that Disney took towards countries perceived as barbaric or savage. The Global Disney Audiences project made some general conclusions based on the countries they included in their study. Their findings supported the idea that Disneyization and the Disney theme parks were influential in shaping how individuals perceived various cultural

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8 Wasko, Phillips, Meehan, Dazzled by Disney?, 18.
9 Ibid., 331.
10 Ibid., 339.
identities, including Muslim cultural identities. While these individuals, living in various countries, may understand that the representations Disney supports are stereotypical and synthesized, Disney was still influential in shaping their general perceptions. Individuals around the world actively notice attitudes that Disney creates about various cultures that Disney deems exotic or the “other” as part of the Disney creative enterprise.

These interactions transcend the park space and shape the knowledge and attitudes of varied individuals through hybrid consumption. While the Global Disney Audiences Project provides evidence that Disney does influence both children and adults in their perspectives on cultural issues, there is still room for growth for this organization or any other researchers. As the Walt Disney theme parks expand, so should the research accompanying their current trends and attractions. The Walt Disney World company is working diligently on expanding their market on a global level. As Disney adapts and shifts its attractions to meet the needs of visitors across the globe, it will likely maintain its cultural representations including that of Muslim or Arab culture.

11 Ibid.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS

The Walt Disney World theme parks demonstrated various representations of Orientalism as expressed through Muslim culture in the three parks. The image of a static culture, independent from other cultural attachments and practices, was predominant in the attractions. There was also a strong emphasis on the lack of individuality, showing that Muslim culture was an authoritarian culture rooted in the practices of a leader who prevented individual thoughts and actions. Fantasy was a strong theme in each of the parks, with the emphasis on exoticism as the dominant representation of fantasy. There was also evidence of gender discrimination with the difference in male and female clothing and roles in the Morocco pavilion. These images and Disney representations were rooted in the Oriental understanding of a pre-modern romanticism, a primitive and decadent lifestyle. However, the strongest image of Orientalism found in all three parks, was the overall undertone of violence which was found in architecture, artifacts, role-playing, and merchandise. When seeing these problematic portrayals clustered in a small space, it becomes evident that Disney theme parks are still representing Said’s definition of Orientalism through the use of Muslim culture.

Researching the Walt Disney World theme parks is a challenging and conflicting endeavor when directing it towards topics in religious studies. When analyzing the theme parks on the most basic level, most of what Disney represents is generally geared towards children and elements of magic and fantasy. It is only when these images and attractions are understood in terms of consumerism and globalization that more definitive issues surface. The Walt Disney World theme parks, each through their own methods of theme and hybrid consumption, address the issue of Orientalism and misrepresentations of Muslim cultures. The park system started with Walt Disney’s vision, which already included these basic principles in the very architecture and
theme of space. With the release of *Aladdin* in 1992, these images were given more popular and dramatized associations, which became accessible in the theme parks. The images that Walt Disney World produces are no longer generic popular culture items, such as the identity created with jeans as described by Fiske, but a commodity distributed and identified for its unique properties. These images not only contribute to Disney’s global success, but also to the misrepresentations of Muslim culture that Muslims are already trying to dissipate due to Hollywood’s consistent attention to Arabs, terrorism, and violence.

While the data provided in this study breaks down the specific products, images, characters, and buildings that contribute to these misconceptions, it is important to look at the general picture. The overall image of Disney’s misinterpretation of Muslim cultures in the three parks presented is focused on representing Middle Eastern culture, violence, merchant and/or Bedouin lifestyle, and folklore. While specific items or themes presented in Morocco, for example, may not be factually incorrect they are not a current or encompassing representation of Muslim culture. There may be belly dancing performers and handmade rugs that originate in Morocco, but these are not finite cultural representations or contributions. While Disney acknowledges that Islam is an active part of Moroccan culture and heritage, with the prominent displays of the Minaret and prayer rugs, there is no additional education or alternative representation of Muslim cultural or religious practices. Even in spaces meant to represent the authentic Moroccan lifestyle, fantasy is the predominant way Disney displays these cultures to its visitors. While Muslim scholars work diligently to provide information that clarifies and reconstructs these Oriental concepts, Disney is actively exploiting them every single day.

There are limits to this research based on the material, time, and accessibility. This research provides a brief glimpse into the theme park system based only on what an individual
can experience as a park visitor. There is no insight provided beyond data visible in the parks or data available in published texts. This was beneficial for the understanding of how an individual can gain information and access to Muslim culture only based in his or her exposure to the Disney theme parks and film. However, this also limits the conclusions and connections that can be made about the impact of the theme parks on visitors. The research, due to the nature of the Disney park security and controlled environment, was limited in terms of guest interaction or employee interaction. There were several occasions in the park when I saw Muslim visitors in the attraction areas. This provided an insightful opportunity to gain information and understanding of the theme park based on insider perspective. However, due to soliciting violations of Disney property, such interactions would not be appropriate. The same applied to in-depth interviewing of Disney employees during their working hours. These issues limited my project to observation, where normally surveys, questionnaires, or interviews might have provided more definitive conclusions. However, even with park and time constraints, and the controversial nature of the topic, it was evident that misrepresentations of Muslim culture were viewable in the three theme parks.

While this research highlights the controversial nature of Disney’s representation of Muslim culture, it is important to realize the need for education and personal accountability. Disney is geared to children and adults across the globe. While it would be important for Disney to acknowledge the misrepresentations it is facilitating, this is not the complete solution. However, it would be irresponsible to say that Disney should keep providing these images without further explanation. Disney has already experienced criticism from the global community for its portrayals of Muslims and Islam in *Aladdin*. The company did take some steps
and make some acknowledgements of their inconsistencies based on this backlash.\(^1\) However, these misrepresentations in both the parks and film are still widely accessible today. It would be beneficial for educators and park creators to be aware and accountable for these images and misrepresentations. For this reason, this research is beneficial if used as a catalyst for change. Instead of having parents and educators wait for Disney to self-correct, these individuals should reach out to their own students and children. The evidence presented here can promote discussion and debate about the benefits and disadvantages of the images and ideas provided by the Disney theme parks. These are accessible examples, which most individuals have some exposure to, that may provide open dialogue about the more general repercussions of misinterpreting religion, race, or gender in a global environment.

Having individuals outside of the academic circle interact and utilize the information presented would be beneficial to the general understanding of religious and cultural representations that often become muddled in American popular culture. There are also many opportunities for future research based on this material. This topic, based on the structure of Disneyization provided by Bryman, allows any culture or identity represented at the theme parks to be analyzed. This leads to new opportunities for research based on this topic. Future research could focus on more specific cues in the park space, such as merchandising, costume, or architecture. Future studies could also expand this research to other Disney theme parks and attractions, since results in different countries may vary. Also, looking at theme parks not associated with Disney may provide some different insight about how popular American attractions portray various cultures and religious practices. It may provide in depth answers about whether this is a strong Disney phenomenon or a more general attraction-based phenomenon.

\(^1\) Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney*, 152.
The most beneficial continuation of this research would be to engage the Muslim community for the insider and outsider role. Providing any in-depth interviewing or surveying of Muslims who have visited the Disney theme parks or been employed by the theme parks in order to gauge their reaction or interaction with the park would significantly shape its purpose. It would be validating to this paper to see if Muslims are still openly offended by the Disney theme park attractions, if there is a consensus among Muslims on this topic, or if there is an apathetic attitude towards the theme parks. This project could be directed towards Muslims in the community local to the theme park, or expand to the global community. Since the theme parks are constantly expanding, updating, and reorganizing, this research is difficult to complete. As new generations experience what the theme parks and films have to offer, the popularity of certain items may fluctuate. Shifts in the current economy or shifts in globalization may already make some of the perceptions presented in this research outdated. However, as long as there are misrepresentations of Muslim culture visible in the theme parks, there will be a revitalized importance to acknowledge and interpret the images and their repercussions.

The Walt Disney theme parks have provided insight into the current representations of Muslim culture based on American consumerism and production. These images are not static in time or space since they are constantly interacting with park visitors, movie watchers, and anyone who purchases a Disney product. As Disney expands into the global market, it takes these misrepresentations of Islam, leading a larger and more diverse audience to interact with it. While Disney keeps growing and updating, its representations of various Muslim culture as one homogenized group are still deeply rooted in Orientalism. While various Muslim communities, and religion and cultural scholars, attempt to understand and breakdown these misconceptions, Disney continues to present them daily in the theme park space. While Disney may continue to
represent their version of Muslim culture in a hybridized form through the homogenized theme park space, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the growing impact of globalization on various cultural identities as it is represented in popular culture.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ann Marie Palmer was born in 1986 in Newburgh, New York. An only child, she moved to Ponce Inlet, Florida at age fourteen and graduated from Father Lopez Catholic High School in 2003. After high school, Ann Marie attended Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. There she earned her B.A., cum laude, in religious studies and psychology. Directing her interest in the area of Islam and popular culture, she entered the University of Florida to pursue her M.A. in religion. She received her M.A. from the University of Florida in the summer of 2009. Ann Marie will continue her education at the University of Florida through the M.Ed. program in Student Personnel in Higher Education in the College of Education.