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Mid-term sample essay
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Occidentalism meets Orientalism through Cinema

Through modern colonial era Occidental nations or the West have conquered and colonized other nations in order to enrich their hierarchies with great amounts of resources discovered in foreign land. Beginning with land occupation, the imposition of new languages and self-identification through colonization of other ethnic groups, these historical past events are a reflection of our past into today's future. Empires such as the British once the most extensive empire in world history occupied South East Asia with their colonies and by the time the United States was founded as an independent nation in 1776 from the British, eventually became a world empire which under the name of God, its mission became manifest destiny and the globalization of the world's future. This paper attempts to demonstrate how media as an extension of the human psychic or physical (McLuhan 26) has been utilized to suppressed minorities, disseminate information, manipulate and influence politically and economically public opinion with foreign system models which have been incorporated as an imposition through the medium of cinema and the utilization of orientalism in post-colonial America as early as the silent cinema's expression era was available.

Orientalism is defined as the imitation or depiction of aspects from Asia, South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and certain parts of Africa. These depictions are usually done by people or groups from Western nations and defining Orientalism relies on a geographical, culture, linguistic, and the ethnic zone called the Orient, therefore indicating that the study of the whole Orient includes civilizations such as China, Japan, Indian and Arab nations. The rule in its historical development as an academic discipline has been the "ism" and its increasing scope, not its selectiveness (Said 163). It's also important to reconsider the way the Anglo-Saxon cinema

has portrayed this orientalism subjectivity in film. I will choose not to label Hollywood as an indication of all Anglo-Saxon cinema, but instead it will be an indication of America's film industry geographic location as of California. The Anglo-Saxon cinema universally is an industry which has collected a group of nations predominantly Anglo-Saxon or white. Countries such as England, Ireland, the United States, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, France, Russia and Germany are just few of the nations that belong to the group of pioneers and developers of cinema and as noted, these same nations have been known as world empires since the age of discovery in the 15th Century (Biggar 125). The representation of the East through Orientalism by the West has been a judgmental and a binary line between Western superiority and Eastern inferiority since colonial times therefore it has been a matter of preconceiving notions of these superiority feelings in cinema predominantly based on skin color, culture and linguistics if foreign to the West.

The employment of stereotypes toward the East has played a significant role since the early years of cinema development into the modern forms of modern cinema of today. Broken Blossoms or the "Yellow Man and the Girl" from 1919 is an American silent drama directed by D.W. Griffith known as one important figure of the history of cinema, a founder member of United Artist, the Academy of pictures arts and science and the ultimate creation of MGM. However, D.W. Griffith is also known by his notorious bias racist film from 1915 called "The Birth of a Nation" which at the time was a success, but also criticized for the infamous portrayal of blackface men seemed as savages animals like and the Ku Klux Klan portrayed as the hero in the film. Broken Blossoms is not much of a difference for racial stereotypes and white supremacy feelings, nevertheless it was a film that D.W. Griffith chose to produce as an indirect significant continuation and as of the universal generalization of white superiority and the race issue, but in this film he chose the story of a Chinese immigrant man living in the East end slums

of London known as Limehouse. This Chinese immigrant is called the “Yellow man” and merely known as the “Chink” storekeeper from the neighborhood. This character is portrayed by a white actor in a yellow face (Richard Barthelmess) along Lucy Burrows (Lilian Gish) playing the main actress role in the film as the daughter of a boxer and the main target of physical, verbal and psychological abuse done by her father’s brutality boxing skills. The Asianphobia disseminated by Griffith in this film has several hidden elements on his adaptation of the short novel called “The Chink and the Child” written by Thomas Burke. The derogatory term of the word “Chink” is used in reference to Chinese people in the original novel and the film demonstrates not only how both channels of communication negatively welcomes the utilization of ethnic slurs as a normal action in literature, cinema and in regular daily life existence. This in general did not only affect Asians as a community, rather any other immigrant living in a Western society who might happened to be a person of color at the time this film was produced for mass societies, but the effects of such depiction as of today toward people of color and immigrants.

The cinema perspective of the East from a Western stand point of view occurred in broken blossoms is a combination of a novel written by an English writer and ultimately adapted to film by an American cinema figure by the end of WWI. At first sight the yellow man is an immigrant from China living in London and a Buddhist hoping to bring peace to white people, a quite character who became addicted to opium due to the emotional distance from his homeland and Buddhist principals, effeminate somehow if compare to Lucy’s father, Battling Burrows is a muscular drunk man, a boxer fighter and a white character who happens to deeply hate anybody that wasn’t born in his country (England). The yellow man becomes attracted to Lucy Burrows, a white female character which upon the beginning of the film its complex to realized that Lucy is just a child that has gone through a lot of suffering, abuse, poverty and have never had a doll. The original novel written by Thomas Burke states that the character Lucy is only twelve years

old and the film communicates that she is the daughter of a prostitute from the slums which left Lucy while she was still a baby at Battling's home front doors steps (Burke, T Ch2).

Nevertheless, Lillian Gish was approximately twenty-two at the time when the movie was shot. The identities given to each character possess the somehow obscure and twisted signature of Griffith's cinema inclined by race, stereotypes, gender identification, savage behavior by foreigners, interracial views, segregation, hidden messages through poetry, murder and violence in many forms. Typically Hollywood's cinema signature and perspective as a driven sense to their success and a combination of the imagery factors mentioned above and the romanticisation of such superior cinema.

In my opinion this film is one of the epicenters of Orientalism in America's cinema history. Not only because the study and analysis of this film could be performed further by the impact and the transitioning effects of broken blossoms in today's modern cinema which don't seem much different for a Twenty first century viewer. The religion stereotyping of Buddhism, outfits dressed by the yellow man character rarely known by his Chinese name Cheng Huan, an unknown name only written on the outside walls from the shop, but never used as a person reference name besides being called "yellow man". This clearly is an extension of the historical white racism performed by Griffith and not only through the medium of imagery but as insert written titles form as well. Expressions go beyond the storytelling line of the film since inserts such as "Chinese, Malays, Lascars, where the Orient squats at the portals of the West" echoes not only the film story narration, but as a representation of the illegal occupation perspective of Orientals into the West through migration, this is condemning minorities in the West and displaying the Orient inferiority through a house of sin full of prostitutes, drug addiction, gambling where the uneducated resides along with people of color, and displaying the West superiority through the skin color attraction of the yellow man toward Lucy which has made the

yellow man to write poetry, play music for her and bow down for the beauty of her skin whiteness naming her “white blossom”.

The impact of such form of cinema romanticizing racism, xenophobia, passionate crimes, and with a narrative perspective of the bourgeois class towards the hopeless proletarians are profoundly significant to not only Orientalism but to the colonization of the mind based upon the elements found in historical and modern cinema material. It is imperative to also write about the end of *Broken Blossoms* is a death triangle of the three main characters. Lucy is beaten to death by her own father, Battling Burrows is shot at point-blank range by the yellow man, then the yellow man as the last survival character takes Lucy’s body to his home and after praying to Buddha he commits suicide using a knife while Lucy’s death body lays on his bed. The arc of the yellow man as the character of focus in the film as a transformation of the inner self did successfully transition from a peaceful religious Chinese immigrant living in a Western society to a character capable to obtain a fire weapon, premeditate a crime of passion and to commit suicide through the religion of Buddhism based in an unclear form of love between and child and a Chinese man. The story ended with an obscure plane for the viewers and foreign religion brought by an immigrant into a Western society linked to murder, suicide capabilities as well as demonizing all religions unknown to Westerners Christians.

In conclusion, Orientalism has penetrated and infested the neutral perspective of the viewers mind by conceptual viewing of stereotypes as early as 1919 in cinema with films such as *Broken Blossoms*. Moreover, the conception and self-identity of Asians not only in America but in the Western world and in Asia itself has been damaged by the imagery of colonialism through film, furthermore it has incriminated the nature of human migration with not basis or acknowledgment of origin, and it has assisted on targeting immigrant communities in Western societies by disseminating fear to those who are not white. The romanticization of segregation,

condemnation of interracial relationships, religions other than Christianity are merely based on the colonial barbarian perspective and behavior from modern Western powers in order to colonize further the mind, the spirit and the judgment of today's viewer as the recipient and main target of all forms of media such as cinema which is under the corporate West control mirroring exactly what once D.W. Griffith did in 1919 but being develop in today's Twenty-First Century television and cinema's global West imposition in the name of universality and the Americanization of the world.

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