PAPER:: KUWAIT IN THE SHADOW OF THE *ARABIAN NIGHTS*

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and challenge the pseudo-ideological association Western travellers hold about Arabia, especially Kuwait. Additionally, the chapter illustrates how Orientalism develops and takes on an ordinary and accepted nature while at the same time its more inflammatory aspects are removed. The first part of this chapter examines how some Orientalist preconceptions of Arabia, and more specifically those inspired by the *Arabian Nights*, informed many of the writings produced by the West about the Arab region and "the Arab." The chapter will further show how such representations have subsequently been internalised and used as identity markers by both the State and society in their heritage representations.

This research investigates representative samples of the writings of Western travellers and officials who visited and wrote about countries in the Arabian Peninsula and, in particular, Kuwait. Fundamentally, the research unearths, layer by layer, the inaccuracies attached to the Western representations of the Arab, as well as elaborating the process of local acceptance of such representations throughout the nation-state building process. First, the research reviews the literature of the *Arabian Nights*, its reiterations, and the books written on Arabia. This interpretation decodes the disguised layers of literary representations of the Arabian Peninsula in understanding not only the generalised and stereotypical approach by Western authors but also how colonial officers and expatriates living in Arabia have uncritically embraced these writings in their understanding of the region.

The second part of this chapter explores the notion of "self-Orientalism" within the Kuwaiti context. The chapter emphasises Alan Villiers' acclaimed book *Sons of Sindbad* and its impact on Kuwait's cultural heritage and its presumed national identity. I examine society's naive and amicable response in accepting Villiers' generalised and stereotyped

portrayal of them as "Sindbads" and how they have allowed themselves to be assimilated into the Orientalist representations of the West. The survey of *Sons of Sindbad*, its adaptations, and translated excerpts published in respected magazines over the years perform a seminal role in presenting the idealised hero-status of Sindbad in Kuwait. This analysis is based on a careful study of the books, magazines, and scholarly works by both Western and Arabic authors that use the image of Sindbad as an idiom to represent the Kuwaitis.

According to Ileana Baird, historical representations of Arabia have come from two sources.[1] The first came from Western travellers and traders who had direct contact with the local populations and developed their own sets of identity markers and symbolic representations. The second and less accurate source of historical representation of Arabia has come from fictional narratives that emphasise Arabia's riches, magic, sensuality, and exoticism. To a large degree, both representations have had a lasting impact on the Western imagination and the local populations.

> The Arabian identity that we convey here is a subtle amalgamation of the two: it comprises a fabulous Arabia that has haunted the European imagination for the past three hundred years and a real Arabia that has had its unique history, culture, and traditions. Significantly, after the oil boom, the newly formed states of the Arabian Peninsula have started a process of nation branding which accounts for both these representations: they have begun assembling their past in museums and heritage sites while at the same time promoting themselves within the Orientalised narratives of the West. [2]

In parts of the Arabian Peninsula, stereotypical motifs that are part of traditional Orientalist discourse, such as "Arabs are nomads of the desert" or "descendants of Sindbad the Sailor and Aladdin" have become increasingly accepted. These representations are also often used today by Arab nations as part of their cultural heritage and national identity. Many such representations in the form of images and words by Westerners have gradually been

[1] Ileana Baird, "Introduction: Complex Legacies: Materiality, Memory, and Myth in the Arabian Peninsula," in *All Things Arabia: Arabian Identity and Material Culture*, ed. Ileana Baird and Hülya Yağcıoğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 4, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv1sr6hx9.6.

[2] Ibid.

internalised through tourism and nationalistic strategies that often underpin political objectives.

This façade of a mystical Arabia has not only impacted Westerners but also those in the Arab world who had by the mid-twentieth century began experiencing the assimilation of Western culture. In many Arab countries it is common to see *Arabian Nights* themed restaurants opening to attract foreign nationals and grand scale amusement parks. One example is Land of Sindbad City in Baghdad, another, is the Arabian Nights Lusail entertainment park in Qatar, whose ad campaign invited visitors to come and enjoy the "authentic Qatari vibes."[3] Similarly, in Dubai, tourists can enjoy evenings of belly dancing performances during desert safaris with "Arabian Nights" atmospheres.

In Oman for example, Hejaiej tells us, much of

> Oman's projected tourism imagery, aimed at an international audience, is often governed by romantic notions of Gulf Arab cultural specificities and narratives frozen in time. Orientalist tropes still exercise, with the complicity of Omanis, a complex hold over the representation, the selection and consumption of the Omani tourist attractions, typically mirroring the accounts of [nineteenth-century] British colonial travellers.[4]

Orientalist views and the projected imagery associated with them are not simply the autonomous creation of the West but rather a creation of the Orient itself as it participates in the construction, reinforcement, and circulation of these views.[5] A significant contributor towards accepting Orientalist stereotypes in contemporary Arab societies is that, following the oil boom, some Arab countries continued to evoke Orientalist and colonial discourses when attempting to construct their national identities.[6] For example, conflating fiction with reality, countries with vibrant seafaring histories, such as Kuwait and Oman, deliberately

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[3] VisitQatar (@VisitQatar), "Savour the @FIFAWorldCup atmosphere with amazing ambience. Visit Arabian Nights Lusail for authentic Qatari vibes and Feel the football spirit," Twitter, December 13, 2022, 5.20 p.m., accessed December 15, 2022, https://twitter.com/VisitQatar/status/1602715057200168965.

[4] Hejaiej, "Textual and Visual."

[5] Yan and Santos, ""China, Forever,'" 297.

[6] Joan C. Henderson, "The Development of Tourist Destinations in the Gulf: Oman and Qatar Compared," *Tourism Planning & Development* 12, no, 3 (2015): 350–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2014.947439; Hejaiej, "Textual and Visual"; Daher, *Tourism in the Middle East*, 9.

used the literary figure and narrative of Sindbad to draw on their long historical and economic bond with trading in the Indian Ocean.

In the case of Oman, which underwent a period of nation-state building in the 1970s, a distinguishable national narrative of its maritime heritage emerged, which was quite different from a general historical understanding of the country's past.[7] With newfound oil wealth, the State undertook a series of ambitious infrastructure and nation-state building projects to transform Oman into a modern unified nation. Within the country, these efforts served as a means of self-identification because of Sultan Qaboos' efforts to integrate the country's diverse regional, tribal, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Externally, however, the country primarily focused on positioning itself as a production, trade, and tourist hub on the global economic map.[8]

The process that Oman used entailed creating a new national narrative to foster a sense of national cultural and historical identity. Moreover, these endeavours for economic diversification and regional belonging also hinged upon demonstrating a strong historical and economic link with the Indian Ocean.[9] As such, the legend of Sindbad and his voyages were an ideal motif that could meet both needs. In 1979 the Omani government agreed to fund Tim Severin's proposal to reconstruct Sindbad's hypothetical ship that supposedly sailed the Indian Ocean in the early Islamic period.[10] While the project was just one of the earlier symbolic and media-friendly events during the effort to consolidate the Sultan's power, it was regarded as a critical sign of developing intraregional tourism as well as trade.[11] It is important to note that the ship was named Soḥar, after the ancient capital of Oman that once

[7] Staples, "Maritime Heritage," 131.
[8] Wippel, "Oman and the Indian Ocean Rim," 175−76.
[9] Ibid., 180.
[10] Staples, "Maritime Heritage," 137.
[11] Wippel, "Oman and the Indian Ocean Rim," 176.

served as an important Islamic port town and is believed to be the mythical birthplace and hometown of Sindbad.[12]

Soḥar set sail along the traditional sea route to Canton, China, following the path that the legendary sailor presumably sailed. Later, a book on the project, *Sindbad Voyage*, followed by a documentary film, provided a general account of how Soḥar was built and sailed; both were attempts to popularise the voyage to an international audience.[13] In 2016, a documentary titled *Sons of Sinbad* was produced on behalf of Al-Salmi Library and the German University of Technology in Oman. In the opening scene, the narrator, an Omani national, intones, "This is the story of my brothers and my fathers. It is the story of men that took to the sea, I call them the sons of Sindbad."[14] Usage of such terminology indicates not only the acceptance of the stereotype by the Omanis, but also their pride in it. Later in this chapter we will also see the same sentiments regarding Sindbad, where the Kuwaitis also proudly call themselves Sindbad. For Kuwait, however, the decision to accept the Western-imposed identity was driven more by a relentless attempt to connect with the West than it was by any desire for an economic, touristic, or political gain. Since Kuwait has an abundance of oil reserves, it does not rely on tourism or its trade routes for income, as Oman does.

In time, the constant repetition and reiteration of stereotyped representations of Arabia within an imperialistic framework dominated by Western culture led to these views becoming official representations of the Arab world—what Homi Bhabha defines as a "mode of representation" whereby certain characteristics of collective identity are repeated and asserted as accepted facts.[15] To this end, Kuwait and Oman both have drifted from a past identity to a metamorphosed Western-imposed one, which due to being on the opposing end of the West's

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[12] John Lawton, "The Sindbad Voyage," *Saudi Aramco World*, September/October 1981, https://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/198105/the.sindbad.voyage.htm.

[13] Staples, "Maritime Heritage," 138.

[14] DEMAX GmbH, "Sons of Sinbad − History of Oman," July 26, 2018, Video, 02:18:00, accessed July 1, 2022, https://vimeo.com/ondemand/sonsofsinbad.

[15] Hejaiej, "Textual and Visual."

cultural dominance, has succumbed to these colonial narratives. In turn, these representations underwent a process of internalisation and eventual normalisation, acquiring an unquestionable authority amongst its citizens.

The *Arabian Nights* and Oriental Preconceptions

According to British military officer, diplomat, and historian Gerald de Gaury, "the mysterious, the great and romantic peninsula of Arabia . . . is like a fly being released from amber, for since the tenth century it has taken no part in great economic or political movements."[16] This scathing remark is noteworthy neither for the derogatory comparison of Arabia to an insect nor for the belittlement of all achievements that took place within the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula in the last millennium; but for the application of terms such as "mysterious" and "romantic" and the generalised reference to "Arabia," a vast region that encompasses many different cultures, races, tribes, dominions, and countries.

Several factors caused de Gaury's assumptions, perhaps the most important being the West's common error in using "Arabia" as an all-encompassing term for the entire Arab world. As Baird notes, one of the causes for this misattribution originates from numerous eighteenth-century accounts, which consider language and religion the main identifiers of a people rather than the actual geographic location of the indigenous population—an "Arab" speaks Arabic and is a Muslim.[17] Another cause of this kind of overgeneralisation is the spread of the Arabic language during the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, which extended from Central Asia to India on the east and to the Atlantic Ocean on the west. Moreover, when Ottoman control and power in the Arabian Peninsula had ceased during the seventeenth century, and the region's governance reverted to its Bedouin chiefs, local

[16] Gerald de Gaury, "Arabia and the Future," *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 31, no. 1 (1944): 41, https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374408731109.

[17] Ileana Baird, "Introduction: Complex Legacies", 4.

identities were still in flux, and Arabs from the Peninsula were still perceived as being under the influence of the Ottoman Empire.[18]

Finally, an important cause of the misuse of the term "Arabia" was generated from the powerful authority of the translations of the *Arabian Nights,* which, according to Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum's perhaps somewhat exaggerated account, "has changed the world on a scale unrivalled by any other literary text."[19] Written originally in Arabic as *Alf Laylah wa Laylah* (One Thousand and One Nights), the *Arabian Nights* is a collection of various Arabic Middle Eastern folk tales compiled between the fourteenth and nineteenth century during the Islamic Golden Age, a period in Islam's history in which culture, economy, and science flourished. Although titled "*Arabian Nights*," very few tales of the collection are in fact Arabic in origin. The collection was created by multiple authors and scholars across Asia and North Africa, with some tales tracing their origins to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indian, Persian, and medieval Arabic traditions.[20]

In Europe, translations of the *Arabian Nights* appeared as early as the eighteenth century, when Antoine Galland translated parts of the collection from Arabic to French in 1704. Around the same time the first English translated version of the *Arabian Nights* appeared in 1706 under the title *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. In the following century, more versions in English translation emerged, most notable of which are Edward Lane's work, published in 1838, John Payne's in 1882, and the erotically accentuated translations by Richard Burton, published in 1885.

The semantics scholar Jamal al-Quinai tells us that when translating the literary works of different languages or cultures, there are always untranslatable elements in the original text, which allow translators room for adjustment and alterations in line with the

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[18] Ibid., 5.

[19] Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, "Introduction," in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, eds. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199554157.003.0001.

[20] Ben Pestell, Pietra Palazzolo, and Leon Burnett, eds., Translating Myth, (London: Routledge, 2016), 87.

representational ideology concerning the targeted audience and culture.[21] The act of translating, thus, is not simply a matter of converting the words of one language to another, but, with it, comes an undertaking of making a whole culture accessible. Drawing on Carbonell's article "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation,"[22] al-Quinai notes that often—subconsciously or consciously—translators become engaged in a process of representation, rewriting, stereotyping, and subversion.[23] For example, in reference to the numerous translations of the *Arabian Nights*, many scholars hold the view that the European translations offered narratives that were more romantic and exotic than the original Arabic manuscript. The European versions eschewed much of the accuracy of the original text in favour of entertainment and dramatic effect for delighting and engaging their European audience, providing an overly exaggerated representation of Arabia that emphasised Arabia's riches, allure, eroticism, and sense of adventure.

Moreover, it is widely viewed that the versions of the *Arabian Nights* we know today are largely a Western representation of the Arab that owes more to the West than Arab scholarship.[24] Notably, in the nineteenth century when parts of Galland's manuscript were reintroduced into the Arab world, some of the tales had to be translated from his French into Arabic as they were nowhere to be found in the original Arabic version.[25] For example, the stories of Aladdin, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, and other lesser-known tales do not exist in the original fourteenth-century Arabic manuscript.[26] Hence, this peculiarity suggests that some of the most iconic Orientalist tropes of Arabian culture, such as flying carpets and

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[21] Jamal AL-Quinai "Manipulation and Censorship in Translated Texts," in *Actas del II Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Ibérica de Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación,* eds. Romania Garcia and Maria Luisa (Madrid: AIETI, 2005), 491.

[22] Ovidio Carbonell, "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation," in *Translation, Power, Subversion,* eds. Roman Alvarez and M. Carmen-Africa Vidal (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 79−98.

[23] AL-Quinai "Manipulation and Censorship," 49.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Dwight F Reynolds, "Folklore," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture*, ed. Dwight F. Reynolds, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 258−259, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139021708.016.

[26] These stories were narrated orally to Galland Ḥannā Diyāb who he had met in Aleppo in 1709. For a full account of the events, see Ulrich Marzolph, "The Man Who Made the Nights Immortal: The Tales of the Syrian Maronite Storyteller Ḥannā Diyāb," *Marvels & Tales* 32, 1 (2018): 114–29, https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstales.32.1.0114; Arafat A. Razzaque, "Who "wrote" Aladdin? The Forgotten Syrian Storyteller," accessed July 1, 2022, https://ajammc.com/2017/09/14/who-wrote-aladdin/.

magic lamps, are Western creations introduced into the Arab culture by Europeans.[27] Thousands of words and phrases in Arabic classical poetry are of great beauty, yet they have barely been translated into European languages.[28] As such, the irony, as noted by Reynolds, is that many translations from the French to Arabic are today deemed as great works of "Arabic" literature.[29]

From Galland on, translations of the *Arabian Nights* constituted the extent of Western knowledge of Arabia,[30] radically transforming the perception of the Arab world in the Western psyche. For those travelling to and writing about that part of the world, Arabia was a world of mystery, allure, and magic. And for the most part, the more extravagant and adventurous the accounts of those travellers were, the greater impact their writings had on the Western reading public, ensuring their survival and widespread impact. Therefore, the accounts of travellers such as Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815), Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1784–1817), G. A. Wallin (1811–1852), George Sadleir (1789–1859), Richard Burton (1821–1890), John Payne (1842–1916), Gifford Palgrave (1826–1888), and Charles Doughty (1843–1926) constitute the few surviving records of much of modern historical interest in the region.[31]

It is noteworthy to point out that most of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century authors on Arabia have been either amateur travellers or government officials stationed in the region. Their writings and surveys contributed greatly to the accumulation of knowledge about the peninsula and influenced the perception of novice travellers who were to follow in the twentieth century.[32] For example, the works of John B. Philby (1885–1960), Rupert Hay

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[27] Reynolds, "Folklore," 258−259.

[28] Carbonell, "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation," 80.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Linda Steet, "Gender and Orientalism: "National Geographic's" Arab Woman," *The High School Journal* 79, no. 3 (1996): 207, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40364718.

[31] J. W. Peterson, "The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991): 1436, https://doi.org/10.2307/2165280.

[32] Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Arabian Women: Religion, Work, and Cultural Ideology in the Arabian Peninsula from the Nineteenth Century through the Age of Abd Al-Aziz" (PhD diss., Columbia University, New York, 1989), 22.

(1893–1962), Harold Dickson (1881–1959), T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935), and J. G. Lorimer (1870–1914), to name a few, provided much of the foundation on which scholars, both Western and Arabic, have built on. At the same time, travellers, explorers, missionaries, and journalists such as Bertram Thomas (1892–1950), Paul Harrison (1883–1962), Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), Freya Stark (1893–1993), Claudie Fayein (1912–2002), Daniel van der Meulen (1894–1989), and Wilfred Thesiger (1910–2003) have been instrumental in providing further knowledge on the peninsula's history.[33]

As we explore the influence of the *Arabian Nights,* we find that its literary themes informed many of the perceptions and experiences of those travel writers. Inevitably, they carried those perceptions and stereotypes to Arabia and incorporated them into their writings. Such influence appears in the work of Lebanese American writer Ameen Rihani who in 1922 travelled throughout the coastal territories of the Arabian Peninsula. His background as a Lebanese—he later became a citizen of the United States—illustrates another aspect of the indigenous absorption of Western themes. Rihani, for instance, began reading Arabic as a child after wandering through English literature texts. He was an Arab himself who migrated to the United States at the age of ten from Lebanon and said that he "came to know the Arabs, and to love them" through "the meadows of English literature." He had read books such as Washington Irving's *Alhambra,* Thomas Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship,* and Charles Doughty's *Arabia Deserta,* all noted Orientalists writers.[34] He was also greatly influenced by the translations of the *Arabian Nights* by Richard Burton and John Payne.

Rihani was so strongly influenced by these Orientalist works in Western literature that he was motivated to travel to the Arab world. For instance, Rihani mentioned that, "I too want to travel in Arabia. But after I read and re-read Doughty, I could not overcome the

[33] Peterson, "The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times," 1436.

[34] Ameen Rihani, "Arabia: An Unbiased Survey," *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 16, 1 (1929): 35, https://doi.org/10.1080/03068372908725038.

passion that would knock off a book. I, too, wanted to write about Arabia." Even though Rihani insists that he "went to Arabia with no preconceived ideas," he recounts "I travelled [in spirit] with Burton to Medina and Mecca, and I read on the wayside *his* "Arabian Nights"."[35]

Moreover, in a speech given at the Royal Central Asian Society in London, Rihani does not remember how some of these books ended up in his collection, so he jokingly asks the audience: "Did I buy them when I used to buy books indiscriminately at second-hand bookshops, or were they brought to me by one of the jinn of the Arabian Nights?" It is clear from these statements that the romanticised text of previous authors overwhelmed the Western mentality. The psychological absorption is so deep and powerful that readers like Rihani were blinded to the realities of the Arab world and unwilling to challenge the beliefs their reading had built.

Furthermore, by incorporating the *Arabian Nights* into Orientalised works of literature Western travellers can position themselves as part of the story, thus giving their narratives a sense of reality and providing an apparent understanding of the Arabian culture to their audience. For instance, having been gifted a copy of the *Arabian Nights* as a child, the British travel writer Freya Stark (who visited Kuwait in 1932 and 1937) was inspired to explore the Arab world.[36] As she travelled through the Middle East, Stark imagined herself being Scheherazade, the main female character and storyteller of the tales of the *Arabian Night*s. She writes in *Letters from Syria:* "I had an adventure which . . . gave me a nasty qualm. I fell into it because it was like the *Arabian Nights*. An old man with a venerable beard came up as I was strolling along with my camera."[37] Here, her reference to the *Arabian Nights* signals the sense of exoticism to the European reader as she sets the stage for her adventure.

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[35] Ibid., 41.

[36] Claudia Pierpont, "East is West," *The New Yorker,* April 18, 2011, accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04/18/east-is-west-claudia-roth-pierpont.

[37] Freya Stark, *Letters from Syria*, (London: John Murray, 1942), 101−102.

For many Western authors, the *Arabian Nights* and the clichéd tropes of flying carpets, jinns, jewels, veils and daggers, merchants, Sheikhs' harems, old men with beards, slave girls, and a myriad of other things connoting wealth, magic, and exoticism became a part of their consciousness. Gertrude Bell's portrayal of Hayal demonstrates this abundantly. During her visit to the king's palace she states, "I feel as if I had lived through a chapter of the Arabian Nights," of "women—wrapped in Indian brocades, hung with jewels, served by slaves" and feelings of anxiety from tales "of murder and the air whispers murder."[38]

Like Stark, Bell tries to portray herself as Scheherazade. She creates an atmosphere of adventure for her European audience by absurdly claiming, "I have been a prisoner, you understand, in the big house they gave me" as she is graciously hosted by the Saudis at the palace.[39] These accounts clearly show how the *Arabian Nights* became a cornerstone of Western perception of Arabian culture—or at least what was expected from the Arabian culture—even though very little of it was in fact Arabian to begin with. As already mentioned, the most vivid exotic descriptions of Arabia were a result of a Western imagination unfounded in the cultural and literary history of the people living in these lands.

Imperialism and the Use of the *Arabian Nights*

It is worth pointing out that the Western version of Arabia was developing at a time when the expansion of European colonial enterprises—primarily French and British—was accompanied by the establishment of institutions for the study of the so-called Orient. Orientalism, designated academically as "Oriental Studies," became a well-established discipline and part of an institutionalised system for understanding the Orient, "making

[38] Georgina Howell, ed. Gertrude Bell: A Women in Arabi: The Writings of the Queen of the Desert (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 128−129.

[39] Ibid.

statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it [and] ruling over it."[40]

Some areas of Central Arabia, which were generally poorly documented in official records due to their physical inaccessibility, were targets for imperial expansion, exploration, and missionary work. Many of these areas, labelled as "Arabian blank spots" on Victorian and Edwardian maps, came to be seen by the world of British imperial intelligence and other officials as almost fictional places, spaces often used to project literary fantasies and illicit adventures.[41]

For example, Muscat was described as magical, mystical, and idyllic in Wellsted's account in 1930.[42] George Curzon, the Viceroy of India, made his first journey to Arabia in 1883 when he travelled to Damascus. Enchanted by what he saw as the romance of the Levant, he recorded in his diary of being "among the people of the Arabian Nights in a city of flowing water, green gardens and howling fanatics."[43] Rupert Hay, the political resident of the Persian Gulf, described Dubai as "most picturesque" with the peculiar charm of "Wild-eyed tribesmen with their camel-canes and daggers [that] takes one back to the time of the Arabian Nights."[44]

Furthermore, in J. G. Lorimer's 5000-page *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (published in 1915, declassified in 1955), which many consider the best source on subjects as diverse as political narratives, economy, slavery, telegraphs, and tribal affairs, the author includes correspondences and reports from the Gulf residencies, political agencies, and several departments of the government of India as well as missionary reports.

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[40] Said, *Orientalism*, 9.

[41] Fuccaro, "Knowledge at the Service of the British Empire," 22; drawing in Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 59, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195331417.001.0001.

[42] Hejaiej, "Textual and Visual representation of Oman."

[43] George Curzon quoted in David Gilmour, "Empire and the East: the orientalism of Lord Curzon," *Asian Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1995): 270−277, https://doi.org/10.1080/714041285.

[44] Rupert Hay, "The Persian Gulf States and Their Boundary Problems," *The Geographical Journal* 120, no. 4 (1954): 439, https://doi.org/10.2307/1791061.

The *Gazetteer* also includes travel accounts, diaries, and local histories written by Orientalist travellers John Lewis Burckhardt, Gifford Palgrave and Charles Doughty as primary sources for information about Central Arabia and Kuwait.[45] These sources, which in some cases are reproduced almost verbatim from their originals, fulfil the expectations of the time for Orientalist writing, often evoking the picturesque, the romantic, and the sublime, thus conforming to the aesthetic principles that informed the nineteenth-century travel accounts of the Middle East.[46] This is not surprising, as the *Arabian Nights* is listed as a reference on Arabia in the *Gazetteer*.[47]

Take for example officer Mark Tager's description of the moment George Curzon arrived in Kuwait during his welcoming ceremony of 1915:

> It was a strikingly picturesque scene; the bright colours of the cavalcade, their flowing robes of orange and red and golden brown flung to the wind as they careered about on their spirited Arab steeds; the more sedate and compact bodies of camelry trotting with silent footfall; the moving crowd of spectators shuffling along on foot; well-fed townsmen in their best dresses; Arabs from the desert, lean and hungry in their ragged 'Abas; veiled women with dark indigo cloaks thrown over their heads and long trailing skirts of gaudy cotton prints; black-eyed and brown-skinned children in every stage of undress.[48]

These stereotypical representations of the "Arab of the desert" and use of adjectives like "flowing," "spirited," "ragged," "lean," hungry," and "veiled" is not merely a way of romanticising the Orient, it is also a way of othering the Arab to legitimise subjugation and domination. As Mounira Hajaiej tells us, "the construction of otherness is based on the belief in a hierarchy of civilizations, and Orientalism is the discourse through which the West has tended to construct the otherness of Arabs and Arabs of the Gulf and reduce them to the same stereotypes."[49]

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[45] Fuccaro, "Knowledge at the Service of the British Empire," 22.

[46] Ibid.

[47] John Gordon Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia.* Vol I. Historical. Part IA & IB (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Print, 1915), 2704.

[48] Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Vol. I., 2647.

[49] Hajaiej, "Textual and Visual."

It is apparent that the process of othering by the West in Arab countries has been persistent, indifferent, and thoughtlessly repressive. In Lorimer's entry, Sheikh Thamer Bin Ghadban, the Sheikh of Kaʿba, is presented to the reader as "little better than a monster in human shape"[50] and the people of Sur as "coarse and vulgar—unlike those of the generality of high-bred Bedouins."[51] The Arab physiology has often been derogatorily described, and instead of offering a neutral picture, many Western texts present a dehumanised version of people of the more rural parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

As indicated by Eleanor Abdella Doumato's study of the medical staff of the American Missionaries stationed in the region, even the quality of medical opinions of Arab physiology was obscured by ideas that had gained currency from the translations of the *Arabian Nights*.[52] For example, in 1924, Paul Harrison would read the *Arabian Night*s to help him understand the physiology of the twentieth-century Bahraini Arab man. After living and practising medicine in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Muscat for fifteen years, Harrison writes, "the Arab is a credulous individual, as anyone may discover by reading the 'Thousand and One Nights,' the one popular novel of Arabia."[53]

Furthermore, in a letter to his colleague Edwin Calverley in Kuwait, Harrison concedes, "I had ambitions at the beginning of the year, and I have still, to produce an article dealing with the Moslem attitude toward women, and to this end consumed about a quarter of 'The Arabian Nights' in its original tongue, as a sort of sidelight."[54] In this article, Harrison concluded the following as his "expert" medical analysis on the Arab's sexual appetites:

> The Arab knows three pleasures, perfumes to smell, food to eat and women to enjoy. . . . The customs that the Arab's appetite has created allow him

[50] Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Vol. I., 690.
[51] Ibid., 1653.
[52] Doumato, "Arabian Women," 16.
[53] Paul W. Harrison, *The Arab at Home* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1924), 209.
[54] Paul W. Harrison letter to Edwin Calverley, May 18, 1918, quoted in Doumato, "Arabian Women," 16.

> four wives and as many concubines as he desires. He may divorce any wife at his pleasure and sell any concubine.[55]

Such a distorted image became prevalent in the West due to numerous literary works that were widely available to the public; as noted above, a lack of understanding of the historical context of the *Arabian Nights* mesmerised Western readers into believing the stories as literal fact.

Colonial hegemony over the Arab world provided much of the context for these developments. Among other things, Western imperialism twisted the global image of Arabia through biased, prejudiced, and superficial approaches—without the inconvenience of research. In a way, "Orientalism supplied colonialism with an enunciative capacity which was transmitted from one generation to the next through repetition and institutional embeddedness."[56] This enabled the Western author "to clothe, disguise, rarefy, and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value and knowledge."[57] And because of the "naturalness, authority, professionalism, assertiveness, and anti-theoretical directness"[58] of their writings, they effectively affirmed the Orientalist view of the world and the existing prejudices.

"Erotic Arabia" and the Transfer of Ideas Amongst Authors

Western travel writers did not write in isolation from each other but rather made many references to each other's works.[59] Edward Said tells us that Orientalism is "a system for citing works and authors," referencing, paraphrasing, and borrowing vocabulary and terminology.[60] Yet attached to these terminologies were latent Orientalist frameworks and

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[55] Paul W. Harrison, *The Arab at Home*, 68−69.

[56] M. Sioh, "Postcolonial Studies," , accessed October 1, 2021, https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/postcolonial-studies.

[57] Edward Said, *The World the Text and the Critic*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 216.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Benjamin Reilly, "Arabian Travellers, 1800–1950: An Analytical Bibliography," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016): 86−87, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1060155.

[60] Said, *Orientalism*, 31.

attitudes under which older generation Orientalists operated. In this framework Europe was seen as being essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, virtuous, normal, and masculine, while the Orient was seen as being irrational, backward, despotic, inferior, depraved, aberrant and feminine sexually.[61]

This framework can be seen in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s biographical entry for Richard Burton, which captures how such connotations can transfer across generations and institutions. In the words of *Britannica*, Burton was the first European to "penetrate hitherto-forbidden Muslim cities."[62] Britannica's choice of the words "penetrate" and "forbidden" epitomises the core nature of Burton's eroticised and overly sexualised style in writing about the Orient, where he, the representative of the Occident, is seen as superior and essentially masculine, while the Orient is seen as exotic and feminine—hence "the penetration." We see these two words—"penetrate" and "forbidden"—used by many other authors to describe European explorations of Arabia and even more so when referring to Burton's exploration. For example, Walter Phelps Dodge writes, "Burton conceived the idea of penetrating to the mysterious city of Harar in Somaliland,"[63] while Alfred Bates writes of "the walled town of Harar, where no European had ever been known to penetrate before."[64] Let us also not dismiss David George Hogarth's *The Penetration of Arabia,* wherein he dedicated a chapter on the cause of Burton's attraction to Arabia as being more than "mere love of adventure or the forbidden thing."[65]

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[61] Ensieh Shabanirad and Seyyed Mohammad Marandi, "Edward Said's Orientalism and the Representation of Oriental Women in George Orwell's Burmese Days," *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 60 (2015): 23, https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.60.22.

[62] F. McKay Brodie, "Sir Richard Burton," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed March 15, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Burton-British-scholar-and-explorer.

[63] Walter Phelps Dodge, *The Real Sir Richard Burton* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 82.

[64] Alfred Bates Richard quoted in Isabel Burton, *The Life of Sir Richard F. Burton* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1893), 12.

[65] David George Hogarth, The Penetration of Arabia; a Record of the Development of Western Knowledge Concerning the Arabian Peninsula (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1904), 6.

For a more Kuwaiti example, let us consider Gerald de Gaury's writings, who as noted, was the political agent in Kuwait between the years 1936 and 1939. In his work, *Traces of Travel*, the aforementioned *Britannica* entry was used almost verbatim by de Gaury, where he also describes Burton as the first European "to penetrate Mecca, the forbidden city of Arabia."[66] In the case of de Gaury, he saw himself as an extension of Burton, whom he wrote about extensively, describing him infatuatedly as "the hero of scholar and schoolboy, the bane of officialdom and the inspiration of the officer; an academic who despised formal education, the man of learning who specialised in sword play and the 'cross-buttock' throw."[67]

Evidently, de Gaury's inability to escape ideology is present both on the lexical and the ontological level. It is noteworthy that from the half dozen books he published on the Arab world, spanning from 1943 until 2008,[68] not one escapes a reference to Burton. Furthermore, a prominent feature of de Gaury's method and style of writing derives from the nineteenth-century reductionist and clichéd portrayals of a feminine Arabia, and his inability to escape references from *Arabian Nights* is obvious. In *Traces of Travel,* for example, de Gaury describes a young Sheikh from Kuwait[69] by citing the following quote from Andre Gide's autobiography *If It Dies*: "An Arab, however poor, has an Aladdin within him all ready to blossom forth in depart; at the first touch of fate—behold him a king."[70] At first glance, the quote might seem guilty only of its stereotypical portrayal of an Arab individual. Yet an in-depth contextual exploration of the quote and its source reveals two tendencies:

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[66] Gerald de Gaury, *Traces of Travel: Brought Home from Abroad* (London: Quartet Books, 1983), 60. De Gaury also makes notable mentions to Hogarth's book *The Penetration of Arabia.*

[67] Gerald de Gaury, *Spirit of the East,* eds. Gerald de Gaury and H. V. F. Winstone (London: Quartet Books, 1979), 170.

[68] These books include: A Saudi Arabian Notebook (1943); Arabia Phoenix (1947); Arabian Journeys and Other Desert Travels (1950); Rulers of Mecca (1951); Faisal, King of Saudi Arabia (1967); Spirit of the East (1979); Traces of Travel: Brought Home from Abroad (1983); Three Kings in Baghdad: The Tragedy of Iraq's Monarchy (2008).

[69] The Sheikh in question here is Fahad al-Salem al-Sabah, the brother of the then ruler Abdulla al-Salam al-Sabah, who de Gaury meets as a child in 1938 prior to the discovery of oil and then again as a man in 1954 following the discovery of oil.

[70] Andre Gide, *If it Die*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Secker and Warburg, 1915), 309, as quoted by de Gaury in de Gaury in *Traces of Travel of Travel,* 80.

first, a latent derogatory connotation that is often so deeply embedded within the Oriental lexicon; and second, the seamless transfer of those connotations from author to author through the generations via citations.

To investigate further, we must go back to the origin of Gide's quote. *If It Dies* is an autobiography revolving around the author's life as a child and his journey through emotional and psycho-sexual development. Gide was an openly self-confessed paedophile,[71] whose fascination and fetishisation of young Arab boys are explicit in some of his other works.[72] The quote in question comes from Gide's trip to Algiers in 1895, where he, Lord Alfred Douglas, and the celebrated author Oscar Wilde travelled Algeria, engaging in a series of sexual exploitations of local Arab boys. Gide uses the character of Aladdin from the *Arabian Nights* to represent the impoverished "feminine-looking" thirteen-year-old boy named Ali who has served a fortnight with Lord Douglas as his lover and as a result now appears pampered and dressed up like a king, courtesy of Lord Douglas's lavish gifts.

In essence, de Gaury's reiteration of Gide's Aladdin is an indication of how the romanticised concept of Gide's Arab boy is thus revived and overlaid onto the Kuwaiti Sheikh, who was relatively poor but now has reaped the riches of oil. Although the ethnicity, culture, stature, and circumstances of the Algerian boy are clearly in contrast with those of the Kuwaiti Sheikh, de Gaury, writing sixty years later than Gide, was unable to discern the difference nor was he able to escape the well-established Orientalist derogatory view of Arabia, continuing to reinforce a stereotypical image from the *Arabian Nights* regardless of context.

[71] Edmund White, "On the Chance that a Shepherd Boy...," accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v20/n24/edmund-white/on-the-chance-that-a-shepherd-boy.

[72] For examples see Gide's novels *The Immoralist* and *The Counterfeiters*.

Post-Oil Image and the Exemplification of the *Arabian Nights*' Representations

When the oil boom happened in the 1950s, the Western press fed on the *Arabian Nights* narrative in describing Arabia and specifically the Gulf. Rare was an article without an allusion to the riches of the *Arabian Nights*. Readers of American newspapers were led to believe that the stories in the *Arabian Nights* were still a reality on the Arabian Peninsula. According to *The Boston Globe*, only "the magic genii are different: today, they are not spirits, they are oil companies."[73] Moreover, Kuwait was designated "A modern fable of The Arabian Nights"[74] by *The Courier-Journal* where aeroplanes interlace the heavens above the sands like the flying carpet of the *Arabian Nights*. And according to the Daily Oklahoman, "cars begin to replace the camel bridging four millenniums since Abraham in a decade."[75]

The oil boom in effect actualised some of the tropes of Arabia's "riches and allure" in the Westerner's imagination. A case in point is illustrated in the 1953 essay by Anna Harrison, a member of the American missionary in Kuwait, who writes:

> Much is being written about Kuwait in our magazines at home, about wealth that is being poured into this tiny province at an unbelievable rate. It outdoes the story of Aladdin and his magic lamp, but this story is true. Naturally, the Arabs can think of nothing else.[76]

Aside from the apparent reference to Aladdin, the word "naturally" here denotes that the mind of the Arab is now totally consumed with wealth and nothing else. These notions inspired by the *Arabian Nights* became a centrepiece of the Western narrative in representing the Gulf.

When de Gaury re-visited Kuwait in 1954 and was invited by the Sheikh—the same Sheikh he described as having an "Aladdin within him"—to join him on an overnight

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[73] John Harriman, "Kuwait's Sheik Can't Spend His Money Fast Enough," *Boston Globe*, December 17, 1951, 17, https://www.newspapers.com/image/433553277/.

[74] Lord Kinross "Fair Shaikh for Kuwait," *The Courier-Journal* September 4, 1952, 13, https://courier-journal.newspapers.com/image/108465457/.

[75] E. M. Eller "The Strategic Importance of the Story Middle East," *The Daily Oklahoman, May 19, 1957, 79,* https://www.newspapers.com/image/450215602.

[76] Anna M. Harrison, "Heritage and Vision," *Arabia Calling* (Spring 1953), 12.

camping trip in the desert, after noticing that the servants were "fully clothed," de Gaury's prejudice resurfaces as his preconceived notion of the exotic Arab world is met with disappointment. He writes:

> Tales had grown up of a palace built at vast expense, of a swimming pool, of troupes of dancing girls and boys, of hall marble, of materials from Persia and India, silken carpets and mattresses of down, of unlimited pleasures of every kind. Instead there was nothing but prefabricated air-conditioned small bungalow fitted with a radio-telephone, and camp-furnishings and a few white tents. Instead of dancing girls there were only these male servants, fully clothed from head to foot.[77]

De Gaury's encounter with this reality provides us with the contemporary binary situation of modern-becoming Arabia, floating between its traditional past and modern acceptance of stereotypes to suit the needs of the *Arabian Nights*-obsessed Westerners.

De Gaury's view of Oriental women and men is a view that is similar to that depicted in thousands of Western works of art and literature, conventionally portrayed as nude or semi-nude and lacking any sort of agency. It was based on a common imperial prejudice that Arab women are exotic creatures of sexual pleasure offering a myriad of magical erotic experiences.[78]

Yet, tales from the *Arabian Nights* has been a literary source of Western representations of the Arab world not just in the "magical Orient" aspect but also in the "primitive barbarians" aspect,[79] where Arab men are seen as villains, treacherous bandits and bigoted men who prey on women. Take for example Tom Stacey's 1957 article on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, "Love Among the Arabs"; the author admittedly acknowledges that, "my ideas of love under the desert moon of Arabia came, like almost everybody else's in the Western world, from two sources—the movies and the Arabian Nights."[80]

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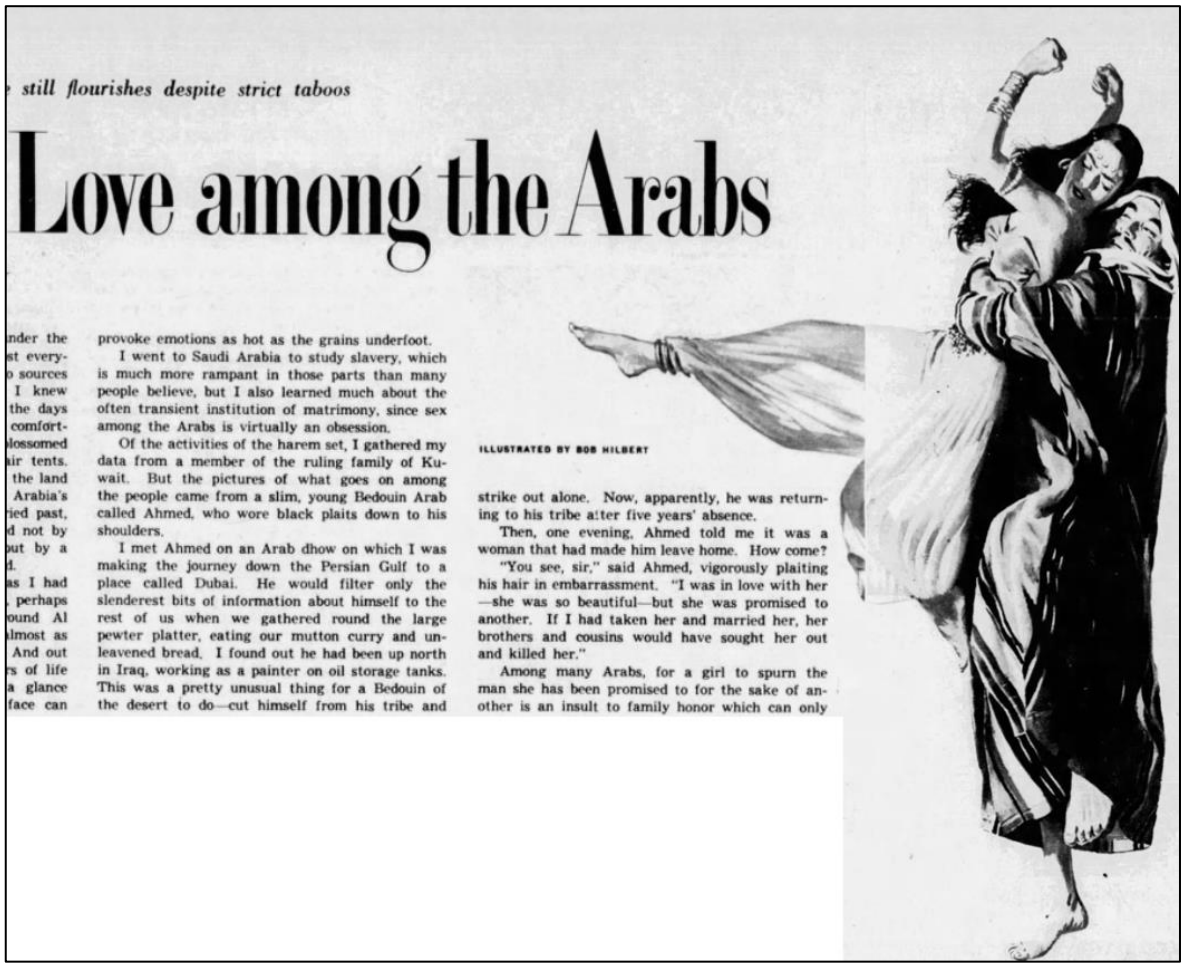
[77] De Gaury, "*Traces of Travel*, 60.

[78] Shabanirad and Marandi, "Edward Said's Orientalism" 24.

[79] Richard, Jacqumond, "Translation and Cultural Hegemony: The Case of French-Arabic Translation," in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, (London: Routledge, 1992), 150−151.

[80] Tom Stacey, "Love Among the Arabs," *The Tampa Tribune*, Sept 8, 1957, 10.

Stacey, a diplomatic correspondent at the time, chose for his article an illustration of an Arab holding a woman captive (Figure 3), going on to describe the average wedding night by stating that, "an Arab girl must put up a big fight on her wedding night" and that if she tries to escape, her husband "grabs her by the ankle and drags her back."



still flourishes despite strict taboos

Love among the Arabs

nder the st every- o sources I knew the days comfort- lossomed ir tents. the land Arabia's ied past, d not by ut by a d. as I had , perhaps ound Al lmost as And out rs of life a glance face can

provoke emotions as hot as the grains underfoot.

I went to Saudi Arabia to study slavery, which is much more rampant in those parts than many people believe, but I also learned much about the often transient institution of matrimony, since sex among the Arabs is virtually an obsession.

Of the activities of the harem set, I gathered my data from a member of the ruling family of Kuwait. But the pictures of what goes on among the people came from a slim, young Bedouin Arab called Ahmed, who wore black plaits down to his shoulders.

I met Ahmed on an Arab dhow on which I was making the journey down the Persian Gulf to a place called Dubai. He would filter only the slenderest bits of information about himself to the rest of us when we gathered round the large pewter platter, eating our mutton curry and unleavened bread. I found out he had been up north in Iraq, working as a painter on oil storage tanks. This was a pretty unusual thing for a Bedouin of the desert to do—cut himself from his tribe and

ILLUSTRATED BY BOB HILBERT

strike out alone. Now, apparently, he was returning to his tribe after five years' absence.

Then, one evening, Ahmed told me it was a woman that had made him leave home. How come?

"You see, sir," said Ahmed, vigorously plaiting his hair in embarrassment. "I was in love with her—she was so beautiful—but she was promised to another. If I had taken her and married her, her brothers and cousins would have sought her out and killed her."

Among many Arabs, for a girl to spurn the man she has been promised to for the sake of another is an insult to family honor which can only

Figure 3. An illustration showing an Arab man holding a woman captive as it appears in Tom Stace's article. Source: Tom Stacey, "Love Among the Arabs," *The Tampa Tribune*, Sept 8, 1957, 11.

Like de Gaury, Stacey, who by then had spent over five years in the Middle East and East Africa, was unable to escape this *Arabian Night* view of the Arab world. He writes:

> Slave girls come in all models and prices. . . . It is an Arab sheikh's duty to keep his concubines happy with at least occasional attention, a frequently dropped compliment and a regular flow of gifts. . . . But whether in the busy city or in the lonely desert, an Arab's concern is first of all—a woman. I must remember to go back and read the Arabian Nights again.

What is seen in this quote is that despite spending years living in the Arab world, Stacey was still in the grip of fiction and the *Arabian Nights*. These representations were so compelling in the Western travellers' imagination that they continued to influence their perceptions even when they had direct experience. For decades, travellers, explorers, and officials from the West have been adapting, reviving, and developing this idea. Certain ideas about Arabia were treated as facts, and this became more and more effective as authors cited one another. As this section discussed how the West portrayed the East, the following section examines how the East received and responded to these portrayals and how these ideas were integrated, embraced, and disseminated within society.

Kuwaitis, on becoming (Alan Villiers') Sindbads

In this section, I explore the notion of self-Orientalism in Kuwaiti society in relation to Alan Villiers' acclaimed book the *Sons of Sindbad* (1940) and its impact on Kuwait's heritage representation. I illustrate how and why Kuwaitis reacted amicably to Villiers' derogatory and stereotypical portrayal of Kuwaitis as "Sindbads" and how modern society has assimilated itself into the Orientalist representations of the West.

Alan Villiers (1903–1982) was a photographer, sailor, and writer. His account of sailing in dhows (the traditional Arabic sailing vessel) with Arab sailors all over the Arabian Gulf, the East African coast, and southern Arabia was documented in his book. The goal of this journey was to record the nautical and cultural tradition that was supposedly disappearing from Kuwait at the time. In 1938, Villiers sailed on a Kuwaiti boom (medium-sized deep-sea dhow), al-Bayan, from Aden to East Africa, Mombasa, and Zanzibar, then back via Oman and Bahrain, to Kuwait. He remained in Kuwait for a few months following the end of the trip, living amongst the Kuwaitis. His book depicts his adventures, the sailors he sailed with, and the time he spent in Kuwait. The film that followed, the photographs, and his stories were considered a tribute to the skills and endurance of the Arab sailors and the age of sailing

before the onset of oil and modernisation. The impact of the filmed version of Villiers' book was further amplified, because as far as can be determined, it was the first video footage shot in Kuwait.

In December 2019, an exhibition titled "Alan Villiers & the Sons of Sindbad—an Australian in 1930s Kuwait" was held in Kuwait. The exhibition was presented by the Australian National Maritime Museum in conjunction with the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, the National Council for Art, Culture and Letters, and the Australian Embassy in Kuwait. It included a series of fifty photographs and the film footage captured by Villiers in 1938, which documented the last days of the Kuwaiti merchant sailing ships.[81] The general interest generated by this exhibition led to discussions with the Australian Embassy on executing a modified version of the exhibit in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman.[82] Moreover, in partnership with the *National Geographic*, plans are already underway for the production of a documentary film[83]—at the time of this writing, production has not yet begun on the film.

In retrospect, an Orientalist title for a book like the *Sons of Sindbad* perhaps might be excused in 1940, when Villiers' book was originally published. However, considering the modern understandings in the fields of humanities and social sciences and the fact that this exhibition was organised by researchers and professionals, one would hope that this type of blatant Orientalist discourse, one that refers to a group of Arabs as "Sindbads," might ring a few alarms as a literal racial slur. Villiers clearly generalises and stereotypes a group of ethnicities by presenting them as a fictional character out of fairy tale—not to mention the fact that Sindbad the Sailor was a fictional character from Baghdad presumably born in Oman, not Kuwait. However, any sense of this was abundantly missing from any of the

[81] The exhibition was organised by the Australian National Maritime Museum in conjunction with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, and the Australian Embassy in Kuwait, with grant funding from the Council for Australian Arab Relations. Lindsey Shaw, "Alan Villiers & the Sons of Sindbad: An Australian in 1930s Kuwait," accessed August 8, 2021, https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/foundations-councils-institutes/caar/stories/alan-villiers-sons-sindbad-australian-1930s-kuwait.

[82] As a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2021, the exhibition was cancelled.

[83] AlfarouqChannel, "*Fī Ḥiwār "al-Majlis" maʿa al-Farouq ʿAbd al-ʿaziz*," November 28, 2019, video, 25:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8AJCuJ6XLk.

discussions and presentations in the exhibition. The opening brought together many relatives of those who had sailed with Villiers—children and grandchildren who were "proud' to see photographs of their relatives on display.[84]

In 2016, a reprint of the book *Sons of Sindbad* was published. The editors, aside from making no note of the title's absurdity, attempted to defend Villiers from charges of imperial bias and Orientalism, on account of him being Australian, and on the evidence of the author's empathy to his fellow sailors.[85] In terms of 'Orientalism' Villiers' writings is imbued with sympathy for the Other, which as is one of the pillars of Said's claims on Orientalist literature.

First, to understand Villiers' perspective, we must also understand his status as an Anglo-Saxon citizen traveling in the 1930s at the height of the British Empire throughout the British protected Persian Gulf. James Canton notes there was a "complex and intimate relationship between Britain's imperial project in Arabia, the travellers who explored these lands and the travel writings they produce."[86] Aside from facilitating travel, which often involved and was enabled by the accommodation of the travellers in the political agent's private residence,[87] "many travelled with the financial or logistical assistance of the Royal Geographical Society or the British government."[88] In return, they would observe and describe in detail all that could be learned about the people, their politics, and the culture, describing natural resources and thus demonstrating the value of the destination as a strategic point for British interests. Thus, these travellers and so called "explorers" were one of the

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[84] Shaw "Alan Villiers and the Sons of Sindbad."

[85] William Facey, Yacoub Al-Hijji, and Grace Pundyk, eds. "Introduction," *Sons of Sindbad by Alan Villiers* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2010), xxx.

[86] James Canton, From Cairo to Baghdad British Travellers in Arabia (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 2.

[87] It is customary for Western travellers to Kuwait to be hosted by the British Agency. political agent Tandy explains that "[s]ince there was no hotel in Kuwait suitable for the accommodation of Westerners, visitors with no local host would normally be guests of the political agent, and very welcome they were." India Office Records and Private Papers [IOR]: Mss Eur F226/28, Maurice Tandy, *Thim Days is Gone*, 115, in *QDL* http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100037450602.0x00001e.

[88] Reilly, "Arabian Travellers," 86–87.

greatest resources in providing information for the British Empire on the colonies they occupied.

This too was the case with American missionaries in Kuwait,[89] who received the rite of passage and, on more than one occasion, financial aid from British officials.[90] Villiers was no different, even taking this a step further. After his voyage at sea, Villiers spent the summer of 1939 in Kuwait as an informant for the British government, presenting de Gaury at the British Political Agency with a 17-page secret report,[91] detailing secret trade routes, smuggling businesses, and the drug trade,[92] concluding that, "the Arab is always ready for any dishonesty of this kind that might bring him a profit, and it is almost impossible to control him."[93] Villiers further states, "Any illegal business that the Arab can manage, he does—the whole lot of them. The *Suri* are the most unscrupulous of all: but the Kuwaiti is not very far behind."[94]

Clearly, the book *Sons of Sindbad* is no different from other Orientalist travel literature, which presents the Orient as the exotic and inferior "other" promoted by a set of recurring stereotypical images and clichés. In effect, Villiers was unable to escape the Western perspectives generated from his race, ethnicity, class, and time. Villiers, as noted by P. J. Cooper, reaches "for jarring and generalising characterisations of 'The Arab,' which for the modern reader may leap from the page."[95]

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[89] Ayid Al-Rashidi, "al-Kuwaītyūn wa Muwajahat al-Taghrīb al-Thaqāfī fī niṣf al-awal min al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn," *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 48, no. 3 (2021): 236.

[90] Reilly, "Arabian Travellers," 87.

[91] IOR/R/15/5/179: A Report on Kuwaiti Dhows, in *Qatar Digital Library* (*QDL*), https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100040050674.0x000078.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] J. P. Cooper, "An Account of Sailing with the Arabs in their Dhows, in the Red Sea, round the Coasts of Arabia, and to Zanzibarand Tanganyika; Pearling in the Persian Gulf; and the Life of Shipmasters and the Mariners of Kuwait," Review of *Sons of Sindbad*, by Alan Villiers, International Journal of Nautical Archaeology 40, no. 2 (2011): 468.

When Villiers travelled with the Arab sailors, he was allocated quarters on the ship's poop,[96] which was a privileged space reserved for merchants and VIPs. He had acquired this privileged position through his connection with Harold Ingrams, the British Resident Adviser in the Hadhramaut. It was Ingrams who introduced him to the al-Hamad brothers, a very prominent Kuwaiti merchant family who owned the ship that Villiers would use for his voyages.[97] This might explain why his photographs were often taken from a slightly elevated perspective, looking down at the action and reflecting Villiers' privileged position that separated him from the rest of the crew.[98] From that perspective, he cast his colonial gaze, watching the crew, investigating them, gathering impressions, describing them, and recording the adventures of his expedition. Villiers, of course, was the hero in these adventures, enduring extreme hardships during his quest.

According to Johannes Fabian notion of the "denial of coevalness," the tendency of the natural sciences to make time spatial led to the denial that anthropologists and their subjects shared the same time in space; promoting a concept in which past cultures and living societies are irrevocably positioned on a temporal slope.[99] With denial of a shared moment in time, the referents of anthropology are placed in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.[100] So when anthropologists study pre-modern societies or cultures, it is as if they are travelling back in time. As a spatialising tool that separates time, Villiers uses Sindbad the Sailor to create an impression that Arab sailors are relics of the past, of a primitive and pre-modern era.[101] As such, Villiers, a civilised and renowned sailor who

[96] In a ship, the poop is a slightly elevated platform at the back of the ship that enables a clear view forward in order to steer, navigate, control, and command the ship while it is underway.

[97] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, 59.

[98] Hofmeyr, "Archipelagic Thinking," 58.

[99] Johannes Fabian. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1983), 17.

[100] Ibid., 31.

[101] Hofmeyr, "Archipelagic Thinking," 58.

has been everywhere, "returns to what he calls the 'pre-industrial cultures' in order, not to know, but to document."[102]

The name of Villiers' book, *Sons of Sindbad*, informs his depiction of the Kuwaiti sailor as the ingenious medieval Sindbad the Sailor from the *Arabian Nights*. Throughout the book, through Sindbad, Villiers captures a romantic idea of the ocean that has long since disappeared. Sindbad the character comes to serve as a literary embodiment of the cunning Arab seafarers and merchants on board the ship. Additionally, Villiers presents the reader with a characteristic dichotomy for the Arab men, pointing out throughout the book, the "Sindbadness" of Arabs he encounters, i.e., which kind of Arabs fit the description of a Sindbad, and which do not. As he explains, "All our wanderers from the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf were potential Sindbads."[103]

A criticism of the author's descriptions and generalisation of the Arab can be found in Yaqoub Al-Hijji's review of the *Sons of Sindbad*. Al-Hijji notes that, "although Allen did [Kuwait] and its maritime heritage a great service with this book, it was not without shortcomings and did not do us [Kuwaitis], our maritime heritage nor the Arabs and Gulf people any justice."[104] Al-Hijji concludes by saying that for Villiers, "it was difficult to imagine that these primitive Arabs, wearing a *thoub*, a *ghitra*, and *ʿiqaal*, could use the British-made 'perfect' apparatus, and read charts from the British Naval Admiralty."[105]

Furthermore, in the text, the sailors are portrayed as a mob of sex-crazed smugglers unable to resist "the lures of the harem material"[106] and who are occupied with dancing,

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[102] Ibid., 52.

[103] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, 107, 208.

[104] Yaqoub Al-Hijji, "Reviewer's Introduction," in *Sons of Sindbad* by Alan Villiers, trans. Naif Kherm.a, rev. Yaqoub al-Hijji (Kuwait: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, 2006), 23 [trans. Author].

[105] Ibid.

[106] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, 269.

sex,[107] and chanting songs to cast out evil spirits.[108] Arab merchants are represented by the clichéd image of rich Arabs with multiple wives that prey on submissive women in the chapter titled "The Other Wife."[109] Fundamentally, Villiers' only partially developed overview has sub-consciously stigmatised the identity of Arabs.

Dissemination of the Idea of Sindbad within the British Government

Villiers' book helped impose the idea of Sindbad upon the Kuwaitis and spread the Orientalist idea associated with that idea. As far as can be ascertained, before the publication of the *Sons of Sindbad*, the name or mention of Sindbad in association with Kuwait and Kuwaiti sailors had never been made. It was only after Villiers' publications that the name became synonymous with the Kuwaiti sailor, after a subtle process of references to and reiteration of the term by several parties involved with Kuwait. Beginning with his secret report to the Agency in which he refers to some of the older merchants on board as "not very modern Sindbads."[110]

It was not long after *Sons of Sindbad* was published that it began to circulate among imperial administrators in the region, eventually becoming something of a guidebook. For instance, upon the orders of business following his appointment as a political agent in Bahrain, Major R. G. Alban requested Villiers' the *Sons of Sindbad* be used as a guide in "dealing with Arabia."[111] Another instance came following the end of War World II, when Villiers' book was recommended by the India Office to the newly appointed political agent in

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[107] Al-Hijji, "Reviewer's Introduction," 24.

[108] Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, trans. Naif Kherma, rev. Yaqoub al-Hijji (Kuwait: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, 2006), 174, 326.

[109] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, 384.

[110] IOR/R/15/5/179: A Report on Kuwaiti Dhows, in *QDL*, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100040050674.0x000084.

[111] IOR/R/15/2/1622: Alban, (PA) to Messrs. Thacker & Co. Ltd. July 14, 1941, in *QDL*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100032538717.0x000060.

Kuwait, Maurice Tandy, in response to his desire to publish a guidebook[112] for the British and American service personnel serving in the Gulf.[113]

Furthermore, during December 1944, the British government was in the midst of preparing pro-British propaganda films in the Persian Gulf and India. According to the script of one film, by the third scene, the camera moves to show footage of the Kuwaiti coastline with images of dhows, sail, and cargo handling. The following is the proposed commentary to be included by the narrator for this scene:

> The first merchant adventurer in these waters whose name will occur to everyone is the legendary name of Sinbad. Though legendary, he is actually representative of a former (very much alive) class of Middle East merchants. What fortunes his voyages down to the waters of the Gulf brought him, Sheherazad told better than I ever can.[114]

Later, on February 20, 1945, a committee meeting was held with Geoffrey Prior, the political resident in the Persian Gulf, to further discuss the details of making the film. The committee decided as a matter of action to obtain a copy of Villiers' *Sons of Sindbad* along with copies of his still photographs to be used at the discretion of the director for the film.[115]

The frequent mention of Villiers' *Sons of Sindbad* among the British administrations gradually attached the idea of Sindbad to the Kuwaiti sailor, until the term itself became linked to Kuwaitis independent of Villiers' book. As a case in point, when visiting Kuwait in 1948, British Council's Director of the Middle East Department, R. W. Highwood writes to the British political agency,

> The Descendants of Sindbad have nothing much to be taught by the West about Commerce, but of technical skill, certain moral values, scientific thought, they have little knowledge. However desirable it may be that the Arabs should retain their primitive modes of life, and however strong may

[112] Ultimately, the decision was not to publish his book.

[113] IOR/L/PS/12/933: External Affairs Department, New Delhi to E. P. Donaldson, India Office, Whitehall, November 11, 1941, in *QDL*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100046384101.0x000053.

[114] IOR/R/15/6/397: Olaf Caroe to Prior (PR) in *QDL*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100061645486.0x000012.

[115] IOR/R/15/6/397: Proceeding of meeting held in the External Affair Department at 11 a.m. on Tuesday the 12 February, 1945, to discuss the making of a documentary film of the Persian Gulf, in *QDL*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100061645486.0x000042.

> be the efforts to retain them, it is certain the West is strongest and the contrast, if wide, between the two is dangerous.[116]

Observing these mentions, it appears that some British officials were not concerned about getting first-hand experiences when dealing with the local population but instead used fictional narratives to get a perspective on the "primitive" Arabs.

The imperialistic attitude and acceptance of Orientalist depiction to the colonised is vivid and stringent in other Western enterprises, and Villiers' book became a way of confirming such depictions. Take the American missionary's annual report of 1950 on Kuwait:

> Looking from the mission hospital one can observe a sea front lined for miles with sail boats that make annual voyages to East Africa and to India. Looking in the other direction one can see the limitless desert whence come the caravans from the storied oases of central and western Arabia. Though these caravans are being rapidly replaced by cars and airplanes, and though the oil fields have drawn away from the sea many of the "sons of Sinbad," this has only served to make the place more populous and more important.[117]

In contrast, the publicity of Villiers' book and these associations that were made with "Sindbad" reached Kuwait's society at a time when Kuwait was on the cusp of its cultural and especially economic revolution. Society was beginning to reap the rewards of the oil industry revenues, and with it came access to a wide range of publications and media. Unfortunately, the diffusion of these associations in Kuwait is alarming, as I demonstrate in the next section.

Dissemination of the Idea of Sindbad within Local Society

Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, who draw extensively on Said's Orientalism and the concept of self-worth embodied in Europe's imaginative geography of the Middle East, have covered this phenomenon. Self, or auto-exoticism,[118] the author's note,

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[116] IOR/R/15/5/198: The Oil Companies in Relation to the Growing Education of the Local Population, in *QDL,* https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100042708804.0x000038.

[117] *Arabia Calling,* "Annual Report for 1950," Spring 1951, 4.

[118] Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, "Belly Dance: Orientalism: Exoticism: Self-Exoticism," *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (2003): 18, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1478477.

is when individuals native to a place of origin who have been subjected to various representations of Europe's imaginative geography begin utilising and incorporating Orientalist elements in their world. In this process, certain aspects of people's lives become overvalued and highlighted.[119] For example, in 1950s Kuwait, government schools conducted "special programmes" expressly tailored for Western audiences wherein children were dressed up in elaborate costumes and enacted plots from the *Arabian Nights*.[120] This could offer some explanation as to why today being considered Sindbads is a source of pride rather than offence, as was the case in the exhibition and other occasions, as we will see later on in this chapter with different examples.

The book *Sons of Sindbad* was well received when it reached Kuwait, and many of its characters (most notably al-Nejdi) became minor international celebrities. In March 1947, the wildly popular magazine *al-Biʿtha*[121] began publishing translated excerpts from the book, *Sons of Sindbad*. The following year, the *National Geographic* featured a fourteen-page article by Villiers titled "Sailing with Sinbad's Sons."[122] Excerpts of this article were also translated and printed again in *al-Biʿtha* in 1949.[123] The idea of Sindbad as a Kuwaiti merchant-sailor, which became so resonant within the Western framework in the representation of the Kuwaitis, also began to take hold within the local society. In 1951, for example, an article was published in *al-Biʿtha* by Ibrahim al-Shatti, titled "The Kuwaiti Sindbad."[124] The author nostalgically recounts the heroics of Kuwaiti sailors in earlier times and the hardships they had to endure.

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[119] Ibid., 20

[120] Madeline S. Holmes, "Kuwait, Ancient and Modern," *Arabia Calling* (Autumn 1954), 10.

[121] *al-Biʿtha, "Abnāʾ al-Sindībād bi-Qalam* Alan Villiers*,"* November 1, 1947, accessed February 4, 2021, https://archive.alsharekh.org/Articles/122/5488/133189/1.

[122] Alan Villiers, "Sailing with Sindbad's Sons," *National Geographic Magazine*, November 1, 1948.

[123] *al-Biʿtha "Riḥlaḥ Maʿa Abnāʿ al-Sindībād bi-Qalam* Alan Villiers*,",* March 1, 1949, accessed February 4, 2021, https://archive.alsharekh.org/Articles/122/5507/133545.

[124] Ebrahim al-Shatti, "*al-Sindibād al-Kuwaīti,*" *al-Biʿtha,* February 1, 1951, accessed February 4, 2021, https://archive.alsharekh.org/Articles/122/5524/133934.

What is notable about al-Shatti's article, in particular, is that it makes no mention of Alan Villiers or his book, indicating that the idea of Sindbad by then may have operated independently from Villiers's book. Although it is possible that the idea of the merchant-sailor that al-Shatti appropriated was present in another form independent of Villiers' book, as far as this research can tell the term "Sindbad" specifically only began appearing frequently in association with Kuwait following Villiers' publication.

Similarly, an article in *al-ʿArabī* by Darwish al-Miqdadi (the former director of the Kuwaiti education department) makes a clear reference to Villiers' *Sons of Sindbad*.[125] Originally published in 1959, the article discusses Kuwait's effort in reviving its maritime glory, with a subhead of "The Sons of Sindbad Renew the Construction of their Ships." Among the features of the article are descriptions of Kuwait's cargo shipping industry's modernisation, as well as its historical origins as a shipbuilding enterprise. Again, it is noteworthy that while the title of the article is an exact replication of Villiers' title, there is no mention of the book.

In subsequent years, Kuwait has also produced two large-scale national operettas devoted to patriotic themes, presented and funded by the Ministry of Information. Both operettas illustrate Kuwaiti maritime heritage as it relates to Sindbad the Sailor. In the first we have "The Diaries of a Sailor—Sindbad" (*Min Muthakarāt Baḥār—al-Sindibād*) in 1979.[126] The operetta featured renowned artists such as the poet Mohammed al-Fayez, composer Ghannam al-Daigan, and artists Shadi al-Khaleej and Sana al-Kharaz. Lyrics were adapted from a poem written by al-Fayez in 1962, but the song was not released until 1979. Shadi al-Khaleej opens the song with the line "I will bring back to the world the talk of Sindbad." Imagery of traditional Kuwaiti ships provides the background for variety of stage

[125] Darwish al-Miqdadi, "*al-Kuwaīt tasʿā li-ʾstiʿādat majdahā al-Baḥrī al-Qadīm,*" *al-ʿArabi*, May 1, 1959, accessed February 4, 2021, https://archive.alsharekh.org/Articles/142/14358/319591.

[126] AlziadiQ8, "*Obiraīt (aal-Sindībād) Ghināʾ "Shadī al-Khalīj" wa "Sanaʾ al-Kharāz" ʿabr Qanāt al-Graīn*," February 10, 2019, video, 55:33, accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y370uS0FNo.

performances featuring Kuwaiti folkloric dances. The operetta was also reproduced in 2017 in Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed Cultural Centre following the same cinematic themes.

In 1995, Kuwait television aired a second operetta titled "We Are Here to Stay," with lyrics written by the well-known poet Suad al-Sabah, in exile during the Gulf War:[127]

> Sindbad was a great *Khalīji*[128] sailor from here
> And those who embarked upon the dream journey are our boys.
> And the paddles that cut through mountain of waves were from here.[129]

The song was a national and regional hit, playing daily on radio stations. Subsequently, the song was reproduced in 2018 as part of an advertising campaign for Zain Telecom. Pundits picked up Zain's version on social media, sparking a public debate regarding Kuwait's misrepresentation and false claims to the origins of Sindbad. During that time, another footage started to make its way around social media. It was from an interview by veteran Kuwaiti actor Jassem al-Nabhan advocating the Kuwaitis as the sons of Sindbad. Al-Nabhan was addressing the lack of historical films about Kuwait when he said:

> There are stories that were told by Captains and the men of the sea that we still didn't embark upon because its expensive to shoot at sea . . . we have Alan Villiers where he spoke of his voyage with Ali Alnejdi (Peace be upon him) the last of the greatest captains . . . the book is there. *Sons of Sindbad*, he named it Sons of Sindbad, who are the sons of Sindbad? We are! Kuwait! The sailors of Kuwait are the Sons of Sindbad.[130]

This shows that some Kuwaitis hold themselves proud to be referred to as descendants of Sindbad, advocating their right to be "sons" of Sindbad regardless of the derogatory association and original concept—and regardless of the fact Sindbad the Sailor was in actuality a fictional character from Baghdad/Oman and definitely not Kuwait.

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[127] It was originally a poem titled "Postcards from my beloved Kuwait" written by the author during the Iraqi war from her anthology Dīwān *Burqīāj "ajila ilā Waṭanī.*

[128] *Khalīji* is Arabic word for "of the Gulf," and refers exclusively to the people of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

[129] NiceQ8i "*Obiraīt – Naḥnu Baqun Hunā,"* May 8, 2018, video, 20:58, accessed December 1, 2022, https://niceq8i.tv/video/4778 [trans. author].

[130] AtvKuwait, "*Hum abnā' Al-Sindībad # al-Kuwaīt Jassem al-Nabhan: Baḥārah*," May 3, 2020, video, 03:09, accessed December 1, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmfUsluSBY8 [trans. author].

Another example of being proud to be Sindbads is seen in the novel, *The Mariner*[131] by the Kuwaiti novelist Taleb Alrefai. The book was written in Arabic in 2004 and translated in English in 2020. The story is a fictional retelling of the life of al-Nejdi, the protagonist of Villiers' book *Sons of Sindbad* and the captain of the ship that he set sail on. Alrefai was inspired to write about al-Nejdi after having read *Sons of Sindbad.*[132] His novel, which is written in the first-person, recounts the narrative of al-Nejdi who now in his seventies nostalgically recalls the Arab dhows, "the last relics of the magic of the old orient."[133] The author uses Villiers' book as the main source in outlining some of the details of the voyages undertaken across the Indian Ocean. Throughout the narrative, there is a clear attempt to invoke a sense of pride in al-Nejdi's character and deliberately refers to Sindbad as ideated by Villiers. In one of the passages, al-Nejdi's character shares, with a friend, "Once, he [Villiers] told me: You're the grandchildren of Sindbad."[134] Another example is seen in the opening scene of the book as al-Nejdi's character recites a passage to his wife from Alan Villiers' book. The scene goes as follows:

> I stand up, holding the book. Noura follows me with her eyes. I smile at her and say:
>
> "Listen. Let me read you what Alan Villiers wrote about the Kuwaiti sailors once he'd got to know them, and then you might forgive their love of the sea."
>
> I flip through the book's pages.
>
> "Listen: 'I had grown to like the Arabs, especially this . . . group of Sindbads who dwelt on our poop. Sindbad himself if he ever existed . . . could not have concocted adventures such as were commonplace with them."
>
> Noura looks at me, and I add:

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[131] Taleb Alrefai, *The Mariner* (London: Banipal Books, 2020), Kindle.

[132] Alqabas, "*Riāwyat al-Najdī' lī-mathā lā tataḥwal ila film sinamā'ī*," accessed March 16, 2022, https://www.alqabas.com/article/370588.

[133] Alrefai, *The Mariner*, chap. 3.

[134] Ibid., chap. 4.

"Alan was talking about the Kuwaitis when he gave his book its title."[135]

The author's invocation of pride in al-Nejdi (and Arab sailors) in response to being referred to as Sindbad reflects the author's conformity and willingness in adopting Sindbad as a representation of the Kuwaiti sailor. Further examination of the above scene reveals that Alrefai cites an incomplete quote from Villiers' original text to gloss over and eulogise Villiers' pessimistic picture. As demonstrated in Table 1 below, Alrefai redacts the phrases like "scoundrel" and "a liar that he was" from Villiers' original description, replacing them instead with ellipsis.

Table 1. A textual comparison between Villiers' the *Sons of Sindbad* and Alrefai's *The Mariner*.[136]

Original text as printed in Alan Villiers *Sons of Sindbad* in 1941 *Strikethrough indicating what was *redacted* from Alrefai's version.	Excerpt from Villiers' *Sons of Sindbad* as printed in Taleb Alrefai *The Mariner* in 2020 *Highlights indicating what the author *added* to replace Villiers original text.
I had grown to like the Arabs, especially this ~~scoundrelly~~ group of ~~old~~ Sindbads who dwelt on our poop. Sindbad himself, ~~a liar that he was~~, could not have concocted adventures such as were commonplace with them.[137]	I had grown to like the Arabs, especially this ... group of Sindbads who dwelt on our poop. Sindbad himself if he ever existed… could not have concocted adventures such as were commonplace with them.[138]

Here, the choice of the author to explicitly redact all the passages that contain unflattering portrayals of the Kuwaitis demonstrate that the author and translator were aware of the negative association with being Sindbads and chose to alter the text, perhaps to avoid public

[135] Ibid., chap. 1.

[136] The book was originally written in Arabic and titled *Alnedjī*. It was translated in French and English; this part of the study addresses the English version since the focus of the research is primarily on the editorial choices of the author in citing the *Sons of Sindbad* (in the Arabic and the English versions) rather than the nature of translation itself.

[137] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, 107.

[138] Alrefai, *The Mariner*, chap. 1.

scrutiny or maybe maintain self-preservation. However, these alterations not only managed to subvert the negative portrayal of the Kuwaitis but also simultaneously laud Villiers as an author.

Translations of Villiers' Texts on Different Platforms

This phenomenon of glossing over or "sugarcoating" Villiers' view of the Arabs is evident in the Arabic translations of all texts relating to his depictions of the Kuwaiti Sindbad. As mentioned earlier, in 1948 Alan Villiers published a fourteen-page article titled "Sailing with Sindbad's Sons" in the *National Geographic*. From that, two pages of the spread[139] were selected for translation and subsequently published in the Kuwaiti local magazine *al-Biʿtha* in 1949. [140] However, to gloss the article, the translators at *al-Biʿtha* chose to redact certain passages that negatively portrayed the people on board the ship. Using highlights, I indicate in Table 2 below exactly what the translators at *al-Biʿtha* chose to redact from Villiers' original article in the *National Geographic*.

[139] Alan Villiers, "Sailing with Sindbad's Sons," 686, 687.
[140] *al-Biʿtha,* March 1, 1949.

Table 2. Text from Alan Villiers' *National Geographic* article in 1948.

Original Text in
Alan Villiers' article, "Sailing with Sindbad's Sons" in 1948
*Highlights indicating what was *redacted* from the Arabic translation in *al-Biʿtha*

On the eleventh night out of Aden we came into Mukalla. It was a grand place to look at – houses and mosques squeezed between mountains and sea. Here we shipped the nakhoda's passengers, 40 Bedouin emigrants to Somaliland, Africa.
I discovered that all the Africa-bound dhows carried 50 to 200 passengers – wandering Hadhramis going to Kenya, Tanganyika, or Zanzibar in quest of fortunes their own harsh land could not give them.

When Hamed remarked that we would load a hundred more passengers, I felt sure he was exaggerating. That was nothing, he said; the boom had carried 260 on her previous voyage.
Our Bedouins brought their women with them. These poor creatures were bundled into the smelly, cramped "great cabin", a frightful place beneath the poop, unlit and unventilated. Here 14 pathetic, docile bundles wrapped in black had to stay cooped up for the next six weeks with their babies and baggage. They had no comforts save a few date-frond mats.

A wallet City Facing the Sea
From Mukalla we went to Ash Shihr, a walled city facing the Arabian Sea. While lying at anchor in the open roadstead, we took on board another hundred-odd Arabs, each carrying his food for their voyage. A few hung their belongings over the ship's sides.
Some of our Hadhramaut Arabs were seasoned travellers, having voyaged as far as Java, Syria, Mombasa, and the Sudan.
Others were unsophisticated, wild Bedouins leaving their desert homes for the first time. Gaping at every activity, they never became accustomed to shipboard life. They were a tough-looking lot. As I watched them milling about the deck, mingling with the mob we already had, I worried about our water supply, sanitary conditions, and my own precious health.
Each man cooked his evening meal on the deck. I was still wondering where all 170 of us were going to sleep when I saw the newcomers, one by one, selecting deck plank bunks under the stars. Not one complained of his hard couch. This I know: the Arab, traveling at sea, can rest his bones upon the space ordinarily occupied by a clothesline, and his capacity for tolerating hardships seems unlimited.

Seasick Passengers Pray, Rush to Rail
We were bound now for Africa. To my surprise, we reached the continental coast within three days. For only one day did we lose sight of land. The Arab mariner likes to keep the shore in sight as much as possible.
Though the weather was reasonably decent, a few passengers became seasick. Their precautions and remedies were weird. Some stuffed paper in ears and nostrils; others sniffed lemons. Nearly all prayed. All was in vain; there was many a rush to the rail.
Some of our passengers, decent citizens, cooked, ate, and slept without raising a riot, but others quarrelled, fought, and yelled until the ship became a bedlam.
We had several blind men going to Zanzibar to beg, and there was a surprising number of wild, mischievous children. No one seemed to be looking after the boys, until some of them fell overboard. Luckily, they were good swimmers.
Although I counted our passengers every day, I was seldom sure how many we had, because whenever we came into a port some of them slipped over the side. The nakhoda, of course, had a list, but when he called off the numbers he was never certain who was answering "Here!".
Authorities at Mogadishu, our first large port of call in east Africa, took a dim view of our human cargo. They laid down the law: any immigrant not previously resident in Somaliland must go elsewhere. But on they had to go, for the days when Arab mariners bossed the East African coast, opening sea routes and founding ports, are gone.
In any port nowadays the first visitors are white-uniformed immigration inspectors to control the ancient movements of peoples, doctors to shut out smallpox, and police to see that the independent Arab pays at least lip service to European laws.

Bayan Does 280 Miles in a Day

Our passengers suffered their disappointment secure in the knowledge that Allah would take care of them. We had to go to Mombasa, in Kenya, before we finally got rid of them.
In Mombasa, a nominal dominion of the Sultan of Zanzibar, the Arab has the last of his privileges. Even our blind beggars were allowed to land. They paid their fare - $2.50 for a 1,800-mile voyage.

Ali and Hamed heaved sighs of relief on getting rid of the Bedouins who, they admitted, were truly well-behaved compared with others they had known.

Our voyage to Mombasa was made with a steady wind always in our favour.

Similar to the previous example, the text was redacted to eliminate any negative connotations Villiers might have expressed about some of the Bedouins. Even though he stresses the hardship of these people, his tone is still derogatory. Moreover, phrases such as "docile bundles," "unsophisticated," and "wild" are all removed from the Arabic translation. This pattern is consistent, even in the two Arabic translations of the book *Sons of Sindbad*. The first translation was the product of a Lebanon-based publishing company called *Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī.*[141] Unfortunately, not much is known about this version except that it was published sometime in the late 1960s. The second time the book was translated was in 1982 by the Kuwait government press.[142] Though the translations differ in style, they both show the same discrepancies and reveal a similar pattern of disguising Villiers' derogatory depiction of the Kuwait sailor. This is illustrated in Table 3 below, where I select a passage from Villiers original text and compare it with the two translations. The process of editing Villiers' derogatory portrayals and substituting them with more acceptable ones is evident in both translations.

[141] Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, trans. Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 196?).
[142] Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad*, trans. Naif Kherma, (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1982).

Table 3. A textual comparison between Alan Villiers' text in Sons of Sindbad, Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, and Kuwait Government Press' translations.

Original English text in Alan Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad* in 1941 *Strikethrough indicating what was *redacted* from both Arabic translations.	Villiers' text translated to Arabic Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, *Sons of Sindbad* (1960s)	Villiers' text translated to Arabic Kuwait Government Press *Sons of Sindbad (1982)* *Highlights indicating what the translators *added* to replace Villiers' original text.
I had grown to like the Arabs, especially this ~~scoundrelly group of old~~ Sindbads who dwelt on our poop.	I had grown to like the Arabs, especially those Sindbads who dwelt on our poop,	I had grown to like the Arabs, especially this mischievous group who dwelt on our poop. Of whom, in my view, everyone one of them is an old Sindbad
Sindbad himself, ~~a liar that he was~~, could not have concocted adventures such as were commonplace with them;	Sindbad himself, if he ever existed, could not have concocted adventures such as were commonplace with them;[144]	Sindbad himself, with all his extravagant attributes he beholds [added], could not have concocted adventures such as were commonplace with them;
Sindbad himself, that old Arab ~~scoundrel~~, would not have been ashamed to ship with us.[143]		Sindbad himself that old Arab adventurer, would not have been ashamed to ship with us.[145]

As is evident, both translations in Arabic take out all derogatory terms, like "scoundrel" and "liar." The 1982 translation uses much milder terms like "mischievous," "extravagant attributes," and "adventurer" that do not convey the same negative connotation as the original.

The examples above further demonstrate how both Arab and Kuwaiti authors and the broader world of government, culture, and scholarship consciously chose to redact the perverse views presented by Villiers. It also indicates the need to preserve the idea of a "heroic" Kuwaiti Sindbad outweighed any real concern for accuracy in citing the original source. Thus, these translations became complicit in supporting and spreading the view that

[143] Villiers, Sons of Sindbad, 107.

[144] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad.* trans. 196?, 148 [trans. author].

[145] Villiers, *Sons of Sindbad.* trans. 1982, 193 [trans. by author].

there was nothing derogatory about being referred to as Sindbad. Because this acceptance left no room for readers to object to or even discuss the derogatory ascription of Sindbad, the idea of Sindbad became increasingly normalised and promoted.

Chapter Conclusion

The chapter challenges the current representation of Kuwait's heritage and establishes an argument that many aspects of the accepted Kuwait identity are but fabricated images based on the Orientalist views Westerners held of the exotic Orient. The popular texts of the *Arabian Nights* and the *Sons of Sindbad* oversaw discursive treatment by several privileged Western operators that aligned their narratives to particular regional, socio-cultural, and political requirements while seeking audiences not only from the West but also from the Arab world. At the same time, some of these spectators were motivated enough to reproduce yet more versions, enabling a series of productions that implicitly altered the identity of Arabia, and specifically Kuwait, within the collective psyche—both Eastern and Western.

Moreover, the chapter outlines how Western representations of the local population can be transmitted from one generation to the next through repetition and institutional embeddedness and how these representations helped mould aspects of Kuwait's contemporary heritage identity. Further evidence was presented about the involvement of local societies and the State in extending such representations by glossing over Western derogatory views in order to save face, yet at the same time conforming to Orientalist standards.

To draw on Grace Yan and Almeida Carla Santos'[146] investigations into how the Others represent themselves, "[t]wo approaches situate self-Orientalism. From a historical approach, the self-produced images of the Orient are heavily influenced by Western

[146] Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (1996): 96–118, https://doi.org/10.2307/2505446.

conceptions. Specifically, Western Orientalist knowledge has been internalised and self-inscribed by the East in turn, becoming inseparable from Western ideas."[147] Local society's choice to accept Western representations, and the actions this acceptance entails, helps in further establishing these Oriental ideas. Therefore, any attempt to provide an understanding of Kuwait's inherent cultural heritage is hindered by the lack of awareness and effort devoted to addressing the impact of Orientalism on cultural representation

[147] Yan and Santos, ""China, Forever,"" 298.