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## **Orientalism in *Firefly* and *Serenity***



"Now everyone can enjoy the comfort and enlightenment of true civilization."

—River's teacher, *Serenity* (2005)

[1] In providing the founding narrative of the *Firefly/Serenity* 'verse, the opening voiceover and its following Socratic pedagogic dialogue in the feature-length film *Serenity* quickly and simply articulate a colonial logic. Enlightenment and civilization are offered; they are refused. After the inevitable battle, those refusing enlightenment are civilized and brought into the fold, into "true civilization." This article seeks to probe how the *Firefly/Serenity* universe is constructed through a discourse of colonial enlightenment, a discourse that depends for its salience on a relation between civilization and barbarism. I argue that the show and film rethink what it means to be colonial and imperial in a postcolonial, postimperial world.<sup>1</sup>

[2] This argument takes shape by situating the *F/S* discourse in two overlapping contexts: the historical colonial "civilizing mission" and the science fiction genre's challenges to and support of "civilizing" missions (particularly *Star Trek* and its spin-offs). In shifting the narrative's point of view from the Federation (*Star Trek*) or Alliance (*F/S*) to the "Outer planets," or more precisely, as Christina Rowley argues, the nomadic spaces in-between planets and moons (Rowley 2007: 319), the *Firefly/Serenity* 'verse shows us colonialism and empire from its margins. In doing so, it produces a simultaneous shift in the way "the Other" operates in the narrative. With Captain Mal Reynolds and his crew existing on the periphery, the deployment of Asian dress, language, decorative elements, and even behaviors cannot simply be the equivalent of an Orientalizing categorization of Asia as "Other." Nor, however, is it fully reclaimed in *F/S* as an unproblematic multiculturalism. In probing the civilizing discourse of the Alliance, I present a reading of the fabric of the *F/S* 'verse that complicates its use of "the Orient," allowing the show and film to provide us with a framework to rethink how Orientalism continues to operate today.

### **From Independents to Reavers: Colonial Logics**

[3] The narrative given at the beginning of *Serenity*<sup>2</sup> recapitulates a modernist historicism often taken to task by those arguing from the periphery (Chakrabarty 2000, Mitchell 2000). The Alliance-voiced set-up for the film (and the backstory for those who had not seen the series *Firefly*), relies on historicist assumptions about the linear march forward of progress and the relative positions of peoples and cultures along that line of progress. Having exhausted "Earth-That-Was" of its space and resources, humanity left in search of a new solar system, a *terra nullius* on which to (terra)form new homes and establish a

foothold separate from Earth. Mirroring narratives of expansion, exploration, and colonization to the New World, Africa and Australia,<sup>3</sup> the presumptively empty planets are reformed in the image of "Earth-That-Was" much as Australian and North and South American settlers presumed an emptiness and then mimicked, and were named their settlements after, cities and regions of the Old World.<sup>4</sup>

[4] The new planets establish a hierarchy—the Central planets, with their Frank Gehry/Daniel Liebeskind-inspired architecture<sup>5</sup> and green landscapes, and the Outer planets, echoing the frontier culture and landscape of the American West, the deserts of central Australia, and the mythos of *Star Wars*' Tatooine and a *Mad Max* future. The next, inevitable move of history—according to the imperial narrative that we come to see is being voiced to students by a teacher—involves the forcible inclusion of the border planets and moons in the benevolent civilization of the Central planets, a historical development marked in the opening scene by the transformation of the brown frontier planet on the teacher's solar system diagram into a purple-blue one, included in the orbit around the center. The founding narrative of the *F/S* 'verse incorporates historicist tropes of inevitable progress, from the terraforming of moons to the necessity of bringing the border planets in line: "The Central Planets formed the Alliance. Ruled by an interplanetary parliament, the Alliance was a beacon of civilization. The savage Outer Planets were not so enlightened, and refused Alliance control. The war was devastating." With only a short beat between the last two sentences, the teacher moves from a discussion of the hierarchy of the two types of planets to the statement: "The war was devastating," indicating the inevitability of *forcing* civilization upon those who refuse it.<sup>6</sup>

[5] Tzvetan Todorov's construction of conquest as an imposition of civilization fits this narrative perfectly (Todorov 1999 [1982]: 179, see also Inayatullah 2003). Rather than a *proposal* of "civilization" that might be rejected or accepted, here, even in the very form of the text spoken by River's teacher, we have a brute imposition of civilization. Following Todorov's argument, this implies that the colonizer/conqueror does not conceive of those conquered as wholly human, thereby justifying (forcible) colonialism through the trope of the civilizing mission.

[6] *Serenity*'s opening sequence echoes Todorov—and the language of colonial justification—in more than just this fundamental way. The Socratic pedagogy that follows from the disembodied voiceover engages the students in a question: if the Alliance brings all of these wonderful things (medicine, technology, peace, enlightenment) to the 'verse, then why would the Independents reject it? The "they" of the Independents then immediately, through the voice of one of the schoolgirls, falls into prototypical colonial discourse: they are cannibals. This move of course echoes that of the Spanish conquerors of the Americas (Todorov 1999 [1982]: 177-79) and many other writers from the Renaissance through the colonial period and up to the present (see Goldman 1999). Immediately after labeling Independents cannibals, this label is redirected to the Reavers—a somewhat mythical (for these children) group of beings/monsters who, according to one of the schoolboys, "attack settlers from space and kill them and wear their skins and rape them for hours and hours."<sup>7</sup> This shift from the Independents to the Reavers provides a reminder of historicist progress: we *used* to think these things about fellow human beings (Independents)—this has now fallen out of fashion and been replaced by the association of cannibalism and mindless violence with the (in)human form of the Reaver.<sup>8</sup> After silencing the discussion of the Reavers, the teacher turns back to the history lesson regarding the Independents, and River responds that the reason they rejected seemingly benevolent civilization is because the Alliance is "meddlesome," telling people what to do and how to be. The critique of colonialism, already embedded in the autocratic telling of the founding historical myth, thereby becomes explicit in River's response.

[7] The deflection from discussion of the Reavers reads initially as the school children rehearsing a narrative of mythical bogeymen at the edges of space/civilization—itsself a common locus for the description and demonization of the Other (Mitter 1992, Wardhaugh 2005). In order to achieve and maintain the Self-Other distinction colonialism requires, one

needs discourses producing the Other *qua* Other—i.e. Orientalizing discourses (Said 1979). The discursive production of an object called "the Orient," separate from "the West," anchored the processes of colonialism and Enlightenment in Euro-America from the 18th century onward. What was revolutionary (and now seems like common knowledge) about Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism lay in its revelation that the production and construction of the Other occurred through European discourse, not that of "the Orient." Later critics and those building on Said have further theorized the contact zone and the interproductive aspects of colonial "encounters" through the concepts of transculturation (Pratt 1992; see Ortiz 1995 [1947]), mimesis (Taussig 1992) and mimicry (Bhabha 1994: 85-92).

[8] But the narrative of *F/S* reveals, as one watches the film to its conclusion, the production of this Other is more than metaphorical—it is simultaneously quite literal. The Alliance, in attempting to pacify the population of a newly terraformed world named Miranda, so quelled the majority of the planet's population that the people there simply lay down and died. A tiny percentage had the opposite reaction to the atmospheric additive called "Pax," with increased aggression, self-mutilation, and inconceivable violence. Rather than acknowledge the massive mistake (for to do so would weaken the civilizing narrative), the Alliance abandoned Miranda and the "surviving" Reavers, who attack outposts on the outer planets and live aboard ships concentrated in a band at the edge of the system. Reavers are the ultimate "Other" for the *F/S* 'verse, as they represent an inhumanity quite literally produced by the civilization and Enlightenment of the Alliance.

[9] In the science fiction world of *F/S* the Reavers reproduce tropes found throughout the colonial record. Reavers encompass the overlapping colonial fears of cannibals (derived from "Caribe" and thus linked to the Caribbean contact zone), murderous thugs (from "Thugee," a tribe designated as "criminal" by British colonizers of India), and a wider mythos of sexual violence by "black men" against "white women."<sup>9</sup> In the context of the Alliance's civilizing mission, they represent both the apex and the nadir: the incontrovertibly failed attempt to create the "perfect world" envisioned and voiced by the character of the nameless Operative in *Serenity*. The argument of the film, then, lies in its uncovering and exaggeration of the colonial power relation in which the Other is both mythically and literally produced by the Centre in order to justify and assert the need for the unending project of civilizing in order, so the teacher tells us, to "ensure a safer universe."<sup>10</sup>

### **Steep Angles: Changing the Point of View**

[10] Before I can articulate the relation between this larger Orientalizing theme within the *F/S* 'verse and the evocation of "the Orient" in its sets, language, costumes, and characters' actions, I need to demonstrate the fundamental way in which *F/S*'s version of the benevolent empire/colonizer differs from other science fiction narratives. My argument is that *F/S* offers us a postcolonial view of empire and colony, one in direct contrast to series such as *Star Trek*, which in its multiple incarnations provided a (sometimes very critical) view of benevolent empire, but did not present the multifaceted, fragmented vision of empire *F/S* provides.

[11] I employ *Star Trek* as a foil for *F/S* because of its popularity amongst academics to illustrate relations of power, politics, and international relations (see essays in Harrison et al. 1996 and Weldes 2003). The reason for this, I contend, is in part because *Star Trek* (and its spin-offs, including *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and *Star Trek: Voyager*) tracked the US zeitgeist in relation to multiculturalism, attitudes towards liberal democracy, and reactions to the Cold War, neo-colonialism, American imperialism, and globalization.<sup>11</sup> *F/S* represents a comparatively short-lived series and film, one that did not have the opportunity to map multiple decades as *Star Trek* did. The end of *Star Trek: Voyager* in 2001 marked the end of an era in US foreign policy and cultural attitudes towards the world.<sup>12</sup> This coincidence left open the television landscape

for new visions of the future and our relationship to the Other, including shows like *Firefly*.

[12] *Star Trek* presents a somewhat weakly justified narrative of benevolent, scientific exploration, one that involves repeated narratives of "first encounters" or in Mary Louise Pratt's language, continual productions of new "contact zones" (Pratt 1992, see Inayatullah 2003: 60). The modernist drive to "know" the universe through exploration redounds also to the *Star Trek* crews, so that knowing the Other is transformed into further knowing the Self as many episodes end up as lessons about the Earth-centered crew's understandings of "humanity" (Inayatullah 2003). *Star Trek*'s liberal-humanist universe, particularly in the *Next Generation* series (1987-94), participates in a particular desire to celebrate and embrace difference—in line with a concomitant rise in multicultural political movements across the US that sought to simultaneously recognize and bridge cultural, racial, and gender divides.

[13] What the *Star Trek* series all share is their point of view as one from the metropole, specifically an assumedly benevolent Federation. Despite on-going subtle and not-so-subtle critiques of the liberal humanist overtones of that perspective, the series remains trapped in the worldview of the imperial power, spreading knowledge and Enlightenment where it travels and garnering some self-knowledge along the way.<sup>13</sup> *Firefly* and *Serenity*, in contrast, take an entirely different approach to the presentation of a universe centered on a similarly hegemonic core: the Alliance. For *Star Trek* fans, it is as if the show had been filmed from the point of view of the insurgent Maquis<sup>14</sup> rather than from the deck of the Enterprise or the safety of the Deep Space Nine space station.

[14] This fundamental shift means that the audience is asked to associate not with the elite Starfleet cohort but instead with a group on a small ship smuggling goods around the edges of space. We are not put in the position of the rebel army attempting to oust the Empire (*Star Wars*) but in the position of the small-p politics, everyday mode of resistance (see Rowley 2007). The *F/S* 'verse shows us instead a nomadic space, one that owes its articulation more to the Western than the politics of *Star Trek*.<sup>15</sup> What it shows us is how power relations operate among people, across information channels, and with nomadic entities like the ship itself, which the benevolent discourse of the Alliance cannot pin down (either literally or figuratively).

[15] In terms of scholarship on colonial relations and imperialism, this shift from *Star Trek* to *Firefly* parallels that between Said's study *Orientalism* (1979) and Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000). Both pairs map a narrative arc across culture and politics from the 1980s to the present. We move from Said's analysis of Europe's complicity in the construction of the Orient to Chakrabarty's call to shift the center from Europe to the margins—to reposition the roots of modernity firmly within the (formerly) colonized world (see also Mitchell 2000).

## ReOrienting Orientalism

[16] *Firefly/Serenity*'s retelling of the space narrative from the periphery offers new ways of thinking the Other, as it calls the audience to relate to those on the margin, not only by existing outside of accepted categories (citizen, resident) but also by actively dodging any labeling or institution that might pin them down. As a metaphor for contemporary postmodern/postcolonial nomadic identity, the show and film demonstrate the contentious spaces that one must navigate as a postmodern subject. Like *Star Trek*'s multicultural message, then, one can read *F/S* as a parallel text to our own contemporary diasporic, nomadic zeitgeist. But if so, how should we read Orientalizing tropes in *F/S*? In other words, if we take the *F/S* 'verse to be a representation of a possible future in which the two powers of "Earth-That-Was"—China and the US—have melded, then what does that melding (and the other exoticizing/Asian elements in the show) tell us about the construction of the Other from the margin? How does this new postcolonial and postmodern diasporic nomadism map onto preexisting constructions of the Other? Is the

use of Mandarin/Cantonese/Hindi, South/East/Southeast Asian decor, chopsticks, a geisha/courtesan figure, and Japanese swords simply a boring Orientalism "gussied up" for the future? Or, as I argue here, is it a much more complex re-incorporation and re-reading of the Other than it seems at first glance?

[17] For Said, the constructed Orient largely encompassed the regions of interest to the British and French colonial empires—the Middle East, North Africa, India, and the spice route. But the Orient was never confined to those locales, for indeed it was not a place: "Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [. . .] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof with a 'real' Orient" (Said 1979: 5). Orientalism, therefore, while having a relationship to political and cultural entities such as China, Japan, India, and Morocco, has an internal logic of its own, one produced by and for a European audience. Indeed, Said goes on to clarify that: "Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West" (1979: 20-21).

[18] The *F/S* 'verse does not incorporate this exteriority wholly; or rather, it attempts to overcome it by incorporating elements of Asia into its fabric without comment. The show and film *normalize* their Asian elements. The use of Chinese language—Cantonese and Mandarin—in the show, film, and its various novelizations/books has been discussed and catalogued by Kevin Sullivan both in print and on-line (Sullivan 2005a; 2005b; 2006). Sullivan points out that despite the popular perception amongst viewers and reviewers that the primary value of Chinese in the show is to allow the crew to swear without being "bleeped," less than half of the Chinese expressions in the show are "swearing" (2005a: 199). The need for the meaning of utterances to be understood by the audience without subtitles meant that other cues were employed in the show and film. No major plot development could occur through the medium of Chinese, and as a result most of the dialogue is in English and no full conversations take place in Chinese.<sup>16</sup> But the extent of Asian elements extends well beyond language; my concern here is to outline the visual elements and suggest that their use, while normalized within the context of the show, remains within an Orientalist framework, but one much more complicated (and related to Said's analysis in *Orientalism*) than a knee-jerk stereotyping of Asia.

[19] The hub of all Asian elements within the show is the interior of Inara's shuttle and the persona of Inara herself.<sup>17</sup> The various scenes of the shuttle's interior reveal a compilation of Asian elements chosen to evoke the luxurious boudoir of a madam, the Orientalist vision of the Middle Eastern harem, and a variety of courtesan images from Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. While the narrative of Inara's creation as a character invokes the trope of the geisha (Rowley 2007: 321 citing Whedon 2005), Inara's shuttle includes very few Japanese elements and her dress and makeup diverge significantly from geisha-inspired culture. Geisha-figures do appear in the series, both in human form (the waitress in the bar at the opening of "The Train Job" 1002) and in verbal discussion (the bobble-headed geisha dolls of "Trash" 1011). And Japanese dress does insert itself into the 'verse in other subtle ways: for example, the layered, kimono-like costuming of the young River in the schoolroom scene that opens *Serenity*. But Inara and her shuttle do not produce a Japanese geisha aesthetic. Nor, despite Mal's strategic and calculated name-calling, is she a whore.<sup>18</sup> Her dress and home/work space suggest a combination of Chinese, South Asian, and Middle Eastern courtesan culture. While these cultures are certainly comparable to the geisha cultures of Edo and Kyoto in the valuing of musicianship, calligraphy, arts, bearing, and manner, the aesthetic range of the shuttle and Inara's costuming/activities echo instead a broader courtesan context.

[20] This referencing happens in two parallel dimensions. First, the presentation of the companion hierarchy, training, and institution parallels many historical and contemporary courtesan cultures. Veena Oldenburg's research on the courtesans of Lucknow in northern India reinforces the understanding of these institutions as politically

and economically powerful organizations that used their standing as respected, central members of the community to further their own fortunes and facilitate particular political ends (1991). The courtesans in Lucknow, for example, helped to bankroll the 1857 uprising against the British, made sure that their needs were met at the Awadhi royal court, and knew all of the secrets of the major players in Lucknawi society. They also took in girls and women escaping abusive marriages, training the talented to become courtesans and providing the less-talented with jobs around the courtesans' house. Oldenburg's analysis is most interesting when it comes to the art of *nakhra* or pretence and its use in seducing men for economic and political ends, not always (or not even) for sexual ones (1991: 43 ff). Parallel to Inara's "wiles" that Mal often comments upon, and the trained use of subterfuge referred to in connection with the Saffron/Bridget/Yolanda character ("Our Mrs. Reynolds" 1006 "Trash" 1011), *nakhra* operates as the core element of a courtesan's profession, something practiced and used in training new entrants into the house.<sup>20</sup> This complex of ideas and practices makes up the position of "courtesan," one distinct from that of "prostitute" or "whore."<sup>19</sup> Similar historical precedents can be found in China.<sup>21</sup>

[21] These precursors of the courtesan can be seen in the texture of set design and costuming for Inara's character. The decor of Inara's shuttle includes Chinese shields, teapots, and textiles; she demonstrates an ability to serve tea and practices her calligraphy skills as a Chinese courtesan would. Above her bed hang sculptures of Krishna and Radha, the youthful South Asian god and his consort, indicating connections between the physical love between a man and woman and the relation between god and devotee often metaphorized in *bhakti* devotional poetry and temple sculpture in India (see Ghosh 2005).<sup>22</sup> The institutional structures that maintain the courtesan status within the *F/S* 'verse, Inara's bearing and training, and the way in which she conducts her business all fit into a well-established history of courtesan culture in China and South Asia, and many of the accoutrements surrounding her provide visual clues to connect us to that past.

[22] Alongside this first historical dimension, a second, representational, dimension of the Orientalizing reference takes form in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean iconographies found in *F/S*. This imagery carries the weight of centuries of Orientalizing imagery of the harem, concubine, and belly-dancer.<sup>23</sup> While on the one hand the history of the courtesan is a long and varied one, marking a space of power for women, the representation of the courtesan for Orientalizing discourse plays up the mysterious sexuality attainable only to the few who "penetrate" the "veil" of the Middle East.<sup>24</sup> The "Asia" referred to in the aesthetics of the show is in this sense akin to "the Orient" of Orientalism. We see citations of objects, textiles, sculptures, behaviors, photographs, and paintings that circulate in order to produce an understanding of what the constructed object "Orient" embodies. Many of the elements of Inara's Asian-inspired garb call upon stereotypes of belly-dancing attire, Thai formal dress and the sari of South Asia. But none of these costumes is replicated precisely—as Amy-Chinn notes, Inara's dress has an "Oriental feel" but does not directly mimic particular sartorial traditions (2006: 178). Like the decor in her shuttle, and indeed, like the set dressing elsewhere in the *F/S* 'verse, the series employs a range of Asian and Middle Eastern-inspired aesthetics in order to produce the texture of a future world after a Chinese-American cultural melding. At times the camera frames a view we have seen before: the nude back of the Ottoman/Maghrebi harem woman in French 19th century Orientalist painting is cited in "Serenity" (1001) when Inara bathes herself in her shuttle.<sup>25</sup> The Afghani *burqa/chadri* makes an appearance in "The Train Job" (1002); a belly dancer entertains the bar and passes Mal information at the beginning of the same episode. Chinese lanterns, hookahs, Moroccan carvings, yazuka tattoos, Turkic saddle bags and other elements can be found throughout the *F/S* 'verse.

[23] As scholars analyzing Orientalism within visual culture have argued, these elements present a vision of the "East" that reinforces its exotic and erotic aspects (Nochlin 1983). Orientalizing images—in the nineteenth century and in the *F/S* 'verse—also serve to erase history from the space of the Other and thereby suggest an erroneous lack of change in the "East." The harem bather is seemingly the same in the nineteenth century

as she is in the future; neither bellydancing nor the veil has changed since time immemorial. In addition, the sometimes contradictory multiplicity of the Orientalist image also plays out here, with Chinese culture represented both as the purview of the upper classes (the Tam family home in the flashbacks of "Safe" 1005), a marker of authoritarian regimes (the Blue Sun/*qing1 ri4/lan2 ri4* logo on t-shirts and infrastructure; the official female Chinese voice of emergency and announcement), and the dog-eating peasant stereotype used to embellish the lower-class chaos of Persephone's port ("Serenity," 1001). *F/S* actively participates in the continuation and reinforcement of these Orientalizing images, relying on their exotic/erotic/ahistorical resonance to construct a picture of the future amalgamated universe. *Firefly/Serenity*, despite the reclamation of the powerful position of historical Asian courtesanship, and despite its attempts to incorporate and normalize Asian elements within its fabric, remains largely within the bounds of Orientalizing imagery.

## Future Orientalisms

[24] On one level, then, the Asian elements of *F/S* do not escape their Orientalist heritage. But the larger context for these Orientalisms is crucial. These representations of "things Asian" appear in the context of *F/S*'s discourse and critique of the colonial civilizing mission, its shift in point of view from the empire to the periphery and its deployment of historical models of powerful courtesans. The Orientalisms cannot be read solely as a recapitulation of 19th and 20th century Orientalisms. Because the universe in which it takes place exists after the empire has triumphed, and because the point of view emanates from a nomadic collection of disparate people who operate on the margins of society, Orientalisms in *F/S* help us to rethink the relation to the Orient (and by extension the Other) we currently inhabit.

[25] In what direction does the rethinking move us? We have, in *F/S*, a universe that shows us simultaneously the brute stereotypical negativity of the objectified Other and the amalgamation of Otherness with the Self without simply assimilating it. In the *Star Trek* universe we were presented with a multicultural, respectful-yet-assimilatory solution to the divisiveness of our world—a solution which incorporated an internal critique but nonetheless held out hope for an ultimate, progressive overcoming of difference. In the *Firefly* 'verse no such solution is forthcoming. The construction of the *F/S* 'verse acknowledges that while the war was lost and the empire prevails, difference has not been "solved." Instead, it has been multiplied and made messy. In fact, *Firefly* illustrates one of the crucial elements of Said's *Orientalism* that often, in its appropriations, gets swept under the rug:

One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away. [. . .] what we must try to respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability (Said 1979: 6).

Orientalism's durability extends to the *F/S* 'verse and certainly to the early 21st-century audience. And *Firefly* shows us that Orientalist discourse is not merely a myth to be overcome at some future, utopic, multicultural stage. Rather than show us a clean, modernist "bridge" with a crew of mixed gender, race, and species, we see the messy periphery of the universe. Our point of entry into this world has shifted, and we see the potential within that messy amalgam instead of wishing for a cleaner, brighter, unified future. *Firefly* and *Serenity* explain to us, through the use of Asian elements in often Orientalizing ways, that the constructions of the Other we inherit cannot simply be overcome, blown away, or swept under the rug. They are replaced by new constructions

(Independents by Reavers) and the old Others (Asian language, dress, behavior) are often incorporated into the Self in complex ways. Historical precedents continue in the future, whether in the form of the frontier and the cowboy, the businesswoman/courtesan, or the evil empire. The liberal humanist hope of escape from these differences and these histories ignores the durability and strength of these discourses, whether they engage with assumed gender roles, the "civilizing mission" or Orientalism.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more on empire and geopolitics in *Firefly/Serenity*, see Bussolini 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I will use *Serenity* (underlined) to indicate the 2005 film; "Serenity" in quotation marks to designate the two-part first episode of the *Firefly* series (as included on the DVD, although not aired on TV first); and Serenity without formatting to indicate the ship itself.

<sup>3</sup> See Lindqvist 2007; Reynolds 1996; Zukas 2005; Ashcroft et al 1998: 32; Pratt 1992 for more on the development and legacy of *terra nullius* ideologies. Expansion into (ostensibly) empty space and its barren moons serves as the ultimate extension of this logic.

<sup>4</sup> For analysis of the larger body of science fiction film and its use of the colonization trope from various angles, see Grewell 2001 and Redfield 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Gehry and Liebeskind exemplify a move in the late 20th and early 21st centuries towards sheathing buildings in metallic, flowing, organic forms. For examples see Curtis 1996.

<sup>6</sup> For additional analyses of this scene, see Wilcox 2008; Sutherland and Swan 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Furthering a historical relation to borderlands and thieves on the edge of society, the "reaver" figure comes from English-Scottish conflicts from the 14th to the 16th centuries, when the border between England and Scotland saw bands of "Border Reivers" raid cattle and horses, attacking English and Scots indiscriminately. See Gray 2000: 22-45. *F/S* creator Joss Whedon was apparently unaware of the connection; see Darkling 2005. The analysis of gender and race issues associated with the figure of the Reaver is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Debates over whether Reavers are "men" or not (the assumption is that they are all gendered male) arise several times over the course of *Firefly* and *Serenity*. Shepherd Book avers their humanity (in line with Christian missionaries to the Americas—see Todorov 1999 [1982]: 176 ff) in "Bushwacked" (1003); Jayne and River discuss both Book's description of them and how they became what they are, crucially highlighting the unintelligibility of the Reaver figure within the mythos of the 'verse (*Serenity* 2005).

<sup>9</sup> For cannibal and its etymology, see Lukes 2003; for thug/thuggee see van Woerkens 2002; for the colonial fear of black men raping white women, see Sharpe 1993; Spivak 1988. For miscegenation and race in *Star Trek* and science fiction, see Wilcox 1993. For more on the "savage" and the Reavers' connections to colonial/frontier histories and mythos (particularly the narrative of the Western) in *F/S*, see Curry 2008 (this issue) and Rabb and

Richardson 2008.

<sup>10</sup> The discourse of safety/security in this opening sequence as well as throughout the *F/S* 'verse is beyond the scope of this paper but clearly represents another way of relating the series and film to contemporary politics and international relations. For more on the interrelation of science fiction and international relations, see Weldes 2003 and the volume from which her essay comes. Christina Rowley (2007) has productively begun to address this relationship in her review of *Firefly* and *Serenity*.

<sup>11</sup> See Lawrence and Jewett 2002: 224-46; Russell and Wolski 2001; Johnson-Smith 2005: 77-118.

<sup>12</sup> *Star Trek: Enterprise* continued the franchise until 2005, but in a notably weaker form.

<sup>13</sup> Russell and Wolski (2001) make a compelling and subtle reading of *Star Trek*, addressing both its colonial/imperialist aspects and the series' internal critical analysis of its liberal humanist imperialism.

<sup>14</sup> The Maquis are a group of Federation citizens living on the border with Cardassia who took their security into their own hands after the Federation ceded their worlds to the Cardassians. The dialogue with the Maquis goes well beyond that formative moment, however, and develops into a subtle critique of Federation hegemony, particularly in the words of Maquis operative, Eddington, in "For the Cause" (*DS9*, 4.21) who tells his commanding officer, Captain Sisko: "Everybody should want to be in the Federation. Nobody leaves paradise. In some ways you're even worse than the Borg. At least they tell you about their plans for assimilation. You assimilate people and they don't even know it." The Maquis continue their presence in both *DS9* and *Voyager* series.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Joss Whedon's influences and the American Western, see Romesburg 2006; Rabb and Richardson 2008; Curry 2008.

<sup>16</sup> For a full analysis of the way codeswitching and Chinese language operates in *F/S*, see Mandala 2008.

<sup>17</sup> For more on interior design in the *F/S* 'verse, see Maio 2008.

<sup>18</sup> I disagree with Amy-Chinn's analysis on this point (2006). I do not read Inara as ever occupying the subject position of the "whore" or "prostitute," but she instead embodies the distinct and historically grounded position of the courtesan, as I argue below. Joy Davidson's (2005) archaeological/spiritual analysis of the whore/goddess figure leaves out the more recent and politically engaged history of the courtesan in South and East Asia. Andrew Aberdein does not depart from the prostitute/whore label fully but fruitfully analyzes Inara through the lens of the Greek *hetaera*, or companion (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Oldenburg notes that some women did provide sexual services to men within the *kotha* (courtesan house), but that these women were not

courtesans. Because they fell under the protection of the courtesan house, they were in a better position than street prostitutes or those who served the cantonment (colonial military area). See Oldenburg 1990 for discussion of the regulation of prostitution after 1857; see also Levine 2003.

<sup>20</sup> See Masson 2008 for more on "wiles" and the rhetoric of seduction in *Firefly*.

<sup>21</sup> The literature on courtesans in China is extensive. See Yao 2002; Yeh 2006; the essays in Part I of Widmer and Chang, Eds. 1997.

<sup>22</sup> To be clear, the Awadhi court of Oldenburg's courtesans was a Shi'i Muslim one, not a Hindu one.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the courtesan figure and the role of sexuality in the 16th century Mediterranean, see Andrews and Kalpakli 2005.

<sup>24</sup> The sexual metaphor of colonial exploration has been explored elsewhere. See McClintock 1995.

<sup>25</sup> The most famous example of this iconography is Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Valpincon Bather*, 1808, Louvre. For a thorough analysis of this sort of Orientalizing imagery, see Nochlin 1983. For more on photography and the harem, see Alloula 1986.