

# Islam, Animation and Money

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**MUCH HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE RECEPTION** of Walt Disney Incorporated's 1993 film *Aladdin* by Arab-American groups in the United States. However, little has been written concerning the reception of the film in other parts of the world, especially in those nations with significant Muslim populations. Although an investigation into the reception of the film in the Islamic nations of the Middle East seems obvious and appropriate, there are other parts of the world with significant Muslim populations that deserve our attention. This paper, then, is a study of the controversy surrounding the distribution and exhibition of *Aladdin* in the nations of Southeast Asia with large Muslim populations. These nations include Indonesia (with the largest Muslim population in the world), Brunei, and Malaysia, all of which are predominantly Muslim, and Singapore, in which Muslims constitute a significant minority.<sup>(1)</sup> Although in the United States the issue may be regarded as primarily one concerning freedom of expression, in other parts of the world the issue is not seen as quite so simple.

Although our intention in this paper is not specifically to establish whether or not the film is, or should be regarded as, insulting to certain national or ethnic groups, a few words concerning this issue seem in order. That the film could be regarded as offensive to Arabs and Muslims seems fairly easy to understand. Some critics have argued that a film that stereotyped African-Americans or Jews as *Aladdin* did Arabs never would have been released.<sup>(2)</sup> And, as an Arab-American critic of the film pointed out, although Jasmine and Aladdin are positive Arab characters, they speak American English, as opposed to the heavily-accented English of the evil characters<sup>(3)</sup> in fact, the character of Aladdin was modelled on the American actor Tom Cruise.<sup>(4)</sup> This ethnic and nationalistic stereotyping is not a new phenomenon in Disney cartoons or in animation in general; as Jonathan Rosenbaum pointed out in 1980, this "submerged nationalistic propaganda," as he called it, can be seen as early as *Pinocchio* in 1940, in which the protagonist, Pinocchio, and the good fairy both have American accents, while the villainous characters have either Italian or English accents.<sup>(5)</sup>

We can go further, and point out that *Aladdin* is one more successful attempt by Disney to Westernize, and even Americanize, an artistic product of another culture. As we saw in the Gulf War, other cultures tend to be valued in the West in relation to their usefulness to the West; the Arabic fairy tale of Aladdin became raw material for the Disney machine, which produced not an authentic depiction of an Oriental culture and its products, but an American cartoon depicting the Arabic world and its people as both exotic and humorous. The emancipated genie, with his Goofy hat and other Disney World paraphernalia, is not only an advertisement for Walt Disney Incorporated, he also serves as an unintended symbol of the "Mickey Mousing" of the world and its various cultures.

Just as the cultures of the world are being consumed by Disney, Western culture is being sold to the world. A recent issue of Singapore's *The Straits Times* reported that WDI "is preparing the ground for a large-scale assault on the heart[s], minds and pockets of consumers in South-east Asia."<sup>(6)</sup> Referring to the establishment of The Walt Disney Company (Singapore), Brandt Handley, the managing director of the new company, said:

The umbrella is up. Under its cover, all the other aspects of Disney's business -- theme park marketing and television, film and video distribution -- will enter the region. Consumer products were the trail-blazers. Like the guy going into the jungle with the machete, we clear a path for Disney's other divisions to set themselves up. That's the strategy we employ all over the world.<sup>(7)</sup> The company seems to have found a willing "victim"; in 1993, Singaporeans alone spent S\$15 (about US\$10) per capita on Disney paraphernalia, exclusive of the money spent on film admissions themselves. In addition to Singapore, Jakarta (in Indonesia) and Kuala Lumpur (in Malaysia) now have WDI offices, joining the already-established offices in the Philippines and Thailand.<sup>(8)</sup>

Although it is not difficult to see why Disney's *Aladdin* is insulting to Arabs and Muslims in general, it seems unlikely that the film's offensiveness can be blamed on Jewish motion picture executives eager to indoctrinate young audiences with negative stereotypes of Arabs, as was suggested by some Arab-Americans.<sup>(9)</sup> However,

in some respects, Disney seems to have been fairly naive, or perhaps insensitive, from the beginning of the film's marketing; the company expressed confidence that *Aladdin* would appeal to children of all ethnic origins, and launched what some regard as the most extensive ethnic marketing campaign ever for a motion picture, with advertising campaigns directed specifically at young Hispanic and black movie-goers.<sup>(10)</sup> Apparently, the studio felt there was no need to reach out to Arab-American movie-goers, or audiences of other predominately Muslim ethnic groups. And overseas marketing campaigns, for the most part, seem to have been left to the local distributors and exhibitors in those countries.

By mid-April 1993, *Aladdin* had grossed over \$200 million in North America; a large portion of these grosses came not from children, but from adults and teenage boys.<sup>(11)</sup> Walt Disney Incorporated expected to gross another \$250 million in the international market,<sup>(12)</sup> and a large share of this gross certainly was expected from Asia. Asia did not disappoint Disney.

The film opened in Singapore at the beginning of May 1993 at seventeen theaters, the first time an animated film had been screened on such a large scale in Singapore.<sup>(13)</sup> As in other Southeast Asian countries, the film's release was planned to coincide with primary school holidays to take advantage of the young audience; as it was put by Mr. Christie Leo, marketing manager for Warner Bros., the company that distributed the film in Southeast Asia, "*Aladdin* is a film with enormous business potential and we have targeted it for the school holidays."<sup>(14)</sup> And, as had happened in North America, Warner expected the film to appeal to an audience wider than one consisting only of children; as Leo pointed out, "[T]he market in Singapore has been building up the last five years -- a lot of teenagers and adults saw *Beauty and the Beast*, for example."<sup>(15)</sup> Indeed, *Beauty and the Beast* was seen by over 400,000 viewers in Singapore, grossing S\$1.9 million (about US\$1.2 million) in a run of three months <sup>(16)</sup> these figures are more impressive when one considers that Singapore is a nation with a population of only about three million, and ticket prices are the equivalent of about US\$4.

*Aladdin* ran into few problems in Singapore; the island's largely Chinese population apparently found little to be offended by in the film, and if the nation's Muslim population was offended, it certainly was not vocal in its opposition to the film. Across the straits in Malaysia, however, this was not quite the case. Unlike some of its neighbours in the South China Sea, Malaysia was torn by conflicting attitudes concerning the film and its depiction of the world of Islam.

*Aladdin* opened throughout much of western Malaysia on 28 May 1993; as in Singapore, the film was opened to coincide with school holidays.<sup>(17)</sup> On the same day, the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, or ABIM) urged the Malaysian government to ban the film as well as the soundtrack on cassettes and compact discs.<sup>(18)</sup> The group included the soundtrack in its attack, as did Arab-American groups in North America, because of the alleged racism of the lyrics of the opening song of the film, in which an Arab character sings: "Oh, I come from a land, From a faraway place, Where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but, hey, its home."<sup>(19)</sup> According to ABIM's secretary-general, Anuar Tahir, "[*Aladdin*] is racist, [and] ridicules Arabs as well as Muslims in general. Malaysia, as a country which upholds moral values, should prevent the dissemination of such messages in our society. The film is not suitable for Malaysian audiences."<sup>(20)</sup>

Certainly, ABIM was not alone in its feelings toward the film; in a nation as devoted to Islam as is Malaysia, there must have been many others who were also offended by the portrayal of Muslims in *Aladdin*. However, there was surprisingly little publicity in the Malaysian press concerning the call by ABIM and others to ban the movie. In fact, only one of the major Malaysian newspapers covered the story, and that paper was an English-language newspaper; none of the major Malay-language newspapers reported ABIM's call.<sup>(21)</sup> The only review of the film to appear in a major Malaysian newspaper failed to mention the controversy, and not only did the reviewer not complain about racism, she was entirely enthusiastic about the film, encouraging adults as well as children to see it.<sup>(22)</sup> Moreover, there was nothing like the mass demonstrations of outrage that accompanied, for example, the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, outrage that resulted in government intervention to ban the book.<sup>(23)</sup> How can we account for this lack of media attention, and the apparent lack of public outcry, regarding *Aladdin*?

Aside from the fact that Disney movies and cartoons most certainly have far more fans in Malaysia and the rest of the Muslim world than does Salman Rushdie, there are a number of other factors involved. First, we

must realize that although the Malays are Muslims, they are not Arabs. We don't mean to suggest that the Malays are insensitive to insults to their Arab brothers and sisters, but the reaction in Malaysia most likely would have been much more negative if the characters stereotyped offensively in the film had been more obviously *Muslims*, rather than specifically *Arabs*.

Another factor we must keep in mind is the public perception of animation. Regardless of how seriously film scholars take animation, to most people it is just cartoons, something for children to watch. Adults may enjoy Disney animation as much as children do, and certainly some of the humor in *Aladdin* is lost on young viewers (and, in fact, on many other viewers; we doubt if the average non-American viewer would "get" the genie's impersonation of Rodney Dangerfield, or more obviously, his impersonation of William F. Buckley, who is probably unfamiliar to the average American as well). However, animation is rarely regarded as something to be taken as seriously as, say, religion or politics. But, as Leslie Sharman points out in a recent number of *Sight & Sound*, it is the trivialization of such issues as religion and politics by placing them in a commercial medium designed for children, at least in the minds of many viewers and, I'm certain, at least some of the filmmakers involved, that so offended many critics of the film. Sharman observes that although some think it is ridiculous to expect "cultural accuracy from an animated cartoon...others contend that it is precisely because of its medium that the film should be questioned."<sup>(24)</sup> But it seems clear that for most viewers, whether Occidental or Oriental, animation is not something to be taken seriously.

However, there are other factors involved that go beyond these obvious reasons. Whether or not they were aware of potential problems with Muslim viewers, Warner Bros., the film's distributors in Malaysia as well as in Singapore, took steps that went far to offset this negative publicity. For example, the film had its Malaysian premiere in Kuala Lumpur at a benefit performance for orphans, where Warner showed the film for free to 146 orphans between the ages of six and twelve, all from Kuala Lumpur and the surrounding area in Selangor; according to newspaper accounts of the event, none of these orphans expressed moral outrage.<sup>(25)</sup> And when the film opened about a month later in Kuching, the capitol of the eastern Malaysian state of Sarawak, a special admission price was set for families -- 20 Malaysian ringgit (about US\$7) for a family of five -- and free sweets were given to all children who attended the film.<sup>(26)</sup> And, as is common with the releases of all Disney animated films, the opening of *Aladdin* in Malaysia was coordinated with promotions involving such retailers as Yaohan's (a Japanese department store chain with outlets throughout Malaysia and Singapore) and the MPH book store chain.<sup>(27)</sup> As the distributors of *Aladdin*, Warner had a great stake in the film's success in Malaysia. Both *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* had done quite well in Malaysia, and *Aladdin* was expected to be an even bigger hit, due both to its success in North America and the positive publicity the film had received there (Naturally, Warner Bros. did not mention the negative publicity the film had received), and because the subject matter was expected to appeal to Malaysian audiences.<sup>(28)</sup> And the film did indeed appeal to the majority of Malaysian viewers.<sup>(29)</sup> Although it may seem odd to Westerners that a film that is fairly widely regarded as offensive to Arabs and, to a lesser extent, to Muslims in general, should appeal to a Muslim people, the film *Aladdin* in most respects is exactly what Malaysians love in a motion picture. It is melodramatic (or overly melodramatic, some would argue); it tells a love story about two attractive characters, a beautiful girl and a handsome young man, one rich and one poor; it contains many romantic songs; and it even has some mild violence thrown in for good measure. In other words, in most respects it is an animated version of the typical Malay movie. And the depictions of Islamic law in the film -- for example the threatened punishment of the amputation of Jasmine's hand for inadvertently stealing an apple, or the beheading (that didn't actually occur) of Aladdin for stealing a loaf of bread (or for consorting with the princess Jasmine; it never is made quite clear) -- is rather tame compared to the punishments meted out in many Malaysian period films, in which characters routinely suffer amputations of various body parts, or are speared, beheaded, and/or burned alive, all in the name of Allah. Anyone familiar with Malaysian cinema should have no problem understanding why audiences, in general, chose to ignore calls to ban or boycott the film and instead treated themselves to an evening of song and romance.

Likewise, the fact that perfectly devout Muslim Malaysian audiences could watch and enjoy a film that can be regarded as offensive to Muslims may seem unusual, but it is not uncommon for Malaysians to accept ideas that seem to contradict, or at least seem somewhat incompatible with, Islam. For example, many devout Malaysian Muslims accept animism and believe in magic, and some even suspect that there are beautiful

women who are actually *pontianak*, or vampires<sup>(30)</sup> (this observation is certainly not meant as an insult to Malaysians or Muslims; we can point out that there are many Christians, for example, who regularly follow their horoscopes in the newspaper or engage in other strictly non-Christian activities). So it should not be so surprising that the Malaysians, who often are able to accept beliefs that seem to Westerners to be inconsistent, could thoroughly enjoy *Aladdin*, and, in some cases, not even understand why the film should be regarded as offensive.

A possible cause for the lack of publicity given to calls to ban the film is the fact that Malaysian newspapers rely heavily on advertising revenues from motion picture theaters (and we might add that many, perhaps most, theaters in Malaysia are owned by Chinese Malaysians, some of whom may not be especially sensitive to Muslims and their opinions concerning motion pictures<sup>(31)</sup>). Although we are not suggesting that theater owners, or the distributors of the film, pressured newspapers to downplay reaction from Muslim groups, it is entirely possible that newspaper executives and editors themselves made such a decision. After all, there was nothing to be gained from publicizing ABIM's criticisms of *Aladdin* (unless, of course, the public had reacted with indignation at the media's lack of interest, which didn't happen), but much to lose if theater owners had decided to pull their advertisements from the newspapers, or even if the advertisements were stopped due to banning the film or decreased box office due to negative publicity. In other words, it was not in the newspapers' best interests to promote, through publicity, the banning of a film that was bringing in significant revenues through advertising.

Likewise, the government of Malaysia, in the form of the ruling party, the United Malay National Organization or UMNO, had little to gain from interfering with the film's successful run in the absence of strong public pressure to do so. In fact, the opposite is more likely; the banning of a film as popular as *Aladdin*, even on grounds that it is offensive to Muslims (grounds that would be perfectly sufficient in other cases), would have created much ill will towards the ruling party at a time when it could not afford it, as elections were scheduled to be held later that year, in November 1993 (of course, there are never times when ruling parties welcome domestic ill will).

Although ABIM has traditionally emphasized Islam and its wish to make Malaysia a truly Islamic state with a legal and economic system based in Islamic law, as opposed to a nation in which Islam is simply the official religion, UMNO has always been far more concerned with racial and ethnic harmony within Malaysia, and actively promotes nationalism instead of Islam as the foundation of the state. ABIM, a group that enjoyed considerable power and influence in the 1970s, became significantly weaker and less radical in the 1980s, and also became more closely allied with UNMO when Anwar Ibrahim, ABIM's president from 1974 to 1982, joined UNMO, eventually becoming a vice president of the ruling party and Malaysia's Minister of Education, and currently a Deputy Prime Minister, while keeping his ties with ABIM. Certainly, any issue that the government did not wish to pursue would not be pressed without his approval.<sup>(32)</sup> After making its initial protestation, perhaps to show its sympathy for and unity with the Muslim youth groups (many of them in Arabic nations) with which it is allied internationally, ABIM quietly abandoned its demands for the banning of the movie *Aladdin*.

The film had an even more peaceful run in the rest of Southeast Asia. *Aladdin* opened in Jakarta on 10 June 1993,<sup>(33)</sup> and ended its successful run in the Indonesian capitol on 14 July.<sup>(34)</sup> As in Malaysia, the film was accompanied by publicity and promotional stunts, including shopping centre appearances by actors dressed as Jasmine, the Genie, Princess Jasmine, and Jafar, fashion shows featuring clothing inspired by the film, and contests for children, with free tickets to the film as prizes.<sup>(35)</sup>

As it had been in Malaysia, the controversy the film had generated among the Arab-American community in the United States was ignored by the major non-English language press in Indonesia. The only major newspaper to cover the story was the English-language *Jakarta Post*, which reported the call made in Bahrain by former US Senator James Abourezk, chair of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, for Disney to alter the lyrics of the opening song of *Aladdin*.<sup>(36)</sup> None of the major Indonesian newspapers reported the request of Malaysia's ABIM to ban the film, or any similar calls by Indonesian Muslim organizations.<sup>(37)</sup>

Reviews of the film were overwhelmingly positive; all of the reviews in the major newspapers, both those in English and those in Bahasa Indonesia, praised the film for its craftsmanship and inventiveness. In addition, many praised the values and morality conveyed by the film, described by critics as including honesty, fairness,

liberty, optimism, perseverance, and faithfulness in love.<sup>(38)</sup> Amidst this praise, however, there was some acknowledgment that the film did present a somewhat distorted picture of the Arab and Islamic world. One critic complained, albeit mildly, that, despite its sophisticated technology and engaging story, *Aladdin* depicted the Arab world too "colorfully" and in a rather heavy-handed way, and that it offered a version of the Middle East seen through "Western artistic sympathies." This writer's ambivalence, however, is revealed when s/he concludes the review by wondering why Hollywood couldn't do the same for Indonesian folk tales!<sup>(39)</sup>

Indonesia, like Malaysia, is a predominantly Muslim nation; however, there are many important differences between the two Southeast Asian nations. For one thing, their attitudes toward the West are quite different. With the exception of the Communist insurgency of 1948-54, Malaysia had a relatively peaceful and easy path to independence from the British, who wished to avoid an ordeal such as the French were experiencing in Vietnam.<sup>(40)</sup> Therefore, except for occasional rumblings about the dangerous influence of Western popular culture (usually in the form of MTV or Madonna concerts) and calls for limiting the use of the English language in advertising, Malaysians, both the people and the government, seem to have a generally non-combative attitude toward the West. Although this seems to be changing somewhat in recent years, Malaysian criticism of the West remains mostly for local consumption, primarily designed to influence the native population.<sup>(41)</sup>

Indonesia, on the other hand, won independence through a violent revolution against the Dutch, and understandably has a much more hostile attitude toward the West, at least in the government if not among the majority of the population.<sup>(42)</sup> In addition to this, Indonesia has a much more highly developed film industry to protect than does Malaysia, and in recent history has had a great deal of conflict with the Hollywood film industry, which Indonesia (correctly) perceives as threatening to take over film distribution and exhibition in Indonesia completely, instead of just dominating it. Therefore, the Indonesian government has little sympathy for the American film industry and its films, animated or otherwise.<sup>(43)</sup> If Malaysia, on the other hand, were deprived of Hollywood's products as a result of disputes with American film distributors, it would have so few films to show that its theaters would soon go out of business.<sup>(44)</sup> (Although Singapore's Board of Censors, in theory, is sensitive to ethnic, racial and religious issues in films, it tends to concentrate much more on the sexual and political content of movies; it is especially meticulous in its scrutiny of films for the positive portrayal of homosexuality or labour unions and their activities [especially strikes].<sup>(45)</sup>

In Indonesia, however, in addition to a general lack of outrage among the population regarding *Aladdin*, there was some fear of American retaliation. Since 1989, Indonesia has been on a "watch list" by the US for copyright infringement involving the marketing of American films and videotapes. A month before the Jakarta premier of the film, concerns (whether warranted or not) were expressed at a Jakarta meeting concerning trade relations that the US was considering using the trade regulation known as "Super 301" to impose sanctions on Indonesia. Although they felt that the US was not being completely fair in its trade dealings with Indonesia, especially concerning the distribution of Hollywood films, the Indonesians wished to avoid any sort of trade war with the US.<sup>(46)</sup> It is entirely likely that the risks involved with banning *Aladdin*, which, as in Malaysia, was an action not demanded by the public at large, were greater than any possible benefits.

There was even less official reaction to the film in the tiny nation of Brunei, which didn't see *Aladdin* until 12 August 1993, when it opened at one of the nation's two theaters, where it played for two weeks.<sup>(47)</sup> The controversy in the US was covered more extensively in Brunei than it was in any other Southeast Asian nation. Not only did the Brunei press report the demand by the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee for an alteration of the film's lyrics,<sup>(48)</sup> it also reported Disney's consideration of the demand,<sup>(49)</sup> as well as WDI's decision, finally, to alter the lyrics for videocassette and laserdisc release.<sup>(50)</sup> And, unlike the Indonesian press, the major newspaper in Brunei reported the demands by ABIM for the banning of the film in Malaysia.<sup>(51)</sup> Despite the fact that all of this took place before the film's release in Brunei, there was no mention in the Brunei press concerning any controversy regarding the film within Brunei itself. The only review of the film in the Brunei press was positive, if not especially enthusiastic, and made no mention whatsoever of the debate surrounding the film.<sup>(52)</sup> Perhaps by the time the film actually made it to the screen in Brunei, the controversy was old news. And, although Brunei is a Muslim nation (one in which, for example, all alcoholic beverages are illegal), it seldom seems to feel the need to emphasize its Islamic

credentials to either its own people or the rest of the world.

One of the great ironies of this situation is the fact that despite steps taken by Disney to thwart the activities of videocassette pirates in Malaysia, who cost the company an estimated 21 million Malaysian ringgit (about US\$7 million) in 1992,<sup>(53)</sup> pirated videotapes of *Aladdin*, usually of very low quality, were readily available throughout Malaysia months before the film was officially released on videocassette and, in fact, often before the film was seen in Malaysian theaters, and almost certainly sold in the hundreds of thousands of copies.<sup>(54)</sup> Therefore, the version most often seen in Malaysia on videocassette is the offending one taped from prints of the film, while less Muslim but more heavily policed areas of the world must be content with the more insipid, but less offending, "cleaned up" version of *Aladdin*, in which the lyrics "Where they cut off your ear If they don't like your face" have been replaced with "Where it's flat and immense And the heat is intense."<sup>(55)</sup> In both versions, however, the land of the Arabs remains "barbaric, but hey, it's home."<sup>(56)</sup>

### Conclusion

The factors affecting *Aladdin's* distribution and exhibition in the nations of Southeast Asia, and particularly in Malaysia, form an intricate and interesting web. Although Islam is a very powerful force in this part of the world, it has close rivals in the love of money and the love of Disney animation (two loves the Muslim world shares with the Christian, Buddhist and atheist worlds). Fundamentalist groups seeking to ban the film sought for publicity in newspapers that depend on advertising, much of it from movie theaters. Distributors and exhibitors, sitting on a potential goldmine with a much-publicized movie in a part of the world that tops per capita movie-going, had to keep in mind the deep religious faith and ethnic consciousness of their customers, while maximising their profits. The Muslim faithful sometimes were torn between their religion and solidarity with their Arab brothers and sisters on one hand, and their love of movies in general and Disney's films in particular on the other. Finally, the governments of these countries often were torn between the demands of groups offended by, and sometimes protesting and calling for the banning of, *Aladdin* and the demands of the mainstream for its "fix" of Disney. In the end, Disney won.

However, we must be careful in our assumptions and conclusions concerning the cultures of Southeast Asia. As we have seen, it is wrong to assume that Southeast Asian culture and society are monolithic; for example, Indonesia and Malaysia may both be Islamic nations, but are quite different culturally. Even within Malaysia, there are great differences. For example, Kelantan, Malaysia's most conservatively Islamic state and one that has resisted the control of UNMO, recently banned *makyong* and *menora*, traditional forms of Malay theater, as well as *wayang kulit*, the shadow play, for violating various Islamic guidelines and rules; obviously, the coexistence of Islam and Malay tradition is not as peaceful in Kelantan as in the rest of Malaysia. Films featuring Muslim actresses who do not observe the *aurat*, or Islamic dress code, have also be banned.<sup>(57)</sup> As this surely includes Princess Jasmine of Disney's *Aladdin*, the film may soon be banned in Malaysia after all, if only in the state of Kelantan.

Whether Disney's version of Americanized world culture will overcome the resistance of at least some of the Islamic world remains to be seen; the apparent financial difficulties, and perhaps imminent failure, of EuroDisney may provide some hope for those who fear the global onslaught of the bland, ever-smiling Mickey Mouse. But if Disney does succeed in franchising Southeast Asia, can Madonna and MTV be far behind? And with the penetration of Western culture will come troubling questions and situations, as the values and traditions of the West clash with those of Southeast Asia, with its own diverse religions and cultures, political systems and traditions, and a population that wants its Islam and its Disney, too.

### Notes

1. The religious demographics of these southeast Asian nations are as follows: Indonesia, 88% Muslim with the remainder primarily Christian and Hindu; Brunei, 63% Muslim with the remainder primarily Buddhist and Christian; Malaysia, 53% Muslim and 29% Buddhist and Chinese folk religions; and Singapore, 16% Muslim, 56% Taoist and Buddhist, with the remainder primarily Christian and Hindu (Stephen Brough, ed.

- dir., *The Economist Atlas* [London: Hutchinson Business Books Limited, 1989], 241-44).
2. "Accused of Arab Slur, *Aladdin* is Edited," *The New York Times*, 14 July 1993, A18.
  3. Don Bustany, president of the Los Angeles chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, reported by David J. Fox, "Disney Will Alter Song in *Aladdin*," *The Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 1993, F1; and Jack Shaheen, "Aladdin: Animated Racism," *Cineaste* 20, 2 (1993): 49
  4. Leslie Felperin Sharman, "New *Aladdins* for Old," *Sight & Sound* 3, 11:12
  5. Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Walt Disney," in Richard Roud, ed., *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary* vol. 1 (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 277
  6. Ann Williams, "Disney puts the Mickey in Asia," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 December 1993, Life sec., 11
  7. Brandt Handley quoted in Ann Williams, "Disney puts the Mickey in Asia," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 December 1993, Life sec., 11.
  8. Ann Williams, "Disney puts the Mickey in Asia," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 December 1993, Life sec., 11.
  9. Richard Scheinin, "Aladdin's Portrayal of Arabs, Muslims Sparks Anger," *The Boston Globe*, 12 January 1993, 71.
  10. Marcy Magiera, "Disney's *Aladdin* Eyes Hispanics," *Advertising Age* 63, 47 (16 November 1992): 12; and Cyndee Miller, "Disney Launches Huge Ethnic Campaign for *Aladdin*," *Marketing News* 27, 2 (18 January 1993): 12.
  11. Betsy Sharkey, "I Dream of Genie," *Adweek* (Southwest edition) 14, 6 (8 February 1993): 24; and Lisa Marie Petersen, "A Studio at the Top of Its Form: Inside Disney," *Brandweek* 34, 14 (5 April 1993): 20-22. According to Brian Lowry, the studio counted on the humor provided by Robin Williams's Genie to attract the adult and teenage audience (Brian Lowry, "Aladdin," *Variety*, 9 November 1992, 62).
  12. David J. Fox, "Aladdin Becomes a \$200-Million Genie for Disney," *The Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 1993, F1.
  13. "Disney Cartoon *Aladdin* to Open at 17 Cinemas," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 May 1993, 25.
  14. Mr. Christie Leo quoted in "Disney Cartoon *Aladdin* to Open at 17 Cinemas," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 May 1993, 25.
  15. Ibid.
  16. Ibid.
  17. "Call to Ban *Aladdin* Because of 'Racial Slurs,'" *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 29 May 1993, 25.
  18. Ibid.
  19. Ibid. For information about the controversy in the United States, see Jack G. Shaheen, "Arab Caricatures Deface Disney's *Aladdin*," *The Los Angeles Times*, 21 December 1992, F3; Scheinin, 71; Casey Kasem and Jay Goldsworthy, "No Magic in *Aladdin*'s Offensive Lyrics," *The Los Angeles Times*, 17 May 1993, F3; "Does *Aladdin* Stereotype Arabs? Children Say Yes - And No," *The Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 1993, F3; "News in Brief," *Video Business* 13, 23 (18 June 1993): 8; Fox, "Disney Will Alter Song in *Aladdin*," F1; "Accused of Arab Slur, *Aladdin* is Edited," *The New York Times*, 11 July 1993, 1:16; and "It's Racist, But Hey, It's Disney," *The New York Times*, 14 July 1993, A18.
  20. "Call to Ban *Aladdin* Because of 'Racial Slurs,'" 25.
  21. The English-language newspaper *The New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur) was the only Malaysian newspaper to report Abim's call to ban *Aladdin* ("Abim wants ban on race-biased 'Aladdin'," 28 May 1993, 4). The English-language newspaper *The Star* (Kuala Lumpur) was the only major Malaysian newspaper to

cover the controversy caused by the film in the United States ("Disney charged with racial slurs in 'Aladdin'," 22 May 1993, 27).

22. Joan Lau, "Aladdin's a winner and a movie for the adults too," *The New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 29 May 1993, 24. Lau had only minor complaints about the film: some of the humor "just goes over the heads of the children. And after a while, they start getting bored. Too much talking, I think"; and "I think the story of *Beauty and the Beast* is more poignant...and touching."

23. "Protesters join 'death for Rushdie' call," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 26 February 1989, 9; and "Muis wants Rushdie book banned," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 12 March 1989, 1 (Muis is the Muslim Religious Council). Although Malaysia did ban Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the government stopped short of endorsing Iran's order to Muslims to kill Rushdie for blaspheming Islam ("Islam's future in Malaysia 'not up to Muslims only'," *The Straits Times* [Singapore], 12 March 1989, 16).

24. Sharman, 13.

25. "Aladdin hiburan kanak-kanak yatim," *Berita Harian* (Kuala Lumpur), 24 May 1993, 18.

26. Advertisement for the film *Aladdin* in *The Sarawak Tribune*, 26 June 1993, 24.

27. See advertisements in *The Star* (Kuala Lumpur) supplement, 4 June 1993, 1, 2; and 5 June 1993, 21.

28. "Aladdin dijangka cipta sejarah box office," *Berita Harian* (Kuala Lumpur), 20 May 1993, 27.

29. According to an account in Kuala Lumpur's *The New Straits Times*, "Cinemas throughout the country are recording huge audiences. Theaters in Kuala Lumpur have been running at full houses almost daily since screening began two weeks ago" ("The magic of Aladdin draws huge audiences," 5 June 1993, 5).

30. See the various essays in Wazir Jahan Karim, ed., *Emotions of Culture: A Malay Perspective* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990). For more information on Malay folk beliefs and their relationship to Islam, see K.M. Endicott, *An Analysis of Malay Magic* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Mohd Taib Osman, *Malay Folk Beliefs: An Integration of Disparate Elements* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989).

31. Although Malays are the predominate ethnic group in Malaysia, constituting 60% of the population, the Chinese minority (31% of the population) tends to be much more powerful economically than the Malays, although Malays are politically more powerful (Brough, 241-42).

32. For a discussion of ABIM and its history, see K. S. Jomo and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," in Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah, eds., *Fragmented Vision* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1992), 85-93.

33. Advertisements in *Suara Pembaruan* (Jakarta), 7 June 1993, 13; 9 June 1993, 13; 10 June 1993, 13; and *The Jakarta Post*, 10 June 1993, 11.

34. Advertisement in *Shara Pembaruan* (Jakarta), 14 July 1993, 13.

35. "Aladdin in Town," *The Jakarta Post*, 19 June 1993, 3; and "4 Tokoh film Aladin' [sic] Bertemu Anak2 Indonesia," *Suara Karya* (Jakarta), 19 June 1993, 3.

36. "Arab Americans say Disney film 'Aladdin' contains racial slurs," *The Jakarta Post*, 11 June 1993, 7.

37. Although Leslie Sharman (13) states that in Indonesia *Aladdin* was withdrawn from distribution until the offending lyrics were excised from the film, we have found no evidence that this was the case.

38. "Film 'Aladdin': Potret Manusia dalam Kartun," *Kompas* (Jakarta), 13 June 1993, 6; "Resensi Film: Kebajikan Timur Tengah ala Barat," *Riau Pos* (Pekanbaru), 4 July 1993, 2; and "'Aladdin' Mengekor Sukses 'Beauty and the Beast'," *Merdeka* (Jakarta), 27 June 1993, 7.

39. "'Aladdin' Mengekor Sukses 'Beauty and the Beast'," *Merdeka* (Jakarta), 27 June 1993, 7. Unfortunately, the writer does nothing to enhance his/her credibility when s/he states that *Aladdin* shouldn't be compared



to more accurate portrayals of the Middle East such as "Lawrence of Arabia starring Steve McQuinn [sic]."

40. Claude A. Buss, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970), 37-38; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, fourth edition (London: MacMillan, 1981), 923-28; Arthur Cotterell, *East Asia: From Chinese Predominance to the Rise of the Pacific Rim* (London: John Murray, 1993), 317-18; and J. Kennedy, *A History of Malaya*, second edition (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1970), 265-82.

41. This phenomenon is widespread throughout Southeast Asia; Singapore provides another example, where the government seems surprised when its actions and statements critical of the West, designed primarily to affect its own citizens, are reported in the Western media and commented on, and criticized, by Western politicians and journalists. The incident involving the caning of American Michael Fay in 1994, which prompted US President Bill Clinton to comment that the Singaporean government was "making a mistake" in its actions, is a case in point.

42. Buss, 48-49; Hall, 933-38; and Cotterell, 319-22.

43. John A. Lent, *The Asian Film Industry* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1990), 207-10.

44. *Ibid.*, 194-5.

45. Lent, 198-9.

46. "Pelanggaran Hak Cipta, Film, dan Video, Penyebab Indonesia Masuk 'Watch List'," *Kompas* (Jakarta), 4 May 1993, 2.

47. Advertisements in *The Borneo Bulletin* (Brunei), 12 August 1993, 2; and 26 August 1993, 2.

48. "Disney meets group on 'Aladdin' charges," *The Borneo Bulletin* (Brunei), 22/23 May 1993, 11.

49. "Short Takes," *The Borneo Bulletin* (Brunei), 4 June 1993, 13.

50. "US Arab group pressures Walt Disney to alter 'Aladdin' lyrics," *The Borneo Bulletin* (Brunei), 12 July 1993, 12.

51. "Group wants ban on 'Aladdin'," *The Brunei Bulletin* (Brunei), 29/30 May 1993, 3.

52. Ali Gambar, "At the Movies: Aladdin," *The Borneo Bulletin* (Brunei), 13 August 1993, 16.

53. "Rakam rompak masih meluas," *Berita Harian* (Kuala Lumpur), 6 May 1993, 19; and "Kerjasama membanteras video rakam rompak," *Utusan Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur), 6 May 1993, 22. Piracy has proven somewhat more manageable in Singapore than in Malaysia; Disney's efforts to stop copyright infringement have resulted in the settlement of over 150 cases in recent years. A recent tactic of WDI is forcing the guilty parties to pay legal fees and damages, in addition to apologizing to a magnanimous Mickey Mouse himself in full-page advertisements in Singapore's *The Straits Times* (Leong Chan Teik, "Twelve say sorry for violating Disney rights," *The Straits Times* [Singapore], 2 June 1994, 21).

54. These videocassettes are most often duplicated from tapes recorded during theatrical screenings of the film (complete with the comments and laughter of the audience, and the occasional head or body in the way of the videocamera), probably taped in the United States or, more likely, in Singapore, since films generally open in Singapore before they are screened in the rest of Southeast Asia.

55. Fox, "Disney Will Alter Song in *Aladdin*," F1.

56. Walt Disney Inc. decided to leave the reference to "barbaric" in the song because, the company explained, it referred to the land, not to the people (*Ibid.*).

57. "Kelantan firm on ban on video games, billiards," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 January 1993, 16. Part of the reason these traditional arts are deemed unacceptable to Islamic purists is that in pre-Islamic Malaysia they were used for spiritual and religious purposes, including healing; also, some Muslims object to the use of representations of human beings in, for example, *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppet theater. See Tan Sooi Beng, "Counterpoints in the Performing Arts of Malaysia," in Kahn and Loh, 287.