1001 Nights and Anime: The Adaptation of Transnational Folklore in Tezuka Osamu's *Senya ichiya monogatari/A Thousand and One Nights* (1969)

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ABSTRACT

Anthologising folktales from across the Middle East and North Africa, the inherently transnational *1001 Nights* has become one of the most adapted works in the history of folklore (Zipes et al. 2015). The tales have been adapted globally into works ranging from literature to theatre, from radio to film and animation. The animated versions of the tales in particular, refer to some of the earliest feature films in animation history and have been the subject of debate concerning their representational strategies (Sterritt 2020; Belamghari 2015). The treatment of the tales by Japanese media producers affords us a way to decentre the significance of these earlier and more lauded Euro-American adaptations and to consider how these transnational tales flowed to, and were appropriated and reinterpreted within, other parts of the world. First translated into Japanese in 1875, the *1001 Nights* quickly went on to gain a foothold within Japanese literature, and more recently it has become the basis for numerous manga and anime adaptations (Nishio and Yamanaka, 2006). This article investigates how one animated Japanese adaptation by famed manga artist Osamu Tezuka, *Senya Ichiya Monogatari* (dir. Eiichi Yamamoto, 1969), expands the transnational status of the original through its appropriation into anime's aesthetic and cultural repertoires. In exploring how the *1001 Nights* have become and remain integral to a transnational repertoire of animated storytelling, we examine the elasticity and transnationality of *1001 Nights* and the implications of its cultural localisation in Japan. We argue that the original's structural and thematic emphasis on journeys, quests and flows provides the Japanese filmmakers with subject matter designed to flow, making the tales an attractive adaptation source for Japanese filmmakers who were themselves seeking greater transnational reach for their animated films. Within this set of flows, a reciprocal transnationality can be found in the *1001 Nights* and its adaptation into anime, offering a mechanism for rethinking the relationships among Middle-Eastern, North African and Japanese forms of storytelling.

1001 Nights ('*Alf layla wa-layla*) is an inherently transnational compilation of short stories and folk tales originating from the Middle East and North Africa, and it has inspired a plethora of translations and adaptations that have transformed the text into one of the world's best-known examples of folklore.[1] Though these adaptations have taken place across the world, in this article we focus on the encounters between Japanese culture and *1001 Nights* in order to think about the way these repeated adaptations have created new forms of hybridisation, cultural appropriation and transculturation. *1001 Nights* made its way to Japan as a stage play titled *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Scamp* as early as 1870, but the first literary Japanese-language translation of *1001 Nights* was created later, in 1875. The ensuing transmedia adaptations of these folk tales have been credited with sparking Japanese interest in Middle Eastern and North African folklore and with contesting the cultural hierarchies inherent in Orientalism (Sugita 2006; Nishio 2006). This article traces the legacy of Tezuka and Yamamoto's version, *Senya ichiya monogatari*, considering how the text's intrinsic transnationalism was compounded and extended by its postwar interpretation in Japanese animation. As we will demonstrate, Tezuka and Yamamoto's version was a palimpsest of the text's previous translations and adaptations, but added its own layers of music, imagery and animated movement to the already heady mix of transcultural adaptation around *1001 Nights*.

Tezuka's production of *Senya ichiya monogatari* illustrates how storytelling contested the mediating role of the West in order to foreground the growing political alliances between various "Orients" (the Middle East and the Far East) in the 1960s and 1970s. As a seminal Middle Eastern text that survived mostly through oral traditions and storytellers who travelled the North African region and the Asian continent, the *1001 Nights* had spoken in earlier periods to the imagination of 18th and 19th century French and British travelling authors such as Antoine Galland (1704–1711), Edward Lane (1838–1840) and Richard Burton (1885). These European versions have become integral to a repertoire of Euro-American animated folklore and storytelling (Leeuwen 2019; Aliakbari 2017). However, by refocusing on how Japanese animators were inspired by these tales, we can decentre these dominant Euro-centric appreciations of the meanings of *1001 Nights*.

Animation is a key adaptation medium for *1001 Nights*, home to some of the most popular versions of the tales. Orientalist usages of Arab folklore and the *1001 Nights* in fact inspired the world's first feature length animated film *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (*The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, 1926) by Lotte Reiniger (Cavalier 2011: 88). This Western interest in the *1001 Nights* folklore has continued with, for example, the Fleischer Studios' 1936 film *Popeye the Sailor meets Sinbad the Sailor*

and UPA's Mister Magoo vehicle *1001 Arabian Nights* in 1959 (Cavalier 2011: 186). Richard Williams' unfinished *The Thief and the Cobbler* (1993) is another adaptation of a *1001 Nights*-story, with some of its staff ending up working on Disney's version of *Aladdin*. Disney's *Aladdin* (dir. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992) is still one of the most high profile adaptations of *1001 Nights* into animation. Disney's *Aladdin* became an unprecedented (though deeply problematic) box office success in 1991 and was remade into an equally problematic live action Disney film in 2019 (dir. Guy Ritchie). As these repeated adaptations illustrate, *1001 Nights* has a presence in animation that echoes through the medium's orientalist-modernist and Euro-American history.

Focusing on Japanese animated adaptations of *1001 Nights* does not immediately remove us from this Euro-American history of adaptation and translation. Sugita Hideaki has noted that in Japan, 'the bifurcation of the *Nights* into two spheres, juvenile literature and pornography' had already begun in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Furthermore, the versions of the *1001 Nights* for children were most often adapted from the European translations of *1001 Nights* by Galland and Lane, whereas the more salacious ones were based on Burton's translations, who included his own 'anthropological notes', mistranslations and orientalist visions of the Middle East and North Africa (Sugita 2006: 142).

Among these, the first Japanese translations of the stories were created by Nagamine Hideki (1875) and Inoue Tsutomu (1883). Nagamine highlights in his version that readers will learn lessons about how virtue is rewarded and evil is punished, and how the book will enlighten its readers on foreign manners and customs. However, the author was 'not particularly interested in the Arabs or the Middle East' (Sugita 2006: 119) and due to its didactic nature, this version, though high in quality, was not very popular with Japanese audiences. Inoue's version, by contrast, was adapted with a large Japanese audience in mind, and included literary embellishments, added explanations and descriptions, and became a great influence on young artists who, at the end of the 19th century, had started to show an interest in the exotic world created in these pages. After the Second World War, Burton's edition was re-translated by Oba Masafumi, popularising the *1001 Nights* in Japan and emphasising its pornographic elements. The history of the manner in which the stories of the *1001 Nights* reached Japan is central to the way the Orient, imagined by Japanese translators as the Middle East and North Africa, is perceived in its media. Nishio Tetsuo, however, points out that 'very few Japanese readers tried to find in *The Nights* the real people of the Middle East.' Instead, Japanese readers aligned themselves with early Orientalist translators, and saw the *1001 Nights* as belonging to European civilisation (Nishio 2006: 160). As in literature, so too in cinema, where films featuring

tales from *1001 Nights* were imported into Japan via early European films using the stories. These inherited narrative and visual traditions of Orientalism, refracted through a European lens, contributed to the diffusion of the notion of the Orient as mysterious, sensual and Other in Japan's adaptations of *1001 Nights*.

Within Japan, the popularity of *1001 Nights* has been such that adaptations can be found scattered across most Japanese media, not least in animation. These adaptations into Japanese animation are significant, because they provide a lens for looking at the shifting meanings of *1001 Nights* in Japan. Animated translation preceding Tezuka's *Senya ichiya monogatari* tended to focus on the fantastical aspects of the tales, including their exotic locations. For example, Ōfuji Noburō's paper cut animation *The Thief of Baguda Castle* (*Bagda-jō no tōzoku*) was released in 1926, in the same year as Reiniger's more famous *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, and was the first film the Ōfuji produced after founding his own studio (Yamamoto 2004: 52). In the choice of *1001 Nights*, we can see how the established tale is used to popularise a new animation studio and Ōfuji's animation techniques. In addition, Tezuka had himself taken previous inspiration from Ōfuji's film and *1001 Nights*, writing the screenplay for Tōei Dōga studio's 1962 film *Arabian Nights: Sinbad the Sailor* (*Arabian Night: Sinbad no bōken*), co-written with novelist Kita Morio (Clements 2013: 100). Although quite different in their aesthetic approaches, these two earlier versions of *1001 Nights* make use of the characters and settings from the original tales following one of the two most common interpretations of *1001 Nights* in Japan: they are adaptations for children.

ANIMERAMA, SEX AND THE ANIMATED PORNOGRAPHIC ADAPTATION OF *1001 NIGHTS*

However, the postwar explosion in Japanese animation afforded new adaptations that specifically attempted to address the cultural tensions at the heart of Japanese borrowings of texts from the Middle-East and Africa. Whereas animated adaptations of *1001 Nights* for children in the pre-, inter-war and early post-war years tended to borrow the characters and narratives of *1001 Nights*' tales, a second type of adaptation aimed at adults tended to focus more on the reputation of these stories for salacious sex. This reputation came to Japan, in no small part, thanks to Oba's retranslation of Burton's exoticised, European version of the tales. The scandalously sexual reputation of *1001 Nights* had been enhanced in Japan by censored translations of Oba's translation that circulated with portions of text cut out, amplifying the anthology's reputation as an outré work (Sugita 2006: 137–141). Sofia

Samatar argues that Tezuka's *Senya ichiya monogatari* utilises this reputation and

> plays on a most conventional curiosity about the sex lives of others. [...] The history of the global circulation of *Nights* is inseparable from the construction of racial and cultural Others as practitioners of, and therefore potential doorways into, nonnormative, sometimes frightening, but also liberating sex. In *Senya*, sex-as-spectacle is generated through a series of contrasts between interiority and exteriority, and between limitation and abundance, with links to both the text of *Night* and its travels (Samatar 2016: 36).

Samatar's reading of Tezuka's film as an exploitation of the Otherness of *1001 Nights* provides one way of thinking about *Senya ichiya monogatari* as a cultural appropriation and exoticisation of the meanings of these Middle-Eastern and African stories. By exaggerating the appearance of sex within *Senya ichiya monogatari*, Tezuka's team aligned the scandalous reputation of the tales in Japan with the country's growing postwar market for softcore pornography (Zahlten 2017). However, the dichotomies of inside/outside and limitation/abundance that Samatar raises might also apply to the film's production, as much as the film itself.

In a pamphlet about *Senya ichiya monogatari* sold to cinema audiences in Japan in 1969, Tezuka proclaims that:

> Animation is not only for children. There should be animation that is suitable for adults. This is my specialist opinion, and for some time, it has been my heart's desire to make 'animation for adults.'

> [In *Senya ichiya monogatari*] I believe I will be able to express my aim of trying to prove that there is something worth seeing for adults in the attractions held by animation – in that wealth of enjoyable images of the world (Tezuka 1969: n.p.).

In this opening statement to *Senya ichiya monogatari*'s promotional pamphlet, Tezuka makes a clear distinction between the dominant children's market for animation in Japan and his own professed desire to appeal to an adult market through animation's 'attractions'. Notably absent here is any discussion of controversial sexual content, though sexual imagery is prominently displayed in the pamphlet's many images. Jonathan Clements argues that this was a commercial, rather than artistic consideration, and that Tezuka 'was turning his back on television, investing his hopes in the world of films for grown-ups, on the understanding that the cinema market in general was still bigger for adults than it was for children'

(Clements 2013: 127). Despite the growth in post-war pornography in Japan, we can see loftier ambitions for 'adult' animation in Tezuka's comments; an attempt to elevate his company's reputation for animation out of the children's market and simultaneously to avoid the censorship perils associated with pornography.

The promotional materials for *Senya ichiya monogatari* dub Tezuka's new adult kind of animation 'Animerama', a neologism that Helen McCarthy argues can be understood to mean 'adult animated drama' (2013: 179). Alternatively, Sheuo Hui Gan argues that the term was borrowed from 'Cinerama', an extreme widescreen format that was popular in Japan at the time (Gan 2007: 68). The cinema pamphlet clarifies the aims, declaring that *Senya ichiya monogatari* 'can truly lay claim to being "the world's first animated film for adults"' and that:

> we named it "Animerama" in order to make a new world of animation emerge and hit back against traditional preconceived ideas […]. To be worthy as "Animerama" the staff under Tezuka Osamu have made [this film] to his specifications: that they ought to advance this new animation. Using the whole surface provided by the multiplane camera's perfect encapsulation of three-dimensions, and you can observe the synthesis of live action and animation (Anon. 1969: n.p.).

Spectacle – and with it quality adult animation – in this explanation, comes from experimentation with animation technologies. The mimicking of Disney's multiplane camera to give scale and depth to *Senya ichiya monogatari*'s animated imagery on the one hand, and model-work and compositing on the other. The emphasis on the technologies behind the animation aesthetic are suggestive of the ways Tezuka's Mushi Productions was trying elevate its reputation in the world of Japanese animation, differentiating themselves from their earlier work and suggesting a departure from both television and the children's market in their new, more technically sophisticated form of adult animation.

The onscreen depiction of eroticism was a major part of these differences. Gan, writing about Animerama, argues that: 'Eroticism is often an effective tactic in ensuring sensational attraction' within Tezuka's new form of adult animation (Gan 2007: 83). Though this is manifestly the case in *Senya ichiya monogatari*, it is also worth noting that eroticism, especially around women's bodies, also becomes a recurrent erotic marker of transnationalism in Tezuka's film. Tezuka's adaptation of the original episodic structure of the tales allows the animated film's protagonist Aldin to travel to distant (often fantastical) lands and explore a variety of sexual behaviours. The transnational seeps into these moments of travel, beginning with the film's slave auction, which displays a wide variety of women's bodies. Subsequently,

Aldin discovers an island populated solely by women, whose animated bodies again suggest a multiplicity of ethnicities and body types. In these examples, the display of diversely racialised women's bodies becomes a kind of translated Japanese Orientalism, rendering sexualised and ethnically Othered women's bodies as a facet of the film's transnationalized eroticism.

These Orientalising tendencies can also be seen in the way *Senya ichiya monogatari* becomes increasingly abstracted during sex scenes. Edward Said, in his landmark *Orientalism* (1978) argues that Orientalism discursively constructs the Middle-East and Africa under the logics of a white, colonising gaze. In previous eras, Said notes, travellers and novelists have imagined Middle-Eastern and African women as 'usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.' (Said 1978: 207). In Tezuka's *Senya ichiya monogatari*, a transposition of aspects of this white, colonising gaze appear, perhaps especially in the treatment of the film's leading women. But, this gaze is rendered ambivalent and ambiguous through abstraction in the animation. For example, Gan relates that during Milliam and Aldin's sex scene, 'Milliam's image is rendered in a variety of graphics influenced by contemporary San Francisco rock music posters from the late 1960s' (Gan 2007: 71). In these moments of abstracted imagery, we can see how Tezuka's animators drew from transnational subcultural imagery that accorded with their erotic animation design. However, rather than straightforwardly internalising the Orientalist gaze, Tezuka's team uses abstraction of movement and imagery alongside a layering of transnationalised influences to off-set and qualify depictions of Middle-Eastern and African female characters. In imagining *Senya ichiya monogatari* as a transnational spectacle based around the sexualised and Othered bodies of female characters, Mushi Productions demonstrates an ambivalence at the heart of its erotic representational strategy.

The interest in the oriental or the exotic combines elements of attraction and repulsion in tension to express the enduring attention paid to the sexualised female body. As Berghahn (2019) describes it, exoticism encompasses a 'spectacle of alluring alterity' that, as Orientalism, posits the 'self' against the 'other' with the presumed 'us' being the Western, or European centre of production. Orientalism 'promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived' (Said: 43–44). Perhaps a fairer and more contemporary, if equally uncomfortable, way to explain the particular type of exoticism at work in the Japanese versions of *1001 Nights*, is the one that conceptualises the Global North and the Global South as distinct economic and cultural entities, rooted in the inequalities inherited from

colonialism and its long historical devastation. Indeed, the growing interest in south-south connections appears from an anti-colonial thinking, away from such binary ideas as centre and periphery. Moreover, as Berghahn illustrates, 'collapsed distances of globalisation and the transnational flows of media and people have resulted in a decentring of the exotic, which […] emanates from multiple localities and is multi-directional in perspective' (Berghahn: 35). This would help to explain why *Senya ichiya monogatari* so often posits the bodies of its Middle-Eastern and African female characters as sites of ambivalent spectacle, eroticism and exoticism. The multi-directional travels of the *1001 Nights* stories, then, enable us to think of these tales as world heritage rooted in folklore loosely located in the Middle East and North Africa, and – in the case of the Japanese interest in them – circulating widely (and wildly) through the imagination.

TEXTURES, MUSIC AND WOMEN AS MARKERS OF DIFFERENCE AND THE HYBRIDISATION OF CULTURE

The travels of the tales, and of its protagonist, Aldin, are emphasised from the start of the film. Aldin's arrival in Baghdad goes together with the suggestion that he comes from the West, more precisely Egypt: he sells medicinal waters from the Nile at the market. Likewise, his skin colour is darker than most of those buying water from him, suggesting an African background, which in turn is stereotypically compounded by his poverty and naivety. But there is a moralistic side to his story, which is emphasised at the end of the film: after travelling the world and becoming wealthy and powerful, Aldin decides to renounce his worldly goods and return to his modest, wandering nature. His North African identity, confirmed in the framing of his story, enables our assertion that this film is the result of a hybridised emancipatory creativity rooted both in African/Middle Eastern and Japanese storytelling practices.

Two original aspects of the *1001 Nights'* storytelling are developed in the Japanese anime and as such allow us to move away from the emphasis on the idea that Tezuka follows or adopts European Orientalist conventions. First, the depiction of women is – both in the Middle Eastern text and in the Japanese adaptation – not *only* or wholly stereotypical. In the original tales, Sheherazade is a storyteller, she emancipates herself from the Shah's destructive attitude towards women. The women in *Senya ichiya monogatari*, although certainly objectified in their depiction, also have space to express themselves. Second, the *1001 Nights'* diverse storytelling devices are not adopted but adapted from the European versions. There is a significant difference between adopting and adapting, as is explored broadly in postcolonial literary theory: adaptation implies an appropriation, a new

ownership of the changes made to the texts (Barry 2006). These two aspects, the representation of women and the palimpsestic adaptation of storytelling devices, inherent to the Middle Eastern understanding of the source texts but wholly absent from the European versions, are used as tools to emphasise the Japanese hybridisation of the transnational life of the texts.

The first non-diegetic indication of this in *Senya ichiya monogatari* – and an agenda of sorts set by Yamamoto and Tezuka at the very beginning of the film – is the juxtaposition of two-dimensional anime with three-dimensional live-action silk carpets in the title sequence. Carpets of course are associated with the Middle East, as Muslim prayer rugs and as expressions of abstract and decorative art. In the European version of *1001 Nights'* myths, the carpet is also the chosen mode of transportation for Aladdin and Jasmine. But in Mushi Pro's version the carpets only appear at the very start of the film. Here, the deep colourful texture of the carpets clashes with the flat and monochrome surface of the animated titles. In this way, the animators 'knowingly play with surface and depth' and the animation engages with the 'politics of the aesthetics of modernism' (Skoller 2013: 226). On the one hand these carpets and the flat monochrome title pages reject realism and set the film firmly in an animated, experimental, artistic context, while on the other hand they explore the hapticity and materiality of the texture, juxtaposed with the surface flatness and the anti-illusionist forms of the narrative.

Paul Wells explores the meaning of fabrics in animation and shows how the unique aesthetic of fabrics on screen recreates a tradition, a story, a narrative through 'associational meanings with common historic dimensions.' The link between fabric and fabrication in animation as such is highlighted here through the combination of textures and patterns of Persian carpets with a 'narrative strategy where materials and textures provide the environment of a story' (Wells 1998: 90–91). In other words, this juxtaposition of textured carpets and animated flatness introduces the viewer to a heightened reference to the Middle East (and it rejects the animated flying carpet in an assertion that it will not adopt that European reading), while it also asserts the Japanese anime identity of the film through its flat, painterly titles. As such, the carpet here is both alien and familiar to the story. It is alien 'because it is displaced from its regular use and context and it is familiar because there is a certain amount of associational security' enfolded within it (Wells 1998: 90–91). In *Senya ichiya monogatari* the carpets elicit a sense of touch and a defamiliarizing comment on the film's interest in adaptation.

Like the carpets in the title sequence, the music in the film is another signifier of hybridisation and emancipation. The soundtrack for *Senya ichiya monogatari* was provided by a short-lived band, The Helpful Soul, led by legendary singer and guitarist Nakahara Junio. At first, the music

recalls 1960s–70s psychedelic bluesy rock from San Francisco, and perhaps also Ennio Morricone's legendary music scores for Spaghetti Westerns. However, the sound is distinctly Japanese, coming from the era of so-called Group Sounds, and incorporating Arab and Asian elements, in order to form a hybrid result that reflects the defamiliarizing process presented by the carpets in the title sequence. The Group Sound is known to blend Japanese rock with American blues (Toru 2015: 10). In the context of this article's focus on the connections between Asia and Africa, it is crucial to note that American-style blues has African roots.

Just as the story of the *1001 Nights* is borrowed and adapted from Arab and African folklore, so too is the psychedelic rock music, based in the blues, adapted from its roots in African music. In his article from 2015, Brickler does an in-depth reading of Hiramoto Akira's manga, *Me and the Devil Blues* (*Ore to akuma no burzu*, 2003). He explores the blues as a genre with a dedicated body of musicians and fans in Japan. He sees AfroAsian cultural products as serving 'a meaningful way of reading opposition against global white supremacy' which he argues 'can be understood as part of a meaningful cultural exchange between peoples of color in a Transpacific space' (Brickler 2015: 14). Brickler describes how the Blues is a matrix: 'something beyond just a musical genre or idiom, and something that might be said to encompass the totality of Black epistemic views and understanding' (Brickler 2015: 46). The layering in *Senya ichiya monogatari* of the carpets with the title sequence and the music by The Helpful Soul therefore helps to highlight the powerful hybridisation of AfroAsian culture, and the adaptation of once-static identity markers into markers indicating cultural change, difference and hybridisation.

The tropes of travel, adventure, seduction and magic are intermingled and produce a narrative that is not fragmented as much as it is episodic in *Senya ichiya monogatari*. This is an important characteristic of the *1001 Nights* and the way they are told by Shehrazad. The framework of *1001 Nights*, in which Shehrazad is the storyteller and the Shah her devoted listener, assures her own and womankind's survival against the Shah's wish to kill all women. The episodic structure of the storytelling, with a non-linear progression, numerous interruptions, anecdotal digressions and delaying tactics, are recognisable narrative devices from the Middle Eastern and North African versions of the stories, whether this is in literature or in film. It is also, as has been widely shown in Arab scholarship, a feminist assertion of the transnational value of episodic storytelling and not only the survival but the emancipation and development of womankind.

The way in which the diversity of women's bodies in *Senya ichiya monogatari* reflects an interest in an opening up of the film's world through transnational travel may be problematic in places, but the depiction of women in

the film is not *only* misogynistic. Milliam, for example, is highly objectified by the filmmakers, but is allowed to express herself through her sexual agency, even if she remains fairly passive, and indeed dies early on. Jalis – Milliam and Aldin's daughter – likewise sensitively asserts herself through sexuality by choosing her own loyal lover over endless wealth. Among the secondary characters, much more agency is afforded to women. They are depicted as stronger and more independent than Milliam or Jalis, freely lustful and eager to satisfy their own sexual desires as well as their political and vengeful ambitions. For example, one of *1001 Nights'* most famous stories, 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves', is adapted and incorporated into Aldin's narrative, when he meets Kamahakim, the Japanese Ali Baba. Kamahakim's daughter, Madia, leads the forty thieves. Madia is mostly depicted naked or with at least one breast on display, and is violently raped early on in the film, undermining her potential as a feminist heroine. However, Madia's rape-revenge storyline demonstrates the Mushi Pro team's awareness of the rise of exploitation cinema in Japan in this period, and presages an important cycle of filmmaking featuring similarly strong female characters including *Shirayuki-hime* (*Lady Snowblood*, dir. Fujita Toshio, 1973) and *Josh Nana-maru-ichi Gō: Sasori* (*Female Prisoner 701: Scorpion*, dir. Itō Shunya, 1972). Within such a rape-revenge narrativisation of Madia we see a different form of agency; she is a skilful master of self-defence and attacks her enemies with her bow and arrows, while she gets her revenge when she kills her assailant. She travels the world with Aldin, not on a magic carpet but on a magical horse and leaves him when he is seduced by sirens. Madia refuses victimhood – whether imposed on her by her father, a thief or her lover – and instead her agency as a survivor confirms the complex characterisation of the women in this film.

This careful decoding of the emancipatory nature of the representation of carpets, music and women in the world of *1001 Nights* allows us to rethink the claims made in the past that Tezuka's manga and anime films, when depicting Black protagonists, are racist (Tezuka Productions and Dark Horse Comics, n.d.: 7). This is largely due to posthumous protest against Tezuka's cartoony drawings of Africans (Schodt 2007: 126–128. Indeed, Frederik Schodt ascribes the conventions for representing Black people in manga to artistic practices set forth by Tezuka. Schodt describes these practices as 'heavily caricatured, with rounded faces, fat bodies, big eyes, and thick lips' (Schodt 1996: 63–64). However, Tezuka's narratives frequently interrogate cases of interracial conflict, where hybridised characters take extensive journeys in order to learn to see their own existence as part of a much bigger whole, in the service of a humanist philosophy. Tezuka's adaptation of *1001 Nights*, demonstrates a layering of influences that work to mitigate such claims about problematic or Orientalist

representation in *Senya ichiya monogatari*. The film weaves together a complex set of inspirations that reveal the way Japan occupied a central nexus of global cultural flows from around the world in the 1960s and '70s. The ambivalence and complexity of representation of women in *Senya ichiya monogatari* illustrates the way this film works to create a new category of adult animation by specifically drawing upon diverse global (and often non-white) traditions as source materials, coalescing the adult within the transnational.

CONCLUSION

Whereas the surface stereotypes and the sexual, erotic content of *Senya ichiya monogatari* point to an Orientalist reading of the *1001 Nights* and their historical and cultural context, the non-diegetic juxtaposition of Persian carpets and African-American music in this Japanese anime enable us to read an emancipatory thrust into *Senya ichiya monogatari*. Despite beginning from translations of *1001 Nights* that follow from the European tradition of adaptation, Tezuka's team uses layering to subvert, exaggerate and deny the veracity of that starting point. Instead, the film highlights an AfroAsian defamiliarization of presumptions of knowledge and of culture that works against Orientalism. Tezuka adapts the *1001 Nights* into an AfroAsian version that excludes the West as a benchmark.

The film engages in the layering of folk-cultural storytelling techniques and hybridises representations of women and ethnic diversities. In doing so, the filmmakers enable us to read *Senya ichiya monogatari* as a text of AfroAsian historical synthesis. As Homi Bhabha has shown, 'cultural translation decentralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation within minority positions' (Bhabha 1994: 327). By recentring this discussion around Japanese animation's adaptation of Middle-Eastern and African folklore, we have shown how local Japanese genres of exploitation cinema work in tension with layered and complex adaptation strategies that borrow from around the world to create a new AfroAsian adult animated version of *1001 Nights*.

NOTE

1 The geographical origin of the *1001 Nights* is a story unto itself, but by and large scholars agree that they originate in what is now known as the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) and South West Asia.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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