

# White Sheiks. Orientalism in England, America, and Italy

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## ABSTRACT

The oral presentation I would like to give at the 6th World Conference on Social Studies that will be held in June 20-22, 2024, in Vienna, is meant to analyze the extraordinary popularity that the figure of the white sheik has had in both European and American culture. My starting point will be a novel, *The Sheik*, written by Edith Hull and published in England in 1919. This novel generated a highly contagious “sheik fever,” considering that the eponymous film (1921), turning the Italian Rodolfo Valentino into a global star, and countless others produced both in America and in Europe (from the 20’s to the 90’s) are based on this novel. Because of this exceptional proliferation of “white sheiks” in both continents, I believe it is important to examine and compare their significance and the different forms of Orientalism they express, taking into account the most prominent theoretical works on Western Orientalism. This topic provides the occasion for the students to comprehend the interconnectedness of cultures and their dialogic nature. Furthermore, although I have already conducted a lot of research on this subject, I would like to propose it as the content of a course taught in collaboration with colleagues from the Italian, the English, and the American Studies departments.

**Keywords:** Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinarity, Cinema Studies, Literature, History