New Media Travel Writing and the Renegotiation of Postcolonial Discourses

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Representations of the ‘Middle East’ on Travel Blogs

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the potential of travel blogs, as a form of popular new media travel writing, to renegotiate conventional discourses about the ‘Middle East’. By conducting a critical discourse analysis on six travel blogs authored by female writers from both the US and the ‘Middle East’, this thesis examines representational practices found in travel narratives, discloses their discursive tendencies, and interprets those in a sociocultural context. Thereby, the analysis draws on a twofold theoretical approach. Postcolonial theory, on the one hand, allows to relate the findings of the analysis critically to the colonial heritage that is inseparable from the genre of travel writing and that informs the discourse about the Oriental ‘other’. Affordance theory, on the other hand, makes it possible to examine how blogging can be seen as a tool that allows disrupting common practices of ‘othering’ in travel writing. The analysis shows that travel blogging has transformative potential and can, mainly through the affordances of self-representation and innovative expression, challenge long-established discourses about the ‘Middle East’. Limiting factors of this potential are mostly arising from neo-imperialistic structures that carry traces of the colonial past. Essentially, the results of this thesis imply that the genre of travel writing is evolving in new media and that it expands the discursive framework of media representations, making it a promising site for future research seeking to explore transcultural encounters and the societal implications of such.

Keywords: travel blogs, travel writing, new media, Middle East, postcolonialism, affordances, critical discourse analysis, Fairclough, media representations
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“So different and so misunderstood, every time I head to the Middle East, I get more curious and discover new things, and I learn that everything I thought I knew was wrong.” (Young Adventuress, 2013a)
1 Introduction

This thesis investigates what role new media\textsuperscript{1} travel writing can play for the renegotiation of long-established representational discourses about cultural ‘others’. With the ubiquity of social media in contemporary society, our travel practices, the way we read about and share travel experiences, has fundamentally changed. When scrolling through social media feeds, like those of Facebook and Instagram, we are usually confronted with a multitude of travel-related posts. Additionally, there are online platforms where people can rate, review, and discuss travel-related information and experiences, or compose blog entries that are accessible to the public. All this content aggregates into a mass of user-generated travel writing that differs from travel accounts in traditional media, such as in magazines, tourism brochures, or on TV. In social media, travel accounts are rarely written by professional travel journalists; instead, the genre is facing an explosion of different voices. Amateur writers and photographers, bloggers, and influencers are taking the reins of representation and contribute to shaping the way we understand foreign countries, peoples, and cultures.

In the genre of travel writing, representations are, and always have been, an inherent and constituting feature. After all, travel writing is about representing the encounter with the unfamiliar and foreign, the so-called ‘other’. The term emerges from the binary opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’, a dichotomy that draws on racial difference in the (cultural, political, social, and economic) relationship between so-called ‘First/Western’ and ‘Third/Eastern’ worlds. For a long time, travel writing has been authored by ‘Western’ writers telling ‘Western’ audiences about the rest of the world. Representations of ‘others’ are hence often problematic as they tend to perpetuate discourses in which the ‘other’ is depicted as inferior to a default ‘West’. Therefore, the genre of travel writing demands a critical perspective, such as that provided by postcolonial studies which is concerned with examining representations of ‘others’

\textsuperscript{1} ‘New media’ is a relative term that distinguishes traditional mass media from ‘newer’ forms of communication using digital technologies. Forms of new media are highly interactive and incorporate two-way communication (Logan, 2010).
critically, disclosing their links to cultural practices of the colonial past and investigating its contemporary effects. In accordance with this academic perspective, travel writing can be seen as “an institutional site where meaning is created and where a collective version of the ‘Other/We’ is negotiated, contested and constantly redefined” (Fürsich & Kavoori, 2014, p. 21). This makes the genre a crucial site to study the ideological implications of transcultural encounters and the manifestation of discourses about the ‘other’.

Looking at present political and public debates in Europe and the US, one could argue that the so-called ‘Middle East’ appears as the definite ‘other’ of contemporary society. Ever since the terror attacks of 9/11 in 2001, a highly negative news discourse clings to the complex and not clearly definable region. In news media, the ‘Middle East’ is often framed as being “incompatible with modernity, human rights, and democracy, as a home for backwardness and violence, and as the battlefield for the ‘war on terror’” (Benkhedda, 2016, p. 42). However, this way of perceiving the region reaches further back than two decades. According to postcolonial critics, such as Edward Said (1978 | 2003), the region has long been subjected to practices of ‘othering’ enacted by the ‘West’. Particularly, colonial representations from the 19th and 20th century shaped the image of the ‘Middle East’ as Europe’s cultural antagonist and Oriental ‘other’.

In a world that often appears inhospitable towards ‘difference’ and where xenophobic and Islamophobic voices become louder, it is timely and crucial to examine the potential of popular media to counter conventional discourses. For doing so, travel writing in new media is a promising field of research. Studies show that not only prospective travelers, but also people who are generally seeking information about foreign places, are likely to consult user-generated travel accounts online (Raman & Choudary, 2014). A particularly popular information source are personal travel blogs. As travel blogs, like other social media platforms, overcome the traditional role of a gatekeeper, they allow for more discursive voices to be heard, voices that can contribute to more nuanced and diverse representations and that can contest long-established ‘Western’-centric discourses about the ‘other’.

Aiming to contribute to the ongoing debate within media and communication studies regarding the potential of media representations to shape the way people understand the world, their place in it, and the place of ‘others’, I want to investigate the discursive potential of travel blogs as a form of new media travel writing to counter
normative representations of the ‘Middle East’. Therefore, I address the following research questions:

*In what ways does travel writing on personal blogs renegotiate dominant discourses about the ‘Middle East’?*

➢ To what extent do representations on travel blogs differ from those in previous forms of travel writing where the ‘Middle East’ is predominantly framed as Oriental ‘other’ to the ‘West’?
➢ To what extent does blogging as a new form of travel writing allow writers to disrupt common practices of representing the ‘other’?

Drawing on theoretical notions of affordance theory and postcolonial studies, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of six travel blogs, focusing on detecting discursive practices and interpreting their implications in a larger sociocultural context. My aim is to take an inclusive, intersectional approach to the material. As travel writing has historically been a predominantly ‘Western’ and male enterprise, I decided to focus on travel blogs authored by female writers of different nationalities, including bloggers who hail from or reside in the ‘Middle East’. The disposition of my study is as follows: chapter two contextualizes my study and sets it up historically. It comprises an introduction to the Orientalist discourse, an overview of the evolution of ‘Western’ travel writing, and a summary of stereotypical representations the ‘Middle East’ faces in the genre. In chapter three, I introduce relevant academic research that has critically dealt with representational practices in travel writing, outlining approaches stemming from postcolonial studies and discussing how travel writing has entered the research field of media and communication studies. Thereafter, I present my analytical framework comprising theoretical considerations from affordance theory and postcolonial studies in chapter four. In chapter five, I provide insight into my research strategy, the methodological approach of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, the sampling process, and the limitations of my study. After discussing ethical considerations in chapter six, I dedicate chapter seven and eight to the analysis, the discussion of results, and concluding remarks. In these chapters, I want to argue that travel blogs – mainly through their affordances to self-represent and express the story of travel in new, creative ways – have the potential to contest long-established discourses about the ‘Middle East’, but also that this potential is limited by factors that underlie the global structures of our neo-imperial world order.
2 Background

2.1 The Orientalist discourse

The process of ‘othering’ is crucial to understand the discourses emerging from representations in travel writing. The media and communication scholar Ezz El Din (2016, p. 1) aptly explains ‘othering’ as “an umbrella concept that in general terms refers to the discursive process of constructing and positioning the Self and the Other into separate identities of an ‘us’ and a ‘them.’” In my study, the identities of interest are these of the ‘Western’ worlds on the one side, and the ‘Middle East’ on the other, or, as the literary scholar and postcolonial theorist Edward Said puts it, the ‘Occident’ and the ‘Orient’. Said explains the interplay between the two identities in his work Orientalism (1978 | 2003):

“[T]he Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either […] as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (p. 4f.).

Said describes the ‘Orient’ as a European invention that has helped to define the ‘West’ as “its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (p. 2). According to Said, it has always been Europe’s “cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (p. 1). The ‘Western’ representations of the ‘Middle East’ manifest in a discourse that Said came to call Orientalism. As a discourse, Orientalism is a way of making sense, of talking about and understanding the world. It draws on colonial binaries that divide the world into two unequal and hierarchically positioned entities (Figure 1).

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2 The terms ‘West’ and ‘Western world’ generally refer to the region and culture of Europe and the Americas, but is also associated with countries whose histories are marked by European immigration, such as Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and (in part) South Africa (ScienceDaily, n.d.).

3 According to the Middle East Policy Council (n.d.), the term ‘Middle East’ was coined at the end of the 19th century by the British foreign service and was originally used to distinguish the area east of the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire and west of India. Similar terms are ‘Orient’ and ‘Near East’. Today, ‘Middle East’ is more widely used both inside and outside the region. However, it is a loose term that has no clear definition of the region it encompasses. It simplifies intercontinental lands and supports a Eurocentric categorization of the world. For a lack of better terms and because it is one of the main concerns of my study to underline persisting Western-centric representations, I use the terms ‘Middle East’ and ‘West’ in apostrophes, recognizing their limitations and inherent bias.
Figure 1: Colonial binaries listed by postcolonial scholar Nayar (2010, p. 199)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White (Euro-American)</th>
<th>Non-white (Asian, also Middle East)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilized</td>
<td>Barbaric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks reform &amp; advancement</td>
<td>Promotes revivalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward-looking</td>
<td>Backward-looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-women</td>
<td>Anti-women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for individual</td>
<td>Communitarian, anti-individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender of Rights</td>
<td>Violator of Rights</td>
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</tbody>
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It is in this discourse, where the relationship of power, domination, and hegemony between the two entities manifests, and it is the reason why “the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (p. 3). As a mode of re-presentation⁴, travel writing has played a crucial role in defining and perpetuating this discourse.

2.2 The Oriental ‘other’ during the evolution of ‘Western’ travel writing

Travel writing can be understood as first-person nonfictional prose about a journey undertaken by an identifiable author that bears “witness to encounters of peoples and cultures across historical, social, geographical, and ethnic divides” (Clarke, 2018, p. 1). Over the centuries, travel writing has taken different forms, whereby its style, purpose, and use of technology has evolved substantially. The representation of the Oriental ‘other’, however, has changed less significantly.

⁴ Representations are never true depictions of reality. As Said explains, language is a “highly organized and encoded system, which employs many devices to express, indicate, exchange messages and information, represent, and so forth. In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation” (p. 21).
2.2.1 Colonial travel writing

Writing and traveling have long been closely connected. My contextualization starts with the period of colonialism, as it was during that time when the range of representations on the ‘Middle East’ expanded enormously (Said, 2003, p. 22). Since the Renaissance, and particularly in the 19th and early 20th century, travel writing has been strongly influenced by European colonialism and imperialism (Clarke, 2018, p. 1). Colonial travel writing manifested in the form of travel books, memoirs, diaries, personal journals, letters, and ships’ logs, all of which functioned to capture the European travelers’ narratives of “adventure, exploration, journey, and escape” (Blanton, 2002, p. 2). British and French authors produced most of the travel writing on the ‘Middle East’ as they were the two colonial powers that dominated the region from the early 19th century up until the end of World War II.

This large body of colonial travel writing, which Said calls Orientalist, builds upon and reinforces long-established discourses about the ‘Middle East’, which had “since antiquity [been] a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences” (Said, 2003, p. 1). There were several recurring representations that drew on the most apparent differences between ‘Western’ and Oriental culture and constructed stereotypes. To clarify, the process of stereotyping means to reduce images and ideas to a simple and manageable form, “rather than simple ignorance or lack of ‘real’ knowledge, it is a method of processing information” (Loomba, 2015, p. 74). Stereotypes about today’s ‘Middle East’ that were dominant in colonial

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5 Some of the early well-known travel narratives include Greek travelers’ tales, such as Homer’s Odyssey (from the end of the 8th century) and explorers’ stories from the late Middle Ages, such as John Mandeville’s Travels (1356) and Christopher Columbus’ (1493) letters to the Spanish king.

6 Colonialism and imperialism are often used interchangeably. Following a more nuanced understanding by postcolonial critic Nayar (2010, p. 1f.), colonialism is the process of “violent appropriation and sustained exploitation of native races and spaces by European cultures” settling in Asian, African, South American, Canadian, and Australian spaces. Imperialism, then, means the system of economic, political, or military domination and exploitation, whereby nations, without any actual settlement, are governed through a remote control (p. 2).

7 Some well-known narratives have been authored by Richard Burton (Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah, 1856), Anne Noel King Blunt (A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race, 1879), Charles Montagu Doughty (Arabia Deserta, 1888), Francois-Rene Chateaubriand (Itineraire de Paris a Jerusalem, et de Jerusalem a Paris, 1810-11), Gerard de Nerval (Voyage en Orient, 1867), and Gustave Flaubert (Voyage en Egypte, 1849).
travel writing are manifold and concern the people, their cultural and religious practices, and the geographical landscapes. One such example is the depiction of the Oriental woman and man. The colonial gaze supported a conception of veiled Oriental women as being suppressed and in need of the manly, courteous European to rescue her from the Oriental man, who, on the other hand, was either depicted as lusty villain who imprisoned his women in secluded parts of the house (harems) or effeminized and portrayed as homosexual (Hoodfar, 1994, p. 8; Loomba, 2015, p. 154). The veil became a signifier of the general oppression of Muslim women, which, in turn, supported the prominent idea of backwardness and primitiveness of Muslim societies found in colonial discourse (Ahmed, 1992, p. 152).

Stereotypes also existed in narratives about landscapes, most prominently about the mystical ‘Middle Eastern’ desert, featuring “stories of the conquest of the void, or wilderness, as well as tales of risk which position the individual explorer in front of a hostile nature” (Melman, 2002, p. 114). A stereotype emerging within these desert narratives is that of the Bedouin. Bedouins, a grouping of Arabic-speaking nomadic peoples of the ‘Middle Eastern’ deserts, have been framed as the most ‘authentic’ people in the ‘Middle East’, the “purity of the Bedouin […] was the result of the hardship in his life and his isolation from the outside world” (Melman, 2002, p. 116). Some of these stereotypical representations remained stronger over time than others, as later travel writing shows.

2.2.2 Industrialized travel publishing

During the 20th century, traveling became a popular leisure activity, resulting in a boom of the tourism industry, which since developed into one of the world’s largest, and fastest growing industry sectors (Statista, 2018). The advent of mass tourism and the proliferation of mass media technologies brought forth a wide range of new forms of travel writing, including general and specialist travel magazines, travel channels and special TV programs, radio shows, tourism brochures, etc. With the spread of travel writing across mass media, the genre developed from being mostly self-published (as in the 19th century and before) into being part of a growing tourism and advertising industry.
Instead of speaking of ‘travel writing’, the industrialized form of travel narratives is often referred to as ‘travel journalism’ \(^8\) (Creech, 2018, p. 157).

As one study on ‘Western’ travel journalism shows, the ‘Middle East’ continues to be represented as “other and exotic, as well as ancient and traditional, […] [using] representational strategies that have their origins in nineteenth-century European travel writing” (Cocking, 2009, p. 59). Thus, common representations of the ‘Middle Eastern’ ‘other’ focus on “the people, principally, the Bedouin, and the landscape, principally, the desert” (p. 59). Particularly in the commercial tourism industry, ‘otherness’ plays a crucial role. There, difference and novelty work as pull factors that industry-based information sources draw on. When competing for audience attention, tourism sources strive to highlight hyper-real depictions, resulting in a “spectacle of difference […] that further perpetuates the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide” (Yoo & Buzinde, 2011, p. 231). Accordingly, the tourism industry has been found to promote the ‘Middle East’ through images of “backwardness, oppression and inferiority (veils, camels, […] tribal peoples)” (Al Mahadin & Burns, 2007, p. 138), stereotypes that emphasize the exoticness of the region (when compared to the ‘Western’ worlds) which are meant to work to attract and fascinate audiences. In summary, it can be said that travel publishing, both in mass media and advertisement, shows tendencies to perpetuate stereotypes of the Orientalist discourse.

### 2.2.3 Postcolonial travel writing

In the 1980s, an important counter-development began to take place, influencing travel writing and academic thought on it up until today. The “tone, style, and content of mainstream travel writing was shifting” (Clarke, 2018, p. 3f.); it became more subjective and adopted a reflective attitude: “narratives of journeys into places actively struggling with the legacies of colonialism and imperialism were notable for the way such processes became a key theme of the journey itself” (p. 4). A sizable body of travel writing had emerged that explored the ‘postcolonial condition’ of formerly colonized places critically.

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\(^8\) To avoid a limited understanding of travel narratives as a product of a publishing industry, I do not adopt the term ‘travel journalism’ but instead use ‘travel writing’ when referring to narratives on travel blogs.
This type of travel writing became recognized as *postcolonial travel writing*, which is different to its predecessors as it actively seeks to “reflect on and critique the history of colonialism and its aftermath” (Clarke, 2018, p. 4). However, the postcoloniality of travel writing has been questioned critically. In postcolonial studies, there has been an ongoing debate concerning the question if travel text can ever be truly *postcolonial* and embrace revisionist, subversive narratives or if that is an oxymoron meaning that the genre will always be irremediably bound to its colonial heritage (Pratt, 2018, p. 225).

Indisputably, there have always been critical, oppositional perspectives throughout the history of travel writing, but more than ever before “socially and politically engaged travelers have used their accounts as vehicles to critique the persistence of colonialism and imperialism” in the late 20th and 21st century (Clarke, 2018, p. 1). This development has accelerated with the advent of new media. With the digital revolution in the 1980s and the subsequent dawn of social media from the mid-2000s, travel writing has spread across the internet and changed fundamentally. Possibilities of blogging, photo-sharing, tweeting, reviewing, and rating on online platforms have resulted in a “resurgence in journaling of travel adventures and self publication” (Pudliner, 2007, p. 46), similar to early travel accounts of the 19th century. However, there is a crucial difference regarding the question of authority over representations. While the authors of colonial travel writing were, generally, “renowned individuals whose travel narratives were usually sanctioned by the state” and the writing hence exclusive and elitist, new media travel writing, such as travel blogging, is, for the most part, participatory and democratized (Azariah, 2017, p. 2). The aim of my analysis will therefore be to look at how the affordances of new media alter the genre of travel writing and renegotiate discourses concerning the ‘Middle East’.

### 3 Literature Review

Over the last three decades, postcolonial travel writing has not only developed as a publishing commodity but also as a field of academic inquiry. For the critical investigation of travel writing, the postcolonial turn in academia is significant. It has, however, only found relatively recent adoption in media and communication studies.
3.1 A critical approach to travel writing: postcolonial⁹ studies

The term ‘postcolonialism’ describes a critical mode of reading that negotiates with the colonial history and neocolonial present of the formerly colonized peoples; it “invokes ideas of social justice, emancipation and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation” (Nayar, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, postcolonialism “emphasizes the formerly colonized subject’s ‘agency’ – defined as the ability to affect her/his present conditions and future prospects – in the face of continuing oppression” (p. 4). Early postcolonial scholars include Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. Although the term ‘postcolonial’ has repeatedly been referred to as being redundant and inadequate¹⁰, postcolonial studies remain strong. Clarke (2018, p. 10) suggests that this is partly because the field has intersected fruitfully with studies on travel writing.

As the literary scholars Hulme and Youngs (2002, p. 8) point out, Said’s “Orientalism was the first work of contemporary criticism to take travel writing as a major part of its corpus, seeing it as a body of work which offered particular insight into the operation of colonial discourses.” With the emergence of postcolonial thought on travel writing, the genre attracted increasing attention of scholars, especially those in literary studies. In a genealogy of the field, Clarke (2018, p. 3) elaborates that postcolonial literary studies on travel writing expanded rapidly after the publication of The Empire Writes Back in 1989, in which culture and postcolonial scholars Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin express concern for marginalized authors and texts, and challenge travel writing’s role in (post-)colonial cultures. Some foundational texts that followed in the early 1990s include Mary Louise Pratt’s Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992), David Spurr’s The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration (1993), and Ali Behdad’s

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⁹ The ‘post’ in postcolonial has two meanings; it refers both to the historical period after formal colonialization, starting in the late 1970s, and indicates the theoretical orientation of academic inquiry which began in the same period. As a theory and critique, postcolonialism emerged from within anti-colonial activist movements in Africa, South America, and Asia. Intellectuals, such as Gandhi, Fanon, Césaire, and Cabral, interrogated colonial practices and generated ideas that merged into the postcolonial school of thought.

¹⁰ Scholars underline that although the era of colonialism is over, the inequities of colonial rule have not been fully erased. Thus, the term ‘postcolonial’ is applicable mainly temporally, not ideologically. As Loomba (2015, p. 38) asserts, postcolonialism describes a process of disengagement from the colonial syndrome and is by no means complete.
Belated Travellers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution (1994). These scholars, working in the wake of Orientalism, questioned the relationship between representations found in colonial and contemporary travel writing and the construction of power, hegemony, and identity formation.

3.2 Travel writing in media and communication studies

3.2.1 Early steps in the field

In contemporary research, travel writing has become subject of several academic disciplines apart from literary studies, including media and communication studies, where the genre had long been overlooked. With the significant role that the travel and tourism industry plays in contemporary society and the related popularity of travel writing, this reluctance has slowly diminished during the last decade, as the communication scholars Hanusch and Fürsich (2014) explain. According to their observations, existing research on travel writing within media and communication studies concerns four primary topics: the representation of the ‘other’, the market and consumer orientation of travel writing, its ethics, and motivational aspects of travel writing (p. 9ff.). Hanusch and Fürsich emphasize that the representation of the ‘other’ is an inherent quality and main purpose of travel writing, stressing the importance of intensified research on the topic. Building upon previous studies, this is the field of research my study is aiming to contribute to.

An early influential work in the field has been provided by the communication scholars Fürsich and Kavoori (2001), who established a critical framework for the study of travel writing that has been widely adopted. Fürsich and Kavoori highlight the capacity of travel writing to build upon, shape, and perpetuate people’s collective imagination of different parts of the world. The framework they suggest for the critical investigation of travel writing includes three interrelated perspectives: ‘Issues of Periodization’, ‘Power and Identity’, and ‘Experience and Phenomenology’. The second of these perspectives

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11 Within media and communication studies, travel writing is mainly understood in its industrialized form, as a publishing commodity that manifests in different media formats. As such, it tends to be classified as ‘soft’ journalism that lacks critical distance and stands in close relation to the genre of advertisement. The research interest in media representations has long been reserved for ‘hard’ journalism, such as political or foreign news (Cocking, 2009).
concerns the representational practices that emerge in the process of ‘othering’. According to them, the investigation of relations of power and identity in travel writing means, on the one hand, to look at cultural/media imperialism, and on the other hand, to look at ideology and identity formation.

Travel writing as an expression of cultural/media imperialism perpetuates powerful discourses of tourism as a form of new imperialism constructed by ‘Western’ countries (p. 160). In this perspective, tourism reinforces existing economic and political inequalities by feeding into the structures of dependency and underdevelopment that underlie the global capitalist world order. In other words, the tourism industry performs economic functions for rich tourism-generating super powers and provides little control for developing countries. When considering the ideological aspects of this relationship of domination and dependency between the ‘Western’ worlds and those who are controlled by them, tourism becomes a form of neo-imperialism, and travel writing a form of cultural imperialism that ‘produces’ and frames parts of the world for ‘Western’ audiences: “Whereas in the past, imperialism was about controlling the ‘native’ by colonizing her/him territorially, now imperialism is more about subjugating the ‘native’ by colonizing her/him discursively” (Shome, 1996, p. 42).

As for travel writing’s relation to ideology and identity, Fürsich and Kavoori argue that the genre is a key site of ideological formation in the way that it functions to construct identities of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ by contrasting practices (p. 163). To investigate travel writing from this perspective of power and ideology, the authors draw upon postcolonial thought and Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse. The theory of discourse by the French philosopher Foucault, as well as other discourse analysis approaches, are well-established analytical tools to investigate representational practices in media. As a form of textual analysis, discourse analysis “focuses on the ways in which media texts support or subvert such aspects of the world as the unequal distribution of power in society, or the legitimisation or subversion of one presentation of the world […] while excluding others” (Bainbridge, 2011, p. 236). Foucault’s approach specifically focusses on the relationship between power and knowledge. In his understanding, power is dispersed and pervasive, it is exercised through regimes of knowledge and diffused in discourse. For Foucault, discourse is the institutionalized way of speaking or writing
about reality, the way of organizing knowledge, that structures the collective understanding of the world (Foucault, 1991; 1998).

Following Fürsich and Kavoori’s work, scholars have continued emphasizing and investigating the significant role that travel writing plays in shaping discourses about places, cultures, and people (e.g., Hanusch & Fürsich, 2014; Edwards & Graulund, 2011; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Cocking, 2009). Often, such studies draw on the analytical framework of postcolonialism (e.g., Johnston, 2018; Simmons, 2004; Wels, 2004; Akama, 2004; Roy, 2011) and analyze travel writing with the help of quantitative content analyses (e.g., Volo, 2010; Tse & Zhang, 2013) or qualitative discourse analyses (e.g., Al Mahadin & Burns, 2007; Simmons, 2004; Benkhedda, 2016; Bosangit, et al., 2012).

### 3.2.2 New media research on travel blogs

Travel blogs have proved to be a particularly popular form of travel writing in new media, as several scholars attest (e.g., Duffy, 2017; Azariah, 2017; Lee & Gretzel, 2014; Volo, 2010), which makes it a fertile field of research. In the anthology *Tourism, Travel, and Blogging: A discursive analysis of online travel narratives* (2017), communication scholar Azariah examines travel blogs as a form of self-representation and place for the negotiation of discourses of travel and tourism. According to Azariah (2017), bloggers tend to present themselves as travelers, not tourists, which increases their level of perceived authenticity and prevents connotations with the tourism industry, hence adding to their overall credibility. However, as she argues, tourism discourses persist in travel writing on blogs and articulate in multiple ways (indicative are, for example, commercially motivated trips and the promotion of places/experiences). Azariah (2017, p. 160) concludes that there is no clear distinction between travel and tourism as “[t]he discourses of travel and tourism are interrelated, and each travel blog negotiates the inherent tensions between these discourses differently.”

Inspired by Azariah’s and other media and tourism scholars’ (Volo, 2010; Bosangit, et al., 2009; Lee & Gretzel, 2014) definition of travel blogs, I lay down the following understanding of the term: a blog (short for weblog) can be defined as online diary consisting of regularly updated, reverse-chronological text-based posts that can be accompanied by multimedia content. Blogs are publicized for anyone to view online and
leave comments. Travel blogs are then blogs dealing with travel-related information. Tourism scholar Volo (2010, p. 298) situates travel blogs in three possible venues: personal blogs, travel community blogs, and tourism destination website blogs, whereby my study focuses on personal blogs.

The communication scholar Duffy (2017) conducted a study specifically focusing on the representational practices in travel blogs. In his multi-modal critical discourse analysis, he adopts a similar perspective as suggested by Fürsic and Kavoori: he investigates persisting and redefined power relations in travel writing on blogs by looking at how foreign local people are represented. As an analytical framework, he introduces the mobility/mooring paradigm. He proposes that “bloggers both ‘moor’ their interactions with foreign locals in existing archetypes by representing them in stereotypical or generic terms; and represent them in ‘mobile’ terms, as individuals whose meaning is negotiable rather than fixed” (p. 444). By suggesting that travel bloggers ‘moor’ their interactions, Duffy accounts for the fact that even in a, historically spoken, post-colonial era, travel writing functions as an ‘effective alibi’ for perpetuating superior attitudes towards ‘others’. On the other side, as he notes, travel blogs have greater potential and freedom than travel journalism in mainstream media to contest dominant discourses. They offer a locus for self-reflection and negotiation of peoples’ identity (p. 444). As a result of his study, Duffy found that “bloggers mostly report local people in positive terms, that these inhabitants written about […] are mostly reported in ‘mobile’ terms that allows for re-negotiation of their identity through interaction” (p. 444). He concludes that “[t]ravel blogs, like other media representations, can either perpetuate a system or challenge it” (p. 447). This statement functions as both underlying assumption and key concern of the discussion of my study.

4 Analytical Framework

4.1 Affordance theory

New media technologies are constantly transforming and re-defining people’s practices of communication, media production, and media consumption. Inevitably, their transformational nature also has a significant impact on travel practices. Therefore, I
deploy an analytical framework that allows me to consider the specificities of new media when analyzing the discursive potential of blog narratives, and to relate these specificities to the findings of my study. Affordance theory is a helpful tool to do so.

4.1.1 Purpose and use

New media offers a range of new possibilities for goal-oriented actions of diverse user groups (Hafezieh & Eshraghian, 2017, p. 3155). These possibilities can be explained by the notion of affordances. Originally founded in ecological psychology, psychologist Gibson (1966) used the term to explain how actors perceive the properties of objects in the environment to perform actions. Affordances are inherent in objects, but are also relational to actors: they must be perceived to produce or afford the actor her/his intended actions (Hafezieh & Eshraghian, 2017, p. 3156).

Affordance theory is a popular theoretical lens for studying media technologies. Its use in new media studies focuses on “identifying technical affordances, perception and actualisations of these affordances, or the social and organisational implications of such affordances” (Hafezieh & Eshraghian, 2017, p. 3155). As my study investigates the question of how blogs, as a part of new media technology, can afford to renegotiate common representations of the ‘Middle East’, there are three particularly interesting aspects to consider: possible affordances, their actualization through the blogger, and subsequent social implications. In other words, my analysis draws on theoretical notions of affordance theory to understand and explain the transformative potential of travel writing on blogs by looking at what affordances blogs might provide, how the respective bloggers make use of them, and what that actualization or non-actualization of affordances means in relation to the research questions.

As the Information System scholars Volkoff and Strong (2017) explain, there are several principles that must be considered when using affordance theory in research. Adopted for my research on blogs, these suggest that

- affordances arise from the actor/blog relation, and are not an independent feature of the blog itself,
• an affordance and its actualization must be distinguished: while blog affordances relate to potential actions, actualization relates to an individual actor and her/his specific use of a blog,
• a blog can have several, interrelated affordances, and
• actors actualize affordances in a social context, i.e. group or cultural norms can affect affordance actualization.

4.1.2 Affordances of (travel) blogs

To pay attention to the (non-)actualization of affordances and their social implications in the analysis, I have identified three core affordances that are important in relation to my research problem. Firstly, blogs democratize the authorship of travel writing. Blogging platforms, such as WordPress or TravelBlog, are usable at no or low cost and afford anyone, who has access to the internet and the necessary technical and linguistic skills, “to capture their travel experiences in words and images and share these with a large and diverse online audience” (Azariah, 2017, p. 1f.). The authority of representation is shifting from professional journalists to, for example, citizen journalists, activists, or amateur writers. It is this democratizing potential of new media that is particularly relevant to my study; the affordance to give voice to potentially anyone, i.e. to empower marginalized groups of people and provide the possibility for self-representation, is a promising factor when considering the renegotiation of discourses which have traditionally been constructed by ‘Western’, often male, writers.

Secondly, blogging platforms afford users uncensored, non-institutional spaces of expression free from constraints of the commercial tourism and publishing industry (Pratt, 2018, p. 227). With a dissociation from commercial influences, travel blogging is a promising departure from mass media narratives: it can sustain a reflective tone, question stereotypes, refer to positive and negative experiences, draw attention to places outside standard itineraries, and create more complex visions of places than commercial travel accounts (Volo, 2010; Creech, 2018). Thus, blogging can be said to afford to expand the discursive framework of media representations.

Thirdly, blogging platforms afford freedom of creative expression. Within an unlimited space, authors of travel narratives have the possibility to create travel accounts
enriched by vivid imagery, extensive and detailed descriptions, links to further readings, and additional (audio)visual material. Moreover, blog posts do not have to be limited to the representation of travel experiences; they can also report on political issues, reflect on cultural questions, serve to negotiate identities, etc. This affordance is significant to consider as “creative acts reveal possible critical and ethical engagements with the world despite one’s implication in the system of exchange, historical difference, and domination that surround travel and travel journalism” (Creech, 2018, p. 168).

The actualization of these affordances and their social implications, however, require a more nuanced assessment, which is part of my analysis. Essentially, new media technologies appear to expand the discursive and imaginative work of media representations. However, the potential of the genre of travel writing to do so also has been debated and must be looked at from a different theoretical perspective.

4.2 Postcolonial theory

Concerns over representations of cultural ‘others’ in travel writing provide a rich ground for postcolonial critique (Creech, 2018, p. 157). Postcolonial critique allows to make connections between the past and the politics of the present and to focus on “forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world” (Young, 2016, p. 11). As my research addresses the question to what extent representations in travel blogs differ from stereotypical depictions of the Oriental ‘other’ in predecessors of the genre and what that means for the renegotiation of discourses in contemporary society, selected theoretical notions from the interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies constitute an important part of my analytical framework. Moreover, postcolonial critique recognizes the importance of the intersection of race, gender, nationalism, and class that I consider to be of paramount importance when evaluating the potential of travel writing on blogs. Relevant theoretical notions of postcolonial critique that the analysis of my study draws on are the already mentioned debate over the postcoloniality of travel writing (see chapter 2.2.3) as well as the concept of agency and discourse.
One crucial point of criticism that has been expressed against Said is that he discusses how the ‘Orient’ was constructed by the ‘West’ but thereby ignores modes of self-representation of the colonial subjects (Loomba, 2015, p. 65f.).

Edwards (2018, p. 26) explains that, until recently, critical academic readings of travel writing have predominantly dealt with the accounts of white men (and less often, white women) traveling the world. This falsely implies that the postcolonial subject does not have recourse to agency in the production of self-knowledge. Hence, as Clarke (2018, p. 11) argues, it must be a mission for the examination of postcolonial travel writing to untie the genre of travel writing from its ‘Western’ moorings. This demands to consider travel narratives written by subaltern subjects and emphasize the significance of agency.

The subaltern is an individual who is constituted through discourse, who “develops an identity because she/he is the subject of a discourse over which she/he may have little or no control” (Nayar, 2010, p. 25). Subject agency, then, means “the extent to which subjects can use discourses or are constituted by them” (Edwards, 2018, p. 25). Spivak, one of the first major postcolonial critics, wrote an essay titled Can the Subaltern Speak? (1988), in which she argues that there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak (p. 307). To Spivak, it is impossible to recover the voice of the subaltern or oppressed colonial subject, as she/he is silenced by the workings of colonialism and, in case of the female subaltern, by the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy. The subaltern has, according to Spivak, no position or sovereignty outside the discourse that constructs her/him and she/he cannot speak but is always spoken for. She concludes that it must be the postcolonial critic who recovers the standpoint of the subaltern and who highlights the powers of oppression.

The potentialities of agency are of pivotal importance to my work, as one of the main affordances assumed of new media is that it democratizes authorship, is inclusive, and provides new possibilities for people to self-represent. Today’s discourse on the

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12 Other charges against Said include that he does not account for deviations from the binary opposition between the ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ throughout pre-colonial history, that he does not connect the Orientalist discourse to colonialisms’ links to capitalism in a sufficient way, and that he concentrates, almost exclusively, on canonical ‘Western’ literary texts (Loomba, 2015, p. 65).
‘Middle East’ cannot be thought of as a uniform phenomenon produced exclusively by ‘Western’ writers and scholars. I argue that it is crucial to acknowledge the great relevance of the production of self-knowledge. Hence, my analysis draws on the arguments of Spivak (who based her thoughts on texts from the colonial era) to highlight changes in the possibilities of subaltern agency and identity construction that arise with the affordances of new media in postcolonial travel texts.

4.2.2 The intersection of postcolonial studies and discourse analysis

The ultimate objective of my study is, however, to draw conclusions about the extent to which discourses are repeated or disrupted despite or because of blogs’ affordances to self-represent, be discursive, and innovative. The analysis of discourse is firmly established in postcolonial studies. Via Said’s Orientalism, the works of Michel Foucault had a lasting influence on the academic field. The Foucauldian insight that informs Said’s work is that “[k]nowledge is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power” (Loomba, 2015, p. 60). Said adopts the Foucauldian term ‘discourse’ when arguing that European colonialism has, apart from direct physical control, also involved a complex process of dominating the representations of the colonized through producing specific forms of knowledge, which manifests in discourse. The analysis of discourses, then, allows to reveal “how power works through language, literature, culture and the institutions which regulate our daily lives” (Loomba, 2015, p. 63). This is what makes discourse analysis a suitable methodological approach for my research project. Further, it provides significant theoretical ideas that inform my analysis.

The concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘power’ play a critical role in discourse analysis. Ideologies are often taken-for-granted belief systems, which emerge in discourse and form people’s understanding of the world (Lawless & Chen, 2016, p. 188f.). Many dominant ideologies appear to us as common sense, things we are logically doing, rationally deciding, and morally believing to be right. Considering this idea, the British linguistic scholar Norman Fairclough (1995b, p. 14) argues that ideologies “create meaning in the service of power”, contributing to produce and reproduce “unequal relations of power, relations of domination”. In other words, ideology is closely related to hegemony in the way that former often functions to create and reinforce the latter (Fairclough, 1992). Hegemony, then, can be understood as the dominance of one
particular perspective of understanding the world, which is accompanied by hierarchic structures (Lawless & Chen, 2016). Essentially, different discourses can constitute ideologies which function to create and reinforce dominant power structures.

The widely-adopted discourse theory by Foucault also has its limitations as it tries to identify only one knowledge regime in a specific historical period. The majority of contemporary discourse analytical approaches, also within postcolonial studies, have moved on from Foucault’s approach as they “operate with a more conflictual picture in which different discourses exist side by side or struggle for the right to define truth” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 13). In my study, I acknowledge these limitations and move beyond Foucault’s notion of discourse and beyond a mere Saidian reading of a text. I base my analysis on the outlined theoretical assumptions stemming from affordance theory and postcolonial studies and use the methodological framework of discourse analysis commonly associated with critical readings of texts. However, my approach will be based on a more media-oriented discourse analysis: the critical discourse analysis by Norman Fairclough.

5 Methodology

5.1 Choice of method: critical discourse analysis

In my study, I consider media narratives as a site of ideological negotiation and representation of a perceived reality that inform discourses. A discourse analysis of these narratives helps to evaluate “the many meanings found in texts and […] understand how written [and] visual […] language helps us to create our social realities” (Brennen, 2012, p. 193). Language, then, manifests in texts which are, according to Fairclough (1995a, p. 6), no isolated entities, but “social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction”. Fairclough is one of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a methodological approach that is widely used in media and communication studies. In Fairclough’s most concrete usage of the concept of discourse, it refers to a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular point of view (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 56). Thereby, the term discourse is countable: one discourse can be distinguished from other
discourses, such as, for example, a postcolonial discourse, an activist discourse, a feminist discourse, a tourist discourse, etc.

There are three core dimensions of CDA: the text, the discursive practice, and the sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 16). The analysis of discourse aims to show systematic links between the three dimensions. The approach is ‘critical’ in a sense that it recognizes and draws attention to the fact that causes and effects of people’s social practice are often hidden. Particularly, “connections between the use of language and the exercise of power are often not clear to people, yet appear on closer examination to be vitally important to the workings of power” (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 54). As a critical approach, CDA is politically committed to social change; it strives to disclose the relation between language, power, and ideology, and investigates “the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 63), making it a suitable methodological approach for my study.

5.2 Research approach and paradigm

Conducting CDA means to take a qualitative research approach. In qualitative research, understanding is the “primary rationale for the investigation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 211). This means that textual readings must be described discursively and context is a central part of the interpretive process (Brennen, 2012, p. 22). In this process, the researcher takes an active role as she/he brings in her/his own interpretative strategies when trying to understand how people use text to make sense of the world (p. 206). Hence, qualitative research does not claim to be generalizable to society at large, as Brenner explains:

“While no two textual analyses produce the same interpretation, researchers draw on the relevant social, historical, political and/or economic context as well as their own knowledge of the text’s place within the broader culture in order to understand the most likely sense-making strategies. While there is not one ‘true’ interpretation of a text, it is not a free-for-all, and there are certainly interpretations that are more reasonable than others.” (p. 206)

A core assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is socially constructed: “reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured” (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). This notion is also constitutive for discourse analytical approaches, in which language is
perceived as access to reality: “With language, we create representations of reality that are never mere reflections of a pre-existing reality but contribute to construct reality” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 8f.). This perspective stems from the philosophy of poststructuralism, the paradigm that my study is based on.

5.3 Sample

The object of my research are posts on travel blogs dealing with representations of the ‘Middle East’ as a travel destination. To identify blogs that are suitable for the objective of research, I performed a sampling method on two stages. The non-probability method judgmental sampling allowed me to select specific cases and to assess their relevance in relation to the research questions. The judgments can thereby be informed by theoretical considerations (Blaikie, 2000, p. 178). As qualitative research does not aim to be representative, a small, nonrandom, purposeful sample was selected, “precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). I considered the number of six blogs to be a sufficient sample size for answering my research questions within the scope of this thesis.

Two aspects that arose from theoretical and methodological considerations were taken into account when choosing the sample: the reach of travel blogs and their authorship. The reach of blogs is important when investigating their potential to reinforce or contest discourses as popular travel blogs with a large readership have a higher chance to contribute to the way people make sense of the world. The question of authorship comes into effect twofold. On the one hand, this study focuses on female travel bloggers as opposed to the male dominance in the genre in the past. On the other hand, the sample takes into account bloggers of different nationalities, including ‘non-Western’ authors, contrasting the historical tendency of travel writing to be authored by ‘Western’ writers who tell ‘Western’ audiences about the rest of the world. As I further suggested that self-
representation is a crucial factor to consider, the sample includes three bloggers who either hail from or reside in a country that is thought to belong to the ‘Middle East’.13

The first stage of sampling took place on www.blogsearchengine.org. Search engines use different algorithms, which cannot be easily disclosed. However, the results tend to be sorted according to what the algorithm defines as most relevant. Thus, it can be assumed that early results have a high reach, adding to their ‘relevance’. After typing the keywords travel blog and Middle East, the first 30 entries were checked for their suitability. Hereby, the following criteria were decisive: 1) to classify as a travel blog, a blog’s content must focus on travel-related narratives, 2) the travel blog must be identifiable as a woman’s personal travel blog that is not authored by a travel organization or media institution, and 3) there must be at least one blog post that deals with a country that can be assigned to the region of the ‘Middle East’.

The first three blogs that met these criteria were chosen to be the object of the analysis, namely: Adventurous Kate, The Blonde Abroad, and Young Adventuress.

### Table 1: Adventurous Kate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kate McCulley aka Adventurous Kate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At the age of 26, US-blogger Kate quit her job to travel. Today, Kate (33) is based in New York and has traveled to more than 70 countries. The goal of her blog is to show women that “independent and solo travel can be safe, easy, and a lot of fun” (Adventurous Kate, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.adventurouskate.com">www.adventurouskate.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notably, among all the entries identified as personal travel blogs, none was authored by a ‘non-Western’ blogger. In order to attend to the second category that I defined to be crucial, the question of authorship, a second stage of sampling was added.
Due to no suitable search results, the keywords travel blogger and Middle Eastern were used, pointing more directly at the sought-after identity of the bloggers. Again, the first 30 entries were checked, considering the same decision criteria, but this time supplemented by the specification that the author of the blog should be identifiable (in her ‘about’ section) to reside in or hail from a country that belongs to the ‘Middle East’. Again, the first three blogs that met these criteria were chosen: Arabian Wanderess, The Boho Chica, and The Zeina Diary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Esra Alhamal aka Arabian Wanderess</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabian Wanderess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esra (30) is a Saudi Arabian, Hijabi travel and lifestyle blogger based in London. She blogs in both English and Arabic. On her blog, she wants to share her travel experiences as an Arab Muslim woman traveling solo or with friends. She focuses on Muslim female friendly destinations as well as architectural heritage and outdoor activities (Arabian Wanderess, 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.arabianwanderess.com">www.arabianwanderess.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Arabian Wanderess*
Natasha is originally from India but has been an expat in Dubai for most of her life. She started to travel in 2012 and likes to experience the world in cultures, cuisines, and hiking trails. With her blog, Natasha wants to share her love for travel and connect with people (The Boho Chica, 2018).

Website: www.thebohoc chica.com

Zeina (27) is a Hijabi travel blogger from Iraq. As a single Iraqi woman and with the world’s second weakest passport (with entry to only 27 countries), Zeina is subjected to many travel restrictions. She is based in Jordan and blogs in both English and Arabic. With her blog, Zeina aims to make a difference: she wants to change the perception the world has about Arab women and empower Muslim, Hijab-wearing woman to travel (The Zeina Diary, 2017a).

Website: www.thezeinadiary.com
5.4 Strategy of data collection and data analysis

The data that is collected for the analysis comprises different parts of the chosen travel blogs, namely all blog posts about ‘Middle Eastern’ countries (including travel accounts as well as informational posts about cultural, social, and religious practices) and the ‘about’ sections or posts of the blogs. Where available, I identified relevant posts following geographical categorizations on the blogs. In all other cases, I searched the headings of all existing travel posts for potential references to the region and, if such existed, examined the content of the posts more closely.

The strategy of data analysis is based on Fairclough’s methodological framework for conducting CDA (Figure 2). To investigate the ways in which texts are linked to discourses and sociocultural practices and thereby inform power structures, a multilevel view of the text is essential. Fairclough’s (1995b, p. 56) analysis includes two complementary elements: the analysis of communicative events and the analysis of the order of discourse. The communicative event refers to the instance of language use and consist of three dimensions:

1) linguistic features of the text (including visuals),
2) the discursive practice (involving processes of text production and consumption), and
3) the sociocultural practice (the wider societal context of the communicative event).

When conducting CDA, each of the three components of analysis must be recognized: “the researcher describes the text itself, place[s] such descriptions within a wider context, and make[s] interpretations about how such practices (re)produce larger social structures” (Lawless & Chen, 2016, p. 189).
For the first step, the linguistic analysis of the text, Fairclough (1995b, p. 58) suggests paying attention to three categories: representations of social practice, constructions of writer and reader identities, and the constructed relationships between writer and reader. The analysis should be sensitive to both presences and absences in the text. The second step, the interpretation of discursive practice, is, at best, based on an additional analysis of the processes of text production and text consumption, which can reveal “how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text, and on how receivers of texts also apply available discourses and genres in the consumption and interpretation of the texts” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 69). However, this step must be tailored to suit the scope of my study. Instead of conducting additional production and audience research, the analysis of discursive practices can also focus on detecting modes of interdiscursivity within the text, as Fairclough (1995b, p. 75) points out. Interdiscursivity is a form of intertextuality that describes how texts draw on already existing discourses, it “occurs when different discourses and genres are articulated together in a communicative event” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 73). The analysis of the linguistic features of a text goes hand in hand with the analysis of how texts draw on already existing discourses. Hence, there is no distinct line to be drawn between the first two steps of analysis, which is why my analysis summarizes both steps and the results presented provide insight into both: what discursive practices are at work in the travel blog narratives and how these discursive processes operate linguistically.
The discursive practice mediates the relationship between the first and third dimension of Fairclough’s framework: “it is only through discursive practice [...] that texts shape and are shaped by social practice” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 69). The third step of the analysis is concerned with the question “whether the discursive practice reproduces or, instead, restructures the existing order of discourse and about what consequences this has for the broader social practice” (p. 69). The order of discourse refers to the discursive practices within a social domain, i.e. their ‘normal’ way of using language and genres. The order of discourse constitutes the resources that are available in communication, thus, it “delimits what can be said. But, at the same time, language users can change the order of discourse by using discourses and genres in new ways or by importing discourses and genres from other orders of discourse” (p. 72). This is where the two complementary elements of CDA, the communicative event and the order of discourse, intersect. Here, the analysis arrives at its conclusions and addresses questions relating to change and ideological consequences:

“Does the discursive practice reproduce the order of discourse and thus contribute to the maintenance of the status quo in the social practice? Or has the order of discourse been transformed, thereby contributing to social change? [...] Does the discursive practice conceal and strengthen unequal power relations in society, or does it challenge power positions by representing reality and social relations in a new way?” (p. 87)

To answer the proposed research questions of my study, the following analysis considers how the identified discursive practices found in travel blog narratives about the ‘Middle East’ renegotiate the existing order of discourse, which, in this case, is informed by the properties of the genre of travel writing and the Orientalist discourse. Thereby, the analysis draws on theoretical considerations of media affordances and postcolonial theory.

5.5 Methodological reflections

For research to be academically relevant, the produced knowledge must be believable and trustworthy. This entails a reflection upon the validity and reliability of a study. However, as qualitative research is based on different assumptions and a different worldview than traditional, quantitative research, different assessment criteria must be employed. Lincoln
and Guba (1985) have introduced such criteria, which have been widely adopted for qualitative research and are used to discuss the limitations of this study. Accordingly, validity can better be understood in terms of credibility and transferability; reliability is discussed through the more appropriate term of dependability.

Merriam (2009, p. 229) summarizes strategies that help to ensure that a qualitative study is credible and transferable (meaning that research findings are linked to reality and can be transferred to a different context) as well as dependable (meaning that the results are consistent with the collected data). In order to meet these requirements, this research project

1) provides a detailed account of the method, procedures for data collection and analysis, and decision points in carrying out the study;
2) it aims to present rich, thick descriptions that are sufficient to contextualize the study in a way that future researcher can “determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred” (p. 229);
3) and it reflects critically on the position of the researcher regarding “assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p. 229).

Even though these criteria ensure the overall quality of the research project, my study also faces limitations that must be addressed. One limitation lies in the fact that Fairclough’s CDA cannot be applied to its full extent. In order to thoroughly investigate the second dimension, the discursive practices, additional research on the level of reception and production would be required. An examination of the audiences’ perspective would be particularly enriching to understand the research problem more holistically as ideological effects cannot be postulated solely based on what is found in a text “without considering the diverse ways in which such texts may be interpreted and responded to” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 9). Volo (2010, p. 301) states that several scholars have emphasized the need to study audiences’ media behavior with blogs. As this exceeds the scope of my study, I suggest possibilities for further research in the concluding remarks. Other limitations include a restricted search result caused by the simplifying keywords ‘Middle East’ and ‘Middle Eastern’ as well as a limited choice of blogs, which
should, in further studies, be extended by blogs authored by people from more diverse backgrounds considering categories of age, gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, and class.

6 Ethics

There are several ethical implications of my research project that must be discussed. Firstly, the question of privacy and publicity that naturally arises when doing online research. In cyberspace, private and public spaces overlap, posing challenges to the researcher regarding the extent to which individual privacy must be protected. Concerning travel blogs as the object of research, the tourism scholars Stainton and Iordanova (2017) composed a set of ethical principles that my study is oriented towards. Important to consider is thereby that 1) the primary object of this study are representations on a textual level, not the bloggers themselves, which means that my work cannot be classified as human subject research, and that 2) the chosen travel blogs do not function as personal diaries but are directed towards the public at large, which means that the material analyzed is in the public domain. Therefore, informed consent of the bloggers was not required and the names of the blogs and bloggers did not have to be anonymized.

Secondly, my personal researcher stance needs to be critically reflected upon. In a qualitative textual analysis, the researcher takes on an active role as she/he brings her/his own interpretive strategies to her/his work (Brennen, 2012, p. 206). Interpretations are inevitably affected by individual factors, such as the researcher’s background, personal experiences, language, race, ethnicity, class, and gender. As a researcher, who is not blogging and only an occasional travel blog reader (not including any of the six travel blogs analyzed here), I take an outsider perspective in my research project which grants me a certain level of objectivity towards the material. However, as a female, white, European researcher, I produce knowledge from a perspective that resembles that of the US bloggers more than that of the Arab bloggers. With this notion about my own situated

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14 This becomes obvious when looking at the number of followers that all six travel bloggers have on social media channels, such as Facebook and Instagram. These numbers range from 1,442 (Arabian Wanderess) followers to 178,623 (The Blonde Abroad) on Facebook; and from 2,033 (The Zeina Diary) to 510,000 (The Blonde Abroad) followers on Instagram (Date of access: 28 May 2018).
knowledge, I want to emphasize that no researcher can observe reality completely neutrally and with my work, I do not claim to do so either. My possibility to gain knowledge about reality is limited and I am fully aware that this study would highly benefit from knowledge produced from the perspective of a researcher who identifies as Arab or Muslim.

7 Presentation and Analysis of Results

7.1 Interdiscursivity

A textual analysis of the blog posts has provided insight into what discursive practices are at work in the examined travel blogs. As expected, there is a multitude of discourses to be found. In the following presentation of results, I illuminate this interdiscursivity, which can be divided into two overall tendencies that often interlock: on the one side, there are discursive practices that are critical and reflective towards representations of the ‘Middle East’ and, on the other side, there are discursive practices in which the region, its people, and their cultures are represented more conventionally, as homogenous and exotic ‘other’ that stands opposite to the normative ‘West’.

7.1.1 Critical-reflective discourses: blogging to fight prejudice

What becomes apparent when analyzing the themes and language of the blog posts dealing with the ‘Middle East’, is that most of them, to different degrees, express a critical and reflective attitude towards misrepresentations of the region. The bloggers draw attention to common misunderstandings and show a willingness to overcome stereotypes. However, there are several important differences in how this manifests in the US blogs and the ‘Middle Eastern’ blogs.
Tendencies in US travel blog narratives

The first thing to be noticed when engaging with the US bloggers’ narratives about the ‘Middle East’ as a travel destination, is that two of the three authors begin their documentation by expressing criticism towards the generalizing and unjust framing that the region faces in the US media. In an introductory post, the author of Young Adventuress prepares her readers for her trip by doing away with, in her opinion, popular misconception that the ‘Middle East’ is a homogeneous region and a place of violence and terrorism: “Terrorists this, Taliban that, Arab insurgents over there, Muslims who kidnap Christians everywhere. REALLY? Think hard, do you all really believe that that is indicative of the entire Middle East?” (Appendix 1). She alerts her readers to the tendency of the US media to generalize the region and portray it as a dangerous place and, as a conclusion, she urges her readers to be more critical. The question of safety is also the first topic that the author of Adventurous Kate discusses when introducing her trip to Jordan and Turkey. The blogger advises her readers to inform themselves thoroughly about the ‘Middle East’, cross-reference their sources, and, as she writes, “perhaps most importantly, follow the news, but take sensationalized media coverage with a grain of salt” (Appendix 2). She emphasizes that the region is diverse and violent incidents in Syria or in Gaza are never representative of the ‘Middle East’ as a whole.

The fact that the travel narratives of both authors start off with a critical reflection and a call for more awareness supports the assumption that blogs allow travel writers to expand the discursive framework of the genre: the authors perceive the affordance of the blog to provide representational freedom and actualize this affordance by embracing critical political positions and challenging normative modes of representation anchored in mass media. This tendency goes in line with Duffy’s (2017, p. 447) assertion that “[w]hile mainstream media are constrained by commercial considerations to reiterate the status quo, travel blogs have greater freedom to not conform.”

Through the explicit ambition to change existing discourses about the ‘Middle East’, i.e. to bring about change on a broader societal level, the blog narratives adopt characteristics of an activist discourse. This is also reflected in the bloggers’ stated ambitions of writing: the authors claim to make it their mission to show their readers what it is really like to travel solo as a woman in the region, in other words, to prove that the ‘Middle East’ is a safe place to travel to and to encourage their readers to recognize their
own prejudices (Appendix 3). From the point of view of postcolonial theory, these tendencies support the idea that travel writing is generally able to break free from its discursive conventions and enhance transcultural sensitivities among readers, as Clarke (2018) and Edwards (2018) suggest.

Although there are no explicit references to persisting legacies of colonialism or critique towards present structures of neo-imperialism to be found in any of the blog narratives, the travel posts encompass several paragraphs in which the bloggers refer to and break down common stereotypes about the ‘Middle East’ which stem from the colonial past (see chapter 2.2). For example, on Adventurous Kate, the author reflects on the impressions she got during her visit to Amman, Jordan, and thereby counters the prejudice that Arab men are particularly intrusive towards women and that all women, whether from the region or not, need to be covered up from head to toe at all times and places: “I worry if I’ll be leered at by the men; I worry that I’m not covered up enough. […] But my fears are completely unfounded. I receive no more attention than in other countries – and not even as much as in Italy or Argentina!” (Appendix 4). She also shares her experience from going to a spa salon in Dubai and seeing, to her own surprise, one veiled woman after another naturally slipping off their robes and veils (Appendix 4), hence neutralizing the ‘strangeness’ of the veiling and admitting to her own prejudices. Similarly, the author of Young Adventuress counters stereotypes by explaining situations in which she faced her own prejudices and learned that they are superficial and false. For example, she writes about her encounter with a Bedouin man using a smartphone, which, to her, was highly surprising as she assumed that Bedouins, as a desert tribe, had not yet arrived in the 21st century (Appendix 5). These observations correlate with the assumption of Duffy (2017) that bloggers tend to represent foreign local people in ‘mobile’ terms, i.e. as individuals whose identity is negotiable and not fixed (Figure 3).
By speaking from their personal, first-hand experiences and by confessing to their own initial ignorance, the narratives convey a feeling of authenticity and genuineness that might make it easier for readers to identify with what is being said. This is an advantage that is, again, supported by the affordance of the medium to not be bound to the norms of an industry. Raman and Choudary (2014, p. 126) summarize and support this line of argument: “Bloggers have more freedom to follow their own style, with no gatekeepers to regulate the content. Criticism of locations, people and hospitality or tourism establishments, the ability to question stereotypes and freedom to depict places and events allow the blogger to be more ‘honest’.”

**Tendencies in ‘Middle Eastern’ blog narratives**

The blogs authored by the ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers show similar critical, reflective, and activist discourse tendencies. However, these tendencies manifest differently. When the authors clear up common misunderstandings that they feel the ‘Middle East’ is attributed with, the question of safety, which is the most prominent concern on the US blogs, is barely discussed. Instead, all three ‘Middle Eastern’ blogs contain informative, educational posts about cultural customs, Muslim religious practices, women’s rights, and political questions concerning the ‘Middle East’. In other words, topics which are prone to ‘Western’ stereotyping and which allow the authors to reflect on them from an insider perspective as they consider themselves to be part of the cultural and religious
communities they write about. These accounts of reflection are hence not motivated by the bloggers’ own prejudices, as it is partly the case for the US bloggers, but rather by situations where the authors have become aware of the existing stereotypes about their country, culture, or religion, both in media and their daily life.

One recurring topic that the bloggers discuss is the headscarf (hijab), both in terms of its general meaning and in terms of the role it plays when being a travel blogger (Appendix 6). The two blogs *The Zeina Diary* and *Arabian Wanderess* feature a Q&A about Hijabi women, in which the hijab-wearing Iraqi and Saudi authors answer common questions about the headscarf and thereby fight prejudices against it (Figure 4).

![Travel Blogger in a Headscarf Q&A](image)

*Figure 4: Headscarf Q&A (Arabian Wanderess, 2016)*

The fact that both authors see the need to dedicate lengthy blog posts to the topic shows that the veil of Muslim women continues to be an object of prejudice and stereotyping. In colonial discourse, the veil did not only signify the general oppression of Muslim women (see chapter 2.2.1) but constituted a symbol of mystery and sexual lust: the veiled woman was “an unknown that begged to be known, an unseen that begged to be seen” (Busse, 2010, p. 192). The veil caused both fantasy and frustration among colonial observers as it concealed the Oriental woman from ‘Western’ apprehension and rejected
intrusion. Thus, unveiling the Muslim woman, both symbolically and literally, and thereby civilizing Muslim societies became a common theme in colonial discourse (Loomba, 2015, p. 189). In the travel writing of the ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers, however, the meaning of the veil is no longer discussed from a ‘Western’, predominantly male, perspective as it was the case in colonial travel writing. Instead, the ‘mystery of the veil’ is solved by its wearers who are actively working against the persisting idea in ‘Western’ worlds that the headscarf is a definite symbol of the submissive Muslim woman who is oppressed by Islam and the Muslim male. As the author of The Zeina Diary (2017b) explains to her readers: “For my part, [n]o I am not forced [to wear the hijab], [h]owever, lots of girls feel pressured by their society to wear it! […] there is always two sides of the story […]. A lot of Arab women choose to wear it and still manage to be fearless and awesome, yet on the other hand, a lot are forced.”

The author of The Zeina Diary also features a separate category on her blog called “Breaking Stereotypes”, in which she introduces Arab women who, to her, embody role models in changing the way people think about Arab women (Appendix 7). For example, one post is about her own grandmother who, against all odds, became the first female medical student in her neighborhood. By referencing an older generation of women as role model, she addresses and breaks with the prevailing view in the ‘West’ that Arab women have only recently become educated professionals. Similarly, the Saudi author of Arabian Wanderess features a category on her blog called “Saudi stories” including several informative posts about the situation of women in Saudi culture and about religious practices of Islam (Appendix 8). There, she critically reflects on the dependency of Saudi women on their male guardians and the ban on women driving (which has only been lifted this year). Her emphasis rests on the fact that these are Saudi cultural practices and are not to be confused with Islam in general: “Keep in mind that this [the male guardianship system] is only a cultural practice and not religious and a lot of the Saudi rules and laws are based on the old Arabian culture” (Appendix 8). She puts a good deal of emphasis on refuting negative generalizations about her religion, for example, by discussing politics concerning Islamic terror attacks by ISIS and the frequent ‘Western’ association of such with Islam at large:

“I am really upset that everyone refers to them as the ‘Islamic State.’ I know they gave themselves the names, but I am going to start calling them SS the Satanic State. That is what they are. Devils and demons causing deaths and spreading hate
and anger. It makes my blood boil, when Islam is associated with evil or blamed for evil. It is a really peaceful religion with a book that has life guidelines and stories. [...] Religion is not to blame, but people and their dark hearts and greed should be held responsible. (Appendix 9)

The narratives on the Dubai-based blog The Boho Chica are less engaged in critical reflections. However, the author also provides informative posts about Muslim culture, such as guides about how to respectfully behave during the holy month of Ramadan and about how to dress in Dubai (Appendix 10). Furthermore, the author provides a guide for the “culture curious” where she, among other topics, deals with the camel culture that is firmly anchored in the culture of the UAE. She provides background information that explains the culture to her readers, emphasizing that its purpose goes beyond taking tourists for a ride through the desert: “Camel racing is a huge sport in the U.A.E. and crowds of enthusiastic locals gather at the racetrack [...] to support their beloved racing camels from all over the Middle East” (Appendix 10). Although she herself is not originally from the UAE, her insider perspective as a long-time resident of Dubai appears trustworthy and authentic.

These examples add a strong educational layer to the discursive practices that have been mentioned so far and support the assumption that the question of authorship plays an important role in the renegotiation of discourses. What distinguishes the blog posts authored by the Iraqi, Saudi, and UAE writers significantly from those of the US writers, is the inside perspective from which they can discuss specifics of the region as they feel a sense of belonging to it. Although their blog posts are still product of individual interpretations and subjective viewpoints, the explanations and statements gain in reliability and profoundness by the ways the authors discuss practices that they have personal experience with and describe places that are geographically and culturally close to them. These differences resulting from the author’s background are linked to the affordance of blogs to give voice to anyone and let people speak for themselves, as Creech (2018) emphasizes. By writing about their own culture, religion, or country, the bloggers disrupt the otherwise predominantly ‘Western’ representation of the world. Thereby, the binary opposition of self and ‘other’ breaks up and with it the hierarchical implications of the process of ‘othering’.

As both Duffy (2017) and Azariah (2017) discuss in their studies, travel blogs are also important sites for self-reflection and identity formation. This is visible on both The
Zeina Diary and Arabian Wanderess, where the authors explicitly position themselves as Arab, Muslim, and Hijabi travel bloggers (Appendix 11). They reflect upon the putative conflict of being a hijab-wearing Muslim and a solo traveler at the same time. As her objective of blogging, the author of The Zeina Diary states that she wants to “change people [sic] mindset toward certain ideas and thoughts about Middle Eastern Women” and empower Arab women to “do anything they want” (Appendix 12). By focusing on travel advice on Muslim female friendly destinations worldwide, the author of Arabian Wanderess provides guidance for other Muslim women who want to travel and thereby she encourages them to do so. The authors frame themselves as determined and vigorous travelers who aim to make visible that it is just as possible and exciting to travel as a Muslim woman as it is for any other woman. By doing so, they present themselves as role-models and contribute to renegotiate their identity as “global citizens who have the freedom and ability to give themselves the experience of different places and cultures”, as Creech (2018, p. 163) puts it.

The postcoloniality of the blog narratives

By revealing these critical-reflective discourses found on the ‘Middle Eastern’ blogs as well as the US blogs, the analysis connects to the debate among postcolonial critics whether or not travel writing can be truly postcolonial (see chapter 2.2.3). The proponents are convinced that the genre “has the potential to embrace revisionist, critical, and subversive narratives, political positions, and innovative modes of representation” (Edwards, 2018, p. 19). In that sense, the examined blog narratives support this optimistic perspective: the bloggers engage in critical reflections, draw attention to unjust framing, combat negative stereotypes, and thereby tell the story of travel in a new way. Part of these innovative modes of representation also take place on a formal level. The blogging platform allows the writers to discuss cultural and political questions in open-ended, creative, and multimedia ways, as in, for example, the mentioned Q&As, extra blog categories, or guides that are rich in visuals, contain hyperlinks to further information sources, and are written in a personal, colloquial tone which constitutes their character as a consumer-to-consumer medium and further adds to the blog’s overall credibility (Duffy, 2017). The actualization of the affordance of creative expression is promising as it, again, shows that the genre of travel writing can be unconventional, progressive, and embrace
new directions forward (Edwards, 2018). However, opposing voices in this debate claim that travel writing cannot be truly postcolonial as it is invariably bound to its colonial heritage, an argument that is just as traceable in my analysis.

7.1.2 Conventional discursive practices: the persisting Oriental ‘other’

Despite the promising discursive tendencies outlined above, there are still multiple indications of conventional representations that stem from the legacies of colonialism and reflect the nature of the genre of travel writing. To some extent, these conventional discursive practices interfere and hold back a renegotiation of discourses in travel writing about the ‘Middle East’.

Hierarchical dichotomies and the normative ‘West’

Firstly, it is noticeable how the blog narratives continue to demonstrate the dichotomizing colonial discourse that Said discusses in Orientalism (2003), in which travel experiences in the ‘Middle East’ are assessed by contrasting them to the ‘West’. Repeatedly, the customs of the ‘Western’ worlds function as a scale for evaluation: on the US blogs, the authors of Adventurous Kate and The Blonde Abroad express sympathy for their travel experience in Jordan by explaining that the country provides “a nice balance between the traditional and cultural aspects of the region with the modern atmosphere of the West”, and that, in the capital, people are dressed “Western-style, […] [showing] that Amman is a constantly evolving city” (Appendix 13). The Dubai-based blog The Boho Chica also shows tendencies of perceiving the ‘Western’ worlds as a standard, against which the author measures Dubai’s and Abu Dhabi’s fashion trends, whereby ‘fashionable’ equals ‘Western’ and ‘sloppy’ equals ‘non-Western’ (Appendix 14). However, whereas the dichotomizing discourse in these cases positions the ‘West’ as superior, contrasting practice on the Saudi blog Arabian Wanderess function to criticize existing inequalities between the two entities. The author makes the equality gap between the ‘West’, here English native speaking countries, and the ‘Middle East’, here Saudi Arabia, subject of discussion. In “Part 1: Saudis Vs. Golden Nationals – WORK” and “Part 2: Saudis Vs. Golden Nationals – Education”, she draws attention to the lack of opportunities for Saudis compared to the great opportunities for the “golden nationals” (i.e. Americans, British,
Canadians, Australians) regarding workplaces and education requirements in Saudi Arabia (Appendix 15). Essentially, these discursive practices confirm that binary oppositions continue to function as modes of identity construction in travel writing on blogs, whereby the entity of ‘us’ is existent only through a construction of ‘them’, perpetuating hierarchical divisions that underlie the contemporary global order. However, as can be seen in the case of Arabian Wanderess, the demonstration of binary oppositions can also function to challenge these structures.

Recurring stereotypes

The Oriental discourse is further reflected in the themes and representations of the travel narratives. All US blogs feature several posts that resemble one another regarding what experiences are highlighted and how these are textually and (audio)visually represented in stereotypical ways. Recurring subjects in the writing about Jordan and the UAE are desert adventures, encounters with Bedouins, and visits to the souks (marketplaces); in other words, subjects that have long functioned to shape the image of the ‘exotic’ ‘Middle East’ (see chapter 2.2.1). It appears that these themes continue to determine what travelers associate and expect from a trip to the ‘Middle East’, as, for example, the author of Young Adventuress indicates when writing about visiting the souks in Dubai: “This was more of the Middle East I imagined and was familiar with” (Appendix 16). The desert narratives resemble those of early travel writing in the way that they pose the adventurous individual traveler against the void, which is romanticized in visuals and titles, such as The Blonde Abroad’s “Red Desert Dreams in Wadi Rum” (Appendix 17), and often accompanied by stories about encountering Bedouins. The Bedouin-narratives are, as it is most apparent on Adventurous Kate, perpetuating discursive practices in which the encounter with Bedouins stands for the authentic ‘Middle Eastern’ experience and is a must-do for travelers: by meeting the Bedouins, the travel blogger can dress up in traditional gown, drink tea, learn how to tie a headscarf, and ride a camel (Figure 5, 6). The author of Adventurous Kate states, “[o]ne of the best things you can do [on a road trip through Jordan] is stop by the side of the road and visit with a nomadic family” (Appendix 18).
The recurrence of these stereotypes supports the assumption put forth by Duffy (2017) that travel bloggers, despite existing tendencies of negotiable, ‘mobile’ representations (as illustrated above), also continue to ‘moor’ their encounters with foreign locals in existing archetypes. Essentially, this shows that, even in a post-colonial era, conventional-exoticizing and generalizing representations of the Orientalist discourse continue to shape the imagination of, and thus travel writing about, the region.

Use of language to describe the ‘other’

Moreover, the Oriental discourse is apparent when looking at the words the US bloggers use to describe the region as a whole. The author of *The Blond Abroad* introduces the ‘Middle East’ as “enchanting region of the world” and uses tropes that frame the region and its people as homogenous, exotic, and definite ‘other’:

“I’m embarrassed to admit that, at 24 years old, I still imagine the Middle East as a Disney cartoon with magic lamps, flying carpets and sexy ’street rats’ with chiseled abs and pet monkeys” (Appendix 19).
Her travel accounts about Dubai draw on further tropes that frame her experiences as “a page out of the […] One Thousand and One Nights”, emphasized by romanticizing visuals of the desert (Appendix 19). Although the author of The Blonde Abroad shows self-reflexivity when admitting to her lack of knowledge and her “skewed image”, she still repeats stereotypical representations without disproving or discussing them critically in later posts. Similarly exoticizing, the author of Adventurous Kate describes Jordan as a great “introduction” to the ‘Middle East’ arguing that the country is well worth seeing as it is “somewhere adventurous, and exciting, and DIFFERENT” (Appendix 20). On Young Adventuress, the region is framed in a way that it appears consumable; the author praises the ‘Middle East’ as an off-the-beaten-path and largely unexplored travel destination and claims her goal to visit all countries in the region by the time she is 30 (Appendix 21).

Such descriptions point to the interrelation of travel and tourism discourses, as discussed by Azariah (2017), whereby places become subject to commodification, indicating that travel representations on blogs, despite the medium’s affordance to be independent, cannot fully escape a tourism discourse in which travel is seen as a form of global leisure consumption (Creech, 2018, p. 158). This is also apparent when looking at how the bloggers present their previous travel destinations: countries appear as something to collect, travel experiences as countable achievements, whereby the more ticked off places indicate a higher level of expertise. Most blogs contain a geographical categorization of travel destinations featuring the ‘Middle East’ as one part of the world, often next to continental categories, such as Europe, Africa, or Asia (Appendix 22). It becomes evident on all blogs that the term ‘Middle East’ is anchored firmly in everyday language, for people who identify as citizens or residents of the region as well as for others. All bloggers use the term without reflecting on its generalizing and Eurocentric implications. The absence of criticism on the usage of the term is indicative for the fact that colonial legacies are not only persistent in stereotypical representations of travel destinations, but also in the way people imagine and talk about the world in general.

The postcoloniality of travel writing – a question of authorship?

To a certain extent, the persistence of the conventional discursive practices outlined in this chapter reflect and strengthen the idea that the genre of travel writing “will always
remain a neocolonial mode that reproduce[s] a dominant North Atlantic idea of ‘civilization’ from which travel writers continue to consolidate a privileged position by classifying, evaluating, and passing judgement on other parts of the world” (Edwards, 2018, p. 19). As an important representative of this, rather pessimistic, view, the international relations scholar Debbie Lisle argues that travel writing reinscribes colonial dichotomies, such as civilized/uncivilized or safe/dangerous, and although the genre has the potential to re-imagine the world in ways that do not simply preserve the status quo, travel writing keeps adopting a ‘Western’-centric and conservative political outlook that is “understood by the remnants of Orientalism, colonialism and Empire” (Lisle, 2006, p. 5). From this perspective, travel writing is prone to reinforce social divisions that underlie the order of our contemporary world. However, similarly to the charges that have been made against Said (see chapter 4.2.1), Lisle also ignores the large body of past and especially contemporary ‘non-Western’ travel writing.

When discussing the presence of a conventional Orientalist discourse, there are, again, significant differences between the US and the ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers’ writing about the region that must be considered in this debate. Generally, the travel accounts found on the ‘Middle Eastern’ blogs are less exoticizing, they contextualize cultural practices and feature more alternative places and experiences in the region, and the representations are less generalizing and often emphasize diversity. For example, the author of The Boho Chica features a post where she introduces the ‘Middle East’ as a whole at first, but then, throughout her descriptions, she emphasizes diversity, assigning specific cultural practices and dishes to single countries and regions, and explaining that the ‘Middle East’ does not only have deserts but the nature is diverse, as in Jordan, for example, where one can find “olive groves, beautiful coastlines, […] wetlands and forest reserves” (Appendix 23). She thereby refutes the image of the ‘Middle East’ as a homogenous region, although making use of the generalizing term. While she mostly lists the same standard experiences as the US bloggers when writing about her road trip through Jordan, travel accounts on The Boho Chica about the UAE (the author’s long-time place of residence) include many alternative recommendations. She advises her readers to escape the typical destinations Dubai and Abu Dhabi and, instead, explore the city Al Ain, climb the Jebel Hafeet mountain, or visit the beach in Dibba, Oman (Appendix 24). The absence or, at least, modification of exoticizing practices is apparent on the blog Arabian Wanderess, where the author almost exclusively deals with the
beauty of the daily life when writing about her travels to Iran and Oman. With her background as a designer, Esra focuses on art and architecture in her travel accounts (Appendix 25). These examples show that, in order to have a constructive and timely debate over the question whether or not travel writing can function as a counter-narrative that defies colonial legacies in contemporary society, it is crucial to consider aspects of authorship and perspective.

7.2 Discussion about the renegotiation of discourses on travel blogs

The textual analysis of the travel narratives has revealed the presence of different discursive practices. What follows in this discussion is the third step of Fairclough’s CDA: an interpretation of how such practices in a communicative event function to reproduce or challenge the existing order of discourse. The discourses inherent in travel writing (see chapter 2), can be renegotiated when language users articulate discourses and genres in new, creative ways (see chapter 5.4). To answer my proposed research questions, I summarize the ways in which travel writing on blogs uses innovative discursive practices to renegotiate long-established discourses about the ‘Middle East’, but also critically reflect on the limitations of these practices as well as their mix with conventional discursive practices, which indicates and works to perpetuate the stability of the dominant order of discourse and thereby the dominant social order.

The Oriental ‘other’ in the past and present

To start with the question to what extent representations of the ‘Middle East’ on the examined blogs differ from those in previous travel narratives: the analysis showed that the present state of the genre and its representations carry many traces of the colonial past, but also that there is a variety of new innovative ways of narrating the encounter with the region. The convention surviving as part of colonial legacies is, first and foremost, the partly persisting Orientalist discourse that Said (2003) discusses in his work. Also, this discursive heritage is reflected in the usage of the term ‘Middle East’ that perpetuates a ‘Western’-centric imagination of the world in which a diverse region
spanning over two continents is constructed as the ‘middle’ of Europe’s geographical ‘east’.

The Orientalist discourse is reflected in contrasting practices through which the experiences in the ‘Middle East’ are assessed by comparing them to a standard ‘Western’ world, and the exoticizing tendencies that become most obvious in the US bloggers’ framing of the region as an ‘exciting’ and ‘different’ travel destination including conventional stereotypes, such as the Bedouins as ‘authentic’ natives of the region and the desert as challenging, mystical place to explore for the ‘adventurous’ individual traveler, tendencies that have been present throughout the history of travel writing on the ‘Middle East’ (see chapter 2). To a certain extent, however, these conventional binary oppositions are challenged: on the one hand, through the self-reflexivity that the authors show when admitting to their limited, biased understanding of the region and when refuting personal prejudices, and, on the other hand, through a form of ‘positive othering’ that becomes apparent when the bloggers express their liking for the region. Although this latter tendency works against presenting the ‘Middle East’ as ‘cultural contestant’, it is accompanied by other disadvantageous implications that support the argument put forth by Fürsich and Kavoori (2001) that travel writing, as an expression of tourism discourse, functions as a form of cultural imperialism (see chapter 3.2.1).

Particularly visible on the US blogs, the region is ‘advertised’ as a ‘must-visit’ and ‘off-the-beaten-path’ travel destination for the intrepid traveler, resembling discourses of the tourism industry. The intersection of travel and tourism discourses that Azariah (2017) assigns to travel blogs is apparent and, partly, stands in contrast to the self-representation of the bloggers. The authors of the examined blogs position themselves as independent solo female bloggers, but all of them, in one way or another, collaborate with the tourism or publishing industry to finance and advertise their blogs (as often indicated in the ‘about’ sections and some respective posts). The intersection with tourism organizations appears to restrict the freedom of representation, which the blogging platform generally affords the authors. This is most evident in the blog narratives about Jordan: the US bloggers as well as the author of The Boho Chica were invited to Jordan by the Jordan Tourism Board, which provided them with a fixed itinerary that led to an accumulation of conventional-stereotypical narratives about the country, whereas the writing by Iraqi blogger Zeina, who does not state any relation to
tourism organizations, deals with more diverse aspects of the country and features less
known travel destinations as she is not bound to an institution that intends the country to
be ‘produced’ and framed in a specific way. This shows that the mere fact that blogs
afford more discursive and critical representation of places, does not mean that the
affordance is always actualized; the genre of travel writing on blogs is not generally free
from commodification, which, as it was shown in the analysis, contributes to the
maintenance of conventional-Orientalist representations and practices of ‘othering’, in
which the emphasis on ‘difference’ works as a pull factor to attract readers.

This supports the argument put forth by postcolonial critics that even if travel
writers aim to take on a critical, postcolonial attitude, they continue to face an inevitable
conflict: the authors “struggle to match their political views with a genre that is in many
ways antithetical to them – a genre that manufactures ‘otherness’ even as it claims to
demystify it, and that is reliant […] on the most familiar of Western myths” (Holland &
Huggan, 1998, p. 65). However, despite the nature of travel writing to represent
‘otherness’ and despite the tourism discourse that interlocks with the genre feeding into
the maintenance of power structures, the analysis presented important indications that
travel blogs have the potential to transform travel writing in a way that it challenges
unequal power relations in society and transform the order of discourse. The main
argument that speaks for this potential is grounded in the two other identified affordances
of travel blogs: the possibility to self-represent and the possibility of innovative, creative
expression. It is here where my discussion connects to the second research question of
how blogging allows writers to disrupt common practices of representing the ‘other’.

Tendencies of disruption of the representational order

When considering the outlined characteristics of travel blogging, it can be noted that both
practices of representing the ‘other’ as well as self-representation are common tropes of
the medium (Bosangit, et al., 2012). As outlined in chapter two, travel writing as a genre
grew through different stages of subjectivity and objectivity, whereby the role of self-
representation and its implications changed significantly. While commercial or
journalistic travel writing is less about the traveler-self and more about the representation
of places, early travel accounts from the colonial era and before have a strong subjective
voice. However, this has usually been the voice of a renowned representative of an elitist
society. What is different in new media, then, is that travel accounts focus on the traveler-self and the authorship is democratized meaning that everyone can, theoretically, take the reins of representation. As I showed in the analysis, this has significant consequences for the renegotiation of discourses: the self-representation of the ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers and their writing about the region and cultural practices disrupt the conventional categories of self and ‘other’ and put forth alternative, ‘non-Western’ ways of imagining the world. In that sense, blogging, and new media in general, can be seen as a tool for the postcolonial subject, or ‘subaltern’ (to speak in Spivak’s words), to increase her/his agency in the production of self-knowledge. Essentially, the analysis of the ‘Middle Eastern’ blogs has confirmed that travel blogs can function as “a mode of representation that allows postcolonial subjects to position themselves as part of global modernity and postmodernity”, as Creech (2018, p. 163) phrases it. Also, the ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers chosen for this analysis have, as might be expected, not only traveled within Arab countries, they also feature travel experiences from Europe, the US, etc. Thereby, the bloggers participate in creating discursive formations of ‘others’ as well, which is a further disruption of conventional ‘othering’ practices.

Some of the ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers actively criticize existing power relations and inequalities and all of them draw attention to common misrepresentations relating to Arab cultures, Islam, and religious practices, making their travel narratives a promising interdiscursive departure from traditional forms of travel writing. However, I want to argue that, even if the bloggers did not express such critical-reflective notions on their blogs, the mere fact that they represent themselves as mobile, global citizens and make visible that Muslim women can travel the world just as anyone else, disrupts the order of discourse that underlies conventional travel writing. Mainly for the reason that these are privileges that are traditionally reserved for ‘Western’ voices. This self-representation further contests the idea that Muslim women are inevitably bound to their nation, religion, and family, or are being suppressed by their male relatives, making the activity of solo travel and the public representation of such a revolutionary act in itself. Considering Spivak’s idea of the suppressed subaltern subject who cannot speak and is always spoken for, the affordance of blogs to give voice to subjects from racially, ethically, or religiously marginalized groups, shows that this argument needs to be reevaluated.
One consideration to take, however, is that the chosen ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers most likely hold a privileged position in their societies. The fact that they can express themselves in sufficient English and have access to the necessary financial resources and to free mobility makes their participation in the formation of discourse possible in the first place. Sufficient English language skills are essential in this context as potential counter-narratives must be understood globally, and especially in the ‘Western’ worlds, in order to confront discourses that have their origin and are held up in this parts of the world. Consequently, other, less privileged, people who lack the necessary language skills and, or, resources are still limited in their participation in renegotiating discourses on a transnational level.

There is another important limitation that needs to be considered in this context. As outlined in the description of the sampling process (see chapter 5.3), it was, from the beginning, difficult to find travel blogs authored by ‘non-Western’ bloggers. The first 30 examined personal blogs that came up in the search results were all authored by ‘Western’ (mostly US, Canadian, and British) authors. However promising the transformative potential of blogging platforms is for the disruption of discourses in travel writing, the alternative ways of representing the world from a ‘non-Western’ perspective are less powerful if they cannot be found, read, and reacted on by audiences. This circumstance confirms that hegemonic structures work to maintain the status quo, in which it is still the ‘West’ dominating the representations of the rest of the world. Nevertheless, there seems to be a sense of a new awareness for Hijabi and Muslim women on social media channels. When searching for the keywords *Middle Eastern/Arab travel blogger*, one stumbles upon several articles that present influential (travel, lifestyle, and fashion) bloggers and *Instagrammers* from the region and thematize the underrepresentation of Muslim voices in the sphere of travel media.15 So although the online search results suggest that travel writing continues to be a form of cultural imperialism, as Hanusch and Fürsich (2001) attest it to the genre, the seemingly growing media interest in, and global presence of,

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‘non-Western’ writers on social media indicates that new media can be used as a tool to gain visibility.

The other affordance of blogs that appears to be promising for the renegotiation of discourses is the possibility it offers writers to express themselves in novel and flexible ways. As the analysis showed, blogging platforms do not only comprise reports on travel experiences but also function as a platform for criticism of media portrayals, critical political discussions, and reflections about stereotypes and misrepresentations. Such practices “in which discourse types are combined in new and complex ways – in new ‘interdiscursive mixes’ – are both a sign of, and a driving force in, discursive and thereby socio-cultural change” (Jørgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 73). With regard to formal aspects, travel blogs allow writers to express themselves in innovative ways that differ from travel accounts in traditional media. As shown in the analysis, possibilities for creative expression are manifold and the information presented is usually visually attractive and easy to access for audiences. These factors contribute to having the story of travel being told in new ways. It is evident that the genre is changing and no longer clearly definable; it mixes with other genres and forms of representation, such as that of citizen journalism or fashion/lifestyle writing for example, whereby the process of ‘othering’ that is conventionally one of the main actions behind travel writing, moves further away from being constitutive for the genre and is accompanied by a growing number of other purposes.
8 Concluding Remarks

Based on the assumption that every communicative event functions as a form of social practice in reproducing or challenging the existing order of discourse, this critical discourse analysis explored the links between discursive practices concerning the representation of the ‘Middle East’ found on six chosen travel blogs and their societal implications. By drawing on affordance theory and notions from postcolonial theory, the analysis helped with understanding the potential of travel writing on blogs to both alter the genre and challenge normative ways of understanding the world.

Essentially, the analysis confirmed that the idea of the world being divided into two entities, the ‘West’ and the ‘non-West’, still permeates our thinking and that despite the affordances of travel blogs, the idea of the Oriental ‘other’ persists, which became especially visible in the US blog narratives. However, it could also be argued that travel writing on blogs does have transformative potential. This manifests not only in critical-reflective discursive practices and in creative, innovative ways of expression, which were present in all examined blog narratives, but foremost in the act of self-representation by people who have long been subjected to external representations and whose share in shaping the way people understand foreign places has historically been limited.

Given this finding, I consider it crucial to continue unknotting the genre of travel writing from its ‘Western’ moorings. As travel has become a more global and less predominantly ‘Western’ activity (Cocking, 2009, p. 56), it can be expected that the number of travel narratives from ethnically and culturally diverse perspectives will increase and with it the potential of hearing the story of travel being told in new, unconventional ways. The subject agency that increases with the ubiquity of new media must, however, be put into context. The ‘Middle Eastern’ bloggers whose writing was examined in this thesis are situated in a privileged position and the mere fact that online platforms invite everyone to participate in the formation of discourses, it does not mean that everyone has the social, cultural, and economic capital to freely travel the world and report on it. Moreover, it is questionable how powerful the sovereignty of ‘non-Western’ bloggers in renegotiating discourses can be, given the fact that the narratives are comparatively difficult to find as it was the case with the examined blogs in this thesis.
In summary, it can be said that the findings of my research support the assumption that travel writing can be progressive and emancipatory, but it also continues to face limitations that carry traces from the colonial past and underlie structures of contemporary forms of cultural imperialism that must not be ignored in this context. It might hence be too optimistic to see the examined travel blogs as definite counter-narratives to existing discourses. Nevertheless, this thesis has shown that blogging platforms offer writers a promising rage of goal-oriented actions and that these, when perceived and actualized, allow the genre of travel writing to engage in valuable political and moral conversations that can bear “witness to the enduring legacies of the past in ways that trouble contemporary certainties, […] [reckon] with the past in the name of a just future” (Clarke, 2018, p. 49), and thereby stimulate a renegotiation of how people understand the world.

Unquestionably, travel blogs are highly individual and may differ dramatically from one another, thus a different sample would have yielded different results. Nevertheless, the examined travel narratives demonstrated repetitive patterns which should be looked at again in further studies. Perhaps even more importantly, the findings of this work would benefit from additional research on a reception and production level, as Fairclough’s CDA suggests it. As media representations never directly determine what people think, it is crucial to investigate how audiences read and interpret travel blogs to more thoroughly evaluate the transformative potential of the medium. In our globalized world, where nearly ‘everybody’ travels and ‘difference’ tends to become less exotic, it seems increasingly contradictory that the genre of travel writing will continue to rely on its constituting feature of depicting ‘otherness’ and ‘foreignness’. Perhaps this is, however, the very feature that audiences want to engage with when reading about travel. When looking at the production level of travel writing, further research should, on the one hand, examine more closely how travel blogs intersect with and are affected by the tourism industry and, on the other hand, how the genre develops in more traditional and commercial media formats, such as in popular travel guides like Lonely Planet.

Finally, it should be underlined that travel media constitute promising sites for further research in media and communication studies that seek to explore transcultural encounters and the societal implications of such, especially when considering that people’s interest in ‘hard’ foreign news is diminishing (Yoo & Buzinde, 2011, p. 222). Ezz El Din (2016, p. 1) aptly stresses the responsibilites and possibilities of future
researchers: “If media practitioners applied a more critical awareness in their writings so as not to reproduce culturally rooted stereotypes, which can inflame conflicts between people and nations, we might see less hostility against migrants and achieve a less racist world.” Considering the ‘fear of Islam’ that has increasingly gripped ‘Western’ societies in recent years and the instrumentalization of such by right-wing parties, further research concerning representations of the ‘Middle East’ and the unequal power relations concealed within them is necessary and needed.
9 References

Bibliography


Empirical sources


Young Adventuress, 2013a. *This Adventuress is off to Jordan!* [Online] Available at: https://youngadventuress.com/2013/04/visit-jordan.html [Accessed 16 May 2018].


Appendices

1: Introduction to the ‘Middle East’ on Young Adventuress

Upon reflection, what surprised me the most about the Middle East is just how just how different it is from what is forced down our throats in American media.

Terrorists this, Taliban that, Arab insurgents over there, Muslims who kidnap Christians everywhere.

REALLY? Think hard, do you all really believe that that is indicative of the entire Middle East? If so, that's very small-minded and you should be ashamed.

America by and large generalizes the Middle East as a foreign and dangerous place, and of course some of it is well-deserved. Parts of the Middle East are volatile and unsafe, parts are war zones. But not all, and it's important to remember that.

Young Adventuress, 2013. *This Adventuress is off to Jordan!*. [Online] Available at: https://youngadventuress.com/2013/04/visit-jordan.html [Accessed 16 May 2018].

2: Introduction to the ‘Middle East’ on Adventurous Kate

Now, because I’m sure you’re all thinking it, here it is:

**Is it safe for a woman to travel alone in the Middle East?**

In parts of the Middle East, it’s as safe to travel as in Europe or North America. Remember that the Middle East is an incredibly diverse region, and just because Syria is under fire right now and there are bombings in Gaza, these incidents are not representative of the Middle East as a whole.

And perhaps most importantly, follow the news, but take sensationalized media coverage with a grain of salt. Know that if there’s violence or terrorist activity in a small region of a country (for example, the Sulu Archipelago in the Philippines), the entire country will be put on your country’s danger list. You wouldn’t go into bad parts of a city late at night — exercise that same caution abroad.

3: Objective of blogging about the 'Middle East' on *Young Adventuress* and *Adventurous Kate*

Young Adventuress, 2013. *This Adventuress is off to Jordan!*. [Online] Available at: https://youngadventuress.com/2013/04/visit-jordan.html [Accessed 16 May 2018].


4: Contesting stereotypes on *Adventurous Kate*

I worry if I’ll be leered at by the men; I worry that I’m not covered up enough. I worry that I’ll be completely unwelcome in this part of the city.

**But my fears are completely unfounded.**

I receive no more attention than in other countries — and not even as much as in Italy or Argentina! Of course, there are a few stares. (“It’s only the Iraqis. Iraqis stare. They’re just curious,” Ibrahim tells me.) And while most of the women in downtown Amman are wearing the hijab, Western women are not expected to cover up at the same level.

And you’d never guess what it was like at the salon, where I enjoyed a few spa treatments as a birthday gift. The salon was for women only, and the windows were covered. Veiled woman after veiled woman came in, whipped her veil and robe off, and got her hair done.

Not what I expected — not remotely.


5: Contesting stereotypes on *Young Adventuress*

Perched on a rock, watching the sun slowly sink behind a thick layer of sand and dust, we drank sage tea and conversed with Hussein, a local Bedouin and one of the most interesting people I’ve encountered on my travels. Over a glass of steaming hot tea, he told us how he met and fell in love with his Hungarian wife. As the sun started to sink faster, I pulled out my iPhone and asked him to take a photo, trying to show him what buttons to click. Laughing, he pulled out his own iPhone and began showing me some great photos he’s taken of his daily life.

21st century Bedouins. Wasn’t expecting that.

Most asked questions for a Hijabi

As a hijabi or a Muslim living in an international community, I get asked a lot of questions about my religion or my Hijab.

I love, LOVE to answer every single question, it is my way to show you the real me and my real religion! So I thought why don’t I gather all the questions I get asked and put them in one funny blog post! Will I did!

**General information**

*Hijab*: headscarf or a piece of cloth that cover your head!

*Hijabi*: A woman who wears Hijab or head scarf.

*Everything I wrote here is from my perspective, not others, you will find lots of people disagree with me, which is totally fine as long there are love and respect*

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**Q**: why are hijab styles generally differ from one region to another? For example my style and Iranian or Emirate style?

**A**: This really depends on the culture, cultures have their own way of expressing, each culture has their signature hijab style. Like I can tell where this girl from her Hijab style if that makes any kind of sense!!!

**Q**: Do you wear Makeup?

**A**: I do! I love love makeup! although I don’t wear that much, I have tons of makeup in my room!

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7: Additional category on *The Zeina Diary*


8: Additional category on *Arabian Wanderess*

Saudi Stories

Women Driving in Saudi Arabia

15 Facts About Saudi Women

Read More →
It is true. A Saudi woman cannot leave Saudi without her male guardian's permission no matter how old she is or her social status. A Saudi woman's life revolves around the openness of her guardian. This is the key to the Saudi woman's freedom. It is sad, scary and super hard. I know many girls who are in situations where they cannot even travel to further their education because their fathers or husbands would not give them exit permission. Some are fearful for their daughters/wives safety and others are just control freaks. Keep in mind this is only a cultural practice and not religious and a lot of the Saudi rules and laws are based on the old Arabian culture.

Thankfully, many Saudi women are lucky enough to be brought up in better conditions than the above, where they come from educated families with understanding parents who trust them and encourage their travels. I am very thankful that my family is that type.


Pros:

• Driving will give women more freedom, and make them less dependant of their male guardian.
• Having less foreign drivers who charge so much
• Making the car journey safer instead of being under the mercy of a strange man.
• A women will be able to get to work and other places without begging all the males of her family to take her to one place (even her own sons).
• In case of an emergency, or the need to go to the hospital, a woman should be prepared to take action. What if her male guardian got injured, and she can't find another driver?
• It's a human right. The right of mobility.

Cons:

• Driving will give women more freedom, and make them less dependant of their male guardian.
• Some Saudi men are not respectful towards women, and some will go out of their way when they see a women driving to harass her intentionally. Especially, teenagers and uneducated, close minded men.
• Saudi men and men who drive in Saudi -generally- don't follow any rules and they just drive not caring about any one on the road. There are all sorts of violations on the street and women might not be ready for that.
• The Saudi roads are so messed up and they are not fit for more people to drive.
### 9: Critical reflections about politics on *Arabian Wanderess*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Claim</th>
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<tr>
<td>ISIS claimed the attack as their own. To be honest, I am really upset that everyone refers to them as the “Islamic State.” I know they gave themselves the names, but I am going to start calling them SS the Satanic State. That is what they are. Devils and demons causing deaths and spreading hate and anger. It makes my blood boil, when Islam is associated with evil or blamed for evil. It is a really peaceful religion with a book that has life guidelines and stories. It is just easy to take things out of contexts and turn it to something it is not. Religion is not to blame, but people and their dark hearts and greed should be held responsible.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISIS KILLED TODAY</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHIA MUSLIMS IN KUWAIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNNI MUSLIMS IN TUNISIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-MUSLIMS IN FRANCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I DON'T KNOW WHAT ISIS IS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL I KNOW IS THAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS DOES NOT REPRESENT ISLAM</td>
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**Experience Camel Culture**

The role of the camel in Emirati culture isn’t just limited to taking visitors for a ten-minute ride on a desert safari. The love for the mighty beast of the desert runs generations deep to a time when nomadic Bedouin desert tribes used them for transportation, milk and meat to survive in the unforgiving conditions of the Arabian desert. Though you can’t join a camel-led desert caravan through the Empty Quarter anymore, there are other experiences to help you understand the ‘camel culture’ in the U.A.E.

Between October and March, rise early one morning and experience the palpable energy at the Al Marmoum Racetrack. Camel racing is a huge sport in the U.A.E and crowds of enthusiastic locals gather at the racetrack as early as 6.30am to support their beloved racing camels from all over the Middle East. Dressed in shiny camel jewelry, the beasts, fitted with robotic jockeys, gallop towards the finish line leaving behind clouds of dust, nervous owners and excited onlookers. The stakes are high with the fastest camels winning cash prizes, luxury SUVs and a whole lot of prestige for their owners.
11: Identity construction on *The Zeina Diary* and *Arabian Wanderess*

**Author: Zeina**

An Iraqi/ Hijabi Travel blogger. Trying to make a difference! I want to empower women and Iraqis in specific. However, I faced a lot of obstacles because of my Passport, I don’t have the luxury to travel to many countries, but I will continue to believe in myself and the world.

Hi everyone!

My name is Ebra Alhamal and I am a Saudi travel blogger based in London. I share my travel experiences as an Arab Muslim woman traveling solo or with friends on here and on YouTube.

I focus on Muslim female friendly destinations worldwide and my travel interests are architectural heritage and outdoor activities.


12: Objective of blogging on The Zeina Diary

Why did I started blogging

As a Hijabi woman from a country that is now known for war and destruction, I wanted to make a difference (As lame as it is) I really want to leave a good and proud Image of Iraq, Women and me to the world.

I wanted to show everyone, That Women especially Arab women can do anything they want! I wanted to show that a normal Hijabi woman like you and me can do something! And thats why I started blogging!

13: Dichotomizing practices on *Adventurous Kate* and *The Blonde Abroad*

Now, THIS was different from the Amman I had seen so far! Modern, trendy, and very Westernized — it reminded me of the Nimmanhaemin neighborhood of Chiang Mai, Thailand, more than anywhere else I’ve been.

There were even bars. But most popular were tea houses — like the one above, Cafe des Artistes, filled with funky local art. Everyone in this neighborhood is dressed Western-style, and it shows that Amman is a constantly evolving city.


Jordan is a country that offers a gentle introduction for those who are new to the Middle East, providing a nice balance between the traditional and cultural aspects of the region with the modern atmosphere of the West. Amman is a great example of this, providing many modern luxuries while still retaining its uniquely Jordanian and Middle Eastern culture.


14: Dichotomizing practices on *The Boho Chica*

*For the cities:* The cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi have huge expat populations and are essentially very cosmopolitan. It’s common for women and men to be dressed as they would be in the Western world. The residents are very fashionable and very rarely do you see people dressed sloppily.


15: Dichotomizing practices on *Arabian Wanderess*

*These are only few examples. There are many more similar cases. I think it’s great that those people are welcomed in Saudi and given cool opportunities, but it will be even greater if jobs are given based on the individual skills, relevant degrees and work experience to holders of ANY nationality.*

It will be great if the same scrutiny is applied to any applicants from all nationalities or if that scrutiny is taken out all together to check the individuals skills and abilities.


16: Associations with the ‘Middle East’ on *Young Adventuress*

17: Desert narratives on the US blogs


18: Bedouin narrative on *Adventurous Kate*

I’m going to the Middle East!

In just two weeks I’ll be flying across the Atlantic to get my first taste of this enchanting region of the world. This is something entirely new for me and, to be honest, I feel incredibly ignorant because I lack any real knowledge of the customs or culture there. A million questions are running through my head like, “Do I need to dress conservatively?” “What key phrases should I learn and in what language?” “Am I going to feel like I stand out because I’m a blonde American?” “Is it dangerous?”

I’m embarrassed to admit that, at 24 years old, I still imagine the Middle East as a Disney cartoon with magic lamps, flying carpets and sexy “street rats” with chiseled abs and pet monkeys.

More than just a restaurant, the Arab-style Al Hadheerah is set among the sand dunes and offers a full entertainment experience. Watch a falconry display, a horse show, a camel caravan, or an impressive tanoura dancing show while have dinner.

You can get a sense of what traditional Arabic culture really looks like, and experience a page out of the famous One Thousand and One Nights.


20: Stereotypical representations of the ‘Middle East’ on Adventurous Kate

Dear Readers,

I know that many of you long to see the world. So you’ve traveled a bit in Europe. You’ve done the resort vacation in Mexico. Perhaps you’ve done a bit of Central America or even Asia.

And you’d like to try somewhere new– somewhere adventurous, and exciting, and DIFFERENT.

May I make a suggestion? Go to Jordan.


21: Framing of the ‘Middle East’ on Young Adventuress

Over the past few years I have developed a surprising interest in the Middle East. For the longest time Europe held the number one place in my heart, and it still does for the most part. But somewhere out of the blue, somewhere between hiking in the mountains of Morocco, to sailing down the Nile to getting lost in the spice markets of Istanbul, I fell in love with this area of the world.

So different and so misunderstood, every time I head to the Middle East, I get more curious and discover new things, and I learn that everything I thought I knew was wrong.

But I want more. I want to see it all. Though I don’t believe in bucket lists, preferring goals with a purpose; but I think I will go ahead and shout it out loud here on my blog (hoping you all will hold me to it) that I hope to visit all of the countries in the Middle East by the time I’m 30. That’s do-able, right? (NO ONE TELL MY MOM, PLEASE!)

Young Adventuress, 2013. This Adventuress is off to Jordan!. [Online] Available at: https://youngadventuress.com/2013/04/visit-jordan.html [Accessed 16 May 2018].
22: Categorizations of travel destinations


Middle Eastern food might have found its way to other continents in the form of shawarma, hummus, falafel, and doner kebabs - street food that you’ll find in every major city of the world, but, there’s nothing like exploring its culinary heritage in the region that is its home. From the Jordanian mjadara (a rice and lentil dish where they’re cooked together), kotfa btahini (a baked meat dish) and mansaf (a rice and meat dish), and Emirati harra (a meat and wheat dish cooked in a clay pot in a clay oven) and machboos (a rice and meat dish), to Levantine favorites such as shawarma, moutabel, and arayes, Middle Eastern food in the region tastes very different from its imported versions worldwide and is a big reason for the gourmand traveler to come visit.

Did you think that all the Middle East had to offer in terms of nature was the desert? While the magnificence of the vast Empty Quarter and the moonscape of Wadi Rum are undeniable, you’d be surprised to know that there is more to nature in the Middle East. From the wadis, sinkholes, beaches, and fjords of Oman, the olive groves, beautiful coastslines, and the wetlands and forest reserves of Jordan, and the lush landscapes of Lebanon to the tranquil nature reserve of the Sir Bani Yas Island and Hajar Mountains in the UAE, there is lots to keep the nature lover busy.

24: Emphasizing diversity of the UAE on The Boho Chica


25: Representing daily life on Arabian Wanderess