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Five Books That Are Literal "True-Life" Masterpieces but Fail to Tell the Complete Truth

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Five books which are literal ‘true-life’ masterpieces; however, fail to tell the complete truth ii

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ABSTRACT:

There are five controversial 'true-to-life' books written in human history, going back 3,700 years to the present. These books hold a wealth of knowledge, and span from religions of the world to geopolitics, politics and warfare. The greatest part in these books is the treasure trove of history, which ought to be read by the generations who comes after. To understand these books there is needed to start by looking at them objectively, and as great as they are, some of the pages in these classics falter to tell the complete truth about what has progressed through history or they have been unbalanced in telling a one-sided perspective; whether it has been that way because of personal beliefs, subjectivity or people not realizing that everything must be viewed for its imperfections. Not on single book has been written without mistakes, but the problem is when people take these books and consider them the de facto source without properly studying them and corroborating with other sources (five or more) to see if matters have changed in the world make-up, religious wise, political, historical or geographical in the place when and where these books were inspired. It is important to analyze if any of the authors have done mistakes, while producing these classics. It isn't only to call out the authors for the errors committed, but most importantly, it is for those people who talk about these books to others in a positive manner, and fail to mention the shortcomings on their pages. The following books are: the Holy Bible, Talmud, Koran, Edgar Snow's "Red Star Over China" and Steve Coll's "Ghost Wars". As I will be stating over and over, it is important to take these books with a 'grain of salt'. Other than taking these with a 'grain of salt' and researching further for those reading my words--to see if the content/connections can become better and corrected for future generations to come.

Keywords: Bible, Koran, Literature, Communism, Talmud, True Life (Bibliography) and Warfare

There wasn't any conflict of interest while writing this study.

FIVE BOOKS WHICH ARE LITERAL 'TRUE-LIFE' MASTERPIECES; HOWEVER, FAIL TO TELL THE
COMPLETE TRUTH

I. INTRODUCTION:

In this theorized version of events, there is one thing happening (and that has always happened) with the truth... The truth is in the eyes of the beholder, and those who research it; whether it is from the perspective of a reporter, writer, student, teacher, police officer or investigator/detective. The truth is one sided sometimes and it is written most times from the perspective of the victor/conqueror. The truth can be subjective, whether the person who is writing it, is doing their best to be objective or subjective. Nobody can say, there is a complete truth, it's just a fallacy of sorts. Those who say, my truth is complete are people lying to themselves. At the end of the day, truth influences every single human being according to their belief system (political or religious) and principles, etc. That is why, humanity needs to have continuous peaceful debates.

What this dissertation intends to prove through five different books is the following: that the "so called" truth isn't always complete. The writer (although he/she researches and investigates) cannot say with 100% accuracy/certainty, my truth is gold. In other words, complete truths aren't always there to guide us, we need to further expand with three to five different references in study or more to feel that we are reaching or gaining some portion of the truth. For example, we can say, $2 + 2 = 4$, that is a complete and conclusive 100% truth. However, one cannot say with certainty that JFK (John F. Kennedy) was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald. The latter sentence has been disputed throughout history and nobody can agree on (especially historians) that JFK was assassinated entirely by Oswald. Nobody can state with 100% accuracy. Therefore, from this point, it's important to hypnotize that there isn't any complete truth, just a subjective perspective which we carry with us and in hopes to find it (the truth as a moral compass) in our daily investigations as students of literature or philosophy, and what history has given us since the conception of humanity.

What this investigation intends to focus on (further) with five-controversial books, those which I will breakdown later throughout this introduction. These books are literary-truths to life classics, and I will extend my/our knowledge from ancient history into contemporary society. These ideas will take us into the days and foundation of the Israelite, with Abraham at the helm, Islam and Muhammad, Mao's Civil and Anti-Japanese War to the social issues which affect us today--topics such as terrorism and 9-11 (September 11th, 2001).

The literature given here are complete works; however, there will be references to back-up and suggest that these books stated below these lines are only a one-sided perspective. These points of view (or opinions) are given to us by the people who lived through an era or

period in history, and that will be backed by people whom their politics or religious beliefs are in the center, right or left and extreme in the arena of perspectives. These books are also full of beauty and horror, such is the case with 'holy' books like the King James Bible, something that to many Christians is considered a holy book; there will be the mention of the Koran explained from a two-prong approach (From the negative side which affects Islam today, the positive which exalts this religious system, and going back in history on the what, why and how this happened). However, many of its personalities and history in these books are drenched in horror, sexism, rape, murder, genocide and racism or thinly-veiled hatred towards a certain group according to their backgrounds, color of skin or race, etc. There is also the other side of these books, showcasing: love, adventure, history, great-story telling, friendship, unity, camaraderie, helping each other and spirituality. All these points are arguments which tell a certain truth, but not the complete truth.

a) The Holy Bible (Old and New Testament):

A book which goes back some 3,700 years (with the backing of the Torah) and as 'saintly' as those in their respective churches love to portray the Bible (especially the King James Version of 1611). A masterpiece in classical works, and for the majority of the stories, these are for the most part based on true life: there is the beauty of love, miracles between a God and his people. However, the truth to the matter stands, the Bible is one book full of sex, violence and bloodshed throughout its history. It also has great beauty (as mentioned before) in humanity and redemption. Therefore, it was written by imperfect men who tell us what we ought to be doing in the eyes of God. However, the truth still remains, when people talk about God in its most simplistic form, they fail to address the facts that the ancient Hebrews to conquer the land of Palestine didn't only put armies of men to the sword; but also the innocent--that's including civilians (men, women, children and the elderly). We forget the amount of cruelty portrayed in this book and more often than not, those whom are religious cannot accept these facts in their own lives, and accept it simply as the word of God in a fanatical way. Abraham is the founder of the Hebrew nation and how can people excuse his actions or thoughts when it even crossed his mind of putting his son to death; was it the act of a fanatic, lunatic, under the influence of alcohol, a drug induced state or just following the orders of God? Moses is regarded as one of the most important men in the Torah and Bible, but can we justify his actions when going in and conquering the land of Canaan? Even going to the extreme in placing the innocent under the sword. Many people can argue with me that it is the word of God, the sign of the times, and how can God allow this in the first place? What I see is a blind-fundamental point of view and a total lack of true spirituality! Am I wrong to think this way? When men like King David (דָּוִד) later came into the story-line, can we possibly do our best to excuse him as a man of his time? However, plenty of people forget to mention that he killed thousands, he went as far as to have an affair with his best friend's wife, Bathsheba. Then, to take his woman after

getting her pregnant, ordered the death of his best friend in the field of battle by telling his soldiers to stay back or back away and not help--as the poor guy went out to face the enemy alone (unaware of his potential death). Later, King David had a son, Solomon (שְׁלֹמֹה) the wise. He was notorious for his womanizing and had over 700 wives and 300 concubines in his harem. He was quite lustful over the Queen of Sheba (שֶׁבַּא מַלְכֵּת) and the Bible can decorate something like this with fancy/flowery prose--but it is what it is, lust. The Book of Songs is another book that is based on the sexual prowess of men, and the lusting over a man or woman; and there isn't anything wrong with that or the love between a man and woman. What I often worry about is how people whom are believers behave towards those who decide or have the right not to believe--and equate them to sin. The chronicles in the Book of Judges, here is the story of Samson and Delilah, and it leaves a lot to be desired (in the old Testament). As time goes by, even Herod's lustful of his own step-daughter, and for this, he puts Saint John to death by cutting off his head (New Testament). And I'm not stating this because I am saintly, these are things which have to be thought out and ought to be faced, and are often denied to make a book look holier than those reading it; whether it was handed down from the Torah to the Bible. Preachers and Rabbis often forget/fail to mention the latter books when preaching about these religious books. The same religious books which are often filled with tales of the following: sex, orgies, blood-lust in war/battle, genocide and cruelty towards another fellow human being. And only what is addressed, as I stated previously is the positive side of humanity. This book can be quite judgmental towards other people, and those whom are religious do their best to ignore these realities and try to behave holier than others/thou. During this dissertation, I will write about the different stories in the Bible and what contemporary religious people forget to acknowledge, the pros and cons. And I am not saying, don't believe in God or in this book, of course, that's not the case. Believe in something holy if that is your wish, but keep in mind that this/these book/books were written by less than perfect men and few women--who often sinned and weren't perfect at all. The issue often stems in contemporary society by the fear of saying something wrong and the political correctness of this period in history.

b) The Talmud (תַּלְמוּד):

Completed around the year 500 of the Common Era (C.E.), the Talmud is basically the book which guides Jewish law or for those Jews whom are observant of the Sabbath or other Jewish holidays--according to the rabbinical laws and customs. It is a compendium of books which offers insight into the Jewish-world and belief system since their days in Babylonia and until the present-day. What many don't state or say when it is being told or taught by the rabbis, as with the Torah, that these books can be somewhat deeply sexist, misogynist and treat women as objects (Kirsch, 2015). What I am stating is the following, that these books are important to read and understand to be

able to follow religious beliefs-traditions in their true beauty and essence; however, they ought to be analyzed in context according to the times these books were written in. I also do believe in the historical context/validity, and importance in the continuance of these traditions. That is not to say, the Talmud or books like the Torah should be rejected. No, I do comprehend that all books written in the past have to be taken with a 'grain of salt' and understood according to the period in which these were written in; whether they are considered 'holy' or not. In ancient times, as in Babylonia or Canaan, these societies were already deeply patriarchal and there was rampant male-chauvinism. Therefore, the laws inserted into these texts were the ones to be followed by men and then, passed down to women and their children. My biggest concern, as I will later explain and expand upon what this book and other books--is when these systems or methods which affected women in ancient times are still practiced presently. Leading people to fall into fundamentalism, and that is my biggest worry/concern by those whom read it and don't take the time to analyze the period in history in which they were written and continue to affect the rights of women or other minorities for that matter. A book can be hidden in the religious-glory of perfection, and those who believe in these often dismiss the painful truths these classics contain. That is why, I do understand that all systems, whether these are religious, social or political ought to go through a reformation (transformation) every generation (every 20 to 25 years) of sorts to help/assist these beliefs to grow into something positive for societies to flourish and learn from them. Therefore, looking at the past as a lesson for these horrors to never be repeated.

c) The Koran/Qur'an (الْقُرْآنُ) & The Prophet Muhammad (مُحَمَّدٌ):

One of the most controversial books to come to light in the last 1,400 years was the Koran. Often mentioned, that it was the Angel Gabriel who inspired Muhammad to write down the word of God onto its pages. The Koran is one of the most read books on earth. After all, Islam is the second largest religion on the planet. However, as with Judaism and Christianity, it is often mired/riddled in controversy. Islam as the two latter religious beliefs are founded in violence and bloodshed. The beauty which emanates from the pages of the Koran is fantastic, gorgeous prose and a classic in literature. However, it is a belief system founded by a man, whether we agree with him or not, he was a man who believed in polygamy and controversially so, married his 6-year old cousin, Aisha when Muhammad was already 53. Many non-believers of the Koran have called this pedophilia, and the question remains--why do such practices in certain Muslim countries still remain? The medieval period was something different and at the time it was full of complexities, that was when a female had to marry a powerful man to insure her status, a good life and security. But to marry a child, who yes, they say as she came into puberty at age 9 (Aisha), consummated the marriage with Muhammad. Still, to me that is anathema, even for that period. But that was then and this is now, when extremism has once again

flourished in certain Arab and Muslim countries. This is not to say, that the majority of Muslims aren't good people or those of true faith. I do comprehend that all beliefs are good for humanity (in some way) and have a positive side. However, what Islam has to be held accountable for is the truth and reality of today. When women in certain nations can easily be raped, abused, tortured or molested by a family member; and if they denounce their attacker, it is at the risk and high-possibility of 200 lashings (e.g. Saudi Arabia). There is such a thing in certain Muslim cultures (e.g. particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan) with its infamous honor killings, which still affect women presently. Furthermore, there is still the rights of women, which leave a lot to be desired along several of the Middle East and North African countries. I have always understood that like for Judaism and Christianity, the same ought to apply for the Muslim faith/community. There is plenty of beauty in Islam, as is the case with the Muslim believers; but again, the majority of Sunni and Shiite peoples have to start standing-up and asking for further reform from within their faiths. The potential is there for a better and greater change. I can only address what I have seen on the issues of the hijab or terrorism; since the majority of Muslims, as well as, Islamist are those of faith. But there is a minority which brings shame to the religion, when they force a female to wear a ha-jib--which is something that ought to be by choice and not by force. There are others who take up arms to terrorize, these shameful acts aren't only to destroy Western society, but other fellow Muslims and Islamist caught in the crossfires of hate as well. The potential is there for Islam, as is the case for Judaism and Christianity to not live in hate, but to live in peace among the commonality of their belief systems. On these topics, I shall later write further in depth for all to get a clearer picture on the rights and wrongs of these faiths; what they should do to change and go in a positive direction.

d) Red Star Over China - Edgar Snow:

Edgar Snow's "Red Star Over China" is a contemporary classic and the true to life modern tale on the Red Army's origins and how this ragtag army fought their way from obscurity to the top. In more ways than one, it is a story about war, their survival after the impressive Long March (6,000 miles/9,656 kilometers), fighting a foreign aggressor and also, the fight for equality. In many ways, it's a miraculous true story. At the time it was written, Ed Snow was a foreign correspondent with the Red Army for the next five-months and in this true life story, the army was fighting a war on multiple fronts. This war was being fought against anti-colonialism, the Japanese Imperial Army (JIP) who invaded their lands. The Red Army who had to fight the hardships of poverty while helping the local population and also, they were fighting Chang Kai-shek's (蔣瑞元) notorious Kuomintang Government. The Red Army led by Mao Zedong (毛泽东) and his soldiers gave the 'A' typical friendliness and smiles to Mister Snow as a foreign correspondent; however, many truths this reporter didn't cover, or he was hidden from the daily truths at the time, as he wrote the book in rapid desperation for publication.

This book also serves as a biography to Mao's incredible life story, journey, the class struggle, his rise to power; while dealing/enduring hardships to unite his people, by allowing his country to properly step-out of impoverishment and into the of the Twentieth-Century. The problems which this book doesn't address are the cruelties and realities of war. In a way, it is romanticized as a war for an adventurer and the Red Army as the good guys. And at the time, it may have been that way. Well, in the way it is addressed; however, it a one-sided and subjective version on the Red Army being the saintly and sole saviors of China. There is more to it than that. China during the 1930s was being brutalized by foreign exploitation and empires, but the worse was yet to come when the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931 and later, mainland China by 1937. What Mister Snow got from being with the Red Army during those crucial months was the scoop of a lifetime, according to sources at the time (Zagoria, 1997). What Snow takes upon himself in these first-hand-accounts is a romanticized version of Mao and the Red Army, and in truth it was prophetic in what was later to occur in China. But one issue must be addressed, for Mao to lead the Army forward, win the day and not be defeated, it had to be done with an iron grip and will. That is why, as I stated above these lines, the winning of the Red Army over the Japanese and later, the nationalist in Nanjing is no short of a miracle. Criticize Mao if you will, and that we shall do when researching and exposing Edgar Snow's book. However, I must state it will be dissected from the positive and negative perspectives. When Snow came along as the first outsider and journalist to cover the war, already Mao had been fighting the Kuomintang for 12-years. Mao's self-glorification came also from the fact in which he was a resilient leader and lucky survivor who was once caught and escaped execution. An educator and a person whom was and still is deeply admired for his written works (especially in his home province of Hunan). What is China today? It is amazing to watch and see. And at the same time, what was China then and it is now incredible to admire, while reading this timeless classic, "Red Star Over China". Here is a contemporary classic which has stood the test of time for 88-years and counting. It is a must read for all those, whether they agree or not with Snow's or Mao's words.

e) Ghost Wars - Steve Coll:

Steve Coll is one of the best writers and journalist between the end of the Twentieth and beginning of the Twenty-first Century. A Pulitzer-Prize winner and a man who wrote "Ghost Wars", which is the true-life story of the C.I.A.¹ (Central Intelligence Agency) in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Who is the de facto man, and the best whom to write this true-life masterpiece. And at the same time, what Ghost Wars doesn't account for is the fact in which America has had a long-spiraling journey. This road began back in the 1980s, when the then Soviets (Russia today) invaded Afghanistan (1979 to 1989) and

¹ C.I.A. Central Intelligence Agency was established in 1947 by President Harry S. Truman.

started a brutal war, and it later spilled out into a 9-year civil war (McGee, 2022). From this point, Afghanistan would never be the same again and it hasn't since 1979.

Afghanistan is a country which has struggled to achieve peace for the last 44-years and tragically, it has not! Foreign intervention since the early-Nineteenth Century has been conducive to the problems which Afghanistan suffers from today (McGee, 2022). The poverty it has lived with, religious intolerance, fundamentalism, extremism and abuse had all began long before; when Russia and the United Kingdom tried to fight and exert their power/dominance/influence over the region. Every single time a foreign power has invaded, it has had a disastrous consequences over that Empire (superpower)--meeting its "literal death"; whether it came from Russia, U.K. or the United States. While empires did try to force their values down the Afghani's throats, Afghanistan has always proven to be a handful in more ways than one. These wars has taken constant turns and tolls on the population. Guerrilla fighting among the tribes and the formation an extremist/fundamentalist army like the Taliban has kept the country at bay, illiterate and ignorant. This has caused one of the worst conditions in human history. Females/women not being allowed to learn, children often brutalized and the local population in constant fear for their lives. Afghanistan has been at these constants for decades, and when the United States invaded in 2001, there was hope for the future; however, it soon turned into another bloodbath and America's initial lack of commitment back in the 1990s did cost them the war in Afghanistan decades later. In this, I believe Mister Coll's book did address; but it didn't address the fact that our problems began long before in places, such as: Lebanon--back in 1983. When Americans at this point started becoming targets for extremism and terrorist acts around the world. The United States didn't take a long-hard look at its foreign policy and the way it treated other countries around the planet. America has always had this arrogance and feelings of hubris to look down on others. Thinking only on military might and not bothering to learn/understand the country's culture and language when entering into it. Therefore, this is one of the main issue other than the prisoners taken to black-op sites and detained for years (whether they were innocent or guilty). This dissertation shall touch and deal with later along these lines. These disasters did not come to the American people overnight. These issues go back to Vietnam (1959 - 1975), Iraq (2003 - 2011) and Afghan (2001 - 2021) Wars. America has to rethink its strategy when going into other lands, and stop thinking that guerrilla forces who live in the mountains, underground tunnels and caves cannot beat the U.S. military. This mistake has proven costly over and over. On that note, there is an old Spanish saying, "If you raise crows, they will eventually pluck your eyes out!" When will the U.S. learn to stop creating these monsters or monstrous conditions/circumstances. This is another topic, I will be covering further along these pages.

These five books are uniquely impressive, because for one-single reason, they have stood the test of time and the quality of the written works shows as such. All have the elements of history to consider and without books like these or people for that matter, the world would certainly be a lesser place. These books cover altogether a span in history going back 3,700 years to the present (in the latter, in the last 20-years or so).

I began with the Bible, since it's one of the oldest books at hand and it is also inspired on the Torah, which are in essence the five most holy books in Judaism (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) and for the Bible, this is covered in the Old Testament. However, in this thesis, I will intend to cover or uncover those books and historical personalities in context, these historical figures that people whom are often religious and in contemporary society don't want to tell the truth, deny or dismiss those in these books as saintly--when they were often all too human. We often give the Bible or Torah a mark a infallible, the complete truth and the word of God; and tell those in the Western-Christian and Judaism world that this/these book/books are holy. When a person comes to study them, they will view, and see many stories of beauty and spirituality to lift the spirits of hope. There will also be stories of deep shame. As I move the reader into the different parts of the book, it is important to understand that I'll do my best (in spite of my feelings) to use positive and negative stories to reflect on why this/these particular religious book/books aren't about the truth; but it is about who is right! The latter is a sad statement, but it is often how people want to feel and view what is right about their religion, and not take the time to properly analyze how this book/these books came to be. It is my job as the investigator to remain as neutral, impartial and objective as possible. I want to write out this investigation as fair and balanced as can be. The problems with books like the Bible or Torah for that matter is the following, and this will be the error in this study: to try to compare what happened thousands of years ago with present-day--political correctness, morality and ethics. Therefore, this in essence is a tragedy, because I am here judging this book/these books and its characters according to my values, and not what had happened in ancient times. This was a total different world than what we have today. As I move forward into the investigation and the reader through the Bible, issues will come-up with the story of Yshua/Jesus Christ, John (there were several, and that I will explain) and Peter. Towards the end of the part, I will focus entirely on the Book of Revelations and why at times the Bible contradicts itself, or was it different writers contradicting themselves? From the words of Jesus of "love thy enemy" to the fanatical views of Peter, and the often confusing Book of the Apocalypse (Revelation): showing a God of hate, judgment, vengeance, fire and brimstone. This is something to be covered and analyzed correctly, and for the reader a warning if you are a Christian, this writing is not to make you believe more or less about your faith. It is written with the purpose to expose the truth which is often denied or not properly studied in this book/these books, etc. Then, it is to clarify, this isn't a religious thesis, but an analysis about the most important books which have influenced our world and to take a closer look at them. It is always necessary to consider, what comes from God (if you believe in one) can be taken as perfection, right?

However, what is written from the human perspective, is it perfect? These traits are the vital ones to consider as you read about portions of the Torah and Bible in conjunction.

The next book is the Talmud, and it's important to consider this book objectively, even when reading the subjective portions written throughout antiquity. It is the written law passed down since the days of Moses and according to what was written, it was passed down for the Hebrew people to follow (from the Torah into the Talmud millennia later). Since the days of the Hebrew tribes in the Sinai Desert, this book was the law for all those are traditionalist Jews (the Torah) or those who follow the Orthodoxy letter of the law (into the Babylonian Talmud). It many ways, it is believed to be given by God and for the time it was written in, yes, possibly that was applicable; however, that isn't the case today. This book has to be placed under a microscope for deeper analysis in the Twenty-first Century to understand it and to comprehend why women were excluded from certain portions; when Judaism or Jewish roots are passed through the female gene and not the male. It tells the importance of the book and to view in the period it was written. That doesn't mean certain practices should be done today. First of all, the Talmud has two ways to analyze and study it. There is The Babylonian Talmud, and that is the book this study will focus upon and then, there is The Jerusalem Talmud. The Jews in contemporary times, at least in their majority concentrate their practices or the majority on the Babylonian one. And to be fair, is this book fundamentalist or is it misogynist for that matter? Well, maybe in ancient times, and this isn't an excuse or to excuse the writings in the Talmud. Deeper study has to raise awareness at the time in history it was written and that today in principle, we cannot condone what is happening when women are treated like second-class citizens according to what was said and stated on a tablet or paper 1,500 years ago. That wouldn't be fair for the females or males reading these words, but we shall look deeply into what was said. Furthermore, it is important to consider this book for reading; whether the person reading it is Jewish or not. The importance in reading this work is because it is one noted as one of the greatest classic and literal works in history. It isn't only for the religious practices and doctrines to follow in Judaism, but it is more to read and become open minded on what are the Jews and Judaism. It doesn't mean, I shall only write about the positive points in the book; however, I shall also show those portions that are negative and affect anybody whether they are male or female. Therefore, the Talmud (Babylonian or Jerusalem) shouldn't be easily dismissed; but read to be enlightened and understand all about the history of this book.

When often reading books like the Koran (meaning, "Recitation") or the story of the holy Prophet Muhammad, the people reading these literary or religious true-life texts/works take everything too literal and forget when these books were written. To judge and say something is essentially wrong according to what a couple of extremist do, it is unfair to an entire society or close to two-billion believers and counting. This is the later religion in the world after Christianity. But one must take the pros and cons that come with life, as is the same with religion. The Koran in essence has great power, and it's a classic in religious literature and circles. The point is the following: there are verses (of the few) which are taken from the Koran and

used as points to show extremism or the case in which something is negatively wrong; and the beauty of the other verses which is a majority aren't taken into consideration. Iman's (إيمان) or the preachers need to challenge (explain more) these verses, or those who speak negatively about the belief, need to dive in deeper to understand things in and out of context. The problem is when we cannot look at something objectively for its beauty, instead of only looking at the fanatical points of view written or manifested during a certain period in history; which at times have been the lesser, and not the other way around. There are many examples of great spirituality in Islam. Overall, we have basically judged an entire religion for generations, and it was something which got far worse after the September 11th, 2001 attacks on New York City (U.S.A.). However, what about the positives surrounding this faith. That is something to further explore and study, as I write about the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad in the later pages. Going back to what I mentioned previously in countries like Pakistan, with the problems or issues on honor killings; however, for several acts of cruelty, there are millions of examples of greater kindness. Taking the belief of Islam, if a person isn't religious or doesn't believe in God (Allah - الله), there are positives and negatives into the faith which must be noted and will be noted throughout this study. However, there are a couple of things to say, before I move into the next book, Islam is a belief system which centers on the family. It is overall, the respect of values for women, children and the elderly; therefore, it is based on equality. It's also centered on closely knit communities, and the nucleus is the family (SE, 2022). Now, there are also things, I believe are improper or wrong with the faith, such as: Muslim women covering themselves-up entirely; but that is for the concept of modesty. In some Muslim countries, women have to by force-and in others-it is a choice. The division in certain societies between men and women can often prove too much to bear (with a striking difference), or the lashing of people in public places (by the moral police) for mistakes and to curve sin--as for places in Saudi Arabia. Hitting a woman is already a sin in my eyes; therefore, she shouldn't be castigated even more for reporting something improperly done to her or hit by another for not wearing her hijab properly. Less than a decade ago, women were finally allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia; is this the rendition of equality that people talk about and never act on it? A belief system ought to be weighed, and change positively with the times to go forward. Does Islam need to be reformed? Some Muslims around the world say, "Nought!" I'd respectfully disagree, and it has to be taken into consideration these changes from the negative to the positive to progress into the future. For now, we'll just have to wait and see, and study further on how this belief is good for society, and can serve as a model of tolerance for the world; while exploring how to curve the negatives which affect it. That will come with time, and the more we study and learn about it.

Before we embark further into the study, there is a moment to understand and never underestimate a book like, the "Red Star Over China". A classical in history and literature, and as I mentioned before, a book which ought to be read like the "Good Earth" (Pearl Buck, 1892 - 1973) by most Middle School Years students, as well as adolescents, and adults around the world. It ought to be shared by Eastern and Western scholars, or those lovers of history to comprehend China a little better. Many times through periods in history, China has been greatly

misrepresented or misunderstood-and by no means-I am trying to justify or sanctify the country. Before China went through a period in history called, "The Century of humiliation". This took place between 1849 to 1949. China dealt with numerous wars, many of these were costly (as war can usually be), and all the conflicts created: constant famines, diseases and death. People perished in the millions during those difficult years. Furthermore, the country was subjugated by empires like: Russia, U.S., France, Germany, Japan, U.K. and Portugal-who took control of many parts of the nation's territories. This created deep resentment and shame throughout the populace. Something which wouldn't change for the better part of 100-years. On top of all this humiliation, millions of Chinese were treated poorly by the elite landowners and other foreign elements/forces inside their own country. After the two previous opium wars (1839 to 1842 and 1856 to 1860), China would have a drug epidemic that would last for 50-years. In major cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou, it created the triads and gangsters controlling their respective territories in the narcotics trade. What happened during the 1920s, 1930s and later into the 1940s--were the wars to push out the foreign invaders. When finally the war and later civil war was won by the Communist, Mao Zedong (1893 - 1976) pushed out the foreign influence and took total control of the country to build it from an agrarian one to an industrialized nation; whether we agree how he did it is something quite disputed until present-day. Disastrous programs like the "Great Leap Forward" (1958 - 1962) and the "Cultural Revolution" (1966 - 1976) did tax a toll on the Chinese population at the time, and for millions of people who lived during that period have called it, "The Period or Time of Confusion". Furthermore, these two major periods in Chinese history cost millions of lives. The desperation to build was to get out of poverty, and what would happen didn't really change until Mao's death in 1976; and when Deng Xiaoping came into power, and in 1980 opened-up China for business all over again. Before we look at all that, we have to look at Edgar Snow's book, "Red Star Over China", and this is something later to be discussed further in depth. Did Mao come to help change China or did he come to take over power and force? There isn't any doubt that China during this period needed a 'strongman' and leader to lead the country forward and out of poverty, and did he? Well, it is said by millions of Chinese that, China wouldn't be China today without Mao's influence. However, was he the true driving force for China's modernity or Deng Xiaoping (1904 - 1997). What is an acceptable truth is the following: the country needed a powerful and influential leader to lead it out of the desperation it lived in before. Right or wrong, we can only view and see what China has become today and what it will be in the future. Therefore, although Mao was a controversial figure in history, he is considered today, "The Father of Modern China" (Szczepanski, 2019). For now, we must carefully study Edgar Snow's book and draw our own conclusions--if Snow was correct with his words, and if what Mao did back then to win the war was acceptable. One can call it simply a miracle! Taking an illiterate army of peasants, teaching them how to fight, read and write. Then, spearheading a win against the Japanese and later Nationalist, to be able to go forward. This didn't happen overnight, before winning the war, the communist had to fight for dominance between 1924 to 1949 (25-years). What we get from Edgar Snow's book is the eyewitness accounts and written testimony of what took place in 1937 for a brief 150-days. But, there is more to this and the Red Army. Can we say that the "Red Star

Over China" is completely true. You will have to follow the study and see what can we agree or not agree with in Snow's book.

The five books in this study/thesis have a wealth of knowledge, theory, facts and shouldn't be disregarded. However, these books out to be investigated for changes and future findings down the line. The topics covered in these five books are from religions to geopolitics and warfare. The history is a treasure trove of knowledge, which ought to be investigated for generations to come and not easily dismissed. Taking books like the "Bible, Talmud, Koran, Red Star Over China and Ghost Wars" isn't an easy task, and one worth investigating for the sake of future generations. Because after all has been said and done, these books do have a continuation or a Part II; whether it is the Torah in connection with the Bible, there is also the Talmud which is connected to both the Torah and Bible; and then there is the Koran, which is connected to all previous books mentioned in one way or another. When it comes to the geopolitical concept of things, well these aren't any different to comprehend; whether these previous historical actions were successful or not, after these books came out. For example, there is Edgar Snow's book, and Mao's subsequent biography, but what after 1944? It is important to understand what came with Mao's influence over China with the "Great Leap Forward" and "Cultural Revolution"; because after Snow's book, it is important to consider and read Mao's works/policies when he wrote and published his "Little Red Book" in 1964 or when he expressed quotes like these: "Politics is war without bloodshed. War is politics with bloodshed (Mao, 1964)." What was Mao's goal? To help or conquer China. These ideas showcase Mao's thoughts on how to strategically lead a country and always be the one in charge or on-top! Moving into Steve Coll's book, "Ghost Wars", there is an important set of circumstances to consider, after its publication years later, Osama Bin Laden was killed in 2011 by U.S. Navy Seals (Pakistan), prisoners taken into black-op sites and then came the fall of Afghanistan, when Americans left in 2021 and the Taliban took charge/hold of the country once again. Therefore, in continuance, Steve Coll published another book called, "Directorate S"; which is the Part II to "Ghost Wars". And it is as important to read the latter as the former to have a clear view and understanding of geopolitics with current-world history. For now, I will only concentrate on the five books mentioned since the beginning of this study. However, it's important to understand, to give this study 'legs', a foundation and backing--there must be research involved, and I will later go into that when explaining the Methodology. There is also to the fact, that I will possibly do further research on other books and their Part II to support the study I'm writing about. For now, for myself and the readers included, we'll move into the Methodology and how this study was developed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

A) The Holy Bible:

1) Let's begin with the story of "*Adam and Eve*". A story which transcends through time and has reflected primarily how human beings came to be. Quite an important story if a person is a Jew, Christian or Muslim. Something which God created in a saintly manner for people to procreate around the earth, and the question remains, how true is this story? And if it's true, did other human beings exist or did the population growth require or came to be from incest? Was it plagiarized from the book of the Torah? Did human beings need a justification for their existence. Since, according to the Book of Genesis, two human beings were made to populate the entire planet, and there wasn't anybody else or at least that is what we are meant to believe. The biggest problem or misconception is in the fact that people believe in this story blindly and without proper analysis or logic for that matter. The desperation of mankind to believe in something has come at what cost? Nobody is taking from the value of the Torah or Bible into question, but it is about proving what you can and still hold onto your faith; then, disregarding the rest! Humanity has always been able to survive on earth for 200-thousand years after the Neanderthals. The premise to consider is the following, if something happened on earth in the last 10,000 years or so, why didn't man develop a written system to gather? In truth, there is a rational explanation, the first written forms came out of Babylonia and before that, there were drawings done by cavemen throughout the world. And in many ways, there are historians which state that the Torah like the Bible were plagiarized (The Truth Hurts, 2022). That examples like the 10-commandments were inspired in the Hammurabi Code or other cultures in context, like the Sumerians (present-day Iraq); however, I am getting ahead of myself and let's focus first on Adam and Eve.

According to the story, Adam and Eve were created by God in the Garden of Eden to populate the earth. It took God 6-days to create the heavens, oceans and earth. On the 7th day he created man, and from a man's rib came forth the woman. For Christian scholars who believe in the Bible, this process took billions of years; however, some creationist in conjunction with Evangelicals and Pentecostals claim that earth is only 6,000 years versus the science which takes it back some 13-billion years (Genesis 2:4 and 3:24, Biblica, 2011). There is a problem when the science doesn't add-up and the historical timeline doesn't fit into what was happening on earth at the time. Therefore, could Adam and Eve been a metaphor in the fight of good versus evil, and human being's downfall from purity? After all, when Adam and Eve were tempted by the Serpent (Satan) and ate from the forbidden tree. It was then that God confronted his creation. Adam of course blamed Eve for this temptation and already the seeds of misogyny were planted in literature to blame everything on a woman as being the sole

temptress (Wikipedia, 2023).

After humanity's fall from grace and Adam & Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Bible also mentions the story of Cain and Abel. Here is where supposedly, the first murder occurred, Cain killing his younger brother Abel out of envy and jealousy. However, we must go even further, when in the Book of Jubilees (it is isn't part of the Christian Bible); but it is a classic Jewish work which describes Cain's marriage to his sister Awan and also, Seth's later union to his sister Azura (Wikipedia, loc. cit.). Although, we must take these stories into a historical context at the time when they were written, it is still known that the Bible has portions of incestuous relationships throughout its story-lines. That isn't to judge what happened in ancient times for humanities survival; however, many of the preachers, priests, church leaders and scholars fail to mention or present these situations when addressing their congregations. Avoiding the topic because something is anathema doesn't help Christianity evolve and get further away from its dark history when these topics aren't addressed properly, and a book like the Bible is considered the holiest of holy--"without any fault" (or so it is assumed). Those believers can argue that the Bible was inspired by God and written by man, and yes--that much may be true. But the Bible without a doubt has its imperfections and it isn't an ineffable piece of work. It is a classic which ought to be scrutinized and discussed openly (constantly) to better the 'word of God'; if it is what the Christian community wants to address, to distance itself from the fanatical-fundamentalism and keep the channels open for proper debate without any judgment of the sort.

The story, although a classic, has to be taken then again with a 'grain of salt', analyzed and that the possibility of Adam and Eve is just that, a metaphor in the fight for good against evil. The biggest problem is when this piece of literature isn't addressed by the Christian community and it is leading people to believe in something blindly and even fanatically. I'm not arguing the Bible's right to be or its veracity, what I am arguing is the facts which aren't often addressed by Christian scholars and the community worldwide. People have the right to believe in what they want and the Bible has stories of truth; however, this isn't one of them.

2) "Noah's Ark" and the need to do the math. Is Noah's Ark a work of fiction, which has turned into a classical myth, or did it happen in our world history? There are controversial truths which tell that the flood did happen. However, it wasn't what many people think or how it happened across the world. The flood was something more regional than anything else, and I will soon get into that in a brief moment. For now, this story is one disputed, and it is mentioned that the Book of Genesis took inspiration or was plagiarized from the 'Epic of Gilgamesh' (Pryke, 2019). Noah's Ark begins with a man called Noah, and how he only followed faithfully the word of God. In spite of being

ridiculed for building this Ark for hundreds of years, he continued to listen to the word of God. Those around him made fun on his building a ship or boat big enough to fit his family and two animals of every species selected on earth. The problem with this story is that, the numbers just don't add up. It would have been practically impossible for Noah to have enough space to fit in all the animals and store the food. It would have to be a super-cargo ship, and many Godly scholars will argue, nothing is impossible for God; and in truth--I'd have to agree. But in this case, the flood also wasn't worldwide, it was local. According to scholars, in the area of the Black Sea some 7,500 years before (Trefil, 2000). What's important to understand about the story is its power. The story has been told and retold for thousands of years. It is in books like the Torah, Bible and Koran. We cannot discard the fact about Noah's existence, he may have been a subject who faithfully served God. And was this flood worldly? No, it was not! However, we can't dismiss this story as simply not true. When the flood around the Black Sea happened for many people around Noah's time, that was their known world and this tale is more a lesson about following the righteous path and doing what you believe in, even in the face of criticisms, the impossible and obstacles. It is more about believing in yourself to achieve a higher purpose in life and not following the majority who are conformist. It is a way to express, and this is especially true nowadays, on how to do the right thing--even when people are telling us we are wrong. It is a story of confidence and furthermore, it is to stay true to ourselves and the course. That is why, the tale of Noah, true or not, it is a story which ought to be read by all and serve as a warning. Do the right thing, no matter what, and let us not sacrifice our values or truths to satisfy others. At least, that's my perspective from this amazing story. Do I believe in Noah's Ark? I really don't. I feel the story is more of a metaphor and lesson on morality. Does the Ark still exists? Well, some people and this is especially true with the Christian community and scholars, that the Ark is on Mount Ararat in Turkey (Than, 2010). However, little evidence has been shown to prove that the Ark is still around or it even existed. Furthermore, it has been disputed between Turkey, Armenia and Iran; since this area is where the Urartu Kingdom existed. I wouldn't say it doesn't exist, an Ark could have existed given the proximity of the area to the ancient flood and around the Black Sea (Blakemore, 2022). But at the end of the day, a person can choose to believe it or not; however, the most important conclusions which need to be addressed are in the science, and so far, this hasn't happened yet for Noah or the Ark.

While watching the film/documentary, "Is Genesis History?" (Purifoy, 2017). There are two paradigms exposed which talked about the Noah's Ark story and flooding of the earth. It intends to place this event in a logical context. One of the first paradigms is in the Historical context. The latter one deals with the Biblical history or order on how this happened (the flooding) according to the Bible. The second paradigm is the Scientific one (based on Evolution), which argues the first. In the documentary, the problem arises when *Dr. Del Tackett* only mentions the flood according to the Biblical

context or in the first paradigm. The documentary never places the flood period in an evolutionary-timeline context--according to the science. Furthermore, the documentary mentions that the flood occurred in a sudden manner and there is no timeline or scientific proof to refute the Second paradigm, avoiding any discussion or debate different from the creationist perspective. All the scholars talking in the film are people whom are Christian, and they are all talking on "blind faith", and talking without any Scientific proof. The film, at least in my opinion goes on to confuse those who watch even further. After all, there is an evolutionary period of 65-million years between the dinosaurs and their extinction, and not in the last six or seven-thousand years. Humans have been around for 200-thousand years and they didn't exist in conjunction with dinosaurs--which some people believe (Pickrell, 2018). The same should be placed with beliefs. There is nothing wrong with believing in something, but not be fanatically-blinded by it--without any scientific proof. My point of view, it does a disservice to the Christian community/believers, etc.

We as a society need more facts, conclusive proof and be objective to the facts that the Ark did or didn't exist; before we can state blindly to the contrary. This story will continue to be investigated by historians, whether they are religious or otherwise; but I don't think it will be the end for the story of Noah's Ark.

3) Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people, and how was it possibly for him to even think about sacrificing his only son, Issac? Here's an explanation on the "Binding of Isaac" (עֲקִידַת יִצְחָק) and why this is more legend than a true tale. Maybe, I am a man of my time and I'm too judgmental of Abraham's actions, possibly too a subjective for my own good. Furthermore, living on the basis of 'presentism'.¹ However, it was known in ancient times and it was actually quite common to sacrifice a first born to a god or gods. We shouldn't judge Abraham too harshly, and what I pretend to understand is why after so many promises from God to give him a child; then, suddenly the Almighty wants to take him away from Abraham. And again, is this a story which tries to prove how one has to be of blind faith to achieve the holy goal? This is something to think about, as I continue to dissect one of the great Bible stories. What is interesting to try and understand, was this story true and would a person such as I could do this to his own child? The answer is clearly, "No!" At least, I couldn't do it and buckle under the pressure. As for the story being factual, there are elements of truth to it. In the following paragraph, I indeed intend to expose the story as factual or truthful as possible. And there is a certain possibility that the story is just another lesson to teach us about humility, to fight-off hubris, loyalty and selfishness when faced with a challenge.

¹ 'Presentism' - the tendency to judge people from the past according to present-day attitudes and circumstances.

The story of "Abraham and Isaac" takes place in the Book of Genesis 22: 1 - 9. It focuses primarily on a promise given by God to give Abraham a first born who will lead one day the nation of Hebrews. However, once that promise was given, then the Lord expected Abraham to sacrifice his first born at 'Mount Moriah or Mount of the Lord'; site where later King Solomon's Temple would be constructed in honor of Elohim/Lord/God, etc. (2 Chronicles). The main focus to consider, what most men would do? If we consider things on the basis of love and humanity, men and women would have turned away from the belief of Judaism; making it too draconian to follow. There are many examples in the Bible, in which: women, children, the innocent are sacrificed for the "greater good" or in all, for the conquest of land. Dividing-up humanity more and more with this outlook. The problem is when people still believe in this hardcore fundamentalism and fanaticism in today's world, and continue to believe in conquering and hurting others of a different ethnicity to gain this conquest. Here is where the greatest sin occurs. But there is something factual which we all must accept, as cruel as this story may sound--this is the way our ancient-forefathers took to living several millennia before. In lands driven by divide, kill or be killed, survival was of the utmost importance and to vanquish one's enemies was the order of the day. In present times, I'd use the story as one of symbolism and beauty on the loyalty of one man for his God, his desire to serve The Lord. The problem is how this story takes a sinister turn. In the end, after all the mental torture/anguish Abraham is put through, God stops the human-sacrifice and decides to give him an animal to sacrifice, and not Isaac.

4) "Moses/Moshe (משה)" - Moses is one of the most enduring, endearing and beloved figures of the Bible. His story is as inspiring as any epic, and one of survival. And it is said, that the stories prior to Moses in this Holy Book are meant to teach a lesson and inspire people--those who read to do the right thing. Furthermore, Moses may be the first character or figure in this book to have existed. Before, the other stories can be considered works of fiction. However, the latter sentence is debatable. Speaking subjectively, Moses as the great prophet of the Israelites shows his imperfections as a man and he is one of the most important voices in the first-five books of the Torah or Hebrew Bible (Genesis - Bereisheet, Exodus - Shermot, Leviticus - Vayikra, Numbers - Bamidbar and finally, Deuteronomy - Devarim). The previous five, as it is told, came from God and were written by Moses. Moses' story comes into the circa in the book of Exodus (Exile) and into Deuteronomy. Here is when the story takes shape or form until its conclusion. Nobody is really certain when Moses existed, but for those historians or connoisseurs of the Bible, he came to be between the 15th or 13th Centuries (B.C.E. - Before the Common Era) (Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, 2023). Below these lines will be his story in a condensed version of events; however, it will be for purposes of the study on the truths which are often left out by those whom believe blindly in the Book's history and veracity, etc.

With the story of Moses, one has to go back some 400-years to the time of Joseph. The latter was one of the Israelite governors in Egypt, and when the community of Israelites began to grow stronger and prosper. Eventually, as Joseph passed away and those around him, a new Pharaoh came to power and seeing that this minority was growing stronger, he was afraid that one day the Israelites would overpower the Egyptians. Therefore, he enslaved them, and from this point the Israelites were an enslaved people for the next several centuries. By the time Moses was born, the Israelite community (although enslaved) was still getting stronger. The Pharaoh who was now in power decides to kill all first born males from the Israelite community, and with this savage edict--he wanted to control a population growth through genocide. Realizing this, and upon Moses mother's desperation, or as any mother who loves her child would do; she prepared a basket and placed Moses inside it to save his life. There she places the floating basket with Moses in it--to float up the River Nile. With Moses' sister closely watching it, the basket will float into the gateway or passage of Pharaoh's palace. Possibly, this was the original intention all along, for Moses to land at the doorstep of the Royal Palace. Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, and he was raised as an Egyptian prince. But Moses knew all too well that he was Hebrew. Moses was raised in the comforts of the palace and many years later (around 25-years of age), this changed when he killed an Egyptian who was abusing a slave (Beegle, 2023). There was a sentence of death on Moses' head, and he had to runaway from Egypt into the land of Midian (present-day Saudi Arabia) to save his life. Signifying the first part of Moses' life/journey, an extraordinary tale and odyssey to say the least. Nobody can refute or say, if this happened or didn't; so far what happened can be factual or the story of legends.

According to the story, Moses was called by God (through a burning bush) to return to Egypt and liberate his people from bondage (Exodus 3: 2 - 4). Suggestion that he had a longing to return to Egypt for his people, but there is a possibility he was under the influence of DMT¹ (Dimethyltryptamine from the *peganum harmala*). The *peganum harmala* is both native to the Sinai and Negev according to Benny Shanon, and ancient Hebrews took these during their religious ceremonies (Shanon, 2008). Moses had his insecurities, since he was a stammerer. However, in the end, he goes to confront the Pharaoh Ramses II. What occurs after was nothing short of incredible or a miracle, the Lord sent 10-plagues to let his people go. The pharaoh was too stubborn to allow this to happen, and it was when the final plague hits; which kills all first-born Egyptians--here was when the pharaoh has to concede and allow the Israelites to leave. Upon the grief suffered by Egypt, pharaoh finally allows Moses to depart with his people. On the run, Moses takes his people over a Sea of Reeds (where papyrus grows) into safety, and not the Red Sea (Beegle, op, cit.). Later, when pharaoh tries to send his army in pursuit of the Israelites, the majority of his soldiers will perish by drowning in this 'Sea'.

¹ DMT - plants and portions of animals mixed in together to produce a mind altering drug.

The third and final part of Moses' story will continue, when he led his people into the desert for 40-years and was given by God the 10-Commandments.

In spite of Moses being a reluctant leader in the beginning, he was the best choice for the job, to lead his people out of Egypt into the desert. God promises the ancient Hebrews the land of Canaan. However, for their shortcomings and often refusal to obey Moses or God's laws (dabbling in paganism, etc.) for that matter, they'll be wandering the desert as nomads for the next 40-years. During that time, the 10-commandments (Some stating-historians and scholars alike-have mentioned that the creation of the 10-Commandments were inspired on the Hammurabi Code; since there are striking similarities) will be created with the Ark of the Covenant and often, the Hebrews' own refusal to obey the laws of God wouldn't allow them to enter the land of Canaan until after Moses' death. Moses' own refusal would also cost him entrance (Wright, 2009). Moses will die at Mount Nebo (somewhere in South Palestine), where according to legend, he is buried by God, and Joshua will become the military leader of the Hebrews in their conquest of Canaan (Woofenden, 2013). Can I say with certainty that Moses existed? According to ancient records in Egypt and what scholars have established in a timeline for Jewish history, the answer is certainly, "Yes!" However, it is often taken out of context, the Bible that is, and those who believe in it take it as an infallible word of God and do forget that this classic in world literature was written by men; therefore, it is not perfect. While it does have elements of truth, it is like any story written by human beings with the exaggerations of prose in literature; often taken from other ancient societies and cultures (influenced either through time or conquest by Mesopotamia, Assyrians and Babylonians alike), and these ideas got inserted into the Bible (Mormon Heretic, 2009). The Bible is not perfect, but it is certainly a historical book/record to be read and worth analyzing correctly, with a complete broadness of mind; such is the case with the story of Moses. An amazing story to say the least, but with its imperfections, indeed.

5) Samson and Delilah (Book of Judges 13 - 16) - does the Bible advocate racism? The story of Samson and Delilah, whether it is truth or fiction follows a concrete path, which will later be manifested in the Hebrew Nazarene culture. The same Nazarene culture/people which King David belonged to in lineage, and later on Jesus Christ.

As the Hebrews incur into Ancient Canaan, they have to face the Philistines, the same Philistines David will have to face later on the battlefield. This is a time when the Hebrews and Philistines are archenemies, and the 12-tribes aren't strong enough to challenge another army. There is a plea from a Hebrew woman for a child, wife of Manoah, and so according to legend or circumstance, she is given this special child; but with several conditions. This child once born couldn't have his hair cut, eat impure foods or drink alcohol. This child was only for the service of God. It was the time of the

Judges in Israel, and this judge will have the superpowers of 100-men to fight the Philistines, his name was Samson (man of the sun). As Samson grows into manhood, and he falls in love with a Philistine woman. Yes, the Hebrews and Philistines were enemies; however, wouldn't it have served to better relations and unite the two cultures who were warring all the time and at each others' throats. I find the Bible to be a book which is holy and yes, possibly inspired by God; but I find it at times to be racist and xenophobic when it comes to human beings. From the Old all the way to New Testament it feels that way since it was written by mostly men and few women. Where it has exclusion on whom a person should or could marry, and it is limited on those who an individual should or could befriend, etc. This is nothing new, and at times continues until present-day. The Bible at different points in history has been used by wicked people to justify enslavement (e.g. "Ham's curse"), create racial divisions, exclude others racially and treat women like lesser beings (Zauzmer Weil, 2019).

In any case, Samson wants to marry this young lady he has fallen in love with. But things were made even worse when he plays games with the Philistines, by giving them riddles, and the woman he wants to marry was later given to another and killed, when Samson burns the Philistine fields for not keeping their word. The story already shows the issue of exclusion between the Hebrews and Philistines, and Samson's own hubris.

When Delilah came into the picture, she was described as a prostitute, master manipulator and spy for the Philistines; possibly in the style of Mata Hari (a.k.a. Margaretha Zelle, Dutch citizen in France). The comparisons between the seductress and so called, 'spy' are indeed quite similar (Stevens, 2022). However, could it be the fact in which the Bible as the rest of society wants to demonize women? Making the Bible as in male-chauvinist patriarchal communities pro-male and anti-female (History, 2022). Samson falls in love with her, and after he plays games with her tries to trick her with riddles upon where his power came from; Delilah after several attempts gets the truth. This needed to happen, because Samson became a big problem/a nightmare for the Philistines. Every time Samson engaged in battle with the Philistines, he killed dozens, and in one instance killed up to a thousand (or as the story is told). Samson finally told Delilah the truth about his powers, which they came through God from his hair. In one instance, Delilah cuts his hair and he loses all his powers. Samson was taken by the Philistines, tortured and his eyes taken out! In one final act, he was placed in chains to be ridiculed in the temple of the god Dago by the Philistines. Samson makes a last request to his captors, that he be placed standing by the two main columns of the temple. In one last plea for mercy, Samson requested from God for his power to come back and kill all the Philistines inside that temple. God grants him his wish, and in one push of the two columns, Samson brings down the entire temple--killing all three-thousand people inside. On this day, he killed more Philistines than he had ever done in his entire life (Judges 13 - 16). Can the story of Samson be true? That is the present

ongoing argument and debate, since he has been compared with the story in the Sumerian culture (modern-day Iraq) of Gilgamesh and Enkidu (Other Papers, 2011).

6) King David and his complexities as a man - This story has many layers, and at times he struggles with his own existence and personality (but aren't we all). However, given the time of unstable uncertainty, which he lived in, he has to be admired and even excused for his imperfections. Indeed, he was all too human. David would define what is to be a person who had many dichotomies and a dual personality. By contemporary standards, he would be considered BPD (a Borderline Personality Disorder). At times for him, life could be completely full of roses, and during other times, he was completely dark (Salters-Pedneault, 2020). This was a man of deep contrasts, and a hero to the people of Israel. You cannot visit Israel and not realize (until being there), the status and importance David is given, it's almost Godlike! A man too emotional and unstable in his behavior, and on the other hand: a great shepherd, warrior, poet, writer, musician, later king and lover of many women in his lustful nature. A man who united the 12-tribes of Israel. A man who cannot be ignored, and he is one to be read, learned about over and over (1 Samuel 16: 10, 13/1 Kings 2:11/Psalms/Proverbs/Ecclesiastes).

Before I visited Israel, I couldn't understand why was David such a big deal. Then, it took me several trips to Israel and visiting his hometown to understand the meaning of his importance to the people whom are Jewish, and especially to the symbolism of the Star of David.

David came up during a time when Saul was King. Israelites had rejected their Judges for a crowned king. This was a period when Israelites fought their fiercest enemies, the Philistines. David was about 12-years (or possibly as old as 17) old when he was called into battle to stand-up against Goliath, Philistia's mighty warrior and champion. Historians have often refuted David's age and placing him more around 17 to 20-years of age. David was never ready for battle or to wear armor, but he was brave enough to go up against a man possibly twice or three times his size and speak out, as Goliath was hurling insults at the Israelites. Goliath at that time had what is known today as gigantism¹ and in honesty, the army of Saul were in fear for their lands and life. Here was when this simple shepherd stepped in, and with a slingshot--he threw a single stone which hit Goliath directly between the eyebrows, possibly knocking him out! Here was when David took Goliath's sword and cut the 'giant's' head off. The Israelites would have their day on the battlefield, beating back the Philistines. David became champion of the ancient Hebrews and won Michal's hand in marriage (one of King Saul's daughters), and here was the start of a long standing rivalry/feud with King Saul (until the former King's death). For the first 10 to 18-years, David became the Israelites' champion in war

¹Gigantism - to be extremely tall, caused by a hormonal imbalance in the person's genes.

and later, he became King for 40-years and united the 12-tribes until his grandson reached the throne.

For years, David became King Saul's right hand man and champion. However, as time went on and David won more victories on the battlefield, things began to change in their relationship. Call it jealousy, and Saul being rejected by God or his consorting with witches, etc.; there wouldn't be a measure of peace for Saul and it is probably what cost him his Kingdom (according to the story). In many ways, Saul was a troubled man and he may have had a BPD complex like David (Salters-Pedneault, op, cit.). Furthermore, by going against David, a popular figure in Israelite culture, that was King Saul's downfall. Women in Israel began singing/chanting upon David's victory over the Philistines, "Saul has killed a thousand, David has killed ten-thousand" (1 Samuel 18:7). Here was the beginning of the end, as Saul began to lose a grasp on reality and control over his Kingdom. He did try to kill David, and when David was on the run; basically, the King was faced with the dilemma in fighting the Philistines without his champion. David ran away from Saul's grasp and became a mercenary on the side of the Philistines (something often not mentioned in this story). This was caused all by Saul and his erroneous judgment against David. The former had nobody to blame in the end but himself. How the end would come for Saul? It was to happen on the battlefield, when he lost against the Philistines. Saul committed suicide and his sons were killed (1 Samuel 31). Upon Saul's death, David ascended to the throne and the "House of David" was to be in charge until David's grandson rose to power.

Now, David as king loved women and he had many, from wives to concubines. But unsatisfied with his variety, went after another man's wife. When he stayed away from the battlefield, as he strolled through the palace, he noticed below a beautiful woman; and let's be honest, which man in David's position wouldn't want the same pleasures? Bathsheba was down below bathing. David wanted this naked woman for himself, and he later found out that she was married to Uriah, one of his best warriors. Here are the sad consequences of events, which later took place: other than breaking two of the Commandment rules, he was secretive about it. He takes Bathsheba for himself, and has Uriah killed on the battlefield by his enemies (2 Samuel 11 - 24). I am talking here about blatant adultery and murder. Did David get away with it? Technically not, since his son from his union to Bathsheba would later die. Only after a year, David 'comes clean' (confessed his sins) about what he did to Uriah before the judge Nathan and God. Yes, David was forgiven; however, this was his greatest downfall as King. And for this reason, for all the greatness in his 40-year reign, he had sunk to an all-time low. According to the Bible, King David would not be allowed to build the holy Israelite temple (too much blood on his hands). As David ruled to be one of a greatest warrior-kings in Israel's history, his hands were literally too bloody from all his conquests and kills to construct anything religious or sacred for that matter. Such task was to be passed

down to his son, Solomon; who ruled with wisdom and peace over his Kingdom.

7) King Solomon - Where his accomplishments often exaggerated? Was he wise, or better known to be a womanizer? Is the Bible intolerant to other religions or ethnic groups?, etc. These are the questions we must ask ourselves and analyze about Solomon's life.

The story of Solomon is one born out of conflict, which tells us about a person who was conceived from an adulterous affair (between King David and Bathsheba). The problems don't end here. For all of Solomon's gifts of wisdom, letters (Proverbs) and passions; he came from a quite dysfunctional family environment. A man whose mother had to fight for his right to the throne. Although, it had been promised by God and later David had to be reminded of such a thing. King Solomon was a conflicted man, and it's quite interesting to study his troubled life (De Haan, 2023).

To have existed, whether truth or legend, his greatness has to be told through the ages. One of the things which made him great was the story about the two women; so called 'prostitutes', and brought a baby who was still alive to be judged. One was alleging that the baby belonged to her and that, the other one stole the infant after killing her own by mistake (smothering the baby in her sleep). One can only imagine between the two women bickering, it must have gotten on Solomon's nerves. When he finally made his judgement, he took a sword and said he would cut the baby in half. The real mother was pleading for the baby's life, saying she rather see the baby alive than dead. The one who wasn't the mother, was indifferent and said she didn't care what the king did to the baby. Showing one great lessons in wisdom and what a true mother's love is all about (1 Kings 3: 16 - 28).

Now, was the Bible sexist? At times it has demonstrated such things through actions; since it called women easily prostitutes or harlots. While it glorified men with many women. This is one truth needed to be told when looking at the story with objective-clarity, Solomon had an immense sexual appetite. Something which can't be felt and seen when he wrote his poetry, and letters about women (Ecclesiastes 2: 11).

King Solomon's greatest conquest other than Queen Sheba (during his time) was the fact that he had an enduring peace which lasted in his lifetime as king. It was even a greater time for prosperity and letters throughout the United Kingdom of Israel. Something which God forewarned him wouldn't last, and the Kingdom was later to be split-up after his death. The biggest reason for this was Solomon's lust for women from other countries/nations and the fact that he allowed them to bring and practice their religious or pagan ways into the Kingdom. Therefore, showing the Bible's prejudices about peoples and the exclusion of their beliefs.

Now, according to the story, Solomon's legacy spread far and wide. This was one thing which was able to happen with him marrying women for other nationalities. Yes, religions came into the Kingdom; however, Judaism spread outwardly into the Arabian Peninsula and to Northern Africa. Making it a further benefit for the Kingdom's prosperity, influence; but also, it began to make it the envy of other countries. During Solomon's time, he also mixed in with women who were darker than the typical Middle Easterner; this caused a riff which presently still remains between Jews who are fairer in skin tones than their African neighbors to the south. The mix between Sheba and Solomon gave birth to another nation, the Ethiopian Jews (1 Kings 10). The Jews from Israel didn't or wouldn't accept the Ethiopian Jews until recently. This lingering effect still remains with racism against those of African origins; however, nobody can deny the legacy which Sheba and Solomon gave to the Jewish community in multiculturalism (Maanit, 2022). Other than the Bible to give a possible confirmation to this story, there is a continuance written down, or an aftermath to what happened between Solomon and Sheba. There is the Ethiopian-literary work, Kebra Negast ("Glory of the Kings"). This classic ought to be studied further, since it is believed that from the union of Solomon and Sheba came a son, Menilek I--the father of the Ethiopian-Jews (Leeman, 2014). My deepest desire is for the Solomon and Sheba story to offer further insight, or provide proof through references from that ancient-period in time. For now, we may just have to wait for the archeologist to find/discover more books/proof about their lives.

8) Jonah and the big fish (Jonah 1)... This story of many inconsistencies has traveled through time, it is beautiful literature, and it is the greatest lesson taught on forgiving and loving one's enemies. Furthermore, how a person can change from doing wrong to right. However, I am quite adamant in believing this story outright; since we can only theorize on why it was included in the Bible. It has more of the elements in legends, than a factual story. But let us analyze concretely the evidence found on why was Jonah sent on a mission to convert into Judaism the enemies of Israel (the Assyrians) and not destroy them outright, as it was done in the past!

First of all, throughout the Bible, God is a vengeful God on the enemies of Israel, and suddenly 'He' has mercy for the people of Nineveh (modern-day Mosul, Northern Iraq). Therefore, he decides to send Jonah on this mission of salvation. Jonah decided to run away from modern-day Israel and jump into a ship going as further southwest as possible. A huge storm engulfs the ship and Jonah realizes that he has 'angered' God and dissuades the crew to throw him overboard. Therefore, bringing the calmness back onto the seas. Jonah was floating down into the dark waters and begs God for mercy, as the story is told. He was then swallowed by a great fish. Nobody was really certain whether it was a whale or shark; and here the story hits a snag. Once inside the fish's belly, gastric juices and acids inside the stomach would have easily killed Jonah and not allowed him to survive three-days in the innards of the fish. Therefore,

many have theorized that Jonah died and was resurrected once he was spat out of the fish. Later, in the story of Jesus (in the New Testament), the Christ was also resurrected as in Jonah's case. The story can be compared more to a metaphor of good and evil, change and forgiveness of one's enemies (I Love Docs, 2021). However, here the Bible's Old Testament departs from its usual cruelty to one of compassion and mercy. In any case, Jonah will go to Nineveh and preach the word of God; the people will repent and therefore, they will survive the wrath of God.

Another thing one has to take into consideration was the journey which Jonah took. If Jonah was trying to escape by going southwest, once he was swallowed by the fish and spat out, he would have landed in present-day coastal Syria, between Latakia and Tarsus. Leaving him quite far away from Iraq, it's approximately a 414-mile journey (666 kilometers), one that would have taken Jonah a couple of weeks or months to reach Iraq. Therefore, the journey isn't/wasn't as 'cut-and-dry' as most people wish to believe, neither it was an overnight journey; to reach Nineveh from Israel would have taken a lot of effort and sacrifice. Why do I bring this point to light? Because when reading the Book of Jonah, God promised to destroy Nineveh in 40-days if the city didn't convert. This is an inconsistency which must be addressed! It is not impossible to reach Nineveh before 40-days, but this had to happen on a camel-caravan covering 40 to 60 miles-a-day (64 to 97 kilometers). When typical travel was done in 15 to 20-miles-a-day (25 to 30-kilometers-a-day) (Labate, 2016). Jonah wasn't prepared for the journey at all, as it was told in the story and after his odyssey at sea.

Until further study and proof is shown to me, I can only come to the conclusion that the story of Jonah was basically invented as a clear work of fiction to teach a lesson.

9) New Testament, the story of Jesus Christ and did he have several wives or lovers?

I'm not here to question the existence of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, or his miracles in the Christian, Jewish or Muslim faith. I'm here to expand further on the loves of his life, and I am not talking about his disciples. The Christ, or as he is known to Jews, Yshua-- was a Nazarene like Samson and David before. Actually, the Bible states that Jesus came from the same lineage as David.

What I want to discuss in detail are the 18-lost years of the Christ, and if he was married to Mary Magdalene. Some scholars have stated that he even traveled to learn from the great Yogis in India (Ahmad, 1889). But the proof is still scarce and debatable. In truth, nobody is/was sure, but one thing is certain--Jesus wasn't calling out people to be celibate (Woofenden, 2018). Celibacy isn't only a practice to abstain from sex, but the truth still remains, it doesn't mean celibates didn't have sex during certain periods.

I never understood why are priest or monks (Buddhism) celibate for that matter. When 90-percent of humanity depends on sex, love and procreation for our survival. And again we revert back to the truth about the Bible excluding females because of misogyny and sexism. Especially in the time of Jesus, when women were treated no better than objects to be conquered by men, desired, to be taken for sex, and only for procreation. This was the truth of the times, the problem was when Jesus came along and started treating women as his equal. And this was something quite radical for his time. Could we view Jesus as the first feminist of in his lifetime? Possibly, and it is one of the biggest reasons to be excluded by other Jews and the all powerful Sanhedrin (the high Jewish court in Palestine during Roman rule). Jesus was popular, but he wasn't always liked by others. He probably had issues with his own disciples on his favor for Mary Magdalene. It was said for centuries that Mary Magdalene was prostitute. This sad fact didn't come from the Bible, it came from Pope Gregory the Great in one of his sermons (Pruitt, 2021). This judgment didn't change for hundreds of years until her story was studied further in the late Twentieth-Century, presently, and her importance was given according to the holy scriptures or what people might consider holy. Views started to change and today, there are deeper studies being conducted about her life to clarify who she really was. She was probably no different than any other woman who is open in a relationship, and looking for love or to feel loved from different kinds of men. Sometimes the wrong ones came along in that search for a lifelong companion, until she finally met Jesus and he became the man/love of her life (Jacobovici, 2015). Not only was this fact, if we can call it that or spiritual; however, it was also an emotional feeling of genuine amour for this man.

The other problem is the medieval practice of being celibate or abstention from sex. I think or feel, the Catholic faith has to reconsider the position of men and women in the Church. This point can only be considered when further proof of Jesus' and Mary Magdalene's life becomes clarified for all to accept in light of their own spiritual conscious or empirical data. Because in ancient times, as it is today, a man to be called, "Rabbi/Teacher" in Jewish tradition has/had to be married. With this being said, radical changes need to happen to abolish this practice or at least consider it, and the way things are going, it may happen in this Century. The Church is losing followers to all these medieval practices, and Catholic faith need to accept on equal terms women and homosexuals in the church. Catholicism or Christian protestants need to take into consideration for those who believe in God, want to serve God, and accept them without any prejudice or without taking into consideration their sexuality. It's all about morality and ethics, and not sexuality, gender or who we share our bed with at night (that is private and personal, according to each individual). Jesus may have been married to Mary Magdalene or may have not, but it is highly doubtful about his celibacy; especially, when he was always surrounded by women.

Furthermore, debates have been reignited in the last decade. It's believed that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had conceived two children from their union (Mount, 2014).

Stronger evidence needs to be studied to find the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, to give her rightful and justified place in history. I am not necessarily talking about the debates which are ongoing in the Christian world, but those scholarly discussions which take part in our world history in an objective manner and without taking sides or bias. Women deserve an equal share in their status with men, and so does Mary Magdalene with her friend and partner, Jesus. Something the Bible and Christians in their majority have often denied because of discriminatory-prejudice against women. Here is where spiritual leaders need to tell the uncanny truth, as much as it may hurt. That is all!

10) Is the Book of Revelation true? Does it reflect prophetically the end of the world? Are these God's or John's angry words? Was John of Patmos (Greece) the sole writer of the Book of Revelations or was there another John? Was John having just a bad dream when he wrote the Book of Revelations?

At times the Book of Revelation has a myth like-obscure meaning. Beginning with the number 666, a number often associated with evil, and it is really (White, 2023)? When in the Far East people use this number as one for good luck. However, as the evidence might point out, 666 was a reference towards the evil Emperor Nero (Skinner, 2023). And who determines whether something is evil or not? Making the number '7' saintly or complete and the '6' sinful or incomplete. Believing, according to the scholars that a number or numbers have cultural value depending on which side of the world a person is from.

This controversial and scary book in the Bible is one full of prophetic prose and literature, and it was written to show a God of anger. And also, Revelation can be confusing when reading such a book. Sometimes it goes with a God of love and mercy; then, at other times it shows a God of anger and hate! Is John's anger reflected onto the book? Some authors and experts in the Bible think so. Analyzing it from a historical standpoint, one could say, "Yes!" What the author was possibly intending to show how the Messiah will return with a vengeance to smite or vanquish all his enemies. And is this a God of love? John of Patmos was most likely showing his prejudices against the Romans and other Christians he didn't like. This book is believed to be the end of times for most believers who read it, and in truth... Is it? Or is it in part a work of elaborate fiction? Well, given the fact and time it was written, it was possibly describing what was ongoing between the Roman Empire and ancient Palestine, and nothing to do with present times (Benjamin, 2021). Written in the First-Century C.E. (of the Common Era), between the years 95 and 96. Was it a prophesy for

the end of times, as in a Nostradamus style or method, or do people confuse that period with our contemporary times? For most who study and understand the Bible, it is believed they do, especially when speaking about the Book; and the problem was often exacerbated during the Middle Ages (Benjamin, 2021). When Revelation was written, it was a conflicting time and it was a great period of turmoil and persecution against the Christian community. There was constant and rampant violence throughout ancient Palestine, and the Roman Empire was the greatest Empire ever at the height of its power, but at the same time, the most brutal! It may have felt to many Christians as the end of times (which it wasn't): when they were being either exiled, imprisoned, tortured, crucified, burned alive or thrown to the lions in Rome for their beliefs. There were constant battles for the control of Palestine, between the Romans and the local Hebrew population. This will change by the time Emperor Constantine (272 - 337 of the Common Era) comes to power, and almost suddenly and just like that, the Christians went from the persecuted to the persecutors for the next 1,500 years. With Bishops like Athanasius of Alexandria (296-298 - May 3rd, 373 C.E.) who made matters worse. Athanasius was exiled in five different occasions, but he managed to hold on to power by sheer survival skills, strategy and determination. He was controversial, but he felt or thought that he could better control Christians through the Book of Revelation; therefore, he scared people into submission, and if they didn't abide by the Catholic Church--he would persecute, torture and kill them.

In the end, the Book of Revelation merits historical, philosophical and studious value. To consider it a valid source or truthful to a scholar, religious person or historians requires multiple factors which have to be taken into consideration on why the Book was integrated into the Bible in the first place. When it came to what John was going through, there is no argument there or about his suffering: considering what was happening in the ancient world, and at that particular time and place. However, for the rest of Book, it can only be considered a dream when it came from one man (or two), and there is no historical validity or proof/evidence to support what is happening presently; especially when, it can be interpreted as something occurring in contemporary times or going back some 1,900 years. The Book of Revelation can be understood as one of interpretive value and thought, and that is subjective indeed, and according to the eyes of the beholder. There is also another point to consider, two Johns may have written this Book, one who stood for peace and love according to the sayings of Jesus Christ, and the other more focused on a vengeful God of war. John of Patmos (or John the Elder) wasn't a Hebrew native; therefore, as a non-native speaker and person who spoke better Greek than Hebrew--there are mistakes found in the Revelation text when translated (Mott, 2023). Versus John the Apostle, who was a native writer of the Hebrew language, wrote four of the Gospels and his style is more in sync, fluid or it reflected the words for peace of Jesus Christ. There would have to be further analysis (to be honest) to consider the validity of this Book. It could be taken as

one historical, because of the time it was written; however, upon further reading, scrutiny and analysis. It could be a philosophical interpretation of the times the author was living in.

Conclusion:

The Bible was written for those whom are believers in the Christian faith; but, the Bible is in every right a historical, poetic and philosophical book which merits further scrutiny when reading, in its investigation, discovery and analysis, etc.

The Book deserves a read, whether a person is of faith or not. However, it's important to understand why this book until this very present-day causes controversy even amongst believers.

The Bible has two factions for those whom are historians and scholars of the Book. The first ones are the creationists. Those are the believers, usually Christians who believe that the earth is only 6,000-years old and that the dinosaurs roamed with human beings (Pappas, 2014). Furthermore, every time I watched a documentary with those who believe in the Creation, I saw that people were in a mere argument to prove a point, than presenting objectively valuable historical-data and evidence to prove their views (Diffen, 2013). Therefore, I had to dismiss the validity of the argument; especially when it came to certain books in the Old Testament. There was too much division, xenophobia, racism and blood lust within its pages. When, I thought the Bible ought to be a book for unity. In spite of the religiousness of the Book, there was more sexuality or between the lines sin than often the believers in this Book care to admit. The other faction in this argument were/are the evolutionists, those who think that the earth goes/went back approximately 13-billion years, people who presented their scientific validity when presenting the facts; whether it was showcasing the existence of dinosaurs 65-million years ago or Noah's flood as one which was local and took place along the Black Sea some 4,359-years ago, and not a worldwide flood. But that is a study which deserves further scrutiny in the future. Even Christian-evolutionists or those who sided with Darwinism were often rejected by the creationists. However, this is an ongoing argument, and it is one which stretches back to 1880 and doesn't seem to have an end to it (Bleckmann, 2006). But what we can gather by all this, and in its importance to address is the following: while people are talking with debate and respect, and not fighting about it, this is a way to further the path and get somewhere. This isn't easy, and at the same time, not impossible to come together; whether we agree or disagree on these matters.

Within these statements lay the conclusion to this part on the Bible and will now enter into the study of the Babylonian Talmud.

B) The Babylonian Talmud (תלמוד): A set of laws inspired on the Torah, and later transcribed into law for and by the Orthodox Jews and other Christians to follow.

Now, let's begin with the 10-commandments, where did these laws possibly originate from? Many have stated that the laws or commandments for the Hebrews to follow originated on Mount Sinai, when God spoke to Moses. A person can find these Commandments in the Books of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Often these are the same Commandments which many Christian/Jewish societies break, and we'll soon get into that. For the present, will focus on the Talmud and what can this investigation extracted from it.

The first-two commandments God gave to Moses were/are: "You have no other gods before," and "You shall not make or have any (false) idols." As one can notice, it can be a part of the semantics, but these two laws are also within the Talmud; especially the Babylonian Talmud for that matter. The issue that I find with these commandments and later laws in the Talmud have to be argued in their interpretation or how they are properly or improperly followed, etc. When people seek the pleasures of vanity, fame or fortune/money for that matter. Does this allow for people to break frequently the commandments and those rules in the Talmud? The answer is clearly, yes! The next two, "You shall not take the Lord's name in vain." and "Keep the Sabbath-day holy." Commandments number 3 and 4 are pretty straight forward if you're a believer in such things. Number 5 of the Commandments is "Honor your father and mother." The latter command is one based on common sense; whether a person is religious or not. Then, comes number 6, which gets a little tricky and mired in controversy, "You shall not kill."; however, I have to argue that with organized religion and religious laws, this one is often broken almost everyday around the world. When nations or peoples call themselves godly, and are always at war with each other, isn't this a contradiction in terms? Where is the true spirituality or godliness? If we can call it that! Number 7 follows with, "You shall not commit adultery." Furthermore, it's the hardest one to follow, in the rules of loyalty. Because statistically speaking, men more often than women break this commandment for lust, love or pleasures of the heart: this is possibly in the bracket of 66.9-percent for men and 40-percent for women (Brian, 2023). Also, in this controversy it is something former President Jimmy Carter (U.S.) put to light in an interview with 'Playboy' years before (in 1976), when asked if he had committed adultery, he answered, "In my heart!" Therefore, and spirituality aside, can this be considered adultery, when we think of it and not do it? Mental health experts have suggested that it is not adultery; because adultery is defined as cheating outside a formal relationship when having sex with another. However, pornography was/is considered a form of cheating. The last three commandments deal more with stealing and telling the truth. These are commandments 8 ("You shall not steal"), and how often people take what is not theirs; number 9, "You shall not bear false witness against your

neighbor," and how easily people do it through malicious gossip, slander and spreading false rumors 90-percent of the time (Travers, 2019); and number 10, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, spouse, servants, nor his ox, or donkey or anything which belongs to your neighbor," this in essence is in the form of envy and it will be what the Talmud talks about in the practical sense of human behavior and the laws which guide human beings (Baker, 2020; Perry, 2015). In truth, the percentages for people whom gossip or envy in society were quite high and the negative effects which were hurtful to others. Here is where Rabbis, while stating the Talmudic laws, have to focus more on the psychology to help people through these issues and not deny these problems with false pretense.

Above these lines, were the 10-commandments explained; however, as the Talmud intends to interpret these as law, already other cultures were more than 1,000 years ahead of the ancient Hebrews. One can look into the Egyptian culture, and will find similarities between one of the commandments and the Egyptian "Book of the Dead". When the commandment said, "You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.", the Egyptians had mentioned the same concept centuries before, "I have not blasphemed" or taken any of their gods' names with offensive vulgarity and blasphemy (Steve, 2019). These ideas on the commandments could have been inspired also from the Babylonian, Mesopotamian and Persian cultures. Another code which long before may have influenced the commandments is the "Hammurabi Code".

There are two Talmuds by the way, the first one is the Jerusalem Talmud and the second, the Babylonian, which came from the Jewish-Rabbinic laws while in exile. They are two rich books in literature, responsible for following: the precepts of the Torah.

However, the Babylonian one is richer, fuller in its text and it's much older than the Jerusalem Talmud. Other books in importance are the Torah, Bible and Old Testament within the laws or rules to follow by the Christians and Jews.

Often, the issues encountered when reading the Talmud, especially the Babylonian and later the Jerusalem versions consists with the exclusion of the Gentile community from Jewish life. It is not in its entirety; however, it happened or for some Ultra-Orthodox, it does happen. In other words, the Talmud in practice allowed for Jews to have dealings with Gentiles; however, it was forbidden to have any type of friendship or connection with them at a personal level. This was the constant for 500 years, when these rules were established and continued throughout the end of the B.C.E. (Before the Common Era, around the year 515) period and well into the C.E. (Common Era, year 70 to be exact) period with the destruction of the Second Temple (Guggenheimer, 1999). The problem isn't in ancient times, when the Talmud (Babylonian or Jerusalem versions) instigated separatism from the gentiles. Different times call for comprehension of different

measures. My biggest concern, it is when exclusion comes towards other backgrounds, and is still practiced amongst some of the contemporary zealots--who still think or believe that this is the correct way in dealing with others. Many traditions before the Great Temple was built by King Solomon 1,000 years before the Common Era still remain in practice by certain members of the Orthodoxy, it's not all, but this is a form of self-imposed distance and bigotry that is done without proper revision or incorporation of the book into the contemporary times we live in, etc. There needs to be a better comprehension about what is ongoing, and this has nothing to do with the Talmud, it is how Jewish believers place these belief/ideas into what's presently happening in the world. The reformation of a belief system needs to go hand-in-hand with its books and the people (leaders/believers) who guide these institutions during different periods, etc. From the outsiders looking in, it shouldn't befall into 'presentism' or for those believers within who believe in the past, it shouldn't fall into the category of 'lexicophilia'¹.

What I have often contended with the Talmud is how women are still treated in present-day society. To each his/her own when it comes to intimacy, but couples (in my point of view) shouldn't allow religious doctrine from ancient times to interrupt their love and sex lives for that matter. Speaking from an outsider's point of view, Orthodoxy and the laws written are beautiful concepts of literature. However, whether a couple decides to make love or not during a woman's menstruation-period is their own business, privacy and there shouldn't be any interference from the outside world (Aubrecht, 1944). Therefore, thinking in the concept of religious observance, couples ought to keep their affairs to themselves. While the Rabbis can only offer suggestions without any intrusion.

One thing to admire from the Talmud, it's the way some of the positive traditions have withstood the test of time. In an age when everything is easily forgotten and disposable, it's good to see traditions still being upheld in contemporary cultures and societies across the world.

The biggest issue which affects today's orthodoxy is the exclusion of other peoples and their faiths, by calling them gentiles and not doing business with them; especially during the Sabbath. Some who do practice orthodoxy are liberalized enough to understand and not allow ancient traditions or divisions impede in dealing with others. Especially when certain individuals take these words too literal and do not deal with 'outsiders'. In many ways, it is a current form of racism. That it happened thousands of years ago, that can be understood. However, with human beings' evolution, I'd think in this day and age, we have progressed enough to not allow things like these divide us with fundamental-fanaticism.

¹Lexicophilia - use of past words and laws which are obsolete and not applicable to contemporary circumstances.

When it comes to eating habits or beliefs, there is better relevance if people share festivals together, such as: Passover, Yom Kippur or Hanukkah. To teach tolerance by the Orthodoxy and allow gentiles to go into their respective communities, and enjoy with their Jewish friends; whether those believers in Judaism decide to keep the Sabbath or not, it's all circumstantial. People can teach by example and not necessarily beliefs or a belief system. Organized religion throughout history has caused more divisions than unity. This isn't only from my perspective. It's from what human history has threaded and showed through time; especially, in the last 10,000 years (Butler, 2019). Religion hasn't been the best or greatest example in cohesiveness or to bring people together. It often influences in political life in quite a negative way and divides communities socially, to the point of going into conflict. Let's take a look at how many wars have been caused because of religious beliefs from within and outwardly. Also, that can be contested within the Orthodoxy, for those who share friendships and foods with gentiles. And those from the Ultra-Orthodoxy, which exclude others from their table, friendships and communities; whether it is based on their beliefs or not, and on what they eat—which might be considered impure (Klawans, 2009). Through the Torah and Talmud in ancient times, what gentiles believed in or ate excluded them from the Jewish table or sharing with Jews in other words. That has radically changed through history. However, there is a 13-percent of the Jewish population in Israel and the United States (New York City particularly) which deals with or dabbles in the far-right of Ultra-Orthodoxy (Haredi or fundamentalist views); it is family oriented, but excludes women in equality or equal terms and rights, etc (Petruzzello, 2023). This same group can sometimes hold great power or sway of the political life in Israel or in New York City itself.

The other issue pertaining to Haredi/Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and their exclusion of Reformed Jews, and not accepting them into the Jewish religious life borders on anti-Semitism (Sales, 2021). This has been a problem affecting the Jewish community for centuries; but in 2021 it exploded into Israel politics. There isn't an issue when people decide to follow the Babylonian Talmud's rich-cultural history: these are traditions, they ought to be respected, read and cherished. The problem pertains when a 2,000-year old way of life wants to be incorporated into the Twenty-First Century standards of living. Therefore, this strict system of laws and followings limit others from becoming part of the religious and Jewish experience. This doesn't affect one person, but it affects an entire country, such as Israel; where the Haredi are the clear minority, but hold political sway and power over the rest.

The Haredi have been for sometime excluded from military service back in Israel, because of their religious beliefs. In my viewpoint, why can't the Haredi serve? When they fully enjoy the freedoms and funding from the Israeli state, and it is a country with no clear division between State and Religious Affairs (Schindler, 2019). The Charedi or far right Ultra-Orthodox Jews do have a historical opposition towards Zionism. However,

there are still part of the country and state of Israel. From an outsider's viewpoint, this could be misinterpreted as a source of convenience for the Haredi minority. Interpreted in this way, it could be seen as: "I'm part of Jewish life when it's towards my convenience. When it isn't, I stay out of its emergency or state affairs.", etc.

Now, back to eating habits, for traditionalist it's important to keep with their faith. However, for years, for those whom eat in a kosher style, it is certainly believed to be healthier for the body. The same can be expressed for those whom are of Muslim beliefs, and decide to eat in a healthier halal way. People whom aren't religious have been adopting these methods of food preparation, feeling that these are healthier choices for their bodies and digestion. For those who practice fasting in the faiths or not, the science is suggesting that these practices are quite helpful for the body's evaluation and evolution. Others have argued that it isn't as healthy as it may seem, however, better eating habits than eating processed foods; but healthier, not necessarily (Lawler, 2022). And again there is the issue of exclusion when preparing any kosher wine, it can't be prepared by a non-Jew or Gentile. There are other things, such as: not mixing milk with meats, etc. (Tobianah, n.d.). It is health-wise for some; therefore, the debate ensues and continues until this very day. But for others, it adds years to life and can help with anti-aging. In truth, there is nothing to suggest that kosher foods are actually healthier, it is the eating of high-standard quality products and avoiding food-born allergies or diseases (Weil, 2012). But for Jews this method or eating habit has been recognized and can easily be taken back to the five Books of the Torah. In other words, going back thousands of years: from the Books of Genesis, then Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Auerbach, 1944). A Book like Genesis has suggested in Chapter 25:23 "that the people will be stronger". In the Book of Exodus (13:7), kosher eating was already practiced during the Passover, to remember and celebrate their liberation from slavery in Egypt. It is my strongest viewpoint that festivities like these ought to be celebrated; whether a person is religious or not. From a remembrance standpoint and historical, so these abuses never happen again in any part of the world against any group of people. This dietary practice works wonders for the body, and since ancient times in the Book of Ezekiel--cabbage, ginger, peppers and vinegar are a good way to replenish the body of nutrients. That is why, in the Talmud, it is remembered as a part of the commemorative events, like the Gemara. It is also part of the Mishna teachings, as part of the traditional laws.

Moving on, for those who work or not on the Sabbath, to each his/her own. There has to be a period of rest and not do anything. Health-wise, is to replenish the body, but throughout time from being overworked, humanity has adopted the weekend or two-days off. This helps a lot to clear the mind and body from work and furthermore, stress. Does it make the person evil or a sinner to indulge in extra work? Well no, there is more to it than the religious point of view. People who overwork themselves, their bodies will breakdown faster with time; therefore, it is of the utmost importance to have a restful

period away from stress or physical and mental exhaustion. The Talmud also states it clearly for those who work too much, and those who work too little. Good work is important for the spirit, and I don't mean that in a religious sense. Work is necessary for the body and soul, it's like nourishment for the spirit. A greater importance still stands, what's too much work or too little of it. It is from the scientific point of view or the opinion of experts that if one works only once a week, that befalls on the concept of laziness and unproductive; while those who work six-days a week--work too much. Are we sinful for working on the Sabbath? It's more about how we treat one another, than religious observance, etc (Auerbach, 1944). The middle ground is five-days a week, for no more than 40-hours and with two-days off (Chu, 2021). There were suggestions to even do flexitime; which meant, four-days on and three days off. Meaning that, employees or those who worked had better productivity rates. Of course, this also meant respecting the rights of those who practiced religious observant dates, etc. More work doesn't necessarily mean more money or further productivity. Sometimes it meant less productivity and bigger problems with cases of burnout when proper rest times or R&R (Rest and relaxation) weren't/aren't given (Wiseman, 2021). Intermittent periods of R&R were proven to be good and useful for the mind, and it gave a person a clear head. The point to take aside, are religious communities working too much in the pursuit of progress and sacrificing the benefits of good health? That is for the religious leaders to answer amongst their own people. Others who have no options, may have to work extra hours to be able to survive/"pay the bills" in this day and age; especially in Western societies, where the cost of living has skyrocketed to an all time high in the last three decades.

Traditions are traditions, and as mentioned before, these concepts ought to be respected. The biggest issue I hold with beliefs is including something which happened centuries or several millennia before, and people try to incorporate into contemporary-daily life. When it's clearly erroneous and passe. It sets limitations to the normalcy of living fully in the late Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries; because it may fall into basic fundamentalism, and that my friends is a dangerous idea/concept. That is why, like Christianity, Judaism and now Muslim beliefs should or ought to go through a level of reformation to avoid fanaticism; which the latter can be even more dangerous than the actual belief itself. For example, like the prohibition of bathing, anointing, intercourse and work during the Sabbath is something which shouldn't be limited--unless it is do to health issues/reasons (Auerbach, 1944). Again, to each his or her own--as they choose how to live. Now, the latter point of view I can clearly understand and respect, what I clearly cannot comprehend is when bathing is limited, anointing or enjoying the pleasures of sex; which are natural releases of the body to feel less stressed out. Especially when, a Book like the precepts of Joel were written some 2,859 years ago. Certain believers can take these concepts too literary and not bathe enough or at all. Baths are the common thing which can help human beings from getting unwanted

illnesses. Once the body doesn't smell, and a person doesn't have an offensive odor, showers can be taken at least three-times a week. Anointing is more on the matter of personal beliefs, etc. But it shouldn't be excluded if a person who is observing the Sabbath--wants too. As for sex, it ought to be done as a release mechanism, and for the pleasures of the flesh. On intercourse, it's important for health reasons, to look younger, to improve the immune system, reduce headaches, to assist afterward in better food choices and to help lovers fall asleep after the act (Wiseman, 2020).

It is the common belief amongst the faithful in different religions, that there is a God of anger if we don't obey Him or Her. If such was/is the case, then all of humanity is condemned for every erroneous mistake committed in every person's life. And there isn't any kind of redemption, atonement or correction for past grievances. Therefore, not giving the person or people an opportunity for modification and change. There are sins which are anathema: mass murder (murder in general), incest, abuse of those whom are weaker. Even with the latter crimes, when a person is caught and placed in prison or before execution are given a chance to repent before dying. This has been the case noted throughout Books like the Talmud, Bible or Koran. There is saintliness if one follows a God/Goddess, but what about those who do the right thing and don't believe. The same people who can be of different religions, agnostic or atheist. Are they equally wrong? Or the woman who doesn't follow in the precepts of God, does that make her a 'Jezebel' when she is living a just life? It is my perspective that a so called, "God of love" is referred to as a "God of anger" throughout the Torah, Bible and in the later books of the Talmud. Did I miss something here? When a person can live a good life and still be condemned, while a religious person cannot! If this is what the belief systems of the world measure up to, then, why believe in the first place? I want to think there is a God of love which forgives everything, even the worse kinds of crimes. I mean, there are such things which are anathema (and again, I reiterate this point) like: war, incest, murder and the abuse of others. And still, human beings can change and become better than before. Men or women for that matter can be evil, but it doesn't mean there is a lack of religion. Furthermore, even when people or societies cannot forgive the evil of these peoples' transgressions, the evil doer still has a chance to change, etc. It is more about personal choices, unless the individual has psychological problems or a mental illness. It all amounts to the choices we make or the environment surrounding us.

Given the times the respective Talmuds were written in (different historical periods), it is quick to presume that women (*Nashim*) weren't equal in stature to men. Sadly, this was the reality for millennia. Actually, most were treated as second-class citizens and honestly, treated rather poorly. Only marriage could give them proper station, and even then, there wasn't no guarantee to this; because some could enter into a very abusive relationship, or sink further into poverty. One way or another, in her lifetime, she was controlled by a man: whether it was her father, brother or husband. Unless a man was

light-years in thinking and ahead of his time, then there was a remote possibility that her life could be a little bit better; and again, there wasn't a guarantee to this. However, we must take into consideration the times and that many of the changes in international laws which occurred for women's rights have been vigilant only until recently. Before that, a woman was just a piece of property, something to be conquered and possessed. By the end of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth-Centuries things began to change; and still, females have to fight for their equal rights in society everyday. Many countries around the world still don't hold their rights in equal stature to men. Thousands of years before, a woman's life was for barter; she was a bartering tool in marriage and in some instances, she was treated and traded into slavery. In other instances, she was treated no better than cattle, and if she befell into the arms of a bad man, her life could easily be used in the skin-trade (prostitution) to make money or she could end up a concubine. In any situation, her life wouldn't be an easy one after she was 12-years old. In the majority of cases, once married, she was expected to be a literal "baby-factory" to only please her husband and hopefully (if she was lucky) breed a male heir for the continuation of the family name. Females for millennia, once they were born, were treated more as an inconvenience--than a family's pride and joy, etc. This is the truth which was stated in the Jerusalem Talmud (completed in the 2nd Century of the Common Era), and the Babylonian one which was only completed a Century later.

For this particular portion in the study, I did focus on the Babylonian Talmud, since I selected this Book subjectively--due to the popularity it has had as a classic. It isn't because the Jerusalem Talmud is any lesser in quality or content; but I find the Babylonian one to be rich in context, and it was written in a greater literary style.

When talking about the Talmud, one has to take into great consideration the treatment of men or women in olden times and what's happening today. My fear isn't the way this book was written centuries before, my greatest fear would be that women are still treated like cattle and bartered with their lives. Taking for example, a woman who has been recently widowed has to be married (immediately), because of the norms and standards of traditions is utter nonsense. In this day and age, women ought to have the choices to believe in whatever she wants and to be with whomever she prefers; whether it's inside her faith, background and gender or not. According to the *Halizah* (peacekeeper) who selects a groom for the widow, which is basically the deceased man's brother. It is the custom in the *Levirate marriage* (yibbum), and performed since it was written and dictated in Deuteronomy 25: 5 - 10. And does it affect a woman's freedom and right to choose? Well, yes, if renaissance, enlightenment, modern, contemporary scholars have to argue and have argued this fact on the restrictions placed on women in the past, and in this day and age--something must happen to better liberalize a belief system in contemporary times. From *Mordecai Kaplan, Baruch Spinoza, Franz Rosenzweig to Louis Jacobs* all argued at one time or

another about the "chosen people of God", their restrictions on themselves, members of the opposite sex and their self-exclusion or lack of integration into normal-everyday life in society for religious reasons. These comments didn't make the latter philosophers anti-Semite, it just made them aware of the problems within a community and the reforms needed to take place in order to give everybody equal rights. And still, women are subjected to more restrictions than men; especially when it comes to becoming a widow or falling into an adulterous affair--when they are practitioners of the Jewish Orthodoxy (haredi). Women are judged by harsher rules and standards than men. Women's rights are still hindered by something which was established centuries/millennia ago and were written by sexist men, and not necessarily coming from the inspiration of God; but by the inspiration of males, etc. Furthermore, it isn't that these religious men aren't/weren't following God's rules, it is/was holding women to (and again) a higher standard than themselves. This is something often seen in a belief system that either place women on a pedestal or the nucleus of these religious-groups are run by misogynist men. This is the reason why more often than not, religious people are heavily criticized, and those who believe are more judgmental; and this should never take away from the beauty, validity and classical means of the Talmud. It is a gateway into a beautiful literary work, and more *halakhah* (legal discussions) ought to take place to preserve these discussions, have more objectivity, clarity and formation in the constant practices. Presently, "there is light at the end of the tunnel", when women, whether Jewish or not are discovering the liberation and deeper understanding in the beauty of the Talmud (Reimer-Torn, 2018).

There is hope for this kind of literature to prosper and its continuation, whether it's with the Torah or two Talmuds. When women and feminist like Ruth Calderon are creating a space for women to read, study and enjoy these classics without any exclusion. Things like the *Beit Midrash* are spaces for equal study/opportunity of the Talmud or Torah today. It is a study hall which one portion is for males and the other for females. This started thanks to Ms. Calderon back in 1989. Giving women the same equal basis to learn from Judaism, without being discriminated against. Of course, these points of view are from a liberalized perspective. But it's hopeful to see the proper functionality of these areas of study and their evolution in Judaism, and it creates an inclusion for everybody to go there and learn without any type of discrimination or prejudice.

However, it doesn't mean that Calderon's ideas aren't subjected to debate, controversy or earning her share of enemies with her liberal perspectives (Harris, 2013). But what's she is intending on achieving is the departure of the Talmud and Torah (when these books are read or studied) from old fashioned secularists and fundamentalists. The latter does not necessarily derives from these books; however, it derives from those who read them and are based on their interpretation and not God's, or from a position of

exclusion, etc.

Those who read the Talmud (depending on their educational background and perspective) can get bogged down on how women were treated back then, and what happens today when those who read still extract portions of the book which borders on sexism and pedophilia. And again, it is an important book (in my point of view) to be read by the masses, enjoyed and those who want to comprehend ancient-Jewish literature; but all those reading these perspectives must take these concepts/ideas in the content with a "grain of salt" and never fall into the past fundamentalist views which don't help this religion or any other for that matter, and book flourish.

What Ms. Calderon is bringing with other liberals, feminist and reformers is something special, for all to take part in an inclusive environment. That is unique for the masses. It is to help these books grow and perpetuate for generations to come. Therefore, getting further away from the ignorant/fanatical precepts which are full of superstitious and outdated ideas, etc. (Calderon, 2013). She (Ms. Calderon) brought these ideas forward when she was part of the Knesset in Israel. However, this was more than a decade ago, and the concern which is often asked, "Who will take forward the mantel of liberalism for all to study Judaism, the Torah and Talmuds without any exclusivity or exclusion in the future?" Well, changes are happening in a positive and slow way; however, they are happening in liberalized countries/societies like the United States, where women are freely allowed to study the above subjects without any limitations or hindrance. The biggest issue stems with the changes in Israel, which is basically led by the conservative element of the Haredi (Jewish fundamentalists). This is something that we will just have to wait and see; especially after the "Israeli-Hamas" War which started on October 7th, 2023.

The biggest concern on the Talmud (especially when speaking about the Babylonian one) topics are usually those which target mostly women, and add greater social pressures on the females. From the topics of adultery to betrothals, these concepts in content almost border on subjugation and slavery of women/females. The importance of liberation for these books and women will only cater to equal justice for all to enjoy, read and study into future generations. The Talmuds which deal with the Mishna and Gemara (the latter completes the Mishna on the laws of obedience) must be further revised for the books and belief to go forward on a positive basis and venue; maybe to look into the possibility of reformation as such. And this doesn't necessarily mean criticism of the books on Judaism themselves. There is more criticism on the male-chauvinist people who study, read and argue for something which is detrimental to women (when it objectifies) on the religion itself. That is why, more study halls are needed to harbor both sexes on equal terms. This will help on the expansion of the books and belief system to be centered on open-minded knowledge.

Also, the biggest (my) concern for the future of Judaism and the Talmuds (whether it's one or the other), is to avoid language which is stereotypical and places blame typically on a certain ethnicity or gender. We have to be careful with such language in contemporary times. Understandably so, there has to be consideration taken when the Babylonian Talmud (Jerusalem or any other book written in ancient times for that matter) was written, and the language used during that particular period. However, in this day and age, there has to be consideration on how people are addressed and the language used. Some types of words can be offensive to others in our present times. Addressing the language which objectifies or uses sexist terminology. These words can be used when addressing the historical period and content; however, a warning needs to be given before such words are used. Further, there needs to be a deeper comprehension that these words cannot be used in the present-day context--because they may offend those present or any other group. Take for example, a Hollywood-historical movie. Yes, certain types of words are used, which today can be offensive to others. Therefore, there needs to be a deeper comprehension which addresses the historical period it was used: and to warn the audience that this is not the feelings of the producer, director or actors involved in the movie. The same goes for any book written in olden times and studied presently.

There shouldn't be an attitude or language of exclusion when it comes to the study of the Torah or Talmud for that matter, or refer to a person as a 'gentile' can be insulting; because there is a language of exclusion for others whom are non-Jews. In other words, when there is the contemporary reference to gentiles, that can sound like the Jewish people are uniquely special and are only allowed to enjoy the words in the above books stated. There is also the argument to be suggested, isn't God equal and for all.

The world has evolved since the times when the Talmuds were first written. However, human beings still have to face slavery in different countries and the mistreatment of women (especially) and children. Taken from that ancient context and what we see today, has the Talmud truly evolved to make the world a better place for people all over, and can women and children be included? The answer is clearly, "Yes!" But there are things which suggest the need to have further reformation within the Jewish and religious communities around the world. Conservatism is acceptable, as well as liberalism. The former and latter are just points of view in which people are allowed to disagree. That's acceptable. The issue which ponders in our everyday global-society is the following: when it is extremist-fundamentalism, deals in violence towards others and still treats women no better than servants. That is something which we still need to consider when reading ancient subjects and on how they are applied today.

One of the books which has inspired others in the method or style of law in the Middle East came originally from the Hammurabi Code (whether it was the treatment of

women, a slave or property when dealing with animals). The Hammurabi Code was mentioned previously, and yes, it did inspire the books like the Torah, and possibly the Holy Bible (Pfeiffer, 2022). However, we must contend with another fact or thought, that it may have inspired the Talmud; especially the Babylonian one. Since many of the similarities reflected in the Hammurabi system have trickled down into how the Jewish law is read (Mishna) and manifested today. When it comes to property: repayment to one's business partner, family member or neighbor when it comes to the destruction of his property. Furthermore, I do mention the word 'his', since not until the late and early Twentieth-Century, women's rights weren't even considered (sadly) in the matter. There is a liability infraction when hurting or killing intentionally or unintentionally another person's animal according the Talmud. These rules came from the Hammurabi Laws and have persisted through history in our Canon of laws.

One of the greatest principles of the Talmud is the social responsibility a person must adhere too. This didn't and hasn't changed from the past, and it is as much of a truth in the present. What has always concerned scholars, and people such as myself, are the double-standards guided towards lower classes and women. Even when there were Israelite kings (e.g. David), the rich and powerful always seemed to judge the lower castes by their own set of rules. Something which hasn't changed much today and continues with certain types of inequality. It isn't with the extreme of the olden periods; however, there are still problems when certain minorities of the population are still excluded, etc. Unless these issues are correctly addressed by a governing body (e.g. the Rabbis): which deals with double-standards, sexism, classism and discrimination.

The Babylonian Talmud has even dealt with the rules against tattoos (part of the *Mishna* in the *Makkot* 3:6, and long before that in the Torah--it was stated in the book of *Leviticus* 19: 26 - 28); which is something that it is still in vigor today. There are other cultures who will also disagree with the defacement or devalue of tattooing one's skin. Then again, reformists must deal with these ever present changes in society and consider the following: is it the mark of a person's body or the condition of a person's heart? That is one thing for traditionalists to break from the idea of a tattooed person coming into a synagogue or study hall, unless that person's marks/tattoos are completely covered. More than ever, traditions are changing and people have started to accept the tattoos as the conditions and transformations in society (Schwartz, 2021). While a person wouldn't have been buried in a Jewish cemetery for having markings 100-years before, today, it has been tolerated and dealt with. Even to the point of considering it for some outside the fashion trend--as something uniquely sacred; then again, to each his or her own (Yanklowitz, 2011). Rabbis have to currently contend with this problem within their faith, since this phenomena started in the 1970s Rock and Roll culture (U.S.) (Schwartz, 2021). Today, it is part of the scene in cities like, Tel Aviv (Israel). Therefore, many spiritual leaders had to modify their perceptions or lose

young members to their congregations and faith.

It doesn't only stop to contend with the current changes in society, especially with those in the last 30 to 40 years. The Babylonian Talmud in ancient times dealt with the problems of people covering themselves with feces or urine to exclude themselves and avoid punishment. This of course, could be considered a form of interference presently; but it is something anathema for those conservative to the Jewish culture. However, and again, what people do in the privacy of their own bedrooms is their business; whether it is doing to themselves with "brown or golden showers", etc. This could be considered to conservatives as something of an aberration, and at the same time, there shouldn't be any interference from the Jewish faith when it comes to a person's privacy/intimacy.

Conclusion:

With the radicalism and changes in our times, the Talmud has consistently adapted itself according to the period it was in. The law is the law according to the Jews; however, it is not without reformation. Whether it is how a woman is treated or perceived, the boundaries amongst neighbors, people in business, dietary habits and furthermore, it ought to avoid the exclusion of any other groups, etc. In other words, inclusiveness for all. It doesn't matter if that person is black or white, male or female, covered in tattoos or not, transgender, gay or straight. Once they adapt to the Jewish rules and faith, why not welcome them?

Things are slowly changing, but there needs to be further debate about these topics without going to war or blows over these issues. Therefore, this is a topic that in the future needs further exploration and the leaders (Rabbis) need to bring these problems or issues into the light and without any kind of shame, etc.

For the continuation of any faith, it must come with an evolutionary factor for it to prosper in a positive direction and continue forward. Therefore, these topics must be exposed and talked/addressed about in the open. Hiding the issues or changes, and masking them for upright conservatism, fundamentalism or extremism is downright hypocritical. We are all part of one world, there is no denying that!

To conclude on the Babylonian Talmud itself. The book has many creationist views; however, it is to my humble understanding that this book is very much an evolutionary one and it adapts to the science of the past, as it adapts to the present and future. All we have to do, whether we are religious or not, give it a view/read and learn from this wonderful ancient literature and culture.

C) The Koran: one of the most important books, symbols, and one which is holiest in the Islamic world. It is a book that closely extends to the hearts of over 2-billion believers (Muslims) worldwide. A religion or belief system that has quickly grown in 1,400 years, stepping on the heels of Christianity and has spread outward from Saudi Arabia throughout the Middle East, portions of Northern Africa and Southeast Asia (DK, 2020). It is one of the truest masterpieces written in human history, and its Prophet Mohammed carried it for all to enjoy. This Holy book reflects and draws many comparisons to the Torah and Bible; while it holds its own original essence in Islam, and the book contains spiritual personalities such as: Adam, Moses, Abraham, Ismael, Jacob, Joseph and Jesus of Nazareth. This same book was already entering Spain (in the conquest of 711 C.E. - Common Era) in a little over 100-years after its conception. With the conquest of Muslim Spain, the Umayyad Caliphate had a golden age of learning: where the best Universities, centers of medicine and knowledge were founded. This reality would remain so for almost 800-years, until the reconquest of Spain in 1492 by the Catholic Royals: King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel.

On the flip-side, the Muslim faith took later a dive into fundamentalism and extremism throughout the Twentieth-Century. However, this latter statement cannot be a generalization in terms; since the majority of Muslims are God-fearing people who serve Islam for the world and its greater good. Can this religious and scientific decline be blamed or linked to the eclipse of the Caliphates? Or what would happen later, when the British/European/American empires rose to colonize many of their lands for subjugation and profit; because, what was done to the Middle East and Northern Africa would later have repercussions throughout our planet with the rise of extremists' groups performing radical-suicidal attacks on Christian societies and in Southeast Asia. Could this be the greatest cause or is the belief in Islam overdue for a reformation? Taken into context, on what happened to Christian and Jewish societies long before, that the latter two had to go through centuries of conflict, bloodshed, extremism and warfare, before understanding that things needed to change in the development of a higher acceptance of others and tolerance (in our differences) to be able to live in peace. While the latter statement maybe be ideal, there is one reality which is a constant, the Koran continues to be read more than ever and the growth of Islam hasn't declined at all. On the contrary, Islam has been one of the fastest growing religions of the Twenty-First Century and it is estimated to be that way for next half-a-century.

My biggest concern about Islam is like with all major religions, it is in the form of exclusion of others who don't believe and want to study a particular belief for its historical value and not for the religious one. This truth can be said/stated about the Koran, if outsiders can read and want to learn about it, why not? But the same might be true with the exclusion of non-believers from places like Medina or Mecca, is this an

example of what Islam or the Koran want to reflect in contemporary times, that is? (Grace, 2019). I wouldn't/don't think so. Therefore, in the subsequent pages, I will do my greatest attempt in explaining Islam/as the Koran from a two-sided perspective. This explanation will stand from its beauty and literary standpoint. However, it will also embark on the contemporary issues faced with how this book and religion are perceived throughout the Western world: from its treatment of outsiders, children (whom are females especially), women, non-believers, child-brides, imprisonment of belly dancers (Egypt) and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) in certain Muslim countries, but not all. And thank goodness, these issues aren't generalized; but a few in which I'll intend to shed light and give possible suggestions for reformative actions. This in no way means that I am an enemy of Islam, on the contrary, I am just an outsider looking in. This comes from a person who has seen the beauty of its people, religion and book; however, I have also seen/witnessed inexcusable male superiority and misogyny, and how it can create a vacuum/divide which hinders on the rights of women and keeps them in positions of servitude. However, in these latter negatives are also starting to change. This is my intention on the exploration of the Koran and its positive application into our contemporary society/culture/ways without the exclusion of any given person: whether that person is of a different gender, ethnicity, station/status in society, creed or religious belief, etc.

What unites or disunites (depending on the perspective) Islam are three important branches. The main one is Sunni, this is the largest branch of Islam in the world, with 1.2 billion followers. It follows the direct teachings of Mohammed. However, as often what happens with the foundation of religions, these can split-up. Therefore, after Mohammed's death, there was a division between Shia, the followers of Ali and Ibadi (الإباضية) beliefs which led to a civil war amongst each other. The problem with the third branch of Islam, Ibadism has often been persecuted by the Sunni majority and this problem dates back to (when Ibadism was established in 657 C.E.) (The Spiritual Life, n.d.). This doesn't end here, Shia believers are mostly in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, and there has been spillovers which have affected both sides (Shia and Sunni altogether); and have often led to war. There is another branch which comes under the Sunni banner, and it is Sufism. The latter one is more mystical and dabbles into a direct experience with God. Sufism has also faced persecution for being too liberal and often been called, 'heretical and polytheist' by Muslim extremists (ISIS and al-Qaeda terrorist groups) and fundamentalists towards Ibadism; which can be a little more orthodox and practiced by its majority in Oman (other than Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and East Africa) (Callimachi, 2017).

What I have studied or witnessed in this faith. Like the Jews, Muslims shouldn't indulge in drinking alcohol or eating pork, at least these are their beliefs. This has been the case with my experiences in the Middle East. I have seen great people/examples of true faith,

while others have been deplorable in their behavior and character. One "rotten apple" can easily ruin a barrel, such is the case with stereotypes. Not all Muslims are the same, and it will all depend on their levels of understanding, open mindedness and education about their own religion (the good which comes from the belief, and its flaws). I have seen Muslims turn away from Islam, or they are basically turned-off because of the fanaticism, extremism and the repression on its people, causing unrealistic expectations on those who practice it, and especially the limitations placed on women; while other experiences have shown me true brotherhood/sisterhood in the faith and compassion (Yichen, 2021). This will also depend where the person is from. In my case, with Muslims from the Balkans or expats practicing Islam outside of their respective countries (some and not all) and in certain communities, I've noticed those who even indulge in the pleasures of eating pork and drinking alcohol; however, these people are usually 'reformed' Muslims or open minded and well educated on the realities of the world (Fam, 2022). The important thing in this perspective is to bring people together and not apart.

As Muslims do apply the contemporary based 'jahiliya' (the new barbarity) to Western culture or Westernized countries who have practiced savage colonialism, can this not be applied also to present-day fundamentalism and extremism? (DK, 2020). I believe it can, it doesn't matter the branch of Islam. What matters is the respect of others' beliefs and if there is an evolution in the religion of Islam. The beauty in Islam, if applied to modernity, it's a good thing in helping others (Sura 5:12, The Koran). The point to mention which is the most important, are Muslim willing to share these precepts outside of their religion? I have seen examples, which suggests, they can and then there is the flip-side with others whom are too fundamental to try, and will not concede to their beliefs on behalf of others: and this is something which must be dealt with and understood when it happens in all religions--and not just one.

The positives which help Islam come into modernity stem from the simplest changes in *Eid al-Adha*, carrying out the traditional sacrifices in animals (cow, goat, sheep or camel for that matter) for a vegan eid (DK, 2020). The vegan way is to protect the animals against cruelty and avoid the sacrifice, while still paying homage to Allah (their God). I also like the fact that with this traditional ceremony there is the aspect of sharing amongst each other (family and neighbors alike, etc.), which is a good way in teaching children and those around them how to share. The beauty of this tradition is the following, whether through the donation of meat or wealth/money is to help the poor. Here is something, I can completely agree with and get onboard with this idea.

The usual problem is what gets into the news reports and the negative perceptions of people; whether these perceptions come from Muslim themselves or the Western media issuing these reports. However, one thing cannot be denied is what happens

when fanaticism affects Islam. For example, what has affected Muslims as a whole is what 1.7% does when they perpetrate terrorists' acts. Taking for example, when a religion has 1.8 billion people/followers on earth versus an army of terrorists (ISIS) worldwide--which can reach around 30,000 extremists. A positive majority cannot be stereotyped or treated unfairly for a negative minority. People who do terrorism are in the business of creating destruction and fear, and destroying from the beauty of life. Take the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas back in Afghanistan (2001), an order which was given by the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar (DK, 2020). Yes, it was his order on the destruction of the Buddhas, and this got the attention of the world; but at what cost in sacrificing the beauty in art, and these relics which had been built between 1,300 and 1,400-years ago. This is fanaticism at its worse. The destruction of idols to get the Taliban's points across certainly backfired in the end, and made them (the Taliban) look backward and ignorant. Terrorism will only make people turn against the religion; whether it affects the innocent or guilty. The same was true with the senseless murder in 2004 of the Dutch filmmaker, *Theo van Gogh* over free speech and his film, "Submission, Part I" (DeLong, 2018). He was basically killed over his views on freedom of speech and how some Muslim women were/are ill treated. The original target for assassination was *Ayaan Hirsi Ali*; however, she was under police protection at the time (Hirsi Ali, 2006 - 2007). The attacker was able to get and kill Mr. van Gogh. This isn't the only one incident when a radical person reacted or overacted with violence. The *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in 2015 sparked outrage across France and around the world, when extremists went on a rampage and killed 17-people in the city of Paris. The two latter incidents or extremist reactions were over negative portrayals of Islam and showing cartoon images of the Prophet Mohammed. The issue which has to be contested here is the following: is it disrespectful to Islam when intending to show images of the prophet? If the answer is "Yes!", there is also a need to be understood when protests over things like these occur, and the issue can be stated over in a peaceful manner and without rioting. In a country (whether in France, the Netherlands or any other for that matter), freedom of speech is imperative (especially in democracies), expression (peacefully) is a must and a country's laws ought to be respected--plain and simple. And it is not for terrorists, extremists, fundamentalists or those whom are in a militant movement to become: judge, jury and executioner. It is basic common sense. The case of *The Jyllands-Posten* affair which happened back in 2005 (Copenhagen, Denmark), when 12-cartoon images were published about the Prophet Mohammed caused riots and protests across the city (DK, 2020). In my point of view, there has to be respect for a person's religion and their ideas--without sounding disrespectful. On the flip side, one has to also consider and adapt to the country's laws, whether people like it or not/agree or disagree; especially, whether they are Muslim or not.

If the Koran is a holy book and it is talking about being merciful (Sura 2: 128, The Koran), then, why is this kind of reaction? I mean, people can be offended, and request for a retraction from the newspapers or an apology. However, what comes after (if the retraction doesn't happen) is sometimes the radicalized form of protests; where neighborhoods are destroyed because of rioting, while violence is being perpetrated. The fear which most people can assume (from the outside looking in), and whom aren't Muslim, that these are fanatical or fundamental points of views. It isn't only fanatical, the question remains, can Muslims forgive other Muslims (Sunni, Shia, Sufi or Ibanism, etc.)? Furthermore, can they forgive people whom are atheist, agnostic, Christian or Jew for these transgressions? Can there be peaceful protests without the resurgence of violence within a city or community? Because, as well as those whom are Muslim and read the Koran, can also give forgiveness. And this forgiveness ought to be extended to other communities for their beliefs; whether this comes from non-believers and their transgressions. The Koran states it clearly and openly over and over, not only in the Sura 3:17 (The Koran), that forgiveness is given for a transgression. It is repeatedly stated throughout this holy book, in the same way which mercy is stated. If such book (which is considered holy), and if comes only from Allah; then, where is the forgiveness and mercy factor for all, or does it only extend to Muslims? This is something which needs to be addressed, studied further and to be cautioned about. For an outsider looking in, there has to be a set example. With that said, Muslims have to be more tolerant of outsiders (vice versa), and from within. The same applies with outsiders who look into the religion, a set of rules ought to be taught by nations with large Muslim populations and communities on how to respect/understand not only Muslims; but people of different religions and creeds. This can certainly help build an open-minded society, and one with a greater tolerance for each other, and less hate, etc.

With the above stated, now to figure out the Koran, one must think about it as a book which can be holy, at least that is one point of view. However, it cannot be seen as perfect or from God. Why is there such a pretext? Since in history, people can have a divine/holy inspiration to write a book about whichever God they believe in. Yes, a book can be a holy inspiration, like the Torah or Bible; but it has to be written by a man/woman, or it has to have an author who was inspired in something divine. The problem with the Koran is that it isn't perfect, no book is perfect (not before or after the Koran) when passing through the hands of human beings and it is subject to interpretation. It had to have somebody who was lettered to receive these ideas from 'above', or if a person was illiterate, then pass these ideas onto a scholar/writer. There are two issues which go against the foundations of the Koran: Mohammed himself was illiterate (Sura 7: 157 - 158) and the book just appeared out of thin air or from God. There had to be person who was inspired when writing it, whether it was from God through the Angel Gabriel, and then it came to a man or woman whom were lettered,

etc. The other perspective in theory can only be the following: a human being was inspired to write a timeless-work of poetic, artistic and religious literature, and after it was completed, it was passed down to Mohammed and his followers to interpret. The author was never given proper credit for his work versus Moses, whom was inspired by God and wrote down the Torah. This doesn't take away from the beauty and value that it has as an ancient book. It is still one to be read and enjoyed by those whom are religious in nature, as well as, non-believers.

Therefore, the Koran had to have an author as it was gathering momentum and the important moments of Mohammed's life. That is why, through human history, when a new religion is founded--it can be established in peace; however, warfare will always ensue and come into the picture. There is a reason for this, it is a way to establish dominance, influence and power over an area of influence. It happened with Judaism and Christianity. Warfare is the point to not only force a religion in that area and upon others, but have a major influence along certain regions. This was the case with Judaism, which thorough warfare they (the Hebrews) exerted influence over a region during ancient times. With Christianity it was done through Emperor Constantine and his Roman Empire, when it converted to this religion--after centuries of persecuting it! The Roman Empire was responsible for spreading not only Christianity, it also spread Latin and Germanic languages (through its conquests in Germania, modern-day Germany) throughout Continental Europe. Then, Judaism like Christianity had gone and are undergoing through there own reformations. Islam experimented or dealt with these same issues when it came into existence. Not only did it happen through religious warfare to establish its religion/beliefs, Islam grew and expanded with imperial ambitions throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa. This wasn't the only thing which expanded, from Arabia the Arab language went outwardly and it even influenced the Spanish language (Muslim Spain). Arab today is the fourth most spoken language in the world. The problem with the latter religions already mentioned is the following: extremists and fundamentalists will also use/have used an excuse to torture and kill the defenseless, because a person won't believe in their religious ideas (van Loon, 1921). This has been the problem to overcome through history; especially, when talking about religious warfare.

There are the issues/problems on how certain Muslim cultures behave towards women. The main idea isn't about whether a female wears a *hajib* (headscarf) or not, that is just a symbolism of modesty and respect towards their beliefs/religion, etc. The biggest matter is the control, and men who control the rights of women. When many countries already have accepted the rights of females as equal citizens or are still struggling to achieve them, this is still a much needed step forward. However, there are countries in which the Islamic population are still dealing with this fact on the equality of females and their rights.

In this portion of the study, the above and below paragraphs will be covering the issues on girls and women, and in certain countries there is still a long way to go. Now, I mind you, most of the countries are Muslim; however, some are Christian, and this isn't in any way looking for an "escape goat" or to place the blame on a certain religion, country, culture or people. The main purpose is to bring attention to this social issue and drag it into the light: furthermore, expose it, change and make things better in our world--for those reading these lines.

The worse countries in violence against women are a total of 15; whether these countries allow the random violence towards females (abuse), harassment, killings, use FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) or still, children (females) are married off as child-brides, etc. These countries are Islamic in their majority, while others are Christian; but this has nothing to do with religion, it has to do with the leaders, or those in power who have to pave the way for changes in behavior and laws to allow equal rights, opportunities and protection for its citizens against any type of wanton violence (especially, when it comes to females). Let's begin with Pakistan, other than the horrors of "honor killings": killing a female who has brought shame into the family, there is a lack of inclusion and opportunities for employment in this respective society. The Central African Republic is the next one, and although it is a Christian country, it still deals with constant warfare and violence; especially when that violence is random and it is directed towards women. Somalia deals with the constant harassment and violence towards females; furthermore, in Somalia there isn't an specific age for a girl to marry and in certain cases this causes the problem of child brides (Gray, 2016). After Somalia, there is Sierra Leone and its constant violence, death rates (whether a woman is in child labor or not) and then, FGM. Sudan is facing the above crises. Chad deals with the matter of early marriages, and especially child-brides. The Democratic Republic of Congo is another one which has to tackle with the constant threat of war and violence towards females; nonetheless, this is a Christian country and then again, this has nothing to do with religion; it has to deal with the changes from within to curve these problems and social issues. The next one is also a Christian country, South Sudan, and the reasons I mention the different countries--whether they are Islamic or Christian is for one single reason: it isn't a religious problem, it is social one. After, there is the country of Syria, where marriage is still a contract (as in most, however, this is a forced one in which the woman is bartered off for money) and as recently as the 1950s--Syrian women were given the right to vote. Afghanistan is one of the worse in violence towards women, burning or stoning people to death; and although, honor killings aren't legal (like in Pakistan), there are still done openly and without any legal prosecution towards men (Concern Worldwide U.S., 2022). Other countries which allow open violence towards women are: Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Kenya (the former ones being Islamic, while the latter is a Christian nation) (Kwamboka, 2022). The countries mentioned above these lines are the 15 nations with the worst record on

violence against/directed towards women and, unless I was specifically mentioned about the country being Christian, then it is Muslim in the majority. Then, again, this has nothing to do with religion (as I often overstated), but with needs in social evolution. And if we call ourselves by a certain belief, we ought to be a positive force for change and an example for that belief. Now, would anybody disagree?

If we take the Koran and apply it to our contemporary times, we must respect all rights of women (Sura 9:71). The latter states that... "men and women are friends to one another." Therefore, if they aren't opposing enemies, why the misogyny which has extended into our present times? Yes, there was a period (in olden times) when girls were sexually abused, enslaved, and there was infanticide. Back in ancient times women and girls were easily bartered, traded off as property into marriage, divorced and used as an inheritance. Even, there are countries which presently allow a man to marry up to four women. To each his/her own. Once a man doesn't abuse and can support his women, that's his business. I don't necessarily have to agree or disagree. What I am contesting is any form of abuse (domestic or otherwise), killings, child-brides and FGM.

There was one nation who has/had the potential to change its attitude towards females and especially women, that was Egypt, and in previous decades it was seen as a model for Muslim liberalism and tolerance. Through the 1940s and into the 1960s, it had its golden age in cinema. It made strides to better the life of females. Then, fundamental ideas came into the picture with President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and it was the changing point and decline to the cultural heritage of belly dancing (Pham, 2021). It was considered by social-fundamentalists as something which went against Islam, whether it was for religious reasons or intolerance of the new socialist system in the Abdel-Nasser government. Soon enough, there was a decline in belly dancers. Something which has had a negative effect in Egyptian society, and after the "2012 -Spring Uprising" things just got worse: women could/can, were and are today easily sentenced from two to three years in prison for exposing their bodies or midsection (AP, 2020). The biggest case that hit the international arena was the arrest in 2020 of Sama el-Masry, and when she was sentenced to three years of imprisonment (TOI Staff and Agencies, 2020). The other topic which needs to be mentioned about Egypt and its practice of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) since the Fifth Century B.C.E. (Before the Common Era). This topic was always persistent in the Egyptian way of life; but, it was Nawal El Saadawi who first brought it to light in the Western World with her creative non-fiction novella, "Women at Point Zero" (El Saadawi, 1977). Experts can argue that yes, since the topic of FGM was brought to light in the 1970s and 1980s Egypt, this procedure has suffered a decline. For example, another story which was also brought to light, possibly by accident, was that of Waris Dirie (the Somali supermodel) in her book, "Desert Flower". The tragedy to take away something of beauty, which was given by birth and nothing in the Koran is

expressed about a female or females being cut or doing on them FGM (Dirie and Miller, 2011). However, if we consider the numbers going from 97% to 87% in FGM cases (1985 to 2015), this procedure which is also known as "female circumcision" is still violent, abusive, a mutilation, inhumane, traumatic, an aberration against females' anatomy and rights (UN Women, 2022). The two situations mentioned above these lines: Belly Dancing and FGM are forms and practices which are ancient. However, belly dancing is considered something of a cultural heritage for Egypt and the world; while the topic of FGM ought to be completely eliminated as a practice in society. The former is something with positive consequences, which has to be transmitted for generations to come; while the latter is a practice with ramifications which subjugates-downgrade females to keep them in control, in line and subservient to men. And here is where the religion has nothing to do or the Koran with these ancient practices which were/are misrepresented, misinterpreted and used by men to control and manipulate certain circumstances presently. In this case, the love-hate relationship with belly dancing in Egypt; which is a cultural-heritage practice used in weddings and that it ought to continued, and not be subjected to imprisonment when a person finds liberation and freedom of expression in their anatomy. Then there is FGM, which is a vile practice and it ought to be eliminated entirely from Egyptian society and other countries' way of life.

Yes, the above cons are the conflicts and contentions suffered in these respective countries and with fanaticism, can this be curved, cured or controlled and even outlawed? Well, now it has been getting better in other/certain Muslim countries, and these countries have been a model of tolerance, compared to 30-years before, and that in itself is progress. The models of tolerance in the Muslim world are in countries such as: Malaysia, Brunei, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates and Turkey. Models of beauty in Islam and speaking from my own experiences, I did see the beauty in culture when I was in Egypt and saw truth faith in some of the people; however, that was from a male perspective and not from a female one, and those experiences went back to 2007, five-years before the "2012-Spring uprising". Also, Saudi Arabia has been making some really great strides compared to the time when I was there 30-years before: woman are being allowed to drive, there are more works planned on the infrastructure, there are also more tourists than ever visiting from all over the world and enjoying its the foods, sites and culture (United Nations, 2017). The contradictions which Saudi Arabia has to face and contend with are still the public executions and lashings, which some can be politically or religiously motivated (Reuters, 2022). Hence, changes are slow, but once these rights and laws gain traction can be progressive. The two other models of tolerance I witnessed were in the countries of Turkey (while visiting their the country twice) and Indonesia. I was in complete awe when visiting the temples or what I saw in the beauty of its mosques, from its times of prayer and songs dedicated to Allah (their God). With that stated, there are other changes slowly occurring, the pros in Muslim society, whether it's inside a country or within its people. This is something to feel good

about, gives people hope. When the Egyptian scholar, Sayyid Qutb said, "The man and the woman are both God's creation and God never intends to oppress anyone from His creation.", there is a line that not only women, but men are taking too slowly to express-equality in these patriarchal societies (DK, 2020). This is a must in the latter for feminism to function properly and in equality. A feminist movement is slowly building-rising in the Muslim world and taking form with women like: Asma Lamrabet and Laleh Bakhtiar (1938 - 2020). What these women are/were calling is for: the equality between men and women. And in the case Ms. Bakhtiar, she was able to complete the first-feminist translation of the Koran in 2007, where she argues and contends against striking or beating a woman (Ibid., p. 85)¹. These issues must come to light, because if as a world community we talk and write about them, these social problems are commonly tied to the Koran² and Sharia law³. Therefore, there should be a revision in keeping this Holy Book and Laws with the current reality of the times. Furthermore, these works/words of law and religion should be read; but another thing we must be able to read and accept for the better part--is the rise in Muslim feminism. Take the example of Malala Yousafzai and her inspiring story, "I Am Malala"; where she exposed and tackled the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Malala exposes some of the sad and unique truths in these societies, and as a young woman, she-herself had to face the discrimination and dangers of girls getting an education in that part of the world (Middle East). Further, Malala witnessed the brutality of the Taliban (first hand) with their public whippings; and thought what she could do about it and how to combat it? (Yousafzai and McCormick, 2016). Here one can see a positive illustration in changes within Islam and the people bringing forth those changes. Malala doesn't only embrace fully Islamic beliefs/values, but the respect for others religions as well, and why these ought to come together in peace and tolerance.

What has been significantly challenging for religions once these are established in a peaceful setting, is when it comes to their expansion. Often, as with Judaism, Christianity and later, Islam all have gone through significant changes, revolutions and some sort of reformation. With that said, these concepts have left those non-believers with unsavory feelings worldwide, specifically in contemporary times. Looking at history and what it has taught us is the following: there is an uncanny familiarity with religions when these come to be. These go from peaceful, and once the belief gains traction/momentum and it is persecuted, this particular belief will go through a period of violence, warfare and imperial gains. It wasn't only been the case with Judaism, Christianity or Islam; this has happened with Buddhism and Hinduism in the past and

¹Islamic Feminism - to allow females and especially women, a greater participation in the Muslim World.

²Koran or Quran - the holiest book in the Muslim World.

³Sharia law - it is the way Muslims must conduct themselves as believers in Islam.

present. If I am to believe in a faith, those who lead this faith shouldn't manipulate the ignorant to control them or they shouldn't use ignorance to say/establish something as holy--when it is not! People are basically forced to give-up the beauty of art, dances and the view of images just to appease their leaders and live under a certain control or manipulative system: therefore, it forces people to be isolated, unhappy, and there is a bigger risk of abuse within a group (Yousafzai and McCormick, 2016). It has proven true in the past, and it continues to be like that today. Now, there are groups of Muslims who believe in not calling out a "Jihad", and often, "Jihad" is misinterpreted and used as an excuse or weaponized for violence; when it should to not be that way (Florida Times-Union, 2015). "Jihad" has been explained by those Muslims who want to live in peace, as a concept or idea that can be defined as "an internal struggle of the spirit", it is sometimes the way one preaches about Islam to others (DK, 2020). However, it is by no means or it mustn't be a way for Islamist to shove their ideas down peoples' throats, etc. And on the other hand, in the Western World, we must be careful with articles and literature which are expressed in thinly-forms of veiled xenophobia, prejudice and racism vice-versa the same applies to the Middle East or Asian countries. Yes, there are certain moments in the Koran, when reading it, the interpretation of Jihad or a lesser Jihad can feel like it is advocating for war (Ibid., p. 134). It ought to never be this way. When a person reads the Koran, he or she must place it into the context of the Twenty-first Century and not read these words as if they were back in the Middle Ages or Seventh-Century. There are portions of the Koranic books, especially within the Suras which advocate for the killing of others whom are non-Muslim (Sura 2: 191). Here is where educated men and women (especially when it comes to Imams) must educate others to not befall into the traps of extremism or fundamentalism. However, let me be perfectly clear: Judaism, Christianity and other religions used the same forms of violence millennia and centuries before, and later there was reformation within its ranks (as expressed in prior pages). The same is happening presently with the Muslim believers (in their majority), whom have started to move away from violence and fanaticism.

This doesn't mean that the Koranic book isn't one with the greatest potential! It is one that is filled with poetry, prose and literary study for generations to come. The problem which continuously affects any religion (upon its growth) for that matter, are the negative stories and aspects that appear through the media in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries. There are "two-sides to every coin", indeed. The further I have read, I felt most comfortable with the aspects of Sufism. Sufism holds the believer responsible for their own actions, and they don't blame the entire world for their own shortcomings. Rumi (رومی محمد جلال‌الدین) said it perfectly, "Yesterday, I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today, I am wise, so I am changing myself!" (DK, 2020). However, there is a contradictory view to Sufism; while they are Muslim, they have had clashes with the other branches of Islam (Sunni and Shia) for being too liberalized or into

mysticism. These contradictions came along since the origins and foundation of Islam; especially every now and then, when the Sufi-Muslims enjoyed alcohol. Philosophers from Persia (present-day, Iran) like, Omar Khayyam (خیام عمر) stated it bluntly, "Drink wine and look at the moon, and think of all the civilizations the moon has seen passing by," (Ibid., 145).

For those who are religious or not, there are reasons to study further about and into the depths of Islam, focusing on the people whom had/have made this belief better in the past and in our times. During the "Golden Age" of Islam, a period which lasted nearly eight-centuries, the greatest advances in study were achieved. Once the Muslims entered Spain, it certainly became a period of learning, with the establishment of Universities in sciences and men like, Avicenna who wrote "The Canon of Medicine" (DK, 2020). This medical encyclopedia was to surpass the style of medicine used by the Greek Empire, and one which had been a part of the known world for the last 1,500 years, until the Umayyad Caliphate came along. Avicenna's medical encyclopedia was to be used throughout Europe for the next 600-years. Greatest advances were also made through: exploration, trade in goods, education and ideas. Men such as, the Arab Ibn Battuta and Chinese-Muslim Admiral, Zheng He made advances in travel over a century before Christopher Columbus came from Italy to explore the outside confines of Europe, Africa and Asia, etc (Ibid., 149).

The biggest fear was how from the "Golden Age" to this point, as I stated before, began to regress and deteriorate. With the fall of the last Caliphate, certain Muslim nations were to be swept-up in turmoil. Except for the stability of the Ottoman Empire; which was a constant threat to Europe for the next 400 years--for this one exception, Muslim lands (in there majority) were constantly conquered, exploited for resources and its people abused. The spirit of tolerance, cooperation, open-mindedness and learning which existed before in Muslim-Spain, Iraq and Syria was lost for centuries. What came after with the constant invasion of lands by the European and American empires was substituted for: ignorance, resentment and fanaticism on either side. Can this be noted in our space and time? And how can nations get back to that spirit of trust and mutual cooperation? The one which specially existed in the Eleventh-Century.

Presently, one can find too many dichotomous-contradictions.

That is why the story of Malala is extremely poignant in our day and age. Her story is an example of two-sides or extremes. Both sides are Muslim; however, one wants an open-minded religious society (in peaceful dialogue) to educate all on equal grounds: whether male or female. The other, which is fanatical, fundamentalist and extremist--wants to destroy all culture. This will leave only ignorance to be followed blindly and without any question at all. The same is true when politics like religions which aren't

properly discussed/debated, and fanatical views changed for a better education and open-minded perspective.

With the changes in Islam into the Twentieth-Century, what affected those nations, such as Turkey (although, today it is a model of tolerance) cannot be ignored or whitewashed in history. What justification can Turkey offer in the Armenian Genocide (600 thousand to 1.5 million victims, estimates are still being debated by historians), and one which can't be even given or ignored (Suny, 2024). It seemed like frustrations boiled over when Islam lost its touch with mainstream society, and began taking it out on civilians or those with no guilt on their hands. However, massacres have been committed against Muslim themselves by Christians (Srebrenica, 1995 - when 8,000 Muslim men and boys were slaughtered by Serb forces) or Hindus and Sikhs in the 1947 India-Pakistan War of Partition, and the killing was estimated between 20-thousand to 237,000 Muslims (UN News, 2021; Fareed, 2017). In the name of God, many acts of cruelty have been committed; however, to descend into madness from an enlightened path in less than 500-years is just deplorable and says a lot. Some societies, and not existentially religions--lost their way; but it was obviously blamed on others (with some justifications to be noted), and in the name of Islam atrocities were committed. Not only against Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs or Buddhist. It was tragically against Muslims themselves. Often, women and children paid the highest price! From an enlightened Caliphate during the Middle Ages to this descent into the madness of hell by ISIS forces in 2014. Excuses can be offered, and at the same time, can it be excused what ISIS or the Taliban did before or is doing presently? Going from a religion of knowledge, science, exchange, cooperation, peace, travel, giving and learning from others--to utter savagery and ignorance. There isn't an excuse for this behavior; especially when Muslims today are paying the heaviest toll!

The Koran as a book that in principle has been considered holy and spiritual; however, it is also a book that is based on sciences, and one constantly aligned with the sciences. One cannot go without the other, if a person in terms considers themselves a Muslim (Sura 10:61 and Sura 12:4). The book is stated as one for peace and humanitarianism (Sura 10:25). Then again, it is a book of many and great contradictions, and if there are contradictions--it cannot come from God's perfection. Therefore, this was created by man and as an inspiration which came from God, if such was/is the case; whether a person believes in God or not, when studying this book, it must be done objectively and cannot be taken subjectively word for word.

In multiple instances when reading the book, "I am Malala", this religion/belief system is a subjected to deep contradictions, like the Koran. While Malala is a young lady who believes in being Muslim, standing for peace, education for all and respecting life. The case is quite different when dealing with the powers that be, whether it came from

the government side (in Pakistan) or that of the Taliban. Malala states in her fascinating book that there is a *Pashtunwali Code*--which prohibits the killing of women (Yousafzai and McCormick, 2016). For that matter, it ought to include any type of honor killing of women or children whom are or aren't Muslim. It doesn't matter how much dishonor is brought upon the family. There are laws and systems in the government to regulate justice. One thing is murder, that which ought to be brought to justice. However, to go out and kill a young lady for falling in love with the wrong man or right one (for that matter), for not wanting to marry at an early age (some girls are married off as early as 12-years old, and the average age in Pakistan is 15), assaulting her for not being accompanied by a family member or shooting her for doing her best to get an education is downright outrageous; whether this happens on behalf of family members or terrorist groups. There is something deeply wrong when a society allows this to happen, whether they are religious or not! This is sending an entire country/culture "back to the Stone Age" and sending an incorrect message about Muslims who live upright lives (Ibid., pp. 71 and 123). In spite of wanting a relatively normal childhood, in the case study of Malala, there wasn't any normalcy with her daily life and death situations. In the end, Malala had to escape/immigrate to the U.K. (United Kingdom) with her family for safety, because of unsafe conditions and persecution. No amount of justification or religious beliefs can justify this treatment and suffering of women, girls and children. A country's children ought to feel safe and protected, and it doesn't matter what people believe in. It is all about common sense and humanity. That is why, I continue to emphasize a reformation (something I'll later discuss below these paragraphs), then again and as stated before, the problem isn't the religion. It will always depend on how people (a country) act on it; whether it is with a fanatical/ignorant point of view or open mind.

In the instance of the Koran, as previously with books like: the Torah, Talmud and Bible--there are deep contradictions. However, we shouldn't be dissuaded from reading these books and focusing on these deep contrasts and dichotomous contradictions. It is honestly part of life and it is a part in learning how to deal with something that we either agree or disagree with, but we should give it a chance to learn from, and not dismiss it; there is valuable poetry, history, prose and literature in the Koran--like other books from the past. That is why, from a historical perspective, Islam like the Koran ought to go back to what it used to be centuries before, a religion that was/is pluralist (DK, 2020). Therefore, with the Twenty-first century, there needs to be changes of attitudes towards the Koran, Islam and the Muslim community. Deep prejudices which began to arise in the 1980s and 1990s (in Western societies, sometimes the fault of Western nations themselves, and sometimes not) with conflicts and wars in the Middle East; and especially after, September 11th, 2001 and the present war in Syria (2011 - Present). Suddenly, there was rejection and misunderstanding of anything Middle Eastern: from the culture, Koran, Islam, being Muslim to belly dancing for that matter (Rhaj, 2024).

However, there is also another factor, the Muslim community needs to meet others halfway with tolerance. There are examples of people out there (on both sides) that are making a difference presently (Global Fund For Women, 2016; Jilani, 2019). But one thing is true and the book, "I Am Malala" states it perfectly, as well as the Koran, "Falsehood has to die, and the truth has to come forward," (Yousafzai and McCormick, 2016).

In conclusion:

The Muslim faith, Islam, as well as the Koran hasn't shown any indications that is slowing down in growth. On the contrary, this faith (more than ever) is revving up and growing into the Twenty-First Century, and beyond. This was stated before. However, what wasn't stated was the following: the place of its origins, Saudi Arabia needs to have further reform by accepting visitors of all faiths into the Holy Sites of Mecca and Medina. There needs to be an avoidance of the exclusion of Orthodox-Jews from the Al-Aqsa Mosque (Jerusalem, Palestine or Israel--take your pick) and its grounds (considered by Muslim and Jews alike, as the burial place of Abraham), as with other Palestinian-Muslims or non-Muslims when there is a conflict between Israel and Palestine, etc (Tanis, 2024; Sebag Montefiore, 2011; France 24, 2023). There ought to be equality for all men and women, and without any distinction of religion. One thing cannot go without the other ("hand in hand"). As a person with no domination of faith, I would be deeply interested in visiting Mecca and knowing further about Islam. Before this can happen, there needs to be greater tolerance for people of different faiths, backgrounds, non-believers (such as myself) and equal standing for females. With that said, there needs to be safety from extremism or fanaticism for those visiting, and indications that a person won't get whipped for exposing themselves by mistake. Saudi Arabia as a country has the right to carry out its own laws; however, it is also important to understand that, it is a Muslim's responsibility to educate others without castigation, verbal or physical aggression. Those who want to learn, and those who teach, ought to accept and respect differences of opinion in tolerance. The greatest limitation or threat to Islam, as well as the Koran, are the inclusion factors from Muslims and how they treat outsiders when excluding them, etc. And alas, if we only live in a perfect world. It's difficult/hard, and at the same time, it isn't impossible. But things/changes take time!

In the case of the West, in places like Europe and North America, there has to be greater acceptance for this belief. And in our day and age, there is! However, there shouldn't be any prejudice whatsoever. However, we live in the real world and this is unavoidable. Especially, when the Western media sometimes adds "fuel to the fire". On this same topic, Muslims have to/should adapt to the country they live in; in this there is an essential truth when dealing with Western-styled democracies. There has to be a

deeper reasoning/understanding that these countries in Europe and North America are allowing freedom of expression. In spite of this, there are still the imperfections of racism and prejudice in any society which people live. It's part of being human and society's imperfections. And it is important to recognize that certain Muslim countries limit freedom of expression and movement (especially for females/women) in their societies. This I hope for it to change within the next 80-years, and according to sociologist, human beings in there own complexities will invent something new to fight over or about in their prejudices. However, for other Muslims societies/countries changes are happening slowly. We'll have to watch and see.

Books like "The Story of Mankind" by Hendrik van Loon, I found the book to be deeply prejudicial towards the Eastern side of the world and Muslim culture. Given the time in which it was written (and, I'm not excusing this), van Loon was a man of his time. Van Loon (at the time) was in search for the truth; however, the way he exposes this truth is through a one-sided European perspective and not from both sides (European and Asian points of view). Then, there is "The Islam Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained" (2020), which is too positive and politically correct about Islam. This book from the DK cooperation was excellently written and exposes the topic of Islam and the Koran at a greater depth; however, I did find the book too influenced, and written in a positive perspective about Islam, and yes, the positives need to be highlighted and mentioned. On that note, Islam like the Koran need to be exposed for its flaws and I think/believe the DK book avoided these points of view to be 'good nature' and politically correct (in our day and age) about the religion. This is the sign of our times. People have to be extremely careful with extremism and those like, Sayyid Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood (Hassan al-Banna, 1928) which promotes terrorism (DK, 2020). Yes, the same Sayyid Qutb referred to (at the top) on page 52 of this dissertation, when he expressed equality between men and women; and later in his written philosophy contradicts himself constantly. The latter can easily setback the Muslim religion/faith, and turn a country who is liberalized (take Egypt) into something that is backward in the treatment of its people: especially, for women and children.

Koran as a book, and I mentioned this repeatedly and previously, should/ought to be studied/read about and learned from; like all other religious books. However, like everything in this life, "it should/ought to be taken (once again) with a grain of salt" and not taken at face value or literally. It is a literary masterpiece deeply held in beautiful-poetry and prose. On the other hand, the Koran can be deeply contradicting and confusing. But so is the Holy Bible, Torah and both Talmuds. It is a book that can be based on deep spirituality, peace, love, forgiveness, love for one's enemies; but it can also be based/biased on prejudices, exclusion, hate, warfare, vengeance and hate for one's enemies. Therefore, one has to take into consideration the period in which it was written. However, I found the Koran to be a deep dichotomy in contradictions. A book

which was written for peace, but then (as with the religion) it spilled into warfare for dominance and control over the Arabian Peninsula, and it then expanded into an Empire which dominated the Middle East, Northern Africa and Southern Europe for centuries. The same can be stated about other religions and religious books, these usually were written for peace, but later, as with Christianity turned into violence for forced-territorial expansion on the belief and further Imperial gains. Sometimes with religious faith, hate crimes have been committed against the innocent. This isn't unique and only to Muslims, whether it was a Jew killing a famous leader (when Yigal Amir assassinated Yitzhak Rabin) or Mormons killing their own family members, out of anger or because "God told them to do so" (Krakauer, 2003; Jerusalem Post Staff, 2022). There is no justification for this kind of hate crime in this day and age. The educated-privileged few need to educate their respective flocks (the majority) on how to conduct themselves peacefully and with tolerance in the face of debates and social/religious disagreements without resorting to blows of violence.

I'd like to use the words of Thomas Paine to express it best from my own point of view: "Each of those churches show certain books, which they call revelation, or the word of God. The Jews say that their word of God was given by God to Moses face to face; the Christians say, that their word of God came by divine inspiration; and the Turks say (referring to contemporary Muslims in general, equating when this was written over 200 years before and to not befall into stereotypical generalizations), that the word of God (the Koran) was brought by an angel from heaven. Each of those churches accuses the other of unbelief; and, for my own part, I disbelieve them all," (Paine, 2003).

Religions, like religious books ought to be studied further--to promote tolerance and acceptance of others for a greater humanity. Also, with that said, there ought to be clarity of judgment and mind. The latter should never befall into fanaticism, which often happens with religious faiths. They start off for peace, and spill into warfare and the destruction of others who disagree them.

These are my conclusions on the Koran, and thank you sincerely for reading. This concludes the study portion on the first-three religious books. From this point, I will focus on the last-two books, which are on: political-sciences, geopolitics and warfare.

D) Edgar Snow's "Red Star Over China": One of the most controversial books ever written in the last 88-years or so. It a piece of classical-literature work/masterpiece identifying a period in history that is often misunderstood (between China's Revolution, World War II and its Civil War). For those who have read this historical-biography, people either love or hate it. Praising Mao Zedong (毛泽东) as the saviour of China, while others have asked themselves: was he a mass murderer or just a man who made a series of bad choices/mistakes when he reached the position as Chairman (1949 - 1976)? Take

your pick and according your interpretation. This portion will analyze the greatness and faults of the book, "Red Star Over China" in an objective manner; while looking into the complex history of China in the last 200 years. The focus on objectivity will be implemented as much as possible, since I want to be careful, fair and not be disrespectful to the figure/legacy of Mao, and what it means to most Chinese in this period of contemporary history. And human beings can often judge and misinterpret. However, nobody can deny what Mao did for China, it was nothing short of a miracle and something which was considered nearly or close to impossible. The question remains: can it all had been done without Mao? Some historians think not. As I mentioned before about other books, this book is a must read (whether a person is for or against) to comprehend what was China back then, and what it is amazingly today!

China's history goes back some 5,000 years and it is a rich tradition of culture which spans back by millennia. With 56-ethnicities through this country known as Zhongguo (中国) or the Middle Kingdom. The beauty of this culture and its ethnic parts can be stated as one of great foods, colorful clothing and ancient sites to see. They have shared their greatest teacher with the world, Confucius (孔子), and there is no denying--China is a Confucian society. What started to affect China came through our contemporary history, when European empires began to interfere in Chinese affairs. However, before we get into that, we can see those repercussions today in cities like Nanjing, Qingdao and Tianjin with its German communities. There is that Russian influence in places like Harbin. The former British-styled colonialism of Hong Kong or the Portuguese influence in Macao--just to name a few. It doesn't matter how we try to divide or explain it, one cannot go without the other. And yes, we may want to excuse it presently, and at what cost (in the past) to the Chinese people. Part of the problem, the European empires saw the weakened and troubled state of the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912). The problem was further compounded with the arrogance of the Manchus into thinking that they were the "center of the world" and their refusal to modernized their backward army. This would prove costly to China for the next 250 years (Martin, 1901). However, with Martin's article, we have to be quite careful; since his perspectives back the sphere of British influence, superiority and supremacy (in the past)--causing it to sound quite prejudicial.

The imperial powers brought the hammer down hard on China by the early Nineteenth-Century. That was when the British first went to war with China (First Opium War, 1839 - 1842), which was basically a way to force the trafficking of narcotics (opium) across the Chinese mainland and outwardly--without any impunity. The Qing Dynasty knowing better, did their best to curve the trafficking of illegal drugs. The strategy (by the British) was to create an addictive nation of Chinese citizens out 400 million for the next 50-years; something that is still a bit of a stigma today (Griner, 2016). The problem didn't end here, it escalated to the conquering, colonization and control

over Hong Kong for the following 155 years (Lovell, 2012). Then, with the Second Opium War (1856 - 1860), where Britain and France joined forces to further consolidate power in China.

Other forms of unscrupulous practices continued throughout the centuries for Empires to make their profit in China. Opium was just one form of control over China, but it wasn't the only method of control. It was used to create an addictive need inside the slums, and enslaved prostitutes and workers whom were already addicted to the drug. Furthermore, it was to create a society of poverty to be controlled by the dirty practices of prosperous Empires (Charrington-Hollins, 2020). It began with the Portuguese's imperial intentions and expansion over China, from the conquest of Formosa (presently, Taiwan) and Macao--to the control over tea. Whomever controlled the trade of tea, silk and later, opium would be the master in this region. Therefore, it began with the Portuguese, later the British, French, Russians, Japanese, Germans and finally, the Americans.

The Taiping Rebellion (太平天国运动 December, 1850 - August, 1864) was another part of the problem during the "Century of Humiliation". When Empires were "sticking their noses" into Chinese affairs. Here, the Qing Dynasty achieved victory over the *Taiping Heavenly Kingdom* who wanted to overthrow the Emperor to implement their own brand of Christianity. The European forces (France and U.K.) assisted the Qing Dynasty to keep them under their control and suppress the Taiping Rebellion. The funny thing which started the rebellion was caused by the Empires introduction of Christianity into China and their pushing of narcotics into the country. It was a dichotomy in terms of hypocrisy and contradictions what was being forced into China. Therefore, it started with the forceful push of illegal narcotics or stealing of products, when the Chinese resisted--then warfare ensued: with colonization and forced religion. By the conclusion of the 14-year Taiping Rebellion, it was something comparable to the loses of World War I; the death toll reached 30-million (Wikipedia, 2024).

This was bound to create a greater resentment amongst the Chinese, and it created reverberations in China's society for decades to come. It wasn't until after the Chinese Revolution of 1911 - 12--that things were to slowly change in China. However, the worse was yet to come. What has hurt China in the past and present are the memories of that terrible history. Something which they haven't easily gotten over, and it affects them presently when dealing with expatriates and other countries. To be quite honest, the leadership and upper classes have been quite despotic and can be comfortable with their inequality. This isn't an old historical problem, it has been a social one in China for the last 500 years, and since the Chinese empire came in contact with Europeans--it has remained a social issue which needs to be addressed and fixed (Otero, 1998). I'd dare say that with Mao it was compounded, mentioned over and over--never

to be forgotten; the insecurities and complexities with the 100-years of humiliation. That is why presently, there is a love and hate relationship with expats, and the outside world.

Also, China had become a land of warlords; where the Nationalist Army defeated each and every warlord subsequently. Then, tensions turned between the Nationalist and Communist parties. This had grown into an intensity which was to cause a major war amongst both sides for years to come (1927 to 1949).

There shouldn't be any doubt in anybody's mind that Mao Zedong was the man who brought China out of the dark ages and into (what later became) a contemporary-developing nation it is today. However, was he the only one, and was it the right or wrong way? Later, I will discuss who is responsible for the true development of China and what happened subsequently after 1949. For now, let's get into Edgar Snow's Mao and what this man really did for China. Was he the best or worse for China? Well, opinions do differ, but one thing cannot be denied and remains, China wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for men like Mao. Before 1949, Mao had been fighting to free China from the colonial yoke and rule of Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist army for the previous 25-years. This was to bring China from an agrarian/impoverished society into a developed one. However, it wasn't going to be easy, since Mao had to form an Army who had to fight not only the nationalist troops; but subsequently the Japanese Imperial Army invasion (Ibid., p. 14). Therefore, for years, he was fighting a war on two fronts. Mao Zedong came into the international spectrum and the political arena by the early 1920s. He was considered one of the greatest hopes for China. A saviour to his country, since America considered European affairs of major importance and not those in the Far East (in other words, in Asia or Southeast Asia); however, what came after was the tragedy which hurt the country for the next 26-years (after 1949), during his rule (Mao's) over China (Keenan, 1953). America came to initially back Chiang Kai-shek's government through his period as leader of China for the right or wrong reasons (1928 - 1949). Mao began with subsequent strategies to overthrow this regime, build an army and give China a fresh start: and develop an egalitarian society for all through education, to pull his people out of poverty, and do it with communism. However, one must think when dealing with China's history in a way of Confucianism and in a totalitarian manner: was this just "smoke and mirrors" to show his best side to Mr. Snow, and not the worst of his country and how he (Mao) would subsequently control/rule over China? But what China intended and intends on doing was/is self-preservation. Yes, it can be a land of "smoke and mirrors" to protect themselves from losing face, blaming others for their own shortcomings and to "throw the stones and hide their hands" when hurling criticisms at others and banning everything that is critical against them. At the same time, nobody can deny the growth of China and India in the last 20-years; how China is leading the vanguard on trade, infrastructure and world education--which (by the way) needs to be improved (Aiyar, 2008). Looking at China in continuance, it is

going/doing good and well in route. It is already a leader here in Asia and will be one of the world leaders in the next 25-years--with the influence of Chinese as a necessary and important economy/language to learn from/about, etc. This country which everybody saw for its amazing potential long before, it's getting finally its "day in the sun"!

Mao Zedong was to state his true intentions clearly through his quotes, after all, he was a great writer and military strategist when it came to leading in the Chinese Communist Party. Furthermore, this was what he wanted for China. He mentioned three important aspects that were to show how he would later rule China:

"The first law of war is to preserve ourselves and destroy the enemy." "Historical experience is written in blood and iron," (Mao Zedong, 1937). "Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun," (Mao Zedong, 1938).

There is no doubt that Mao's strategy continued to progress through his studies, experience and knowledge about "The Art of War" (Sun Tzu, p. 6 - Thomas Cleary translation). When he read it, he applied it perfectly against his enemies, "A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective", (Sun Tzu, The Art of War). This was to prove his greatest deception, rise to power and control over China for generations to come (even after his death).

Red Star Over China is a book which has stood the test of time, timely, organized and well written, greatly prophetic on what China (and Mao) were to become decades after the War, and with its inaccuracies--it continues to show a valid-historical perspective. With a thought on the Chinese Revolution, the war with Japan and what China has become presently. However, China continues to be a land of "smoke and Mirrors" when it comes to the truth, their perspectives on reality, what they like to show or not show to the world. It is a land of great growth and potential; however, it still needs to learn to deal with its ghosts and its past history.

Let's begin with the history of the "Long March" (长征) and Mao's desperate game/gamble and need for survival in his retreat to save his communist forces from the nationalist government (KMT - Kuomintang). The horror of this march was to take place between October, 1934 (starting in Yudu, Jiangxi) through October, 1935 (and ending in Yan'an, Shaanxi). Upon the withdrawal against the Nationalist Forces, Mao's army began with 90,000 troops--less than 20,000 were to survive this horrific-disaster of a journey, in other words, 70,000 men lost their lives: and it showed one thing, the will, courage and determination of the Communist Army to fight and live to see another day (Real Time History, 2023). However, historians have argued the truth

about the Long March and how it has been inflated to almost mythical proportions in distance and that the distance was lesser than the 9,000 to 12,000 kilometers (5,600 - 7,456 miles) to only 3,000 kilometers (1864 miles) (Wikipedia, 2024). Furthermore, the kidnappings of locals along the way (were) to help with the losses of the communist troops; whether it happened one way or another in this controversial march, it is still an impressive feat in strategy and maneuverability to fight the Nationalist troops.

The news of the Chinese Communist Party's¹ survival reached all-four corners of the globe, and attracted adventurers and journalists for the adventure or scoop of the century. One name which was to become synonymous with the CCP was that of Mao Zedong's (all over the world) and the man to interview him was to be a young journalist known as Edgar Snow.

Mao's strategy worked for a young Angolan who studied under Mao and learned Maoist's strategies/techniques while in China. His name was Jonas Savimbi, the guerrilla leader of the UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) forces who applied this same strategy 40-years later. For his own survival, he imitated Mao's strategy of the Long March during the Angolan Civil War (1975 - 2002) on February 9th, 1976. For his survival and that of his forces, he retreated from Gago Coutinho with 4,000-troops. The fruits of his training paid off, when seven months later on August 28th, 1976 he made it into Cueleiro with only 79-people and having had covered 3,000 kilometers in distance (Bridgland, 2022).

Part of Edgar Snow's experience wasn't only to cover the "Long March". He wanted to know and learn further about the mysteries of China and this ancient culture. Most of all, the curiosity for those of us who presently come and are drawn to China. That was the same with Mr. Snow back then. He was to write an in-depth expose on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) origins and its leaders: Mao's life (from early childhood onward), the Red Army leaders, the main struggle against class, pulling China out of poverty, illiteracy, the Civil War, the anti-colonial war (especially the one against Japan) and finally, the guerrilla warfare tactics and its important events (Explore China 探索中国 - Cordes, 2021).

When Edgar Snow came into the spotlight, China was engulfed in wars of many factions. China wasn't only divided amongst White (Nationalist) and Red (Communist) Armies. What further divided the country was the corruption, greedy landlords, despotic leaders, poverty, gangster-ism, drug addiction and the country being fought over by many warlords (Wei, 2022). In spite of Wei's perspective on "Orientalism", I

¹CCP - The Chinese Communist Party was first established in Shanghai, China with its First Congress in 1921.

have to disagree: Mister Snow's subjective perspective for Mao Zedong and the war was spot on. The only issue with Snow's point of view is the following: it is a one sided view, and praised more often than not the Communist side. As a journalist he did report fairly on what he saw, but possibly Mister Snow didn't consider or wasn't allowed to see the hidden realities (negative side) of the Communist Party. However, "Red Star Over China" cannot be dismissed as a true account of events, since it does have historical accuracy and validity; but from a subjective point of view and what the then young-journalist saw. Snow was an adventurer and that is the truth, but his written points cannot be dismissed or denied for generations to come. On top of all these issues, Snow was witnessing the problems with: colonization, the recent Japanese invasion and the slaughter in the millions of Chinese citizens that would eventually expand into 1945 and continue into the bitter disputes occurring presently. The Chinese had two-bitter wars against the Japanese. The First Sino-Japanese War was fought over the control of Korea (1894 - 1895). The Second Sino-Japanese War took place between 1937 to 1945, the latter war was to be the most destructive the world had ever seen. Japan's intervention in China for its resources was to cause a long-lasting riff which continues until this very present-day. Another thing which cannot be denied, Mao's words in the 1930s had a long-lasting effect for generations to come; especially when speaking about the social-revolutions of the 1960s globally.

Whether one is for or against Snow's point of view, nobody can deny what he wrote was a truth-to-life literary masterpiece. One thing Snow was spot on and he had been mentioning or writing about it since 1931 until 1941, was the rise of Japan and the necessity to destroy the Japanese war machine before it was too late. Snow published his book, "Battle for Asia" and its content would prove ominous to what Japan did several months later on December 7th, 1941; when its aerial military attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Hawaii (Pakesi Sinuo, 2009). Historians on the European side of the world always like mention about the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939) as the trampoline which catapulted nations into World War II (1939 - 1945), since it would place countries against countries (Edukemy, 2023). However, historians often overlook where the commencement of WWII really began, it was with Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and later 1937 in Shanghai (AHA, 1944).

With Mister Snow, Mao Zedong had an opportunity to expose further his cause. Nobody would/could ever had understood, imagined or predicted what was to come after 1949. Further down these lines, and I'll get into that point of view in the explanation. What started to change between China and the United States was after 1941. The obvious choice in leadership was with Generalissimo Chang Kai-shek, since America was severely anti-Communist or against Socialism for that matter. America took the high road. And it befalls on hypocritical words that the "Land of the free", which is always stating, "Freedom of expression", the right to believe "in the pursuit of happiness"

and to believe in one's "creed" is often hindered/mired when it comes to certain religious groups or political ideologies, etc. "Red Star Over China" gave insight into Mao's mind, his works/methods in military strategy and later, with what he wrote in his "Little Red Book" (1964). His strategies or Maoist guerrilla system/ideology were adopted not only by Communist believers, such as: Jonas Savimbi 40-years later. The U.S. military also adopted his useful techniques for guerrilla warfare, and were later used by the Green Berets in infield tactics during the Vietnam War (1959 - 1975) (Woodward, 1987).

After everything which has been said and done, and before I conclude on this analysis about "Red Star Over China". There are two points worth mentioning, Edgar Snow being persecuted after 1941 for having reported favorably on Mao's Communist Army in the United States. The man (Mister Snow) did his job, he saw many favorable things about the Army versus with the Nationalists, he saw more corruption. Mao's Communist Army for better or worse, were doing their best to educate the masses from illiteracy, pay for services and give food were ever they went. It doesn't mean that the Communists didn't use methods of indoctrination, whether it was by freedom of choice or other wise. At that time, Mao was doing something which nobody had the bravery or vision to do: and it was to change the entire agrarian system, modernize the country, educate and make people aware of what was ongoing. This isn't to say that it was perfect, since it wasn't always that way, and at times things were done by force. However, was the remedy worse than the problem? That is something, I'd like to explain further in detail. For now, and especially after 1941, Snow was persona-non grata in China. This became true after 1945, when the Chinese-Civil War began (1945 - 1949). Of course, Mister Snow would be subsequently denied visas to visit China. This wasn't only from Chang kei-shek's Nationalist side. The American government also made it hard for Snow to write and have his articles/pieces published. Tensions became worse with America and China after 1949. They escalated even further during the Korean War (1950 - 1953), because these were the years of McCarthy-ism in the United States and the "Red Scare" (1917 - 1920/1947 - 1954); in which anybody with communist's friends, sympathies, ties or ideology were blacklisted, accused of spying or faced prison sentences. This blacklist was to destroy careers and lives for a decade.

For Snow, as a journalist, things weren't any different. Snow wouldn't be able to return to China until the early 1960s.

Mao was a brilliant soldier, strategist, scholar, great leader during his wartime period, poet and writer. He did great things to organize a revolution and social revolution. However, it isn't to say that he was a great Chairman. People confuse in principle what he was during the latter portion of his life and career as a statesman, especially after 1949. What he created was a miracle in the making, and he became the founder of

China, that was/is a fact. What brought the country to near collapse was the "Great Leap Forward" and "Cultural Revolution", all in the desire to retain power and throw the country into desperate modernization; however, it threw the country further into chaos. Some Chinese people who lived during that era have called it, "The Period of the Confused". Described by those who survived as a period of turmoil, madness, unstable economy and constant purges for those who suffered during those years (Unger, 2007). Mao was a great leader on the battlefield, but he wasn't an economist; something he should have allowed Deng Xiaoping to perform, but his ego got the better of him (Walker, 2021). Hence, Mao threw the country into the worse-man made famine in the history of China (1958 - 1962). Things got so bad during those years, and the later "Cultural Revolution" (1966 - 1976). It is said that through violence, thuggery, famine and desire for control, 20-to-45-million died; nobody is certain of the numbers. Reports of some of those who were starving did come out, and these same people resorted to cannibalism to survive (Dunn, 2021). The problem which has besieged the CCP until this present-day has been the total lack of transparency and extreme secrecy when it came to those horrible years. To face the past and accept these mistakes doesn't make a country or its people weaker, actually, it makes them stronger. However, for some these truths are often too pain to bear given the nature of the circumstances.

China is presently at a crossroads, between following its conservative past or to continue in progressive motion with its current socialist-capitalist values. There is no denying the legacy left behind from Edgar Snow's book ('Red Star Over China') and what Mao Zedong did for China. Like it or not, the images of Mao are everywhere in China (from the RMB - national currency to its statues) and like his "cult-of-personality" continues to grow; it almost places Mao on a 'perfect-saintly-pedestal'. When an actor does a T.V. series in China about Mao, the show places an angelic-like glow/aura around him. To an extent, his statues carry that same expression/impression, as the benevolent leader. However and in truth, let us not be blinded by charm, Mao was more Machiavellian in his methods than people like to admit. He has been the most influential leader, compared to past Emperors and present-day Chairmen. It has been a century since Mao's Communist Revolution began in China, and this is something not easily forgotten or placed aside into annals of history or for the Chinese people. It may take another generation of Chinese to start questioning (even more) about Mao for all his greatness and faults. But, that cannot be called out by the Western superpowers or the media. These changes on the historical-perspectives of Mao and China have to come from the Chinese people themselves or for those in the upper echelons and halls of power.

I am not trying in anyway, shape or form to judge Mao. What made him a clear student in "The Art of War" or "Machiavelli" were the facts in which he eliminated or

banished the landowners, and this was possibly a "necessary evil" during the Chinese Civil War and before (Ziyu Li, 2022). Later, they would have become his clear enemy. He also consolidated his power not from the elite, but from the lower classes, the poor farmers of China, and this is what made him most popular amongst the people (Ibid., 418). It was and is the reason he has remained largely popular until this very present-day. Mao Zedong was a "coin with two sides", in many ways, extremely charming, and during other circumstances, he could be: utterly ruthless, controlling and manipulative (Machiavelli, 1532). During wartime, people do things under duress to survive, and Mao did the same. The problem was after the wars and the way he treated his own always comes into question. The question will always remain with us lovers of history, was his mind set on the ways of war, even during peacetime China? Well, Mao had to implement drastic measures to help the country flourish, and at what cost? Once again, in the book, "The Red Star Over China" hints came to light: but the entire magnitude wasn't exposed properly or ignored conveniently by Mister Edgar Snow do to his relationship with Mao (in friendship), his ideology, or was the journalist simply kept in the dark--like most expatriates during that time. He later (Snow) became in theory blinded by his own subjectivity. As observers of history, we will never know, and in truth and without judgment: Snow still stands as a great man and journalist, and Mao as the miraculous founder of the People's Republic of China. Indeed, an incredible/amazing story which will go on for ages and one worth a good read.

There is one thing to assert when talking about Mao, other than following "The Art of War", as it is done by scholars and government officials; he followed "Machiavelli's Prince" to the letter. In many ways, his power came from the way he influenced the masses and not necessarily his leadership skills when he was in power for approximately 27-years. The long lasting effect which Mao left behind, can certainly be felt today in China and the way Communism is looked at inside China and abroad. In summary, through a strategy of fighting perseverance: he was able to establish the PRC, retain it and in the process, he did all this once he acquired power. Then, he created a state and kept it, this all followed the same principles as in the book, "The Prince" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). There are moments when the historical figure of Mao can leave people either in awe or utter disgust, there isn't any doubt about that! However, opinions will be divided for generations to come.

In conclusion:

China is a land of miracles: from its 5,000-year culture full of Emperors, the Great Wall and the four main inventions which made The Middle Kingdom so great: the printing press, crossbow, paper and compass. However, what made China evolve from a controlled-agrarian state which was abused by Empires two centuries before was a man called, Mao Zedong. A century prior, he began fighting to reconquer China from the

exploitation of landowners, Nationalist government and Empires who controlled this country. It was the book, "The Red Star Over China" and Mao's biography, written by Edgar Snow which gave international exposure to Mao and the Communist Party's plight in this battle to defeat the Nationalist government and kick out the Japanese, who came to China to invade it for its resources. Again, and without trying to sound repetitive, nobody knew what would later happen during Mao's tenure as Chairman.

The question here remains, was the country better for it? Historians and local Chinese who believe in Mao's legacy say, "Yes!" to this; while others argue to the contrary. And there isn't any doubt, or shouldn't be, that without Mao there wasn't to be a contemporary China in the full swing of development. The truth is, it had to start from somewhere: and it began with Mao, Edgar Snow and the brave cadres who fought for what China is today. In conclusion, it isn't only about personalities, such as Mao. People have a lot to thank Deng Xiaoping over what China has become presently, a technological powerhouse, leading the world presently and becoming one of the top nations who will lead/dominate the world with its economy in the next 25-years, if not before (Dollar, Huang and Yao, 2020). Especially now, China has pulled it off in the last 20-years. For this, China has plenty to thank Mao over, and those who sacrificed themselves for it; because without them, it would have taken far longer. For this, I might add in an overstatement, when people have to only look and say, it is indeed something miraculous!

E) Introduction - Ghost Wars is another one of these books by Steve Coll which hits a core nerve when it comes to wars, revolutions, skirmishes and fights which are fought over territory in the field/heat of battle. Not since World War II, a war was fought over Good vs. Evil. After 1945, the truth about war was entirely different. Most of these wars were fought in a guerrilla style, except for the Korean War (1950 - 1953). More and more, the fights over ideologies, territories, natural resources, an ethnic groups and again, religion was brought into the picture. What happened with the horrors of WWII soon people forgot/became a distant memory and began repeating genocidal actions against their fellow human beings; since people didn't comprehend the history, knew too little or nothing about it! These Wars took a new methodology done in the United States, and it never did matter if these wars were Democratic or Republican sponsored; at the end of the day, it is the "two sides of the same coin". These wars took/take place on a geopolitical spectrum and will not stop until one side or another abandons the fight.

From the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), by 1947 it took the form of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), and soon the atrocities resumed. It didn't matter anymore if these atrocities now came from the victors who wanted to impose their ideology on others. What mattered was the escalation of cruelty from the United States into other countries around the world. The victors or victims of WWII were now the bullies, and

these powerful nations from the U.S., U.K., France, Netherlands, Russia and Israel began abusing the rights of others; especially the minorities whom they were supposed to protect. The U.S. has always based themselves on the so called, "Desire for justice and equality", when in truth they are missing the vital form of equity. They are as imperial as Great Britain. Although, U.S. citizens will often deny that their government behaves like an Empire, when they often do so like their British cousins.

The same has happened with the *Steve Coll* book, "Ghost Wars". It doesn't say it directly, but this piece of great literature is taking a one sided view; although, it is supposed to be objective in the matter. This isn't to say that the CIA isn't doing their best to do good against global-terrorist's groups like: the Taliban, al-Qaeda or ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). However, long before the book "Ghost Wars" came about, another piece of great historical-literature came out with the *Bob Woodward* book, "Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA". And it took again, a one-sided perspective on behalf of the U.S. and forgot or briefly mentioned the abuses committed by the United States across Latin America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and in the sociopaths they trained to hurt others in the "School of the Americas". This is one of the issues which quickly needs to be addressed when speaking about these great works. It doesn't showcase the wrongs and atrocities committed before hand and that is why, many nations today despise the U.S. for its hypocrisy across the world. This isn't to say that the U.S. doesn't have greatness in its country and people, it does! But it is often mired by internal double standards or abroad. For example, the U.S. has had a "War on Drugs" since the 1970s; however, it is the biggest user of narcotics in the world. Another thing is to call out for racial equality in other countries, as it did in the past with Apartheid-South Africa. Then, back in the U.S. the African-American and Latino communities are subjected to racial, social inequality, and treated inhumanely. This is the hypocrisy, I am often referring too.

Since the 1960s, the U.S. didn't learn from the stern warnings and lessons in their engagement throughout the Vietnam War (1959 - 1975), and you don't invade a people who have been fighting for hundreds of years to protect their homeland. The lesson wasn't learned in Vietnam, and it wasn't learned neither in Afghanistan (2001 - 2021); America's longest engagement in a war. Warnings were given beforehand; however, nobody did listen to the mess which was about to happen, and the United States went in arrogantly--thinking that being a superpower would do the trick!

Patrick Leahy said it once perfectly, "You guys are setting yourselves up for a fall", (Woodward, 1987). The problem with the U.S., Americans and their politics is the following: people are shortsighted and want to solve everything through the "power of the purse" or muscle, (Ibid., p. 243). These kinds of wars are for the long term and if the U.S. isn't prepared for this, they ought to get out in 18-months or less. Military might/force gets deadly and complicated--with societies which have been around for

thousands of years. More often than not, the U.S. ends-up pushing their values down peoples' throats for the short term goal, but not in the long term.

In the cases of warfare, as with the Steve Coll and Bob Woodward books; when the U.S. began a conflict which thought they could finish quickly, but didn't, these were the times to listen or read "The Art of War". "There is no instance of a nation benefiting from prolonged warfare", (Sun Tzu, 2020). Plenty of times the U.S. has gambled on the wrong person, especially placing money and faith on madmen. Historically, this has been one of the greatest downfalls of the U.S. as a country. This has gone on for 70+ years and when will the U.S. learn how not to place their trust on psychopaths. Here are examples and lessons to be learned for the future: Fulgencio Batista (Cuba), Ngo Dinh Diem (Vietnam), Shah of Iran, Augusto Pinochet (Chile), Suharto (Indonesia), Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), Saddam Hussein (Iraq), Ferdinand Marcos (Philippines), Jonas Savimbi (Angola), Manuel Noriega (Panama), the al-Saud royal family (still in power, Saudi Arabia), Francisco Franco (Spain) and Anastacio Somoza (Nicaragua) (Carr, 2024). There has been other cases; however, we will refer to the men above these lines.

It wasn't and isn't only the level of hypocrisy and selfishness in the United States, it was also done when former Presidents like Ronald Reagan called other countries or empires 'evil'. In his March 8th, 1983 speech, he publicly denounced the former U.S.S.R. (Union of Soviets Socialist Republics/Russia) as an "Evil Empire", while giving a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals (Glass, 2018). This was the biggest insult not only to the Russians, but to the world. When not accepting or realizing that the U.S. through its own imperial gains, often denied through expressions of Christianity, that has caused the same problems in other countries around the world. This focus didn't start only since the days of the War in Vietnam, it went further back to the manipulation of the press during the Spanish-American War (1898), the massacres in the Philippines when the Filipino-American War (1899 - 1902) took place, the Invasion of Haiti (1915 - 1934) and subsequently the interventions throughout the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America. Using excuses to create 'escaped-goats' to avoid facing national problems back (home) in the U.S. and build a powerful country economically (through the industrial war machine), while promoting warfare abroad. Then, inserting ideology into the mix: whether it was political (against communism) or religiously based (e.g. "God bless America"), etc. Take the above example of the Filipino-American War, and if you ask most U.S. citizens about the history, it is was a genocidal war against the Filipino population which too few know about.

Langhorne 'Tony' Motley (former Ambassador and Assistant Secretary of State) once predicted what would become of the "Agency"¹ and what William Casey

¹Slang terms for the C.I.A. - "The Agency, The Farm or The Company" just to name a few.

brought during his tenure as Director in the CIA (1981 - 1987). He stated the issues and mentioned a downfall on what was to become in the state of affairs between the Intelligence community and the U.S. government, "Things are different now", he said. "Casey's in there and he's got a lot of clout, so at State they now listen to you." Casey represented the real voice of Reagan (then President of the U.S. between 1981 - 1989), the White House, the Administration. "At State they are defensive and don't do what the Administration wants--those bastards", he growled. "If the Agency ever gets like that, we don't deserve to exist", (Woodward, 1987). This was Mister Motley expressing on the power of the CIA and how much control they have over Congress, the Administration and President. With this uncontrolled power, the Agency has often gotten away with the abuses and overseas disasters, which have come later to haunt the country. This was the then disaster in Nicaragua. With that said, this concludes on the Introduction.

Now, it is time to focus on the Steve Coll's book and why it is a true-to-life masterpiece and literary classic; and at the same time, it falters when not telling the complete truth on how America botched the War in Afghanistan. When the United States went in to replace the Taliban, only to leave the Taliban again in power (2001 - 2021).

The warnings were clear since the U.S.'s involvement in Afghanistan back in the 1980s, while doing their best to destroy/topple the former U.S.S.R. Russia was already hemorrhaging cash, with a financial system and an Empire that was on the verge of collapse since the 1970s. With the Reagan years and their antagonism towards the Russians, they truly made matters worse and nearly brought Armageddon into the world; in the way, John F. Kennedy almost brought it with Krushchev in the 1960s. And at the same, by the 1980s in helping the Mujahideen forces in Afghanistan, they created another problem that was to expand into a global war on terrorism 20-years later. It was already noted in Bob Woodward's book: how cash, weapons and support was filtering from the C.I.A. Station in Cairo, Egypt to help the rebels in Afghanistan (Ibid., 269). Charlie Wilson did want to help the rebel Mujahideen forces against the Soviet Invasion (1979 - 1989), but at what cost?

In Steve Coll's book, "Ghost Wars", the problem had already exacerbated to the point in which, it had created the birth of Islamic jihad against the U.S. and the issues with Osama bin Laden in years to come. This is an undeniable truth in the book; however, it doesn't hold the U.S. government and national security to accountability for their incompetence and arrogance amongst the often ignored threats which were to later affect its American citizens during the 9-11 attacks.

The U.S. has often held to its reputation in creating monsters which later they can't control and will turn against them in the long run, throwing the country into: turmoil, another useless and unnecessary war. One can argue that the West is on the "side of

justice or justified"; however, who started the problems in the first place when faced with a terrorist attack. Well, it began when Empires who abused the citizens in a particular foreign land they invaded in contemporary history, and created a worse situation/condition that was to last for decades. It doesn't matter who is right or wrong at this point. It is more important to hold-up a mirror to transparency and hold accountability to what these powerful nations have done. And again, it doesn't matter where it started, but who did it initially, whether it came from former empires like: Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Russia or Great Britain. And, how they will end this mess? Recently, they have all been paying the price for their invasions of Muslim lands (whether it was across the African Continent or in the Middle East) with terrorist acts in their own countries/"backyard". That isn't to say, that it is justified what the terrorists are doing to these lands, but again, who started it? That is the question the U.S. and other countries must ponder and ask themselves, as with other powerful nations, "Where did we go wrong and correct the problem before it spirals into another global conflict as in World War III?" Furthermore, I am not saying that the Middle East or Continental Africa don't have other complex issues which usually throw certain countries into a constant state of warfare. What I am trying to reflect upon here is when human beings are not minding their business and go against this saying, "never scald your lips on another man's soup" (old Irish proverb). The same is true when countries invade others over religion, territory, land, natural resources (water) and ideology just to conquer, and the local community is forced to accept and suffer for the beliefs of the invaders. This is the common issue which affects these invaders in the years or decades to come.

Bob Woodward's "Veil..." was the Part I in warning to what would happen years later to Western-European Superpowers and the United States. Steve Coll's book, "Ghost Wars..." just affirms that truth even more in a Part II like series. It is like a bad movie being played over and over. The above literary classics aren't the problem, it's the people reading these pages whom are not paying close attention and not accepting the truth.

With "Charlie Wilson's War", the Representative from Texas tried his best to support a just cause; whether it was for Afghanistan and later, Pakistan. The problem with Middle Eastern politics is the following, the C.I.A. seems to be backing the wrong person in what was known at the time as Operation Cyclone (1979 - 1992). By the way, this was the longest running (at the time) C.I.A. operation in the history of the Intelligence Agency. The outcome to this operation came when (it was later discovered) that Mujahideen Leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was secretly killing rival factions of the Mujahideen and helping Osama bin Laden in the process (Neikirk, 2022). The same bin Laden who would later mastermind the 9-11 attacks.

These books don't address the biggest issue of all, how the C.I.A. does business with these governments and people (their leaders) who often are abusers of human rights: the same leaders who don't respect the rights of women/females as equal citizens, enslave their own and force women into unwanted marriages. I mean, the U.S. isn't a better example on its own; especially, when it deals with minorities. However, countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan still have a long way to go on their Civil Rights improvement. Whether it is Pakistan with radical-extremism or honor killings, Saudi Arabia with their public executions and giving lashings to women for walking alone, Afghanistan with the Taliban and not allowing women/females to get a proper education--therefore, what the latter is causing: poverty and illiteracy. Superpowers have to recognize that they have half of the blame when it comes to these outcomes; but they aren't the only ones, it is also extreme radicalism in these countries and their respective leadership which are holding their countries hostage and behind in quality-of-life improvement by 30-or-40-years.

The problem was compounded by the fact that the United States were chasing the Soviets for 45-years. One thing is National Security, the issue got worse and worse when the U.S. took these issues abroad. The U.S.'s "heavy-handed tactics" caused these problems to get out of hand. However, we cannot only blame the Americans, Russia also had a lot of the blame in this geopolitical game of cold warfare. This actually made matters worse, because it didn't only make enemies out of the Russians, it made enemies with other nationalities, religions and ideologies. These particular areas of the world weren't only in Afghanistan, it was also in the following: Vietnam, Somalia, Ethiopia and Angola (Woodward, 1987). Causing more deaths and destruction than needed to be and later, these same extremists who hated the U.S. or other European Powers--began attacking parts of the Western side of the world. Wars do end, however, there has been a continuance of extremism which has lasted until this very present-moment. Starting in the 1970s and going further into 1983 (Beirut, Lebanon) and beyond, when suicide bombers began taking collateral damage. It will not be shaken for decades to come, unless nations respect each others' boundaries and can talk it over--without the need to engage into further conflict. There has to be goodwill to heal these old wounds (on both sides), if not, nations will be headed into the same 'circle of stupidity': repeating the same mistakes over and over, and expecting different results.

When addressing all these constants, and ignoring the signs for years, which isn't ignored in the Steve Coll book: however, there are moments when the hard topics aren't addressed and how men in the Twenty-First Century will not sit amongst women to do business, have a conversation, let them (the females) get educated and not treat them as an inferior gender. It isn't ignored in the Peter Senge (The Fifth

Discipline) book on doing business, being educated and treated on equal grounds. However, what's surprisingly-shocking that in this century men had never sat with women to do business on equal terms (Senge, 2006). This is the case for several countries, and these include nations like (and again): Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Afghanistan itself--just to mention a few. Respect of religious values and tolerance is one thing, but nations not having a proper sit down, addressing these issues, and just ignoring and doing business with people like this is what's causing the continuation of the abuse and these wars/conflicts in the Middle East and in certain areas of the African Continent. We can address the West's involvement in these areas and take a step back; however, we can't ignore what is keeping nations like these in an abusive state of affairs of its people. This affecting women and children alike. There is another "cloud hanging over their heads", the investments of Muslims nations on those whom are terrorists, and supporting these wrongful actions because the others are fellow Muslims. One thing is to argue (justifiably so) what the United States or other European Powers are doing, that is acceptable and bring them up to speed in accountability! What isn't acceptable is the justification and investment in violence, when it's out of control!

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007 is one of the principle points for change on how things are done and how extremism is handled, especially in Pakistan. However, just like any reformation movement, these changes must come from within. If not, these countries will easily slide into fundamental radicalism (ABC News, 2007). Furthermore, they will continuously treat women as second-class citizens and as an 'object' to be viewed as property. And when extremist and fundamentalist cannot get their way, will kill and enslave to make a point.

The same applies in the Islamic world and how people indiscriminately kill fellow Muslims, and justify everything for the greater good and believe this is the word of God speaking. Take for example, the split in ideology between those like: Abdullah Azzam (1941 - 1989, founder of Hamas) and Osama bin Laden (1957 - 2011, founder of al-Qaeda) (Coll, 2005). Their paths didn't only hurt Israel or the Western World for that matter, they killed and destroyed the lives of innocent Muslims, and how can other Muslims (not all, but in certain countries of the Middle East) condone this behavior?

Another important point which must be addressed, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not only the growth of extremism or fundamentalism. There is a bigger threat in the social fabric on how governments handle the schools or madrassas. These aren't in essence the problem, because some of these schools do teach a reformed version of Islam. The bigger spectrum is when Islam is taught in the thousands of madrassas across Pakistan and Afghanistan in an extremist and fundamentalist way (Muhammad Shafiq, Abdul Razzaq Azad and Muhammad Munir, 2019). Causing not only the

rejection (banning) of minorities, women and children. It is fostering to go to war with fellow Muslims, liberals, their local governments and the West. When madrassas ought to be schools for Islamic reformation, thought, peace and to allow all those who want to learn from the teachings of Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. A madrassa doesn't only have to be about religious education. It can help those who want to get educated and acquire an honest trade; especially, for young people whom are poor (Dr. Fazal Rabbi and Dr. Shahid Habib, 2019).

What the C.I.A. has to contain with in the last 40-years, and presently is "dropping the ball" when it comes to terrorism, counter-terrorism and other superpowers. Again, National Security is one thing when dealing with China or Russia. That is completely understood, but chasing them out of ego or to make a point is a waste of time. The greatest position the U.S. can take against terrorism is to not abandon it for other matters, because these matters in the long run will escalate greatly into terrorist attacks in the U.S., the West or other European powers. This same issue will pertain to Russia and China, given their large Muslim populations. Stability in the Middle East is the primary goal, and it is imperative into this new century; especially, when looking for peaceful ways/solutions in handling correctly Afghanistan and Pakistan (USIP, 2024). Mutual cooperation is the key to quenching these attacks and those which spiral into "out of control" wars with no end in sight. The U.S. has to consider investing not only in arming these countries militarily or building these people an infrastructure, that is only a fraction of the problem: but to go deeper into the issue by understanding their culture, language, religion and educate these people to help their subsequent-country's interest and that of the U.S. This is a long term investment, which its fruits will not be seen overnight, but in years to come. As stated previously, reformation cannot only be a one-sided issue. Yes, governments have to reform, like religious and political ideologies. However, they aren't the only agents for change. The C.I.A. is another "Agency" which needs to dramatically change through reformation (Otero, 2020).

In conclusion:

Investing in dangerous allies isn't solving the problem for the U.S., U.K. or other European Nations. The problems cannot be handled with money, or throwing military might at them. Great Britain, the United States and Russia tried; and look at the disastrous effects/consequences it caused in Afghanistan ("where Empires went to die") or places like, Syria and Iraq. This is the case with those in Saudi or Pakistani Intelligence. Investing in people that will later stab them or the West in the back--at least that is the logic. When nations above these lines invest in extremism, these organizations will eventually turn against them; whether this extremism is from the Muslim Brotherhood, from within or any form of jihad that is not ensuing peace.

Possibly at one point they served as buffers against violent extremism, all in pursuit of the expansion of Islam through democratic values (Lynch, 2016). However, this isn't the case anymore; while Islam was promoted through this organization as a violent means to an end--Islam as a dominating force in geopolitics and religion.

When reading the Part II to Steve Coll's "Ghost Wars" book, with the title "Directorate S..." There is a gorgeous verse at the beginning, which states the words by Leonard Cohen, "Everybody Knows" (1988): "Everybody knows that the dice are loaded, everybody rolls with their fingers crossed, everybody knows the war is over, everybody knows the good guys lost." Speaking frankly and as a fellow American, oh Mister Coll, we haven't been the good guys since 1945. As much as we love our respective society, its liberties and country; often as Americans, we forget to mention that we are the abusers and not the abused. That since 1945, the world has been fighting needless wars over ideologies, religions, proxy-wars to establish control or dominance over an area, its resources and peoples. Forcing a way a life, as conquerors, down people's throats. This perspective isn't only for the United States, but also, our frenemies, the Russians. The latter two, and including in this fiasco, Great Britain left Afghanistan in the worst state/condition than it was originally meant to be. We fixed nothing, but destroyed everything! The Taliban is still in power and now, what are we going to do about it? That will be the next question to answer in the generation to come, because the local problems in the Middle East are starting to spillover worldwide. Take my case in point with the war between Israel and Palestine, and how it has spilled over to Iran. It isn't anymore about religion or ideology, it's more about arguments, who wants to right and violent reactions by right or left-wing extremists; whether these extremists are Jewish or Muslim. When communication and tolerance broke down for the embrace of fanaticism, things escalated for the worst in the previous two-and-a-half-decades.

There is also another factor to this matter, the current drug epidemic in America. Presently, and when especially talking about 'H' (heroin)¹, a drug that was practically dormant for 20-years; after its rise during the 1970s drug-epidemic, and decline during the 1980s and 1990s. What caused its current surge (all over again) in the last 20-years? Well, our involvement-yet again-in Afghanistan. When will we learn not to invest into narcotics which will hurt our people, then ship/smuggle/whatever into the United States to be sold for profit at the destruction of human beings' lives? We are sacrificing our people for economic gain, whether its generation 'Xers' or millennial to this

¹Heroin - Opium poppy which was grown 5,500 years ago in ancient Iraq (Sumeria). Developed as a drug/narcotic (opioids) in 1874 by C.R. Wright, while he was boiling morphine; this turned into diacetylmorphine. However, credit for the discovery is often attributed to Heinrich Dreser.

dangerous substance. Speaking from my perspective, we have nobody to blame but ourselves. The question remains, when will this lesson be learned? Currently, there is a implemented (in the latter country) to stop the hardcore sales of narcotics; and with the world's biggest purchaser like the United States and its government needs to stop saying one thing (with the War on Drugs) and then, doing another (Meyer, 2018). Furthermore, ban on opium production with the Taliban, after it took over once again in 2021. However, there has had a yo-yo effect on the economy, and 80-percent of the opium production (sadly) comes from Afghanistan. There will have to be greater incentives for Intelligence institutions, whether these are in the Middle East, Western Societies or the United States itself needs to stop cutting corners when it comes to the allocation of funds for a cause, and once the job is completed not necessarily abandon the goal in its entirety. Not because one enemy is defeated, doesn't mean another one will not arise from these ashes and later cause problems around the world. Mistakenly, the West, its allies and other superpowers mistook these rag-tag armies (arrogantly so) as a danger to themselves and the country they were fighting in; and didn't see these organizations capability to arise and attack people around the world. It wasn't only against the military: but other financial institutions, buildings, newspapers, airports, bus and train stations throughout the globe. Who are the ones to get hurt? Well, the majority of times, it's the civilian population. When will lessons be learned and people will start taking these terrorists examples seriously, and as a cautionary tale to be aware and not let it happen again. Prime example, the Taliban after it ceased power in Afghanistan (2021), and once again heroin was outlawed/banned; however, not completely gone and the rights of females has certainly gone downhill (Smith, 2024). This is yet to be seen for any positive changes in the future; instead, what the world sees is a continuous repetition of these matters at hand and not positive changes!

This concludes the portion on Literature summary of these five distinctive-classics, which are great reads to learn from in: historical value, content, context, geopolitics, ideologies or religious ideals/beliefs and entities. However, the latter five have failed or haven't been told in complete truth, and issues still linger: which affect our current-societies in certain countries or worldwide. From here, I'll move into the Data and Methodology faze of this project.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

The methodology used was to do my best in providing for this thesis a base which stemmed from an investigative perspective. My desire, although at times was not always perfect, and it was to remain as objective as possible; and to view things through the proper methodology and investigative methods, etc. However, do to my limited information with most of the Chinese libraries here in the country, I used other exterior/external sources through VPN and internet outside of China. I resorted to methods which included the following: so far three of the methods used have been books, articles inspired on these books and my personal experiences while traveling, living, being stationed in these respective countries or as a former journalist, etc. The references which were used went back several thousands of years to what’s recent in daily life, the news and contemporary literature. Most of these topics were analyzed from different perspectives/angles, taking from all sides (whether these were religious, atheist, agnostic, political, based on ideologies or geopolitics) and points of view (opinions), etc. As the writing was developed, more data came along as it was gathered and read. This information was dealt with as properly as possible and integrated fully into the study. The other methodology used, since I work in an I.B. (International Baccalaureate) environment, was to use I.B. ideas, literature and an I.B. style in the written portions. The methodology used was based on over five different references and up to fifty different references per book. The kind of data collected will be for those whom are neutral, for or against these books. Perspectives will come from myself from what I have stored at home or on computer. Other than articles and books which are on the internet or those acquired in knowledge through purchases--became part of this study; as it grew and gathered momentum this thesis/dissertation, it was developed little by little until its full completion during this year, 2025. I used information from major newspapers around the world (the majority will be in English, or those articles/books translated into English). Other options which I used were on internet websites from: Google, MSN, Yahoo, You Tube, and those which have a certain reputation for journalistic integrity. I was able to access these through the use of a VPN outside of China (as stated before). Furthermore, I did my best to avoid any propagandist literature; whether it goes for or against my social or political beliefs/views. Propagandist points of view can come across from the East of the World, as well as the West. Since, I do have to be careful with what was stated, written or said--while I live in China. After living here all these years, I’m still a guest and need to respect/protect my family and the culture I am in, etc. Therefore, the pieces suggested are those about journalistic works which can be easily accessed, and sometimes these are for or contrary to popular opinion. For this particular reason, I did my best in completing this study and concentrating on something innovative. When I wrote about these-five books, it was (once again) with the utmost respect and not taking cheap shots. I still believe in the great quality of these books and consider these masterpieces of literature; whether those reading these words agree with me or not. The importance is to keep an open mind and see what kind of insight this study has to offer, and draw out new ideas/conclusions about these kinds of literature--looking at these works from a perspective never seen before. Furthermore, those reading these words and my ideas can come

along and better these concepts with their own words and study in the future. Especially, if they think it can create a greater model for tolerance in the exchange of ideas and debate--without any violence. In other words, whether people agree or disagree with my perspectives, they can walk away peacefully and respect each other without befalling into destructive warfare. The world needs presently less war and more understanding in tolerance. As stated above these lines, I integrated my own ideas and years of experience in the journalistic world; since I had worked for major publications in and out of China (e.g. Shenzhen Daily, Beijing Global Times Metro Section and the Nanjinger). Here is for all, “Five books which are literal true-life masterpieces; however, fail to tell the complete truth”, I hope you can get a refreshing insight into learning something new for now. It is my greatest wish and hope that this dissertation/thesis styled paper can be read by all: whether they are a street cleaner or a CEO at a major company. For all those in the future who come along, can better these ideas, and they are more than welcome to do so!

IV. CONTENT AND RESULTS:

For further discussions, or at least in future ones, these books ought to be studied in a slow method or process to allow better comprehension of these literature works. And to be honest, I mean years of study, not in a rapid succession of months. For example, when studying the Babylonian Talmud, the Jerusalem Talmud ought to be mentioned as well--to have a complete comprehension of both. One cannot go without the other, and this is the error in this study. The lack of sufficient time to literally 'digest' and comprehend about the changes these books, and how these have progressed throughout history: and how these books had to be moulded according to the times and periods people were/are living in. This isn't only with the Talmud, this is also relevant with the Bible, whether this version used was a King James Bible or the New Bible Version for people to gather better understanding of these legendary works when it comes to religions, etc. As with the above beliefs and principally Islam, those holy men and women who were spiritually inspired to write these words had the ideas through the following: natural manifestations, vivid writer's imagination, episodes of delirium, miracles (if those reading these words believe in such things), actual spiritual experience or an ingestion of chemicals/substances to enhance the mind. In the latter, poppy seeds, hallucinogenic mushrooms, coca (cocaine), opium and ephedrine (Ephedras) drugs were used/taken/drunk for thousands of years across Ancient-Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East (Hellenic Museum, 2021; Hoffman, 2019; Athope, 2016). However, nobody is questioning the religious relevance or authenticity of these books at hand: but we must view these with caution to not fall into total-blind fanaticism, and there has to be a consideration in studying other possibilities. Furthermore, we must study with neutral perspective when dealing with these literary works. The latter religions, as its books are literary works to learn from and bring us closer to God, if that's the case; and on the other hand, it ought to never be forced down a person's throat or through forceful conversions. These are to be read and studied, even when a person is religious or an atheist. These works are to serve as a path to enlightenment or a greater historical comprehension on where to prove or disprove if these people actually existed and if they did, have a rightful account/record of their moments/movements in a timeline, etc. The problem that is acquired here is the following: when people say, these books were written by a God or the God--without any further investigation. These books are thus religiously inspired, and yes, maybe it was by a God; however, these books have errors in the timeline, judgments and were definitely written by men/women for that matter. That is the analytical truth we must consider/gather before jumping into blind assumptions, etc. This doesn't end here, the above religions were created by men and the followers have to see the reality which befalls when a spiritual movement is created. This latter form leads to the religions/religious going to war to establish who was/is right or wrong. The same as it was 5,000 years before is (sadly) the same as today. There are also other matters at hand, if a person is to be religious, he or she must allow science and proof through research that there is a God and indeed, that this being does or doesn't exist. Men like Galileo and Darwin brought proof of science in a very simplistic way and for the masses to understand, and future generations to better comprehend. It was through

men like St. Augustine who allowed religion and science to converge for the betterment of humanity and 1,600 years later, it was Pope John Paul II back in 1996 who thought religion and evolutionary-scientific theory can come together, and explain the inexplicable in everyday life (Myers, 2014).

In the case of Edgar Snow's book, "Red Star Over China", one thing cannot minimize the blows of these horrific wars (Civil and Worldwide), even 80-to-90 years later. Mister Snow does his best to try and soften the horrors of the war and what all sides did. There isn't one side that was good or better over the other, war is just simply cruel in any kind of epoque. The Chinese people were doing their best to search for a way forward, and Mao Zedong was the perfect man at the perfect time to bring the country together and liberate it from tyranny: whether that tyranny was coming from the Kuomintang or the Japanese Imperial Army. The problem was what happened after 1949, and there was so much hope for China with Mao, and at the same time--his leadership pulled off something which was no short of a miracle. At the time, by the end of the 1950s and 1960s, Mao should've taken a step back from politics and allowed Deng Xiaoping (a true economist) to drive the country into better economical conditions, as Premier Deng proved when he took over office in 1980 and drove it forward. Can we judge Mao for his past greatness or mistakes? I don't think so, that would be unfair. However, it's important to understand/comprehend the following: "Without Mao there wouldn't be any China" (as often stated by many Mainland-Chinese citizens). Even when presently, Communism and Capitalism are at odds with each other. He (Mao) was a man of his time, a period in history. He was the right man, for the right job, at the right moment; whether we agree or disagree with him--he pulled it off and today, he is still revered as one of the most beloved leaders in the whole of China (Khan, 2019). However, few know (in present day) about Mao's true history and what happened during those crucial years (1949 - 1976). Another point to make about Edgar Snow's book, although he often places the CCP on a pedestal and he is more subjective than objective when it comes to idealizing Mao into an almost godlike person, his book has remained a must read for almost 90-years, and it is the closest historical account/record to what happened during the war on the front lines (Stern, 1941). Often, Mister Snow was never given proper credit for the way he did his best to bridge China and U.S. diplomatic relations; and this credit was given to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Nixon in the 1970s (Smith, 1989). For his beliefs, he suffered the penalty during the McCarthy era (1950s "Red Scare"), and he paid the price like many who were deemed Communists; that made him uproot his life and move to Switzerland, where he lived until he passed away in 1972. What were Edgar Snow and John Stuart to China? And despite their political differences, they indeed helped bridge the gaps between the U.S. and China relations--during their time in China, and afterward (Fangmeng, 2019).

The Steve Coll books on espionage are pure literary masterpieces, especially when speaking about the one titled, "Ghost Wars". No book is perfect, but the "Veil" holds greater truth in what was to happen to the United States--14-to-16-years later. The misguided notions

of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and their so called 'freedom' tactics in other countries only compounded problems when it came to dealing with issues on a short-term basis and not on the long term ones; which was the greatest failure abroad for the U.S. It got worse when the U.S. solely had/has focused its sights exclusively on Russia and China, and had not taken seriously the terrorist threats which were to loom their way into the early Twenty-First Century. Playing the geopolitical strategy has not benefited the U.S. for the best in its interest locally or abroad. Director Casey back in the 1980s saw these problems looming over the United States and the CIA strategists thought that by the early 2000s the Third World Countries would be affected by the following: food resources, water (shortages), and stagnant-economic development (Woodward, 1987). The problems with the "War on Drugs" and its total failure in Mexico and the United States. But it wasn't only Mexico's failure and lack of will in fighting corruption against the Cartels, it was also the U.S.'s failure in "going to bed or sleeping with the enemy" (once again, the same mistakes repeated over and over), like in the 1960s and in its dealing with the Mafia; the U.S. again perpetrated the same error in going into business with the Mexican-Cartels. Political instability into this new Century has been a big problem in Third World Nations. Syria has been in constant war since 2011, and with the toppling of the Assad regime there is a power vacuum with no end in sight: mind you all, this didn't start only because of the geopolitical convulsions into this new century, it was further compounded with Syria's water shortages, and what the war caused was a desperate migration never seen since World War II. What caused further problems in the Latin American, Middle Eastern regions--were the United Kingdom and U.S.'s backing of madmen and despots. Presently, these are the results of nearsighted decision making, and not viewing the problem (once again) in the long term. What has happened in countries like: Mexico and Syria are just a few examples of bad planning and mismanagement on behalf of the world-superpowers, constant intrusion and corrupt governments (whether these are democratic or dictatorial). In comparison, the same intrusion which Russia has exerted over Ukraine, going back to the days of the U.S.S.R.: as with the current War in Ukraine (2022 - Present), and Putin's hand in trying to forcefully unite the two countries because of their ethnic and historic ties (Putin, 2021). In that same context, as viewers of world affairs, we can see the problem between Israel and Palestine. Governments turning into this extreme-right or left-wing politics; which later leads people (down a road/path) to have to deal with the lack of: tolerance, racism and in the worst case scenario, terrorism (Bloom, 2024). The same can be expressed or said about countries like, Afghanistan. It wasn't only a failure, it is another future war looming over the heads of Western powers; whether this war takes place in the Middle East, Eastern Europe or in Latin America.

That is why, there aren't any good guys here, just human beings in power making bad/poor decisions/choices and not thinking about the consequences. It would seem some elitists in power can make decisions on behalf of the people, get slapped with the effects and consequences which later affect their entire populations and not only them, since these same elitists who came from money always had "daddy to pick up the pieces of their mistakes"; now that "daddy isn't here to clean-up after their messes", these messes are trickling down their

respective countries. Who gets affected mostly? The middle classes and poor are the ones to suffer, which is presently happening. Is humanity repeating the same mistakes as in the 1930s and 1980s? In my perspective, yes, I sincerely believe so!

Getting back to the Steve Coll book, "Ghost Wars". Mister Coll got it nearly perfect in his exposition of the facts from the beginning of the Afghan War, and the American involvement back in 2001. His perspective is mostly objective, but he is writing from the U.S. standpoint and not from both sides of the threshold when the War began to develop, and even years before. That is certainly where I criticized his book, and although factual, it is missing certain-elements of truth. These truths aren't covered properly in the reading, and the Americans themselves did not take into account the following: whether Mister Coll was intentional or unintentional in leaving these details out remains a mystery, and it is yet to be seen in years to come. The following set of circumstances are as follows before the 9-11 attacks: the threat of an imminent danger against the United States, the lack of cooperation between intelligence agencies/allied countries led the information/misinformation to come into a puzzling-confusion of pieces and without any comprehension of what was about to happen. Terrorists cells were already gathered in Afghanistan. The same organization (al-Qaeda) who sent the 19-terrorists into the U.S. were awaiting orders to perpetrate the 9-11 attacks, and the intelligence agencies were not properly prepared in dealing with extremist ideologies in the region of the Middle East and Continental Africa. After the 9-11 attacks, the illegal disappearance and torture (called, "enhanced interrogation techniques") of prisoners (sometimes without just cause, and for years) who weren't on the list of detainees in secret prison facilities in (Abu Ghraib (Iraq), Guantanamo (Cuba), Bagram Air Base (Afghanistan). Finally, the arrogance or indifference to the threat led these things to happen against the United States (Khan, 2019; Waldman and Kennedy, 2017). Last, but certainly not least in this list of details was the following: the spike in the Opium-trade in Afghanistan and worldwide, causing a drug epidemic--especially in the United States. The same threats which came against the Pan-Am flight 103 that blew-up over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988; and later, the same threats by terrorists organizations which were geared towards the United States. Nobody took seriously (especially intelligence agencies) the resilience of these "rag tag" army of terrorists: whether these came from Libya or Afghanistan. Again, these warnings (at least two) came ahead of time, actually 16-days before when it came to flight 103: State Department, FBI (the Federal Bureau of Investigation), CIA and German Intelligence all "dragged their feet", and not taking prompt action (Brodsky, 2025). The same case was true when it came to the John Miller interview in 1998 of Osama bin Laden, bin Laden was already warning the United States that there would be an imminent attack against its civilians; especially after the two U.S.-Embassy attacks in East Africa (ABC News, 2000). Therefore, I can only conclude in this portion what has been previously (and overly) expressed: whether it was through dismissive indifference, arrogance or incompetence--Western nations failed to take subsequent actions against these warnings.

V. DISCUSSIONS:

The five books selected for this dissertation run from a gamma of the ancient to contemporary literature. These works are classical, at least in my point of view and ought to be at the top of the must read books of all time, according to: the historical, religious and geopolitical era these were placed upon. These will still be read hundreds--if not thousands of years from now. Hopefully, humanity will have the common sense to not self-destruct in religions, ideologies, politics and warfare. The greatest reason for the selection of these books is the fact that presently, they are all controversial in one form or another: and are still discussed today in Universities, classes and study halls around the world. The topics selected were chosen for its distinctive purposes in covering different themes: from the religious, historical, ideological, warfare and geopolitical. And if we certainly look at the world around us today, these five concepts/ideas are part of the fabric which constitute our societies as one global entity. These are aligned and interwoven amongst each other. More than the discussion of these five books and their subsequent topics, what I will intend to define is the principal ideas in this part, and the pros and cons in these books.

I will begin with the first book selected for this topic, the Bible. Firstly, let's begin with the pros: 1) it is ancient literature to comprehend better the religious and ethnic problems inside the Middle East presently; 2) it is a book which a person can read/study whether they are a believer, agnostic or atheist; 3) it allows those who study or read this book to be objectively critical in its content and address any mistakes or historical timelines which can be spotted; 4) a person can view in the study of the book--if it is actually true in its content, a work of fiction or accurate, etc.; 5) in the right hands, the Bible can be a book used to help others and do good (Black, 2017). The second points are the cons to this book in the following context: 1) the rise of fanaticism amongst Christian faiths; 2) how people interpret this form of literature; 3) when people intend to adapt the verses into their contemporary lifestyles, it is something which may or may not apply/backfire in the religious and social context; 4) people who believe that the Bible is an entire work based on truth, it is without any mistakes or prejudices; 5) create warfare to justify a belief; 6) going back to the interpretation and how people perform violence to justify the Bible (Phillips, 2024). The Bible can be read and adapted to any culture or language. What has to be clearly defined is that the Bible (especially for those who believe in the book) is not a literary-work based on complete truth and many historical events are still to be verified or proven. Those whom are or aren't believers view the Bible as a great book; however, also (these people must) understand that the Bible was written by men and it may have errors. A person can still believe in the book, and view its content with what's verifiable and the events which are not--have to be studied further until scientific proof arises. The Bible can be a book of contention and argument between those who believe in evolution and creation: whether our societies go back in the evolutionary scale thirteen-billion years ago or go back using the creation methodology, which is only six-thousand years (Diffen, 2013). The latter is still the greatest point of contention between those discussing this book.

This study originally focused on the Babylonian Talmud text. However, this study is meant to incorporate a little of both (Babylonian and Jerusalem/Yerushalmi - ירושלמי תלמוד) for the discussion phase of this project. Maybe both of these will befall into generalizations, but reflecting in a positive manner, it wasn't necessarily my intention to generalize. I want to focus on Judaism and the richness of its traditions. In the same way, I focused previously on the Bible. These books are rich in history, and it doesn't matter whether we differ in our distinctive points of view; these books ought to be read to understand how important these works are for historical and religious literacy/purposes in their continuity. The good thing about learning the Talmud or its pros is the following: 1) the Talmud has a set of Halakhic (laws) which influence those who practice Judaism and the Rabbinic people whom lead the Jewish community; 2) it gives those whom are Jewish a sense of community, family, respect--especially when we are talking about the environment inside a Kibbutzim; 3) it promotes positive debate on these books, and how to correct any issues which will affect the religiousness and community as a whole; 4) it fosters a sense of history, traditions, and it is passed down from family member to family member. The bad things or cons about learning the Talmud: 1) learning it from a person who is not experienced, not well versed or educated in the art and literature of these books (Babylonian or Jerusalem for that matter); 2) people who either teach or learn the Talmud can be viewed as snobs or elitists when it comes to the teachings of these books, and whom they teach this knowledge to; 3) students of the Talmud can become too relaxed in the book's teachings or harmonious, and forget why they are learning the book in the first place (because I do believe and sustain, these kinds of literature ought to be for all and not the few); 4) people can become too focused on details and not apply correctly these set of laws to the reality of this day and age; 5) those who study these books can develop a fanatical-fascination for them, and forget about the whole in and out of their community; 6) the exclusion of certain peoples according to ethnicity or religious backgrounds, or genders (for that matter) from learning these books, because of misogynist, a superiority complex, racist or elitist views about their religion; 7) those who teach the Talmud (Rabbis or otherwise) can be too strict and don't make the learning fun (Sarna, 2017; Bashevkin, 2020; Bible Analysis, 2024; Spitzer, n.d.; Goldberg, n.d.).

In this fourth paragraph, the main focus will be on the Koran and Islam as a whole. Keeping in mind, and as previously mentioned in this study repeatedly, Islam is a religion or belief system which encompasses 1.8 billion people (believers) around the globe and second in followers to Christianity. It has its positives and negatives, and again, as I mentioned before--it is one of the fastest growing religions on the planet. Now, I have met people whom are great Muslims and others whom haven't been the best example. However, without falling into subjectivity, I'd like to add, and mention as a "yes" on the reading and study of the Koran; and once again, whether a person is a believer or not. In its purest form, it's great literature, and that is why it deserves an opportunity in its reading. As far as the pros for reading the Koran are the following: 1) in the right hands, it can promote tolerance and peaceful ways when it is taught to others; 2) reading the Koran within the Muslim community brings people together, promotes family and it gives people a sense of belonging; 3) guidance and moral framework on

how a person ought to conduct themselves in daily life; 4) the Muslims as a community do their best in fostering good education and knowledge when learning the Koran; 5) for those who read it and believe in such words, it gives a sense of fulfillment--spiritually and/or otherwise; 6) it is a book that has been around for over 600 years, it deserves to be read, and for those who believe in its words, it deserves (the Koran) to be objectively observed/viewed and promoted. As for the cons, here are the following: 1) taken out of context in an ignorant manner causes fanaticism, extremism, hate and war; 2) gender inequality, especially when women/females aren't treated equally in the eyes of men, often females from a young age are silenced, and furthermore, in certain countries homosexuals and lesbians or any other person who attempts to be transgender can be put to death; 3) in some countries, there isn't any religious freedom/tolerance or the choice to not believe, and minorities can be persecuted and treated quite harshly--from verbal, physical abuse, torture and in extreme cases, being put to death (for their religious intolerance against others); 4) controversial interpretations can drive people to perform terrorist acts, marrying child-brides, since the Prophet (already a middle-aged man) married his cousin when she was just six-years old, Aliyah and what is done in certain extremist communities--women are entirely covered for the sake of modesty or in other places, there is still the practice of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation); 5) when the latter points happen above these lines, there is a cause/drive for those who don't understand the beauty of Islam or the Koran to become Islamophobes; 6) the Prophet Mohammed is to be venerated and respected, that I can understand, but to believe that the Koran was written by God/Allah is entirely ludicrous and fanatical, God can inspire men/women to write something that can become beautiful and classical in literature; however, for something to appear out of thin air--simply needs to be backed by scientific proof, and this honestly hasn't happened yet (Ablison, n.d.; Breure, Pluijm and Lohnen, 2018).

In summation, the contemporary issue with the three-previous books and religions is the constant contentions with these three beliefs; those who have led or lead these groups, and those who lead their people down a fanatical path, and later, they brainwash/hypnotize/enslave the masses to committing horrible acts in the name of God or their ideologies, and in the books these beliefs were written in. There are those who are true and sincere in their respective faiths/beliefs/ideas, and have done things for/in peace; but from the beginning and in the majority of contemporary cases--people are using violence to go to war and kill over their ideologies, and furthermore, their religions (le Bon, 2020; Marx, 2015). There is a need to take into consideration that the latter three religions and their books need to be taken into consideration on how these were inspired; because, while they were written by men, one important thing must be noted--were these men inspired while using any hallucinogenic drugs? (Hartogsohn, 2021).

With Edgar Snow's book, "Red Star Over China" we start to know more and more about China, as well as Mao Zedong who came into the international-spot light. Before "Red Star Over China", there was "The Good Earth" by Pearl Buck published in 1931, which exposed the social-

issues in contemporary-Chinese society; although, this book was a fictional work, it still captured the reality of the times and what millions of Chinese were going through. In spite of China's ancientness, it was a land shrouded in deep mystery and in the last century, before the Twentieth, it began to come to light with the imperial exploitation amongst its shores. China had had to deal with an opium crisis for the second-half of the Nineteenth-Century. This was one of their biggest stigmas added to the "Century of Humiliation". China was later mired by warfare for the first-half of the Twentieth-Century. The pros about Edgar Snow's book are as follows: 1) through his "scoop" of a lifetime, Mister Snow was able to gather what was happening on the front lines of the war against the Comintern, and with the Japanese Imperial Army aggression which was to follow and shed light on the horrors occurring in China; 2) Mr. Snow exposed the good which the Chinese Communist Party was doing for the people, from offering free education to helping the people feed themselves through their training and service in the army; 3) he exposed the life of Mao Zedong, his writings, leadership style, military tactics and his struggle from its conception; 4) the story helped highlight the positive changes the CCP was doing to better themselves in China, and rid themselves of warlords and a dictator like Chiang Kai-shek in the country (Zhou, 2020); 5) the book has had a positive impact worldwide, it is still one of the most read books after 88-years and going strong--to better comprehend what the Chinese people went through and their suffering; 6) it is a classic in military history, politics and one of the best in warfare literature events ever written; 7) the fact that what Mao did was nothing less than a "miracle" or something close to it; 8) it is the story telling or true story from one man's perspective and as he dares to mention, not everything is accurate; 9) shows the Chinese people creating a political consciousness and how China whether by force or through volunteer efforts was pushed forward to change (Yu, 2023); 10) one of the best books to read after John Reed's "Ten Days That Shook the World" (Hodder, 2021). The cons are as follows: 1) Mister Snow at the time of his "scoop" was quite subjective (as a journalist) in his desire for the CCP to win the war and too "rosy" at times (Wikipedia, 2025) ; 2) Mr. Snow was only showing the positive side of the CCP and its army, not allowing him to see the true events which were later to transpire (Zhou, 2020); 3) Mao Zedong's dark side as a leader was never shown or didn't come to light and therefore, today he is remembered almost angelic-like and everybody talks about the positives in the man--but not his flaws; 4) the kidnappings of the Red Army to "beef-up" its ranks; 5) gives only the credit to Mao and forgets about men like Zhou Enlai or Deng Xiaoping; 6) the book has to be studied further for any mistakes the author may have inquired in exaggerations intentionally or unintentionally, leaving negative subjects out. To finalize in this explanation of the book: is the book a must and is it worth the reading? I'd say an absolute "Yes!" The book merits a read for students of politics, foreign affairs, military history, warfare literature and for those wishing to learn more about foreign correspondence. It is a book to better comprehend China, its suffering, history, culture, politics, Confucian ways, mysteries and what China has become today.

The Steve Coll book, "Ghost Wars" is a masterpiece in literary-history, and it is a great pleasure to read for those students/people/experts in foreign affairs and geopolitical issues. The

book until that moment explained with its pros and cons what had happened in Afghanistan for the past 25-years until this classic was published in 2004, and what has continued subsequently until present-day, 2025. Mister Coll addresses the pros for this book in quite an objective manner: 1) it is a dire warning for the United States (and other Western countries) on how certain foreign policies have to change when dealing with the Middle East, Africa and their people; 2) the book is a great historical record on what needs to be understood about the issues in the Middle East and Afghanistan; 3) explains from the beginning all which went wrong with the U.S.S.R.¹ and the United States in Afghanistan ("...the graveyard of empires...", Jones, 2010); 4) foretells which mistakes ought to never be repeated again to avoid future terrorists attacks against the West; 5) the need for military and intelligence personnel to better comprehend the region they are tasked with, know the language, its culture and religion to avoid the typical clashes of East vs. West; 6) how either through arrogance, ignorance, incompetence or indifference caused the terrorists attacks against the United States (because nobody thought this 'ragtag' terrorist group could pull it off); 7) that when the U.S. commits to a certain region in the world, it ought to invest further in its development through education, infrastructure and in creating long-lasting peaceful measures. The cons for this books are as follows: 1) doesn't/didn't give an average time frame (for military and intelligence personnel) on when to pull out of Afghanistan and if this was done, after Osama bin Laden was killed--it was time to leave the Afghan region (Tzu, 2010); 2) this book takes a Western-point of view, although, it is quite objective; 3) the horrible treatment of those prisoners taken, placed and tortured in detention centers by the United States, especially the innocent and leaving them there to rot for years (a prime example of such detention centers, Guantanamo) (Slahi, 2015); 4) Mister Coll's book is great, however, it only covered the terrorists' acts against the U.S. after the fact; 5) the two people who covered these warnings ominously before they happened were in the Bob Woodward's book "Veil..." (1987, a must read for those to understand in greater length/detail these geopolitical and warfare topics) and later, in John Miller's interview with Osama bin Laden inside an Afghan cave (which Osama gave dire-warnings on what was about to happen to the United States and other Western superpowers, the latter interview ought to be seen) (Woodward, 1987; ABC, 2000); 6) to better understand these issues and not repeat the same mistakes--which continue to happen, books like Mister Coll's ought to be read further now and in the future; 7) the need to educate North Americans and Europeans starting from the point when they are in Grade School all the way into High School/Universities about the Middle East, Africa, their respective cultures, languages, religions and foods--to breakdown prejudices, hate, stop the need to use aggression/war against them and avoid wrongful stereotypes.

This concludes the portion of the "Discussions" for the five books. This part was based on what's talked about currently amongst students (High School and above), people, politicians and historians, etc. It was also based on the pros and cons for all these books. This next portion will be the finale of this dissertation and this is the eighth-part of the study, titled, "Conclusions".

¹U.S.S.R. (1917 - 1991) - the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, founded by Vladimir Lenin.

VI. CONCLUSIONS:

When addressing these five books, a person must consider reading these at least once in a lifetime; since the books themselves hold a wealth of knowledge for those whom consider these treasure-troves in history. The five are timeless classics which delve into the religious, historical, ideological and social-politics/geopolitics which measure what is happening and adapting into our contemporary-global culture/society. There are more important books than these in the classical-historical context; hence, these five can be read at any moment in time (for future generations) and still be understood to what's happening in our or their present-day circumstances. The first three are religious, and can come across as the most controversial ones in history: The Holy Bible, The Babylonian Talmud and The Holy Koran. These three can be considered sacred to some, but not to all. To say that men/women were inspired in writing these books, the answer is clearly, "Yes!". Now, were these books written by God or a supreme being: the answer accordingly and without any prejudice is that these weren't written by God; but possibly divinely-inspired, and written human beings. The people who wrote these books (for good or bad reasons), either had: religious fervor, manifestations of nature (e.g. thunderstorms), 'divine inspiration' through miracles (if those who wrote these--believed in such things), written in a moment of suffering or hysteria, inspired through illness (physical or mental), illusions and possibly in a state of euphoria when those who wrote the words took natural hallucinogens. Nonetheless, the latter books offer literature, prose, poetry, war, love, peace, solutions to problems, divisions over land, laws, cultural customs at that time: whether the portions are a historical or fictional-history when these were written, etc. However, if a person is an agnostic, atheist or believer, these books ought to never be pushed aside, and these must be studied further to what happened millennia or centuries before. The books hold valued-clues, can still be learned and studied from in their present form.

For the other two historical, ideological and geopolitical books; these are a valuable knowledge on what happened/happens in the Middle Eastern and East Asian affairs. The "Red Star Over China" and "Ghost Wars" have a unique perspective in capturing a time in history, social-perspectives, and at that moment the influences of these books; because these are ongoing issues that are still relevant in Afghanistan and China today--which can be read and seen in these two countries while studying the books. Moreover, in conjunction to the "Red Star Over China", to understand China better, added to this list of books is: "The Good Earth" by Pearl Buck who was a Nanjing University based professor back in 1931 and later, a Nobel Prize Winner in Literature (Otero, 2013). Furthermore, there is the book, "The search for modern China" by Jonathan Spence (Spence, 2012). Other than the "Red Star Over China", "The Good Earth" and "The search for modern China" can teach readers about China's history: from the Ming Dynasty into the late Twentieth-Century. For Steve Coll's "Ghost Wars", there are further complexities to be met or addressed; when reading one of Mr. Coll's books, whether it is "Ghost Wars" or "Directorate S"--these ought to be read in conjunction with Bob Woodward's "Veil..." to further comprehend what was done well and at times erroneously through the history of the

C.I.A.; how it was handled or mishandled in the Middle East and Afghanistan (all together) from the 1980s into the early 2000s.

Now, let's be objective to the reality and realism of any book written in a factual-way. First of all, and to be completely honest, no book tells the complete truth or story. Books can be objective in their nature; however, it's been my experience and that of others, books can become subjective when written by a person with a certain belief or ideal; whether this belief is politically motivated or otherwise. The writer can lean into the side of which he or she believes or benefits the most from; this can happen by mistake, in a conscious or subconscious way. Therefore, sometimes this is done on purpose to give the book further strength into that particular ideology or make it viable for commercialism. When it is addressing religions like: Judaism, Christianity or Islam, there are certain similarities within the Bible, Talmud or Koran. For example, these three religions came one after the other and were inspired in the same monotheistic beliefs. Many of the Bible's, Talmud's and Koran's characters are just about the same, and when discussing these ideas, there is a commonality between these religions. It doesn't matter if these were led by Moses, Jesus Christ or Mohammed. The principals are the same and what sometimes separates them, can also unite them--if a peaceful debate is allowed.

The greatest differences are in the latter two books of the study: although, these are based on ideology, warfare and geopolitics. Edgar Snow's version deals with China and with Steve Coll's, it's all about the Middle East (especially, Afghanistan). The research aims of this study is for people to better this study in the future and criticize it objectively. Moreover, it's important to understand the necessity for this current adult-millennial generation and in the future, the need to read these books: which I hope this study can inspire people to do through the learning of history, world religions, ideology, warfare, culture/customs and geopolitics. If these subjects are studied with an objective mind and open heart, imagine how it can bring people together in constructive debate, breakdown barriers, breakdown borders and eliminate the horrible prejudicial/bigoted/racist attitudes towards one another. In an era when false information flourishes sometimes without any control throughout the internet, and subjective views can cause frightful, ignorantly based arguments and violence; there is the greatest need and more than ever, to read about the past in a factual manner and adapt it to the present circumstances in history to what's happening in the reality of our times, etc. There is a tendency, the more one can read these timeless classics in literature, the further a person or people will be able to comprehend their own existence, and the healing truth society currently needs. If "knowledge is power", then these five books in history and others can lead those to comprehend what's wrong or right with societies (Bacon, 1597). The comprehension of these books aren't an easy task to read and will take the reader several years to make an intelligent decision and argument on how to better approach, understand the meaning of these past words, come-up with their own opinions and conclusions about a certain topic. I selected five; however, there are other books outside this selection which are great and have also stood the test of time. With that said, "Books permit us to voyage through time and tap into the wisdom

of our ancestors," (Carl Sagan, 1980--from his book, "Cosmos").

This study intended to explore the hidden facts not mentioned often in society's religious, historical, political, cultural, regional and geopolitical; or those facts which a person has to read between the lines. There is a state of exploration and discovery throughout these five books. The importance is to delve into the hidden truths and what is not said, read or written between the lines; and inspire others to explore further what are not the complete truths told in these books. The sources or references need to be further researched outside of the five books mentioned previously.

Taking Judaism and how books like the Torah and Talmud were inspired. And the question remains, where did this inspiration come through?: deep religiousness, natural manifestation/occurrences, miracles, hysteria, dreams, illnesses, illusions or taking any type of natural-drug enhancement--which gave these a momentous-euphoric manifestation? Through the latter terms, did this give the person the inspiration to write, or were others asked to write for them? What's important is for people to make up their minds, continue the process of learning and exploration. This is also to know, that once Judaism was established, it also inspired the creation of two other major-world religions: thanks to men like Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. The same which happened with Judaism and its inspirational pouring into the subsequent Torah and Talmuds, also occurred in Christianity with books like the Bible, and in Islam with the Koran. The latter book, the Koran has been mentioned/told by Muslim followers to have been written by God. That 'truth' is still one which needs to be further explored, and there is no denying the influence of these three religions and books on the rest of the world; whether people are believers or not. The books are in their own right classics of literature.

For the ones on geopolitics and ideology, there are still others which need to be analyzed on the opposing views of Mao Zedong's life (aside from the "Red Star Over China"), these books/literature/ideas need to be stated as opposing ideas/arguments. However, there is no denying how Mao inspired people with his military strategies like for example: the Cultural Revolution, the United States Special Operations Groups or men like, Jonas Savimbi with his version of the "Long March".

In the case of "Ghost Wars", there needs to be a greater study to mention (outside the book) about the prisoners which were innocent or those falsely accused of terrorist acts and taken into clandestine sites to be interrogated and tortured for years to come. If anything, all these perspectives and ideas need to come to light. Different points of view/ideas will arise from those like myself when reading these books. That is why, it is important that these books are continued to be read subsequently in the years or decades ahead.

This study in question has issues which may affect it now and in the future; therefore, making it weak or limited to a group of my peers, teachers (Professors) and those reading this

dissertation. First of all, the time constraints in investigating and writing out the study. If I were to do it all over again, to be completely transparent, I give myself two-to-three-years in the developmental process of this text. Sometimes, although enjoyable, it felt too stressful or in a rush for its completion. Yes, over one-hundred books, articles, videos and documentaries were read or seen to give this study "two-legs" in its credibility to stand-on once it is read and represented by myself. However, nothing is perfect and only time will tell when reading it to its full completion--to state what needed to be done further to heighten the evidence in question for the five books in their "truths" or lack of. Was the study scholarly enough to be in the light of true studious professionalism? At times, "Yes!". Then, there were other times, I'd have to honestly state, "No!" That is why, after its completion there will be a reread on what needs to be studied or added/corrected further in the future months or years. There is a reason for stating this to the governing body at Selinus University in Italy. I wish for the study in the future months to be sent to a publisher, since it's my point of view that this read will give some interesting insights on World issues, culture, religion, warfare and geopolitics. Although, it is not perfect, it is for all to read. I hope it can be enjoyed from the local street cleaner to a major CEO at a corporation, or to a person at the highest spheres in governmental offices. That may be too ambitious for now, but it may be an admission (for some) for it to be worth taking a look into this study. Secondly in the matter, there is another worry at hand, this was written without any prejudice or bias; however, at times I may have strayed from objectivity into subjectivity by mistake, and I wasn't intentional in doing so. It was more about my own humanity and imperfections, while I passionately wrote out my investigation giving other peoples' perspective and my own from their books, articles, videos and documentaries. There were moments in which I thought about the author Hendrik Willem Van Loon, who wrote in his book about "The Story of Mankind" (1921), and thought about this dissertation being written in a rather personal style. However, I'd like to add, the way I wrote wasn't in a prejudicial way, style or intended as such; not like Van Loon, who was a man of his time and mistakenly at times wrote in a prejudicial way against those who were non-Europeans. My intention was to avoid such ignorant and silly stereotypical assumptions. In continuation, the title was my own idea in its conception and originality from beginning to end, hoping that the study answered enough questions to make it sustainable for those out there. This will all depend on who reads this investigation, and it will also depend on "the eye of the beholder", as I gave it my own interpretation through the last 16-months (2024 - 2025).

To reiterate in this conclusive and last-two paragraphs of the dissertation/written study, there are certain things relevant to take into consideration. For those who come along in the future, there is hope to better this study through greater incorporation of proof. There is also a wish for these books to not become something forgotten or a thing of the past/passe. There are books which merit to be read, and certainly these five merit a lengthier exploration and investigation. With a little more time, other books can be added to this list of five. For example, with the reading of the Talmuds (Babylonian or Jerusalem), it should be in conjunction with the Torah to explore further the religious arena. For those interested in ideology, Edgar Snow's

classic "Red Star Over China" ought to be read in conjunction with John Reed's, "10 Days That Shook the World" and Pearl Buck's, "The Good Earth"; and to finalize in this area, Jonathan Spence's classic, "In Search for Modern China". In the same geopolitical/religious/ideological fashion, with Steve Coll's book, "Ghost Wars", there has to be greater interpretation in the intelligence field with books like, "Directorate S", and as I mentioned multiple times before--Bob Woodward's "Veil...". These books go hand-in-hand with one another. These are also books that I myself will delve further into with rereads--once this study has been properly concluded.

In an era when, fake news throughout the world is the order of the day; there has to be a further need to be the most investigative when dealing with any topic at hand. With this point said, it's important to investigate through multiple sources about the books and articles we read on a daily basis to establish factual information or what's not. With that said, it's important to have an orderly continuation when we read and investigate something, and not get lost in the falseness or fallacies of life (Penders, 2018). Therefore, it's important that this generation, whether 'Z' or millennial or those coming up in the future of the world can go back into previous classical literature; then, analyze such texts with a critical and objective mindset--without befalling into fanaticism or without using AI (Artificial Intelligence) to digest everything for them. When the latter points can be established, there is a moment of crystal-clear clarity to present the proof of these books to other people and readers of such classical-true-life-literary books. To not get thrown into mindless arguments, where everybody wants to be right. Readers and those who come across these themes can feel inspired to go into the past and read other famous literary classics in a way which these cannot be forgotten. Furthermore, from the past, readers can establish what is happening and why it is happening in the present. Once humanity knows and understands the past, they can avoid the pitfalls in repetition for any of the negative parts of history. That is why, for those who pick-up this dissertation/study now and in the future, it is my greatest desire that all five books or more are read to see what other methods of inquiry-based ideas come up to establish greater proof. Therefore, it is important that these books can be corrected of any fallacies or mistakes committed in the past and present with this text (Arnold, 2020). Later, things can be reformed and updated to the current circumstances thanks to those with inquisitive and investigative minds. If there is to be any hope for humanity in the future, is that people understand these books, read their history, geopolitics, ideologies and religions of the world. This is to better understand this study and come up with their own ideas/conclusions on what to prove or disprove. That is all for now with this thesis, and it is my best wishes that this written portion did answer some of the pondering questions of life (and not all) in these books, and inspired an investigation to improve what was already written. This is the finale and it concludes this project. I thank those for sincerely reading it.

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