

Playing the Savage: Professional Wrestling's Portrayal of the Exotic Through James "Kamala" Harris

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In the world of American professional wrestling, cultural performance has traditionally been used and reinforced for the sake of developing characters and stories that bring fans into the arena or into the mass audience of television and online viewers of wrestling shows. Historically, some of these cultural performances have constituted a xenophobic cultural space where people of color and foreigners are typically given the role of the villains, or "heels," while white performers of domestic origin are typically given the roles of the heroes, or "faces." These cultural performances enact racial, gender, and political ideologies that reproduce hegemonic relations of power. This study focuses on the career of African-American wrestler James Harris and the evolution of his cultural performance as "Kamala" to illustrate how ideologies of race and colonialism intersect to reproduce historical and evolving stereotypes in U.S. popular culture. Using content analysis, I examine a selection of performances that represented turning points in the career of Kamala, including the creation and introduction of the character to regional audiences in Memphis wrestling in 1982 and his introduction to national audiences with the World Wrestling Federation several years later. Additionally, Kamala is examined using Schudson's five dimensions for determining the strength of a cultural object to gauge the extent to which Kamala can be viewed as a cultural object.

Keywords: performance; colonialism; exotic; authenticity; culture

Professional wrestling is a site of study that has been generally overlooked by researchers, arguably due to its reputation as a low-culture form of entertainment. Wrestling evolved from a serious sport based on Greco-Roman and catch-as-catch-can competition styles in the early 1900s to what is marketed today by WWE as "sports-entertainment." Dubbed the "spectacle of excess" (Barthes 13), the original competitive concept of professional wrestling would be combined with other facets of entertainment—like the narrative story structure and drama of film—by

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wrestling promoters as a way of drawing in crowds and “legitimizing morality for a spectacle of pain and suffering, crusade and revenge” (Rickard 136). With this change, wrestlers were no longer two equally worthy competitors engaged in combat but rather protagonist and antagonist telling a story through their choreographed sequence of moves. As wrestlers traveled the world, the story performed in front of one audience could be retold in front of another audience. With the advent of televised wrestling, one performance could be broadcast to thousands in an area, and now through satellite and online streaming technology, wrestling is seen by millions around the world.

Much in the same way films and fictional television programs have been categorized as media texts worth studying for their impact on culture and society, professional wrestling performances must also be studied as texts with an impact on society, particularly as wrestling has grown from regional entertainment to a worldwide form of entertainment by way of organizations such as World Wrestling Entertainment. Similar to other narrative-driven forms of entertainment like film and fictional television shows, professional wrestling uses a wide array of characters from diverse backgrounds to tell its stories. Characters and performers in professional wrestling act as global cultural representations and often incorporate cultural stereotypes into the portrayals. According to MacFarlane:

In wrestling, such characters and their progressing narratives remain closely, if not inextricably, tied to the performer themselves, defined by their personal idiosyncrasies of physicality and capacity to author in-ring narratives that are simultaneously varied and familiar (152).

As a result, British wrestlers are portrayed as being highly civilized yet smarmy while black wrestlers rap and dance their way to the ring, Mexican wrestlers wear masks and wrestle the *lucha libre* style, and wrestlers with a southern United States accent are cast as beer-swilling, bar-fighting, blue-collar rednecks. Non-white characters are usually tasked with performing racial and cultural stereotypes while white characters are not typically burdened with stereotypical portrayals to the same extent. Race can play a part in the designation of the hero and villain roles. Non-white wrestlers typically assume more threatening roles as “heels”—the wrestling term for the antagonist—while white wrestlers often assume roles as “faces”—the wrestling term for the protagonist. However, race and stereotypes were not always concrete determinants of role as some non-white performers such as Junkyard Dog, Koko B. Ware, and Bobo Brazil were largely presented as fan favorites during their careers while white wrestlers such as the “Million Dollar Man” Ted DiBiase and “Ravishing” Rick Rude were predominantly heels during theirs.

Yet crafting narratives and characters that are “varied yet familiar” is how professional wrestling audiences are exposed to the exotic. To establish a narrative and create interesting characters, professional wrestling storytellers draw from a variety of sources, including cultures different from those of themselves and their audience. Root notes that “cultures from which aesthetic or ceremonial forms are obtained are usually deemed more interesting ... more authentic and exotic by those who are doing the taking” (70). Guided by Foster’s view of the exotic as a symbolic system, Huggan posits that exoticism is:

A particular mode of aesthetic perception – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to immanent mystery ... a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity (13).

When applied to tourism Minca notes that the construction of exotic tourist destinations is largely dependent on “an increasing stratification of demand” (392) decided by outsiders. This results in what Prideaux et al. describe as the creation of “new spaces that conform to the current pattern of internationalized mass tourism in terms of structure, use of space, commodification of cuisine and attractions, often with only marginal concessions to the culture and heritage of the host society” (7). Foreign sites of significant culture and importance offer these authentic encounters through comfortable and familiar means so that tourists are “given the impression that they are embarking on an exotic adventure but within the confines of their own experiences of cultural normality” (7). Thus, the addition of the exotic adds to the spectacle of professional wrestling by allowing fans to experience something new, different, and authentic in a familiar setting: the conventional professional wrestling performance.

The broader research problem explored in this study is how non-white cultures are portrayed in televised wrestling: a mediated text that has typically relied on cultural stereotypes to develop characters and to construct an entertainment narrative. To accomplish this preceding goal, this study will focus on the construction and evolution of one character: Kamala. Standing 6 feet and 7 inches tall and billed as the “Ugandan Giant” and the “Ugandan Headhunter,” audiences would easily assume that Kamala really was a “savage” imported from Africa. Kayfabe aside, Kamala’s move set was unrefined, he was strong without appearing to have spent significant time in the gym, and his wrestling attire was little more than black trunks, a loincloth and tribal war paint on his face and chest. Kamala became one of the most colorful characters in the history of wrestling and, despite

being billed as a “savage” from Uganda, he was portrayed by U.S.-born wrestler James Harris.

Born in Senatobia, Mississippi in 1950, Harris made his wrestling debut in 1978. He began his career as “Sugar Bear” Harris but largely went unnoticed in the wrestling world until he moved to England in the early 1980s and adopted the heel persona of the “Mississippi Mauler” Big Jim Harris (LaRoche). As the “Mississippi Mauler,” Harris would intimidate his opponents by trash talking and pounding his chest during matches, much to the displeasure of English audiences. However, despite finding success in England as the Mississippi Mauler, Harris would return to the United States in 1982 after suffering a broken ankle. Upon being offered work in the Memphis wrestling territory, Harris and Memphis wrestler/promoter Jerry Lawler developed the character of “Kamala: The Ugandan Giant” (LaRoche). According to Harris, Lawler thought that the character was one that would make Harris “more money than you ever made in your life” (“The Rise and Fall”). Though the gimmick was outlandish and somewhat problematic for its time, Harris was not ashamed as he “felt at home” portraying the character and knew it was “just what I wanted” (“Emotional Kamala Shoot”). Kamala was heavily promoted as a “savage cannibal” who was rumored to be the former bodyguard of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Promotional vignettes showed Kamala clad in a loin cloth and face paint, walking barefoot through the Ugandan plains and tall grass as a narrator warned audiences of Kamala’s impending arrival to the Memphis wrestling territory.

Kamala would appear in front of crowds, making his entrance each time with African tribal music and a large tribal war mask and spear. Led to the ring by Friday (later renamed Kim Chee), a masked handler in safari expedition clothing (presumably to protect his identity as a smuggler and human trafficker), Kamala would be unleashed in the ring and ordered by his handler to destroy his opponent. According to Harris, adding the handler was something that had never been done before and it helped the character appear “more jungleish, African, wild, more of a savage ... it made me look uncontrollable back during the time people really believed it” (*Wrestling Epicenter*). Kamala’s savagery was displayed in his non-technical wrestling style, which consisted almost entirely of wild chops, body splashes, and bear hugs. His savagery was also evident in his lack of awareness for the rules of professional wrestling, as he often attempted to pin his opponents while they lay face-down on the canvas. Harris incorporated this detail into his performance of Kamala as he knew the character was a cannibal who was not aware of the rules so “as long as I’m on top of him, it didn’t make no difference which way he was turned ... I was thinking they was supposed to count him out” (“Kamala The Ugandan

Headhunter”). Once the savage had defeated his opponent, Kamala’s handler would subdue him once more and lead him out of the arena.

Eventually, Kamala would make his way to the national stage with the World Wrestling Federation (now known as World Wrestling Entertainment) for two runs with the company, once beginning in 1984 and again in 1992. Despite presenting professional wrestling as family-friendly fare, Kamala was still initially portrayed in the World Wrestling Federation as a “savage,” even going so far as eating a “live” chicken on one of the organization’s television programs (WWE, “List This!”). During his second run with the company, Kamala was given a sympathetic face role as a mistreated and misunderstood savage and subsequently paired with the organization’s resident man of religion, Reverend Slick. Slick would attempt to civilize Kamala by having him participate in acts considered to be “civilized” such as bowling. After his final run in the World Wrestling Federation, Harris’ Kamala would largely become a fixture on the independent wrestling scene until Harris was forced into retirement in 2012 due to complications from diabetes, which led to Harris having both legs amputated.

Kamala’s role as a memorable and mass-consumed culturally stereotyped character in professional wrestling makes him a relevant subject for the study, especially considering that wrestling audiences might never see a character like Kamala again due to the wrestling industry gradually inching toward becoming more reality-based, more socially aware, and more culturally sensitive.

Literature Review

Though limited in number, the scope of academic studies on professional wrestling has been rather wide. From ethnographic studies on professional wrestling audiences and their emotional investment in wrestlers and storylines (Burke; Koh; Saayman and Kruger) to the meaning that wrestlers assign to “pain” as a culture (Smith), wrestling has served as a useful site for cultural studies. Particularly important is literature looking at how professional wrestling has impacted society and popular culture.

As professional wrestling is centered on characters settling their disputes through combat, several studies have examined sport-entertainment’s use of violence and the potential to bring out aggressive behavior in its viewers. As “naïve viewers,” Tamborini et al. examined 36 hours of World Wrestling Entertainment programming in fall 2002 and coded for the acts of violence that appeared in the programming, using coding schemas designed by the National Television Violence Study. Tamborini et al. found that “violence in professional wrestling is not only unremitting, but it is more likely to be portrayed as justified, unpunished, and

lacking extreme harm,” which in turn is likely to influence naïve viewers to view violent behavior as an acceptable trait that can be acted out without fear of admonishment (“The Raw Nature” 216). Using the same 36-hour sample of World Wrestling Entertainment footage from fall 2002, Tamborini et al. found that acts of verbal aggression were more likely to occur in televised professional wrestling than acts of violence. Furthermore, the three most prominent types of verbal attacks in professional wrestling were shown to be attacks on character, attacks on competence, and swearing directed toward a particular individual. Tamborini et al. also found that while anger-driven verbal aggression is a response to amusement-driven verbal aggression, the use of humor “undercuts the seriousness of verbal aggression,” thereby making it seem as if verbal aggression is not problematic (“Talking Smack” 253). In a separate study using the same sample, Lachlan et al. found that when acts of violent retribution were performed by faces, those acts were performed without approval from an on-screen authority figure and they tended to be larger in scale than the original violent act that was perpetrated on them.

In an examination of how race plays a role in character development in World Wrestling Entertainment, Taylor suggested that racialized gimmicks help non-white performers “gain visibility” and “appear different and deviant” from the other performers on the roster (311). However, while offering performers the chance to stand out and appear different, these racialized gimmicks also affect how high up the card a non-white performer can advance. If a non-white performer is saddled with a comedy gimmick, such as those of Korean-American redneck Jimmy Wang Yang or cross-dressing Italian Santino Marella, they have less of a chance of reinventing themselves, leading to a lack of consideration for a main event spot and of taking the company’s top championship.

White performers, however, are often allowed to reinvent themselves as edgy, goal-driven competitors free of stereotypes. An example is white performer John Cena, who first appeared in World Wrestling Entertainment in 2002 as a wrestler in plain tights who did not have a connection with the audience. Cena would soon adopt the persona of the “Doctor of Thuganomics” and perform many traits usually reserved for African American wrestlers. He began wearing “fitted caps and throw-back basketball jerseys” and traded in his tights and boots for jean shorts and high top sneakers (Taylor 316). He delivered freestyle raps insulting his opponent while walking to the ring, introduced his mantra of “Hustle, Loyalty, and Respect” and held various World Wrestling Entertainment championship belts—including the top title in the organization—which he often converted into spinner belts reminiscent of spinner tire rims that were popular in African American culture at the time (Taylor 317).

How nationalities and U.S. prosperity have factored into professional wrestling's presentation has also served as the basis for several studies related to professional wrestling. A prominent historical character in professional wrestling is that of Hussein Khosrow Vaziri, better known to wrestling audiences as "The Iron Sheik." The Iron Sheik's gimmick was that of an Iranian nationalist who touted the superiority of Iran while insulting America and spitting on her hallowed ground. The Iron Sheik would enter the arena carrying the Iranian flag, dressed in a robe with pointy Middle-Eastern inspired wrestling boots on his feet and Iranian headdress on his head. Rahmani's examination of the Iron Sheik looked at the character as one created out of response to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, with the Iron Sheik serving as a representation of Iran that could be defeated by American wrestlers like Sgt. Slaughter and Hulk Hogan to symbolically re-establish America's dominance in the eyes of wrestling audiences. Rahmani also pointed out that by entering the wrestling business, foreign wrestlers like the Iron Sheik are forced to become "caricatures that perpetuate ideas of American innocence and benevolence," while reinforcing jingoistic stereotypes of whatever country America is at war with (108). Rahmani also references the character of Muhammad Hassan, an Arab-American character introduced after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, who often spoke of being judged and mistreated for being an Arab in the United States but did so in a way that elicited anger from the audience rather than sympathy. Hassan's purpose was to play on the security fears of Americans post 9/11 and give audiences a figure that they could direct their anger and hatred toward. Just as Rahmani argued that the Iron Sheik was a representation of Iran used to raise American morale, Nevitt noted that Hassan was created for a similar purpose: to show that World Wrestling Entertainment was representative of the United States of America. Having a wrestler from the U.S. vanquish a foe like Hassan would be equivalent to the United States rising up and defeating terrorism within its borders, thereby raising national morale. However, the portrayal of Hassan caused much controversy, as images of Hassan performing a beheading gesture on his opponent and Hassan's unconscious manager being carried from the ring in a way resembling the "public funerals for suicide bombers" upset many viewers who felt art imitated life a little too closely (Nevitt 327). As a result, the creation of "foreign menace" heels took on a more traditional approach by relying on the classic formula that foreign threats should be "monstrous fighting savage(s) with a desire to inflict pain" (328).

Academic research on professional wrestling has certainly identified patterns in the representation of race and culture in the context of U.S. professional wrestling televised around the world. This study seeks to contribute to the literature by exploring identity construction in U.S. professional wrestling, especially how

minorities have been portrayed. This paper will further examine identity and race construction to reveal how the use of old and new stereotypes is still a dominant narrative strategy promoted by American professional wrestling organizations like World Wrestling Entertainment.

Methods

Kamala will be analyzed as a media text in two parts. The first part will consist of a qualitative content analysis being performed on several YouTube videos relating to important points in the development and portrayal of the Kamala character. These videos have been viewed in chronological order and selected for their accessibility as well as the quality of the content. Rather than focus on the wrestling of the character, they represent the rhetorical presentation, performance of culture, and views that others have of Kamala. Upon viewing the videos, they were analyzed for the way that Kamala is presented visually, as well as for any dialogue that refers to Kamala. Dialogue found to reference Kamala will be examined for the content of the message and coded according to what the tone of the dialogue is, such as a white performer referencing the character in a way that could be considered racist.

Second, the character of Kamala will be analyzed according to Schudson's five dimensions for determining the strength of a cultural object: retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and resolution. According to Schudson, retrievability of a cultural object means that audiences should be able to access the object freely. Rhetorical force measures the impact and power that the cultural object has, while resonance refers to how the cultural object fits into discussions of society. Institutional retention refers to whether or not the object becomes ingrained in our everyday lives or has a larger impact on society. The last dimension, resolution, refers to whether or not a cultural object causes audiences to react to encountering the object. It is important to consider how Kamala fits these dimensions as he represents a cultural object in the world of professional wrestling and pop culture, and establishing his efficacy can only serve to improve the way the character is interpreted by other scholars.

Analysis

To examine the evolution of the character chronologically, the first video analyzed was "Jimmy Hart offers Kamala watermelons and women! (8-28-82) Memphis Wrestling" (Memphis Wrestling Video Vault). Visually, Kamala is represented as a "savage" being distinctly out of his natural environment. Jimmy Hart leads Kamala into the studio, but when Kamala becomes distracted by the audience, Hart begins to clap his hands to regain Kamala's attention as if he were attempting to get the attention of a small child or animal. Kamala paces the studio,

never straying too far from his handler Hart, and when he sees that the camera is aimed at him he responds by raising his spear and pointing it at the camera in preparation to attack the potential threat. When Kamala is in the ring he begins pacing, similar to the way an animal paces when caged, as he waits for his opponent to arrive. Later in the video Kamala stands over the body of his subdued opponent, waving his spear to fend off other wrestlers from attending to and saving his fallen opponent. This visual is indicative of the savage hunter who fights off others, man or animal, from stealing the prey that he worked hard to obtain. Kamala only leaves the ring when Hart once again calls to Kamala and claps his hands to get the savage's attention.

From an aural standpoint, multiple allusions are made to Kamala's status as a foreign and ignorant savage. Kamala's handler Hart exclaims at the start of his promo:

“The man was mistreated! Can you imagine, this man, Kamala: The Ugandan Giant, has never ever tasted a watermelon in his life! He don't even know what a watermelon tastes like! Can you imagine depriving this giant of that? Can you imagine, Kamala has never even been with a woman in the United States! ... Can't you imagine: Kamala, a big watermelon party with Kamala, and all those pretty little girls? This man would go crazy! Watermelons and women, Kamala! Woo!”

Kamala's opponent, Jerry Lawler, later comes out and issues verbal threats to Kamala that include highly noticeable aspects of racism based on Kamala's appearance. Lawler refers to Kamala as a “big Ubangi,” and threatens “I'm going to take that big Black jerk and I'm going to beat that paint off his face and then I'm going to wet his lips and stick him to that wall right over there” (Memphis Wrestling Video Vault).

In both Hart's and Lawler's dialogues, the racist and stereotypical overtones are overt. Though Kamala is being portrayed as a foreign savage, Hart's statement concerning Kamala's lack of experience with watermelons and his sexuality immediately links him to stereotypical portrayals of African-Americans in the media. Meanwhile, Lawler's threat (and the audience's subsequent cheers) to wet Kamala's lips and stick him to the wall is indicative of a Southern culture that has traditionally been prejudiced toward and used violence against black people. Thus the threat to stick Kamala to a wall by his lips is on par with threatening to lynch Kamala.

The second video analyzed, “Championship Wrestling from Georgia chapter 15,” contains the debut vignette promoting the arrival of Kamala in Georgia Championship Wrestling in 1984. This video represents a turning point in the career of Kamala as initially he had been performed only in the Memphis wrestling

territory; however, two years after being created in Memphis with Lawler, Kamala had become a successful character that could now perform in different territories and draw a paying crowd. In a short interview segment preceding the vignette, Jimmy Hart proclaims that Kamala “doesn’t know a lot of holds, he doesn’t know a lot of moves, he just beats people, he beats them in the right way!” By referencing that Kamala has no technical proficiency as a wrestler but instead as a “savage” who beats people “in the right way,” Hart reinforces the idea that Kamala is a creature whose sole purpose in a wrestling ring is to hurt others and follow the directions of his handler. Visually, the debut vignette features Kamala in his natural surroundings, the “Ugandan Jungle,” and is shot to look as if it were part of a nature documentary. The audio portion highly supports the idea that Kamala is a savage as the dramatic voiceover references Kamala’s physical features, stating that Kamala is “the ugliest man known to professional wrestling today” and is “as strong as some of the largest animals known to man.” By equating Kamala’s strength to those of large animals, the savage stereotype is reinforced as it once again presents Kamala as a creature that is, much like an animal, driven entirely by instinct rather than logic.

In the third video, titled “Event Center – Kamala & Slick,” Kamala was now being presented as a face. Although beginning his second run with the World Wrestling Federation in 1992 as a heel, by late 1993 Kamala had gained sympathy from the audience and become a face. It should be noted that Harris has said this change in Kamala’s character was determined by WWF owner Vince McMahon, and it was not something that he enjoyed at all as he preferred performing Kamala as a savage heel (*IYH Wrestling*). Kamala’s character turn started when he began to be abused by his handlers as a result of losing matches. Eventually the abuse became too much and Kamala was “saved” by the Reverend Slick, who from that point on became Kamala’s manager and “spiritual advisor.” In the video, Kamala is still visually represented as a savage through the wearing of his war mask, shield, and loin cloth, as well as his unfocused movements and slight pacing while his new advisor addresses the camera. While Kamala does his guttural groans, it is through Slick’s dialogue we are taught to show compassion for the savage, as Slick explains that “the one of light ... mercy and compassion” has taken Kamala away from his former abusive handlers. Slick is also the first individual to refer to Kamala as “a human being ... a man” and states that his adoption of Kamala is “a mission of mercy.” Though the other media texts involving Kamala have portrayed him as a savage and an animal, it is only when Kamala is turned into a sympathetic face that he is acknowledged as being a man. By definition, Kamala should not be a “noble savage” as the entire premise of his character has been based on the idea that he was a savage before being brought over to wrestle others. However, with references to

religion and colonialism, it is clear that Slick sees Kamala's rescue and redemption as a result of God's will.

The fourth video examined for this study was "Slick teaches Kamala how to Bowl" (WWE). Visually, Kamala is no longer portrayed as a savage but rather as a simpleton still dressed as a savage. When Slick hands Kamala a bowling ball customized with his war paint, Kamala stares wide-eyed at the bowling ball, initially refusing to accept it but later cradling it as if it were a baby and refusing to have it taken away. Near the end of the video, Kamala finally rolls a bowling ball but not before stopping to comically shake his posterior prior to throwing the ball in the wrong direction. Ultimately, Kamala manages to throw a strike when no one is looking and a celebration ensues. Through the interview dialogue we find out that Slick is trying to teach Kamala many things, with bowling being one of them. The main thing that stands out in the dialogue is Slick's constant reassurance that he is Kamala's friend and would not do anything to hurt him. Slick's approach allows him to gain the trust of Kamala, who is uneasy about bowling. Though we cannot apply much in terms of dialogue other than Slick reinforcing that he is a true friend of the savage, the comical image of Kamala shaking his butt before rolling the ball definitively removes the savage label from Kamala. Without this label, Kamala can no longer be taken as a serious threat, and there no longer exists a reason to fear the savage.

Through stereotypical and racist presentations, the character of Kamala is a strong cultural representation according to the Schudson's five dimensions. When considering the level of retrievability as a cultural object, Kamala has become an easy cultural text to access due to online video sites like YouTube and the WWE Network, which contain many of the televised matches and video packages that presented him as an exotic savage. This access allows new generations to encounter the character of Kamala while allowing older generations to relive the cultural performance that Kamala provided wrestling audiences. Apart from video footage, there are numerous news stories about Harris' experiences as Kamala, his current condition, and the legacy of the Kamala character. More recently, Harris has been in the news discussing his new life path as a music recording artist and carpenter, and he also spoken about the complications from diabetes that forced him to retire after having both legs amputated.

As a rhetorical force, Kamala is an extremely strong cultural object. As a cultural marker in the world of professional wrestling, the character of Kamala represents a time when blatant racist portrayals were common in a wrestler's gimmick. Today, many wrestlers are still given gimmicks that have the potential to be controversial; however, they are toned down to an extent for the sake of not

offending audiences or, in the case of WWE, investors and advertisers. Additionally, Kamala is indicative that audiences are often driven by their curiosity to experience the exotic in a safe setting. Through his portrayal of Kamala, Harris offered wrestling audiences an opportunity to do just that, even if that opportunity was a problematic one in terms of cultural and racial understanding of African history and culture.

As a resonating force, Kamala's strength as a cultural object invokes social referents in the creation of the character. According to Lawler, creator of the character, Kamala was a character that in its early years connected with audiences because it was associated with newsworthy topics at that time. Kamala's link to timely real world figures like Ugandan dictator Idi Amin and the indigenous African tribes presented in *National Geographic Magazine*, as well as Frank Frezetta's fantasy paintings, all make Kamala an inauthentically authentic exotic figure ("Steve Austin and Jerry Lawler").

In the world of professional wrestling, Kamala has most definitely achieved institutional retention. Kamala's memorable look and portrayal as an unstoppable savage have become so institutionalized that Kamala has served as the archetype for the look and portrayal of other savages in the wrestling world. Wrestlers portraying savages as recent as the characters Umaga, Great Khali, and Kongo Kong have relied on archetypes established with Kamala. If a wrestler wears war paint on their face, communicates only through unintelligible grunts and screams, wrestles a non-technical style, and is being led to and from the ring by a handler/representative, wrestling audiences are being led to believe that the character is a savage. Just as Kamala turned face in the early '90s, there continue to be attempts to civilize the savage and remove any threat they possess by making them fan friendly. While the savage being misunderstood is an explanation that is still used to draw sympathy from the audience, the comical route seems to be the primary one taken when removing the savage's threat. Much like Kamala's butt wiggle when bowling, more recent savages have also been tamed through comedic action, such as the Great Khali's desire to dance with beautiful women and be known as the "Punjabi Playboy."

Kamala also provided resolution as a cultural artifact through the spectacle of the exotic that the character displayed. According to Schudson, a cultural artifact with resolution must get a response from the audience. One possible response in this context is that the character of Kamala made audiences more culturally aware and educated. In order to fully comprehend Kamala's character one needed to know or learn certain aspects about the character's supposed origins, including why the savage originated from Uganda, why he was billed as a cannibal, and how much of an important figure Idi Amin was to warrant Kamala being billed as his bodyguard.

Thus it can be said that while Kamala was billed as an uncivilized and uneducated savage, he served as an inspiration for others to learn about the world cultures and events that inspired his creation.

Conclusion

James Harris was not the first professional wrestler to portray the role of an exotic outsider in professional wrestling, but his portrayal of Kamala has become one of the most enduring and important throughout the history of professional wrestling.

Yet in spite of what can be learned about the foreign exotic from the portrayal of Kamala, some foreign characters in professional wrestling are still based on outdated stereotypes. In recent years WWE programming has seen two Puerto Rican wrestlers portray masked bullfighters from Mexico, complete with over-the-top Mexican accents and a little person in a bull outfit; years later the same two Puerto Rican wrestlers would lose the bullfighting gimmick and adopt one where they promoted a Puerto Rican timeshare scam; a Bulgarian bodybuilder espousing Russia's superiority to the U.S.; and three masked Mexican wrestlers with no prior association suddenly being paired together and given noisemakers and piñatas to carry to the ring. While stereotypes continue to shape professional wrestling narratives, studies on such portrayals can foster media literacy skills that allow for the critical reading of portrayals of minorities as comedy acts, and critical analysis opens space for looking at minorities as humans and competitors who have as much opportunity for success as their white counterparts.

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