The 'Other' is for the 'Self'

A Contrastive Analysis on the representation of the Hetero-Image of the Middle East as an instrument to Present the Auto-Image of the U.S in *Aladdin* (1992) & *Aladdin* (2019)

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Abstract

Due to the increased (re)production of Disney classics in live-action format, this study compares the representation of the Middle Eastern culture in the *Aladdin* (1992) animated film and its 2019 live-action remake. Using an imagological approach, this research improves the understanding of how the representation of the 'other' (i.e. hetero-image) might be used to generate and support a positive representation of the 'self' (i.e. the auto-image) in Disney films that exclusively show the 'other'. The inquiry of this thesis is as follows: how are subtle distinctions in appearance, behaviour, and language traits used to promote a favourable self-image to the Disney audience. In order to address the research question, this research looks at how Arabic culture is portrayed in Disney's *Aladdin* where the heroes are supposed to reflect ideals that the American spectator can identify with and distance themselves away from the Middle East. Unlike other studies that have focused on the Arab as the 'other', this one claims that the Arab is also the 'self'. Therefore, this study employed a content analysis focusing on the appearance, behaviour, values and language use of different characters in the two versions of *Aladdin.* This research reveals that Disney has made a significant attempt in the linguistic and physical features of its characters, but not in the behavioural and moral aspects of their films. The hetero-image is maintained through the slight (residual) contrasts between the protagonists and supporting characters.

Keywords: Imagology, auto-image, hetero-image, Arabs, Disney movies, cultural representation, Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism, American Orientalism.

Contents

1. Introduction

"It's barbaric, but hey, it's home," sings the entrance song of Disney's 1992 animated film *Aladdin* (Belkhyr, 2013, p. 1369). The film begins with scenes of deserts, bazaars, and voices in the background (Belkhyr, 2013, p. 1370). The message is obvious. The spectator is presently on an imagined "carpet ride" across the Middle East, which is a (claimed) barbarous region. Disney successfully launched a live-action remake of the same film in 2019, twenty-seven years after the debut of what is now regarded as a childhood 'classic'. While the broad plot has remained unchanged, a deeper examination reveals that some elements have been changed. Since its premiere, some have lauded the film as a truly representative achievement (Mouallem, 2019), which contrasts sharply with the negative reaction Disney received for the previous version, which was criticised for explicit stereotyping (Belkhyr, 2013, p. 1368 and 1369). Several academic publications have also addressed cultural representation in film, notably the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood. Shaheen (2003) undertook a thorough investigation of more than 900 movies that featured depictions of Arabs in his most recent book, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, and found that "only 5% of Arab cinema parts include ordinary, human individuals" (p. 192). For more than a century, Hollywood has utilised repetition as a harmful teaching tactic: Shaheen (2003) claims that these conventionalised repetitive images of Arabs and Arab-Americans have 'schooled' viewers film after film; *Aladdin* (1992) also being one of these. Scholars claim that the film is full of Orientalist portrayals of the Middle East, varying from songs that portray the Middle East as violent and "barbaric" (Belkhyr, 2013, p. 1369), to the way individuals are shown with huge noses, to the depiction of the unpleasant weather (Haydock & Risden, 2009, p. 216; Edwards, 2001, p. 15).

In cultural studies the notion of Orientalism is crucial to comprehending how the Middle East is portrayed in popular culture (Said, 1978). The reason Disney used Orientalism, according to

numerous writers, was due to the state of the United States' (U.S.) relations with the Middle East at the time (Wojcik-Andrews & Phillips, 1996, p. 80 and 82; Edwards, 2001, p. 21). The ending of the Cold War and the subsequent Gulf War changed U.S. relations with the Middle East in the early 1990s, according to some researchers, which meant that the U.S. employed Hollywood as a soft power to create a picture of the Middle East that suited the narrative required to explain political stances (see Wojcik-Andrews & Phillips, 1996, p. 80 and 81). However, it appears simplistic to view political interactions as the primary determinant of representation onscreen. In the framework of imagology, these stereotyped portrayals of cultures might be critically reviewed. Imagology is the study of how national cultures are portrayed in text, discourse, and multimedia (Beller & Leerssen, 2007, p. 27). This implies that, rather than attempting to comprehend a society through social interactions, historical events, and culture as sociology and anthropology do, imagology seeks to "understand a discourse of representation" (Beller & Leerssen, 2007, p. 27). Beller & Leerssen (2007) differentiates between the auto-image and the hetero-image, where the auto-image refers to one's own image and the hetero-image refers to the image of the 'other'. When a group of people creates a picture of their own culture that will be used to compare them to other cultures, they create a hetero-image. In imagology, this is referred to as aspected and spectant viewpoints, with the former referring to the depicted nationality and the latter referring to the person who provides the perspective (Beller & Beller & Leerssen, 2007).

This study aims to add to the understanding of how the auto-image can be constructed using the hetero-image in media depicting only the 'other'. Specifically, how are subtle differences in appearance, behavioural, moral, and linguistic characteristics employed to present a positive auto-image to the Disney audience. To do so, this study will examine the representation of Arabic culture in *Aladdin* (1992 & 2019) where the protagonists of the movies are assumed to reflect values in which the American viewer can recognise themselves and set themselves apart from the Middle East. Different from other studies, which directed their attention to the study of the Arab as the 'other', this study argues that the Arab is the self as well.

This study consists of seven chapters, including this introduction to the study, that start with an introduction to the subtopic at hand. The theoretical framework is explored in detail in Chapter 2 where key imagological, societal and theoretical concepts are discussed. Moreover, Chapter 2 will offer an overview of existing studies on how Arabic culture has been represented in Disney films over the years. Chapter 3 presents the case study of Disney's *Aladdin* (1992 & 2019), including a plot summary and an introduction to the research question and sub-questions. The methodology of this study is described in Chapter 4, and the findings are presented in Chapter 5. In the discussion chapter, the results for the sub-questions are reviewed (see Chapter 6) in connection to the methodology outlined in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 7 will offer a response to the research question and explore the limitations of this study and possible future research.

2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter, the most relevant literary concepts and theories for the present study will be described and discussed.

2.1. Imagology, stereotypes and representations

Imagology is concerned with the depiction of groups or nations, which gives rise to the concept of a "National Character" (Chew, 2009). Individuals frequently adopt an ethnocentric worldview when encountering people from diverse cultures, in which 'their' culture is regarded to be superior to 'the other's' culture, as stated in the introduction (Said, 1978, 2016; Beller & Leerssen, 2007). Othering has the ability to contribute to national representation, which is defined as "a strong desire to label persons of other cultural backgrounds wrongly, collectively, and typically unfavourably" (Jackson, 2014, p.161). This is accomplished by assigning all citizens of a country a common set of characteristics while dismissing their differences (Jackson, 2014). This research adheres to Schein's (2012) definition of culture, which states that culture "guide[s] and constrain[s] the behaviour of members of a group through shared norms that are held in that group" (p. 14).

When looking at the depiction of diverse cultures in the context of another dominant culture, stereotyping on a national level can be addressed. The way culture is portrayed can reveal information about a person's self-image. As Beller & Leerssen (2007) distinguishes between the auto-image and hetero-image, Hall (1997) proved that representation of the self and the other is also not a simple procedure; it is a mechanism for members of a society to exchange meaning through language, signs, and pictures. This interchange can only occur through the exchange of shared ideologies, and cultural and conceptual structures. Coupland (2010), who argued that representations are a collection of semiotic mechanisms by which persons and groups may be recognized, emphasises that representation is more than merely referencing to individuals or a group. The relevance of countries within the scope of representation was highlighted by Beller & Leerssen (2007), who stated that a nation's identity may

be recognized by behavioural patterns in which 'nations' express their auto perspective to the varied living environments and collective experiences. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that portraying a community in a specific light, by unfairly emphasizing certain elements of that group, may substantially influence individuals to think and consider such characteristics by means of their hetero perspective when making judgments and assessments of that culture (Collingwood et al., 2018). It has been shown that whenever the mainstream press, for instance, uses racial signals in their discourse, it might activate racial thoughts and alter people's political choices (Collingwood et al., 2018).

2.2. Out-group vs. in-group

Identity is more than just a set of identity markers that characterise a person; it may also be self-assigned or attributed to someone else. It is possible to have different perspectives about oneself, how one portrays oneself, and how one is viewed by others (Jackson, 2014). This is related to the notions of in-group and out-group, where an individual might be a member of numerous groups with similar identities (the in-groups) that function as the norm and observes other persons who do not fulfil the in-group's norms and are thus considered the out-group (Jackson, 2014). Because out-group members are perceived as being different and unique, the out-group is often referred to as the 'Other' (Jackson, 2014). This frequently leads to stereotyping people from out-groups as "very little unfavourable behavioural information is needed to confirm a negative stereotype about a group" (Ratliff & Nosek, 2011, p. 2), whereas "much favourable information is needed to contradict a negative stereotype about those out-groups" (Ratliff & Nosek, 2011, p. 2). In media discourse, phrases like 'us' and 'them' are employed to speak about oneself or the other, emphasising the uneven representation of in- and out-groups (Nurullah, 2010). Otherization refers to a shift in views toward people who are foreigner or distinct to the 'we' leading to an 'Other' that is frequently "reduced to less than they are" (Holliday et al., 2010, as cited in Ten Thije, 2016, p. 585).

2.3. Orientalism

Edward Said's (1978; 2003) concept of Orientalism is an important topic in understanding how the Middle East is represented in popular culture. His point is that Western understanding of the Orient is constantly tainted by biases that reinforce Western dominance. The West produces a positive self-image and a negative picture of the 'Other' by depicting the Orient as contradictory to the West (Said, 1978, pp. 1-3). As a result, the West functions under an "us vs. them" paradigm, depicting Westerners as "rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding true ideals, without innate scepticism" (p. 49). In his study on Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), Nadel (1997) stated that commercial films are a particularly well-suited medium for investigating this debate since movies are seen (viz. peer-reviewed) by a significant number of people within the film industry. This indicates that the representation chosen for a specific group, in this case the Middle East, is likely in agreement with the beliefs of all those who directed the film on what the Middle East is and looks like (Nadel, 1997, p. 185). Orientalism, Halliday (1993) believes, is a notion that is applicable to any nation which has had a heritage of imperialism. In addition, he casts doubt on Said's claim that knowledge created by imperial countries is intrinsically flawed (pp. 158-159). Whether one accepts or disagrees with this critique, it is crucial to remember that Said's (1978) book was released 50 years ago. While its academic effect is evident, it is fair to presume that the world has changed since then; 9/11, the rise of ISIS, and globalisation have all altered the relationship between the West and the Middle East.

Kerboua (2016) devised a system for categorising Orientalism into three chronological stages: early Orientalism, American Orientalism, and Neo-Orientalism. These are distinguished from one another by various players, times, pre-existing views of the Orient, perspectives, and objectives (p. 21). This differentiation allows for the depiction of the evolution of Orientalism instead of portraying it as a static notion. Furthermore, it recognizes that Orientalism supports a variety of purposes. The two types of Orientalism which are pertinent here are American Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism. From 1945 to the 1990s, American Orientalism is identified with the (post) Cold War period; this type

of Orientalism is characterised by the United States portraying themselves as benign and seeking to aid the Orient while also working to protect its own influence in the area (Kerboua, 2016). Neo-Orientalism, on the other hand, relates to the fear of Muslims' worldview and its supposed link to extremism. As a result, Neo-Orientalism began in the 1990s, grew in prominence around 2001-2002, and has stayed consistent ever since (Kerboua, 2016, p. 20). Of importance to this study, as will be discussed in the following section(s), is how Orientalism can be linked to the representation of the other in Disney movies since most of the Disney classics were released in during the period of American- and Neo-Orientalism.

2.4. Cultural representation in Disney movies: The use of accents

Despite the fact that cartoons are enjoyable and well-liked across the world, research has shown that they are not neutral, as briefly stated in the previous chapter; they are likely to carry signals about society and linguistic ideology. Klein & Shiffman (2009) investigated the representation of minorities in children's animated cartoons and determined that these films are more likely to depict dominant social group's culture than that of the minority groups' culture(s). For instance, when creating characters animated films are likely to expose their viewers to linguistic ideologies such as 'one nation, one language', and they will employ pre-existing assumptions linked with ethnic and regional languages (Azad, 2009). In reality, Disney, as one of the most well-known creators of animated pictures, is not immune to the tendency. Disney's animated classics have grown in popularity in recent years as new television series and live-action versions like *Once Upon a Time* (2011), *Maleficent* (2014), and *Cinderella* (2015) have reintroduced Disney characters that many viewers grew up loving. *Beauty and the Beast* and *Mulan*, both live-action films released in 2017/2018, added to the excitement. Nonetheless, some Disney animated films have been chastised over the years for stereotyped representations of gender and ethnicity (Booker, 2009). Although accents and national culture have garnered a lot of attention in animated Disney classics (e.g. Lippi-Green 1998), there has been some

research on how national cultures are represented in Disney's recent live-action adaptations of these masterpieces.

A study on the representation of culture in Disney movies is that of Alagić (2017); this study examined how national cultures are represented in the 1950 Disney classic *Cinderella*, and how this has altered in the 1997 and 2015 *Cinderella* respectively. Alagić (2017) found that the three Disney versions of *Cinderella*, which span 65 years, exhibit distinct differences in national culture and race portrayal. For instance, in *Cinderella* (1950), all human characters were white, while the live-action version from 1997 features a wide range of ethnicities. Interestingly, this casting choice appears to have been toned down again in *Cinderella* (2015), indicating a brief peak in inclusion. Moreover, despite its French location, *Cinderella* (1950) is very American: the General American (GA) accent was the primary variety used and the depiction of French culture (or items thereof) seem to align with Disney's interpretation on American ideology, emphasising freedom from persecution (Rosenthal, 1999, p. 897 and 904). On the other hand, Cinderella (1997) depicted a diverse range of cultures coexisting without any apparent hierarchy; accents, names, buildings, attire, and performances conjure up images of other nations and eras. Despite the fact that the emphasis on cultural inclusion may indicate a conventional American melting pot (Firchow, 2007, p. 90), *Cinderella* (1997) is likely the most politically and interculturally accurate *Cinderella*. With regards to *Cinderella* in 2015, a white, mostly British cast that were given French features, dominates the screen, and allusions to French culture (e.g. French landscapes, attire, language, and women's roles), similar to *Cinderella* (1950), make a reappearance. Importantly, as Alagić (2017) points out, the villains (e.g. Cinderella's stepmother) and protagonists (e.g. Cinderella) have distinct accents: the stepmother sounds distinctly British while Cinderella uses a variety closer to GA (and/or French).

Sonnesyn (2011) investigated the usage of accents in Disney animated films from 1995 to 2009; she concluded that 61% of the characters spoke a standard variant of American English. Other

English types, such as regional dialects of American and British English, were spoken by the remaining 40%, and foreign accents were frequently utilised to identify characters as villains. Azad (2009) also stated that, despite the lack of dialects or languages that can logically be connected with factual locations, accents were exploited in comparable ways to establish characterizations in mythological contexts. Furthermore, some research shows that repeated exposure to animated film depictions of accents and dialects might lead to linguistic prejudice (Azad, 2009; Rosa, 2006; Sonnesyn, 2011; Marzolph, 2019). When it comes to creating characters for their storylines, filmmakers and television producers have a variety of resources at their disposal. Physical characteristics and specific character qualities might help to evoke images of the characters, but the characters' use of words can be just as effective. A character's vocabulary, syntax, accent, and other linguistic traits can mean a great deal to viewers. The use of fictional characters' language as a simple technique to express more about their origin or nature has a long history; Lippi-Green's (1997) research already showed in the late 1990s that Disney animation heavily depends on non-native English accents as well as British accents when creating wicked characters. These non-native accents are often contrasted with the GA accent (Lippi-Green, 1997; Azad, 2009; Rosa, 2006; Sonnesyn, 2011; Marzolph, 2019). GA is a non-regional and neutral accent heard on tv and radio and spoken by around two-thirds of the American population and is most often recognised by its rhoticity and vowel extensions (Collins et al, 2018). General American, according to Wells, "comprises the bulk of American dialects that do not display significant eastern or southern traits. However, there is some geographic variety in general American" (Wells, 1996, 467-473). Although research of Lippi-Green (1997) and Wells (1996) have made significant additions to the portrayal of country cultures in Disney films, these studies are somewhat dated (over 25 years old) and focuses solely on the analysis of language in animated Disney films and not on the live-action movies.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, Alagić's (2017) study makes a connection to how the other's culture is represented by Disney in different decades and the use of accents to make villains and heroes relatable to the U.S. American audience. Since accent use was one of the methods used to create stereotypes in the different versions of *Cinderella* (Alagić, 2017) and different Disney animated movies (Lippi-Green, 1997; Azad, 2009; Rosa, 2006; Sonnesyn, 2011; Marzolph, 2019), it is worthy to include the use of accents in the investigation of other Disney movies, e.g. *Aladdin*.

3. Case Study

In this chapter, articles and theories that connect the discussion in Chapter 2 to the inquiry of this thesis, namely *Aladdin* and the representation of the Middle East, are discussed. Additionally, this chapter provides information on the *Aladdin* franchise and a plot summary of the films.

3.1. *Aladdin* (1992) – *Aladdin* (2019)

Aladdin (1992) is a successful animated movie that was released on November 22, 1992, by Walt Disney Pictures. It is inspired by the *One Thousand and One Nights* Arabic folktale. *Aladdin* was the most popular film of 1992, making over $217 million in the United States and over $504 million worldwide, despite being released in November of that year (https://www.boxofficemojo.com). The international popularity of this picture is backed up by Disney Corporation's distribution infrastructure, which serves as an illustration of the U.S. film industry's global dominance (Crane, 2014, p. 377). Nevertheless, the film was highly criticised in several areas: Slant Magazine's Ed Gonzalez (2004) gave the film a negative critique, calling it racist, silly, and a "narcissistic circus show" (https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/aladdin/).

Aladdin's 2019 live-action film is a remake of the 1992 original, which has the same title and setting. Similar to 1992, the film's production aspects and plot indicated racial politics, which was criticised by critics. Some raised suspicion about the film's mixing of Arab and Middle Eastern culture and lack of detail and attention as they did throughout the casting process. *Aladdin*'s stereotyped depictions of Arabs are meant to portray the Arab world as morally and/or culturally inferior to the West. Belkhyr (2013) investigated how Disney fosters American ideals while simultaneously denouncing 'the East's' identity, which usually includes Arabs. Furthermore, foreign accents, such as Arabic accented English, are associated with negative character roles (e.g. villains) in Disney films, whereas Standard English accents, such as the American accent, are associated with positive character

roles (e.g. heroes), reinforcing prejudice against countries other than the United States (Waters, 2019; Lippi-Green, 1997).

3.2. Plot summary

Aladdin is a story about a young adolescent named Aladdin who lives on the streets of Agrabah, a mythical city surrounded by a desert; he survives by stealing or taking food from the locals. One day, Aladdin runs into the sultan's daughter, Jasmine, who is attempting to experience life outside the palace and not be married off to a prince for the sake of the Kingdom. Aladdin met and fell in love with Jasmine right away, but the sultan's vizier Jafar separates them by sending Aladdin on a dangerous journey to retrieve a magical lamp. Aladdin gets trapped underground during his search for the lamp; after rubbing this, a genie appears and offers him three wishes. His first wish was to be transformed into a prince, including all of the respective attributes such as money, and castle, in order to propose marriage to Princess Jasmine. The second request is for Jafar's magic ability to return his palace after it has been transported far away. Aladdin's most significant desire is the final wish, which is to grant Genie's freedom. Aladdin saves Jasmine and Agrabah from Jafar, and Aladdin wins Jasmine's love and marries her.

The 2019 live-action remake of Disney's *Aladdin* brings the classic animation film up to current movie practices as a musical fantasy film. It features a narrative that is quite similar to the animated film *Aladdin*, in which a good-hearted street urchin named Aladdin competes for the affection of Princess Jasmine, the princess of Agrabah. When he discovers a magical lamp, he utilises the genie's abilities to transform himself into a prince and marry her. He's also on a quest to stop the evil Jafar from stealing the magical lamp that may grant his innermost desires to rule Agrabah. Although Aladdin does not find himself worthy of Jasmine, he saves her and Agrabah. In *Aladdin* (2019) the story ends with the Sultan crowning Jasmine as the next sultana-regent, free of the obligation to marry a prince; she marries Aladdin for love.

3.3. The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S.

The media's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims has been discussed by a number of intellectuals. Lind & Danowski (1998) concluded that portrayals of Arabs in Western media have depended extensively on racial stereotypical assumptions. Years after Lind & Danowoski's (1998) work, Alsultany (2012) published a book on the depiction of Arabs and Muslims in the media following 9/11. According to Alsultany (2012), the media's representation of Arabs and Muslims in the United States has changed both over the twentieth century and since the September 11 terrorist attacks. Notably, the Middle East was represented as a remote location with deserts, floating carpets, and wealthy Arabic men in silent films around the turn of the century. When the United States became a worldwide power in 1945, the depiction of negative Arabs grew by depicting Arabs as, e.g. bombers. It is only sometime after 9/11 that this unfavourable image of Arabs began to give way to a more realistic image of Arabs and Muslims (Alsultany, 2012).

Referencing back to Orientalism (Section 2.3.), earlier Hollywood films like *The Sheik* and *Arabian Nights* presented the Middle East as a monolithic dream country populated with genies, flying carpets, and luxurious palaces inhabited by rich men and their harem females. While these images were likely amusing and harmless, they homogenised cultural differences in the Middle East, depicting the area as backwards and in need of Western civilization. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967, the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973, the Iran Hostage Crisis, and the Gulf War were all followed by a succession of Middle Eastern crises and wars. The exotic Middle East receded from American media, replaced with portrayals of bloodshed and menacing terrorism. As Shaheen (2003) observed, hundreds of Hollywood films over the last 50 years have connected Islam to holy war and terrorism, portraying Muslims as either "hostile alien intruders" or "lecherous, oily sheikhs set on utilizing nuclear weapons" (Shaheen, 2015, p. 9). Within this line of thinking both Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) and *Aladdin* (2019) provide a foundation for learning more about how the media may affect viewers' perceptions of different national

cultures. This is especially important since the intended audience of Disney movies are children (Lippi-Green, 1997), who are quickly influenced by what they are exposed to (Zipes et al., 2015, p.36). For instance, in the case of *Aladdin* and the inquiry of this study, the unfavourable image of Arabic culture will impact children through this film's incorporation of western ideology; children will choose to link themselves with Jasmine and Aladdin (Hurley, 2005), or favourably and/or negatively associate various accents with a certain character and/or culture (Lippi-Green 1997). Hurley (2005) also contends that children's self-image is impacted by how they see themselves portrayed in fairy tales, since this plays a vital role in shaping their belief system. As a result, fairy tale imagery has a particularly strong influence on youngsters of colour in terms of internalising white privilege.

3.4. Research question and sub-questions

Due to the shift in the portrayal of Middle-Easterners in the media in a more realistic manner after 9/11 (Alsultany, 2012), American- and Neo-Orientalism (Kerboua, 2016), and the increased (re)production of Disney classics in live-action format, this paper will seek to answer the following research question:

> *How do the appearance, behavioural, value and linguistic characteristics of the most prominent characters in Aladdin (1992) and Aladdin (2019) support the dichotomy between the auto- and hetero-image of the cultures involved?*

In order to answer the main question in this study, the following sub-questions will be systematically addressed:

1. How are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed through the characteristics of outward appearance of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?
2. How are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the behavioural characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?

3. How are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the value characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?

4. How are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the linguistic characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?

The above categories (i.e. appearance, behavioural, value and linguistic characteristics) were chosen since they have been shown to be used to attribute ethnic stereotypes to diverse characters on American prime-time television (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000, p. 694). In the case of this study, Mastro & Greenberg's (2000) scales were adapted to the *Aladdin* motion pictures to compare the physical, behavioural, appearance and linguistic characteristics of the main characters in the two versions of the movies thereby providing the present study with insights into the construction of the auto-image and the hetero-image in *Aladdin*.

Based on the above discussion of theories and the case study, this study expects to find a difference in cultural representation between the two versions of *Aladdin* that can be seen in the characteristics ascribed to the most prominent characters in the stories.

3.5. The research aim and societal relevance

This study will look at two versions of *Aladdin* made by the Walt Disney Company in order to address the research question. Answering this research question is crucial in a number of ways. For starters, investigating this issue demonstrates the relevance of popular culture in international relations and demonstrates that power dynamics may be found in distinct locations. People watch movies, read comic books, or listen to mainstream music to pass the time in their daily lives. These seemingly innocuous mediums expose individuals to a wide range of ideologies and are also important locations of power contestation in terms of meaning contestation (Hall, 1997, pp. 340-344). By addressing the

significance of representation, this research adds to the current studies on popular culture. It proposes a method for analysing stereotype construction in Hollywood films by looking at a collection of (adapted) qualitative factors (i.e. appearance, behaviour, values and linguistic characteristics) that accounted for ethnic representation of minorities on American prime-time television (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

Secondly, films and the animation industry are critical sources of soft power. Hollywood has successfully exported American ideas, beliefs, and lifestyles through its vibrant film industry (Fraser, 2008, p. 174). While it is true that Hollywood is not universally accepted, it would be naive to reject it as a major source of American power. The fact that Disney is a billion-dollar corporation with streams in 133 countries shows its worldwide significance (Watson, 2019; Walt Disney Company, 2020).

Finally, and probably most importantly, movies influence people's perspectives and views of the world. This is far more evident in the work of Walt Disney since the corporation primarily attracts a youthful demographic whose viewpoints have been shown to be impacted by the films they see (Hurley, 2005, p. 221-222). It also has an effect on the broader public. Foucault contends, as Hall illustrates, that representation (for example, in movies) constitutes an element of the acceptable discourse resulting in understanding about the portrayed subject. This knowledge generation through representation may also be viewed as a display of power with one group over the other (Foucault, as cited in Hall, 1997, pp. 260-261). As a result, analytically examining representation in films is vital since it impacts people's understanding of what is depicted, in this case, the Middle East. It becomes critical to develop films with realistic portrayals and overcome prejudices in order to prevent perpetuating knowledge rooted in Western hegemony and power. Subsequent generations will be educated to begin their life with an unbiased view, resulting in an open-minded future world. This study can assist in determining under what conditions people are therefore inclined to make films that

appropriately portray populations of people or places, as well as how to encourage realistic depiction on screen.

4. Method

This chapter presents the methodology adopted in this study to examine the representation of the Middle East in *Aladdin* (1992 & 2019).

4.1. Qualitative research

Due to the fact that imagology is a subjective field of study that is difficult to quantify, a qualitative research technique was adopted for the present study. Dörnyei (2007) refers to qualitative research as a "language-based analysis" (p. 243) since words are utilised to analyse and convey the major results rather than numbers (p. 25). Furthermore, qualitative research is iterative, which means that the researcher swings back and forth between data gathering, analysis, and interpretation depending on the findings throughout the process (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 243). The qualitative research that has been used in this study to address the research topic and sub-questions is a content analysis focusing on the appearance, behaviour, values and language use of different characters in the two versions of *Aladdin* (see Section 4.3. for specifics).

4.2. Materials

The first movie is the animated *Aladdin* (1992). This film was directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. The duration of the film is one hour and thirty minutes, and it was released on November 25, 1992. The second movie is the live-action remake *Aladdin* (2019), which was directed by Guy Ritchie. The duration of this film is two hours and eight minutes, and it was released on May 24, 2019. The original movie posters are depicted in Image 1 (see below). These films were selected due to the time interval between the two films, allowing for a comparison to be made in the auto- and hetero-image development.

Image 1. Original movie posters for Aladdin (1992) (left) and Aladdin (2019) (right).

4.3. Procedure

In terms of the procedure, this study aims at following the methodology described in Dörnyei (2007) and Section 4.1. to gain meaningful insights into the auto- and the hetero-image of *Aladdin* (1992 & 2019). The following figure represents the research design as well as the research project progress (see Figure 1).
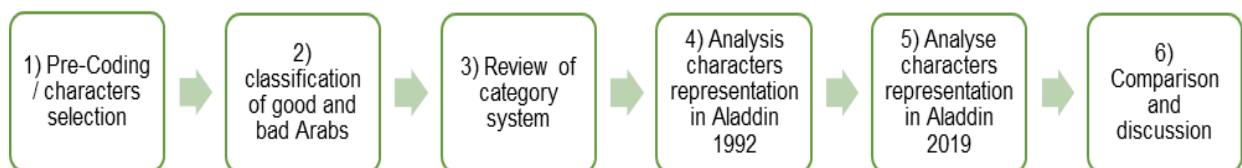
Figure 1: Procedure of the analysis employed in this thesis.

Firstly, the two films were viewed entirely and basic remarks on the narrative, setting, and major theme were made while viewing. Secondly, each film was re-watched and a character list was created, paying close attention to the roles they were performing. The prominent characters that were observed were regarded as 'good' if they had a collaborative connection with the protagonist(s) (i.e.

Aladdin and Jasmine). Characters that are perceived as being antagonistic to the protagonist(s) were labelled as being 'bad' (i.e. Jafar) (see Table 1 and Table 2). It is worth noting that the labels 'good' and 'bad' are rather black and white; however, as Alsultany (2019) notes "the bad Arabs are ugly and have foreign accents while the good Arabs – Aladdin and Jasmine – possess European features and white American accents" (https://theconversation.com/how-the-new-aladdin-stacks-up-against-a-century-of-hollywood-stereotyping-115608). The contents in Table1 and Table 2 are based on the observations by the author of this thesis after watching the two movies.

Table 1. Characters list of 'bad' Arabs in Aladdin 1992 & 2019.

				Bad Arabs		
	Character	**Role in the film**	**Appearance**	**Behaviour and values**	**Accent**	**Additional information**
1	**Jafar**	Antagonist	Constant cunning face features, wicked eyes, darker skin, hooked nose, defined facial structure, and distinctive facial hairstyle are all apparent ethnic qualities.	Cunning, deceitful, and selfish. Arrogance mentality	Strong, deep-toned, and well-spoken English accent	More than any other character, he is driven by a desire for riches and power. Ready to take benefit of Princess and the King without remorse
2	**Peddler**	Minor/supporting character	a bald, short, thin man with tanned skin	a cunning merchant with a mysterious link to the Agrabah legends	Middle Eastern accent	He functions as the primary interaction with the viewer
3	**Merchant**	Minor/ supporting character	A large and terrifying man	Aggressive, backwards and a greedy man	Middle Eastern accent	
4	**Old Lady**	Minor/supporting character	Fat woman with a red lipstick	She is a cheerful middle-aged woman who is fascinated by Aladdin.	Middle Eastern accent	She considers Aladdin to be "rather tasty," a statement she is extremely happy to say out loud .

Table 2. Characters list of 'good' Arabs in Aladdin 1992 & 2019.

				Good Arabs		
	Character	**Role in the film**	**Appearance**	**Behaviour and values**	**Accent**	**Additional information**
1	**Aladdin**	Protagonist	No beard, a young guy with pale skin and little Arabic traits.	Unrestricted, modest, and evasive	The accent of a young American	An orphaned Arabic boy who survives by stealing food. He reminds the audience of Disney's Robin Hood
2	**Jasmine**	Protagonist	A typical beautiful young princess. Revealing costumes	Charming, honest, and perceptive	American female accent	

After codifying the characters as 'good' or 'bad', the researcher searched for the most remarkable features in the representation of 'good' and 'bad' characters and formed categories based on the traits discovered.

Based on the above preliminary analysis, the hypotheses were then identified and additional relevant theories were incorporated into the theoretical framework. As a result, the depiction of the two prominent cultures in *Aladdin* were ascribed as the auto-image represented by Arabs with American characteristics and the hetero-image represented by Arabs with Middle Eastern traits. In order to answer the sub-questions presented in Chapter 3, the following four categories, consisting of different sub-categories, were chosen to investigate the representation of 'good' and 'bad' Arabs in the two *Aladdin* films:

1. Appearance characteristics: *attire, make-up, skin colour a*nd *hair colour*

2. Behavioural characteristics: *aggressiveness, motivation* and *intelligence*

3. Value characteristics: *satisfaction* and *greediness*

4. Language characteristics: *accent* used

In order to consult a uniform – more objective – measure to delve into the specifics of the representations of the hero characters, the antagonist and the minor characters, this study adapted

Mastro & Greenberg's (2000) bipolar adjective variables (p. 694) to compare the appearance, behavioural, value and linguistic characteristics of the main characters in the two versions of *Aladdin*. These categories were chosen because they allow for a thorough examination of the auto- and the hetero-image based on the outwardly appearance of characters and their personality traits (i.e. internal characteristics). Moreover, they allow identification of not only the morality in the movie but also it provides a link to the nonverbal-verbal indicators of the characters. As a result, these labels provide a good opportunity to approach the 'good' and 'bad' characters in the movies in a systematic manner; these categories will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and 6.

5. Analysis

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of *Aladdin* (1992) and the live-action *Aladdin* (2019). Both films are examined separately in their respective sections; each section is divided into four sub-sections that discuss the qualitative aspects discussed in Chapter 4.

5.1. Qualitative analysis of characters represented in *Aladdin* (1992)

5.1.1. Appearance characteristics in *Aladdin* (1992)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, characters who were assigned Middle Eastern appearance characteristics, such as the Peddler, the Old Lady and the Guards, were given characteristics that resemble the hetero-image the audience has of the Arab world and consequently, stereotypically considered 'bad' Arabs. Specifically, Arab merchants and guards had teeth gaps, big noses, huge stomachs, and shaggy brows in various pictures, e.g. 0:06:50 or 0:18:32, making it easy to identify them as the 'bad' guys. The Peddler appears at the beginning of the movie as a bald man with tanned skin, a thin black goatee, and a rectangular moustache with a triangle gap at his philtrum (00:01:47). His outfit is basic, consisting of a floor-length sky-blue robe, a red belt knotted around his waist, and brown sandals. The Peddler's attire is most notable for his comically huge white turban, which is double the size of his own head (see Image 2). Another evidence of the negative stereotypical representation of the characters with Middle East characteristics is the appearance of the Old Lady as an ugly elderly lady. She is assigned huge, with overexaggerated characteristics such as big lips and breasts, teeth spaces, and ugly makeup. She is given a non-provocative outfit without any accessories (see Image 2).

Image 2. The Peddler and Old Lady in Aladdin (1992).

On the other hand, characters who were assigned American appearance characteristics, such as Jasmine and Aladdin, were given characteristics that resemble the auto-image of the audience which represents the 'good' Arabs. The depiction of the protagonist Aladdin is obviously westernised. He is depicted as a conventionally attractive young man with broad shoulders, black, untidy hair, big matching eyebrows, and brown eyes. Moreover, he is of middle height and has a dark skin colour. However, in comparison to the characters, he is pale in complexion (see Image 3). In the same way, Jasmine's appearance is intended to be westernised, opposite to the Old Lady, Jasmine is presented as a stunning young woman with a seductive, sensual body. Jasmine is a thin young woman of medium height, her skin is olive, her cheekbones are high, her eyes are brown with long lashes, and her hair is straight and thick, reaching her thighs. Jasmine's provocative casual dress was inspired by Arabian harem women and was meant to be simple. She's wearing a sky blue (later turquoise) crop top with sewn-in off-the-shoulder straps that display her stomach and navel, matching puffy slacks with a light-blue V-shaped waistband, and cerulean curled shoes. With this attire, she wears full accessories (see Image 3), and her hair is styled in a two-part ponytail with matching teal bands that end in a little swirl. Moreover, Jasmine's character is also used in a portrayal of over-sexualization of Middle Eastern

women; with her physical features, she employs her sexuality to attract Jafar to distract him in order to obtain the lamp by complementing his height, complexion, beard, and gapped teeth (1:16:49).

Image 3. Aladdin (left) and Jasmine (right) in Aladdin (1992).

The self-image as represented by the contrast between the 'good' and 'bad' characters allow for the majority-Western audience to empathise and identify with good characters because Aladdin and Jasmine seem more like them and look closer to their norms. In contrast to the image represented by the Old Lady and the Peddler, the audience would prefer not to look like them, making them an out-group rather than an in-group.

5.1.2. Behavioural characteristics in *Aladdin* (1992)

The behavioural characteristics of characters identified as 'bad' Arabs display higher frequencies of aggressiveness (viz. primitive and backwards in contrast to the protagonists). For example, the Arab guards pursue Aladdin throughout the city, hurling swords at him when he stole a small loaf of bread (0:07:38). This behaviour is recurrent for 'bad' Arabs, and can be highlighted by one moment, namely when Jasmine first goes to the marketplace; she notices a hungry child and offers her a fruit from a vendor. The shopkeeper stops her and demands money as she tries to move further. Jasmine is unable to do so and attempts to explain that she lacks money but can obtain them from the palace. The Arab seller grabs her hand, draws his sword, and demands, "Do you know what the penalty

for stealing is?" (0:18:42), implying that chopping off people's hands is a regular punishment in the Middle East for stealing. Instances where the guards attempted to drown Aladdin or when Jafar stated that Aladdin was beheaded for his offences continue the motif of aggressive 'bad' Arabs throughout the film (1:03:07 and 0:24:39). These behaviours imply that the Middle East's judicial system is backwards and that its folks are harsh.

On the other hand, Aladdin is characterised as an urchin; he is shown as a little thief who must deceive market merchants in order to obtain food or fruit, but he is a kind and generous thief. For example, in the 'One jump' song he sings "Gotta eat to live, gotta steal to eat. Tell you all about it when I got the time!" (00:07:44). He displayed satisfaction in fleeing the harsh guards with his sidekick Abu, in an attempt to find fun in the trials of his day-to-day life as a homeless young man despite the fact that he is compelled to steal for survival. On the other hand, Aladdin's robberies are depicted as necessary, yet he was also willing to give up his food in order to help starving children (00:06:14). This example of Aladdin's selflessness is a recurrent theme which is demonstrated multiple times during the film, particularly for the benefit of Jasmine, and most notably at Genie. In other words, Aladdin's acts and personality are regarded as less morally corrupt than that of the thieves and guards in the marketplace because he only takes food to survive. Moreover, Aladdin's 'violence' is more geared towards outsmarting shopkeepers and guards as opposed to their responses to him (and Jasmine). In doing so, the 'bad' Arabs (viz. hetero-image) are shown as less intelligent, and more violent, than the auto-image. In terms of motivation, both 'bad' and 'good' Arabs are seen to be actively in pursuit of their goals. The major contrast between the hetero- and auto-image arises from the nature of the goals and the means by which these are attained.

5.1.3. Value characteristics in *Aladdin* (1992)

Jafar, the main antagonist in *Aladdin*, is presented as a deeply immoral monster who would kill anybody who stands in the way of his evil plans. In this manner, this character embodies the

satisfaction and greediness of the group of 'bad' Arabs the best. His need for self-satisfaction and greediness can be seen in the opening scene (00:05:01), when Jafar shows no remorse in sending Gazeem, a thief and murderer working for him, to his death in the Cave of Wonders; Jafar wanted the magic lamp so he could be an all-powerful wizard and sultan of Agrabah, yet he did not want to retrieve the lamp himself presumably because he knows the Cave would not let him in, yet he simply asserts that "Gazeem was obviously less than worthy" in a dry tone (00:05:50). Throughout the film, Jafar is portrayed as a peaceful schemer and earns the trust of everyone around him until he obtains possession of Genie's lamp; he then becomes arrogant, dictatorial, and angry with his people.

Contrastingly, Aladdin is shown to underestimate his own value; despite being a typically cheerful and fun-loving character, Aladdin was frequently discriminated against in Agrabah as he was seen as a worthless member of society. Aladdin finally believed such accusations and he considered himself as undeserving of Princess Jasmine's affections, believing she deserved someone of greater status, i.e. someone who could provide for her. These concerns drove Aladdin to engage in undesirable behaviour such as lying compulsively, breaking commitments, and concealing his actual nature under the disguise of 'Prince Ali'. Once again, showing the auto-image encompassing Arab in a less morally corrupt light as opposed to the hetero-image; Aladdin only did those things out of self-sacrifice for Jasmine's happiness and future, never out of greediness for her riches or his desire to not be a street rat anymore. However, as Aladdin is robbed of all of his aid (including magic and the assistance of his friends) during the climax of the plot, he devises an attempt by himself to save the city. He does this by employing his wit, and he triumphs in the conflict. Following these experiences, Aladdin comes to terms with his situation, and decides not to keep living a lie by accepting himself; a development Jafar does not go through.

In a nutshell, the contrast between the protagonists and the antagonists in *Aladdin* (1992) is best seen in the morals of the 'good' and 'bad' in terms of greed vs. humility and egoism vs. selflessness.

5.1.4. The linguistic representation in *Aladdin* (1992)

One of the most evident linguistic differences of the hetero- and auto-image pertaining to the Arabs in the films is their accents while speaking English. Accents are used to build up good or bad characters. Specifically, 'bad' Arab characters show a bias towards foreign accented Englishes and the 'good' Arabs drift more towards an inner-circle variety of English, in this case, the General American accent – which in the context of these films is considered accentless. In the speech of villains, linguistic stereotypes are particularly prevalent; the Merchant and guards have a strong Arabic accented English. The most distinctive features of the Arabic accented English is the use of voiced /b/ instead of the aspirated /p/[1]. For example, in the marketplace scene (00:16:26) the /p/ is realised as /b/ in 'pay' by the merchant while Jasmine pronounces this allophone in standard GA manner (00:16:28). Moreover, hetero-image characters, such as the Peddler, use a trilled /r/ in words like 'rewarded' and 'rare' in the opening scene. Additionally, the Peddler released the fricative /ð/, indexed by the combination of the letters (th), as /d/ in 'this' in the opening scene; this is not the case for the auto-image representing characters. Lastly, the different stress patterns predominantly distinguish characteristics of the characters with Arabic accented English. Notably, the Peddler uses stress placement at the final syllables of the words in the first scene. This is due to the influence of the Arabic language stress which has a constant set of rules for stress placement compared to the varied stress placement in the English language. By giving Aladdin an American accent, and him being one of the primary heroes in the film, this allows the spectator to identify him from the antagonists, and identify with him as an auto-image representation of the target audience.

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[1] See Munro (1993) and Port & Mitleb (1983) for more on differences between Arabic and English vowels and consonants.

5.2. Qualitative analysis of characters represented in *Aladdin* (2019)

5.2.1. Appearance characteristics in *Aladdin* (2019)

Disney was applauded for employing Middle Eastern actors in the majority of starring roles in *Aladdin* (2019). As a result, Arabs in this rendition do not have stereotypical exaggerated characteristics because they are played by real people. For example, *Aladdin* (2019) was narrated by a Mariner (the Genie in his human form, played by actor Will Smith) who is wearing authentic Middle Eastern clothes, some pieces of accessories, no prosthetics and his natural (facial) hair (see Image 4). The Old Lady in *Aladdin* (2019) has larger breasts, is more curvy, and is a bit more elderly in comparison to the princess look of Jasmine, thereby rendering her as a representation of 'bad' Arabs (see Image 2 and 4) due to the recurrent depiction of Middle Eastern women as either ugly or hyper-sexualised; by presenting Middle Eastern women like this a distance is created between the audience and the hetero-image.

Image 4. The Mariner(left) and the Old Lady (right) in Aladdin (2019).

In general, the characters' outfits are varied and Agrabah is described as a "melting pot" of many ethnicities due to its ideal place near the sea; it is a seaport where people from all nations and cultures come together (0:01:55 and 0:16:32). This live-action movie allows a wide range of realistic and authentic Middle Eastern and South Asian outfits to be displayed. Pyrans of Afghani, Middle

Eastern clothing, textiles brought from the Middle East, Indian textiles and other items can be seen. Furthermore, every Arab male can be seen in distinct turbans from the Gulf (see Image 5).

Image 5. Middle Eastern outfits in Aladdin (2019).

On the other hand, the protagonists of the film represented by Aladdin and Jasmine were assigned American characteristics. They resemble the auto-image of the audience which represents the 'good' Arabs. For instance, Aladdin is westernised; he is shown as a young, attractive, athletic, contemporary man with light-coloured skin compared to the other characters. Aladdin has no beard, which gives him a more 'Western' image. Aladdin's attire is a comfortable one that also portrays his status as an impoverished guy (see Image 6), yet his attire is traditional Middle Eastern garments. Similarly, in contrast to the Old Lady, Jasmine's look is designed to be westernised, portrayed by a British-Indian actress Naomi Scott, instead of a Middle Eastern actress. This ties back to the categorisation of the Old Lady as a 'bad' character due to her traits as curvier than Jasmine; the division between the two 'types' of Arab women presented here reflects the physical traits associated with Western beauty standards: thin, young, attractive and modest. The audience will therefore not (want to) identify with the Old Lady since she is curvier and less young than Jasmine thereby creating a distance between the auto- and hetero-image. Furthermore, Jasmine's character is not very sexualised in *Aladdin* (2019): she has

conservative clothing resembles that of royalty and less princess-like facial characteristics, namely with natural eyes and lashes (see Image 6).

Image 6. Aladdin (left) and Jasmine (right) in Aladdin (2019).

5.2.2. Behavioural characteristics in *Aladdin* (2019)

In *Aladdin* (2019) characters labelled as 'bad' Arabs have greater rates of aggression in their behaviour in contrast to the protagonists in the movie. For example, in the marketplace scene when Jasmine offered the young child a piece of bread, the shopkeeper, with an angry face, tried to take her bracelet as a sort of compensation for her deed (00:06:55). On many occasions, the guards keep pursuing Aladdin and somebody can be seen to be thrown into a hole as a penalty (00.09.16). These examples promote the impression that 'bad' characters – the hetero-image – are characters with dubious morality where aggression is used to fix issues. With regards to Aladdin, played by Mena Masoud, he is portrayed as the main protagonist and a depiction of a 'good' Arab. He is depicted as a generous thief who steals food and other items to pawn off for food (00:05:53). Additionally, he seems to have a good relationship in this film with the vendors which shows more satisfaction in his daily circumstances in an attempt to find fun in the trials as a homeless young guy.

The second character representing the auto-image, Jasmine, was also depicted as an intelligent woman compared to the hetero-image characters in this film as she was constantly using her smarts to solve problems. Culminating to the point where she used several tactics to uncover the truth about Prince Ali by using maps and listening to the way he talked to her. Overall, Jasmine is shown as an intelligent woman who vows to resist everything she does not desire. Her major goal was to advance to the position as a female ruler, which was against custom and law. Disney's efforts to include western philosophy, e.g. feminism through the character Princess Jasmine can be seen here, with Jasmine being presented as a lady who aspires to be a country leader. This can be seen at (00:22:05) where Jasmine is depicted having a disagreement with her father. She claims she has the potential to be a leader; however, her father interrupts her and says she cannot be a sultan since this (i.e. women as rulers) has not happened in the kingdom's 1,000-year history. The audience is made aware by the above scene that women's independence is still severely restricted in this hetero context, even for ladies from well-respected families.

5.2.3. Value characteristics in *Aladdin* 2019

In the live-action movie 'bad' characters are displayed as characters with less morals, e.g. they show selfishness and greed for power without any selflessness. Played by Marwan Kenzari, Jafar is the primary antagonist in the *Aladdin* plot line. Jafar sees himself as better than everybody else and deserving of the rule of Agrabah, although he had achieved most of his goals via a series of dubious and greedy actions. Jafar required the lamp to achieve his longstanding goal and support his self-importance. This can be seen in the desert scene where a contrast is drawn between the fact that Jafar was irritated by Aladdin claiming that he was a thief similar to himself in the past; Jafar insists that he is a different sort of thief (00:30:41). Although it is true that thieves are evil, it is obvious from this interaction that Jafar attempted to distinguish himself as a thief by pursuing a larger goal of stealing a kingdom rather than stealing small items like Aladdin had done. Jafar's character is constantly angry,

e.g. this can be seen in the film scene where his servant informs him that he is only an advisor to the throne (00:12:15) or when the Sultan informs him of his status at 00:21:10, as seen by his facial expression (see Image 7). The evidence of his greediness and self-centeredness are hallmarks of the 'bad' Arabs and support the good qualities of the 'good' auto-image encompassing Arabs, i.e. the jolliness of Aladdin. Moreover, Jafar's character shows misogynistic traits that are often used as indices of 'backwardness' in non-Western societies. This can be seen in the character's over-idealized the concept that a woman could not be the sultan of the land but that a man with experience could when undervaluing Princess Jasmine's leadership abilities (00:22:17).

Image 7. Jafar in Aladdin (2019)

In contrast, the audience is invited to identify themselves with the values of Aladdin who is brave, honest, confident and respectful. Aladdin is fearless; he is given the ability to take big risks and make quick, accurate decisions. For example, Aladdin has put himself in danger (00:27:36) by entering the palace without permission; it was undoubtedly a courageous move in a sincere attempt to return Jasmine's bracelet. That is the only reason why he must conduct such a dangerous and unsafe action while ignoring the consequences that may occur, again making his actions less immoral. Moreover, Aladdin never lies about his monkey stealing Jasmine's jewellery. In fact, the monkey took Jasmine's bracelet without Aladdin's permission. As a result, everything Aladdin stated was correct. This emphasises Aladdin's sincere character and demonstrates trustworthiness, honesty, and the ability to maintain a commitment.

Aladdin has a distinct sense of competence and self-assurance compared to Jafar. His competence is defined as his ability to make accurate value judgements not devise evil schemes. For example, as Jasmine and Aladdin conversed at 00:14:00 after running away from the market, it was clear that both Jasmine and Aladdin had accomplished something together by trusting each other yet not knowing the other intimately. This shows an intraconnectedness in the auto-image of the characters and boosts their positive qualities as opposed to that of the hetero-image. Not only Aladdin but also Princess Jasmine exemplifies the need for social assistance for the hetero-image (i.e. starving children) and the auto-image (i.e. each other). By assisting those in need, this positive attitude expresses sympathy of the auto-image.

5.2.4. The linguistic characteristics in *Aladdin* (2019)

In the *Aladdin* live-action version, one of the most noticeable linguistic disparities of the hetero- and auto-image in the movie is the characters' accent. In the movie some 'bad' characters have clear Middle Eastern accented English, such as the Merchant, the Old Lady and Jafar who represent the 'Other'. However, the Mariner, a good character played by Will Smith, an African American actor, uses his native vernacular English; in other words, he does not adapt a GA or a Middle Eastern accent. Conversely, the protagonists of the film put on an American accent, for example Mena Massoud who plays Aladdin is a Canadian actor and originally from Egypt; surprisingly, he did not use his regular accent in the film. Similarly, Princess Jasmine (Naomi Scott), put on an American accent regardless of her British-Indian background.

The live-action movie reflects a variety of accents in order to avoid stereotypical (linguistic) representations; however, this was not completely successful considering the 'good' Arabs in the movie spoke in an American accent. The audience are exposed to a variety of accents which reduce their prejudice against the 'Other', however they are still invited to associate themselves with the auto-image represented by the 'good' Arabs.

6. Discussion

In general, when comparing the two movies, the live-action *Aladdin* (2019) remake changed superficial points from *Aladdin* (1992), such as the appearance characteristics and adding more contemporary musical elements to it. Nevertheless, at its core the live-action remake kept what made the film problematic. This remake could have been an opportunity to not only remove stereotypes from the film but to also embrace and celebrate the contributions of Muslim, Middle Eastern and South Asian Americans in the context of an incredibly divisive political climate. This chapter responds to the research questions formulated in Chapter 3 and discusses the above findings.

6.1. Appearance representation

This section responds to the thesis's first sub-question, namely *how are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the appearance characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?*

One of the most prominent changes between the two versions of *Aladdin* was the portrayal of the 'bad' Arabs. In *Aladdin* (2019) 'bad' Arabs did not have stereotypical exaggerated characteristics because they're played by real people. This is a step forward from the original version's racist representations. For example, the Peddler from Aladdin (1992) was substituted for a Mariner in Aladdin (2019) with less exaggerated facial characteristics. More instances of the less negative representation of the 'bad' characters in *Aladdin* (2019) is the appearance of the Old Lady as a less elderly, less ugly and with more natural makeup. Similar to *Aladdin* (1992), she is given a non-provocative outfit without any accessories (see Image 2). In the animated movie, characters like the Peddler, the Old Lady, and the Guards, who were given exaggerated Middle Eastern appearance features, were thereby distanced from the audience's self-representation and were therefore stereotypically deemed 'evil' Arabs. The self-image makes the audience, which consists of a majority

of Western viewers, empathise more with the 'good' characters (Aladdin and Jasmine) because they look more like them; in contrast to the hetero-image. By portraying the Orient as incompatible with the West, the West creates a positive self-image and a negative image of the 'Other' (Said, 1978). In the live-action movie there is a noticeable step away from othering (Jackson, 2014) by removing some noticeable negative racial stereotypes and using realistic Middle Eastern fashion for both 'bad' and 'good' Arab characters. This is an attempt to show the 'bad' Arabs in the movie not as the out-group. Conversely, 'good' characters in the movie still had a westernised look; however, the distance between their appearance and the 'bad; Arabs' appearance was minimised not only due to the switch from animation to actual actors, but also in an attempt to motivate the audience not to look at Arabs as an out-group and reduce the stereotypes that existed in the animation movie. This was clearly shown by Princess Jasmine's less princess-like facial appearance and in her less provocative outfits that fit the Islamic culture.

6.2. Behavioural representation

This section responds to the thesis's second sub-question, namely *how are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the behavioural characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?*

In both movies, characters have been labelled as 'bad' based on their behaviour; hetero-image Arabs have a higher frequency of aggressive behaviour compared to the protagonists, as evidenced by the Merchant and the guards. This behaviour suggests that the legal system in Middle East is archaic and that its citizens are harsh. Beller & Leerssen (2007) elaborated on this concept, stating that a culture's identity may be recognised by behavioural patterns in which nations display their unique, frequently varying reactions to diverse living circumstances and collective experiences. By depicting the Middle East in a certain light to overemphasise certain aspects of that community may have a significant impact on the audience's thinking and consideration of such traits when making judgements

and assessments about the Middle East (Collingwood et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the degree of aggressiveness and violence portrayed by 'bad' Arabs is minimised in *Aladdin* (2019). For instance, instead of chopping off Jasmine's hand (*Aladdin*, 1992) the shopkeeper tries to collect her bracelet in *Aladdin* (2019, 00:06:55). In both movies, robberies are shown as heavily punished despite the protagonist's need to steal for survival. In other words, Aladdin's actions and personality are seen as less morally evil than those of other thieves and guards in the marketplace. Furthermore, Aladdin's 'aggression' is aimed at outwitting shopkeepers and guards rather than their reactions to him (and Jasmine). As a result, the 'bad' Arabs (i.e. the hetero-image) are shown as being less clever and more aggressive than the auto-image. This portrayal goes with Said's (1978; 2003) notion of Orientalism, which is a key issue in understanding how the Middle East is portrayed in popular culture. His argument is that Western perceptions of the Orient are distorted by prejudices that serve to maintain Western supremacy. By portraying the Orient as incompatible with the West, the West creates a positive self-image and a negative image of the 'Other' (pp. 1-3). This can be seen by the incorporation of Western philosophy as "rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding true ideals, without innate scepticism" (Said, 1978, p. 49) that would allow Jasmine to marry for love and/or become sultan.

6.3. Value representation

This section responds to the thesis's third sub-question, namely *how are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the value characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?*

In the live-action film of *Aladdin*, 'bad' characters are still depicted as characters with less morals, such as selfishness and thirst for power, as in the animation film. Jafar, the antagonist, is the most prominent representative of the 'bad' characters. Although thieves are inherently bad, it is clear from the exchange between Gazeem and Jafar (00:05:50) that Jafar wanted to set himself apart from 'lowly' crooks by pursuing a broader objective of taking a kingdom rather than stealing minor goods.

This shows that the portrayal chosen for the hetero-image is more or less in line with the beliefs of individuals involved in the film's production on how the Middle East manifests itself (Nadel, 1997, p. 185). In comparison to Jafar, Aladdin exudes a strong feeling of expertise and self-assurance. His capability is determined by his capacity to make proper value judgments rather than invent bad plots. As a result, the 'other' is shown as a sinner in comparison to Americans, instilling a sense of superiority by slandering an entire people and reinforcing prejudices. The hetero-image presented by Disney is strengthened in terms of imagology by the contrast they uphold between themselves as spectators of Arabic culture in Agrabah. The findings of this study align with Belkhyr's (2013) assessment of how Disney imposes American ideals and prejudices on its audience while vilifying 'the East' and other 'Oriental' civilisations, similar to how Native Americans were represented for years (p. 1377).

6.4. Linguistic representation

This section responds to the thesis's fourth sub-question, namely *how are the auto-image and hetero-image constructed in the linguistic characteristics of the prominent characters in the two Aladdin films?*

The accents of the Arabs in the movies are one of the most obvious linguistic differences between the hetero- and auto-image depicted in the films as they create good and evil personalities. Specifically, in the animated movie 'bad' Arab characters were given foreign accented Englishes, but 'good' Arab characters were given an inner-circle variation of English, namely General American (GA). In the live-action movie there were a clear variation in the accent use of the characters, this was not only due to the fact that the actors spoke their own varieties of English, such as the Mariner, but it was also an attempt to reduce the problematic linguistic stereotypes from the first *Aladdin* (1997) which was widely criticised (Lippi-Green, 1997). This improvement in accent representation invites the audience to look at the 'Other' not as negatively as it was intended in the animated film but rather as varieties that should be considered respectably. However, the problem was not completely solved

due to the protagonists' clear standard American accent which was not their native accent. In particular, with regards to Princess Jasmine, Marzolph (2019) argued that Disney's choice to cast Naomi Scott, a British and Indian (rather than Middle Eastern) star, is another missed "golden opportunity [Disney] would have had] to change the [overall negative] portrayal and give children a counter narrative of a positive portrayal of Middle Easterners using Arab/Middle Eastern actors" (Awad, 2017, as cited in Marzolph, 2019, p 279). This highlights Disney's tendency to consider the American accent for its protagonists, moreover, supporting the fact that the audience are still invited to consider 'good' Arabs as an in-group where they belong together to the auto-image. As Shaheen (2003) observed, the use of accents allowed audiences to distinguish between the 'Western' protagonists and the 'Eastern'' antagonist. Therefore, the stereotypical representation of the accents used remained the same in both versions of *Aladdin*; however, this is more subtle in the live-action film.

6.5. The bigger picture: Auto- and hetero-image in *Aladdin* (1997 & 2019).

This section examines the results and discussion of the four sub-questions to respond to the thesis' main research question, namely *how do the appearance, behavioural, value and linguistic characteristics of the most prominent characters in Aladdin (1992) and Aladdin (2019) support the dichotomy between the auto- and hetero-image of the cultures involved?*

Around 1992, the Middle East was frequently depicted in the media in a terrible way (Arshad et al., 2015, p. 12); films from the same time depicted individuals from the Middle East in numerous stereotypes, varying from sheikhs with harems to terrorists (Shaheen, 2003, p. 178 and 180). A review of 1992 movie releases reveals a lack of variety in performers and plots, indicating a lack of representation in general. In 2019, the situation has shifted slightly: movies that contain more diverse casts, such as *Black Panther* (2018) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), have done well at the box office and in the press. Furthermore, the rise of social media sites has provided a place for minority groups to have their voices heard (Georgiou, 2013). It also allows users to interact (actively or unintentionally)

with societal concerns and individuals they may not have encountered before, such as those from the Middle East. With regards to *Aladdin,* this means that individuals were able to obtain their own information (online) in 2019 and no longer had to depend on traditional media outlets. As a result, societal changes and pressures of an online era may have played a role in the 2019 *Aladdin*'s decreased Orientalism.

From the analysis and results of this research, it is evident that *Aladdin* (2019) has made progress in terms of casting, depiction of Arab women, right use of Middle Eastern cultural components, and removal of openly racist parts from the first film. Disney made a concerted attempt to portray the Middle East in a more accurate light by obtaining input from a council of Middle Eastern professionals. Nevertheless, some Orientalist concepts, such as overgeneralization, brutality, and the Middle East's backwardness persist. Surprisingly, the Orientalism seen in *Aladdin* (2019) does not exactly correspond to Kerboua's (2016) description of what Orientalism looks like post-2001. Neo-Orientalism, according to Kerboua (2016), contains traits such as a concentration on Islam, Muslim people in Western society, and the belief that the Middle East is a danger to Israel and the West. While there are instances where the Middle East is depicted as a danger, such as when Arabs are seen organising invasions and persuading people on the street to steal, there is no explicit mention of the Middle East attacking Western nations. All these indicators are rather modest. Furthermore, the film does not emphasize Islam, which is an important aspect of Neo-Orientalism (Kerboua, 2016, p. 21-22). Whether there is a new ongoing shift in the concept of Orientalism is unclear since establishing the Middle East as a danger is still in the film.

As a result of the awareness of Orientalism in *Aladdin* (1992), explicit stereotypes were replaced in 2019 with substantial attempts to portray the Middle East actors and genuinely reflect the diverse Middle East cultures using settings and decorations; Arab men were no longer represented with enormous noses and aggressive behaviour, and women were no longer hyper-sexualised.

Additionally, characters were able to use their own accents instead of exaggerating a foreign one. Furthermore, plot changes ensured that women were no more shown as weak and passive (e.g. Jasmine became a sultan). Although the Middle East remained shown as backward, foreign, and aggressive, it was no longer referred to as "barbaric" (00:01:57) and its cultural allusions portrayed other ethnicities. In terms of linguistic characteristics, the General American accent was still deemed an index for 'good' Arabs. Overall, the above mentioned findings support the fact that Disney as an American film production company, through the appearance, the behaviour, the value and the linguistic characteristics of the characters still reflects the self-representation of American culture in the film industry - despite minimising the discrepancy between the representation of 'the Other'. In this manner, the hetero-image is still used to support a 'good' auto-image.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary

The present paper looked into the representation of auto- and the hetero-image of Arabic cultures in the Disney classic *Aladdin (*1992), and its live-action adaptation *Aladdin* (2019) by means of qualitative method analysis. To conduct this research, the following research question was answered:

> *How do the appearance, behavioural, value and linguistic characteristics of the most prominent characters in Aladdin (1992) and Aladdin (2019) support the dichotomy between the auto- and hetero-image of the cultures involved?*

The live-action film takes a significant step forward from the animation version's racist portrayals. The distance between the heroes' appearance and the appearance of the other Arab characters was minimised not only due to the transition from animation to actual actors, but also in an attempt to encourage the audience not to view Arabs as an out-group and to reduce stereotypes that existed in the animation film. In both movies the 'bad' Arabs (i.e. the hetero-image) are depicted as behaving less intelligently and more violently than the auto-image. The movies produce a 'good' Western self-image and a negative picture of the 'Other' by portraying 'bad' Arabs as incompatible with the West (Said, 1978).

Similar to the behavioural characteristics, the 'bad' Arabs (i.e. the hetero-image) are depicted as having fewer values and morals than the auto-image in both films. Disney produces a good self-image and a negative hetero-image of the 'Other' by giving 'bad' Arabs less morally positive traits. The contrast they establish between the West as witnesses of Arabic culture in Agrabah strengthens the hetero-image of the Middle East. This is in line with Belkhyr's (2013) assessment of how Disney instils American beliefs and prejudices in its audience while vilifying 'the East' and other 'Oriental' civilisations (p. 1377).

Moreover, one of the most striking language contrasts between the hetero- and auto-image shown in the films is the Arabs' accents. The use of a GA accent in the animated *Aladdin* (1997) movie serves to establish particular positive and negative preconceptions about Arab characters; there was a clear variation in the accents used by the characters in the live-action film, which was not only due to the fact that the actors spoke their own dialects of English, such as the Mariner, but it was also an attempt to reduce the problematic linguistic stereotypes from the first *Aladdin* (1997) (Lippi-Green 1997). This increase in accent portrayal encourages viewers to view the 'Other' not in the negative light that the animated picture intended, but rather as a variety of people who should be respected. However, some characters' (specifically the protagonists) maintained (read: used) a standard American accent which was not their natural accent, thereby not addressing the main issue.

Overall, Disney is trying to translate current views on diversity and celebrate cultural heterogeneity in their movies. This study shows that Disney, over the span of three decades, progressed in their linguistic and appearance representation of minorities but not in the behavioural and moral aspects of the characters in their movies. The subtle (residual) differences between the protagonists and supporting characters maintain the dichotomy of the U.S. American auto representation via the construction of a hetero-image.

7.2. Limitations

The most prominent limitation of this study is that research into cultural representation is frequently subjective; findings are constantly influenced by the researcher's interpretation as well as preconceptions (Dörnyei, 2007). Additionally, the researcher is from the Middle East and her understanding of Arab representation is largely based on how the East views the West. However, the researcher experienced and trained in intercultural communication which helped in avoiding biases, as well as consulting academic sources on the matter (including those discussed in this thesis). Furthermore, this research had a limited amount of time to be carried out thereby limiting the scope of

the study. Nevertheless, the representation of national cultures in Disney's live-action adaptations is an area that has yet to be thoroughly examined and numerous questions remain for exploration.

7.3. Further research

The present paper investigated the representation of auto- and the hetero-image of the Arabic cultures in the Disney classic *Aladdin* (1992), and its live-action adaptation *Aladdin* (2019). However, there is little to no research on the shift from animation to live-action films, and the impact that this change may have on diversity and cultural representation in these types of films. Future studies could use the imagological approach to look at the transcripts of the two movies and explore in detail whether the discourse (i.e. words types, tone and formality) employed by the protagonists, antagonists and minor characters reflect similar or different stereotypes. Additionally, it could be beneficial to explore whether the films' subtitles in foreign languages reproduce the type of language-based stereotypes as that of the films' original language by using, e.g. the Haladian model (Halliday, in Munday, 2016). Moreover, follow-up studies could replicate the method used in the present study to examine the influence of age on stereotypes. Furthermore, there is a need to explore other recently released animated films produced by Disney as well as by other studios, such as Pixar and DreamWorks, to compare the representations of Arabic culture in recent years. It will be worth-while investigating if Disney follows through on the commitments that appear to be part of the already-taken measures.

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