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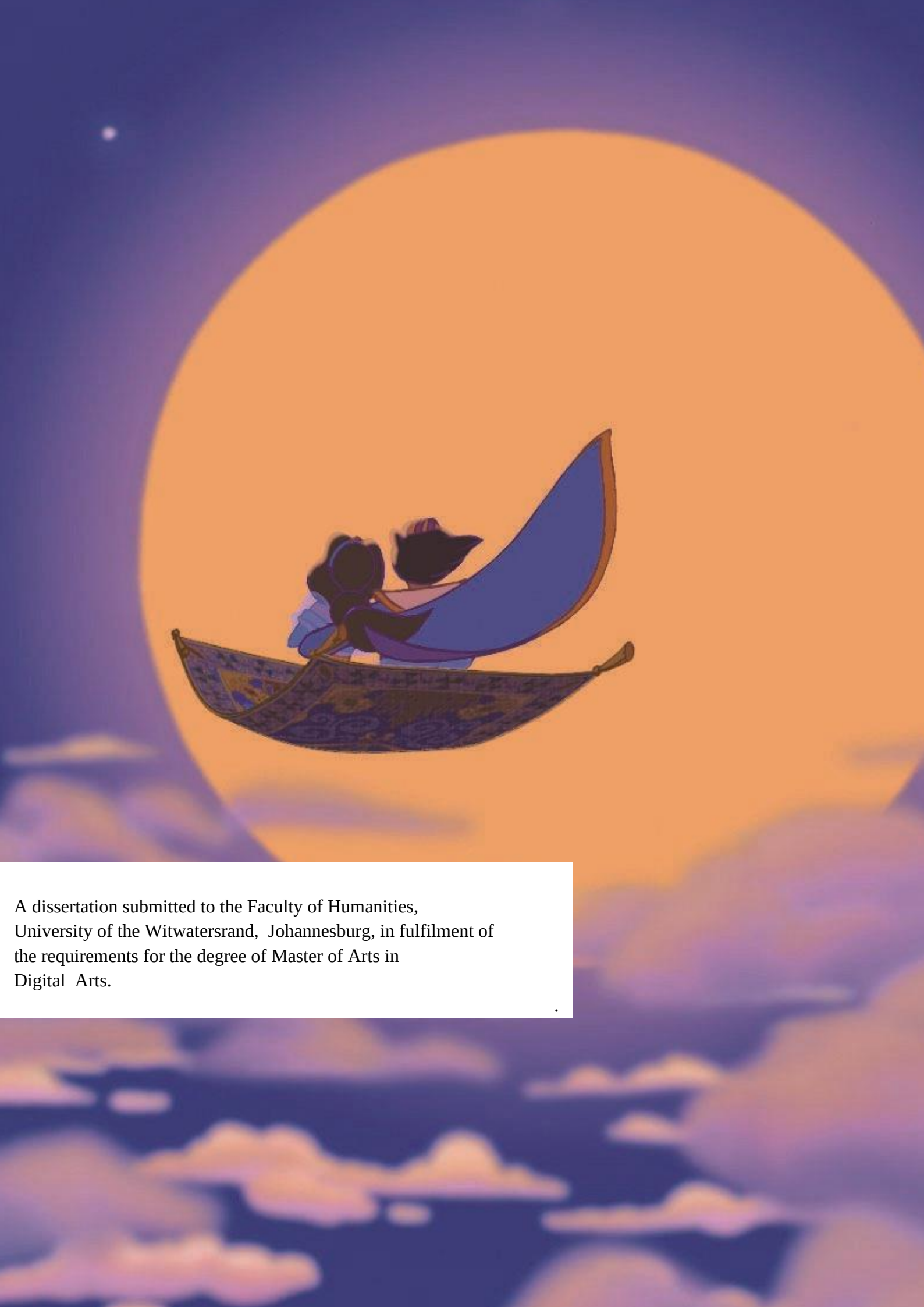
1,001 Arabian Slights: researching the visual representation of Arab Muslim people and themes through Orientalism in Disney's Aladdin (1992) and then using this research to develop a progressive retelling of the story

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Digital Arts.

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Master's Dissertation
University of the Witwatersrand
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UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

1,001 Arabian Slights:

Researching the visual representation of Arab Muslim people and themes through Orientalism in Disney's Aladdin (1992) and then using this research to develop a progressive retelling of the story.

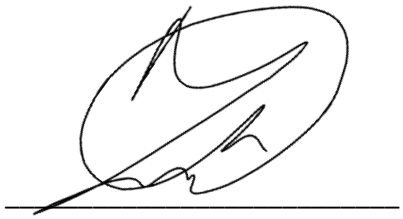
Abstract

This paper aims to shed light onto the shadows cast by the creation of the animated characters and settings in Aladdin (1992), and questions how these depictions may have shaped perceptions and inadvertently perpetuated harmful stereotypes. By shedding light on these aspects, the paper contributes to a critical evaluation of the broader implications of animated content in shaping societal attitudes and reinforcing cultural stereotypes.

Za’yaanah Albertyn

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation/thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Digital Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



07/03/2024

Waiver letter number: HRECNMW24/01/11

To **Kirsten,** my supervisor, you are not only a mentor but an inspiration in education and values. Thank you for pushing me to do my best. I am profoundly grateful to you. Your unwavering support, sage advice, and invaluable guidance throughout the difficult yet rewarding process of crafting this dissertation has been a blessing. Your commitment to academic excellence, passion for knowledge, and genuine interest in my intellectual growth have left a permanent mark on my academic journey and my life in general. Your mentorship has been a gift, and I am honoured to have had the privilege of working under your tutelage.

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To my **Yazeed**, I am aware that every milestone, every late-night epiphany, and every triumph over adversity bears the mark of your influence. Your patience, understanding, and encouragement have been the ink that filled the quill of my aspirations, allowing the words of this work to flow with a grace beyond measure. I love you.

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You are more than an academic institution; you are the very piece that has changed my life.

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With heartfelt thanks and immense love,

Za'yaanah (Zee) Albertyn

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For my mother and grandparents.

Bia and Granny.

You truly saw me.

Prologue

In the tapestry of my childhood, a chapter revolves around the animated masterpiece—Aladdin. As a young Muslim girl, Princess Jasmine, within its enchanted frames, was the first Disney character who resembled me, and embodied diversity absent from traditional fairy tales.

My parents bought a cherished VHS tape of Aladdin (1992), a relic in our home. Countless afternoons were spent rewinding, reliving favourite scenes, committing every song and gesture to memory. Aladdin, Jasmine, and their companions became more than characters; they were my companions, guides, and heroes. As the veil lifted, I perceived shadows beneath my beloved film. Aladdin (1992), once a symbol of representation for me, revealed unfortunate flaws. Subtle prejudices and stereotypes became apparent, casting a disheartening hue over cherished memories. Despite veiled offense, my attachment to Aladdin (1992) remained steadfast. It was a bittersweet loyalty, fuelled by the absence of other Arab Muslim representations achieving global recognition. I yearned for authentic characters and narratives mirroring my faith and heritage. Amidst complex emotions, a sense of betrayal arose. The film that sparked my imagination now fell short of authentic representation. Disney, a bastion of dreams, stumbled into perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Since this realization, I've been searching for an accurate and progressive portrayal of my faith in animation that can reach a mass audience. In my ongoing quest, I hope to discover narratives that not only celebrate my faith and heritage but also contribute to a more inclusive cinematic landscape. As I navigate the complexities of representation, I am driven by the belief that storytelling has the power to shape perceptions and foster understanding. My journey is not just a personal exploration but a collective endeavour to promote diverse portrayals that resonate with audiences worldwide, transcending the confines of stereotypes and fostering a true sense of connection and appreciation for our shared humanity.



Figure 1. A drawing of myself, watching Aladdin circa 2003 (1992)

Note from author:

Dear Reader,

Please note that the latter part of this written dissertation (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) should be read in conjunction with its accompanying artbook in order to fully conceptualise its views and understandings.

Thank you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet."

- *Rudyard Kipling*

I invite you to step into the enchanting world of Disney's *Aladdin (1992)*, where magic carpets soar through the Arabian nights and Genie's grant wishes amidst the dazzling spectacle of Agrabah. However, beyond the vibrant colours and musical crescendos lies a deeper exploration into the visual tapestry of this iconic 1992 animated film. In this paper, we embark on a thrilling journey through the visual dimensions of *Aladdin (1992)*, not merely to bask in the radiant glow of its animation, but to unravel the intricacies that may have inadvertently woven threads of racism and Islamophobia into the narrative fabric.

I will be critically dissecting the visual representations that have sparked discourse surrounding cultural sensitivity and stereotyping in the context of the animated film *Aladdin (1992)*.This paper aims to shed light onto the shadows cast by the creation of the animated characters and settings, and questions how these depictions may have shaped perceptions and inadvertently perpetuated harmful stereotypes. Prepare to embark on a magic carpet ride of critical analysis as we explore the unintended consequences of the visuals in Disney's *Aladdin (1992)*, unravelling layers of meaning that extend far beyond the whimsical surface of this beloved cinematic masterpiece.

Aladdin (1992), known for its vibrant animation and captivating storytelling, has been both praised for its entertainment value and criticised for its portrayal of Middle Eastern culture. (Gusain, 2023) Throughout the film, certain visual cues, character designs, and cultural references have been called into question for perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing negative biases. (Bowen, 2017) of These depictions can be seen in the exaggerated facial features, clothing, and settings, which may inadvertently reinforce harmful stereotypes about the Middle East and its people.

By examining these visual elements present in the film through *The Handbook for Visual Analysis: Visual Meaning: a Social Semiotic Approach* (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004) as a methodology for visually analysing *Aladdin (1992)* I seek to understand the implications they may have had on the wider discourse surrounding race and religion. The elements used in the film have the potential to shape the viewers' understanding and perception of Middle Eastern culture and the Islamic faith. This

analysis will provide a valuable opportunity to critically engage with the impact of visual storytelling and its role in perpetuating or challenging harmful narratives.

For my main theoretical lens, I will be referring to Edward Said's Orientalism. Edward Said's groundbreaking work, Orientalism (1978), challenges traditional Western perceptions and representations of the East. Said argues that the West has constructed a distorted and homogenized image of the Orient, perpetuated stereotypes and reinforcing power dynamics. Drawing on postcolonial theory, Said explores how the East has been portrayed as exotic, backward, and inferior, serving the interests of imperialistic endeavours. When analysing Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* through the lens of Orientalism, one can critically examine how the film might perpetuate or subvert these stereotypes. From the characters to the setting, *Aladdin (1992)* offers a rich ground for exploring Orientalist tropes and their implications, allowing for a nuanced examination of how popular culture contributes to shaping perceptions of the East. The film becomes a fascinating case study through which to dissect and question the prevailing narratives surrounding the representation of the Orient in Western media. For these reasons, I will be using Said's Orientalism as one of my main theoretical lenses while analysing *Aladdin (1992).*

Using this research, I have created an accompanying artbook that reimagines the visual elements of *Aladdin (1992)* in a more authentic and culturally wholesome manner. This artbook aims to showcase a version of the film's elements that aligns with cultural sensitivity, authenticity, and inclusivity. By carefully reinterpreting the character designs, settings, and cultural references, I intend to present an alternative visual narrative that reflects a deeper understanding and appreciation of Middle Eastern cultures, while avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes.

Through this paper and artbook project, I hope to encourage discussions on responsible and conscious representation in *visual* media. By examining the potential impact of visual elements in popular films like *Aladdin (1992)*, we can contribute to a more informed and inclusive approach to storytelling. This endeavour seeks to highlight the power of visuals in shaping perceptions, fostering empathy, and promoting cultural appreciation. Ultimately, it aims to challenge and transcend the limitations of past portrayals, paving the way for a more respectful and accurate representation of diverse cultures in art and media.

As we delve into the nuanced portrayal of the mystical Orient in Disney's *Aladdin (1992)*, it becomes evident that our exploration not only showcases on the film's cultural significance but also serves as a catalyst for fostering responsible representation in visual media, aligning with the broader aim of encouraging informed and inclusive storytelling.

It is imperative to include the background on where the narrative featured in the film originated from in intention to understand why it changed overtime to appeal to different audiences.Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* is based on Antoine Galland's translation of *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp (1704)* from his book of short stories titled 1001 nights.

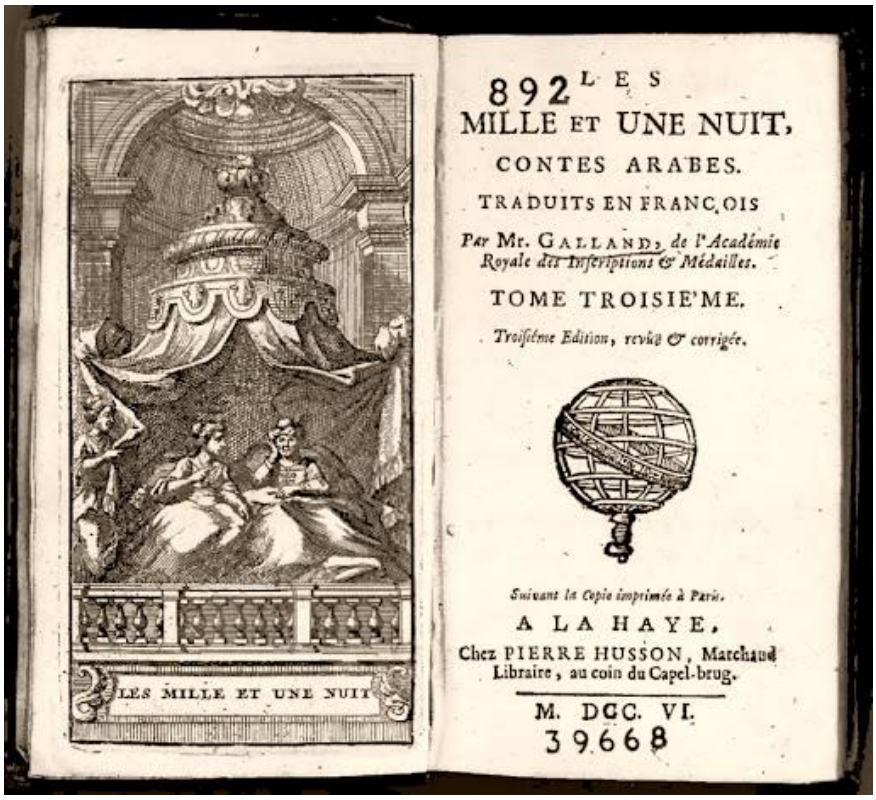


Figure 2. The Arabian Nights (Galland, 1704)

The animated film's relevance solidifies its place in pop culture even up to today with several contributing factors, many being the film's never-seen outlook into the mystical world of the Orient.

The original story is set in China and features a Chinese, Muslim, protagonist named Aladdin, who finds a magic lamp and is helped by a Genie to win the love of a princess. However, over time, the story became associated with the Middle East rather than China. This was due in part to the fact that the Islamic world had a long history of trade and cultural exchange with China, which meant that

many stories and cultural traditions were shared between the two regions. (Bourenane, Abderrahmane. 2013 pp. 13. 235 - 25)

"The use of the term 'Arabization' begs clarification. Since the original Muslims were mostly Arab, everything associated with them - their culture, names, and family structures - has been associated with Islam. But this presents a problem since the vast majority of Muslims in the current world are not Arabs. There is not even an Arab monolithic form of Islam and culture. Some might even suggest that passing off Arab culture as Islam in this regard is inaccurate, exclusionary, and disrespectful of other Muslim cultures, evolving through a blend of religious and local traditions and customs." (Balatas Ghoshal, 2010, pp. 69-89*)*

The concept of 'Arabization' holds significant relevance in the discourse surrounding the origins of *Aladdin (1992)*, as it serves as a poignant reminder to acknowledge the intricate nature and diversity of Muslim cultures that extend beyond the Arab context. By highlighting the term 'Arabization,' we are prompted to move beyond simplistic notions and recognize the multifaceted dimensions of Islam and its associated cultures.

Furthermore, 'Arabization' acts as a reminder to distinguish between religion and culture, emphasising the importance of understanding that Islam is a religious belief system while Arab culture represents a distinct cultural heritage. This distinction becomes particularly crucial when analysing the visual components of *Aladdin (1992)*, as both the concept of 'Arabization' and the differentiation between religion and culture have undoubtedly influenced the design choices within the animated film.

The incorporation of these concepts into the discussion of *Aladdin's (1992)* visual components encourages a more nuanced examination of the film's aesthetics. It prompts us to consider how the visuals were shaped by the interplay between religious and cultural influences, and how the filmmakers aimed to depict the diverse Muslim cultures present in the narrative. By acknowledging the impact of 'Arabization' and recognizing the distinction between religion and culture, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex factors that have shaped the visual representation of *Aladdin (1992)*.

As Islam spread across the Middle East and North Africa, it introduced a wide range of religious concepts, beliefs, and cultural practices. This historical backdrop greatly influenced the way the story of *Aladdin (1992)* and the Wonderful Lamp was perceived. Originally rooted in Chinese folklore, the tale underwent a transformation and became associated with the Middle East due to the significant presence of Islam in the region.

Although it is noted that the original tale is said to presumably take place in ancient central Asia, China, It is suggested that the Islamic themes in the original story were Arabized by the creators of *Aladdin (1992),* contributing to the generalisation that all Muslims are Arab and vice versa.

It is important to note that even though the film may be set in a fictional space and town that may bear similarities to the Middle East and its cultures and religions, "fantasy locations cannot conform to reality, but they often conform to their creators' prejudices." (Rose, 2019)

The inclusion of Islamic themes and characters in the story of *Aladdin (1992)* highlighted the impact of the religion on the narrative. Concepts such as faith, destiny, and the power of the divine played prominent roles in the original tale. Recognizing these inherent Islamic elements, the creators of the animated film *Aladdin (1992)* intentionally chose to set the story in the Middle East. This decision aimed to capture the essence and authenticity of the original tale while also appealing to the cultural associations that had developed over time.

In my analysis, I will delve into the comprehensive examination of the animated film *Aladdin (1992)*, which was released by Disney in 1992. This highly acclaimed film was brought to life by the creative vision of renowned directors John Musker and Ron Clements, who have demonstrated their storytelling expertise through the success of their more recent and diverse work such as the animated film *Moana (2016*). By studying the visual and narrative aspects of *Aladdin (1992),* we can gain a deeper understanding of how the creators may have navigated the intricate relationship between Islamic influences, orientalism, cultural representations, and the art of animation.

It is also important to note that I will be using the film's inspiration *The Thief of Baghdad (1940)* to clarify and find justification for the choices made by the creators of *Aladdin (1992)*, as it is consistently mentioned to be a great drive for the film's visuals (Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin, 2004).

According to Evelyn Alsultany, a scholar specialising in the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in American media, the conflation of Arabs, Persians, and South Asians overlooks their unique cultural identities and inadvertently perpetuates Orientalist concepts of substitutability. (Alsultany, 2013) This blending of distinctions within Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) societies in cinematic depictions implies a reductionist perspective, wherein the filmmakers seemingly perceive a homogeneity among individuals of brown backgrounds, thus implying a lack of differentiation. (TeachMideast, 2022)

Critics have also mentioned that the casting directors have used the term "melting pot" as a rationale for engaging in less diligence and consideration in the culture component inclusions in the film.(TeachMideast, 2022) This "melting pot" statement is solidified through Orientalism (Said, 1978)portraying the concept as 'exotic' and other worldly, far from Western direction.

Even so, the release of the animated film *Aladdin (1992)* potentially evoked a process of reflection among children from diverse backgrounds, particularly those identifying as People of Color (PoC), who may have perceived similarities between themselves, and the characters depicted on screen. It is an observation that the absence of representation of these cultures within the American population could have resulted in PoC audiences gravitating towards any alternative or distinct portrayal available to them.

Aladdin (1992) was one of the first animated Disney films to portray a person of colour as the protagonist of the narrative other than Mowgli from the Jungle book and the first film to portray Arab Muslim people overall. *Aladdin (1992)* was Disney's first attempt at non-Western storytelling in this period, but the film faced sharp criticism and protest" (Kim and Brunn-Bevel, 2023)

This quote highlights the groundbreaking nature of *Aladdin (1992)* in the realm of animated Disney films, specifically its significance in portraying a person of colour as the protagonist, a milestone that preceded even Mowgli from The Jungle Book. *Aladdin (1992)* stands out as Disney's initial foray into non-Western storytelling, presenting Arab Muslim characters in a prominent light.

The film *Aladdin (1992)*, with its notable departure from the prevailing standards of white and Western representation commonly associated with Disney productions of that era, naturally elicited an expectation of resonance among audiences of colour. While originally crafted with the intention of appealing to American viewers, *Aladdin's (1992)* appeal transcended its initial target audience and garnered widespread attention (Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin, 2004). The film gained popularity in a short time starring Disney's first PoC hero and heroine, the reception of the film gained international success by being the first highest-grossing animated feature film at the time. The film was nominated for several academy awards and earned an estimate of over $504 million in worldwide box office revenue, followed by two direct-to-video sequels, and later, a live-action remake in 2019.

Aladdin's (1992) success can be viewed through a multifaceted lens. Firstly, it marked a pivotal moment in Disney's commitment to diversifying its narratives and characters. By featuring a person of colour as the lead and delving into Arab Muslim culture, the film broke away from the conventional Western-centric storytelling that had dominated Disney's earlier works. This shift was a positive acknowledgment of the diverse global audience and an attempt to offer a more inclusive representation on the animated screen.

However, the criticism and protests that *Aladdin (1992)* faced should not be overlooked. The challenges stemmed from concerns about cultural sensitivity, stereotyping, and misrepresentation. These reactions underline the importance of navigating cultural narratives with care and understanding, especially when delving into non-Western contexts. *Aladdin's (1992)* success, therefore, also sparks a conversation about the evolving expectations of audiences and the responsibility that comes with depicting cultures outside the mainstream.

Overall, the film *Aladdin (1992)* can be seen as an example of how Orientalism (Said, 1978) operates in popular culture, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing power imbalances through its representations of the Middle East. The critical analysis and deconstruction of Orientalist representations in pop culture films hold significance due to their potential contribution to cultural misunderstandings, reinforcement of prejudice, and marginalisation of Eastern cultures. By challenging and subverting Orientalist tropes, a pathway is created towards the development of more authentic and respectful portrayals of diverse cultures in the realm of film.



Chapter 2: Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to establish the broader framework for my dissertation, which centres on fostering discussions about responsible and conscious representation in visual media. With a specific focus on the film Disney's *Aladdin (1992)*, this review aims to contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to storytelling.



Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* provides a crucial lens for the analysis of *Aladdin (1992)*. Said, a prominent Palestinian-American intellectual, laid the foundation for post-colonial studies through his work, particularly in *Orientalism (Said, 1978).* This concept explores how the West has historically represented and misunderstood the East, constructing stereotypes and cultural biases. *Aladdin (1992)*, set in the fictional city of Agrabah, draws upon Orientalist tropes, reflecting broader Western perceptions of the Middle East and Asia. Said's critique of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* aligns with the film's perpetuation of stereotypes and simplifications about Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, contributing to a romanticized and homogenized view.

In a European context, the term "Orient" refers to places once colonized by European powers or lands close to Europe, with varying definitions provided by scholars like Mabrol. *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* manifests in different pursuits: as an academic discipline, a style of thought shaping perceptions, and a corporate institution reinforcing power dynamics. Said's exploration of these aspects serves as a foundation for understanding how Western representations contribute to the "othering" of Eastern cultures. The film *Aladdin (1992)* becomes a significant case study, exemplifying how Orientalist ideas are embedded in media creation and consumption.

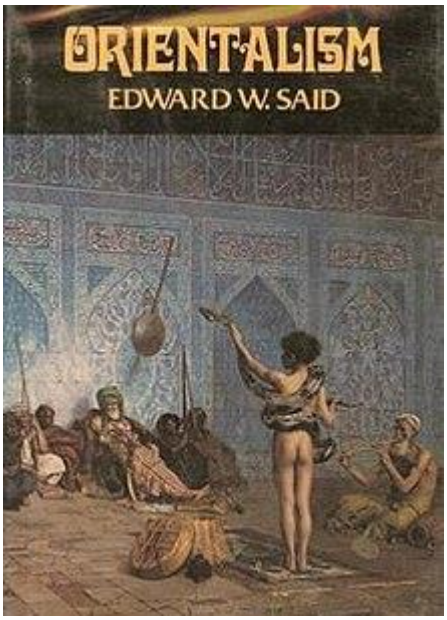


Figure 3. Orientalism (cover) (Said, 1978)

The three main elements of orientalism, as discussed by Said, find resonance in the analysis of *Aladdin (1992)*. Firstly, the film contributes to the perpetuation of misconceptions and prejudice against Muslim Arab individuals, aligning with the amorphous nature of similarities between diverse concepts within the "Orient." Secondly, *Aladdin (1992)* serves as an exposition of orientalist ideas and structures built over time through written and visual media, reinforcing stereotypes and marginalizing communities. Thirdly, the film's visual inspirations from 19th-century orientalist works connect to the concept of "Modern Orientalism," highlighting how the legacy persists in American foreign policy and cultural productions.

Animated media, including *Aladdin (1992)*, emerges as a powerful tool with the potential to influence and educate. However, its impact on cultural understanding is nuanced. The film's simplification of complex cultural elements for a young audience risk perpetuating stereotypes and presenting a narrow representation of Middle Eastern cultures. The visual appeal and accessibility of animation come with the responsibility of critically examining and challenging orientalist narratives, emphasizing the need for accurate and nuanced portrayals.

The Orient - Edward Said

Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* is highly relevant to the analysis of Disney's *Aladdin (1992)*. Edward Wadie Said, a Palestinian-American intellectual, literary critic, political activist, and musician, played a pivotal role in the establishment of post-colonial studies while serving as a literature professor at Columbia University.

Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* is important when analysing *Aladdin (1992)* (1992) because it provides a framework for understanding how the film portrays and perpetuates certain stereotypes and cultural representations related to the Middle East and Asia.

Orientalism (Said, 1978), as defined by Said in his influential work *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*, refers to the Western scholarly and cultural tradition of representing the East (primarily the Middle East and Asia) in a way that reinforces stereotypes, exoticizes the culture, and often serves imperialist interests. It involves a set of assumptions, biases, and generalizations that Western societies have historically made about the "Orient."

In the case of *Aladdin (1992)*, there are several elements that can be examined through the lens of Orientalism *(Said, 1978)*

Stereotypical Representations: The film features stereotypical depictions of Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, including exaggerated accents, clothing, and architecture. The characters are often portrayed as exotic and mysterious, reinforcing preconceived Western notions about the Orient. *(Said, 1978)*

Exoticization: The setting of Agrabah, although fictional, is presented as an exotic and fantastical place, contributing to the Western tendency to romanticize and otherize Eastern cultures. This can perpetuate a narrow and distorted view of the region.

Imperialist Undertones: The portrayal of Jafar, the antagonist, as a power-hungry and cunning sorcerer can be seen as aligning with historical Western narratives that depict the East as a threat to Western values. This narrative fits into a broader historical context of imperialist powers viewing the Orient as a place to be conquered or controlled. *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*

Cultural Appropriation: The film appropriates various elements of Middle Eastern and Asian cultures without accurately representing their diversity and richness. The blend of different cultural elements into a single, fictionalized setting may contribute to a homogenized and simplified view of the East.

By applying Said's *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* to *Aladdin (1992)*, one can critically analyse how the film reflects and perpetuates Western stereotypes and biases about the Orient. It encourages viewers to question the authenticity and fairness of the cultural representations in the film and raises awareness about the impact of such portrayals on shaping public perceptions.

Said's work, particularly in his book *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* explores how the West has historically represented and misunderstood the East, constructing stereotypes and cultural biases in the process. *Aladdin (1992)*, set in the fictional city of Agrabah, draws upon Orientalist tropes and reflects the broader Western perceptions of the Middle East and Asia. (Said, 1978)

In *Aladdin (1992)*, one can observe Orientalist elements in the portrayal of the mystical and exotic Orient. The film perpetuates certain stereotypes and simplifications about Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, contributing to a romanticized and homogenized view. The exoticization of Agrabah and its characters, the use of suggestive mystical imagery, and the amalgamation of diverse cultural elements without accurate representation are all aspects that align with Said's critique of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*.



Said argues that Western representations often serve to reinforce existing power dynamics and contribute to the "othering" of Eastern cultures. In the case of *Aladdin (1992)*, this can be seen in the way the film frames Agrabah as an exotic, fantastical place, perpetuating certain Western preconceptions about the East. (Said,1978)

Analysing *Aladdin (1992)* through the lens of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* allows for a critical examination of how the film engages with cultural stereotypes and contributes to the broader discourse on representation in media. It highlights the importance of considering the impact of such portrayals on shaping perceptions and fostering a more nuanced understanding of diverse cultures. (Said,1978)

In a European context, the term "Orient" refers to places with structures located in areas once colonized by European powers or lands close to Europe. However, According to Mabrol, researchers may define the Orient as somewhere far east such as China or Japan. There are several lenses of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* within these places. (Mabrol, 2020)

- *Orientalism as* an academic discipline: developed in the late 18th century, orientalism was an archive of knowledge that aided historians to perpetuate and reinforce western representations. This may mean that *Orientalism (Said, 1978)* served as a way for historians to gather knowledge about non-Western cultures, but it often resulted in reinforcing stereotypes and biased Western ideas of these places, their people and their culture. (Said,1978)
- *Orientalism* as a style of thought: This concept of orientalism is based on ontological and epistemological ideas between the Orient and the Occident. This is referring to a way of thinking that divides the world into two parts: the Orient (Eastern cultures) and the Occident (Western cultures). The Occident is based on ideas about what is the reality of the Orient and what we may know about these two regions. This concept suggests that there are fundamental differences between the Orient and the Occident, and it shapes how we understand and perceive them. (Said,1978)
- *Orientalism* as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient: Linked to colonialism, this pursuit focuses on using orientalism to authorise and dominate the Orient. *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*, according to Edward Said, is a way of thinking that influences how the Orient (Eastern

cultures) is understood and treated by corporations. In the corporate world, activities like creating knowledge, representing cultures, and doing business contribute to shaping how people see the Orient. (Said,1978) This includes things like marketing, consumer trends, business practices, and making products or services that fit Orientalist stereotypes and fantasies. When corporations rely on Orientalist ideas and stories, they risk reinforcing stereotypes, making the Orient seem exotic, and profiting from the fascination people have with Eastern cultures. This can lead to cultural appropriation, turning traditions into products, and using Orientalist images to make money. It's important to critically examine and question these practices. By doing so, we can promote a more respectful and fair way of engaging with Eastern cultures, moving away from exploiting and simplifying them. (Said,1978)

Table 1. A table representing the 3 main points of Orientalism and their significance to Aladdin (1992)

Point	Importance	Relevance to *Aladdin (1992)*
*Orientalism)*as an academic discipline	The development of *Orientalism* as an academic discipline in the late 18th century signifies a historical context in which Western scholars studied non-Western cultures. It is essential to understand the roots of *Orientalism* an archive of knowledge that aided historians in shaping Western representations.	Analysing *Aladdin (1992)* through the lens of *Orientalism* allows for a critical examination of how the film may have drawn upon historical academic representations. The film's portrayal of the fictional city of Agrabah and its characters may reflect historical biases and stereotypes perpetuated by earlier Orientalist scholarship.
Orientalism as a style of thought	The concept of *Orientalism as* a style of thought emphasizes the ontological and epistemological ideas that shape how the East (Orient) and West (Occident) are	Understanding how *Orientalism* operates as a style of thought is crucial for analysing how the film constructs its narrative and visuals. Aladdin's portrayal of

	perceived. This framework divides the world into two parts, influencing the understanding of reality in these regions.	the Orient and Occident may align with the dichotomies established by Orientalist thinking, influencing how audiences perceive and interpret the cultural elements depicted.
Orientalism as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient	The corporate use of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*, linked to colonialism, highlights how businesses influence the understanding and treatment of the Orient. This includes activities such as creating knowledge, representing cultures, and conducting business practices that may perpetuate stereotypes and fantasies.	Examining *Aladdin (1992)* in the context of *Orientalism* as a corporate institution is pertinent to understanding how the film, produced by a major entertainment corporation like Disney, may contribute to or challenge Orientalist ideas. The analysis should explore how the film's narrative and marketing strategies may align with or question Orientalist stereotypes, and how it navigates the delicate balance between representation and commercial interests

When discussing orientalism with media as the "recurring images of the other", (Said, 1978) we must consider the dynamics that power and knowledge hold within the context of contemporary media.



Figure 4. "The state of being other or different" (Foster, 2010)

Understanding "the other" in the context of discussing *Orientalism* within media refers to the persistent and stereotypical representations of non-Western cultures, particularly those of the Middle East and Asia, as exotic, mysterious, and different from the Western norm. In this context, "the other" refers to people and cultures perceived as outside the Western mainstream, often portrayed as foreign or alien. Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* emphasizes how Western media, literature, and art have historically created and perpetuated these stereotypical images of the East. The term "the other" implies a dichotomy where Western societies position themselves as the norm, and anything outside this norm is labelled as different or "other." *(Said, 1978*

These recurring images of the other contribute to a simplified, often distorted, and exoticized view of non-Western cultures. When discussing orientalism within media as the "recurring images of the other," the focus is on how certain visual, narrative, and cultural elements are repeatedly presented in ways that reinforce Western preconceptions about the East. This representation can lead to the marginalization, stereotyping, and homogenization of diverse cultures, limiting understanding and perpetuating cultural biases. Analysing media through this lens involves critically examining how these recurring images shape perceptions, reinforce stereotypes, and contribute to the broader discourse of *Orientalism (Said, 1978).*

Edward Said discusses three main elements and purposes of Orientalism (Said, 1978) (Mabrol, 2020). When we talk about orientalism in relation to media, we need to think about how certain repeated images portray non-Western cultures as different or exotic. This was described by Edward Said in 1978. We should also think about how power and knowledge play a role in shaping these portrayals in modern media. Edward Said discussed three main aspects of orientalism, which have been widely studied.

First, we may understand orientalism through the amorphous nature of similarities between diverse concepts that the 'Orient' holds concerning the multiple cultures and religions residing 'within the realm of what western writers consider the 'Orient.' In this context, the animated film *Aladdin (1992)* emerges as a significant contributor to the perpetuation of misconceptions and prejudice against Muslim Arab individuals.



The mass audience response to Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* reflects a complex entanglement with the legacy of Orientalist representations. Despite the film's efforts to craft a fantastical Middle Eastern setting, the audience reception often perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes. The character design, cultural elements, and narrative choices have contributed to reinforcing Western perceptions of the Middle East as exotic, mystical, and otherworldly. While the film garnered popularity and acclaim, its impact on shaping and perpetuating Orientalist tropes within the broader cultural consciousness is evident in the audience's reception. This dynamic interplay between the film's intentions and the audience's interpretation highlights the enduring influence of Orientalism in shaping portrayals of the Middle East in mainstream media.

By aligning itself with the legacy of orientalist representations through mass response of the audience, *Aladdin (1992)* becomes implicated in the process of distorting and essentializing false cultural and religious identities of Muslim Arab people. Through its portrayal of characters, settings, and narratives, the film not only reinforces preexisting stereotypes but also disseminates a miseducated understanding of Muslim Arab cultures.

Secondly, Edward Said explains orientalism as an exposition of orientalist ideas and structures that have been built over time through the vehicle of written and visual media. (Said, 1978) Said explains how the western and European traditions of knowledge allowed historians and writers to construct what we now know as the "The Orient" as its cultures. Consequently, the perpetuation of such misrepresentations in popular media serves to further marginalise and stigmatise these communities, fostering a climate of misunderstanding and prejudice.

It may prove to be essential when critically examining and challenging the orientalist narratives perpetuated by works like *Aladdin (1992),* emphasising on the need for more accurate and nuanced portrayals of Muslim Arab individuals and their diverse cultures. By engaging in a more informed and inclusive approach, media creators can contribute to dismantling stereotypes and fostering a climate of cultural understanding and appreciation.

The third point of the three main aspects of Orientalism (Said, 1978) examines the concept of 'Modern Orientalism'. Orientalism established by British and French colonialism was adopted and

adopted by the United States. According to Said, this is best exemplified by American foreign policy's manifestation of these legacies.

In summary, these three points provide a comprehensive framework for critically examining *Aladdin's (1992)* engagement with Orientalism (Said, 1978). They help shed light on the historical roots, cognitive structures, and corporate influences that may have shaped the film's portrayal of the Orient. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how media representations can either perpetuate stereotypes or serve as a means of questioning and challenging prevailing cultural narratives.

Aladdin (1992) as a semiotic resource

In the *Handbook for Visual Analysis: Visual Meaning: a Social Semiotic Approach,* Leeuwen and Jewitt explain that a resource that can be depicted from several 'point (s of view' . "This resource allows people, places, and things to be depicted from above or below (or at eye-level), and from the front, the side or the back. Both these dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal, are graded, a matter of degree." (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

This matter of degree ensues in an array of angles in which the resource may be depicted and how this resource will allow its consumers to depict others from other angles as well as themselves within their perspective.

These points of views create 'potential' depending on where the subject is positioned. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004) "This does not mean that it is possible to say what different points of view will mean exactly. But it is possible to describe the kinds of meaning they will allow image producers and viewers to create, in this case, the kinds of symbolic relations between image producers/viewers and the people, places or things in images."(Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004) The reading furthermore explain that 'symbolic power' can be generated from a vertical perspective.

"To map out meaning potentials, Kress and van Leeuwen use 'system networks', a style of diagramming that derives from the work of M.A.K. Halliday (1978), whose linguistic theories have been a decisive influence on this kind of visual analysis. The system network below encapsulates the resource of 'point of view' (square brackets mean either/or)."(Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

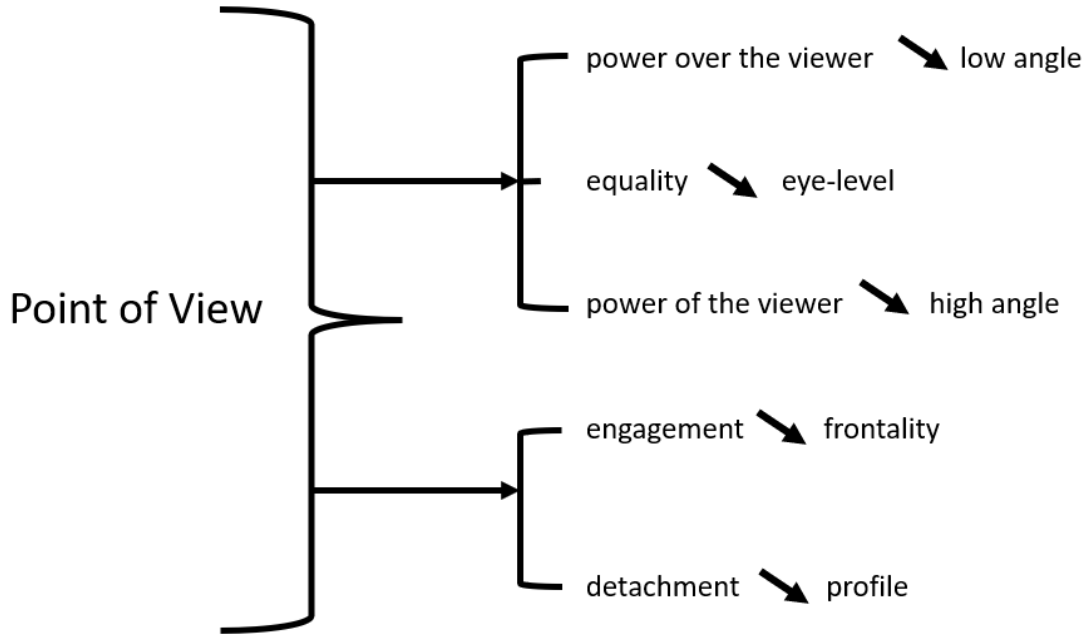


Figure 5. Point of View (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

"Such resources have histories. They were invented in the context of specific interests and specific purposes." (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Angle Manipulation

In the context of physicality, when you look down on an object or subject, you are most likely to have power over that object/subject.

For example, most adults tend to be taller than children and are more likely to be in a position of power over that child. The same way in which when the subject looks up at an object above them, they may be under the 'symbolic' power of the person or concept above them.

Possible meanings of symbolic power can range from fear of the higher concept to inspiration and aim to reach that position from the lower angle. Within the context of the animated film *Aladdin (1992)* In order to achieve 'symbolic equality', an eye-level angle can produce the elimination of symbolic power. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Leeuwen and Jewitt describe the horizontal angle being the connection or disconnection between what is represented. The highest amount of contact occurs within a frontal point of view because only then is the viewer 'directly confronted' with the true meaning of the concept. "Two points need to be made. First, 'power', 'detachment', 'involvement', and so on, are not 'the' meanings of these angles. They are an attempt to describe a meaning potential, a field of possible meanings, which need to be activated by the producers and viewers of images.

Secondly, symbolic relations are not real relations, and it is precisely this which makes point of view a semiotic resource. It can 'lie'." (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Within the context of *Aladdin (1992)*, the analysis based on Leeuwen and Jewitt's visual meaning framework suggests that the film's producers strategically deploy visual elements, particularly those associated with 'oriental' imagery, to create angles of symbolic power and influence perceptions. Importantly, this analysis acknowledges the potential power dynamics inherent in the production process, where Western creators are making a film through the lens of orientalism, portraying Muslim Arabs.

The vertical perspective, as highlighted by Leeuwen and Jewitt, involves looking down upon an object or subject, symbolizing a position of power. In *Aladdin (1992)*, this can manifest through scenes where characters with symbolic authority or cultural significance are portrayed from an elevated position. The producers, being in a position of power as Western creators, may use this visual

technique to emphasize a particular narrative perspective or cultural representation, potentially reinforcing stereotypes, or preconceived notions.

Conversely, the horizontal angle, particularly the frontal point of view, directly confronts the viewer with the true meaning of the cultural elements presented in the film. In the case of *Aladdin (1992)*, 'oriental' elements may be strategically employed to create a specific visual impact, influencing the audience's perception of Muslim Arab culture. The producers, operating from a Western perspective, have the power to shape these symbolic relations through the deliberate inclusion and framing of 'oriental' imagery.

The concept of 'symbolic equality,' achievable through an eye-level angle, becomes significant. In specific scenes, the producers may use this angle to minimize perceived power differentials and create a sense of relatability. However, the power dynamics in play, with Western creators engaging in orientalism, may still influence the portrayal of Muslim Arab characters and culture, potentially perpetuating certain narratives, or stereotypes.

The analysis of symbolic relations within the visual language of *Aladdin (1992)* underscores the importance of recognizing the potential implications of power dynamics in the production process. The strategic use of 'oriental' elements by Western creators raises questions about cultural representation, authenticity, and the potential impact on viewers who may interpret these visual cues based on their own perspectives and preconceptions.
This is apparent through the use of multiple uses of these elements to create a false image of the Orient and its variety of respective cultures and religions.

Furthermore, the idea of the symbolic significance through visual presentation is further expanded when Leeuwen and Jewitt explain that certain visuals may allow us to equate with someone who possesses a higher power than us, or it may detach us from people we are involved with and are actually equated to in reality. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

The entire visual aesthetic of the characters was based on the character-building methodology perfected by caricature artist Al Hirschfeld. (Solomon,1992) "I look on Hirschfeld's work as a pinnacle

of boiling a subject down to its essence, so that you get a clear, defined statement of a personality," explains *Aladdin (1992)* supervising animator Eric Goldberg…"(Solomon,1992) Whether Al Hirschfeld art intended to be harmful and contribute to stereotypes is much debated, but I have deduced that it solely depends on the motive and intention of the artist themselves. When Al Hirschfeld was told that his caricature artistic style impacted the visuals in *Aladdin (1992)* he took no claim to the line but commended them on their mention of him. (Rochman, 2020)

According to Helly Douglas, UK writer and teacher on the Pro-Writing Aid blog, caricatures "are made by exaggerating personality and behaviour, as well as physical appearance. They are created for a humorous or grotesque effect, or to make a subtle point about politics or human behaviour. When used to highlight human shortcomings, caricatures are a form of satire" (Helly, 2022)

Caricature images can be perceived as negative due to their tendency to exaggerate and distort the features of individuals or groups. By amplifying certain physical characteristics, caricatures may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, contributing to a distorted and potentially offensive representation. When these visual representations rely on cultural or racial stereotypes, they risk being culturally insensitive and fostering misunderstanding. Additionally, if the humour in caricatures is derived from mockery or ridicule, it can be hurtful and offensive, impacting the self-esteem of the subjects.

Caricatures often lack the nuance needed for a comprehensive understanding of individuals or groups, oversimplifying complex identities. While some may argue that caricatures serve as harmless satire, others contend that their negative impact on perception and attitudes, especially when rooted in stereotypes, warrants critical examination. Ultimately, the interpretation of caricatures as negative varies based on cultural, social, and individual perspectives, highlighting the need for sensitivity in their creation and consumption.

On the contrary, when Joanne Greco, writer for the Ridgefield Press interviewed David Leopold, Director for the Al Hirschfeld foundation, he stated that "We recognize that some drawings could be found offensive. Hirschfeld's work is generally described as caricature, but the label is limiting. His

art is not pejorative. His intent was not to poke fun at his subjects or perpetuate stereotypes, but rather it was a distillation and celebration of the performance. "(Rochman, 2020)

The scenery depicted in the film was inspired by early 19th-century orientalist paintings of the 'Arab World'. (Ayres, 2003) Another major visual inspiration for the animated film was a fantasy film called the thief of Baghdad released in 1940 by United artists. (John Culhane, 1993)

All of these concepts and mediums have contributed to the visuals of *Aladdin (1992)* in some way and their biased influence is prominent. In order to analyse the film's visual elements, we must understand where and when this story took place.

As mentioned above, *Aladdin (1992)* was inspired by the United Artists film *Thief of Baghdad* (1940). Similarly, the writers decided to set the tale of *Aladdin (1992)* in Baghdad, Iraq. However, at the time of the film's production, The United States of America was in high conflict with Iran during the Cold War and the producers did not want the animated film to be associated with the war. The setting then changed to the fictional kingdom of Agrabah, still maintaining its resemblances and referrals to Iraq and the Middle east in general. *(Brockington, 2019)*

Bisma Misbah, graduate of Florida International University, majoring in middle eastern studies, based Edward Said's ideologies of orientalism and compares them to the content in *Aladdin (1992)* in the table below:

Orientalist Element	Saidian Interpretation	Presence in 1992 Film
5) Cultural Reflection	"Out of [Western relations to the East] comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West." (182)	Released one year after the Gulf War, the setting's name was changed from Baghdad to Agrabah to avoid the political association with Iraq; additionally, Jafar resembles Saddam Hussein (Giroux and Pollock 2010). The present study examines how the movie is a reflection of the modern Western relationship to the East, specifically in the post-9/11 era.
		and many of the signs in the film are written in nonsensical script rather than actual Arabic letters (Shaheen 1993).

Figure 8. Ideologies of Orientalism compared to Aladdin *(1992) (Misbah, 2020)*

Figure 7Ideologies of Orientalism compared to Aladdin *(1992) (Misbah, 2020)*

3) Eastern Inferiority/	"A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between [the West] and its immediate surroundings on the one hand, and on the other, a land beyond theirs which they call 'the land of the barbarians" (167).	The original 1992 film perpetuates some ideas of Arabs as savages; for instance, Princess Jasmine is an oppressed Eastern woman, confined by the rules set forth by a "backwards" society dominated by Arab men. Jafar is darker-skinned, bearded, and has an Anglo-Arab-sounding accent - perpetuating the Orientalist view of Eastern features as inferior. Additionally, there are references to *shar'ia* law (specifically, the cutting of a thief's hands), depicting Islamic society as evil and savage (Palmer 2009).
/Oppression nen	"Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate" (188).	Princess Jasmine, despite belonging to royalty in a high class, Eastern, presumably Islamic society, is shown in revealing outfits for the majority of the 1992 film, resembling the "sexualized" women in the harem clip during the song, "One Jump Ahead," as well as the belly dancers in the song, "Prince Ali." She is also confined by the rules of the society around her, not being allowed to leave the palace. Additionally, aside from Jasmine, there are no other main female characters (Eddarif 2016).

Figure 6. Ideologies of Orientalism compared to Aladdin *(1992) (Misbah, 2020)*

The analysis above provides details how *Aladdin (1992)* incorporates Orientalist elements, as interpreted through the lens of Edward Said's ideas. Let's connect this interpretation to the concept of symbolic power and point of view in the context of the quote by Leeuwen and Jewitt.

Symbolic Power and Point of View: The film's protagonists, Jasmine and Aladdin, are portrayed with Westernized features, lighter skin, and American accents, aligning them with positive traits. This reinforces a symbolic power dynamic where Western attributes are associated with the "good" characters, conforming to the cultural norms of the time.

Cultural Ambiguity/Inaccuracy: The confusion in depicting Agrabah, incorporating elements from various Eastern cultures, reflects the film's adherence to Orientalist tropes. The inconsistent representation contributes to the symbolic power dynamic by reinforcing stereotypical views of the East as a vague and exotic "Other."

Elimination of Symbolic Power: The film perpetuates stereotypes of Arabs as savages, with characters like Jafar embodying the Orientalist view of Eastern features as inferior. The use of point of view and symbolism could have been potential semiotic resources to challenge and eliminate these stereotypes, but the film instead aligns with prevailing notions.

Cultural Reflection and Point of View: Eroticization/Oppression of Eastern Women: The film's portrayal of Princess Jasmine reflects an Orientalist perspective that associates the East with untiring sensuality and limited freedoms. Symbolic power dynamics, reinforced through visual representations, contribute to the eroticization and oppression of Eastern women in the narrative.

Cultural Reflection: The film's name changes the city from Baghdad to Agrabah and the resemblance of Jafar to Saddam Hussein demonstrate how the movie reflects the modern Western relationship to the East, particularly in the post-9/11 era. The choice of point of view and symbolic representation can influence the audience's perception of the cultural and political context.

These connections situate *Aladdin (1992)* as a semiotic resource that reflects and perpetuates Orientalist elements, utilizing symbolic power dynamics and specific points of view to reinforce stereotypes and cultural norms of the time as the film skips the opportunity to challenge prevailing notions and contribute to a more nuanced and culturally sensitive portrayal of the East.



Chapter 3: Animation. Tool or Weapon?

Animated media is a powerful tool for education and has the ability to function as a curated visual aid that may also improve understandings through a variety of implementations. Through thoughtful curation and selection, animated media can be tailored to align with specific learning objectives and cater to diverse educational needs. It can present information in a clear and concise manner, breaking down complex topics into more accessible and digestible forms. This visual representation can help students grasp abstract ideas, visualize processes, and develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Animation can be an effective way to simplify complex concepts for children, using visual metaphors, simplified explanations, storytelling, and interactive elements to engage young learners and help them better understand the world around them. (Avadmin, 2021)

The evidence of cultural existence lies in everyday practices of people from every corner of the world. The language people speak, faith put on to religions, gambling in Las Vegas and eating different food are only minor examples of cultural reflection. People are not born knowing what to do with their lives. They learn through messages communicated to them which bear the stamp of culture. (Bin Mat Omar, 2011)

In simple terms, this statement means that the proof of a culture's existence can be found in the daily activities and behaviours of people worldwide. The idea expressed is that individuals don't inherently know how to live their lives; instead, they learn from the messages and values communicated to them, which are influenced by the culture they belong to. (Bin Mat Omar, 2011)



Applying the theory that the evidence of cultural existence lies in everyday practices to stereotypes in *Aladdin (1992)* we can see how the film reflects and perpetuates certain cultural perceptions through its portrayal of characters, settings, and narratives. This implies that the message that is being communicated through the film *Aladdin (1992)*
could have the power to simplify complex cultural elements for a broad audience and may serve as a tool to introduce diverse cultures, languages, and traditions to audiences who may not be familiar with them.

However, this also means that *Aladdin (1992)* may also be used as a weapon when it perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces existing biases. Simplification, while making cultures more accessible, can also lead to oversimplified and distorted representations that reinforce preconceived notions.

In the case of *Aladdin (1992)*, the movie tells a story that is set in a Middle Eastern-inspired fictional land, Agrabah, and features characters that are based on Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures. While the movie may simplify some of these cultures and present them in a more relatable and engaging way for children, it may also perpetuate stereotypes and preconceived ideas about Middle Eastern people.

Aladdin (1992) is one of the most successful animated films that were released during Disney's renaissance period. (Bergren, 2017) *Aladdin (1992)* was created to cater towards a young target market ranging from young children to early teens. These children belonging to a different culture, religion, race etc. than to the characters of *Aladdin (1992)* may understand the film to represent its real-life assumed counterparts of its people and their culture. The potential for the film to impact the viewer's perspective and understanding of Arab Muslim people through the erasure, reduction, and harmful interchangeability of the elements of the "Orient" Is present.

Firstly, the movie presents a fictionalised version of the Middle East that is based on Western stereotypes and preconceptions. For example, the city of Agrabah is depicted as a place filled with exotic architecture, bustling markets, and camels, which may not accurately represent the diversity and complexity of Middle Eastern cultures. This can lead viewers to form simplistic and inaccurate perceptions of the region and its people.

Secondly, the movie reduces the complexity of Arab Muslim culture to a few exotic elements, such as the use of the Arabic language, the presence of mosques, and the depiction of belly dancers. This reductionism can lead viewers to view Arab Muslim culture as monolithic and homogenous, erasing the diversity of cultural practices and beliefs within the region.

Thirdly, the movie engages in harmful interchangeability of the elements of the "Orient." The movie conflates different cultures and traditions from the Middle East and South Asia and uses them interchangeably to create a fictionalised "Orient." For example, the character of Aladdin is portrayed as South Asian, while the setting and many of the cultural references in the movie are Middle Eastern. This interchangeability of cultures can lead to further erasure of the diversity of the region and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

In the case of *Aladdin (1992)*, the movie draws inspiration from Middle Eastern culture, and while it showcases aspects such as architecture, clothing, and music, it is important to recognize that these elements are inaccurately presented through a lens of Western interpretation and storytelling and engage in harmful interchangeability of multiple "oriental" cultures. This may lead to a simplified and potentially skewed depiction of Middle Eastern culture, reducing it to a collection of exotic and fantastical tropes.

Furthermore, *Aladdin (1992)* may unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes about Middle Eastern people. The characters' appearances, accents, and mannerisms can inadvertently reinforce clichéd and generalized representations. These stereotypes can contribute to a limited understanding of the diverse and multifaceted nature of Middle Eastern cultures, reinforcing misconceptions and biases.

It is crucial to approach animated movies and any form of media critically, particularly when they depict cultures different from our own. While they can serve as a starting point for cultural exploration and spark curiosity, it is important to supplement these representations with accurate and nuanced information about the cultures being portrayed. This can be achieved through discussions, educational materials, and exposure to authentic voices and perspectives from Middle Eastern communities.



By acknowledging the potential limitations and stereotypes in animated films, educators, parents, and viewers can foster critical thinking and cultural sensitivity in children. Encouraging discussions about representation, challenging stereotypes, and promoting a broader understanding of diverse cultures can help mitigate the potential negative impact of simplified and stereotypical depictions.

In hand with the films proposed orientalist foundation, and ability of animation to influence and break down complex concepts, the first understanding of orientalism situates itself within an academic context. This archive of knowledge including stories and 'discoveries' studied and curated by orientalists may have directly or indirectly impacted Disney's choices when producing the film. This produced the capability of this academic view to find its way through modern western works fulfilling its purpose through adaptation of European *Orientalism* to an American perspective.

A further understanding of orientalism describes the concept as a school of thought. It was found that Western cultural discourse relies largely upon epistemological and ontological distinctions between the East and West. Because western educational systems and their co-ordinators developed, thought, and acted on the basis of this imaginary distinction, it leads to disastrous outcomes in media and real life for colonised peoples and their identities. Edward Said suggests that if one favours this distinction, they must be titled an orientalist.

The final understanding of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*focuses on the domination of the Orient through colonialist ideals on orientalism.

"Another argument supporting an orientalist approach to the Thousand- and One-Night's translations is the explicit linking, by the translators themselves, of their translations to an external, exotic reality. In the preface to his *Mille et une nuits(1704)*, published between 1704 and 1717, Antoine Galland declares that the readers of his translation could acquire all information they might want about the habits of the Orientals, without leaving their armchairs, since the stories contain a truthful picture of life in the Orient." (Leeuwen, 2016)

In her analysis of the 1992 animated Disney movie *Aladdin (1992)*, Mariam Khalifa, writing for Sail, an online magazine based in the United Arab Emirates, explores the significant themes and issues

depicted in the film. One prominent aspect Khalifa examines is the portrayal of Agrabah, the fictional town in which the story takes place. Agrabah, while not an actual place, draws inspiration from Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Asian cultural elements and identities.

Khalifa's examination underscores the cultural significance embedded within the movie's setting. By basing Agrabah on Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Asian aspects, the film intertwines multiple cultural influences and identities. This deliberate amalgamation within the animated medium enables *Aladdin (1992)* to present a more expansive and multicultural narrative, mirroring the diverse global perspectives prevalent during its production.

The choice to construct Agrabah as a fictional town with these specific cultural inspirations prompts further discussion about the representation of Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Asian cultures in Western media. Khalifa's analysis suggests that *Aladdin (1992)*, while providing a platform for cultural representation, may still raise questions about the accuracy, authenticity, and potential stereotyping or exoticizing of these cultures within the film.

Overall, Khalifa's examination of *Aladdin (1992)* in Sail contributes to the broader discourse surrounding the cultural implications of animated movies. By focusing on the cultural foundations of Agrabah, Khalifa highlights the complexities and nuances involved in the portrayal of Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Asian cultures, offering insights into the movie's impact on cultural representation and its potential for perpetuating or challenging cultural stereotypes. (Mariam, 2016)

Chapter 4: Visually unpacking *Aladdin (1992)*

The following chapter will be unpacking the characters and the visual setting of *Aladdin (1992)* and analysing their inspirations and the decisions that were made when creating their makeup and designs.

In order to complete my practical component, I have analysed multiple elements, that have aided me in deciding which elements I have revisualized in my artbook. Keeping in mind the analysis of the film through a semiotic approach in the last paragraph, the inspiration for the film must be discussed in order to understand where the creators of the films derived their visuals and themes from.

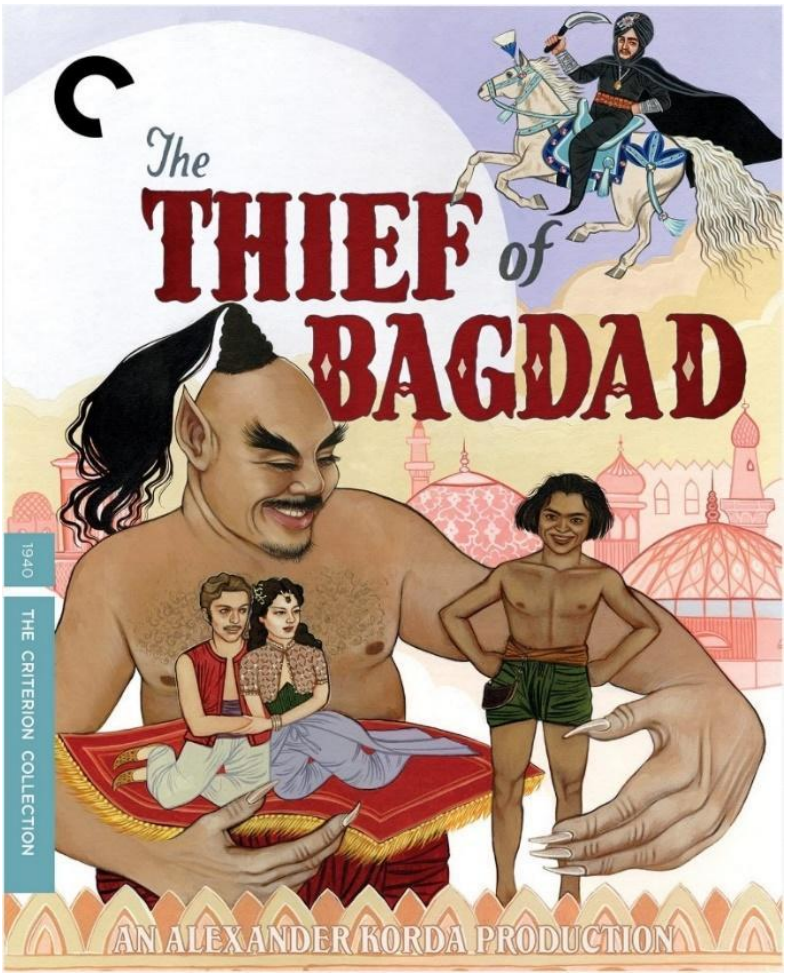


Figure 9. The Thief of Baghdad, Cinema poster (1940)

It is mentioned by the producers in the films behind the scenes documentary (*Diamond in the Rough*, 2004) , that *Aladdin (1992)* was inspired by and derived the concept of the Genie from *The Thief of Baghdad(1940)(Nicolaou, 2019).*

This film, also directed through the western idea of the orient, uses concepts and symbols from multiple religions and cultures as a tool to create interchangeability between oriental discourses. At

the time that it was released, travelling was far from common, and the film produced a window for the average western audience to view what the Orient was.

The Thief of Baghdad (1940) : An Inspiration

Concerning the casting choices of the film, the sidekick character to the protagonist, Abu, was portrayed by Sabu Dastagir. Sabu Dastagir was an Indian Muslim actor and one of the only two people of colour casted in the film. Even though Sabu was not of Arab descent, the casting choice relied on interchangeability between cultures and nationalities of brown people to carry the story. The film also makes use of brown face to present the rest of the cast as Arab or rather their version of what 'Arab' is (Jones, 2016).

In this paper I will be using The Handbook for Visual Analysis: Visual Meaning: a Social Semiotic Approach (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004) as a methodology for visually analysing *Aladdin (1992)*. Leeuwen and Jewitt situate the context of visual analysis through a semiotic approach.

"For social semiotics this is a vital point. There are kinds of 'rules', from laws and mandatory prescriptions to 'best practice', the influence of role models, expert advice, common habits, and so on. Different kinds of rules apply in different contexts. As for breaking the rules, only people with a large amount of cultural power are given permission to do this, at least in public places. Most of us have to conform. In private, in the smaller groups and 'subcultures' we live in, we may have more freedom, but our semiotic productions and interpretations are not likely to spread much beyond those small circles. They will remain relatively marginal. Sometimes, however, society needs something new, and then novel modes of production and interpretation will stand more of a chance of being added to the culture's treasury of visual resources."(Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Reflecting on the provided quote, underscores the idea that those with cultural power, such as influential creators and media producers, play a crucial role in shaping cultural representations. The quote emphasizes the existence of rules and norms within society, including in the realm of cultural production, and the limited ability of most individuals to break those rules. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Cultural Power and Rules in Media Production:

The Western creators of *Aladdin (1992)* held cultural power as influential figures in the entertainment industry. They played a significant role in shaping the narrative, visual elements, and overall representation of the film.

The rules mentioned in the quote could refer to prevailing cultural norms, expectations, or stereotypes that existed within the Western context. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)These creators had the authority and platform to either conform to or challenge these norms through their production.

Permission to Break Rules:

The quote suggests that breaking cultural rules is a privilege often granted to those with a large amount of cultural power. In the case of *Aladdin (1992)*, the creators had the authority to either conform to traditional Orientalist portrayals or challenge them by presenting a more nuanced and respectful representation of Middle Eastern and Asian cultures. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Influence on Visual Resources:

The creators' decisions regarding the representation of the "other" in *Aladdin (1992)* had the potential to influence societal perceptions and contribute to the visual resources available in Western culture. If they chose to challenge stereotypes and present a more authentic depiction, it could have a positive impact on broader cultural understanding. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Novel Modes of Production and Interpretation:

The quote suggests that sometimes society needs something new. In the context of *Aladdin (1992)*, this could imply a need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive representation of the East in mainstream media. The creators had the opportunity to introduce novel modes of production and interpretation that could add to the cultural treasury of visual resources. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004)

Aladdin (1992) can be seen as a semiotic resource that reflects the prevailing rules and cultural norms of the animation industry during its production. The film's adherence to certain stereotypes and lack of cultural sensitivity, despite having the potential to challenge existing norms, highlights the impact of cultural power and the need for more diverse perspectives in shaping visual and narrative resources in popular culture. (Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004.



Visual Character Analysis

Within the realm of cinematic discourse, the characters in *Aladdin (1992)* emerge as pivotal subjects demanding nuanced examination. This section engages in the character analysis, employing a methodological lens that seeks to decipher the intricate layers comprising the animated personas within the narrative. This pursuit extends beyond the surface-level portrayal, venturing into the deliberate visual and symbolic choices embedded in each character's design. Anchored in the principles of semiotics and narrative theory, this analysis aspires to unravel the complexities of character construction as orchestrated by the animators and storytellers.

This extends beyond the canvas of character design to encompass the socio-cultural framework, particularly through the lens of *Orientalism (Said, 1978))*. By integrating background information into our analysis, we aim to discern the implicit cultural nuances and examine the potential perpetuation of stereotypes within the film. This academic undertaking is not confined to deconstructive critique; rather, it seeks to contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding the intersection of animation, cultural representation, and storytelling.

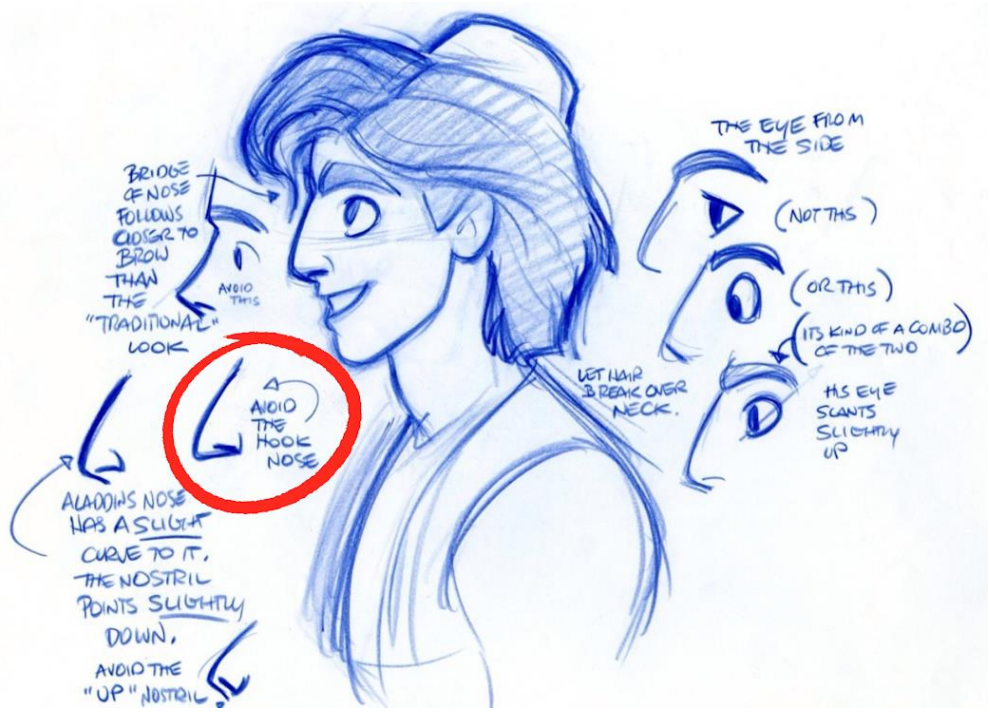


Figure 10. Aladdin, The Making of an Animated film pg. 14 (Colhane, 1993)

"Avoid the Hook Nose": the Villainization of oriental features.

Above is a scan of *Aladdin's (1992)* prospective character design in *The Art of Aladdin (1992).*Although Mark Henn was the lead artist when designing the characters for the film, I was unable to gather research on who the exact artist that made this sketch as many animated feature films have many subordinate artists that often clean up and finalise designs.

'Avoid the Hook nose', a suggestion that was made either by the artist or their employers. The hook nose, or more scientifically known as an aquiline nose is a common prominent feature that many middle eastern people may possess and is often used as a means of antisemitic caricature when designing Arab characters for entertainment purposes.

The main characters and protagonists of *Aladdin (1992)*, Aladdin and Jasmine are not designed with this feature in mind, but rather give features that white audiences are more familiar with. "The protagonists, Jasmine, and Aladdin, have more Western features, such as lighter skin and American accents, leading the audience to associate the "good" characters with these traits. Additionally, Aladdin has no beard, unlike the rest of the Arab men in the film: making him appear

less "Eastern."" (Misbah, 2020) Alan Menken, *Aladdin's (1992)* composer stated, "It's so much of the Disney style to make the characters also very recognizable, American types within that context," "So, Aladdin and Jasmine are kind of Valley kids, as well as being these Arabian characters." (*'Aladdin': 25 Things You Didn't Know About the 1992 Animated Classic! | Entertainment Tonight*, 2017)

The need for the character design team to edit the main characters through a westernised Lense may solidify the suggestion of villainising Semitic features. However, this feature is not completely absent in the film but is rather villainized through the film's antagonists, Jafar and the royal guards.

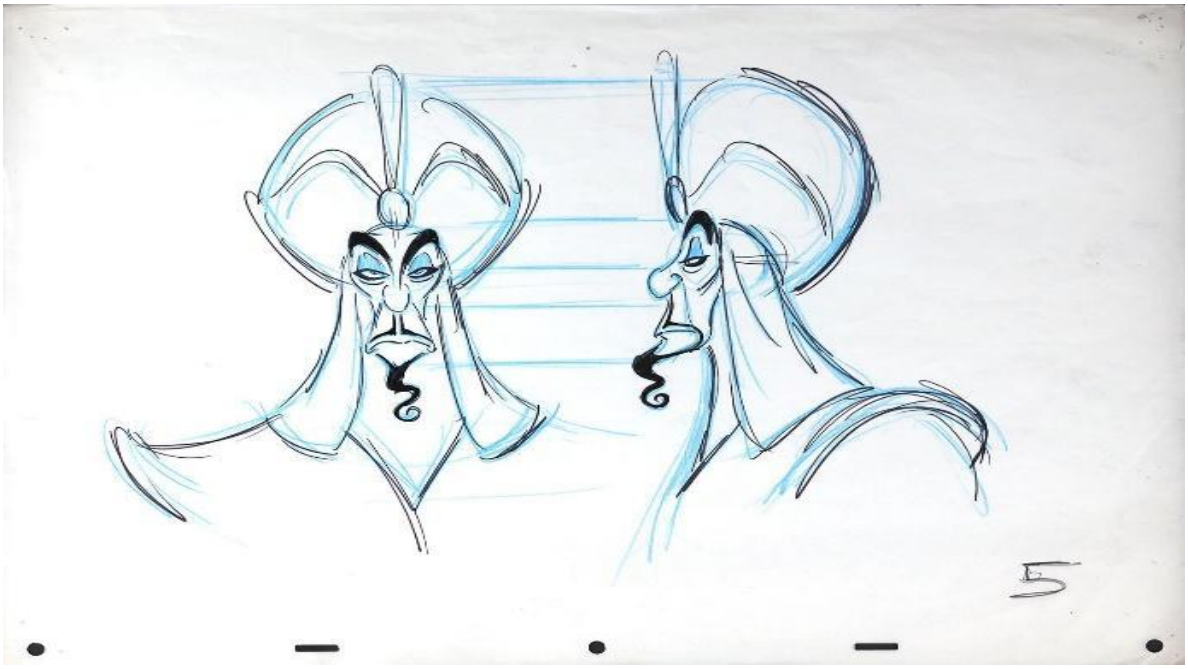


Figure 11. Aladdin, The Making of an Animated film pg. 18 (Colhane, 1993)

However, there are 2 other characters that possess hooked noses, the Genie, and the sultan. It may be suggested that these characters were designed with the hooked nose facial feature in order to indicate other traits of their character other than villainy.

The sultan is viewed to be gullible and childish; he also believes in the 'law' that Jasmine should get married before her next (16th) birthday. It is a popular assumption that Arab men marry their daughters off young due to Arab culture. And while that may be true in many cases, the association

of the sultan's visual design and his views are solidified in implemented stereotypes. Considering the Genie's hooked nose, His character might have been designed that way to indicate his mysticism through the implementation of a feature that is viewed to be "otherworldly" to white audiences.



Figure 12. (Aladdin 1992, 00:15:07)



Figure 13. Aladdin 1992, 00:36:07)

When discussing film and television, whitewashing is most commonly understood as the placement of white actors that portray people of colour. However, if we examine whitewashing as an entire concept, ethnic ideas and structures are further diluted beyond casting choices to be more palatable to white audiences.

The entirety of the *Aladdin (1992)* cast had only white actors and actresses voicing the characters. The only person of colour casted, was Filipina singer Lea Salonga. The actress was casted to provide the singing voice for Jasmine.

When analysing the characters of *Aladdin (1992)*, it is suggested that whitewashing of the main characters was implemented. The decision to base both main characters off of white American people shows a deep inconsideration of the representation of middle eastern people as a whole.

During the conception of the film, it was an industry norm to not only cast white actors to voice animated characters, but it was common practice to situate PoC characters within the western Eurocentric lens by whitewashing the 'good' and therefore subsequently main characters.

In the context of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*, whitewashing can perpetuate the idea that the only way to make a film or show set in the Middle East or other regions is to cast white actors in lead roles. This reinforces the idea that the East is a place that is exotic and foreign, and that only Western actors are capable of bringing these stories to life.

This practice is linked to *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*in pop culture because it reinforces the idea that white, Western culture is the norm and the standard to which all other cultures are compared.

"Racism and White supremacy factor into this monochromatic alternate universe, where white dominates the big picture, pushing other colours to the sidelines or out of the frame entirely." In modern parlance, historians, authors, and creators who do this are guilty of whitewashing. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines whitewashing as "gloss over or cover-up," which is what the racial form of whitewashing does. As a result, White worldviews ignore the sins against people of colour, such as Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, Latinos, and other minorities, since they barely exist in revisionist history. (Helligar, 2020)

Based on this information provided by the character designers in the documentary, Diamond *in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin,* both of the main characters were not designed and modelled based on Arab people. As I discuss each character's background, it is imperative to keep the above paragraphs in mind in order to understand why certain decisions where made, resulting in the final visuals of the film.

Aladdin

Background

In this section I will be examining Aladdin's character design, mentioning the departure from the 'prince charming' archetype led to an intricate weaving of Aladdin's appearance, drawing inspiration from 80s icons, and eventually reflecting the popularity of Tom Cruise in the early 90s.

Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer's historical scrutiny unveils intentional choices in Aladdin's attire, blending cultural accuracy with mystical elements. (Glamour, 2019) As we delve into the visual aesthetics and parallels with *The Thief of Baghdad (1940)*, subtle guidance to "Avoid the Hook Nose" surfaces, showcasing the oriental feature villainization. The broader lens of whitewashing casts a shadow, with a predominantly white voice cast and considerations of Eurocentric norms shaping character representations.

During the Disney renaissance, the most popular Disney films released before and at the time included those which portrayed princesses as the protagonist. The director of *Aladdin (1992)* considered making Aladdin a royal character but claimed, "Prince charming? No one wants to animate prince charming!" They then started with a concept of rejecting the expected 'hero' stereotype and at first designed Aladdin much smaller and shorter inspired by 80s icon Michael J. Fox.



Figure 15. Comparison of Aladdin and Tom Cruise (1997)

Producers John Musker and Ron Clements first described the main characters Aladdin and Jasmine to resemble Fox and Julia Roberts. (*Diamond in the Rough*, 2004) However, they changed their minds and moved towards designing Aladdin to resemble Tom Cruise as he was on the rise of popularity in the early 90s.

Visual Description and Analysis

In a Glamour interview History professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer "fact checks the historical accuracy of the costumes and wardrobe in the animated Disney film Aladdin. "(Glamour, 2019) Concerning the period of time in which the film takes place, it may be suggested that the original tale may have been set in the late 17th - Early 18th century during the Ottoman empire rule. (*Historian Fact Checks Aladdin's Wardrobe | Glamour*, 2019)



Figure 16. Aladdin (Aladdin,1992)

In the film, Aladdin, the protagonist is dressed in some loose pants, a small purple vest on his naked chest with a fez and does not have any shoes.

Aladdin's pants are fastened at his waist with some cloth and are cuffed at the bottom. According to Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer, Aladdin's pants, called Shalwar, are accurate to the region and proposed time of the film (Aladdin, 1992). On his top half, Aladdin is wearing a small purple vest slightly covering his bare chest. Brammer mentions "it is highly unlikely that a similar character will have worn a vest on the naked upper body. What Aladdin is wearing in the film can be considered a typical attire of mystics, who historically isolated themselves from society and its riches, practising self-severe self-discipline, and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically, but not always, for religious reasons."(Glamour, 2019)

The choice to portray Aladdin's character in "a typical attire of mystics" suggests the mystification of the Middle East and its people. Aladdin is not described as a mystic but rather just a poor young, orphaned boy in Agrabah. (Disney Wiki, 2023)

The historical association of the Middle East and Islam with mysticism holds a noteworthy presence in Western perception. This enduring connection arises from the tendency to regard both these concepts as "the other," thereby facilitating the inclination to categorise their elements as mythical

and otherworldly, rather than recognizing them as deeply rooted cultural beliefs for a significant portion of the population. The creators of *Aladdin (1992)* do this by dressing his character in a suggestive mystical manner in order to create the association of Islam, middle eastern people and the mysticality.

Concerning Aladdin's footwear, he is barefoot; Brammer mentions that Aladdin would have worn shoes or some foot covering due to the hot weather, even due to his poverty (Glamour, 2019).
The decision not to give Aladdin shoes is suggested to visualise his economic state through appearance; as a poor boy, Aladdin may not have been able to afford shoes. However, taking Brammer's statement that Aladdin would still have shoes or some foot covering despite his poverty, the suggestion may relate to other perceptions of the character as being uncivilised.

Concerning Aladdin's headpiece, the hat upon his head is a fez. Fez is a headpiece that originated in the early 19th century in Fez, Morocco. The fez was adopted by leaders "in the Near and Middle East strongly encouraged their followers to adopt modern clothing and customs to align their nations with Western countries." "It was constructed of felt, dyed red with the juice from berries that grew outside the city. The brimless style of the fez allowed the wearer to easily touch his head to the floor during the daily prayers practised by Muslims." (fez, no date)

When watching the film's inspiration, The Thief of Baghdad (1940), we can see an explicit derivation of the clothing choices made for Aladdin's character. Seen on the right is one of the main characters of The Thief of Baghdad (1940), Ahmad, portrayed by actor John Justin, wearing an open red vest, similar to Aladdin's purple vest. When comparing Ahmad's outfit to Aladdin's, they are almost identical except for the colour placement and the absence of the fez. Ahmad is wearing a red vest with a purple belt and salwar, whereas Aladdin is seen wearing a purple vest, salwar pants and a red belt. The colours were swapped, and the fez was added to Aladdin's character in Aladdin (1992).

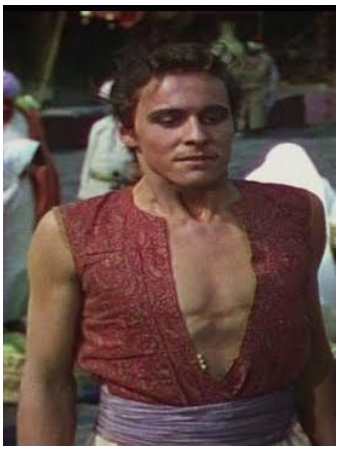


Figure 10. Ahmed, Thief of Baghdad (1940) (00:37:23)

In summary, the character analysis of Aladdin (1992) unveils a deliberate departure from conventional Disney character tropes during the Disney Renaissance. The initial consideration of Aladdin as a non-royal, more diminutive protagonist challenged the traditional 'hero' stereotype. Scrutiny of historical accuracy, particularly in costume and wardrobe, reveals a complex interplay and interchangeability of cultural representation and mystification.

Aladdin's attire, barefoot status, and the fez headpiece are examined in the context of economic symbolism, perceptions of civility, and historical accuracy, each contributing to the nuanced portrayal of the character. The comparison with The Thief of Baghdad (1940) provides insights into the evolution of character aesthetics, showcasing deliberate colour and accessory choices in Aladdin's design. In essence, Aladdin's character design becomes a canvas reflecting not only the narrative needs of the animated film but also the conscious disengagement with historical, cultural, and cinematic contexts.

Princess Jasmine

Background



Figure 17. Jasmine Guy (1992)

This section critically examines the design and portrayal of Princess Jasmine in Disney's *Aladdin (1992),* with a particular focus on her character's appearance and attire. Insights into the early sketches reveal the decision to utilize Jasmine Guy's appearance as inspiration, prompting discussions on the potential implications of incorporating Eurocentric features into the final character design. Mark Henn's design process sheds light on the challenges in creating Jasmine's visual identity, including the inspiration drawn from his sister's photograph. The rest of the section delves into the orientalist tropes embedded in Jasmine's iconic blue outfit. It explores the implications of her additional costumes in the context of sexualization and objectification. Comparisons with European orientalist paintings and historical representations underscore broader themes of stereotyping and lack of diversity.

Princess Jasmine's early sketches made use of her real-life namesake, African, Portuguese American actress Jasmine Guy. However, the writers thought her look was "too" severe and opted for a different direction. (*Diamond in the Rough*, 2004) The suggestion that the use of Jasmine Guy's appearance as an inspiration when designing Princess Jasmine was 'too severe' marks the assumption that the creators of the film did not want Princess to be designed after an Arab woman nor any woman of colour at all. Jasmine Guy is not of Arab descent, but her appearance is built of non-Eurocentric features. This understanding while analysing the final appearance of Jasmine in the film suggests that she was designed to cater to white audiences as she possesses more euro-centric features in her final visual appearance.



Figure 18. Comparison between Jasmine and Beth Allen (1997)

Disney artist, Mark Henn, who has been partially responsible for the design of every Disney princess since Ariel, referred to a number of 'exotic' models to inspire the design of Jasmine. However, he was unhappy with the designs. During a visit to Disney World, Henn saw a guest with long black hair and knew he wanted that feature for princess jasmine but was having difficulty imagining the princess' face. (*Diamond in the Rough*, 2004)

After finding his younger sister Beth Allen's high school graduation photo in his wallet, Henn was inspired to create Jasmine's look based on her features. The directors approved a concept sketch based on her, resulting in Jasmine's design as it was previewed in 1992. The acceptance of Henn's decision to base Princess Jasmine, an Arab princess, off of his white American sister suggests the reduction of the character as a whole and results in the whitewashing of the character.

Visual Description and Analysis

Assuming Henn's family is of European descent, the above information indicates that Eurocentric facial features inspired Jasmine. Due to this decision, Jasmine's final character portrayal in the film represents a European, fair-skinned woman.

Analysing Jasmine's facial features and complexion in *Aladdin (1992)* through the lens of Orientalism (Said, 1978)requires examining how the character's portrayal aligns with Orientalist tropes and historical representations of Eastern women.

Exoticization and Homogenization

Orientalist depictions often involve the exoticization and homogenization of Eastern cultures. Jasmine's features, including her large, expressive eyes and petite nose, may align with Western ideals of beauty that were historically associated with an exoticized and romanticized Orient; however, Jasmine's character was directly designed after a white woman of European descent.

Lighter Complexion and Eurocentric Beauty Standards:

Notably, Jasmine's complexion is relatively lighter, which aligns with Eurocentric beauty standards. Orientalism (Said, 1978), historically rooted in Western colonial perspectives, often portrayed Eastern women with features deemed more acceptable or attractive according to Western norms. This can contribute to the perpetuation of biased beauty standards.

Stereotyping and Lack of Diversity:

Orientalist representations tend to oversimplify and stereotype diverse Eastern cultures. Jasmine's facial features, while aesthetically pleasing, may lack the nuanced diversity found in real-world Middle Eastern populations, specifically in Iraq. This simplification can contribute to monolithic perceptions of Eastern beauty. Jasmine's appearance should be considered for potential cultural appropriation, especially if her features are presented without an authentic understanding or respect for the diverse facial features found across Middle Eastern cultures. Authentic representation involves acknowledging and celebrating the diversity within Eastern communities.

On a positive note, Jasmine's personality subverts certain Orientalist expectations. Her assertiveness, independence, and agency challenge stereotypes that typically portray Eastern women as passive and submissive. However, assessing whether this empowerment narrative coexists harmoniously with or contradicts the visual tropes associated with her facial features is crucial.

In summary, Jasmine's facial features and complexion in *Aladdin (1992)* can be analysed through the critical lens of *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*. While certain elements may align with historical tropes, it is essential to recognize the character's potential subversions and consider the broader impact of such portrayals on perceptions of Eastern beauty and identity. A nuanced understanding of the character requires careful consideration of cultural sensitivity and a commitment to authentic representation. Throughout the film, Jasmine is seen wearing several different outfits, but this is her most iconic portrayal. Jasmine wears blue Salwar and a cropped blue off-the-shoulder blouse that bares her midriff. She is accessorised with a matching blue tiara and some chunky gold jewellery. She is first seen in the outfit while she is in the confines of her home, the royal palace.



Figure 19. Princess Jasmine (Aladdin,1992)

Jasmine's blue outfit in *Aladdin (1992)* is an intriguing subject for analysis through the lens of Orientalism (Said, 1978), particularly in its portrayal of an Oriental woman. The costume, while visually striking and iconic, reflects certain Orientalist tropes and exoticized representations.

Aesthetic Appeal and Stereotypes:

The vibrant blue hue of Jasmine's outfit captures attention, contributing to the overall visual appeal. However, this colour choice aligns with the Orientalist tradition of portraying the East as exotic and fantastical, often emphasizing vibrant and opulent aesthetics.

Exoticized Elements: Jasmine's outfit's design incorporates elements often associated with Orientalist fantasies. The crop top and harem pants combination may perpetuate Western fantasies of a sensualized and exotic Orient. These elements contribute to the broader pattern of Western art representing Eastern women as alluring and mysterious.

Representation of the 'Other':

The choice of Jasmine's attire can be seen as a manifestation of the 'Orientalist gaze,' where the character is exoticized and portrayed as the 'Other'—different and distant from Western norms. The outfit becomes a visual expression of how Western audiences historically perceived and fantasized about women from the East.

Cultural Signifiers: Incorporating cultural signifiers, such as the headpiece and jewellery, may contribute to the mystique attributed to the character. While these elements may draw inspiration from Middle Eastern cultures, there is a risk of oversimplification and generalization, reducing the diverse cultures of the East into a homogenized and romanticized image.

Empowerment vs. Stereotyping: On a more nuanced note, one could argue that Jasmine's character challenges stereotypes in certain aspects. Her assertiveness and desire for independence defy traditional depictions of passive and submissive Asian women. However, juxtaposing these qualities against a visually exoticized outfit could inadvertently reinforce the trope of the 'exotic yet rebellious' Eastern woman.

Cultural Appropriation: The outfit's design should be scrutinized for potential cultural appropriation, considering whether it accurately represents the diversity and richness of Middle Eastern cultures. Misappropriation of cultural elements in costume design can perpetuate stereotypes and undermine authentic representation.

Jasmine's blue outfit in *Aladdin (1992)* encapsulates both aesthetic allure and potential pitfalls in its representation of an Asian woman. While it contributes to the film's visual appeal, the analysis through the lens of Orientalism (Said, 1978)reveals how costume choices can inadvertently reinforce exoticized stereotypes and perpetuate certain cultural biases. The nuanced interpretation of Jasmine's character and attire necessitates careful consideration of the broader socio-cultural implications embedded in the film's visual storytelling.

The second outfit of Princess Jasmine's is seen as she runs away from the palace and finds herself in the market of the city of Agrabah. She is seen wearing shoes and a dark brown cloak accompanied by a light brown scarf that is partially covering her hair. While it was and still may be common practice of Muslim and/or Arab women to partially cover their hair while outside their homes, I do not believe this was a consideration on the character designer's part. Due to the narrative of Princess Jasmine being forced to marry a prince before her 16th birthday, she runs away to be free from obligation. She is the Princess of Agrabah, presumably well known by all if not most of her subjects, she would verily need a disguise in order to blend in and slip out of the palace and conform unnoticed.



Figure 11. (Aladdin 1992, 00:17:56)

This suggestion may be confirmed when Jasmine takes off her scarf to reveal to the palace guards that she is the Princess and commands them to release *Aladdin (1992)* from their captivity. When her identity is revealed, the guards did not recognise the princess while she had her hair covered because her scarf acted as a disguise and not as the *hijab* (hair covering) associated with Islamic practice.



Figure 13. (Aladdin 1992, 00:24::07)



Figure 12.(Aladdin 1992, 00:23:28)

The third outfit that we see Jasmine in includes golden shoes, a red strapless bandeau, salwar pants, pointy golden jewellery, a tiara, and a snake armband. This outfit is far more sexualised than the other two within the narrative context. In this scene, Jasmine is trying to convince Jafar through "seduction" to confirm that his wish to make her fall in love with him has worked. This is firstly narratively highly problematic as Jafar is a middle-aged man and Jasmine is a few days from just approaching her 16th birthday. Within visual and narrative context, it does not make sense for Jasmine to change her outfit from her usual blue attire to the red outfit unless the writers wanted the audience to view her in a different manner.



Figure 14. (Aladdin 1992, 01:16:49)

This pushes the audience to view Jasmine as an object rather than a person and her sexuality is only used to distract. "Also, in one of the last scenes of the movie, Jafar treats Jasmine as a sexual enslaved person by referring to her as "pussycat". In this scene, she is wearing a red, sultry version of her original blue outfit; the red colour of this outfit connotes the idea of sex, and romance. The constant sexualisation of Jasmine causes the male characters, specifically Jafar to treat her with less respect.

In the final fight scene between Aladdin and Jafar, Jasmine is physically abused by Jafar. Overall, the acceptance of the sexualizing causes the male characters to view women as objects

Theoretical Discussion: The Oriental Woma(e)n

History professor Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer, states that Princess Jasmine’s outfit is “a straight take from European orientalist paintings.”(Glamour, 2019)

Pictured on the right, is Fabio Fabbi, a famous orientalist Italian painter who pictures Arabian women in a painting called “Harem Beauties At Market ”. (Fabbi, 1861) Princess jasmine's outfit is somewhat similar to the main figure pictured in the painting concerning the blouse, pants, and shoes.



Figure 15. harem Beauties at a Market (Fabbi, 1861)

Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer mentions that Jasmine's outfit is "too revealing" for the proposed period and place. ”(Glamour, 2019). This is not because of the Islamic mandate of encouraging women to practise modesty in fashion but because of Jasmine's status as a royal.

The suggestion of Princess Jasmine being associated with women belonging to harems and the carnal art through her outfit is also suggested by creative writer Mark Stamp. Stereotyped harem clothing in Orientalist paintings commonly features bare midriffs and low-cut tops, highlighting sensuality. Additionally, flowing, and sheer fabrics, like silk or chiffon, are often depicted, contributing to an ethereal and romanticized aesthetic in Orientalist portrayals.

Historically, the term "harem" refers to the private quarters of a ruler or wealthy individual in some Middle Eastern cultures. It is important to note that the concept of a harem has evolved, and its

portrayal in popular media may not always accurately represent historical realities. (Definition of HAREM, 2024)

In factual historical contexts, women in a harem would typically wear elaborate and luxurious clothing that reflected the wealth and status of the owner. These garments could include colourful and ornate dresses from rich fabrics such as silk, satin, or brocade. The clothing might be adorned with intricate embroidery, jewels, and gold or silver embellishments.

The depiction of women in harems in Orientalist paintings has often perpetuated stereotypes and inaccuracies about the clothing and lives of women in those settings. Orientalist art, popular in the 19th century, often portrayed a romanticized and exoticized version of life in the Middle East and other Eastern cultures. These paintings, while visually stunning, often reflected Western artists' biases and preconceived notions rather than accurately representing the diverse and complex realities of the depicted cultures.

In his travels in Europe in 1895, Ahmed Midhat Efendi, an Ottoman journalist and writer, expressed dissatisfaction, stating, "The embodiment of the East is a cherished figure reclining on a sofa... Her attire, revealing more than concealing, exposes her legs hanging from the sprawled couch, with only a half-covered belly and chest adorned in translucent gauzy fabrics as delicate as a dream... Despite the visual pleasure derived from this portrayal, it is not a reality but rather a dream, a poetic vision... One might be led to believe that this body is not a wife to her husband and a mother to her children, but perhaps merely an object serving the pleasures of the man who owns the household." (Shaw, 2011)

Ahmed Midhat Efendi's 1895 critique of the exoticized portrayal of Eastern women reclining on a couch with revealing attire parallels the stereotypical representation of characters like Princess Jasmine in popular culture. While not a direct reference, the dreamlike and objectified image described by Efendi reflects broader cultural perceptions of femininity during that era, which persist in certain portrayals today. As a character, Princess Jasmine embodies some of these romanticized elements, though contemporary interpretations often aim to challenge and redefine such stereotypes.

It is important to note that Princess Jasmine is fictional. At the same time, her character and her attire draw on orientalist tropes and can perpetuate misleading stereotypes about the clothing and lives of women in the Middle East.

In reality, the clothing women wore in historical harems would have varied significantly based on factors such as culture, period, and social status. It is crucial to recognize that generalizing or simplifying the diversity of Eastern cultures based on these Orientalist depictions can lead to misunderstandings and reinforce harmful stereotypes. When discussing historical clothing or cultural practices, it is essential to rely on accurate historical sources and be aware of the potential biases present in artistic representations.

When women are analysed through the guise of Orientalism, as mentioned, they are often sexualized. Painter and Master of Visual Arts graduate Farazeh Syed mentions how Orientalism has contributed to Western ideals of women from the Middle East:

"In keeping with the above Western tradition of 'nudes', the Orient too was depicted in sensuous, languid, seductive feminine nudity, inviting European male gaze, indulgence, and control. The women in the countless odalisque and harem paintings by various Orientalist artists had a stereotypical appearance as if there was a universal odalisque." (Syed, 2021)

Expanding on this point, Ranna Kabani, a Syrian cultural historian, suggests that orientalist painters use oriental depictions of women; the women in these paintings "appear to be cloned from one model, as if depictions of one woman in an endless variety of poses." (Kabbani, 1986, p. 84)



Figure 16. (Aladdin 1992, 00:08:22)

Relating this statement to the portrayal of Jasmine in *Aladdin (1992)* while being compared to the other middle eastern women in the film, her outfit is strikingly similar to the "harem" girl characters. It is suggested that they appear to be "be cloned from one model." (Kabbani, 1986, p. 84



Figure 17. (Aladdin 1992, 00:08:17)

Both Jasmine and the group of women wear the off-the-shoulder blouse revealing their midriff and salwar pants, only finding differentiation in their accessories. It is also important to note that these women along with Bakhtawar, the keeper of the brothel and Jasmine are the only women to have lines in *Aladdin (1992)* and are shown in a full shot view (1992.)



Figure 18.(Aladdin 1992, 00:08:19)

Bakhtawar is large compared to the 'harem' girls and is described as "a tall and obese woman with tan skin, black hair, a bulbous nose and prominent bags under her eyes." (*Bakhtawar*, no date) She hits Aladdin with a broom for "flirting with her girls without paying."

According to Aladdin fandom Wiki "They are first seen when Aladdin breaks into their brothel where he happily ogles them as they express both annoyance and flirtatious behaviour. They seem to be familiar with him but are shown to not sympathise with his plight." (Groosenat0r, no date)
The lack of effort that was put into the design of these characters, even though their roles are not imperative to the film or the narrative, due to the lack of representation of women, the audience relies solely on these portrayals of Arab woman from the film which is being reduced to either sexualised or villainous.

Compared to the men in the animated film who have distinctly different looks, the woman is reduced to these stereotypes of Arab women. "The fact that there is a lack of diversity in the female cast of *Aladdin (1992)* and that they most likely used the same model for all the females in the film is another means of objectification of the female body. " (owensbyd, 2015)



Figure 19. Renaissance Disney princesses. (Photo: Flickr)

Jasmine's outfit is the most revealing compared to Disney's Disney princesses in the Renaissance era. The proposed discourse surrounding Jasmine does not favour the concept that young women should not show their bodies or figures, but rather, why is she the only character portrayed this way?

According to Screen Rant, these Disney princesses were depicted in films intending to portray stories from the 1500s to the 1800s. (Tyler, 2020) During this time, women from distinguished and wealthy families were often seen to be wearing corsets under their dresses to create the appearance of a smaller waist and "to fl "then the stomach and emphasise the fullness of the skirts and chest." (Lane" 2021) Snow White, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, and Cinderella all wear ball gowns, so it can be

assumed that this was the standard for Eurocentric women to wear corsets during the periods of the princesses above.

However, Jasmine is seen never to be wearing a corset despite Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer, a history professor who analysed *Aladdin’s (1992)* fashion for accuracy, mentioning that during this time, it was common practice for an imperial woman to wear a corset as her undergarments, even in 18th-century Iraq. (Glamour, 2019)

Considering this fact, Jasmin Jasmine is the same size or considerably smaller than the other princesses without a corset. This visual leads to the creation of a fetish for the "other" Stud" es have shown that the bodies of women of colour were "erotic" by European colonists upon entering the New World." (Asa" e, 2021). Jasmine is seen as "the o "her" and "therefore it is more 'accepted' to sexualise and therefore fetishise her appearance.

Jasmine is also notably the only princess of this era, Disney, who does not possess the sole role of the main protagonist. Her character is constantly in the hands of the men around her up until the final moments of the film. Less care and consideration were taken when designing her character.

Jafar

Background

Jafar is the main antagonist of *Aladdin (1992).*His character in the film acts as a vizier to the Sultan of Agrabah. Jafar also holds the power of sorcery and hypnosis with his gold cobra staff and uses this power to often manipulate the sultan for his own gain. Jafar wears a long black cloak, a cape, and a turban with some red detailing. He appears to be middle aged with a curly black beard.

Jaffar is one of the only main characters other than the sultan and the Genie that possess the visual feature of a hooked nose.



Figure 20. Jaffar (Aladdin,1992)

Visual Description and Analysis

Jaffar is portrayed as vaguely Middle Eastern, which reinforces his "foreign" or "other" status in the context of the film. His accent is markedly different from the accents of the heroic characters like Aladdin and Jasmine, who have American or neutral accents. He also has darker skin to both Jasmine and Aladdin. Jafar's visual and vocal portrayal draws upon common Hollywood stereotypes of the time, perpetuating the notion that individuals with certain physical features or accents are more likely to be antagonists or "bad guys." This can be seen as problematic, as it simplifies complex cultural identities and perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

Jafar's appearance and accent can be seen as a form of visual shorthand used to quickly convey his "otherness" to the audience. In storytelling, characters are often visually and aurally coded to communicate information about their role in the narrative. In Jafar's case, these codes are used to signify his role as the villain. It's important to consider the cultural and historical context in which *Aladdin (1992)* was created (1992). At that time, Hollywood often depicted Middle Eastern and Arab cultures through a Eurocentric lens, reinforcing stereotypes and biases. (Gahndi, 2022) Disney's representation of Jafar reflects this broader trend.

Analysing Jafar, the main antagonist in Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* , through the lens of Orientalism reveals a complex portrayal shaped by stereotypical representations of Middle Eastern cultures. Orientalism, as conceptualized by Edward Said, refers to the Western tendency to depict Eastern societies in a manner that reinforces existing power dynamics and cultural hierarchies. In the case of Jafar, several elements contribute to his characterization within this framework.



Figure 21. (Aladdin 1992, 01:17:30)

Firstly, Jafar's physical appearance aligns with Orientalist tropes commonly associated with villainous characters in Western media. He possesses exaggerated features, including a hooked nose and a dark complexion, reflecting a long-standing tradition of portraying Middle Eastern individuals with sinister traits. This visual depiction perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces negative perceptions about the region.

Secondly, Jafar's position as the Grand Vizier in the fictional city of Agrabah echoes Orientalist notions of despotic rulers and scheming advisors prevalent in Western narratives about the Middle East. His pursuit of power, coupled with his cunning and manipulative nature, reinforces the stereotype of Eastern leaders as authoritarian and conniving.

Furthermore, Jafar's mystical abilities, particularly his use of dark magic and association with a serpent-headed staff, align with Western notions of the mysterious and magical Orient. This portrayal

taps into Orientalist ideas of the East as a land of mysticism and exoticism, reinforcing the notion that Middle Eastern cultures are inherently otherworldly and dangerous.

Moreover, Jafar's language and demeanour are often coded as "foreign" or "exotic" in comparison to the more "Westernized" characters, such as Aladdin and Jasmine. This linguistic and behavioural coding perpetuates the notion of a stark cultural divide, presenting the East as fundamentally different and incomprehensible to Western audiences.

In summary, Jafar's character in *Aladdin (1992)* can be seen as a manifestation of Orientalist tropes, reinforcing stereotypical representations of Middle Eastern cultures prevalent in Western media. The visual, narrative, and linguistic elements associated with Jafar contribute to a skewed and oversimplified portrayal, perpetuating a distorted Western understanding of the East.

The Genie: A shining, shimmering, splendid plot device.

Background

The Genie in Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* has become an iconic beloved character to many generations that have been exposed to the film. With the vocal talent of Robin Williams, the performance is memorable as it is incredible.



Figure 22. Genie (Aladdin,1992)

Visually, the Genie is blue with a glow-y outline and does not possess feet for most of the film but rather a long smoky tail that follows his form. He has his hair tied in a small gold hair band and has thick eyebrows as well as a twirly goatee. He is accessorised with thick gold hooped earrings and a gold bangle on each respective wrist. When analysing the Genie's nose, it appears to have a similar shape to Jafars hooked

nose. Similar to the Genie in The Thief of Baghdad (1940), the Genie has striking resemblance concerning their respective hair styles, facial hair, outfit design and skin colour.

It is suggested that the Genie was designed with this distinctive nose shape, not with the intention of portraying villainy like Jafar, but rather to symbolise mysticism and an otherworldly visual appearance compared to the human protagonists, Jasmine, and Aladdin.

The Genie first appears in the film when Aladdin rubs the lamp that the Genie resides in. This awakens the Genie and results in Aladdin being granted three wishes. According to CBR Aladdin wishes for the following: "to be a prince, be saved from drowning and free the Genie." (Yip, 2022)



Figure 23. Genie in The Thief of Baghdad (1940) 01:07:00

Visual Description and Analysis

Personality wise, the Genie is very charismatic, witty, and outgoing. According to DisneyWiki, "For thousands of years, the Genie served as a slave to whomever held ownership of his lamp, to which he was eternally bound unless granted freedom by a master. The Genie possesses phenomenal cosmic power that allows him to grant wishes, shape-shift, and transcend space and time."(*Genie*, 2023)

He involves himself in the plan to convince the town of Agrabah of Aladdin's royalty as Prince Ali Ababwa in order to fulfil one of his three wishes. In order to steer public opinion about 'Prince Ali Ababwa', the Genie inserts himself in the civilian's conversations praising Aladdin. He is able to do this as a result of his shape-shifting abilities as listed in the above quote. He disguises himself as several human and animal forms and makes his way through the town commenting on Ali Ababwas merit and stature.



Figure 26. (Aladdin 1992, 00:50:21)



Figure 24. (Aladdin 1992, 00:48:53)



Figure 25(Aladdin 1992, 00:50:13)



Figure 27. (Aladdin 1992, 00:49:55)



Figure 28. (Aladdin 1992, 00:49:53)

"As well as largely driving the plot in the first film, Genie serves as a comic relief element in each appearance. He is shown to have shape-shifting abilities, which allow for many and varied sight gags. His supernatural disposition permits him to break the fourth wall and parody real-life people and

popular culture completely outside of the boundaries of the universe in which he is contained." (Genie, 2023)

Genie's role in the first film is not limited to merely being a passive character; instead, he actively propels the narrative forward. In essence, he acts as a driving force behind the unfolding events, influencing the decisions and outcomes that shape the story's progression. Furthermore, Genie's presence in the film serves a dual purpose. While he contributes significantly to the plot's development, he also assumes the crucial role of providing comic relief. This comedic aspect is a recurring theme in his subsequent appearances across various story iterations. Genie's comedic relief stems from his unique ability to change his physical form, leading to several real-life visual gags that captivate the audience.

The connection to real-life people that Genies references is a way to relate to the audience watching the film, as many may have been exposed to those real-life people in some sort of other visual portrayal through television and film. He parodies real-life individuals and references popular culture that exists entirely outside of the fictional world in which he resides. This facet of his character injects humour and a metafictional element into the narrative and makes the storytelling more relatable and relevant to the contemporary audience.

According to Rotten Tomatoes, *Aladdin (1992)* is rated "G" for general, meaning all audiences are permitted to watch the film. (Aladdin—Rotten Tomatoes, 1992) It is assumed that many parents attended screenings of the film with their young children during its release in 1992 and may have also watched the film at home with their children.

Firstly, it is essential to recognise that the choice of references in a film can have cultural and demographic implications. Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* is primarily a family-oriented animated film with a wide-reaching audience, including children from diverse backgrounds. However, many of the references made by the Genie are tied to figures from old Hollywood, which primarily featured white actors and entertainers. This may create a disconnect for people of colour, especially those who come from different cultural backgrounds or were not exposed to these white Hollywood figures.

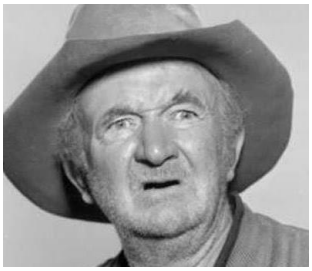


For people of colour, these references may not hold the same cultural significance or resonance as they do for those who grew up with these icons. This can result in a sense of exclusion or alienation, as the humour and references may not align with their cultural experiences and frames of reference. These choices could unintentionally reinforce a sense of otherness or marginalisation for viewers who do not see themselves reflected in the film's humour.

Additionally, when examining the broader context of diversity and representation in media, the choice of these references raises questions about the lack of representation of people of colour in the entertainment industry, particularly during the eras when these Hollywood figures were most prominent. It underscores the historical underrepresentation of people of colour in media and the need for more inclusive storytelling.

In summary, while the references to famous white figures in *Aladdin (1992)* may provide humour for some viewers, it is essential to consider how these choices might impact the perception of the film, particularly among people of colour who may not share the same cultural familiarity with these references. This highlights the importance of diverse representation in media and the need to ensure that all audience members can fully engage with and enjoy the content without feeling excluded or marginalised.

All the real-life people that functioned as parodies for comic relief for the Genie's character. (SBNEnter, 2021) (See list below)

Name of Real-life Person	Portrayal in Real-Life	Portrayal in *Aladdin (1992)*
Mary Hart	 *Figure 29. Mary Hart*	 *Figure 30. (Aladdin 1992, 00:50:08)*
Walter Brennan	 *Figure 31. Walter Brennan*	 *Figure 32(Aladdin 1992, 00:49:50)*
Carol Channing	 *Figure 33. Carol Channing*	 *Figure 34. (Aladdin 1992, 00:43:26)*
Jack Nicholson	 *Figure 35. Jack Nicholson*	 *Figure 36. (Aladdin 1992, 00:54:35)*

William.F.Buckley Jr	 *Figure 37. William.F.Buckley Jr*	 *Figure 38. (Aladdin 1992, 00:39:59)*
Arnold Schwarzenegger	 *Figure 39. Arnold Schwarzenegger*	 *Figure 40. (Aladdin 1992, 00:36:48)*
Groucho Marx	 *Figure 41. Groucho Marx*	 *Figure 42. (Aladdin 1992, 00:37:17)*

Theoretical Discussion



Figure 43. (Aladdin 1992, 01:23:34)

The Genie is powerful and can perform magic in real time, however, he is confined to the one who rubs his lamp until he is free. This concept of the desire to be free was not in the original tale of *Aladdin and the wonderful lamp (1704)* and was suggestively projected on to the character as an American value. (*Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin*, 2004)

This statement concerning the Genie's freedom was made by an associate professor in the department of English and comparative literature at UCLA, Dr. Ali Behdad.

Dr. Behdad signifies how this, and other parts of the original tale was changed to forecast American values such as 'freedom' to create relatability between the film and its audience. (*Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin*, 2004) Jinn in Islam

"Jinn (often al-jinn or djinn) are shape-shifting spirits made of fire and air with origins in pre-Islamic Arabia. They are the inspiration for Aladdin's Genie and have held space in Arab culture for almost as long as Arab culture itself. And yet, having transcended both religion and the physical world, so little is understood about the spirits." (Ettachfini, 2018)



Figure 44. Al Mudhib (1460-1560)

The Qur'an and Hadith, possess integral texts within Islamic tradition, that contain several references to jinn. Jinn, as described in Islamic literature, coexist within the same realm as other beings but inhabit a distinct world separate from that of humans. They possess the ability to perceive human beings while remaining invisible to the human eye.

Within Islamic theology, the concept of jinn holds considerable significance. The Qur'an, considered the primary source of divine revelation in Islam, alludes to the existence of jinn in multiple verses. These references often portray jinn as sentient entities with their own agency, capable of making choices and being held accountable for their actions.

In *Aladdin (1992)*, the Genie is portrayed as a comical mythical figure that is bound by a lamp that holds him obligated to grant 3 wishes to whoever picks it up.

The significance of cultural and religious discourse in any faith should be portrayed as accurately as possible in order to avoid prejudice and assumptions of those belonging to another faith. Reduced representations can impact how others view the discourse itself. When we reduce or oversimplify these discussions, it can lead to misconceptions and misinterpretations, potentially perpetuating stereotypes and creating barriers between people of diverse backgrounds. By representing cultural and religious discourse faithfully, we can foster a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Animal sidekicks: Abu, Rajah, and Iago

Abu



Figure 45. (Aladdin 1992, 00:19:06)

Background

The main characters, Aladdin and Jasmine have their respective animals in which they rely on for companionship and comfort. Aladdin has Abu, a small monkey that helps him throughout the film. Abu is mentioned to be a "mischievous, kleptomaniacal monkey and Aladdin's loyal pet and partner-in-crime." (*Abu*, 2023) Abu is a small brown monkey that wears a vest similar to Aladdin's along with purple and red fez.

Something Interesting to consider when referring to the films inspiration *Thief of Baghdad,* the main character, Ahmed has a sidekick character that is named Abu. As mentioned before, Abu's character was portrayed by Sabu Dastagir, one of the only 2 people of casted in the film. Abu's character is constantly referred to as "the thief" throughout the film as he steals most things to drive the plot.

Figure 47. (The Thief of Baghdad 1940, 01:34:09)

Figure 46. (Aladdin 1992, 00:28:20)

After Ahmed gets arrested, he meets Abu in prison who is being held for thievery. Abu arranges for their escape by stealing the keys to their cell from the guards. It is also to be mentioned that Abu is turned into a dog later in the movie as a curse.



Similar to the *Thief of Baghdad (1940),* in *Aladdin (1992)*, Abu helps Aladdin escape from captivity with a bobby pin. As mentioned above in his introduction, he is often seen to be stealing things throughout the film, which often frustrates Aladdin.



Contextual Analysis

According to Foster on Film, "Modern audiences should note how much Disney swiped from The Thief of Bagdad for the animated *Aladdin (1992)*. There's the evil Jaffar who runs the kingdom (Disney's version even looks like Conrad Veidt), a beautiful princess with an infantile Sultan-father who loves toys, a sidekick named Abu who steals and is non-human (well, he's only a dog for part of The Thief of Bagdad, while he's a monkey for all of Aladdin), a powerful Genie, a flying carpet, and an item to be taken from a trapped temple."(Foster, 2023)

Abu's Character in *The Thief of Baghdad (1940)* is turned into a dog, this may be a metaphor for his obedience and loyalty to the main character Ahmed. In "The Thief of Baghdad" (1940), Abu had a limited role and reduced presence in the story. However, in *Aladdin (1992)*, Abu was reimagined as an animal sidekick character who lacks the ability to speak like a human character but communicates through grunts and actions.

Despite this transformation, there are still enough similarities between these different portrayals of the character to associate them with one another through the actions of the characters, their role, and the plot of both films.

The decision to change and then transfer Abu's character (considering that he was one of the only characters portrayed by an actor of colour) from human to a monkey in the animated film may convey the message that his character in "The Thief of Baghdad" (1940) is 'subhuman.' (Haslam, 2017) According to Nick Haslam, writer for The Conversation, research, and report website, "Dehumanising ape metaphors were commonly applied to Indigenous people during colonial wars and conquests." (Haslam, 2017) This aids the statement that the creators of *Aladdin (1992)* reduced Abu's character because they did not find importance in maintaining and/or progressively recreating the character despite the later creation of the film within a more progressive period of time.

The choice to use a monkey for Abu's portrayal considering the fact that monkeys are not indigenous to Iraq, and it would be uncommon for people to engage in foreign animal trade at the time of the period of time of both respective films, showcases a suggestion to sub-humanise Abu's Character. (Animalia.Bio, 2023) Whether this occurrence was the direct intention of the film creators or not, more consideration should have been taken into the decision to change the characters and how that would actually be implemented without following in sub humanising a character.

Rajah



Figure 48. (Aladdin 1992, 00:14:15)

Rajah is princess Jasmine's pet tiger, he is described as her "loyal, protective pet tiger and constant companion." (*Rajah*, 2023) The naming of Jasmine's tiger as "Rajah," derives its etymological roots from the Hindi language, for 'prince,' introduces a nuanced layer to the cinematic narrative through an orientalist lens.

The name, Rajah, stands out because it's different from the other names in the main cast, which mostly have Arabic origins. The writers chose this name, rooted in Hindi, for Jasmine's tiger, showing they picked from different cultures. If they wanted all the names to match and stick to Arabic themes, they could have used 'Ameer' for Jasmine's tiger. This mixing of cultural elements in the names reflects an artistic style through orientalism, where different influences are combined to create a fancy, though not entirely accurate, portrayal of the story's setting.



Figure 50. Map showcasing Bengal tigers and their indigenous areas



Figure 49. Iraq on world map

Moreover, within the orientalist discourse, the inclusion of a tiger within the Arabian landscape introduces an exoticized and

fantastical element, transcending geographical and zoological accuracies. Tigers, being non-native to Iraq, as underscored by biogeographic verities, amplify this orientalist tendency by contributing to a constructed, idealized vision of Baghdad, Arabia.

The utilisation of the name "Rajah" through the introduction of a non-indigenous species within the Arabian context serve as emblematic instances of orientalist artistic choices, embodying a fusion of cultural motifs and fantastical elements that contribute to the cinematic tapestry's exotic allure.

Iago

According to DisneyWiki, Iago is described as "a sarcastic, loud-mouthed, and short-tempered parrot that served as Jafar's sidekick….." (*Iago*, no date) Parrots are not indigenous to Iraq. In the wild, parrots are typically found in tropical and subtropical regions, such as Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, and nearby islands. Iraq, being a country in the Middle East, does not have the climate and habitat that would support native populations of parrots.

Iago's design is based on the Indonesian native parrot, the red lorey.



Figure 52. Map showcasing red loreys and their indigenous areas.



Figure 51. Iraq on world map



Figure 53. Red Lorey



Figure 54. Iago (Aladdin 1992, 00:53:35)

Redesigning Iago into a bearded vulture native to Iraq makes more sense for several reasons. Firstly, parrots, including Iago's original design inspired by the red lory from Indonesia, are not indigenous to Iraq. The country's climate and habitat do not support native populations of parrots, as these birds are typically found in tropical and subtropical regions like Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, and nearby islands.

Choosing a bearded vulture for Iago's redesign aligns more closely with the natural fauna of Iraq. Bearded vultures are native to the Middle East, including Iraq, making them a biologically and geographically suitable choice. This adaptation not only respects the local wildlife but also enhances the character's authenticity within the context of the story. Additionally, a bearded vulture's characteristics, such as its unique appearance and behavior, can be creatively incorporated to maintain Iago's sarcastic, loud-mouthed, and short-tempered personality while reflecting the region's biodiversity more accurately.

Architectural and Setting Design

Rasoul Azadani, Iranian Disney cinematographer and animator served as the film’s layouts provider. Azadani provided the artists with pictures of the Iranian city of Isfahan, his hometown. (*Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin*, 2004)

It is stated that the scenery designers for *Aladdin (1992)* based the landscapes for the film on 19th-century orientalist paintings and Persian miniatures. (*Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin*, 2004) Although it is mentioned that some efforts have been made to depict the film’s inspiration of

location somewhat accurately, there are some opportunities for harmful interchangeability to arise. It is important to understand why these architectural portrayals matter within the realm of animation.

Preservation of Cultural Identity: Arabesque architecture, embellished with distinctive features like intricate geometric patterns, elegant calligraphy, and the use of specific materials, is an integral aspect of the cultural essence of the Arab world. The careful depiction of these architectural marvels in animated films acts as a guardian, safeguarding and illuminating this unique identity—a timeless manifestation of the captivating spirit that characterizes the rich heritage of the Arab world.

Avoiding Stereotypes: Inaccurate representations have the capacity to fuel stereotypes, reinforcing misunderstandings about the cultural wealth of the Arab world. By faithfully portraying Arab architecture, animation becomes a powerful agent in dispelling these stereotypes, serving as a channel to cultivate a profound and nuanced understanding of the diverse cultures thriving within the captivating tapestry of the Arab realm.

Respect for Diversity: The Arab world is a treasury of diverse cultures, where each locality showcases distinct architectural styles resonating with its history and cherished customs. Accuracy in animation acknowledges and celebrates this remarkable diversity, avoiding the oversimplification or lumping together of Arab cultures. In this approach, a path is paved for a depiction that is not only respectful but also finely nuanced, encapsulating the intricate essence of the diverse cultures woven into the Arab tapestry.

Educational Value: Animation is a powerful tool for education and cultural exchange between the viewers and the creators. Accurate depictions of Arab architecture can serve as an educational resource, offering insights and background into the history, art, and craftsmanship of the topic.

Cultural Appreciation: By accurately portraying Arab architecture, animation can encourage viewers to appreciate the beauty and sophistication of these architectural styles. This, in turn, fosters cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Mitigating *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*: *Orientalism (Said, 1978)*refers to the Western tendency to romanticize or exoticize Eastern cultures, often leading to inaccurate and simplified portrayals. Accurate depiction of Arab architecture helps mitigate orientalist tendencies, presenting a more authentic representation.

The accurate depiction of Arab architecture in animation is not just about surface-level beauty; it transforms into a deep tribute to a culturally rich legacy. It goes beneath the exterior, exploring the complexities of a heritage that merits both reverence and understanding. This representation acts as a passionate catalyst, breaking down the barriers of stereotypes, fostering a growing appreciation, and planting the seeds for a more intimate and finely detailed understanding of the diverse cultures that grace the Arab world's vibrant tapestry.

The Royal palace



Figure 56. Agrabah concept Art (Aladdin 1992)



Figure 55. taj Mahal (2003)

One of the most iconic long shots of the film shows the sultan's palace above the city of Agrabah. This mentioned palace in Agrabah has a striking visual resemblance to the Taj Mahal in India. However, the narrator in the beginning of the film states that the city of Agrabah is near the Jordan river, Iraq lies to the east of Jordan. (*Agrabah*, 2020) The mention of a real-life river and country solidifies that Agrabah is in the middle east and not in south Asia Agra, India.

The building has a similar structure to the Muslim place of worship, often referred to as a ‘mosque’ in modern times derived from the Arabic word masjid, which means "place of prostration." (The Met, 2012)

As previously stated, the decision to alter the name of the city in the animated film *Aladdin (1992)* was influenced by the backdrop of the war involving the USA and Iraq. It has been suggested that the term "Agrabah" might be a deliberate anagram of the letters in "Baghdad," albeit with the notable absence of the letter ‘ds and the inclusion of the letter 'r''. An explanation for the creators' choice could be a fusion of the geographical reference to the Taj Mahal's setting in Agra, India, amalgamated with the notion of Baghdad, leading to the coined term "Agrabah." This creative choice could have served as a means to evoke a distinctive and fictional location while subtly drawing from real-world inspirations.

Chapter 5: A Whole New World, literally: How can we progressively re-visualise *Aladdin (1992)* through the medium of an art book?

Upon further research I have discovered that there is a lack of tools to analyse films within Arab and Islamic context. Arab and Islamic culture like all religions and traditions are fluid among a variety of followers. However, in order to develop a methodology that will assist in making a visually progressive retelling of *Aladdin (1992)*, I have decided to include the comparison of a case study: The Knight and his Princess. I believe this film is relevant as it is a more recent release and is the first feature animated film made by all Arab talent.

Aladdin (1992) and The Knight and the Princess (2019) are both animated movies that take place in the Middle East and draw on elements of Islamic and Arab culture. However, they differ in several ways, including their style of animation, their storytelling approach, and their portrayal of Middle Eastern culture.



Figure 57. The Knight and The Princess (2018)

Firstly, the animation styles of the two movies are quite different. *Aladdin (1992)* is a traditional 2D animated movie, while The Knight and the Princess (2019) is a 3D animated movie. This difference in animation style affects the way the movies are presented and the visual impact they have on the audience.

Secondly, the two movies have different approaches to storytelling. *Aladdin (1992)* is a classic fairy tale story of a poor boy who falls in love with a princess and uses a magic lamp to try to win her heart. *The Knight and the Princess* (2019), on the other hand, is a historical fantasy adventure that takes place during the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, where a young princess and her knight must work together to save their kingdom from an evil sorcerer. (same time as Aladdin)

Finally, the portrayal of Middle Eastern culture in the two movies differs significantly. *Aladdin (1992)* is criticised for perpetuating harmful stereotypes of the Middle East, including reducing Arab Muslim culture to a few exotic elements, such as the use of the Arabic language, the presence of mosques, and the depiction of belly dancers. The Knight and the Princess (2019), on the other

hand, tries to portray Middle Eastern culture more accurately and respectfully, and to highlight the diversity and complexity of the region. For example, the movie features characters of different ethnicities, religious practices, and cultural backgrounds, and includes references to historical events and cultural practices.

"People in the West currently are more interested to learn about jihad, the veil, the status of women in Islam, and the various fundamentalist movements. For them Islam is solely all of the above. They assume the jinn is a topic better left for Disney and popular culture, or at best, to anthropologists." (El-Zein, 2009)

The quote underscores a prevalent trend where Western audiences tend to focus on specific, often stereotypical aspects of Islamic culture, such as jihad, the veil, and fundamentalist movements. The intricate and rich concept of the jinn, deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, is often overlooked or relegated to the realm of entertainment or academic study. This limited perspective perpetuates a skewed understanding of Islam, emphasizing narrow aspects while neglecting the broader cultural tapestry. To foster a more comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of Islamic culture, it is essential to encourage curiosity and exploration beyond sensationalized topics, embracing the multifaceted nature of traditions like the jinn within their cultural and religious contexts.

Chapter 6: Redesign and Reflection

Now that we have analysed the characters and space in context to the film and why they may be problematic, the following paragraph aims to propose redesigns of each respective character mentioned and reflect on the decisions made while doing so.

In the enchanting world of *Aladdin (1992)*, While these animated classics prioritised character expression and stylistic flair over strict realism, my art book seeks to embark on a journey toward cultural accuracy. Understanding that these films did not aim for documentary precision, I aim to infuse authenticity by considering the characters' origins, social backgrounds, cultural influences, and specific periods.

In this reinterpretation, Aladdin's attire will be reconsidered through the lens of the historical era that inspired the film, taking cues from Iraqi men's clothing choices during that time. To ensure an informed approach, I draw insights from the expertise of Ayşe Baltacioğlu-
Brammer, a History professor specialising in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, fact-checked the fashion designs in the original *Aladdin (1992)*. Additionally, considering the proposed historical

setting during the Ottoman Empire's rule in the late 17th to early 18th century and drawing from Alexandra de Marly's analysis of Middle Eastern dress, this project aspires to weave a tapestry of cultural realism into the vibrant fabric of Aladdin's world.

Aladdin (1992) was mainly hand-drawn. This means that it would be nearly impossible to add intricate embroidery on the characters at the time of production. It is important to note that these films were not striving for documentary accuracy; they prioritised conveying character and style over strict realism, which is especially relevant in animation. However, cultural considerations will be considered when recreating these characters and settings.

In the context of my art book, my goal is to achieve a decent level of cultural accuracy. This involves considering the characters' country of origin, social background, cultural influences, and the specific period. It is important to note that while I aim to maintain recognizability, my overarching objective is to create pictures that capture a sense of cultural realism. This pursuit of realism might entail certain adjustments to elements of the original designs, being portrayed in my own personal drawing style, and taking inspiration from the original character design concerning shapes and colours.

Characters

I intend to reinterpret Aladdin's primary attire in the movie with consideration of the historical era that may have inspired the film while also considering Iraqi men's cultural and fashionable clothing choices during that period. I will also base the Redesign on the opinions and suggestions of the History professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Ayşe Baltacioğlu-Brammer. Baltacioğlu-Brammer was interviewed by Glamour to fact-check the fashion designs and choices in the film *Aladdin (1992).*

As mentioned above, the period of time must be considered when redesigning the visual elements. It may be suggested that the original tale may have been set in the late 17th—early 18th century during the Ottoman Empire's rule (Historian Fact Checks Aladdin's Wardrobe | Glamour, 2019). I will also use journalist Alexandra de Marly of Brittanica's analysis of Middle Eastern dress.

Aladdin

In the redesign of Aladdin, the focus is on authentic and nuanced representation of Middle Eastern men, rejecting stereotypes and embracing diversity. Grounded in a commitment to accuracy, cultural

sensitivity informs clothing choices, drawing inspiration from traditional outfits. Facial features are approached with care, addressing potential stereotypes linked to facial hair and emphasizing diverse characteristics. The redesign aims to contribute to a respectful understanding of Middle Eastern cultures, transcending clichés and fostering a more accurate narrative in character design.

- Diverse Representations: I must acknowledge the diversity within the Middle East, encompassing various ethnicities, cultures, and traditions. Avoid generalizations that treat Middle Eastern men as a homogeneous group.
- Avoid Stereotypes: I should steer clear of common stereotypes such as portraying Middle Eastern men solely as terrorists, extremists, or individuals with oppressive attitudes. These stereotypes contribute to a skewed and unfair representation.
- Authentic Clothing Choices: Be accurate and respectful in depicting clothing choices. Middle Eastern men, depending on the region and context, may wear traditional attire or modern, Western-style clothing.
- Facial Features and Physical Appearance: Represent a range of facial features and physical appearances, as Middle Eastern men, like any group, exhibit diverse characteristics. Avoid homogenizing or exaggerating features.

Clothing: As per Noor Nasr, a writer for Talk In Arabic, an online resource and blog for learning Arabic, "The costume (traditional outfit)for men consists of a pair of baggy pants known as a shalwar, a long- sleeved shirt, and a vest." ." (Nasr, 2013) As see in figure__, I have designed Aladdin to have baggy shalwar pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and a red vest. As mentioned in Aladdin's character analysis, it is mentioned that he would have worn a shirt or blouse under his vest.



Figure 58. Redesign of Aladdin

Facial Features: Concerning Aladdin's facial features, I went back forth on whether to give his character facial hair or not. According to Rising Kashmir, leading English newspaper in Jammu, mentions

"To keep beard is a Sunnah (beneficial) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)." (Khan, 2020) Although the keeping of a beard in Islam is seen as beneficial to its culture, many may associate its appearance and presence on any middle eastern man as 'dangerous' and already proposes conviction. "Images such as the oppressed woman draped in a burka or the angry man with a long beard touting a gun are prevalent in everyday discourses, popular media, and political rhetoric in the U.S. Particularly since 9/11 and the escalation of the "war on terror," these sorts of representations have not only become common but have also had widespread ramifications in both domestic and international politics." (Lukinbeal, 2011)

In understanding of the quote, it is not necessarily the keeping of a beard that has these stereotypical subtexts but rather the keeping of a bear on specifically a middle eastern man. I then thought to give Aladdin's character a beard, However, I decided against this as it is mentioned that Aladdin is only a young boy so it would not make sense to give him facial hair. Despite the decision made, we must keep this discussion in min while creating adult male characters. Concerning the rest of Aladdin's facial features, I have designed the character with a darker skin tone and a larger hooked nose.



Figure 59. Redesign of Aladdin, Facial close-up

Reflection

In the redesign process of Aladdin's character, my foremost consideration was to acknowledge and celebrate the diverse representations within the Middle East, avoiding the trap of treating Middle Eastern men as a homogeneous group. Conscious efforts were made to steer clear of harmful stereotypes, ensuring Aladdin wasn't solely portrayed as a terrorist or individual with oppressive attitudes, which often contributes to an unjust representation. Mindful of cultural and religious practices, I aimed for accuracy in depicting Aladdin's attire, rituals, and customs, steering clear of misrepresentations or exaggerations.

For Aladdin's clothing, I drew inspiration from traditional outfits described by Noor Nasr, incorporating baggy shalwar pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and a red vest. Delving into the nuanced

discussion on facial features, I grappled with the decision to give Aladdin a beard, considering its association with stereotypes. Ultimately, given Aladdin's youthful characterization, I opted against it, recognizing the need to be cautious about facial hair representations on adult male characters in the broader context of cultural stereotypes. I ensured that Aladdin's facial features included a darker skin tone and a larger hooked nose, mindful of the potential implications of these choices on his character's portrayal within the broader cultural narrative.

Princess Jasmine

Because visual portrayals play a significant role in shaping perceptions, and it's crucial to approach the representation of Middle Eastern women with respect, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to avoiding stereotypes. When redesigning Princess Jasmine's character visually, there were several things I had to keep in mind:

- Respect Religious Diversity and Nuanced Representation: If a character is depicted with religious attire, ensure accuracy and avoid generalizations. Recognize that Muslim women, for example, may choose to wear various styles of clothing based on their individual beliefs and cultural influences.
- Individuality in Appearance - Diverse Features: Portray Middle Eastern women with diverse facial features, skin tones, and body types. Avoid homogenizing their physical appearances, as the Middle East is a region with rich ethnic and cultural diversity.
- Avoid Exoticization - Natural Portrayal: I will steer clear of exoticizing Middle Eastern women through overly stylized or sensationalized visuals. I must represent Princess Jasmine naturally and authentically, avoiding unnecessary emphasis on perceived 'exotic' features.
- Cultural Context: Research and Accuracy: I must understand the cultural context and historical backgrounds of the Princess Jasmine. Inaccuracies can contribute to misrepresentations and reinforce stereotypes.
- Avoid Homogenization- Diverse Backgrounds: Acknowledge the diversity within the Middle East by avoiding the homogenization of characters. Different countries and regions have distinct cultural practices and aesthetics.



Figure 60. Iraqi Woman by Maisoon Alrubaei (2018)

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Concerning Jasmines character, I have redesigned the main outfit that she wears in the palace. As for the outfit Jasmine wears when she goes into the city (headscarf and robe), it made sense to not redesign this outfit as it serves its functions, those being as a disguise for princess jasmine and commoner covering. As for the outfit Jasmine wears when Jaffar has supposedly tricked her through the Genies magic lamp, this outfit should have been considered In the first place.

I have introduced more accurate fashion choices referring to what royals would have worn in Iraq during the proposed time of Aladdin's setting but also how this type of clothing is modernly interpreted. I have also created a list of common visuals in orientalist paintings that I will be avoiding while redesigning her characters clothing:

Bare midriffs and low-cut tops: Harem outfits are often shown with tops that expose the midriff and have low necklines, emphasizing sensuality.

Flowing, sheer fabrics: The use of sheer and flowing fabrics, such as silk or chiffon, is common in these depictions, creating an ethereal and romanticized appearance.

Clothing:

Main Outfit: According to Noor Nasr, author for Talk In Arabic, online Arabic resource and blog, "The costume (traditional outfit) for women includes a long dress known as a soran/kaftan, which is sometimes worn over a long-sleeved blouse. The costume is also sometimes worn during traditional Iraqi weddings." (Nasr, 2013) In my re-design of Jasmine, I have portrayed her character in a light blue soran/kaftan dress that is worn over a long-sleeved blouse. She is also wearing a tiara and some gold jewellery to symbolise her royalty.



Figure 61. Redesign of Jasmine

Embroidery: Nasr also mentions that "One of the most important aspects of traditional clothing in Iraq is the use of intricate embroidery and beadwork. This is particularly true for women's clothing……This type of embroidery is known as *tatreez* and is a traditional art form that has been passed down for generations." (Nasr, 2013) Taking this into consideration, I have designed Jasmine's dress to have slight incorporation of some beadwork and embroidery while still maintaining the cartoon style.

Tiara: My redesign of Princess Jasmine includes the presence of a tiara that is bejewelled with a *Durr Al Najaf stone. "The Durr Al Najaf* (Arabic: دُر ٱلنَّجَف) is a glossy and clear gemstone from the quartz family. The name means "pearl of Najaf" as it can only be sourced from Wadi-al-Salaam (Arabic: وادي السلام, romanized: Wādī al-Salām, lit. 'Valley of Peace') in Najaf, Iraq." ('Durr Al Najaf', 2024) I believe this addition to the characters tiara is a cultural ode to the setting of the story, Baghdad Iraq. In the original film Jasmine is seen with a blue crown with a blue stone. I propose that the addition of this stone and removal of the original (blue) stone would show intention of significance.

Facial features: According to Country Way, "Iraqi women are known for their distinct facial features. One of the most prominent features is their nose, which is usually long and straight, with a narrow bridge. Their faces are usually oval-shaped, with high cheekbones and a defined jawline. Their lips are usually full and plump, and their eyebrows are thick and well-defined." (Robertson, 2023)



Figure 62. Redesign of Jasmine, Facial close-up

As seen in figure 61, I have taken these visual perceptions of Iraqi woman into consideration. My redesign of Princess Jasmine has a oval shaped faced with high cheekbones and full plump lips. I have also defined her eyebrows and gave her a longer nose In comparison to the original design. Concerning Princess Jasmin's skin tone, according to Country Way, ""Iraqi women have a variety of skin tones, ranging from fair to dark to fair" (Robertson, 2023), I have taken the liberty from this statement to give Princess Jasmine a medium-olive skin tone, in comparison to Princess Jasmine's fairer skin tone in the original film.

Reflection

In reimagining Princess Jasmine's character, I meticulously navigated the delicate terrain of cultural representation, prioritizing respect and sensitivity. My redesign was guided by a commitment to avoiding stereotypes, offering a diverse portrayal that acknowledged the rich backgrounds of Middle

Eastern women. Princess Jasmine's attire was carefully crafted to avoid reduction to a single dress code, recognizing the varied clothing styles influenced by culture and tradition. Religious diversity was respected with accurate depictions of attire, mindful use of symbols, and nuanced representation. Embracing individuality, I incorporated diverse facial features, skin tones, and body types to counteract homogenization.

The redesign intentionally steered clear of exoticization, focusing on natural and authentic depictions. Extensive research ensured cultural accuracy, avoiding misrepresentations that might reinforce stereotypes. Specific attention was given to Jasmine's outfits, introducing traditional Iraqi wedding elements, subtle beadwork, and a tiara featuring the culturally significant Durr Al Najaf stone. Facial features mirrored the distinct characteristics of Iraqi women, and a medium-olive skin tone represented the varied spectrum observed among Iraqi women. In essence, this redesign sought to present Princess Jasmine authentically and nuancedly, promoting a more respectful and inclusive portrayal within the animated narrative.

Genie

Embarking on the creation of the redesign of Genie from *Aladdin (1992)* inspired by the rich lore of Jinn in Islamic tradition is an exciting journey. To ensure accuracy and respect for cultural and religious nuances, here's my guide on how I shaped my animated Jinni character:

Versatile Appearance: My character captures the essence of shapeshifting, with a versatile appearance that visually represents their ability to transform.

Elemental Traits: I will incorporate subtle fiery or smoky elements into their design.

Attire and Symbols: If my character assumes a human-like form, I incorporate cultural attire from regions associated with Islamic tradition, specifically Iraq. I will use symbols or motifs that align with Islamic art and culture.

Avoid Stereotypes: I am mindful of avoiding stereotypes that may be offensive. I represent my Jinni character with respect and authenticity. Stere otypes include Stereotypes when visualizing Genies, often derived from popular culture and folklore, can include:

- Blue Colour: Genies are commonly depicted as being blue, likely influenced by the famous blue Genie in Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* . While this portrayal is iconic, it doesn't accurately represent the diverse nature of Jinn in Islamic tradition.
- Oversized Turbans and Pointy Shoes: Some visualizations depict Genies wearing exaggerated, oversized turbans and pointy shoes, perpetuating a caricatured image that may not align with the cultural and religious origins of Jinn.
- Jewellery: Genies are often adorned with extravagant jewellery, such as bracelets, necklaces, and earrings, contributing to an exoticized and opulent portrayal. This may not align with the simplicity or diverse representations of Jinn in Islamic tradition.
- Hair Tied Back in a Ponytail: Some depictions feature Genies with their hair tied back in a ponytail. While this might be a stylistic choice, it's essential to consider that such details are not specified in Islamic scriptures and may contribute to a more generalized and stereotyped image.

When creating visual representations of Jinn, it's crucial to be mindful of these stereotypes and avoid perpetuating simplistic or inaccurate portrayals. Balancing creativity with cultural

sensitivity can lead to more nuanced and respectful depictions of these supernatural beings in line with their cultural and religious origins. It's important to approach visualizations of Genies with cultural sensitivity, avoiding these stereotypes to foster a more accurate and respectful understanding of Jinn as described in Islamic tradition.

Taking inspiration from authentic sources and consulting cultural experts can contribute to more nuanced and culturally respectful portrayals. By carefully navigating these considerations, my animated Jinni character can emerge as a compelling and respectful representation, blending creativity with cultural and religious sensitivity. I have decided to refer to pieces of art from the late

14th and 15th century that have said to portray jinn.



Figure 64. Detail of a miniature from a Book of Divinations made for Tahmasp I



Figure 63. The Jinns of Kin Solomon, unknown (1500s)

Many of these paintings depict Jinns to have unconventional skin tones, wings, and horns. I have decided to incorporate 2 of these elements into my redesign of the Genie from *Aladdin (1992).* However, I will not be choosing the colour blue for the Genie's skin tone as I want to move away from stereotypical portrayals of jinn in media as mentioned above.

The inclusion of horns in artistic representations of Jinns might draw from broader cultural symbolism or be inspired by similar features associated with supernatural beings in various mythologies. Artists often incorporate symbolic elements to convey certain characteristics or evoke specific emotions, and the depiction of horns may be a way to emphasize the mystical or otherworldly nature of Jinns.

The symbolism of horns has been deeply ingrained in various cultures, representing power and fertility. (Coudert, 1987)Horned animals, associated with strength and reproductive potency, served as symbols in ancient societies. This connection led to the proliferation of horned gods and goddesses across cultures, such as the Sumerian, Egyptian, Hindu, and Greek pantheons. (Coudert, 1987) In Abrahamic iconography, horns are primarily associated with devils and demons, this is important to note because Jinns can also be interpreted as demons. (Coudert, 1987)

There is also a tone of fear in many of these paintings. In figure 68 we can see a dark figure floating above a man in bed. "Here Kabus, wearing trousers and gold anklets, and accompanied by two horned attendants, swoops down on the man, hoping to ruin his sleep. Here Kabus, wearing trousers

and gold anklets, and accompanied by two horned attendants, swoops down on the man, hoping to ruin his sleep." (*Sleeping Man*, 2013)



Figure 65. The Ascension of Propitious Stars and Sources of Sovereign 1604 by Al-Su·ūdī

Jinn's may showcase mischievous behaviour due to the nature of their existence. (Farooqi, 2012) "According to Islamic writings, jinn live alongside other creatures but form a world other than that of mankind. Though they see us they cannot be seen. Characteristics they share with human beings are intellect and freedom to choose between right and wrong and between good and bad…." (Khalifa and Hardie, 2005) It is also noted that because jinn have the freedom to be morally good or evil, they can also be viewed to be an aid or dangerous to humans. Because of this interpretation and understanding of Jinn, they can be compared to mythical creatures such as the goblin. "there is actually a great deal of variety within the goblin world. Some are friendly and helpful, while others are vicious and dangerous" (Team, 2023). Like Goblins, Jinns are known to cause mischief among the human world, crossing back and forth from our realm and theirs. (Farooqi, 2012) In order to depict this 'mischievousness' I have given the Genie sharper teeth and yellow glow-y eyes. Glowing eyes are often associated with heightened emotions, power, or otherworldly attributes in storytelling. In this context, they can symbolize intensity, unpredictability, or a departure from normalcy, traits often linked to mischief. In a cultural context, glowing eyes are commonly depicted in mischievous or trickster characters such as sprites and goblins. These characters are often portrayed as cunning, unpredictable, and capable of causing mischief or chaos.



Figure 66. Genie. Redesign

Reflection

In crafting the redesign of Genie from *Aladdin (1992*), my creative process is deeply rooted in the rich lore of Jinn in Islamic tradition, ensuring accuracy and respect for cultural and religious nuances.

As an artist, I'm deeply satisfied with the creative journey I undertook in redesigning Genie from *Aladdin (1992)*. Artistically, I'm proud of how I delved into the rich tapestry of Islamic lore surrounding Jinn and drew inspiration from historical depictions in the Topkapi Palace Museum. The decision to incorporate unconventional skin tones, and horns allowed me to break away from stereotypes while still paying homage to the mystical essence of Jinn. Additionally, the careful avoidance of clichés like blue skin and oversized turbans was crucial in ensuring a respectful representation of the character.

In terms of representation, I believe the redesign successfully navigates the delicate balance between cultural authenticity and artistic expression. By grounding the character in historical and cultural context, I aimed to create a portrayal that resonates with audiences familiar with Islamic traditions while also inviting curiosity and appreciation from those less acquainted with them.

Jaffar

Jafar is the main antagonist in *Aladdin (1992)*. As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, Jaffar in the Sultan's trusted vizier, a "high-ranking political advisor or minister." ('Vizier', 2024)

It is also imperative to mention that even though Jaffar's character is a villain in the story of *Aladdin*(1992), I should still steer away from using stereotypes while portraying his character in the representation of a middle eastern man.

When redesigning Jafars visual portrayal, I considered his attire from a historical perspective.

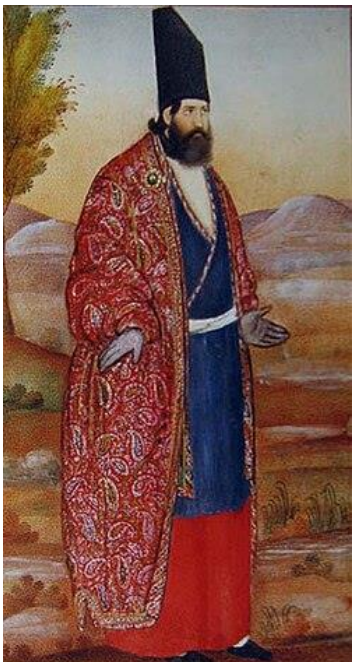


Figure 67. Portrait of Iranian prime minister, Amir Kabir by Sani ol molk. (1540, Ol Molk)

Clothing: The vizier pictured on the right is wearing colourful robes, a cloak and a tall hat called a *pasha.* In my redesign, I have decided to implement these fashion choices to Jaffar's character to ensure a more culturally and historically accurate outfit.

I have redesigned Jaffar in a black- and cream-coloured robes with red accents, still keeping into consideration his original colour scheme in Jaffar's original design.



Figure 68. Redesign of Jafar

Facial Features: It is worth mentioning that exaggerated middle eastern features are often used to portray villainy across media. This practice reflects cultural insensitivity, limits the representation of Middle Eastern identities, and fosters biased perceptions, impacting real-world attitudes and interactions. The reliance on such portrayals not only distorts the reality of the region's rich cultures but also reinforces negative stereotypes that can have tangible consequences for individuals of Middle Eastern descent, promoting xenophobia and discrimination. (Gahndi, 2022)

A prominent feature that was told to be avoided when designing the main characters, Aladdin and Jasmine was a 'hooked nose.' This was a recommendation that either originated from the artist or their employers while making the film. The hooked nose, scientifically referred to as an aquiline nose, is a prevalent characteristic found in many individuals of Middle Eastern descent. Unfortunately, it has been frequently exploited in entertainment to perpetuate antisemitic caricatures when depicting Arab characters, emphasizing the need to avoid reinforcing such harmful stereotypes. In the original film, Jafar's character has hooked nose, in attempt to show his "villainy" through this stereotype.



Figure 69. Redesign of Jafar, Facial closeup

However, I have found that it is obviously still possible to make Jaffar look villainous without resulting to a hooked nose. As seen in the redesign for Jaffar's character, I have given Jaffar a nose with no hook and a straight bridge.

Skin tone: Concerning Jafar's skin tone, I have decided to show a range of skin tones among the characters by making Jafar's skin tone tan, but still fair. In the original design for Jafar's character, his skin tone is comparably darker than that of the main protagonist.

In my redesign process of Jafar, the decision to eliminate the hooked nose and dark skin as markers of villainy stems from a conscious effort to move away from perpetuating racial stereotypes and challenging traditional Orientalist depictions. Recognizing the impact of visual representations on cultural perceptions, the creative team likely aimed to create a more nuanced and culturally sensitive portrayal of the antagonist.

Reflection

By discarding the hooked nose stereotype, the redesign seeks to avoid reinforcing negative tropes associated with Middle Eastern characters, such as the insidious and scheming villain with exaggerated features. This departure aligns with a broader commitment to fostering a more inclusive and respectful representation of diverse cultures.

Similarly, eliminating the dark skin stereotype challenges the tendency to associate darker complexions with villainous traits. This decision reflects an awareness of the harmful impact of such portrayals on real-world perceptions and strives to counter the notion that physical appearance can be indicative of a person's morality or intentions.

The redesigned Jafar may focus on emphasizing his villainous qualities through other means, such as his actions, expressions, or demeanour, rather than relying on racialized features. This approach allows for a more complex and multifaceted portrayal of the character, emphasizing that evil deeds are not inherently tied to specific ethnic or cultural attributes.

In summary, the decision to redesign Jafar without a hooked nose and dark skin demonstrates a commitment to avoiding racial stereotypes and challenging the Orientalist tropes that have historically shaped the portrayal of Middle Eastern characters. This intentional shift contributes to a more thoughtful and respectful representation of diverse cultures within the context of the animated narrative.

In my redesign of Jafar's character, I wanted to ensure a more culturally sensitive and historically accurate portrayal, steering away from perpetuating stereotypes associated with Middle Eastern characters. One key consideration was the acknowledgment of the problematic use of exaggerated features, such as the hooked nose, in media to signify villainy. I made a conscious decision to eliminate this stereotype, opting for a more realistic representation of facial features to contribute to positive cultural perceptions.

Taking historical accuracy into account, I carefully chose Jafar's attire, incorporating colourful robes, a cloak, and a tall hat, reflecting the visual richness of Middle Eastern cultures. This not only adds authenticity to the character but also aligns with the role of a high-ranking political advisor in that region.

Addressing the issue of skin tone, I opted for a tan yet fair complexion for Jafar, deliberately moving away from the original darker skin tone. This decision aimed to challenge the association of darker skin tones with villainous traits, demonstrating an awareness of the impact of such portrayals on real-world perceptions.

By emphasizing Jafar's villainous qualities through his actions, expressions, or demeanour instead of relying on racialized features, I sought to add depth and complexity to the character. This approach aligns with my commitment to a more inclusive and respectful representation of diverse cultures, emphasizing that morality or intentions are not inherently tied to specific ethnic or cultural attributes.

In summary, the redesign of Jafar without a hooked nose and dark skin reflects my dedication to avoiding racial stereotypes and challenging Orientalist tropes. This intentional shift contributes to a more thoughtful and respectful representation of Middle Eastern cultures within the context of the animated narrative.

Redesign: Animals

Abu

As I delve into the transformation of Abu's character from "The Thief of Baghdad" (1940) to Disney's *Aladdin (1992)* (1992), particularly the decision to shift him from a human to a monkey, a myriad of intriguing questions surfaces. The shared elements between the two films — the sidekick role, the

act of stealing, and the eventual transformation into an animal — provide a rich foundation for analysis.

The historical lineage drawn from "The Thief of Baghdad" and the subsequent incorporation of similar motifs in *Aladdin (1992)* illuminate the cinematic interplay and the weaving of narrative threads across time. The evolution of Abu from a human character in the former to a monkey in the latter prompts me to question the implications of this creative choice.

I find resonance in the idea of dehumanization, as illuminated by Nick Haslam. Portraying Abu as a monkey, an animal historically associated with dehumanizing metaphors, raises questions about inadvertent perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. Haslam's exploration of dehumanizing ape metaphors applied to Indigenous people during colonial periods adds a layer of historical complexity to Abu's transformation.

The observation regarding the selection of a monkey for Abu's portrayal, despite its lack of indigenous relevance to Iraq and the absence of foreign animal trade during the depicted period, underscores the potential oversight in cultural and ecological accuracy. This choice prompts me to reflect on the creators' awareness and consideration of cultural sensitivity, as well as the implications of using a species not native to the region.

In the context of the evolving societal awareness and progressive values at the time of *Aladdin (1992)*, I can't help but see this as a missed opportunity for a more enlightened portrayal. The nuanced understanding of character representation, especially when navigating cultural and historical contexts, becomes a crucial aspect of my analysis.

In essence, my focus on the transformation of Abu's character in *Aladdin (1992)* offers a valuable lens through which to examine cultural representation and the unintended consequences of creative decisions. By exploring historical inspirations, cinematic parallels, and the potential implications of sub humanization, I aim to contribute to a critical discourse on the intersection of animation, cultural sensitivity, and regional accuracy in visual portrayals.

For this change, I propose changing the character of Abu from a monkey to the native Iraqi rodent, the Jerboa. Jerboas are native to the deserts of the Middle East, including parts of Iraq and other countries in the region. Choosing an animal that is part of the natural fauna of the setting can

contribute to the authenticity and cultural accuracy of the film. The choice of a Jerboa is made with respect to the natural environment and without relying on stereotypes, it can be seen as a thoughtful and culturally sensitive decision.



Figure 71. The Iraqi jerboa



Figure 70. Redesign of Abu

Reflection

I am thoroughly pleased with the result of this redesign. I believe I've successfully retained Abu's essential qualities of mischievousness and loyalty, despite the alteration of his species from a monkey to the Iraqi jerboa. This transformation was particularly gratifying for me, as it required careful consideration to ensure that Abu's character remained authentic and engaging. In fact, I regard this redesign as one of my most successful redesigns, as it demonstrates my ability to adapt and innovate while preserving the core essence of a beloved character.

Rajah – Ameer

Choosing a caracal over a tiger as the character Rajah in *Aladdin (1992)* can be attributed to several factors that enhance narrative and cultural coherence:

Cultural Authenticity: Tigers are not native to the Middle East, including Iraq, whereas caracals have a broader range that includes regions like Iraq. Opting for a caracal aligns more closely with the fauna indigenous to the setting, promoting cultural authenticity in the film.



Figure 72. The Iraq indigenous caracal

Ecological Plausibility: Considering the film's Arabian setting, a caracal's natural habitat in arid areas and its adaptability to diverse landscapes better suits the environmental conditions depicted in the story. This choice adds a layer of ecological plausibility to the narrative.

Realism in Storytelling: Caracals are known for their agility and cunning hunting techniques, aligning with Rajah's role as a protector and companion in the film. This choice provides a more realistic portrayal of the animal's behaviour, contributing to a more believable and engaging storyline.

Cultural Sensitivity: Tigers often carry symbolic significance in various cultures, and the choice of a caracal minimizes potential misinterpretations or cultural disconnects.

Visual Distinctiveness: Caracals have a distinct appearance, particularly with their tufted ears, which can contribute to the character's unique visual identity. This distinctiveness aids in creating memorable and visually appealing animated characters.

In summary, the decision to use a caracal as Rajah in *Aladdin (1992)* enhances the film's cultural authenticity, ecological realism, and overall storytelling coherence. It demonstrates a thoughtful approach to incorporating wildlife into the narrative while respecting the cultural and environmental context of the setting.

I have changed Rajah's name to Ameer. Renaming Rajah to "Ameer" emerges as a thoughtful and culturally resonant choice. Given that Arabic is spoken in Iraq, employing an Arabic name like "Ameer" not only maintains the meaning of "prince" but also enhances the linguistic and cultural authenticity of the narrative.

This adaptation reflects a nuanced understanding of the linguistic landscape in Iraq and the broader Middle Eastern context, fostering a deeper connection between the storyline and the region's cultural identity.

Choosing a name with Arabic origins not only aligns the character more closely with the cultural setting but also demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and respect for the diversity of languages spoken in the region. Overall, the decision to change Rajah's name to "Ameer" adds a layer of cultural richness and authenticity to the reimagined *Aladdin (1992)*, enriching the storytelling experience for audiences familiar with the Arabic language and cultural nuances prevalent in Iraq.

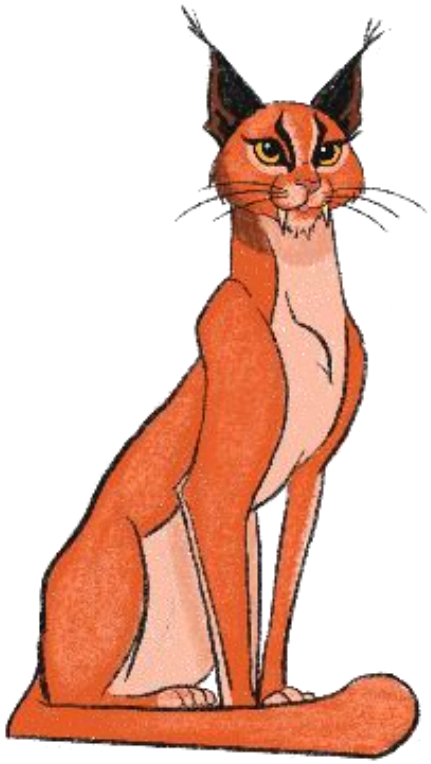


Figure 73. Redesign of Rajah, Now Ameer

Reflection

Reflecting on my redesign, I feel confident in its success for several compelling reasons. Firstly, opting for a caracal over a tiger as the character Rajah aligns with the cultural authenticity of the setting in *Aladdin (1992)*. Tigers not being native to the Middle East, including Iraq, the decision to feature a caracal enhances the narrative's coherence by showcasing fauna indigenous to the region. This thoughtful choice demonstrates my commitment to maintaining ecological plausibility and realism in storytelling, as caracals are better suited to the arid landscapes depicted in the film and possess characteristics that align with Rajah's role as a protector and companion.

Moreover, renaming Rajah to "Ameer" adds another layer of cultural richness and authenticity to the narrative. By choosing an Arabic name like "Ameer," which means "prince," I've shown a nuanced understanding of linguistic and cultural contexts, particularly considering Arabic is spoken in Iraq. This adaptation reflects my dedication to inclusivity and respect for the diversity of languages spoken in the region, enriching the storytelling.

Iago

I propose the change of Iago's character from a parrot to a bearded vulture due these reasons:

Reason & Comparison	Vulture	Parrot
Symbolism of Death vs. Colourful Exoticism	Symbolizes death, decay, and ominous foreboding due to its scavenging nature. The vulture's appearance is often stark and can evoke a sense of dread.	Represents vibrancy, exoticism, and intelligence. Parrots are known for their colourful plumage and mimicry, conveying a more lively and visually appealing image.
Aesthetic Impact	Has a more sinister and foreboding appearance with a bald head, sharp beak, and dark plumage. The vulture's aesthetic contributes to a menacing and ominous atmosphere.	Features a visually striking and colourful appearance. The parrot's vibrant feathers and expressive features create a more visually appealing and lively presence
Cultural Associations	Often linked to death and the afterlife in various cultures, portraying a more ominous and negative connotation.	Symbolizes positivity, intelligence, and companionship. In many cultures, parrots are associated with joy and tropical beauty.
Behaviour Traits	Exhibits scavenging and opportunistic feeding behaviour, emphasizing a connection to betrayal or treachery.	Known for mimicry, intelligence, and social behaviour. Parrots are associated with positive qualities like communication and companionship.
Environmental Context	Adaptable to various habitats, including deserts. The vulture's presence can be linked to harsh and unforgiving environments such as the Iraqi dessert.	Typically found in tropical and subtropical regions, conveying a connection to lush and vibrant landscapes.

Figure 74. Comparison between the bearded vulture and the parrot

In my redesign of Iago, I opted to replace the traditional parrot companion with Iago, Jafar's loyal sidekick in the 1992 animated film. This decision was grounded in a careful consideration of symbolism, aesthetic impact, cultural associations, behaviour traits, and environmental context.

Firstly, the symbolism of death associated with the vulture aligns more closely with the conniving and treacherous nature of Iago. The vulture's ominous foreboding and scavenging tendencies parallel Iago's role as a schemer and opportunist within the narrative. The vulture's stark and sinister appearance mirrors Iago's untrustworthy character, creating a thematic consistency that enhances the storytelling.



Figure 75. Redesign of Iago

Aesthetically, the vulture's foreboding look contributes to a menacing atmosphere, complementing the dark and cunning personality of Iago. This choice enhances the visual impact of the character, emphasizing his villainous traits in a way that a brightly coloured parrot might not achieve. Iago's appearance aligns with the darker elements of the story, reinforcing the overall tone and mood.

Culturally, vultures are often associated with negative connotations, linking them to death and the afterlife. This aligns perfectly with Iago's role as a henchman to the main antagonist, Jafar. The vulture's symbolism resonates with the villainous nature of the character, creating a more coherent narrative.



Figure 76. Redesign of Iago, Facial Closeup

Finally, the environmental context also supports the choice of a vulture over a parrot. Vultures are adaptable to harsh and unforgiving environments, which aligns with the villainous settings and schemes in the *Aladdin (1992)* narrative. This contextual connection enhances the character's integration into the story world.

Reflection

In conclusion, my decision to replace the parrot with Iago, embodying the characteristics of a vulture, is a thoughtful redesign aimed at enhancing the thematic consistency, visual impact, and narrative depth of the character within the context of *Aladdin (1992)* Additionally, while retaining certain elements of the original character designs, such as Iago's appearance, I could have ventured into a more animated depiction to inject a sense of dynamism and personality into the character.

Redesign: Architecture

In order to re-visualise the scenery and architecture from *Aladdin (1992)*, we need to decipher the period of time the story was proposedly told in context. Eli Grant, professional novelist and Quora user writes: "There is no distinct period. Agrabah is a fictional country that combines the aesthetics of many different North African and Indian nations from many different time periods which makes it very difficult to point at any one time period." (Grant, 2018)

Ahmed Rabee, graduate of English Literature and Islamic Studies, Al-Azhar University, Cairo-Egypt, suggests: "Mostly in the time one thousand nights have been written. In the mid of the 8th century. Especially at the reign of the famous Haron Al-Rasheed the Abbasid caliph. He is mentioned as a character in too many stories with his minister Jaafar." (Rabee, 2018)

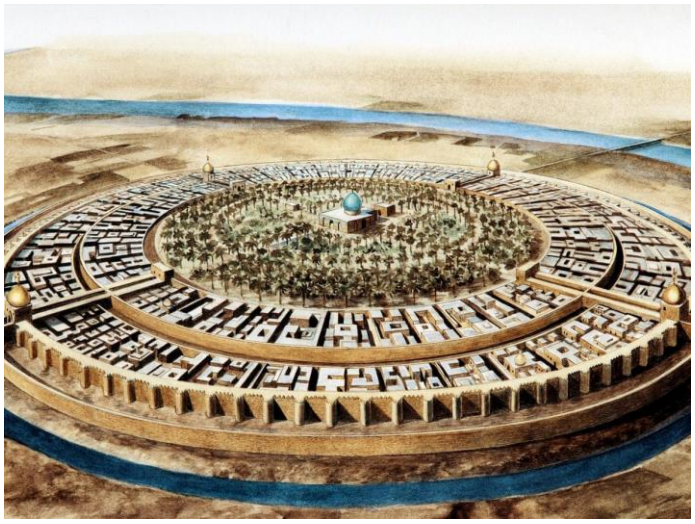


Figure 77. The round Iraqi Imperial City

Concerning the setting, as mentioned above, Agrabah is a fictional town based on the real town in Iraq, Baghdad. (*Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin*, 2004) If we analyse Baghdad, Iraq within the context of the mid-8th century out of all the buildings that were in construction and in use at that time, the round city was viewed as the urban core of culture. According to The Guardian: "The birth of Baghdad was a landmark for world civilisation. The foundation of al-Mansur's 'Round City' in 762 was a glorious milestone in the history of urban design. It developed into the cultural centre of the world." (Marozzi, 2016)

Another interesting piece of Iraq's historical architecture delves into the wonders of the hanging gardens of Babylon. Although not 100% factually confirmed exactly which city the gardens were built, whether Nineveh or Babylon, multiple historians confirm that the architectural wonder stood in Iraq.



Figure 78. Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Arabesque architecture, embellished with distinctive features like intricate geometric patterns, elegant calligraphy, and the use of specific materials, is an integral aspect of the cultural essence of the Arab world. The careful depiction of these architectural marvels in animated films acts as a guardian, safeguarding and illuminating this unique identity—a timeless manifestation of the captivating spirit that characterizes the rich heritage of the Middle east.

Utilizing a historical landmark like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as a backdrop for the setting in the *Aladdin (1992)* film, as opposed to basing the Sultan's palace on the Taj Mahal, offers a more culturally resonant and historically nuanced storytelling approach. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, adds an authentic layer of historical richness and mystique to the narrative.

Firstly, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, with its elusive and mythical aura, aligns with the fantastical and enchanting nature of the *Aladdin (1992)* tale. Its inclusion fosters a sense of wonder and magic, inviting the audience to delve into a world that transcends reality.

Moreover, by opting for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the concept pays homage to the diverse cultural heritage of the Middle East, emphasizing the region's deep historical roots. This choice enables the film to celebrate the unique history of Mesopotamia and the ancient wonders that once graced the landscape, contributing to a more authentic representation of the Arabian Nights setting.

In contrast, basing the Sultan's palace on the Taj Mahal, while undoubtedly a symbol of architectural grandeur, might introduce cultural dissonance. The Taj Mahal is a prominent Indian landmark, and its association with a fictional Arabian setting could potentially dilute the cultural specificity of the narrative, leading to a less coherent and more eclectic portrayal.



Figure 79. Redesign of the Agrabah Palace inspired by the hanging gardens of Babylon.

In my redesign concerning the palace of Agrabah, I have also proposed the idea of using a real-life Iraqi castle to inspire my concept art. Sherwana Castle, located in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, holds historical significance as a symbol of the region's rich cultural heritage. (Ghafour, 2021)

Built in the early 19th century, the castle served various purposes throughout its existence, including as a military fortress and residence for local rulers. Situated on a strategic hill overlooking the town

of Sherwana, the castle features a distinctive architectural blend of Ottoman and Persian influences. (Ghafour, 2021)

Over the years, Sherwana Castle has witnessed periods of conflict and change, reflecting the turbulent history of the region. Today, it stands as a testament to Iraq's diverse history and serves as a reminder of the resilience and endurance of its people through the passage of time.



Figure 80. Sherwana Castle, Iraq

Redesigning the palace of Agrabah in *Aladdin (1992)* with inspiration from Sherwana Castle in Iraq rather than the clear Taj Mahal influence can be more culturally respectful and avoid the harmful interchangeability between Indian and Middle Eastern architectures. The tendency to interchange these distinct architectural styles can perpetuate stereotypes and oversimplify and confuse the diverse cultures of the Middle East and South Asia. By drawing inspiration from Sherwana Castle, which embodies a unique blend of Ottoman and Persian influences specific to the region, the film can break away from the common portrayal of Agrabah as a generic "Oriental" setting.

This approach promotes cultural authenticity, acknowledging the rich architectural diversity within the Middle East. It also avoids perpetuating the misconception that Indian and Middle Eastern

cultures can be easily interchangeable. Embracing Sherwana Castle's distinct aesthetic would

contribute to a more nuanced and respectful representation of Middle Eastern architecture in the context of the *Aladdin (1992)* narrative, fostering a greater appreciation for the cultural intricacies of the region.

Reflection

In reimagining Agrabah for *Aladdin’s (1992)* narrative, I chose to evoke the architectural wonders of Iraq, specifically drawing inspiration from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and Sherwana Castle. This decision adds a layer of historical richness and cultural resonance, seamlessly blending fantasy with real-world heritage. While many might opt for the Taj Mahal as a model for the Sultan's palace, I advocate for Sherwana Castle in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, reflecting its Ottoman and Persian influences and avoiding potential cultural misappropriation.



Figure 81. Redesign of the Agrabah Palace inspired by the Sherwana Castle

This choice honours the region's diverse history and sidesteps harmful interchangeability between Indian and Middle Eastern architectures.

Sherwana Castle's role as a symbol of Iraq's heritage and its turbulent history aligns perfectly with the enchanting and enduring spirit of Agrabah. By incorporating these elements, I aimed to foster appreciation for the Middle East's cultural intricacies while ensuring a respectful and nuanced representation in animated storytelling. Overall, I am happy with the choices made, though I acknowledge that some adjustments, such as colour grading in figure 82, could further enhance the cohesion of the design.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The extensive exploration of the visual representation of the characters and settings in Disney's *Aladdin (1992*) has unravelled a complex understanding of Orientalism, unveiling stereotypes, cultural misappropriation, and the perpetuation of harmful narratives. This dissertation has meticulously analysed these depictions, illuminating their profound impact on societal perceptions and the reinforcement of biases within the realm of popular culture.

At the core of this examination lies a profound recognition of the imperative to deconstruct Orientalist tropes and foster a more inclusive and authentic portrayal of Arab Muslim identities. By meticulously delving into the historical and cultural accuracies, I attempted to ensure that the proposed alternative depictions not only celebrate the rich heritage of the Middle East but also serve as a testament to the diversity and complexity of its cultures.

While embarking on this journey, it was essential to acknowledge the influence of my artistic style, which may diverge from the original animation. Nevertheless, my aim was to create a reinterpretation that could serve as a foundation for further exploration and as a reference point for future artistic attempts. By embracing this approach, I sought to offer a fresh perspective while maintaining a level of familiarity that resonates with audiences.

However, in acknowledging the potential for improvement, I recognize several areas where further refinement could enhance the overall representation. For instance, exploring multiple outfits for the characters could provide a more nuanced portrayal of their cultural identity and individuality.

The literature review established a foundational understanding of Orientalism, emphasizing its role in shaping Western perceptions of the East and perpetuating stereotypes through academic discourse, cultural representations, and corporate institutions. Through Said's framework, the analysis revealed how *Aladdin (1992)* exemplifies Orientalist tropes, constructing a fantastical, yet homogenized portrayal of the "Other." (Said, 1978)

Moreover, the exploration of semiotic resources, as elucidated by Leeuwen and Jewitt, provided deeper insights into the film's visual language and its implications on power dynamics and cultural representation. The strategic deployment of angles and imagery within *Aladdin (1992)* underscores the film's complicity in reinforcing Orientalist narratives and perpetuating cultural stereotypes, despite its potential to challenge prevailing notions.

The dissertation's findings underscore the enduring influence of Orientalism in shaping media representations and cultural perceptions. Despite Disney's efforts to craft an entertaining narrative, *Aladdin (1992)* ultimately reflects and perpetuates Orientalist elements, contributing to the exoticization, eroticization, and marginalization of Eastern cultures.

Moving forward, it is imperative for media creators and consumers to engage critically with representations like *Aladdin (1992)*, interrogating the power dynamics, cultural biases, and historical contexts that underpin them. By fostering a more nuanced understanding of Orientalism and its impact on media, we can work towards dismantling stereotypes, promoting cultural sensitivity, and fostering authentic, inclusive portrayals of diverse cultures.

The redesign process began with a critical examination of Princess Jasmine, Genie, Jafar, Abu, Rajah, and Iago, considering their visual representations, cultural associations, and potential stereotypes. By incorporating elements such as traditional Iraqi wedding attire for Jasmine, authentic depictions of Jinn from Islamic tradition for Genie, and nuanced facial features for Jafar, the proposed redesigns sought to challenge stereotypes and promote cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, the dissertation explored the implications of character transformations, such as Abu's change from a human to a monkey and Iago's evolution from a parrot to a bearded vulture. By proposing the use of native Iraqi rodents like the Jerboa and indigenous animals like the caracal, the redesigns aimed to enhance narrative coherence and cultural relevance while avoiding harmful stereotypes.

In addition to character redesigns, the study delved into the reimagining of architecture in the fictional city of Agrabah, drawing inspiration from historical landmarks like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and Sherwana Castle in Iraq. These architectural choices aimed to celebrate the rich heritage of the Middle East while avoiding cultural misappropriation and promoting a more nuanced portrayal of the region.

Overall, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing discourse on cultural representation in animation by offering practical insights and creative solutions for redesigning characters, animals, and architecture in a culturally sensitive manner. By prioritizing authenticity, accuracy, and inclusivity, the proposed redesigns strive to create a more respectful and engaging animated narrative that celebrates the diversity and complexity of Middle Eastern cultures.

As animation continues to evolve as a powerful medium for storytelling, it is imperative for creators and filmmakers to embrace cultural sensitivity and diversity in their artistic efforts By adopting the principles and methodologies outlined in this dissertation, future animation projects can aspire to create more meaningful



and impactful narratives that resonate with audiences worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to cultural understanding, animation has the potential to become a platform for positive social change and cross-cultural dialogue, enriching the artistic landscape and fostering greater empathy and appreciation for diverse perspectives.

Through an in-depth analysis of the original film and meticulous research into cultural and historical contexts, this study has proposed thoughtful redesigns that aim to foster a more inclusive and respectful representation of Middle Eastern cultures within the animated visual portrayals.



Figure 82. Aladdin 1992, 01:27:03

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Note: all images of the animated film *Aladdin (1992)* were taken via screenshot on the Disney+ streaming platform.