MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

A Whole New World or Just Another Arabian Night?

Orientalism and Americanization in Disney's *Aladdin* 1992 & 2019

verfasst von | submitted by

Laura Moser BEd

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education (MEd)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt	Degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 199 507 511 02
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt	Degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Lehramt Sek (AB) Unterrichtsfach Englisch Unterrichtsfach Geschichte und Politische Bildung
Betreut von	Supervisor:	Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Alexandra Ganser-Blumenau

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1. Introduction

Movies, books and other types of media can shape a person's worldview from early childhood onwards. *Arabian Nights* has been a widely popular collection of stories about the "exotic" and "mysterious" Middle Eastern and Asian part of the world for centuries now (Bullock and Zhou 449–450). The story "*Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp"* is among the best known and most popular ones of the collection (Cooperson 265). Since the invention of film and the rise of the cinema, several movie adaptations of the story have been released. Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), has become a classic for millions of children worldwide (Bourenane 241–242). However, since its release, the movie has often been critiqued for its stereotypical and Orientalist portrayal of the Arab characters. In 2019, Disney released a live-action remake of Aladdin's story. While the storyline and plot have stayed the same, the filmmakers have made some changes and additions, attempting a more timely version. The aim of this thesis is to analyze to what extent the 2019 Disney adaptation of *Aladdin* still features notions of Orientalist stereotyping. Moreover, the 2019 live-action remake will be compared to the 1992 animated film and changes with regards to Orientalism will be discussed. In addition, it will also be examined in how far both Disney adaptations of *Aladdin* are shaped by US-American culture and US Orientalisms. The movie analysis will focus on the following research questions: To what extent does the 2019 movie adaptation of *Aladdin* feature underlying notions of Orientalist stereotyping? To what extent do the 1992 and the 2019 Disney adaptations of *Aladdin* differ regarding aspects of Orientalism? To what extent are the Disney movie adaptations of *Aladdin* shaped by US-American culture?

In my analysis, I will focus on the music, the settings as well as the characters and their portrayal, including their appearances, accents, and worldviews. Moreover, I will consider references to laws and traditions as well as interpret the protagonists regarding the influence of US-American culture and US Orientalism. Cinematic methods such as camerawork, photography, sound and the use of color are taken into account in each analyzed aspect.

Considering the global reach of Disney and the company's various types of products as well as influence on children and adults alike, the relevance of this topic seems evident. Giroux and Pollock (77) label Disney a so called "teaching machine": according to the researchers,

Disney also sells values and identities with its products and thereby teaches children from a young age onwards to consume (Giroux and Pollock 74). Lippi-Green (103) notes how, in the past, Disney has repeatedly retold and reinterpreted stories from other cultures around the world, for example *Beauty and the Beast* (France) or *Mulan* (China). She points out the problem that oftentimes, the Disney versions of those stories are the first and/or only ones that children get to know (Lippi-Green 103). Therefore, it seems important to critically analyze such narratives.

At the present moment, the 1992 adaptation of *Aladdin* is over 30 years old and as a result, the film's issues regarding Orientalism and racism have already been discussed extensively by various researchers (see, e.g., Addison 1993; Felperin 1997; Bullock and Zhou 2017; Bourenane 2020). During the past three decades, the film industry as well as society in general has undergone numerous changes. Disney has tried to adjust to those changes by attempting to produce films that are more sensitive to contemporary society's standards and by making an effort to incorporate more diversity in their movies (see, e.g., Sackl 2022). For viewers who want to watch the 1992 animated *Aladdin* film on the Disney+ streaming platform, the company has included the following content advisory:

> This program includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures. These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together.
> Disney is committed to creating stories with inspirational and aspirational themes that reflect the rich diversity of the human experience around the globe. […]
> (The Walt Disney Company 2024)

By including this statement, the firm openly acknowledges that their stereotypical representation of Arabs in the movie was inappropriate. Since Disney's live-action remake of *Aladdin* premiered only five years ago in 2019, few studies seem to be concerned with this recent retelling. In fact, I have found only two works with a certain degree of relevance to this thesis, namely Van den Bossche (2022) as well as Ayuningtiyas and Mustofa (2021). The former mainly presents a feminist reading of the movie and the latter does not conform to academic standards, because it is not peer-reviewed and contains quite a few grammatical errors. In addition, Ayuningtiyas and Mustofa's analysis as well as their conclusions seem to be very superficial. Therefore, their study will not be considered in this thesis. Due to this apparent research gap, it seems relevant to investigate whether Disney's *Aladdin* 2019 still includes notions of Orientalist stereotyping, even after they have issued a content advisory

for their earlier animated version. As Disney is a US-American company and thus part of the US film industry, it is only logical to explore the concept of Orientalism in an American context and also analyze in how far the *Aladdin* movies are shaped by American culture and US Orientalism.

This thesis will be structured as follows: The first section consists of a literature review, in order to contextualize the analysis. First, I will explain the concept of Orientalism as defined by Edward Said, for which I will mainly relate to his book *Orientalism* (1978). Then I will focus on US Orientalism and the United States' history of their relationship with the Middle East. The most important work to which I will refer in this chapter is Little's *American Orientalism* (2008). In addition, I will discuss the American film industry's representation of Arabs and ethnicity, including a synopsis on Disney and its critics. Finally, the written tale of "*Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp"*, part of Galland's famous *One Thousand and One Nights* collection, will be briefly summarized and the discussion surrounding its origins outlined. The next section will be concerned with the 1992 and 2019 Disney adaptations of *Aladdin*. In a first step, a summary of both movies will be provided. The next three chapters will consist of the films' analysis and discussion. Each chapter will focus on one of the three research questions, the first chapter on the 2019 live-action remake of *Aladdin*, exploring potential notions of Orientalist stereotyping. In the second section, I will compare the 1992 with the 2019 adaptation and discuss potential changes in terms of Orientalist stereotyping. The third subchapter will question to what extent both Disney adaptations are shaped by a specific Orientalism. *Understanding Movies* by Giannetti (2002) will serve as the main work of reference for the analysis of cinematic methods and film in general.

2. (US) Orientalism and the American Film Industry

Orientalism is not a modern phenomenon. A fascination with as well as a fear of foreign cultures and the want to position oneself in contrast to the "other" is deeply rooted within Western history. The following chapter will provide a brief explanation and overview of this concept, which was coined by Edward Said. In the first subchapter, Edward Said's definition of Orientalism will be presented. The second subchapter will explore the concept of Orientalism in the context of the United States. The main foci will lie on how and why US policy makers use and reinforce Orientalist stereotypes, the interplay of US Orientalism and Exceptionalism as well as the othering of Muslims and Arabs. The third and final subchapter focuses on how the Hollywood film industry, especially Disney, portrays Arabs as well as race/ethnicity in general.

2.1 Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism

The Palestinian American scholar Edward Said coined the term Orientalism in 1978 in his book of the same title. Said defines Orientalism as "the system of European or Western knowledge about the Orient" (197), as a "a created body of theory and practice" (6). It is a Western style of thought which distinguishes between "the Orient" and "the Occident" and which is characterized by the Western domination, restructuring and exertion of authority over the Orient (Said 2–3). Essential Orientalist ideas about the East are that its inhabitants are primitive, backward, inaccurate, sensual, show a tendency towards despotism and have an abnormal mentality (Said 205; 230). Orientalist scholars, so called Orientalists, thereby present an image of the Orient which is created and/or reinforced by them and backed by a history of thoughts, images and vocabulary (Said 5). Said calls this process "Orientaliz[ation]" (5). The West presents the Orient according to their views about it, instead of the Orient representing itself. A crucial point is, however, that the Orient has let this Orientalization happen without much resistance (Said 6–7). The author stresses that Orientalism is not just a Western fantasy about the East, but a complex culmination of geopolitical awareness and distinction, texts ranging from economics to sociology, history and philology as well as economic and political interests and power relations (6; 12). Said argues that "Orientalism is–and does not simply represent–a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12). This

means that by presenting the Orient a certain way, the West also presents and defines itself, namely as being inherently different and superior to what the Orient stands for according to Orientalist reasoning[1]. The author elaborates on this representation as follows:

> [T]hat Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, "there" in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. (22)

Western, or more concrete European, ideas about the Orient have existed since antiquity (Said 1). Certain preconceptions and images are tightened accordingly to this day.

Literary discourse about the East is present in every epoch. Almost every epoch since antiquity has Western scholars, Orientalists, occupied with and writing about the Orient. Until the eighteenth century, Orientalists were mainly preoccupied with Biblical studies, Islam or the Semitic languages (Said 51). In the eighteenth century, the definition of which regions the Orient includes was expanded (Said 116). According to Said, eighteenth century Orientalists such as Ernest Renan and "the father of Orientalism" (130), Silvestre de Sacy, created a scientific and rational basis for Orientalism, including terminology and ideas, which Orientalists of later centuries could and did work with (122). In the nineteenth century, Orientalism became a wildly popular field of study. According to Said, Raymond Schwab's work *La Renaissance orientale* is one of the best examples of this upswing in interest (51). Said classifies nineteenth-century Orientalism as consisting of two contributors, namely of scholars, for example Islamicists, as well as of enthusiasts, such as Goethe (51). The popularity of travelling to the East and then writing about the journey led to a growing body of travel-literature, influenced by the authors' experiences (Said 157). Examples of such authors are Flaubert, Mark Twain and Disraeli. This body of literature in turn contributed to the fact that public awareness of the Orient grew. In the twentieth century, Orientalism became a political instrument and a tool to position Europe in contrast to the Islamic and Asian countries (Said 253). Moreover, modern inventions such as film have intensified existing Orientalist ideas, as Said describes:

> One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural

[1] Parts of this paragraph have been used in tasks for the Thesis Seminar taught by Prof. Mag. Dr. Susanne Reichl in the winter term of 2023.

> stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of "the mysterious Orient". (26)

As a byproduct of the many crises in the Middle East, for example the Arab-Israeli wars, a certain stereotypical image of Arabs has been intensified even stronger in American popular culture (Said 284). This problematic will be explored in more detail in the subchapter about US Orientalism.

While Edward Said's examination of Orientalism is widely acknowledged as an important and influential theory, his work has also been critiqued by some scholars. Since a thorough analysis of Said's theory and its critics is not my main research focus and would exceed the limits of this master's thesis, I have decided to briefly mention only three critics of Said's work and their main arguments. The three scholars whose critique I want to address are Donald P. Little (1979), Michael Richardson (1990) and Bernard Lewis (1993).

D. P. Little's main argument is that Said fails to differentiate between different fields of scholars studying Orientalism. For Said, every Western person studying the Orient is supposedly the same and equally wrong or stereotyped in their beliefs (D. P. Little 129–130). D. P. Little accuses Said of not having done enough research in the field of Orientalist studies (132). Moreover, he claims that the Palestinian American scholar is bitter and feels offended by Orientalism, because of his Palestinian background and the choice to identify with this part of his origins (132). D. P. Little seems to interpret a lot of personal and emotional factors into Said's line of argumentations. However, it is unclear whether or in how far Said's work has really been influenced by those factors. In his conclusion, D. P. Little still gives credit to Said's work and deems some of his arguments as being true, but he also states that Said should have done more research on the topic in order to differentiate to a greater extent (137).

Secondly, I want to mention Richardson's view on Said's work. Richardson recognizes that Said's work is very influential and attributes its success to the author's passionate and vital writing style (209). Richardson mentions that Said's work lacks "[a]nthropological images of the Orient" (209). Moreover, he calls Said an idealist and criticizes that the Palestinian American scholar does not question for what reasons or purposes certain images of the Orient were created, except for imperialist reasons (209). Richardson thinks of Said's line of argumentation as being weak and he sees the confirmation for his view in the fact that Said has shifted his position about certain topics in some of his later publications (210). Richardson's final point of critique is that Said supposedly misrepresents Orientalists as

much as they misinterpret the Orient (211). In his conclusion, however, the scholar recognizes that Said has provided "valuable raw material" for further research about Orientalism (216)[2].

The third critic I want to mention is Lewis. Out of the three critics I have addressed in this section, he is surely the fiercest. Lewis calls Said's line of argumentation about the Orient and Orientalism arbitrary and absurd (258). Said's work is supposedly full of misstatements and ignorance (Lewis 259). According to Lewis, Said has a "lack of knowledge of what scholars do and what scholarship is about" (258). Moreover, Lewis also claims that the choice of works that Said cites in his book is arbitrary and that the author intentionally ignored scholarly work that did not fit his argumentation (262). Lewis attributes the success of Said's work to the fact that it shows "a simplified version of complex problems" (264). Said's *Orientalism* supposedly

> […] responds well to the sentiments of those in the West, and especially in the United States, who condemn their country as the source of all the evil in the world as arrogantly and absurdly as their forbears acclaimed it as the source of all good (Lewis 264).

As can be seen by the wording of Lewis' critique, he is fiercer and more direct than the other critics, to the extent that one could say he is almost insulting. Lewis clearly has very strong opinions and seems to have very little understanding for contrasting thoughts. Despite some of the arguments Said's critics point out, I believe that the key points of Edward Said's definition of Orientalism, especially the stereotypes he mentions, are still important and most accurate for the purposes of this thesis.

2.2 US Orientalisms

The history of the Orient is infused with and molded by Western politics and their economic and imperial interests. As Said mentioned, the Orient "is either to be feared or to be controlled" (301). The European powers, especially the UK and France, as well as the United States, as the latest power in the postwar period, have tried to control the Orient in order to enforce and protect their interests (Said 295). However, it needs to be distinguished between Orientalism as a general concept, as I have defined in the first section of this chapter, as well as between European Orientalism and US Orientalism. The reason for this is

[2] Parts of this paragraph have been used in tasks for the 120013-1 MEd Thesis Seminar taught by Prof. Mag. Dr. Susanne Reichl in the winter term of 2023.

that the motives and interests behind using Orientalist reasoning and the enforcing of stereotypes differ between Europe and the United States. As this thesis is primarily concerned with the US-American company Disney and their movie adaptations of the tale of *Aladdin*, the following section of this chapter will focus on US Orientalism.

Whenever the US government sees a threat to their interests in the Middle East, it seems to interfere in Middle Eastern politics. During the Cold War era, a significant interest of the United States was to prevent a strengthening of Soviet influence in the Middle East. However, the US main interest in the Middle East has always been its vast amount of oil (D. Little 43–44), as can be seen by the example of the Suez crisis. When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a vital international oil transit route, Western powers saw the need to interfere. Even though Nasser promised to keep the oil flowing, the UK, France and the US feared that other Middle Eastern countries could follow the example and nationalize oil companies (D. Little 172–173). The Western powers portrayed Nasser as a dictator equal to Hitler or Mussolini (D. Little 169; 173–174). Thereby they justified their interference and painted a certain picture of the "enemy" that surely influenced the public's support of government action and military interventions. The way that the US justify their interference in other countries' politics is a good example for US Orientalism. The US feels the need to help Middle Eastern countries "to succeed in establishing their changing society on a new and stable base," because "Middle Eastern states lack the strength and skill to solve the problems of peace, stability and welfare unassisted" (Halpern qtd. in D. Little 198). This line of argumentation leads to the deduction that US politicians believe that Middle Eastern countries cannot change their society and build a stable base on their own, because they are apparently not skilled enough. This view is a core reasoning of Orientalism. If those countries supposedly cannot represent themselves and therefore, need to be represented by the West (Said 21), it is not far off to say that they also cannot govern themselves and need to be governed. Of course, the protection of US interests is also a crucial factor for the US seemingly thinking of itself as the world police. The following quote by Landis, a former emissary of Roosevelt, sums up this precise way of thought:

> To someone really interested in preserving American interests in the Middle East, […] the best way is not to support the existing governments which may blow up in his face at any moment, but instead to gradually change what is in order to avert Communist revolt. (Landis qtd. in D. Little 197)

However, US interference often led to even greater chaos or crisis in the Middle East. The best examples for the failure of US interventions are Iraq with Qassim and Saddam Hussein, Libya with Qaddafi, Iran with Khomeini and the Second Gulf War. In those cases, the intervention of the United States caused upheaval and revolutions, that were often bloody and resulted in the rise of dictators and radicalization. Moreover, those conflicts contributed to the strengthening of Orientalist stereotypes (D. Little 334). On the one hand, the soldiers in battle demonize their opponents (D. Little 334) and on the other hand, the US government vilifies the enemy to justify their military actions, for example by comparing Saddam Hussein to Hitler (D. Little 259). Without this demonization, it would surely be a lot harder to have the public's support and to warrant the need to send thousands upon thousands of Americans to fight in a war on foreign soil that does not pose an immediate threat to the sovereignty of the United States.

US Orientalism and American Exceptionalism

American Exceptionalism can be defined as the belief that the United States is the most powerful nation of the world, that they are politically and morally exceptional and that it is their duty to be a role model for the world (Hodgson 10). According to the theory of American Exceptionalism, the US is unique and superior to all other nations and therefore, American hegemony is legitimate even outside the US (Paul 14). At the core of this belief lies the City upon a Hill trope. John Winthrop's City upon a Hill sermon has been used by countless politicians to reinforce the myth of American Exceptionalism. This image that the United States should be like a city upon a hill and that the whole world is watching America, that it should be a beacon of light for the rest of the world, is fundamental to the concept.

According to Nayak and Malone, US Exceptionalism is closely linked to US Orientalism and they should be explored together to gain a better understanding of US identity and policy-making (254). Nayak and Malone claim that

> American Orientalism is a style of thought that gets grounding through American Exceptionalism, a particular and specific form of Orientalism intended to produce ''America.'' […] Orientalism and Exceptionalism share in common the discursive deployment of ontological difference and epistemological claims underlying the American providential mission to provide order to the world, the justifications for conquering and occupying territories, and the racial hierarchy that prioritizes Anglo-Saxons. (254)

This would mean that since, according to Orientalism, the Orient cannot represent itself and needs to be represented, American Exceptionalism is the justification for why the US supposedly have the right to be the one to do the representing for the Orient. By representing the Orient, the US also presents itself a certain way, namely as the polar opposite of everything the Orient stands for according to the US representation of it. As Said already mentioned, Orientalism has more to do with "our" world than with the actual Orient (12). According to Nayak and Malone, "[k]nowledge claims about the Other (the Orient/the East) actually cement the way the Self (Europe/the West) sees and constructs itself" (256) and "the 'we-ness' of the nation is predicated upon the Other against the 'we' is constituted" (260). This would mean that every nation needs an Other as a contrast to the values and qualities that characterize said nation. The West, especially the US, wants to present itself as being superior, therefore the Orient as the West's Other is represented as inferior. Representations of the Self and the Other belong to the concept of Othering.

The Othering of Muslims / Islam and the US

Oxford's *A Dictionary of Gender Studies* defines Othering as "a process whereby individuals and groups are treated and marked as different and inferior from the dominant social group." This distinction between us/the known versus the Other/the foreign seems to have deep roots in the theory of different civilizations.

For Samuel Huntington, civilization is "the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity," involving "elements, such as language, history, religion, customs institutions and […] the subjective self-identification of people" (43). Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations involves seven major civilizations, one of them the so called "West" and another one the Islamic civilization (45-47). The Western civilization generally includes Europe, North America and Latin America (Huntington 46). The Islamic civilization and the West have been in conflict for the past fourteen centuries and will continue to be in the future (Huntington 212). The main problems between the Islamic and the Western civilization are first, that they are both convinced that their culture is superior and second, that the West feels that it is their duty to share their culture with and impose it on other civilizations (Huntington 218).

> The West, and especially the United States, which has always been a missionary nation, believe that the non-Western peoples should commit themselves to the Western values of democracy, free markets, limited government, human rights,

> individualism, the rule of law, and should embody these values in their institutions. (Huntington 184)

This supposed obligation to impose Western values and beliefs on the rest of the world, because of the Western civilization's superiority seems to be a crucial point in concepts such as Orientalism and Othering.

According to Huntington, "the civilizational 'us' and the extracivilizational 'them' is a constant in human history" (129). The main reasons for Othering lie in feelings of superiority or inferiority as well as feelings of fear and mistrust toward people perceived as being different (Huntington 129). In the case of the United States, the government's behavior towards Muslims after 9/11 seems to be a prime example for Othering in combination with Orientalism and Exceptionalism. After 9/11 President Bush has essentially distinguished between "good" and "bad" Muslims (Maira 633). For the most part, "good" Muslims are peaceful, loyal to the US and act as informants about Islam and the Arab world in general, for example about the oppression of women, of racism or of the anti-Semitism of Muslims (Maira 633–635). "Bad" Muslims, in contrast, either have links to terrorism or are terrorists themselves, they are anti-Western enemies and pose a threat to national security and democracy (Maira 635–636). Essentially, this distinction would mean that "good" Muslims are assimilated according to the United States' image and that they now share the same values as the Western civilization – they are "Americanized." "Bad" Muslims, however, would be the ones who are still embodying the values of the Islamic civilization and are thereby the image of the Orient according to Orientalism, namely backward, inferior and immoral. The following section will describe how the American film industry makes use of Orientalist images in their depiction of Arabs and thereby enforces racial stereotypes.

2.3 Hollywood, Disney and the Depiction of Arabs[3]

American mass media, such as television and film, play a crucial role in sharing and reinforcing cultural images and stereotypes of the Orient (Said 26). It is even more problematic that the mass audience consumes such media without reflection (Said 325). Shaheen (172) analyzed 900 films in a timespan ranging from the 1890s until 2001 with respect to how Hollywood portrays Arabs and Muslims. According to the scholar, the Arab in

[3] Parts of this subchapter have been used in tasks for the 120013-1 MEd Thesis Seminar taught by Prof. Mag. Dr. Susanne Reichl in the winter term of 2023.

movies is portrayed as the cultural "other" by Hollywood, as different from the white mainstream and as threatening (Shaheen 172).

> From 1896 until today, filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy #1—brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews. (Shaheen 172)

The Western fear of Islam stems from the historical conflict between Muslims and Christians and has been shared through "literature, folklore, academic writings, and now film," as the newest medium since its invention (Ramji 1). In the early 20th century, Islam was portrayed as exotic and mysterious, with belly-dancing women living in harems and bearded sheiks riding camels in the desert (Ramji 2). From the 1970s onwards, political events influenced the image of Muslims and transformed them into terrorists (Ramji 3). Shaheen (174) stresses that Hollywood does not distinguish between Arabs and Muslims and therefore, consumers also do not. The American film industry tends to portray Muslims heavily associated with the Middle East (Ramji 2). According to Ramji (4), Muslims are not always portrayed as "bad." However, the "good" Muslims are Westernized characters, who fight the "bad" Muslims together with the Americans (Ramji 4).

As Shaheen (174) points out, the stereotyping and vilifying of a group of people can have drastic consequences, such as the dehumanization of the said group. When people are repeatedly dehumanized, discrimination and even genocide can be the outcome, as history has shown. Nowadays, the problematic is aggravated by the world-wide coverage and consumption of American media. The scholar elaborates on the problem:

> Hollywood's renditions of Arabs frame stereotypes in viewer's minds. The problem is peculiarly American. Because of the vast American cultural reach via television and film—we are the world's leading exporter of screen images—the all-pervasive Arab stereotype has much more of a negative impact on viewers today than it did thirty or forty years ago. Nowadays, Hollywood's motion pictures reach nearly everyone. (Shaheen 174)

Especially Disney, as part of the American film industry, enjoys an immense popularity with children, and adults equally, around the globe. Numerous people, worldwide, consume Disney not only through their movies, but also through their merchandise, amusement parks or advertisements. In 2019, the company launched their streaming platform Disney+, which is one of the latest additions to the firm's portfolio. According to a report by Ampere Analysis, a UK data and analytics firm specialized in media, games and sports, around 50 percent of US households with children younger than 10 years old had a Disney+

subscription in 2020 (License Global 2020) – only a year after the platform's launch. In the first quarter of 2024, Disney+ subscription rates reached 149.6 million viewers worldwide (Statista 2024) – how many of these subscribers have children is not known.

According to Giroux and Pollock (1), Disney has a large influence on children. Giroux and Pollock (91) argue that Disney movies are not only entertainment, but also "teaching machines." As Wills (5) mentions, "Disney exerts a powerful influence over our education, our values, and our lifestyle choices." Giroux and Pollock (91–92) explain this influence as follows:

> Disney films combine enchantment and innocence in narrating stories that help children understand who they are, what societies are about, and what it means to construct a world of play and fantasy in an adult environment.

Giroux and Pollock (92) stress the need to reflect upon the messages that are shared in children's movies and not simply consume them as entertainment. I agree that this notion of learning through films is very problematic because production companies control what values and worldviews are shared. Lippi-Green (111) points out that especially

> [a]nimated films offer a unique way to study how a dominant culture reaffirms its control over subordinate cultures and nations by re-establishing, on a day-to-day basis, their preferred view of the world as right and proper and primary. Precisely because of animation's (assumed) innocence and innocuousness, the film makers have a broader spectrum of tools available to them and a great deal more leeway.

The fact that animators are not expected to accurately reflect reality, gives them the opportunity to shape cultural narratives by creating worlds according to their own perspectives. Lippi-Green hypothesizes that while the entertainment factor of animated movies certainly plays a role, "they are also a vehicle by which children learn to associate specific characteristics and life styles with specific social groups, and to accept a narrow and exclusionary world view" (111). Therefore, consumers of Disney movies or their parents should be aware that every film carries cultural and social messages. Of course, it can be argued that such messages are not always intentionally included by the filmmakers nor do most viewers conduct a deep analysis of hidden meanings in a movie. However, this does not mean that certain messages are not there. Movies still convey certain meanings and therefore, they should not be consumed completely unaware and without reflection.

Wills (104–105) describes how Disney has shaped US-American culture since the firm's existence:

> The company has promoted a range of fundamental notions and ideals through its movies: universal love, good conquering evil, and simple happy endings. It has also

> pushed a range of cultural and social values: a Protestant-style work ethic, absolute morality, and traditional family roles.

On the whole, Disney portrays very traditional American values. However, those traditional values prove to be problematic in today's modern world. Disney critics review the company's handling of race and gender representations (Wills 119; 122). The perpetuation of racial and cultural stereotypes, the whitewashing of characters as well as the preference for white characters have been points of critique with regards to race (Wills 119). The company has reacted to this critique by incorporating princesses of different ethnicities and cultures into their movies as lead characters (Sackl 82). While this reaction might appear as very positive on the surface, it also contains some problems. Lacroix (2004) analyzed the portrayal of female characters of color in Disney movies in contrast to white Disney princesses with special regard to Orientalism. The results of the analysis suggest that female characters of color differ in their physical appearance, the focus is increasingly on their body, their costumes are stereotypical images of their ethnicity and they are portrayed as exotic and sexual (Lacroix 222). Moreover, Lacroix (223) also found that the character traits of the non-white princesses were closely linked to racial stereotypes.

Considering the critique Disney receives, some authors also defend the firm, one of them being Douglas Brode. In his book *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment* he explores whether the influence Disney exerts over its consumers is negative or not (Brode 6). In defense of Disney, he argues that the idea of diversity and other standards, for example the problematic of whitewashing characters, did not exist when Disney started producing movies and that the company was actually one of the first advocates of diversity (Brode 1; 8; 12). Brode (10) claims that it is crucial to consider the context of certain scenes which might appear problematic in an analysis. Moreover, he stresses the importance of approaching Disney with an open mind (Brode 268). I agree that in an analysis, one should not be led by presupposed assumptions, but be objective and consider more than one viewpoint. Therefore, it is important to recognize that while Disney's handling of race is not unproblematic, the company has apparently made an effort to incorporate diversity in their movies. Whether this effort has been enough in a movie such as Aladdin, cannot be determined objectively in an academic thesis – this is a question everyone must answer for themselves. However, an analysis such as the one in this thesis can showcase problematic aspects in a movie and thus, serve as an impulse for a critical reflection.

3. The Tale of *Aladdin* and Its Background

The story of *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*[4] is part of the *One Thousand and One Nights (*also known as *Arabian Nights)*, a collection of oriental folkloric tales translated by Antoine Galland. However, the origins of the story are unclear (see Marzolph and van Leeuwen 82–85). Scholars doubt that the story of the orphan boy with the magical lamp belonged to the original collection of the Arabic manuscripts *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (One Thousand and One Nights) that Galland translated into French (Bourenane 2020; Larzul 2004; Warner 2012; Cooperson 2006). As Bourenane (237) mentions, Aladdin's story has no references in the original Arabic version of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Furthermore, there is no "authentic original Arabic counterpart of the translated version of Aladdin" (Bourenane 237). Warner (360) draws attention to the fact that *Aladdin*, along with some other supposedly added stories, shows influences of the Western fairytales of Galland's time. Therefore, it is assumed that Galland is the author of the tale (Warner 360). Implementing a discourse analysis on *Aladdin*, Bourenane (239–240) found Orientalist perceptions as well as controversial uses of Islam in certain elements of the story, such as the princess's veiled face, the consumption of wine and the princess lying in bed with a stranger.

> The junction between an oriental culture and religious discourse besides a Western perception and imagination of the latter as can be read in the previous examples, unveil a hybrid narrative that can only be explained as Western creation of an oriental tale as doubted by several scholars. (Bourenane 240)

Larzul (258) names the Syrian narrator Hanna as Galland's source for certain oral tales that he then included in his *Arabian Nights* collection, even thought they were not part of the original *Alf laylah wa-laylah*. The story of *Aladdin* was among those 13 tales Hanna told him, as the summaries of the tales in his journal indicate (Larzul 259). With help of those summaries, Galland wrote new tales in a similar fashion to the original texts in his *One Thousand and One Nights* collection. In an analysis of language and style of the first volumes of the *Arabian Nights*, which includes the stories Galland translated from the Arabic manuscripts, and the last two volumes, which include texts based on Hanna's oral storytelling, Larzul (270) found a clearly recognizable "transition from adaptation to creation." This suggests that Galland took the main ideas from Hanna's oral version of

[4] The tale is also known as *Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp* as well as *Aladdin and the Magical Lamp*.

Aladdin and wrote a new story, influenced by the fairytales of his time and his translated stories of the *Arabian Nights*.

The original tale of *Aladdin*, as it appears in the *One Thousand and One Nights* collection, is set in China. Aladdin is described as the lazy son of a poor tailor. The boy gets deceived by a Moroccan sorcerer, who tells him he is the brother of Aladdin's deceased father and wants to make him a rich merchant. In reality, the sorcerer needs the orphan boy to climb in a cave in the mountains, filled with riches, to procure a magic lamp. However, the sorcerer angrily traps Aladdin in the cave, but he can free himself with the help of a jinnee[5]. The sorcerer left, thinking Aladdin was dead and so, the lamp ends up in Aladdin's possession. By accident, the boy calls the jinnee of the lamp, who can turn every wish into reality. Slowly, Aladdin and his mother become very wealthy. When Aladdin sees the princess Badr-al-Budur, the Sultan's daughter, he instantly falls in love with her and wants to marry her. Aladdin's mother goes to the Sultan and presents him with jewels from the magic cave to ask him to grant her son permission to marry the princess. However, the princess' hand had already been promised to the Grand Vizier's son. When Badr-al-Budur and the Grand Vizier's son marry, Aladdin uses the jinnee's help to turn the wedding night into a nightmare. The jinnee transports the couple's bed to Aladdin's house, puts the bridegroom into a closet and Aladdin sleeps next to the princess. This continues several nights, until both the princess and the bridegroom beg their fathers to be released from the marriage. The Sultan finally annuls the marriage. Once again, Aladdin's mother asks the Sultan to grant her son permission to marry Badr-al-Budur. When Aladdin, with the help of his lamp, is able to fulfill an impossible task set by the Sultan, the marriage finally takes place. In just one night, Aladdin builds a large palace in front of the Sultan's palace. The poor orphan boy, now a richer man than the King of China himself, became known for his generosity throughout the whole kingdom. Unfortunately, the Moroccan sorcerer learned that Aladdin was still alive and a rich man now. The sorcerer decides to travel to China to steal the lamp. He is successful and transports the palace and the people in it to Morocco. When Aladdin learns what happened, the jinnee of the ring he owns brings him to Africa. On Aladdin's instructions, the princess poisons the sorcerer and Aladdin finally kills him. Back in China, however, the sorcerer's

[5] There are several different ways to spell "jinnee" or "genie" and usually, they all have their own specific meanings (see, e.g., Peterson). For this thesis, I have decided to deploy the spelling of the respective text. Therefore, I use "jinnee" in this chapter, as the term is also written in this form in Dawood's version of the tale of *Aladdin*. In the film analysis chapters, I will use "genie" to refer to the magical being in the lamp, because Disney decided to spell the term accordingly.

brother finds Aladdin and wants to kill him. With the jinnee's help, Aladdin sees through the brother's deception and kills him first. Eventually, he lives a happy life with the princess. (see Dawood 165–236)

Aladdin is one of the best known and most popular stories of the *One Thousand and One Nights* collection. There are several filmic adaptations of the story made long before the Disney movie became popular. Larzul (241) mentions around "30 cinematographic productions" that were inspired by the tale and calls the 1906 movie by Capellani "the most faithful adaptation of the original tale." In contrast, the 1992 Disney movie refashioned the whole story, including only core elements of the original. As Larzul (242) describes, Disney simplified the plot, omitted certain characters (e.g., Aladdin's mother), merged others (e.g., the sorcerer and the vizier), renamed some (e.g., Badr-al-Budur becomes Jasmine) and invented new ones (e.g., the monkey Abu). Bullock and Zhou (450) claim that nowadays, *Aladdin* stands for Orientalism – in the sense that it is so full of Orientalist stereotypes that one only needs to watch the movie to understand the core ideas of Orientalism.

4. The Disney Adaptations

This chapter provides synopses of the respective storylines of the 1992 as well as the 2019 Disney adaptation of *Aladdin*. Those summaries serve to contextualize the movie analysis in the following chapters.

4.1 *Aladdin* (1992)

The animated version of Disney's *Aladdin* was released in 1992. It was produced and directed by John Musker and Rom Clements and features the voices of American actors such as Robin Williams, Scott Weinger or Linda Larkin. The music for the film stems from Howard Ashman and Alan Menken.

The story is narrated by a character referred to as the peddler. He only appears in the opening scenes of the movie and is not a part of the story he tells. The main characters of the tale are the thief Aladdin, princess Jasmine, the Sultan's vizier Jafar, the Sultan and the Genie. In addition, the monkey Abu accompanies Aladdin, the tiger Rajah is Jasmine's pet companion, the parrot Iago belongs to Jafar and the Genie is friends with a magic carpet. Other individuals appearing in the movie, for instance merchants or guards, can be considered side or background characters.

The peddler's story begins with Jafar, who is standing in the desert in the middle of the night, opening the Cave of Wonders and forcing a man to enter the cave. Since only the so-called "diamond in the rough," a person who is worthy, is allowed to enter, the man is crushed by the cave's entrance, which consists of a tiger's mouth. The next scene shows Aladdin with an obviously stolen loaf of bread, running through the streets of Agrabah trying to escape the guards. When he finally manages to escape and wants to eat it with Abu, he sees two little children searching the trash for something edible and he generously gives them his only bread. Then, he has an encounter with a new suitor for the princess, who is entering the city on horseback and almost runs over the children. The suitor calls him a "worthless street-rat" and Aladdin is left feeling downcast and unhappy about his situation. He sits in his crumbling tower and dreams of a better future. Meanwhile in the palace, the Sultan chides Jasmine for rejecting yet another suitor and reminds her that according to the law, she has to marry a prince before her next birthday, which is in three days. Jasmine, however, is very opposed to the idea of a forced, arranged marriage. She wants to marry for

love, live her life more fully and be freer in her choices, also with regards to being able to leave the palace grounds. This leads her to sneak out of the palace at night. In the morning, she roams through the streets of Agrabah, which is when Aladdin sees her for the first time. When Jasmine gives a hungry little boy an apple from a market stall, the vendor accuses her of stealing and wants to cut off her hand. Aladdin rescues her and together, they flee from the guards. He takes her to his home and they talk about feeling trapped in their lives. In the meantime, Jafar has used his magic snake staff to compel the Sultan to give him his magic ring and then he uses it to find the "diamond in the rough," who turns out to be Aladdin. Jafar sends guards to arrest him and Jasmine returns to the palace, because she wants to free him, but is told that he is already dead. In reality, Aladdin is in a prison and Jafar, in the disguise of a fellow prisoner, shows him how to escape in exchange for his help. They ride to the Cave of Wonders and Aladdin enters it without problems. He is supposed to retrieve the magic lamp for Jafar and touch nothing else. Abu, however, cannot resist and touches a red jewel. As a result, the cave begins to crumble and flood with lava. With the help of the magic carpet, Aladdin manages to reach the entrance, but Jafar pushes him and he falls down again. The entrance closes and Aladdin is trapped. Almost unintentionally, he rubs the lamp and the Genie emerges, who explains his magic and that Aladdin is now his new master. The Genie uses his magic to teleport everyone out of the cave and into an oasis in the desert. There, Aladdin wishes to become a prince. The Genie manifests clothes worthy of a prince and together with a large entourage, Prince Ali marches into Agrabah to present himself as the princess' new suitor. At first, Jasmine is not very enthusiastic about yet another suitor and Jafar is equally opposed to Prince Ali, but for different reasons. He has made the plan to marry the princess himself to become the next Sultan. Aladdin then offers to take Jasmine on a magic carpet ride, on which he shows her a range of different places. Jasmine falls in love with him and recognizes Prince Ali as Aladdin, but he tells her that he just pretended to be poor to get to know the city. Back at the palace, Jafar orders the guards to throw Aladdin into the sea, but the Genie rescues him. When Aladdin tells the Sultan what Jafar has done to him, the vizier is thrown into the dungeons. Jafar, however, has realized that Aladdin has the magic lamp and orders Iago to steal it. In possession of the lamp, Jafar wishes to become Sultan and banishes Aladdin to the ends of the world. Moreover, he enslaves the Sultan and Jasmine. In the meantime, the magic carpet helps Aladdin to return to Agrabah. Jafar wishes to become the most powerful sorcerer and transforms into a large snake to fight Aladdin.

Aladdin, however, outsmarts Jafar. He tells him that the most powerful being in the universe is a genie and at once, the power-hungry Jafar wishes to become one. What Jafar realizes too late is that while a genie does have immense powers, he is also the slave of the lamp and subject to his master's wills. The Genie banishes Jafar's lamp into the Cave of Wonders, so that he is no longer a danger. The Sultan, grateful for Aladdin's help, remembers that he has the power to change laws and does so, in order to enable Jasmine to marry Aladdin, even though he is not a prince. In the end, Aladdin frees the Genie, he and Jasmine marry and they take off into the night on the magic carpet.

4.2 *Aladdin* (2019)

The 2019 live action remake of *Aladdin* was released in 2019. It was directed by Guy Ritchie and features actors Will Smith, Mena Massoud, Naomi Scott, Navid Neghaban, Marwan Kenzari and Nasim Pedrad starring as the protagonists. The film's soundtrack stems from Alan Menken. Even though the main plotline is similar to the 1992 movie, the movie contains new, refashioned strands of action and therefore, still seems worthy to summarize.

In this version, the story is narrated by a character referred to as the mariner, who tells it to his children as a kind of life lesson. Later in the movie, it becomes clear that the mariner is the Genie as a human. The protagonists are the same as in 1992, but the filmmakers have added one character, namely Dalia – Jasmine's handmaid.

The mariner's tale begins with Aladdin stealing a necklace in the marketplace and trying to resell it, but he only gets a bag of dates for it. When he wants to share it with Abu, he sees a poor family sitting on the ground and gives it to them. In the next scene, Jasmine is strolling around the marketplace, sees two hungry children and gives them bread from a stall. The vendor accuses her of stealing and demands her bracelet as payment. Aladdin intervenes, outsmarts the merchant and together they run away from the guards. In the meantime, Jafar kills the man he assigned to find the "diamond in the rough" for insulting him. Aladdin takes Jasmine, who pretends to be her handmaid Dalia, to his home. There she explains why the Sultan keeps his daughter locked away and they talk about their lives. When a new suitor arrives in the city, Jasmine has to get back to the palace to meet Prince Anders in the palace's Great Hall[6]. After the meeting, the Sultan talks to Jafar in his study. Jafar wants to

[6] In the book *The Art and Making Of Aladdin*, Zemler (55) states that the filmmakers did not include a throne in the palace, which is why there is no throne room. Instead, they call the room in which the Sultan receives guests the Great Hall. Therefore, I will also refer to this room as the Great Hall in this thesis.

persuade the Sultan to invade Shirabad, the kingdom of Jasmine's deceased mother. When the Sultan does not agree, Jafar uses his snake staff to compel him with his magic, but Jasmine interrupts them. She tells the Sultan that neither Prince Anders nor any other foreign prince could be a better ruler than her. The Sultan, however, argues that a woman has never been Sultan before and therefore, it is impossible. Jafar tells her that she should finally accept those traditions and better be seen and not heard. Aladdin breaks into the palace to see Jasmine, but they are interrupted by Dalia and arrange a meeting for the following day, which he is unable to attend. Before he can leave the palace, Jafar's guards arrest him, because Iago thinks Aladdin is the "diamond in the rough." Jafar kidnaps him and brings him to the desert. There, he offers Aladdin a deal – if Aladdin retrieves the magic lamp from the Cave of Wonders, Jafar will make him rich enough to impress a princess. Aladdin is indeed found to be worthy to enter the cave and manages to fetch the lamp, but Abu, tempted by a red jewel, touches the forbidden treasure and the cave responds by crumbling and flooding with lava. Aladdin is able to reach the entrance, but Jafar pushes him back and the entrance closes. Trapped in the cave, Aladdin rubs the lamp when he inspects it and the Genie appears. He explains his powers and the concept of the three wishes and frees everyone from the cave by teleporting them into the desert. There, the Genie says that his deepest wish would be freedom. Aladdin wishes to become a prince and the Genie fulfills it. Together with a large entourage, Aladdin enters Agrabah as Prince Ali and officially meets the princess and her father. Prince Ali embarrasses himself a lot and at first, Jasmine sees in him just another suitor who tries to impress the Sultan. At the harvest celebration, the same night, he gets another chance and dances with Jasmine, but when he puts himself in the center of attention, she leaves. Moreover, the Genie sees Dalia for the first time at the celebration. A few hours later, they take a stroll and fall in love. Meanwhile, Aladdin convinces Jasmine to take a ride on the magic carpet with him. After the ride, Jasmine figures out that Prince Ali is the same person as Aladdin. In order to uphold the illusion of being a prince, Aladdin lies to her and says that when they first met, he was just in disguise to familiarize himself with the city and its people. Jasmine believes him and they kiss. Iago observes Aladdin flying on the magic carpet and Jafar realizes that Prince Ali is Aladdin. He throws Aladdin into the sea and the Genie rescues him. Jafar tells the Sultan that Prince Ali wants to conquer Agrabah and has therefore fled, but Jasmine and Aladdin expose Jafar's lies and the Sultan orders the guards to imprison the vizier. With Iago's help, Jafar can

escape and steals the magic lamp from Aladdin. He enters the palace, transforms the Great Hall and awaits the Sultan, who appears with Jasmine and an entourage of guards. Jafar wishes for the Genie to make him Sultan, but after a powerful speech from Jasmine, the majority of guards stay loyal to Jasmine's father. As a result, Jafar wishes to become the most powerful sorcerer. Then, he exposes Prince Ali as Aladdin and banishes him to the ends of the earth. Afterwards, Jasmine sacrifices herself by telling Jafar she will marry him. In the middle of the ceremony, Aladdin arrives on the magic carpet, Jasmine steals the lamp and together, they fly away. Iago, however, chases them and Jafar tries to fight them with his magic. The Sultan throws Jafar's snake staff over the balcony, but Jafar is powerful enough and uses his magic to retrieve the lamp. Aladdin, however, uses his wits and outsmarts Jafar by telling him he is still second to someone, because the Genie is more powerful than him. As a result, Jafar wishes to become a genie, but does not consider that now, he is a slave of the lamp. The Genie banishes Jafar to the Cave of Wonders. Instead of using his last wish to render a marriage with Jasmine possible, Aladdin wishes the Genie free. Finally human, the Genie and Dalia make plans to travel the world and have children. Aladdin leaves the palace. In the meantime, the Sultan tells Jasmine that she has proven courage and strength and that she is the future of Agrabah. He makes her Sultan and enables her to change the law, for example to marry Aladdin. Jasmine catches up with Aladdin right outside the palace gates, tells him the good news and they kiss. The movie ends with their marriage.

5. Orientalist Stereotyping in Disney's *Aladdin* (2019)

The following chapter will discuss in how far the 2019 live-action remake of *Aladdin* includes notions of Orientalist stereotyping. In order to answer this question, I have analyzed the intro song Arabian Nights, the main settings of the movie as well as the portrayal of the main characters, with a special focus on their accents and physical appearances. This analysis also builds the basis for the comparison with the 1992 animated adaptation in chapter 6.

5.1. The Intro Song "Arabian Nights"

"Arabian Nights" is sung by a man on a boat, called the mariner, who is later revealed to be the Genie in his human form, played by the American actor Will Smith. It is a modernized, extended and updated version of the 1992 intro song of the same name. Smith sings in his native variety of American English and also incorporates beat boxing and hip-hop elements in the song.

The song lyrics introduce the audience to the movie setting and describe the supposed characteristics of Arabian nights.

> Oh, imagine a land, it's a faraway place
> Where the caravan camels roam
> Where you wander among every culture and tongue
> It's chaotic, but, hey, it's home (Will Smith 0:10–0:24)

The first line of the first verse states that the film is set in a land far away from the audience, suggesting a foreign country. The mention of camels here, as well as references to sand and dunes later in the song (0:29; 1:56; 2:54), leads one to associate this land with a desert. The audience also learns that the country must be very culturally diverse, with a lot of different ethnicities living there. The final line attributes this place to be chaotic, but home. Lines in the second verse tell of bazaars, filled with exotic spices, textiles and bargaining ("At the fabled bazaars / With the cardamom-cluttered stalls / You can smell every spice / While you haggle the price / Of the silks and the satin shawls"; 1:00–1:14). Lines in the chorus speak of a land full of magic ("This mystical land full of magic and sand"; 1:53–1:56). Moreover, everyone there needs to decide their own destiny, if they follow the path to darkness or want to be good (2:00–2:15). Arabian nights can "shock and amaze" (2:37–39) and one always needs to be cautious and prepared (2:48–2:51).

The instrumental sound in "*Arabian Nights"* seems to be inspired by a blend of Middle Eastern folkloric music, with modern pop, hip-hop and rap elements. The instruments that can be heard in the song include flutes, various types of drums and different string instruments. It could be the case that traditional Middle Eastern instruments such as darbuka drums and an oud (similar to a guitar) have been used to recreate a traditional sound. The main melodic theme of the song (see, e.g. 0:47–0:52) seems to be very common for films set in Arabic countries, because of the Phrygian dominant scale that is used. Similar versions of this sequence of notes can be found in movies such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Prince of Persia* (2010). Due to the fact that very similar sounding melodic themes are frequently used for movies set in the same geopolitical area, upon hearing this melody, one instantly associates *Aladdin* with the Middle East.

In summary, the song describes a foreign place, with camels and deserts, which is culturally diverse, chaotic, exotic, magical, full of wonders, but also dangerous. Some of these attributes, such as chaotic, exotic, mystical and dangerous are commonly used Orientalist stereotypes to describe the Orient (see, e.g., Said). The used instruments and common melodic theme strengthen those associations.

5.2 Settings

Aladdin is set in the fictional city of Agrabah. Several establishing shots throughout the movie tell the audience that this city is surrounded by desert on the one side and the sea on the other. The most important settings are already shown while Smith sings the intro song: the city from above, the marketplace, the palace as well as the Cave of Wonders in the desert.

5.2.1 Introductory Shots

During the intro song (1:45–4:40), the camera seems to be a person through whose eyes the audience sees the city – especially the scenes in the marketplace and the palace leave this impression. After an extreme long shot of the city from the seaside (2:18), the camera sweeps through the streets, only showing close-ups and medium shots of certain scenes in the marketplace/bazaar (2:28–3:07). It is interesting that in the first ten seconds, the camera is tilted downwards, so that the audience only sees the ground, the feet of people and camels as well as the bottom of market stalls (2:28–2:38). The choice of camera angles and

limited view could serve to provide the audience with glimpses into this foreign culture and place in which the movie is set. Another possibility would be that those shots simply introduce the main characters and briefly convey their point of view. After all, in this first minute, Abu, Aladdin's monkey, is in the center of the frame, running around and stealing small wares and belongings. Since he is quite small, it would make sense that the camera follows him at his eye-level. At the bazaar, the lyrics of "*Arabian Nights"* correspond to the shown scenes. At the end of the marketplace, the camera tilts upward and presents the palace for the first time in a low angle shot (3:08), before moving inside at the eye-level of the shown characters (3:11–3:36). Together with Jafar's parrot, the camera moves and shows a long shot of the city from above (3:39), before taking the audience to the Cave of Wonders and the desert (3:53–4:35). All those settings are introduced at night, fitting the title and lyrics of the intro song "*Arabian Nights."* The shots evoke several different associations – the bazaar shows a city vibrant with life, the palace stands for the richness of the royal family, the Cave of Wonders and Jafar imply danger and ruthlessness, and the fact that it is night creates an area of mystery and magic.

5.2.2 The City

The film includes several establishing shots of the city from different viewpoints (see, e.g., 2:18; 3:39; 6:21; 13:57; 15:00; 17:53). Agrabah consists of the palace, the marketplace, a minaret, which suggests the existence of a mosque, and the homes of its inhabitants. Moreover, it also has a harbor near the palace walls. The harbor is significant for the city's image as a port city, in which many different cultures and ethnicities meet. The roads of Agrabah are unpaved and made of reddish sand or earth (see, e.g., 17:07). The lack of paved/brick roads could be interpreted in the light of Orientalism, namely as a sign of primitiveness. Numerous palm trees and other plants are spread throughout the city, whose buildings are very colorful and diverse (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: *The City of Agrabah With Its Diverse Buildings (Aladdin 2019, 6:20)*

As Figure 1 displays, every house looks different. Some have cupolas, some spires and others platform roofs. Similarly, some are decorated with tiles and intricate ornamentation, others are very simple. All buildings, however, appear to be influenced by a Middle Eastern / Islamic architectural style. The diversity in the buildings' designs could be read as a symbol for the diversity of their inhabitants. Many houses seem to be built with adobe bricks, which is quite common in hot climates. A few buildings look older, almost like ruins reminiscent of the past. Aladdin's home, for example, seems to be an abandoned ruin, because bricks are missing in a lot of places, the balcony balustrade is crumbling and the roof has holes (13:30–13:55; 17:53). Those broken houses could stand for the citizens' poverty. Another possible interpretation would be that the buildings show the people's backwardness and inability to provide for themselves, in the fact that they cannot even build stable houses or repair them properly.

5.2.3 The Marketplace

The marketplace or bazaar is the first location shown after the intro song is over. It consists of multiple streets with stalls lining each side (4:51) as well as a larger square in which vendors are selling their wares (6:25). The stalls are very diverse, some are (partly) indoor, most are outdoors, there are simple wooden tables, some vendors even sit on the ground (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: *A Street Belonging to the Bazaar (Aladdin 2019, 4:51)*

As depicted above, the offered goods are piled high on simple trays and range from pots and pans to textiles, food and even flower petals. Everything is very colorful – the people's clothes, the wares, the buildings. The streets are bustling with people of different ethnicities and cultures (see fig. 3). Shots such as Figure 3 serve to showcase the diversity in Agrabah's citizens.

Figure 3: *The Bustling Marketplace of Agrabah (Aladdin 2019, 6:29)*

Moreover, it is very noisy, because vendors promote their goods loudly and energetically and customers are chatting or bargaining (see, e.g., 4:48; 6:33). The haggling and general volume at the marketplace can be read as the outcome of a very lively, vibrant trading city, but they also convey a strong sense of exoticness and could interpreted as showcasing the chaos of 'Oriental' bazaars.

In general, the inhabitants of Agrabah seem happy – the marketplace is bustling, there are children playing and people chatting with each other. However, there are also several

indications of severe poverty, such as the beggar on the ground (6:59), the children Aladdin gives his dates to (6:08) or the ones Jasmine steals the bread for (6:37). They have dirt-streaked faces and clearly cannot afford any food. Aladdin himself mentions several times that he has to steal to eat (see, e.g., 8:22–10:12). One could argue that poverty exists in every city – however, the Sultan's palace stands in stark contrast to the living conditions of Agrabah's citizens.

5.2.4 The Palace

The palace is the home of the Sultan and his daughter Jasmine. Made of white stone, with golden cupolas and multiple spires, it is a massive building on a hill, located at the coast on the left side of Agrabah (see fig. 4). On a first, distant glance, it blends quite well with the rest of the city and seems as if it is simply another part of it. Upon further examination and especially in comparison to the building underneath, which is located at the bottom center of the shot, the contrast between the Sultan's great wealth and the poverty of some inhabitants seems dramatic.

Figure 4: *The View of the Palace From Aladdin's Home (Aladdin 2019, 15:00)*

A wall, which is only slightly recognizable in Figure 4, is guarding the palace grounds. This wall could be read as a symbol of the royal family's distancing from the rest of Agrabah. Another interpretation could be that it is a symbol of Jasmine's confinement. She seeks freedom but is not allowed outside the palace grounds.

Rooms inside the palace are shown in various scenes, including a Great Hall, the Sultan's study, Jasmine's room, Jafar's room and a courtyard garden (see, e.g., 18:55–20:14; 20:24–21:45; 23:28–24:34; 25:12–25:30; 1:06:53–1:06:57). The interior design of the palace is very

opulent. The doors are adorned with stylized flowers and floral patterns (see, e.g., 23:26). The Great Hall has gilded walls with a lot of decorative ornamentation in arabesque patterns and a mahogany wooden floor (see fig. 5). The intricate design, in combination with the amount of gold, seems very expensive. The Great Hall is the room in which the Sultan receives guests and through its design, they are instantly greeted with a glance upon the family's wealth.

Figure 5: *The Great Hall in the Palace (Aladdin 2019, 19:24)*

The room is connected to the courtyard garden, which has soft pink walls and a pinkish red floor with inlaid ornamented tiles (1:06:53–1:06:57). Countless plants and flowers garnish the garden, whose centerpiece constitutes a fountain with water lilies in the middle. It is the outdoor space besides the balconies that is shown in the palace during the movie and therefore, potentially the only one Jasmine has access to. Apart from this garden, Jasmine seems to spend her time in indoor spaces, such as her room. Jasmine's chambers are decorated slightly different than the other shown rooms (23:28–24:34). Although there is also a lot of ornamentation, parts of her walls are tiled and showcase delicate drawings of palm trees and birds, the other part is designed in geometrical patterns, but not fully gilded like in the Great Hall or her father's study. Her room encompasses closets painted in flowers, a bed and several seating arrangements, with colorful pillows in mostly pink and light green shades. In addition, different sized vases with flower arrangements as well as several candles and tables with books create a warm and cozy atmosphere. The books are a symbol of Jasmine's intellect and the warm atmosphere can be seen as a reflection of her personality. Similar to Jasmine's, Jafar's living space also reflects his personality. Jafar's room looks like one of a sorcerer (25:12–25:30). His walls are painted dark blue, he has a shelf with books behind bars and jars containing unclear substances as well as a large model of the solar

system – all contributing to the dark, mysterious atmosphere of his room. His room symbolizes his dark intentions.

In summary, the palace is very warm and inviting, with the exception of Jafar's room. In general, the rooms reflect the inhabitants' personalities. The palace's gilded walls and gold decorations as well as its intricate ornamentation display the great wealth of the Sultan. The palace's interior design is clearly influenced by Arabian architectural styles.

5.2.5 The Cave of Wonders

The Cave of Wonders is located in the desert and is only shown in night scenes (see, e.g.; 3:55; 33:30), which contributes to its dangerous and mystical atmosphere. The entrance to the cave is shaped like a giant tiger head protruding from the side of a hill. The tiger head has glowing orange eyes and is able to talk. Whenever someone wants to enter, it says: "Only one may enter here. One whose worth lies far within. A diamond in the rough" (33:47–33:58). If the person who wants to enter is unworthy and tries to set foot in the mouth of the tiger head despite the warning, it shows no mercy and crushes the person (3:55–4:23). Within the cave, a dangerous-looking stone pathway (see, e.g., 34:40) leads over a dark abyss to the main chamber, which is filled with riches. The inside of the Cave of Wonders is made of stones. Jewels, jewelry, gold and other kinds of treasure lay scattered on every surface (35:14). In addition, small gold particles seem to be incorporated in the stones. The gold creates a beautiful contrast to the dark rock, causing it to stand out and shine. The magic lamp is located on top of a high monolith that looks like a raised finger, which gives the impression of a warning sign (35:21). After all, Aladdin is told to only take the magic lamp and touch nothing else of the treasures in the cave. When his monkey Abu touches a ruby, the cave is angry and says that since he has "touched the forbidden treasure," he "will never again see the light of day" (37:37–37:48). Lava floods the chamber and the stone pathways as well as the walls begin to crumble. Up until this point, the inside of the cave was filmed in low lighting and a blue hue. With the lava, everything turns red. While blue is often associated with serenity and tranquility, red can suggest aggressiveness or violence (Giannetti 23). As long as Aladdin adhered to the cave's rules, it was calm, but when Abu broke them, it became furious and along with the cave's mood, the colors changed. After the entrance has closed and Aladdin is trapped, the lava and crumbling stop and the colors and lightning become more neutral and slightly brighter (40:23). The cave's

magic and aura of mystery seem to be gone and it appears almost normal, except for the amount of riches.

In summary, the analyzed main settings (city, marketplace, palace, Cave of Wonders) portray an exotic, colorful city with Indian and Arabic influences, located in a region with a hot climate. The references to the minaret suggest that it is an Islamic country. The shots of the bazaar play into the stereotype of an exotic and to a certain degree also chaotic Orient that is vastly different from the West.

Agrabah is bustling with people of various cultures and ethnicities. This suggests a very diverse city or country, with good trade relations to others. However, most inhabitants seem to be rather poor, the majority of buildings are very simple and quite a few are either unfinished or in ruins, such as Aladdin's home. Moreover, most city streets only consist of a dirt road. The royal family, however, lives in a gigantic, opulent palace that displays their wealth from the outside as well as the inside. Even though Jasmine mentions several times that if she was Sultan, she would be a ruler who is there for the people, this notion that the Sultan and his family have riches in abundance, while the rest of the city lives in poverty seems to be very stereotypical. It could be argued that it relates to the Orientalist idea of the Orient's primitiveness and backwardness.

5.3 Character Analysis

In the following character analysis, I will put a special focus on the protagonists' accents and the color scheme of their clothes and discuss how those aspects can have an impact on the viewers' perception of these characters. Regarding the question of Orientalist stereotyping, it seems important to analyze how characters are portrayed and which associations such a portrayal could evoke.

As *Aladdin* (2019) takes place in a fictional Middle Eastern setting, one would assume that either all characters speak with an Arabic accent or none do. Lippi-Green (108–109) explains that if a film is set in a country with a different first language (L1) than English, filmmakers have three options, namely to carry out the whole dialogue in the country's L1 and use subtitles, to let each actor or actress use their native variety or most commonly, to have L1 users of English speak English and occasionally imitate the accent of the country's language in which the film is set in. The researcher points out that logically, the latter option means

that the whole cast would have to speak in the chosen accent (Lippi-Green 109). However, usually it is the case that only a few cast members will speak in the accent that the setting would require (Lippi-Green 109). The decision who those actors or actresses with an accent will be is not arbitrary, as Lippi-Green mentions, but "follows logically from the dominant stereotypes (or in some cases, from the actor's native language)" (109). In the case of *Aladdin* (2019), that the accent of a character does not always correspond to the actor's or actress's origins. Naomi Scott, for example, is a British actress, but Jasmine speaks in a noticeable American accent, which means that she had to imitate one for the whole movie. Other actors, such as Navid Negahban and Marwan Kenzari, speak English with a foreign accent off-camera and were able to keep it as their respective characters. Some of the side characters have Arabic accents, but it is unclear if they are natural or an imitated. Regarding the main characters, however, only Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie speak American English. Therefore, I assume that all accents have been chosen deliberately by the filmmakers in order to serve a certain purpose.

Regarding the significance of color in connection with the portrayal of certain characters, Peacock states that "[i]n its ability to emphasise moods and meanings, in its symbolic and dramatic impact, colour in film often makes direct statements or glosses key points" (109). Bellantoni highlights the power of color as a "tool for filmmakers to subliminally layer a story," because the audience hardly ever discerns it as a potentially manipulating factor (xxviii). Colors can be used to "visually help define a character" (Bellantoni xxv). Therefore, it seems important to also discuss the characters' appearances with regards to the use of color and its significance for their individual storylines, especially considering Jafar as the villain of the story and Aladdin as the hero.

5.3.1 Aladdin

Aladdin is played by Egyptian-Canadian actor Mena Massoud. He speaks a variety of American English, which could be read as a sign of his Americanization[7].

During the movie, he adopts two personae: initially Aladdin is a poor thief and "street rat," but with the Genie's help, he later pretends to be Prince Ali to meet and impress the princess. In his first scenes (see, e.g., 4:59; 6:02; 10:40; 13:44), Aladdin wears brown shoes,

[7] Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie's Americanization will be explained and analyzed more extensively in chapter 7.

beige loosely-fitting linen harem pants with a green cummerbund, a white, striped shirt and a red, embroidered waistcoat with a hood. According to Bellantoni, if a man wears red, it can sometimes be "perceived as heroic" (14). In the 2019 *Aladdin* movie, Aladdin wears a red waistcoat in contrast to his purple waistcoat from the 1992 adaptation, for instance. It could be argued that the red one serves to subtly foreshadow his role as the hero of the story from the beginning.

Aladdin has straight black hair with strands hanging in his face. In addition, he wears some type of cap on the back of his head, which bears resemblance to traditional Muslim skull caps such as a taqiyah or fez. In contrast to the other characters, Aladdin is clean-shaven and has only a very slight shadow of a beard. Moreover, he has white, straight teeth and dimples, giving him a movie star grin. Figure 6 shows Aladdin in his typical clothes in his home. Both his clothes and the state of his home lead to the impression that he is quite poor.

Figure 6: *Aladdin in His Home (Aladdin 2019, 18:01)*

When the Genie transforms Aladdin into Prince Ali and he formally meets Jasmine and her father for the first time in the palace's Great Hall, his clothing resembles that of the Sultan (see, e.g., 54:14; 59:41). He wears white clothes with heavy gold embroidery – a type of suit with a golden belt underneath a very oversized cape and beige boots with pointed toes. Prince Ali also wears a large white turban with a golden brooch and a large white feather. Aladdin's attire on first appearance as Prince Ali stand in stark contrast to his clothes as his true self. Prince Ali's clothes for his first meeting with Jasmine, along with his large entourage and the amount of gifts, appear very exaggerated and give the impression that he is trying too hard to present himself as someone he is not and to impress the princess with

his supposed wealth. In his following scenes as a prince, Aladdin wears a reduced, less extravagant version of this first Prince Ali costume. He is still clothed in the white-gold suit-like outfit with the golden belt, but without the cape and turban (see fig. 7).

Figure 7: *Aladdin in His Reduced Prince Ali Costume (Aladdin 2019, 1:02:26)*

Prince Ali's hair is gelled back. The low-cut suit and the large belt, together with the hair style, cause Aladdin to bear some resemblance to Elvis Presley and give him a Hollywood star look.

In his Prince Ali persona, Aladdin wears shades of white (possibly ivory), with golden elements. White is often associated with purity in Western cultures, but also in Islam – it is the color that brides wear, but white clothes can also stand for cleanliness. This choice of color could serve to signify that Aladdin is pure at heart and therefore, he is the one who is worthy, the so-called "diamond in the rough." He is often portrayed as generous and his intentions as Prince Ali as good. Moreover, his white clothes could symbolize that he is the light to Jafar's darkness. He, as the hero, stands in contrast to Jafar, the villain – literally, through their plotlines and metaphorically, through their clothes. While Jafar uses his magic to gain power, all Aladdin wants to achieve with the Genie's magic is to change his life for the better and the chance to marry Jasmine. Various scenes in the movie show Aladdin's selflessness – not only when he gives his only food to poor children, but also when he uses his last wish to free the Genie. According to Peacock, white can also suggest a blank slate (8): Prince Ali's white clothes could be a symbol for Aladdin's chance at a new beginning and a new life, which the Genie can help him attain. As Prince Ali, Aladdin can start over – he is no longer the street rat and thief that Jasmine had met in the marketplace. In fact, at first, she does not even recognize him at all and even though he makes a rather awful first impression

during their official introduction, as a prince he has equal chances of her choosing him as her other suitors do.

5.3.2 Jasmine

Jasmine is played by the British actress, singer and producer Naomi Scott. Apart from *Aladdin* (2019), Scott is known for her roles in *Charlie's Angels* (2019), *Power Rangers* (2017) and *Lemonade Mouth* (2011). Female empowerment and the fight against injustice are recurring themes in her roles. In *Lemonade Mouth* (2011), for instance, Scott's character Mo's storyline showcases many similarities with Jasmine's – a conservative father and the drive for freedom and self-expression.

It is interesting that Scott spoke General American for the whole movie, instead of her native British English variety. One potential reason could be that the filmmakers wanted the three protagonists to speak in a US American variety to set them apart from the other characters, for example individuals with a more traditional worldview, such as the Sultan, or from the obviously evil Jafar, and thereby mark them as the good characters. Alternatively, it could also be the case that the producers thought that American English would make Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie as well as their individual plotlines more relatable to the audience. Another possible explanation could lie in Lippi-Green's findings that lovers tend to "speak mainstream varieties of U.S. or British English […] in spite of the setting of the story or the individual's ethnicity" (125). This trend could explain why Aladdin and Jasmine speak in an obviously American variety and why Naomi Scott, for example, made the effort to imitate it instead of keeping her native British English one for this role.

Unlike the rather limited wardrobe of Aladdin, the princess wears around ten different outfits throughout the film. For this analysis, I have chosen three that are representative for Jasmine's wardrobe and storyline. On the one hand, her outfits reflect the facets of her life and on the other hand, they can also be seen to show the character's progression. Costume designer Wilkinson explains that Jasmine's clothes correspond to the personae she has to take on: "In the palace, Jasmine's looks are constricted with corsets and boning to reflect how constrained she is in royal life. Her looks in her private chambers and outside the palace are freer and looser" (Zemler 80).

Outside of the palace, where Jasmine is forbidden to be, she needs to be unrecognizable. Therefore, when the princess sneaks out of the palace to go to the marketplace, she is in disguise (see fig. 8): She wears a beige tunic with elements of yellow and green as well as a beige veil with sheer stripes and trimmed with black, dark red and turquoise lines at the hem. The veil covers her hair and only leaves her face free. From the waist downwards, Jasmine's tunic is open and reveals turquoise pants underneath.

Figure 8: *Jasmine in the City in Disguise (Aladdin 2019, 6:27)*

It seems noteworthy that Jasmine always wears pants, either underneath her dresses or without them, while this is not a very noticeable feature in other women's clothes. Dalia, Jasmine's handmaid and the woman with the most screen-time apart from Jasmine, is always wearing dresses (see, e.g., 28:25; 59:31). The only time that another woman is wearing pants is during the belly-dancing scene at the harvest celebration. It could be the case that for Jasmine, pants are a form of silent rebellion against the society she lives in. Furthermore, they distinguish her from the other women in Agrabah and could already hint at her different values. In the marketplace scene, Jasmine meets Aladdin for the first time. Interestingly, the color scheme of their clothes matches for this first encounter: Both have green, beige and red elements in their clothes. This alignment could signify that they belong together and foreshadow the ending of the movie, in which they marry.

The outfit in the market is the simplest and least extravagant as well as the one, in which Jasmine is most covered and veiled. The dress in the next scene, when Jasmine receives a new suitor in the palace's Great Hall, builds a stark contrast (see fig. 9).

Figure 9: *Jasmine in Her Pink Dress for Her Meeting With Prince Anders (Aladdin 2019, 19:01)*

While the tunica and veil in the city helped to disguise her as a handmaid and blend her into the crowd, this dress serves to draw the attention to her and make her look regal. It is bright pink with turquoise elements and heavily embroidered with gold coins that glitter with every step she takes. The broad hem is also golden. The dress features a tight corset with a heart-shaped neckline, a big skirt and a long train. Once more, she wears turquoise pants underneath it. The corset, in contrast to the looser dress in the marketplace, symbolize the tight, strict structures of her life as well as her confinement in the palace. The pants underneath the dress, however, could once again stand for her rebellion against these same structures. In addition to the richly embellished dress, Jasmine wears earrings, a necklace and a tiara made of gold with turquoise jewels in them. The dress's design appears to include Indian influences, especially regarding its design and ornamentation, and possibly hints at Scott's Indian roots. The actress's mother originally comes from India (Elle 2019).

The third costume is an updated version of Jasmine's iconic turquoise outfit from the 1992 animated movie (see fig. 10). She wears a turquoise corset crop top and wide turquoise harem pants embroidered with peacock feathers and crystals. The corset has a flesh-colored mesh bodice covering Jasmine's midriff, thereby making the top less revealing and sexualized than the original. Moreover, the princess wears golden jewelry with turquoise stones as well as a small crown with some type of sheer veil with the same design as the pants that connects to her fingers and creates the illusion of a peacock opening its feathers when she raises her arms. Her hair is in the same braid as in the 1992 film. Jasmine wears this outfit at the Sultan's harvest celebration, when she dances with Aladdin and other couples (see, e.g., 1:07:08–1:08:57). The outfit and type of dance are reminiscent one of

Indian belly-dancing performances. This is also the outfit that she wears on her magic carpet ride with Aladdin and during the song “A Whole New World,” which marks another step on her way to freedom and empowerment. While she still wears a tight corset, the loose pants can be seen as a symbol for her journey.

Figure 10: *Jasmine in Her Iconic Blue Outfit (Aladdin 2019, 1:12:17)*

The movie’s costume designer Wilkinson states that he drew a lot of influences for the outfits from Morocco, Turkey and India (qtd. In Zemler 75). Especially Jasmine’s clothing seems to showcase a lot of Indian influences. The colorful textiles, amount of embellishments and jewelry clearly mark the princess as royalty and once again display the Sultan’s wealth.

Almost all of Jasmine’s outfits are kept in very vibrant, saturated colors. Bellantoni mentions that the “paler a color is, the more powerless it is” (6). In turn, this would suggest that bright colors can convey power. Jasmine’s bright clothes could be seen as a reflection of her personality and also her willpower. She is determined to change her life and reach her goals. Jasmine is not afraid to speak her mind, and she is not easily oppressed. While it is clear that her iconic blue outfit from the 1992 movie had to be included in some form in the remake as well, the choice to dress her in blue in the first place seems to be an interesting one. As already mentioned, blue is often associated with powerlessness. To a certain extent, Jasmine is in fact powerless, because she is trapped in her life as a princess and restricted in her scope of actions. While she might be powerless to act, however, she is very strong-willed. Moreover, Bellantoni (82–83) explains that blue mixed with green, which turns into turquoise, can be used to convey exoticism, but also openness and interaction. In Islamic color symbolism, mystical qualities are attributed to turquoise (Rodrigues 111). Jasmine

wears turquoise elements in every outfit and also her iconic one can be described as consisting of the color turquoise. It is also interesting that for the final scenes, when Jafar takes the power, Aladdin wins the fight and Jasmine becomes Sultan, she wears a purple dress. As was already mentioned, purple can stand for transformation. The color of her dress thus fits the storyline that change is happening and her transformation from princess to Sultan – from being trapped to freedom.

5.3.3 The Sultan

Jasmine's father is played by Iranian-American actor Navid Negahban. The actor inherently speaks English with an Arabic accent, which is also the case in his role as the Sultan. In the light of Lippi-Green's (108–109) explanations, it makes sense for the actor to have kept his accent, since this can be seen as adding to the movie's setting.

Regarding the Sultan's appearance, his clothes include a long tunic underneath a cape, a cummerbund and a belt as well as a turban with a bejeweled brooch and a feather in it (see fig. 11). Moreover, the Sultan wears shoes with pointed toes. His only jewelry is a golden ring as well as the brooch with the turquoise stone on his turban. He has a long and bushy grey beard with streaks of white and heavy dark eyebrows, which makes him appear very stereotypically Arab. Underneath his turban, the Sultan has long, dark grey hair.

Figure 11: *The Sultan in the Center of the Shot and Jafar on the Right Side (Aladdin 2019, 18:59)*

His wardrobe is mainly kept in light colors such as ivory, gold or yellow, but it is noteworthy that in contrast to his entirely cream-colored outfit from the animated movie, his clothes in the remake often contain bright, colorful patterns, including green, yellow and shades of orange. According to Bellantoni, orange is seen as "uncomplicated, welcoming and warm"

(129) and green can "signal health and vitality" (160). Yellow is often associated with "powerful life energy," but the "more it is lightened, the more elegant it becomes" (Bellantoni 42–43). Those bright spots of color could serve to soften the Sultan's seriousness and be a reference to his 1992 counterpart, who was portrayed with a significantly more playful personality. Moreover, the pale yellow could signify his elegance and wealth as a Sultan. What should also be mentioned are the golden accents in his clothing as well as in that of the other characters connected to royalty (Jasmine, Prince Ali, Jafar and also the Genie). Gold is commonly associated with wealth, but also nobility, due to its high price. Thus, it makes sense that the Sultan and the people in his vicinity wear a lot of gold and that several elements in the palace are gilded.

5.3.4 Jafar

Jafar, played by Tunisian-Dutch actor Marwan Kenzari, speaks in an accent that is hard to specify – not American but also not fully British. Since the actor has Dutch origins, the decision to cast him as Jafar and keep his foreign accent seems to bear significance, especially since Jasmine imitated to speak General American instead of her native variety. In a study on language features and linguistic stereotypes in Disney movies, Lippi-Green analyzed over 370 characters and 38 animated Disney films released from 1937 until 2009 (111–112)[8]. The researcher found that less than half – approximately 40 percent – of the analyzed characters who speak in a foreign accent are evil (Lippi-Green 117). As Jafar is clearly the villain in *Aladdin*, it seems logical that he does not speak in a recognizable American English accent to set himself apart from the heroes of the story. In fact, his Dutch accent could be quite easily mistaken for a British one. Of course, it could simply be the case that Marwan Kenzari, who plays Jafar, did not want or was not able to imitate an American accent. However, his accent could also serve strengthen his status as the villain even more by sharing similarities with British English. Dobrow and Gidney conducted a study on children's animated television shows in connection with dialect and foreign accents. The researchers found that evil characters usually did not speak in a US American variety and that "[t]he foreign accent most often employed by villains was British English" (115). One reason for this might be that othering does not only occur between Western and non-

[8] Even though Lippi-Green's study focused on animated movies, I think it is justified to refer to her findings at this point in the discussion of my analysis, because of the study's focus on Disney films, the fact that *Aladdin* 2019 is a remake of an animated movie and her findings regarding the use of accents.

Western countries, which is considered as Orientalism, but also between the US and other Western states through American exceptionalism (see, e.g., Nayak and Malone 254). While using varieties of English in movies produced by English-speaking countries seems reasonable to ensure the audience's understanding, the US could use British English for villains to set themselves apart from the evil characters and mark the American English-speaking characters as the heroes with superior morals.

Regarding Jafar's appearance, the vizier only wears dark clothes, in contrast to the Sultan. The style, however, is similar and also includes a long tunic with a cape. As depicted in Figure 11, Jafar's outfit usually consists of dark red clothes with gold detailing at the hems. He also wears a golden breastplate that could either hint at a military background or at his intentions as the future Sultan. After all, as vizier he wants to convince the Sultan to invade the neighboring kingdom of Shirabad (20:24–21:26) and when he becomes Sultan himself, his first order to the guards is to assemble an army to do so (1:35:45). Jafar wears a black turban with a gold brooch featuring a red stone and a black feather in it. In addition, he has a golden snake staff with which he can compel others to believe and do what he wants. The Sultan's vizier has a dark full beard, but it is not long or bushy like the Sultan's. Underneath his turban, he has short dark hair. Moreover, Jafar has slightly crooked teeth.

When the Genie transforms Jafar into a Sultan, his clothing changes (see fig. 12). As Sultan, he wears a black tunic with a blood-red cummerbund and a light-golden pattern. His cape is also black with a golden hem and a red pointy collar. His turban remains largely black, but with new golden stripes. The style has also changed and become more round with a black veil hanging at the back.

Figure 12: *Jafar as the new Sultan (Aladdin 2019, 1:35:09)*

When Jafar wishes to become the most powerful sorcerer, his clothing changes once again (see fig. 13). His tunic, cape and turban are replaced and now blood-red. The golden patterns as well as the turban and his snake staff also change. Jafar now wears a necklace of pointy golden plates and the red feather in his turban is accompanied by two longer ones in black, so that they somewhat bear resemblance to devil's horns.

Figure 13: *Jafar as a sorcerer (Aladdin 2019, 1:41:40)*

While the majority of characters is dressed in light or bright, colorful outfits, Jafar is the only one whose wardrobe consists entirely of dark red and black clothes. This color scheme strengthens Jafar's image as the villain. Red is the color of blood, which can have positive and negative associations. Moreover, red is often connected to passion and lust (Bellantoni 11). Bellantoni remarks that "red is power," but also notes that this power can relate to the good characters as well as to the evil ones (2). This means that the red in Jafar's clothes alone does not necessarily mark him as the antagonist. In combination with darkness, however, red is "always foreboding" (Bellantoni 13). The red in Jafar's clothes is always combined with black. In Western cultures, black is often associated with death or mourning, as it is usually worn to funerals. In Islam, the color is sometimes considered a bad omen (Rodrigues 111). Moreover, Bellantoni states that "red, yellow and black are the colors most often associated with fear" (66). It can thus be argued that the red in Jafar's clothes stands either for his power as a sorcerer or for his lust for power and that the black means he should be feared, especially when he becomes Sultan. Interestingly, the red disappears from his clothes almost completely when the Genie fulfills his wish to rule. This could be read as the achievement of his quest for power at this particular moment and as the beginning of his reign of terror. When he wishes to become the most powerful sorcerer, his clothes

transform and turn predominantly red. The red here clearly stands for his powers as a sorcerer. It is also noteworthy that as a genie, Jafar's skin color is red and not blue like the Genie's. This could also signify Jafar's great hunger for power.

5.3.5 The Genie

The Genie, played by American actor Will Smith, speaks a variety of American English. Similar to Aladdin, this feature could be read as a sign of his Americanization and mark him as one of the main characters with "good" intentions and an American worldview.

When the Genie emerges from his lamp for the first time, he appears as a very large and muscular magical being with twirling smoke instead of legs, a bare chest, blue skin color and a very deep, echoing voice (40:50–41:01). He wears a lot of golden jewelry as well as golden cuffs around each wrist which mark that he is bound to the lamp and its master (see, e.g., 48:33). In addition, the Genie has golden tattoos, wears a chin-beard and his hair in a top knot. Although he can change his looks and take any form he wants, the golden cuffs on his wrists always remain. In order to accompany Aladdin to Agrabah without drawing attention, the Genie decides to take human form. As a result, he changes his skin color from blue to black. Figure 14 depicts the Genie in his chosen human form. As can be seen, his hair, beard and jewelry, including the cuffs, have stayed the same, but now he is considerably smaller, less muscular, fully dressed and is no longer blue.

Figure 14: *The Genie in His Human Form (Aladdin 2019, 49:00)*

His outfits consist of a shirt underneath some type of long waistcoat or tunica, a cummerbund as well as wide harem pants and shoes with pointed toes. Sometimes he also wears a turban, for example to the Sultan's harvest celebration (see, e.g., 1:02:36). When

Aladdin frees the Genie, he loses his magic and his cuffs and turns fully human. As a human, he does not wear any jewelry, except the golden rings in his beard and ponytail.

As was already mentioned, the Genie's skin as well as his magic are colored blue, in contrast to Jafar's red. In his human form, he is always dressed in varying shades of deep blue and purple. Cool colors, such as blue, tend to be associated with tranquility, serenity and aloofness (Giannetti 23). Blue can also signify powerlessness or sadness (Bellantoni 82). On the one hand, it is interesting that the filmmakers chose blue as a color for the Genie. After all, genies possess immense powers. On the other hand, in the light of the narrative that this character is enslaved and can only be freed by his master, the choice makes more sense. While the Genie does possess unbelievable magical powers, he is still powerless to free himself and change his life or to oppose an evil master like Jafar. The aspect of blue as conveying sadness is also reflected in the Genie's life. He is trapped in his lamp until someone rubs it, which does not seem to happen very often. Moreover, he is unable to find happiness due to his trapped state. That the Genie usually wears deep blue colors could relate to darker shades of blue being associated with intellect (Bellantoni 82). He is wise and often the voice of reason for Aladdin. This color choice also matches the fact that the Genie presents itself as Prince Ali's advisor and helps him uphold his act as a prince. In his human form, the Genie's clothes also include elements of purple. According to Bellantoni, purple tends to be associated with magic and the mystical, but also with death and transformation (86; 190–191). It could be argued that the Genie wears purple to mark him as a magical being. In addition, the purple might also serve to mark his transformation from his magic form to his human form or foreshadow that in the end, he will be freed, lose his magic and become mortal.

5.3.6 Background and Side Characters

Many side characters, for example various merchants and commoners at the bazaar (see, e.g., 4:55–5:04; 5:40–5:57; 6:48–7:12) or the man working for Jafar (see, e.g., 12:04–12:24) speak in an Arabic or foreign accent. The palace guards do not speak at all – except for Hakim, who seems to be the head guard, because he commands the others. However, he only speaks a few words, so that it is unclear whether he has any noticeable accent (1:40:25–1:40:43). In the 2019 live-action remake, the filmmakers added Dalia as a side character, presented as Jasmine's handmaid. In addition, she seems to be the princess's only

friend and later appears as the Genie's love interest. The reason for adding her as a new character might be that Dalia has more traditional viewpoints than Jasmine, especially regarding marriage and the role of women. Sometimes she tries to act as a voice of reason for the princess and as someone who challenges Jasmine's feminist worldview. For Dalia, love, marriage and motherhood seem to be the ultimate goals and at the end, she manages to fulfill them with the Genie. Dalia, who is played by Iranian American actress and comedian Nasim Pedrad, has a very slight accent, but it is unclear whether it is foreign or a variety of English. This could be interpreted as a marker for her more traditional worldview. In addition, it sets her apart from the main characters.

As depicted in Figures 2, 3 and 8, the people of Agrabah wear very colorful and diverse clothes. Women often wear long dresses and veils; the men are dressed in tunics. However, most of the women in the movie only wear veils that cover parts of their hair and not the whole head like Jasmine's when she is in disguise. Moreover, some of the women wear golden headdresses atop their veils, which evokes associations with Indian influences, especially the South Asian head jewelry Maang Tikka. Most men wear some sort of headpiece, often variations of a turban, and, usually, different types of full beards. The palace guards are dressed in a uniform, consisting of a tunica, a sash, pants, boots, a chain armor and a round, golden breastplate (see, e.g., 1:34:17). Furthermore, they wear a turban with a piece of cloth hanging in front of the face and a turban helmet with a red feather on top. The guards also carry a spear and a shield. Most guards along with Hakim wear clothes in warm shades, such as bright red, golden and orange, with white turbans. The guards working for Jafar wear black clothes with golden and dark red elements (see, e.g., 1:34:37). The discrepancy in the color schemes of the guards' clothes can be interpreted as a symbol for their loyalties. The uniforms of the guards loyal to the Sultan correspond to the royal family's color scheme, while the guards loyal to Jafar wear similarly dark clothes as he does.

On the one hand, Disney appears to have resumed to incorporate the diversity of cultures and ethnicities addressed in the movie itself in several ways also in the portrayal of the characters and in their choice of cast. After all, the actors stem from various ethnic backgrounds. The characters are dressed in a variety of costumes inspired by the region's cultural diversity. Especially the background actors wear clothing styles of different Arabic and Asian cultures, contributing to this notion of Agrabah's multicultural society that is

recurrent throughout the whole movie. Due to his costume, the Sultan with his long and bushy full beard looks stereotypically Arab. Jasmine's wardrobe, in contrast, showcases a lot of Indian influences. In addition, the line "Where you wander among every culture and tongue" (Will Smith 0:10–0:24) in the intro song strengthens the feeling that the movie celebrates multiculturalism.

On the other hand, the diversity in the characters' outfits can be read as a sign of Orientalism and the filmmakers' ignorance regarding cultural differences. According to Said (231), Orientalists have a history of formulating generalizations about the Orient. Orientalism does not recognize the individuality of specific individuals, cultures, characteristics or experiences within this region (Said 287). However, the Middle East consists of a variety of countries with their own unique cultures. To wildly pick elements of different cultures and form a new fictional culture with them seems problematic, because it carries traces of this Orientalist ignorance. Therefore, it is questionable if the portrayed ethnicities and cultures are in fact a sign of diversity and multiculturalism or if they just stand for an Oriental "mix".

The use of color, especially regarding the characters' clothes, can be interpreted with respect to the characters' plotlines and general portrayals. The specific colors used for Jafar's outfits mark him as the evil villain, while Aladdin's light clothes highlight his pure heart and his role as the hero. It could be argued even further that Jafar and his darkness, along with his foreign accent, connect to stereotypical Orientalist ideas, while Aladdin's light in combination with his accent and Western worldview mark him as an American hero. As Maira notes, the physical appearances of Muslims are often linked to feelings and assumptions about them (636). Similarly, the portrayal of the protagonists are connected with certain perceptions and associations. Without any background knowledge, Jafar's appearance alone probably evokes different feelings than Aladdin does, simply because of the color scheme of their clothes. Upon seeing Jafar, one instantly assumes that he has ill intentions.

This chapter was set out to answer the question to what extent the 2019 movie adaptation of *Aladdin* features underlying notions of Orientalist stereotyping. As was already mentioned in the theory chapters about Orientalism, common stereotypes about the Arab world and its inhabitants are that they are exotic and sensual, but also primitive, backward and inferior to

the West[9]. The analysis has shown that certain aspects of the 2019 *Aladdin* remake reflect such stereotypes. The lyrics and sound of the intro song as well as the accompanying visuals already point to a foreign place, which is attributed as chaotic, exotic, magical and dangerous. The notion of an exotic, culturally different country is further emphasized in the movie's settings. Agrabah's bazaar, with its haggling and cacophony of sounds conveys the impression of being a chaotic place. Many of the city's streets and buildings are quite simple and some are even partly ruins, which suggests that its inhabitants are not very rich. Those buildings stand in stark contrast to the opulent palace, which displays great wealth. The state of the city could be interpretated as suggesting the inferiority and backwardness of the country, in which most inhabitant live in poverty and broken houses, while its rulers have riches in abundance. Whether the royal family shares their wealth with their subjects is unclear, but it does not seem this way, considering that Aladdin has to steal to afford food and beggars are shown several times throughout the movie. The Sultan's wealth in contrast to his poor subjects could hint at the Orientalist trope that rich sheiks rule over the impoverished, exploited inhabitants of Eastern countries, which highlights the stereotype of the inferiority of the Orient in contrast to the United States' supposed superiority, where democracy is prevalent.

Certain features of the protagonists can be seen as pointing towards a backward worldview: Jasmine's father, for instance, is convinced that a woman cannot be Sultan, simply because it has never been done before. Another example would be Jafar, who tries to oppress Jasmine by telling her multiple times that it would be better for her to be seen and not heard. He clearly has a backward worldview in which women should know their place, be silent and are reducible to their looks. According to Addison, the romanticized Oriental woman of writers such as Flaubert or Burton is "wordless and mindless, endlessly sexual, yet undemanding" (7). Jafar's opinion of how Jasmine should strive to be corresponds to those Orientalist ideas. Despite the inclusion of such stereotypical aspects, the filmmakers' effort with regards to an authentic[10] and diverse portrayal of the region also has to be acknowledged. A recurring aspect found in the analysis was the diversity of cultures and ethnicities that is showcased in a variety of ways throughout the movie – the soundtrack, the setting as well as the character

[9] For a detailed account of Orientalist stereotypes see, e.g., Said (205; 239) and D. Little (11; 36; 41).

[10] "Authentic" is used here in the sense that the filmmakers' tried to use materials from the region as well as consulted experts to portray what a real Agrabah could have looked like if it had really existed.

portrayal and the cast itself. The book *The Art and Making Of Aladdin* by Zemler gives insights into the filmmakers' intentions. According to Zemler (14),

> the filmmakers' goal was to create a movie for viewers of all ages, genders, cultures, and backgrounds, offering a universal tale of what it means to find your inner strengths and become comfortable with yourself.

The producers aimed to embrace diversity with Agrabah and respect the culture of this fictional kingdom located in the Middle East, which is why experts on the region have been consulted worldwide during the movie's production process (Zemler 15).

According to Menken, the composer of the original 1992 *Aladdin* songs, the filmmakers wanted to increase the authenticity of the reimagined 2019 soundtrack (Menken qtd. in Zemler 130). Therefore, they used a range of instruments from the Middle East and combined them with "traditional Western sounds" (Menken qtd. in Zemler 131). The oud, the quanun (a type of harp) and the rebab (a string instrument) along with several percussion and wind instruments were used to create a more authentic sound for the songs in the remake (Zemler 130–131). Regarding the movie's setting, the producers reimagined Agrabah as a "bustling port city" located along the Silk Road and therefore, an important trading location between Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe (Zemler 14–15). This explains the variety of different cultures that can be seen in the movie. According to the filmmakers, Agrabah's marketplace was mainly inspired by the streets of Marrakech, but also includes influences from Africa and southern Spain (Zemler 42). Considering the Islamic heritage of Southern Europe – dating back to the Moors control over regions such as the Iberian Peninsula between 711AD and 1492AD – as well as its lasting influence on the culture and architecture, it seems reasonable that the filmmakers drew inspiration from Spanish regions as well. Production designer Jackson mentions Moroccan tiles used in the palace courtyard and Islamic flower motifs that can be found throughout the whole palace (Jackson qtd. in Zemler 55). Costume designer Wilkinson was inspired by patterns, colors and textiles from various Middle Eastern countries for the characters' outfits, including Morocco, Turkey and India (Zemler 75). In addition, Zemler (21) mentions that there was an emphasis on casting primarily actors and actresses "from countries and regions that influence Agrabah," in order to "build a global cast who brought the vibrant world of Agrabah to life".

By incorporating this mixture of different cultures in the movie, the filmmakers created their own fictional world. It could still be argued that creating such a blend of cultures corresponds to the Orientalist manner of seeing the Orient as one big entity instead of a

multitude of distinctive cultures and customs. Considering the filmmakers' intentions and efforts, along with the fact that Agrabah is a fictional kingdom in a fairytale world, however, this argument is considerably diminished. Rather, the emphasis on diversity can be read as an attempt to create a story which people worldwide can relate to. Regarding the question of Orientalist stereotyping, the findings of this analysis suggest that the 2019 *Aladdin* remake clearly includes Orientalist stereotypes such as an emphasis on the exotic and foreign as well as notions of primitiveness and backwardness. The extent of those stereotypes, however, will be measured against its 1992 animated precursor in a comparison in the next chapter of this thesis.

6. Changes in Orientalism: *Aladdin* 1992 vs. 2019

The following section focuses on my second research question, namely to what extent both Disney movie adaptations of *Aladdin* (1992 and 2019) differ regarding aspects of Orientalism. In order to answer this question, I have examined changes in the intro song, the settings as well as the characters and their portrayal. Moreover, I have considered references to laws and traditions.

6.1 The Intro Song "Arabian Nights"

Since the release of the 1992 movie, its intro song has been under a lot of criticism for its racist insinuations. Protest by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) eventually achieved that Disney changed the lyrics in the first verse (Bourenane 244). In the original *Arabian Nights* song, the first verse read as follows:

> Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place
> Where the caravan camels roam
> **Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face**
> It's **barbaric**, but hey, it's home
> (Ashman & Menken. Arabian Nights. Original song text. 1992)

The line "Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face" was then changed, so that the new first verse sounded:

> Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place
> Where the caravan camels roam
> **Where it's flat and immense and the heat is intense**
> It's **barbaric**, but hey, it's home (Bruce Adler 0:14–0:28)

Interestingly, the term barbaric was not changed, even though the attribution is heavily influenced by Orientalism. That the Orient is primitive, backward and barbaric are essential Orientalist ideas (see, e.g., Said). In addition, barbaric has its roots in the Greek word "barbarikos," which means "foreign" (Addison 5). For the people of Ancient Greece, foreigners were put on par with being uncivilized. This notion of the uncivilized, foreign and culturally "other" is conveyed in the intro song and throughout the 1992 movie.

For the 2019 remake, the song has undergone some changes, not only, but most importantly regarding its lyrics. The first verse of *Arabian Nights*, sung by Will Smith, sounds as follows:

> Oh, imagine a land, it's a faraway place
> Where the caravan camels roam
> **Where you wander among every culture and tongue**

It's **chaotic**, but, hey, it's home (Will Smith 0:10–0:24)

Not only has the third line once again been changed, but the term "barbaric" has been substituted with "chaotic" as well. The line "Where you wander among every culture and tongue" already hints at the film's strengthened emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity. The substitution of "barbaric" with "chaotic" seems to be an improvement, but only on the surface. The attribute "chaotic" is still mostly negatively connotated and an Orientalist stereotype of the so-called Orient. If the Orient is chaotic, in turn, this means that the West is organized, because they are opposites (Nayak and Malone 256; Said 1–2).

Apart from the lyrics, it also needs to be mentioned that 1992 *Arabian Nights* is sung with an imitated Arabic accent. Due to the fact that Bruce Adler is an American actor, it can safely be said that he imitated the accent on purpose. A reason for this imitation could be to increase the exotic atmosphere of the film. As Bourenane points out, the intro song "foreshadows an oriental imaginary theme" (243). The accent, along with the lyrics and sound, is only one factor that serves to introduce the Middle Eastern setting and create the right atmosphere. In contrast, for the 2019 movie, Will Smith sang the intro song in his natural American accent. Of course, it is debatable whether a clearly US-American accent is better than an imitated Arabic one in a movie set in the Arab world. I would argue that it is always a matter of the particular intentions and outcomes connected with this choice. On the one hand, the accent imitation in the 1992 movie increases the exotic atmosphere and the feeling that the film portrays a different, foreign and culturally "other" part of the world. This can be seen as problematic, because it contributes to the creation and reinforcement of Orientalist stereotypes. Children watching the animation might think that the way the peddler and other characters speak is how every Arab speaks and thus, be prejudiced in their future encounters with Arabs. Moreover, the imitated accent is certainly a bit exaggerated, which could offend English-speaking people with an actual Arabic background. On the other hand, an American accent for a main character, as it is the case in the 2019 version, also has purposes and results. For instance, it contributes to a further Americanization of the protagonists and their story. It can also be seen as a tool to increase the relatability of the movie – US' viewers might be able to better identify with the characters and immerse themselves in the film more fully if the characters speak American English – especially considering that the 2019 *Aladdin* movie is supposed to be for the whole family, as Ritchie points out several times (see, e.g., Zemler 6; 14). Since the US has had a rather problematic

relationship with the Arab world for the past few decades – particularly considering 9/11, the War on Terror and the countless lives of American soldiers that were lost during military operations in the Middle East, US-American viewers might feel more comfortable nowadays if the main characters in a family film spoke in an American accent rather than a foreign one. It also needs to be mentioned that if the 2019 movie is watched in other languages besides English, accents do not play as much of a role – at least in the German version, nobody has a particular accent. This means that the choice of language features very likely serves a certain purpose in the original version.

To conclude this section, the comparison of the intro song has shown that the filmmakers have tried to remove some of the problematic Orientalist elements of the 1992 animated movie in the production of the 2019 live-action remake. For instance, certain lines of the lyrics have been changed and the singer has refrained from faking an Arabic accent. While the alterations are predominantly positive, one needs to be aware that the attribute "chaotic" still carries Orientalist ideas. All in all, however, it has to be acknowledged that the intro song has improved considerably in comparison to its 1992 counterpart.

6.2 Settings

The settings of the 2019 movie are largely refashioned after the model of the 1992 animation. In the 1992 version, the focus is more on the people and the settings are kept rather simple, whereas in 2019, the filmmakers have lain more emphasis on the sets – probably to increase authenticity and enhance the cinematic experience of the audience. In both versions, the settings are one of the main contributors for the films' exotic atmosphere. The 1992 movie, however, features more exaggerated depictions that are heavily connotated with Orientalist imagery. At the beginning of the film, the peddler, who is narrating the story with a heavy Arabic accent, describes Agrabah as a city full of mystery and enchantment (*Aladdin* 1992, 2:06–2:09). This description serves to set the proper atmosphere for the audience right from the start. In addition, it already evokes associations of a mystical Orient, full of magic and the unknown. As exemplification for the Orientalist stereotyping in the animated film, I will discuss two shots of *Aladdin* 1992 in detail and compare them with their counterparts almost 30 years later.

6.2.1 Creating an 'Oriental' Atmosphere

Figure 15 depicts the main shot of the opening scene of the animated movie. A man with a large turban rides a camel in the desert, against the backdrop of a gigantic setting sun. Simultaneously, the intro song Arabian nights is playing. As a result, the scene is very atmospheric, but also exaggerated. According to Bourenane (244),

> [t]he yellow colour [sic!] that dominates the scene out of the reflection of the yellow light of the sunset on the sand is recognized as an orientalist trope that tints and enriches the orientalist iconography and permits a dreamy environment in an exotic space.

Figure 15: *Opening Scene (Aladdin 1992, 1:05)*

The peddler on the camel is shown almost during the whole intro song. Only briefly, the scene changes to the overly exaggerated palace (*Aladdin* 1992, 1:18–1:26) and then the marketplace, in which the viewers can see a fire-breather and a few citizens, dressed in turbans and tunics or heavily veiled (1:30–1:33), before once again turning to the peddler. The opening scenes already lead to the impression of an exotic, foreign place in which the movie is set and which is portrayed very stereotypical.

In contrast, in the first few seconds of the 2019 intro song, one can see merchant ships on the sea and an establishing long shot of Agrabah from the seaside (*Aladdin* 2019, 0:34–0:47; 2:18), which provides a less biased first impression – also because the lightning is more neutral. As was already analyzed in the previous chapter, the 2019 opening scenes then show the marketplace of Agrabah and introduce the main characters (apart from the Genie). The notion of an exotic, foreign setting is still prevalent, but in a less stereotypical fashion.

The viewer can see a marketplace full of different people and cultures. Then, the camera moves and shows the palace. The viewers see the Sultan on a settee with plates of food around him, talking with a guard and throwing a chicken thigh to Jasmine's tiger Rajah. Then the camera pans to Jasmine, who is sitting on the fountain in the courtyard and is petting her tiger. Those shots introduce the wealth of the Sultan and especially the presence of the tiger strengthens the exotic feeling. At last, the Cave of Wonders and Jafar are shown in the darkness of the desert, conveying the dangerous aspect of this movie setting. The fact that the merchant ships, the port and the marketplace, which stand for Agrabah's importance as a trading spot and meeting point of a lot of different cultures, are the first shots during the intro song emphasize the filmmakers' intentions to refashion Agrabah as a bustling port city and embrace diversity (Zemler 15).

In a comparison of the two opening scenes, it can be said that both evoke associations of an exotic, foreign place. The 1992 animation, however, uses stereotypes and exaggeration, while the emphasis in the 2019 movie seems to be a more nuanced portrayal of a culturally diverse setting, with as much authentic elements as possible. It also needs to be mentioned that the 2019 movie features a very similar moment of people riding camels in the desert later in the film (*Aladdin* 2019, 30:33) that can be seen as a counterpart to the peddler in the desert from 1992. The more realistic depiction in 2019, resulting from the fact that it is not an animation and the way that it was filmed (more neutral lightning, extreme long shot) as well as the placing of the scene at a much later time in the movie, reduces the stereotyping factor considerably. In addition, the shot does not introduce the movie or the setting in 2019, but rather serves to exemplify the journey from Agrabah to the Cave of Wonders.

6.2.2 Exaggeration in the Main Settings

A prime example for the use of exaggeration in the settings of the animated movie is the Sultan's palace, portrayed in Figure 16. The palace, which bears a lot of resemblance to the Taj Mahal in India, is towering over Agrabah. In relation to the rest of the city, the palace is gigantic and drawn very exaggeratedly. Bourenane sees the fact that the Sultan's palace seems to be a replica of the Taj Mahal as a tool to "connote [the] Arab leader's wealth comparing to their poor subjects who are represented in the marketplace, which is chaotic and crowded" (244). While the palace in the 2019 movie is also quite large (see, e.g., fig. 4), overall, it blends better with the rest of the city. The representation of the palace seems to

correspond to how the ruler is seen and also sees itself. In 1992, to be Sultan means to be the most powerful man of Agrabah – he can do whatever he wants, even if it means that he is playing with his toys the whole day. In 2019, he is more of a part of the city – still powerful and wealthy, but a bit closer to the people and their needs.

Figure 16: *The Sultan's Palace Towering Over Agrabah (Aladdin 1992, 1:18)*

Apart from the use of exaggeration, the settings of both movies are rather similar in the messages they convey. In both movie versions, the shots of Agrabah's buildings convey poverty. The way the homes of its inhabitants are built, namely very simple and often half in ruins, play into the stereotype of a primitive and backward Orient. The marketplaces and bazaars, on the other hand, portray the exotic aspect of the city. Bourenane interprets the setting of *Aladdin* 1992 as an "unexploited, very rich land, where cities are poor and primitive and the monarchs are well housed" (243). The researcher reads this dichotomy between poverty and wealth as a sign for a colonial discourse included in the animated version of *Aladdin*. As my analysis has shown, a contrast between the citizens of Agrabah and the royal family is still detectable in the 2019 remake.

In summary, the settings of both movies are overall very similar to each other. While the 1992 version features simpler images, but more exaggeration, the 2019 depictions are more neutral and realistic, but also more cluttered with details to a point where it sometimes seems too much. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that both the 1992 as well as the 2019 adaptation of Aladdin carry elements of Orientalist stereotyping – namely of an exotic, but also primitive and backward Orient.

6.3 Aladdin and Jasmine

In the 1992 version, Aladdin and Jasmine are dressed very revealingly. Figure 17 illustrates the two main characters as they appear for the majority of the 1992 movie. In her blue outfit, the princess basically only wears a bra top and very low-rise pants. Her red clothes, which she is wearing when Jafar takes power, are even more revealing. Lacroix (221) points out that

> Jasmine's costuming emphasizes the Middle Eastern influence of the setting of Aladdin and depicts Jasmine in a more sexualized light. [..] The costuming […] plays into Western cultural notions of the Orient through the referencing of the imagery of the harem and the associated exotic, sexual stereotypes.

Through her outfit, Jasmine is Orientalized, reflecting the Orientalist stereotype of the exotic and sensual Eastern woman. Moreover, her portrayal acts as focal point for the male gaze – in Mulvey's line of argumentation, Jasmine connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness" (63). She is displayed in a very revealing outfit, which draws the male viewers' attention to her physical appearance and tempts them to look at her.

Figure 17: *Jasmine and Aladdin (Aladdin 1992, 1:22:17)*

In 2019, the characters – especially Aladdin and Jasmine, but also the harem girls, for example – are far less sexualized. Figures 6, 9 and 10, in comparison with Figure 17, showcase that in 2019, the characters wear significantly more layers of clothing and no longer appear with a bare chest or midriff. Especially Figure 10, which depicts Jasmine in the

contemporary version of her iconic blue outfit, provides a good example. The turquoise bodice has been extended with a flesh-colored bottom, so that only a small band of skin is left bare. The reason for those more modest outfits could be that modern-day society's standards have changed – nowadays, similarly revealing outfits as in 1992 could be seen as too inappropriate for a live-action family film. Moreover, as the filmmakers' have mentioned, the intention was to "create a movie for viewers of all ages, genders, cultures, and backgrounds" (Zemler 14). Audiences in certain non-Western cultures might have taken offense if real actresses (as opposed to animated characters) had been dressed as revealingly, which could have resulted in a ban of the movie.

6.4 The Citizens of Agrabah

While it is clear that the 1992 movie is animated and thus, unable to provide a realistic or authentic depiction, it still needs to be mentioned that it presents a very exaggerated and stereotypical representation of the characters. The commoners that can be seen in various parts of the city such as the marketplace, resemble antisemitic caricature illustrations of Arabs (see, e.g., fig. 18).

Figure 18: *Men at the Bazaar (Aladdin 1992, 19:34)*

They appear with large, hooked noses as well as bushy black beards and eyebrows. According to Said (286), after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, it became popular in American

cartoons to depict Arabs as “clearly ‘Semitic’,” with large hooked noses, which marked a shift from a Jewish to an Arabic target as the base of all problems. Especially the noses evoke memories of the caricatures of Jews spread by Nazi Germany and thus, appear as very problematic illustrations in a children’s movie. Many of Agrabah’s inhabitants are portrayed with gaps in their teeth (see, e.g., 8:43, 8:46, 8:51) and the men are all dressed in a similar fashion, wearing simple clothes with a turban. The tooth gaps convey a lack of hygiene, since children are usually taught that this is the result of not brushing one’s teeth often and well enough. Moreover, the guards (see, e.g., 9:10) appear as stupid brutes. This Orientalist portrayal enhances the stereotype of the primitive and brutal Oriental, who cannot think for himself and solves problems with violence.

In comparison, the 2019 remake features images of a very diverse society. Figures 3 and 8 depict the multicultural inhabitants of Agrabah. The portrayed people obviously stem from a variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. This reflects the heterogeneity of the Middle East. While the 1992 portrayals suggest that all Arabs are the same, the filmmakers’ efforts in 2019 show that this region includes a lot of different cultures that can all meet to trade and do business in the fictional city of Agrabah.

In the 1992 movie, the women that can be seen in public places are often heavily veiled (see fig. 19). Maira mentions that “the veiled woman is a foundational trope for Orientalism and colonialism” (632).

Figure 19: *Women in Agrabah (left) and Aladdin in Disguise (right) (Aladdin 1992, 7:22)*

As Figure 19 illustrates, the women wear long dresses and headscarves covering most of their hair. A lot of them also wear a piece of cloth covering the lower parts of their faces, so that only the eyes are free. An exception to that are the harem girls (8:22), who are dressed in a fashion similar to Jasmine's, with flowing pants, a bra top and a bare midriff. In contrast to Jasmine, however, they wear a long veil, which covers only the back part of their heads, as well as a transparent cloth in front of their mouths and noses. Bourenane suggests that "[t]he orientalist discourse generates this binary representation of oriental female figures, it categorizes the Orient into a sexualized group with an attractive outfit and a more sexualized veiled group striving to be unveiled […]" (245). Accordingly, Jasmine would then belong to the sexualized group as her revealing outfit insinuates. The rest of the women in the movie would be seen as even more sexualized, even though their outfits hide their bodies, because they are yet to be undressed. However, it does not necessarily have to be the case that the women that are more veiled are also more sexualized. The covered women in the streets of Agrabah could also stand for the narrative of the confined Oriental female.

Addison views the veil as "an erotic prop for American fantasy, rather than a recognizable system of social order. 'Veiling' in *Aladdin* is reduced to coquetry: it signals beauty and promises to reveal, not to cover" (11). The researcher also mentions that the Arabic custom of veiling, known as "hijab," is usually connected with seclusion (Addison 10). That Jasmine is already unveiled could be connected with her storyline, because she has been secluded and confined to the palace her whole life. There would have been very little need to be veiled in her own home. Addison (11) argues that Jasmine still would have been exposed to the public male gaze through Jafar. However, I argue that as the princess, Jasmine would have been off-limits for Jafar and the palace guards anyway. After all, she is legally obliged to marry a prince. Moreover, the male employees in the palace could even be seen as an extension of her family since she has been around them her whole life. Additionally, when Jasmine enters the public spaces of Agrabah, for example the marketplace, or also the balcony for her engagement announcement, usually she is dressed more modestly. Moreover, Jasmine's revealing outfit could also be seen as a symbol for her pursuit of freedom and her more open-minded or Western opinions, which set her apart from the other women in the movie and signal her Americanization. In this interpretation, she embodies the Western/US feminist narrative of the empowered, independent woman, who is free to make her own choices.

6.5 The Sultan and Jafar

The 1992 portrayal of Jafar and the Sultan (see fig. 20), in comparison with their characters in 2019, is also more stereotypical. The Sultan is a very small, round person, with a white bushy beard. His comical appearance fits his personality. He seems to be quite naïve, trustful and very playful – almost like a mixture of a child and a grandpa. According to Bourenane's interpretation, this portrayal shows the Sultan's incapacity to lead and thereby, to symbolize "the Western superiority over [sic!] oriental inferiority and backwardness" (245).

Figure 20: *The Sultan and Jafar (Aladdin 1992, 15:16)*

As was already mentioned, the portrayal of Jafar, on the other hand, leads almost instantly to the impression of him being the evil antagonist. After all, the narrator describes him as "a dark man, with a dark purpose" right at the beginning (3:09–3:19). Jafar is tall and thin, with haggard features and always dressed in black and red clothes.

In the live-action remake, the Sultan's personality stands in stark contrast to his animated counterpart (see fig. 11). While he is still good-natured, he appears more serious and worried, as if he has already seen war and been through tough times in his life. Apart from his personality, his physical appearance is also different: He is tall and slimmer, but with the same white-grey beard and bushy eyebrows. Jafar (see fig. 11) is also portrayed less stereotypical in 2019, although his dark clothes still mark him as an evil character.

6.6 The Genie

Since the Genie is a magical being, whether his appearance relates to Orientalist stereotyping or not is hardly possible to analyze. After all, he frequently changes his appearance and can take any form he wants. What can be analyzed, however, is how he is portrayed in his human form. In the 1992 movie, the Genie appears in his magical blue form for the majority of the time. He only briefly takes human form, during Prince Ali's parade. In this form, he has a lighter skin tone than other characters and could even be described as white (see, e.g., 49:12, 49:38).

Figure 21: *The Genie in His Human Form (Aladdin 1992, 49:12)*

This remarkably light skin tone along with his muscular physique and the fact that he speaks in an American accent sets him apart from the citizens of Agrabah and Americanizes him – similar to Aladdin and Jasmine, whose accent and physical features also differ from the rest of Agrabah's citizens. Since the Genie is one of the main characters and frequently helps Aladdin, the hero of the story, it seems to make sense that he is also Americanized to mark him as a character to which American children can relate to. In comparison, Will Smith, who plays the Genie in 2019, is a black actor. In the live-action remake, he spends approximately the same amount of time in his genie form as in his human form. While he also speaks in a noticeable US-American accent, his darker skin tone allows him to blend in more with Agrabah's citizens, while once again highlighting the diversity of ethnicities showcased in the 2019 movie. Smith's African American heritage adds a new narrative to the Genie's story as

it can be read as relating to the United States' history of slavery. The next chapter will further discuss the influence of American culture on the Genie's character portrayal.

In summary, it can be concluded that the side-characters in the 1992 movie are a rather homogenous group, because they all look very similar to each other. Their portrayal is heavily marked by Orientalist stereotyping, evoking associations of unkempt, brutal and stupid Arab men and either overly sexualized or completely veiled Arab women, which could stand for the unknowable, mysterious Orient. In comparison, the characters in the 2019 adaptation of *Aladdin* seem very diverse and while there are a few cases of mild stereotyping, it is by far not as problematic as in 1992. Regarding the main characters (Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie), it seems as if they are heavily Americanized in both movies, which will be further explored in the next chapter. All in all, the characters in the 2019 movie are represented in a less stereotypical and more serious manner. Of course, it also needs be considered that almost thirty years, as well as events such as 9/11 and the War on Terror, lie between the release dates of the two adaptations. While negative depictions of Arabs and Muslims have increased considerably in Hollywood movies after the terrorist attacks (see, e.g. Shaheen 2003; Ramji 2016; Senanayake 2021), Disney apparently aimed to portray a more positive and less stereotypical image of the Arab world in the 2019 *Aladdin* adaptation in contrast to their 1992 animation.

6.7 References to Laws and Traditions

Several instances in the 1992 movie, especially when laws or customs are mentioned, contribute to the Orientalist stereotype of a backward Orient, driven by traditions. Those instances involve the Sultan or side characters, such as merchants or other commoners, and sometimes restrict Aladdin or Jasmine in their actions. Two examples of such references to laws or customs are Jasmine's incident with the merchant at the marketplace as well as her marriage problem: The first situation occurs when Jasmine tries to run away from the palace and steals an apple at the bazaar in order to give it to a hungry child. The merchant catches her, grabs her arm, pulls out his sword and asks her if she knows what the penalty for stealing is (18:23–18:50). It is clear that he wants to cut off her hand, but Aladdin stops him just in time. This supposed penalty of taking thieves' hands hints at barbaric laws and strengthens the stereotypical image of a backward and primitive Orient. In contrast, in the 2019 movie, Jasmine steals two loaves of bread for the poor children and while the

merchant is seemingly angered, he accepts her bracelet as payment (6:38–7:31). The merchant's demand for payment is justified in any case, but the 2019 remake has managed to solve the situation more elegantly, without alluding to the same stereotypes as the animated film. Nevertheless, it would not have been necessary to equip the character of the merchant with such a strong, comical Arabic accent in the 2019 version. A reason for this portrayal could be to add comic relief in the story and lighten the mood, considering it is a family movie.

The second situation in which the law plays a role in the evocation of stereotypes is the problem of Jasmine's need to pick a future husband. In the 1992 adaptation, the Sultan mentions that according to the law, the princess needs to get married to a prince before her next birthday (13:14–13:20). Jasmine is very unhappy with the idea of a forced marriage – she states that the law is wrong and that she wants to marry out of love (13:21–13:32). Aladdin also believes a forced marriage to be unfair (22:14–22:19). In the end, the Sultan changes the law for Jasmine and thereby enables her to choose her husband herself, regardless of his social status (1:24:38–1:24:44). Those scenes are problematic for two reasons. First, this law and the idea of forced marriages again allude to the stereotype of a backward Orient, in which marriage seems to be the highest goal for a woman – albeit not as a romantic idea, but as the will of men to be able to control women. Second, while the law is changed at the end, it only improved Jasmine's situation in the respect that she is now allowed to choose from a larger pool of men and is no longer limited to princes. She can get married to Aladdin for love, even though he is only a poor thief and not Prince Ali. Nevertheless, her obligation to marry someone by law has not changed. The fact that she is the princess, and a woman, still means that the goal for her is marriage. For the 2019 remake, the filmmakers have modernized Jasmine's situation by providing her with more agency and a less stereotypical goal. The law still obliges Jasmine to marry a prince, but she does not want to choose a husband. Instead, it is her wish to rule over her father's kingdom one day (21:55–22:04). Her father states that she cannot become Sultan, because "it has never been done in the thousand-year history of [their] kingdom" (22:04–22:10). The Sultan's views are very traditional and also evoke the stereotype that the Orient is backward. He believes that something cannot happen simply because it has never been done. However, certain scenes throughout the movie suggest that the Sultan just fears for Jasmine's safety, because of the murder of her mother. Jasmine knows this, but still feels

trapped (15:13–15:20). She is convinced that she was born to be a leader and determined to fight for her goal, which Aladdin encourages her to do (26:25–27:01, 1:18:33–1:18:44). At the end of the movie, the Sultan makes Jasmine the next Sultan (1:57:26–1:58:00). Thereby, he gives her the chance to change the law, which states that she must marry a prince, if she wished to get married to Aladdin. In comparison with the 1992 movie, Jasmine's character was given a lot more agency in the remake. She is an empowered woman, who fights for her goals and while she is still dependent on her father's decisions, in the end, her future lies in her own hands. Notions of Orientalist stereotyping are still slightly detectable, for example in the Sultan's line of argumentation at the beginning (22:04–22:10) and also in Jafar's claims that Jasmine should accept the traditions, be silent and obey (23:00–23:12, 1:35:48–1:35:54). Overall, though, Jasmine's goal is not as stereotypical, but more modern and feminist in the 2019 adaptation.

In conclusion, the 1992 movie features a more stereotypical view of Arabs and represents them as barbaric, backward and with a quite narrow worldview focused on traditions. Regarding the 2019 remake, filmmakers have made an effort to modify those problematic scenes, by reducing Orientalist stereotyping and putting more focus on aspects such as female empowerment instead. Van de Bossche, one of the few scholars that have discussed the 2019 Disney adaptation of *Aladdin* so far, has also pointed out that the remake managed to "adjust some of its Orientalist stereotypes" (67).

7. Americanization in Disney's *Aladdin* (1992 and 2019)

While most characters showcase varying degrees of Orientalist stereotyping, the main protagonists Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie appear Americanized in both versions of the movie. Not only are they the only characters with a very distinct American accent, but their appearances, worldview and values are also noticeably different to those of the other individuals in the movie.

7.1 Aladdin – The American Hero

As was already mentioned before, Aladdin is one of the only men without a beard. The only other beardless man in the 2019 adaptation is Prince Anders, Jasmine's blonde suitor from the fictional Skånland. In the animated film, Aladdin also seems to be the only one without a hooked nose. In addition, he is quite muscular, whereas most other men are drawn with rather round bellies. The most obvious reason for him to be clean-shaven and to share different physical features is so that his appearance already marks him as different from the other male characters in the movie and thereby foreshadows his Western or American values in contrast to their conservative ones. According to Cooperson, Aladdin's "appearance was modeled on the Tom Cruise character in the patriotic film *Top Gun*" (276). In the 2019 adaptation, as Prince Ali, he is styled like a Hollywood star and his clothes bear resemblance to Elvis Presley's iconic suits. Aladdin's worldview is more 'modern' in contrast to that of other characters, for example the Sultan: While Jasmine's wish to become Sultan seems utterly impossible to her father, Aladdin believes in her and her abilities. Once, he even mentions that Jasmine should be the next ruler (*Aladdin* 2019, 1:18:35–1:18:39). Similarly, in the 1992 movie, he criticizes the idea of forced marriage (*Aladdin* 1992, 22:14–22:21).

Aladdin's plotline is characterized by a social upward movement and thereby closely relates to the narrative of the American Dream. He starts out as a poor, orphaned boy, who has to steal in order to survive and is often called "riffraff," "street-rat" or "scoundrel" (see, e.g., *Aladdin* 2019, 7:09). His situation is explained in the song "*One Jump Ahead*" (*Aladdin* 2019, 8:23–11:11). A guard even tells him that he was born worthless and will die worthless (*Aladdin* 2019, 17:30–17:38). Aladdin feels trapped in his life (*Aladdin* 2019, 16:12–16:31), but he also has the strong drive to change his life for the better (*Aladdin* 2019, 18:00–18:34).

He dreams of being rich and living in a palace (*Aladdin* 1992, 12:15–12:24). Addison (15) argues that Aladdin desires wealth, in contrast to Jafar, who wants power:

> Wealth is never identified with power, and especially not destructive power: it is always delightful, always innocent, always friendly. Jafar's desire for political power is evil, and it leads to the enslavement of Jasmine and the Genie, and the probable death of Aladdin and the Sultan-or at least their impoverishment. Aladdin's desire for love and wealth, on the other hand, is good, and leads to the destruction of Jafar, the "freeing" of Jasmine and the Genie, and the successful transfer of political power from the Sultan to Aladdin. (Addison 15–16)

According to Addison's argument, Aladdin could then be seen as the embodiment of the "good" Muslim (see Maira 635), who values liberty and frees Jasmine from oppression. Jafar, in contrast, represents the "bad" Muslim (see Maira 635), who wants to terrorize the people of Agrabah and oppress Jasmine. However, I disagree with Addison's statement that wealth is never identified with power. Money can be a source of power and it certainly can be used in destructive ways, for example to wage war. Moreover, wealth is often linked to positions of power. Jafar himself mentions that he comes from an equally poor background as Aladdin (*Aladdin* 2019, 31:37–32:01) – with the right amount of money, however, he certainly could have bought himself into a position of power. In addition, wealth can cause people to change negatively by inspiring greed. The Genie, for example, warns Aladdin not to become too greedy, because "there is not enough money and power on earth […] to be satisfied" (*Aladdin* 2019, 47:00–47:10).

In the 2019 adaptation, the following long shot can be seen as a metaphor of Aladdin's journey from poverty to wealth.

Figure 22: *Aladdin's Home on the Left and the Palace on the Right (Aladdin 2019, 17:53)*

Aladdin's home, whose state is a clear indicator of his poverty, is located on the left side of the image, while the palace in all its opulence is situated on the right. In this establishing shot, the camera slowly pans from right to left before cutting to the next scene, which shows Aladdin inside his home (*Aladdin* 2019, 17:48–17:55). The depicted shot shows Aladdin's origins in poverty and his aspirations for the future, which is also the place his story ends. The poor thief from the beginning becomes the husband of Jasmine, who, at that point, is no longer just the princess but the new Sultan. With the Genie's help, Aladdin climbs the social ladder and manages to change his life for the better. Aladdin's story can be interpreted as relating to the American Dream narrative "from rags to riches," which is one of the foundational myths of America (Paul 367). His life literally progresses from dishwasher to millionaire, or in his case from thief to the second most powerful person in the kingdom. The only exception is that Aladdin does not achieve his goals through hard work, but through the Genie's help. He is not a "self-made man," whose work ethic has improved his life – without his luck of discovering the Genie, it is highly unlikely that he would have achieved the same happy ending. Nevertheless, Aladdin is clearly the hero of the story, considering that he also rescues the kingdom by outsmarting Jafar and thus, preventing the villain from establishing a reign of terror. Through Aladdin's heroic actions (e.g., saving Jasmine, freeing the Genie, defeating Jafar), Bourenane sees the character as "the defender of the oppressed and the saviour of the Orient in a Western tongue and shape" (247). Moreover, the researcher interprets the animated version of Aladdin's character as

> the melting pot of all American values, he is the defender of the poor and of freedom, and he fulfils the American dream through a nice car [i.e the magic carpet], wife and a house. He personifies the self-made man who manages to provide for him as well as his family a nice decent life. Finally, Aladdin represents the American Cold War and post-Cold War capitalist ideology through depicting the link between his success and the capital. He values the capitalist ideology and the Protestants' ethics through his quest for the money and his breaking out of the Marxist class system to reach the upper class and the ruling position. (Bourenane 248)

In 2019, Aladdin still embodies those values – the only aspect that has changed is that he does not gain the ruling position in the end.

7.2 Jasmine – A Quest for Liberty and Autonomy

In both adaptations, Jasmine is portrayed as a woman who knows what she wants and is willing to fight for it. As already mentioned in chapter 6, in 1992, she rebels against the idea of a forced marriage, arguing that "the law is wrong" and she only wants to marry for love

(13:20–13:31). She refuses to pick a suitor and even tries to run away from the palace. The princess feels trapped – in the palace she is told "where to go and how to dress" and she is "not free to make her own choices" (*Aladdin* 1992, 21:40–21:44, 21:49–21:51). Jasmine's storyline represents the American values of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. At the beginning of the story, she is not free and even though she clearly loves her father, she dreams of a life where she is able to make her own choices and find love regardless of social status. In the 2019 retelling of the story, Jasmine's situation has not changed much. She still feels trapped, telling Aladdin that the princess is "kept locked away in the palace," because the Sultan is afraid (*Aladdin* 2019, 15:11–15:20). Her main goal, however, is not to get married, even though the Sultan also desperately tries to find a suitor for her. Jasmine wants to become the next Sultan of Agrabah despite the fact that a woman has never been Sultan before (*Aladdin* 2019, 22:02–22:10, 26:25–27:01). By pursuing this wish, she challenges the traditional gender roles that still prevail in Agrabah. The princess' drive for freedom and the ability to make her own decisions relate to the American core values of liberty, independence and autonomy. In the empowering ballad "*Speechless*," Jasmine explains that she will no longer be trapped and "be silenced:" nobody can "keep [her] quiet" and she will not "live unspoken" (*Aladdin* 2019, 1:37:14–1:37:21; 1:37:37–1:37:40). With this song, she responds to the multiple times Jafar has told her that she should be silent and that it would be better for her to be seen and not heard. In Jafar's viewpoint, Jasmine should be passive, similar to an inanimate object: He sees her as a figure to be looked at – without agency of her own – which again can be read in the light of Mulvey's theory of the male gaze (62). In "*Speechless*," Jasmine also responds to the Sultan, who has kept her confined in the palace her whole life and has always tried to quell her wishes to be his successor one day. In the end, the Sultan grants his daughter her wish. By making her Sultan, he gives her agency and enables her to make her own choices – she can change the law and marry Aladdin, whom she has fallen in love with. Jasmine is a headstrong, emancipated woman, whose character clearly displays influences of US-American culture.

Similar to Aladdin, Jasmine's appearance has also been Americanized. In the 1992 version, critics have pointed out that Jasmine's physical features are mainly white, especially her "delicate nose and small mouth" (Lacroix 220). According to Lacroix, Jasmine's only signifiers of "racial difference" are her "overly large […] almond shaped eyes" and her skin color (220). In the light of the Orientalist stereotypes that mark the portrayal of most other characters,

Jasmine's appearance can both be seen as Americanized as well as displaying Orientalist stereotypes. As was already discussed, her portrayal can be related to the sexualized Oriental woman. In 2019, Jasmine is played by British actor Naomi Scott, who has Indian roots. By casting her, Disney seems to have tried to incorporate more diversity and authenticity in the film in contrast to its animated version.

7.3 The Genie – A Story of Enslavement

Disney's *Aladdin* character the Genie of the Lamp is Americanized through his storyline. He is the most powerful being in the universe – but despite his great cosmic powers, he is subject to the person in possession of his lamp. Whoever rubs the magical lamp is his master, for whom he has to fulfill three wishes (*Aladdin* 2019, 42:13–42:40).

At this point, it seems worthy to briefly bring up the history of this mythical figure and to mention that traditionally, a genie was not always a slave. Peterson, who describes the history of jinn and genies, mentions that the belief in jinn is older than Islam, but plays a role in many Muslims' faith (95). The researcher points out that initially, jinn were free-willed, invisible and powerful mortal spirits, which could be, and do, good or evil (Peterson 95). The genies, as they appear in movies or stories nowadays, originated from the *One Thousand and One Nights* tales (Peterson 97–98). According to Peterson, "[o]f all the possible ideas about jinn, then, Western media culture came to focus on two: jinn are potentially powerful for either good or ill, and jinn are tied to objects" (99). The scholar differentiates between two master narratives regarding the representations of jinn in Hollywood and Western popular culture (100), the relevant one for this thesis being the narrative recurring in the various versions of *Aladdin*. In the story of Aladdin, the jinn is always a slave bound to his lamp and master, often with a limited amount of wishes (Peterson 101). The jinn of early Arab or Middle Eastern folklore have been Westernized into the genie. According to Peterson (93–94),

> the genie is a mythic figure whose relevance is tied to the emergence and spread of consumer society. As a magical figure that can circumvent hard work, inheritance, successful investment, and other traditional modes of attaining the wealth necessary to fulfill the limitless desires associated with capitalism, the genie is an important character in modern fantasy.

The genie displayed in the Disney movie adaptations of *Aladdin* is clearly the epitome of an Americanized jinn. His role entails that he is a slave, has to serve his master and can only fulfill three wishes. Therefore, the story of the Genie can be read as a narrative of

enslavement. Like a slave, he has to do whatever his master wants, with three exceptions: One cannot wish for more wishes, to fall in love or bring someone back from the dead (*Aladdin* 2019, 46:35–47:12). In 1992, the Genie also cannot kill anybody (40:05–40:19). When Aladdin asks him what he would wish for, the Genie says that he "would wish to be free," "to be human" (*Aladdin* 2019, 49:24–50:01). Although he is such a powerful being, he is unable to free himself. The owner of the lamp is the only one who is able to wish him free. Like Jasmine and Aladdin, the Genie is trapped in his life. Similarly, his story also relates to the American values of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. All the Genie wants is to be his own master, to not have to serve someone else. Instead, he wishes to be able to make his own decisions and find happiness. The Genie wants to live a normal, human life. In the end, he is freed by Aladdin – his master who is generous and selfless enough to use his last wish for the Genie – and his story ends happily, with Dalia as his wife and two children.

According to Cooperson, the Genie of the 1992 version was inspired by Korda's Djinni in *Thief of Baghdad* (1940), which resembles a "wise but caustic Black slave persona" (275). The fact that Disney decided to color the Genie blue "sidestepped the race issue" (Cooperson 275). Interestingly, in 2019, Disney decided to cast a black actor for this role and while the Genie is still blue in some scenes, he spends a considerable amount of time in his human form. It is especially interesting that, in the 2019 movie, whenever he talks about freedom, the Genie always turns to his human form, even though he is in his genie form in between sentences. In 1992, he stays blue for this conversation. It seems as if the fact that Will Smith is a black actor contributed to the decision to show the Genie as African American when he talks about his wish. After all, the US has a long history of slavery. Therefore, it seems a deliberate choice to have cast a black actor for this role. Seeing Smith talk about enslavement and his character's wish of freedom evokes associations of US slavery and possibly improves the audience's understanding of his situation. The intention behind this depiction could also be to evoke sympathy for the Genie.

The Genie's Americanization is also recognizable in another aspect other than his embodiment of American values. The Genie, especially in the 1992 animated film, often refers to US-American culture, for example by impersonating certain characters or making jokes that can only be understood if one is accustomed to the US and the West in general. In 1992, the Genie, for instance, impersonates Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator (36:46–36:50), turns into a gambling machine (37:14–37:16), a French waiter (37:56–38:02) and

references other Disney movies, like *The Sword in the Stone* (38:49–38:50), *Pinocchio* (45:02) or *Dumbo* (46:50), to name only a few. In conclusion, the Genie can be interpreted as Americanized through two aspects: first, his slave narrative in connection with the pursuit of liberty and happiness, and second, his references to US-American popular culture.

7.4 Riches in the Desert and the Ideal Arab Ruler

In this subsection, I will analyze the significance of the Cave of Wonders as a metaphor for the United States' interest in Middle Eastern Oil. In addition, I will discuss how Jasmine's father is represented as an ideal Arab ruler with regards to the preservation of American interests as opposed to Jafar's portrayal as the Sultan.

In both versions of Disney's *Aladdin*, the Cave of Wonders is situated in the desert and harbors immeasurable treasures, which are hidden deep in the ground and heavily guarded. Interestingly, in the original tale of *Aladdin* in Galland's *One Thousand and One Nights*, the cave is not located in the desert, but in a mountainous area (see Dawood 172). This suggests that the location in the desert bears significance. It could be argued that the Cave of Wonders as portrayed in the Disney movie versions stands for hidden riches in the desert and thus, signifies the vast amount of oil in the deserts of Middle Eastern countries. In the movies, the tiger head, which is the entrance to the cave, states several times that "only one may enter. One whose worth lies far within. A diamond in the rough" (*Aladdin* 2019, 33:47–33:58). The person that Jafar hired to fetch the lamp from the cave is crushed by the tiger head, because he is unworthy. In the 1992 movie, this man is clearly supposed to portray an Arab (*Aladdin* 1992, 5:35–6:25). In contrast, Aladdin, the Americanized hero of the story, seems to be the only one who is worthy to enter. To summarize the Tiger's position, one must be worthy to get access and most treasures are forbidden, even to those allowed to enter. This would mean that only certain treasures are acceptable to exploit and only for certain people. The ones who see themselves worthy to have access to oil is the US. Hence, it is only Aladdin who is worthy to enter the cave and not the man hired by Jafar, who is portrayed as stereotypically Arab. Giroux and Pollock even go as far as to describe Jafar's looks as "a combination of Saddam Hussein and the Ayatollah Khomeini" (139). Bullock and Zhou see Hussein and Khomeini as "exemplary figures of 'evil' in US discourses of world leaders in the early 1990s (and perhaps even today)" (453). One also has to consider that the 1992 adaptation was released only a year after the first Gulf War ended: oil and the

preservation of Western access were crucial factors in this war (D. Little 73–74). Since the protection of US interests is facilitated if the relevant countries are governed by rulers who are open for a connection to the West and potentially even for its influence, the portrayal of the Sultan in *Aladdin* (1992 and 2019) can be interpreted in this light.

In the 1992 film, the Sultan (Jasmine's father) is wearing light clothes and is portrayed as naïve, playful and easy to influence. As long as he rules, the sun is shining and the sky is bright (see, e.g., *Aladdin* 1992, 1:10:36). When Jafar becomes the new Sultan, the sky instantly turns dark and cloudy, with a storm approaching fast (*Aladdin* 1992, 1:11:05–1:11:36). This obvious change in weather conditions corresponding to the change in leadership could signify that a power-hungry leader like Jafar can only bring darkness, doom and disaster. Addison points out that "power is associated with darkness, it is the 'dark purpose' of the malign Arab – the benign Arab is legally and practically powerless" (15). In contrast, a ruler who is trusting, easy to influence and preoccupied with other things, like Jasmine's father, in connection with the sunny and bright day, could be an indication for how the ideal Arab leader should look like according to a Western or American viewpoint. Addison sees the Sultan as a representation of "benign, or friendly, Arab power," a ruler is "[s]oft and senile" and can be "easily manipulated by their less amicable Arab allies, represented by the megalomaniacal Jafar" (10). However, if he is generally easily influenced, the Arab allies Addison mentions could be substituted just as well with a Western power pretending to be an ally and his role interpreted accordingly. Moreover, an alliance usually suggests that both parties' interests are considered. However, one could argue that Jasmine's father appears as the kind of ruler the US wants or needs in Arab countries, in order to protect its own interests in the geopolitical area of the Middle East without considering said countries' needs. A power-hungry person such as Jafar as the head of state is only driven by their own agenda and their desire to conquer. Hence, such a leader is probably not very preoccupied with the needs of their subjects, let alone susceptible to the interests of a foreign country. Addison (17) argues that in the end, the Americanized hero Aladdin saves Agrabah and the world from the bad Arab power of Jafar and then rules the kingdom. In this respect, an additional aspect of American influence is added – namely the goal that the US eventually installs a ruler that adheres to Western values. To achieve this, the US often interferes in Middle Eastern politics by supporting certain nations or rulers, for instance through money. In *Aladdin* 1992, the Genie – who is also Americanized – helps

Aladdin to fulfill his dreams and can thus be read as a symbol for American support in a future head of state with similar values. Moreover, the fact that it is a clearly Americanized character who succeeds in the end suggests the supposed superiority of American values and can be linked to the theory of US Orientalism and Exceptionalism. The US sees itself as the most powerful and morally exceptional nation worldwide (see, e.g., Hodgson; Paul; Nayak and Malone), which, in turn, implies that all other nations are inferior. According to Orientalist theory, this especially applies to the Orient, since it apparently cannot even represent itself (see, e.g. Said). In this light, the Sultan's childlike portrayal could be read as a sign of the inability to rule, which can only have to outcomes – an Arab despot such as Jafar takes the power or the US installs a ruler with a Western worldview, such as Aladdin, who is supported by an equally Americanized character.

In the 2019 version, the change of leadership is not portrayed as dramatically. However, the contrast between Jasmine's father and Jafar is still clearly recognizable: On the one hand, their clothing distinguishes them from each other and on the other hand, the weather conditions change when Jafar is in power. The Sultan always wears light colors with bright highlights, whereas Jafar is dressed in blacks and reds, even when he becomes Sultan, then a sorcerer and finally a genie. Moreover, when Jafar takes the throne, the weather changes from a bright day to a dark twilight sky, full of clouds (*Aladdin* 2019, 1:33:50). The palace also turns from an inviting building into a frightful-looking place (see, e.g., 1:35:00). Usually, the palace's white marble gleams in the sunlight, but the low lightning combined with the dark clouds in the background convey a sense of foreboding and evoke associations with a haunted mansion. While the Sultan's character traits have changed – compared to the 1992 film, he is more serious and less childlike – it is still clear that he is a better ruler than Jafar would be. However, throughout the whole remake, Jasmine is foreshadowed as the ideal Sultan, because she is compassionate, strongminded and deeply cares for her people. The character traits that mark Jasmine's father as naïve and easily influenced in the 1992 version are significantly lessened in the 2019 retelling of the story. Therefore, it can be argued that the US' motivations behind his portrayal do not seem to play the same role as in the 1992 version.

In summary, both versions portray Jafar as a head of state who absolutely needs to be prevented from ruling, because of his character traits and sinister motivations. Instead, a leader who is more easily influenced (in case of the 1992 movie) and/or cares primarily for

the welfare of their subjects (as in the 2019 remake) seems to be preferable. The party who, realistically and apart from the inhabitants, profits the most from a head of state such as Jasmine's father would be a power like the US, who would need an easily influenced ruler to protect their main intentions regarding the Middle East, for example the oil flow (see, e.g., D. Little 43–44). Therefore, it could be argued that the portrayals of the Sultan and Jafar are influenced by an American/Western point of view.

To conclude this section, both Disney adaptations of *Aladdin* are influenced by US-American culture in the respect that the main protagonists (Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie) embody American values that correspond to their respective plotlines. Aladdin's story is characterized by a social upward movement and the American Dream narrative. The Genie's deepest wish is to be free and to no longer being forced to bow to a master. Jasmine wants to be able to make her own choices in life and not having to submit to the men in her life. All three protagonists are trapped in their respective lives and their plotlines relate to the pursuit of liberty, happiness and autonomy, core values of US-American society. Addison (12) also recognizes individualism and freedom as signal themes of *Aladdin*.

Another aspect in which the films could be interpreted as influenced by American culture are the representations of certain elements or scenes in relation to the US' relationship with the Middle East. The portrayal of the hidden riches in the Cave of Wonders as an underground desert cave could be connected to the US interests in Arab oil. Similarly, the differences in the portrayal of Jasmine's father in contrast to Jafar as the Sultan could also interpreted to reflect US interests – namely their idea of the right Arab ruler as someone the US can influence and/or a leader that is sensible and cares more for his people than for personal power and thereby does not pose a threat to the West.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the 2019 Disney movie adaptation of *Aladdin* with regards to underlying notions of Orientalism, compare it to the 1992 animated film to examine what has changed in terms of Orientalist stereotyping and discuss to what extent both versions of the movie are influenced by US-American culture.

Orientalist Stereotyping in Aladdin (2019)

After a thorough analysis of the intro song, the settings as well as the character portrayal, it can be concluded that the live-action remake alludes to certain Orientalist stereotypes – first and foremost to the portrayed region's and culture's exoticness, which is hinted at in the intro song, by shots of the marketplace and by the characters' costumes. The movie's setting is also described as chaotic and dangerous, especially in the intro song and strengthened by certain shots (e.g., the marketplace or Jafar at the Cave of Wonders). Moreover, it could be argued that shots of the citizens' simple houses as well as certain characters' mindsets evoke ideas of primitiveness and backwardness. However, it also needs to be stressed that the movie puts a lot of emphasis on diversity and authenticity by displaying a variety of ethnicities (also with regards to the cast) and using elements, materials and inspiration from several different cultures. While it could be argued that the mixture of cultural influences in the 2019 movie could be caused by an Orientalist ignorance of the uniqueness of different cultures, it has to be said that the filmmakers have clearly made an effort to portray the movie's setting as a very diverse region, with a lot of different ethnicities and cultures. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that *Aladdin* is still a movie based on a fairytale and that Agrabah is not a real country. Therefore, one cannot expect the portrayal of the region to be completely realistic. After all, nobody knows how a real Agrabah would look like. A certain degree of artistic freedom should always be allowed.

2019 Versus 1992 – What Has Changed?

First and foremost, it needs to be mentioned that in the thirty years lying between the two adaptations, a lot has changed in society, especially with regards to diversity and political correctness. In addition, *Aladdin* 1992 was an animated film, whereas its 2019 version is a live action movie. Therefore, it is only logical that they are not one and the same and that

certain changes were simply inevitable. With regards to my research question, it can be concluded that, in comparison with its 1992 precursor, the 2019 remake of *Aladdin* showcases considerably less notions of Orientalist stereotyping. Problematic elements, such as lines in the intro song, or character portrayals, for instance sexualized clothing, purposely imitated accents or antisemitic caricatures, have been changed, reduced and/or altogether removed. The 1992 film makes a lot of use of exaggeration as a tool to create the right atmosphere – especially with regards to exoticness. Examples for this would be the opening scenes (e.g. the peddler on his camel) or also the palace towering disproportionally large over Agrabah. In 2019, filmmakers have put an effort into increasing authenticity. Moreover, the 1992 movie portrays the characters as a very homogenous group – most men are bearded and have large, hooked noses; women are usually veiled or sexualized. The 2019 film, in contrast, reflects the great variety of cultures and ethnicities of the Middle East and Asia. Overall, the characters in the remake are presented in a less stereotypical manner, also with regards to their worldview. Furthermore, the referenced laws are not portrayed as backward and barbaric as they were in the 1992 version. All in all, while the Orientalist stereotypes that are alluded to remain basically the same, they have been considerably softened in the 2019 remake.

Influences of US-American Culture

With regards to the question of Americanization, it can be concluded that the main protagonists Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie are Americanized through their accents, appearances and the US-American values they embody. All three of them are on their personal quests for liberty, autonomy and happiness. Aladdin's storyline closely relates to the narrative of the American Dream and presents him as the hero of the story. The character of the Genie is additionally Americanized through his role as a slave and the modification of his character compared to the traditional jinn of Arab folklore. Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that the color scheme of the characters' clothes seems to correspond to their respective storylines, especially marking Aladdin as the American hero and Jafar as the Arab villain. The Disney movies of *Aladdin* showcase influences of US-American culture in another respect. The symbolization of the Cave of Wonders as well as the portrayal of the person who is Sultan could be interpreted in a way that would suggest a

reflection of US interests – for instance regarding Middle Eastern oil and a ruler who is easy to influence.

As a final point, it once again needs to be mentioned that *Aladdin* is a fairy tale. Some might argue that it should be treated as nothing more. Nevertheless, and as innocent as the story might seem, it is undeniable that the Disney adaptations do contain notions of Orientalist stereotyping and therefore, critical thinking and reflections are important. Especially as a teacher, it seems important to concern oneself with the messages that all types of media convey in order to help the students to enhance their critical thinking skills as well as increase their awareness of what they unconsciously consume and how such stereotypical portrayals can affect their worldview.

Aladdin is of course not the only Disney movie that has a history with stereotypical portrayals nor is it the only remake. For future projects, it might be interesting to analyze other Disney movies, especially with a previous version by the same company, to see what has been changed and improved. One of the newest Disney remakes, for example, would be *The Little Mermaid* (2023), which has already sparked controversy even before its release because of the filmmakers' choice to cast black actress Halle Bailey as Ariel.

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10. Abstracts

10.1 English Abstract

This thesis examines the Disney adaptations of *Aladdin* (1992 and 2019) with regards to Orientalist stereotyping and Americanization. Considering the movies were released almost three decades apart, the question as to what changes have been made in terms of Orientalism is also raised. The movie analysis focuses on the intro song, the main settings as well as character portrayal in connection with plot lines. It was concluded that the 1992 animated version strongly reinforces the Orientalist stereotypes of an exotic, mysterious and backward Orient, for instance through its sexualization of women, its antisemitic caricatures, the presentation of Arabs as a homogenous group and its references to barbaric laws. In the 2019 remake, those stereotypes can be seen as considerably softened, albeit not removed altogether. Moreover, it was found that in both movie versions, the main characters Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie have been Americanized through their appearances, accents and respective plots. All of them represent core values of the US, such as the pursuit of liberty, autonomy and happiness.

10.2 German Abstract

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit den Disney-Versionen von *Aladdin* (1992 und 2019) im Hinblick auf die Vermittlung von orientalistischen Stereotypen und die Einflüsse US-amerikanischer Kultur. Die fast dreißig Jahre, die zwischen den Veröffentlichungen der beiden Filme liegen, werfen außerdem die Frage auf, welche Änderungen hinsichtlich Orientalismus in der 2019er Neuverfilmung gemacht wurden. Der Fokus der Filmanalyse liegt am Intro-Lied, auf den wichtigsten Schauplätzen sowie auf der Darstellung der Charaktere in Verbindung mit ihren Handlungssträngen. Der Animationsfilm aus dem Jahre 1992 beinhaltet und bekräftig die orientalistischen Stereotype eines exotischen, geheimnisvollen und rückständigen Orients. Dies wird beispielsweise durch die Sexualisierung von Frauen, die antisemitische, karikaturartige Darstellung von Arabern als eine einheitliche Gruppe ohne Individualität, sowie das Beziehen auf barbarische Gesetze und Traditionen erreicht. In der Neuverfilmung sind dieselben Stereotype zwar im Ansatz ebenfalls erkennbar, wurden jedoch erheblich reduziert. Beide Filmversionen amerikanisieren die Hauptfiguren Aladdin, Jasmin und den

Dschinni durch ihr Aussehen, ihre Akzente und jeweiligen Handlungsstränge. Alle drei verkörpern fundamentale US-amerikanische Werte, wie zum Beispiel das Streben nach Freiheit, Selbstbestimmung und persönlichem Glück.