White heroes and princes of the East

- A Critical Discourse Analysis of the representational practices of Whitewashing

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“The single story creates stereotypes. The thing about stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story... Stories Matter.

Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity... When we realise that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.”

- Chimamanda Adichie (2009)
Abstract

Whitewashing entails the practice of whitening or altering an historical or fictional characters of colours with the casting of white actors. The lack of diversity in today’s media landscape highlight the importance of problematizing such representational practice usage and effects. This study therefore examines the discourses and meanings found in whitewashed characters from selected scenes in the films Dr Strange and Prince of Persia. The study used the theoretical approach of Richard Dyers “Whiteness”, Edwards Saids “Orientalism and Stuart Halls “Representation and Stereotype “to gain a diverse perspective on the practices of representation. The applied methodological approach of Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis enabled hidden and unspoken messages to be brought forth and discussed accordingly to the theoretical frames. The study found that the “whitewashing” is an excursion of symbolic power in which it is used to ultimately maintain and produce whiteness as the norm.
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1. Introduction

The Ancient One and the Prince of Persia, originally depicted as a Tibetan male monk and a Persian Prince are fictional characters from a comic book series and a videogame. Yet, when these stories were projected on to “the big screen” these two characters were portrayed by white actors, ultimately ‘whitening’ and altering their ethnic backgrounds. This practice known as “Whitewashing” has caused a lot of debate regarding its usage in today’s diverse society. Zhang (2017) states that “whitewashing” is an important concept in the study of racism. Not only limited to films, the practice can also occur in the workplace and education and refers to the construction of problematic white racialized identities. In filmmaking “whitewashing” describes when white actors are casted to portray fictional or historical character of ethnic origins but also the usage of make-up and acting to represent racial attributes and stereotypes of the ethnical characters portrayed. The ladder is often characterized by “blackface” or “yellowface”, in which its early use can be found in D.W Griffins Birth of a Nation (1915) (Tierney, 2017).

Birth of a Nation, often viewed as one of the most technically forward and influential pieces introduced many cinematic innovations, ultimately influencing and shaping the practice of American film-making. The film not only marked the “birth of cinema but also projected “the birth of Ku Klux Klan” to its widespread audience in which it portrayed the Klan as a band of white brothers gloriously defending white womanhood, honour and racism, by beating and lynching savage black men (Hall, 1997: 251-2). Stuart Hall (1997) argues that there is a symbolic power in the ability to represent something or someone in certain way. Birth of a Nation represented the black experience with white actors wearing “blackface” and acting upon racial stereotypes drawn from “slavery days”. One can therefore suggest that the films representation and whitewashing was a display of power over the black male, consequently supporting the claims of white superiority and racism which the Klan wanted to project.

Unfortunately, the previous mentioned characters (The Ancient One and the Prince of Persia) demonstrate that whitewashing still persist in the contemporary film industry. Unless challenged, whitening and stereotyping not only creates an unequal power relation in which
agency and power is diminished but also sustains and reproduces a lack of diversity on the big screen which does not reflect the today's globalized landscape. This highlights the importance of studying and problematizing the use of such problematic representational practice.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

Throughout this paper, I intend to present and study the usage and societal implications of “Whitewashing” and its representational practices relating to power and discourse. The study will be based on empirical data selected from the films Dr Strange and Prince of Persia as both films created a debate regarding its usage of the practice. The chosen methodical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enables a deep examination of whitewashing as hidden and underlying meanings are brought forth and discussed.

My research questions are therefore:
- What discourses and meanings can be found in the representations of whitewashed characters in Prince of Persia and Doctor Strange?
- What sociocultural practices are these discourses and representations rooted in?

1.3 Disposition

The paper begins with a summary of previous studies findings and discussions in the subject of race and representations in films. The next section introduces the theoretical frames of “Representation”, “Stereotype”, “Whiteness” and “Orientalism”, followed by a presentation and explanation of the methodological approach of Critical Discourse Analysis. The following section called “Analysis” will then apply the presented theoretical and empirical frameworks on the selected material from Prince of Persia and Dr Strange and discuss the findings in relation to the papers research questions. The paper then concludes with a summary and conclusion of the analysis results and suggest future studies to further the study and understanding of the subject.

2. Literary Review

Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness (2001) is a collection of essays discussing the relationship between race and U.S cinema ranging from the birth of sound and up until the 1960s, also known as the Classical Hollywood era. The authors argue that the birth of
whiteness can be traced to institutional policies and practices within major film studios which produced, distributed and lastly normalized whiteness on the big screen. Films within this period constructed whiteness as a norm, a formation which has maintained its hierarchical structure into the contemporary era, consequently making them harder to challenge and break (Bernandi, 2001). Prince of Persia and Dr Strange were distributed by Disney, one of the leading media companies in the world. A study of 26 Disney films by Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman et al (2004) showed that if represented, marginalized groups were often portrayed with negative racial and cultural stereotypes which has persisted over time and share similarities with previous portrayals in early Disney films. Characters of colour were often reduced to playing the villain or the scary character in many of the animated films. For example, in the Jungle Book, apes with the voices of African Americans sing to a young white boy “I want to be a man. I want to walk like you, talk like. I want to be like you”. The deeper meaning of these lyrics can be interpreted to displaying the unequal relations of black and whites, linking the primitivism of apes with blackness and idealising the human traits which the white boy embodies. However, in newer released films one can also find positive portrayals non-western characters and surroundings.

A study conducted by Auner, Blas et al (2017) approaches whitewashing from the audience perspective using Social-Identity theory and Mere-exposure theory to gain an understanding over its continuance use in the film industry. Some argue that whitewashing occurs due to the audience preference for white actors. However, this notion brings to question whether the audience truly wants to see films with predominantly white actors, or is this something they have become accustomed to seeing, in other word, if this preference has been formed by film executives and studios and rooted in industry habits. From the perspective of the mere-exposure effect theory, moviegoers prefer to see films which reinforces the normalized representation of predominantly white actors in media and movies. The continuous exposure to a stimulus, in this case an overwhelmingly representation of white actors, can positively affect ones liking of the stimulus in future events (Auner, Blas et al, 2017). Previous studies have identified Eurocentrism as the driving factor behind this preference, in which the world is represented and interpreted from a western perspective and then perceived and maintained as a reality. The projection of such worldview is shaped by the practices of most filmmakers who are descendants of European settler. This in turn affects the consumer perception of reality as such cinematic representations of eurocentrism, if not challenged will be perceived as a normalized stable in popular culture. This is an essential part of “whitewashing” as it
entails “inequality of cultural representation and racial stereotypes” (Zhang, 2017). A case study conducted by Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2016) examines the portrayal of diversity in the top 100 grossing films of 2013. The study shows that the race/ethnicity of speaking characters was dominated by white characters (74.1), whilst underrepresented groups only constituted around a quarter (25.9) of the on-screen representations. In which the latter group consisted of 14.1% Black, 4.9% Hispanic, 4.4% Asian and 1.1% Middle Eastern representation. The study not only demonstrates that the cinematic representation is dominated by white actors who also quite often embodies most of the heroic characters portrayed on screen but also the representation of men from “other” races projected cultural stereotypes. The audience preference for whitewashing would therefore be due to the exposure of films such as the top 100 grossing films of 2013 which supports the projected eurocentrism. As a result, anything which falls outside of this perspective is perceived as “the other” and attains a negative connotation (Zhang, 2017).

Such perceived standards support the argument for white actors being a financial necessity for the success of a film. Movie producers argue that they would have difficulties funding their projects without casting white actors (Auner, Blas et al, 2017). For example, the acclaimed director Ridley Scott rejected accusations of whitewashing in his biblical film Exodus: Gods and Kings by using such claims of financial interests. Scott (2014) stated “I can’t mount a film of this budget, where I have to rely on tax rebates in Spain, and say that my lead actor is Mohammad so-and-so from such-and-such.. I’m just not going to get financed. So, the question doesn’t even come up” when defending the films portrayal of Moses biblical journey with an overwhelmingly representation of white actors in leading roles and a shortage of actors from the middle east. However, this notion is challenged by studies which found that films with diverse casted characters generate more box office revenue in comparison to films in which white characters are overrepresented.

The film industry can no longer ignore the changes to the population and the increasing demands for a diverse media landscape. The unequal level of representation does not mirror the current demographic of the United States, in which half of children under the age of 5 are non-white. Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2016) therefore concludes that the selected material is projecting a homogenized picture of the world, an on-screen practice which do not reflect the diversity of the off-screen audience and population (ibid).
In conclusion, these previous studies highlight the lack of ethnic representations in films due to the projection and normalisation of whiteness, a practice which can be traced back to the formation of early cinematic institutional polices. These practices have consequently influenced the preferences of the audience, even though the on-screen representation does not always reflect the diversity of the audience, but ultimately these studies neglect to approach the practice of whitewashing and its relations to these factors. This might however, be due to the lack of previous academic studies which discusses and approaches the issue from the projected films. These studies approach the construction of “other” races in white cultural contexts hindering the discussion of the construction of whiteness and practices which enables its dominance. By critically assessing and discussing the discourses found in whitewashed films, one can nonetheless, gain further understanding of how the practice is shaped and furthermore shapes intuitional practices and policies which normalises and projects whiteness.

3. Theoretical framework
The following section presents the theories used in this study. I will start with presenting Stuart Halls “Representation and Stereotyping” and define some the main concepts, relevant to this study, followed by Edward Saids “Orientalism” and lastly present Richard Dyers “Whiteness”.

3.1 Representation and Stereotype
To understand the nature of representation, one must start with its defining practices. Stuart Hall (1997) defines representation as a process in which meaning and language is connected to a culture. Two systems of representations are introduced, the first is related to the correlation between the meanings constructed in our mind and things in the world, such as objects, people and events. We form concepts of abstract items, people and places just as we might form concepts of objects and people we perceive and have previously encountered. Mental representations in our head allows us to meaningfully understand the world by organizing similarities and differences. This is not fully individual process but one linked to the same “conceptual map”, in other words a shared culture of meaning. The second system of representation; language is involved in the process of creating shared meanings as “language is broadly defined as a system which deploys signs, any signifying system to produce meaning”. This demonstrates that meanings are not fixed or unchangeable as they are made to signify by humans, within society and cultures (Hall,1997; 67).
Representation of differences and otherness, also called “the spectacle of the Other” builds upon representation as a signifying practice. The issue discusses how differences are given meaning through representational practices such as stereotyping with emphasis on racial and ethnic differences. The practice of stereotyping is central in the representation of differences as it reduces a person to a few traits embodied by memorable and simple characteristics. These are then represented as fixed and unchangeable, ultimately naturalizing the given stereotypes. The practice usually occurs in asymmetrical power relations, in which it is directed to the dominated group as a violent hierarchal display of power. The symbolic power of representation exercises its ability in representing someone or something in a certain way as mentioned earlier in the text. The exertion of power is not only limited to physical and economic dominance but also includes “representation, knowledge and ideas”. One that is not of physical character but of symbolic and cultural essence (Hall, 1997).

The discussion of race exemplifies the display of power in terms of representation. The division of people does not rest upon biological differences which makes them seem naturalized and fixed. Race is a cultural and historical construct, in other words a product of human action and interaction used to represent differences between people of various skin tone. The importance does not lie upon the differences but its given significance used to ultimately uphold a political and social hierarchy. In other words, the essential part of stereotypes is the relationship between the deeper underlying meanings which hides beneath the produced visual representations.

Racism emerged as a defence ideology in which the superiority of “whites” legitimized slavery and its trade thus making the economic institution acceptable. The new ideology spread to those outside the trade and maintained into the nineteenth-century as the “natural” divide of human race transformed into a taken for granted assumption. As the same argument regarding differences was also used to legitimize the right of the superior white Europeans to establish colonies in the lands of the inferior “others” (Storey, 2009). Racism was given significance in its usage to uphold an unequal hierarchy.

3.2 Orientalism
Edward Said (1979) introduces Orientalism as a term used to depict the relationship between Europe and the Orient, in which, the latter is used to define Europe by serving as its counter
“image, idea, personality and experience”. The construction of the different “Other” was consequently used to uphold Western identity and culture. Said (1979) represents three meanings of Orientalism, the first referring to the term in an academic context. Whilst the second meaning approaches Orientalism as “A style of thought” based on the epistemological and ontological divide of the world into two unequal parts, the Orient and the Occident. Wherein the imaginary divide was used to produce descriptions and theories of everything which entails the Orient (ibid). The third meaning introduces the term as a Western construct of domination over the Orient, and its creation as a “British, French and lastly, an American cultural enterprise”, constructed to reproduce and maintain hegemony over the Orient (Said, 1979:4).

John Storey (2009) furthers Orientalism in the study of popular culture by applying the approach to imperial fictions, introducing two imperial plot structures found in films, novels and myths such as Apocalypse Now and Tarzan. The first plot structure describes stories which follows “white colonizers succumbing to the primeval power of the jungle”, in other words “going native”. Whilst the second structure entails “stories of whites, who because of the supposed power of their racial heredity impose themselves on the jungle and its inhabitants” (Storey, 2009; 172). Said (1979) suggest approaching the Orient not as a mirror of reality but as a projection of the non-orient. The representational practices used in imperial fictions would therefore reflect the desires and needs of the producers rather than those depicted in the story as the plot structures ultimately builds upon and reproduces a culture of imperialism ((Storey, 2009; 172)). One should therefore critically question the meaning of the chosen narrative, settings and figure of speech, when approaching representations of the Orient and its inhabitants as such representations are firstly constructed through the lens of a European (Said,1979).

3.3 The Matter of Whiteness
Dyer (2005) states that racial imagery is central to the practices of the world ranging from access to housing, jobs and healthcare but also at a global level affecting countries cost of export and status in international gatherings. Racial imagery is a constant factor producing barriers that people struggle to overcome as judgments on appearance and geographical differences shape their everyday life (Dyers, 2005). Previous studies often lack perspective on racial imageries of white people and put emphasis on the production of other races in white cultural contexts. Stuart Halls “The spectacle of Others” (1997,225) and the study of ethnic
diversity in films by Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2016) falls into this category as both studies approach representation and stereotypes in white cultural productions. Dyers (2005) however, argues that such perspectives might limit the perception of race and its constructed imagery as the issue is not only attributable to those who are non-white. Such association and lack of discussions might lead to whiteness being perceived as a human norm whilst race is only attributed to the rest. Equalling whiteness with humanity creates an asymmetrical power position as the ability to speak for all races is only reserved to some. This is exemplified by the lack of use of the word whiteness in the writings of white people in the west even though representations of whites are disproportionately dominant. Various field such as media, politics and education are predominantly white, yet they might present diversity in the field of genders, sexuality and class, the issue of whiteness still prevails disguising itself to portray a diverse image of the world. Still, unless the question of racial representation is challenged, this limited image of humanity will continue on being produced as the norm and whiteness made invisible excluding some in the powerful position of what being human entails (Dyers, 2005; 10-12). Equating whiteness with inequality not only brings the matter to the forefront but confronts the economic and political hierarchy which it maintains, thus enabling the rejection of whiteness to be the rejection of its” privileges and pain” (Bernardi, 2001; 18).

### 3.4 Summary

The selected theoretical framework present a diverse perspective on representation, allowing for a wider viewpoint to examine my material and go beyond what is shown. Stuart Halls theory of representation and stereotype describes representations as a signifying practice in which stereotypes can be used to assign meaning to differences. For example, racism was given meaning by human culture and society in order to maintain an ideological and financial institution. The use of Edwards Saids “Orientalism” allows me to not only gain an understanding of the projected representations but also how it reflects the desires and needs of those constructing the representations. Whilst Dyers “Whiteness” furthers the discussion and problematizing of whiteness, which the previous research mentioned lacked perspective on.

### 4. Methodology and Material

#### 4.1 Method

Some might argue that one cannot fully understand a text unless its deeper meanings and less visible aspects are brought to light and discussed. The focus should therefore not only lay on
the linguistic content of a text (such as grammar and words) but also the political, cultural and economic context in which it was produced (Berglez, 2010). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a development of critical linguistics, incorporates the interrelationship of language, power and ideology in its framework. The word “critical” derives from the practice of denaturalising strategies such as taken for granted assumptions, hidden meanings, ideas and absences. These strategies may present themselves as normal and unchangeable components of a text but are in fact ideological attempts to shape the representation of people and event to promote certain interests (ibid).

CDA is not only committed to being “critical” and exposing such power relations but also, challenging them in the hopes social change by bringing to light the hidden political and ideological agendas (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For example, Teun Van Dijk, who from socio-cognitive perspective works against racism by exposing racist discourses and ideologies found in news. The field has also been associated Ruth Wodak and Norman Fairclough whose primary focus of analysis springs from the linguistics approach (Berglez, 2010). The various approaches to CDA demonstrates that it does not traditionally encompass the characteristics of a structured and defined academic discipline as it lacks a clear set of research methods. One can instead approach the subject as an “problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement” in other words, a variety of tools, in which the chosen process depends on the study of interest. (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak, 2011) Nonetheless, these various tools share the ability of examining how language both shapes and is shaped by society and its relation to power and injustice.

The research process of CDA begins with the matter of research, consequently making the mode of analysis dependent on ones’ subject of investigation. Fairclough (2010) argues that a starting point for a research topic is “focusing upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspects” as CDA enables an understanding of such wrongs nature, sources and ultimately solutions. This study focuses on the social wrongs of whitewashing. One might however, question the definition of a “social wrong” and whether the selected research topic falls within this category. A controversial formulation assigns the term to when the social, political or economic well-being of some people is overlooked for the interests of others (Fairclough: 236,2010). The use of whitewashing support the construction of an overwhelmingly white image of the world whilst diminishing the representation, agency and power of minorities. The selected chosen social wrong will be examined by drawing upon the linguistic and
analytical methods developed by Norman Fairclough (1995 & 2010). The following section introduces Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach to conducting a critical discourse analysis.

**4.2 Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis**

The term discourse has various definitions within but also outside of the field of CDA. The abstract definition describes the complex relations of meaning making through written or spoken language, in other word communication between people however, the term can also be extended to include various “semiotic activities” such as film and videos (Fairclough, 2010;3). Fairclough approaches discourse as an interdependent three-dimensional practice which includes a linguistic description of spoken or written text (*text*), text production and consumption (*discourse practices*) and explanation of the social and cultural process in which the communicative event (news or documentary) is part of (*sociocultural practice*). These frameworks can be used with various forms of emphases, for example one might only focus on a certain dimension depending on ones study (Fairclough, 1995). My emphasis will therefore be on text and sociocultural practice rather than discourses practices, as the second dimensional approach emphasises the socio-cognitive aspects of text production such as consumption and interpretation (Fairclough, 2010). This study is however, not concerned with a direct analysis of the audience perspective, I therefore find this framework not to be relevant in the coding of the selected material.

**4.3 Text**

The first dimension ‘*text*’ consists of a linguistic analysis of the vocabulary, grammar and structure of sentences (cohesion). Multimodal material such as films and television also calls for an analysis of the construction and interaction between visual images and language. However, the first dimension does not only describe a text form but also emphasis how such structures are used to construct meaning. Thus, enabling a multi-modal analysis of the relationship between images, sound effects and language in the production of meaning in Dr Strange and Prince of Persia This have been discussed in terms of *ideology* in which representations, identities and relations have been central. Fairclough (1995) defines ideology as “meaning in the service of power”, such as taken for granted assumptions and prepositions which links text with previous reconstructed elements of other text, ultimately producing and reproducing unequal power structures. One can question a texts ideological components by
examining the selected representation both present and absent, but also by examining the
collection of identities and relations. In other words, ask oneself: “How is the text designed,
why is it designed this way and how else could it have been designed” (Fairclough, 1995:
202).

4.4 Sociocultural practice
The analysis in this dimension refers to the approach of discourses practices from different
levels ranging from situational, institutional and wider societal context. Fairclough (1992)
describes three aspects which frames the sociocultural practice: economic and political
(revolves around issues of power and ideology) and lastly cultural, which embodies questions
of value and identity. Mass media operates within the frames of social institutions being
shaped by and furthermore shaping the network, blurring the limits between public and
private domains of social life. Media, in modern society serves as a platform for creating,
circulating and maintaining ideologies. These in turn generate meanings and representations
of the social world which can shape ones understanding of issues like race or gender.
Representations serve a vital role in the debate of impartiality, manipulation and ideology in
the media but these are also equally affected by identities and relations. As “the Wider social
impact of the media is not just to do with how they represent the world it is also to do with
what sorts of social identities, what sort of versions of ‘self’ they project and cultural values
these entail “ (ibid:7). Structures of ownerships for such practices are of great importance as
ownership in the hand of the few ensures that the dominant voices are continuously heard,
hindering wide participation and representation in the creation of media content discourse
(Fairclough, 1992).

4.5 Material
The study is based on selected scenes from the films “Doctor Strange” and “Prince of Persia”
to examine and discuss the practice of whitewashing in accordance to the research questions.
Both films have reached a wide audience as they generated a combined sum over one billion
dollars worldwide. However, they are also recent films that has generated a social media
outcry regarding the use of whitewashing. The selection of films has been restricted to be
based and represent the two different practices of whitewashing. Dr Strange casted a female
white actress to portray a character originally of ethnic origins whilst Prince of Persia used
white actors to portray the ethnicity of the area represented (Persia) through darkened skin.
Approaching the subject with an analysis and comparison of the two different practices will allow for a deeper understanding of what “whitewashing” entails.

The following section presents a short background of the films synopsis and the debate it created regarding the use of whitewashing. I have restricted the material to be based on a close analysis of four scenes (two from each film) called “Meeting the Ancient One”, “The Death of The Ancient One”, “Meeting the Prince and the Royal Family” and “Introducing Princess Tamia” which will be presented in the analysis chapter. As the names of the scenes indicate, they mostly depict the introduction of the whitewashed characters. One might argue that the selection of other scenes might produce different conclusions however, the question of discourse and representation regarding the use of “Whitewashing” becomes relevant in the the introductory scenes as they not only demonstrate how the characters are firstly presented to the audience but also if the matter of “whitewashing” is acknowledged or rendered invisible. I therefore found these scenes to be of relevance and importance in relation to this paper research questions.

4.6 Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Prince of Persia released in 2010, is based on a video game set in ancient Persia. The film follows the adventure of Dastan (Jake Gyllenhaal) in an ancient Persian city ruled by King Sharman. The king impressed with Dastan courage, adopts the orphaned boy in at young age and welcomes him into the royal family. Years later, the prince and his brother invade a city ruled by Princess Tamina under false pretences. In the city Dastan finds a mystical dagger containing the sands of time, a magical dagger with the ability to turn back time. However, he and the princess are forced to flee as he is falsely accused of murdering his adoptive father by his power-hungry uncle. The film then follows his quest for justice against his evil uncle who tries to regain the power of the dagger and ultimately control of the kingdom. Dastan manages to save the world against evil and his father by using the powers of the dagger turning back time to hindering the transpired events and saving the world.

The title role and several main characters were portrayed by white actors with Jake Gyllenhaal, an American with European decent portraying the title role of Prince Dastan and English actress Gemma Aerton as his companion Princess Tamina. The remaining royal family of Persia was also portrayed by white English actors bring forth the debate of cinematic colonialism in the portrayal of middle eastern characters (Allen, 2010).
4.7 Doctor Strange

The film Doctor Strange (2016) is one of the latest film adaptations from Marvel, taking a comic book hero and his action filled journey into the big screen. The plot follows Dr Strange, a brilliant surgeon who after a car accident damages his hand. After several failed surgeries, the doctor becomes disillusioned with western medicine and desperately travels to the Nepal for alternative healing options. There he meets The Ancient One, who takes him in as student of the arts of magic and alternative realities. A healed Dr Strange chooses not to return to his old life and instead remains in the mysterious company where he trough the teachings becomes the most powerful sorcerer and defeats the evil that threatened to destroy the world.

The film was one of the highest grossing of 2016, making close to 700 million dollars worldwide (Imdb, 2017). However, it was also met with a social media outcry which criticized the lack of Asian characters in a film mostly set in Asian countries (Nepal & Hong Kong) and the whitewashing the character- The Ancient One. Tilda Swinton, a white British actress, was cast to portray the character, described in the comic as a male monk with Tibetan origins. The writers of the film argued that the casting of Tilda Swinton was a positive step not only towards ethnic but also gender diversity in film. (Yee, 2016). They also argued that the casting and change of setting from Nepal was driven by a political sensitivity and financial matters towards the relationship between Tibet and China. As such representation would alienate the massive target group of Chinese consumers ( the second-biggest movie market, ultimately siding with the Chinese government by excluding Tibet from the narrative (Wong, 2016).

4.8 Methodological limitations

As mentioned, CDA argues that “discoursal practices are ideologically invested”, reproducing and maintaining power structures (Fairclough, 2010; 67). All ideas in society have diverse levels of ideological investments for example, the field of science tends to be less ideological than politics. (Berglez, 2010). A text becomes ideological when it positions itself as non-ideological and naturalised, this is not always transparent to those who produce or consume these texts. This furthers the need to critically approach a text and form an awareness of the true message projected. However, a critical discourse analysist faces an interesting paradox in positioning oneself objectively and critically outside the ideological practices without
unconsciously being incorporated within the same practice or trying to neutralise different ideological practices. Ideologies are shaped in hierarchal societies yet, Fairclough (2010) argues that ideology and society itself are two separate entities. If human beings can overcome the hindrance of an unequal societies they can ultimately also overcome ideology (Fairclough, 2010). One might also mention that the purpose of CDA is not to determine whether the ideological presumptions are true or false but ultimately demonstrate how dominant actors create structures and processes that can affect ones understanding of different matters (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

One might also mentioned that by critically problematizing the practice of whitewashing, I am already positioning myself outside the ideological context in which it was produced. As I would otherwise find the messages of the film to be non-ideological and a neutralised reflection of reality, ultimately consuming such meanings without any questions. To overcome such hindrances in this study, I intend to critically asses the underlying factors behind the practice of whitewashing. Not by only being “critical” in the literal sense but to bring to light and discuss the hidden political and ideological meanings which the text produces making this methodical approach relevant to the studies research question. As mentioned above, the purpose of CDA is not to promote or asses the ideological practices as true or false but gain an understanding of how these effect ones perception on matters.

5. Analysis
The analysis of the selected scenes will start with a presentation of the “text” and the relationship between visual image, language and sound effects and how they are used to construct meaning. The section of the following scenes will conclude with a discussion of the political, cultural and economic context in which the “text” was produced.

5.1 Dr Strange

b) Meeting the Ancient One
The following scene follows Dr Strange journey into the mysterious east. Disillusioned with western medicine, he uses his last money to venter into the unknown in the hopes of healing his damaged hands. The character bewilderingly walks the streets of Kathmandu before
entering the sanctuary of the Ancient One. The sanctuary is a dark lit room filled with the smoke of incenses which lightly clouds the view of the audience, drawing out the suspense of the character revealed to be the ancient one. The Doctor is then introduced to an older Asian man sitting at the centre of the room. The positioning, timing and scenery suggest that he is finally introduced to the Ancient One. The doctor turns and greets the man named Mr Hamir whilst receiving tea from an unknown character. Suddenly the man leaves and the camera shifts to the previous hidden tea server, a white woman wearing what would appear to be a white long garment with Asian characteristics. The doctor is bewildered and confused when she is revealed to be the ancient one. This encounter plays upon the Doctors racial and gender expectations, as he was using masculine pronouns when discussing the Ancient One and assuming that the “Asian man” embodied this character. One can also see it as a play on gender roles in which the woman was invisible until she was proven to be the teacher he was seeking. The Ancient One and the doctor then engage in a discussion regarding her perceived ability to heal his hands using energy and magic, as she states:

- “I know how to re-orient the spirit to better heal the body”

He belittles the use of such practice calling images of chakras and acupuncture gift shop items. His medical background hinders the possibility of his knowledge being widened through discussion as he continuously refers to medical sciences challenging the knowledge presented by the Ancient One. After a relentless debate in which he refuses to accept her perspective she “pushes” him to astral project into a colourful dimension in which he gains a first-hand experience of the teachings he was previously diminishing.

Prompting her to sarcastically ask:

- Have you seen that before in a gift shop?
The Ancient One held the knowledge the doctor was seeking as she stated: “I know how to re-orient the spirit to better heal the body”. The reliance on Tibetan/ Nepalese knowledge, magic, residence and aesthetics without the representation of those in which these practices originates from diminished the agency of the inhabitants to display this by themselves. One might also add that Mr Hamir had no lines in the film exemplifying the invisibility of the “Asian narrative” (Dyers, 2004).

The film acknowledges this in attempt of humour by confronting Dr Strange’s racial expectations of the Ancients One being the stereotypical Asian man. He implied Master Hamir visually embodied his expectations of the character by addressing him firstly. The film highlights the problematics of stereotypes by shifting the emphasis from ethnic differences and by demonstrating that they are not always true and can limit ones perception of people (Hall, 1997). Breaking the stereotype with a woman portraying the Ancient One presented a diversity in the field of gender. This brings to question whether diversity of gender allows for the diversity of ethnicities to be compromised, such as the producers of the films argued. The groups included in this presented diversity share the same racial imagery in which a dominant representation of whiteness persist, ultimately projecting a Eurocentric representation of the area of interest. Dyers (2004) argues that the ability to speak for all races is reserved to those who are disproportionately represented. Such display of power leaves the matter of whiteness unquestioned and unchallenged and lastly transformed into the standard in which some exceed and other fail.

The teachings of the Orient were constructed as the last desperate option of succeeding in where the Western medical practice had failed. One can therefore make the distinction between two competing discourses, one representing western medicine and the other alternative oriental healing, both however, from the narrative of two white characters. Dr Strange reject the teachings of The Ancient One, calling them fairy-tale and gift shop items.
which fictionalises the real practices of chakras and acupuncture. When he is proven wrong the power of these practices is restored but only through the lens of Tildas portrayal.

The producers also stated financial and political claims for altering the location of the sanctuary and the origins of the Ancient One. This demonstrates how the production of the media text was shaped by the social world and its political relations (Fairclough, 1995). As the Tibetan presence in the comics was excluded to appease to the Chinese government and its consumers (Wong, 2016). However, one might also ask whether the Nepalese setting would have instead enabled the character to be of Nepalese origins however, the claim for gender diversity as previously mentioned outweighed the need for cultural accuracy.

**b) The death of the Ancient One**

![Image](image.jpg)

After a fight with the evil forces, the ancient is damaged and taken to Dr Stranges previous hospital. Whilst she lays upon the surgery bed dying, she astral projects into a dimension in which time is relative and leaves her body. Dr Strange still in the present reality, watches as her pulse stops whilst doctors vigorously try to bring her back to life. He leaves his body and joins the Ancient One as he tries to persuade her to return. Both, floating in the air appears as translucent and godly versions of themselves as their body still lays within the hospital room. They descend upon a balcony with a great view over the New York skyline where she ponders her long life. The following conversations transpires:
The Ancient One - I have spent so many years peering through time, looking at this exact moment. But I can’t see past it. I have prevented countless of terrible futures and after each one there is always another one and they all lead here. But never further

Dr Strange - You think this is where you die?

The Ancient One - You wonder what I see in your future?......You have such capacity for goodness. You always exceled, not because you craved success but your fear for failure.

As the Ancient One is coming to terms with her death she presents the Doctor with the option to return to normality as his new knowledge of magic would allow him to fully heal his damaged hands or to serve something greater than himself. However, if he chooses the first option the “world would be lesser for it”. He replies that he is not ready, as it is implied that he would be her predecessor of the role as the protector of the worlds, making him the most powerful sorcerer. She calmly states “No one really is” before releasing his hand and vanishing from the Astral Plane. This action signified her death despite the doctors still trying to revive her in the present reality.

This scene follows the ending of a relationship which began in the previous presented section. Dr Strange’s learnings took fruit in Nepal and ended in his previous home New York, as the death scene marked the student becoming the new master and gatekeeper of all good. This play on the” Great white-explorer” can be likened to the imperial plot structure previously introduced by Storey (2009). As it signifies the character leaving to explore the unknown, master its art and returning home enriched and enlightened without the voices of the place explored present. This transferral of knowledge can be perceived as a continuation of the white saviour account as one can notice the absence of the geographical and representational narrative in which the magic originates. However, one can argue that Nepal is still presents in the usage of its magical knowledge, power and clothing but only through the lens of the non-orient. The selected choice of representation projects an exertion of domination, in other words “symbolic power” (Hall, 1997) in which the absence signifies that the “Orient” cannot represent themselves nor perhaps manage its powers in the same abilities as Dr Strange, as he not only had the “capacity for goodness”, he also always exceeded” (Said, 1979).
Once again, one can distinguish the competing discourses between western medicine and the “other”, the mythical ancient magic represented by the Ancient One. Dr Strange still holds the belief in the medical sciences asking her to return to her body in so the doctors can save her in the surgery room. However, as she has accepted that her death is beyond her, having seen it before, rendering the medical attention useless. From a social cultural perspective, media text shapes ones understanding of matters, these representation, though rooted in fantasy are projected as binary opposite and in conflict, in which the western discourse of healing is rooted in science and reality and “the other” in fantasy and magic.

5.2 Prince of Persia

*a) Meeting the Prince and the Royal Family*

The introductory scene of the film follows the voice of a narrator who sets the historical and social setting by describing Persia as a great empire in a land far away whilst images of soldiers riding camels in the dessert are accompanied by “oriental music”. One is then introduced to a flashback of the Persian king and his brother. The narrator stated that the king had “two sons but the gods were not done”, implying that the family would expand on “the day in which the king witnessed a single act of courage”. One is then introduced to the young orphaned boy named Dastan using his last money to buy an apple in the Persian market. He witnesses a young boy being slapped by a soldier whilst the crowd looks on in horror without intervening. Dastan steps into the crowd screaming stop to no avail and in a desperate act he throws his apple on the soldier to stop the brutal beating. A chase ensues in which the Dastan skilfully evades the soldiers whilst the king sits in the shadow observing. One can hear “oriental music” in the background as the boys run on the rooftops of the clay houses.
surrounding the market. However, Dastan is caught by the soldier and brought forward to have his hand cut-off in an act of punishment for throwing the apple. The music stops as the king come out of the shadow and stops the barbaric act. Everyone except Dastan bows to the king as a conversation ensues between them, both characters speak with a British accent. The story is then pushed to the present in which one meets the adult Dastan, portrayed by Jake Gyllenhaal and now adopted by the king.

The main characters in this scene, the king and young Dastan were portrayed by white British actors. The absence of the narrative rooted in reality was also exemplified in the use British accents to represent the way of speech in Persia. This however, demonstrates a clear influence of the European and American, construction of the Orient in which this selective representation represents the projection of “self” rather than the inhabitant of the region (Said, 1997) As Fairclough (2010) argued, a text becomes ideological when it position itself as neutral image of reality. This portrayal of Persians demonstrates an ideological attempt to shape the representation of people to promote certain interests, in this case a Eurocentric worldview (Berglez, 2010). Such representations are constructed from the perspective of filmmakers with European or American background (Said, 1979). One can also from a political perspective question whether such representations is shaped by the US long and complicated relationship with Iran, and if such portrayals can be perceived as “an excursion of power” in which the Americanized representation of Persian culture and inhabitants is a display of dominance (Hall, 1997).

b) Meeting Princess Tamina
Under false pretences, the prince and his brothers forcibly enter the holy city. When they finally break into the royal palace, the princess lies awaiting them. She is wearing a hood over her head covering her face, prompting the crown prince to remove it. The reveal of the tall dark haired and tanned skin princess prompts a loud gasp throughout the room filled with the prince’s male soldiers. Their loud reaction demonstrates her immense beauty and its effect on people as it also renders the crown prince speechless for a moment. He then loudly proclaims – For once the stories are true! Which implies that great stories were told regarding her beauty. Princess Tamina, the only main female character through the film is also the only one female with any speaking lines thus embodying the films representation of the Oriental female. However, the portrayal of princess Tamina as the most beautiful in the film tells us more about the desires and needs of the producers rather than the beauty standards of the area depicted (Persia). Not only is this representation problematic, as the character is portrayed by a white British actress with a British accent, it also promotes a Eurocentric standard of beauty, unrealistic to those who truly hails from the Middle East. The actress ethnicity is rendered invisible and portrayed as an objective reflection of the character and its surroundings thus naturalising her “whiteness” (Dyer, 2004). As her appearance is presented as an objective representation of Persian women, in other words projecting an ideological Eurocentric perception of beauty.

The study by Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2016) demonstrated that Middle Eastern characters only constituted of 1.1 percent of the on-screen representation making such representational practices not only unequal but also allowing the majority to represent the minority obscuring their narrative in the construction of their culture. One can distinguish the usage of a symbolic power in play, as the portrayal of the princess support and furthers the representations of predominantly white characters in films, even those set outside of “western culture”. The ability to speak, represent and act to all only becomes reserved to some due to the perceived notion of whiteness equalling humanity, ultimately projecting an image of the world which only reflects the few and making the standards of whiteness define normality (Dyers, 2004).

The film was produced and portrayed through an American production and lens as representations of the Orient are firstly shaped by one’s own circumstances. The European or American would therefore approach the matter firstly as a European and secondly as
individual due to the belonging of a group which has had previous political, economical and historical involvement in the area. (Said, 1979). The belonging of such group would therefore influence the practices of projecting the world in ones own image, creating beauty standards which benefit ones own racial imagery and all others would fail.

6.1 Conclusion and Discussion

Relating to the papers first research question presented in the beginning of the study, the discourses and meanings found in the films were portrayal of white people being the gatekeepers of all good and the invisibility of whiteness. As mentioned earlier, both films, exemplified the two different practices of whitewashing. In Doctor Strange, the Ancient One was portrayed by a white woman, altering the characters’ ethnic origins. The presented scene acknowledged the ethnic replacements of the character by bringing forth the diversity set in gender, yet in this diversity, whiteness still prevailed and was presented as normal and neutral factor. Whilst the main characters in Prince of Persia were portrayed by tanned white actors under the guise of embodying the ethnical characters, rendering their whiteness invisible and a perceived reality of the Persian society thus promoting an ideological discourse. Both films were also structured around the magic and mysticism of the east, without direct representation of its inhabitants, in either speech nor in imagery. The meaning of such representations and constructions of the East in these films can be regarded as a display of power and control. The Orient is usually portrayed as an inferior counter image, however in these film the Orient was instead portrayed as a mirror image of the West with the applied projections of western culture and norms, such as beauty standards and language. The ability to represent someone or something in a certain way is a display of control as such practice undermines the ability of those represented to take part in the narrative. The power to project “cultural representation, knowledge and ideas” (Hall, 1997) are then reserved to the majority which the study of racial representation by Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2016) demonstrated.

The fact that everyone in Prince of Persia had a British accent supports Saids ( 1997) argument that the east cannot be portrayed without the traces of British and French imperialism. Such representational practices not only maintain a hierarchy, it also upholds a discourse of the orient which serves the West and does not tell us much about the orient and its habitants, cultures and norm. The whitewashing practices of these films upholds the idea of whiteness serving as a norm and displays Dyers statement of white people displaying the
world in their image, living up to the standards of humanity in which others fail. (Dyer, 2004) The diversity in representations of whiteness does not equal diversity but upholds the representational inequality relating to non-white characters.

Fairclough (1992) argues that the ownership structure within mass media are of great importance in ensuring that some voices are heard more than others. The policies and practices of major film studios in the classical Hollywood era produced and normalized whiteness on the big screen, a practice which has remained into the contemporary era (Bernandi, 2001). Both selected films were distributed by Disney, a major film studio which has previously portrayed character of color questionably. Approaching the discourse and representations from an institutional context, one might gain an understanding of the institutional practices in which the presented discourses and representations are rooted in. However, the analysis also showed how political and financial reasons also shaped the selected representations. For example, excluding Tibet from the story of the Ancient One to appeal to the Chinese government and its consumers. The wider cultural impact of such representations is the projection of an ethnocentric identity of the areas presented. These three aspects which framed the socio-cultural practice (economic, political and lastly cultural) demonstrates the interdependent relationship between discourses and representations and the political, cultural and economic context in which it was produced.

Nonetheless, the financial arguments for the use of “Whitewashing” cannot suffice any longer as recent films such as Black Panther demonstrates the success in diversity. Breaking down the practices of media intuition which produces, distributes and maintains the usage of “whitewashing” lies not only within its walls but also with the actors, producers and consumers. The casting of the white actor Ed Skrein as a character originally depicted as Japanese in the new Hell Boy franchise raised a social media outrage which prompted him leave the project. Rejecting the cinematic representations of eurocentrism is a call for equality as, the beginning quote states, stories matter, they can either dehumanize or empower. This emphasizes the importance of equal representational and avoiding the single story which whitewashing entails as some stories are rendered invisible and told by others.
6. Limitation and Future Studies

The use of Critical Discourse Analysis provided me with the tools to transparently identify, discuss and lastly present the discourses and representational values found in the selected material. What we can learn from content is how some actors construct representations and it relations to a wider social practice. This approach however limited the paper from studying the audience perspective as one must also consider how consumers of such films may produce different meanings and discourses. The study can therefore be complimented with the use of reception theory to gain an understanding of how the audience own discourses interact with those produced in these films.

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