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Remaking Hollywood

How representation of women and ethnic minorities
has changed between movie remakes and their
originals

Abstract

In this study I will examine whether or not there are any differences in the representation of ethnic minorities and women between Hollywood movies released in the 1990's and remakes of the movies released in the late 2010's. The study is based on the assumption that the numerous political movements for equality in the 2010's, such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite, might have led to a shift in the political climate that would impact the level of representation in the movie industry. The changes in representation will be explored in both a quantitative and a qualitative manner as both the dialogue time and the contents of the movies will be analysed. The analysis will connect the results of the comparisons to both the political movements as well as relevant political theories. The study finds that ethnic minority representation heavily increases in the movie remakes where thematic aspects allow for it. Meanwhile women remain underrepresented in both originals and remakes. Lastly, from a qualitative perspective, the depictions of both women and ethnic minorities is found to be improved in the remakes as harmful stereotypical characterisations and tropes tend to be removed.

Keywords: Hollywood, Representation, Remake, Political Activism, Equality

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1. Introduction

The political climate is constantly changing. When it does it not only impacts the outcome of elections, what subjects take the primary role in political discussion and what policies are instated. It also affects what discussion we partake in, what language we use and what type of entertainment is produced and consumed. In this essay I will focus on how changes in the political climate impact one particular sphere of the entertainment industry: Movies. The political climate has impacted, and been impacted by, the medium of movies for a long time, whether it's Hollywood constructing stories that mirror the cold war in a pro-american manner (e.g. *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Rocky IV* (1985)) (Shaw, 2007, s.266-267), or whether it's activists in Thailand and Myanmar adopting symbolic language from the *The Hunger Games* (2012) in protests against the government (BBC, 2021). This seemingly unlikely pairing is therefore a frequent target for political research, and one that I intend to explore in this thesis.

1.1 (Re)presenting: The Aim of the Thesis

During the 2010's there have been a lot of political movements advocating for equal treatment and opportunity for women and ethnic minorities (Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, #SayHerName, #OscarsSoWhite, the Women's march etc.). Some of these movements will be discussed further in the 'Background' section as they lead me to believe that there might have been a shift in the political climate as more focus is being put on issues of equality.

Furthermore, in the same manner that movies can mirror the political environment in the contents of the movie (eg. movies from the 80's reflecting the cold war) there might also be a possibility that a changing political climate can impact who actually gets to be included on the movie screen as women and ethnic minorities are given more recognition in this new political environment. With the increasing awareness and movements against social injustice, the domination of white men in Hollywood through a historic lens might therefore be challenged by this shift in political climate. This is what I aim to explore in this thesis.

1.2 Why is this political?

Upon reading the introduction to this thesis and what I aim to explore, one might be inclined to ask themselves: “Why is this political?”. Is there really anything inherently political about representation in movies? Although this is a valid question, the answer is a simple yes. First of all, movies are a huge part of the entertainment industry and are consumed by millions of people. Whether or not different groups of people are represented, as well as in what manner they are represented can therefore impact how these groups are viewed both on a societal and individual level. For example, “Whitewashing” and the lack of inclusion of black actors in movies, or the casting of black actors in roles inferior to those played by white people, can have a huge impact on how young individuals construct and perceive body image, as it depicts white skin as the “Default” and reinforces harmful stereotypes respectively (Nelson, 2016, s.6-7). In a similar manner, as our societal behaviour and perceptions are impacted through a process of socialisation, depictions of stereotypical gender roles in media raises concerns for the striving of gender equality (Signorielli, 1990, s.50-51).

In addition there is also a more obvious political aspect of representation in movies for women and ethnic minorities. Being an actor in a Hollywood production is most definitely a high profile job as it is high paying and sometimes even celebrated at prestigious award shows viewed around the world. To therefore exclude certain groups from being represented in Hollywood would add to an already existing problem in America of scarcity of women and ethnic minorities in high paying jobs as well as racial and gender wage gaps (Economic Policy Institute, 2021) (Dickler, 2017).

1.3 Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to investigate whether or not political movements of ethnic minority- and gender equality during the last decade has led to a shift in the political climate in which we see a change in how the groups are represented in the movie industry. I intend to explore this issue both in terms of how much representation women and ethnic minorities get, as well as how they are represented. In order to fulfil this aspiration I have chosen my research question as follows:

Has the level of representation for ethnic minorities and women changed between movies released in the 1990's and their remakes released in the late 2010's, and are there any differences in how these groups are depicted?

I have decided to analyse remade movies and compare them to their original predecessors. I have chosen this approach for a few reasons. The first reason is that it allows me to explore how the representation changes when the story remains roughly the same. It therefore excludes the aspect of 'the story', which might inherently require the inclusion, or exclusion, of certain groups for thematic purposes. For example it might not be fair to compare a movie set in 1400's Britain to a movie set in 1400's Kongo in terms of ethnic minority representation. The second reason is that it allows me to explore whether parts of the original movies that might be problematic in a post-Black Lives Matter post-#MeToo (etc.) - era are being changed or rewritten. Which would not be a progress that could be analysed if I were to be looking at completely different movies. The last reason is that I have not found any studies regarding specifically representation in remakes. This leads me to believe that there might be a blank space for this study to fill in the overall research on the subject, which allows me to make a cumulative contribution to the field of research (Esaiasson et.al, 2012. s.31).

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In the next section, the 'Background', I will go over information required for understanding the scope of my thesis, this will include the historic white male dominance in Hollywood as well as the recent political movements that I suspect might have impacted representation in the movie industry: #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and #OscarsSoWhite. In the 'Theory' section I introduce four highly relevant theories that will be used to analyse the results from my research: Intersectional Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Critical Race Theory and Orientalism. In the 'Method' section I will discuss restrictions and decisions made for my thesis, as well as explain how my research has been carried out. In the 'Results' section I will present the research, which will then be analysed and discussed in the 'Analysis' and

‘Discussion’ sections using relevant parts of the ‘Background’ and ‘Theory’. Finally, I will present that the findings of my thesis suggests that the political movements of the 2010’s have impacted representation, as the remakes tend to have increased ethnic minority representation when thematic aspects call for it and harmful stereotypes and tropes tend to be removed. The thesis also concludes, however, that women continue to be underrepresented in both the original movies and the remakes, making it clear that there still are improvements to be made in the process of *Remaking Hollywood*.

2. Background

2.1 Hollywood - A White Man's World

Hollywood has throughout history been heavily dominated by white men. One movie from Hollywood's early years in particular has been heavily referred to as setting the tone for the movie industry in the 20th century. This is D.W. Griffith's 1915 movie *The Birth of a Nation*. The movie featured heroic depictions of the Ku Klux Klan and included the practice of blackface, painting the bodies of white actors black in an attempt to resemble people of colour. This alongside the inclusion of obvious racial stereotypes of African-Americans, set the precedent that people of colour only could play simple or demeaning roles, which would be a prevailing view in the industry for the following fifty years, leading to a lack of black representation in Hollywood (Giglio, 2010, s.1-3). *The Birth of a Nation* also pictured women in a subordinate and Victorian manner (Malone, 2015, s.10) which might be a contributing factor for women's struggles in the movie industry of being underrepresented and often cast in subordinate roles (Lang, 2015).

This white male dominance has been setting the tone for Hollywood as an entire industry in the 20th century, and in fact we can see that it has been prevalent even in our contemporary landscape of film. All the nominees for Oscar roles in both 2015 and 2016 were white (Bieske et.al, 2023), and a report by Martha M. Laurzen shows that only 7% of movies in 2021 had more female than male characters and that the percentage of female protagonists

remain well below 40% (Laurzen, 2022, s.1-2). However with recent political activism challenging this idea, there might be reasons to suspect a change to this pattern.

2.2 #MeToo - A Rejection of the Patriarchy

Now regarded as one of the biggest feminist movements in recent times, the #MeToo movement took off back in 2017. It's roots goes back way earlier however, to 2006 when Tarana Burke coined the phrase in order to show solidarity within her movement to help and support young women of colour who are survivors of sexual abuse (Sarah Jaffe, 2018. s.80). More than a decade later, in October 2017, the term resurfaced as an astounding number of female celebrities came forward to accuse Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct. The term then spread and became a huge feminist cultural movement when actress Alyssa Milano invited people to share their stories and experiences of sexual harassment with the hashtag #MeToo. (Hillstrom, 2019. s.1-3). This took the movement to the mainstream and became a movement not only against sexual misconduct within the movie industry but against the patriarchal structures that our world is built around as a whole, and was seen as a way of empowering women instead of staying silently oppressed. As Sarah Jaffer puts it in her article "The Collective power of #MeToo":

The movement is not just about Hollywood, just about the worst of the worst, or even just about the workplace. It is a rejection of a core piece of patriarchal power—and the beginnings of imagining what a society without that power looks like. (Sarah Jaffer, 2018. s.81-82)

The movement therefore isn't just an uprising against sexual harassment but has become a cultural sensation that challenges discrimination and inequality towards women as a whole. Because of this, along with the prevalence the movement has had within specifically Hollywood and the movie industry, I believe that #MeToo might have had a big impact on how women are being represented in film, both in a quantitative and qualitative sense.

2.3 Black Lives Matter - A Battle for Human Rights

In February 2012 Trayvon Martin, a 17 year old African-American boy, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a member of the neighbourhood watch, in Sanford, Florida. The perpetrator did not face any punishments and the incident along with the court case became the spark that ignited protests and demonstrations against the racial profiling and dehumanising of African-Americans that is evidently prevalent in the American justice systems. (Garrett Chase, 2018, s.1092-1094) Following the court case, Alicia Garza took to social media with posts such as “Black people. I love you. I love us. Out Lives Matter.” which was later seen by her friend Patricia Cullors who forwarded the message with a direct call to action: “Alicia Garza, myself, and hopefully more black people than we can imagine are embarking on a project. we are calling it #BLACKLIVESMATTER”. Ayo Tometi (formerly Opal Tometi) saw the potential of #BlackLivesMatter and assisted in making social media platforms and spreading the message. This is the start of the social rights movement we know as Black Lives Matter today. (Garrett Chase, 2018, s.1095-1096, 1098)

The movement has gotten new light on multiple occasions as more black Americans have died unjustly by the force of police. Some of the more notable resurgences are the death shootings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014, Freddie Gray's death in police custody in 2015 as well as the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in 2020. (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d.) (Hannah Lindgren, 2022)

The movement has, just like the #MeToo movement expanded from its main issue of police brutality and racial profiling into a bigger movement aimed at equality for black people as a whole. As Ayo Tometi, one of the founders of the movement, said in her article in TIME magazine:

It is about the full recognition of our rights as citizens; and it is a battle for full civil, social, political, legal, economic and cultural rights as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (Lenoir, Tometi, 2015)

2.4 #OscarsSoWhite - The Blinding Truth

Following the reveal of the Oscar nominations of actors in January 2015, there was a lot of discussion on social media including a lot of criticism against the academy's decisions. Out of the twenty actors and actresses nominated, not a single one was a person of colour. There was not any shortage of potential nominees either as one of the biggest movies of the year was the Martin Luther King Jr. biopic *Selma*. This sparked April Reign, a proficient writer and editor, to make a post on twitter that contained the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite. This became a media sensation in 2015 and became an even bigger movement in 2016 as the streak of not including people of colour as Oscar nominees continued. (Bieske et.al, 2023)

Although there still is a long way to go when it comes to reaching an equal representation in the Oscar awards, there has been some improvement following the #OscarsSoWhite movement which might be reasons to stay positive. This year, The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, which has its roots in the University of Southern California (USC), presented their research meant to measure the impact of the #OscarsSoWhite movement. In this research they prove that in the 8 years prior to the movement (2008-2015) only 8% of Oscar Nominees were people from an underrepresented ethnic group, while in the 8 years after the movement (2016-2023) the number had risen to 17% (USC Annenberg, 2023). According to the report, the movement might also have some intersectional claims as the representation of women in the nominations also increased from 21% to 27%.

Because of the cultural impact that "OscarsSoWhite had, as well as its proven effects on the inclusion of underrepresented groups in the nomination process of the Oscars, I believe that it is also heavily possible that it has had effects on the overall representation in the movie industry.

3. Theory

3.1 Intersectional Feminism

Because my thesis focuses on both the representation of women and of ethnic minorities, there is also reason to explore the intersection between these two. For a long time feminists of colour have stated that problems of oppression such as racism and sexism should not be seen as completely separate issues. One prevalent writer on this subject is Audre Lorde who claims that there is a certain academic arrogance in discussing feminism without taking into account the differences between women in a country where problems like racism, sexism and homophobia practically speaking are inseparable (Lorde, 2011/1984, s.245). Both Lorde and other black feminists such as Bell Hooks continue to state that feminism has been dominated by upper-middle class women who struggle with the unfulfilling life of being a housewife, wanting more from life than their mundane life provides. This however is not the struggle of the most vulnerable women, the ones who struggle with financial survival, racism and homophobia (Audre Lorde, 2011/1984, s.247) (Bell Hooks, 2011/1981, 275-277).

3.2 Postcolonial Feminism

Similar to intersectional feminism, a postcolonial approach to feminism also works under the assumption of feminism being dominated by the white upper-middle class but also stresses the importance of the fact that it's dominated by the western world. It therefore takes into account the differences in struggles over national borders, in addition to race and class. Its name of postcolonial (or decolonial) feminism implies the existence of a structural domination from the west. This domination gives western feminism a sort of legitimacy in the western humanitarian discourse, even when they discuss "third world women" in a manner that is both arbitrary and inadequate. Western feminism therefore becomes a part of the imperialistic structure as it portrays the "third world woman" as poor, uneducated, passive, sexually restrained and oppressed in contrast to the western enlightened and educated woman. (Chandra T. Mohanty, 2003, s.34-35, s.38) This is what postcolonial feminism is shedding light on as well as challenging.

3.3 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory was created by a collective of activists and scholars. It builds on civil rights and ethnic studies, while expanding them by introducing aspects such as economics and history to the theories as well as how social conceptions of race impact media and political movements (Delgado, Stefancic, 2023, s.3). It is based on the assumption that racism is a central part of the integral power structures in America which controls the way society functions. People of ethnic minorities are facing injustices in everything from wealth disparity, healthcare and prejudices. (Delgado, Stefancic, 2023, s.8-9, s.12-14). It therefore is a necessary perspective to include when discussing how societal movements and media are impacting each other.

3.4 Orientalism

Orientalism is a term most heavily connected to Edward W. Said and his book titled *Orientalism*. In it he discusses orientalism as an academic field and its overgeneralized nature as the scope of the field covered Indian, Arabic, Chinese, Mesopotamian and countless other cultures and languages, making it more or less a study and fascination of anything Asian. This leads to a huge generalisation of the east which has made “Oriental” synonymous with the exotic, the mysterious and the barbaric (Said, 1978, s.51-52). Said also discusses how the introduction of television, film and other media has led to reinforcement of these oriental stereotypes. Specifically he discusses Arabic stereotyping as he himself has experienced it as an Arab-Palestinian in America. He states that Arabs are painted as barbaric, totalitarian and terroristic as a dichotomy to a democratic Israel and that the cultural stereotyping, racism and political imperialism in America is very persistent against Muslim and Arabic cultures. (Said, 1978, s.26-27)

4. Method

As explained in earlier sections my goal is to compare the level of representation for women and ethnic minorities between remakes of movies and their originals. In this section I will explain how I intend to investigate this problem, what limitations I have chosen and how I define and operationalize certain terms.

4.1 Ethnic Minorities and Women:

First of all I need to address what I refer to as “ethnic minority” and provide a reasonable operational indicator for how to discern ethnicity. Considering Hollywood's history of being heavily dominated by white actors, I will consider any ethnicity that is not white as an ethnic minority, whether it's black, asian, latinx, native or MENA (Middle East & North Africa. This goes in line with other studies of similar character, such as the UCLA-Hollywood Diversity Reports (UCLA, 2021). I must also provide an operational indicator for how to divide the actors into the groups of white or ethnic minority as this is not obviously measurable (Svensson, Teorell, 2007 s.39). Therefore I will consider anyone with at least one biological parent from an ethnic minority group to be of an ethnic minority. The reason that I have decided to limit the study to representation of ethnic minorities and women is partly because of my limited time and resources, and partly because I believe these groups have had the most integral part in the equality movements of the 2010's.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis - A Ticking Clock

The first part of my study is of a quantitative nature and will be carried out as follows. Before viewing the movie, the cast will be divided into four groups depending on what ethnicity and gender the actor of the character has: White men, white women, men of ethnic minorities and women of ethnic minorities. These groups will have a designated stopwatch that will be used to measure the dialogue time of the different groups. Whenever a character talks, the timer of the group that the character's actor fits into will be started and will then be stopped when the

character stops talking. This will be done throughout the movie to provide the total time in which all of the four groups speak.

These measurements will then be converted into percentages in order to show how much of the movie's dialogue and monologue is carried out by what group. This helps us get a view of how much representation each group gets in relation to each other and also eliminates the problematic aspect of the original movie and the remake having different lengths. By comparing the percentages of representation between the original movies and their remakes we can easily see if there has been a change in how much representation the different groups get, which can then be explained by applying the relevant parts of background and theory.

I have decided to focus on the time that characters talk and not on the time that they are visible on screen. This is partly because, in most cases, carrying out dialogue serves as a better indicator for character importance than screen time. Another reason is that if I were to measure the time where characters from the different groups are visible on the screen, I would soon run into problems with how I would go about discerning what group extras in the background fit into as well as how to measure big groups of people varying in ethnicity and gender.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis - The How of Representation

The second part of my study will be a qualitative analysis of the movie which will be structured as a small comparative analysis for each pair of original and remake. The analysis will be covering aspects of how the representation is being carried out, such as what kind of roles are given to what group, how the contents of the movie has been rewritten to fit a new political climate and how the movies interact with the theory and background covered earlier in this thesis. As the movies studied are not necessarily political in nature, this analysis will be focused on specific parts of the stories that are relevant for the scope of this thesis.

In addition to the intrinsic value of the qualitative analysis, it also acts as a sort of safety net for the assumption made by the quantitative analysis. Even if representation in terms of

dialogue time is high, there might for example be trends of female actors or actors of ethnic minorities playing characters that fit into traditional stereotypes for that specific group. If so, it would open discussions of whether or not this could be called “increasing representation” in any positive manner as it would still be used in a derogatory way, which would go against the political movements that I claim may have led to increasing inclusivity.

4.4 Choice of Movies

4.4.1 Defining Remakes

The first distinction to be made in explaining how I chose what movies to analyse is what defines a “Remake” since there are similar forms of movies that I will not be covering. With “Remake” I refer to a movie which is completely based off an earlier movie, and that therefore maintains the same story with only minor tweaks. This is different from let's say a “Reboot” of a film which might maintain certain characters or story elements, but has a different overall story that ignores previous entries of the series (Dimanna, 2022). I will also not be covering sequels as this is a follow up from the original story and not the same story.

4.4.2 Time Frame

The aim of the thesis is to explore whether numerous political movements in the 2010's have led to increasing representation in Hollywood movies. Therefore the pool of remakes which can be chosen will be limited to those released in the late 2010's, more specifically 2017 or later. To limit the possible factors that might impact representation, I have also limited the release date of the original movies to no earlier than 1990. When considering the limitations set in the next paragraph, and the movies chosen, we will see that the movies fit the time frame of remakes being released in the late 2010's and originals being released in the 1990's.

4.4.3 Following the Money

My last methodical choice in how to decide what movies to choose is to follow the Box office income of the movies that fit the time frame, and pick the ones with the highest income. This is because they are the most representative of Hollywood and the movie

industry, they reach most people and they are the movies that bring in the most revenue to the industry. If there actually has been a change in the political landscape, and this change has affected the movie industry and what people want to see on the screen, these would be the movies that would be the most affected as people would pay to see what they want and studios would want to make what the people will pay for.

4.4.4 Animated Movies

As will be seen in the choices of movies, I will be including animated movies even though the actors are not visible on screen. This is not an obvious decision however so I will briefly explain the basis for this choice. Firstly, to disregard animated movies would be to look past a giant part of the movie industry and would not go in line with my previous reasoning of following box office earnings. Secondly, voice actors can be just as affected by increased representation as on-screen actors. Lastly, by including animated movies I can see if there is a difference in how representation changes between animated movies and live action movies, which might lead to interesting findings.

4.4.5 Chosen Movies

Because of my limitations of time and resources, I have narrowed down my study to four sets of originals and remakes. Following the limitations and grounds for decisions explained above, these are the four movie sets that will be included in the study:

- *Aladdin* (1992, 2016)
- *The Lion King* (1994, 2019)
- *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017)
- *IT* (1990) - The remake of which is divided in to a part 1 (2017) and a part 2 (2019)

5. Results

In this section I will present the results that were found from measuring the amount of time each group speaks. This will be presented one movie at a time, and will be analysed and discussed in the following sections.

5.1 *Aladdin* (1992, 2019)

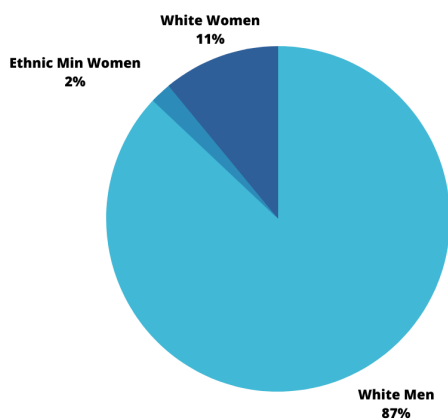
Aladdin (1992) - Total time: 63,5 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	55:06 - 55 min	07:07 - 7 min	00:00 - 0 min	1:25 - 1,5 min
Percentage:	87%	11%	0%	2%

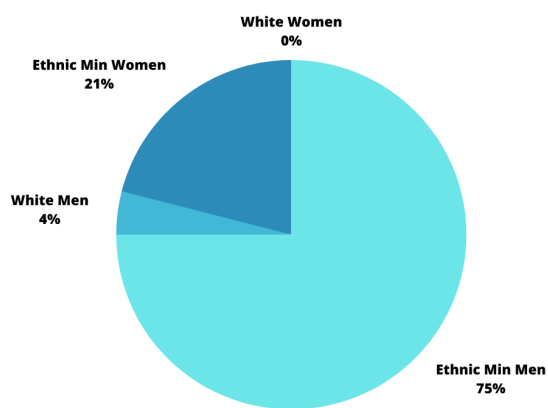
Aladdin (2019) - Total time: 74 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	2:49 - 3 min	00:03 - 0 min	55:18 - 55,5 min	15:24 - 15,5 min
Percentage:	4%	0%	75%	21%

Aladdin (1992 & 2019) - Side by side comparison:



1992



2019

5.2 The Lion King (1994, 2019)

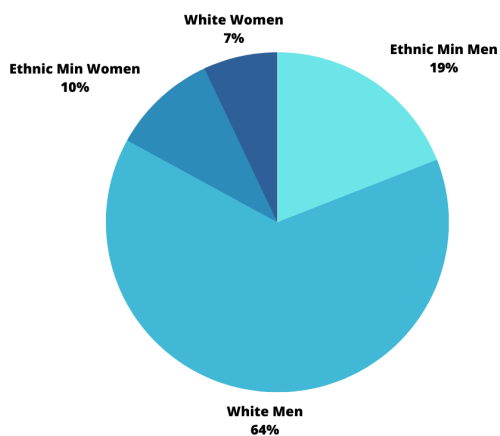
The Lion King (1994) - Total time: 57 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	36:32 - 36,5 min	03:57 - 4 min	11:05 - 11 min	5:27 - 5,5 min
Percentage:	64%	7%	19%	10%

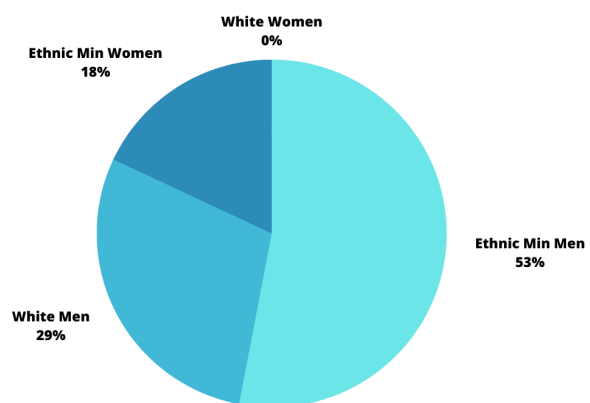
The Lion King (2019) - Total time: 64 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	18:38 - 18,5 min	00:07 - 0 min	34:01 - 34 min	11:28 - 11,5 min
Percentage:	29%	0%	53%	18%

The Lion King (1994 & 2019) - Side by side comparison:



1994



2019

5.3 *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017)

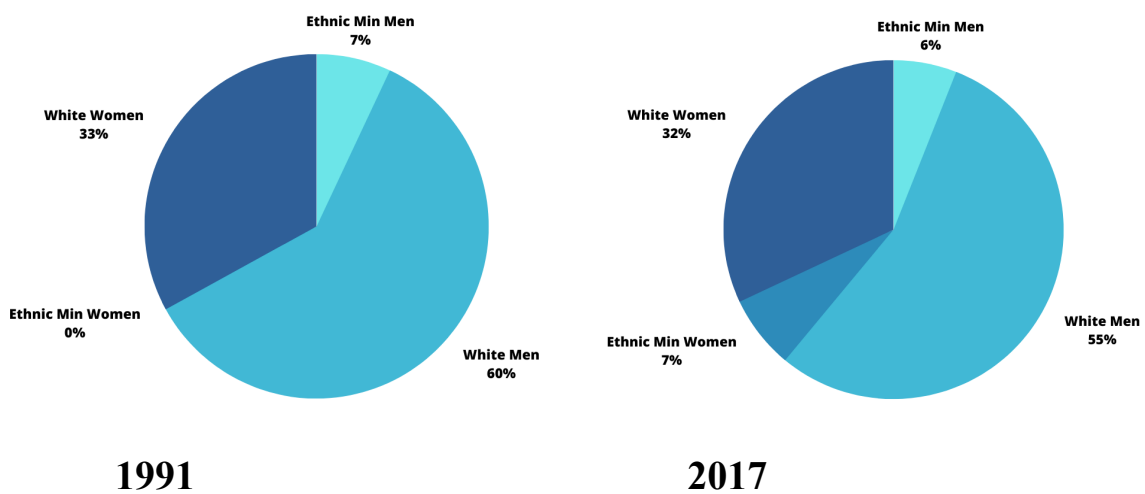
Beauty and the beast (1991) - Total time: 53 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	31:53 - 32 min	17:32 - 17,5 min	03:21 - 3,5 min	00:00 - 0 min
Percentage:	60%	33%	7%	0%

Beauty and the beast (2017) - Total time: 68,5 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	37:39 - 37,5 min	22:05 - 22 min	04:00 - 4 min	05:03 - 5 min
Percentage:	55%	32%	6%	7%

Beauty and the beast (1991 & 2017) - Side by side comparison:



5.4 IT (1990, 2017+2019)

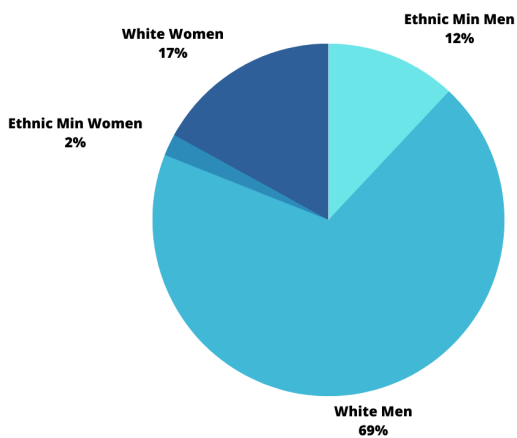
IT (1990) - Total time: 103,5 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	1:11:39 -71,5 min	17:04 - 17 min	12:29 - 12,5 min	02:27 - 2,5 min
Percentage:	69%	17%	12%	2%

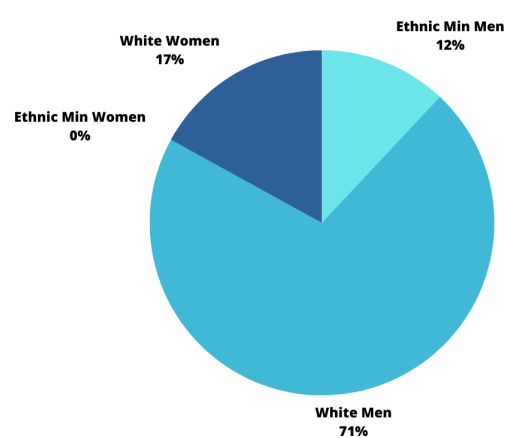
IT chapter 1 (2017) + IT chapter 2 (2019) - Total time: 137 min

Group:	White Men	White Women	Ethnic minority Men	Ethnic minority Women
Dialogue Time:	97,5 min	23,5 min	16 min	00:08 - 0 min
Percentage:	71%	17%	12%	0%

IT (1990 & 2017 + 2019) - Side by side comparison:



1990



2017+2019

6. Analysis

In this section we will analyse the results found in the last section in order to explore what it means and how we should view it, as well as discuss how it relates to relevant parts of the background and theory section. We will also do a comparative qualitative analysis for each movie remake to see how the contents of the movie have changed in terms of how they represent ethnic minorities and women.

6.1 Quantitative Analysis of Ethnic Minority Representation

The first immediate finding in our results is the overwhelming overrepresentation of white people in the original versions of the movies. 98% of the dialogue in *Aladdin* (1992) is carried out by white people, 71% in *The Lion King* (1994), 93% in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and 86% in *IT* (1990). In each case it is an overwhelming majority, which can possibly be explained by the huge dominance that white people have had in Hollywood in a historic sense, and by the fact that the recent movements of equality for ethnic minorities discussed in the background section, such as BLM and #OscarsSoWhite, has yet not occurred. We might also look at this phenomenon from the perspective of Critical Race Theory. By looking at the structural racism and all the ways in which it is embedded within western society and interacts with social life. We can see how it is possible that prejudices might lead casting directors to cast white people over people of colour disregarding the differences in qualifications, in the same way that employers might refuse to hire a black p.H.D. in favour of a white high school dropout (Delgado, Stefancic, 2023. s.9).

In the remakes of the movies however, we see great improvement in representation of ethnic minorities in particularly two of the movies: *The Lion King* (2019) and *Aladdin* (2019). In these movies, ethnic minorities went from being heavily underrepresented to receiving an overwhelming majority of the dialogue. It is not hard to realise why these movies might stand out from the rest in terms of ethnic minority representation. *The Lion King* and *Aladdin* are set in undefined parts of Africa and in a made-up Arabic country respectively, neither of which are white-dominated in a historic sense. To therefore not include ethnic minorities in

the casting makes little sense both thematically as well as politically considering the recent movements for equality. This is the case more so in *Aladdin* as the characters in *The Lion King* are animals, but still the setting of both movies call for ethnic minority inclusion.

In June 2020, Jenny Slate, a white voice actor stepped down from her role of the biracial character “Missy” on the show *Big Mouth* following the Black Lives Matter protests, which she noted as the reason for her action (Slate, 2020). April Reign, the creator of #OscarsSoWhite, also spoke about how white people should not be cast in ethnic minority roles in an interview with NPR (Hagan, Mullins, 2020). It is therefore safe to say that these movements have impacted the casting of voice actors, and they might also be a part of the explanation as to why we see the increase of ethnic minority representation in *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*.

The setting of *Beauty and the Beast* is mid 1700’s France and the setting of *IT* is a fictional town in Maine called Derry, which is depicted as having problems with racism. These settings do not call for ethnic minority inclusion in the same manner, which might explain why we don’t actually see a staggering amount of change in ethnic minority representation in these movies. In *Beauty and the Beast* ethnic minority representation only increased from 7% to 13% and in *IT* it even decreased from 14% to 12%.

6.2 Quantitative Analysis of Female Representation

When we look at the numbers for the representation of women in our studied movies, we might first notice that the total time in which female characters carry out dialogue has gone up between every movie original and their later remake. However when we look at the percentages of the total dialogue that is made up of female characters in comparison to male, we see that the percentages are quite stagnant. This is because the total dialogue time is higher in each remake compared to the original, so even if women speak more, they still maintain somewhat the same percentages. The most telling example of this is the movie *IT*, in which the dialogue time of female characters increased with 20% between the original and

the remake, but the percentage of the total dialogue time carried out by women decreased from 19% to 17%.

The reason that these percentages have not gone up might be explained by the fact that female roles tend to be forced into supporting roles to the male characters, made important through their kids, love interests or through how they in other ways interact with male characters (Collins, 2011, s. 290-292) (Lang, 2015). If this is the case in our movies, that would explain why male characters also get more dialogue time as they are the ones that the expanding female roles empower, which makes the percentages stagnant. And in fact this is very relevant in most of our movies. In *The Lion King* the female roles are either mothers or the love interest of the main characters, in *IT* the main female character Beverly is the love interest of multiple main characters and most of the other smaller female roles are either mothers or love interests of the male main characters. In *Beauty and the Beast* most of the minor female roles are love interests to male characters, and even the main story of the protagonist Belle includes a romance with a male character. Lastly the main female characters in *Aladdin* are love interests to the main male characters. So although the female characters seemingly get more recognition in the remakes as the dialogue time goes up, the fact still remains that the male characters dominate the total time spoken and the percentages remain somewhat stagnant.

6.3 *Aladdin* - Qualitative Analysis

The original 1992 version of *Aladdin* is full of politically problematic instances. Already after the two first musical numbers there are an overwhelming amount of orientalist stereotypical depictions of Arab countries with lines such as “It’s barbaric, but hey it’s home!”, “Welcome to Agrabah, city of mystery, of enchantment.” and “Stop thief! I’ll have your hand for a trophy!” alongside stereotypic depictions of Arabs as pushy sale merchants, sword swallows, snake charmers, walking on hot coal, relaxing on nail mats and more. All of these are stereotypical depictions in line with Edward W. Said's theory of the “Orient” becoming overgeneralized and synonymous with the mysterious, exotic and barbaric (Said, 1978, s.27, s.51-52). All of these stereotypes are also used for comedic effect in extreme

ways as the characters all hurt themselves or are made fun of by other means. As the characters are all played by white voice actors, this opens up the discussion of whether this can be seen as a sort of “Digital Blackface”. The term has recently been brought up in the mainstream as GIFs of black people are being circled for comedic effect by white people, which can be seen as co-opting ethnic minorities cultures for comedic effect (Blake, 2023). This is exactly what *Aladdin* takes part in as animation of people from ethnic minority cultures are used for comedic purposes by a white-dominated cast.

Another aspect of the 1992 movie that should be brought up is that it is heavily problematic from the perspective of postcolonial feminism. The main female character in the movie, the princess “Jasmine”, is stuck in her castle and forced to meet princes who are attempting to impress her, as she has to marry a prince according to the laws of Agrabah. Towards the end of the movie she also becomes a slave to the evil sorcerer “Jafar”, being chained in light clothing and forced to serve him food. The only time she seems free is when she is “saved” by the male hero of the story “Aladdin”, to whom she is a love interest. Throughout the movie she is therefore depicted as passive, oppressed, sexualised and in need of saving. This is exactly the type of depictions that postcolonial feminists express discontent with as they have been created from the lens of an imperialising western society in an arbitrary and inadequate manner (Chandra T. Mohanty, 2003, s. 34-35, s.38).

However the issues that I found in my analysis of the 1992 movie have for the most part been resolved in the 2019 remake. The most obvious of these improvements is the fact that representation of ethnic minorities has increased to an incredible degree as the dialogue has gone from being carried out by 98% white people and 2% ethnic minorities to 4% white people and 96% ethnic minorities. This is almost a complete opposite of the white dominated 1992 movie, which makes sense as the remake is live action and would require white people to play characters of ethnic minorities, which would be highly controversial in the wake of movements such as Black Lives Matter and #OscarsSoWhite.

The second issue that is resolved is that of the oriental stereotypes. The pushy merchant is removed from the script, and the stereotypes of people on the street walking on coal, snake charming, sleeping on nail mats etc. are also removed. In addition to this, the problematic

vocabulary is for the most part either written out or exchanged, for example the lyric “It’s barbaric but hey it’s home!” has been changed to: “It’s chaotic but hey it’s home!”. The removal of racist depictions of “the Orient” alongside the increased representation fixes the problem of digital blackface entirely and makes the movie much less politically problematic.

The third issue that is resolved is the depiction of “third world women” as oppressed and passive. *Aladdin* was not only the movie that had the biggest increase in the representation of ethnic minorities, it was also the movie with the biggest increase of female representation as the number went up from 13% to 21%. Even though the number is still small in comparison to the male roles, it is a significant increase. The way in which the increased representation is handled is also significant as in the remake Jasmine becomes a more detailed character with her own story arc. We see her struggle with wanting to become a sultan and help her people but constantly being shut down by the men and the patriarchal structures that deny her this right. She then performs an entire song about female liberation, standing up to the patriarchy and not staying silent (which addresses her struggles in the original movie which was not covered in detail). In the end we see her story arc complete as she becomes sultan and able to care for her people (in contrast to the original, in which Aladdin becomes sultan). This resolves a lot of the issues the movie had from a postcolonial feminist viewpoint as she is no longer depicted as oppressed and in need of saving, but rather as confident and self-sufficient.

As much compliments as I give the remake however, it is far from perfect. The only new major female character introduced is there for the sake of being a love interest to the already existing male character of the genie, and some elements of depicting Agrabah as mystic and other stereotypical depictions remain. Still, we see clear improvements between the 1992 original version of the movie and the 2019 remake.

6.4 *The Lion King* - Qualitative Analysis

Despite the fact that the movie is set in Africa, the voice acting cast in the original 1994 version of the movie *The Lion King* is dominated by white people. Of the total dialogue time, 71% is carried out by white people and only 29% by ethnic minorities. Furthermore only six

characters are voiced by ethnic minorities throughout the movie: Sarabi, Mufasa, Young Nalai, Rafiki, Shenzi and Banzai. Of these, only three have prominent roles throughout the entire runtime of the movie, as Sarabi only plays a very minor role, Mufasa dies, and young Nala grows up. What we have left then are three prominent roles played by ethnic minorities, which as we will see all raises some issues regarding racial stereotyping.

In her text *Animated Movies and Racial Associations* Kayla Wiltfong addresses the problem of animals depicting humans through an analysis of the movie *Sing* in which the character “Johnny” and his family reinforces two harmful stereotypes of black people: as apes and as criminals (Wiltfong, 2017 s.111-113). It might seem out of left field to bring up another movie when discussing *The Lion King* (1994), but the movies are facing similar issues. One of the characters played by ethnic minorities is Rafiki, a baboon who seems to be a blatant stereotypical reflection of how the western world might picture African culture. He is spiritual, mysterious, and primitive, speaking a made up language meant to imitate tribal languages. Add to this the fact that it is one of the only roles played by an African American, and the fact that it is a literal ape portrayed on screen. It is not hard to see why this depiction is problematic to say the least. The other two major characters played by ethnic minorities are the hyenas Shenzi and Banzai who fall into the harmful stereotype of black people as criminals. The hyenas are the subjects of Scar, a lion who is portrayed as evil and cunning with a white British voice actor, and contrast him by being displayed as stupid and less competent while being played by black voice actors who use a lot of slang in their speech. This dynamic paints them as dumb criminals whilst still being as evil as Scar. Therefore this movie falls into the exact same pitfalls that Wiltfong discusses about the movie *Sing*, reinforcing the incredibly harmful stereotypes of black people as primitive apes and dangerous criminals (Wiltfong, 2017, s. 111).

While some of the issues discussed above still remain in the 2019 remake, there are also some big improvements such as the hyena characters being completely rewritten and Rafiki speaking Xhosa, an official south african language (Schiller, 2019). The issues also gets less problematic by the fact that the representation of ethnic minorities is much more diverse across the entire cast as the dialogue time for ethnic minorities went from 29% of the total to 71%. This means that main roles such as Simba, Scar and adult Nala are played by ethnic

minorities and not only characters that are not present throughout the entire movie or that fit a specific stereotype. Alongside this progression the female characters also became somewhat more detailed in the remake, being more confrontational against the patriarch of Scar as well as having a bigger part in the end fight against the hyenas. However this is overshadowed by the fact that the quantitative representation of women has remained stagnant between the movies as they carry out 17% of the dialogue in the original from 1994 and 18% in the 2019 remake. In total we can see that the remake of *The Lion King* is a success in terms of how and to what degree ethnic minorities are represented, but remains heavily dominated by male characters.

6.5 *Beauty and the Beast* - Qualitative Analysis

In the 1991 version of *Beauty and the Beast* we get introduced to the main character Belle and her struggles of not being like the others in the small village where she lives in the opening musical number titled “Belle”. In the reprise, Belle also expresses that she does not want to marry Gaston, who she calls boorish and brainless, and become “his little wife” and states that she “want much more than this provincial life”. This is a perfect example of the type of struggles that has been prevalent in western feminism but that has been heavily criticised from an intersectional perspective by the likes of Audre Lorde and Bell Hooks for only relating to white upper-middle class women (Audre Lorde, 2011/1984, s.247) (Bell Hooks, 2011/1981, s.275-277). Alongside this critique, there are also no women of ethnic minorities represented in the movie whatsoever.

In the 2017 remake of the film, Belle's expressed struggles in the opening number and reprise remains the same but are covered in more detail than in the original, for example in a scene where she teaches another young girl to read causing other villagers to react with “Isn't one enough?” and “We have to do something”. There are also some women of ethnic minorities included in the casting, the two main ones being “Madame Garderobe”, the employed opera singer of the castle who was cursed into a wardrobe, and “Plumette”, an employee of the castle cursed into a feather duster. However, while Belle's struggles are covered thoroughly and as she marries a prince at the end of movie, making her a high class princess, the

struggles of the lower class employees of colour are still not brought up in the slightest. This still makes the movie vulnerable to the critique of intersectional feminists, even with the remake, as powerful statements like the following from Audre Lorde are very applicable to the film:

If white american feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism? (Lorde, 2011/1984, s.247)

In the musical number “Belle” we also get a view of the village and the other villagers. In the 1991 version these are all white, however in the 2017 version there are people of colour as well, roaming around as middle class civilians as well as one character with a few lines who is a librarian. However in the 18th century France this would definitely not be the case as this was before the full scale colonisation of Africa had even begun, and at this time the ports in Africa that France had access to were mainly used for slave trade (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d.). To see French-African people in the middle class roaming around in a small village is therefore not realistic thematically in the time period and geographic setting. Whether or not this is supposed to be seen as an improvement in representation then opens up a discussion about what is called “colourblind casting”.

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting*, Kristen J. Warner discusses the issue from her perspective of a black woman. She states that although she is happy to see people with similar looks as her on the screen, she also doesn't want these characters to be deprived of socioeconomic and historic context as the relatability comes from the realness and empathetic connections, not from similarities in looks. Therefore she feels like these characters are being forced into the normative value of whiteness and therefore does not provide any meaningful representation (Warner, 2015, s.6-7). If you view the casting from the perspective of who gets roles in Hollywood however, this might still be considered an improvement in terms of inclusion. Whether or not the 2019 remake of *Beauty and the Beast*

improves on the subject of representation is therefore up for debate, as the quantitative increase of dialogue time might be problematised by the way in which it's carried out.

6.6 *IT* - Qualitative Analysis

Comparing the percentages of what groups carry out the dialogue in the 1990 original version of *IT* and the 2017 + 2019 two part remake leads us to the simple conclusion that not much has happened. The percentages between the original and remake are almost identical as the only changes are the dialogue of white men going from 69% of the total dialogue to 71% and ethnic minority women going from 2% to 0%. Even though many scenes are changed or added in the remake, making much of the horror elements different, the main story also remains the same for the most part. Therefore there are not many overarching differences to discuss in this movie, however there are two key differences regarding representing ethnic minorities and women that I would like to discuss.

The movie remake, specifically the part 2 released in 2019, avoided one stereotypical trope of the horror genre - the black guy dying. In a study examining almost a thousand horror movies, it was found that about 45% of the over 1500 black characters died and was therefore excluded for the rest of the movie, causing a problem from the viewpoint of adequate representation (Coleman, Harris, 2023, s.8-9). The black character Mike Hanlon does not die in the original version of *IT*, but he does get attacked, leading him to be hospitalised for the rest of the movie until the very last scene. This might seem like a completely separate issue, however from the perspective of representation this becomes equally problematic as he is excluded from a big part of the movie including the important climax of the end fight. In the 2019 remake however he is not only a part of the entire movie, but also plays an integral role throughout the movie and especially in the climax. This then avoids an issue of stereotypical tendencies in the horror genre that the 1990 original does not.

While the 2019 part 2 of the remake rewrites the story to avoid a problematic stereotypical movie trope, the 2017 part 1 of the remake does the opposite. The group of main characters in the movie, who call themselves "The Losers Club", consists of six boys and one girl. The girl

Beverly is somewhat problematic in both movies as she is depicted as the love interest of multiple of the boys, which furthers the Hollywood tendency to have female characters be important only in relation to male characters, especially as mothers or love interests (Lang, 2015). Other than this however, the 2017 part 1 remake rewrites the story of the 1990 original to make Beverly the first and only one to be captured by the evil being Pennywise in the movie. This makes it so the group of six boys need to work together to save the one and only girl of the group who is passive and helpless. This is a variation of the “Save The Princess” narrative that was prevalent in everything from early Disney movies to classical video games. This trope is heavily problematic as it reinforces the stereotypic gender roles of the male saviour and the woman needing to be saved (Beaubien, 2017. s.43, 47). The story of *IT* therefore has two major changes in terms of how ethnic minorities and women are represented, which seems to take one step forward and one step backwards in the strive for equality. The main takeaway from the analysis however is the fact that the representation remains almost identical between the two renditions.

7. Discussion

Through establishing the results of the study and analysing them, I have found quite a few general findings that I would like to discuss in this section. Because of my limited time and resources the points of analysis were quite few, as I was only able to cover four instances of movies being remade. This makes it hard to generalise these findings and establish them as truths throughout the entire movie industry as more studies of this sort would have to be made. However, within the scope of this thesis I want to summarise and share the biggest takeaways from the study that may be seen as a cumulative contribution to the study of representation in movies.

7.1 Thematic Correction for Ethnic Minorities

The first major finding in this thesis is that when looking at the movies that has been remade in a post- Black Lives, Matter and #OscarsSoWhite society, the biggest changes of

representation of ethnic minorities seems to happen as a form of thematic correction and not as a rewriting of the story. We see this by comparing the changes of representation between the remakes and originals in *The Lion King* and *Aladdin* to the changes of representation in *Beauty and the Beast* and *IT*. The increasing level of ethnic minority representation is way more drastic in the cases of *The Lion King* and *Aladdin* as they are set in thematic settings where it is more appropriate for the sake of validity to increase the level of ethnic minority representation, instead of retaining the white dominated cast that the original versions of the movies have. The fact that the original casts of the movies were dominated by white actors was shown to have a strong possibility of originating from the historic white dominance of Hollywood, while the increased ethnic minority representation in the remakes is seemingly related to the movements of Black Lives Matter and #OscarsSoWhite as both voice actors and proficient writers has referenced these movements while advocating for ethnic minority representation in voice acting. *Beauty and the Beast* and *IT* however are set in environments that do not need an increase in the representation of ethnic minorities for thematic purposes, and in fact increasing it might actually be historically inaccurate, which therefore could harm the validity and open up discussions of “Colourblind casting”. Because of this we don’t see nearly as big of a change in terms of ethnic minority representation in these movies as the story and environment remains the same between originals and remakes.

7.2 Stagnant Female Representation

The second finding is that while the increase of ethnic minority representation happens without rewriting the story, by recasting roles and correcting the thematic errors that the originals made with casting, increasing female representation does not happen as organically. No characters that were originally played by men were recast to be played by women (as was the case with white actors being switched out for actors of ethnic minorities), and the thematic environments do not necessarily call for increasing representation of women (even though it would not be harmful either as the cast of all movies are heavily male dominated). In order to reach a more equal representation of women then, what seems to be needed is rewritings of the story. The movie with the biggest increase in female representation between original and remake was the movie *Aladdin*. In order to accomplish this, the movie remake

rewrote the story to include a new major female character named Dalia, as well as rewrote the story arc of the existing major female character Jasmine, resulting in the characters dialogue time expanding and even getting a new song. As remakes usually retain the original story however, and as there seems to be an unwillingness of recasting male characters as women, the finding of this thesis is that the quantitative representation of women tends to be quite stagnant between original movies and their remakes, despite movements such as #MeToo.

7.3 Removal of Stereotypes

The third finding is regarding the qualitative analysis of the thesis. The original movies contain various stereotypical tropes and depictions that would be regarded as heavily problematic in our political climate today. In line with my assumption that the shift in political climate after movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite has led to a change in how women and ethnic minorities are represented in Hollywood, we see these stereotypical tropes and depictions being removed in the movie remakes to a high degree. Some examples of this is racial stereotypes being removed from characters in *The Lion King* (2019) and Princess Jasmine no longer being passive and oppressed in *Aladdin* (2019). These changes go in line with the political movements and also makes the movies less vulnerable to criticism from the perspectives of political theories such as Postcolonial Feminism and Orientalism. The remakes are not perfect however as they still contain problematic instances of tropes such as “Save The Princess” as well as being open to critique from theories such as intersectional feminism, leading us to the conclusion that there still is a long way to go in the striving for equality in Hollywood.

8. Conclusion: Reflections and Findings

If I had been given the opportunity of remaking this thesis, or if I would have had more time and resources, I would have wanted to analyse more instances of remakes spanning different genres and studios. This would have given me a greater opportunity to explore how widespread changes in representation in Hollywood are as well as how they differ between

genres and studios. I also would have wanted to explore how the representation of women and ethnic minorities has been impacted behind the curtains, as writers and directors also could be impacted by the effects of the political movements in the 2010's.

Even if this thesis has been restricted due to these circumstances, there have still been some clear conclusions from the research. I have found that the shift in the political climate brought forth by social and political movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite has in fact led to changes in representation. The quantitative representation of ethnic minorities has risen tremendously in the movies where inclusion would be thematically accurate, although it remains somewhat stagnant when it is not. In the case of women, the quantitative representation did not see any staggering increases which leaves women as continuously underrepresented in male dominated stories. However, in the qualitative analysis of the movies we find that there has been tremendous change in terms of removing harmful stereotypes and tropes. So even though there is a long way to go, this thesis has concluded that with the help of contemporary political movements for equality, we are well on our way on the journey of *Remaking Hollywood*.

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