Stereotyping and Othering of Non-White Characters in "Harry Potter" Movies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the way the non-white characters, such as Black and Asian, are portrayed in *Harry Potter* movies. The non-white people are put in the group of unimportant characters. Their characters seem to be portrayed differently compared to the white characters in term of their characterizations. Using film language theory, such as body language and dialogue, I find there are Stereotyping and Othering towards the non-white characters. I analyze the Stereotyping toward non-white characters such as Cho Chang and Kingsley Shacklebolt as the Asian and Black character using the gestures, facial expression, costumes, and dialogues. I also analyze the Othering towards non-white characters such as Centaurs and Dre Head as the non-human characters using the appearance, accents, and costume. Also, the Yule Ball costume for Cho Chang and Patil twins also shows exoticism because of the races of the characters.

Keywords: Racism, Stereotyping, Othering, Representation, Fantasy Fiction

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about the most popular genre for films, fantasy fiction would be one of the most popular nowadays. People enjoy the story full of imagination, in other words, not based on facts or history. Fantasy fiction genre is all about the "world-building" which means the process of constructing an imaginary world, sometimes would be associated as making the whole fictional universe. As the settings, characters and story of fantasy fiction are not based on real life. The stories of wizards, elves, dragons, and superheroes are always fun to read because once in a while people need to escape their reality to this world full of magic and dreams.

One of the most famous works that become a legend in popular literature is the *Harry Potter Series* by J.K Rowling. The fantasy story about Harry Potter and his magical world was initially targeted for people aged nine to eleven, but a lot of fans also came from among the adults, which makes the series become very well known. The adventure of Harry Potter and his friends, Ronald Weasley, and Hermione Granger, has been divided into 7 books and adapted into 8 films in total. The series ended in 2011 with the eighth film, *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows-Part 2* (Harry Potter film breaks UK box office records, 2011).

Harry Potter and Voldemort are represented as the most powerful characters in the series. Each of them has their own important adherents. Harry Potter's followers are called "Dumbledore's Army" and "The Order of Phoenix", which consist of students and wizards who are loyal followers of Hogwarts' former headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. The members of the organizations are mostly Harry Potter's friends. The most famous ones are Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood, Severus Snape and Sirius Black who are the main characters besides Harry Potter. But there are also minor characters that are mentioned as the members, which are Parvati and Padma Patil, Dean Thomas, Cho Chang, and Kingsley Shacklebolt. Interestingly, the non-white characters are included in the non-important character group. The characters that are mentioned before were not so popular in the series because they do not have such an important role in the series that can actually change the storyline.

From the examples that I have mentioned about the characters in the *Harry Potter* movies, the role of non-white characters is represented as the insignificant. It looks like they are put into the story just to show that there is diversity and multiracial characters such as Blacks and Asians in Hogwarts. The media seems to accept the whiteness as the norm in relation to the issue of race. In an article written by Sarah Shoker, PhD Candidate of Contract and Sessional Faculty Department of

Political Science McMaster University, she mentioned that, "Hogwarts plays host to a variety of people of color (The Indian Patil Sisters, Cho Chang, Dean Thomas, Blaise Zabini, Kingsley Shackebolt) but they are, in a sense, invisible. Their races are so invisible that they become the minor roles." (Shoker, 2013).

Apart for having minor roles, the non-white characters are being given Stereotypes and Othering to show that they are different compared to the white characters. The Asian and Black characters are portrayed in different way in term of their act and appearance. Merriam-Webster Dictionary define stereotype as a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). For example, stereotypes for Asians include smart and polite. In the movie, Cho Chang as the Asian woman is put in *Ravenclaw,* which is the house for smart people. It meets the expectation that Asians must be smart by putting Cho Chang in the house of smart people. The Othering in the movies is shown by the role of non-white characters as 'the other'. Othering is a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities. Dimensions of Othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone.

The non-white characters are pictured as the adherents compared to the white characters in many ways. It can be shown by how the non-white characters have minor representation and pictured as different compared to the white characters. It is interesting to me how the non-white characters are portrayed in the series.

In this analysis, I want to know how the non-white characters are portrayed in *Harry Potter* movies. I want to show that the non-white characters are portrayed differently by being given Stereotypes and Othering.

Harry Potter's wizarding world created by J.K Rowling has many characters that are from different races and backgrounds. The characters in *Harry Potter* are multicultural, such as Whites, Blacks, and Asians. As J.K Rowling stated, *Harry Potter* movies are "very British" in a number of interviews and we can see that Hogwarts society represents British culture in a multicultural and multiracial way, but numbers of critics come from the media in case of racial issue. The racial issues come from the main story in the books about the battle of race between the purity of wizards' race based on their bloodline. This study, however, is focused on the racial issues based on the films. The analysis focus on the portrayal of non-white characters in the screen and how they are portrayed. By looking at the visual language in *Harry Potter* films, and in popular films in general, we can be more aware of the existence of racism in the way characters are displayed.

The theory that I am going to use is Stereotyping and Othering theory. I also use the film language theory for the working theory. Stereotyping is the process constructing misleading representations of a minority racial group by defining members of the group by a small number of characteristics. By making the judgments about the worth, taste and morality of another culture, we can give influence to our attitude behaviors and actions toward the member of a certain culture. According to Lippman, Stereotypes are individual attitudes so strongly inter conditioned by collective contacts that they become highly standardized and uniform within the group. Lippman also added, "we do not first see and then define, we first define and then see. In the great blooming and budging confusion of the outer world, we pick out what our culture has already defined for us." (Deeksha, n.d). One effect of Stereotype is to separate 'us' from 'them'. Othering means creating a Stereotype of a group as being fundamentally different, dangerous and even subhuman (Stereotyping and Othering, 2017). When we see people from another group from different culture, race, background, religion, or profession, we might see them as 'the others'. Othering has this negative connotation since it leads to marginalizing certain groups. The other way media can represent one certain group is through a process of exoticism. Exoticism refers to the ideological circulation and consumption of images of foreign lands that romanticize or mystify other cultures. Exoticism is considered racist because it is pointing out differences of races in such an offensive way. Exotic is not a compliment. It is an etherizing mechanism reserved for the foreign, strange, and unfamiliar (Ziard, 2014). It happens with people of color because they labeled as different than the white people since white is considered as the 'neutral race'.

The appearances of white people have been labeled as boring or bland. Therefore, any other group which outside the white group is considered as sensual, exotic or labeled as "the other". In Bell Hooks' "*Eating The Others*", she compares 'the other' as seasoning to the white people's culture to enhance their so-called plain lives:

> "Cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commoditized and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate- that 'the other' will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten" (pg 39). -Bell Hooks

White people believe experiencing the other will give 'flavor' in their lives. It will fulfill the fantasy and sensual desire apart from the dominance of white culture. Non-white people are often pictured as primitive, unintelligent, or animalistic. Therefore, exoticism positions non-white groups as socially and cognitively inferior to white, 'civilized' society.

The film language theory will help me to analyse the films. Body language is a tool formed in fiction film and television series, which is used to convey meaning in a narrative context (Hojbjerg, 2014). Body language speaks more than words in the movie industry. The concept of body language is a non-verbal communication dealing with all bodily expressions. Facial expression in the movie shows the emotion of the character. A simple smile can be meant anything such as happy or sad. A gesture is an activity, a product of energy and motion (Chare & Watkins, 2015). Gesture occurs as a result of particular movement from the face. Appearance includes the makeup and costume. Appearance determines the image the audience forms of the characters. Apart from the non-verbal language, films have its verbal language such as dialogue. Dialogue can push the story forward and reveal something about a character.

I will use this theory to show the Stereotypes of Asian and Black characters in *Harry Potter* movies, such as Cho Chang and Kingsley Shacklebolt in how they are portrayed by showing the film language, such as body language and dialogue. Also, I will use the theory of Othering to show how the non-white characters such as Centaurs, Dre heads, Cho Chang and Patil twins are seen as different in term of their representation in the movie shown by the film language.

STEREOTYPING AND OTHERING OF NON-WHITE CHARACTERS IN *HARRY POTTER* MOVIES

Racial stereotypes are constructed beliefs that all people in the certain race share given characteristics. Apart from having minor roles in the movies, the non-white characters are given special 'image' compared to the white characters to show that they are different. Some of them are even pictured as negligible compared to the white characters.

In this part of analysis, I will explain how the non-white people, such as Asians and Blacks are being given Stereotypes and Othering using the film language as the working theory. The film language theory will help me to see how the non-white people are represented in the screen based on the body language and dialogues.

2.1 Stereotyping Non-white Characters in *Harry Potter* Movies

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2.1.1 Stereotypes of Asian Character (Cho Chang)

One of the most popular Asian characters in *Harry Potter* movies is Cho Chang. She has the feature of East Asian woman with oriental face and long black hair. She has a Chinese name, which means she is a Chinese woman. She is also known for being Harry's love interest in the fifth movie, *Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix*. She is the only visible East Asian woman in the series,

which also makes her stands out more than any other characters. There are 2 (two) kinds of Stereotype of Asian woman that are shown in the movie for Cho Chang, which are polite (well mannered) and child-like. The Stereotypes will be shown through the film language aspects such as dialogue and body language. The body language analysis will include facial expression, gesture and costume.

2.1.1.1 Cho Chang's Stereotype as The Polite Asian

First of all, Cho Chang is always pictured as polite or well-mannered woman. Her dialogues always show she respects everyone by saying "thank you", "please" and "sorry". To be polite has the assumption of to know one's place, to be docile and to obey. To be called polite is to be reminded of exploitation and inferiority (Wu, 2016). In this scene of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Cho Chang is seen to order something from the food trolley. She said "please" to the lady, while Ron Weasley just said his order without saying "please". She also ended her conversation with a smile, which makes her more polite looking as it is shown in the picture 1

Picture 1: Cho Chang says "please" and "thank you" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*; 2004)

2.1.1.2 Cho Chang's Stereotype as The Child-like Asian

Cho Chang often pictured as youthful and innocent East Asian girl from her costume. According to Dr. Mukkamala, the senior staff psychologist at the University of California, the participants of her survey with adult women who self-identified as Asian American said that Asians are expected to look cute and small (Mukkamala, 2018). Cho Chang physical appearance is innocent, young, and oriental. In *Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix*, she is physically pictured as child-like by setting her hair in pigtails and having straight front bangs as seen in picture 7. Cho pictured as a girl who has a straight bang in *Harry Potter and Order of Phoenix*, which means she is portrayed to look like an Asian child.

Picture 7: Cho Chang's clothes compare to Luna Lovegood (*Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix*; 2007)

She also wears colorful clothes to show that she is youthful and innocent. Cho Chang is wearing light blue beanie and rainbow-colored sweater. The other characters in the screen are wearing dark colored clothes, while only Cho Chang wears light colored clothes. She is wearing greenish blue color or turquoise, which is associated with meaning of refreshing, feminine, joy, energy and creativity (Bourne, 2010).

In conclusion, Cho Chang as the Chinese character in Harry Potter has the stereotype of polite and child-liked. Using the film language theory of gestures, facial expression, physical appearance, costume, and dialogue, it is proven that Cho Chang has the image of the typical Asian woman. According to APA journals, Asians are considered submissive/passive/quiet, expected to be agreeable, not speak up or stand up for themselves (Suyemoto, 2018). Usually, the East Asians' are given characteristics as polite and child-like. She does not appear as the superior because of the way she talks, look and act. While childish means she is portrayed as a little girl. Being a little girl means she has less power than the other characters.

2.1.2 Stereotypes of Black Character (Kingsley Shacklebolt)

In the movies, Kingsley is portrayed as a big bald black man who works for both *Ministry of Magic* and *Order of Phoenix*. He always wears funny and eccentric wizard robes in purple, round cap, and also gold earring in one of his ears. He also pictures as a casually calm and relaxed guy who always have some witty dialogues with the other characters. He is wearing less formal costume than the other ministers, which makes him look less serious. As one of the most often shown black character, Kingsley has the black stereotypes of nonchalant.

2.1.2.1 Kingsley Shacklebolt's Stereotype as The Nonchalant Black Man

Kingsley is pictured as a nonchalant guy because he is behaving in calm manner, often in a way that suggests he is not interested. He always has time to tell jokes and not take everything too seriously. From his dialogues, we can see that he always responds everything in such calm and funny way. In the *Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix*, Kingsley is seen as a guy who works with *Ministry of Magic*. In one of the scenes, he goes to Hogwarts with the ministers to capture Dumbledore. While the others are talking with a lot of tension, Kingsley acts funnily by throwing a funny line to the minister himself as it is shown in picture 9.

FUGDE	Dawlish, Shacklebolt, you will escort Dumbledore to Azkaban to await trial for conspiracy and sedition.
DUMBLEDORE	Ah, I thought we might hit this little snag. You seem to be laboring under the delusion I'm going to… What was the phrase? Come quietly. Well, I can tell you this: I have no intention of going to Azkaban
UMBRIDGE	Enough of this. Take him!
SHACKLEBOLT	Whoa… well, you might not like him, minister. But you can't deny. Dumbledore has got style.

Picture 9: Kingsley says funny line to the minister
(*Harry Potter and The order of Phoenix*; 2007)

His appearance in the movie makes the audiences laugh because of his lines and appearance. His line in this scene is funny because he shows that he does not care about the situation and other's condition. He holds several serious positions, which are a member *Order of Phoenix* and *Ministry of Magic*, but his lines show that he is not as serious and formal as the groups he represents.

Black men have the stereotype of unapologetic or carefree because they usually do not care of what other people think (Pilgrim, Dr. David; 2012). Kingsley shows that he only wants to tell a joke to the minister and does not care of what the minister going to say or think of his act. Therefore,

the minister shows the reaction of shock of Kingsley's act because he does not expect someone would say that to him. Kingsley is shown as unapologetic, means that he does not apologize or regret what he said but instead he feels satisfied for being himself which makes his character stands out as a black character.

As the conclusion of Stereotyping of Non-white People in *Harry Potter* movies, the non-white people especially Cho Chang and Kingsley Shacklebolt, are given stereotypes that make them different. Cho Chang is portrayed as polite and child-like, which makes her look powerless. Kingsley Shacklebolt is portrayed as nonchalant, which makes his character look funny and underestimated despite of his power in magic and his position in ministry. Both characters are given Stereotypes that make them portrayed as insignificant.

2.2 Othering Non-white Characters in *Harry Potter* Movies

There are creatures in Harry Potter movies that talk like human and also acts like human but their appearance is in the form of animal or other creature such as centaurs and Dre Head. A Centaur is a magical creature whose head, torso, and arms appear to be human and is joined to horse's body. Despite possessing "human intelligent", they are classified as 'beast' by the Ministry of Magic (Harry Potter Wiki). The physical appearance of Centaurs in Harry Potter movies is shown as non-white people because of their skin color. Their skin color is dark and brown, which is unclassified as Caucasian, but black African. Their hairs are also visibly dark, almost black, which is a typical hair color for black African people.

Dre Head is a shrunken head that is used as accessory on the *Knight Bus* in *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*. It has Jamaican accent and long dreadlocks. It is considered as non-white character because of its face feature and the iconic dreadlocks. It also has Jamaican accent, which correlated with African black people.

These characters are both physically and by status are different than the white characters. They are seen as 'the other' by the human characters. Othering is the process of casting a group, an individual or an object into the role of 'the other' and establishing one's own identity through opposition to and, frequently, vilification of this 'other' (Gabriel, 2012). Using the theory of body language and dialogue, I am going to analyze the way these characters are considered as 'the other' by the white characters in the movies.

In the movies, the non-white characters are represented as 'the other' by their costume. In Yule Ball scene of *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, the Asian ladies are visibly wearing their traditional costume, for example Cho Chang is wearing Chinese style robes and The Patil Twins are wearing Indian style robes.

They wear their traditional costumes based on their origins, which makes them different compare to the white characters. Using the theory of costume of film language, I am going to analyze the way these non-white characters represented by their different costume compare to the white characters.

2.2.1 Othering Non-White People as Non-human Characters

Centaurs are either admired or feared because of their exoticism. The physical look of Centaurs is so different with big and dark body, which makes them admired. They are also seen as savage and wild animal, which make them feared. From a dialogue in *Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix*, Dolores Umbridge mentioned that centaurs are 'filthy half-breed' with disgusted look as seen in picture 15. The choice of dark skin for centaur role makes the appearance of the centaur even more different and exotic. It looks like the centaur is no longer as seen as human like, but more like a creature like because of the skin color.

Picture 15: Umbridge talks to the Centaurs (*Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix*; 2007)

2.2.2 Exoticizing Non-white Characters through Yule ball's Costume

In *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, one the most important events is the Yule Ball. People get to dress up in a nice gown and suits to go for a dance in the great hall to as the *Triwizard Tournament*'s tradition. When this event comes, the most popular Asian characters in the movie, who are Cho Chang and Patil Twins, show up with their traditional gown from their ethnicity. The white characters such as Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley or Fleur Delacour, wear western style gowns, which considered as the normal formal gowns that do not represent any western ethnicity.

Cho Chang wears Chinese traditional style dress to the Yule ball. She wears a Chinese style gown with silvery gold color and flowers, as seen in picture 17. By wearing the Chinese traditional dress, Cho Chang is shown as different. She has to show her identity as a Chinese woman by the dress she is wearing. The white race is seen as the normal race and being white means "not to have race, therefore they can wear the normal western style dress which does not represent their ethnicity. White culture is the unquestioned standard of behavior and ways of functioning embodied by the vast majority of the institution (Gita Gulati-Partee, 2014).

Cho Chang's dress is seen as different compare to Fleur Delacour dress in picture 18. Cho Chang's dress looks more traditional and 'exotic' in a way that it is foreign. Cho is portrayed to be more oriental with the way she dressed for such an important occasion. She is portrayed as someone unusual and unique because of her race as an Asian in the middle of white people society. While Fleur, as the guest from France, which is different from Hogwarts' British student, dressed as normal as the other white people. Despite of her different nationality, she does not look foreign. However, Cho is shown to be the 'foreign' one even though her nationality is British.

Picture 17: Cho Chang's Yule Ball gown (*Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*; 2005)

Picture 18: Fleur Delacour's Yule Ball gown (*Harry Potter Wiki*)

As a conclusion of this subchapter, the non-white people are seen as 'the other' in the *Harry Potter* movies. They are portrayed as non-human characters or foreign characters. The Centaur and Dre Head character that show the characteristic of Black people show the Othering of non-white people. They are seen as savages, wild, and funny. The Exoticizing of non-white people is shown by

the Yule Ball costume of Cho Chang and Patil twins. They wear the tradition costume based on their race, which is Chinese and Indian. Despite of their nationality as British people, they still exoticized as the foreigners. It is shown that non-white people are seen as the foreign and 'the other' in *Harry Potter* movies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the non-white people are still seen as different in the *Harry Potter* movies. The characterization of the non-white characters cannot be separated from the Stereotypes that existed in the society. Even though those Stereotypes may not be true, they are still strongly used for people of color. The white people seem not to have any stereotype because they are white. They are the normal ones and expected to be the dominant ones. It becomes such an important aspect in the movie because of the movie background. Non-white people are shown as the foreigners even in such a multicultural society. It shows the norm of whiteness, which makes white as the normal race. According to an article called "*A Norm of Whiteness*" by Alexandra Giroux, being white would be natural and talking about "race" would mean talking about all the people who are not white. "To talk about race is to talk about all races except the white" (Dyes 1997, p.18). In *Harry Potter* movies, being white is considered as the normal ones and the dominant. The white people are the ones who rule the world, while the non-white people are given the role as supporters. Stereotyping, Othering, and Exoticizing are used on the non-white characters to give colors or accents to the otherwise bland white world.

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