

Constructing the Savage: Imaginative Geography, Orientalist Binaries, and the Civilizing Mission in *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) Film

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"Jesus said to them, "the kings of the gentiles Lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call himself benefactors"
Luke 22:25 (NIV)

ABSTRACT

The paper examines *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) through the lens of Edward Said's postcolonial theory of *Orientalism* (1978). focusing on the film reproduces Orientalist binaries of "civilized" versus "savage" through the portrayal of Mufasa against Kiros and the white lion pride. Using a qualitative approach, this study conducts a close analysis of selected dialogue and cinematography to explore stereotypes, colonial hierarchy and imaginative geography. As a result, 1) the binary opposition between "civilization" and "savagery" is a constructed divide where Mufasa's desire for land is framed as destiny, while Kiros's identical desire is framed as barbarism. 2) The film's landscape is divided into morally charged spaces, where Milele is depicted as sacred and deserving of order, while the spaces associated with Kiros are framed as cold, chaotic, and illegitimate. 3) The film's deepest ideological operation work through Orientalism, hiding colonial hierarchy inside emotionally warm and visually beautiful moments such as "*we are all one*", where unity appears inclusive but ultimately depends on Mufasa's singular authority. Understanding how the film frames the civilized-savage divide, imaginative geography and latent Orientalism helps the audience recognize how colonial ideologies are recycled within mainstream family entertainment. Future researchers can expand this inquiry into other Disney productions set in non-western environments to examine how animated storytelling continues to shape global perception of identity, power, and belonging.

Keyword: *Orientalism, Latent Orientalism, Imaginative Geography, Mufasa*

INTRODUCTION

Children's films and storybooks have a huge influence on how children think about the world. Animated films are fun and engaging ways to shape a child's understanding of different cultures and societies. The Disney film *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) is a highly relevant example of this. The story is about an orphaned lion who brings peace and structured order to a wild, divided

animal kingdom. *Mufasa* actually reflects real-world problems. Which is when non-Western societies are stigmatized and stereotyped as inherently chaotic and dangerous. Directly reflecting real world issues such as colonial bias, racism, and systemic prejudice. Reports from the United Nation (UN, 2022) and the World Values Survey indicate that people from marginalized, non-Western backgrounds face systemic disadvantages due to these deeply rooted cultures. Discriminatory attitudes and racial prejudices have surged globally in recent years. Highlighting the widespread and escalating nature of this problem. From this, it encourages the audience to reflect that media prejudice can influence our treatment of other cultures and also shape global power dynamics.

This research analyzes the musical drama film “*Mufasa: The Lion King*” (2024) directed by Barry Jenkins. As a cinematic prequel to Disney’s earlier adaption of *The Lion King*, the film was first released in the United States in December 2024, produced by Walt Disney Pictures. The film is categorized as a family-friendly film for children aged 6 and above yet also appealing to a wider, more intergenerational audience through exploring its thematic complexity regarding leadership, inheritance, and territorial legitimacy. *Mufasa: The Lion King* has won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Character Voice-Over Performance (Motion Picture) in 2024.

Through a flashback, Rafiki reveals that Mufasa is born an orphan who finds a new family when a royal cub named Taka takes in. The two grow up as inseparable brothers, but a ruthless lion named Kiros destroys their pride. The brothers must flee and search for a new home alongside new friends. As Mufasa naturally steps into a leadership role and wins Sarabi’s affection. A deeply jealous Taka betrays him to Kiros. Ultimately, Taka repents and saves Mufasa during the final battle, which earns his iconic scar. Mufasa then defeats Kiros to become the first king of the Pride Lands, setting the stage from the original film.

The postcolonial framework developed by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* (1978) serves as the foundation for this investigation. Which establishes the relationship between the West (the Occident) and the non-Western world (the Orient) is a constructed dynamic of power, domination and complex hegemony. Said argues that Western society constructs an inferior, opposing image of non-westerners. Whom he refers to as the “Other”, in order to define its own power and identity relationally. Said (1978) explains that “*the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’*” (p. 40). Forcing the other into a rigid binary opposition in order to establish the West as intrinsically logical and capable of self-governance. This essentializes complex non-Western populations into biological populations into biological or tribal tropes in media narratives. Locking them into a “savage” identity that makes them seem inherently obedient to a “civilized” force. To reinforce this binary, Orientalism makes use of

imaginative geography. A term Said created to explain how dominant cultures assign ideological meaning to physical spaces by projecting their fears onto the non-Western landscape, portraying it as chaotic or wild. By framing these geographic borders as cultural inventions rather than objective facts, narratives structurally justify the need for external intervention to establish order. This aligns directly with Said's concept of latent Orientalism, the unconscious, deeply entrenched cultural certainty regarding non-Western inferiority. In modern storytelling, this latent bias frequently appears as the "Civilizing Mission" where Western intervention is disguised as a moral necessity rather than an invasion. Because the imaginative geography is depicted as broken and the "Other" as irrational, the conqueror is reframed as a savior bringing peace, allowing children's media to seamlessly recycle colonial ideologies while appearing politically neutral.

While a recent scholarship on the film *Mufasa* has successfully portrayed the mechanical linguistics of discourse in leadership. Such as Widyasari and Sulatra's (2025) application of Jakobson's communicative model to demonstrate how the character uses referential and conative language to establish authority. This structural approach treats the script as a culturally neutral text. Existing research did not address the macro-level power dynamics and ideological implications inherent in a Western studio writing an African story, by removing languages from its geopolitical production environment. As a result, significant thematic gaps exist regarding how these seemingly harmless language functions could unintentionally reinforce traditional orientalist tropes. Such as the exoticized monarch or idealized scenery, designed primarily for Western consumption (Said, 1978). To address this critical limitation, this article will fill in the gap and apply Edward Said's postcolonial framework to evaluate how the cinematic and linguistic discourse in *Mufasa* actively constructs and "Other" African social hierarchies under the pretext of impartial leadership discourse.

By analyzing *Mufasa* through Edward Said's Postcolonial theory. This research will explore how the film constructs and reinforces deeply entrenched Western Ideological frameworks regarding African narratives. Specifically, it investigates how the narrative positions Mufasa as a "civilizing" force against the perceived "savagery" of the white lions. Reflecting how non-Western subjects are frequently forced into stereotypic, exoticized roles. This study argues that beneath its family-friendly surface, the film functions as a latent Orientalist text, one whose cinematic and linguistic discourse "Others" African social hierarchies by casting Mufasa as a Westernized, civilizing force against the white lions' coded savagery. In doing so, the film exemplifies how children's media shapes global perceptions of non-Western identities, making the case for exposing these embedded colonial ideologies central to any decolonized understanding of real-world power dynamics.

Binary Opposition

Civilization	Savagery
In Milele, Mufasa and his many animal companions see themselves as the land's moral and logical defenders. They stand for diplomacy, organized order, and inclusive leadership that maintains the safety and tranquility of the Savanna. In stark contrast to the perilous outsiders, their identity is presented as the "normal" and moral ideal. <i>"The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'"</i> (Said, 1978, p 40).	It is stereotyped that Kiros and the white lion pride are inherently violent, tribal, and motivated by an unreasonable desire to conquer. Instead of being given nuanced, understandable motivations, they are assessed by their harsh, chaotic surroundings and essentialist, bloodline-based anger. They are only perceived as an existential danger to the peace of civilization. <i>"A central feature of Orientalism is its 'tendency to essentialize and to racialise the Orient and its inhabitants... as a kind of biological subspecies... fated to occupy a subordinate position.'"</i> (Said, 1978, p 207).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method to analyze the film *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024), directed by Barry Jenkins. Through the lens of Edward Said's postcolonial theory, specifically the concept of *Orientalism* (1978) Said's theory is used to analyze the film's portrayal of systemic prejudice and the colonial stereotypes that define its social faction. This theory was chosen because it allows us to look closely at how Western biases are hidden inside a family-friendly cartoon. By looking at the film as a reflection of society rather than just a simple film, this research explores how the story creates a strict divide between the "civilized" hero and the "savage" white lions. Ultimately passing colonial prejudices onto a global audience.

The data collection involves a close examination of specific scenes in the film instead of just summarizing the plot. The analysis focuses specifically on two things, the characters' dialogue and the film's settings. First, the dialogue is analyzed to see how "heroic" speech is actually used to hide bias and make Mufasa's takeover seem natural. Second, the visual analysis compares the different environments in the film. It looks at the contrast between the beautiful, peaceful land of Milele and the harsh, freezing, and chaotic Outlands. By looking both at the dialogue and the settings. The study highlights how the film portrays the white lions as naturally violent. Which is used to justify Mufasa stepping in as a "civilizing" leader. This study scope focuses on the systemic prejudice using the binary opposition of *Civilization vs Savagery*. This paper highlight is to expose the colonial ideas hiding beneath the surface of modern children's films. By pointing out these hidden biases, the study goes beyond just reviewing a film.

DISCUSSION

1. The "Civilized" vs "Savage"

The events analyzed in this section take place across the first and second act of the film. A young orphaned cub named Mufasa is swept away by a flood and separated from his family. He encounters a cub named Taka as he wanders around unfamiliar territory, a royal cub who takes him in despite the objections of the pride. From the moment Mufasa arrives, he is branded a "stray," an



Picture 1. Obasi and Sarabi

outsider with no noble bloodline and no right to belong. The pride leader named Obasi makes this rejection immediate and visceral, treating Mufasa's presence as a biological contamination rather than a social inconvenience. As the story progresses, a far greater threat emerges in the form of Kiros, a ruthless white lion who commands his own pride and seeks to conquer all territory in his path. It is within this conflict between the "stray" who becomes a king and the conqueror who is framed as a savage that the film's Orientalist binary is most clearly constructed.

The film constructs the "savage" identity of Kiros and the white lions not through nuanced storytelling but through a deliberate combination of dehumanizing language and alienating cinematography. This is first established through Obasi, whose dialogue functions as the film's



Picture 2. Obasi Warning

earliest and most explicit act of Othering. When he snarls, *"Only to be awoken by a disgusting, hideous, revolting stench of a stray... when we come upon an outsider tell me what do we do? Eat it"* (00:19:07), the language of sensory repulsion, disgust, and the threat of consumption reduces the outsider to something subhuman. Said (1978) identifies this as Orientalism's tendency to essentialize non-Western subjects *"as a kind of biological subspecies... fated to occupy*

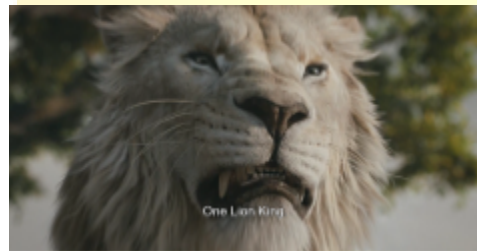
a subordinate position" (Said, 1978, p. 207). The cinematography mirrors this dehumanization: a low camera height, wide-angle lens, and shallow depth of field isolate the vulnerable cub against a vast, indifferent horizon, physically marginalizing him within the very landscape the dominant pride claims as their own.

This pattern of visual Othering continues as the antagonists are given more screen time. When Obasi declares *"These outsiders will devour everything in their path"* (00:19:32), the medium

shot places him sharply in the foreground while a shallow depth of field blurs everything behind him, centering his authority and making his judgment of the outsider feel absolute and uncontested. Similarly, in the scene where he warns *"One day he will betray you, that is what strays do"* (00:27:04), a low-angle shot frames him atop high rocks against a wide open sky, the warm golden-hour light making his mane glow and reinforcing his dominance over both the landscape and the narrative. Said (1978) argues that the Orient is *"given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation"* (Said, 1978, p. 308), and this is precisely what these scenes achieve: the identity of the "stray" and the "outsider" is treated as a biological certainty, something that does not need to be proven but simply declared by those in power.



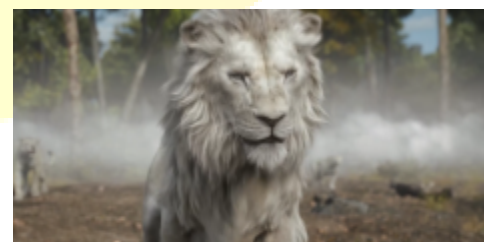
Picture 3. Obasi Dominance



Picture 4. Kiros and the White Lions

When Kiros himself is introduced, the film's construction of savagery becomes most explicit. His declaration, *"The Circle is broken. There will be one Lion King"* (00:40:30), delivered against a shallow depth of field that deliberately blurs the natural background, stripping him of any geographical or communal context. Where Mufasa is narratively placed within the landscape as its steward, Kiros is visually detached from it, reduced to a pure biological threat with no connection to the land he claims. Said (1978) argues that *"the Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental'... but also because it could be, that is, submitted to being, made Oriental"* (Said, 1978, p. 5). Kiros is not inherently savage; the film deliberately makes him so by denying him the interiority and communal belonging that Mufasa is given as a narrative birthright.

The binary reaches its peak in the film's climactic confrontation, where Kiros commands his pride with *"Blood for blood!"* (00:44:45). The cinematography here uses high-contrast lighting, aggressive low-angle shots, cold desaturated color grading, and snarling close-ups that frame his claim to territory as pure barbarism. This stands in direct contrast to Mufasa's leadership, in which the film consistently bathes in warm, golden light and wide, inclusive compositions. Said (1978) describes

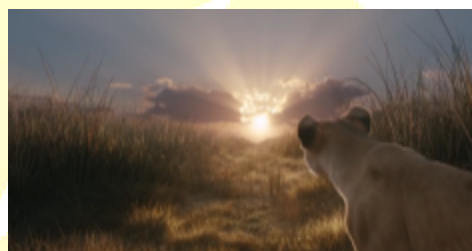


Picture 5. Kiros and the White Lions

this as the Orientalist *"political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')"* (Said, 1978, p. 43). The film never invites the audience to question why Kiros wants what he wants. His desire for land is stripped of the same sympathetic framing that makes Mufasa's identical desire feel destined and just. Through lighting, camera angle, and dialogue, the audience is taught that some figures simply are the threat, and that the right response is not understanding but defeat.

2. Imaginative Geography

Before the journey to Milele begins, Mufasa and his companions are forced to flee from their destroyed homeland after Kiros along with the white lions attack their territory and threaten every land in their path. As their journey progresses, Mufasa and his companions come across dangerous and unfamiliar territories while seeking safety and a proper place. Throughout their journey, the characters began sharing stories and visualizing a mythical place known as Milele, which is believed to exist beyond rivers and mountains. The film's cinematography captures the beauty by bathing Milele in a warm, golden-hour lighting and balanced frames. Through the visual composition, the land is portrayed to be suitable for conservation and leadership. As a result, the story shifts its focus from the theme of survival to finding the ideal place.



Picture 6. Vision of Milele

It can be observed from how Milele is described in the dialogue. In particular, the dialogue explains Milele as being *"a place beyond the river's end, across the deepest canyon, on the other side of the mountains, a place beyond the horizon itself. A pride land so green, so...perfect..."* (00:37:27). In addition to describing Milele, this statement gives Milele the quality of imagination in order to create the notion of an ideal place beyond normal geography. By highlighting the distance from the river, the canyon, the mountains, and even the horizon, the land becomes imaginary and thus beyond the political scope of reality. This effect is reinforced by the use of cinematographic tools of utopian framing, backlighting, wide shots, depth of field and green scenery as it helps to depict the Pride Lands as a space of ecological-political harmony. In essence, according to Said this cinematic portrayal transforms the African continent into an artificial one. In other words, the film does not present the reality of the dynamic geographical reality but presents a restricted and simplified setting where characters move about just for Western stories of leadership and ethics. (Said, 1978, p. 63).

This is further supported by Said's statement that *"The Orient was almost a European invention... a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable*

experiences” (Said, 1978, p. 1). Through this perspective, Milele can be read not only as a geographical destination but also as an invented ideal landscape whose beauty and perfection are organized through fantasy, distance, and desire. Given that Milele is portrayed as a perfect land, there is an implicit suggestion that this kind of land needs a “rightful” king for its maintenance. This is where the politics of geography starts. The perfection of the land legitimizes Mufasa’s power in the land through the way the scenery is presented. Viewers are not supposed to question whether the kingship is essentially an act of taking over the land. What matters here is to understand the scenery as a necessity of maintaining the land in its perfect state. In analyzing the film, the portrayal of perfection in the land is employed in legitimizing the absolute rule of the rightful king while marginalizing others, such as Kiros or “strays,” who have connections with lands in chaos.

The tree scene reinforces this construct as well. As the characters state, *"This is the tree...from your visions"* (01:28:29), the cinematography utilizes high bird’s eye shots, wide angle



Picture 7. Sacred Roots

shots, deep focus shots, and shots which emphasize the spread of roots on the land just like blood vessels. These shots do not portray the tree as just a natural phenomenon but rather turn it into something much deeper, that is, a sacred repository of memory, destiny, and legitimacy. With regard to the postcolonial approach to the tree in this case, the tree represents an imaginative geography of the film

because through its imagery, the viewers learn that the land is already prepared for its rightful king. This supports Said’s explanation that representation often works from the outside, where *“the representation does the job, for the West, and faute de mieux, for the poor Orient”* (Said, 1978, p. 21). In this sense, the film’s sacred image of the tree does not simply show African land speaking for itself. Rather, it presents the land through an exterior narrative framework that already determines what the land means and who is destined to govern it.

A similar case can be seen in the scene with the line *“The earth will shake”* (01:38:41). The bird’s eye shot eliminates the horizon and focuses only on the relationship between the animals and the ground. It implies that a leader is a person who is territorial as well as spiritual. In fact, Mufasa is shown to be an animal that is “grounded” on the earth and connected to it, thus, able to govern it. The reason for this is the fact that imaginative geography frequently creates the impression of nature and



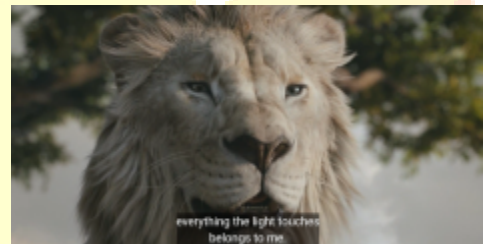
Picture 8. Earthly Connection

natural order of things when in reality it is a social construct. This is in line with Said's view that *"The Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about himself. No dialectic is either desired or allowed"* (Said, 1978, p. 308). Therefore, the land and its inhabitants are not presented as dynamic or politically complex, but as fixed within a narrative order that prepares them for Mufasa's destined leadership.

In sharp contrast to this, the spaces related to Kiros and white lions have been constructed as dangerous, volatile, and abnormal. The conversation *"They were huge, white as ghosts"* (00:32:59), identifies the white lions as ghosts that have invaded their natural habitat. Whiteness does not remain an ordinary phenomenon for them, but it creates a sense of fearfulness and abnormality among them. In a conversation where Kiros says, *"Everything the light touches belongs to me"* (00:40:24), the use of close framing, shallow depth of field, and extreme concentration on Kiros's face reflects his attitude toward conquest, ownership, and dominance. While the need for the land was represented nobly by Mufasa, it has become barbaric through Kiros. This contrast is supported by Said's theory that *"Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness"* (Said, 1978, p. 204). The white lions, especially Kiros, are therefore not merely villains in the story; they are positioned as chaotic and threatening figures who make Mufasa's leadership appear more moral, civilized, and necessary. In this way, the film constructs a political vision of reality where the familiar and idealized leadership of Mufasa is placed against the strange and dangerous threat represented by Kiros and the white lions (Said, 1978, p. 43).



Picture 9. Ghostly Invaders



Picture 10. Kiros's Dominance

3. Latent Orientalism

Earlier, Taka saw his mother and Mufasa was getting harassed by the white lions. Instead of helping them, he ran away. Obasi knew that and confronted Taka to not tell anyone about this. Taka felt guilty and later on Obasi said *"deceit is a tool of a great king"* (0:35:59). The film's portrayal of this leadership dynamic reinforces latent orientalism biases by framing strategic manipulation as a sophisticated virtue of "civilized" governance. Through Obasi's assertion, the dialogue suggests that the dominant ruler possesses an intellectual complexity that the "savage" other lacks. This aligns

precisely with Edward Said's (1978) concept of "*flexible positional superiority*" (p.7). Demonstrating how the western coded leader maintains the upper hand through strategic intellect and manipulation rather than mere brute force. To visually reinforce this authoritative deceit, the cinematography structurally reflects the dialogue. The close up shot focuses on Obasi's face to highlight his power. While the dark blue, nighttime lighting and subtle shadows emphasize a sense of hidden secrets. As kashaka (2025) notes in their analysis of cinematic lighting, this specific use of shadow creates a "mask-like" effect that manifests the "shadow archetype". Representing an inscrutable, powerful figure who operated outside traditional transparency. By positioning the lion slightly to the side so that the darkness dominated the frame. The camera visualized the very deceit Obasi speaks of.



Picture 11. Obasi Confrontation

In Milele, Mufasa stands out in front of all varieties of animals. Gathering all of them to unite them and against Kiros and the white lions pride. He gave a speech declaring that "*we are all one*" (1:42:55). A moment presented as the emotional climax and moral of his leadership. This line promotes equality and togetherness, suggesting that every animal in the Pride Lands holds equal value. However, the way this scene is filmed tells a completely different story. The camera is consistently positioned behind Mufasa, making the audience see the entire gathered crowd through his eyes. Every animal, every species, every "Other" is viewed from this singular point of view, quietly suggesting that unity does not exist on its own, it only exists because he is the one leading it. The warm golden lighting and wide shots make this arrangement look natural and beautiful, which makes it even harder to question. This is exactly what Said describes as latent Orientalism "*an almost unconscious (and certainly untouchable) positivity*" (Said, 1978, p. 206). Where colonial hierarchy is not shown openly but is instead embedded inside something that looks progressive and feels good. Therefore the declaration is not truly a message of equality. It is a message that unity belongs to whoever stands at the center of it and in this film, that center is always Mufasa.



Picture 12. Milele Gathering

After defeating Kiros and establishing his rule over Milele, Mufasa addresses his brother Taka before the gathered animal Kingdom. He declares "*As long as I'm king, my brother will have a place here... But I won't ever say your name again.*" Remaining him Scar and simultaneously offering mercy while asserting absolute authority. This moment is framed as an act of compassion, a generous

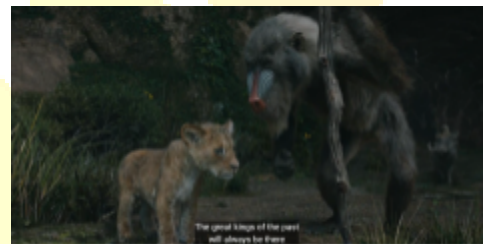
king choosing forgiveness over punishment. However, what is actually happening is far from ideologically, Mufasa is stripping his brother of his Identity by erasing his name and the entire natural world. Every animal, species, bears witness to and silently endorses this act. The cinematography makes this power arrangement look not like a political decision but like a cosmic truth. A wide high angle master shot places Mufasa at the center of a semi circle of animals, with sweeping golden hour light and long shadows giving the scene a feeling of magnificence. The deep depth of field kept everything sharp, from the elephants in the foreground to the giraffes in the back.



Picture 13. Mufasa's Speech

Visually connecting Mufasa to the entire landscape as though the land itself recognizes him as its rightful ruler. This reflects what Said warns about when he argues that Orientalism is *"Therefore, Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture... It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts"* (Said, 1978, p. 12). The film is not simply telling a story, it is encoding a political reality, where the authority to name, to erase, and to grant belonging is naturalized. As the brightest of singular, westernized leader. The African landscape, its animals, and even its character become a backdrop that exists to confirm and celebrate the authority. Embedding a colonial power structure so deeply inside visual beauty and emotional warmth that a child audience it as simply the natural order of things.

When it's almost close to the ending, there was an intimate scene with Rafiki and Kiara. Rafiki was comforting Kiara because she was scared. To comfort her Rafiki told her that *"The Great Kings of the Past will always be there"*. Portraying Mufasa ancestors as a celestial, everlasting force that protects and validates the Milele. This moment appears to be a gentle, culturally rich recognition of spiritual tradition and ancestry. However, looking more closely, what the film is actually doing is naturalizing a specific bloodline's right to rule by framing it as divinely ordained rather than politically constructed. The cinematography here makes this ideology feel sacred and unquestionable. A low angle medium shot positions the Kiara looking upward at Rafiki, creating a sense of respectful amazement that frames this exchange not as a conversation but as a transmission of holy, unchangeable truth. The cool, desaturated twilight lightning "Otherizes" the spiritual realm. Making



Picture 14. Rafiki and Kiara

the connection to the Great Kings feel like a supernatural phenomenon that exists beyond questions or challenges. Together these visual decisions support a celestial order and imply that Mufasa's bloodline was always cosmically destined for greatness rather than just deserving of it. This operated what Said warns, arguing that the unfamiliar is gradually repackaged into something that "*Allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing*" (p.58). The film takes the African spiritual concept of ancestral connection and repackages it into a familiar western framework of divine kingship and inherited legitimacy. Making Mufasa's dynastic rule feel not like a colonial imposition but like an ancient, universal truth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to investigate the Orientalist ideology of *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) through three interrelated frameworks: the binary opposition of "civilization" and "savagery," imaginative geography, and latent Orientalism as a civilizing mission. The findings confirm that the film creates a binary opposition between Mufasa and Kiros by using dehumanizing language and alienating cinematography, in which the same act of claiming territory is interpreted as destiny when done by Mufasa and barbarism when done by Kiros. The film also segments the land into morally charged spaces, playing upon the notion that the land is sacred and meant to be ordered, as Mufasa ascended to power. The film's most potent ideological message lies beneath the surface, in the beauty of the images and the warmth of the emotions that it conjures up, so that it is all but invisible, and that Western colonial logic is encoded within moments that seem progressive, spiritual, and morally improving.

The results have vital implications for parents, teachers, and filmmakers. A child who consumes this kind of media is not just watching a story about lions. They are absorbing a framework of who is entitled and who is not, whose land is worth protecting and whose is not, and whose identity is inherently threatening. Media literacy education should therefore create the means to identify ideological structures such as lighting, camera angles, music, and landscape, which are not only evident in obvious stereotypes but also embedded within imagery. Filmmakers who work with non-Western stories have a responsibility to involve the communities whose cultures they are using, rather than reducing them to passive subjects of a Western narrative gaze. Future studies may expand this research by analyzing other Disney productions set in non-Western environments, such as *Moana*, *Aladdin*, or *The Jungle Book*, and by exploring audience reception studies that engage children from non-Western backgrounds to examine how they internalize, resist, or reinterpret these embedded ideologies.

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