

## The 'Other' physical transformations in *The Adventures of Tintin* TV series

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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Describing a race through the verbal and visual description of physical appearance is often used to create binary opposition between 'Us' and 'Other', so it does in *The Adventures of Tintin* comic books by Hergé. In *The Adventures of Tintin* TV series adaptation (1991-2) by Stéphane Bernasconi, 'Other's verbal and visual physical depictions that are portrayed in the comic books undergo transformations that occur on non-White characters. These transformations—changes, additions, and omissions—can be clearly seen in the *Tintin* TV series entitled *The Blue Lotus*, *Cigars of the Pharaoh*, and *The Broken Ear* that are adapted from the comic books of the same titles. The theory of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon and Orientalism by Edward Said are used to reveal and explain the adapter's strategies to make the skin colours, costume, and deformity moderation and negotiation in order that the TV series can be accepted by the audience around the world today.

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## INTRODUCTION

Film adaptation these days is not only from novels but also comic books. According to Strömberg (2010), the word 'comics' can be misleading concerning the nature of many publications that carry this label. In other words, the term "comics" is often misinterpreted as something comical or funny although it may contain no comical elements at all. *The Adventures of Tintin*, for example, are classic Franco-Belgian comic series that are adapted in many media. Among all *Tintin* adaptations, only the television series produced by Ellipse-Nelvana Production in 1990s had all comic albums adapted, except *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*,

*Tintin in Congo*, and *Tintin and Alph-Art*. Directed by French director Stéphane Bernasconi, with Peter Hudecki as the Canadian unit director, the series was made in 2D animation and first aired on the original networks FR3/France 3 (France) and Global Television Network (Canada). Every album was packaged into one episode with one or two parts, more or less 22 minutes per part, and divided into 3 seasons. Moreover, the films were delivered in English language, although the texts inside the films were still French. Later on, these series were aired on an American TV Network—ABC Weekend Specials (1977-1995) TV Shows for children every Saturday morning.

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Consequently, when the original works were adapted into TV series, they underwent a number of changes in terms of content and form. The stories were simplified and appropriated because of technical reasons, like duration and age considerations, as they were mainly aimed at children. Controversial and/or inappropriate scenes were mostly erased due to the different political appropriateness of the new era. The scenes which have cigarettes, cigars, and alcohol are omitted, except for Captain Haddock. It seems these adventure-comedy stories across ages with slapstick and intrigue humours make Tintin's adventures seem apolitical, yet it turns out that nothing is apolitical.

The most visible issue in *The Adventures of Tintin* comic books is the representation of local or indigenous people. According to Said (2003), the cultural representations created and even reinforced prejudices 'against non-Western' cultures, putting them in the rudimentary classification of the 'Other'. It is not surprising that the 'Other' representation and depiction are mainly found in colonial literature. The comparison between Occident and Oriental comes from a concept that has been created by the Western itself. This concept came when the West conquered other countries in the colonization era. To make it more understandable, Ferdinand de Saussure creates the theory of binary opposition. According to Saussure, as cited in Putri and Sarwoto (2016), binary opposition is a way for each unit of language to have value or meaning and be defined as binary code, in reciprocal determination with another term. This relation is structural and contradictory, it is never balanced, one party will be subordinate. For example: good/bad, diligent/lazy, superior/inferior, and so on. The basic relationship of Saussure's binary opposition is related to Said's Orientalism. Said (2003) also mentions that the Western idea of labelling the 'Other' as the opposite of 'Us' is to define that White is better than Non-White in every aspects, either it is physical, cultural, behaviour, or science and technology. This

concept implicitly tries to civilize the 'Other' by creating a false consciousness that indeed, the differences should be highlighted and celebrated. In addition, some differences are put in hyperbole or degraded. The binary opposition, then, could be found in colonial and post-colonial literature. The writers usually deliver a broader message or issue through characters, places or events by using metaphors; or in other words, an allegory of colonialism. These writings, then, unconsciously influence the readers so that grouping occurs-- the Occident and the Oriental in this context.

Usually, when a colonial and post-colonial work is adapted a few decades later, its contemporary adaptation tries to modify it along with the times in order to encounter those issues. According to Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013) an adaptation, like the work adapted, is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society, and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum (p.142). Certainly, there is a new perspective from a different point of view that gives birth to a new meaning when it is consumed decades later. Therefore, Bernasconi made changes when he adapted the comics into TV series for America and later for the world consumption. It is only by carefully analyzing the issues of history, politics, and representation that one can adequately grasp the meanings of French language comics and graphic novels, including those in translation that are migrating and reaching new readers around the globe (Mckinney, 2008, p.5). Thus, in the discussion below, I will examine what kind of transformations, preservation, and omission were made by the adapter.

## METHODS

For this study, a qualitative approach is employed since this study of adaptation of comic books to TV series is related to colonial and post-colonial eras; it also examines cultural and political issues. To collect primary data, I used close reading, watching, and in-depth content analysis of

both *The Adventures of Tintin* comic books written by Hergé and the TV series directed by Stéphane Bernasconi. In the process of data selection, I re-read and re-watched all comic books and film series to find the related issues. I eliminated the unrelated series and focused on the chosen data. For the comic books, I analysed both visual and verbal text from the scenes that have been chosen; each was discussed in accordance to each topic. Following this, to analyse the process adaptation to film, I searched the shifting contained in the film or the parts erased or eliminated. To support the analysis, I apply Said's Orientalism as a means of analyzing the issues in the comic books and also Hutcheon's theory of Adaptation as tools of explaining the changes of adapting them to films. Certain supporting theories were included to reveal the related issues contained in comic books and films. The supporting pictures were included when they are needed.

Secondary data is collected through related books, journal articles, online articles on films, interviews, and online resources that reflected colonial and post-colonial literature and film adaptation. The objectives of this research are to determine whether the moderation and negotiation done by the director are well addressed for the adaptation's reasons. The qualitative method includes decontextualization, comparison, interpretation, and compilation; thus, the study's finding is interpretative.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this discussion is to examine the characters' physical deficiencies in the comic books and how they transformed in the film adaptations so that the audience could capture it as mainly physical differences. To analyse it, I use the scenes from the examples from *Tintin in Congo*, *The Broken Ear*, *Tintin in America*, *The Blue Lotus*, and *Cigars of the Pharaoh*. The three topics discussed are the physical depiction of non-White races (black, yellow, red, and half-caste), half-naked, and ugliness/deformity.

First of all, there are three skin colours of non-Whites which can be found in *The Adventures of Tintin* (black, yellow, red) to illustrate other races. It could be by colour or nicknames. For instance, Congolese are illustrated by black colour (figure 2), Indian is called red skin (figure 13), and Chinese man is addressed by yellow skin (figure 14). These skin colours are emphasized as Sharma (2011) believes that racial classification is given to a group of individuals. In other words, the classification is created in purpose to shape other humans so they will be differentiated. He divides people so that they can be distinguished physically and genetically. The same as hair, eyes, nose, lips, ears, and face form, skin colour is categorized as definite physical characteristics and it is one of the most significant distinguishing characteristics. The following distinctions are defined in terms of skin colour: White skinned people e.g. Caucasian; yellow skinned people, e.g. Mongolian; black skinned people, e.g. Negroes. These skin colours, therefore, are one of the most significant distinguishing characteristics for races.

When the five titles of *Tintin* comic books were created in the 1930s, human races classification according to Earnest Albert Hooton, a physical anthropologist, was well known at that time. Later in 1947, Hooton modified the theory to be more specific. According to Hooton (1947) as quoted in Sharma (2011), he classified humans into four races:

- (1) White consists of European, Eur-African, caucasoid,
- (2) Negroid includes African Negro, Nilotic Negro and Negrito (Pygmies),
- (3) Mongoloid includes Classic and Arctic Mongoloid (Eskimoid),
- (4) Composite Races are further classified into three categories:
  - i) Predominantly White: Predominantly Australian, Indo-Dravidian and Polynesians.
  - ii) Predominantly Mongoloid: American Indian and Indonesian Mongoloid or Indonesian-Malay.

- iii) Predominantly Negroid: Melanesian Papuan or Oceanic Negroids, Bushmen-Hottentot and Tasmanians.

In short, non-White races represented by skin colours in *Tintin* comic books are Negroid = black, Mongoloid = yellow, and Predominantly Mongoloid (American Indian) = red. However, real humans' skin colours are not literally white, black, yellow, or red primary colour, but it is actually in the same tone (from darker to lighter) as it can be seen in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Pantone's skin colour tones

Therefore, addressing people's skin colour through the primary colours (white, black, yellow, and red) is created with a purpose to make an explicit distinction. In addition, the Other races are distinguished as physically more inferior than White.

**TRANSFORMING PHYSICAL DEFICIENCY TO PHYSICAL DIFFERENCE**

This part examines the transformations in the film adaptations.

**The Eradication of Black Race Characters**

To begin with, I will start with the depiction of Negroid in the comic books. Negroid race is illustrated by black opaque colour where actually they have dark brown tones. The representation of 'native' Africans is physically caricatured as ugly and primitive such as black coloured and huge lips, half-naked, bare footed person, even compared to an animal—monkey (figure 25). Mounfort (2012) also mentions nickname 'juju-lipped Negro' where the exaggerated lips become bigger and coloured (compared to White's lips which are drawn with line).

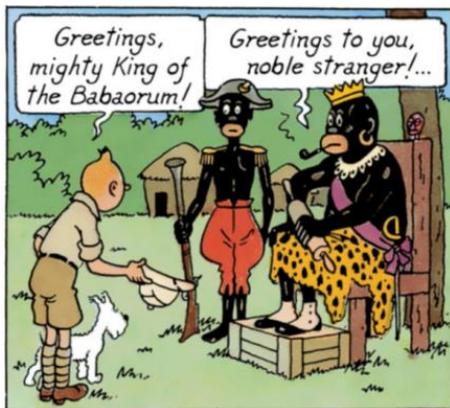
Another Negroid visualisation is how they dress. Normally, the black races in the village are dressed with a piece of fabric to cover their lower body part. Moreover, the leader usually wears shoes while the lower position people go barefoot. As we could see in figure 2, the man in front is wearing shoes and different colour fabric among others. Also, the King wears more fancy shoes in figure 4. In short, they are depicted half-naked as it could be seen in figure 2 and figure 4; even though the black race character is a person who has high position in their tribe, like king and the counsellor in figure 4, they are also visualized half-naked—of course with adding some attributes to differentiate between the commoners and the higher position. However, the certain additional western attributes actually made them look ridiculous. The king Babaorum wears a crown, lace collar, purple sling with a hanging sword below, leopard skin, oxford ankle shoes, smokes with a pipe, and holds on a rolling pin. Moreover, the counsellor at the king's left side wears western soldier attributes such as the hat, shoulder board, trousers, and holds a gun, but he does not wear shoes. Nevertheless, the most noticeable thing is both of them do not wear clothes. These are kinds of a joke to show how backward they are in using western stuff as 'fashion'. In addition, half-naked and bare feet also applied for low class people like slaves (figure 5).



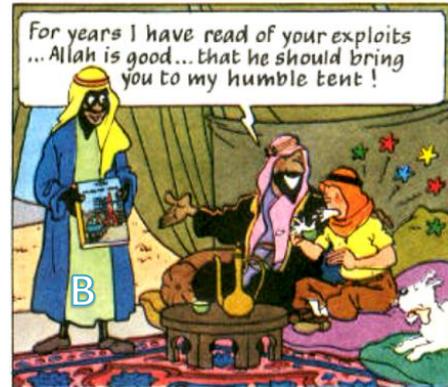
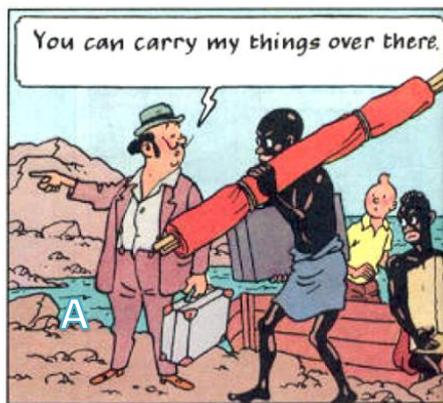
**Figure 2.** The half-naked Congolese are shouldering Tintin who is sitting on the ‘traditional’ transportation in “Tintin in the Congo” comic book



**Figure 3.** A colonial means transport: the African version of the sedan chair



**Figure 4.** King Babaorum and his counsellor fashion style in “Tintin in the Congo” comic book



**Figure 5.** Black race as White’s slave and servant in “Cigars of the Pharaoh” comic book

However, not all Congolese and black races are designed half-naked and barefoot, some of them are dressed properly like westerners (figure 6). Some people who have jobs wear uniforms and dress appropriately. Although they have a job, their job positions are low and placed below white race; in other words, as blue-collar workers (figure 7) or servants (figure 5). Even though there are ‘Other’ races, the Negroid is still in the lowest position, and plays the role of servants.



**Figure 6.** Tintin’s arrival in Congo “Tintin in the Congo” comic book



**Figure 7.** Negroid as a blue-collar worker in “Tintin in the Congo” comic book

Nevertheless, Hergé saw *Tintin in the Congo* as his “youthful transgression” (Farr, 2001, p. 21). Commenting on Hergé’s statement, Farr (2001) argues:

Much later when Tintin’s African escapade had become something of an embarrassment and Hergé was having to fend off accusations of racism, he offered an explanation in the interviews he gave Numa Sadoul. “*For the Congo as with Tintin in the Land of the Soviets, the fact was that I was fed on the prejudices of the bourgeois society in which I moved... It was 1930. I only knew things about these countries that people said at that time: ‘Africans were great big children... Thank goodness for them that we were there!’ Eyed these Africans according to such criteria. In the purely paternalistic spirit which existed then in Belgium*”.

By that reckoning, if *Tintin in the Congo* gives a wildly inaccurate picture of Africa, it does at least illustrate the prejudice with which Europeans then viewed Africans (p. 22).

As Farr (2001) mentions above, *Tintin in the Congo* portrays the constructed depictions of Africans or Negroid by the Europeans. In addition, it also portrays Belgian colonization, oppression and cruelty that caused half of the population to decrease. Therefore, this album which contains colonial contents such as slavery, violence, black race negative depiction was not filmed. What is more, the decision to erase black race is applied to all Tintin film series, for example the two scenes of figure 5 in *Cigars of the Pharaoh* comic book. In figure 5 A, the drawing of the Africans holding things is changed to the White holds his own things. Figure 5 B is not filmed.

On the other hand, the omission could be done if the scene does not have an important role that affects the storyline or plot. Figure 8 illustrates this point clearly. Tintin goes undercover to arrest two villains who steal a fetish in *The Broken Ear* comic book edition. In his disguise, he wears a curly wig, colours his skin with black, and makes

his lips bigger and red. By dressing up like a Negroid, the three men on the left side, who do not know Tintin’s plan, are shocked as we could see their facial expressions in the first strip. When Tintin opens the wig and his real hair is shown in the second strip, the two villains immediately recognize him through his distinctive hair. In this case, Tintin is ‘borrowing’ Negroid’s physical characteristics and using them through make up and hairstyle aiming not to be noticed by anyone.

However, an act of borrowing other cultures these days could become controversial; for example make up and costume in the Halloween season. Figure 8 is a perfect example to describe this phenomenon. Vincenty (2020) raises a particular question, “is it appreciation, or appropriation?” (para. 1). Negroid-style dressing may have been fine in the 1930s; in contrast, in this era it could be considered as cultural appropriation. According to Cuncic & Marsh (2020), cultural appropriation refers to the use of objects or elements of a non-dominant culture in a way that does not respect their original meaning, give credit to their source, or reinforces stereotypes or contributes to oppression. Cultural appropriation, therefore, is a complex and subtle phenomena that many people struggle to comprehend—or are unaware of when they are committing it. Moreover, it can lead to cultural denigration, namely when someone adopts an element of a culture with the sole purpose of humiliating or putting down people of that culture. The most obvious example of this is black face, which originated as a way to put down people of colour as having certain undesirable personality traits.

To avoid cultural appropriation, cultural denigration, and racial accusations, Tintin’s disguise is changed in the movie adaptation by not disguising as a certain race. Tintin puts black wig with a different hairstyle, adds a moustache and wears glasses to cover his face, and maintains his skin colour (figure 9). Moreover, like Africans, visual illustrations of Native Indian American —

traditional Indian costume (figure 10) along with a redskin nickname — are not filmed as well as all the Redskin city scenes in *Tintin in America* comic book. Some people might argue that the appropriations are limiting imaginations, yet there are rules and manners in the society that should be respected for humanity and the sustainability of film industry.



Figure 8. Tintin disguise as a Negroid in “The Broken Ear” comic book



Figure 9. Tintin disguise in “The Broken Ear” film

## Unspoken Nicknames

Besides the visual illustration of skin colours, there are also written skin colour nicknames in the comic book. For example, Redskin for Indians (figure 10 and figure 11) and Yellow skin for Chinese (figure 12). Even though the Indians are not depicted by red colour like the Negroid who is illustrated with black colour, their skin is more reddish if it compares to the American. However, in the album, not only the White who has a nickname for the Indians, but the Indians also calls the White with Paleface. What is more, Redskin is also used as the name of the city (figure 11 A and later is changed to Red Dog city in the film adaptation (figure 11 B). The city is modernized and illustrated as a cowboy city, not an Indian city, by shooting thoroughly the entire bustle of the city.

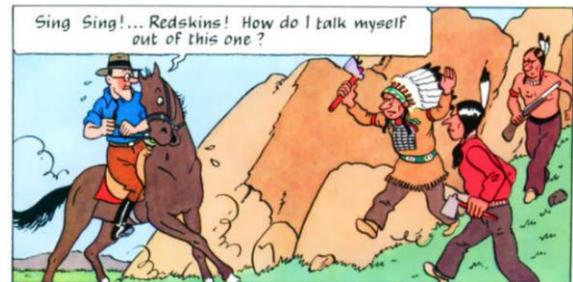


Figure 10. An American calls Indians as Redskins in “Tintin in America” comic book

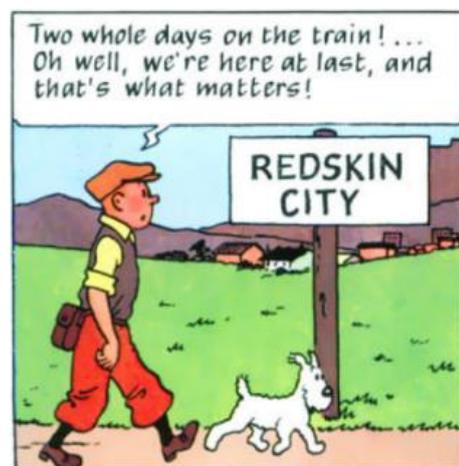




Figure 11. The change of Redskin city in “Tintin in America” comic book to the film

Figure 12 of *The Blue Lotus* comic book, describes an oriental stranger from Shanghai who wants to meet Tintin. Before he came, Tintin had already been warned by a fortune-telling fakir who predicted that there would be a person with yellow skin looking for him. Yellow skin is often given to describe Mongoloid or Asian people. As noted by Mountfort (2012), China was apparently the foremost “Othered” (p. 38) civilization for Europeans at that era. Consequently, Chinese became the representative of Asian, as it indirectly mentions “Shanghai”, whereas there are Japanese characters also in the comic book like Mitsuhirato and his party. Shanghai is emphasized twice by Maharaja’s servant and continued by Tintin’s response, repeating “from Shanghai”. It seems Tintin’s answer is to make sure where he comes from; however, it is a way to do an affirmation by repetition.



Figure 12. Tintin meets a man from Shanghai in “The Blue Lotus” comic book

In the film adaptation, on the other hand, this scene is being simplified. There are omissions of several words in the description of the man from Shanghai. The scene’s script is provided below,

*Maharaja’s servant: There is a stranger to see Tintin sahib. He said it’s very important.*

*Tintin: Strange, but no one knows I’m here.*

*The Chinese man : Mr. Tintin (bowing)*

*Tintin : ... (bowing)*

In contrast from the main source, Shanghai is not mentioned and repeated. The Maharaja’s servant does not mention where The Chinese Man comes from, nor does Tintin. Moreover, the most important part is that Tintin’s suspicion is not included. Nevertheless, “stranger” is still maintained as an explanation to the audience that Tintin never meets this man. In addition, by keeping his Mongoloid physical appearance, slanted eyes and black hair, the audience can immediately guess what his race is.

These physical illustrations in the sub-chapter about other races made some people and academicians consider Hergé as a racist although he admitted that none of his works have malicious aim to degrade or humiliate others. In an interview by Numa Sadoul, Hergé said that there was popular prejudice to portray the yellow people (Farr, 2001) and some people warned him to be

careful when he brought Tintin to China. Before the creation of *The Blue Lotus*, Hergé, then, was introduced to Zhang, a Chinese student from whom Hergé learnt Chinese art and literature, and the most important thing is a real friendship. Tintin and Zhang's friendship is inspired by his friendship with Zhang, where he used Zhang's name as a character in his work and their friendship continued until decades later. *The Blue Lotus* was basically a portrayal of the perception about Chinese and political conditions in China at that time. In fact, Hergé himself has already done an action to counter the prejudice by creating generous characters such as Zhang, Mr. Wang and his family, and other Chinese who help Tintin. He also wrote about Zhang again in the next album *Tintin in Tibet* to illustrate how sincere their friendship is. Also, there is a conversation between Tintin and Zhang about European's perception about Chinese and they both laugh because they know that it is just a myth. Moreover, the director modifies Mitsuhiro's employee characterisation as a person to save Tintin from mad poison injection while actually he is not in the comic book to reduce Chinese villain.

### Hybrid Race Reconstruction

Another example to counter Orientalism in the film adaptation is visualizing Lopez in *The Broken Ear* who is identified as half-caste in the comic book (figure 13). According to Aspinall (2013), half-caste is a term to degrade racial categories related to the moral condemnation of "miscegenation" from the 1920s to 1960s. It portrays historical connotations as less, secondary, degrading, unnecessary and also refers to negative historical origins: slave trade (Aspinall, 2013). Paradoxically, although half-caste term is already replaced by mixed race, some people are content to use half-caste term even to make it as self-descriptor or group identifiers while others consider it a dated racist term or rude (Aspinall, 2013).



Figure 13. Ridgewell tells Tintin about Lopez in the Walker expedition in "The Broken Ear" comic book

Nevertheless, since the director decides to emphasize and visualize "the Walker expedition", he does negotiation by constructing Lopez's identity in order to emphasize Lopez without clearly showing his race background. As Lopez has an important role in the story, he could not be erased. Thus, his identity reconstruction is the best answer. Moreover, if the director keeps Lopez as a mixed race with his role as a thief, it could bring negative perception about half-caste depiction. As it is addressed to American and International audiences, the director considers the mass audience reception to these modern television adaptations of classic literature.

There are a number of important differences between the comic book (figure 13) and the film adaptation (figure 14). In the comic book, Ridgewell says "... a half-caste named Lopez, the explorers' interpreter ...". In the film adaptation, on the other hand, he says "He (*Walker*) had with him a young man named Lopez who was the guide for the expedition". The two transformations to describe Lopez's identity are as follows: first, "half-caste" is changed to "young man" and second, "interpreter" is changed to "guide". Therefore, he makes Lopez as 'natural' as possible to counter the stigmas of

Others by illustrating him as a young guide man instead of a half-caste interpreter.

Howard (2000) believes that social identity is based on several structures such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, and location indicators such as geography and place. Following this, the term 'race' is usually associated with physical or biological differences such as skin colour and eye colour; ethnicity describes social or cultural differences that are not always visible to the eye or grounded in nature (Hall, 2004). However, race and ethnicity are often overlapping (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Phoenix, 2010).

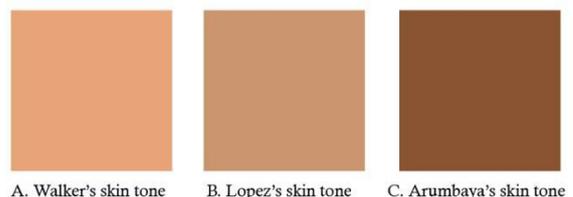
The changes in the film aim to illustrate Lopez without removing the original characterization in the comic book. Sanders (2005) states that the appropriations and modifications do not undo history, but they do call its stability into question; Lopez identity construction does not necessarily erase the meaning behind his true identity as a half-caste, yet it maintains the 'difference' as according to Hall (2004), it is the key to the concept of identity. First of all, the director changes "half-caste" into "young man" by focusing on Lopez gender and age (as Lopez is a name for a man) as his identity. Following this, becoming a guide is less strong than an interpreter to define Lopez's race and ethnicity as a half-caste. According to Phoenix (2010), language is one of the parts in the term "ethnicity" which refers to a collectivity or community that makes assumptions about shared characteristics based on cultural practices and shared history. In other words, if Lopez is able to speak and communicate using Arumbaya's language, the audience might assume that Lopez is part of the tribe. On the contrary, being a guide does not mean that he can speak the local language; a guide might know the area well but he might not originally from there or speak the language. In the film, Lopez's presence beside Walker occurs only in their arrival in the Arumbayas' village because his duty as a guide is to lead Walker and the party to the tribe's village, not to help Walker communicate with the tribe. It can be seen that Lopez never accompanies Walker

when he is with the Arumbayas; Walker interacts with the Arumbayas by himself.

Another important finding is that, in fact, Lopez's hybrid identity is shown in his skin colour. If we look closely at figure 14, Lopez physical appearance is illustrated like Walker (westerner)—small nose, small mouth, and lighter skin tone (compared to the native Indians). However, as it is seen in figure 15, Lopez's skin tone (B) is in between Walker's skin tone (A) and Arumbayas' skin tone (figure C). In short, the new colour is produced. Traditionally, it has been argued that hybridity as an 'in-between' term, referring to the 'third space', and for ambivalence and mimicry (Kalra, Kaur, & Hutnyk, 2005). The 'hybrid' species is different and cannot stand on either side but produces something new (Hall, 2004). Therefore, the director maintains the story's fidelity by changing from mode of telling to showing, transforming word into visual by giving new skin tone to Lopez.



**Figure 14.** Illustrated Lopez in "The Broken Ear" comic book



**Figure 15.** Comparison of skin tones

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the physical depictions of non-White race representations in the comic book are moderated and negotiated in the adaptation process by doing transformations namely adding, replacing, and erasing.

In the first sub-chapter, exaggerated depiction about black race are made and low class job are given in order to put them in low status to create distinction between White and non-White. This is not included in the TV series due to cultural denigration against the black race. Moreover, dressing up like Negroid is replaced by dressing up to be a different person in the film adaptation to avoid cultural appropriation.

In the second sub-chapter, nicknames of skin colour, like yellow skin and red skin, are not mentioned in the film adaptation. The adapter does not film the scene in Redskin city and changes its name to Red Dog city because it is related to the history of the American nation where formerly White people took the land and colonized Native Americans or Indians.

The third sub-chapter reveals the reconstruction of hybrid race illustration. In the comic book, hybrid race is written as half-caste—a negative term to explicitly show the race background. By contrast, in the adaptation, the adapter emphasizes more on the physical identity rather than focusing on the racial and ethnic identity. Besides the verbal reconstruction, the adapter visualizes the hybrid race, Lopez, by giving him ‘in the middle’ skin tone colour, a colour between Walker and the Arumbaya’s, so that what is visible is the difference in skin color, not the difference in race.

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