

Re-Animating Injustice: Spatial Segregation, Historical Erasure, and the Politics of Invisibility in Zootopia 2

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Abstract: This study examines how Zootopia 2 (2025) constructs a social allegory of structural exclusion through three mechanisms: spatial segregation, historical erasure, and stereotype manipulation. Drawing on qualitative content analysis of five key scenes, the study integrates animation-specific theoretical frameworks—particularly Aylish Wood's concept of 're-animated space', Suzanne Buchan's 'animated spatial politics', and Mihaela Mihailova's 'mastery machine'—to analyse how the film's digital animation techniques produce social meaning. The analysis demonstrates that Zootopia 2 advances beyond the first film's focus on individual prejudice to address systemic conditions of marginalisation, while its 'Disney-style ending' partially undermines this structural critique through individual moral resolution. The study contributes to animation studies by foregrounding the medium's specific capacity for social commentary and to critical animal studies by developing a complex animal narrative that resists simple metaphorical mapping.

1. Introduction

Zootopia was released in 2016, directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore and produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios. Unlike other commercial films, it confronted social prejudice head-on through allegory, according to Beaudine et al.[1]. Beneath the surface of peace and love, Zootopia framed the city as a predator-prey ecosystem and showed how fear and stereotyping distort intergroup relations. It also suggested that individual understanding, embodied by protagonist Judy Hopps, could overcome bias. However, the film left something on the table. By framing injustice mainly as a problem of personal attitudes, it hid the deeper structures, historical legacies, and institutional mechanisms that keep inequality going long after individual prejudices have faded.

As a sequel, Zootopia 2 (2025, directed by Jared Bush and Byron Howard), picked up this inquiry and took it in a direction that the original did not touch. Reptiles, who were completely absent from the mammal-centric world of the first film, are brought into the story, and this shifts the focus from individual attitudes toward systemic conditions. Through their enforced invisibility, spatial segregation, and the slow revelation that Zootopia itself was built on a suppressed history, the film raised a question that the original never got around to asking: what happens when exclusion is not just the product of personal bias but embedded in the city's geography, institutions, and foundational

myths?

Therefore, this paper argues that *Zootopia 2* reflects real-world social issues, specifically racial prejudice, systemic discrimination, and power inequality through its animal narrative. The study demonstrates how the film uses spatial segregation, historical erasure, and stereotype manipulation to construct a social allegory that resonates with patterns of structural exclusion familiar from real-world contexts. Following Meighoo's insistence on complex rather than simple allegory[2], the analysis does not treat reptiles as direct stand-ins for any specific human group. Instead, it examines how the film's interspecies dynamics illuminate general mechanisms of marginalisation, mechanisms that operate across different historical and social settings without reducing to any single case.

The significance of this study lies in how it traces the mechanisms through which animated films make structural injustice visible. *Zootopia 2* shows entire communities segregated, their histories stolen, their stereotypes weaponised by those in power. Understanding how popular media constructs these arguments matters because such narratives shape how audiences encounter complex social issues: they teach people what injustice looks like, who deserves sympathy, and what solutions are imaginable.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Animation Theory and the Animated Animal

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on animation studies' understanding of how the medium constructs social meaning through form. Animation scholarship has long recognised that the animated animal is not a neutral vehicle for human stories but a specifically animated construct whose meanings emerge from the medium's technical and aesthetic properties.

Andrew Darley argues that animation studies must establish its own disciplinary identity rather than remaining a subfield of film or media studies[3]. This disciplinary autonomy is crucial for understanding how animation addresses social issues through medium-specific mechanisms—not merely as a vehicle for content but as a form that actively produces meaning through its formal properties. Darley's insistence on animation's specificity informs the present study's approach: *Zootopia 2* is not analysed as a film that happens to be animated, but as a work whose social commentary is constituted through animation.

Paul Ward further develops this medium-specific perspective by examining how animation's production processes shape its representational possibilities[4]. Ward's framework is particularly relevant to *Zootopia 2* because the film's reptile-mammal dynamics are not merely scripted but animated—literally constructed through digital modelling, texture mapping, and motion capture. The animal in animal animation is thus a digital artifact, not a photographic record, and this artifactuality has consequences for how social difference is represented.

More directly, Aylish Wood provides a methodological model for analysing how animation constructs spatial environments that carry social meaning[5]. Wood examines how animation re-animates space—not merely representing it but transforming it into a dynamic, mutable entity. Applied to *Zootopia 2*, this framework illuminates how the Marsh Market is not a setting but an animated space whose textures, proportions, and movements actively produce social hierarchy. The descent from *Zootopia*'s bright surface to the Marsh Market's damp underground is a spatial transformation that is achieved through specific animation techniques: changes in lighting models, texture resolution, and camera movement.

2.2 Animation, Power, and the Politics of Representation

While animal narratology provides tools for understanding how species difference carries social

meaning, it does not fully account for why animation specifically has become a privileged site for racial and social allegory. Animation studies offers a complementary perspective on how the medium's formal properties enable particular kinds of political commentary.

Mihaela Mihailova examines how digital animation technologies naturalise certain power relations through their operational logic[6]. Mihailova argues that digital animation's emphasis on control—of vertices, of motion paths, of render pipelines—produces a fantasy of mastery that resonates with broader ideologies of technological and social control. Applied to *Zootopia 2*, this framework suggests that the film's digital construction of reptile bodies (their scales, their venom, their movement) is not merely representational but operational: the digital control of these bodies mirrors the social control of marginalised populations within the narrative.

Suzanne Buchan analyses how animation constructs spatial politics through specific techniques of layering, compositing, and camera movement[7]. Buchan's concept of animated spatial politics—the way animation makes space itself political through formal manipulation—is directly applicable to *Zootopia 2*'s segregation narrative. The film's division between *Zootopia*'s bright, open spaces and the Marsh Market's confined, dark environment is achieved through animation-specific spatial techniques: differential lighting models, texture resolution, and virtual camera behaviour.

2.3 *Zootopia* Studies: From Simple Metaphor to Structural Critique

Academic attention to the *Zootopia* franchise has grown significantly since the first film's release in 2016, but existing studies exhibit a systematic limitation that the present study addresses.

Beaudine, Osibodu and Beavers offer the closest existing reference for this paper[1]. In their analysis of *Zootopia*, they point out that the predator-prey divide in the film serves as a direct metaphor for racial relations in Western societies. By exposing the systemic prejudice faced by marginalised groups, their work challenges the myth of meritocracy, the idea that success depends only on individual effort. They interpret Judy Hopps as a token minority figure in a police force dominated by larger animal species. This view provides a methodological model for linking animated narratives to real-world social structures.

However, their approach relies heavily on demographic statistics (matching the 10% predator population to the 12.6% Black population in the 2010 US Census), a method that risks simplifying complex racial dynamics into mere numerical parallels. More importantly, their analysis focuses almost exclusively on individual prejudice and intergroup conflict, paying little attention to how institutions, historical narratives, and spatial arrangements perpetuate inequality.

The present study responds to this limitation by drawing on animation-specific analytical frameworks. Donald Crafton traces the historical entanglement of animation with racial and ethnic representation[8]. Crafton demonstrates that animation's veiled genealogies—its hidden histories of production and reception—shape how contemporary animated films address social issues. This historical perspective provides a useful context for understanding *Zootopia 2*'s reptile narrative: the film's introduction of a previously absent species (reptiles) disrupts the established predator-prey binary and demands analytical tools that can account for multiple, overlapping systems of exclusion.

Mike Jones provides a technical framework for analysing how animation constructs spatial segregation[9]. Jones examines how the virtual camera in digital animation creates vanishing points that organise spatial perception and social hierarchy. Applied to *Zootopia 2*, this framework illuminates how the film's camera movements—descending into the Marsh Market, panning across segregated districts—actively construct the spatial politics of segregation. The vanishing point, in Jones's analysis, organises what is visible and what recedes from view; in *Zootopia 2*, this technique is mobilised to render reptile spaces literally peripheral, outside the central field of vision.

2.4 Animal Narrative and Humanimallegory

Herman provides a foundational account of animal narratives as cross-species storytelling practices, distinguishing between narratives that convey human issues and those that approximate animals' own experiences[10]. Jacobs extends this framework by emphasising how animal narratives simultaneously avoid reducing animals to symbols and expose the constructed nature of social hierarchies[11].

Meighoo introduces the term 'humanimallegory' to describe how social hierarchies are reflected in animated animal stories, distinguishing between simple metaphors and complex animal narratives[2]. This distinction is central to the present study's analytical approach: rather than matching Zootopia 2's reptiles to a specific marginalised group, the study examines how the film encodes reptiles through species attributes, social identities, and behavioural traits, and how these encodings interact with the social structures represented in the film.

The present study integrates humanimallegory with the animation-specific frameworks developed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2. The reptiles of Zootopia 2 are not merely symbols of marginalised humans; they are animated digital constructs whose cold-bloodedness, venom, and locomotion are visually and narratively elaborated through specific animation techniques.

Spencer Roberts offers a useful framework for understanding how animation constructs the representational status of its characters[12]. Roberts examines how digital animation blurs the boundary between presence and absence in the frame, creating what he calls virtual semiotics—a system of signs that operates through the medium's specific capacity for illusion. This framework illuminates how Zootopia 2's reptiles occupy an ambiguous representational space: they are biologically present in the narrative but socially absent from the city's official spaces and histories. The film's animation techniques—particularly the contrast between the fluid, detailed rendering of mammal characters and the provisional, shadowy rendering of reptile spaces—materialise this social absence.

2.5 Qualitative Content Analysis as Method

Methodologically, this study draws on Kuckartz's systematic approach to qualitative content analysis (QCA)[13]. Kuckartz argues that QCA is particularly suited to analysing complex texts, including films and visual media, because it combines structured coding with interpretive flexibility. Kuckartz's emphasis on transparency and traceability—every interpretive claim must be grounded in specific, identifiable evidence—makes this method appropriate for animation analysis.

For a film analysis, this means linking each coded category to concrete scenes with timestamps, rather than making general assertions about the film's 'message'.

Kuckartz outlines four core steps: developing coding categories, defining operational indicators, systematically coding materials, and analysing coded data to identify themes. This framework was adapted to the specific demands of animated film analysis. Rather than generic textual categories like language or discourse, the coding system focuses on species attributes, interspecies interactions, and social hierarchy—the three dimensions of social representation. This adaptation required careful thought about how visual and narrative elements in animation convey social meaning differently than verbal texts. A character's size, movement, and environment in Zootopia 2 are active carriers of social commentary, and the coding system attempts to capture this.

It should be noted that animation studies lacks a standardised methodology for scene analysis, a gap noted by Ward in his discussion of theory-practice relationships in the field[4]. The present adaptation of QCA to animated film analysis thus represents a methodological contribution, bridging systematic social science methods with the medium-specific demands of animation scholarship.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis operates through three interconnected dimensions: Character Symbolism, Social Structure and Power, and Conflict and Justice. These dimensions emerged organically from engagement with the literature and repeated viewings of the film, rather than being imposed from the outset. The framework builds on Herman's and Meighoo's emphasis on how animal characters carry social meaning[2,10], but it became apparent that character analysis alone could not account for the most disturbing aspect about the film: the way Zootopia's gleaming cityscape depends on the invisibility of its reptilian underclass. This led to the addition of the social structure dimension, drawing on Beaudine et al.'s analysis of interspecies power relations[1] but extending it to include spatial segregation and historical erasure. Finally, the conflict dimension emerged from observation that Zootopia 2 stages not just interpersonal conflicts but epistemological ones: whose knowledge counts, whose history is recorded, whose testimony is believed.

Within this framework, the analysis pays particular attention to what is termed the politics of invisibility. Throughout the film, reptiles are not merely disliked; they are unknown. Most mammals in Zootopia have never seen a reptile, have been taught that reptiles are extinct or mythical, and react with fear and disbelief when confronted with their actual existence. This dynamic maps onto what critical race theorists call epistemic violence, the systematic suppression of marginalised groups' knowledge and historical presence. The theoretical framework thus combines animal narratology with insights from critical race theory and spatial justice studies, though it should be noted that this is not a comprehensive critical race analysis. Rather, these theoretical lenses are used heuristically, to illuminate what the film is doing and to remain self-critical about what it might be oversimplifying.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Scene Selection

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is employed as the primary methodological approach in order to collect the representative scenes in Zootopia 2. Therefore, Zootopia 2 was viewed three times. The steps are outlined below, which will be presented in more detail later in the process. The first viewing was for overall narrative comprehension. In the second viewing, approximately 20 plot notes were made, recording specific details of animal characters, interspecies interactions, social conflicts, and spatial arrangements, with timestamps recorded for key moments. This note is attached in the appendix for easy viewing and verification. In the third viewing, 5 key scenes were selected from 20 scenes, which are the main object of this paper analysis for targeted verification of coding decisions and thematic interpretations.

Developing a careful research method was essential for this study and prevented over-interpreting. Potential bias was mitigated by grounding every interpretive claim in specific textual evidence and by coding scenes prior to developing full thematic analysis, following Kuckartz's recommendation to separate coding from interpretation as much as possible[13].

From approximately twenty candidate scenes identified, five scenes were selected according to three criteria during the second and third viewing: coverage of all three analytical dimensions (character symbolism, social structure, conflict and justice); reflection of all four social issues (racial prejudice, systemic discrimination, social stratification, power inequality); and narrative centrality. Table 1 presents the selected scenes with timestamps and analytical relevance.

Table 1. Selected Scenes from Zootopia 2

Scene	Timestamp	Scene Description	Analytical Relevance
1	00:29:42	The lynx family threatens Horse Mayor to kill Gary, Judy, and Nick, individuals who hold the truth, or use political resources to remove the mayor from office.	Political privilege and power threat; demonstrates how the dominant group actively manipulates institutional mechanisms to suppress dissent and maintain control.
2	00:33:45	Judy and Nick enter the Marsh Market for the first time, discovering the hidden settlement where reptiles and semi-aquatic mammals live in makeshift conditions beneath Zootopia's modern cityscape.	Spatial segregation as structural violence; reveals how marginalized groups are rendered physically and epistemologically invisible through geographic isolation.
3	01:01:29	Gary reveals that his grandmother Agnes De Snake, not the lynx chieftain Ebenizer Lynxley, was the true founder of Zootopia and creator of the weather wall; Ebenizer framed Agnes, stole her patent, and expelled all reptiles.	Historical erasure and narrative control; exposes how power operates through the monopolization of historical records and the systematic rewriting of collective memory.
4	01:15:40	Mammal journalists broadcast sensational coverage of the "reptile threat," repeating claims about venom attacks and criminal behavior despite having never communicated with any reptile.	Media narrative as structural power; illustrates how stereotyping is manufactured and weaponized by those in power to legitimize existing inequalities.
5	01:22:33	Horse Mayor experiences a moral epiphany and turns to assist the protagonists in exposing the truth, contributing to the lynx family's eventual arrest.	Conflict resolution path; raises questions about whether justice is achieved through institutional mechanisms or individual moral conversion.

4.2 Coding System

Each scene was analysed using a standardised coding catalogue with three dimensions and nine indicators (Table 2). Coding was conducted independently for each scene, with brief justifications recorded for each code. Thematic analysis of the coded data was then conducted to identify patterns across scenes, followed by metaphorical mapping to connect film content to real-world social issues. This multi-stage process helped ensure that the interpretations remained grounded in the film's actual content rather than preconceptions.

Table 2. Coding Catalogue for Zootopia 2 Text Analysis

Coding Dimensions	Specific Coding Indicators	Operational Definitions
1. Symbolic meaning of animal characters	1.1 Species Attribute 1.2 Character Social Identity 1.3 Behavioral Traits	1.1. Classify each character by core species traits 1.2 Document the character's social status, occupation and power

		position in Zootopia 1.3 Identify whether the character's behaviors conform to or challenge species-based stereotypes
2. The different species relationship of the social structure	2.1 Interspecies Interaction Mode 2.2 Social Power Distribution 2.3 Intergroup Segregation Status	2.1 Record the interaction between different species such as cooperation and conflict 2.2 Note the distribution of core power among different species and mark unequal power allocation phenomena 2.3 Document spatial, social or resource acquisition segregation between species
3. Narrative conflicts and resolution approaches	3.1 Conflict Type 3.2 Conflict Trigger Factor 3.3 Conflict Resolution Path	3.1 Distinguish the core different type of narrative conflict 3.2 Identify the key factors leading to conflicts 3.3 Record the specific methods to resolve conflicts

4.3 Mapping of Selected Scenes to Coding Dimensions

The five scenarios used for analysis were coded according to the three-dimensional framework listed in Table 2. Table 3 below labels the main coding dimensions of each selected scenario for reference.

Table 3. Selected Scenes from Zootopia 2 with Corresponding Coding Dimensions

Scene	Timestamp	Coding Dimensions
1	00:29:42	2.1(Interspecies Interaction Mode) 2.2(power Distribution)
2	00:33:45	2.3(intergroup Segregation Status) 1.1-1.3(Character Symbolism)
3	01:01:29	1.1-1.3(Character Symbolism) 2.1-2.3(Social Structure) 3.1-3.3(Conflict and Justice)
4	01:15:40	2.2(Power Distribution) 3.1(Conflict Type)
5	01:22:33	3.3(Conflict Resolution Path)

5. Scene Analysis and Findings

Rather than presenting findings by coding category, which would fragment the film's narrative coherence, this section is organised thematically around four analytical threads that emerged from the coding process. Each thread draws on multiple scenes and coding dimensions to build a cumulative argument about how Zootopia 2 constructs its social allegory. This thematic structure means that the sequence of the analysis does not correspond one-to-one with the numerical order of the coding dimensions in Table 2. Instead, individual dimensions reappear across different threads as they

become analytically relevant.

5.1 The Marsh Market: Segregation as Spatial Violence

The entry into the Marsh Market (00:33:45) marks the first sustained exposure of spatial injustice in the film. The Marsh Market is a place for reptiles to live in Zootopia 2, and almost no mammals except semi-aquatic mammals enter here. The visual contrast between Marsh Market and Zootopia is striking. Above ground, Zootopia has modern buildings, efficient transportation and abundant resources. Below, in a swampy suburb accessible only by hidden passages, reptiles and semi-aquatic mammals inhabit a makeshift world of half-wrecks, wooden docks, and water pipes.

The contrast is not merely thematic but formal. The descent into the Marsh Market is rendered through a vertical camera movement—a downward tracking shot that pulls Judy and the viewer from the brightly lit, horizontally organised cityscape into a space of diagonal instability. Where Zootopia's districts are colour-coded in saturated primaries (Tundratown's ice-blue, Sahara Square's orange, Rainforest District's emerald), the Marsh Market is rendered in a muted palette of browns and grays, its textures visibly rougher than the polished digital surfaces above. This is not a location that exists to be photographed; it is a space that had to be animated into existence frame by frame, and the labour of that construction is visible in its provisional architecture.

The sound design reinforces this spatial hierarchy. Where Zootopia's surface is saturated with ambient noise—traffic, conversation, media broadcasts—the Marsh Market is marked by dampened acoustics: water dripping, wood creaking, distant voices muffled by humidity. The space is not only unseen but unheard, a sensory absence that naturalises reptile exclusion as perceptual habit rather than political decision.

Moreover, the epistemological invisibility of reptiles is encoded in the film's rendering techniques. Mammal characters are modelled with high polygon counts, detailed fur simulation, and dynamic lighting that emphasises their physical presence. Reptile spaces, by contrast, are rendered with lower texture resolution, flatter lighting models, and less dynamic camera movement. This differential rendering is not merely aesthetic; it materially encodes which bodies count as fully present in the animated world.

From the coding perspective of Table 2, the scenario is mainly in dimension 2.3 (Intergroup Segregation Status). This isolation manifests itself simultaneously at three levels: spatial (reptiles are banished to the margins), social (mammals and reptiles do not interact in public life), and epistemological (reptiles' existence is almost erased from public knowledge). This multi-level exclusion is related to Lefebvre's analysis of space as a product of power[14]. Dominant groups produce space in ways that make marginalised groups physically invisible, a process that is central to spatial injustice. Mammals are undoubtedly the dominant group in society, while reptiles are the marginalised group. Spatial segregation exacerbates misunderstandings on both sides and stereotypes and discrimination against marginalised groups by the dominant group.

Moreover, serving as a pivotal ideological turning point, this scene fundamentally subverts Judy's established worldview. Judy, who in the first film represented the belief that individual effort can overcome any barrier, confronts a form of exclusion that predates her own consciousness. She cannot work hard or be kind to address this problem. The injustice is structural, built into the city's geography and history. Her realisation, visible during the descent, marks a shift in the film's political sensibility from individual merit to structural injustice.

5.2 Stolen History

If the Marsh Market makes spatial injustice visible, then the fact that the true builder of Zootopia, Agnes De Snake, was framed and wronged renders historical injustice visible as an inevitable

structural feature. At 01:01:29, Gary reveals that it was his grandmother Agnes De Snake, not the lynx chieftain Ebenizer Lynxley, who was the true founder of Zootopia and the creator of the weather wall. Ebenizer framed Agnes for the murder of the turtle nanny, stole her patent, and expelled her, which led to the expulsion of all reptiles from the city and the rewriting of history to erase their contributions. This reinterprets the entire film: the prosperity of Zootopia is not only built on the exclusion of reptiles but also on the theft of their labour, innovation, and historical recognition.

The revelation scene operates through a specific animation technique: the flashback to Agnes's original design is rendered in a different visual register—sketchier lines, less stable colour, a 'rough animation' aesthetic that contrasts with the polished present. This formal choice does not merely signal 'pastness'; it visually encodes the instability of historical memory itself. The past is not simply absent; it is present as a lower-resolution image, a degraded copy that signals its own suppression. When Gary presents the original patent, the document is shown in extreme close-up, filling the frame—a formal assertion of evidentiary weight that the narrative has previously denied to reptile testimony.

The scene's lighting design also carries social meaning. The dinner party where Gary disrupts the lynx family's narrative is lit in warm, golden tones that initially suggest civility and order. Gary's entrance introduces cooler, harsher lighting that visually marks him as an outsider to this comfortable world. The shift is not merely atmospheric; it is a lighting-based social coding that aligns with the film's broader chromatic politics: warm tones for established power, cool tones for disruptive truth.

This scene is significant on three coding dimensions. For character symbolic meaning (1.1-1.3), Gary's revelation redefines him from the villain initially perceived by the audience to a truth-telling hero. His disruption of the dinner party and questioning of the lynx chieftain turn the 'crime' of stealing the diary into an act of historical restoration. For social structure (2.1-2.3), the scene reveals how power operates through narrative control. The lynx family maintains its dominance by monopolising the preservation of historical records rather than just through force. For conflict type (3.1-3.3), the scene presents an epistemological conflict about whose knowledge is regarded as legitimate. What renders this historical erasure feel contemporary rather than merely historical is the film's attention to how it was accomplished. The lynxes did not simply kill Agnes and hope no one noticed. They built institutions, schools, museums, public memorials, that systematically propagated their version of history. This is the control of historical narratives to legitimate existing power arrangements.

Delgado and Stefancic identify this as a core mechanism of racial domination[15]. Education itself can function as a tool of domination when it excludes certain voices from the curriculum. This insight connects the film to ongoing debates about whose history gets taught in schools, whose monuments stand in public squares, whose contributions are celebrated in national narratives. This historical narrative monopoly is the core mechanism of racial domination. By controlling historical discourse power, the ruling class screens and beautifies its own achievements, obscures the efforts and experiences of minority groups, and gives legitimacy and continuity to the unequal power structure. This fictional narrative accurately reflects the institutionalised historical aphasia and cognitive injustice in the real world.

Historical erasure of labour and contribution is not limited to fictional narratives. The Chinese labourers who built the western leg of the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s—roughly 12,000 workers, the vast majority of that section's workforce—were systematically excluded from the completion ceremony and subsequently written out of national narratives, a process consolidated by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.¹

The parallel between Agnes De Snake's erasure and the historical treatment of Chinese railroad workers illustrates the structural nature of historical aphasia: it operates through multiple mechanisms—educational screening, official narrative monopoly, rewriting of public memory, and

institutional exclusion—ultimately solidifying racial hierarchies and structural inequalities.

5.3 Stereotype as a Political Tool

In the previous analysis, reptiles were spatially isolated and their historical contributions were erased. Building on this, *Zootopia 2* further reveals how stereotype is created to serve political purposes. Throughout the film, the lynx family constructs reptiles as dangerous and untrustworthy through both media and political privilege. This construction has a clear function: by creating the illusion of a reptilian threat, the dominant group is able to consolidate its own rule while diverting public attention from its own crimes.

The Lynx family's political operations are directly presented at 00:29:42: They threaten the horse mayor to kill Gary, Judy, and Nick, individuals who hold the truth, or use political resources to remove the mayor from office. This scenario corresponds to 2.1 (Interspecies Interaction Mode), the interaction between different species such as the lynx family's threat to the horse mayor, as well as the stigma and prejudice against reptiles. Thus, the discrimination of reptiles by mammals is not entirely a spontaneous social prejudice, but also the result of active manipulation by those in power, such as the lynx family. The lynx family used its institutional position to tie the purging of dissent to fear-mongering, allowing political persecution to proceed in public safety.

The media coverage at 01:15:40 in the movie further illustrates the lynx family's construction of reptiles as dangerous and untrustworthy through media channels. Mammal journalists, who have never actually communicated with any reptiles, keep repeating sensational claims about venom attacks and criminal behaviour. The media provides these ruling classes with the means to report on these stories as a deliberate fabrication by those in power. At the coding level, this scenario is mainly reflected in dimension 2.2 (power distribution). Control over media narratives is a structural power that is different from physical coercion or economic control, yet is just as effective in maintaining an unequal order. Systemic discrimination therefore requires ideological legitimization, making power relations appear natural and inevitable by creating specific narratives[15].

The media coverage at 01:15:40 is rendered through montage: rapid cuts between different mammal news anchors, all repeating identical phrases. The repetition without variation is a formal technique that visualises the manufacture of consensus. Notably, no reptile appears in these broadcasts; the 'reptile threat' is discussed entirely in their absence. This is not merely narrative bias but formal exclusion: the animation literally refuses to render reptile bodies in the media space, making their invisibility a matter of frame composition rather than plot.

The news broadcasts are also chromatically coded: the studios are lit in sterile blues and whites, suggesting 'objective' journalism, while the stock footage of reptiles (when occasionally shown) is tinted in sickly greens and yellows. This colour grading is not neutral; it is a post-production technique that attaches moral valence to species difference before any narrative argument is made. The film thus exposes how animation's formal properties—editing rhythm, colour grading, frame composition—are mobilised to construct political consent.

Moreover, a critical tension remains: while the film criticises stereotypes, it also risks inadvertently reinforcing them. Gary is indeed poisonous, and his bite did poison Chief Cattle, and Pawbert, a member of the lynx family, also used this venom against Judy. Gary's venom is his biological trait, which does not mean he is morally flawed, but for most of the film, mammals fear it, and the media's strong emphasis and promotion of it is constantly reinforcing this stereotype, ultimately making him serve the political interests of the lynx family. Although the film was originally intended to break the stereotype that a venomous snake does not mean a bad snake. But whether audiences, especially younger ones, will still internalise the association that snakes equal danger based on having this framework is an open question. Although the movie makes Gary carry an interpretation needle with

him seem like a solution, there are no laws and regulations to improve it. It mainly relies on self-awareness and does not fundamentally solve the problem.

5.4 Resolution: Disney-Style Ending

The film also has a happy ending in the film's finale, where the lynx family is finally captured, the snake's reputation is restored, and the reptiles rejoin Zootopia society. It is also a Disney-style ending, which refers to a narrative closure model that appears repeatedly in Disney animation and live-action films: no matter what kind of conflict or trauma is experienced in between, the story will eventually lead to a happy and emotionally satisfying ending, justice will be served, love will be rewarded, social order will be restored to harmony, and the audience will leave with the satisfaction of 'living happily ever after.' This ending is often criticised as a narrative attempt to dissolve complex social contradictions and transform structural problems into moral victories at the individual level[17].

The ending is achieved through three formal mechanisms. First, chromatic restoration: the final sequence returns to the high-saturation palette of Zootopia's opening, visually encoding 'problem solved.' The Marsh Market, previously gray-brown, is not shown in the final montage—its absence from the frame is the film's way of resolving its problem without resolving its space. Second, musical closure: the score returns to a major-key orchestral arrangement associated with Judy's earlier triumphs, sonically linking the new resolution to individual achievement rather than structural change. The music does not modulate; it repeats, suggesting circularity rather than progression. Third, bodily normalisation: Gary's final appearance shows him upright, clothed, participating in social rituals—a visual assimilation that neutralises his earlier serpentine difference. The animation does not ask whether mammals have learned to coexist with snake bodies; it asks whether the snake body can be made unthreatening enough to be ignored.

The ending scene exhibits two features that kept the ending stuck in Disney-style ending. First, the realisation of justice depends on 1:22:33, which is coded as 3.3 (Record the specific methods to resolve conflicts). Because the horse mayor had a moral epiphany, he turned to assist the protagonist. Second, and more importantly, the film emphasises that the revelation of truth is a prerequisite for justice, but it is not equivalent to justice itself. Just knowing that Agnes founded Zootopia does not undo the damage done by a century of exclusion. Many reptiles still need years to overcome internalised shame, mammalian societies do not transform overnight, and reconciliation is a process, not a one-time event. Just like the situation in real society where some ethnic groups are marginalised, it also takes time to repair and correct the system.

This tension is central to the political expression of Zootopia 2 in Disney: beneath the surface of peace and laughter, it allows the audience to think about its meaning beyond that. It presents reconciliation without showing easy forgiveness, it delivers justice, seemingly allowing history to be written off without actually addressing the issue.

6. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that Zootopia 2 advances beyond the first film's 'metaphor mapping'[16] to construct what the literature review identifies as a complex animal narrative. The film preserves reptiles' biological specificity—cold-bloodedness, venom, serpentine locomotion—while using interspecies dynamics to reveal the general operating logic of structural exclusion. This refusal to directly correspond allows viewers to confront an internally self-consistent system of fictional inequality rather than searching for one-to-one group mappings.

From this system, four recurring mechanisms emerge: spatial segregation renders marginalised groups physically and epistemologically invisible; historical erasure naturalises current power arrangements; stereotypes transform biological differences into moral threats; and institutional

gatekeeping controls whose testimony counts as credible. These patterns echo across multiple real-world contexts without reducing to any single case.

However, the limitations of animal allegory warrant acknowledgment. Translating human suffering into species conflict risks making discrimination appear more resolvable than it is. In the film, a century of erasure is undone by exposing a patent; in reality, repair requires material redistribution, institutional transformation, and generational struggle—processes beyond the scope of commercial animation. Audiences and researchers must remain aware of where allegory's boundaries lie.

This research has methodological limitations. The selection of five scenes necessarily excluded other significant elements—Judy and Nick's partnership crisis, comedic sequences, action set-pieces—that shape how audiences process social themes. Sawahata et al. demonstrate that humour perception involves predictive neural processing, indicating that comedic rhythm modulates cognitive resource allocation[18]. A more complete analysis would integrate these formal aesthetic dimensions, particularly given animation's reliance on visual and kinetic humour as a mode of audience engagement.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study addresses a question Zootopia never really answered: what happens when exclusion gets embedded in a city's geography, its institutions, its founding stories, not just into what individuals think? The analysis of five scenes suggests Zootopia 2 takes this seriously, though not always consistently.

The film's answer, roughly, is that embedded exclusion operates through three reinforcing mechanisms. Spatially, the Marsh Market shows how segregation does not merely separate groups but makes the marginalised literally unthinkable, most mammals have no category for 'reptile' because they have never encountered one. This is what systemic discrimination looks like when it is built into the physical environment. Institutionally, Agnes's erasure demonstrates that power sustains itself less through brute force than through controlling who gets remembered: schools, museums, public memorials all working to naturalise one group's dominance. Those in power decide whose labour matters, whose name survives, whose descendants inherit shame or pride. And at the level of founding myth, the media's manufactured 'reptile threat' reveals how stereotypes function not as innocent misunderstandings but as political tools that make current arrangements seem inevitable. The audience learns to sympathise not with the abstract idea of justice but with specific characters like Gary, Agnes, whose individual stories carry the weight of collective harm.

Whether the film fully achieves the complex animal narrative called for by the theoretical framework is another matter. The ending gestures toward institutional resolution, the lynx family arrested, reputations restored, but leans heavily on individual moral awakening to get there. This is not quite the structural answer the film's own logic demands. A mayor who helps because he has a change of heart is still, in the end, a person making a choice, not a system reformed. The film knows this, and it keeps showing what a century of exclusion has damaged that cannot be quickly fixed, but Disney's commercial imperatives pull it toward closure nonetheless. The solutions it imagines remain partial: truth-telling is necessary but not sufficient, reconciliation is a process rather than an event, and a single document cannot undo generations of erasure.

Moreover, this tension is what makes the film interesting rather than disappointing. It gets the problem right in ways few animated films attempt, even if it cannot resolve it. For researchers and educators, that partial success is worth studying: it shows how popular media can make structural mechanisms visible to audiences who might otherwise ignore them, and it invites the kind of argument this paper has engaged with throughout. A film that leaves you quarrelling with its choices has done

more intellectual work than one that simply confirms what you already believe.

This argument extends beyond the cinema. *Zootopia 2* suggests that justice requires knowing the history that has been hidden, holding institutions accountable for maintaining it, and learning to share space with groups we have been taught to fear. These are slow, contested processes, not single revelations. The film knows this even when its ending pretends otherwise. That gap between knowledge and resolution is not a failure of the film so much as an honest reflection of where we actually are.

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