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A Bakhtinian Reading of Disney's Reciprocal Relationship with its Critics Since *Snow White* (1937) in the light of a Comparative Analysis of *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Moana* (2016).

Gizem İncegöl

115611031

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İtir Erhart

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Pocahontas (1995) ve Moana'nın (2016) Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi İşığında Snow White'tan (1937) bu yana Disney'in Eleştirmenleriyle Karşılıklı İlişkinin Bakhtin'in Teorisiyle İncelemesi

Gizem Incegul

115611031

Tez Danışmanı :

Doç. Dr. Mır Erhart

İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

(İmza)

Jüri Üyeleri

Doç. Dr. Erkan Selen

İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

(İmza)

Jüri Üyesi:

Doç. Dr. Eylem Yenerdeğuslu

İstanbul

Kadir Has Üniversitesi

(İmza)

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ABSTRACT

Women and racial minorities have been fighting for their initial human rights for decades, and where are we now? In an urge to find “one of the reasons why”, this study shifts back to childhood and focuses on children’s animated movies by Disney, a harshly criticized company for promoting stereotypes. In addition to a critical discourse analysis, this study also acquires an -almost- affirmative approach upon an alleged reconciliation of the company with its critics and toning down sexism and racism in its contents. This reciprocal relationship requires a Bakhtinian reading on the basis of his concepts of Addressivity and Responsivity. Moreover, each criticism is matched with the target movie and what the company does/ whether it changes the criticized features in the following production or not is analysed. As a result, it was found that Disney tries to give a proper response to the criticisms it receives. Moreover, filling a gap in the existing knowledge, another aim of this thesis is to pursue the reason why Disney promotes bias for decades. Pursuing the motive behind, both sociopolitical atmospheres in which animated movies were released and CEO’s managing the company at the time are investigated. While the atmospheres of each era does not justify Disney’s attitude, it was concluded that the management holds a greater power over the productions and the messages they convey.

Key words: Disney, Bakhtin, discourse analysis, stereotypes

ÖZET

Kadınlar ve azınlıklar yıllardır temel insan hakları için savaş veriyor, peki bugün neredeyiz? Bugünkü durumun sebeplerinden yalnızca birini bulma arayışındaki bu çalışma çocukluğa odaklanarak, Disney'in bu hedef kitleye yönelik hazırladığı animasyon filmlerine odaklanıyor. Söylem analizinin yanı sıra bu çalışmada, söz konusu şirketin yıllardır aldığı eleştiriler akabinde yönelebileceği bir uzlaşma sürecine de, olumlamacı bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşıyor. Disney'in içeriklerindeki cinsiyetçi ve ırkçı söylemleri azalttığı bu süreç, Mihail Bahtin'in teorisinden Addressivity ve Responsivity yani "hitap" ile "cevaplılık" konseptlerinin ışığında inceleniyor. Şirketin aldığı her bir eleştiri, hedeflenen film ile eşleştirilerek Disney'in bir sonraki yapımında bu özellikleri değiştirip değiştirmediği inceleniyor. Sonuç olarak, Disney'in mevcut eleştirilere cevap vermeye çalıştığı saptanıyor. Bunun yanı sıra, bu çalışma, mevcut literatürdeki bir boşluğu doldurma gayesiyle Disney'in yıllar boyunca ayrımcı dili yaymış olmasının ardındaki sebebi de araştırıyor. Bunun ardındaki motivasyonu arayan çalışmada her bir filmin yayımlandığı yıldaki sosyo-politik atmosfer ile şirketi bugüne dek yönetmiş üç farklı yönetim kurulu başkanı, muhtemel bir mazeret olarak ele alınıyor. Günün gerekleri Disney'in yaklaşımını aklamada yetersiz kalsa da, yönetim kurulu başkanlarının, animasyonların verdiği ya da vermeye çalıştığı mesajlar üzerinde etkili olduğu sonucuna varılıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Disney, Bahtin, söylem analizi, stereotipler.

INTRODUCTION

While Baudrillard defines culture as one going through the process of “agonizing revision” of “rewriting everything”¹, Bakhtin goes beyond the notion of culture and claims that life itself, by its nature is dialogic. The question of this thesis is, “How do we “rewrite everything” and how much the dialogic nature of life itself is involved in this rewriting process?” This study aims to analyse the company Disney’s reciprocal relationship with its critics and whether it -in Bakhtinian terms- give a proper “response” to the “utterances” “addressing” the content it creates, challenging it to be promoting sexist and racist bias. In many recent researches, it is claimed that there is a reconciliation process by Disney and the company has been “toning down” sexist and racist messages in its productions. Particularly focusing on so-called “Princess Movies” the company releases, the presumable change is going to be analysed.

Since Disney released its the most egalitarian movie, *Moana* quite recently, in 2016, it can be claimed that there is not enough contribution about this particular movie to the existing knowledge. In this study, first of all, Disney’s princess movies are going to be analysed in a chronological order and how the portrayals of female and male characters change, how the messages conveyed differ are going to be shown. Afterwards, a comparative analysis of *Moana* and *Pocahontas* is going to foreground the presumable change in tone clearly, since both movies have the same theme but there is 21 years between their release dates.

Considering the fact that Disney predominantly reprocesses European fairytales or myths by adapting them to the American culture, the notion of rewriting is an essential part of this study. That is to say, not only how

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994) 12.

Disney changes its tone chronologically, but also how the way it rewrites original tales, the way it omits or implements stuff will be the focal point of this thesis. With *Pocahontas* and *Moana*, the company utilized “the daughter of the chief” theme twice in 1995 and in 2016. With a comparative analysis of the two characters, again in Bakhtinian terms, the question whether the company really gives a proper response to its “addressers” or not will be answered.

In addition to the lack of literary research about *Moana*, another gap aimed to fill is the reason “Why?”. Why does Disney create such biased content? In an urge to find this, each movie will be analysed in their sociopolitical context and possible influence by the three CEO’s of the company will be investigated.

1. PROMOTING THE UBIQUITOUS: HOW DISNEY REINFORCES SEXIST AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES

1.1 Methodology

Analysing whether and/or how Disney promotes the binary oppositions in society, especially the one between man and woman and how, alongside with socially attributed roles, these oppositions are reflected on children’s animated films is important. The thesis also traces the presumably patriarchal authority behind the urge to categorize human beings and how Disney productions reinforce the belief of heteronormativity with its ubiquitous portrayal of gender roles. Even though they have no scientific reference whatsoever, binary oppositions such as man/woman, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, Western/Oriental, master/servant are so ingrained in people’s minds that they are now seen as “normal” and even “unquestionable”. Since these binary oppositions are quite deeply engrained, a shift back to our childhood, along with an analysis of children’s

animated films we have all had watched, is necessary. In the pursuit of unearthing the reason behind such consistent bias, this research investigates the role of content which is produced primarily for children and its possible involvement in the process of normalisation of gender and racial stereotypes. The films to be analysed are two animated movies by Disney: *Moana* and *Pocahontas*. While Pocahontas, as a character, is considered to be one of Disney's second-generation princesses, Moana, from the third generation, is depicted as a modern version, even a filtered rewriting of Pocahontas, through whom Disney tries to provide an account of all the sexist content it had produced up until then. The presence of Moana as a modern character provides us with an opportunity to examine the concept of Responsiveness introduced by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.² Afterwards, the thesis was transformed into a constructive feminist study by appreciating Disney's moderation and temperance in its sexist and racist content. Even though both heroines have strong personalities and are each the daughters of the chiefs of two different tribes, the ways they look at life and what they look for from life differ greatly. Moreover, another concern of this research is identifying the clashes between the concepts of gender portrayal and/or racial identity in the two animated films and how the ideas they convey differ.

1.2 Theoretical Background: Why Do We Otherize?

Considering the language we use, the movies we watch, the books we read, the governors we elect, it does not come as a surprise that discrimination in terms of gender and race has turned out to be a notion deeply ingrained in today's actions. The reasons for the urge to categorise are many. French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan asserts that each subject needs

² M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).

a significant “other” to uphold his or her fictive identity by saying: “It is this moment that decisively tips the whole human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others...”³, while French philosopher Jacques Derrida goes one step further in *Acts of Literature* and claims that language consists of binary oppositions which can be unearthed by adopting a deconstructive approach, saying:

“And the reading must always aim at a certain relation, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not [...] of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce.”⁴,

In *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, which is a coherent analysis of Michel Foucault’s theory, it is said that we, as individuals, self-craft ourselves on the grounds of what society and societal norms offer us: we are not completely free during the process, we delimit ourselves by conforming to the norms.⁵ Moreover, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler says that we conform to the norms imposed on us by society and again we cannot be honest, even with our own selves, since we look outside on the world and inside on ourselves through a certain framework of norms.⁶ Butler also says that these norms are neither natural nor neutral. We are born

³ Jacques Lacan, and Bruce Fink, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, (New York: Norton, 1977), 5.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 101.

⁵ Hubert L. Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Harvester Press: Brighton, 1982).

⁶ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (Vancouver: Crane Library at the University of British Columbia, 2011).

into a certain society which is already normative, thus, in a way, we grow up with these norms. This is the reason why examining how social norms are reflected within content for children is important. If a child who is in process of, in Foucaultian terms, “self-crafting” and we present him or her a Disney movie, what would be the result? What message do these movies transfer to them? How do these movies rewrite societal norms? Again, the question to ask is, “What happened, or has been happening, so that these young white children presuppose that they have the right to join the line in such an unjust way?” Are these binary oppositions simply imposed on us at the very early stage of life? In order to answer these questions, a look back at children’s animated films is necessary.

In the realm of positive sciences however, the accepted notion is supported by the way the brain operates, in which the unusual is observed and understood by being put into conventional categories which are more familiar.⁷ Explaining the whole issue as it currently is will always be a challenge as this is an ever-evolving issue. The aim of this particular research is to focus on the blind spots of many theories by questioning how this normalisation process of gender discrimination in particular, or even binary opposition in general, can be seen as unquestionable. In an urge to find this, a shift back to childhood is chosen as the right methodology.

⁷ Hung-Cheng Chang, Stephen Grossberg, Yongqiang Cao. “Where’s Waldo? How perceptual, cognitive, and emotional brain processes cooperate during learning to categorize and find desired objects in a cluttered scene,” (Frontiersin, 2014)

1.3 The Importance of Media Consumption in the Process of Normalizing Bias

Before moving further, it is crucial to acknowledge how our surroundings, what we observe throughout our lifespan effect our ways of thinking. The content the media transfers reflects the realities of the society it belongs to. Therefore, through media consumption, people get to “experience” a kind of socialization, especially through TV and internet, and in this way, they are almost “taught” their society’s basic beliefs and value systems.⁸ Moreover, media consumption is also considered to be influential in how people construct their portrayals of gender or racial identities. Researches show that being exposed to movies, books, etc. filled with characters constructed with regard to stereotypical gender or racial roles, changes, if not governs, individuals’ concepts of “real” gender or racial identities⁹. More importantly, productions targeting children, -as in this research, Disney productions- constitute more danger. Since children are in kind of a transition period in which they observe and come up with “facts”, they might suffer from difficulties while discriminating between what is right or wrong, fact or fiction. Thus, what they see or rather, what we let them see and watch even more greatly influence the way they think and how they turn out to be as adults.¹⁰ In 1997, Pryor and Knupfer stated that for the last 25 years, mass media has been acting as the most important medium in children’s socializing.¹¹ According to Zipes, these

⁸ Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Dana E Mastro, “Mean Girls? The Influence of Gender Portrayals in Teen Movies on Emerging Adults' Gender-Based Attitudes and Beliefs,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85. (2008) 131-146.

⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰ Vivek Agarwal, Saranya Dhanasekaran, “Harmful Effects of Media on Children and Adolescents,” *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health.*(2012) 38-45.

¹¹ Debra Pryor, Nancy Nelson Knupfer, “Gender Stereotypes and Selling Technologies in Television Advertising: Effects on Society,” (Kansas: 1997).

productions can even change and divert the audience's original vision, since they benefit from visual esthetics, humour and eroticism to blur any undesirable message between the lines.¹²

Moreover, it is accepted that media consumption, especially contents stained with bias can effect children in a negative way; psychologically. Moreover, Grabe and Hyde even stated that media use is highly related to body dissatisfaction.¹³ Girls with perfect bodies on TV or movie screen, like Pocahontas, do not really represent the perfect role model for young viewers. Studies have shown that girls who are exposed to such "almost impossible to attain" bodies incessantly, might suffer from body dissatisfaction during their life.¹⁴ Not only children, but also adult women are also effected by those representations. Douglas Brode asserts that when *Snow White* was released, women, no matter what their status is in the social and economical hierarchy, felt "compelled" to buy dark red rouges and heavy mascaras.¹⁵

A comprehensive study carried out by Ofcom states that today, 96 percent of children between the ages of 3 and 4 watch TV for 14 hours a week and 52

¹² Jack Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar, ed., (New York: WW Norton, 1999), 332-352.

¹³ Shelley Grabe, Janet Shibley Hyde, "Body objectification, MTV, and psychological outcomes among female adolescents," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 39, (2009), 2840-2858.

¹⁴ Daniel Clay, Vivian L. Vignoles, Helga Dittmar "Body Image and Self!Esteem Among Adolescent Girls: Testing the Influence of Sociocultural Factors" *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 15, (2005), 451-477.

¹⁵ Douglas Brode. *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*, Teksas: University of Texas Press, 2005), 172

percent of them go online for nearly 9 hours a week.¹⁶ As for children between the ages of 12 and 15, the study shows that 90 percent of them watch TV on a TV set for around 13 hours a week and 99 percent of them spend approximately 20 hours a week online. Thus, the amount of time spent in front of a TV set is more or less same at the ages of 3 or 15, moreover the time they spend online increases. Between the ages of 3 to 15, our perceptions, thoughts and goals in life are shaped. In *Enhancing Learning through Play: A Developmental Perspective for Early Years Settings*, Christine Macintyre underlines the fact that children, especially the ones between the ages of 3 and 4 enact the roles they see around; no matter if the role is attributed to his or her mother, father or a character seen on TV.¹⁷ When they reach the age of 5, they take one step further and beyond just “enacting” what the characters around do, they start empathizing with them. In 1971, Bandura stated that children are inclined to model behaviours they see on TV or in movie screen.¹⁸

That is to say, for instance, a little girl at the age of 5, goes beyond dressing like a Disney princess, she also tries to embody that princess’ characteristic traits, too. Thus, animated movies, just like any other production targeting children, play a crucial role in their characteristic development and they might reinforce the concepts of socially attributed gender/racial stereotypes and bias.

¹⁶ Ofcom Corporation, “Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2018,” Accessed May 16, 2019. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/134907/Children-and-Parents-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-2018.pdf.

¹⁷Christine Macintyre, *Enhancing Learning through Play: A Developmental Perspective for Early Years Settings*, (London: Routledge, 2016). 24.

¹⁸Albert Bandura, *Psychological modelling: Conflicting theories*, (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1971).

The stereotype projection to children does not only shape how they imagine themselves or how they think about their own life. Children who are exposed to content stained with bias incessantly also start to behave in a certain way in public, too. Many will be familiar with the picture depicting a group of children in a park, queuing up to play. The picture, which was taken during the segregation period in which African American people in the United States had subordinate status, presents a queue that consists of white children at the front and the black children are at the end of it. It is implied that the black children must join the line behind any white children, while white children can join the queue in front of black children. One can possibly claim that during that particular period, racial discrimination in the United States was so powerful, that this was simply “normal”. However, it still seems strange to see 5-6-year-old children internalizing discrimination and behaving in a blatantly discriminatory manner to conform to the attitudes of the day. This is the reason why this study focuses on children’s animated movies.

Moving further to a more theoretical approach, in his well-known work, *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes says: “There exist, for instance, dolls which urinate; they have an oesophagus, one gives them a bottle, they wet their nappies; soon, no doubt, milk will turn into water in their stomachs. This is meant to prepare the little girl for the casualty of housekeeping, to ‘condition’ her for her future role as mother.”¹⁹ The toys are considered to be very influential in child development. By giving little girls dolls which urinate, we do not support their imagination, we only impose the idea that it is “their duty” to take care of the baby. By making little girls watch *Snow White*, we give an underlying message to them that if they stay humble,

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, Richard Howard, and Annette Lavers. “Toys,” *Mythologies*, (The Noonday Press: New York, 1992) 53.

pretty and patient enough, even though evil step mothers can come across, a prince will come to save them.

Most researchers approach the issue with a psychological framework; introducing the reader with the stages of development in a human being's lifespan, proving that children start imbibing even the most severe stereotypes at early stages in life, through conducting fieldwork and carrying out interviews. However, a research, a content analysis which also includes the history of the firm which produces these productions and how the firm's approach changes in relation to the current era would be a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge. Feminist literature is rich in research criticizing Disney for its sexist and racist content. Before moving ahead with introducing and analysing particular Disney productions, it is crucial to acknowledge the history of Disney Company, in full The Walt Disney Company which was founded in Los Angeles, California in 1923. Today, Disney is seen as one of the greatest mediums for transferring sexist and racist content, and just analysing their productions' language would not be enough in order to reach a comprehensive study. Who was responsible for the story-making processes for the company? What was happening in the World, when Disney was releasing these movies?

2. HISTORICAL ATMOSPHERES AND THREE CEO'S EXAMINED IN AN URGE TO ANSWER THE QUESTION WHY

2.1 When The Walt Disney Company was Founded

Conducting a discourse analysis, analysing series of complex meanings in a particular production -in this case, it is Disney's productions *Moana* and *Pocahontas*- in terms of issues such as gender and race requires inquiries and taking one step back to the history of the company and the social

atmosphere of the time period during which the productions were released. As said before The Walt Disney Company was founded in 1923. Five years after World War I, when many soldiers were still suffering from shell shock and the prevalent feelings of the era was despair, sorrow and grief. It had been 3 years since the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote. 1923 was the year when the first issue of Equal Rights was published, 7 years after the formation of The National Woman's Party (NWP) in America in 1916. It was the time when President Franklin D. Roosevelt was taking steps such as New Deal to support African Americans who filled labor shortages caused by World War I.²⁰ In short, 1923 was the year when the people all around the world suffered from great disasters and needed to "laugh". It was the time when people and legislations were undergoing certain changes in favor of minorities. The Walt Disney Company was founded just in the right time to provide people with an opportunity to laugh, to forget about daily troubles. Their first full length feature production was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which was released in 1937 with a budget of 1.49 million dollars. During the time, it was the highest-grossing film with sound.²¹ It was nominated for Best Musical Score in 1938 Academy Awards.

The time period around 1938 is important for women. The legislations rewarding women and black people their initial rights were being passed, one by one. In 1936, women gained judicial approval of medicinal use of birth control. Mary McLeod Bethune was appointed by President Roosevelt as the Director of the Division of Negro Affairs for the National Youth

²⁰ *Library of Congress*, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom," Accessed 10 May, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/segregation-era.html>.

²¹ Oldest, "10 Oldest Disney Movies Ever Made," Accessed 10 May, 2019. <http://www.oldest.org/entertainment/disney-movies/>

Administration. In the same year, the first African-American federal judge, William H. Hastie was appointed, too. She was the first woman who was appointed by the President himself and was holding the greatest authority among African-American officials during the time. In 1937, The U.S. Supreme Court upheld Washington State's minimum wage laws for women. In 1938, The Fair Labor Standards Act established minimum wage without regard to sex. In 1939, Jane M. Bolin was appointed as the first African-American woman judge in the United States. Thus, the time period during which The Walt Disney Company released its first animated movie was, just like the era it was found, is filled with appointments and legislations in favor of minorities.

However, it would not be appropriate to say that this first production reflects the enthusiastic mood of the social equality movement of the time. Even though the first three princesses, *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) were created before the second-wave feminism, which is also considered to be the basis of "the modern feminism"; other princesses created after that, even during the peak of the Women's Right Movement, hardly represent the modern woman of the time period. Ariel (1989), Jasmine (1992), Pocahontas (1995) Belle (1991) as characters, still demonstrate the traditional roles determined by the social order. However, as it will be discussed in this paper, Disney tries to catch up with the social change. The appearance of Jasmine and Pocahontas, as the first Arabic and the first Black princesses is important. Moreover, the most recent princesses like Moana (2016), Elsa and Anna (2013), Merida (2010) are expressing great examples of female independence and female solidarity to the audience. However, is Disney, through the influence of the human rights movements, capturing the features of the modern woman of the time, or rather, just giving a response to the harsh criticisms through toning down the

level of sexism and racism in the movies? The first real example of female solidarity takes place in a Disney movie in 2013. It was not until 2016 that heroine and the hero do need each other and there is not a romantic relationship between them. Considering the fact that Disney is kind of following the Renaissance of human rights after 5-10 years,²² we can say that the content filled with bias cannot be the result of the prevalent thought of the particular time period. Guizerix also states that Disney does not reflect the liberalistic thoughts of the time, though they were very much dominant. Claiming that Disney ignored the women's movements of the time with each Disney movie, Guizerix states that the company undermined the progress women obtained.²³

2.2 Walt Elias Disney's Personal Life as a Possible Justification for Bias

Analysing an animated movie requires historical research to provide a basis. However, in order to reach a well-rounded conclusion, investigating and digging up the characteristics, even the private lives of the managers of the firm which published the animated movie, would be a fruitful contribution. While doing a similar research, Pamela Colby O'Brien holds Walt Elias Disney, the founder of the giant firm, responsible for such "stained" content the company produces.²⁴ On the other hand, by referring to O'Brien's point, Kirsten Malfroid confutes her idea by pointing out to another CEO, Michael Eisner. Following the death of Walt Elias Disney on the 15th of December

²² Jaquelyn Guizerix, "From *Snow White* to *Brave*: The Evolution of the Disney Princess," (2013), 5.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Qtd. in Christine M. Yzaguirre, "A Whole New World? The Evolution of Disney Animated Heroines from *Snow White* to *Mulan*," *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses*, (2006), 505.

1966, the company was going through an unproductive period, which was going to last until the 80's. Thus, Walt Elias Disney's influence on the process, and his enthusiasm for better animated movies was diminishing for the company during the period following his decease. Malfroid strengthens her argument by referring to the appointment of Michael Eisner as the manager within the firm during the 80's, after which Disney corporation was stronger than ever, and the biased messages were still prevailing. Malfroid states that "(Michael Eisner) as one of the main ideological sources behind the messages delivered through the Disney princesses movies released during the popular revival of the nineties."²⁵ Thus, while O'Brien holds Walt Elias Disney responsible for the content, Malfroid states that Eisner is the one to keep an eye on.

In her article, "Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney's *Cinderella*" Naomi Wood explains that the entire story-making process was under Walt Elias Disney's control and the staff had to receive his approval for any idea they might want to implement in the animated movies.²⁶ Moreover, she also claims that the company was replacing stereotypes belonging to the European culture mainly, with the American ones, in order to address the American middle class ideally. In Wood's work, she cites Frances Clarke Sayers and Bruno Bettelheim and defines Walt Elias Disney's fictive world of Disney as "an amalgam of cultural stereotypes filtered through the cleaning lens of nostalgia".²⁷

²⁵ Kirsten Malfroid, "Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in the Disney Princess Series," (2009), 5.

²⁶ Naomi Wood, "Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney's *Cinderella*." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 20, no. 1 (1996), 29.

²⁷ Ibid.

As O'Brien, Malfroid and Wood's arguments differ, there is another scholar, whose claims challenge and contradict what the other researchers say. Amy M. Davis wrote an essay in which she advocates Walt Disney. In the article titled "The 'Dark Prince' and Dream Woman: Walt Disney and Mid-Twentieth Century American Feminism" she challenges the "misconceptions" about Disney productions and Walt Elias Disney's life. She begins with describing Walt Elias Disney's childhood and how he was influenced by the female figures in his life. Davis uses Walt Elias Disney's close relationships with his mother Flora, sister Ruth and aunt Margaret as evidences for the so-called misconception about Disney's being the distribution center for sexist and racist content.²⁸ On the other hand, in Davis' article, it is also admitted that Walt Elias Disney had little experience with women other than his close family members and teachers. One of his employees at Ink and Paint, where animated movies are prepared for Disney company, Katherine Kerwin comments that Walt Elias Disney was a very introverted person and it was obvious he felt uncomfortable around girls. Elizabeth Bell also says that "the production staff was overwhelmingly male, except for 200 women in the Painting and Inking Department."²⁹ Kirsten Malfroid expresses the influence of female participation in a production by saying:

"This predominantly male input on the level of story-writing could partly explain the derogatory content towards women. (...) The input of a female screenwriter, namely Linda Woolverton

²⁸ Qtd. in Malfroid, 8.

²⁹ Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds., *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 107.

(Beauty and the Beast) can affect the movie's content to the extent of even providing a feminist message."³⁰

Not only Walt Elias Disney's relationships with other women, but also his past-traumas are closely examined by scholars. Citing Stephen Watts, Malfroid highlights Walt Elias Disney's unfortunate experience during and after the World War I. Again in Amy M. Davis's work, quoted in Malfroid's thesis, it is said that as a young soldier, Walt Elias Disney was shown a documentary about sexually transmitted diseases and this aroused Walt's suspicion of women. Furthermore, after the war, when Walt Elias Disney arrives back home, he discovers that while he was away, his high school girlfriend, without telling anything to him, got married to another man.³¹ Davis argues that these traumas did not make Walt Elias Disney a misogynist person, but rather, are the essence of the notions of "Graceful and Good Woman" and "Evil, Immoral Woman" that we see throughout Disney productions. Nothing can express someone's true personality but their own words, thus, while analysing Walt Elias Disney's approach to women or minorities, it is better to take a look at his own words. "Girls bored me- they still do. I love Mickey Mouse more than any woman I've ever known."³²

Davis not only tries to justify Walt Elias Disney, but she also presents counter-arguments for the racist content of Walt Disney movies. The movies are especially criticized for their portrayals of the people of colour and allegedly anti-Semitic statements. Davis, on the other hand, underlines that fact that Walt Elias Disney had many Jewish and African-American

³⁰ Malfroid, 11.

³¹ Qtd. in Malfroid, 8.

³² Walter Wagner, "You Must Remember This: Oral Reminiscences of the Real Hollywood," (New York: Putnam, 1975).

employees, even at positions holding higher authorities.³³ Another scholar, Allison Craven takes one step further and claims that even Walt Elias Disney's wife Lillian might be of Native American origin, since she was raised in Lapwai, Idaho, an Indian reservation.³⁴

As a result, there are clashing points of views when it comes to Walt Elias Disney's personality and his influence in the content of Walt Disney's movies. As O'Brien, Wood and Bell put the blame on him; Davis' claims seem to challenge them. However, Malfroid clearly states that Amy Davis' article about Walt Elias Disney is found to be one-sidedly positive, by saying; "Her analysis might be a bit biased by her own ideological views, which seem to tie in with Walt's conservative and gender stereotypical beliefs."³⁵

2.3 Michael Eisner and Prosperity after Disney Recession

Following the death of the founder, the Walt Disney Company was undergoing a tough time period during which they were suffering from lack of creativity and management problems. They released the animated movies *The Jungle Book* (1967), *The Aristocats* (1970), *Robin Hood* (1973), *Winnie The Pooh* (1977), *The Rescuers* (1977) and *The Fox and the Hound* (1981). The box office results for these movies are; *The Jungle Book* - 73,7 million dollars, *The Aristocats* - 17,4 million dollars, *Robin Hood* - 32 million dollars, *Winnie The Pooh* - not announced, *The Rescuers* - 29 million dollars and *The Fox and the Hound* - 39,9 million dollars. As it can be seen, following the death of Walt Elias Disney in 1966, the box office incomes of

³³ Qtd in Malfroid, 13.

³⁴ Allison Craven, "Beauty and the Belles: Discourses of Feminism and Femininity in Disneyland," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, (2002), 137.

³⁵ Malfroid, 15

the animated movies hardly meet the expectations. But after the end of the 1980's, the company was going to reach the highest grosses, however, the stereotypical approach, does not really change. As mentioned above, another scholar, Malfroid points out to the fact that Disney reaches its peak point "after" the death of Walt Elias Disney which took place in 15th December 1966, thus, the time period after his decease should also be analysed before doing a content analysis. She states:

"Top manager Michael Eisner injected the Walt Disney Company with new zeal near the end of the 1980s. New feature-length animation movies were launched, following each other quite rapidly, and old "classics" were rereleased. The Walt Disney Company was a popular success again."³⁶

One of the two animated movies to be analysed in this thesis, *Pocahontas*, was released during "the Eisner Era" at Disney. Before investigating Eisner's influence in the incessant sexism and racism in Disney animated movies during his period, it would be beneficial to study the era, the 80's. When *Pocahontas* was on screen in 1995, it had been 3 years since the Los Angeles riots, which began when the police officers shot and severely beat an African-American man, Rodney King for speeding on freeway and not obeying the police forces. The crowds demanded the dismissal of L.A. police chief, Daryl Gates and by the time him and other four officer were found not guilty, L.A. riots began. According to the latest reports, 55 people died and more than 2,300 got injured. The total damage of the riots are estimated around 1 billion dollars. However, after one year, federal court decided that the authorities violated Mr. King's civil rights and he received 3.8 million dollars. Thus, *Pocahontas* was released just after the time period during which people of color not only raised their voice, but also earned

³⁶ Malfroid, 15.

respect and compensation for the violation of their hard-earned civil rights. The year in which *Pocahontas* was released is also known with Million Man March. The march which gathered hundreds of black and white people together in Washington; people who aimed at bringing about a “spiritual renewal” among the people of colour and instigate the notion of solidarity between them.³⁷ As for women’s rights, 1995 is also an important date, because of the 1995 NGO Forum on Women and the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women. For the events, 31,000 women from 200 countries got together in China, struggle to obtain funds and visas notwithstanding. In 1994, the Congress ruled that teachers should receive training about gender equality and girls should be encouraged to study math and science. Thus, *Pocahontas* was released not only when the people of color was gaining their rightful place in society, but also when women were traveling thousands of miles to speak of their rights in China.

Michael Dammann Eisner was appointed as the chief executive officer of the Walt Disney Company on the 22nd of September 1984 and he held this power until the 30th of September 2005. Citing Hoisington, Malfroid explains this period by saying, “the content of the new series of Disney princesses movies stayed conservative”.³⁸ She asserts that, even though the princesses were modernized with regard to the tendencies of the 90’ies, they were still portrayed as the members of “the fair kind”, who are looking for romance as damsels in distress. In 1989, *The Little Mermaid* was released and the movie reaches the domestic total gross of 84,3 million dollars and 211 million dollars in total lifetime gross worldwide. It was a great success, that the time period following the release of *The Little Mermaid* was called “Disney Renaissance”. During the Disney

³⁷ *History*, “Black History Timeline,” Accessed 17 May, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>.

³⁸ Malfroid, 15.

Renaissance, the company reached the highest domestic and foreign box office results and the profit it earned was greater than ever. Following *The Little Mermaid* (1989), it released *The Rescuers Down Under* (1990), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998), and *Tarzan* (1999). These movies are among the well-known and highly acclaimed productions of Disney. However, the princesses of the Disney Renaissance; especially Ariel, Belle, Jasmine and Pocahontas are still pretty, harmless girls looking for romance and they almost have no other goal in life. The notions of selflessness, male domination and submissiveness prevail throughout these movies. Thus, it can be claimed that even though Walt Elias Disney is gone and almost 20 years passed, Disney still promotes gender roles through movies. As for the company's attitude for racial discrimination, though the introduction of colored people as princess' (Jasmine and Pocahontas) was highly appreciated, by the time it was released, *Pocahontas* was the first movie without a happy ending and Jasmine was the only princess who did not marry a real prince.

Eisner is predominantly described as a man who is concerned with monetary purposes more than other issues. Hoisington states that he was kind of "echoing" what Walt Elias Disney did; focused on social success stories such as the life stories of poor girls ending up with marrying a prince and becoming princesses.³⁹ Moreover, going beyond what Walt Elias Disney did; Eisner is allegedly said to behave rude towards his workers, excessively controlling and even mobbing them especially for more profit.⁴⁰ Underlining his interest in monetary purposes, Deborah Ross claims that even though throughout his era, Disney releases movies portraying people of different ethnicities (other than American or European) as underdeveloped and primitive, Eisner's goal was never to inscribe certain radical

³⁹ Deana Michelle Hoisington, *Disney!s World: The Art of exclusion*, (1996).

⁴⁰ Malfroid, 16

ideological -or, racist- messages. She argues that because of his passion for more profit, the company was going through a time period during which they would be making an animated movie of anything that would boost the sales.⁴¹

In his article titled “Memory and Pedagogy in the Wonderful World Of Disney”⁴² Henry A. Giroux claims that Disney has “the institutional and ideological power of a 4.7 billion multinational conglomerate that wields enormous influence pedagogically and politically in a variety of spheres.” The book was published in 1995. In 2019, 14 years after Eisner resigned as all his duties at Disney, the company is still considered to be one of the most recognizable companies in the world, with a market value of 152 billion dollars.⁴³ In 2018, the company earned 12.6 billion dollars and this amount was the highest figure the company earned until that day. Walt Disney Company’s yearly net income of 12.6 billion dollars is a true success, since the same figure for Disney was 8.98 billion dollars in 2017, 9.39 billion dollars in 2016, 8.38 billion dollars in 2015 and 7.5 billion dollars in 2014. 2018 was also the year in which Disney announced record revenue of 59.43 billion dollars. Even though the majority of this income (45 billion dollars) was gained through its market share in the United States and in Canada, the company and its productions are catching millions of people’s attention all around the world. However, Disney not only releases animated movies, but it also launches consumer products of the characters in the movies. In *A*

⁴¹ Deborah Ross, “Escape from Wonderland: Disney and the Female Imagination,” *Marvels and Tales* 18.1 (2004), 63.

⁴² Henry A. Giroux, “Memory and Pedagogy in the Wonderful World Of Disney” *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, Elizabeth Bell, Linda Haas and Laura Sells, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 27.

⁴³ *Statista*, “Net Income of the Walt Disney Company in the Fiscal Years 2006 to 2018,” Accessed 17 May, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273556/net-income-of-the-walt-disney-company/>

Concise Handbook of Movie Industry Economics, the company's ancillary sources of income are specified as the consumer products, theme-park attractions, videos, television, books, direct-to-video sequels and live theater shows.⁴⁴ According to Reavis' 1998 data cited in *A Concise Handbook of Movie Industry Economics*, only about 15 percent of the total net income came from the domestic box office. For instance, the movie *Pocahontas* generated 142 million dollars in domestic, but 200 million dollars in international box office. *The Lion King* generated 313 million dollars in the United States, but 438 million dollars abroad. *Moana* brought about 248 million dollars in domestic, but 388 million in international.⁴⁵ Also considering Giroux's statement that Disney movies and home videos are watched by hundreds of millions of people each year,⁴⁶ this research is not only focusing on the company's influence in the United States, but rather, on its influence on the children all around the world.

2.3 Bob Iger and New, Bias-free Movies for Disney

After Walt Elias Disney and Michael Eisner as two influential figures in Disney history, it is also crucial to analyse the current CEO, Bob Iger, under whose management the company released highly appreciated movies *Frozen*, *Brave*, *Tangled*, and *Moana*. Though there is not many academic researches about him -yet- as there is about Walt Disney and Michael Eisner, the interviews and press statements gives hints about his personality.

⁴⁴ Charles C. Moul, ed., *A Concise Handbook of Movie Industry Economics*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 167.

⁴⁵ Numbers "Moana (2016)". Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Moana>.

⁴⁶ Henry A. Giroux, Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

He admits that they are kind of abandoning the company's core values to maintain brand relevance in the modern world.⁴⁷ He praises the movie *Black Panther*, which has an entirely black cast, black director, black producer and he points out to the fact that this is the essence that makes Black Panther appealing. Though he confesses that it is a complicated issue, he says that he is not against the idea of a same-sex couple in a Disney movie. He ironically makes fun of previous Disney princesses by foregrounding the fact that they were pining for a rich man and "real dumb".⁴⁸ This shows that, the influence of a CEO in Disney might carry more importance than anticipated.

Moving back from 2019, as explained in this paper, throughout the time period in which Disney maintained its presence as the signifying power of the United States, the world has been undergoing a period of change, especially in terms of human rights. Even though the Disney Company does not adapt to the atmosphere of change immediately, from *Pocahontas* to *Moana*, the company changes its tone to a more moderate rhetoric in terms of racial and gender issues. What was influential in this change of positioning was not only the sociopolitical changes, but also the harsh criticisms the company received incessantly. What is more, Whelan claims that the change in Disney's tone is also the result of the change in its audience. She states that the company acquired a more neutral language during the time in which second and third way feminists started to become mothers, aunts and grandmothers of the new generations who are the targets

⁴⁷ Richard N. Haass, *Council of Foreign Relations*, "A Conversation With Disney CEO Robert A. Iger," Accessed 16 May 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-disney-ceo-robert-iger>

⁴⁸ Entertainment, "Disney CEO Figures They've Built Up Enough Goodwill To Do A Real Sexist One," Accessed 16 May 2019. <https://entertainment.theonion.com/disney-ceo-figures-they-ve-built-up-enough-goodwill-to-1819576426>

of Disney.⁴⁹ Before analysing how the company gave reaction to them, it is crucial to give room to the criticisms it received.

3. ON THE WAY TO RECONCILIATION: THE CRITICISMS DISNEY RECEIVES

3.1 “The Little Mermaid is an Anorexic Barbie!”

Accusing Disney of using the image of innocence portrayed in its animated movies as a mean for simple deception and securing its own expedience (authority and power), Giroux claims that the world of Disney is an ideological tool to “rewrite history, and purge it of its seamy side.”⁵⁰ Moreover, Giroux also comments that Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* looks like an almost “anorexic” Barbie.⁵¹ In the same book, Claudia Card points out to the discrepancies between Carlo Collodi’s *Adventures of Pinocchio* (1882; 1988) and Walt Disney’s *Pinocchio*. As underlining the fact that Disney excised the part where Pinocchio kills Jiminy Cricket, Card claims that though it is an act of violence that might effect children in a negative way, by exluding the murder, the company also diverts the way Collodi portrayed the issue of “growing up” in the original version and omitted some of the important aspects of the original story, like guilty conscience.⁵² . Asserting that in the original version, Pinocchio is able to not only empathize, but also reciprocate other people’s care and expectations, Card says that in the original version, when Jiminy Cricket mouths instructions to Pinocchio, he

⁴⁹ Bridget Whelan, “Power to Princess: Disney and the Creation of the 20th Century Princess Narrative,” *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 29, (2012) 27.

⁵⁰ Bell, et al. 27.

⁵¹ Ibid, 99.

⁵² Ibid, 33.

“really” is the voice of Pinocchio’s conscience. However, in Disney’s version, the same character is turned into a more tolerant version of the first; while Pinocchio obeys Geppetto and Blue Fairy.

Even in 1975, Kay Stone harshly criticizes Disney and refers to the princesses *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty* as girls so passive they need to be wakened up by a man. She underlines the fact that Cinderella marries the prince through excessive selflessness, kindness and endurance and *The Six Swans* reveals a perfect example of the notion of evil women who victimize the youthful, pretty girls.⁵³ Comparing and contrasting Disney productions with German fairytales (Märchen), Stone reveals that while all Disney heroines are pretty, obedient and immobile women, Märchen characters - which are the source of inspiration for Disney heroines- are mainly male. Moreover, unlike Disney heroines; they can be unattractive, even messy; and their looks won’t effect how the end of the tale will turn out to be. For instance, she compares the Grimms’ tale “The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is” with Disney’s *Cinderella*. While the eldest son in the first is clumsy and portrayed as a silly person, in the end, he succeeds in virtue of his bravery. On the other hand, Cinderella marries the prince through being an obedient and cute girl who does lots of housework.⁵⁴ Being one of the most criticized princesses of Disney, one of the reviews about Ariel the Little Mermaid was that she was a product for “consumer fetishism”.⁵⁵

⁵³ Kay Stone, “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us”, *The Journal of American Folklore*, (American Folklore Society, 1975), 43.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 44.

⁵⁵ Eleanor Bryne, Martin McQuillan. *Deconstructing Disney*. (London: Pluto Press, 1999) 23.

3.2 “Good Girls, Bad Women, and Doting Servants”

Furthermore, Bettelheim expresses his opinion that a child, especially a little girl who was raised listening to fairytales like *Cinderella*, she might actually believe that one day, a fairy mother might come to save her.⁵⁶ Moreover, girls with actual stepmothers, after watching Disney animated movies, might believe that all the problems in her life are caused by the stepmothers, since Disney is promoting that idea. Elizabeth Bell claims that the female characters in Disney productions are “paintings layered upon paintings, images drawn on images, in a cultural accumulation of representations of good girls, bad women, and doting servants.”⁵⁷

In the book *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment* which is neither criticizing nor justifying Disney, Brode reveals a previously unpublished photograph belonging to Disney, depicting the company’s original theme for the pagan orgy scene in the animated movie, *Fantasia* (1940). According to Brode, the company was going to cast female centaurs -a creature with the upper body of a human and lower body of a horse- to play African American women. Due to the censorship rules of the time, the company could not manage to do that.⁵⁸

In 1995, just after the great success of *Beauty and the Beast*, while Disney was applauded for portraying the heroine, Belle as a strong character, June Cummins wrote a critique of the animated movie and of Disney. While accepting that the character of Belle is different, she states that she still sees the same romantic plot in which the notions of autonomy, integrity, self-

⁵⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, (New York: Knopf, 1976), 54-55.

⁵⁷ Bell, et al. 51.

⁵⁸ Brode, 48.

sufficiency, mobility and most importantly, independence are robbed. She reveals the fact that in *Beauty and the Beast*, the message is still the same, that you can only achieve happiness with the help of a strong prince.⁵⁹ Similarly, even though Pocahontas is again a highly appreciated character with her being a strong-willed and free spirited princess, her portrayal was also criticized being reinforcing the stereotypical gender roles depicted in *Snow White*.⁶⁰ Since her first encounter with John Smith very much resembles romantic movies, the fact that Pocahontas does not look like a teenager but a grown-up woman and her ongoing relationship with Smith is very much like the ones in the movies for adults, not for children's; the movie is not cherished by feminist communities. Moreover, Pocahontas' acts of selflessness promotes the stereotypical ideas of "female as a nurturer, female as a sacrificing mother figure", too. The theme of selflessness is prevailing all over Disney productions, and in *Pocahontas*, the heroine gives up on her love, because she feels that she has to stay with her family and her tribe.

3.3 Sanitization and Americanization: Disneyfication

In 2007, in an academic journal by Libe Garcia Zarranz, it is claimed that while adapting other country's fairytales to silver screen, there is a process of sanitization and Americanization going on. Stating that sanitization and Americanization together puts forth "Disneyfication", Zarranz emphasizes

⁵⁹ June Cummins, "Romancing the Plot: The Real Beast of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Volume 20, Number 1, (1995) 22.

⁶⁰ Lauren Dundes, "Disney's modern heroine Pocahontas: revealing age-old gender stereotypes and role discontinuity under a façade of liberation", *The Social Science Journal* 38, (2001), 354.

that through animated movies, -which is supposedly an “innocent” genre specifically for children- Disney tries to reanimate power relations, female and male sexuality, racial identities and social hierarchy.⁶¹ Whelan, on the other hand, claiming that the company was performing a kind of monopoly of the same narrative, the one about being a princess, criticizes the fact that among the first wave princesses, two of them spends most of their time throughout the movie, in coma, waiting for a prince to save them.⁶²

Summarizing all the negative criticisms Disney received throughout these years would take a number of pages. On the other hand, main opinion of the scholars focusing on Disney animated movies is that the company started to tone down sexism and racism in its productions in 2009 with the release of *The Princess and the Frog* and held the line with the productions following it. Thus, as mentioned above, the change of Disney’s portrayal of women and racial minorities is worthwhile to study. However, there are other scholars who claim that a sense of change came along with *The Little Mermaid* (1989), since Princess Ariel saves a man who is about to drown and she incessantly goes against her father’s wills proving her bravery.⁶³ Just around the time when *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled* and *Brave* young viewers were introduced with alternative portrayals of women and people of colour. However, it was not until the release of *Moana* in 2016 that Disney finally came up with a movie in which there is a female figure in a non-romantic role/storyline; it is a perfect example of female solidarity with its lack of a male leading figure which would be “the norm” and

⁶¹ Libe Garcia Zarranz, “Diswomen Strike Back? The Evolution of Disney’s Femmes in the 1990’s” (2007), 55.

⁶² Whelan, 23-24

⁶³ Zarranz, 56.

finally, there is no romantic interaction between female and male characters who both need each other, for the tale to have a happy ending.

The reasons why Disney started to tone down its sexist and discriminative tone are many. It is claimed that over the years, as women gained more and more power in society, the portrayal of the “fair kind” has also evolved and this is reflected on Disney’s princesses’.⁶⁴ However, as explained above, the company does not react to the social changes immediately but rather, tries to “catch up with” them. Even though princesses became more empowered over the years, until the release of *Moana*, almost all the princess’ were still in a romantic relationship with the male figure and their identities were somehow less empowered compared to the male hero, especially during the first two eras.

At this point, it has been shown in this study that until the third era with Bob Iger, personal backgrounds are not the reason why Disney promotes bias. Moreover, social climate also does not justify the deed. It is a widely accepted idea that Walt Eisner Disney had a problematic relationship with women, however, this is not the case with Michael Eisner, who was the head of the company during the time period during which it released *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and other many controversial productions. The appointment of Eisner does not really change the content the company produces, they still receive almost brutal criticisms. These movies are among the harshly criticized productions, especially by the feminists of the second wave. On the other hand, 20th century was when people were becoming more conscious about feminism and egalitarianism. Thus, the number of criticisms the company received, which are also mentioned very briefly above, could be influential in Disney’s new productions, new portrayals of

⁶⁴ Whelan, 10.

princesses and storylines in general. At this point, Russian Theorist Mihail Bakhtin's concepts of Addressivity and Responsivity might be useful to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between the critics and Disney; thus, the change in Disney's sexist and racist tone.

4. MIHAIL BAKHTIN AND HIS CONCEPTS OF ADDRESSIVITY AND RESPONSIVITY

4.1 "Life, by its very Nature is Dialogic"

Being a teacher also, Mihail Bakhtin's arguments are mainly utilized in the realm of pedagogy and especially, in studies focusing on teaching-learning process. However, considering his own words "Life, by its very nature is dialogic"⁶⁵ and his being primarily a literary theorist, Bakhtin's approach to Addressivity and Responsivity would be very helpful while analysing Disney's interactions with critics and responses to the criticisms it receives.

Born in 1895 in Oryol, Russia, Mihail Bakhtin is known to have lived in many different cities which are rich in diverse cultures and languages. He especially shared his ideas in intellectual circles and benefited from a variety of different ideas. According to him, in order to live, you have to participate in dialogue in multiple ways and he states that words and sentences themselves neither belong nor address to no one. He distinguishes the notion of "word" from "utterance", and claims that each utterance must always be addressed to someone and they also should be seeking response. He acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between the owner of the

⁶⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, Vern McGee, Michael Holquist, and Caryl Emerson. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, (1987), 293.

utterance and the addressee.⁶⁶ He says that real life dialogues are adjusted towards the expected reply of the other end, the addressed. Moreover, each utterance has to have a beginning and an ending, no matter if it is vocal or written. What distinguishes Bakhtin from other theorists is that, he attaches importance to the two ends of a dialogue, not the word or the utterance itself. He values the active involvement of the both parties and acknowledges the fact that the “meaning” differs accordingly.⁶⁷

Moreover, Matusov claims that Bakhtin also embraces the notion of disagreement -a gap in the mutual understanding-, and he accepts it as a necessary condition for communication and for human existence.⁶⁸ Thus, in this study, in the light of Bakhtin’s notion of Addressivity, the reciprocal relationship between the critics and a possible gap in the mutual understanding will be examined. How the harsh criticisms address the company and how Disney gives a response to those utterances, how the company approaches the gap in the mutual understanding will be analysed.

According to Bakhtin, Addressivity is essential for an utterance, an addresser needs an addressee to appeal to, and to receive a response. Underlining the fact that “word” is a two-sided notion, Bakhtin distinguishes what the utterance means for the speaker and for the listener. Admitting that two meanings of the same utterance differ in both parties, Bakhtin also states that “word” is actually the end-product, created by the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁷ Steven J. Armstrong, Cynthia V. Fukami, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Management Learning, Education and Development*, (2009), 135.

⁶⁸ Eugene Matusov, “Irreconcilable differences in Vygotsky’s and Bakhtin’s approaches to the social and the individual: An educational perspective. *Culture and Psychology*,” (2011), 99-119 .

reciprocal, bilateral relationship between the two ends of the dialogue.⁶⁹ He also mentions that as they are involved in a dialogue, human beings bring the words to a multiplicity through different roots such as cultural diversity, background variety, sex, age-groups, political view, etc. As each human being bring about different responses to an utterance, “dialogue creates interplay of discursive forces”.⁷⁰ Bakhtin calls it *heteroglossia*,⁷¹ which means that the source of the same utterance might not be singular; but rather a unity of a number of different voices. In the context of *heteroglossia*, different voices “sing” together and contribute to the utterance itself, however, they do not constitute a one single, coherent voice.

4.2 The Intersection of Bakhtin’s Theory and Disney’s Reciprocal Relationship with its Critics

The intersection point between Bakhtin’s theories and the main point of this research -which is, Addressivity of Disney- might be his distinction between centripetal and centrifugal forces in case of any interaction. While the former means “official”, the latter means the opposite. Centripetal forces are the ones that reinforce the current norms and order. However, unofficial, centrifugal forces defy the existing rules and they might put forth change in the end.⁷²

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, (1987), 86.

⁷⁰ Rishabh Kumar Mishra, “From Monologue to Dialogue: Interpreting Social Constructivism with a Bakhtinian Perspective,” *International Journal of Progressive Education*, Volume 11, Number 1, (2015), 77.

⁷¹ M. M. Bakhtin, (1981).

⁷² Ibid.

A Bakhtinian reading of Disney's relationship with its critics would be a valuable contribution to the existing literature. However, how do we intersect his theory -especially his concepts of Addressivity and Responsivity- with the process of compromising? Before analysing how Disney responded to the criticisms it received, how the portrayals of the princesses have evolved over the course of years have to be examined. The reason why this study particularly focuses on *Moana* and *Pocahontas* is due to the fact that they will be analysed as rewritings and *Moana* is a very recent production, released in 2016 and there has not been enough research focusing on it. While Disney has been compromising or, rather, reconciling with its feminist critiques, the change the company's productions underwent and how the language has changed between the dates in which *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Moana* (2016) were released worth studying. As explained in detail above, until now, many scholars criticized Disney's productions and marketing strategies for rewriting and reinforcing gender stereotypes. While Peggy Orenstein's book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* handles the issue from a mother's perspective and harshly criticizes Disney, in the article "Images of Animated Others: The Orientalization of Disney's Cartoon Heroines from *The Little Mermaid* to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*", Celeste Lacroix analyses women of colour in five different Disney animated movies, basing her theory on 'orientalization' in Edward Said's terminology. On the other hand, in the introduction of *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender and Culture* (1995) edited by Bell, Haas, and Sells, the editors claim that Disney productions present a sanitized world, one free from violence, sexuality and political struggle.⁷³ As a result, not only because there is a clash of ideas, but also Disney is undergoing a process of moderation in content and being almost a rewriting of *Pocahontas*, *Moana* is considered to

⁷³ Bell, et al. 7.

be a focal point of this change, a brand new study centred on the period between 1995 and 2016, the dates when *Pocahontas* and *Moana* were released, is needed.

4.3 Disney's First, Second and Third Era Princesses

The aforementioned moderation in Disney's content and tone does not appear out of the blue and we end up with more brave and independent heroines. In "The Evolution of Disney Princesses and their Effect on Body Image, Gender Roles, and the Portrayal of Love", Rachael Michelle Johnson states that there are three different eras for Disney's princesses.⁷⁴ While the first era consists of the princesses of the early productions such as *Snow White and Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959); the latter era includes *The Little Mermaid*, (1989) *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998). Pocahontas, being the heroine of one of the children's animated movies to be examined in this work, is portrayed as a second-era princess. Lastly, according to Johnson, the most recent era starts with the release of *The Princess and the Frog* (2009); continues with *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012) and ends with *Frozen* (2013). This study was published before *Moana*, which was released in 2006. Thus, it would be an appropriate decision to include *Moana* in this selection, since the main character of the movie, Moana, is no less than other third era princesses in terms of egalitarianism and sense of independence. However, as England et al. states in 2011, in the article titled "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses", there is a significant lack of scholarly research primarily

⁷⁴ Johnson, Rachael Michelle, "The Evolution of Disney Princesses and their Effect on Body Image, Gender Roles, and the Portrayal of Love" *Educational Specialist* (2015,) 6.

concerned with the most recent era, the third one.⁷⁵ During the time in which this thesis was written, the contributions to the existing knowledge focused on the latest productions such as *Moana*, *Tangled*, *Frozen* are not sufficient enough to provide the researches with a well-rounded, comprehensive approach to the issue.

It would not be inappropriate to say that the portrayals of the princesses of the first era goes beyond the traditional feminine attributes. These princesses, who are Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty* are hardly good role models for children, since the salvations of Snow White and Cinderella come through their only asset, which is physical appearance and Aurora, whose rescue depends on a kiss from the prince, is immobilized almost throughout the half of the animated movie.

The second era princesses still possess the traditional attributes of “the fair kind”, however, their characters are incorporated with masculine traits, alongside with the traditional ones. For instance, the second era princesses are neither as immobilized as Aurora the Sleeping Beauty nor they solely depend on their suitors for salvation. These princesses are Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jasmine from *Aladdin*, Pocahontas and Mulan. These princesses are obviously more athletic, heroic and independent.⁷⁶ For instance, Aurora stands out with her rebelliousness and she continuously tries to make her own decisions.⁷⁷ However, this does not change the fact that she trades her legs and voice in order to be with the

⁷⁵ Dawn Elizabeth England, Lara Jan Descartes, Melissa A. Collier-Meek, “Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses.” *Semanticsscholar*, (2011).

⁷⁶ Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario, “The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess,” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, Volume 27, Number 1, (2004), 14.

⁷⁷ Johnson, 2-3.

prince she fell in love with. Furthermore, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* is depicted as a brave young woman who enjoys reading. Also, Belle is an outspoken person who is not afraid of any judgment. However, the theme of selflessness is prevailing throughout the movies in the second era. Pocahontas is, arguably the most masculine heroine of all eras, acts as a peacemaker between her people and the British colonizers. However, this does not mean that she or any other princess in the second era does not possess stereotypical gender roles, which will be discussed further on.

“The princesses from the first era encapsulate submissiveness, traditional female gender roles, and stereotypical beauty. Over the years Disney princesses have become more egalitarian, heroic, and athletic, showing progress that they transform with the corresponding societal shifts.”⁷⁸

Even though there is a progress of “neutralization” for Disney princesses, as Johnson says later on, we continue observing how Disney keeps on portraying its princesses through traditional norms for beauty and how they become more and more sexualized. While the princesses in the first era are mainly innocent, pretty young girls without almost any sexual attribute; one of the second era princesses, Pocahontas, who is known as the most masculine, stubborn princess who makes decisions on her own, is arguably the sexiest princess ever; with her long legs and sexy, curvy figure. Wearing a very short one-shoulder sheath showing her curves which looks like almost ripped underlines her sexuality as a “savage” girl. Considering that *Pocahontas* is one of the few Disney animated movies which do not end with a marriage, Lacroix suggests that her sexualization and her being a

⁷⁸ Ibid., 2-3.

native are the barriers to a happily-ever-after ending.⁷⁹ Also underlining the fact that the only biracial couple before Pocahontas and John Smith was Esmeralda and Phoebus in *The Hunchback of the Notre Dame*, Lacroix hints that it is highly possible that it is not a coincidence that the only movies of Disney which do not end with marriage includes biracial couples. She also emphasizes the fact that both Pocahontas and Esmeralda are portrayed as exotic beings with darker skin but less clothing, compared to their white predecessors.

Moreover, including Pocahontas, all second era princesses are more mobilized and brave characters. In her 2013 work, Guizertix calls the productions during this era “Middle Films” and states that second era princesses are “less domestic but more adventurous than those of the Early Films.”⁸⁰ About the second era princesses, Guizertix also states that these girls had dreams more related to adventure, however, they still sacrifice those dreams and their independence in the name of love.

“Princesses in these films dream of adventure and reverse gender roles by saving both themselves and their male peers from threatening situations, while men in these films appear more foolish and less desirable than earlier princes.”⁸¹

What distinguishes the third era from the second is the notion of gender roles and physical appearances. First of all, in the first movie of the third era, *The Princess and the Frog*, we are introduced with reversed gender roles and fragmented male figures for the first time. The princess of the

⁷⁹ Celeste Lacroix, “Images of Animated Others: The Orientalization of Cartoon Heroines From *The Little Mermaid* to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*,” *Popular Communication* 2. (2012), 225.

⁸⁰ Guizertix, 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

animated film, Tiana, is a free-willed young woman whose sole aim in life is to open up her own restaurant. As she works hard for this, their paths cross with Prince Naveen. Throughout the movie, we witness how practical and intelligent Tiana is and how she balances the thrill and fuss Prince Naveen causes. Likewise, Maui, the male hero of the animated film *Moana*, is portrayed as a demi-god, whose powers mostly rely on a hook given to him by a Goddess, again, a female character. Moreover, his character is explained to the viewers by ridiculing his self-esteem and pompousness. Aside from being the hero of the movie, the one who is going to save “the damsel in distress”, Maui, is almost like a side-character, who is created with the aim of amusing the viewers. However, towards the end of the animated movie, Maui and Moana helps each other and only then, the movie reaches a “happily ever after” ending. Thus, we can say that the notions of reversed gender roles and empowering the female characters are strongly reinforced in the latest movies.

Moreover, previously “sexualized” princesses of Disney are no longer looking like Victoria’s Secret models, now they look like “normal” human beings. Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* is the first African American Disney Princess⁸². Furthermore, Moana and Merida from *Brave* with their chubby figures and fuzzy hair do not look like the princesses of the previous eras at all.

The discrepancies between the second and the third eras are obvious, however, Disney also changes its tone and approach to the gender roles during the third era itself, too. In the opening of the first movie of the last era, *The Princess and the Frog*, the friend of the heroine Tiana, Charlotte La Bouff says that even if it is disgusting to her, she would kiss a frog, even one hundred frogs, if in the end she will be marrying a prince. Moreover, the

⁸² Ibid., 8.

young viewers of the animated movie are introduced with a huge social gap between Tiana, who is the daughter of a working-class family with her friend Charlotte La Bouff (Lottie), who is a white girl and the daughter of a very rich family. In *The Princess and the Frog*, the notions of a dream marriage with a prince, racism and social hierarchy are reinforced, even though Tiana as a character is an independent, strong-willed woman who is pursuing her goals in life. On the other hand, Disney, the company which has a shameful past on gender and ethnic stereotypes, is seemingly trying to change the way it characterizes female figures for its productions.

5. A CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DISNEY'S RESPONSIVENESS AFTER EACH MOVIE

The differences between the first, second and the third era princesses are many. Before moving further with a context analysis of *Pocahontas* and *Moana* and reveal how the latter is a rewriting of the former; a brief analysis of this change in tone on Bakhtinian terms is needed. Mihail Bakhtin claims that each utterance, including the criticisms to Disney productions, always address to someone and they are always seeking response. A comparative analysis of the princesses in the three different eras will reveal whether the Disney gives that response or not.

The criticisms the company receives, as included in this study, are numerous. However, in Bakhtinian terms, they form a *heteroglossia*. Though each of them address to another crucial aspect found in Disney's animated movies, no matter if they are about gender or racial discrimination in these productions; they produce a unity of different utterances. As Bakhtin said before, the utterances are not the same, their sources are many, however, they "sing" together and put forth a one single, coherent voice.⁸³

⁸³ Bakhtin, (1981).

Whether this unity of utterances could receive an appropriate response, or rather, responses in each Disney production, is going to be revealed in this study.

5.1 About the First Era

In the late 20th century, after it released *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, Disney was being almost chastised for portraying women as passive beings, since during both *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the heroines spend most of their time half-dead. Snow White is continuously tricked by her “evil” step mother and needs to be rescued by the seven dwarfs or the handsome prince. Cinderella is almost no different. She is enslaved by her -again- evil step mother and sisters and forced to do housework for them. Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty* on the other hand, is doomed to sleep for a hundred years on her fifteenth birthday, after a needle pricks her finger. Who curses her with this faith is again a female figure, as seen in the case of Snow White. And who rescues her is, again, a handsome prince. These first era princesses are passive but innocent girls who are manipulated by evil female figures to be rescued by prince charmings. The criticisms the company receives at the time were centering around; lack of female solidarity, women as damsels in distress and the incessant need for a prince for salvation.

5.2 Evolution of “The Princess” in the Second Era

Does Disney give a proper response to those criticisms in Bakhtinian terms? The first princess of the second era is Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*. In “Where Do Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid*”, Laura Sells, who is a women’s studies scholar, makes a spectacular comment for Disney, she states that with Aurora (*The Little Mermaid*), the concept of a mermaid has turned into a “bourgeois” icon for the current

feminist wave. Sells even claims that this particular character of Disney is giving signals for “reinventing” the portrayal of “woman” as subjects who have actual voice, as beings who can raise voice and speak out.⁸⁴ Considering the previous criticisms about portraying women as passive subjects, it would be an appropriate comment to state that Disney, in Bakhtinian terms, gives a response to the utterances addressed to itself. The company tries to omit the features that disturb the audience and critics and tries to put forth more “natural” and balanced characters. However, Ariel’s sisters are still the promoters of the patriarchy and Ursula the sea-witch is - just like Snow White’s evil step mother- tricks her, the movie still does not address the criticisms about the issue of lack of female solidarity.

Another princess from the second era is Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*. At this point, we not only have a character with voice, but also a girl who enjoys reading. She aspires to embrace the outside world. Arguing that Belle is a “Disney Feminist”, Susan Jeffords states that she as a character has been highlighted as “different” from beginning till the end; with her intellect and vision.⁸⁵ The previous criticisms mention not only female immobility, but they also underlines the fact that the first era princesses do not have goals in life. They live innocent lives and they end up marrying the prince. However, in *Beauty and the Beast*, we have Belle, who is not impressed by the masculinity of Gaston -the hero of the movie-, even though most of the women in the province are attracted to him. The character of Gaston is not only important for the female figure in the movie, but he also reinvents the

⁸⁴ Laura Sells, “Where Do Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid*,” *From mouse to mermaid: the politics of film, gender, and culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 177.

⁸⁵ Susan Jeffords, “The Curse of Masculinity: Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*,” *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. Elizabeth Bell, Linda Haas and Laura Sells, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 170.

male icon of the time. “A savage man” turned into a family member, through “education”. Claiming that this movie is more aware of the sexual politics of the time, Marina Warner signals the fact that Disney is “finally” starting to catch up with the mainstream of the era,⁸⁶ which was one of the main arguments of this study. However, the theme of selflessness was prevailing in this movie, since Belle gives up on her independence and mobility for other people other than herself. She gives up on her dreams for pleasing other people, which is going to change in the production following *Beauty and the Beast*.

The gap in the mutual understanding between Disney and critics, in Bakhtinian terms, seems to be embracing a compromise. Apparently, Disney tries to give a response to the comments made especially by the feminists of the time. Since the company has not given place to a person of colour in any of its productions until now, any comment about its racist approach was made out of the absence of the minority figures. When Disney releases *Aladdin* in 1992, the audience was introduced with the first female heroine who is not white. In the scene in which Jasmine was seen for the first time, she holds a male underwear, which is spectacular for a Disney heroine. Until this point, the princesses were never portrayed as aggressive or outgoing characters as much as it is in Jasmine’s case. The Arab Princess, who is even more rebellious than Ariel, unlike Snow White or Cinderella who become princess without even knowing what it really means, Jasmine can threaten a male figure, Jafar, that once she becomes princess, she will get rid of him. She can kiss a villain but she is also shown as a kindhearted princess who helps the poor. She does not listen to her father if she wants and she really is not into the power or richness marrying a prince would bring her. She defends her rights against male figures, against patriarch aggressively. She

⁸⁶ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*, (London: Vintage, 1995), 313.

chooses love and wants to marry Aladdin. The outspoken and brave nature of Jasmine introduces the young girls with an alternative portrayal of a princess for the first time. Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* was criticized mostly for its lack of egocentrism, since Belle values her father even more than herself. However, Jasmine goes against anyone for her own interests. She, in the pursuit of her own wishes, does not comply to anyone. However, it should not be forgotten that it takes three movies and a TV show for Aladdin and Jasmine to get married and *Aladdin* is the first Disney production that includes a princess who does not marry her prince.

Until the release of *Pocahontas* in 1995, Disney seems to be giving response to the criticism about immobile heroines, voiceless passive girls, one dimensional characters and the theme of selflessness. However, there are still female figures who are hindering the heroine's salvation. Moving further with another princess, who is also a woman of colour, Disney introduces the audience with Pocahontas, who is more masculine than any other female heroine in a Disney production before. One of the few issues that Disney has not re-touched until this point was female solidarity, which shows itself in *Pocahontas*. Throughout the movie, Pocahontas is portrayed as a stubborn princess who does not want to marry Kocoum as her father wishes and the character to whom she seeks advice is a female figure; Grandmother Willow. Grandmother Willow is shown as a spiritual guide and a maternal figure to Pocahontas, who had lost her mother when she was little. Moreover, Pocahontas' best friend Nakoma also supports her, however, she warns Kocoum, the man Pocahontas want to avoid, when she thinks that she was in danger. In *Pocahontas* we do not have evil female figures, we only have a stubborn princess surrounded with two women trying to help her, which is quite striking. Moreover, Disney, who has been promoting every aspect of the patriarchy during the first era, happens to show the British colonizers in *Pocahontas* as the "disturbers of the peace".

Following *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, which was released in 1998 has a Chinese princess, who disguises as a man to join the military instead of her father, to prevent his death in the battlefield. This is arguably the bravest act we have seen from a princess and this movie again does not have an evil female figure. In the beginning of the movie, her mother and grandmother tries to marry Mulan off, however, they eventually accept the fact that she is not “sufficient enough” to please a man with her clumsiness and lack of flirtatiousness. Those scenes are hardly pleasant for young audience, and *Mulan* ends when Mulan marries a handsome war-hero. However, considering Disney started its productions journey with a princess who was half-dead and waiting for a prince to kiss and save her, *Mulan*, being a female princess who fought in the war as a man, should be considered as a great step for the company. In Bakhtinian terms, throughout those years, Disney tries to give response to many of the criticisms mentioned above.

Overall, it can be concluded that princesses of the second era possess some features of a modern woman; strong-willed, courageous and independent. They are much more mobile compared to the first wave, they raise their voice when needed and they can stand up against patriarchy and traditions if they interfere with their life and goals. They are no longer pale white girls; they are of Arabic descent, Native American and Chinese. However, they still give up on their goals in life, in the name of love. Though their sole aim in life is no longer finding the prince charming as in case of first era princesses, they still make sacrifices for their love or for their families. For instance; Belle gives up on her freedom, Pocahontas feels obliged to stay on the island with her tribe and her family, even though it was apparent that she was yearning for discovering new countries. *Mulan* marries a man even though from the beginning of the movie, she was depicted as a girl who is not “that type”. The existence of a romantic relationship with especially a handsome male character is essential in these movies, and what was

criticized the most was the influence of this romantic relationship over the princess' reaching her goals in life. The princess had to marry the male hero, in order to get through.⁸⁷ Was it too hard for Disney to end one of the movies with a princess who does not wish to get married and still be happy, or with a princess who leaves everything for adventure, just because she wants? Was it still too early?

5.3 Egalitarianism and Third Wave Princesses

It can be claimed that Disney takes the biggest step with its third wave princesses. In 2013, Guizerix suggested that the third chapter includes Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010) and Merida from *Brave* (2012).⁸⁸ The study was published in 2013, thus, it would be an appropriate decision to include Elsa and Anna from *Frozen* (2013) and of course, Moana from *Moana* (2016). It was not until the audience meets these girls that Disney gives room to female solidarity and reversal of gender roles. Disney always had evil female figures or neutral female characters who could only had the slightest influence to the plot in general. Moreover, princesses, though more independent, still opted to act selflessly. But in the third era, princesses are going to save the lacking male figures, pursue their own goals in life and even reject marriage proposals! Their portrayals are no longer limited to the traditional gender roles, they even surpass the male figures in movies.

The first princess of the third era is Tiana, who is also the first African American Disney princess. Her and her friend Lottie's portrayals reveal a perfect example of Disney's responsiveness. In the opening scene, Tiana's mother reads the tale of *Princess and the Frog* to these two girls. While

⁸⁷ Guizertix, 17.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Tiana expresses that she is disgusted with the idea of kissing a frog for marrying a prince, Lottie, who is a more familiar type of a girl for American or European audience, seems to be mesmerized by the idea of marrying a prince, no matter what. At this point, asserting the fact that with her yellow hair, blue eyes and frilly pink dress is the one the girls are going to identify with, Guizerix claims that Disney gives a response to all fairy-tale romance criticisms. At the end of the movie, it is Tiana who reaches the happy end, and it is Lottie who understands that marrying an actual prince is not that important.⁸⁹ “The stereotypical wealthy white girl” who used to be the main focus of the movie is no longer under the spotlight, on the other hand, now, “the one to watch” is the un-romantic girl who is definitely not after pursuing handsome, rich princess to get married. Disney clearly juxtaposes what it had done until the release of *The Princess of the Frog*, the key to happiness -which is a prince- is no longer selflessness, submissiveness or patience. Princess Tiana, especially after losing her father, works so hard, which is unlikely for a Disney heroine, and shows her intelligence throughout the movie, while saving both her and the handsome prince’s lives when they were both frogs. Through Lottie, who is very much like the company’s very much criticized princesses, Disney gives the audience something to hold onto, but in the end, it shows that the path to chose is actually Tiana’s. The importance of this particular movie is not only of gender studies, but also racial Addressivity, since Disney points out to its first African American princess as “the good example”, “the appropriate role model” against the American upper-middle class beautiful, white girl, Lottie, who if this movie was created 20 years ago, would probably be the princess. However, even Tiana still possess some traditional gender roles. For instance Lester argues that the fact that she is a cook and waitress fits

⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

the traditional expectations.⁹⁰ She still needs Flynn Rider to save her, she even acts affectionate sometimes.⁹¹ She stays amphibian (as a frog) until she is saved by a prince,⁹² and this is the theme most harshly criticized in Disney's case.

When we reach the year 2010, *Tangled* is released, which is an animated movie which can be read as the rewriting of the tale *Rapunzel*. As mentioned in this study before, Disney was criticized for portraying Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* as a submissive girl who is abused by the movie's male hero. In Bakhtinian terms, Disney seems to give a response to those criticisms through the new portrayal of Rapunzel in *Tangled*. Guizerix claims that "The Modern Rapunzel" does the opposite and acquires a different technique to that of Belle's, and she rejects her abuser (Belle does not, for fear of losing her father). When analysing it in the light of Bakhtin's theory, it is seen that Disney really tries to make up for what it did before (and got criticized). The theme of subordination, -no matter if it is in the form of an endless sleep (*Snow White*), selflessness (*Pocahontas*) or actual captivity (*Belle*)- has been prevailing all over Disney productions. However, in case of *Tangled*, the company is trying to give a different message to its audiences. The person who captured Rapunzel is her step mother, Mother Gothel, and even though she chastises her harshly, Rapunzel actually loves her. However, in the movie, Rapunzel does what Pocahontas could not; she leaves her once-loved family member for freedom and adventure. She does what Belle could not; she is determined to leave the castle and free herself from captivity. At this point, we witness a Disney princess' ability to

⁹⁰ Neal A. Lester, "Disney's the Princess and the frog: The Pride, the Pressure and the Politics of Being First," *The Journal of American Culture*, (2010), 294-308.

⁹¹ Johnson, 25

⁹² Brooks Barnes, "Her Prince Has Come, Critics, Too," *New York Times*, 31 May, 2009.

distinguish logic and emotions; which is a pretty new concept for these animated movies.⁹³ Moreover, just like in case of Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*, once again, the female heroine is more capable than the male hero. While Rapunzel escapes with Flynn Rider, we see how clever she is, through the way she convinces him to escape and how she saves herself alongside with him. The reversal of gender roles is quite strongly ingrained in *Tangled* that one can even assume that the hero of this movie is not Flynn Rider, but Rapunzel herself. Both Rapunzel and Flynn Rider save each other in stressful and life-threatening incidents. And once again, just like Tiana, the new princess Rapunzel is also portrayed as a savior, not the damsel in distress.

Comparing *Tangled* (2010) to *Aladdin* (1992), it should also be underlined that differences between the endings of both movies also shows how Disney changes its tone. Even though she herself is the daughter of the king, Princess Jasmine had to share, or even yield her power to Aladdin. It is him who became “Sultan”. However, in *Tangled*, Princess Rapunzel can inherit the throne and continues to rule the country as her parent did before. What Disney did in 1992 was repelling for feminists, and in 2010, they changed the royal inheritance rules for their princesses.

However, there are still points to criticize in case of *Tangled*. For instance, Mother Gothel makes fun of Rapunzel’s looks and claims that she is clumsy and getting chubby. Guizerix again points out to the fact that even though until this point we had a Native American, African American and even an Arabic princess, however, all of them are looking like Victoria’s Secret models. None of the princesses have a full figure, which would be more “realistic”. In the beginning of this research, how seeing perfect bodies on TV and on screen effects children was revealed and the images of these

⁹³ Bell, et al. 44.

princesses, including Rapunzel, is fueling the common problem among children, especially young girls, which is, body dissatisfaction. One more thing to emphasize is the fact that Rapunzel in the movie is actually quite slim. Mother Gothel's criticizing her of being chubby, even though she is not, resembles symptoms of anorexia. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Rapunzel decides to escape the tower only after seeing Flynn Rider. Moreover, the narrator is not herself, but Flynn Rider.⁹⁴ Rapunzel's goal in life is also criticized, Saladino argues that the fact that her only wish is to see the floating lights is quite limited for a heroine.⁹⁵

Another important fact which should also be seen through a critical eye is Rapunzel and Flynn Rider's romantic relationship. Disney still does not put forth a relationship free from romantic grounds, and each couple in each movie has to involve in a romantic relationship and almost all of them get married in the end. Considering all Disney movies with a princess, the company is still giving a message of "If there is a princess, there has to be a marriage".

Will Disney give a Bakhtinian response to the utterances mentioning her princesses' being like Barbie dolls? Will the company come up with a power couple without a magical romance? With the release of *Brave* in 2012, we are introduced with Merida, who is a princess with a more realistic figure. With her frizzly, fluffy red hair, short height and slightly fuller figure; the audience could finally watch a princess who actually looks like an ordinary person; who is someone they can actually empathize with.

⁹⁴ KJ Dell Antonia, "Disney's *Tangled*: Fun, But Not Feminist," 23 November, 2010. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2010/11/disney-s-tangled-fun-but-not-feminist.html>

⁹⁵ Caitlin J. Saladino, "Long may she reign: A rhetorical analysis of gender expectations in Disney's *Tangled* and Disney/Pixar's *Brave*," (Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 2010).

Moreover, even though *Brave* is a Disney-Pixar movie, which means that it was not produced by Disney solely, it can be seen as the first movie which includes a princess who is not into any kind of romantic relationship and remain unattached throughout the movie. When Mulan's mother and grandmother tries to get her married, she was found "unfavorable". Though Mulan is a strong female character, it was obvious that she somehow felt uneasy after accepting the fact that she is not getting married. In case of Merida, however, things are different. Her parents are also trying to match her with an appropriate suitor, but she strongly resists the idea of it. Finally a Disney production can give a message that implies marriage and magical romances are not crucial for being happy in life and getting married is a choice, not a necessity.

It can be concluded that *Brave* is a movie which is mainly focusing on a mother-daughter relationship, not a magical romance -which is again, a first for Disney company-. Throughout the movie we are presented with the clash of two generations. While Merida's mother, Queen Elinor is portrayed as a strong female figure which is upholding traditional gender roles, Merida is representing the new era. While her mother is being annoyingly dominant while expressing her opinions about Merida, -like the fact that she should get married or she should not be carrying a weapon-, she is not portrayed as an evil mother or a step mother figure as in previous Disney animated movies. Even though her ideas are not catching up with the current time period, she is more like an over-protective mother figure, not an evil person, which is again a big step for Disney in Bakhtinian terms, since their portrayals of mothers have been either evil or non-effective to the storyline until this point.

Even the movie *Brave*, which was cherished by the feminist critics when released, can be criticized. Throughout the movie, the decision not to get married is overly emphasized. So much that Merida, as a girl who chooses

not to get married, is depicted as the exception. Merida is different, thus, she might not want to get married. The only thing that is weird about her is not only her decision to stay single, she is, from top to toe, pictured as an outsider figure. Guizerix also states that her interactions with other male figures such as lords also suggests that she is somehow “abnormal”.

Moving forward to *Frozen* (2013), the audience is now introduced with not one, but two princesses; Elsa and Anna. The animated movie has a female co-director, Jennifer Lee. Incorporation of a female director is a first for the company. Lee also worked as a screenwriter for *Frozen*, thus, she presumably had a great effect on the portrayals of the lead characters; Elsa and Anna. These two characters are sisters with a strong bond and through their story, Disney, for the first time in its history; gives room to female solidarity in one of its animated movies. Anna, who is portrayed as a fearless person goes after her sister, Anna to save her. Moreover, she is not only strong mentally, but also physically. We witness her body strength when she punches Hans, who is a male figure, in the end of the movie. Elsa, on the other hand, is the “princess” of this story. Being a successful ruler to Arindale, she is both feared and loved by citizens.

“But the important question remains: when women are in the dominant position, are they in the masculine position? Can we envisage a female dominant position that would differ qualitatively from the male form of dominance? Or is there merely the possibility of both sex genders occupying the positions we now know as “masculine” and “feminine?”⁹⁶

In her book, *Women and Film*, Ann Kaplan questions the possibility of a female sovereign without the male features. In *Frozen*, the Queen Elsa is

⁹⁶ Ann Kaplan, “Is the Gaze Male?” *Women and Film*, (Methuen; London, 1983) 35.

described as a frigid queen who does not have any emotions, which does not go against the stereotypical belief that women holding power are emotionless and to be feared. However, as time goes on, Elsa learns how to amalgamate both aspects; emotion and power in her personal traits and she balances so-called masculine and female traits; she becomes both authoritative and loving.⁹⁷

However, arguing that the movie implies that women cannot be both powerful and emotional, Law claims that *Frozen* also reinforces this stereotype.⁹⁸ Moreover, the physical appearances in the film, are found somewhat complicating. Both Elsa and Anna look fit, with thin and small waists, small noses, yellow hairs and big blue eyes; their looks fit to the traditional norms. Johnson draws attention to the fact that Elsa the queen's physical appearance undergoes a certain change, as she leaves the kingdom she ruled. She starts wearing more make-up and she looks more "voluptuous". It is agreeable that she might want to discover her sexuality as she moves forward in her life, away from the kingdom she ruled, however, Johnson argues that this is sending conflicting messages to the audience, since this kind of empowerment does not come from within, but rather, from the outside world.⁹⁹

The last animated movie to be analysed in this study is, *Moana* (2016) which is encompassing almost all the criticisms the company received until this point and comes forward as a rewriting -or redemption?- of *Pocahontas* (1995). Moana is a girl who is pushing the gender role boundaries, she is the only one in her tribe to go beyond the reef to save everyone. She, like anyone in this world, needs to be saved by someone else at some point.

⁹⁷ Johnson, 24.

⁹⁸ Michelle Law, "Sisters goin' it for themselves: *Frozen* and the evolution of the Disney heroine," *Screen Education* 74. (2014), 16-25.

⁹⁹ Johnson, 21.

However, her savior -Maui- also needs her. Moana is never a damsel in distress like Belle, Ariel or any other Disney princess. She is saved by Maui, and she saves him afterwards. Their relationship which is free from any kind of romance -which is again a first for a Disney movie- underlines the notion of gender equality. Even though Moana's mother is portrayed as a character who does not effect the plot greatly, it is her grandmother who encourages her to take the adventure and save the tribe. Moreover, another important point is that Moana restores the heart of the furious female goddess Te Fiti, which was stolen by the demi-god Maui himself. In this Disney movie, a disaster caused by a male interference, a hurt done to a female character is retrieved by the collaboration of a female and a male character. Moreover, in the end of the animated movie, it is implied that she is going to be the next chief of the tribe, after her father. In *Pocahontas*, though Pocahontas too was the daughter of the chief, it is never implied or even mentioned that there was such a possibility.

It can be concluded that since *Snow White* (1937), the female appearance in Disney's animated movies has undergone a drastic change and this step-by-step approach explained above, is greatly effected by the criticisms the company received during the time period. In the light of Mihail Bahtin's theories of Addressivity and Responsivity; the reciprocal relationship between the Walt Disney Company and its severe critics is examined. Even though the company, especially during the third era, tries to make up for what it did in the previous years by giving room to more brave, intelligent and independent female characters who are also supported by female ones; it is not found sufficient enough. It is argued that since these movies juxtapose clashing ideas, -first presenting the traditional and then moving forward to the modern one- they might confuse the audience, mainly

constituted by younger individuals.¹⁰⁰ For instance, in *Frozen*, Elsa first displays lack of control over her emotions and this leads to a decrease in her authority. Since this would send a traditional message to the kids that “women cannot control their emotions”, it seems problematic. Even though as the animated movie proceeds Elsa learns how to balance both traits; the notion of power and emotion clash is a challenging topic to handle when it comes to female characters, and Disney’s way of handling is not quite appreciated. These juxtaposing ideas, though the latter is promoting gender equality, still reinforce the traditional typical gender roles.¹⁰¹ It is also concluded that since these animated movies include both types of messages, they are insufficient in causing any kind of permanent change when it comes to gender equality.¹⁰²

6. DISNEY AND ITS REWRITING CONCEPT AS A MEAN TO ANALYSE ITS RESPONSIVENESS

6.1 What is rewriting?

In *The Illusion of the End*, Jean Baudrillard defines our culture as one going through the process of “agonizing revision” of “rewriting everything.”¹⁰³ Arguing that all the stories we create are the quotations of other/former stories; Baudrillard’s theory is quite striking when applied to the reconciliation process of Disney with its critics. Sticking to Baudrillard’s theory and refraining from moving forward to Roland Barthes’ theory “The Death of the Author” in which pretty much all modern texts are considered

¹⁰⁰ England, et al.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, 27

¹⁰² England et al.

¹⁰³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994) 12.

to be a rewriting,¹⁰⁴ I would like to elaborate on the term “rewriting”. In a classic and literary style, defined as “an endless attempt to heal such breaches loaded with silent affects”¹⁰⁵, rewriting can at its simplest be described as a new version of an original output, be it a text, visual content or even a song; with certain alterations in tone or context. Surely, the nature of this “change” is not limited to this. Coste argues that a rewriting may include formal imitation, recycling, reprocessing, reworking and (im)mutation of forms¹⁰⁶. And it may also include recontextualisation and defamiliarisation in form of reshaping, distortion, deconstruction and mutation. I will utilize Coste’s terms such as reprocessing, reworking and recontextualization during my analysis of Disney’s rewriting concept.

6.2 Disney’s History of Rewritings

Before the *Pocahontas* and *Moana* comparison, a brief summary of Disney’s rewriting history is needed. Starting with *Snow White*, which is actually a German Grimm Brothers fairytale, the company is known for creating the modern -or rather, Americanized- versions of European tales. Following *Snow White*; *Cinderella* and *Rapunzel (Tangled)* are also 19th century Grimm (German) tales. However, Disney clarified that Charles Perrault’s tale, *Cendrillion* (1697) is the source of famous *Cinderella*. *Sleeping Beauty* on the other hand, was first written by an Italian author, Giambastitta Basile. The original version of *The Little Mermaid* belongs to Danish author Hans Christian Andersen. *Beauty and the Beast* is actually a

¹⁰⁴ Roland Barthes, Richard Miller, Richard Howard, and Honoré de Balzac, *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4.

¹⁰⁵ Claude Maisonnat, Josiane Paccaud-Huguet and Annie Ramel, eds, *Rewriting/ Reprising in Literature: The Paradoxes of Intertextuality*. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009) VIII.

¹⁰⁶ Didier Coste, “Rewriting, Literariness, Literary History,” (2004), 3.

fairy tale by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve. *Mulan* is actually a legendary figure in Chinese history. Before in this study, while analysing the criticisms Disney received, how Disney changed and even “diverted” these fairytales was explained, however, in short, the critics were not happy with the way in which the original fairytales were being rewritten. As explained high above, Zarranz argued that the process of rewriting in Disney also included sanitization and Americanization and she came up with the word: Disneyfication.¹⁰⁷ For instance, in the Disney version of *The Little Mermaid*, while Ariel trades her voice and legs to become a human, the penalty of a possible failure is just turning back to her life as a mermaid. However, in the original version, it is death. Moreover, in the original story, the prince marries another girl, because he believes that it was her who saved him in the shipwreck. Facing the death penalty, Ariel was offered a proposal; if she kills the prince, she will be a mermaid again. What is more, the tale does not have a happy ending; seeing that the prince marries someone else, Aurora jumps off into the sea and we understand that she turns into a foam. This is what the critics call, “Sanitization” of Disney. While rewriting this story, they completely get rid of the dramatic parts and thoroughly change the plot in order to be able to give the audience a heart-warming, joyful, happy romance.

Does Disney stick to this path while rewriting the original stories? In this thesis, in the light of direct references between the two animated movies, *Moana* will be accepted as the rewriting version of *Pocahontas*. What Disney changes in each original story and the motive behind the urge to change the original is going to be compared. With a content analysis, these movies will be compared and contrasted. In the previous chapters how Disney’s tone changed in Bakhtinian terms was analysed and a conclusion

¹⁰⁷ Zarranz, 55.

that the company is really in a process of reconciliation was reached. Now, the comparison of *Moana* and *Pocahontas* will be the solid demonstration of this process.

There are 21 years between the dates *Pocahontas* and *Moana* were released. Working on these two quite similar plots, both focusing on the adventures of a daughter of a chief, the questions to be asked are, “Does Disney still “sanitize” their worlds?”, “Does the company still portray the damsels in distress as it did in the first era?” Or, “Does Disney keep on making change as it did in the eras following the first one?”, “Are there any differences between the portrayals of Pocahontas who was first introduced to the audience in 1995 and Moana from 2016?”, “How are the characteristics of the male characters, especially the lead male character in these two animated movies differ?” In short, how Disney’s approach to “daughter of the chief” theme between 1995 and 2016 changes is going to be the main focus of the following sections.

6.3 A Comparative Analysis of *Moana* and *Pocahontas* Focusing on the Approach Disney Acquired While Reprocessing

The reason why *Moana* and *Pocahontas* are particularly chosen are many. To start with, both *Moana* and *Pocahontas* -just like almost all Disney movies- are rewritings in themselves. For instance, the inspiration for *Pocahontas* was an American Indian princess named Amonute.¹⁰⁸ The storyline of *Moana*, on the other hand, is based on Hawaiian, Tongan, Tahitian, samoan and Polynesian mythology. Expectedly, almost any rewriting requires some serious alterations in the original version and how this process had happened how *Pocahontas* and *Moana* is going to be compared.

¹⁰⁸ Karen Robertson, “Pocahontas at the Masque,” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (1996), 551-555.

Unearthing the truth about “real” Pocahontas’s life, Townsend argues that contrary to what the animated movie tells us, Pocahontas in real life was kidnapped by the English colonizers and kept as a prisoner for months until her father agrees to pay the tribute with the corn they breed.¹⁰⁹ Only after she converted to Christianity and married John Rolfe, could she be a free person. Claiming that storytellers on purpose diverted her story to cover up their own guilt, Townsend argues that the alterations in Pocahontas’ story is unfair. On the basis of Townsend’s argument, “Storytellers subverted her life to satisfy their own need to believe that the Indians loved and admired them without resentments”,¹¹⁰ Disney’s attitude in the continuation of this unfairness seems culpable. In Edward Said’s words, since this is an imposition of Western domination over the Orient, this is also, *Orientalism*.¹¹¹ The animated movie by Disney, *Pocahontas*, almost completely changes and “falsifies” the story belonging to Pocahontas in real life. Beyond just creating a heart-warming story for children, the company diverts World history, behaving as if the colonizers did not kill thousands of native people there and real Pocahontas, trying to be the breach between her people and the colonizers, did not die. In most of the researches, the reason why Pocahontas died was linked with her immune system which is not familiar with the bacterias and viruses in Europe. Custalow on the other hand, argues that because Pocahontas knew so much about the political strategy of England and she might put their presence there in danger, she was not allowed to go back to her homeland and in the end, she was

¹⁰⁹ Camilla Townsend, “Preface,” *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma: The American Portraits Series*, (2005) 5-6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 6.

¹¹¹ Edward Said, “Introduction,” *Orientalism*, (New York: Penguin Books India, 1979), 5.

murdered, most possibly poisoned in England.¹¹² In Coste's terms, first Western culture; then Disney, (im)mutates the real life story of Pocahontas to come up with a-) A diversion in history to satisfy European needs¹¹³ b-) A story to hit the box office. A real life story of bloodshed is turned into a magical romance, which is again, in Coste's terms, recontextualization. Many rewritings are recontextualized, however, in case of *Pocahontas*, these alterations, especially in Said's terms, do not really look neither insignificant nor innocent.

There is not much academic work focusing on the background of the characters in *Moana*, however, with the help from the unofficial sources we know that it is based on Hawaiian, Tongan, Tahitian, samoan and Polynesian mythology.¹¹⁴¹¹⁵ Though these unofficial sources will also be taken into consideration, the literary contribution by a Tongan cultural anthropologist, Tēvita O. Ka'ili will be the basis of this section in which the real life story of Moana will be compared with Disney's animated movie. Ka'ili argues that contrary to the original, mythical figure, Maui in the animated movie is portrayed as "one dimensional, selfish, borderline abusive, buffoon" in order to highlight Moana's mental features and her strength.¹¹⁶ Compared to the cruel alterations in the real life story of Pocahontas, omitting some features of a male mythical character, a demi-god to foreground the female heroine

¹¹² Dr. Linwood Costalow, "Chapter Twelve: Murder in England," *True Story of Pocahontas: The Other Side of History*, (Fulcrum Publishing, 2007), 177.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, xi.

¹¹⁴ "Moana: Real Story Behind the Movie," Accessed 16 May 2019. <https://cyprusuni.com/chat/threads/moana-the-real-story-behind-the-movie.735/>

¹¹⁵ "The Real Maori and Pacific Legends That Inspired Disney's Moana," Accessed 15 May 2019. <https://theculturetrip.com/pacific/new-zealand/articles/the-real-maori-legend-that-inspired-disneys-moana/>

¹¹⁶ Huffpost, "Hina: The Missing Heroine from Disney's *Moana*," Accessed 15 May, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2HedMfl>

seems quite a U-turn for Disney. Furthermore, though admitting that the theme of “girl power” was influential in the movie, Ka‘ili argues that Disney distorts the myth’s symmetry by completely omitting one heroic goddess; Hina, who is Maui’s companion. Underlining the fact that in Polynesian mythology, gods and goddesses are equal in quantity and this creates symmetry; Ka‘ili blames Disney for distortion. However, the choice of omitting Hina also seems like a result of an urge to foreground the character of Moana. According to Ka‘ili, Hina is the one who always helps Maui when he needs it. For instance, in one of the myths, it is told that Maui attempts seven times to catch the sun, however, he fails. He captures the sun only when Hina gives him a rope made out of her hair. This mythical legend very much resembles the scene in *Moana*, when Maui finally accepts that he is no longer a demi-god and will not be able to use his hook to shape-shift anymore. After Maui tries to change into giant hawk like 10 times and fails, Moana interferes and encourages him to try again. Afterwards, Maui succeeds. As a result, we might argue that Disney, after omitting a very important mythical figure from the plot, associates some of her features with Moana, again, in order to thrust her forward.

Disney, who changed the life story of Pocahontas which was full of blood, death and misery into a magical romance, seems to have done the alterations in a very different direction, when it comes to Moana. The colonialist and sexist attitude of Disney is almost gone in 2016. The male character which is a very important figure in Polynesian mythology, Maui, is turned into a character to be ridiculed. He has weaknesses, he is sometimes fearful, sometimes selfish and even ungrateful. But on the basis of Ka‘ili’s argument claiming that Disney did this alterations to foreground Moana, it can be concluded that the company’s approach to the way they are going to change the original plot changed heavily. In Coste’s terms again, Disney who (im)mutated forms in a quite indecent way for *Pocahontas*, uses

reprocessing and recycling in *Moana*. This time, the company changes the original plot in order to reach a “girl power movie”, not a magical romance despite the fact that the thousands of native people were killed by the colonizers. Considering Bakhtin’s concept of Responsivity, it can be concluded that the company takes the criticisms in consideration. How they diverted the history for Pocahontas was criticized almost harshly, and they seemed to “Address” to the critics with *Moana*.

7. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF *MOANA* AND *POCAHONTAS*

7.1 Father and Daughter Relationships

The movies *Pocahontas* and *Moana* can also be compared and contrasted with a content analysis method. First of all, two dialogues -one with their fathers and the other is with their grandmothers- bring the ostensible tie between *Pocahontas* and *Moana* to the light and gives the audience a clue, hinting that *Moana* is actually a rewriting of *Pocahontas*. Both Pocahontas and Moana are strongly attached to their fathers; while Moana wants to make her father proud as his successor, Pocahontas dearly loves her father, who is also the only parent she has. Thus, it is quite striking to see dialogues resembling each other, in two different movies. For instance, Pocahontas’ father Chief Powhatan, after giving Pocahontas her mother’s necklace, says; “It suits you.” Appreciating her daughter’s resemblance to her mother, Chief Powhatan admits that Pocahontas is going to be the next person to be the source of “wisdom and strength” as her mother used to be. Thus, the necklace is a symbol for her being the successor of her mother and “It suits her”, as Chief Powhatan says.

On the other hand, interestingly, Moana’s father also says “It suits you” to her, but for a very different reason. When the coconut trees on the island starts to rot, people of her tribe asks Moana what to do. Advising them to grow a next plant in a particular place, Moana impresses her father with her

finesse. Her father, Chief Tui says “It suits you” meaning that managing a group of people and being the “chief” suits her. This is not the only time he implies it, also when Moana arrives on the island after restoring the heart of Te Fiti, meaning both her brave act and stubbornness, Chief Tui again says “It suits you” to her again. These three dialogues, when compared, tells a lot about these movies and characters. Thought to be “carrying her mother’s spirit”, while Pocahontas is seen as “the new mother” by the people on the island, Moana is seen as the new leader. Though Pocahontas too is the daughter and the only successor of the chief, even a possibility of her taking over is never mentioned. On the other hand, Chief Tui always expresses his excitement for her daughter’s upcoming governing, we are even shown a “coronation-like” ceremony for Moana.

Thus, Disney, in 21 years, changes the social positioning of the girl who is “the daughter of the chief”. The daughter of the chief is no longer her mother’s shadow, in 2016, the daughter of the chief is the new sovereign. One more interesting detail about Pocahontas and Moana is the fact that they both wear blue necklaces resembling each other. Interestingly, Moana’s blue necklace is a symbol for her duty for saving the tribe -carrying the heart of Te Fiti-, while Pocahontas’ blue necklace is an heirloom from her passed mother.

These two characters’ relationships with their fathers are also interesting. Throughout *Pocahontas*, Chief Powhatan and his daughter only talks about Pocahontas’ possible marriage with Kocoum or her affair with John Smith. On the other hand, Chief Tui talks to Moana about many topics. Sometimes he chastises her for her stubbornness or he takes her to the peak of the mountain on which only the ruler of the tribe is allowed. He teaches her life lessons, mainly focusing on governance, unlike Chief Powhatan and Pocahontas.

7.2 Female Characters

The female characters in two animated movies also both reflect and contrast each other. Grandma Willow in *Pocahontas* appears to be the mentor for Pocahontas, just like Gramma Tala is for Moana. However, while Grandma Willow gives Pocahontas advises particularly focused on her love life, Gramma Tala encourages Moana to go beyond the reef and save the tribe and all the islands in the area. Both Moana and Pocahontas suffer from existential crisis from time to time; Grandma Willow and Gramma Tala are the characters to lead them. Especially Moana observes her surrounding and questions her role in the island. She needs that she has to be useful, too. However, while Moana's concern is how to save the tribe and be a good ruler, Pocahontas' hurdle is different. She is curious about a dream in which she sees a spinning arrow, which, afterwards, will be understood as a sign for John Smith's arrival, pointing out to him.

Through Moana's dialogues with Gramma Tala, we understand that she is determined to restore the heart of Te Fiti for her people. However, Pocahontas is more concerned with John Smith, than she is about her tribe. Both Pocahontas and John Smith are convinced to restore peace only when Grandma Willow tells them that they can only be together if both parties ceases fire. Interestingly, while Grandma Willow advises Pocahontas to listen to her heart and follow the arrow, Gramma Tala asks Moana "Who are you?", steering her to find the meaning of her life and her goal herself. Moreover, both mentors are in some way connected to nature and considered to be crazy by other people. After she dies, Gramma Tala comes back in the form of ray, and Grandma Willow, is actually a tree.

There are a few female characters in *Pocahontas* and while one of them is Grandma Willow, the other is Nakoma, Pocahontas' best friend. Though Nakoma does not do anything to hurt Pocahontas, she is the one who told Kocoum that Pocahontas was going to meet one of the colonizers.

Expectedly, Kocoum goes after Pocahontas and get killed by one of the English men. On the surface, Nakoma looks like she likes Pocahontas and cares about her. However, their relationship is not portrayed as one as strong as sisterhood. Considering the fact that Nakoma find Kocoum very attractive and Pocahontas does not want to marry him; Nakoma might even be a little bit jealous of Pocahontas. Moreover, it is implied to the audience, through Nakoma's complaints after Pocahontas' leaving the village to meet John Smith.

Lack of a mother figure is significant in a movie, and while in *Pocahontas* we have it, in *Moana*, we don't. Though her mother is more of an intermedator between Moana and her father, she is the one who helped her pack before sailing off. When Moana was convinced by her grandmother at her deathbed, she goes back to her tent and finds her mother packing for her. In *Pocahontas*, we have no mother and almost no female solidarity.

In the previous Disney movies, we always had problematic mother and daughter relationships. Mature female characters tried to poison, stab, kill, enslave and torture young and beautiful girls. Even in *Brave* and *Mulan*, which are pretty recent Disney movies, mothers express their patriarchal, traditional, stereotypical and oppressive opinions about womanhood, marriage and men quite openly. In *Moana*, on the other hand, we have a mother figure, Sina, who silently helps her daughter to go, save them. It should also be noted that Sina does this against her husband's will. Chief Tui is the strongest opposition to the idea of Moana, sailing, because he fears that he might lose her daughter.

One last female figure in *Moana* is, of course, Te Fiti. Holding the power to create life, Te Fiti is portrayed as a fierce goddess. After Maui steals her heart, she no longer creates life and productivity is decreased on many island on the area. When Moana approaches her to restore her heart, Te Fiti,

the fierce goddess throwing flames at her out of anger, calms down. After Moana restores her heart, the fierce creature in flames turns into a beautiful goddess, and they rest their heads on each other. Thus, Disney not only gives room to a mother figure who goes against her husband and thus patriarchy's will, but also a perfect example of female solidarity. After regaining her power to create, Te Fiti even forgives Maui, giving him a new hook -which is also the sole source of his demi-god power- in place of the old, broken one.

7.3 Male Characters

Claiming that the sex-gender system is a set of social relations which are in effect since the very beginning of the social existence, DeLauretis argues that the stereotypes are not only for women, but also for men.¹¹⁷ Thus, in addition to Moana and Pocahontas, a comparison between the portrayals of John Smith and Maui is essential. To begin with, it is crucial to say that John Smith in *Pocahontas* is portrayed as “the ideal man” according to the Western stereotypes. He is strong, powerful, respected and very attractive. Even the movie begins with scenes appreciating his bravery and heroic features. In the opening scene, by the time he is seen, we hear the other crew members talking to each other about him, asking “Is that John Smith?”. Moving on, a crew member says that he had heard so many unbelievable stories about John Smith. Later, during the voyage, John Smith saves the life of a crew member, thus, his portrayal as a hero is sealed even in the beginning of the movie. This is the opening scene for John Smith, but how do we meet Maui? Is he also portrayed as an ideal man? Though we meet John Smith before any other significant character in *Pocahontas*, in *Moana*, we are introduced with the male leading character almost in the midway of

¹¹⁷ Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, (Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), 220.

the movie -in the 37th minute-. Only after we get to know Moana, her family, her childhood, her goals and dreams in life can we meet Maui. This preference again foregrounds Moana's significance in the movie, as the focal point of the whole production. In case of Pocahontas, however, only after we meet John Smith and after English men sail off and have some adventures on the island, can we meet Pocahontas.

As explained above, the portrayal of John Smith is quite impressive. On the other hand, as underlined through Tēvita O. Ka'ili's comments before, it is not the case for Maui. Not only the audience only meets him quite late compared to Moana and other lead characters, but also he is kind of a ridiculed character. In the first scene with John Smith, we see him getting on the ship as if he was flying, however, in his first scene, Maui sees Moana and freaks out. Afterwards, he at once starts to brag about himself. The confounding fact is, in the way he is portrayed while bragging, it is obvious that he has some problems about himself. At some points during the movie, it is understood that he was abandoned by his family and even his wickedest deed which is stealing the heart of Te Fiti, is done in order to please humankind. John Smith is portrayed as a strong hero from the beginning, but, Maui is at first observed as a bragging coward then turns into a nicer person as we get to know him better, which is more realistic considering the nature of human relationships.

Both characters have scenes in which they sing and travels the land, however, as John Smith sings about his life, his appreciation with this new world and his desire to "tame" it, Maui sings about his own very heroic past life, which is again, done in a quite satirical way. Interestingly, the content of these songs are not very different, however, while in *Moana*, the male character is ridiculed, in *Pocahontas*, though he does the same - bragging and belittling the Orient-, it is shown as a heroic act. Which is again, in Coste's terms, "reprocessing" the original version.

The male characters' relationships with the female lead also differ quite interestingly. In *Moana*, Maui teaches her how to sail and read the stars; he teaches her everything he knows. Thereby, Moana is able to continue her mission when Maui abandons her. Moana on the other hand, teaches Maui that he is not no one without his magical fish hook. At the end, Maui is changed into a new person so much that he can sacrifice his precious fish hook in order to save Moana. When she points out to that, Maui just says that he does not need a hook anymore, he is Maui. While *Moana* includes a reciprocal relationship on very civilized terms, in *Pocahontas*, John Smith teaches Pocahontas how to behave like a "civilized" person. He shows her how to shook hands. Pocahontas on the other hand, teaches him that they are not savagers as John Smith thinks. This does not look like the ideal romantic relationship, though. As Maui transforms into a new person who values himself without bragging as a once abandoned child, John Smith changes a little; he learns that not all native Americans are savagers.

Moreover, the first song Maui sings on the movie is called "You're Welcome", underlining the fact that he is "awesome" and all humankind should be grateful, ironically, as expected, no one really is. However, at the end of the movie, when he sacrifices his hook for Moana, after she thanks him, he looks at her sincerely and says "You're Welcome". These two scenes are the most straightforward evidence showing Maui's transformation. Unfortunately, no such change is available for John Smith, since he is perfect from the beginning till the end. He does nothing bad, does not hurt anyone. Though Maui both hurts and heals people; just like a person does in real life.

Both in *Moana* and *Pocahontas*, heroines save heroes. Pocahontas saves John Smith's life by begging her father, while Moana saves Maui's life by tricking Tamatoa who is about to kill him. Knowing that tortoise Tamatoa is very much fond of shiny pieces, Moana covers a shell with bioluminescent

algae, making it look like the heart of Te Fiti. Just a minute after that, Maui too saves her. The difference is clear, as Moana uses her intelligence and cunning, Pocahontas expects her father to pity on her and on her lover.

As a result, John Smith and Maui from the two films are two male figures who are completely different. Maui is a demigod whose power depends on a fish hook, which is again given to him by a female god, Te Fiti. Throughout the movie, his egocentrism is ridiculed to the point where we see that he is anything but a hero. It is Moana who talks him into restoring the heart of Te Fiti and saving the people. Moreover, after being abandoned by Maui, Moana continues the journey and tries to restore the heart on her own. In a way, she struggles with Maui's ups and downs and childish behavior. Maui is never portrayed as a powerful male character and it is clearly shown that Maui is afraid of Te Fiti as he cannot face her anger after stealing her heart. However, Moana can, and when Moana sees that the spiral in which the heart has to be put is on the breast of the monster-like being hurling flames at her, she does something deserving of applause. She says: "Let her come to me," and we are faced with a scene of female solidarity. The female goddess, Te Fiti, approaches Moana; they touch and communicate with one another, and Moana restores the heart. Moreover, by saving her people, she also saves Maui who was all alone on an island for years after stealing the heart of Te Fiti. So, for the first time in Disney history, a heroine saves a damoiseau, or young gentleman, in distress.

In the animated movie *Moana*, Disney also gives room to the reversal of gender roles to some extent. Moana displays the characteristics that we culturally attribute to both sexes. So does Maui. For example, during their adventure, Maui continuously tries to escape because he is afraid. On the other hand, Moana does not fear almost anything. They both help and support each other. Maui abandons Moana a number of times; when they

meet for the first time, he leaves her alone on the island. When Kakamoras attack them, he decides to leave the heart of Te Fiti -swallowed by Heihei- behind and it is Moana who goes back to save it. She accomplishes with the help of Maui who comes back. That is to say, their balanced relationship is again highlighted. Maui is continuously encouraged by Moana to keep on fighting. While the relationship between Pocahontas and John Smith is a heterosexual one, which is “normal” in societal standards, the one between Moana and Maui is unusual, free from any stereotypes attributed to sexes. There is never a romantic gesture between the two.

7.4 Physical Appearances

In *Moana*, not only there is no romantic relationship between the two lead characters, but also they do not look ideal, which is quite unusual for Disney movies. This preference starting with *Brave* and *Merida* -though this movie is a Disney-Pixar production, it may be included- seems to change Disney’s attitude. As explained above in this study, Disney has always been harshly criticized because of the way they model their characters. The princesses are always thin, have long legs and big bright eyes. Moana is not really a tall and thin girl. She is not fat, though she is not almost anorexic like Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. She has frizzly hair and she looks like an ordinary girl. Maui is also not the ideal prince a girl would like to marry. He is definitely not handsome, though he thinks that he is. He is muscular, but he somehow looks a little bit chubby. His hair is frizzly, just like Moana’s and this couple of lead characters definitely does not fit in the traditional expectations for a movie couple.

In *Pocahontas*, however, we are faced with the embodiment of two stereotypical gender roles: a powerful, dominant, handsome male figure and a sexy, beautiful, nurturing and admiring female character. As mentioned before in this thesis, Pocahontas’ body was heavily criticized for resembling

that of a Victoria's Secret model. Her short, one-shoulder dress accentuates her curves and she really looks like a sexy girl. Likewise, John Smith is quite fit, muscular and strong. He always looks handsome, even when he is about to be killed. Throughout the movie, the audience is told, between the lines, that beauty and power are two features that compliment each other, and beautiful women will eventually find love. It is only Pocahontas and John Smith that looks this good in the movie, and they find each other. Pocahontas' friend Nakoma is not that attractive and it is obvious. Kocoum is not as handsome as John Smith, he is portrayed as a bulky native man. Two people almost "handpicked" find each other and as claimed above, the message *Pocahontas* gives is not really healthy for young audience.

7.5 The Theme of Sailing

The theme of sailing prevails throughout these two movies. In *Pocahontas*, both native Americans and English men sail for different purposes. In the beginning of the movie, both parties makes a voyage. The men in Pocahontas' tribe comes back from a voyage they made to defend their land. English men, however, sails to conquer a new world. First, a comparison between these two voyages is needed, then, the theme of voyage in *Moana* is going to be implemented.

The movie opens with a scene in which English men prepare to set off to discover a new land in which they will find gold and become rich. They sing about their expectative wealth and declare that they seek freedom and prosperity. All of them are male, for sure, and only John Smith seems like a person who really is good looking and brave. When one sailor falls overboard, John Smith saves him, and when Smith admits that they would do the same for him, too, other sailors stay hesitated. This implies to us that on that ship, there is no unity. The purpose of that voyage is only "money". We do not see what people from Pocahontas' tribe does on ship, however,

when they arrive back on the island, Chief Powhatan heralds that their village is safe again. Thus, the purpose of their voyage is safety.

Voyage theme in *Moana*, however, is very different. After her grandmother shows Moana the old ships on the island, she understands that they descended from voyagers, that their ancestors used to navigate huge ships. The moment Moana understands that, we see a flashback in which Moana's ancestors sail off. The people on ships are both male and female; and there is a perfect harmony between them. Not one of them does any particular job alone, they sail together and they look so happy, unlike the voyages we see in *Pocahontas*. Interestingly, the voyagers in *Moana* sings about their homeland, their own island and admits that they will go back there, that they will not forget their homeland. This draws a contrast between the purpose of English men's voyage in *Pocahontas*. Their purpose was to establish new plantation areas and hopefully find gold in there.

Another voyage in *Moana*, is of course, the one Moana makes to restore the heart of Te Fiti. Just like the ones her ancestors made and unlike what English men in *Pocahontas* did, she does it not for prosperity, but for safety and continuation of peace. In *Pocahontas*, when Kocoum and other sailors arrive back on the island, Chief Powhatan heralded that their village was safe again. Interestingly, when Moana arrives back, her father, Chief Tui heralds the same thing. But this time, the one restoring the peace is not a bunch of men, but rather, a young girl, Moana. Disney re-used many of the lines from *Pocahontas* in *Moana* and in Coste's terms, this is called recontextualization. Just like the line "It suits you", "Our village is safe again" is used at two occasions conflicting each other. Disney no longer attaches safety to men, now, a woman can also save a tribe.

The goal of this research was to make a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge, since, most literature about Disney is more destructive than constructive. Though it is crucial for the researchers to challenge and

criticize companies promoting stereotypes, it is also beneficial to appreciate if there is a change for the better. Not only this, but also many researchers, until that point, foregrounded Disney's reconciliation process with its critics. The release of the movie *Moana* in 2016 is particularly important for those who have been following the process in which Disney toned down sexism and racism in its contents. Thus, a brand new study focusing on it, especially with a comparative analysis with a previous, harshly criticized animated movie *Pocahontas* is, I believe, a worthwhile one. In 1989, Laura Mulvey asserted that the camera's perspective is the way society perceives individuals.¹¹⁸ In addition to her, Barbara Creed underlines the fact that society and media are one with the other and gender roles are recreated through mass media.¹¹⁹ This is the reason why we have to be so careful about what we watch and why we have to oppose, and even protest the productions that rewrite bias, especially if those productions are targeting children.

¹¹⁸ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

¹¹⁹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that Disney, the company which has been harshly protested and even chastised due to the sexist and racist messages its productions convey since the release of its first full length animated film *Snow White* in 1937 has a reciprocal relationship with its critics and this bilateral connection is foregrounded through the difference between the company's two different portrayals of the same theme of "the daughter of the chief" through *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Moana* (2016). Before moving further to the comparative analysis of the two characters -Pocahontas and Moana-, a chronological examination was done and each princess movie Disney released until now were contrasted with each other. Matching the movies with both negative and positive comments each of them received, what Disney did in each next movie was analysed. It was shown that the company did try to "change" some of its the most expostulated features in following animated movies.

If Disney has not been doing this for quite a long time, all the findings might be accepted as a contemporary preference the company acquired due to the necessities of each time period. On the other hand, Disney's reconciliation process has been so obvious for many years that many researchers distinguish Disney princesses into three different eras. In brief, while the princesses in the first era are considered to be passive and submissive, in the second era, we are introduced with an energetic generation of girls who fight in wars, challenge societal stereotypes, stand up to their fathers and are able to be "out of the line". On the other hand, movies in the second era continues to convey stereotypical messages to children. For instance, the institution of marriage is never criticized in these movies, the idea of marriage is still shown as a mandatory deed for a young girl. Moreover, though most of them are not white American girls with blue eyes and yellow hair; second era princesses are always thin, sexy and good

looking. In the last era however, he have slightly chubby Merida and Moana with her frizzly hair. Moreover, both girls do not get married and Merida even rejects a proposal. We have female solidarity, strong mother figures who support their daughters even when they are going against their father's wills, we have characters who openly criticize social norms and go against them.

In the light of these informations obtained, a recently released animated movie, *Moana*, about which there is not sufficient research was targeted. Considering Disney handled the same "the daughter of the chief" theme before, a comparative analysis with *Pocahontas* was considered to be useful. There are 21 years between the releases of these two movies, thus, Disney's change in tone, if there was any, should have been obvious upon acquiring a deconstructive approach while comparing and contrasting two movies with the same theme.

As a result, it was seen that Disney goes beyond just reprocessing the same theme, but it also re-uses the exact same dialogues in two different movies. As Pocahontas' father says "It suits you" to her upon giving her her mother's necklace, Moana's father utters the same line upon underlining the fact that she is the next chief after him. Interestingly, though she is the only offspring the chief has, Pocahontas is never suggested as the next sovereign, unlike Moana. Thus, it can be concluded that the societal position attributed to the daughter of the chief has changed in 21 years.

As a result of these and similar other findings explained in this thesis, *Moana* was approached as a rewriting movie, with which Disney tried to give an account of *Pocahontas*. *Moana* is not only a rewriting of *Pocahontas* in itself, but it is also inspired by Polynesian mythology. Also, *Pocahontas* is based on a true-life story, thus, they can be considered as rewritings in themselves, too. The decision to implement the concept of rewriting in this study brought about a slight change in the methodology. Is

there a possibility that Disney, alongside with the messages its contents conveys, also changed the way it “re-writes” original stories?

In an urge to discover this, the original stories, which are the real life story of Pocahontas and Polynesian myths about Moana were viewed. It was seen that while rewriting *Pocahontas*, Disney highlighted the male figure John Smith, trivialised Pocahontas as a character, completely diverted the real life of “real” Pocahontas which is full of bloodshed and disaster and changed the historical events in such a way that cannot be accepted. On the other hand, it was also unearthed that Disney, while utilizing myths about Moana from Polynesian mythology, did the exact opposite. They weakened the male hero Maui, omitted a strong female demi-god Hina and attributed her features to Moana in order to highlight her as the main character, just like they did with John Smith. For instance, John Smith is not the person who got involved into a romantic relationship to Pocahontas in real life, but Disney implemented another person’s relationship with Pocahontas to him in order to make him the focus of the movie, even overshadowing Pocahontas herself.

A deconstructive approach to the methodology of Disney acquired while rewriting the original stories was highly useful in seeing the intention of the firm. The features they left out, the characters they enhanced with features they found or created and their urge to highlight certain characters was expressing that Disney, the company which is responsible for unbelievably sexist and racist animated movies for children was now changing real myths in order to come up with a stronger heroine.

Talking about the limitations of this study, it is crucial to say that even though there are a number of researches focusing on similar topics -except for *Moana*-, there is not enough contribution to the existing knowledge about the possible reasons behind a continuing sexist and racist approach of Disney. Even though the study acknowledges the fact that there is a

reconciliation process going on, finding the reason “Why?” might be helpful in finding “How?”. How does it happen that Disney, in Bakhtinian terms, started to “give a response to” the criticisms it received? In the beginning of the study, in an urge to find an explanation to find the reason why Disney has been producing the content which are obviously going to be challenged by its critics, two motives were examined: Necessities of the time and personal influences. Is there any possibility that during the time period in which Disney produced its criticized movies, such stereotypical arguments are considered to be “normal”?

Upon making a survey of the historical records, it was found that Disney almost goes against the current wave of human rights. While women are fighting for their initial rights and an awareness of racial equality was at peak, the company still releases almost misogynistic and racist movies. Thus, the sexist and racist content the company produces cannot be justified by the mentality of the era. However, a positive impact was in case. While the granddaughters of the first wave feminists grew up to be adult women with children -targeted by Disney- the company did change its tone. As a result, the way of thinking of the time period or the mentality of the age cannot explain Disney’s content, however, it can be accepted as one of the reasons for the moderation of its tone.

Alongside with “the necessities of the time period”, a possible personal influence was also considered as a possible reason behind Disney’s approach. In order to dig into personal effect, first of all, the researches, articles about the founder of the company, Walt Elias Disney were viewed. Though Walt Elias Disney is claimed to have problematic relationships with women and racial minorities; no such thing was valid for the CEO of the company during “Disney Renaissance”, Michael Eisner. While there was no evidence linking him with any sexual and racial bias, Eisner was an allegedly money-minded person. According to the articles about him, he

was just going with the themes and topics which would bring more money to the company. Michael Eisner can be held responsible for the princesses; Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Belle from *The Beauty and the Beast*, Jasmine from *Aladdin*, Pocahontas and Mulan. Though especially Belle was embraced by many feminist critics, all of these princesses were harshly criticized.

As mentioned above, one of the biggest limitations in this study was to fill a gap left out by many other researches and answer the question, “Why?”. Both Walt Disney and Michael Eisner contributed to the productions of such stained content, though they are completely different people. Can it be supposed that the CEO of the company is not “that” influential? An alternative explanation came through upon getting to know the current CEO of the company, Bob Iger, under whose ruling highly appreciated movies *Frozen*, *Brave*, *Tangled* and of course *Moana* were released. Iger is a person who can criticize the previous movies of Disney and he clearly states that he feels guilty because Hollywood does not reflect the diversity in real world effectively. He ironically makes fun of previous princesses by saying in 2014 that, now, they are going to come up with a princess who is empty, unfulfilling, and valueless until the moment she is kissed by her true love. After this statement, the company released its the most egalitarian movie, *Moana*. Thus, it was seen that, CEO of the company is more influential in the messages conveyed. Especially in the recent years, the personal effect seems to be more influential in the character portrayals in Disney movies, since the moderation in tone is more obvious than ever. However, future researches should include more analysis about personal interfering, and especially Bob Iger as Disney continues to release more animated movies.

Apart from personal influence and necessities of the time, the bias carved into our language and culture should be foregrounded as an indispensable reason for the sexist and racist discourses we are presented with. In *Giving*

an Account of Oneself, Judith Butler says that it is almost impossible to get rid of stereotypes; but we at least have to acknowledge and try to figure out the ways in which we might mitigate the impact these stereotypes have, especially upon our children.¹²⁰ Thus, the inherent bias in language should be included as a third force. Though Disney's reconciliation process is highly appreciated, both in this study and in many other researches; different and maybe radical changes should be implemented and enforced.

¹²⁰ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York: Fordham U Press, 2008.

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