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(Still from *The Princess and The Frog* 0:0:29, disneyplus.com)

A Cultural Analysis of The Walt Disney Company and Their Production of Non-White Imagery in *Aladdin* (1992), *Mulan* (1998), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), *The Princess and The Frog* (2009), and Pixar's *Soul* (2020)

Abstract

With The Walt Disney Company celebrating its 100th anniversary, it is now more than ever essential to discuss Disney's role and responsibility in representing minorities and diversity and why representation matters. As millennials of color, our generation was no exception to Disney's iron grip on the children's media market, and as we grew up, we realized how influential Disney is in their attempts to mirror the world and teach children. More specifically, we realized how impactful animated movies are in their role in representing minorities like ourselves.

Through our studies, we have previously concerned ourselves with The Walt Disney Company on several topics like ecocriticism in *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Brother Bear* (2003), and most recently on the issue of race and racial representation, where our 9th semester brought a dissertation on implied blackness and black culture in *A Goofy Movie* (1995). It is due to this interest in Disney's animated movies that we interest ourselves with a comprehensive study and analysis of the selected movies: *Aladdin* (1992)*, Mulan* (1998)*, Pocahontas, Lilo & Stitch* (2002)*, The Princess and The Frog* (2009)*,* and *Pixar's Soul* (2020), in order to discuss Disney's conscious yet failed attempts to display non-Western cultures and African-American life.

Through a comparative analysis that examines racial discourses presented in Disney's filmography, this master's thesis discovers that while Disney takes the initiative in their role of representation and their wish to produce stories of non-Western culture, there is an inevitable truth in Disney's subconscious decisions to promote stereotyping and prejudicial imagery towards minorities and non-Western cultures. Disney's reproduction of non-Western cultures relies on predated conceptions of world perceptions, resulting in historical inaccuracies and the gentrification of non-Western culture to promote Westernized values and cultural norms. These findings lead to a discussion on Disney's display of racial bias and whether Disney can still be considered a teaching machine and tool for children's learning when their products rely on a hereditary racial bias. Finally, this thesis concludes that Disney should be used as entertainment and not as reliable material for children to learn about the world and other cultures.

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Introduction

If someone was to time travel to when Walt Disney first drew the sketch of his soon-to-be-famous mouse and told him of his impending success, would they also tell him of the racially insensitive mistakes he was bound to make? Moreover, most controversially, would he agree that they were racially insensitive? While we will never receive those answers from Walt Disney himself, the company and legacy Disney left in his passing have attempted an answer for such questions with a renewed focus on diversity and inclusion that defy racist imagery like the infamous *Song of the South* (1946), a movie while divisive in interpretation made Walt Disney himself proud of his accomplishments.

In a biography by Neal Gabler, Gabler examines the origin of the accusations of Walt Disney's racist behavior and whether there was evidence of such a claim. Amid challenging war times, Walt decides to change direction when he notices how expensive and time-consuming full-feature animation films have become, and to try a less intensive film production method, Walt interests himself in a combination of animation and live-action (Gabler "Chapter Nine - III"). His interest falls on an adaptation of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus and the tales of Br'r Rabbit, stories that were to become the infamously insensitive movie *Song of the South*. While Gabler does emphasize Walt's intentions were never racist, he does admit Walt was racially insensitive. "At a story meeting he had referred to the dwarfs piling on top of one another in *Snow White* as a 'nigger pile,' and in casting *Song Of the South* he noted a 'swell little pickaninny' he had found" (Gabler "Chapter Nine - III"). According to Gabler, Walt knew there would be a need for extra supervision of the movie to ensure its authenticity, which is why Walt hired Jewish Maurice Rapf to supervise Dalton Reymond on the final script and direction of *Song of the South*. During said supervision, the revision was certainly made, and Walt's initial allowance of references like "'negro boy and 'negro girl' was omitted from final drafts" (Gabler "Chapter Nine - III").

Additionally, words like "'darky'" was removed from the final script as well (Gabler "Chapter Nine - III"). Despite such revisions, Gabler insists Walt expressed no intention of blatant racism, certainly with his friendship with Uncle Remus actor James Basket and his petition to honor him at the Academy Awards. However, Walt's so-called racially insensitive opinions carried onto several other films, of which such depictions brought on an unfortunate legacy of Walt Disney and The Walt Disney Company's reputation as racist and non-inclusive.

Even in Walt's late memory, The Walt Disney Company continues to produce movies of great significance regarding the subject of representation and the portrayal of ethnic bodies. Later productions in postmodern America brought to attention the continuously racially insensitive imagery and stereotyping from early Disney days, which provoked the incentive for this master's thesis and our

research question. Due to the lack of representation in Disney, aside from one handful of ethnic bodies in either minor or critically controversial major roles, we interest ourselves in a critical analysis of the Disney culture and their treatment of non-white characters.

With the upcoming release of Disney's newest live-action feature film, *The Little Mermaid* (2023), and its controversial casting decision of Halle Berry for Ariel, this thesis researches the relevance of the representation of minorities, the representation of non-white and non-Western cultures, and whether there is a need for such a demand from a children's media company like The Walt Disney Company. Therefore, this master's thesis will conduct a racial analysis of selected Disney movies that center non-White bodies and non-Western stories to discuss and conclude whether Disney produces media based on racial bias.

Literature review

With The Walt Disney Company celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2023, it is relevant to observe the many topics and subjects for discussion Disney has concerned themselves with over the years. As Disney has produced an incredible filmography during those 100 years, they have not one form of storytelling but several, including stories with animals and humans, whom all tell allegories that the audiences in real life can relate to and learn from.

Disney's prominent international success and monopoly on the children's market garners not just the pleasurable attention from audiences but also the critical consumption and reflection from academics worldwide. In order to determine whether a media company like The Walt Disney Company can be held accountable and in such high esteem for their representation and lack thereof, this thesis conducts a literature review on the many scholastic study fields Disney movies have influenced. Regarding Disney, there are several study fields due to the vast nature of the imagery Disney produces. However compelling and relevant other fields of interest might be, this thesis concerns the issue of race in Disney.

During our research, we determined there are three main issues scholars investigate in the case of Disney. The first is the use of animals, the second is Disney's implication and effectiveness on social issues, and the third is their role in representing modern society and the many ethnicities the world inhabits. Scholars like David Whitley have examined the significance of nature and humanity's relationship to nature and animals portrayed in Disney movies in his book *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation: From Snow White to WALL-E* (2012). Whitley investigates elements of nature and animals through several decades of Disney movies, including ecocritical readings of wilderness and ecology in *Pocahontas* and *Brother Bear.* Another scholar who interests herself in animals and nature is Lauren

Dundes in her collection of academic essays on Disney and their take on social issues presented in Disney narratives, such as the ones Whitley concerns himself with. Dundes' collection *The Psychosocial Implications of Disney movies* (2019) shows a vast scholastic interest in Disney, from their portrayal of gender and family values to sexuality and the inclusion of race in Disney movies.

Indeed, the issue of race is a study field of its own when it comes to the Disney repertoire, as Disney has both been praised and criticized for their inclusion and diversion from the representation of different ethnicities. C. Richard King and his collective research alongside Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo and Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo have extended themselves to several study projects on animated films and their intention of diversity, certainly with the issue of racial diversity and the harmful representation some animated studios have contributed to. Such research questions King et al.' proposes in *Animating Difference: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Films for Children* (2010) are essential to our thesis statement, as through critical readings on anthropomorphic bodies who inhabit racial features and stereotypes, we have become aware of the increasingly alarming rate animated movies continue to perpetuate prejudiced opinions on racialized bodies.

During our research for this thesis, we realized the extent to which Disney contributes to diversity and representation and how Disney's shortcomings have been addressed. On the topic of Latin American representation, we found audiences were agreeable with Disney's attempts to aid the Latin communities with non-stereotypical imagery, whereas Disney fails to do so in the cases of other minorities like the Indigenous communities in America, their dismissal of the importance of African-American representation, as well as the perpetual stigmatization of Asian cultures. Our literature review provides a preliminary understanding of scholarly attention brought to Disney's filmography and how, despite the topic of race continuing to be relevant for such a mainstream media like Disney, there is still room for academics to voice their concerns on children's media and the responsibility we as audiences place upon them.

Theory

Anthropomorphism

As our selected movies deal with animals with humanlike traits and humans with animalistic traits, it is imperative to look at Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2012) where he examines animal tropes, including anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. To understand the increased interest and intrigue animals propose in literature, Garrard looks to John Berger's essay "Why look at animals?", where Berger claims "when we look at animals, they may return our gaze, and in that moment we are aware of both

likeness and difference" (Garrard 152). For such a distinction between likeness and differences, Garrard elaborates on human and non-human behaviors and how to analyze them in terms of their metonymy and metaphor (153), metonymy meaning their likeness and metaphor their otherness (154). Because of such distinctions, Garrard believes that humans can be, and be compared to, animals, as cultural perception and political ideology help shape our understanding of animal behavior and human behavior in contrast to animals (153). This leads to Garrard's ecocritical trope of anthropomorphism.

According to Garrard, anthropomorphism was used as a derogatory term "implying sentimental projection of human emotions onto animals" (154), meaning animals are of agency to possess human traits. Moreover, Garrard distinguishes between two kinds of anthropomorphism: crude and critical. The former is also known as "disnification", where crude anthropomorphism typically appears in children's media as child-friendly, cute animals that defy their biology. Garrard refers to Steve Baker's comment that "'the basic procedure of disnification is to render it stupid by rendering it visual [...] anthropomorphic animal narratives are generally denigrated as childish, thereby associating a dispassionate, even alienated perspective with maturity'" (155). In a later part of this master's thesis discussion, there will be an elaboration on Disney as a teaching machine for children and whether their narratives provide substantial learning materials (c.f. p. 108).

Regarding disnification and disnified subjects, Disney uses anthropomorphic imagery and characters to promote their topic of discussion in age-appropriate narratives. An example of such a discussion is grief in *Lilo & Stitch* or what happens in the afterlife, as predicted in Disney's *Soul*. While Garrard uses the dolphin as an example of how crude anthropomorphism changed the perception of dolphin nature from violent to cute and cuddly (155), there are several examples of Disney's crude anthropomorphism, certainly in the selected movies used for this thesis. Disney uses crude anthropomorphism in *The Princess and The Frog* in the alligator character Louis and how he has no predator-like behavior but exhibits bubbly personality traits and the desire to become human and play music (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:36:54).

The latter, referring to critical anthropomorphism, concerns itself with the biological and scientific study of animals and animal behavior. However scientific, Garrard notices that animal studies have become increasingly aware of similarities between animal and human behavior (Garrard 157). "Ethologists, however, who study animal behaviour in the field, today argue that the accumulated evidence for behavioural as well as anatomical homology between humans and the social mammals mean that anthropomorphic explanation of, for example, cultural transmission of knowledge should be the default position henceforth" (157). Thus, Garrard summarizes that through terms like politics and culture, scientists and ethologists examine animals and animal behaviors in the same species ani-

mals and species similar to the animals studied. This results in the opportunity for critical anthropomorphism to remove itself from biology in exchange for the ability to analyze human behavior similar to animals or reflected onto animals (Garrard 158). An example of critical anthropomorphism is the establishment of hierarchy in the animal kingdom, similar to how humans form societies based on seniority through work and life experience.

Another example of critical anthropomorphism is the relationship between predator and prey and how they behave in ecosystems regarding the food chain. Such an example is seen in *Lilo & Stitch*, where the alien mutation 626, later renamed Stitch, frightens the dogs in the kennel, displaying Stitch as the predator and the dogs as prey. As we observe human behavior in animals and our similar dynamics, we also concern ourselves with animal behavior reflected onto humans. This phenomenon is what Garrard refers to as zoomorphism. Zoomorphism is the appropriation and application of animal behavior and characteristics onto humans. Once more, Garrard distinguishes zoomorphism into two categories: The first is a crude zoomorphism, and the second is a critical zoomorphism.

Most interestingly for this thesis is the understanding and use of crude zoomorphism. In regards to crude zoomorphism, "The visual symmetry in the typology between anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, dubbed 'theriomorphism' [...] is apt, in that both the crude forms are interdependent, as, to a lesser extent, are the critical forms" (160). For an example of a crude zoomorphism, Garrard uses the racist representation and "vicious kind" (160) of zoomorphism of referring to minorities as certain types of animals, e.g., Jews as rats or Africans as apes (160). In the case of Disney, Disney has since edited and removed their previously insensitive depiction of black bodies as crows in *Dumbo* (1941), and they have issued disclaimers on several movies with stereotypical imagery (c.f. p 107), e.g., in *Lady & The Tramp* (1955) with their sinophobic depiction of Chinese archetypes in the Siamese cats.

Different from crude zoomorphism, critical zoomorphism concerns itself with the evolutionary and Darwinian study of humans. According to Garrard, "unlike crude zoomorphism, critical zoomorphism involves the rejection of simplistic biological determinism (or essentialism) and attempts to give an evolutionary account of the full range of human traits, including language and morality as well as the sex and violence that predominate in traditional zoomorphism" (Garrard 161). An example of critical zoomorphism comes from Disney's *Tarzan* (1999), where Professor Porter and his daughter Jane study the "ape man" Tarzan (*Tarzan* 0:46:44 - 0:51:31) and his primitive self in contrast to their evolutionarily correct and modern self.

Because we find examples of crude zoomorphism in our selected movies, Garrard's theory of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism are significant in understanding racist representations of ethnic bodies in Disney and their continuance of racist imagery. Due to the crude zoomorphism in Disney,

we turn to racial discourses and their relevance for children's movies with ethnic characters. The following sections will focus on racial discourses like Edward W. Said's Orientalism, Veracini and Hixon's examinations of European and American settler colonialism, and the theoretical approach to Film Blackness by Michael Boyce Gillespie.

Film Blackness

Black bodies have been the subject of many harmful stereotypes portrayed in entertainment since the 1800s, from minstrelsy to the film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915); both left a still present stigmatization and caricatured visualization of the black body in Hollywood. As this master thesis investigates racialized bodies in Disney's modern filmography, we turn to Disney's first films involving persons of color and their controversial legacy. The first is *Mickey's Mellerdrama* (1933), a supposed satirical cartoon of Mickey and his friends' reenactment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (IMDb). In this animated short film, Mickey Mouse and his friends dress up and perform a minstrel show (0:24, TOONS & Games on YouTube), where Mickey uses residue from explosives to adorn blackface, wearing a worn-out sack with patches to imitate the character Uncle Tom.

Disney makes another attempt at the portrayal of black living with their controversial movie, *Song of the South*, a movie no longer available for streaming (Tobias, "Song of the South: the difficult legacy of Disney's most shocking movie"). *Song of the South* resituates the black slave in the character Uncle Remus.

> Disney's *Song of the South* [...] contextualizes the transcribed slave tales into a family melodrama centered on the relationship that develops between Uncle Remus, an old black man, and Johnny, a young white boy. Uncle Remus tells the child the stories of Brer Rabbit, and these scenes of oral instruction subsequently trigger the film's transitions into animated versions of the tales that parallel the family melodrama by offering life lessons to Johnny (Gillespie 25).

Minstrelsy and filmmaking like *Song of the South* were once considered films that depicted authentic stories of black people and black living. However, due to severe criticism, such shows are no longer produced. Instead, Hollywood has made great efforts to move on from stereotypical portrayals, inspiring theoretical approaches like Gillespie's Film Blackness.

Black filmmaking has since come a long way. From the parodical portrayal of black living to a Hollywood-centric attempt to show the black struggle, the theoretical and cinematographic aesthetic

Film Blackness takes back the narrative of black persons from a white-centric production to the authentic experience of the black person, told by the black person themselves. Michael Boyce Gillespie writes in *Film Blackness* (2016) how black film has evolved in several levels of storytelling, including "visual negotiation, if not tension, between film as art and race as a constitutive, cultural fiction" (Gillespie 2). The concept of Film Blackness aims to differentiate between races and minorities presented in the arts from the societal connotations and stigmatization, hence allowing a common, applicable understanding. Gillespie attempts to frame this idea and conceptualization of blackness and film aesthetics to literature, music, and other creative, contemporary media for "a wider conception of blackness as the visualization and creative production of knowledge that is one of the core values of the idea of black film" (2). Gillespie challenges the assumption that black film can only be evaluated and valued if it shows an authentic story of any minority race and their lives.

Film Blackness attempts to broaden the idea of black film by challenging our understanding. "What do we mean when we say black film? Black directors, actors, or content? [...] What does the designation black film promise, and what does it disallow?" (5). While Gillespie hopes for this conceptualization's possible success, he acknowledges any possible room for error and stays critical of the approach. "What if film is ultimately the worst window imaginable and an even poorer mirror? What if black film is art or creative interpretation and not merely the visual transcription of the black lifeworld?" (5). This prompted Gillespie's investigation of race and how especially the African-American race and culture have affected American filmmaking. Gillespie believes race to be a constitutive and fundamental part of American history, from anti-black racism to white supremacy (6), and he quotes professor Wahneema Lubiano's observations. "'What is race in the United States if not an attempt to make 'real' a set of social assumptions about biology?'" (6). Therefore, Gillespie considers the presumptive idea of racial appearances on screen authentic. "This misunderstanding of art enables a critical negligence and wish fulfillment that leaves black film as fruit from the poison tree or the idea of race as quantifiably, fantastically whole" (6). Gillespie believes Film Blackness insists on its importance through a multidisciplinary approach through art, culture, and history. This is achieved through an engagement with film as art and aesthetic.

Film Blackness occurs and becomes relevant due to the consistent and perpetual misappreciation of black art, and it points its criticism toward the perception that black media is not as prominent and flourishing as mainstream, white media (7). To elaborate on this criticism, Gillespie refers to Mark Reid's *Redefining Black Film* (1993), where Reid attempts to rectify the issues he believes are associated with black film. Reid focuses on two types of films; the commercial and the black independent film. Reid defines the black independent film as "'written, directed, produced, and distributed by individuals who have some ancestral link to black Africa' and cautions against critical analyses that

'[avoid] serious historical issues and [ignore] the polyphonic forms of black subjectivity'" [*sic*] (Gillespie 10). Reid distinguishes the two film types by the increased focus on commercial film. He believes that film histories and analytics tend to ignore the differences between commercial and black independent films, therefore burying black film history (10).

Gillespie believes Reid's thesis to be possibly problematic, as he does not find the necessary ground to distinguish the two types of film, as he, unlike Reid, considers either type of film as a black film, no matter the production process. Reid believes that "'critics and historians must describe how, by what means, and to what extent black independent filmmakers have chosen to be responsive to the needs of the black community'" (11), which Gillespie believes to be a "disservice" (11) to the black community, as it unsubscribes from black individuality and compresses blackness into one solid community with the same common issues as each other. The same can be discussed for Lubiano's point on racial depictions based on social assumption and how black bodies have been, and still are, presented through stereotypical conventions in live-action and animated feature films.

Gillespie believes the racist depiction of black bodies to be inherently American and native to American history, thus challenging to escape. He refers to Glenda Carpio and her question of "'whether the possibility exists for contemporary artists to untether stereotypes from their fetishistic moorings, even as she remains wary that such work risks ultimately reinforcing the stereotypicality'" (21). Carpio believes the prominence of stereotype-driven media is so deeply rooted in American mentality that removing such depictions would create a resurgence and new interest in such racist art (21). This is evident in the continuance of problematic black stereotypes in newer film productions.

Mimicking *Song of the South* and continuing the racist legacy of Disney animation, *Coonskin* (1975) combines live-action and animation with the story of two prison escapees (19). Gillespie examines the animated movie *Coonskin* and their exaggeration of the black body through animation and animated body language. The character Pappy is inspired by the nostalgic, apologetic nature of Uncle Remus, as Pappy reminisces: "'I just remembered. I use to know three guys just like you and your friends' [...] Pappy's vernacular storytelling is animated by the anthropomorphized figures of a rabbit, a bear, and a fox" (19). Animations like *Coonskin* appear innocent, though they promote anti-black visualization. This results in a grossly exaggerated animatedness of the black body.

Gillespie uses Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005) and her term reanimation and animatedness. When examining animatedness, Ngai focuses on ethnic bodies and how "Versions of these excessively 'lively' or 'agitated' ethnic subjects abound in American literature [...] [T]he kind of exaggerated emotional expressiveness I call animatedness seems to function as a marker of racial or ethnic otherness in general" (Ngai 93-94). This exaggeration of the racial body is what Gillespie observes in *Coonskin*. "These figures are so black that only the whites of their eyes and teeth make the sight of their face

possible. They have the exaggerated physiognomy of distended lips and asses while dressed in hip 1970s urban clothes" (Gillespie 17). Not only are they drawn as caricatures of black men, but their sound is also linked to stereotypical portrayals of black men using African American Vernacular English, a Harlem accent, and the use of scat in the title sequence (18). This thesis examines these racial characteristics and animatedness in our selected movies, *The Princess and the Frog* and *Soul*.

Subaltern

"The Other" is an interdisciplinary term that covers the philosophical and psychological conceptualization of different humans than "the Self" and cultural and symbolic significance when identifying another, different human from oneself. When trying to identify the "Other" as someone belonging to a group beneath the group one's self belongs to, that "Other" becomes a subaltern native. In his book *Gramsci and the Emancipation of the Subaltern Classes* (2022), Marcos Del Roio examines Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's findings and theories on the subaltern. On what a subaltern was, Roio summarizes: "[T]he subaltern, from an etymological point of view, only means someone who is inferior or interiorized" (Roio 265). For the use of subalterns concerning inferior social groups, Gramsci first coined the term.

> Gramsci began to use it, apparently to the detriment of more established notions within Marxism, such as proletariat, working class, and peasantry [...] While searching for the elements that could establish a new anti-capitalist civil society, the vagueness, and fluidity suggested by the subaltern class or group expression may enrich the discussion (265).

Gramsci's definition of a subaltern class refers to the existence of a superior class, thus establishing the significance of hegemony and the hegemonic systems these subalterns are placed in to reaffirm their subordination.

In Gramsci's observations of the Italian peasants, those in powerful positions who uphold the hegemonic society must be those of higher economic and cultural standing. During his imprisonment, Gramsci met with other Italians from different parts of Italy, thus forcing him to expand and further his understanding of the subaltern class. He noticed, "There were cultural and value differences that distinguished different regions of origin to the segregated ones, which would be an impediment of placing all meridional Italy within the same framework" (270). Gramsci's elaboration led to a more complex understanding of the subaltern that adapted into a study of subaltern bodies and cultures associated with colonial and postcolonial theory and criticism.

In their chapter "A Small History of Subaltern Studies", Dipesh Chakrabarty navigates the continuing relevance of the term subaltern and how it relates to postcolonial theory in a study of its own. "It started as a critique of two contending schools of history: the Cambridge School and that of the nationalist historians. Both of these approaches declared [Ranajit] Guha [...] were elitist. They wrote up the history of nationalism as the story of an achievement by the elite classes, whether Indian or British" [*sic*] (Chakrabarty 471). Subaltern studies intended to produce meaning and give voice to those subaltern groups who were not included in the historical analysis of India's succession, allowing those subordinates of the elite to become a part of the history (472).

Chakrabarty relies on Guha's examinations of how India's elite and subalterns navigated and influenced colonial India. According to Guha, the elite comprised a selective group of Indians who governed India like the British parliament. Meanwhile, the subalterns of India practiced "'politics the people'"[*sic*] (472). This type of politics heavily depended on "'the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or on class consciousness depending on the level of consciousness of the people involved'" (472), thus believing the subaltern's politics as more violent and in resistance to the elite's domination (472). The subaltern's norms and values differed vastly from the elite's, all of which based their premise on their level of work and life experience.

Guha believed that India's peasants and other subaltern groups were placed into two different power arrangements. Firstly, like the type of politics governed by the elite, was the power enforced and introduced by the British. Another was a "set of relationships in which hierarchy was based on direct and explicit *domination and subordination* of the less powerful through both ideological-symbolic means and physical force" (474). This ties back to Gramsci's beliefs that if given the opportunity, the proletariat and the underclass will always try to overrule and overthrow the upper-class bourgeoisie (Roio 280). Chakrabarty summarizes Guha's research and how he desired a history in which the subaltern was the narrator and "'the maker of his own destiny'" (Chakrabarty 478), a history that will conclude on the difficulty of a solely subaltern narrative.

Peasants and subalterns did not leave documentation of their own. Historians turned to other disciplines to understand the subaltern experience and livelihoods, thus establishing subaltern studies. Chakrabarty borrows Eugen Weber's explanation: "'The illiterate are not in fact inarticulate; they can and do express themselves in several ways. Sociologists, ethnologists, geographers, and most recently demographic historians have shown us new and different means of interpreting evidence'" (478). Weber, like Guha and other subaltern scholars, concludes that the lack of peasant and subaltern documentation is not for lack of trying, but rather the ruling class has provided the voice and accounts that document their experiences (478). In keeping with the belief that the underclass will attempt to surpass the upper class, Guha notices how peasant revolts are only documented from their counterparts, i.e.,

the perspectives of the upper class, the ruling class, and their military as well as police forces (Chakrabarty 479), thus producing biased accounts of history. Guha, therefore, called for a "need for the historian to develop a conscious strategy for 'reading' the archives, not simply for biases of the elite but for the textual properties of these documents in order to get at the various ways in which elite modes of thought represented the refractory figure of the subaltern and their practices" (479).

Since Guha's research on the subaltern, other scholars like Gayatri Spivak have raised questions about subaltern studies and their lack of research on gender. In Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak", Spivak forcefully questions the subaltern, specifically the gendered subaltern, and its voice. In his essay "Refiguring the Subaltern", Peter D. Thomas speculates on the subaltern and subaltern studies' ability to redefine themselves from Gramsci's theories. On Spivak's impact on Subaltern studies, Thomas summarizes:

> Spivak argued that the subaltern was not only deprived of the capacity to speak by the dominant order but that the subaltern was defined by its exclusion from representation as such, in both political and aesthetic senses [...] the subaltern thus appeared to be a category suited to analyze and to problematize the experiences of marginalized, oppressed individuals and groups, particularly in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Thomas 862)

Spivaks influential essay gave way to what became a different corpus of subaltern studies across nations and continents. While it gave voice to the subaltern and their shared and individual "'incapacity'", subaltern studies, as a continuing presence in literary theory, have been questioned and criticized. Thomas seeks to refigure and redefine subalterns, subalternity, and any distinctions that categorize different forms of subalterns. In order to reproduce meaning to the subaltern, Thomas borrows Gramsci's theorization of the subaltern and proposes three groups: "the 'irrepressible subaltern', the 'hegemonic subaltern,' and the 'citizen-subaltern'" (872).

The irrepressible subaltern is based on Gramsci's belief that subaltern groups are more expressive than they give themselves credit. Likewise, theorists like Spivak regard the subaltern with as little credit as they do. "Subaltern classes or social groups are 'on the margins of history,' that is, 'history' conceived in the sense of historiography, as a text written almost invariably by the victors" (872). However, the scale of their involvement in history, the dominant group and victors serve as the narrators of subaltern history by their domestication and control of history and, therefore, the truth about subaltern history (872). Gramsci's conception of subalternity is not only applied to social groups but also gender, ethnicity, and regionality (873), hence Spivak's interest in the subaltern and the gendered subaltern and their ability and permission to speak for themselves.

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The hegemonic subaltern differs from the irrepressible subaltern, allowing the upper class to speak for them and accept society's hierarchy and constructed dynamic. "Subalternity, that is, constitutes a general dynamic in political modernity, even and especially within the different conditions and contexts of its development." (Thomas 874). Thomas elaborates that to understand the hegemony subalternity and its subjugation, we must also examine and understand the hegemonic constitution for the upper class (874). Just as subaltern groups were not only omitted from historical accounts, so was the upper class more than just reduced to a group of oppressors. Thomas explains that modern ruling classes need to create and maintain subaltern social groups to stay in power and sustain the ruling class as is. "[T]he need for the continual production and reproduction of subaltern social groups constitutes a fragile and tenuous basis of enduring political power [...] It is precisely here, in the midst of a hegemonic relationship, constitutively open to contestation, that the potential political power of the subaltern lies" (875).

From this hegemonic dynamic also came the citizen-subaltern, where "the 'traditional' subaltern is thus reconceived, on the one hand, as a 'potential citizen', a potential now still only partially fulfilled for some social groups; and on the other hand, subalternity comes to be seen as an enduring 'trace' or latent threat of exclusion, even and perhaps especially within the achievement of citizenship" (876). This form of subalternity serves as the ruling class's vain attempt to categorize the subaltern and promote them to second-rank citizenship. "In a dual move, the 'traditional' subaltern is thus reconceived, on the one hand, as potential citizen, a potential now still only partially fulfilled for some social groups" (876), while constituting as a threat of exclusion for other subalterns once achieving citizenship. "Gramsci's theory of subalternity can therefore be regarded as an attempt to theorize the constitutive relationship between freedom and unfreedom in political modernity" (876), thus concluding the subaltern classes are never entirely void of expression or representation while also acknowledging subalternity as a result of hegemony. "'The end' of subalternity is conceived not in terms of an exit from this condition but as the internal transformation of the hegemonic relations that structure it" (877).

Orientalism

Since the 19th century, there has been a division between the Western and Eastern countries. From the Western point of view, Eastern countries were viewed as inferior to the West, of which the West was considered superior.

Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) explores the term's depth and the Western conception of the colonized Eastern countries. Considering Western perception of the East through Palestinian scholar

Edward W. Said, Said develops the theory of Orientalism that attempts to look at how the East has and continues to be considered the "The Other." Said states that the theory had received criticism from specialists, as they claim it is too vague and "connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth century and early twentieth-century European colonialism" (Said 2). Orientalism stems from the word orientalist, which links to those studying the Orient. Said explains that Orientalism is a way of acknowledging the Orient "that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1).

Said defines the term in three ways that he considers to be interdependent. Firstly, he defines it by saying, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'The Orient' and (most of the time)[*sic*] 'The Occident.'" (2). Secondly, Said states that several writers, including poets, novelists, and theorists, have come to terms with accepting the distinction between the East and the West (2). Lastly, Said claims that the late 18th century was a starting point for Orientalism and the corporate dealing with the Orient "by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling in, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Said expresses that these three definitions represent a way of understanding the Orient. Additionally, Said examines the distinction between the Orient (East) and the Occident (West), where he claims that it is a "relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (Said 5). Said looks at how the Orient was not Orientalized "because it was discovered to be 'Oriental' [...] but also because it *could be* - that is, submitted to being - *made* Oriental" (5-6).

Said is inspired by the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault's beliefs of the interrelations between the discourse of power and knowledge, where Said claims the particular discourse is a way to identify Orientalism. Said claims that without looking at Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot understand "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said 3). Said, therefore, interests himself in the discursive research on Orientalism based on literary accounts and political and imperial movements from Britain, France, and the US and how they reproduce the Orient in texts.

Based on these texts, Said claims that Eastern countries have been considered dangerous and a threat since the 1950s (26). With his experience as a Palestinian living in the US, Said describes it as disheartening what the Arab people come across in their everyday life because of where they originated. "The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding

in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed" (Said 27). Said claims that the prejudice and racism towards Arabs have resulted in Orientalists from the US insincerely identifying themselves with the Arab community, whether politically or culturally (27). Continually, Arab Orientalists have either been linked with "discredited political and economic interests (oil company and State Department Arabists, for example) or religion." (27) Said points out that the Arabs were viewed as more threatening after the year 1973 due to the Arab-Israeli war (Said 284).

> Cartoons depicting an Arab sheik standing behind a gasoline pump turned up consistently. These Arabs, however, were clearly 'Semitic': their sharply hooked noses, the evil mustachioed leer on their faces, were obvious reminders (to a largely non-Semitic population) that 'Semites' were at the bottom of all 'our' troubles", which in this case principally a gasoline shortage" (285-286).

Based on these texts and this research, Said claims that Middle Eastern citizens living in the West, more specifically America, have experienced years of turbulence concerning the West and East. Said refers to two orientalists, former British prime minister Arthur James Balfour and former Earl of Cromer, Lord Evelyn Baring Cromer. Balfour and Cromer described the Orient as irrational, morally corrupt, and childish, as well as different from the Occident, which was described as rational, mature, and normal (40). Thus perpetuating Eurocentric superiority through a cultural strength that gave voice to the Orient.

The Western perception and information about the Orient's intelligence and intelligibility of the Oriental world gave identity to the Orient, not necessarily aligning with the Orient's self-perception and expression (Said 40). This distinction between Western and Eastern people is evident in how Balfour and Cromer observe those from the Orient as subjects for study, judgment, discipline, and illustration, showing how "the Orient is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks" (40). This installed the political perception and discourse of "us and them", with the familiar being Europe and the West "'us'" (Said 44), and the different and strange as the Orient and the East, "'them'" (44). "Orientals lived in their world, "'we'" lived in ours" (44).

The subjection of the East furthered the perception of Western strength, which Said questions and criticizes. Consequently, this study of the Orient subjugates the Orientals as a "subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves" (35). Though he criticizes the harsh rhetoric and information Orientalists bring, he acknowledges clear divisions and distinctions between those from different cultures and parts of the world. For this observation, he turns to Rudyard Kipling's writing and use of the White Man.

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Said refers to Kipling's use of the White Man with how Orientalism has evolved and remained a present ideology since the 19th century. Kipling's use of the White Man was a contemporary idealization of British colonizers and settlers on tour to new lands. "Behind the White Man's mask of amiable leadership there is always the express willingness to use force, to kill and be killed. [...] [H]e is a White Man, but not for mere profit, since his 'chosen star' presumably sits far above earthly gain" (Said 226). Kipling's White Man was the link between the colony and the colonizers. The White Man served as a form of authority to the non-whites and as an agent of learning and "implementation of policy" (227) for the new worlds the White Man ventures to. In turn, the White Man - or the Occidental - was the only person who could speak for the Orientals and name them (228). Finally, the White Man's purpose is to situate the Oriental in a co-dependent position of inferiority, where no Oriental "was ever allowed to be independent and rule himself" (228).

Although Said's theory has been examined and studied for four decades, there have been questions and criticism. One of the critics of Said's *Orientalism* is the Pakistani author Ibn Warraq, whose book *Defending The West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007) highlights his concerns about Said and his writings. He claims that Said's writing on the Orient, Islam, and the Islamic civilization were incorrect (Warraq, Part One "Edward Said and The Sadists"). Warraq believes that Said attacked the principle of Orientalism, "which is devoted to the academic study of the Orient and which Said accuses of perpetuating negative racial stereotypes, Anti-Arab and Anti-Islamic prejudice" (Warraq, Part One "Edward Said and The Sadists"). He also points out that Said accuses Orientalists "as being a group complicit with imperial power and holds dem responsible for creating the distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, which they achieve by suppressing the voice of the 'Oriental'" (Warraq Part One "Edward Said and The Sadists). Nevertheless, Said's idea of the outcome was hoping that *Orientalism* would be "one installment of several, and hope there are scholars and critics who might want to write others" (Said 24). Therefore, he believed that *Orientalism* would be impactful for others, including critics such as Warraq. Theories like Orientalism are one of many theoretical approaches to understanding Western media portrayal and use of the Orient and Eastern cultures. As Western media is among the most internationally consumed, they are responsible for Western audiences' introduction to the stories of minority groups. Another example of a minority group presented in Western media is the Indigenous Americans.

Settler Colonialism

As this master's thesis conducts an analysis of *Pocahontas* and *Lilo and Stitch*, it is relevant to examine the portrayal of Indigenous people in Western animation. We turn to settler colonialism to understand the themes presented in our selected movies.

Lorenzo Veracini defines settler colonialism in his 2019 article "Settler Colonialism" as a "specific mode of domination where a community of exogenous settlers permanently displace to a new locale, eliminate or displace indigenous populations and sovereignties, and constitute an autonomous political body" (Veracini 2019 1). Veracini elaborates on colonialism and the term colony in his book *Settler Colonialism* (2010), stating that the term colony bears a double meaning. "A colony is both a political body that is dominated by an exogenous agency, and an exogenous entity that reproduces itself in a given environment [...] 'colony' implies the localised ascendancy of an external element" (Veracini 2010 2-3). Additionally, he claims that settler colonialism characterizes both meanings, as "both the permanent movement and reproduction of communities and the dominance of an exogenous agency over an indigenous one are necessarily involved" (3). He explains that the settler colonial phenomena relate to colonialism and migration (3). Nevertheless, Veracini expresses that not all colonialists are settlers, and not all migrations are related to settler migrations (3). Settlers are considered sovereign and founders of political orders in contrast to migrants, who were viewed as "*Appellants* facing a political order that is already constituted" (3).

While both share similarities, Veracini stresses the critical distinction between settler colonialism and colonialism. For this explanation, he refers to A. G. Hopkins' differentiation between settler colonialism and colonialism. Hopkins focuses on how settler colonialism bases itself on demography, "'where white settlers became numerically predominant, colonial rule made peoples out of new states; where indigenous societies remained the basis of government, the state was fashioned from existing peoples'" (Veracini 5). Likewise, D. K. Fieldhouse divides settler colonialism into three groups, the mixed, the plantation, and the pure settlement colonies.

> [I]n the 'mixed' colonies, settlers had encountered a resilient and sizeable indigenous population and asserted their ascendancy while relying on an indigenous workforce; in the 'plantation' colonies, settlers relied on imported and unfree workers; and in the 'pure settlement' colonies, the white settlers had eradicated and/or marginalised the indigenous population. (5)

While Veracini acknowledges these classifications of settler colonial groups and how they can be applicable and understandable, he believes settler colonialism to be a more profound phenomenon, not

to be reduced to demographic categorizations. Veracini believes that if these classifications are applied, the colonizer would no longer be colonizers once they become the majority of the population (Veracini 5), which leads to the indigenous people becoming minorities and no longer being colonized.

Unlike colonialism, settler colonization establishes a different relationship between the settlers and the Indigenous people. Veracini refers to Patrick Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism and how settler-colonial relationship dynamics differs from colonialism, as "settler colonialism is not a master-servant relationship marked by ethnic difference [...] Settler colonialism is not a relationship primarily characterised by the indispensability of colonised people" (8). According to Veracini, Wolfe states the purpose of settler-colonization was to gain the land, though not necessarily with the native labor force. Wolfe saw European settler colonialism as a "'winner-take-all-project'" (8) that sought to replace the already-established structures of the Indigenous people and labor force with their practices. Wolfe's explanation of settler colonialism removes settler colonialism from the many subcategorizations it previously placed concerning colonialism, thus serving as an "antitype category" (9).

Veracini explains that he only examines the European settler, acknowledging that there are non-European settlers as well. Walter L. Hixon researches American settler colonialism in his book *American Settler Colonialism: A Story* (2013). As Hixon lists several non-European settler societies, he focuses on American settler colonialism and claims that American settlers drove an ethnic cleansing of the continent (Hixon, "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). He refers back to Veracini's definition of settler colonialism. "'Settler colonial projects are specifically interested in turning indigenous people to refugees'" (Hixon, "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). He uses Amie Césaire's term "thingification", an expression of how the colonizer removed the identity of the colonized people. "The colonized people could not be an individual but rather was a 'thing' - a savage, a barbarian, a nigger" (Hixon, "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). Instead, colonization dehumanized the colonized people. Referring to Said's Orientalism, Hixon mentions that Said has influenced how the West and East have been viewed (c.f. p. 17).

Said showed how literary discourse established a powerful binary between Western modernity - viewed as rational, progressive, manly, and morally and racially superior - and the non-Western "Other", typically presented as heathen, primitive, treacherous, and de-masculinized. Orientalism shifted attention to the ways in which "'colonial knowledge' shaped the 'encounter' between the metropole and the periphery in a variety of global settings" (Hixon "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). Hixon turns to Homi Bhabha's notion of colonial ambivalence. Colonial ambivalence refers to the complex, conflicting emotions associated with colonization and the

colonized experience. This includes the distrust and friction between the colonizers and the colonized people.

Hixon touches upon settler colonial studies, the interdisciplinary field of academic study which explore settler colonies. Bhabha explains how dependent the colonizers are on the colonized people in order to develop their identities, "e.g. 'I am white and civilized, he is brown and savage'" (Hixon "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). Consequently, the colonial identities were constructed yet unsteady, thus in need of constant required repetition and assurance to proclaim themselves as being real (Hixon, "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). However, Bhabha's examination of the colonial ambivalence stems from the colonizer's desires and the colonized people's resilience. "The colonizer desired the colonized other, for example for his attunement with nature or sexual liberation, and yet was repulsed by his primitiveness and the dangers that he posed" (Hixon "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). This ambivalence causes the colonizer to unconsciously mimic characteristics expressed by the "'savage'", thus enabling "the colonized other the capacity for agency and resistance because the relations were not as fixed as they appeared to be, but rather were inherently unstable and malleable" (Hixon "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History, and Theory").

Colonial ambivalence was not inconsequential, as it did affect the dynamic between settler and indigenous. "Masses of Americans empathized with Indians, condemned treaty violations and aggressions against them, and strove to shepherd them to civilisation and salvation" (Hixon "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). This form of solidarity held little water or actuality, as most did not believe the Indigenous had a right to appear in colonial spaces. While they did sympathize with the Natives, they also neglected to put a noticeable effort into improving standards of living as well as colonial power structures that enforced their inevitable subalternity. Finally, Hixon borrows Veracini's explanation of how the imperial power forcing itself on the Indigenous people and land was not as interested in governing the Indigenous but rather "'to seize their land and push them beyond an ever-expanding frontier of settlement'" (Hixon "Chapter 1 - Introduction: Settler Colonialism, History and Theory"). As this thesis concerns European and American settler colonialism, Veracini and Hixon's approaches are significant for understanding the process of settler colonialism and how such stories of the settlement are presented in the literature, like children's movies.

Methodology

Through theoretical approaches like Edward W. Said's Orientalism, we intend to research and understand the controversial discourse that films like *Aladdin* and *Mulan* brought on with their representation of Eastern culture. To further our understanding of the spectacle the Oriental body presents, we contextualize the process of "Othering" a non-White body through Antoni Gramsci's approach to the Subaltern with reference to Dipesh Chakrabarty's reproduction of the Subaltern presented in the Orient.

Additionally, we seek to understand the production of African-American filmmaking and the appearance of African-American bodies in *The Princess and The Frog* and *Soul* through Michael Boyce Gillespie's Film Blackness. This theoretical approach seeks to understand the importance and relevance of depictions of authentic black living and the black experience. Finally, we concern ourselves with the social consequences and complications of colonization, more specifically settler colonialism, in our selected movies *Pocahontas* and *Lilo & Stitch*, where we seek to understand the significance of indigenous culture and bodies and how we produce and reproduce colonial narratives of the "Other" Americans, the Natives. These theories will provide our founding understanding and method to deduct our analysis that answers the following question: **How does Disney express bias through their selection of racial representation?**

As we gathered our materials, we discovered that while our selected movies were well-discussed, there were limited articles on topics that we wanted to investigate for this master's thesis. While there were multiple studies on Indigenous characters in Disney, specifically on colonialism in *Pocahontas*, we found significantly fewer studies on *Lilo & Stitch* regarding colonialism, certainly our interest in settler colonialism. In the case of *Lilo & Stitch*, we found several studies on queerness and neurological divergence, whereas *Pocahontas* was a research field for not only colonialism but ecocritical relations to nature. In the case of *Aladdin* and *Mulan*, however, a more significant scope could be examined regarding the research on Asian representation and Orientalism, though they interested themselves in portraying gender roles rather than ethnic authenticity. Finally, on the topic of African American representation in Disney, *The Princess & The Frog* has been widely received and critiqued in terms of gender and class, as well as race, whereas in the case of *Soul*, we were only able to procure two academic articles that examined such a newer production by Disney.

While such limitation on secondary literature could present itself as a disadvantage to back this thesis, we find this thesis advantageous in how our findings might add to the conversation and study field of racial discourse in Disney. E.g., our placement of the already-small field of research on *Lilo & Stitch* furthers the study field of colonial perspectives in Disney, as well as our racial analysis of *Soul*

and Joe's role in Disney as the first leading black man. Thus, our thesis provides independent work in a prominent research field with continuous relevance to Western society with our increased attention to representation and how certain representation matters.

Analysis

As this master's thesis seeks to investigate representation in Disney, we have selected three main groups of ethnicities that we analyze for racist imagery. The following section will discuss Asian representation in Disney through the critical approach of Edward W. Said's Orientalism.

Disney's *Aladdin* (1992)

Aladdin is the Disney adaptation of the folk tales "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves". These stories are associated with the *One Thousand- and One-Nights* collection during the Golden Age of Islam, which consists of Middle Eastern and South-Asian folk tales translated into Arabic.

Aladdin opens with a title sequence and the opening song "Arabian Nights," sung by a peddler voiced by Bruce Adler. "Arabian Nights" sets the stage for the movie by introducing the fictional Arabian city of Agrabah and its people. During the song, the audience follows the peddler's journey from the desert to arriving to the city. The peddler depicts the Arab world as an exotic and magical beauty, reinforcing the region's stereotype as a land of mysticism and fantasy (*Aladdin* 0:02:04 - 0:02:08). Through "Arabian Nights", Disney depicts the Arab world as a monolithic entity. They represent the Arab world as a barbaric and hot place where camels wander around. In the song, the peddler uses generic terms such as "Arabian Nights" and "Arabian Days" while showing the Taj Mahal in India. The story is also set in Agrabah and situated near the Jordan River, as the peddler mentions (*Aladdin* 0:02:08 - 0:02:10). However, the peddler describes it as a place "where the caravan camels roam" (*Aladdin* 0:00:50 - 0:00:53) which contradicts the location, as the caravan camels are more frequently in the North African countries. Thus, Disney neglects the diversity of cultures, languages, and traditions. This suggests that the Middle East is singular and reduced to exotic stereotypes.

It is also noteworthy how the lyrics from "Arabian Nights" have been changed since its release in 1992. Bisma Misbah explains this in her 2020 article "One Jump Ahead or Behind? Princess Jasmine, The Magic Lamp, and A Whole New World: Cultural Representation, Identity, and Orientalism in Disney's *Aladdin* (2019)". Initially, the lyrics of the opening song were: "Where they cut off your ear / If they don't like your face / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home (Misbah 7). Afterward, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee asked Disney to remove these lines. Critics stated that these three lines presented the Arab world as violent, perpetuating harmful stereotypes of the Middle East

and Arab culture (Misbah 7). After receiving the criticism, Disney altered the lyrics to "Where it's flat and immense /And the heat is intense / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home" (*Aladdin* 0:00:54- 0:01:00). The new lyrics meant to be more neutral and avoid negative connotations towards Arab culture.

However, Samantha Heydt argues in her chapter "Cinematic Essentialism, Political Agendas: Walt Disney's *Aladdin*" from the book *Debating Disney: Pedagogical Perspectives on Commercial Cinema* (2016) that these updated lines still misrepresent the Arab world and is instead "presented as hostile since the focus on the (actual) vast desert neglects to mention the diverse [...] topography of the region, which also includes beautiful stretches of land" (Heydt 148). They have kept the word "ba-baric," which suggests that the region's people and culture are primitive and uncivilized. Furthermore, depicting the region as "flat and immense" with "intense" heat is oversimplified. Likewise, Disney simplifies Middle Eastern artifacts and objects through the iconic bazaar the peddler opens once he reaches Agrabah, most notably the lamp. The peddler presents the Genie to the audience where he mentions that it "changed the course of a young man's life. A young man who, like this lamp, was more than he seemed" (*Aladdin* 0:02:55 - 0:03:00), introducing one of the main protagonists of the movie, Aladdin.

Aladdin, the "Other" Prince

Looking at Aladdin, he differs from the other characters, both socially and culturally. He is an orphan who is homeless. The audience meets Aladdin in his first scene, where he steals bread and runs from the police officers of Agrabah. This shows that he is from the lower class of Agrabah's social hierarchy and lives in poverty. Aladdin's clothing highlights his lower-class status as he wears a vest with loose-fitting baggy pants tapered at the ankle. He also wears a red fez hat, commonly worn in the Middle East. Aladdin is linked to the idiom "A diamond in the rough" by the peddler and Jafar, expressing that he possesses hidden qualities yet realized. At the movie's beginning, the audience sees how Jafar finds the hidden cave in the desert. The cave entrance is shaped like a tiger's head, and no one can access the hidden cave without the golden scarab in Jafar's possession. "Know this. Only one may enter here. One whose worth lies far within. A diamond in the rough" (*Aladdin* 0:05:17- 0:05:29), foreshadowing to the audience that Aladdin is the only character given access to the hidden cave.

As a subaltern, Aladdin is denied access to resources and opportunities because of his low social status. While it is unrealistic and critical that a man in a male-dominated social structure is denied access to resources, it provides the Disney version with a good rags-to-riches story as Aladdin climbs his way to success and riches through love and deceit. However enticing such a plot might be, it is interesting that Disney chooses to be selective on what parts of Islam they find appropriate for

Aladdin. As they are aware of Islam and mention Muslim symbols like the prayer and the Arab translation of the word God, surely, they would be aware of another of the five pillars of Islam, *zakat*, or alms in English. Alms is the Muslim duty to donate and help less resourceful communities ("The Five Pillars of Islam", The MET). Despite the pious duty to help, Disney foregoes any Muslim identity to establish Aladdin as the Occident-passing, struggling subaltern in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the audience follows Aladdin and the challenges and obstacles stemming from his subaltern status. He is discriminated against by the people who are in positions of power, including Jafar, Sultan's advisor, who looks down on Aladdin. The commoners and citizens of Agrabah are also aware of Aladdin and his struggles. Instead of providing Aladdin with help, they shrug off his stealing to boyish antics and establish him as a troublemaker. His subaltern status is emphasized when he meets the daughter of the Sultan, Princess Jasmine, whom he falls in love with. Because of his low social status, he cannot encounter Jasmine as himself "I'll never meet her again. I'm a street rat, remember?" (*Aladdin* 0:26:19-0:26:23). However, Aladdin gets introduced to the Cave of Wonders by an old and lowly prisoner who says that it is "Filled with treasures beyond your wildest dreams. [...] Treasure enough to impress even your princess" (*Aladdin* 0:26:52-0:27:00). In the Cave of Wonders, Aladdin discovers the magic lamp which he rubs and causes the Genie to be released. Genie offers to grant Aladdin three wishes. One of Aladdin's wishes is to become a prince, as he mentions that he feels trapped in his current lifestyle as a "street rat" (*Aladdin* 0:21:53). Therefore, he dreams of a better life where others can accept and respect him. Nevertheless, he also wishes to become a prince, hoping that Jasmin falls in love with him and gains respect from the Sultan.

As Prince Ali, he presents himself as a wealthy and sophisticated suitor for Jasmine's hand in marriage as her father is looking for a man to marry Jasmine. His attire becomes more decadent and opulent when he becomes a prince, reflecting his newfound status. He wears a white turban with a large jewel in the center, a purple jacket with gold trim and embroidery, and white pants with gold sandals. The change in Aladdin's clothing reflects the changes in his demeanor and behavior, and it also is similar to the clothing of the Sultan and Jafar, representing power and authority. As a prince, he is more confident and refined, with a sense of responsibility and duty. His royal status is affirmed in the song "Prince Ali" when Genie tells the people of Agrabah, including the police officers, to kneel for Prince Ali as Aladdin is on his way to ask the Sultan for Jasmine's hand in marriage (*Aladdin* 0:49:28).

Aladdin loses his status as a subaltern when he becomes a prince, as he is no longer different from the others and does not get mistreated by the people of Agrabah. He gains agency with this new persona of Prince Ali, allowing him to take control of his narrative rather than remain in his marginalized status. His new persona as Prince Ali represents power and elegance, threatening Jafar's chances

to marry Jasmine to become Sultan and ruler of Agrabah. Consequently, Jafar's jealousy and anger towards Aladdin results in Jafar discrediting Aladdin and his lies to Jasmine and Sultan in the song "Prince Ali (reprise)".

> Prince Ali, yes, it is he
> But not as you know him
> Read my lips and come to grips with reality
> Yes, meet a blast from your past
> Whose lies were too good to last
> Say hello to your precious Prince Ali! (*Aladdin* 1:12:53- 1:13:10).

In order to ensure his position as Sultan, Jafar wishes to maintain Aladdin's role as a subaltern. He transforms Aladdin back into the clothes Aladdin wore before he was Prince Ali, thus suppressing him into the outsider role Aladdin was given by society. This time, however, Disney rewards Aladdin for his subaltern status, as he decides to commit to himself and his authentic self and comes clean to Jasmine about his intentions.

In true Disney fashion, Aladdin, Jasmine, and Genie defeat Jafar, and though Jafar is gone, Aladdin is faced with the consequences of his actions. He is back where he started with no money, prospects, or the girl of his dreams. Aladdin even releases Genie by granting Genie his freedom through Aladdin's final wish, thus releasing himself from the possibility of changing Agrabah law. To everyone's surprise, the Sultan has had a change of heart and decides to change the law that dictates whom Jasmine might marry. Hence, Disney's message for audiences to stay true to themselves is reinforced through Aladdin, as he is finally rewarded for the first display of his genuine self. However wholesome the ending of *Aladdin* might be, Disney's binary message of "be true to yourself" garner the question of why they needed to display Orientalist ideology to achieve such a story and message.

Encoding Orientalism in *Aladdin*

Looking at *Aladdin*, we recognize the portrayal of characters, icons, and Middle Eastern places as perpetual stereotyping of the Orient. In the case of characters and undoubtedly female characters, Misbah comments on the negative portrayal of Arab women, arguing that "Disney's use of harem scenes in the film feeds into the Orientalist notion of the degradation of women in the Islamic World 'reactivat[ing] the rooted misconceptions about Middle Eastern [women] as being merely sexual objects, entertaining men'" [*sic*] [(Misbah 7-8).

Misbah refers to the women in the Harem during the song "One Step Ahead," where the audience sees young women in revealing clothes. Their harem manager reacts angrily to Aladdin not paying them for their services (Misbah 19). These portrayals of women in the Harem perpetuate negative stereotypes about Middle Eastern and South Asian women as passive objects of male desire. It also reinforces the idea that a woman's worth relates to her sexuality and that they exist solely for men's pleasure. This refers back to one of Said's explanations on the oriental women: "Women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing" (Said 207).

According to Said, Oriental women are made for the male gaze, which corresponds to the Harem women, whose occupation relies on the male gaze and men's participation. Jasmine, an Oriental woman, is a princess introduced in *Aladdin* as a passive and less influential character in a patriarchal society. She must abide by her father's, as well as society's, rules regarding marriage: "The law says you must be married to a prince" (*Aladdin* 0:13:13 - 0:13:19). The Sultan does not initially find Jafar a suitable match, though, with manipulation and magical influence by Jafar, the Sultan finds Jafar suitable for Jasmine. However, Jasmine is not thrilled by the idea of marriage dictated by law, as she wants to marry out of love (*Aladdin* 0:13:28 - 0:13:30). The Sultan's idea of marriage is finding someone who can take care of and provide for Jasmine for when he cannot provide for her any longer, indicating that Jasmine is in need for a man, whether it is her father or husband.

Jasmine falls in love with commoner Aladdin, which goes against the law. Therefore, she feels just as trapped as Aladdin but for different reasons (c.f. p. 27). Jasmine feels trapped because of the strict societal expectations placed upon her as both a princess and a woman from the Middle East. She is expected to marry a prince, but she longs for the freedom to choose and marry for love. Jasmine also feels trapped by the patriarchal traditions of her kingdom, where women have limited autonomy and are expected to fulfill traditional gender roles. Her father and society's expectations of Jasmine, as well as her passiveness, correspond with one of the elements of Said's description of an Oriental woman. "She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her" (Said 6). These qualities of an Oriental woman are placed onto Jasmine and her quest to find an appropriate husband and love marriage, rather than the arranged marriage her father wishes to find her to protect her. As Disney reinforces Jasmine as the Oriental woman, so is her placement as the character trope of the damsel in distress. Even though Jasmine presents herself as a strong and independent character, her power and agency are often limited by the male figures around her. This is presented in *Aladdin* when Jafar kidnaps Jasmine and must be rescued by Aladdin, reinforcing the idea that her father is right about her need for male protection and that she cannot be truly independent.

Numbers of characters: 308.402

Misbah notes that, despite being a princess in Eastern society, Jasmine wears revealing clothes as well, ultimately sexualizing and associating her with the young women in the Harem, as well as the belly dancers (Misbah 13). Her physical appearance, mannerisms, and clothing are present in a way that emphasizes her exoticism. She is depicted with large, expressive eyes lined with Kohl, full lips, and long dark hair, often associated with Middle Eastern and South Asian women. Her clothes are also distinctively exotic, with flowing fabrics and jewelry that evoke association with the clothing of the traditional Harem girls. Fahad Alzahrani explains Disney's portrayal of Oriental women in his article "Women in the Middle East: Princess Jasmine" and how Disney's depiction of Jasmine contradicts the women and the traditional norms in the Arab culture.

> Jasmine's identity does not fit the genuine Arab culture in terms of costumes, physical appearance, character, and sexuality. Some of the actions in which Princess [*sic*] is involved do not correspond to the duties and roles which should be performed by medieval princesses in the Arab countries. Apparently, Walt Disney's major goal was to increase the target audience and make the animated movie more popular among the viewers (Alzahrani 237).

Disney's target audience is predominantly white. Alzahrani notes how the Americanized audience wants to see American families and values with equal opportunities for both women and men. However, Arab women in American media are not presented accurately (238). He notes: "Arabian women were never adjusted to these norms and are not sexualized in the way it is usually presented in the American media" (238).

Heydt agrees with Alzahrani's statement, as she also claims that Jasmine's revealing clothing has nothing to do with the cultural and historical aspect and more to do with the objectification of women (Heydt 148). This reflects the Western perception of and fascination with Oriental women. Oriental women have been associated with exoticism and objectification. They are portrayed as submissive, passive, and sexually available with their beauty and exoticism. Katherine Bullock and Steven Zhou comment on another Orientalist example, the fictional city of Agrabah, in their article "Entertainment or blackface? Decoding Orientalism in a post-9/11 era: Audience views on Aladdin". It is noteworthy how Disney has decided to name the fictional city Agrabah as it is translated to "most strange" in Arabic (147). Initially, Disney wanted to name the city Baghdad. However, Bullock and Zhou state that the movie was released a year after the Gulf War, where the United States "led a coalition to drive Iraq back from its invasion of Kuwait" (Bullock & Zhou 454), hence they renamed it Agrabah (454).

Disney is known to repeat character classes which Sean Harrington touches upon in this chapter, "Disney Character Tropes," from the book *The Disney Fetish* (2014). Harrington refers to Janet Wasko, describing six repeating character roles in Disney movies: the hero, the love interest, the sidekick, the mentor, the villain, and the henchman. Looking at *Aladdin*, we see that Aladdin fits the hero's character, with Princess Jasmine as his love interest and Abu as his sidekick. The Genie is considered Aladdin's mentor as he fits the description of someone "who is forced by fate to aid the Hero". (Harrington 72). Genie helps Aladdin fulfill his wishes to become a prince and live the lifestyle Aladdin has strived to have. Jafar is categorized as the movie's villain as he, alongside Iago as the henchman, tries to stop Aladdin from marrying Princess Jasmine (72). These repeated character tropes make for a checklist by Disney to include them in their movies. We see how Disney attempts to make it more Westernized since the main characters of *Aladdin* fit into the description of these character roles.

Notably, the characters have been Westernized in ways other than befitting the repeated character roles. According to Bullock and Zhou, the audience is supposed to identify the most with Aladdin and Jasmine as they are: "highly Westernized in their speech and comportment. They [...] are not adorned with foreign accents and head scarves. Both Aladdin and Jasmine speak with American accents [...] In this case, they are less pawns of the Orient than they are representations of Western agency" (Bullock & Zhou 456). Heydt agrees with Bullock and Zhou, adding that Aladdin and Jasmine take on an American identity with their fair complexion and Angelo accents (Heydt 148-149). Jasmine and Aladdin have physical appearances more aligned with Western beauty standards than traditional Middle Eastern. We see Jasmine with a slim waist and Aladdin with a slender, muscular build and a chiseled jawline. Unlike the other male characters, Aladdin has no beard to present him as less Eastern passing (Misbah 12).

Additionally, ethnic characters with American accents are seen multiple times in Disney movies. Misbah states that those Westernized traits lead the audience to associate "the 'good' characters with these traits" (Misbah 12). Heydt believes this is an ongoing "racial pyramid that exists in most WDC pictures: white-voiced characters at the top, other ethnicities below, darkest-skinned at the bottom" (Heydt 148). Thus Disney promotes "Otherness" through ethnic characters with non-ethnic characteristics while also depicting "Otherness" through primitive imagery of non-human behavior that corresponds with their non-human sidekicks. This leads to Disney's display of zoomorphic traits in their human actors while enforcing what should be humoristic additions of anthropomorphic characters.

Anthropomorphism and Zoomorphism in *Aladdin*

In *Aladdin*, we see the use of Garrard's anthropomorphism through several characters, including the monkey, Abu. Although Abu does not speak like a human, he can express his emotions and thoughts through body language, gestures, and sounds. Throughout the movie, we see Abu help Aladdin with the challenges and obstacles Aladdin faces while simultaneously sabotaging Aladdin. Another character with anthropomorphic traits is Jafar's sidekick Iago. Iago is a parrot who also displays human-like characteristics and behavior. Unlike Abu, Iago speaks like a human to Jafar.

Juliet Markowsky discusses the relevance of anthropomorphism in children's literature in her article "Why Anthropomorphism in Children's Literature?", where she explains that one of the reasons is "to enable young readers to identify with the animals. [...] The one thing that can unify what different children bring to a given book is that they may identify with an animal that has human attributes" (Markowsky 460-461). This makes Abu and Iago identifiable with their human traits. Abu is perceived as childish, as he argues with Aladdin over bread and steals from the cave despite being told he is not allowed to touch anything except the lamp. Iago is selfish and dangerous as he plots Aladdin's demise with Jafar, thus placing Abu and Iago as the protagonist and antagonists' respective sidekicks while also counterparts for each other. Their anthropomorphic behavior compliments the zoomorphism found in Abu's companion, Aladdin.

The audience sees how Aladdin's zoomorphic traits appear in the movie. During the song "One Jump Ahead", the audience follows Aladdin and the chase scene between himself and the police of Agrabah. We see him jump and climb from one building to another in Agrabah (*Aladdin* 0:07:49*)*, much like an animal would in its natural habitat. The people of Agrabah, including the police officers, call him a street rat and tell him "You were born a street rat, you will die a street rat" (*Aladdin* 0:11:14-0:11:18). This is to denigrate him and reinforce his low social status. Street rat indicates that Aladdin is dirty, untrustworthy, and beneath the notice of the ruling class. The police officers portray the ruling class tasked with maintaining law and order in Agrabah. They see themselves above people like Aladdin, whom they view as a nuisance and a threat to Agrabah. By calling him a street rat, they seek to dehumanize and justify their mistreatment of him because he is below them in the social hierarchy. Thus, Aladdin's meeting and partnership with Genie become the turning point for the police's attention to Aladdin.

In *Aladdin*, we follow one of the main characters, a genie who undergoes several metamorphoses. Throughout the movie, Genie transforms himself into different personas. Genie aims to help Aladdin in every situation and every persona. For instance, we see in the song "Prince Ali" how Genie has transformed into a human with similar clothes to the royal characters such as the Sultan and Jafar.

(*Aladdin* 0:49:06). Genie transforms into a bee, so he can inconspicuously talk to Aladdin and guide him in his flirtation with Jasmine. “Enough about you, Casanova. Talk about her. She’s smart, fun, the hair, the eyes. Anything. Pick a feature” (*Aladdin* 0:56:18 - 0:56:25). These different metamorphoses serve a different purpose. They also showcase Genie’s versatility as a magical being and how powerful Genie can be.

Genie is not the only character who undergoes metamorphosis in *Aladdin*. As mentioned (c.f. p. 27), we see an old prisoner who introduces Aladdin to the Cave of Wonders, later revealed to be Jafar in disguise (*Aladdin* 0:27:02 - 0:27:04). His metamorphosis allows Jafar to manipulate Aladdin to go to the Cave of Wonders and get the magic lamp that Jafar strives to possess. In Jafar’s proper form, he is animated with darker skin and more prominent facial features, such as a hooked nose and bushy eyebrows. This depiction of Jafar reinforces the stereotype of Middle Eastern people as villainous (c.f. p. 18). This point of exaggerated ethnic features is continued in Jafar’s villainous actions, as Jafar undergoes another metamorphosis to kill Aladdin, now in the form of an enormous cobra. His transformation into a cobra represents his final descent into evil. As a cobra, Jafar is a fearsome and deadly predator, embodying the danger and malice he represents. Even his staff resembling the cobra, is a tool of manipulation, as we see how Jafar uses magic through the staff to reveal who the diamond in the rough is. “Part, sands of time. Reveal to me the one who can enter the cave” (*Aladdin* 0:19:55 - 0:20:02). Thus, the hourglass reveals Aladdin, indicating that he is the one Jafar searches for. Jafar conjures his dark magic to hypnotize people and bend them to his will. This further emphasizes the placement of Jafar as the villain, with not only his use of dark magic that harms the main characters and protagonists, but his exaggerated ethnic features allow Jafar to truly represent Orientalist ideology in how predatory the Oriental man was perceived.

It is noteworthy how Jafar, the only character with explicitly ethnic features, is given such a fearsome and demonic presence. While Jasmine and Aladdin speak with American accents and have delicate ethnic features, Heydt also comments on how Disney has decided to give the villainous character Jafar a different accent, indeed when “he displays more Arabic features than any other character while speaking with a thick Arab accent. The exaggerated ethnic characteristics of the antagonist cast an unbecoming light on Middle Eastern people and culture” (Heydt 148). Based on this analysis, we see how Disney’s *Aladdin* “depicts the Arab world as a backward, irrational, and anarchistic civilization composed of violent and deceitful people, an other/exotic/threatening world in which cobras are lured from baskets and law has no place other than keep women in their supposed places” (147).

Disney's *Mulan* (1998)

Another expression of Orientalism is the Disney movie *Mulan*. Like *Aladdin*, *Mulan* is an interpretation and adaptation of the traditional Chinese folklore of Hua Mulan. Disney adapts this story from a fantastic display of filial piety to a growing-up story, where the protagonist Mulan searches for individuality. No longer serving the country to protect her frail elder father, Mulan goes to war in search of individuality and acceptance of her person before she succumbs to societal expectations of how to bring honor to her patriarchal community.

Across the Orient and Imperial China

Naomi Greene and Sheldon H. Lu dissect Chinese-American animated films in their book *From Fu Manchu to Kong Fu Panda: Images of China in American Film* (2014). In their chapter titled "Challenges and Continuities", Greene and Lu examine how American filmmaking on China and Chinese culture has departed from early stereotypes of the Chinese villain and instead introduced the animated "Other" as presented in *Mulan*.

Before American filmmakers can attempt to make an "Other" of the traditional Chinese hero, they must present the Orient in what can only befit an Orientalist perspective. "Creating an image of China more unreal and imaginary than ever before, they turn that country into a site of spectacle as well as a repository of American attitudes and beliefs" (Greene & Lu 182). Mulan opens in a title sequence of swirling black ink that forms mountain tops on what looks to be a scroll or a tapestry. The final swirls form the Great Wall of China, which opens the movie's prelude of the Huns' attack on the Wall. The Great Wall ignites in alarm, with Shan-Yu's message reaching the Forbidden City, where the emperor resides and accepts the war declaration. "Deliver conscription notices throughout all the provinces. Call up reserves, and as many new recruits as possible" (*Mulan* 0:02:45). The emperor ends his speech with a sage declaration to General Shang that "A single grain of rice can tip the scale. One man may be the difference between victory and defeat." (*Mulan* 0:02:55-0:03:00) The prelude then cuts to the image of a rice bowl and chopsticks expertly picking up a single grain of rice, thus foreshadowing the one man that will be significant to Chinese victory.

Referring to Dutch scholar Jaap Van Ginneken, Greene and Lu observe Van Ginneken's interpretation of Mulan and how the film draws on typical, stereotypical imaging associated with "'tourist familiarity with the culture: chopsticks and rice bowls, jade and lacquerwork, calligraphy and watercolors, abacus and incense, rice fields and cherry blossoms, [...] and even the Forbidden City and the Great Wall'" (Greene & Lu 198). Greene and Lu believe these symbols become a commodity for the film and carry no value other than help associate the audience with what is appropriate in Chinese

culture. Thus placing China as a "pure spectacle" (Greene & Lu 198), as Mulan [*sic*] is a movie "inhabited by modern people" (198). In true Disney fashion and a display of postmodernity, our expectations of who will save China are subverted as the person who picks up the rice is a woman, thus introducing the protagonist Fa Mulan and her quest to bring honor to her family.

Make a Disney Hero Out of You

Fa Mulan is a young woman who disguises herself as her father's son to take his place in the imperial war against the Hun invasion. Under the alias Ping, Mulan attempts to find herself and who she truly is. She cuts her hair in a grand gesture to signal her rejection of her identity as Mulan, and she leaves her ancestral home to serve in the war.

Mushu, a disgraced ancestral guardian dragon, takes it upon himself to make Mulan a war hero and not only redeem and retrieve her but also to restore his place as a proper guardian and maintain the honor of the Fa family. In their article "Princess of a Different Kingdom: Cultural Imperialism, Female Heroism, and the Global Performance of Walt Disney's Mulan and Moana"[*sic*], Sotirios Mouzakis examines how Mulan's journey of self-sacrifice reduces her to a familiar, Western-centric coming-of-age story. "Her clumsy, non-conformist gender behaviour indicates her conceptual origin in a post-enlightened Western society rather than in a relatively conservative, tradition-bound Asian context" (Mouzakis 67). What remains of traditional Chinese culture is reduced to ambiguous concepts like ancestral worship and anthropomorphic imagery of small, red dragons as sidekicks.

While hinted at in Zhou's private moment of sword practice, Chi-Fu takes note of the conscription meant for Mulan's father, as Shang double-takes "*The* Fa Zhou?" (*Mulan* 0:34:13), suggesting Mulan's father is a memorable soldier who displayed valor in previous battles. Mulan's disguise as Fa Ping brings expectations that she/he, like Fa Zhou, will become a great asset to the imperial military. After an intense training montage with Mushu as both help and hindrance, Mulan successfully becomes a worthy soldier to take on the task of protecting Imperial China. Though, when Mulan's identity as a woman is revealed, Mulan faces her reality presented in the song "Reflections", that neither her family nor society accept her true self.

Bring Honor and Feminism to Us All

It is central to the movie's message that Mulan can only accept her role as a woman and the proposition of marriage and traditional family structures once she has defeated the enemy at hand and presented herself and, by proxy, her gender as worthy of entering male spaces. Mouzakis notices that "Heroes rarely follow the fixed set of rules that are laid out for them. 'Finding herself' thus becomes more than just a quest for personal individuality - it becomes her quest to be a hero" (Mouzakis 69).

Numbers of characters: 308.402

Themes like honor, duty, and patriarchy have become associated with the Orientalist perspective in the movies *Aladdin* and *Mulan*. Ultimately, Mulan brings honor to her family through her participation and acknowledgment from Imperial China and the emperor himself. However, she also succumbs to traditional gender norms, thus achieving honor to the family for her valor and furthering the family. Mulan, placed in a time and setting with constitutional patriarchal gender roles, is encouraged to find a husband and a family through a matchmaker that cleans her up and transforms her into the model, perfect wife.

> Ancestors, hear my plea
> Help me not to make a fool of me.
> And bring honor to our family tree.
> Keep my father standing tall (*Mulan* 0:08:28).

Although Mulan does not initially reject her role and her upcoming nuptials, she is not ready to follow through. With notes on her arm (*Mulan* 0:03:20) on what proper answers to give the "scarier than the undertaker" matchmaker (*Mulan* 0:08:32), and clumsy behavior that ultimately harms and offends the matchmaker, which results in the matchmaker rejecting the Fa family (*Mulan* 0:11:21), Mulan is considered too clumsy, unprepared, and unkempt (*Mulan* 0:06:09) to fulfill her duty to the family.

With this in mind, Disney establishes Mulan and her family as Orients through Mulan's "Otherness", which ostracizes her from her community. Different from *Aladdin*, *Mulan* expresses the Oriental ideology through not only gentrified imagery of what is associated with Asian culture but the reduction of Mulan's self-sacrifice to a story of Western individuality and racial prejudice of the Orient. Aside from Chinese icons like the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, and the appearance of fable animals like the dragon, *Mulan* becomes a mimicry of Chinese culture. The character Mulan makes a great effort to appease her parents and their ancestors to continue the family honor, thus establishing Imperial China as a society bound to loyalty, family, and patriarchy.

Mulan defies expectations of proper female behavior and demeanor, placing her "Otherness" in a group of Subalterns unfit for service to the emperor and undeserving of the honor. Though Mulan is resourceful and intelligent in teaching her dog Little Brother to do her chores and strategizes on the battlefield, she fails to do the one job that should come naturally to her. At least, according to society, it should be imperative for Mulan to find a husband. Her failure is further emphasized by her father's unwavering loyalty to his country. Mouzakis notices in Mulan's song "Reflections" that:

> The lyrics are not only an expression of Mulan's status as a misfit but also, and more importantly, a prism through which her exceptionality and transgressive nature shine. Albeit interwoven with an existential identity crisis at first, Mulan's rejection of playing by the rules and attempt to develop her own individuality correspond to a more progressive Western set of values instead of a more traditional, less individualistic, Chinese one (Mouzakis 69).

Mulan's personality and search for purpose, aside from the expected servitude to country and patriarchy, are not the only markers of "Otherness" placed upon her. However, they drive her to find her path in life.

During the song "Bring Honor to Us All", the women of their province create a grand spectacle of how Mulan, an Oriental, needs refinement before her community can accept her. She is transformed from a "sow's ear" into a "silk purse", thus exotifying Mulan's Oriental body by dressing her in a traditional Han-Fu, her makeup done in traditional Huadian, and they adorn her hair and neck with jade jewelry and hairpieces, so she fits the description and recipe for an "instant bride" (*Mulan* 0:06:32). In their article "Popular Culture and Public Imaginary: Disney vs. Chinese Stories of Mulan", Jing Yin discusses how Mulan's quest for individuality and display of feminist ideals is non-threatening to Western gender inequality due to the racial bodies presenting such subjects. They notice how "non-Western cultures are often assumed to be the primary source of gender repression. [...] Feminism is less threatening and more acceptable to the Western audience if non-Western women are rescued from, or willing to fight against, their traditional cultures" (Yin 63). Thus, Disney perpetuates the Orientalist perception of China as inherently sexist, with no room for non-conforming women and unattractive men.

An Oriental Worth Fighting For

As findings in this master's thesis suggest, Orientalism is evident in Disney's *Mulan*, though it may not be their intention. Despite the swirling imagery in inky title sequences and swirling steam from fires and fireworks, Chinese icons are only part of how Disney presents a cultural hierarchy regarding Chinese culture. By cultural hierarchy, we examine how Chinese culture is situated in the movie, whether it comes across as authentic and secondary to American culture, and how the latter might have influenced the making of the movie.

Presenting China and East Asia as a monolithic society, Disney uses the imagery of Imperial China to situate the audience in impressive Chinese landscapes. However, the cultural practices of these Chinese figures are less authentic than they seem. Though matchmaking is common between families to strengthen bloodlines, a profession like a matchmaker did not exist in traditional Chinese

society. “The ritual of a matchmaker interview enunciates traditional Chinese culture as everything that is not universal or modern, everything that Mulan is up against” (Yin 61). Firstly, pairing a matchmaker with a young woman of a great family like the Fa’s is unheard of. Indeed, if Fa Zhou was as famous for his valor in battle, and their family estate was as large and grand as a personal temple for ancestral worship, there would not be a need for an outside person to fix Mulan up with a local man. If Mulan came from a renowned family, surely suitors would line up for her hand in marriage, unlike the display of American adolescence and marriage based on love that we see in Mulan once Shang comes to visit the family estate. Secondly, the matchmaking ordeal reduces Chinese culture to young women who are encouraged to comply and submit to the patriarchy, norms, and values unrecognizable and insignificant to 1990s Western society.

Yin suggests that the Disney version of Mulan’s tale reinforces the existence of the Oriental and perpetuates racial ideologies through gentrified imagery and erasure of Chinese culture and belief systems. “In order to make Mulan a heroic figure, Chinese culture was denounced and deprecated as an Oriental tyranny. In this sense, the significance of the feminist character was predicated on the representation of China as the cultural Other” (59). Though a great success at the box office, *Mulan* received criticism from Chinese audiences for being inauthentic and wrongly presentative of Chinese culture and temporal setting.

Zhaosheng Tong considers the Chinese audience in his article “Analysis of Mulan’s Poor Reception in China from the Perspective of Orientalism” and argues that despite the many adaptations of Hua Mulan by Chinese writers, Disney’s *Mulan* is strikingly disingenuous to Chinese culture and history (Tong 349), and “[a]nother crucial factor that alienated Chinese audiences from it is perhaps the improper ways characters were portrayed” (349). From our initial meeting with the Huns to introducing our main characters, Disney perpetuates stereotypes through ethnic caricatures. Most interestingly is the visual representation of good and evil, leading, and side characters.

Mulan is more noticeable and appealing than the other girls who wait for their turn with the matchmaker. Other girls have their hair dressed in circles and spectacular shapes, while Mulan’s placed in a bun with a jade comb. Their bodies are either skinnier or bigger, while Mulan’s is just the right amount of fuller-bodied and curvy to accentuate her femininity and her establishment as the main character (*Mulan* 0:08:46). Their eyes are closed or barely open in slits. At the same time, Mulan’s are perfectly almond shaped with sharp eyeliner and eyelashes to accentuate her Asian eyes. Thus Disney reproduces Sinophobic images with these similar-looking Oriental women to make Mulan outstanding and appeal to a Western audience. By giving her a fuller body, face, and bigger eyes, Mulan is given soft ethnic features that seem arbitrary, thus rendering her ethnicity arguably unimportant and replaceable with a white body. This, along with her tomboyish personality, is what Yin believes to be the

main reason Disney avoids placing Mulan as the "sexually manipulative dragon lady, another Asian stereotype" (Yin 64).

Aside from Captain Li Shang, the same care cannot be found in the movie's male characters. With a muscular and tall physique, Shang's features are strikingly different from the other men serving the war. Shang has large open eyes like Mulan, and his face is framed with a chiseled jawline and high cheekbones. All of these come across as near Eurocentric features and in stark contrast to the other soldiers, who bear visible ethnocentric features that allow them to act like and be observed as inhuman. Mulan and Shang's Sino-ethnic features are ambiguous and less exaggerated than the other soldiers. Ling, Yao, and Chin-Po all display different expressions of the Oriental body, with Ling as the skinny Oriental with a cunning smile, Yao as the short and aggressive man, and Chin-Po as a pious Buddha. Their unattractive appearances and unflattering personalities are further emphasized in their trio, "A Girl Worth Fighting For," when they list what type of woman they aspire to court once they return from war (*Mulan* 0:48:03). Though they come across as brutes, unrefined men who discard women as the weaker sex, the soldiers cannot complete their objective of protecting the empire and winning the war. Only when they reveal Mulan's identity and the men embrace their femininity to defeat the Huns do they win the war. Disney subjects Imperial China to Western, modern feminism and gender roles, thus rendering the authenticity of China obsolete.

Instead of accepting their most well-trained soldier as a woman, Mulan is ridiculed and threatened with execution for her dishonorable deceit. The emperor pardoned Mulan due to her earlier rescue of her superior officer, the newly appointed Captain Li Shang. Though previously impressed with Mulan's alias Ping and Ping's steady improvement above the other soldiers, Shang becomes fond of Ping and what Ping offers the imperial war and, to an extent, Shang's honor and credentials as newly appointed captain of an imperial army. Shang is not only Ping's comrade in arms and superior officer. He also becomes Mulan's love interest when Mulan has successfully helped defeat Shan-Yu and prevent his invasion of the Forbidden City. With fatherly encouragement from the emperor, "You don't meet a girl like that every dynasty" (*Mulan* 1:18:44), Shang is encouraged to pursue Mulan, and he arrives at their family estate with the excuse of delivering her helmet. Mulan accepts Shang's open invitation for contact, and she invites him to stay for dinner, implying Mulan finds marriage, after all, in her superior officer and comrade. Disney's *Mulan* suggests that women like Mulan can exist and show prowess in patriarchal structures like Imperial China while also maintaining their identity as women and help not only themselves but men persevere due to their shared femininity.

American Helpers in the Orient

Despite both movies' attempts to keep the authenticity of the temporal setting, *Aladdin* and *Mulan* fail to maintain the tone of the atmosphere because of characters like Mushu and Genie. Both characters fit the helper trope, as they serve as comic relief and aid the main character on their journey to complete their quest. Mushu and Genie modernize the stories with their existence, their way of acting and speaking, and their choice of voice actors. This way, they become the audience's window to the story world. Mushu, voiced by comedian and actor Eddie Murphy, is strikingly out of place in his setting.

While he is a dragon, and the dragon carries great symbolism for Chinese culture, Mushu is anything but what is associated with a dragon. He is an anthropomorphized, pint-sized dragon that moves in a humanoid fashion with animated gestures and facial expressions. He is neither strong nor powerful. Instead, he has a lizard-like body and the voice of someone from the modern USA. Speaking with AAVE, Mushu further ostracizes the audience from the immersion to Imperial China. Mulan's defiance of Chinese culture is encouraged by Mushu, as Mushu sees it as an opportunity to seek glory and respect for himself, which he lost due to an ancestor's death by his account. Furthermore, his modern speech and jokes aid in the displacement of authenticity. If Mushu had been cast by a regular actor who spoke with the severity and sage as the Chinese characters, surely *Mulan* would not fall into the comedy genre as it does.

While it might not be intended, the theme of honor and dishonor is also belittled by Mushu's outrage once he meets Mulan, and Mulan does not know who he is. "Dishonor on you! Dishonor on your cow! Dishonor on your whole family" (*Mulan* 0:28:47). Khan, obviously a horse and not a cow, is added to those in line with Mulan's inevitable failure; thus, Mushu reduces the severity of what dishonor could imply to the family. A regular horse not possessing anthropomorphic traits, unlike Mushu, cannot be disgraced the same way a human can. He is, after all, a horse, but it adds comedic value to the movie and lessens the dramatic tone of filial piety and the repercussions of war and battle that is to come. Even as Mushu tearfully waves Mulan goodbye before she enters the camp, "My little baby, off to destroy people" (*Mulan* 0:36:06), Mushu stands in for a parental figure for Mulan, as he helps her and comforts her in the war to come.

The little help Mushu does provide Mulan is neglected by his ridiculously shaped body and his postmodern existence. Indeed, no dragon would succumb to biting soldiers' behinds in order to help their ward proceed in male bonding. Moreover, no male - human or non-human - would suggest such ill-placed advice as Mushu does. Mushu's bad advice underlines his anthropomorphized existence, as it reminds the audience that even though he sounds and acts human, his perception of male bonding is

heavily flawed and based on fraternity behavior with physical violence, insults, and practical jokes on personal values, all of which lands Mulan in great trouble.

Despite his failure to secure Mulan her objective, Mushu does an excellent job of entertaining the audience with his many references to real life outside the story world. Mushu exposes soldiers who wore heart-printed boxer shorts centuries before their invention, and he cooks for Mulan what looks to be congee, called porridge by Mushu, and in best American fashion, he magically conjures smiley-faced bacon and eggs to the porridge. Even Mushu's name, similar to the Chinese-American dish mu shu pork, is comical and outside what seems genuine to Imperial China. Mushu's existence and assistance to Mulan emphasize Orientalism in the movie, as he brings modernity to *Mulan* in the form of humor, much like the Genie in *Aladdin*. Both take on the subsidiary role of comedic relief while presenting themselves as the mentor and aid to the main character. Unlike Mushu, Genie succeeds in assisting his protagonist Aladdin, though he also causes obstacles to overcome.

Voiced by comedian-actor Robin Williams, the Genie is a disnified portrayal of the supernatural icon of the genie in the lamp, commonly associated with the mysticism found in the Orient. Presented in a blue, humanoid body, Genie is a tall and broad-shouldered anthropomorphized character, a stark difference from the oriental body presented in *Aladdin*. Similarly to his American voice actor, Genie has a long nose with a crooked, toothy smile, while his mouth is outlined with a thin goatee that swirls at the tip. He speaks with a distinct Midwestern accent and jokes in the same postmodern manner as Mushu does, leaving the audience with the same disingenuous feeling of authenticity regarding language and humor. Genie's Westernized personality and speech drive Aladdin to achieve what he could not, thus presenting Genie as the Occident who teaches the Orient about himself and the world he lives in.

Genie does not keep his role as the Occident throughout the movie, neither in the animated nor live-action version, as Genie is only provided freedom should his master choose to present it to him. Coincidentally, his master is Aladdin, who, despite his Orient body, does not appear as Oriental in voice and appearance. This point is made explicit in the live-action version from 2019, where black American actor Will Smith acts as Genie. Genie's Midwestern accent has been replaced with Smith's use of AAVE, and his body - no longer just blue and skin-colored like Aladdin - is a visible black body when presented in human gatherings.

In their article "Disney's Aladdin (2019), The Old Rum in the New Bottle: Stereotyping Gender and Race", Md Mohiul Islam and Nilufa Akter point out a double meaning in regards to Genie's imprisonment with the casting of Smith. "Eventually, the traitor, Jafar, also became the master of the Genie. This also indicates that Genie becomes the slave of the owner of the lamp, and this casting here

as Genie symbolized the racist attack onto the African Americans. Their freedom depends on the owners only regardless of their origin and nature" (Islam & Akter 83). Thus, Genie's existence is no longer based on fantasy and the myth of a trapped spirit in a lamp that grants wishes, but rather the physical embodiment of how African slaves and their descendants lived in the conditions of non-African superiors. The reminder of Western as well as Eastern slavery (c.f. p. 106) is only secondary to the Westernization the character of Genie brings to *Aladdin*, both in the animation as well as the live action.

Williams' Genie adapts his body and appearance to whichever scene the movie presents, and the scenarios and images Genie himself conjures. In the song "Prince Ali", Genie transforms himself into a human with subtle changes like firm legs instead of wisps tied to the lamp, and he adorns himself a skin color in change for his blue shade, all the while keeping his facial features and body shape. His interchangeable appearance makes for an ambiguous character figure, as his shape-shifting and his ability to conjure objects and living figures create moments where the audience sees reminders of the natural world outside the story world. Like Mushu, Genie provides more comedy than immersion into the Arab world presented in Agrabah. Misbah comments:

> Throughout the original film, Genie had changed himself to impersonate Western personalities like Jack Nicholson and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Though Will Smith's Genie has a distinctively American humor, he has a greater respect for Arab culture than the original Genie; for instance, he no longer reduces Aladdin's name to the Americanized Al (Misbah 30)

Misbah's points on the imposing Western influences in Agrabah are relevant, seeing as the animation and live-action are produced nearly three decades after each other. The 2019 production is mindful of the criticism 1992 *Aladdin* received for its lack of cultural authenticity. However, Misbah's interpretation of Smith's Genie, and how Misbah finds Genie shows respect towards Arab culture by not nicknaming Aladdin, is interesting as Smith's Genie is just as culturally inaccurate as Williams' Genie was.

Williams' Genie fits the 90's Hollywood-centric humor in how the character impersonations of Genie relates to the humor of parents who watched *Aladdin* in 1992, while at the same time the nickname Al makes Aladdin more approachable and pronounceable for Western audiences, certainly children. His jokes and slang fit 90's expressions, with expressions like abracadabra, pizzazz, and yahoo (*Aladdin* 0:37:46), emphasizing the whiteness behind Genie's voice. These impersonations, expressions, and jokes are not translatable to Arab expressions, thus imposing American culture on a predated Arabic world. Genie does attempt to keep it culturally relevant with nods to desserts like baklava, the original collector of the tales of *Aladdin* (*Aladdin* 0:37:32), and the midday prayer. Despite

their American-based personalities, Genie and Mushu's humor are translatable due to the comedic nature of the animation. If they are to appear in live-action, there are another set of expectations for such a movie, and such humor would change the atmospheric setting, and genre and deprive the plot of urgency and the movie of drama if not done correctly. This brings attention to the live-action versions of *Aladdin* and *Mulan* and how they adapt the story from animation to live-action.

Gender and Power Positions in The Live-Action Version

While Disney has taken steps to improve their representation, there are certain movies produced by Disney that continue to be discussed regarding the appropriation and display of different cultures aside from Western. Disney's *Aladdin* and *Mulan* exemplify Orientalist perspectives on foreign, ancient societies.

In their newest series of live-action adaptations, it is noteworthy how a live-action of both *Aladdin* and *Mulan* has been made and, therefore, necessary to analyze to examine whether Disney has improved from their previous critique. In 2019, Disney made the live-action *Aladdin,* whose story follows a similar plot to the original. Disney's active decision to keep Genie in the live-action and to remove the character Mushu signals the importance of Genie's character and how his role is essential for the plot. However, other elements have been repeated in the live-action. Misbah comments on how Jasmine and Aladdin are still Westernized in the live-action. Throughout the live-action movie, Jasmine and Aladdin continue to have American accents in contrast to the villainous characters (Misbah 15). This showcases Said's theory of the West "Othering" the East. "The majority-Western audience empathizes with Aladdin because he sounds more like them, as we will also see with characters we were meant to relate to, like Jasmine, Genie, and Dalia" (Misbah 18). Since the release of the original *Aladdin* in 1992, Disney has made changes that we see in the live-action movie because of the criticism they have received throughout the years. We see how the lyrics in their opening song, "Arabian Nights," has been altered.

> Oh, imagine a land, it's a faraway place
> Where the caravan camels roam
> Where you wander among every culture and tongue
> It's chaotic, but, hey, it's home (*Aladdin* 2019 0:01:46 - 0:01:59)

Played by Will Smith, the Genie sings how Agrabah is a place where you are among every culture. The change in the lyrics erases the idea of the Middle East as a monolithic entity that they depicted in

the original song from *Aladdin* in 1992. They have made the Middle East more representative as they show that there are many other cultures in Agrabah.

Furthermore, they have changed the depiction of Agrabah from barbaric to chaotic to capture the sense of the vibrant and diverse Middle Eastern region while avoiding the use of derogatory and generalizing language. Through the change of the lyrics in "Arabian Nights", Disney aims to be more inclusive of other cultures and less derogatory with their use of language. Despite their more vivid representation of Agrabah and the Middle East as well as South Asia, Misbah claims that "Arabian Nights" still showcases the Oriental fantasy with the use of phrases like "This mystical land of magic and sand" (*Aladdin* 2019 0:03:29- 0:03:31) and "They seem to excite, take off and take flight. To shock and amaze" (*Aladdin* 2019 0:04:08 - 0:04:16).

Additionally, it is shown in Genie's song "Friend like Me" how Disney has altered Islamic references to an accurate representation of Islam. For instance, Misbah comments on how Disney has changed the 1992 version's "Sunday's Salaam" to "Friday's Salaam", which is more culturally accurate "since Friday is the Holy day for Muslims and it demonstrates Disney's effort to be more culturally sensitive" (Misbah 29). However, it is interesting how 1992 *Aladdin* used Sunday as a holy day for Muslims when it is a holy day for Christians. It not only reflects the Western perception of the Orient and the ignorance of Islamic traditions, but it also shows how The Walt Disney Company has taken the criticism they received from the original and shows their effort to be more culturally accurate in the live-action version. The audience also follows the journey of Jasmine's hopes and desire to be the next Sultan of Agrabah, a new detail we did not encounter in the original movie. In 1992 *Aladdin*, Jasmine's dream is to marry someone whom she loves and not someone her father chooses for her (c.f. p. 29)

Nevertheless, we see a new detail added to Jasmine's storyline: she wants to take over her father's position in the live-action. However, Jasmine's passiveness and role as a female are emphasized as her father in the live-action doubts her wish and capability as a Sultan. "My dear, you cannot be a sultan, because it has never been done in the 1.000- year history of our kingdom" (*Aladdin* 2019 0:22:03 - 0:22:09), reflecting the portrayal of women in the Orient. Instead of continuing to be passive, Jasmine reflects on her desire to change the patriarchal perception of women in her song "Speechless". With the lyrics "Cause I know that I won't go speechless. All I know is I won't go speechless. Speechless" (*Aladdin* 2019 1:38:29 - 1:38:40), Misbah claims it to be an empowerment song for women, as well as rejecting Orientalist view of the Orient women remaining silent and passive (Misbah 34).

Misbah states that Disney has evolved regarding female representation as we now see more female representation in the live-action, which Misbah praises them for. Additionally, we see Jasmine as the only leading female character in 1992 *Aladdin,* but in 2019 *Aladdin*, we follow Jasmine and her

companion, her handmaiden Dalia. Another change that Misbah comments on is how Disney notably has decided to change Aladdin's interaction with girls from the harem to an encounter in a classroom in the live-action. "By placing the girls in a class instead of a harem, this empowers their presence, rather than sexualizing it. Though the detail is small, the impact is major; this change shows that Disney has made progress in its representation of Muslim women" (Misbah 20-21). Disney's portrayal of women in educational places is a measure taken to promote the non-stereotypical association of modern-day Middle Eastern women, where most Middle Eastern countries give women educational opportunities. While watching women in gender-neutral social structures like a classroom may be empowering, it is historically inaccurate. It may still promote Orientalism in how Western media companies provide education for women in fiction, while they in real life were not of liberty to study in the period the movie takes place. The same historical inaccuracy is evident in the live-action version of *Mulan* (2020).

Like *Aladdin* (2019), *Mulan* (2020) tried to depict a more accurate representation of Chinese culture as Zhuoyi Wang claims in his article "From Mulan (1998)[*sic*] to Mulan (2020)[*sic*]: Disney Conventions, Cross-Cultural Feminist Intervention, and a Compromised Progress" that the movie "strove to be more gender progressive, culturally appropriate and internationally successful adaption of the Chinese legend of Mulan than the animated original" (Wang 1). However, Wang criticizes the outcome of the live-action and claims it misrepresents Chinese culture and instead maintains Orientalist stereotypes (1). Like *Aladdin*, Disney has made changes in their original plots, where not only was Jasmine presented as more progressive and powerful, but Genie was given both his freedom and the opportunity to find love.

Interestingly, Disney's changes in *Mulan* (2020) were not in order to add story elements but rather remove and change the entire structure and plot of the movie. No longer driven by filial devotion, Mulan's live-action character has become a troublemaker, a social reject, and her story and struggle to fit in now focuses on a Kung Fu narrative, similar to the ones Greene and Lee criticize for their sinophobic character (c.f. p. 34). Mulan, no longer a clumsy girl next door uncomfortable with gender roles but a girl born with male "chi", is mistreated by her community for her lack of ability to fit in. She does still enlist in the war for her father's sake and stead, though her soldier companions are replaced, as is her commanding officer Li Shang with a fellow-ranked officer, who becomes her implied romantic interest, should she choose him to be. No longer winning the battle on her own, the enemy Bori Khan (previously Shan Yu), is defeated after his witch companion Xiannang sacrifices herself to aid Mulan. Mulan is celebrated in the Imperial court and not during the festival, and though she refuses the Emperor's answer to join the army, she returns to her village only for them to pursue her in

Honghui/Li Shang's stead. Mulan is propositioned a position of power rather than the honorable task and promise of marriage, as she was supposed to.

Disney's choice to change many significant plot points has resulted in the Chinese community's further rejection of Disney's portrayal of the legend Hua Mulan. Wang comments that "It received a 'cold shoulder' in China allegedly for its 'mixture of oriental elements and symbols in the eyes of Westerners'" (Wang 2). Furthermore, audiences called for boycotts due to political controversy (2) regarding the Chinese government and police brutality in Hong Kong (Suliman, "Disney's 'Mulan' faces boycott calls from activists in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand"). As to why director Niki Caro decided to remove Mushu from the movie, Wang writes that Mushu's "endless stream of uninvited and useless instructions to Mulan not only directs the audience's attention away from Mulan, but also ironically fills this supposed 'Girl Power' film with childish mansplaining" (6). Instead, Mushu's guidance is replaced with a phoenix, with Caro claiming that "'The dragon is representative of the masculine, and the phoenix is representative of the feminine'" (6). If Caro's decision to change Li Shang and remove Mushu bases itself on MeToo rhetorics and the desire to further Mulan's agency as a woman, surely Caro could have chosen a different movie to direct.

Instead, these significant changes also change the entirety of the plot in *Mulan*, Mulan's journey, and her impact on her society. Caro removed the Hua family from their ancestral home and demoted Hua Zhou to a regular soldier rather than the decorated legend he was (c.f. p. 36) to promote Mulan's extraordinary abilities as a warrior. The only reference to Hua Zhou's great capabilities is his "One warrior knows another" (*Mulan* 2019 1:41:43), completely erasing the importance of his relief and happiness to see Mulan return alive and well in the original animation (*Mulan* 1:19:33). This change in the dynamic between Mulan and her father not only ostracizes the audience from the movie in their expectations and remembrance of the movie and plot, but it also changes unnecessary elements from the original story.

Furthermore, the decision to demote Li Shang to a fellow-ranked officer named Honghui in the name of the MeToo movement removes the significance of how Mulan pursued Shang and how Shang only pursued Mulan once she retired from her service to the emperor. If anything, 2020 *Mulan* has become increasingly disingenuous compared to the original in 1998. There was no need to change Shang's character nor remove Mushu due to his "mansplaining" (Wang 6), as Mulan knows not to act like a man, given she is a woman in a male-dominated sphere.

As *Aladdin* (2019) received the same criticism as *Mulan* (2020), the movie stayed true to its source material in which Jasmine was given a secondary plot with her desire to become Sultan rather than remove her desire to be with Aladdin in order to become Sultan. Had Disney decided to remain as accurate to *Mulan* as they were to *Aladdin*, they would have kept Mushu and Li Shang without

changing large sections of their characters and plot. If live-action Mulan still wanted to bring honor to her family and make amends, surely the marriage proposal would be a better fit to honor the source material *Mulan* is based on and fulfill Mulan's destiny as a woman in Imperial China. Caro's decision to promote a feminist narrative in Imperial China is not only historically inaccurate and impossible, but it also promotes the narrative that women who choose marriage and love are not as free-thinking and free agents. Despite the effort to improve, we conclude that neither *Aladdin* (2019) nor *Mulan* (2020) come across as genuine and authentic expressions of Eastern cultures. Based on the change from animation to live action, Disney continues to accidentally promote Orientalist ideology, despite their increased attention and mindfulness of problematic issues and imagery they previously presented.

Disney's *Pocahontas* (1995)

Another minority group of interest is the Native Americans and how Disney portrays them in their movies. Disney has a long history of portraying Native Americans in its movies, including *Pocahontas*, which this master's thesis will focus on in this following section. The following section will attempt to navigate the settler colonial story of *Pocahontas* and analyze the meeting between the New World and England.

Pocahontas depicts the English settler's journey to explore and conquer the New World. However, the New World belongs to the Native Americans, the young woman Pocahontas and the Powhatan tribe. Throughout the movie, the audience sees the encounter between two cultures with fundamentally different values and ways of life. *Pocahontas* opens with two songs from each party, told by two intradiegetic narrators. From two contrasting belief systems, the English settlers and Native Americans narrate the same story using extradiegetic sounds but with different perspectives. The song "The Virginia Company" sets the stage for the following story. English settlers sang "The Virginia Company" as they prepared to establish a new colony in Virginia.

> In Sixteen Hundred Seven
> We sailed the open sea
> For glory, God, and gold
> And the Virginia Company (*Pocahontas* 0:00:14-0:00:24)

Their opening lines establish the motivations of the settlers for their journey. They seek glory, which refers to the recognition and honor of establishing a new colony. They also sought wealth, as the new

colony would provide opportunities for trade and commerce. Lastly, the settlers seek to spread their Christian faith, as mentioned in the opening lines.

However, the settlers are uncertain what they will find in the New World. “For the New World is like heaven. And we’ll all be rich and free. Or so we have been told” (*Pocahontas* 0:00:22 - 0:00:32). The settlers believe the New World, a land of opportunities, represents a new beginning for them with wealth and freedom. Nevertheless, the last line emphasizes the uncertainty and doubt about the promises of the New World. They are not confident about what to encounter in the New World and whether it meets their expectations.

Looking at the song “Steady as The Beating Drum” from the Natives’ point of view, the Native Americans sing to celebrate their culture and traditions. While singing, we see the Natives returning home from a war with another tribe, the Massawomecks, where they celebrate their arrival. Throughout the song, the audience hears them sing in English and the indigenous Algonquian language. On how they view their land, the so-called New World, the Natives sing:

> Plant the squash and reap the bean
> All the earth our mother gives
> O great spirit, hear our song
> Help us keep the ancient ways
> Keep the sacred fire strong
> Walk in balance all our days (*Pocahontas* 0:06:32 - 0:06:50)

Referring to Garrard’s ecocritical themes like the pastoral and the wilderness, *Pocahontas* displays both pastoral and wilderness perspectives on the New World and the yet-to-be-discovered resources and possibilities the New World offers. The song “The Virginia Company” tells of the settlers’ expectation of the same grand discoveries as the Spanish found in the New World. However, the Natives’ song “Steady as The Beating Dum” is an early indicator for the audience that the English are sure to the disappointed with the natural and holistic world they are about to encounter.

Though the New World did indeed hold many resources Europe was still due to discovering, Disney maintained a pastoral setting for the New World in their holistic, ecological approach to nature and their responsibility as humans to foster what they believe to be a natural course for life, in how animal life was undisturbed and nature unspoiled. At least, the pastoral perspective is depicted in “Steady as the Beating Drum”, whereas the wilderness and desire to conquer it is continued from “The Virginia Company” to Ratcliffe’s solo turned duet with John Smith, “Mine, Mine, Mine”, where Ratcliffe claims the land for his own, where John sees the land as an opportunity for himself to seek

adventure and trials of manhood in how he conquers the elements presented him (*Pocahontas* 0:27:40). It is, therefore, interesting that while Disney goes to great lengths to display the beautiful relationship between man and nature through the Natives and how detrimental the settlers' interference with it might become, Disney does perpetuate the belief that it is good and evil in both sides and that no one is victorious or justified when it comes to war. This is further emphasized with zoomorphism in *Pocahontas* and how it villainizes the characters and their differences.

Zoomorphism in *Pocahontas*

Interestingly, while Disney villainizes the settlers' intention to corrupt the New World, they allow the settlers to demonize the Indigenous they encounter, thus proving a contradictory belief on who is right or wrong. In the movie, the audience sees how the English settlers, as well as the Natives, refer to each other as savages and beasts.

The settlers depict the Natives as filthy heathens and primitive. Meanwhile, the Natives describe the settlers as strange beasts that are "Pale and sickly. They have hair on their faces like dogs" (*Pocahontas* 0:22:44 - 0:22:46). The settlers and the Natives' prejudices towards one another and their insistence on demonizing each other, aligns Garrard's explanation "that zoomorphic representation of humans is often depressingly deterministic" (Garrard 161). The zoomorphism becomes necessary in order for the settler to position themselves against the Natives, and vice versa, in order to both understand their similarities and differences. This relentless desire to produce stereotypical imagery of Natives and Indigenous people reinforces Disney's perpetual display of "noble savages" that live in harmony with nature and animals, though they lack the sophistication and civilization of European culture. Though both cultures are human, they lack the sympathy to realize their humanity and only focus on their differences. This is evident in how Disney uses animalistic behavior on the Indigenous characters, including Pocahontas.

Disney presents Pocahontas as a character with a strong connection to nature and the animals surrounding her. Throughout the movie, the audience sees how Pocahontas communicates with her two animal friends, Meeko and Flit, a raccoon, and a hummingbird, respectively. Pocahontas' communication with animals highlights that humankind is not far from nature but rather a part of it as it is a part of Pocahontas' life. Furthermore, Pocahontas' movements and mannerisms reflect zoomorphic traits. For instance, the audience sees how Pocahontas crawls near the river, corresponding with how an animal crawls (*Pocahontas* 0:29:48 - 0:30:20). Additionally, the audience also sees how Pocahontas is jumping toward a branch of a tree which mirrors the zoomorphic mannerism (*Pocahontas* 0:38:52-0:38:54).

In her article "Neocolonialism in Disney's Renaissance: Analyzing Portrayals of Race and Gender in Pocahontas, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, and Atlantis: The Lost Empire", Breanne Johnson examines Pocahontas' animalistic behavior, and she explains how "Her movements [...] are animalistic, keeping with the stereotypes of indigenous people as close to the earth and subtly imbuing them with a non-human otherness" (Johnson 29). This sort of predator-and-prey behavior and dynamic is an example of critical zoomorphism, as Pocahontas' hunting instincts are like an animal rather than a human who studies the field and the animal. Instead, Pocahontas becomes similar to an animal in how she observes John before she acts (c.f. p. 52). This aids the settlers' idea and early expectations of how Natives were uncivilized and, therefore, inhuman.

Another character exhibiting zoomorphic traits is Ratcliffe. It is ironic how Ratcliffe characterizes the Natives as vermin when he proclaims, "They're vermin as I said and worse" (*Pocahontas* 1:04:02 - 1:04:05), when he is reminiscent of one. Besides the obvious that Disney named him after a rodent, Ratcliffe has the facial characteristics of a rat, such as a pointed chin and a large nose. Additionally, in the scene where Ratcliffe and the settlers walk on board the ship, Ratcliffe is interestingly placed in the background, whereas a rat runs aboard the ship in the foreground in the same shot. (*Pocahontas* 0:01:28-0:01:30) Not only are rats and vermin associated with disease and decay, but they are also often associated with personality traits like greed and cunningness, aligning with Ratcliffe's persona in the movie. The rat is not only a reference to the many diseases the settlers brought the New World, but it also foreshadows the true nature of Ratcliffe's character and how he will inevitably betray his crew in his hunt for the Natives and John's mutiny through his relationship with Pocahontas.

The Love Story of Pocahontas & John Smith

As the audience follows two cultures, it is relevant to look at the two main characters, Pocahontas, and John, as they are not only the representatives of their different societies but also differ from those of their own cultures. Pocahontas stands out from her tribe as she, as mentioned in the previous section, has a love for adventure, contradicting the other female characters in the movie, such as Nakoma. Kekata from the Native tribe explains how Pocahontas has inherited qualities from her mother. "She has her mother's spirit. She goes wherever the wind takes her" (*Pocahontas* 0:07:48-0:07:52), indicating that her mother was just as open-minded, adventurous, and independent. This sets the premise of how Pocahontas defies her village's expectations and plans for her, as Pocahontas instead follows her instincts and intuitions. She is open-minded in the sense that she is willing to take new paths and risks, even if it means that she will face challenges or go against the expectation of others. An example of such a path is when Chief Powhatan expects Pocahontas to marry Kokoum in the arranged marriage

he has prepared for her. Rather than settle for Kokoum, she befriends one of the settlers, John, whom she learns about his culture and way of life.

Although the settlers pose a threat to her tribe, Pocahontas is intrigued by the meeting of new people, unlike her. Their first encounter takes place near the river, where at first glance, John is struck by Pocahontas' beauty in a close-up of John's reaction (*Pocahontas* 0:30:59), where the camera later switches to a close-up shot of Pocahontas at just the right timing with the wind in her hair (*Pocahontas* 0:30:58 - 0:31:04). John's amazed look indicates that Pocahontas appeals to John, and he finds her intriguing. It is in their first glance at each other that Pocahontas realizes the strangeness of John, and she runs away from him. However, John runs after her and reaches for her hand as she is about to sail away, trying to make her stay. At this moment, Pocahontas takes John's hand, and the audience sees the wind blow leaves around their hands while Pocahontas listens to the wind in the form of extradiegetic sound of Grandmother Willow singing. "Listen with your heart. You will understand" (*Pocahontas* 0:32:28 - 0:32:35). Grandmother Willow's call to Pocahontas shows both Willow and nature's encouragement for Pocahontas to trust her instincts with John rather than doubt the strange and foreign.

During their encounter, they quickly realize that they come from two different cultures and have different language barriers, as they both teach each other how to greet in their languages. Pocahontas wants to know more about the unfamiliar village of London and claims that she wants to see what the settlers have in London. John responds with, "You will [...] We're going to build them here. We'll show your people how to use this land properly" (*Pocahontas* 0:38:12- 0:38:18), claiming that the Natives think their land is fine because their knowledge is limited in regards to houses which reflects John's stereotypical portrayal of the Natives (*Pocahontas* 0:38:24 - 0:38:30). However, it is notable that John does not realize his ignorance toward the Natives. He refers to Pocahontas' tribe as savages when speaking to Pocahontas but does not understand how the derogatory term dehumanizes the indigenous people. It implies that they are uncivilized and inferior to the European colonizers.

As the story progresses, they develop a strong bond, where John learns more about Pocahontas' culture and land and vice versa. They fall in love with each other. Consequently, Pocahontas denies Kokoum's proposal, which also depicts her different beliefs in contrast to her tribe's traditions. John's relationship with Pocahontas symbolizes Bhabha's idea of colonial ambivalence (c.f. p. 22). John and the other settlers come to the Natives' land, hoping to conquer, colonize, and exploit its resources. They are attracted to the idea of the New World and the alleged resources the New World has to offer, claiming that "It's incredible. And it's all ours. I've never seen anything like it" (*Pocahontas* 0:19:40-0:19:46). John's prejudice of the Natives as primitive and inferior is reflected in his first encounter with Pocahontas. However, he quickly unlearns them as Pocahontas teaches John her culture, as they develop a bond and shared understanding. Thus John learns to appreciate other cultures unlike his own,

and he comes to understand the humanity in cultures, unlike the English. He is genuinely interested in learning more about their land and way of life, in contrast to the other settlers, whose focus primarily lies on exploiting the land for their and the Company's benefit.

This corresponds with Whitley's observations, where he claims that "Smith is differentiated through his ability to respond to Pocahontas' tutelage in alternative values, increasingly distancing himself from the colonial urge towards mastery" (Whitley 83). Unlike Ratcliffe and the other settlers, John also learns to acknowledge that it is the Natives' land, not just a place open for the taking (*Pocahontas* 0:53:50-0:53:53). On the other hand, Pocahontas is curious and wants to know more about John's way of living. However, she is cautious and made aware by her tribe and John of the settlers' intention and desire to take over her land. Therefore, Pocahontas becomes a bridge between two cultures alongside John, as they both can establish a connection despite their differences. Thus, Pocahontas and John's relationships become a romanticization of the newfound common ground between the settlers and the Natives, whereas Disney oversimplifies the complications and violence brought by the meeting between the Natives and the English. This will be elaborated on in a later section on whether such a love story would be plausible for their setting and situation.

Poetic Irony in *Pocahontas*

As the settlers and the Natives conflict, their differences become increasingly explicit throughout the movie through poetic irony. Turdimatove Madinakhn Ravshanova explains in "DIFFERENT TYPES OF IRONY IN LITERATURE" how there are four types of irony in literature: Situational, the dramatic, verbal, and comedic irony. This master's thesis will mainly focus on dramatic, verbal, and situational irony.

According to Ravshanova, Dramatic irony is a term used "when a writer lets their reader know something that a character does not. This is the contrast between what the character thinks to be true and what we (the reader) know to be true." (Ravshanova 334). In *Pocahontas*, the relationship between Pocahontas and John is kept in the dark as the other characters do not know about them. Therefore, the audience has more knowledge about the relationship and puts them above the characters regarding the information. Pocahontas' friend Nakoma senses something unusual with her, as she says, "You're hiding something" (*Pocahontas* 0:46:26 - 0:46:28). Pocahontas replies, "I'm not hiding anything" (*Pocahontas* 0:46:29 - 0:46:31). However, Nakoma finds out about the relationship between John and Pocahontas and decides to tell Kokoum. The dramatic irony breaks when Kokoum witnesses an encounter with Pocahontas and John. Afterward, Chief Powhatan, Governor Ratcliffe, and the other characters discover the secret nature of their relationship, and the dramatic irony of this situation creates

tension and emotional impact as the audience follows their relationship but knows the consequences when it is revealed to the other characters.

Looking at situational irony, Ravshanova describes this term as a "contrast between what happens and what was expected (or what would seem appropriate)" (Ravshanova 335). At the beginning of *Pocahontas*, the audience witnesses one of the settlers say, "You can't fight Indians without John Smith" (*Pocahontas* 0:01:10 - 0:01:13), where John replies with, "That's right. I'm not about to let you boys have all the fun" (*Pocahontas* 0:01:13 - 0:01:16). This indicates that John is willing to fight the Natives, and he calls it fun with a grin. However, after his encounter with Pocahontas, he also sees the New World from her point of view. John learns that the Natives are not as dangerous and ignorant as the settlers believe. The audience and the characters witness how John defends the Natives when Governor Ratcliffe demands the settlers get into a fight with them.

> GR: "Then you must know the Indians' whereabouts. We'll need that information for the battle."
> JS: "What battle?"
> GR: "We will eliminate these savages. Once and for all."
> JS: "No! You can't do that."
> GR: "Oh, can't I?"
> JS: "Look. We don't have to fight them." (*Pocahontas* 0:52:26 - 0:53:10)

This argument displays the beginning of John's character development as it shows how his view of the Natives, and their land has changed because of his relationship with Pocahontas. The song "Savages" leads to the situational irony, where the settlers are on their way to fight the Natives after getting the news that the Natives captured John. Both groups sing about their negative portrayal of the other. The settlers sing their proclamation of hatred towards the Natives.

> What can you expect from filthy little heathens?
> Here's what you get when races are diverse
> Their skins are hellish red,
> They're only good when dead (*Pocahontas* 1:03:53 - 1:04:03)

The settlers dehumanize the Natives by describing them as barely humans (*Pocahontas* 1:04:08 - 1:04:10) but instead accuse them of being evil, threatening, and devils. On the other hand, the Natives sing about their fear and anger toward the settlers. "This is what we feared, the paleface is a demon"

(*Pocahontas* 1:04:32 - 1:04:36). It starts with a duet between both groups until the audience follows Pocahontas' interruption of their conflict duet.

Pocahontas is conflicted and wants to stop John's execution. Since the war is now unavoidable, the song marks the point of no return for the story. The conflict halts when Pocahontas intercepts and tries to convince her father not to kill John. "This is where the path of hatred has brought us. This is the path I choose, Father. What will yours be?" (*Pocahontas* 1:08:02-1:08:13). Powhatan gets wind blown through his face, which shows his connection to the wind. This is a reference to earlier in the movie, where Powhatan describes Pocahontas' mother's spirit still being with them "Whenever the wind moves through the trees, I feel her presence" (*Pocahontas* 0:46:08 - 0:46:12). The wind that blows towards Powhatan indicates an encounter and spiritual guide between Pocahontas' mother and him before Powhatan decides not to kill John. However, situational irony occurs when the audience and the characters are stunned by John sacrificing his life to save Powhatan from the bullet that Ratcliffe fired. If one was not aware of previous Pocahontas legends like Whitley (Whitley 82), John's self-sacrifice is a shocking turn of events, as it shows in a grand theatrical gesture that John finally changed his first opinions on the Natives and how, instead of fighting them, he helps and saves them (*Pocahontas* 1:09:49).

Pocahontas' speech makes both groups realize that, despite their prejudice towards each other, war will not solve their issues and remove their prejudice. Therefore, Pocahontas becomes a plot device for the conflict between the settlers and the Natives, as she helps convince her father not to kill John, which serves as an eye-opening moment for the settlers. The settlers discover that the Natives' intentions are not to fight but are more peaceful because they did not kill one of the settlers. Therefore, they realize the lies that Ratcliffe has been telling them about being dangerous and savage when, in reality, the audience witnesses how the settlers are marching to fight the Natives with weapons.

This is consistent with the notion of verbal irony. Ravshanova defines verbal irony as when "the speaker means something very different from what he or she is saying" (Ravshanova 335). Verbal irony occurs when Governor Ratcliffe dehumanizes and belittles the Natives in front of the settlers. However, the verbal irony breaks when the settlers are told lies throughout the movie. It is ironic how they viewed the indigenous people negatively, but the settlers initially came to their land, intending to conquer it. The Natives are not dangerous as the settlers initially believed them to be. In the end, the settlers and the audience watch the Natives bring corn to them before departing as a sign of peace and goodwill. By offering them corn, they are also welcoming them into their culture and a sign of willingness to share their knowledge about their culture. The gesture bridges the two cultures, paving the way for mutual understanding and cooperation, diminishing the settlers' prejudices towards the Natives and the violence committed in the New World.

Numbers of characters: 308.402

Settlers, Savages, Barely Even Human

Interestingly, Disney chose to adapt the legend of Pocahontas and the first stories of settler colonialism in America, certainly when Disney has a history of producing racially insensitive material on Natives in previous movies like *Peter Pan* (1953). From *Peter Pan* to *Pocahontas*, Disney has changed their perspective on Natives, shifted the portrayal of stereotypical, bloodthirsty nature, and placed it onto the settlers and the invasion of the New World.

Whitley discusses Indigenous American culture presented in Disney's Pocahontas and how Pocahontas - an exciting love story - distorts historical accuracy and the true nature of Algonquian Natives and their culture. "The form in which Indian culture is realized in the film seems to me, particularly from the thematic viewpoint of this book, to be more problematic than the movie's distortions of history in the direction of melodrama" (Whitley 84). As Disney shifts focus onto the settlers and the atrocities sure to be committed in the New World, they fail to acknowledge the Algonquian warfare aside from a single off-handed remark by Chief Powhatan upon his return to the village (*Pocahontas* 0:07:26). Referring to a study on Algonquian tribes and cultures by Helen Rountree, Whitley investigates how the implied warfare against the neighboring tribe would have occurred. While such an act of war was uncommon in Algonquian war protocol (84), to ensure the win in such a war would entail the annihilation of "the entire male warrior sector of defeated tribes, either in battle or, as described earlier, through torturing survivors to death" (84). Additionally, Whitley discovered that the mistreatment of female villagers was executed through economic discrimination, genocide, and social exclusion (84), all of which Whitley believes are unnecessary in retelling another culture.

With the historical accounts of the Algonquians' true nature and culture, it is interesting that Disney chose to omit their ability for warfare and focus on the unrealistic and untrue love story of Pocahontas and John. Indeed, Disney concludes *Pocahontas* with the binary message that you must choose your own path to be true to yourself, despite the detrimental consequences such paths would have on your community. In order to reach such a conclusion, the two parties are brought to a climax and confrontation through the songs "Savages - Part I" and "Savages - Part II", where the settlers and the Natives declare war on one another and degrade each other (c.f. p. 55).

While Disney does intend for the audience to sympathize with the Natives, Disney provides the narrative of how there is no good or evil side when it comes to war, no matter who the invaded or the invading party is. If the audience must sympathize with the Natives, then surely Disney would not need the addition of the Natives and their name-calling of the settlers. Disney allows the Natives to be seen as equally offensive to the settlers in their war declaration, whereas the Natives were previously perceived as inferior to the settlers in weaponry, their society, and agriculture cultivation. Thus Disney

demonstrates a shift in dynamic and power structure from the inferiority of the Natives to their being equally violent and aggressive as the settlers were portrayed.

Such a power shift is curious to observe, as Disney goes to great lengths to demonstrate the willingness of Natives to declare war on what is essentially an invading party. Indeed, Whitley's examination of Algonquian culture and warfare is an interesting topic of discussion, as it brings attention to the invaded party and how they might have defended themselves outside the story world. As we focus on the story world presented in *Pocahontas*, there is genuinely no need to perpetuate the idea of evil on both sides of the war, when the Natives are the invaded party and the settlers are foreign invaders in search of their resources, no matter the cost of materials or human lives. Indeed, Whitley's discoveries of Algonquian warrior traditions are essential to understand the internal conflicts presented early in the movie between two Native tribes. However, they remain unimportant in the case of the settlers and the narrative Disney provides. Thus, Disney uses another example of disnification with the wholesome ending and the newly paved common understanding between the colonizer and the colonized. It neglects the severe consequences settler colonialism has had on contemporary America and teaches inaccurate history to children. These will be elaborated on in a later section titled "The Consequences of Colonial Narratives".

Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* (2002)

Lilo & Stitch is another, albeit different, expression of settler colonialism from Disney, changing the narrative from European settlement to an implied postcolonial narrative of Hawai'ian displacement. The following section will attempt to analyze *Lilo & Stitch* from a settler colonialist perspective, emphasizing *Lilo and Stitch* as subalterns in each of their communities.

This section will further elaborate on the significance of Hawai'i as a remote paradise. However, it is noteworthy to first address *Lilo & Stitch's* Hawai'i and the effect tourism has. In her article "We Are Not Alone: Finding Family Across a Universe of Differences in Lilo and Stitch", Crysta A. Rollison examines the presence of "Otherness" and the subaltern in *Lilo & Stitch* and how a postcolonial society continues its colonial heritage with its first contact to extraterrestrials. In the case of protagonist Lilo, Rollison believes that not only are her personality and special interests a way to ostracize her, but so is the fact that she is Hawai'ian and native. Rollison examines the deleted scenes of the movie, specifically one where Lilo and Stitch walk down the streets of their town, and tourists stop them. "The scene is titled, 'Model Citizen: Mayhem at the Beach', and involved Lilo tricking tourists into thinking that a tsunami was coming after being insulted and belittled multiple times" (Rollison 10), referring to one tourist that asks for directions to the beach and mispronounces "Mahalo" (0:06,

HeleZort on Youtube), and another that also asks for directions but in a much more rude and inherently racist manner. “Hey, speak English? Which way to the beach?” (0:13, HeleZort on Youtube). Lilo points the two tourists in different directions, leaving the audience to wonder which way was correct or if both were wrong. Rollison believes that “It is undoubtedly clear that the implications of these things are not lost on Lilo, young as she is. [...] Even without this scene, it’s apparent that Lilo is, on some level, aware of the colonial gaze and seeks to reverse it through her hobby of taking unflattering pictures of tourists” (Rollison 11).

If we interpret the deleted scene as canonical to the theatrical release, then Rollison’s interpretation cements Lilo as observant of the status and categorization she has received as a Subaltern. However, based on the final theatrical movie, Lilo’s interest in the tourists could also be interpreted to be because she is native. Initial expectations from the audience would be that the tourists take pictures of Lilo as she is the native and, therefore, a spectacle, like in the deleted scene. However, Lilo finds the tourists a spectacle and rarity. The insurgency of tourists each season allows Lilo to see multiple different bodies and expressions of race and body types that she is unfamiliar with in the native community. She even asks Nani, “Aren’t they beautiful?” (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:22:58) as they inspect her bedroom wall filled with candid pictures of tourists in unflattering angles and situations, clearly displaying her intrigue in her study of the tourists. Nani does not share her enthusiasm for the tourists. Indeed, she has complicated interactions and circumstances due to their heavy presence.

O’hana Means Family. Family Means Everybody Gets Left Behind or Forgotten

Posing as legal guardian, and now primary adult caretaker, Nani struggles to maintain domestic stability for herself and Lilo. Rollison notices the unfortunate placement of Nani in hospitality work in service to tourists, allowing tourists to exotify her in her line of work.

Nani works at a tourist luau where she and other employees, including her boyfriend David, are dressed in stereotypical clothes associated with Hawai'ian tourist traps. Indeed, the fire twirler David is performing in front of a crowd of white tourists. His smirk when he drinks water before his final trick implies he knows the luau is a gig rather than an authentic experience. The crowd cheers in awe of his final trick (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:32:04). The heavy implication of tourism and American influence on Hawai'i indicates how, as settlers, Americans continue to keep a significant hold on Hawai'i and the use of Hawai'ian land. As for Nani, she tries to conform to and abide by the society she is a part of. With Child Protective Services and Cobra Bubbles investigating her case, Nani is once more subjugated by outside forces and pressured to find a job and stability befitting others’ standards, not Nani’s nor Lilo’s, though Lilo makes it difficult for her.

In the case of *Lilo & Stitch*, family - O'hana - is a central theme. Most interestingly, they do not show any form of traditional family composition. In their research paper, "Who cares for the kids? Caregiving and Parenting in Disney Films", Jeanne Holcomb, Kenzie Latham, and Daniel Fernandez-Baca sample 15 Disney movies across Disney's filmography from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to *The Princess and the Frog*. In an attempt to analyze and understand the utilization of parenthood, specifically motherhood, their article suggests a pattern regarding the absence of parenthood in Disney. "Disney films often use 'coming of age' stories with adolescent protagonists transitioning into adulthood. These protagonists typically endure difficulties that require caregiving and nurturing, such as instrumental support and emotional guidance" (Holcomb et al. 1958). Holcomb et al.'s research, among other studies, suggests Disney's production of family-friendly content is noticeably poor concerning the actual representation of families. Especially ones with healthy relationship dynamics, hence their history of producing stories based on child abuse by family members and the marginalization of mothers and elevation of fathers (1959). "The audience sees the struggles related to a shifting relationship from sister to mother. There are very tender moments in which Nani engages in comforting behavior (e.g., singing to Lilo) as well as difficult moments within their relationship (e.g., Nani and Lilo fighting)" (1968).

Despite their differences, Lilo and Nani are siblings who know each other's quirks. Nani is quick to figure out Lilo's schemes, just as Lilo knows how to get on Nani's nerves, though it lands them in trouble several times with the social worker assigned their case. Even when they need to vent, they simultaneously scream into pillows (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:21:25 - 0:21:30), though Nani and Lilo reconcile later with more love and understanding than they showed each other previously the same day. Although Lilo is very young, she is not unaware of their situation and makes very perceptive comments. She communicates her familial needs to her sister in "I like you better as a sister" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:22:05), though Lilo shows an unexpected child-like lack of situational awareness when she believes her sister's announcement that she will only scold her on special occasions. Lilo even answers, "Tuesdays and Bank Holidays would be good" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:22:48), displaying an interestingly calm and natural response to Nani's obvious joke.

Even as Nani tries to keep Lilo unaware of their position, she can only do so much without Lilo's bright perception. She even offers Nani, her caretaker and older sister, comfort as she says: "Don't worry. You're nice. And *someone* will give you a job. I would" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:52:35 - 0:52:39), displaying a maturity that should not be placed on a child her age. Lilo is non-compliant, as any unadjusted child would be after such a traumatic event, and she defies Nani's attempts to parent Lilo and establish any adult authority between them, even as CPS is on their way to inspect their home and Lilo has locked Nani outside of their home. "I'm going to stuff you in the blender, push "puree",

then bake you in a pie and feed it to the social worker! When he says, “Mmm! What’s your secret?”, I¨m going to say… Love! And … Nurturing.” (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:16:13 - 0:16:27). In what appears as dramatic irony, Nani’s reprimand is interrupted by social worker Cobra Bubbles, and he continues to interrupt or accidentally observe several incidents of Nani’s failing control of their domestic situation. The dysfunction is further exaggerated by Lilo’s continuing and unnerving interest in the macabre, as she has moved on from alien-possessed stuffed animals to voodoo-like spoon dolls of her “friends” submerged in a pickle jar to “punish” them (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:19:37). This unusual behavior from a young girl like Lilo causes the audience through Bubbles to think Nani as irresponsible and unsuitable for Lilo’s care. However, he gives Nani a chance to redeem herself if she follows the rules.

Nani is forced to find a job by herself, and without any secondary childcare outside the home or the hula school, she is forced to take care of Lilo by herself as well. Though sympathetic to Nani and Lilo’s situation, Bubbles is adamant about removing Lilo from Nani’s care, thus continuing the displacement of native Hawai'ians with modern measures, and further alienating Nani and Lilo from their community. Bubbles, a black man himself, is a contradictory character in how he has been colonized and now serves as the colonizer, showing the perfect example to Nani and Lilo of how they are expected to perform in their society, given US rules and expectations. Bubbles tries to enforce American societal expectations onto Nani, just as Lilo later tries to subjugate her adoptive blue dog, Stitch, by not only her but also Bubbles’ request.

A Strange Girl with a Strange Dog

The protagonist Lilo and deuteragonist Stitch are both ostracized and excluded by their own community, for each their own reasons. In the case of Lilo, she has not done any wrongdoings that would garner exile, though her classmates exclude her as much as they can. When asked why she is late for hula, she replies, “Today is sandwich day” (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:13:09), telling the instructor and her classmates what appears at first glance to be an incredulous story of how she feeds Pudge the fish a peanut butter sandwich each Thursday and how important it is because Pudge controls the weather (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:13:08).

Lilo’s classmate Mertle discredits Lilo’s story and calls her crazy, resulting in a fist fight. Lilo is thrown out of hula school for the day, and when Lilo tries to make amends with her classmates, they reject her advances again. Though this time, it is because of her toy and how it is different from the Barbie-doll-like toys the other girls have. Lilo pulls out a homemade stuffed animal, similar to a voodoo doll, but the doll repulses the girls, and they run away while Lilo explains the doll’s origin.

To cheer Lilo up and subconsciously distract Lilo from her exile, Nani takes Lilo to the dog pound and allows her to adopt a dog. Lilo finds and adopts the strange blue dog the pound keeper and

other dogs fear, and she names him Stitch. The adoptive dog, however, is no dog. Before Stitch becomes Lilo's companion, he is introduced in the movie's prelude as Experiment 626, an illegal genetic mutation caused by Doctor Jumba Jookiba (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:00:48). Jumba denies his indictment and his supposed unlawful actions of genetic experimentation to the great council of the alien Federation (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:00:52). At the same time, ironically, the court is presented with the crime itself - a feral-looking Experiment 626 in a tube made to contain prisoners. The implication of a great galactic alien federation suggests that space's vast and mostly unexplored entity is collective and sentient, similar to our sophisticated and societal understanding.

Gathered under one Federation, different alien species gather for common issues in the case of Jumba and his illegal experimentations. The aliens in court attendance for Jumba's hearing are audibly and visibly upset and shocked by 626's existence and what Rollison comments can "be assumed to be alien profanity" (Rollison 3) as 626's response to the Grand Councilwoman shocks and incites his inevitable exile. "Although the scene is not necessarily within a human frame of reference, the dehumanizing language (referring to Stitch as 'it', as opposed to 'he') and the fearful reactions to merely seeing him establish Stitch as an Other within this alien society" [*sic*] (3).

The mere suggestion that aliens are as sentient and similar to research teams on other planets, similar to studies of outer space in our wild, implies not only has Hawai'i been subject to colonization by America and is now under alien influence, but so has Earth in its entirety to outer space. The councilwoman suggests they rid Earth of 626's inevitable landing and destruction, and the Earth expert agent Pleakley vehemently denies this. "Earth is a protected wildlife reserve. We've been using it to rebuild the mosquito population which, need I remind you, is an endangered species!" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:07:21-31). Pleakley as an Earth expert suggests Earth is no more than just a case study for a galactical force like the Federation and that our civilization is reduced to the farming and preservation of wildlife for mosquitos, similar to how Western societies regard unspoiled wild-life in non-Western societies. Pleakley cements the alien collective's perception of Earth as foreign and different, thus implying Lilo and the existence of Hawai'ians, and any human is subject to control to preserve them as if they - like the mosquitos - cannot do this themselves. With 626's supposed destructive nature, they fear for Hawai'i's safety and depart to find 626 and bring him back into their custody. This humors Jumba, as he is incredibly proud of 626's heinous character, "So tell me, my little one-eyed one, on what poor, pitiful, defenseless planet has my little "monstrosity" been unleashed?" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:09:44-56), and he gladly accepts the quest for 626's capture alongside agent Pleakley, who fears the confrontation and, in lieu, 626.

Alien Invasion and the Domestication of the "Other"

Disney established The Federation as an influential collective with the power to annihilate and annex Earth like the US did the Kingdom of Hawai'i. By exiling 626 and later retrieving him, the Federation exhibits colonial power and attitude as they contemplate the destruction of Hawai'i and the insignificance of Hawai'ian livelihood and people. 626's existence poses not only a threat to Hawai'ian society but also to the alien Federation. 626 is considered an abomination and wrong in a world of different species and extraterrestrials. Only Pleakley seems to enjoy what Earth offers as he admires Earth and dresses in drag to cover up his four-legged, one-eye alien body.

Usually, the human perception of aliens and the "Other" usually predates this behavior and interaction with foreign entities. Because 626 is created by man, in this case, another alien like himself, 626 becomes a particular Subaltern, the homunculus. The homunculus is an artificial creation of man ("Homunculus", Online Etymology Dictionary), or in the case of 626, an alien life form. Such a creation poses evolutionary questions and worries that the galaxy did not find amusing. Nor does it indicate that the Federation will comply with its existence. Even with his descent on Earth and his meeting with humans, they do not understand or accept him, even questioning if he is an animal (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:26:29). On Earth, 626 has a chance to become something the Federation denied him, which is to become his own person. This allows him to elevate himself from the Subaltern group the Federation placed in him, and he reluctantly accepts the new role he has been given as Lilo's dog under the pretense of destroying Hawai'i if given a chance by an unsuspecting Jumba and Pleakley.

While everyone else stays away from 626, Lilo, as a fellow Subaltern, gravitates towards 626 and lovingly adopts and renames him Stitch, henceforth known and referred to in this paper as such. Lilo subconsciously continues the cycle of colonization by forcing Stitch to assimilate into Hawai'ian; therefore, American customs and norms, much like Bubbles, are sent to represent the American values to Lilo and the Hawai'ians. Interestingly and most negligent, Bubbles does not suspect Stitch to be an alien despite Bubbles' existing knowledge of extraterrestrials (*Lilo & Stitch* 1:15:58). Neither does he take Lilo's claim of alien invasion seriously due to her history of macabre hobbies. This begs the question of whether Bubbles' intervention could have prevented Lilo's removal from the home and provided resources to Nani and Lilo, aside from the superficial sympathy Bubbles exhibits. Stitch sees the damage his violent behavior has on Lilo and Nani's family, and with David's guidance and harsh words, he understands he cannot continue his violent outburst, though he cannot understand their origin.

This places Lilo as the knowledgeable colonizer and Stitch as the unintelligent "Other" that must be taught, as Lilo suspects and claims it must be because Stitch's own family is no longer with

him. She even gives Stitch an out with the opportunity to leave if he cannot comply with his new role in the family like she did Nani when she called O'hana and got to keep Stitch. Stitch tries to show Lilo's hard work of assimilating Stitch is finally complete and successful when Jumba attempts to capture Stitch. Stitch tries to convince Jumba he has changed, "W… Waiting… - For what? - Family. - Aaah! You don't have one. I made you" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:57:42-56). Jumba jumps the opportunity to perpetuate his former identity as the homunculus 626, threatening to take Stitch apart and rebuild him, thus objectifying Stitch and reducing him to a thingification. Stitch refuses to comply with Jumba, leading to the point of no return, where the aliens destroy Nani and Lilo's house, resulting in the final call for Bubbles to remove Lilo.

Rollison considers Stitch's resolution to attempt assimilation as a "very human thing. This suggests, then, that Stitch's growth reflects not only his ability to grow but the ability of all humans to grow regardless of their birth. Most important is how Stitch grew because he was allowed to do so, regardless of the intention of those who gave him that chance" (Rollison 3-4). Stitch's growth allows him to accept Lilo's proposition to become a part of their family, thus fully assimilating into his new Earthling identity as Lilo's dog and companion. Stitch's acceptance into Lilo's family allows Lilo to regain some control of the O'hana she lost and continuously fears losing. Lilo's lack of acceptance and understanding for her loss and grief not only comes across in her interest in the macabre and aids in establishing her identity as an "Other", but it also maintains her identity as colonized and displaced from her roots.

Return to Status Quo

As the movie's theme is family and the message that family is important, we return to the former point of how family and family structures are essential in Disney movies. "Prior to the death of her parents, Lilo existed in a very traditional family" (Rollison 8), consisting of a nuclear family unit with both parents and two children. Lilo is left with only her older sister, which affects her ability to bond with her peers.

Lilo shows an extraordinary interest in the macabre - voodoo spoon dolls and zombie-like stuffed animals reminiscent of a voodoo doll. Nani entertains this interest by responding that her former boss is a vampire who wanted her to join "his legion of the undead" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:35:08-13), with Lilo whispering, "I knew it" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:35:14). Lilo's interest in the supernatural is therefore crucial in her transitioning between her newly established family unit of her and her sister. Stitch's identity as an extraterrestrial and the alien invasion in her home frightens her initially but does not seem to surprise her. As Stitch accepts his newfound family, Lilo comes to accept an extraterrestrial settlement in Hawai'i through not only Stitch but the arrival of the Federation, leading to Jumba and

Pleakley deciding to stay with them and their family. Lilo is returned to the status quo of a nuclear family with Nani and David in parental roles as Lilo and Stitch's caretakers, and in an epilogue-like montage, we see Jumba and Pleakley decided to stay with them as adoptive, honorary members of the family.

Lilo & Stitch maintains what is left of the settler colonial mentality left by the US. Lilo's success in assimilating Stitch, the alien, and the new "Other" in need of submission to US customs and values, reflects the subjugation of Hawai'ians during the US annexation of Hawai'i and Hawai'ian sovereignty. Furthermore, re-establishing a nuclear family with a traditional mother and father figure re-establishes traditional Christian values inherent to American culture. Thus *Lilo & Stitch* reinstates the colonial gaze on Hawai'i and the Natives by forcing them through fictional works to comply with and display American values. Though Lilo and Stitch are regarded as subalterns in their respective communities, they find comfort that they are no longer alone and create their own family unit befitting their society.

The Consequences of Colonial Narratives

Both *Pocahontas* and *Lilo & Stitch* are examples of disnified stories concerning the movies' respective plots but in the implication of historical effect and accuracy. Johnson claims that Disney attempts to tell a true story about *Pocahontas* "but ignores many historical facts in order to make a film that is marketable to children" (Johnson 23), which also can be said about *Lilo & Stitch*.

The original tale of Pocahontas is not representative in the Disney animated movie as it does not depict the history of the Native American culture. Whitley elaborates by saying, "But what is seen in *Pocahontas* is not quite as straightforward as the 'truth' of the land was taken over, nor even the 'truth' of the alternative values of the American Indians which, until recently had been marginalized, distorted beyond recognition or forgotten" (Whitley 83). Nevertheless, Whitley explains that the real Pocahontas was abducted by the English people and kept as a prisoner to pressure her father, Powhatan (82). This allows for the story of Pocahontas to become disnified. Pocahontas' marriage to colonizer John Rolfe (82) is replaced by a romantic and almost too-good-to-be-true forbidden love between herself and John.

Unlike Pocahontas' true marriage to settler John Rolfe, which Disney interestingly adapts in the sequel *Pocahontas: Journey to A New World* (1998), John's pursuit of a romantic relationship with Pocahontas poses a threat to both of their communities. Like a Shakespearean drama, Pocahontas and John's communities are at odds as the Algonquian Indians fight to keep the settlers off their lands

while the English settlers fight to overtake them. In such a high-stake situation, it would be almost impossible to establish a romantic relationship between such opposing sides.

Despite the lack of historical accuracy, Whitley believes it does not play any role in the importance of the symbol the character Pocahontas embodies. Instead, an act of self-sacrifice, as both Pocahontas and John display, serve as a disnified action with a dual message that "individuals can break with the assumptions of their social conditioning and that differences separating social groups can, ultimately be overcome" (Whitley 82). The song "Colors of the Wind" becomes vital to whether Pocahontas can persuade John to forgo his colonial mindset. The same message is found in *Lilo & Stitch,* another Disney movie where historical accuracy is foregone and replaced with symbolic gestures.

As *Pocahontas* is a musical, and the music serves to aid the narrative and continue the plot, *Lilo & Stitch* uses extradiegetic music to set the scene and mood for the story to unfold. Instead, the movie soundtrack supports Lilo's fascination with real-life musician and American king of rock and roll, Elvis Presley. Lilo uses Elvis's music not only to cope with her feelings (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:15:46) but also uses Elvis's music to convert Stitch into what she thinks Bubbles might believe a model citizen to be. The influence Elvis Presley has on Lilo is not a coincidence. Even Jumba exclaims he loves this song, referring to "Hound Dog" (*Lilo & Stitch* 1:00:22).

According to Gabriella Parent, Elvis presented Hawai'i as an island paradise in many of his movies (6), thus aiding in the gentrification of Hawai'i. Jumba claims he listens to Elvis Presley's music despite being an alien, thus implying he could become a model citizen by Lilo's standards as he listens to and likes the king's music. The movie does not tell or explain how Jumba manages to listen to Earthling music in outer space. Nor do they explain Elvis Presley's significance, other than he was an appreciated artist to Lilo. Any historical meaning is foregone, much like the original songs on the soundtrack.

Any implication of Hawai'ian history and Hawai'ian culture is reduced to three songs, "He Mele no Lilo" and "Hawaiian Rollercoaster Ride", composed by Alan Silvestri and Mark Kealií Hoómalu, and the farewell song "Aloha 'Oe" which Nani dedicates to Lilo in what is supposed to be their last night together. "Hawaiian Rollercoaster Ride" does not hold historic significance, though it expresses Hawai'ian vacation sentiments and appreciates surfing and surfer culture. However, the song "Aloha 'Oe" refers back to "He Mele no Lilo", as "He Mele no Lilo" is a song of praise and admiration to the last two monarchs of the Hawai'ian kingdom - Queen Lydia Liliúoani and King David Kalakaua ("He Mele no Lilo", Genius). In her final moments as queen, Liliúoani dedicates her song "Aloha 'Oe" to her kingdom and country, singing farewell to her kingdom as the US annexes Hawai'i as a sovereign state ("Aloha 'Oe", Genius). "He Mele no Lilo" also samples from another song dedicated to King

Kalakaua, thus signifying that the Hawai'ian spirit still appreciates and upholds the memory of their lost kingdom. Nani practices Hawai'ian culture and folklore and teaches Lilo to do the same, not just with hula and their speaking Native Hawai'ian. She also teaches Lilo Hawai'ian history as she sings the queen's song. While the songs bear historical meaning and are a gesture to recognize Hawai'ian heritage, Disney neglects their responsibility to teach the audience the great symbolism behind the music.

On their streaming platform, Disney+ offers no English subtitles in *Pocahontas* when Pocahontas speaks Algonquian, except when she teaches John winggapo and anah (*Pocahontas* 0:37:11). A similar missing translation is found in *Lilo & Stitch* when they speak Native Hawai'ian, there is only an English close captioning that reads "(Speaking Hawaiian)" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:13:35), with two exceptions of the word O'hana and Mahalo. This implies a US audience would recognize the world mahalo without an explanation like O'hana was given, perhaps due to Hawai'i's heavy tourism and gentrification as the perfect island vacation paradise. Thus, the meaning behind "He Mele no Lilo" and "Aloha 'Oe" is lost on an audience unknown to US-Hawai'ian history, as they require research to understand their importance. Interestingly, Disney chose such a historically significant song for an animated movie that otherwise does not address Hawai'ian history. Lilo and David are the only reference to the song and historical figures, as the late king and queen are their namesakes. Instead, the history of Hawai'i is ignored as the title sequence, and the song itself continues the exoticism of Hawai'i as an island paradise.

Concerning Fieldhouse's three categorizations of settler colonialism (c.f. p. 21), the intention of both *Pocahontas* and *Lilo & Stitch* is a pure settlement. In *Pocahontas*, Ratcliffe intends to find the supposedly hidden gold in Virginia. Whitley notes that Ratcliffe's intentions differ from John's as his "[...] attitude towards the land is a cruder and more direct expression of imperialist designs; driven by competition with other colonizers for the glittering prizes that will bestow status and wealth, he seeks simply to ravage the earth for its immediately realizable resources" (Whitley 83). Therefore, Ratcliffe strives to find gold no matter the consequences, as he even would eliminate the Natives (c.f. p. 55). However, Ratcliffe fails in his pure settlement as he ends up sent back to England by his crew. Ratcliffe failed as an individual; however, England as a colonial power succeeded with pure settlement as they stayed in Virginia and established a colony.

The pure settlement is also showcased in *Lilo & Stitch* as we see Jumba searches for Experiment 626. When he finds him in front of a dog pound and aims to shoot him, Lilo gets in front of Stitch, oblivious that someone wants to shoot Stitch. We see how Jumba would not have any problems shooting Lilo if it meant he would get Stitch. However, Jumba has a moral compass in Pleakley, as he tells him not to shoot Lilo; "I have determined this situation to be far too hazardous [...] That girl is a

part of the mosquito food chain" (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:27:58 - 0:28:08). It is noteworthy that Pleakley's only explanation not to do damage to Lilo is because of the mosquitoes. Their only means of survival is through humans, which is Pleakley's only concern.

On the other hand, Captain Gantu has no remorse as he, with no hesitation, catches both Lilo alongside Stitch, though it is only Stitch he wants to capture (*Lilo & Stitch* 1:04:10 - 1:04:18). His intentions of pure settlement in Hawai'i are mainly based on his personal agenda through the Federation. Lastly, the arrival of Stitch threatens to damage the pure settlement of Hawai'i before meeting Lilo at the dog pound. Stitch defies his own nature when he sees the consequences of Lilo's kidnapping, and he learns the value of O'hana. Based on the pure settlement of *Lilo & Stitch*, the intentions of Jumba, Gantu, and Stitch are unsuccessful as we see the colonized become the colonizer in Lilo. She teaches Stitch the meaning of Ohana and the American culture through Elvis's music (c.f. p. 67), thus providing Stitch a new place to belong, though it is a Subaltern group. Jumba and Pleakley seem to like this agreement and stay with Stitch's new family.

We see how Garrard's theory of anthropomorphism occurs in *Pocahontas* as well as in *Lilo & Stitch*. Pocahontas's spiritual guide, Grandmother Willow, embodies anthropomorphic traits. She is illustrated as a talking tree and portrayed as a wise mentor to Pocahontas. Grandmother Willow is given human-like qualities like an old, gentle face (*Pocahontas* 0:14:40) and a witty, disciplinary personality. These qualities allow her to become a suitable mentor and character to guide Pocahontas and later John. Nature itself has also been anthropomorphized and given a female identity, often referring to Nature as Mother Nature. It is only fitting that her spiritual mentor is a part of nature herself, and she can offer guidance and advice to the other characters, such as John, in the movie.

Grandmother Willow provides guidance to humans and animals like Meeko, Flit, and Percy, all of whom are examples of anthropomorphic animals, as they can communicate with the humans in the movie. They show signs of understanding the human's emotions, where they display human-like emotions such as joy or sadness. This is evident in how Meeko, Flit and Percy comfort Pocahontas once John has been sentenced to death (*Pocahontas* 1:05:53-1:06:18), and how the other animals adopt Percy into their group after Ratcliffe mistreats Percy (*Pocahontas* 1:12:38). Though they are anthropomorphic in that they possess a greater perception of humanity than regular animals without such a consciousness, the anthropomorphism we see in *Lilo & Stitch* is similar to the humanoid with animalistic qualities and behaviors.

The aliens in the movie exhibit human-like emotions and communicate with the humans such as Lilo and Nani. In *Lilo & Stitch,* the aliens are sentient, self-conscious beings that embody anthropomorphic traits. This comes across as ironic, as aliens often are portrayed as non-humans. In the courtroom of the Federation, the audience is introduced to vastly different alien species, indicating

there is not only one or two but several, implying there are multiple alien societies and planets that are inhabited. However, it is interesting how the aliens all possess similar physical traits to animals. The grand council of the Federation is a group of different alien species, two of which are similar to marine-like animals (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:0:40). One is a humanoid-like squid contained in an aquarium-like incubator while dressed in an astronaut suit. Another is a three-eyed slug with tentacles that bear suction cups like an octopus. The third is a robot, and the fourth and fifth are hard to place animal-wise, though Captain Gantu, as the fifth and final council member, has a head shaped in a matter where it seems he has husks as jawbones (*Lilo & Stitch* 0:03:28). The different shapes and features reminiscent of animal-like anatomy make the extraterrestrials less threatening in physique and therefore appropriate for a children's movie, hence another form of disnification on the theory that aliens exist.

Stitch, a genetically mutated alien, is, according to Jumba, an attempt to mutate Jumba himself and create life that transcends alien capacity, thus a form of eugenics. Stitch is genetically designed to look like Jumba, though he only possesses the same four eyes as Jumba. The rest of Stitch's anatomy is a body equipped with four forearms, two hindlegs, and large ears and antennas, though two arms and the antennas are retractable. It is clear to everyone except Lilo that Stitch is no ordinary creature and indeed not a dog, which makes Bubbles' expectations impossible and illogical regarding human behaviors from a non-human like Stitch (Rollison 4). However, it is possible to cultivate Stitch as he is a homunculus. If man created him, then he can be taught by man. This ultimately allows Lilo to colonize Stitch, as not only is his body transformable, but so is his mind. Such representations of the "Other" and examples of settler colonization bring this section of our analysis to a concluding question of whether these movies represent Native Americans authentically.

As this thesis establishes in our analysis of historical accuracy and of indigenous culture and symbols, there are discrepancies found in both *Pocahontas* and *Lilo & Stitch*. Regarding *Pocahontas*, the story of Pocahontas is based on the life of Matoaka, though Disney has decided to adapt the legend of Pocahontas, thus further appropriate the life of Matoaka. In an article from The Indigenous Foundation, co-founder Meera Baswan writes: "Pocahontas was one of the first real-life Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women [...] When English colonizers arrived in Werowocomoco, they began targeting women and young children, and began sexually assaulting Indigenous girls. Many planned to kidnap Pocahontas, as she was the chief's daughter" (Baswan, theindigenousfoundation.org).

According to Baswan, the actuality of Pocahontas and John's interactions and meetings is foregone in the Disney version. John was 27 when he entered the New World, and Pocahontas was merely ten. As this thesis concludes that the relationship between Pocahontas and John would have been implausible if the circumstances Disney presented were real, the reality of their ages makes such a relationship further incredible and thus unimaginable. Furthermore, Pocahontas' relationship - or lack of

- with Kokoum is far from reality as well, as he was her first husband and was later murdered by her kidnappers, similar to how the settlers kill Kokoum in an attempt to protect John. Baswan concludes her assessment that "Not only has Disney inaccurately portrayed the life of Pocahontas - they have also romanticized her life, and in extension, sugarcoated the trauma Indigenous people faced through colonization" (Baswan), thus Disney is selective on which parts of her story are profitable and what is not.

Likewise, in *Lilo & Stitch*, Disney foregoes any responsibility of a good story on Hawai'ian families and Hawai'ian living. Parent writes in her article:

> Storytelling has and continues to play an extremely important role in Kanaka Maoli's culture. [...] The Indigenous people of Hawaii[*sic*] are inherent storytellers who believe that stories cannot be owned or copyrighted, [they] [*sic*] are not commodities to be sold for a profit, and are to be shared within context and with respect to the people who share this knowledge (Parent 7).

Parent believes that without such a display of respect for Hawai'ians and the story Disney presents of Hawai'i, their story further misappropriates Hawai'ian culture and adds to the continuing practice of settler colonial culture (Parent 7). Disney is once again selective in which parts of Hawai'i and Hawai'ian culture they want to use for their storytelling.

From the lack of explanation in the Hawai'ian music to their lack of authenticity in the concept of O'hana, Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* is lackluster when it comes to Hawai'ian authenticity. "The writer-directors of the movie visited Hawaii[*sic*] and were blown away by its utopian landscape and the local values shared by their tour guide. This local guide explained that 'ohana meant family, but not only blood relations. It can be anyone within a community that one takes into their family" (7). If such a sense of family and community exists in real Hawai'i, it comes across as shallow and non-existent in *Lilo & Stitch*. Nani and Lilo are alone and left to fend for themselves if not for the intervention of Bubbles and David. Though Bubbles acts as an agent of the state and therefore aids in the displacement of Lilo, he provides no resources to Nani in order to care for Lilo.

The same goes for their local community, though the Hawai'ian community is portrayed to be close-knit. It is implied that David, Nani's boyfriend, is her contact person for job opportunities, as once Nani loses this job and goes job hunting, David is there to support her and even finds offers for her while she cares for Lilo (*Lilo & Stitch* 00:59:15). Interestingly, all of these jobs are in hospitality,

with Rollison pointing out how they are all either tourist attractions or rely on tourism, thus "demonstrating the heavy dependence of the local economy on tourism, which is a typical feature of postcolonial societies" (Rollison 10).

Furthermore, Parent comments on the Hawai'ian community's role in Nani and Lilo's lives and, consequentially, the lack of roles taken to help them. "No one within the community steps up to accomplish their duty by 'ohana [*sic*] principles. Therefore, there is great irony in 'ohana [*sic*] saving Stitch as a single individual as he learns the concept of family" (Parent 8). Parent believes this to be another example of settler colonialism, as the concept of Ohana has not only been simplified to a feeling of belonging, but it also becomes another selling point for tourism and the idealization of Hawai'i as an island paradise. Disney has not only reestablished American rule and settlement of Hawai'i by copyrighting songs concerning Hawai'ian culture and oral traditions (9), but they also reestablish the annexation and removal of agency for the Hawai'ian people. In a true settler colonial manner, Disney becomes those who create the narrative of the colonized and the Subaltern in both early recollections of American history, as well as recent.

The Importance of Disney's Racially Insensitive Past

This thesis has already accounted for the existence of Disney's controversial *Song of the South*. For this section, it is pertinent to investigate Disney's attitude towards its racially insensitive past. As our theory on Film Blackness suggests, it is necessary to investigate the decisions to use and refuse the inclusion of black identity in Disney filmography.

In their article "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-don't mention it", Jaime J Weinman dissects Disney's restraint to publish *Song of the South* and the implications their racist history has on public perception. Comparing Disney to Warner Brothers or Universal's releases of old cartoons and their disclaimers of sensitive material, Weinman says: "A film with the magic name "Disney" on it is automatically assumed to be child-friendly. Which means that if *Song of the South* hits DVD, millions of children will soon be quoting Bre'er Rabbit's 'Dat I is!' to their parents" (Weinman 2). Weinman believes the release of *Song of the South* would be too complicated in comparison to previously removed insensitive Disney materials like *Fantasia* (2) or later reiterations of "Arabian Nights" in *Aladdin*, as discussed earlier in this master's thesis (c.f. p. 45).

Despite Disney's conscious attempt to not offend African Americans, at the time when Weinman wrote their article in 2007, Disney did not attempt to edit or reiterate the use of "red men" in movies like *Peter Pan*, and how "they are bloodthirsty savages who threaten children with execution, they say 'ugh' and 'squaw' a lot, and most of them are drawn to look almost subhuman. They even

have a song (What Makes the Red Man Red?) based on the premise that not having white skin is so weird it needs a production number to explain it" (Weinman 2). Since Weinman's article, the international release of the streaming service Disney+ serves as Disney's official attempt to remove itself from its racist pasts without editing its entire filmography. Now placing disclaimers on movies or shows with controversial subjects or racially sensitive materials, Disney shows conscious incentives to improve their representation of ethnic diversity, certainly with their theatrical release of their franchise-saving animation movie, *The Princess and the Frog,* and the first ever black princess in Disney's repertoire in a time of experimentation and implementation of new animation techniques.

The Princess and the Frog (2009)

The Princess and the Frog marks the end of Disney's post-renaissance era with its release in 2009, thus ending one of Disney's most challenging production periods with a blockbuster, award-winning animation picture. Disney returns to their roots with a modern fairy tale and princess story with Tiana and her journey from rags to riches.

The movie centers on Tiana's ambition to become independent and fulfill her father's dream of self-employment in their restaurant. With her father's untimely passing, it is now her job to achieve his dreams and become the breadwinner for herself and her mother, Eudora. The following section will attempt to analyze and interpret expressions of blackness through Gillespie's Film Blackness through the character Tiana and how her story of rags to riches depends on the sanitized whiteness Disney produces and maintains.

Being Black in New Orleans

Set in 1920's New Orleans, Louisiana, Tiana is a black woman in a time when Jim Crow laws and racial segregation subjugated black families. Tiana's mother, Eudora, is employed by the La Bouff family, and with no one to care for her daughter while she works, she must bring her to work, ultimately landing Tiana a lifelong friendship with the daughter of the La Bouff family, Charlotte. In a time skip post-title sequence, Charlotte hires Tiana to cater to her upcoming Mardi Gras party, where Charlotte intends to meet the foreign prince of Maldonia, Prince Naveen, and hopefully end her party with a marriage proposal. Tiana is initially excited about Charlotte's job opportunity, as it will finally land her the run-down sugar mill in the industrial bay area, a place she intends to renovate into a restaurant. She is "Almost there" (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:14:06 - 0:14:08) in regards to finalizing her and her father's dream of opening a restaurant, ambiguously titled "Tiana's".

Disney does not shy away from the social division between blacks and whites in 1920s Louisiana: While Charlotte lives in white mansions similar to colonial buildings that use private vehicles for transportation, Tiana and her mother must use public transportation by railway to reach their living quarters. Passing several white neighborhoods, they finally arrive at their destination, a black neighborhood separate and far away from the whites (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:03:37 -0:03:49). Their houses are smaller, closer, and darker colored, underlining the economic inequality and lack of equal opportunity for housing (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:03:50 - 0:03:53). However, Tiana and her community do not seem to mind this, as Tiana's father cooks a large, chipped pot of gumbo delicious enough to share with their entire neighborhood (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:04:35 - 0:04:47). This reinforces the perception that black communities were tight-knitted and financially co-dependent on each other, as they helped feed each other. The need to care for others passes to Tiana at a young age. While Charlotte dreams of age-appropriate fairy tales and princes, Tiana dreams of financial stability and self-sufficiency, further emphasizing her current and future struggles and establishing the economic and social division between Tiana and her peers. From childhood, Tiana looks mature to fit her age-inappropriate narrative of caring for and nurturing her family and community. Her maturity is continued into adulthood when she appears in the title sequence returning home from work to change her clothes and go to another job that starts when the other ends (*Princess and The Frog* 0:06:39 - 0:07:21).

Tiana's work ethic fits the temporal setting she finds herself in: She needs work to support herself financially, though, with its presentation in postmodern Disney animation, it also perpetuates modern prejudice that African-Americans work several low-income jobs to make ends meet. Coincidentally, Tiana's black friends criticize her for her constant working (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:09:53-0:09:56), implying they are better off and not as financially dependent as Tiana is, as they can sustain social relations outside of work. This dream for independence ages Tiana not only mentally but also physically.

Tiana and Charlotte, seemingly the same age, are animated in vastly different bodies. Charlotte's white body is more petite in stature, her mouth is full of spaced-out baby teeth, and her dewey eyes are accompanied by chubby cheeks (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:1:48). In stark contrast, Tiana's facial features are more mature, with a leaner face and a mouth full of straight, adult teeth. Her lips are fuller than Charlotte's, and her facial expression is mature (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:01:30). After the time skip, their bodies are presented as adults, though their facial features are similar to when they were children. With her fuller body and curves, Charlotte keeps her chubby cheeks and dewy eyes, while Tiana keeps her mature facial structures on a tall, lean body with subtle curves (*The Princess*

and the Frog 0:25:34). With her facial structure remaining the same, Tiana confirms this thesis' argument that Tiana's lack of aging and femininity befits her with the archaic stereotype of the black Mammy, as presented by Donald Bogle. This will be elaborated on in a later section of this analysis. Furthermore, Tiana and Charlotte's physical features are visual reminders of their race, class, and agency differences.

"For you, it's going to be tough": The juxtaposition of Tiana's Blackness

Tiana continues to inhabit an intense work ethic even in her frog form. According to Sarita McCoy Gregory in her article "Disney's Second Line: New Orleans, Racial Masquerade, and the Reproduction of Whiteness in The Princess and the Frog," "Tiana spent an inordinate amount of time in her anthropomorphic form and, I would argue, does not really move us beyond the stereotypical image of black women as invisible or as solely attached to labor" (Gregory 433). For a Disney princess, Tiana certainly stands out compared to her predecessors, as not only is she the first princess to willingly work to support herself financially, but she is also the only Disney princess to undergo metamorphosis from human to animal.

Indeed, Tiana's transition from human to frog and the uncertainty of her future is visualized in the animation of the restaurant poster she keeps as a memento and keepsake for her father's memory. Furthermore, it is uncertain what Disney's final intention for Tiana's restaurant is. While it could be a way to subdue audience expectations of whether Tiana will succeed in her task, it could also be an editorial mistake, as we see several shots with Tiana's poster reading "Tiana's place" (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:26:37) and not just "Tiana's", as shown in the prelude of the movie. The lack of final commitment to Tiana's restaurant shows a lack of care in the film's final editing and a disregard for Tiana's ambition. As this thesis later discusses the movie's message that money cannot buy you happiness, it is interesting how Disney facilitates Tiana's early and implicit perception as indecisive regarding her future. By titling her restaurant "Tiana's" and later "Tiana's Place", it is uncertain what sort of establishment she wants to run, thus rendering Tiana frivolous with her future and her commitment to sustain herself, her mother, and their community. Unlike other Disney princesses, Tiana was not destined to become a princess.

According to Gregory, Tiana's storyline is second to Charlotte's, as Disney intended for Charlotte to be the princess of the story. "Charlotte performs the role of 'princess', dancing in the arms of Lawrence in blackface, while Tiana is sidelined first as the caterer and then as a frog. [...] Charlotte was the original princess, not Tiana. Tiana only became a princess at the very end after she married the frog/prince" (Gregory 438). With Dr. Facilier's cursed deal placed on Naveen to seek a princess to

marry, which in Facilier's deal is rich heiress Charlotte, Naveen accidentally encounters and kisses Tiana, transforming and cursing her to the form of a frog.

In her article "Scripting the Way for the 21st Century Dinsey Princess in The Princess and the Frog [*sic*]", Kimberly R. Moffitt examines the differences presented through Tiana's blackness and Charlotte's whiteness. When comparing Tiana to previous Disney princesses, Moffitt makes the same observation as previous academics, and the observation this master thesis remarks: Tiana is new and different because she is black and not white.

> It is the embodiment of whiteness that inherently explains the value of these young women [Disney princesses], the expectation of saving them, and then bestowing princess status upon them [...] Unfortunately, Disney still missed the mark by rendering Tiana's Black body and princess status invisible for most of the film (Moffitt 472).

Moffitt explains how Tiana's blackness and her life are new and different from what audiences have previously been exposed to. As previously discussed, Tiana is the first Disney princess to work voluntarily and takes pride in her labor. Disney princesses were previously damsels in distress in need of saving by a man, and by Moffitt's account, Tiana creates a new "'third wave princess narrative'" (472) in which princesses can save themselves without the help of their princes. This could arguably be Disney's expression of third-wave feminist ideology. However, it is curious why they choose Tiana as their frontrunner for this narrative.

Tiana, a black woman in 1920s America, has benefitted from neither the first nor second wave of feminism due to her blackness, certainly with the enforcement of Jim Crow laws in the deep South and the segregation of Whites and coloreds. Thus, Disney uses Tiana as a martyr and front figure for a movement that does not concern or benefit her yet. Though Tiana paves the way for independent princesses who do not need a prince, she does need the prince - or the appointed princess of Mardi Gras, Charlotte - to achieve her dream. Additionally, Tiana only becomes a princess because Charlotte, as a white person with status and Tiana's white friend, allows her the possibility.

Furthermore, Moffitt argues that Tiana's existence as a black woman can only exist in Disney due to Charlotte's presence as a white woman. "This reduces Tiana's blackness. Her race and its nomenclature are secondary in the film, serving to further denigrate Black female bodies" (473). It is curious why Disney chose to place this narrative of metamorphosis on their only visually black princess, certainly in the case of their first black main character. Jennifer L. Barker examines in her article

"Hollywood, Black Animation, and the Problem of Representation in Little Ol' Bosko and The Princess and The Frog" how Tiana's transformation motivates Disney's racial fantasy of equal opportunity. In regards to Tiana's transformation, she remarks:

> From the first few minutes of the movie, much is made of the fact that Tiana is disgusted by frogs, and therein lies the revelation of her deepest fear, a fear that underlines most binary approaches to difference: that she is nothing special. Or if one connects it to Black stereotypes associated with frogs in early animation, the idea that she can only ever be a caricature in the eyes of others (Barker 495).

Barker's interpretation of Tiana's laments about her blackness further emphasizes Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals of Black characters. Furthermore, the racialization between Tiana and Charlotte aids in the perception of Tiana as befitting both the Tragic Mulatto as well as the stereotype of the Mammy, presented by Bogle in his book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An interpretive history of Blacks in American films* (2003).

Bogle presents the Mammy as two-fold: "Mammy is distinguished, however, by her sex and her fierce independence. She is usually big, fat, and cantankerous. [...] Mammy's offshoot is the aunt jemima, sometimes derogatorily referred to as a 'handkerchief head.' Generally, they are sweet, jolly, and good-tempered — a bit more polite than mammy and certainly never as headstrong" (Bogle 9). Secondly, the Tragic Mulatto was an archetype that depicted a biracial woman whose downfall became her blackness. "Usually the mulatto is made likable - even sympathetic (because of her white blood, no doubt) - and the audience believes that the girl's life could have been productive and happy had she not been a 'victim of divided racial inheritance'" (9).

While Tiana is a dark-skinned black woman with both of her parents black, she fits the Tragic Mulatto in terms of how restricted her economic and social status are. Unlike her black peers, Tiana forces herself to work tirelessly, while other black women of her age have the agency and ability to relax and go dancing (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:09:40), a luxury Tiana cannot allow herself. Even Tiana's mother, Eudora, stresses her wish for Tiana to settle down and give her "grandkids" (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:13:51). "In fact, a 1992 statistic reports that Black women were more engaged in the workforce than White women up until mid-1990. As a result, Tiana's Black body is scripted as overtly visible, but in ways that are palatable to Disney's mainstream audiences" (Moffitt 479). The supposed freedom to act at will, which Tiana's black community possesses, is not only historically inaccurate but also reinforces Tiana's helplessness and the accidental placement of her as a black stereotype.

Numbers of characters: 308.402

Additionally, Eudora's encouragement of Tiana's love life is - while well intended but at the expense of Tiana's work life, is another luxury that Tiana and Eudora cannot afford to lose. Thus, black culture and workforce are disnified in *The Princess and The Frog*. Disney allows Tiana's community the privilege to live as their white peers while disallowing Tiana the ability to do the same. Tiana must lead a life of struggle and peril to reach her ambitions, thus underlining the movie's narrative and the perpetual story of the black struggle. Tiana's blackness becomes her tragic flaw and downfall, as Disney not only punishes her for her gullibility when she kisses random, strange frogs but also punishes Tiana for her black body with said transformation. She must stay a frog until a man (Naveen or Dr. Facilier) or a white person (Charlotte) allows her to return to her black body.

As previously stated, Tiana's lack of femininity and sexuality in the said black body allows her placement into the stereotype of the Mammy. While Tiana is neither big-bodied nor aggressively domesticated with household chores and work, she exhibits non-sexual feminine expressions with a focus on nurture and domestic capabilities, like her service jobs as a waitress and cooking skills. Furthermore, she acts as the primary, disciplinary female role in Prince Naveen's journey to learn humility and self-reliance, as she teaches him how to cook (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:56:23). Her hyper independence fuels Naveen to adopt her work ethic, as he says, "I don't know how to do anything" (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:56:51).

Moffitt notices Bogle's stereotypes in *The Princess and The Frog* as well, as she claims that "Black women have historically been scripted as having little value, generally occupying some iteration of the mammy archetype [...]. More specifically, '[B]lack women in animated were limited to the ever-present and almost synonymous mammy, maid, auntie, washerwomen, picaninny or savage'" (Moffitt 475). Her observation of black female bodies aligns with Disney's portrayal of Tiana and her ambitions. While Tiana does not embody traditional traits of the Mammy or the Mulatto, Moffitt does notice stereotypical depictions of black women through the presentation of Tiana. "Interestingly enough, it is in her anthropomorphism that Tiana has an ability to assert herself as a 'strong Black woman' without the negative connotations associated with that familiar trope" (481). Tiana escapes the negative stereotypes of black women by becoming a frog (481). By displacing Tiana from her physical human body, Disney allows Tiana to present herself in a manner removed from prejudiced understandings of black culture.

Returning to Barker, she also remarks that "Tiana's journey is structured in terms of food, frogs, and the negotiation of self and stereotype" (Barker 493), noticing how not only is Tiana placed into archetypes, but so is characters like Mama Odie and her bayou wisdom on how to combat the Shadow Man.

Numbers of characters: 308.402

The Return of the Disnified Gospel Truth

Presented as the antithesis of Dr. Facilier's evil voodoo practice, Mama Odie is the witch doctor living deep in the bayou and off-grid from society. Tiana and Naveen are brought to Mama Odie by Louis the alligator and Ray the firefly, hoping she has wisdom on returning to their human bodies. Disappointingly enough for Tiana and Naveen, Mama Odie presents nothing less than a kind scolding hidden in gospel music.

As Gregory observes, "Disney gifts Mama Odie with 'vision' that transcends color and class" (Gregory 438), thus presenting Disney's colorblind narrative and message through Mama Odie. Though Mama Odie's messaging is colorblind and without any prejudice, she, as a character, presents stereotypical visuals. As Tiana's personality fits the Mammy, so does Mama Odie's body. She is a blind lady with a boisterous personality, befitting her black, caricature-like body. Thus, Mama Odie easily fits the Mammy stereotype. Speaking in AAVE, Mama Odie instantly knows Tiana and Naveen have met Dr. Facilier, and she scolds them like a mother figure, further Mammifying herself and how she takes action and care for the main characters. It is curious why Disney chose to present characters like Dr. Facilier and Mama Odie, as they avoided stereotypes with the main character Tiana yet actively pursued them in subsidiary characters.

Perhaps the explicit placement of Mama Odie as a Mammy allows Disney to direct their colorblind message that neither riches nor race should affect how you live your life. As Gregory notices, "Mama Odie's bathtub gumbo represents the portal through which Tiana and Naveen see how they can reclaim their humanity" (439), yet it is curious how Mama Odie decides upon herself to comment on their lifestyle. Indeed, Louis believes her to be intelligent and dependable, yet Mama Odie could not possibly understand the difficult positions that neither Tiana nor Naveen find themselves in. As Mama Odie lives off-grid in the bayou, surely, she feels no effect of the Jim Crow south she resides in. With animals as her companions and aided with her physical limitations in eyesight, Mama Odie is unaffected by the intense workload black women had in the 1920s. This makes her the perfect character for Disney to attempt a disnification of the message that money cannot buy you happiness and that love conquers all. Likewise, it also makes her the worst character to attempt this message, as Mama Odie cannot understand Tiana or Naveen's struggles.

Indeed, if Disney wanted to present a black struggle film, why focus on Tiana and her black ambition to deny her the ability for Disney magic in the form of independence beyond the Jim Crow South under the guise that she must "Dig a Little Deeper" (*The Princess and The Frog* 1:03:32 - 1:03:34). Instead, Disney presents a half attempt at an expression of black excellence with the first black main character and black princess under the guise that hard work does not pay off, and that

someone else - either a man or a white woman - must aid you in your quest for excellence, so long as you surpass your dependency on materiality. In a colorblind Disney narrative like *The Princess and The Frog*, love is enough to prosper. This begs the question if Disney has continued this idea that blackness cannot exist without whiteness as its counterpart.

Pixar's *Soul* (2020)

Since *The Princess and the Frog*, there has not been a black lead character in Disney movies until the newest release, *Soul*. Strikingly black in dark skin, tight curly hair, and Afro-ethnic features like a strong nose and jaw, Joe is a remarkably black body in a white-centric Disney repertoire, which makes him an interesting case study, as he does not keep the opportunity to stay in his black body. This analysis will focus on the racialization of bodies and racialized anthropomorphism seen in Disney's *Soul* and how the existence of character 22 trivializes Disney's attempt at black inclusivity.

Joe in *Soul*

Marking Joe as one of the few older protagonists in Disney history, it is interesting how Joe finds himself as a crosswalk in his life at this stage. Joe works as a part-time music teacher, and the school offers him a full-time position with benefits such as a pension and medical insurance.

Joe is torn between a financially stable career exchange for his uncertain future as a jazz musician (*Soul* 0:03:31). He even delivers the news of his new employment to his mother, Libba. She is thrilled about this new opportunity and change of lifestyle for him. "After all these years, my prayers have been answered. A full-time job [...] You're going to tell them yes, right? [...] Joey we didn't struggle giving you an education so you could be a middle-aged man washing your underwear in my shop" (*Soul* 0:03:35 - 0:04:00). Libba's lament on Joe's insincere effort to support himself and create a stable life for himself makes for an exciting adult character in Disney, as we have previously followed stories of adolescent characters in search for themselves. In *Soul*, we follow Joe's journey to self-acceptance and self-fulfillment. Libba's comments leave Joe with no option but to say yes to the job. This also emphasizes their economic situation.

Joe's mother owns an independent tailor shop, and she explains how "most times, this shop is what paid the bills. So when I'm gone, who's gonna pay yours?" (*Soul* 1:03:03 - 1:03:08), indicating that Joe's pay from his part-time job does not cover his bills and his mother's shop supports him financially. He dreams of becoming a jazz musician and gets the opportunity of his lifetime to audition at the jazz club for the famous jazz musician Dorothea Williams. Initially reluctant, she is impressed with his jazz performance and offers him to play for her opening at her show which he accepts.

Because of his excitement and distraction, Joe does not look at his surroundings and falls into a utility hole and dies. He ends in "the Great Before", a place for souls that have yet to exist in the mortal world and mortal bodies. Joe, alongside the other souls, is transformed into a blue soul. He becomes a mentor for another soul named 22, who sees no good on Earth and refuses to cross into the mortal world. Therefore, his job is to make 22 more optimistic about Earth and living. They end up returning to Earth with 22 entering Joe's coma-ridden body, and Joe enters the body of an anthropomorphic cat, and Joe must convince 22 to leave his body and lead her own life in order for himself to return and fulfill his lifelong dream of music.

Joe's confusion and rejection of his mortality are arguably due to his sudden death, as he was prepared for his grand moment of success and not his untimely death. Regarding Disney and the Disney magic usually felt in their cinematic feature films, *Soul* leaves plenty to the imagination of how the soul system works, how "the Great Before" has come to exist, and why Joe has not entered the afterlife. First, as Joe dies, he lands on a white escalator transporting him to a great bright light, which Joe runs from to escape what is presumably the afterlife. Then, Joe falls into a grand, translucent grass plane and meets an orderly in the form of a scribble-like stick figure that describes itself as: "I am the coming together of all quantizised fields of the universe. Appearing in a form your feeble human brain can comprehend. You can call me Jerry" (*Soul* 0:13:27 - 0:13:36). Jerry explains to Joe that "the Great Before", the place he has entered, is a plane of pre-existence for souls that have yet to earn their "Earth pass" to live a mortal life. In reality, this pre-existence is a factory for souls and how these factories pick, produce and deliver these personalities to Earth once they have earned their Earth pass.

Like the audience, Joe has questions on how their system works, to which Jerry explains it is a "You seminar". By calling the pre-existence presented in *Soul* a seminar, Jerry suggests that participating is elective, though the character and soul still pending an Earth pass, 22, suggests otherwise. Joe, wanting to escape "the Great Before" and return to his mortal life, is presented with two choices by Jerry: Become a mentor for souls or return to the escalator leading to the great bright light. Joe reluctantly agrees and is ultimately matched with 22, a pessimistic soul that has seen several mentors and failed to produce working Earth passes. Thus "the Great Before" becomes a place of purgatory existence for Joe, "Your body is in a holding pattern." (*Soul* 0:14:16), as his mission to either pass on or return to his life is determined by 22's acquirement of an Earth pass, all of which Joe is responsible.

The acquirement of an Earth pass is interesting in itself, as the You seminar is, as suggested by Jerry, a seminar. Seminars are elective courses. However, the counselors strongly encourage that 22 completes the seminar, whichever means and mentors are necessary. Joe, the protagonist, is reduced to the role of a helper for 22, as he must find 22's spark. 22 even complains to Joe how:

> "I've had thousands of mentors who failed and now hate me. Mother Theresa - "I have compassion for every soul. Except you. I don't like you." - Copernicus - "The world does not revolve around you, 22!" - Muhammad Ali - "You are the greatest pain in the butt." - Marie Antoinette - "Nobody can help you! Nobody!" - Thanks, but no thanks, Doc. I already know everything about Earth, and it's not worth the trouble" (*Soul* 0:22:00 - 0:22:22)

While Joe has ulterior motives with 22's acquirement of the Earth pass, he does show interest in her and decides to aid her in the search for her spark. Thus, Joe's role as the helper in 22's quest reduces him to the unfortunate literary trope of "The Magical Negro", enforcing Joe's blackness and black struggle even in his non-mortal body.

Encoding Film Blackness in *Soul*

Matthew W. Hughey navigates archetypes given to black characters in literature, certainly the unfortunate role of the self-sacrificing black helper, the "Magical Negro". In his article "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films", Hughey believes black stereotypes have removed themselves from Donald Bogle's archetypes like the Tom, the Coon, the Mammy, and the Black Buck, thus introducing the Hollywood appropriate "Magical Negro".

> The MN has become a stock character that often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into completent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation (Hughey 544).

Joe's fateful return to mortality depends on 22's acceptance and cooperation in her search for her spark and her Earth pass, thus reducing Joe's life and existence as a subsidiary to a white character like 22. While 22 has yet to be born into a physical form, she has already achieved white privilege in allowing her to possess Joe's body, lead Joe's life, and decide for herself whether she will give back to Joe his bodily agency. It is interesting how Disney removes Joe from the role of the protagonist, and the narrative of Joe's climb to musical success suddenly changes to 22's search for meaning in life. 22 learns the purpose of life at the expense of Joe's life and bodily autonomy, thus reducing his body and 22's possession of said body to a form of blackface and the act of minstrelsy.

Regarding Joe's body, his black body is removed from the screen and changed to the form of an anthropomorphic blue soul with markers of ethnic features like the bridge of his nose, a large mouth,

brown eyes, and thick eyebrows. Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo and Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo claim this type of Disney accident to be a racialized anthropomorphism in their article "'Look Out New World, Here We Come?' Race, racialization and sexuality in Four Children's Animated Films by Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks". Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo look at how *Shark Tale* (2004) is an example of racialized anthropomorphism, as they note that the main character Oscar appears as a "'little hustler fish,' speaks in a clearly 'Black' American accent and lives in the ghetto part (South side) of the reef. His blackness is not only found in his accent and place of residence but also in his mannerisms, behavior, and jewelry [...] which are highly racialized" (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo 170). Even though they examine the racialized anthropomorphism in *Shark Tale* (2004), we see the resemblance of the same racialized features in our selected movie, *Soul.*

While Joe is a visually black man in a black body, he maintains his blackness in his anthropomorphic form not only through ethnic features but through his love for jazz music. Joe tells 22 that his dream of becoming a jazz musician stems from his father's former job as a jazz musician and "Black improvisational music. It's one of our great contributions to Americans culture" (*Soul* 0:23:44 - 0:23:48). As Joe's soul is transported to the therapy cat in his body's bed, suggesting the cat is either dead or soulless, and 22 enters Joe's body, all visual traces of Joe's blackness are diminished and reduced to his voice and his ambition for jazz music.

While it may not be intentional, Disney expresses blackface and minstrelsy through 22's possession of Joe's body. Voiced by white American Tina Fey, 22 is automatically associated with whiteness, despite not being born into a body with an ethnic expression. Thus 22's interactions with Joe's body become an interesting case of minstrelsy. Minstrelsy was a theatrical form of satire based on black living and struggles produced and acted out by white actors (Bogle 25), and with 22 alarmingly pronouncing her failure to acquire the "Body Test Drive, like, 436 times" (*Soul* 0:38:06 - 0:38:09), 22 moves Joe's body in an uncontrollable, exaggerated manner similar to the minstrel performer. With Joe in the body of a cat, 22's movement of Joe's body becomes caricaturist as we observe them from a worm's eye view. Joe's body, no longer strong and round and able, is now tall and lanky and whimsical; as 22 faceplants onto chairs (*Soul* 0:38:28 - 0:38:30), she moves Joe's "meat sticks" (*Soul* 0:37:52) with flappy, disgusted movements, and she trips over Joe's feet, thus illustrating the clumsiness and uselessness of the black body displayed by the white performer. Ultimately, 22 claims Joe's blackness as her own, thus eliminating the opportunity for Disney to produce and represent authentic Afro-American culture. The article "Pixar's film full of "Soul" demonstrates the same issue with the lack of blackness in *Soul*.

Numbers of characters: 308.402

> When Pixar first promoted the film, the premise drew criticism for its portrayal of a black character as a nonhuman. The context behind this is the frustration that a film with black characters will not even prioritize their blackness. Instead, the film reduces them to nonhuman characters and takes away the focus of their black identities ("Pixar's Film full of "Soul" 1).

Joe is allowed for a subtotal of 9 minutes to live his own black life in his black body before his body is surrendered to "the Great Beyond" and accidentally passed onto 22 for her to subjugate, and Joe's excitement for the life he has led inspires 22, ultimately deciding to remain in Joe's body without his consent.

Throughout the movie, we do not get the opportunity to see an accurate representation of black culture through our protagonist, but rather in Joe's lessons to 22 on life and pleasure and his actions as 22's spiritual guide. Hughey believes that the endless casting choice of supernational entities given to black actors ultimately removes the historical implication of black identity to make black bodies more viewer friendly. "On the one hand, this basic narrative appeals to feelings among whites and blacks alike that there can be a racial reconciliation and accord. [...] On the other hand, these films resonate with a racial crisis in the United States so unpleasant that it must be replaced by fantastical stories of magic" (Hughey 550). Brittani Telfair criticizes in her article "Pixar's 'Soul' cannot make up for what it lacks" Disney and their choice to yet again remove a black person from their black body, explaining that she "was more disturbed than amused, as it felt like the film's creators were urging audiences to engage in colorblindness and forget that Joe was Black, ensuring that he would not be found offensive or threatening by a broader demographic" (Telfair 1).

Interestingly, while Joe is non-threatening, Disney expresses that not all black men are as digestible as Joe, with Terry's accidental capture of Joe's friend Paul and Terry's frightening coercion of Paul. "No harm, no foul. Oh, boy. Look, uh, fella. There's no reason we can't keep this little incident between us, eh? Mistakes happen. And, uh, it's not your time. Unless you keep eating those processed foods, am I right?" (*Soul* 0:56:36 - 0:56:50). Terry's attempt to silence a quivering Paul is, as Telfair interprets eerily similar to an incident of racial profiling (Telfair 1). Paul is captured in Joe's stead, and before Terry can doublecheck whom he has in his possession, he berates Paul the same way he would have Joe, thus falsely incriminating a black man for another black man's actions. Furthermore, Terry perpetuates the stereotype and prejudice that black people only eat processed foods as he assesses Paul's grocery bag. Though Paul's shopping could have merely been one instance of grocery shopping and not Paul's entire meal plan, Disney implicitly perpetuates the perception of black financial inequality in not only Joe's lack of financial stability but in Paul's choice to eat processed foods, of which is usually associated with black foods due to low incomes.

Numbers of characters: 308.402

This is not the only example of Disney's lack of knowledge of black culture and living, as 22 herself expresses obliviousness to the importance of black music like jazz. Finally adjusting to another person's body, 22 drums on the railing of a bridge, proudly proclaiming, "Hey! I made a song. I'm jazzing." (*Soul* 0:57:36). Jazz and "jazzing" are reduced to making sound, or ultimately noise, thus implying jazz is not enjoyable for the majority, as it is made of sound and not melodies like Joe believes. Additionally, Joe believes his spark is his love for music, specifically jazz, which reduces black music and enjoyment of music to a quirk rather than a real music genre or career path. This begs the question of why Joe's ambition and Joe's story in *Soul* are reduced to a movie on Joe's black struggle.

While Disney rewards Tiana's ambition for financial independence with a marriage proposal and the ability to move social classes in a time unsuitable for black ambition, they punish 21st-century Joe for his ambition to lead the life of a musician. His mother guilts him to pursue a career path that removes him from his mother's economic care while rendering himself tied to a job he does not dream of. While it seems Joe likes teaching and enjoys the excitement some students show in music (*Soul* 0:01:33 - 0:01:38), Joe wishes he could pursue that excitement for himself, despite not being introduced to many opportunities to do so. This is interesting, as Disney is associated with Disney magic and the ability to make all your dreams come true, so why can Joe not chase his own dreams? Disney, or rather Pixar, is not above life-changing moments for older characters, as seen in Pixar's *The Incredibles* (2004) with Bob Parr's new job opportunity (*The Incredibles* 0:34:53) and the 2009 release of Pixar's *Up's* Carl's call to the adventure of a lifetime (*Up* 0:22:49). This thesis argues that these characters are given their opportunity because of their white bodies, while Joe's black body is what hinders him from the path to success, thus putting Soul in the narrative of a black struggle film.

Joe struggles to seek financial stability and musical success while maintaining his black identity in life and the afterlife. Even so, 22 and her white woman's voice cannot understand the black experience and why Joe and other black characters settle for a life of mediocracy. As 22 puppeteers Joe's body to the barbershop, another visible and gentrified example of black culture, she starts a monologue on the meaning of life, which surprises and inspires the other black patrons in the salon. They even comment on 22/Joe's newfound philosophy, saying they never knew he had such an "interesting education" (*Soul* 0:53:42 - 0:53:46). They merely considered him a music teacher with no more sustenance to him. This underlines how Joe's unambitious lifestyle perpetuates modern black struggles, rendering them mediocre and unimportant.

Even Joe's barber, Dez, has been appointed a life of the settlement, as he wanted to pursue the career of a veterinarian after his military service. However, due to familial distress with his daughter's sickness, he found barber school to be cheaper and more accessible (54:10). When questioning if Dez

feels unfulfilled, he answers, “I’m happy as a clam, my man. Not everyone can be Charles Drew inventing blood transfusions” (*Soul* 0:54:22 - 0:54:26). 22 cannot comprehend this mentality, thus emphasizing her own white privilege, as she observes Joe, Dez, and the other black patrons. Even as Paul ridicules Joe’s dreams, 22 in Joe’s body says: “He’s just criticizing me to cover up the pain of his own failed dreams” (*Soul* 0:54:40 - 0:54:53), further emphasizing how blacks cannot succeed in following their dreams and must lead a life of compromise.

As 22 previously mentioned to Joe, she was content living in “the Great Before” with no actual living experience or comprehension of mortality, ultimately leaving her unsympathetic to Joe’s struggles and how he could not pursue his dreams, even if he wanted to. Only when Joe has sacrificed his own life and body for 22’s Earth pass can 22 finally live her own, and Joe can return to his own body. Thus, Joe finishes his role as the MN (c.f. p. 83) in his sacrifice for the personal gain of the white protagonist, though he does not understand how this happened and why. Jerry answers Joe with “A spark isn’t a person’s purpose” (*Soul* 1:11:55 - 1:11:57), thus rendering Joe’s ambition unimportant for his life purpose. This also implies that Joe reduces his own personality to his love for music, whereas Jerry believes the search for mortal meaning is basic human comprehension, placing his celestial being and understanding superior to mortals. Furthermore, this perpetuates the belief that black ambition is unrealistic, as Joe’s quest for success and individuality is irrelevant to a successful life.

Through the counselors, Disney perpetuates that ambition, fame, and success are not life-driven forces a person should follow, as a black person in the United States. Joe returns to Earth in an attempt to live his dream, and he finds it unfulfilling even after he has dreamt of it for so long. Dorothea Williams, his idol, delivers a cryptic message similar to what the patrons in the barbershop and the counselors Jerry say: You can find enjoyment in life without a greater purpose or ambition. However, this begs the question of why black characters cannot seek success in the same way a white character can.

Soul could have presented a narrative on black excellence. Instead of responding to criticism Disney received for *The Princess and The Frog* on the colorblind narrative presented in a black body, Disney managed to produce yet again a film expressing colorblind ideology in how Joe could live in a white body and still lead the same lifestyle he is presented with in *Soul*. Thus Disney underlines how black ambition is unattainable if not given the opportunity by whites. Joe’s blackness is easily removed from the narrative, as its sole purpose is to further 22’s quest for purpose and not for Joe’s own personal story and gain. Instead, Joe’s blackness becomes his downfall when it should have been his success and driving force. To Joe, his existence becomes irrelevant until he dies, as he believes his life only started when he was allowed to play with Dorothea Williams. Instead of Joe sacrificing his soul and

mortality for an unborn person, Disney could have empowered his blackness and black body by presenting him with equal opportunity to chase his dreams and become a musical figure, should they want to. Instead, they revert to previous depictions of lackluster black representation with black bodies anthropomorphized in animal and celestial forms, thus enforcing the colorblind ideology and disnified message that any story and struggle apply to any person, regardless of ethnicity.

Black Representation Matters

As Bogle explains the appearance of the character trope "The Buck" (Bogle 13), he relates the trope's creation to the release of the controversial film *The Birth of a Nation*, a film that garnered extensive criticism of its portrayal of black people and the civil war in the US. The NAACP hoped for such a film to be the last Hollywood would see of these harmful portrayals of blacks (Bogle 15). This was not the case, as Walt Disney Company contributed to the minstrel scene barely two decades later with *Mickey's Mellerdrama* (c.f. p. 9).

The cartoon *Mickey's Mellerdrama* could be argued as a piece of fiction that criticizes the minstrel scene, as it depicts Mickey's absurd methods of adorning blackface with dynamite and other messy articles to mimic dark skin, as well as the audience's displeasure of the show. However, Disney's association with controversial black portrayals allows for a pattern established from early Disney inventions and even their 21st-century filmmaking that suggests otherwise. As we are not black, we cannot position our understanding of the black experience as blacks can. Therefore, our interpretation of Gillespie's example on *Coonskin* (c.f. p. 12) extends itself insofar as we can apply the same ideology of the racial grotesque to *The Princess & The Frog* and *Soul* with their minimization of black movies into non-human forms.

In our previous section, we establish the transformation of both black main characters, Tiana and Joe, into non-human bodies on account of the non-black character's intervention. This transformation is what Gillespie refers to as an act of the racial grotesque. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's observations on the grotesque, Gillespie comments: "'The grotesque image *reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming*'" (Gillespie 34). Regarding *Coonskin*, Gillespie believes such filmmaking produces a paradoxical relationship for the viewer regarding their perception of human and human, in which racial bodies are presented as overtly exaggerated stereotypes (34) that border on non-human forms.

In the case of *Soul's* Joe, Disney produces an image of the racial grotesque in their untimely and quick death of Joe in the first 9 minutes of the film, thus rendering his adult black body into the smaller lifeform of an anthropomorphized soul. The same image of the racial grotesque is reproduced

and reanimated in 22's possession and puppeteering of Joe's body. As previously mentioned, we see 22's movement of Joe's body as puppeteering and minstrelsy, both in how she has failed her course on human body movement and her white voice behind the black body. Disney made 22's movements comical in how 22, previously accustomed to her smaller non-human form, now must move a large, adult man's body without what is essentially her driver's license.

The requirement for souls to pass a course on body movements before they can enter bodies suggests that bodies are vehicles, and this suggests that 22 and the unborn souls comprise human bodies to superficial vessels that can be maneuvered at will. By commandeering Joe's black body, 22 makes a spectacle of not just her act of blackface and minstrelsy, but she and Disney display an image of the racial grotesque in the denigrative manner Joe's body is taken from him and his soul misplaced in the hospital's therapy cat. Similar expressions of the racial grotesque are evident in *The Princess & The Frog* in not just Tiana's transformation into a frog, but the character Dr. Facilier is problematic in itself on both a cultural level and a visual.

The villain of *The Princess & The Frog* is a witch doctor nicknamed "The Shadow Man" who goes by the name Dr. Facilier. Elizabeth Pérez explains the conceptualization of Facilier's background and visuals, concluding Facilier's origins to be of Haitian superstition and culture. In her examination, she quotes interviews from director Ron Clemens, who called for casting on the character "'Dr Duvalier'. 'A 30-40 year old Voodoo magician/fortune teller. African American. Charming, charismatic, smooth and a [*sic*] sinister bad guy. Theatrical and grandiose. Dialect: Elegant, possibly New Orleans Creole'" (Pérez 59). Clemens initially named Facilier Duvalier. However, due to intense criticism regarding similarities to the Haitian dictator Duvalier, Clemens changed Facilier's name but kept the Haitian inspiration. Claiming Facilier is based on the New Orleans "'Bokur", Clemens explained: "'These are loners who've broken away from the Voodoo religions, made pacts with dark Voodoo spirits and sell magic for money. As Ava Kay told us 'these spells almost always backfire, as easy answers are really no answers at all'" (60). As to who Ava Kay is, Perez discovered Ava Kay Jones to be the inspiration for the character Mama Odie and one of the key contributors to their ethnographic research for the movie (58). Jones is an ordained African American priestess who practices Voodoo, a religion completely different from the magic used by Dr. Facilier. Jones refers to that as "Hoodoo", a practice intended to hurt and cheat people under the guise of magic (64).

To take La Bouff's fortune and power for himself, Facilier cheats Naveen and his companion Lawrence to do his bidding to achieve his objective. To underline the severity of Facilier's powers, Disney provided him with menacing, talking totems and a shadow that serves as Facilier's doppelganger. His appearance is similar to the Haitian demon Bawon Samedi (Daniels, "Bawon Samedi"), though his body movements and lanky body are reminiscent of the Jim Crow posters and depictions

of black bodies on said posters. Facilier's presence and manipulation of not only his body but of Tiana's black body serve as an expression of the racial grotesque. As non-Haitian and non-African audiences are not necessarily familiar with the distinction between hoodoo and Voodoo, we are oblivious to the severity of Facilier's abilities, certainly with the presentation of voodoo priestess Mama Odie.

Though Perez examines the correct practice of Voodoo through Jones' clarifications, this is not information easily accessible to the ordinary viewer of the movie. The practice of African religion in the demonized version of Voodoo further emphasizes the expression of the racial grotesque in Facilier. Not only is Facilier a black man who sold his soul in exchange for powers delivered from higher demonic powers (*The Princess and The Frog* 1:21:04), but he is also a gangly-looking black man whose body language and movements are overtly exaggerated and animated, thus rendering him a spectacle aside from his dark magical abilities. This spectacle is transferred onto Tiana's unknowing self through the deal Facilier makes with Naveen, thus adding Tiana's transformed body to the racially grotesque image of the non-human body Tiana finds herself. As Tiana's body is already racialized in the proportional differences in her and Charlotte's younger bodies, she is further racialized and exaggerated in her metamorphosis into a frog. Not only is Tiana anthropomorphized as a talking frog, but Disney defies biology in the proportionate differences between Tiana and Naveen in frog form.

According to an animal study by Renato C. Nali et al., female frogs are by 90% typically larger than male frogs across different species (Nali et al. 728). Furthermore, Disney changed Tiana's color scheme from her darker-than-Naveen's skin to a lighter hue on her frog skin. Disney produces an example of crude anthropomorphism through Tiana and Naveen by coloring Tiana lighter than Naveen and physically altering the frog's biology to emphasize the gendered differences between the frogs. Naveen's face is larger and rounder, similar to his human facial structures, whereas Tiana's shrunk and lost any identifying features of her human facial structure. Additionally, Disney displays Tiana's frog body in what is similar to the minstrelsy shown by 22 in Joe's body, as Tiana moves her frog body in lanky, uncontrollable movements (*The Princess and The Frog* 0:29:57). While this comes across initially innocent, as human-born Tiana would naturally not know how to move a frog's body, it expresses exaggerated movements similar to the minstrelsy. Thus Tiana's frog body and how she learns to control, adapt and accept the non-human parts of her new form becomes an expression of racial grotesque.

While we can sympathize with the intention to use animals in children's literature, we are mindful of the possible consequences an excessive use of anthropomorphic imagery could result in. R. C. DoRozario suggests in her article "The Consequences of Disney Anthropomorphism: Animated Hyperenvironmental Stakes in Disney Entertainment" that Disney blurs the lines between nature and

culture with their animation of talking animals and plants, thus producing a hyperreal world perception (DoRozario 51). By removing Tiana, Naveen, and Joe from their human bodies and into non-human bodies, Disney not only displaces ethnic bodies into anthropomorphic bodies but also perpetuates the continuous displacement of ethnic bodies in their natural bodies. While they did not unzip their black skin like in *Coonskin* (Gillespie 28), Disney conned Tiana into her transformation into a frog while purposefully murdering Joe and removing him from the world of the living. This brings the question of whether *The Princess & The Frog* and *Soul* represent the black experience and are fit to be examined under film theoretical approaches like Film Blackness.

As Gillespie suggests, blackness and Film Blackness are subjective in how the success of a black film and the perception of Film Blackness bases itself on the viewer's knowledge of the black experience. As non-black women of color, we cannot possibly understand the black experience, but we observe inconsistencies in Disney's attempts to portray an authentic story of a black person. As Perez implies, Disney went to significant measures for their focus groups and gathering of information for the production of *The Princess & The Frog,* the same as Charles Solomon's article for the New York Times suggests Disney underwent for *Soul*.

According to Solomon, through an interview with director Pete Docter and co-director Kemp Powers, Docter worked on *Soul* for two years before he partnered with black co-director Powers. "'We wanted somebody who could speak authentically about this character and bring some depth to him'" (Solomon, "'Soul' Features Pixar's First Black Lead Character. Here's How It Happened"). Additionally, Powers explains that his initial contract with Disney was mere 12 weeks, but Docter extended his work to a higher position in co-direction. On the importance of black representation, Powers said to Solomon: "'Some people might relish the idea of saying they speak for Black people, Black Americans, whatever: I am not one of those people'" (Solomon, "'Soul' Features Pixar's First Black Lead Character. Here's How It Happened"), ending his statement that while he knows his position as a Black man, he only speaks for himself and his own experience. This refers back to Gillespie's Film Blackness and how each black experience is subjective to one's life or understanding of such a life.

Interestingly, Docter sought Powers for the consultation on authenticity only years later, when he, as a white director, had already started the work on a film based on a black man and his black experience. While Docter intended for *Soul* to be authentic and representative, even in the US casting call of black actor Jamie Foxx, the same courtesy could not be extended to several European translations and casting calls for *Soul*. The New York Times writer Lisa Abend notices the critical decision for the Danish casting call to finally land on white actor Nikolaj Lie Kaas, despite the active decision to cast black actors as minor roles for the same movie (Abend, "Pixar's 'Soul' Has a Black Hero. In Denmark, a White Actor Dubs the Voice."). Regarding the Danish response to the casting call, Abend

refers to Professor Mira Skadegaard of Aalborg University, who claims there is a history of denial regarding structural racism in Denmark. "'We don't really understand this as a critique of institutions and structures; we see it as a critique of who we are'" (Abend, "Pixar's 'Soul' Has a Black Hero. In Denmark, a White Actor Dubs the Voice."). Furthermore, Abend discovered that the German casting call for Joe went to a white actor, while the casting call for the minor character Paul went to German-resident Afro-Japanese actor. The fact that Disney gives agency and the opportunity for European cast and franchises to allow non-black actors to voice black characters minimizes the seemingly great interest Disney claims to show in their effort to include more diversity.

As we watch the post-credit dedications to the Danish voices on Disney+ (*Soul* 1:41:08), we notice the casting call for Danish-voiced Paul went to Black actor Remee Jackman, Dez by Black rapper Al Agami, and Curly played by Black actor Melvin Kakooza. The Danish cast for Disney's *Soul* made the presence of black actors evident in the cast list, yet they provided major roles for white actors under the guise that the "best actor" got the job rather than provide opportunities to represent an authentic black person to the black actors cast in minor roles. In fact, Disney did cast a black actress - Nellie Ettison - to play adult Tiana (*The Princess and The Frog* 1:37:28), and the Danish casting calls have previously gone to extraordinary measures to find breakout roles and debuts for actors and actresses for big feature films like Disney's *Moana* and the casting or Clara Rugaard-Larsen as Moana's voice (*Moana*, 1:47:31). Surely, Disney could call for an open casting for the role of Joe or provide the role to already age-appropriate actor Remee Jackman instead of his minor role in Paul, rather than the approval of white actors like Nikolaj Lie Kaas. By allowing European casting to land non-black actors for major roles, Disney minimizes their appeal to overseas audiences, as the lack of accurate representation transcends from the picture to the cast. If movies like *The Princess & The Frog* and *Soul* lose their appeal due to such measures, surely the authenticity and feel of a black movie would be removable as well.

Despite the innate tendency to gravitate towards Disney movies and their appealing nature, both *The Princess & The Frog* and *Soul* leave much to be desired regarding structural elements like plot and the possibilities within the story world. While *The Princess & The Frog* was critically acclaimed, the plot is unfeasible at most, as Disney magically produces and provides the ability and possibility for Tiana to become a restaurateur in 1920s America. At this time, she might have been able to keep a black shop that only serves black customers due to segregation laws and customs. Disney yet again disnifies Tiana's circumstances and provides her the magical opportunity to transcend class and race in a society where she would not be able to, no matter the financial capabilities provided to her in matrimony. Despite the historical inaccuracy, *The Princess & The Frog* provides more substance

and realistic images of black culture by including Creole culture, cooking, and Afrocentric religion in Voodoo.

In contrast, *Soul* commodifies the black body and reduces Joe's appearance and existence to a jazz musician who must sacrifice his body to mentor an unborn white soul. Joe's blackness is reduced to symbols like the black barber, the significance of jazz, his mother's complaints of his irresponsibility even in adulthood, and the body he inhabits. We concluded that Joe's story could be removed from his blackness, whereas Tiana's cannot, as her story is provided to her because of her blackness. Though Tiana is punished for her blackness, as she is transformed into a frog, she is also rewarded with riches through matrimony and provided a better standing in society than she would have initially been given.

While Gillespie does argue that a black film should not necessarily be good or be perceived as authentic in order to be a black film (c.f. p. 11), we believe Disney, as a children's medium, should present stories that remove themselves from stereotypical imagery and racist manipulation of black bodies through blackfaced voice-acting, as well as the conscious decision to promote the first black princess in her human form, when in fact she is mainly present in her frog form. When comparing both movies, *Soul* leaves much to be desired regarding black culture and the black experience. In contrast, The *Princess & The Frog* attempts a larger display of the diversity found in New Orleans by including unfortunate flaws like halved truths on Haitian culture and religion and the problematic use of anthropomorphism on Disney's first and only black princess.

Discussion

Men are from Pixar, and Women are from Disney

Our analysis showed clear differences in the ethnic representations Disney has produced, certainly regarding male and female leads and main characters. This brings to our final research question of whether Disney can provide sufficient representation, despite multiple evidence of racial bias. With theories like Gillespie's Film Blackness, Said's Orientalism and Veracini's understanding of European settler colonialism, and, finally, Hixon's American settler colonialism, Disney's portrayal of ethnic bodies and their problematic themes and motifs are brought to scholarly attention through critical, comparative readings like Emilie Snedevig Hoffmann's.

In her article "Diversity Dissected: Intersectional Socialization in Disney's *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, and *The Princess and the Frog*", Hoffmann discusses the socialization of racial discourses associated with Disney and their ethnically diverse princess cast. Hoffmann investigates what she defines as socialization through the accessibility and understanding of Disney narratives based on an intersectional

representation of ethnic female characters for a white audience. Hoffmann compares characters like Tiana, Jasmine, and Mulan to how they are written to fit the princess narrative. However, they come across as vastly different, with one more serious and ambitious than the other. According to Hoffmann, "Disney socializes their young target audience in accordance with the values of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and white privilege in a racialized manner that conveys differing messages for different intersectional groups of children" (Hoffmann 61). This point is made evident through the preceded findings in our selected movies.

Based on four of the six movies chosen for our analysis, we conclude that there is a pattern in the production and reproduction of Disney princess narratives and female leads. Hoffman notices this development from previous white princesses placed in damsel-in-distress narratives, referring to academics like Cole Reilly and Annalee R. Ward, with Ward, who explains the newfound origin of this Disney princess story. "Disney 'provides many of the first narratives that children use to learn about the world,' about what is right and wrong and about how one should live. Since, 'animation is not an innocent art form' but 'allow[s] [*sic*] the producers to exercise complete control' over which representations and messages they will contain" (64). Continuing this argument with Reilly's observations, Hoffmann argues that in order to create more dynamic female characters, Disney has evolved from their previous princess constellations with more progressive female characters that inhabit modern feminist values from Western society. Though this may be accurate for some Disney characters, Disney ultimately returns to the narrative that women can only find self-fulfillment in romantic love (64).

To summarize our previous findings, our princesses and female characters are presented as headstrong women with the will to improve their living standards on their journey to self-fulfillment. Tiana, a black woman in 1920's America, is allowed to be an independent restaurateur. Disney graces Tiana with her dream presented to her by a man eligible for marriage, but only after she has succeeded in her task. Despite their ambitions and societal limitations, Disney allows characters like Tiana to exceed the audience's expectations of her time and surroundings.

Differently, characters like Pocahontas, Mulan, and Jasmine are presented with propositions and expectations of marriage, only for them to contest that decision and embark on their journey before they choose to settle down. Pocahontas and Jasmine are placed in similar positions: Their single fathers have decided for their daughters that they are ready for marriage, going as far as to select their potential matches without their consent and involvement. This ultimately leads to both princesses defying their filial expectations of submission and participation in the family line's succession as they fall in love with atypical matches for their time. Princess Jasmine finds a pauper for a husband, while indigenous Pocahontas finds love in a colonizer. In contrast to the former, Mulan accepts her gendered role and expectations for marriage, and she actively seeks a matchmaker, though she is unsuccessful. Instead,

she chooses to go on a journey of self-fulfillment before she settles down for her superior officer, a man who first believed Mulan to be a man due to her cross-dressing war disguise.

Finally, in the case of *Lilo & Stitch* and Lilo's older sister Nani, Nani is presented as a woman with no time for romance, as she has her little sister to care for and to fulfill the task of achieving a job and domestic stability for their family. Though her love interest, David, does provide her with work opportunities and helps care for Lilo when they are together, David is given a submissive and timid expression of masculinity. He lets Nani lead their relationship until the sequel *Lilo & Stitch 2: Stitch Has a Glitch* (2005), where Pleakley teaches David to assert his masculinity in his and Nani's relationship (*Lilo & Stitch 2* 0:16:53).

Male characters like Shang and David open for discussion on how male leads and male counterparts differ from their female leads. Returning to Shang, his characteristics are what one associate with a typical man of his time. He is a man who serves in the army and follows patriarchal expectations of himself, as he fulfills his duty to the imperial army before he is encouraged by the emperor and, by proxy, society to settle with a family. Hoffmann believes that the type of masculinity Shang portrays is significant for Shang to be perceived as:

> [m]ore manly than Mulan so his masculinity is not questioned. For this reason, Shang does not cross-dress in order to save the Emperor. [...] That Ling, Yao, and Chin-Po's cross-dressing is used as comic relief is evident from the humor derived from Yao's comment about whether his dress makes him look fat, his tripping because of it, and them being called 'ugly concubines' (Hoffmann 90)

Through Shang and his subordinates, Hoffmann concludes that non-conforming males and their gender behavior are demonized and valorized in the perception of female inferiority due to patriarchal ideology on gender and sexuality (90). Thus, temporal settings of the Orient present the social constructions that actual displays of manhood are based on the constant adherence to one's masculinity. Indeed, this message is also seen in *Aladdin*, in not only Aladdin as the lead but also side characters like the Sultan, the royal vizir, and villain Jafar.

According to Hoffmann, characters like Jafar and the Sultan are given personalities that reinforce the heterosexuality and masculinity of the main character. In the case of the vizir Jafar, Hoffmann describes his presence as "camp". Hoffmann defines camp as follows: "Camp can be defined as the interplay between incongruous juxtaposition such as feminine-masculine, gay-straight, rich-poor, etc." (80), of which the contrast usually is used for humor purposes. To aid our understanding of the term camp, we turn to UrbanDictionary, which defines camp as: "so bad it's good, except it's gay"

(urmomshotcorn, Urbandictionary.com). This refers to displays of hyperfeminine or hypermasculine visuals like extravagant clothing on well-groomed people or non-heterosexual displays of personality.

Regarding Jafar, Hoffmann sees him as camp due to his highly feminized outer appearance. "Matching 'fashion's current standards of female beauty', he has high cheekbones, plucked eyebrows, and a tall slender boy and looks as if he may be wearing make-up. Furthermore, he is the only important male character in the film to wear robes; even the princess wears pants" (Hoffmann 80). Interestingly, Hoffmann notices the same character composition in the villain Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), thus equating Jafar's outer appearance with a character in drag resembling Maleficent (80). Additionally, Jafar's humor also consists of sarcasm and puns, which according to Hoffmann, is camp humor, as "[c]amp humor laughs at any form of essential thought" (80). Not only is Jafar camp and therefore non-conforming to heteronormativity, but he also actively defies it and tries to deny Aladdin and Jasmine their ability to maintain heteronormative relationships with each other.

Though Jafar insists on Jasmine's hand in marriage to the Sultan, he does not insist due to his romantic interest in Jasmine but rather his devious ambition to gain Sultan's position and power over Agrabah. While he does show a slight interest in captive Jasmine and her red outfit, Jafar restrains himself when he realizes her deception, thus underlining the campy attitude he represents, as he does not succumb to heterosexual attraction and maintains his goals and ambitions to steal the kingdom from the Sultan, another older male that presents as camp while maintaining heteronormative standards.

It is interesting how Hoffmann perceives Jafar, the villain, as flamboyant while stressing the presence of "several homophobic jokes" (80) by the good main characters. Firstly, while Genie could be perceived as camp due to his gender-changing appearance, Genie does encourage the heterosexual coupling of Aladdin and Jasmine, going as far as to joke to Aladdin how he likes him but does not want to pick out furniture with him (*Aladdin* 1:04:33), indicating the idea that two men who shop for their shared living space are ludicrous. Furthermore, the Sultan jokes at Aladdin's expense that he is grateful Aladdin saved him, but he would not express gratitude with kisses and even shakes his head at the thought (*Aladdin* 1:06:30).

The use of such humor seems innocent at first glance, though with the villainization of Jafar's flamboyant appearance, it comes across as homophobic. Not only does it reinforce the Orientalist perception of Agrabah and its firm adherence to patriarchy and heterosexuality, but it also aids in presenting Aladdin as a rulebreaker for his society and presents him as not only Westernized but also modern and comfortable with his sexuality. As *Aladdin* is a musical, Aladdin moves and dances like he performs a theatrical number in his solo song "One Step Ahead". He is slender and moves his body in swift motions that starkly differ from a character like Shang, a man with a more robust and square

body shape. Furthermore, Aladdin's personality and comfortability with his masculinity are also presented as fluid, in how he sympathizes with Jasmine's struggle to fit societal expectations for women while displaying a borderline homoerotic friendship with Genie with their level of physical affection and admiration towards one another.

Hoffmann argues that Aladdin is both feminist and antifeminist due to this behavior, certainly when he "also displays questionable behavior such as repeatedly lying to Jasmine and invading her personal space. Furthermore, he perpetuates patriarchal discourses of female objectification when he tells Jasmine 'You aren't just some prize to be won'. By saying 'just', Aladdin is essentially saying that women are, at least partially, prizes to be won" (Hoffmann 80), which Hoffmann perceives to be antifeminist. Arguably, this point comes down to semantics, as Hoffmann focuses on Aladdin's use of "just" in how women are indeed prizes while also more than that. If Hoffmann focused on Aladdin's use of "you" in his direct address to Jasmine, the interpretation would point to how Aladdin would single out Jasmine and how any other women would be "just a prize", but Jasmine would be so much more than that, undoubtedly due to her princess status and riches. If Aladdin was antifeminist, he would have taken his last wish from Genie and given himself a royal status, so he could marry Jasmine and become a suitable match to continue and enforce the law to which Jasmine is subjugated.

Instead, Aladdin emphasizes his feminist ideology by refusing Genie's reminder of Aladdin's last wish. Instead, he grants Genie his desire to become free and, in return, gives up his ability to marry Jasmine by royal decree. The Sultan rewards this selflessness as he abolishes the law and grants Jasmine the agency to choose the modern man Aladdin. With male characters like Aladdin, who displays sympathy for women's rights, and hypermasculine Shang, who unlearns his misogynistic view on women and physical capability, Disney introduces newfound expressions of masculinity in their male characters, certainly with the introduction of Prince Naveen of Maldonia.

Referring to Naveen as the "New Lad", Hoffmann summarizes such a character as self-indulgent, recklessly selfish, and insincere. A womanizer and a player (99), Naveen is presented with the consequences of his actions when he tries to cheat his way to monetary status with the help of Dr. Facilier, and in return, he must learn "the importance of caring for others" (99). Hoffmann believes "That immaturity and 'narcissism is resolved through renewed priorities of heterosexual commitment'" (99). Unlike the other male characters, Naveen is portrayed as clueless, as well as weak, as he "does not attempt to take on the villains, and who relies heavily on his love interest [...]. Such characters 'offer up a depiction of masculinity as fallible, damaged, and distinctively unheroic'" (100), a significant change from the men we see in *Aladdin* and *Mulan*. While Jasmine relied on Aladdin's strength, Mulan found an equal in Shang, and, finally, Tiana is independent of men and Naveen's influence. Instead, Naveen relies on Tiana to teach him how to improve his life. With Tiana's so-called

third-wave feminist ideology (c.f. p. 77), Naveen unlearns his privileged, misogynistic behavior by slowly referring to Tiana by name and not as a waitress, and he offers to help Tiana by himself and not because she forced him.

Regarding Naveen's ethnicity, Hoffmann refers to a study Moffitt has done on black mothers and their interpretation of *The Princess and the Frog*. In this study titled "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work: Black Mothers Reflect on Disney's the Princess and the Frog", Moffitt alongside Heather E. Harris found that black communities are conscious of their consumption of inclusive media, and they comment on the noticeable absence of a black lead for a black princess:

> The participants were as exasperated by Disney's decision to make Tiana's mate an ethnically ambiguous, olive-toned, wavy-haired male with a Latin accent from the fictitious country of Maldonia. Many disagreed with this choice and once again felt that Disney missed an opportunity to redeem their racial past. Several remarks reflected their displeasure that a Black male was not selected as the prince (Moffitt & Harris 66).

Finally, Moffitt and Harris conclude that black bodies are used in *The Princess and the Frog* to reinforce the message that fairytales are indeed just fairytales, thus indicating that black royalty is unrealistic and unattainable. Moffitt and Harris' study indicates the perception from black communities that the exclusion of black men and boys in fairytales and Disney films perpetuate the constant typecasting of black men as sports stars and entertainers rather than potential love interests and, in Naveen's case, royalty.

By giving Naveen a racially ambiguous expression, Disney avoids the conversation of black male representation and their participation in inclusive media. While they attempted a more inclusive story with older black man Joe in *Soul*, Disney misses the mark again by removing Joe from his black body, even when they have typecasted Joe as an up-and-coming entertainer. Instead, Joe relinquishes his body and autonomy to a white person with unfulfilled potential while giving up his potential and reinforcing white supremacy through his own body. Disney's use of characters like Naveen and Joe continues to hinder positive and non-stereotypical representation of black men, giving the audience few to no black characters to identify themselves with.

Latinx is the New Black: Disney's First and only Authentic Representation

Because ethnic men and women are presented differently and given different narratives and paths, they become subject to discussion on whether they are represented equally and with the same value. This

begs the question of whether Disney has given more value to other types of ethnic representation and if those movies were more successful in public perception than the ones this thesis has researched.

To answer this question, we turn to the use of Latin-American culture in Disney movies. One of those movies is Pixar's *Coco* (2017) which has been praised for its successful representation of a Mexican family. Our research has discovered several studies on Disney-Pixar's *Coco* and the successful representation of Mexican cultures and bodies. One study by Abigail S. Walsh and Margarita Azmitia found that audiences with Mexican heritage were content with *Coco*. Their research finds that "The participants in this study communicated overwhelmingly positive feelings about *Coco*" (Walsh & Azmitia 61) concerning family dynamics, the use of the Spanish language, and the commitment to Mexican holidays. While some participants were mindful of out-group audiences' perception of Mexican culture and how *Coco* could be interpreted as a monolithic Mexican experience (57), the study suggested an overall positive experience when watching *Coco*. Another study executed by Istiwarni Diah, Siti Anisa, and Buiarto found the same sentiment and positive response in their focus group, as they studied *Coco* for a sufficient representation of Mexican cultures and holidays.

Regarding *Coco*, Diah et al. argue that "It allows millions of Mexican descent children to see their histories, their culture, their beliefs, and for non-Mexican will have a chance to see and learn about Mexican culture. [...] So, people will understand the beauty of Mexican culture, how they celebrate their tradition, prioritize family, and put themselves together" (Diah et al. 100). Both studies allow Western audiences to interact and appreciate non-Western cultures, giving incentive to cultural openness, as researched and discussed by Marloes Cattel. Cattel's study found that Disney movies like *Coco* open the discussion for whether animated movies like *Coco* bring parents and children closer to cultural appreciation and understanding, thus participating in cultural openness and global citizenship. Cattel defines cultural openness as "the extent to which an Individual is open to, and interested in, the similarities and differences between their own and other groups" (Cattel 6). As Western audiences see a more authentic representation of minorities like Mexican culture in Disney's *Coco*, they are more susceptible to cultural openness and interaction and participation in their appreciation of non-Western culture and representation of ethnic bodies.

The same appreciation is seen in audiences' response to Disney's *Encanto* (2021), representing Colombian heritage and culture in a family given magical abilities. While most academics interest themselves in the discussion *Encanto* opens on mental health and generational trauma, Laura Zornosa from The New York Times writes in her article on Colombian representation in Disney's *Encanto*. Zornosa found that "many Colombians and Colombian Americans loved the film - but it has also started a debate: What can and can't one movie capture about a country?" (Zornosa, "Encanto May Be Accurate, But Can It Carry a Whole Country?"). Zornosa found that Disney brought in focus groups

like Familia, their own internal employee group for Latin employees, where Familia brought input on how to present Colombia in a manner that mattered. Here, Zornosa summarizes that not only did the producers do weeks-long research, the Disney employees, as well as the Colombian Cultural Trust, but also gave input on what was key for Colombian culture and not to shy away from elements Colombians were not proud of, like guerilla warfare (Zornosa, "Encanto May Be Accurate, But Can It Carry a Whole Country?").

Though Disney did garner success and praise for *Encanto*, some criticize the film for the lackluster representation of Colombia, with Zornosa quoting New York University's Camilo Garzóns critique that "it was a representation of Colombia projected from an American perspective" (Zornosa, "Encanto May Be Accurate, But Can It Carry a Whole Country?"). Zornosa's article invites a debate on whether or not Disney shows an active bias in the ethnicities and non-White cultures they wish to engage with. Ultimately, *Encanto* was intended to remove the association of druglords and crime from Colombia and Colombian culture, and Disney succeeded in the blockbuster success brought by *Encanto*.

If Disney has such immense success in their interaction with the Latin community and Latin cultures, how come their attempts to represent other minority cultures, besides the ones previously discussed, have fallen short? While *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) centers on the story of Quasimodo and his journey to not only self-acceptance but to find his place in society, Disney makes a point to express not only Quasimodo's disabled body but also his Roma heritage (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* 0:03:44). The villain, Judge Frollo, made it not only a point to incriminate all "gypsies" in Paris but to persecute and purge them from the city. Meanwhile, Disney removes all traces of Quasi's ethnic relation to the Roma of Paris, as he not only has another color scheme and ethnic features from his dark-skinned and dark-haired parents, but he also does not resemble the Roma girl, Esmeralda, though they have a similar heritage. This begs the question of why Disney decided to maintain Quasi's gypsy heritage if the plot centers on his deformity and the social rejection he experiences because of his appearance. Indeed, Disney could have presented Quasi as French rather than gypsy while keeping Frollo's rejection of Quasi's deformed body in terms of his Christian beliefs.

Another Disney movie focused on a non-White society is *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000), where Disney invites the audience to visit the ancient Inca Empire through the story of Emperor Kuzco and his journey to learn humility. Once more, Disney produces a movie without the intention to keep true to the culture, as Kuzco, his companion Pacha and the citizens of their small town display no particular cultural significance to what is now known as Peru other than the landscapes. In fact, the opposite is evident in the villain sidekick Kronk and his affinity for cooking European foods like Greek Spanakopita (*The Emperor's New Groove* 0:14:08).

Finally, *Brother Bear* makes a point to portray Inuit tribes in what appears to be the Alaskan wilderness, where higher spiritual powers punish the main character Kenai for killing a bear. He is, in turn, transformed into a bear and must learn to find the similarities between humans and animals alike. While the movie feels genuine in what appears as authentic clothing and hunting practices, the movie's soundtrack is inspired by several modern genres in not only Phil Collins' musical entries, but the gospel church in the title song by Tina Turner removes the audience from the pastoral setting and into a modern Black church, despite the lyrics' profound messaging of spiritual guidance (*Brother Bear* 0:04:17). Thus *Brother Bear* continued to perpetuate the stereotypical association of spirituality and the interaction with wilderness to Native American tribes.

Since the release of *Brother Bear*, Disney has released the movies *The Princess and the Frog, Coco, Encanto*, and *Soul*; all four movies are examples of Disney's attempts to separate themselves from their racist past and to improve their representations of other cultures, aside from caricatures and stereotypical tropes. Another recent movie that received praise for its portrayal of Chinese-American identity was Disney-Pixar's *Turning Red* (2022) a growing-up story about Mei Lee, who struggles to find a balance between her mother's expectations of who she has to be and her exploration of self-identity. Although *Turning Red* garners praise, Chen and Liu notice some criticism when it comes to the significance of Chinese culture in the movie's plot. Rui Chen and Yiu Liu examine the Chinese audience's response to the movie. They discovered a refreshingly positive response to the movie, which is surprising, considering Chinese apprehension to Western media portrayals of Asian cultures, specifically Chinese.

> The story is not culturally specific; it concerns the growth issues that everyone experiences. As the protagonist has an immigrant family, it again indirectly shows this group's portrayal, reflecting multiculturalism's flourishing situation. Children of immigrants are frequently caught between two worlds, attempting to uphold their family's honorable traditions while also ensuring that the opportunities of the new country, which their parents have worked so hard to arrive to, do not go to waste (Chen & Liu 11-12).

Children presented with such family dynamics and expectations are often portrayed as characters who become their parents' projects, as the parents project their dreams and expectations onto their children, and vice versa (12). "'It feels like only East Asians can empathize because we all need to apologize for failing our mother's expectations'" (12), a sentiment Chen and Liu believe to be typical for, and inherently, Eastern-style parenting styles.

Interestingly, the same sentiment can be applied to *Coco* and *Encanto*. While these movies center on Mexican and Colombian culture located in their respective nations, both Miguel and Mirabel are given the task of unlearning generational trauma and filial expectations of loyalty and honor in order for them to achieve self-identity and independence to become whom they wish. It is noteworthy how Disney has repeatedly applied this particular narrative for their recent growing-up stories on ethnic and not white bodies, except for *Luca* (2021), an anthropomorphic merman who transforms into a tan Italian in human form. This suggests that Disney continues to "Other" their ethnic characters in new ways than physical features like non-white skin and non-Western cultures, as the idea of self-identity and self-fulfillment can only be achieved in ethnic households when the person cuts all ties and resists family expectations and resistance before they embark on their journey. Despite Disney's conscious efforts to remove itself from its racial past and mistakes, the perpetual "Othering" of ethnic bodies continues to place Disney in controversial arguments on whether Disney can diversify their materials and productions. This is relevant to the significant changes in Disney's live-action renditions of their animated movies.

All Minorities Look the Same: The Live-Action Version

In recent years, Disney has released several readaptations of their classic stories. Most interestingly for this thesis is the live-action production of *Aladdin* (2019) and *Mulan* (2020), as well as the most recent May release of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) and the announcement of the upcoming live-action of *Lilo & Stitch.* Though *Aladdin* and *Mulan* garnered criticism and controversy, Disney has received significant backlash from their casting of Ariel as a black woman rather than the white redhead she was in the 1989's version.

In an article for Vox, Aja Romano is intrigued by Disney's outrageous response from fans and audiences. "A key cry among these kinds of fans is that such productions are insisting on what they've dubbed 'forced diversity.' Detractors claim that the goal isn't really to inject realistic representation into the universe meaningfully, but rather to advance a 'woke ideological agenda.'" (Romano "The racist backlash over The Little Mermaid and Lord of The Rings is exhausting and extremely predictable"). This is an argument Romano found increasingly present in fans who adhered to alt-right movements and ideologies. Instead, these fans would prefer what Romano calls "organic diversity", which happens naturally through canonically ethnic characters or introducing new, original characters of color. Disney responds to the criticism of their casting choice through a readaptation and retelling of their original story of Ariel. While Ariel and her sisters were always meant to be personifications of the seven world seas, their ethnicity never reflected the whereabouts of said seas. Thus it becomes

plausible for a black actor to represent a world sea, despite playing the role of a fictive supernatural being.

According to an article from YouLoveIt.com, author Eric Geron created a guide- and concept book for *The Little Mermaid* (2023), which places King Triton's seven daughters across a fictional world map similar to our world map. However, the continents are vastly different ("Little Mermaid Live Action Ariel's movie 2023 Sisters names, magic abilities and appearance"). According to the article, Ariel is no longer thought to be from the Caribbean Sea but from the fictional Carinae Sea. By rendering the seven seas entirely fictional and placing them consciously on a fictional map, Disney is allowed deniability on any suspicions of forced diversity. Instead, the new adaptation and additions to the fictional world Ariel resides in provide counterarguments for *The Little Mermaid* to actually produce organic diversity, as the character Ariel and her name were merely inspired by the original story from H. C. Andersen and not a direct adaptation from the source material.

Disney is readapting one of their own stories, so they have the liberty for creative changes. This is evident in the upcoming live-action of *Lilo & Stitch*, where they have made significant changes that the audience disagreed with for several reasons. Disney's first announcement of cast members shows Disney's intention to truly represent Native Hawai'ians in the actors for live-action, certainly in the case of the Hawai'ian actors who play Lilo, Nani, and David. However, controversy has already risen on their casting choice for the actor who plays David and the actress who plays Nani.

According to Morgan Sloss' Buzzfeed article, audiences were shocked by the casting of light-skinned actors to play dark-skinned characters, especially with the discovery that Sydney Agudong, who plays Nani, is supposedly not Native Hawai'ian but Filipino (Sloss, "The Role Of David In The Live-Action "Lilo & Stitch" Has Been Recast After Kahiau Machado's Reported Use Of The N-Word On Social Media Resurfaced". Additionally, Kahiau Machado received criticism for how he was cast as dark-skinned David, later replaced by actor Kapio Dudoit due to Machado's past use of racial slurs (Sloss, "The Role Of David In The Live-Action "Lilo & Stitch" Has Been Recast After Kahiau Machado's Reported Use Of The N-Word On Social Media Resurfaced").

The criticism Disney has already received from early announcements of *Lilo & Stitch* is similar to the critique given to the 2019 live-action remake *Aladdin*, as previously mentioned in our chapter on Orientalism and the choice to cast Will Smith as Genie (c.f. p. 43). The criticism was also extended to the main leads, as Disney casted Indian actress Naomi Scott and Egyptian actor Mena Massoud to play Jasmine and Aladdin (Romano, "The fraught cultural politics of Disney's new Aladdin remake"). If we were to argue about the implementation of forced diversity in *Aladdin* (2019), the first and most noticeable change is the casting choice of black actor Will Smith to play Genie. Smith's casting choice

not only comments on the African American struggle but also criticizes the continuing prejudice against blacks in the Middle East by casting a black man as an entrapped slave.

According to a comprehensive historical study, Jere L. Bacharach examines the earliest traces of African slaves in the Middle East, referencing as early as the 3rd century (Bacharach 472). Thus Genie as a black man becomes an actual display of so-called organic diversity, as the existence of African slavery was indeed significant and widespread in the Medieval Middle East (Bacharach 489), and Genie's existence as a supernatural being transcends not only gender but also race. Suppose the audience is unaware of the historical impact black slaves had on non-Western cultures. In that case, the argument of forced diversity becomes relevant, as it removes Williams' legacy as Genie. As Middle Eastern women, we were unaware of the historical significance of black slaves in the Middle East before this thesis. Hence we considered fans' criticism of forced diversity regarding 2019 *Aladdin* and decided it was unreasonable due to the nature of Genie's character and design.

Since Aladdin's story is disnified from the original tale, Disney holds the right to any final creative decisions for casting and reason. Thus audience outcry on Smith's Genie seems insignificant in consideration of North African and Indian cast choices for main characters who are supposed to be Middle Eastern characters. Only two Middle Eastern actors were cast for 2019 *Aladdin,* both Iranian actors playing the Sultan and the servant Dalia. The discussion on forced diversity should direct itself at inconsiderate casting for characters who explicitly express non-Western ethnicity rather than critique fable animals and supernatural beings.

Likewise, with the audience's insistent demand for organic diversity, surely original stories like *Coco*, *Encanto,* and *Turning Red* would be remarkable examples of Disney's attempt to meet fan expectations and produce meaningful expressions of diversity. With the newest release of *A Strange World* (2022) that introduces biracial couples and homosexual characters, Disney meets the demand for diverse characters in not only biracial couples, different body shapes, light- and dark-skinned black characters, as well as the introduction of the first canonical LGBT characters presented in an original Disney movie. This is just one of Disney's many steps to redeem itself and improve its reputation as previously insensitive to minorities. Another is Disney's conscious initiatives to edit insensitive materials from older movies like *Aladdin* (c.f. p. 45) and *Fantasia* (1949) and later place pause screens with disclaimers on insensitive stereotyping. As Danish master students produce this thesis, we can only access the Danish translation of the disclaimer. For the English version, CNET provided a screenshot that reads:

> This program includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures. These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, we want to

> acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it, and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together. Disney is committed to creating stories with inspirational and aspirational themes that reflect the rich diversity of the human experience around the globe (Bisset, "Disney Plus disclaimer now acknowledges 'harmful impact' of racist stereotypes")

Disney concludes their disclaimer and message with the provision of a link to their website, titled "Stories Matter", where Disney addresses audience complaints and their awareness of previous controversy, as well as their active initiatives to change their narrative and improve their impact on the meaningful representation of minorities. While Disney's message is resoundingly noble and justifiable, it is critical to mention Polygon journalist Matt Patches' discovery that movies with these disclaimers are removed from children's profiles and are only available through 18+ profiles (Patches, "Disney Plus quietly pulls Peter Pan, Dumbo from Kids profiles over racist stereotypes") [*sic*]. This leads to our final question and discussion on whether or not Disney can continue their legacy as children's media and stay relevant as a teaching machine for children.

The Capitalist Moral of the Story

When it comes to children's animated media and media consumption, Western audiences equate children's films with The Walt Disney Company. Thus, Disney has become a household name for children's media consumption. This monumental impact that Disney has on the children's market has caught the scholarly attention of Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock in their book *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and The End of Innocence* (2010). Other scholars significantly frequent Giroux and his studies, and his analysis is therefore considered paramount to understanding Disney's social impact on the children's market.

Giroux and Pollock examine Disney's repertoire as a teaching machine for children. Their research is based on the generational consumption of Disney media and how Disney lessons shape the minds and identities of children from early childhood to adolescence (Giroux & Pollock 92). However firm a grip Disney has on children's markets, Giroux and Pollock believe parents are more than ever attentive to the messaging children consume, as Disney is a company associated with blind trust and allegiance from said parents.

> It may seem heretical to criticize the Walt Disney Company, a corporation that claims to share the major concerns of parents, particularly the need to protect children from witnessing and

> being influenced by social conflicts, sexuality, and the moral difficulties associated with adulthood. But while Disney films do not promote the extreme violence that has become central to many other forms of popular culture, they do carry cultural and social messages that require carefully [*sic*] scrutiny (Giroux & Pollock 92).

By addressing Disney as a "teaching machine", we as audiences and consumers ascribe Disney as a great power and influence in children's teaching of right and wrong. Disney stories are presented as what are essentially allegories. Disney movies are meant as allegories, and they function as tools for children to navigate through the struggles of the main characters in not only our sympathy for their struggles but the ability to appreciate their circumstances and learn from their mistakes.

Furthermore, Giroux and Pollock argue that Disney extends their role in education through larger forces than popular media, as Disney has "sponsored teacher-of-the-year awards, provided Doer and Dreamer scholarships to students, and offered financial aid, internships and other learning opportunities to disadvantaged urban youth through educational and work programs" (Giroux & Pollock 94). As this thesis directs its criticism and mindful observations toward Disney's representations of ethnic bodies and the lack thereof, there is significant scope for a dissertation on a literary analysis of Disney as children's media and children's literature.

While intent on providing escapism for children through fantastical imagery and stories, Disney tries to teach children an age-appropriate lesson about the world through allegorical stories. Though Disney does not tell stories of real-world problems that affect the children in real-time, they did address social issues in older movies, like the subject of classism in movies *Aristocats* (1970) and *Lady & The Tramp* (1955), and poverty in *Oliver & Company* (1988). Later, Disney dealt with loss and grief in *Lilo & Stitch*, miscarriage and death in *Up*, and mental health in *Inside Out* (2015). Most recently and successfully on racial equality, Disney's release of *Zootopia* (2016) teaches children not to have prejudice, providing a story on how racism and perpetual stereotyping can lead to devastating consequences and mistakes.

Giroux and Pollock's observation that Disney is mindful not to expose children to issues unrelated to them and their understanding is interesting and a borderline hypocritical approach from the company. Disney is familiar with how to produce age-appropriate stories on controversial subjects, as seen with the aforementioned movies concerning genuine issues, which begs the question of why Disney deemed their movies with disclaimers unfit for children's profiles. If Disney is a children's media company, and their movies are mainly used as learning tools for children, surely controversial topics like racial stereotyping and inequality are great conversation starters and introductions to teaching children to treat everyone fairly, regardless of gender and race. Giroux and Pollock agree, arguing that

"As a producer of children's culture, Disney should not be given a pardon because it is defined as a universal citadel of fun and good cheer. On the contrary, as one of the primary institutions constructing childhood culture in the United States and around the globe, it warrants healthy suspicion and critical debate" (97). They argue that despite Disney's pleasurable images and fun stories, they are not without fault and provide contradictory messages. This is evident in the recent development of Disney's distinction between good and bad characters in their movies, as there are no clear villains, but rather morally grey characters presented with the opportunity to change and improve themselves.

With Ernesto De La Cruz exempted from this argument, Disney has not provided an irredeemable villain since *Tangled* (2010) and *Frozen* (2013). Instead, movies like *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) present the antagonist Namaari with the opportunity to change and redeem themselves, undermining the severity of the movie's plot with the disnified message that teamwork is great to work and that any person has good in them, no matter their past. Such vague villainy and antagonist play demonstrate that the need to produce good movie plots is secondary to the ability to sell and market their movies and, by proxy, toys and experiences. "Enchantment comes at a high price if the audience is meant to suspend judgment of the films' ideological messages. [...]. The role of the critic of Disney's animated films is not to reduce them to a single ideological reading but to identify the "preferred textual messages" they encode" (Giroux & Pollock 103). Hence this thesis investigates the implied messaging behind Disney's use of ethnic bodies in binary narratives and vague depictions of cultural significance and whether Disney displays bias and preference for one culture over another.

Indeed, scholars have studied the racial presence in Disney and the implication of their insufficient attempts to provide multicultural entertainment. Using stereotypical imagery and character tropes, Disney situates itself in an unfortunate continuation of whiteness and the normalization of absent minority cultures. "Cultural differences are either trivialized or expressed through a 'naturalized' racial hierarchy, which is antithetical to any viable democratic society. There is nothing innocent in what kids learn about race as portrayed in the 'magical world' of Disney" (112).

Through our findings, we have determined a tendency for Disney to express racial bias towards not only white bodies but to certain minorities like Latin-American as well as Chinese-American bodies. This type of bias towards certain racial bodies is evident in the analysis of Jane E. Shawcroft, Sarah M. Coyne, Jessica D. Zurcher, and Pamela Jo Brubaker, where they examine examples of symbolic annihilation in Disney movies. Shawcroft et al. define symbolic annihilation as "the absence or underrepresentation of groups in media (frequently based on gender, race, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or physical ability)"[*sic*] (Shawcroft et al. 347). Through symbolic annihilation, Disney produces not only movies with unequal representation of gender and sexuality but also produce movies with ethnic characters while simultaneously failing to represent them authentically.

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Because Disney exercises symbolic annihilation regarding race and racialized bodies, we conclude that Disney cannot be used as a teaching machine and learning tool for children's development and identification of cultural differences. "Because depictions of gender, race, ethnicity, physical ability, social class, or other attributes of a person in media can affect the way that individual views themselves, the lack of holistic depictions of people in media who share those attributes can impede healthy identity development" (Shawcroft et al. 348). This is certainly evident for non-Western audiences who view Disney as primary children's media. As women of color, we have not seen ourselves represented in Disney in roles other than Princess Jasmine, a character who lacks any expression of sincerity regarding Middle Eastern culture and values. The disconnect between an actual Arab and a fictional character like Jasmine was further exaggerated in the live-action, where they not only westernized Jasmine but also changed her culture to what resembles Indian or Pakistani culture and fashion. As Disney continues to look in the direction of Latin and South-Asian cultures, audiences like ourselves are left to wonder when they will return to their previous attempts at cultural diversity and if they can redeem themselves from their reputation of lackluster multiculturalism.

If Disney must continue their monopoly on the children's market, surely Disney must not only meet demand with supply but grow from their past and produce meaningful content for not just Western audiences. With the upcoming release of *Wish* (2023), a movie that ambiguously bases itself on the Iberian Peninsula in a blurry expression of South European and North African cultures and bodies ("Disney's Wish: The Official Teaser Trailer, YouTube), hopefully, Disney will be tempted to venture south from *Wish* and enter uncharted, cultural territories that will expel them from their unfortunate reputation of cultural and racial bias.

Conclusion

For this master's thesis, we sought to investigate Disney's use of ethnic bodies and whether Disney expresses racial bias. As Disney produces predominantly movies centered on white bodies and whiteness, we concerned ourselves with non-Western representations of culture in movies like *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, *Pocahontas*, *Lilo & Stitch*, *The Princess and The Frog*, and *Soul*, all of which are movies that display different ethnicities and bodies.

Our findings in this thesis conclude that Disney expresses racial bias through their representation of ethnic bodies with racially insensitive imagery and the reproduction of their previously criticized narratives that incite stereotyping and prejudice. This conclusion is reached through a critical reading of our selected movies with the above-mentioned theoretical approaches. Additionally, due to the nature of Disney movies and how they reproduce images of nature and the relationship between

man and nature, Garrard's ecocritical theory is applied in order to understand displays of animalistic behavior and Disney's need to perpetually propose the idea that humans and animals can understand and relate to one another. We argue that such an idea of human behavior applied to non-white bodies suggests there are inhuman qualities to non-white persons, which we find offensive and wish to further analyze and discuss through racial discourses to discover their implied meaning.

To understand what implications such representation of non-white culture from a predominantly white company might entail, we examine how ethnic bodies are "Othered" and what "Otherness" might imply through Gramsci's understanding of the Subaltern and how the Subaltern navigates in a world unsuited for a minority group. Furthermore, we seek to understand how these characters are "Othered" and turn to theoretical approaches like Said's Orientalism and how his theory might lead to discoveries of racially insensitive imagery in animated movies like *Aladdin* and *Mulan* that display Asian culture. We also interest ourselves in the representation of Indigenous cultures, for which we turn to Veracini and Hixon's examinations of settler colonialism through European and American settlements to understand the implications of colonialism and the reproduction of colonial narratives in children's movies. Finally, we return to Disney's use of African-American representation and how Gillespie's Film Blackness can provide an understanding of the black experience through black film and black filmmaking to determine Disney's reproduction of black stereotyping and the lack of genuineness in their representation of black culture.

Through Said's Orientalism, we conclude that Disney uses Orientalist ideology and perception of Eastern cultures presented in the movies *Aladdin* and *Mulan*. *Aladdin* and *Mulan* perpetuate the Orientalist belief that non-Western cultures like the Middle East and the Chinese all loyally conform to patriarchal structures, which is undoubtedly made evident through the female main characters, Jasmine and Mulan. In the case of Aladdin, Disney presents their first and only characters of Middle Eastern descent through animations that suggest their inferiority to Western culture with the help of supernatural creatures like the Genie to interrupt with commentary that contemporary Western audiences might relate to. Similarly, Mulan continues this interference with the mythological creature of the dragon Mushu, suggesting that Western audiences cannot relate to non-white cultures and stories from non-Western societies without adding American humor and family values to make characters more receptible to said audience. While both movies take place centuries before our time, and such values were indeed sustained in their time, for Disney to reproduce these stories with the addition of postmodern humor and social manners suggests Disney's intention of reproducing prejudicial beliefs of a non-Western culture of which perpetuates the stereotypical perception that non-Western societies are subjugated patriarchal structures in today's time as well.

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As Disney reimagines the first meeting with the New World in a disnified romance, they distort and diminish the real historical consequences of the explorations of the New World. Though patriarchal structures are also present in *Pocahontas*, Disney focuses on the story of the Algonquian Indians' first encounter with the settlers through the romanticized retelling of Pocahontas and John's love story. By reproducing colonial narratives of savage but noble Indians through characters like Pocahontas, Disney places a significant responsibility on one woman to end an inevitable war and for her to embody not just her entire tribe and culture but the nature and environment of the New World. All in order to make the settlers understand the consequences of their settlement. Likewise, Disney continues their negligence of the historical impact and consequence such settlements and colonialism had on the Indigenous Hawai'ians in *Lilo & Stitch*, where the active settlement has concluded, and audiences are met with the displacement of the Indigenous Hawai'ians. Disney reproduces once again colonial narratives of an active settlement through Lilo and Stitch by allowing the colonized to become the colonizer.

Our findings of these movies suggest Disney expresses racial prejudice towards non-American cultures with the perpetual reproduction of patriarchal norms and values and the addition of modern language and culture for Western audiences to relate and interact with the stories presented. We, therefore, investigated whether Disney continues this disingenuous narrative of non-white bodies through the representation of non-white Americans like African-Americans in movies *The Princess & The Frog* and *Soul*. As *The Princess & The Frog* was the first movie to present a leading black character and princess, Disney sets the high expectation of a story befitting a princess. However, they left black audiences disappointed with Tiana's transformation into a frog, thus mitigating the importance of black representation in children's media and enforcing colorblind narratives. The same colorblind narrative is reproduced in their newest black-leading movie, *Soul*, where once again Disney transforms their lead, black character Joe into a non-human body. Tiana and Joe's transformations serve as teaching tools for their non-black counterparts Naveen and 22, of which Disney uses black stereotyping like the Mammy and the MN to ensure non-black superiority. Only then can the non-black person grant Tiana and Joe the opportunity to return to their original body, thus removing Tiana and Joe's bodily autonomy and agency to reproduce black struggle films rather than promote black ambition and excellence.

These findings bring this thesis to a comparative analysis of our selected movies, where we investigate and interpret the similarities and differences produced in movies with similar themes. Disney commodifies subjects such as dysfunctional family structures and patriarchal societies that impact female agency and create forbidden relationships, in addition to the severe consequences that war, settlements, and colonialism had on non-white cultures through disnification. We conclude that Disney exotifies non-white female characters through increased attention to visual cues like the clothes they

wear and how Disney uses their femininity and sexuality to both seduce and overpower men, but also in order to further stereotypical narratives of ethnic women exotified through service labor. Disney disnifies non-Western cultures through arbitrary images and plot devices such as an easily assimilated alien invasion and ancient creatures who speak in a postmodern language and references to produce an age-appropriate story that teaches Western audiences of other cultures.

We conclude that Disney's gentrification of non-white cultures and bodies is unsuccessful due to their tendencies to produce racially insensitive imagery that they have previously been criticized for. This master's thesis believes that such disnifications are severely influential in how Disney attempts to teach Western audiences but, in actuality, produces historically and socially inaccurate images of representation. Thus, Disney continues to reproduce said images due to their lack of genuine concern and research of the minority groups they intend to represent. It is because of this disingenuous effort to produce non-white stories that Disney inevitably expresses a racial bias towards some ethnic groups rather than others.

For instance, we observe Disney's increased attention to Latin-American culture and their intent to present Mexican and Columbian culture with a certain level of authenticity previously unseen by Disney as a company. Disney foregoes stereotypical narratives of familial loyalty in order to promote individuality in movies like *Coco*, *Encanto*, and the newest addition of the Chinese-Canadian movie *Turning Red* (2022), implying Disney's intentions to learn from previous racially offensive materials. Though their live actions leave much to be desired on what they seemingly learned from their newer animated movies, non-Western audiences like ourselves can only hope that their upcoming release of *Lilo & Stitch* is a turning point in their inauthentic representation thus far.

As we conclude on the findings in this master's thesis, we are aware of how we have addressed topics like gender and sexuality that are entire research fields on their own. This thesis can inspire further readings and elaborative studies on subjects like an intersectional feminist reading of Disney princesses and female characters, as well as the analysis of implied, ambiguous mentions of non-heterosexual commentary and characters to the newly added, explicit mentions of LGBT characters through Disney's filmography, certainly with how non-heterosexual characters are in non-white bodies. While we do criticize Disney for their lack of authentic representation, and their expression of racial bias, we are aware of Disney's attempt to address the topic of racism and their response to the conversation in their release of *Zootopia.*

As the name Zootopia suggests, their world is a supposed utopia where everyone and every species get along and can live in symbiosis, no matter their species and the relationship between predator and prey. The plot does indicate otherwise, as *Zootopia* defies animal nature and hierarchy in the

domestication of predators and the socialization between carnivores and herbivores. The movie implores audiences to remove themselves from prejudice and teaches younger audiences that discrimination based on race is harmful and offensive. As the different animal species are visualized with features similar to stereotypical depictions of selected ethnic groups, *Zootopia* could have provided an interesting case study on racism in children's media. However, this thesis sought to demonstrate the same racist tendencies in the animated movies that already featured ethnic bodies. We concluded that while *Zootopia* might have been sufficient to answer our thesis statement, we believe that such a discussion on racial bias is best suited for movies with vivid visuals of non-white bodies to reach such extensive research and final understanding of such an elaborative thesis statement.

As Disney does indeed hold a monopoly on the children's media market, other animation studios produce movies with non-white characters that also tend to create racially insensitive images. An animation studio in direct competition with Disney would be DreamWorks, who have produced and released *Shark Tale* (2004), *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), *Madagascar* (2005), and *The Road to El Dorado* (2000), where all these movies have been criticized for their reproduction of stereotypes and their harmful representation of exotified "Others". It is, therefore, crucial to continue this research field and investigation of racial representation in children's media as it continues its significant influence on the daily consumption of literature for younger audiences.

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