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Films with a Focus on *Brave* (2012)”

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1. Introduction: Entering the Magic Kingdom

I think of a child's mind as a blank book. During the first years of his life, much will be written on the pages. The quality of that writing will affect his life profoundly.
- Walt Disney-

There is no escaping the Magic Kingdom as it continuously expands its terrain each year to reach an ever growing number of consumers. The Walt Disney Company has become an entertainment and media conglomerate influencing, inspiring and indoctrinating people around the globe with its beliefs about the happily-ever-after life. Although the messages of their animated movies are often hidden behind a veil of fun and childhood-innocence, the primarily young target audience does learn their lessons from the films and they will affect their lives profoundly. Disney's animated world communicates ideas about the ideal family life, the roles one should assume as girl or boy and, as will be the focus of this study, about people from different ethnicities and nationalities. Since *Aladdin* (1992), Disney's princess fairytales have started to include princesses from diverse ethnicities and nationalities, such as the Arabian princess Jasmine, the Native American Pocahontas, the Chinese Mulan as well as the Scottish princess Merida from *Brave* (2012), which will be the focus of this paper.

For a long time, Disney's animated movies have not been under close scrutiny. Dismissing the need to critically investigate the messages communicated, people continued to believe in the 'safety' of Disney films, an image which was supported via Disney's claim to 'simple' family-oriented entertainment. One of the first influential and critical works stems from Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version* (1968), a biography about the life of Walt Disney. Yet, in recent years, the number of works critically investigating the cultural machinery of the Disney Company has grown. Among them are Bell et al.'s *From Mouse to Mermaid* (1995), Henry Giroux's *The Mouse that Roared* (1999), Annalee R. Ward's *Mouse Morality* (2002) and Amy M. Davis' *Good Girls and Wicked Witches* (2006). While most of these works rather focus on earlier films of the Disney canon (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* until *Mulan*), the following study examines closely one of the more recent Disney/Pixar princess movies, namely *Brave* (2012). In addition, it mainly addresses the depiction of different ethnicities and nationalities, an aspect which is often marginalized compared to the amount of studies concerned with issues of gender representation in Disney films.¹ A further integral, but often overlooked, aspect of the following analysis is

¹ see for instance Davis; Giroux and Ward who seek to answer more general questions regarding the pedagogical and moral influence Disney exercises on its audience; and Bell et al. whose focus is on gender, film and other cultural, but not ethnic/national, issues;

the contextualization of the movie *Brave* within its production process as well as its reception.

Beginning with a closer examination of *Brave*, the first part questions what strategies of representation are used to depict Scottish identity. It also addresses issues of whether the characters' Scottish identity offers scripts of behavior for them and whether these Scottish character traits influence aspects of gender portrayal. Hence, does the Scottish nationality enable the producers to feature a stronger, more self-empowered female heroine? Besides the influence of Scottishness on the characters and the plot, the analysis also considers possible effects the cultural background of the Disney Company itself, i.e. US American values and beliefs, have on the representation of Scottish culture. The second part serves as a contextualization of the movie *Brave* uncovering issues of production, regulating forces and the consumers' reception of the film. Finally, the study refers to three popular Disney princess movies: *Mulan* (1998), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Aladdin* (1992). The analysis of these films serves to show *Brave*'s positioning within those movies, their similarities and differences, and allows for the making of more general statements about the influence of cultural values and beliefs cherished by the Disney Company in regards to the representation of other ethnicities and nationalities.

The representation of ethnic/national identities in *Brave* and the film's contextualization within issues of production, regulation and consumption is methodologically based on du Gay's circuit of culture (see fig. 1).

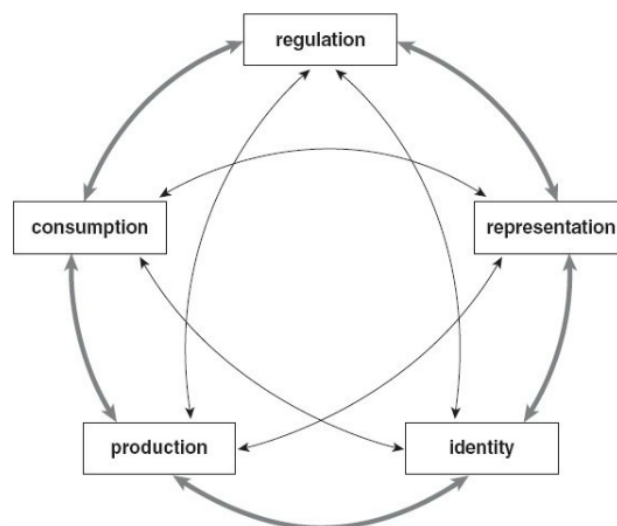


Fig. 1: The circuit of culture (Du Gay et al. XXXI)

The circuit of culture comprises of five interrelated cultural processes: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. During the process of representation, meaning is created via language, in oral or visual form. This aspect is closely intertwined

with identity since, through representation, identities are constructed. In this paper, the examination of various ethnic/national identities represented in Disney movies is informed by theories from Stuart Hall (on representation), Michel Foucault (on discourse), Roland Barthes (*Mythologies*), Hayden White (*Metahistory* and *Tropics of Discourse*), Anthony D. Smith (on national and ethnic identity), Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities*), Richard Dyer (on stereotyping) and Edward Said (*Orientalism*). The circuit of culture, furthermore, encourages its users to go beyond a rather textual analysis of representation and identity within a film to include the processes concerning the context in which the movie was produced; in other words, to go beyond face value. Issues of production, regulation and consumption of *Brave* are investigated by mainly drawing on information about the production process as articulated in the book, *The Art of Brave*, as well as consulting newspaper articles, interviews and reviews. The final part of this study, which focuses on ethnic/national identities in three other Disney films, summarizes relevant findings from books and articles about these films such as Ward's *Mouse Morality*, Giroux's *The Mouse that Roared* and Ayres et al.'s *The Emperor's Old Groove*.

By taking a closer look at the mechanics involved in the construction and endurance of ethnic and national identities, it will be shown that the same aspects are essential to representing such identities on screen. Hence, representations of landscape and territory, history, myth, tradition and customs, as well as stereotyping and otherness play a crucial role in depicting Scottishness in *Brave*. Furthermore, these representations of Scottishness trigger associations of the 'brave and independent' traits that are reflected in the female protagonist, Merida, which help to give her the 'right' to fight against the traditions and rules imposed upon her. The examination of the context in which the movie was produced emphasizes how the Walt Disney Company represents the production process by drawing on statements of the film's production team. In addition, the consumers' reception of the movie is analyzed. Finally, the aspects of landscape, history, customs, stereotyping and otherness also prove to be integral in the construction of ethnicities and nationalities in *Mulan*, *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin*. While the different nationalities and ethnicities of the films are represented as the exotic other from a rather superficial perspective, US America's and Disney's beliefs and values penetrate the movies and influence the depiction of other cultures.² Thereby, the US American myths of

² Wherever the name "Disney" is used in this paper, it is being referred to the Walt Disney Company and its films. When reference is made to the company's founder, this is indicated by addressing him as Walt (or Walter Elias) Disney.

freedom, independence and self-realization have become the universal elements of all Disney movies, whether or not representing the core values of other cultures.

In short, this study deals with the following aspects:

- The importance of landscape, historical collective memories, myths, legends, traditions and customs, as well as stereotyping and otherness used as tools to represent ethnic and national identities in Disney movies
- Western stereotypical representations of ethnic/national identities and the functions of these stereotypes within the film, i.e. explaining the characters' motivations and behavior
- The non-coincidental, purposefully constructed messages propagated by all those involved in film productions and the consumers' engagement within these films
- Disney's imposition of their own values and beliefs upon cultures represented in their films

2. Representation and Identity

Disney films entail a wide range of representations of people, places, objects and events woven together into a narrative. All the different images the consumer perceives carry value and meaning, and often they transmit a certain moral about life, relationships and growing up. The receivers of the messages, usually children, learn to decode them and also construct their understanding and beliefs about the world based on these representations. Thus, on reflection, it becomes obvious how influential Disney's role is in terms of communicating ideas, meanings and knowledge about the world to a broad audience. Especially the impact on children is crucial, since they are still at the beginning of developing and organizing their own knowledge of the world. Furthermore, in comparison to adults, children only have a rather limited amount of frames of reference to draw on.³ Yet, what exactly is the relationship between representation, meaning and identity?

Stuart Hall (*Representation* 3-5) claims that one way of making sense of the world is by interpreting it with different frameworks of knowledge at hand. Another way of giving things meaning is by how they are used in everyday practices. For instance, a fork is in many cultures conventionally used as a tool to eat food with. This particular use of a fork gives the item its meaning. Nevertheless, people who are not familiar with this meaning, might use the fork differently and thus also give it another meaning. In Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, for example, Ariel gives the item of a 'fork' a new meaning by using it as a hairbrush. Finally, things are also made meaningful by how they are represented:

[...] we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them. (Hall, *Representation* 3)

Hence, the images and sounds embedded in Disney films are loaded with meanings, values and emotions. Of course, this is not the end of the meaning-making process as the consumer, at the other end of the screen, still has to decode these representations. The signs and symbols used need to be interpreted and their function needs to be understood in order for them to signify something to the audience. Colors, for instance, are often used as symbols and their meaning usually depends on the context in which they are used. Furthermore, this context often gives the audience hints as to how they should interpret the

³ See Jean Piaget's theory of the child's cognitive development (for instance in Wadsworth); According to Piaget, children possess an innate, very basic mental structure which is the foundation for all subsequent learning and knowledge. This basic mental structure consists of schemas, i.e. ways of organizing knowledge. During a child's cognitive development these schemas, in this study referred to as frames of reference, grow in number and complexity. Schemas can be understood as mental representations of the world which are used to link and understand new information and to respond to situations.

symbol. For example, in the Disney/Pixar production *Inside Out* (2015), the consumer gets insights into a teenage girl's mind where five personified emotions control her feelings. The emotions joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust are all represented by different colors. In this particular case the color Green represents disgust. However, in other movies the color Green can take on different meanings. For instance, at the end of the movie *The Great Gatsby* (2013) the protagonist reaches out for a green light which signifies hope, his dreams and desires. Hence, the producers of a film have to embed those symbols in a clear context to create meaning. Such symbols as colors but also many other signs, images and language are involved in the processes of signification by acting as systems of representation. Hall differentiates between two essential systems of representation: the system of mental representation and that of language as representation (*Representation* 17-21). The first system helps us to establish a link between the 'real' world and the concepts about it in our mind. For instance, we have a concept of a girl in our mind but the realization of this concept in 'reality' can take on an infinite number of different 'faces'. Nevertheless, the concept enables us to classify what or who a girl is and what/who it is not. Thus, the system of mental representation offers different ways of classifying, organizing and arranging the world and, as illustrated in the example above, depends on differences and similarities. Having the same mental concepts means that we are able to interpret the world similarly, which is often referred to as 'belonging to the same culture' since our communication is based on shared meanings. The second system, which enables us to communicate these meanings, is that of language. Here language does not only refer to written or spoken words but also to visual images, sound, facial expressions, gestures, etc. All those languages use signs to express meanings and to translate our mental concepts.

However, how do we decipher the signs and how do they reveal their meanings to us? The meaning of things does not reside in themselves, or in their nature, it is we who fix their meaning by the way we use, interpret and represent them (Hall, *Representation* 21-24). For instance, a bow and an arrow do not simply have the meaning of "a weapon to hunt with", or nowadays maybe more accurately "a sport, a way of entertainment". It is our usage of the object that constructs its meaning. Furthermore, representations of these objects with strong, swift male characters hunting in the wilderness give them further connotations and hence also meanings. These meanings are, however, not fixed. They change and can take on more connotations depending on their context of usage. In *Brave* we encounter a female character, not a male, who carries a bow and arrow as one symbol

(among others) of her strong will and determination to fight for her own destiny. Even though the relationship between signs and meanings is subject to change, it has to be fixed in some way in order for us to be able to communicate. The stabilization of meanings results out of social conventions, as Spencer claims, “Meaning is not implicit in signs, images, words and other cultural codes; rather, it is based on shared conventions, and these vary between and within cultures” (1). Another example comes from fashion. Tartan, an item with a defined set of patterns and colors, does (or did) not simply have, for some cultural groups, the meaning of ‘belonging to a specific clan’. The meaning is not natural but it is inscribed into the piece of clothing and attains value and meaning through social conventions practiced by particular groups.

Although some representations, e.g. photographs, use signs which resemble the world very realistically, i.e. iconic signs, they still have a referent which they *re*-present in a specific mode and from a specific perspective (Branston and Stafford 106; Long and Wall 79). As Spencer puts it, “Representation is not the thing, the event, the phenomenon itself: it is an encoded interpretation of the thing, event, phenomenon” (7). Thus, representation often reflects only one viewpoint despite the fact that there are different angles from which an event, people, etc. can be depicted. Films in general and also Disney movies illustrate this aspect. In *Mulan*, for example, the consumer gets to observe the event from Mulans’/the Chinese perspective. Viewing the events through this lens, one perceives the Huns to be eternally evil and inhuman since Disney does not unveil the motivation and reasons behind their attack. Webb observes that images are always “limited” and “interested” (142): limited, in the sense that they do not present us with the whole range of what there is to be represented but only a selective portrayal. Furthermore, images are ‘interested’ in the sense that they act in the interest of a particular group who intend to depict people or an event in a specific way. Continuing the analysis of the Disney film *Mulan*, one observes that of each identity, Huns and Chinese, only one character quality is depicted, i.e. bad/villains versus good/heroes. Disney’s interest in making these clear distinctions is most probably to simplify the plot. Representation is therefore “always partial and fragmentary and [...] most certainly reflects dominant interests” (Spencer 7). With regard to Disney films and the partial representation or underrepresentation of ethnic/racial identities, one can observe the dominance of white characters, such as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Tarzan* (1999), *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2013), etc; Whereas other ethnic/racial groups are underrepresented: Arabic in *Aladdin* (1992), Indian in *Pocahontas*

(1995), Asian in *Mulan* (1992) and only in 2009 the first black princess Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog*.

One of the most fundamental points about representation is the power that some groups have over others to depict them in a specific way. Hence, these representations produce and disseminate certain ideas and knowledge about the people, places and events they *re-present*. Hall refers to Michel Foucault who studied the relationship between knowledge and power under the concept of discourse (*Representation* 41-51). Here discourse does not refer to the linguistic term, but Foucault rather uses it to describe how ideas, knowledge and statements about specific topics are produced and regulated at a certain historical time. More specifically, discourse is “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, “The West and the Rest” 291). In other words, discourse entails sets of rules which govern and regulate practices, i.e. how to speak, think and act according to the rules of a specific discourse (Storey, *Cultural Theory* 130f.). Hence, discourses offer us social ‘scripts’ of what to say, think and how to perform in a specific situation and what to perceive as ‘normal’ behavior in that situation.

The Walt Disney Corporation is one of those influential and powerful institutions that use particular chosen discourses to circulate knowledge about specific topics. In the chapters to follow, we will primarily explore discourses of ethnicity and nationality, but also of gender and family and the links between them. One discourse influences and supports the other and as a result they attain the status of ‘truth’. By referring to Foucault, Hall furthermore explains that each society chooses particular discourses which they hold to be true (*Representation* 49). Disney often selects predominant discourses of US American/Western society which they present and construct as the ‘truth’. Thus, Disney has the power to create fictional characters that personify particular discourses which ought to represent a model of good or bad behavior to consumers. As the way we think about the world changes according to social and historical circumstances, discourses are also subject to change. Therefore, Disney too adopts those new elements of discourses as becomes obvious from the gender discourse. Older Disney movies illustrate rather passive women, for example in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), who wait to be rescued by men. In more recent films, women tend to take on a more active role, as in *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012), and *Frozen* (2013). How women should behave and what one can say about their behavior has changed and so has Disney’s representation of women as well as our interpretation of the movies. Thus, one also has to consider that this

analysis is being influenced by today's discourses, nevertheless, it still seems useful to highlight and reveal predominant discourses and how they work, i.e. as a product of power and knowledge and the fact that they only seem natural but are not.

So far, we have seen that discourses entail ways of acting, speaking and thinking. Hence, discourses are closely intertwined with identity since they offer us models of how to act, think and feel. Those who act according to these models, i.e. who act according to the knowledge and ideas circulated via specific discourses, act in exactly the way we would expect them to behave. In addition, discourses open up subject-positions from which we read, view and make sense of a text (Hall, *Representation* 56). Nevertheless, one still has to decide whether to fill and take up a subject-position or not. Spencer claims that our 'identikit', i.e. ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, etc., determines how we read an image (30). Furthermore, "[i]dentity is a work in process, a negotiated space between ourselves and others" (Taylor and Spencer 4). The formation of identity is never-ending since we always try to position ourselves according to different discourses. Moreover, we often define ourselves through others, i.e. through characteristics which belong to others but not to ourselves. A more detailed account of identity construction will be given in the next chapter which focuses on the construction of ethnic and national identities.

2.1 Representations of Ethnic and National Identities

Many people envision their identity as a stable entity, something natural which has been given to them at birth and on the basis of this 'given', primordial or biological aspect they think to develop their personality. For most people it seems essential to know where they come from, where they belong to, who their ancestors are, where and how they lived. Often, we draw conclusions about our behavior and that of others referring to ideas about ancestry, homeland and mother tongue which seem to be innate to us. All of these aspects relate to questions of ethnicity, race and nationality, three terms which are closely intertwined. Their definitions have given rise to fierce debates and are not only confined to academia but had and still have consequences for people all over the globe.

Although we like to see our identities as something 'given', we have already discussed the influence of different discourses on our identity formation. Storey emphasizes that "[...] it is a concept of identity as constituted in history and culture and not something inherited from nature" and furthermore points out that we are not dealing with one single identity but "multiple and mobile identities" as "a form of 'production' rather than the 'consumption' of a fixed inheritance" (*Inventing popular culture* 79). Hall also

opposes the common way of perceiving identification versus identification as part of discursive practices:

In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'. (Hall, "Who Needs Identity" 2)

Hall particularly claims that "[...] identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (4). Thus, while we like to think that the foundation of our identity resides in our roots, i.e. where we come from, it is rather constructed on the basis of representations of the past, our ancestors, our culture and its traditions. These representations have influence on who we become in as much as we try to belong and fit into their narratives. Hence, Hall argues that identity arises in "coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'" (4). Again, such representations are part of different discourses and identity is constructed at a "suturing point"⁴ (5). This is the point where a subject temporarily attaches itself to a particular discourse and thus becomes the subject of the discourse and can be represented as such. For instance, a person who engages in activities to save the planet from pollution can be described as environmentalist. Thus, such a person would enter the discourse of environmentalism and could also be used by a reporter, for example, to be represented as an environmentalist.

Ethnic, racial and national identities are often grounded in discourses of ancestry, heritage and history. In defining heritage as a discursive practice Hall refers to it as a means of constructing a "collective social memory" ("Whose Heritage?" 5). This memory can be conceived as a story based on specific selected incidents and high points of a nation. In Hall's words "[...] nations construct identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding 'national story'. This story is what is called 'Tradition'" (5). The Scottish national story, for instance, has selected quite a number of tales about heroic Highlanders fighting for independence and justice, which has become part of the Highland Tradition. One of the most well known stories is that of William Wallace which has been disseminated through its representation in the film *Braveheart* (1995). The film has been celebrated because of illustrating this particular aspect of Scottish identity (especially the hero's loyalty to his nation and courage to fight

⁴ According to the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary 'a suture' is "the seam or seamlike line along which two things or parts are sewed or united".

for independence), although it may not faithfully stick to all historical ‘facts’. Hence, the collective social memory of a people is represented through cultural artifacts and practices. Alison Landsberg coins the expression “prosthetic memories” to refer to the way in which mass media, particularly cinema, constructs stories of the past for the people who could not experience them first hand (qtd. in Storey, *Inventing popular culture* 85). Thus, certain films can be seen as filling in the people’s ‘memory-gaps’.

Also historical accounts should not simply be taken for true and as facts. The telling of a coherent history of a nation or people is strongly tied to power relations. Those who are in power are in power to tell their story. Hayden White emphasizes the fictive element of historical accounts (*Metahistory* 1-7). While he does not deny that they are based on actual events, he still stresses the fact that they have the formal structure of a narrative. Hence, the historian first has to select and arrange the data into a chronicle, i.e. ordering the events on a time line. Then the events have to be expressed in a particular story entailing a beginning, middle and end. Finally, the events are connected by cause and reason, what White calls ‘emplotment’, and in this way a story of a particular kind is created. He concludes that “[...] the techniques or strategies that [literature and historiography] use in the composition of their discourses⁵ can be shown to be substantially the same, however different they may appear on a purely surface, or dictional, level of their events” (*Tropics of Discourse* 121).

Although we have explored how heritage and history are discursively constructed and hence are not embedded in nature and do not simply rely on facts, they are still important reference points in developing our ethnic, racial and national identities. People build up strong feelings towards these identities and Disney has learned to make use of the stories which refer to our ‘roots’. The stories about our ancestors and their history are often emotionally charged and people can easily relate to them, especially to the fictions that are created around them. Disney films, and films in general, invite a broad audience to identify with the characters by constructing the storyline around universal values and themes as love for family, friends, or lovers, protecting one’s nation and people, independence, etc. Thus, although the story might be specific to a certain group of people, belonging to a specific ethnicity or nation, the audience can still relate to the story. Nevertheless, this is not to undermine the importance of the narrative’s setting. Quite on the contrary, choosing a narrative around a particular people seems to give the characters of the films the ‘right’

⁵ Note that Hayden White’s use of the term ‘discourse’ differs from Foucault’s definition of the same term. Here ‘discourse’ refers to linguistic (written) interaction, to be more specific, to the narrative discourse which in White’s opinion not only literary but also historical texts employ.

or the ‘necessity’ to behave in a particular way as well as it seems to be a driving force behind the storyline. In, for example, Disney’s *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) the story of Tiana seems to be naturally inscribed into her ethnicity/race and builds on the common narrative of a poor black family in New Orleans struggling for a better life. While her white friend Charlotte is depicted as a spoiled young girl, Tiana has to fight hard for her dream to own a restaurant to come true. The plot clearly rests on ‘roots’ and narratives of the past and hence seems to work quite naturally. Before starting a detailed analysis of ethnic and national identities in *Brave*, more precise definitions of ethnicity, race and nationality are examined in order to be able to grasp their importance.

2.1.1 Ethnicity, Race and Nation

Ethnicity, race and nation are all interrelated concepts. Not only do they entail who we are, how we live, what our values are and how we should interpret the world, but they also function to organize our societies. All three concepts have a common core: They all relate to ideas of shared descent and ancestry as well as to the idea of a common culture. Nevertheless, each term is accompanied by specific connotations. Thus, race refers to the classification of humankind in abstract groups whose primary marker of difference is their physical appearance. The particularities of ethnicity, or ethnic groups, are that the primary marker of difference is cultural, i.e. cultural differences of social boundaries; ethnic groups are often regarded as foreign, exotic, minority and other, and they are perceived as a sub-category within a nation-state. Finally, the term nation carries a strong political connotation and is therefore often referred to as nation-state. (Fenton 12-23)

The concept of ‘race’ developed during the Enlightenment, seventeenth till eighteenth century, when Europeans started to colonize different parts of the world. They differentiated between groups of people based on their phenotypical, i.e. physical appearance and claimed that these biological differences were evidence for certain intellectual dispositions and temperamental characteristics. They furthermore invented a system of racial classification, ranging from superiority to inferiority, with the Caucasian (white) race on top of the hierarchy. Via this system the oppressors could legitimate their rule over others. Although nowadays no one denies the existence of differences in physical appearance as skin color and hair type, which can at times be located to specific geographical regions, the hypothesis that these aspects influence other aspects like intellect and temperament, is nowadays widely rejected. Moreover, there are more differences among one ‘stock’ of people than between one race and another. Nevertheless, race still

matters. The concept carries its connotations and assumptions which influence our behavior and thoughts. Hence, race also finds its expressions in media representations of our everyday life. (Baldwin 177f.; Cottle 4-10; Fenton 53-57; Walton and Caliendo 3-6)

Common stereotypes about race also sometimes appear in Disney movies. Notice, for example, in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), the depiction of hierarchical structures between white and black, or the reference made between rhythm, jazz music and black people's innate rhythmic feeling. The film is set in the 1920s in New Orleans, Louisiana, a time when these stereotypes were still widely held to be 'true'. Furthermore, details like the lighting bug's name Ray and the black witch being blind and wearing black glasses remind us of black musicians like Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder. In addition, critics argue that Disney's strategy of racial representations has often resulted in anthropomorphism and racially coded language or accents (Byrne and McQuillan 96; 104-5; Giroux 105-6). For instance, in *The Lion King* (1994) the hyenas embody black American stereotypes and Shenzi, the leader of the hyenas, is voiced by Whoopi Goldberg. In *The Jungle Book* (1967) the song "I wanna be like you," sung by the monkey King Louie, may also carry implications of racism as the lyrics include phrases such as "I wanna be a man", "I wanna walk like you, talk like you" etc. If one considers the animals of the jungle to represent humans, one must then reflect upon the messages communicated about the people of Africa.

In contrast to the concept of race, the term ethnicity or ethnic groups rather stresses the differences among groups of people according to cultural and historical aspects. Ethnic identities (like racial and national identities) are primarily about drawing boundaries. Although everyone has an ethnic identity, specifically in the Western world, the term is usually used with regard to others. 'We' belong to a nation; the 'others', as immigrants for instance, are labeled ethnic minorities. These differentiations are not only made on the basis of cultural aspects but also on the 'exotic' appearance of the 'others'. Ibrahim refers to Max Weber who argued that circumstances of historical and social nature generated group markers to differentiate among communities (13). Weber also claims that ethnic groups are constructed around the belief in a common origin even though this common origin is widely fictitious. Further theories of ethnicity can roughly be divided into two camps: the primordialists and the instrumentalists. The primordialists claim that people perceive to have a bond that ties one naturally to others, for instance one is born into a group (family, language group, etc.) and because of this bond one feels loyalty towards the group members. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, postulate that ethnic identities are

used in a rational way to serve the person's (political) interests. Hence, ethnicity is highlighted when it benefits someone under a given circumstance. (Ibrahim 13-15; Fenton 80-87)

These two views are however not entirely exclusive. Disney films often play upon the 'natural' bond between the protagonist and her/his family or ethnic group. It is depicted as common sense to be loyal to those people and to protect them (e.g. in *Pocahontas* (1995)). Nevertheless, not all Disney films highlight ethnic identity in the same way. Some (e.g. *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), *Brave* (2012)) use ethnicity more explicitly and profoundly than others (e.g. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000)). This is not to say that in those other movies ethnic identities are not represented at all but they are not 'central' or highlighted. Rather, different ways of identification are prioritized such as class or gender.

Fenton and Ibrahim, furthermore, refer to Frederik Barth, a social anthropologist who made an important point about ethnic groups (Fenton 90-92; Ibrahim 15). Barth emphasizes the boundaries that are drawn between one group and another. The importance is therefore not the cultural content of an ethnic group per se, but rather the characteristics that differentiate one group from another. Furthermore, those characteristics can be internally and/or externally determined, i.e. defined by the group itself and/or defined by others. Disney can be described as an actor who externally defines and depicts characteristics of other groups. The ethnic groups of Disney films have distinctive characteristics and the boundaries can usually be drawn between them and a mainstream Western/American ethnic identity, a rather broad identity and not as easily to pin down as those well defined and clear-cut ethnic identities represented in the films.

The term nation is also closely linked to ethnicity and race. One of the particularities of national identity is the identification with a specific place. Again this can either be done internally, by identifying oneself with that place, or externally, by others who identify a group of people with a specific territory. Baldwin explains that the concept of nation is a rather modern one which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century (158). She goes further claiming that the primary reason for the emergence of this new type of identification is that other forms lost their value. These other ways of identification, like family, tribe, religion, were rendered less important and useful due to modifications of social relations triggered by new communication technologies. Although nations seem to offer a secure and stable identification (it seems as if they have a long historical past), they

are always prone to change. Representations and narratives about nations adopt according to social changes and power relations. Fenton claims that the difference between ethnic groups and nations lies within the nations' power of self-government (52). Ethnic groups do not rule for themselves but are bound to the politics of a nation. According to him there are multinational-states in which various nations exist that may demand independence. As an example he lists Scotland within the state of Britain.

One of the most useful definitions of nation stems from Benedict Anderson who understands it as an imagined community: "it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). He goes on to argue that nations are "*imagined*" because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Only through the imagination of such a collectivity of people can the concept of nation exist. However, each nation has its boundaries and therefore it is "imagined as *limited*" because even the largest of them [...] has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself as coterminous with mankind" (7). This also entails the exclusion of others who do not belong to this imagined community within its specific territory. Moreover, nations are "imagined as *sovereign*" because the role of dynasties and religion became less important, whereas the nation developed as the symbol for freedom (7). Last but not least, the nation is "imagined as a *community*, because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). Hence, inequalities existing as vertical lines, like gender, class or ethnicity, seem to be non-existent or at least less important. This phenomenon is also observable in many films that focus on national identity and the nation as community (Hollywood productions such as *Braveheart* (1995), *Pearl Harbor* (2001) and also Disney films like *Mulan* (1998) and *Brave* (2012)). The people of a nation are depicted as fighting for a common cause, for example for independence or peace, they all act in concert, whereas the internal difference within the nation find only marginal expression within those films.

Anthony D. Smith in his study on national and ethnic identities explains the importance of ethnic groups, or pre-modern 'ethnie', in the formation of modern nations (19-42). He claims that an ethnic community is made of six attributes:

1. a collective proper name
2. a myth of common ancestry
3. shared historical memories
4. one or more differentiating elements of common culture
5. an association with a specific 'homeland'
6. a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (21)

The more prominent these attributes are in an ethnic community and the more widely they are shared by a population, the stronger is the community. Such an ethnic community can then become the ethnic core of a nation, i.e. the nation is formed on the basis of this ethnic core. In terms of a nation's territorial claims, Smith states that its boundaries are "largely determined by the myths and memories of the dominant *ethnie*, which include the foundation charter, the myth of the golden age and the associated territorial claims, or ethnic title-deeds" (39). Hence, foundation myths of an ethnic community are taken over by the nation to justify and support its existence. Not surprisingly, the attributes of a nation include those of an ethnic community but also a political, legal and economic dimension is added. Smith, thus, defines a nation as

a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members. (14)

These features of nations and ethnic communities explain on what grounds such collective identities are built and try to account for their endurance. The values such a community shares bind them together and mark it as different from other nations/ethnicities. The following subchapters focus more specifically on aspects that hold together such communities, namely: territory and landscape; myths, historical collective memories and tradition; and finally, otherness and stereotyping. Furthermore, the analysis of Disney movies will mainly draw on these aspects and concepts in order to investigate how ethnic and national identities are depicted in the films.

2.1.2 Territory and Landscape

*An apparently simple picture of a country scene
may yield many fields of vision.*

-Stephen Daniels-

A particular territory or stretch of land can take on significant meaning for people and thus, they start to view it through a specific lens. Nations and ethnic communities make use of territory and landscape by culturally appropriating it and hence, making it meaningful for their people. Especially the representations of landscape and territory, produced in a

specific context, allow the land to inherit a sense of value and meaning. A landscape is thus “a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings” (Cosgrove and Daniels 1).

The cultural image of a landscape is a defining feature for nations and ethnic communities since they share a historic territory and feel associated with a specific homeland. Anthony D. Smith differentiates between two models of nations, the territorial “civic” model of a nation with common institutions and a common culture; and the genealogical “ethnic” model of nation focusing on common descent (8-14). He emphasizes that within both models historical and territorial heritage matters. A specific territory thus seems to establish a bond among the people who inhabit it. This also applies to (pre-modern) ethnic communities who do not possess the land physically, as nations do, but still establish a historical and symbolic link to it (40). Nevertheless, we are not talking about any kind of land.

It is, and must be, the ‘historic’ land, the ‘homeland’, the ‘cradle’ of our people [...]. A ‘historic’ land is one where terrain and people have exerted mutual, and beneficial, influence over several generations. The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where ‘our’ sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought. All this makes the homeland unique. Its rivers, coasts, lakes, mountains and cities become ‘sacred’ [...]. (Smith 9)

Historical memories and the land with which they are associated become inextricably linked. The territory and landscapes are marked by what happened there and they attain symbolic value for the members of the community who share them. Landscapes are thus prone to become the icons of a nation or ethnic community.

Sörlin explains how the articulation of territory and landscape constitutes regional and national identities. Landscape first had to be expressed by language (not only in words but also in other symbols), in order to ‘mean’ something. He defines the articulation of territory as a process by which, primarily, one area is differentiated from another, i.e. the landscape of one nation is made different from that of another nation. Secondly, affection and memory is created around the landscape. Through these processes people acquire a sense of belonging to a specific space. The people of a nation/region also have to learn about the characteristics of the land, which is done by means of social or national remembering. National curricula, text books, art and images, museums, monuments, flags as well as tourism help us to remember the ‘characteristics’ and ‘uniqueness’ of our homeland. (Sörlin 103-9)

Considering the iconicity of landscape it becomes obvious that representations of territory and landscape also play a crucial role in films. The representation of landscape in Disney movies allows the audience to make inferences about the people who live there, i.e. about their national and/or ethnic identity. It thus sets the scene for the action which seems to unfold naturally in its surroundings. Additionally, within these landscapes it is easy to incorporate magical proceedings due to their 'exotic' appeal.

2.1.3 Historical Memories, Myths and Tradition

One of the most crucial factors of establishing a bond between the members of a national or ethnic community is the historical memories they share. As we have seen, they are often linked to a specific territory and landscape and thus a sense of a historic homeland is created to which the community feels it belongs. Furthermore, in a preceding chapter (2.1) it was discussed how history and heritage are discursively constructed. Summarizing the main points, a collective social memory is constructed by selecting the high-points of the nation/ethnicity which are then assembled into an unfolding national story. Thus, there is usually a great emphasis on the 'golden ages' of the community and the stories of heroes, sages and legends which contribute to the construction of a distinct national/ethnic identity (A. Smith 78). The members of the community are exposed to this national story and they become consumers of it and hence develop their sense of belonging and identity on the back of it. As Weedon claims, "Individual constructions of identity are affirmed by seeing something of oneself and one's forebears in representations for the history of the nation" (26). Warfare also often enters this national story and provides memories and myths for the following generations. Although it cannot be claimed that warfare always supports the cohesion and continuity of a community (it can also fracture the community into smaller parts or alliances are formed with others), warfare can mobilize the consciousness of a nation or ethnic community (A. Smith 27).

Since we have already discussed the influence of shared historical memories and heritage elsewhere in more detail, we will now turn to myth. Defining the term 'myth' is not an easy task and so there are various approaches trying to come to an understanding of the concept. Roger Silverstone provides a useful survey of important theories on myth. He summarizes the common features of the works of Ernst Cassirer, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Mircea Eliade who believe that "[myth, the] world of mystery and imagination, of feeling, participation and transformation is involved in the creation of order and of a secure reality out of the darkness of the unknown" (58). Thus, myth on the one hand belongs to a world

apart, apart from the world of science and common sense. On the other hand, myths are also able to penetrate everyday acts and hence they are used to counter fear of chaos and the unknown. Moreover, they promote solidarity among the members of a community. Silverstone also refers to Claude Lévi-Strauss who sees myth as structural and thus claims that myth is a kind of language which both “reflects the ordered activity of man’s mind and derives or attempts to resolve the natural disorder of precultural experience” (58). Myths hence often serve to answer universal questions of human existence. Silverstone, in expanding the notion of myth to mythic, also relates it to magic, ritual and folktales. He concludes with a definition of the mythic:

The mythic dimension of culture contains traditional stories and actions [e.g. rituals] whose source is the persistent need to deny chaos and create order. It contributes to the security of social and cultural existence. The mythic is a world apart, but it is also close at hand. It acts as a bridge between the everyday and the transcendent, the known and the unknown, the sacred and the profane. (70)

Myth thus plays a role in reducing the uncertainties and ambiguities of the world. One of its main functions is therefore often to create and stabilize a social order.

Anthony D. Smith believes that the boundaries between history and myth, especially in pre-modern communities, are often blurred (22). The most important myths are those of common ancestry. Ethnic communities and also nations draw on the myth of common descent and present the whole nation/community as belonging to one huge family. He claims that “[...] even where a nation-to-be could boast no ethnic antecedents of importance [...], the need to forge [...] a coherent mythology and symbolism of a community of history and culture became everywhere paramount as a condition of national survival and unity” (42). Myths and histories of the past thus still have a function for the present and future, i.e. that people believe in their belonging and communion.

Disney movies often contain myths of ancestry and heroes. In *The Lion King* (1994), for example, order can only be guaranteed when the ancestral myth is valued and fulfilled. Hence, the rightful king, Simba, has to reign and not his uncle Scar under whose rule chaos and misery are brought about Pride Land. When Simba returns and expels Scar, peace and order are restored. Simba at the same time fits into the myth of the hero who becomes the savior of Pride Land. Joseph Campbell claims that there are certain universal myths which only differ in their variations: “[A]ll [communities] have been built from the one fund of mythological motifs – variously selected, organized, interpreted, and ritualized according to local need, but revered by every people on earth” (232). The most common universal myths are about creation and the origin of humankind, heroes, suffering and evil,

as well as destruction. Jung also observes that “[...] the myth of the hero is the most common and the best known myth in the world. [...] The essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual’s ego-consciousness – his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses – in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him” (Jung and von Franz 101). In Disney movies, the discovery of the hero’s strengths and weaknesses is often related to a period of transition until order is again established, as for instance in *The Lion King* (1994) the transition is represented via Simba’s excursion to the jungle where he meets Timon and Pumba, in *Mulan* (1998) it is visualized through the crossdressing and in *Brave* (2012) Merida tries to undo the spell that transformed her mother into a bear.

Another definition of myth comes from Roland Barthes who sees myth as a way of communicating an underlying set of values or ideology (250-316). Myth, in this sense, thus shares some resemblance with Foucault’s idea of discourse. Barthes develops the concept of myth within the structuralist approach and bases it on the process of signification, i.e. a signifier (word or image) relates to a signified (the object in the world or a mental concept of it in our mind) and together they form a sign. Barthes calls this the first level of signification or the level of denotation. However, he claims that there is also a deeper level of signification, that of connotation. On that second level of signification, the first sign becomes the signifier of another signified and together they produce a second sign, i.e. the myth (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Barthes and myth (adapted from Barthes 259)

This concept of myth can, for instance, be applied to the following picture of Disney princesses (see fig. 3). On the first denotative level, we perceive a line-up of thirteen of the most prominent Disney princesses ranging from Anna to Elsa from the film *Frozen*. (Those who are not familiar with Disney movies might only perceive thirteen beautiful girls. They still might arrive at the same connotations.) On the connotative level, this sign becomes another signifier, i.e. that of variety, richness and diversity. The princesses can clearly be assigned to different ‘backgrounds’ and also ethnicities. Thus, the myth the picture seems

to communicate is that Disney movies are sensitive to other cultures and value multiculturalism.



Fig. 3: Line-up of Disney princesses

The following figure (fig.4) is an illustration of the example of Disney princesses as applied to Barthes' concept of myth:

1 Signifier patches of color, lines of drawing	2 Signified cartoon princesses
3 Sign I SIGNIFIER a line-up of thirteen Disney princesses	II SIGNIFIED variety, richness, diversity
III SIGN Disney is sensitive to other cultures; They value multiculturalism as well as other cultures' perspectives on life	

Fig. 4: Disney's multiculturalism as a myth

Most importantly, however, myth is not innocent. Although the denotative level helps to naturalize and disguise the myth (it seems as if the connotations come up naturally with the images), myth always has a hidden intention. The picture of the Disney princesses has the intention of making the consumer believe that diversity is something natural to Disney movies and Disney merchandise. Nevertheless, a closer look tells us that US American values are often induced into each character no matter what cultural background they seem to come from (see chapter four). Furthermore, the myth of Disney's multiculturalism can be and is evoked not only by this specific signifier, i.e. the line-up of Disney princesses, but a range of different signifiers are used (and their repetition) to perpetuate this particular image of Disney. Those signifiers are the movies themselves (e.g. *Mulan*, *Pocahontas*, *The Princess and the Frog*, *Brave*), merchandise, advertising as well as Disney's theme parks. Barthes also points out that myth has to be considered under its historical and social

circumstances. Thus, to create and communicate the myth of Disney's cultural diversity became important for the company because of social change. Disney took up society's increasing concerns about multiculturalism and made cultural diversity part of their selling strategy by producing 'multicultural' films. Barthes concept of myth can of course also be applied to national myths, as for instance to those which communicate strength and greatness of a nation.

In order to return to the mechanisms that bind a nation or ethnic community together we now turn to the issue of tradition. The term 'tradition' is usually used to refer to cultural aspects, a collective wisdom, knowledge or customs, which are handed down and passed on from generation to generation. The adjective 'traditional' connotes endurance and continuity. Traditions can be perceived as positive or negative. When it is emphasized how traditions are rooted in the past, they can be used to legitimize certain conducts or, on the other hand, they can also be looked upon scornfully in a sense that they prevent social change and progress. Thus, traditions seem to share aspects of myths and are similar to their function. A national tradition or a nation's customs seem to foster the "deep-rooted nature of a national culture" (Baldwin 11). These national traditions and customs are often transmitted via media representations and thus seem to represent the particularities of a nation or ethnic community. Also tourism often draws on these particular aspects of a community which can be discovered, explored and experienced within the homeland of the people. (Baldwin 11)

Historical memories, myths and traditions clearly play a pivotal role in creating feelings of belonging to a nation or ethnic community. The use of these aspects in film representations gives the audience a sense of how deep-rooted the characters are in their homeland and also provide and confirm myths/ideas about national/ethnic identities.

2.1.4 Otherness and Stereotyping

Another feature which Anthony D. Smith defines as fundamental for the existence and endurance of an ethnic community or a nation are the differentiating elements of common culture. What is important is that a set of distinguishing elements of one culture differs from the set of elements of another culture. Thus, one population is able to define itself as different from another. For instance, the US American accent and festivities like Thanks Giving can be opposed to the British accent and royal festivities like the Queen's birthday. Those elements, as Smith explains, are rather 'obvious' cultural markers such as language,

customs, pigmentation and religion. However, these elements first have to be endowed with meaning in order to act as such markers of difference. (A. Smith 23)

Language is one of those markers that is inextricably linked to identity and thus also to national and ethnic identities. The language a person is using does not just tell us “what the person says, but [it also tells us] *of the person*, from which others will read and interpret the person’s identity in the richest and most complex ways” (Joseph 225, emphasis given). Thus, we draw inferences about a person based on their speech. Language is therefore not only used as a tool to communicate but also as a tool to represent, to represent one’s identity. By using their voice, spoken or written, people produce a representation of their identity, one that is recognizable for others. Thus, the others can ‘read’ the national and ethnic identity from what a person says and how they say it. (Joseph 224-227)

Language and other markers of differentiation thus help us to assign a specific nationality and/or ethnicity to people. A common way of identifying ourselves is therefore by looking at others and, more specifically, at the ways in which we differ from each other. Films also often draw on such differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and mark a group of people or an individual as ‘other’. Yet, what function does the use of ‘difference’ have?

Looking at the matter from a linguistic perspective, ‘difference’ is indispensable for the production of meaning. We only understand the meaning of ‘black’ with its opposition ‘white’. Similarly, we can mark ‘difference’ between nations and ethnicities. The British are not French, not Indian, not American, etc. The English then, are not Scottish, not Welsh and not Irish. Nevertheless, this way of marking ‘difference’ is also precarious since those binary oppositions reduce diversity to a few essentialist features. Thus, Englishness could be reduced to queuing, tea time, fair play, politeness etc. leaving out many other manifestations of Englishness. Hall, moreover, explains Jacques Derrida’s hypothesis of the relationship between the opposites (*Representation* 235). Derrida argues that the relationship is often not neutral. Rather, there is one dominant and one inferior pole. For example, ‘men’ would be the dominant pole in contrast to ‘women’, ‘white’ would be the dominant pole in contrast to ‘black’ and ‘English’ would be dominant in contrast to ‘Scottish’. Despite the reductionist and simplification processes which occur through the drawing of boundaries and differences, they also help us to classify and order things in a systematic way. It is thus easier for us to grasp the opaque diversity of the world and organize our thoughts and ideas. In order to classify things, clear distinctions need to be made between them. Nevertheless, this classifying and ordering processes often implies

that one social/cultural group considers itself as central and positions its opposite pole as the 'other'. (Hall, *Representation* 234-237)

A very popular study of Otherness is presented by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism*. In his opinion the West has created an image of the East as the 'other'. The Orient is not something which simply exists, it is a European invention. By defining Orientalism as a discourse, in the sense of Foucault, he claims:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (113)

Hence, the invention of the Orient simultaneously meant the invention of vocabulary to talk about it, of institutions to support it, of scholarships, imagery and even colonial doctrines. Creating this discourse of Orientalism also implies differentiating it from its opposite, the Occident. Nevertheless, the relationship between Orient and Occident is not an equal one. The Occident, the European, Western identity, is given a superior position and the Orient is rendered backward and inferior. The relationship is thus one of power, of domination, of defining the East through the West. (Said 111-117)

Disney acts in a similar way in as far as it uses its power to create pictures of certain cultures as the 'other'. They promote their particular view of a specific culture in their movies and we often find the opposition of target audience (American, Western culture) versus some exotic 'other' represented in the film. For instance, in *The Little Mermaid*, the mermaid world is depicted as the 'other'; in *Pocahontas*, it is the Indians; in *Aladdin*, the Arabs; in *Mulan*, the Chinese; and in *Brave*, it is the Scottish. Their 'otherness' is clearly marked through difference to the more familiar, 'normal' American/Western culture. Usually, 'otherness' is further emphasized via stereotypical representations of these cultures.

Stereotyping is a term that is commonly used nowadays and often carries negative connotations. However, what exactly is 'stereotyping' and what functions does it have? Why are we using stereotypes and why are they used so frequently in movies when we are aware of the fact that they are not true for everyone who seems to fit into a specific group? Richard Dyer refers to Walter Lippmann, who coined the term 'stereotyping', and takes his ideas as a starting point for defining four aspects of stereotypes; Stereotypes as:

1. an ordering process
2. a 'short cut'
3. referring to 'the world', and
4. expressing 'our' values and beliefs. (Dyer, *Role of Stereotyping* 207)

Stereotypes help to order and organize the immense amount of data we perceive and thus make it easier for us to grasp the world and to make sense of it. In the light of this aspect, Dyer states that one cannot simply claim that stereotyping is bad, it is, to some extent, even necessary or inescapable (207). Nevertheless, the problem is that the information stereotypes contain is only partial but this partiality and its limitations are not being made explicit (207). On the contrary, the stereotype, and the order which is created through it, seems to be absolute, certain and unchangeable. Pickering, for instance, states that this aspect of stereotyping is hazardous since it "[...] attempts to deny any flexible thinking [...] in the interest of the structures of power which it upholds" (3). Crucially, power relations play an important role in who stereotypes and who is being stereotyped.

Secondly, stereotypes can serve as 'short cuts' since they are a type of representation which is striking, easily-grasped and simple. Still they can have lots of connotations and therefore contain more information than one might think at first glance. Thus, stereotypes are not as simple as one might believe since many inferences have to be made in order to understand a certain stereotype. (Dyer, *Role of Stereotyping* 208)

Dyer's third point is that stereotypes serve as reference to 'the world'. He further claims that stereotypes are actually a subcategory of 'types' which form the broader category. He defines 'type' as "any simple, vivid, memorable, easily-grasped and widely recognized characterisation in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or 'development' is kept to a minimum" (Dyer, *Stereotyping* 355). Typing allows us to make a reference between a particular person or object and the concept of them in our mind. For instance, a person can be assigned a specific ethnicity, nationality, gender, class etc. according to our concepts of that particular ethnicity, nationality etc. Compared to types, Hall claims that stereotypes go even further and "*reduce* everything about the person to those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them, and *fix* them without change or development to eternity" (*Representation* 258, emphasis given). Thus, a few essential traits are taken out of context, then simplified and exaggerated and applied to everyone who seems to belong to that group. Furthermore, stereotypes are represented as fixed, natural and given.

Dyer's last point is that through stereotyping 'our' values and beliefs are expressed (*Role of Stereotyping* 209). The central question is, however, whose values? Stereotypes are only able to operate if everyone agrees on them: everyone believes that members of a

specific group are like such-and-such. But, there must be someone who creates the stereotype, i.e. those who are in power. They use these stereotypes to define those who 'do not belong' as 'other' and themselves as central. Hall calls this strategy 'splitting' (*Representation* 258). Thereby the 'normal' is split from the 'abnormal' and hence the 'abnormal', the 'different', the 'other' is excluded. Dyer, moreover, states that those 'who belong', the dominant group, use the norms and values of their own culture and simply apply them on that of the 'others' (*Stereotyping* 356). In this way, they succeed in defining the 'other' as different or even abnormal. Furthermore, he claims that stereotypes carry an implicit narrative. Thus, it seems as if the stereotyped trait determines the person's whole personality and his/her actions can be understood and explained (away) (358).

Stereotyping plays a fundamental role in Disney movies. They help us order the information we receive, it is easier for us to determine the relationship between the characters and they are often used to trigger funny moments and laughs. Nevertheless, some movies work with very rigidly defined stereotypes as for instance gender stereotypes. Many Disney films communicate a particular image of how girls (and boys) have to look, behave and think. Especially in older movies like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950) but also in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and even in *Pocahontas* (1995) the princesses' lives revolve around loving a man. It seems as if the girls' happiness is dependent on finding their prince. On the other hand, the princes are depicted as strong, adventurous, independent and the saviors of the young women. Thus, the stereotype of the Disney princess usually contains an implicit narrative, i.e. that of finding a man, which is however broken in *Brave* since Merida has no interest at all in finding a man. Furthermore, Disney movies also make use of national and ethnic stereotypes and thus draw us into a specific, often exotic and mystical, land where the action unfolds. Also, the stereotypical representation of the characters' nationality or ethnicity often entails an implicit narrative. For example, Pocahontas' Indian ethnicity is emphasized in the way she lives in harmony and balance with Mother Nature. This particular character trait also influences the plot since it is she who suggests living harmoniously side by side with the British explorers. Thus, one particular stereotyped trait of the Indian rubs off on the whole plot of the movie. This aspect of stereotyping is also paramount in other Disney films as we will discover in the analysis of *Brave*.

Within the last chapters, the essential aspects of a nation and ethnic community have been investigated: the creation of an iconic landscape, of historical collective memories, myths and traditions as well as the importance of differentiating cultural elements. These aspects

create a sense of belonging and have the function of holding together a community. They also play a crucial role for individuals who develop their national/ethnic identity on the back of these features. With regard to film representations, these aspects are fundamental since they navigate the audience into a specific place. The audience is therefore able to perceive the characters' national and/or ethnic identity and makes inferences about them on the basis of this information. Film representations of national/ethnic identities of course also have an influence on what we think about these nationalities/ethnicities. This is also true for Disney movies since they too entail values about different cultures and communicate them to a broad audience. In the analysis of the Disney movie *Brave* the aspects of landscape, history, myth, tradition, otherness and stereotyping are central. We will see which mechanisms are employed to depict the Scottish identity and which values about that culture are being communicated to the audience.

2.2 Representations of Ethnic and National Identities in *Brave*

In the Disney film *Brave* (2012) ethnic and national identities play a crucial role and have an influence on other aspects such as gender, as well as the way in which the narrative unfolds. The characters' physical appearance, their behavior, their customs, the territory and age they live in are all represented in a very clear way so that it is easy for us to locate them and assign them a specific ethnic and even national identity. As the following diagram (see fig. 5) visualizes, due to the characters' white skin, we would assume they are Europeans or Americans. However, the representation of their physical appearance allows us to narrow down further their possible ethnicity to a Celtic identity. In a last step we can even determine their nationality because of the specific territory they live in, the accent of their language, the food they eat, the kilts they wear and the music they play. Hence, we would assume they are Scots.

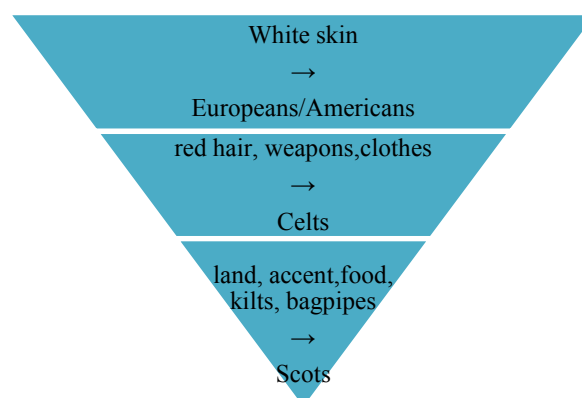


Fig. 5: Assigning an Ethnicity/Nationality

All these elements of representation and markers of difference act as clues for us in order to be able to locate the narrative and to assign an identity to the characters. Yet, how are we able to draw these conclusions and what do children, who might not know much or even nothing about the Scottish, learn about this specific ethnic/national identity? Our knowledge about Scottishness is primarily based on other representations of Scottishness that appear in stories and are spread via historical and fictional books, oral accounts, the news, the internet and films. Therefore, we will first look at the filmic canon of representations of Scottishness to find out if there are typical themes and topics that recur. This will show that our picture of the Scottish is heavily influenced by such representations to the point that we internalize a rather stereotypical Scottish identity and take it for granted that Scots look and act like this and thus, share a particular culture or way of living. We will then find out if the Disney film *Brave* does continue this tradition of filmic representations of Scottishness and thus also introduces children into a dominant Scottish discourse, or whether it offers different perspectives on the Scottish identity instead. Furthermore, it will be discussed why Scotland offers a good playground for the mythic elements of Disney movies and what role stereotyping plays.

2.2.1 Common Representations of Scottishness in the Cinema

“The ways in which the outside world has seen Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and in which the countries themselves have connived, are in the terms crystallized by Hollywood [...]” (Richards 175). This statement by Jeffrey Richards in *Films and British National Identity* clearly shows the influence others have on constructing an image of national identity, and in our case of Scotland. The particular image of Scotland that has been promoted is that of a rather old-fashioned and backward country not being compatible with the modern and industrialized world, an image which has not always been received euphorically by Scots. Nevertheless, Richards points out that the broad audience rather favors stories about myths and dreams than documentary and fact-accounts. Therefore, especially Hollywood but also England have designed stories about Scotland that include these mythic, dramatic, spectacular elements. (Richards 175-177)

Duncan Petrie explains that cinematic representations of Scotland can be broadly classified under three major traditions, the topics of Kailyard, Tartanry and Clydesidism. Kailyardism refers to the way in which Scotland was/is depicted as the countryside consisting of only small towns where the inhabitants would act and live in a backward way. The trope of Tartanry produced and contributed to the discourse of the noble

Highlander, a romantic illustration of the Scottish patriot usually associated with the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 and Sir Walter Scott's works. The Romantic movement, eighteenth until nineteenth century, propagated an image of the Scottish as freedom fighters who try to resist the unification with England/Great Britain. Films which fall into the discourse of Clydesidism deal with an industrial Scotland and its working-class with a focus on masculine representations. While Clydesidism is obviously not a trope to be found in the Disney film *Brave*, aspects of Kailyardism and Tartanry are clearly incorporated. (Petrie 2-9)

In order to avoid the negative connotations of Kailyardism and Tartanry, Petrie stresses Scotland's representation as remote and peripheral place, as well as screen adaptations of the heroic past and romanticizing of the Jacobite rebellions (8f.). With regard to the remoteness of Scotland, Petrie claims that this particular depiction of Scotland gives way to certain kinds of narratives typically located in peripheral places (32-51). Also the way the characters are represented is influenced by this specific space, a wild, picturesque landscape and as he argues, "Central to this [particular kind of narrative and characters] is the idea of remoteness – physical, social, moral – from metropolitan rules, conventions and certainties" (32). Hence, Scotland is a place where one can retreat into adventure and romance, a place beyond the rules of civilization, where dreams might come true, where fantasy and desire find expression. The films therefore often resort to a nostalgic past to allow mythic elements into the narrative. A crucial role in creating Scotland as a peripheral place bound to nature is the representation of the landscape itself. A romantic picture is given of the wild landscape as Richards states,

Life in the mountains was harsh and dreary until the Romantic movement celebrated it, and, thereafter, cascading waterfalls, glens and crags, mountain lakes and picturesque ruins became the prime elements in the identity of Wales, Ireland and Scotland, 'the land of the mountain and the flood' (179).

This particular depiction of Scottish landscape clearly motivates a narrative full of mythic, romantic and adventurous elements. Richards goes further arguing that Romanticism invented a particular kind of Scotland characterized by typical representations of landscape, music and the supernatural (178-181). Moreover, he claims, referring to Malcom Chapman's work, that in the eighteenth century a pan-Celtic identity was invented including Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Cornwall. Most probably the Celts did not exist as ethnic group until the creation of a Celtic past where Celts were depicted as having a distinctive culture, a common origin and language. Although the languages did have a common origin, "Scotland was far from being racially united or distinct" (Richards 180)

and thus the Celts as an ethnic group are an invention. The Celtic ethnicity was coined during a time when nationalism arose and the peripheral countries tried to claim a distinct identity from the English. According to Richards:

The Celtic identity was then constructed and read back into the past. [...] The Anglo-Saxon was seen as phlegmatic, stolid, practical, unimaginative, prosaic, individualist. Therefore the Celt was constructed as emotional, restless, poetic, imaginative, artistic, communal. This is completely unhistorical. [...] It so happens that the characteristics ascribed to the mythical Celt were precisely the qualities most prized by the Romantic revival (181).

This image of opposition between the English and the Scottish is one many of us have in our minds. Richards however observes that the filmic representations of the English and Scottish often tend to avoid presenting the English characters as villains. It is rather the bureaucrats and officials that are condemned, yet those are often played by English characters (e.g. in *Whiskey Galore!* (1949), *Rob Roy – The Highland Rogue* (1953). Moreover, the English are often ‘bewitched’ by the small Scottish communities. Nevertheless, the opposition between Scottish and English identities recurs in the representations and romanticizing of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. (Richards 191)

Not only did the Romantic tradition of the eighteenth/nineteenth century invent a particular landscape and the Celtic identity, but another focus was on the historical past, especially the medieval past. Historical legends of the thirteenth century, such as William Wallace, Robert the Bruce and Bonnie Prince Charlie, were taken as models for the construction of the figure of the heroic Highlander, a ‘noble savage’ and patriot fighting for the independence of his country. This romanticized figure found its reemergence in depictions of two other historical events, namely the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. Although the Jacobite rebellions were rather a struggle between Scottish Highlands and Lowlands, they were nevertheless widely appropriated as another battle of the Scottish against the unification with the British state. Again, the illustration of the landscape as wild and untamed nature reflects the character’s virtues: he is loyal, noble and fights in honor of his land and people. His enemies are the oppressors of the Hanoverian British state who intend to rob him of his independence. This image, as well as popular novels by nineteenth century writers such as Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, who also tried to forge a distinct/distinctive identity for the Scottish as noble Highlanders, served as basis for many screen adaptations. (Richards 178)

Along this renaissance of the heroic freedom fighters, the representation of Scots in their ‘traditional’ Highland dress, the tartan and kilt, also had its revival. Trevor-Roper (191-215) explains that Highland traditions, as wearing a kilt, the clan tartans, music being played with bagpipes, were all invented during the eighteenth century. The traditional Scottish dress, i.e. the kilt, was actually an imitation of the long Irish shirt. Only after the Irish shirt had been considered inconvenient for workers in factories, the short skirt i.e. kilt was born. After the rebellion in 1745, the English banned the kilt and when rendering the ban void, middle and upper classes began to identify with and celebrate it. Furthermore, at the onset there were no specific clan tartans, these only emerged in the eighteenth century. The different patterns and colors were simply a marketing strategy and only subsequently their meaning of ‘belonging to different clans’ was inscribed into them (Richards 183). Baldwin also notes the artificial construction around the meaning of the Highland dress, a meaning which is prone to change (11f.). She points out that during the 1950s it was considered effeminate to wear kilt, but nowadays the Highland dress celebrates its revival, often worn at weddings and other special occasions. This piece of garment has risen to the status of one of the most recognizable features of Scottish culture promoted by an increase in Scottish nationalism.

Many film adaptations also incorporate the Highland dress as a recognizable element of Scottishness and combine it with the character of the heroic Highlander. One of the most popular representations is that of Hollywood’s *Braveheart* (1995). Richards refers to the movie in terms of a distortion of the historical facts around William Wallace, a Scottish patriot of the thirteenth century. He concludes that “the film is carefully constructed to appeal to the ‘politically correct’ sentiments of 1990s Hollywood. It supports the struggle of a small and powerless country against a large, tyrannical and imperialist neighbour” (185). Even though *Braveheart* does not stick to all historical facts, Mel Gibson’s performance is one of the most widely known representations of Scottishness and thus has influence on how we perceive the Scots, their history and culture. Another Highland hero upon whom quite a few films are based is Rob Roy. It is interesting to point out that even Walt Disney has produced its own version of historical and mythical past of this Scottish legend in *Rob Roy – The Highland Rogue* (1953). This production also includes the typical kilts, the bagpipe music and Highland dances. Interestingly, it is not the English who are represented as the villains but the Scottish Secretary of State. (Richards 187)

When comparing our image of Scottishness with those filmic representations, it is very likely that they coincide. Most of us might also have to admit that our perception of Scottish culture is informed by films and other media representations. For instance, tourist information websites about Scotland also draw on these Scottish representations. Often the kilts, tartans, bagpipes and Highland Games are presented as ‘uniquely’ Scottish. Moreover, picturesque images of the landscape should convince potential tourists to visit Scotland (VisitScotland; Scotland.org). The short summary of cinematic representations of Scottishness should therefore illustrate that a particular discourse of Scottishness exists, a discourse which is far from natural. It is constructed in order to forge a particular ethnic/national identity. This becomes especially explicit when considering the inventions of Celts as an ethnic group, the kilt as Highland dress and the landscape as romanticized untamed nature. In the following chapters, we will see whether the Disney movie *Brave* continues this discourse of Scottishness by looking at aspects of landscape representations, customs, myths, legends and stereotyping.

2.2.2 Setting the Scene in *Brave*

*Towering in gallant fame,
Scotland my mountain hame
High may your proud standards
gloriously wave.*

*Land of my high endeavour,
land of the shining river,
Land of my heart forever,
Scotland the Brave.*

-Cliff Hanley “Scotland the Brave”, 1950-

The Disney film *Brave* contributes much to the discourse of Scottishness: the wild landscape, the rather small communities, the castle, the music and the clans with their tartans. All these elements help to locate the narrative and they draw the audience into a specific place, the place inhabited by a particular ethnic/national group. Hence, we directly connect a specific landscape with a certain type of people, a certain national/ethnic community.

As we have already discussed in chapter 2.1.2, a territory and its landscape are being made meaningful by those who inhabit it and this meaning is also conveyed to others. As Baldwin states, “We must also understand the ways in which nations claim a deep affinity with a national territory made meaningful to them through a sense of community and history connected to particular symbolic places and landscapes within that territory” (162). She furthermore argues that the representation of these places is even more important since not everyone has the chance to “intimately know” all of the places, spaces and landscapes. Thus, films offer a good possibility for those people to experience

the places via representation. Let us consider again Anthony D. Smith's idea of how national identities are shaped through legends and landscapes, they are formed by traditions, stories of golden ages and myths about heroes which are all located in ancient homelands, on hallowed ground (9, 23, 78).

In the Disney movie *Brave* landscape plays a crucial role. The invention of this specific territory works in the same way as described by Baldwin and Smith above. It gives shape to the characters' identity and especially to their ethnic/national identity. Meaning is inscribed into places, they are made meaningful for the audience as they turn out to stand for the place of the Scottish, their history, traditions and legends. The specific locations where the action takes place trigger connotations which also have influence on how the consumers perceive the characters and their relationships and dynamics.

The opening sequence is one of the most important ones that sets the course for the movie and draws the audience into this particular landscape.

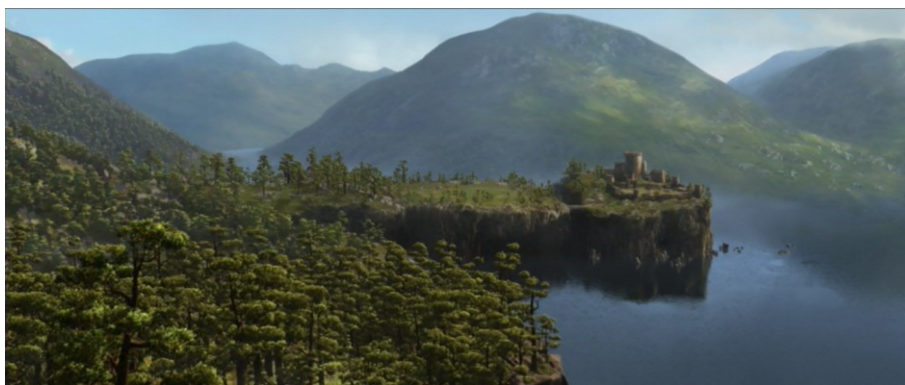


Fig. 6: Opening scene of the soft rolling hills [00.58]

The opening scene starts with a long establishing shot from a rather high angle in order to be able to take in all the beauty of the landscape. The audience perceives the soft rolling hills, the water making its way through the mountains, the forest and the castle on the edge of the cliff. The whole picture conveys a sense of harmony and peace. Although the viewers until now might not know that this is an image of Scotland, except for those who have seen trailers or advertisements of the film, the place is right from the beginning defined as peripheral and liminal, i.e. at the far edges of the world. The only sign of civilization is the single castle on the edge to the water, which gives us the impression of being sealed off from our 'reality' and day to day life. As we have discussed above, Scotland lends itself nicely to be depicted as this isolated and peripheral land and this opening shot is able to draw us into this mystic territory. By zooming into the place where the first action takes place, the audience is introduced to little Merida and the small

community around her. Merida is depicted as living peacefully with her mother and father and the idyllic landscape seems to reflect their harmonious life.



Fig. 7: Little Merida and her environment [01:07-02:59]

The last picture shows Merida's first appearance in the forest. Again a long shot is used to capture the little girl among the huge trees reaching far into the sky. This first encounter with the forest gives the audience a sense of the untamed, wild nature and also portrays this place as eerie and even dangerous. The viewer gets the feeling that something is lurking behind the trees and this is also the first time Merida (and the audience) sees a will-o'-the-wisp. Therefore, the forest, right from the beginning, is also depicted as the place where magic happens. All of these aspects of the forest are however not new to Disney movies as can be seen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) where Snow White flees into the forest where she meets the dwarfs and seems to be safe. Nevertheless, her evil stepmother finds her and she bites into the poisonous apple and falls into a deep sleep. The forest with its dangerous and unknown corners but also magical beauty seems to lend itself nicely to being a place where people trail off the path and find themselves surrounded by magic.

The scenes of Merida's childhood are followed by the fade-in of the movie's title, skipping her later childhood and returning to her in her teens. Again at this moment landscape plays a pivotal role.





Fig. 8: Second opening sequence showing the different kinds of landscape [04:14-04:42]

These picturesque landscape shots further immerse the audience into the place where Merida and her family live. They outline the Scottish landscape, its beauty but also its dangerous sites. The sequence of pictures is accompanied by Merida's monologue coming from the off: "Some say our destiny is tied to the land. As much a part of us as we are of it. Others say fate is woven together like a cloth, so that one's destiny intertwines with many others. It's the one thing we search for or fight to change. Some never find it but there are some who are led." [04:14-04:54]. Particularly the first part of her speech emphasizes how the land forges people's identity. It is her destiny then to become a Scottish princess and to live with the expectations such a role demands. It is a coming-to-terms with the land she lives in and with the traditions, history and stories that have been inscribed into this specific land. Thus, it is a coming-to-terms with the discourses created around Scottishness and princesses and where she will find her positions among those discourses.

Another aspect, which already appears in the last picture of this landscape sequence, is the symbolic quality places are able to carry. As we have discussed before, such symbolic places are essential in creating a unified community and in aiding the long lasting existence of this community. The Standing Stones can be read as such a symbol. Although at this point of the story we might not know its exact meaning, we can guess that it will be of significance later on. The stones are emerging out of the fog, which carries connotations of danger and tragedy. The circle reappears when Merida is riding on her horse Angus through the forest but Angus abruptly stops before the circle and throws Merida into it. The viewers have the sensation that Angus feels the danger of the place as he does not want to enter it. It seems to be a portal to a magic world, a world of transformation. In the end, when Merida tries to save her mother from taking on the shape of a bear forever, these Standing Stones are the place where 'history is written'. It so happens in the course of the film that a specific location is being inscribed with meaning and hence is turned into a symbol for the generations to come. Lamont-Brown moreover notes that ancient stones in the area of Scotland were often believed to have magic properties: "Stones set up as totems, markers, memorials and burial mounds in

prehistorical times were all supposed to have magic potency by succeeding generations, and, as the reasons for setting up dolmens, menhirs and stone circles were forgotten, the more they were looked upon as magic” (16).

Another symbolic place of Merida’s world is that of the Firefalls.

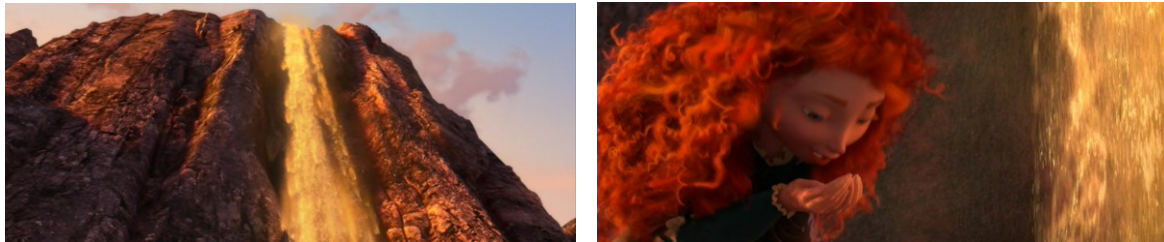


Fig. 9: The Firefalls [08:18-08:21]

Those images are again a romanticized version of the landscape, an aspect often used in cinematic representations of Scotland as we discussed above. The Firefalls represent the wild nature and also Merida’s freedom which is emphasized by her joyful laughter and screams when she reaches the top of the mountain. She knows that this is a dangerous adventure but her determinism to climb up to the Firefalls seems to ‘be in her Scottish blood’. After returning home from her adventure, she excitedly tells her family that she climbed the mountain and drank from the waterfall. It is then when her father adds jokingly, “Firefalls? They say only the ancient kings were brave enough to drink from the fire.” Thus, climbing the mountain and drinking from the water is already induced with meaning, i.e. that only the brave are able to do it and that it requires an extraordinary person to do it. On the *Brave*-DVD under special features one can find an option to play the film while listening to the comments of director Mark Andrews, co-director Steve Purcell, story supervisor Brian Larsen and editor Nick Smith. Commenting on this scene, one of them notes that the idea of the Firefalls was inspired by a natural phenomenon which actually takes place in the Yosemite National Park (USA) at a certain time of the year when the sun sets and “casts this light on the falls that catch fire and they call that Firefalls” [08:10-08:25 Special feature]. Thus, we can observe how representations of places in films work. The actual location of the Firefalls is in the U.S., already inscribed with meaning there, and is then easily transferred into the movie’s location, i.e. Scotland. In addition, it seems to fit naturally into the film as another picturesque and powerful image of ‘Scotland’. Fergus’ comment, Merida’s father, only serves to naturalize the Firefalls’ existence.

A further function of places and spaces is their power to influence the viewers’ perception of the characters, their relationships and dynamics. In *Brave* one can broadly

distinguish between two spaces: the interior, i.e. the castle of the DunBroch clan, and the exterior, i.e. the wilderness. Especially Elinor, Merida's mother, and the princess herself are characterized through those locations. At the beginning of the film, when their relationship is still harmonious, they are both depicted in nature. However afterwards, Elinor is confined to the castle and is not represented outwards except after her transformation into a bear. It seems as if the castle is the place where she is in control, even over Merida's life, whereas the wilderness resembles Merida's 'true' home, where she feels in harmony with nature.



Fig. 10: Indoors versus Outdoors [06:01-07:25]

Inside the castle Merida has to follow the rules of her mother who tries to train her in the role of becoming a princess. Yet, when Merida has got her day off, the audience gets to know the real Merida, a princess of another kind. She is lively and wild as if she were influenced by her 'Scottish temperament'. This is represented by the stark contrast between the two settings, the castle and the wilderness. Moreover, the colors and the amount of motion highlight the difference. Dull, dark colors and a very static camera are used inside the castle, on the other hand, the landscape shines in bright colors and the camera moves fast through the thicket following Merida on Angus. Hence, the landscape depicted in the film, the 'Scottish' landscape, seems to have an influence on Merida's character, it defines who she is and she also identifies herself with it.

2.2.3 Myths, Legends, Traditions and Customs in *Brave*

*Those days are past now,
And in the past they must remain.
But we can still rise now
And be the nation again!
That stood against him
Proud Edward's army
And sent him homeward
Tae think again!*

*O Flower of Scotland,
When will we see your like again
That fought and died for
Your wee bit hill and glen?
And stood against him,
Proud Edward's army,
And sent him homeward
Tae think again!*

-Roy M. B. Williamson, 1965-

Stories of myths and legends as well as the carrying out of traditions are fundamental for holding together a community. As Anthony D. Smith argues, the members of a nation “[...] were united, if not made homogeneous, by common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions” (11). Hence, these aspects help to emphasize the idea of a shared history and a shared ancestry that only belongs to those who are part of the community. Such glorious moments and legends also find their way into popular songs like *Flower O’ Scotland*, one of the unofficial anthems of Scotland. The song is also played at sport events of the Scottish football team and the Scottish rugby team (Scotland National Anthems). Smith furthermore points out how we find national symbols being reproduced in everyday life,

[...] flags, anthems, parades, coinage, capital cities, war memorials, ceremonies of remembrance for the national dead, [...] the countryside, popular heroes and heroines, fairy tales [...] all those distinctive customs, mores, styles and ways of acting and feeling that are shared by the members of a community of historical culture (77).

All these symbols and stories that also find their entrance into songs, books, and films bind the people of an ethnicity and nation together. As Merida puts it, and as those stories make people believe, their destinies are intertwined, their fate is woven together like a cloth. In the Disney movie *Brave* itself we can observe how the story of the ancient kingdom and traditions are used to establish a bond between the four clans of DunBroch, Macintosh, MacGuffin, and Dingwall. The ethnic identity of the Scottish is thus depicted as having a long lasting history, a shared origin and common ancestry that define who they are. Myths and magic also play an important role in defining their identity. Hence, in those aspects *Brave* also fuels the common discourse of Scottishness.

In addition, traditions and customs play an important role in *Brave*. They, on the one hand, are symbols for the Scottish culture and thus the audience can relate them easily to this particular national identity. On the other hand, Disney constructs traditions inherent to the film by which it is explained how Merida’s community came into being and how their bond can endure. Regarding the traditional customs, they entail quite stereotypical features of Scottish culture. They include ‘typical’ Scottish food like haggis, the Highland dress, the kilts and different tartan patterns. One of the clans even paints their bodies with blue colors reminding us of Mel Gibson in *Braveheart* (1995). Another feature is the bagpipe music being played during the festivities which are combined with a sort of Highland Games. Other details that were included are Pictish symbols and the Lewis Chessmen.



Fig. 11: Scottish traditions [15:42-17:60]

However, with regard to the bagpipe Richards challenges the idea of bagpipe music being an inherent Scottish feature. He argues that it was rather constructed as ‘true’ Scottish culture. Instead of being a long established distinctive element of Scottish custom, the bagpipe was actually being played all over Europe. While it became obsolete in other parts of Europe, it was continued to be played in the periphery and was then established as a distinctive Celtic feature. (Richards 181)

One of the main traditions that is inherent to the film and on which the whole storyline is based claims that the princess has to marry one of the oldest sons of one of the clan chiefs. Traditions are passed on from one generation to the next and they also serve to establish a sense of belonging among the members of a community. In the case of the film *Brave*, it is crucial to consider one further aspect of traditions: When it is emphasized how they are rooted in the past, they can be used to legitimize certain conducts or, on the other hand, they can also be looked upon scornfully (Baldwin 11). Those two issues of traditions are clearly part of the movie with respect to the marriage-tradition. Merida’s mother tries to legitimize the tradition by referring to how it has been done in the past and by stating all the rules involved in the betrothal. The reason for the implementation of this tradition is, apparently, so that the clans continue to live peacefully and under one unified kingdom. Nevertheless, the argument does not seem to be very well developed. Why would the clans immediately break out into war? Does their bond not also have other advantages? Still, the older generation of the film holds on to the tradition which is primarily enforced through Merida’s mother. In her speech in front of the clans she explains, “In accordance with our laws, by the rights of our heritage, only the first born of each of the great leaders may be presented as champion and thus compete for the hand of the princess of Dun Broch. [...] It is customary that the challenge be determined by the princess herself” [20:15-22:00]. Although Merida fights against this tradition during the whole film, it is she who at the end regrets how selfish she had been and is about to give in just before her mother stops her and signals her to break with tradition:

But I've been selfish, I tore a great rift in our kingdom, there's no one to blame but me, and I know now that I need to amend my mistake and mend our bond and so there is the matter of my betrothal, I decided to do what's right. [Her mother, as bear, signals her to cut-off and shows her what to say.] And... and... break tradition! My mother the queen feels in her heart that we'll be free to write our own story, follow our hearts and find love in our own time. [01:04:00-01:05:20]

Thus, at the end the tradition is regarded as obsolete and not fitting the new-age. In this way Disney achieves to combine the past, present and future, i.e. the setting of the film, the Middle Ages, with the present and future concerns of the audience.

The telling and retelling of stories of golden ages and legends is another significant aspect in *Brave* as well as it is crucial for holding together a community. Donald Smith explains that storytelling as an oral tradition was fundamental for a distinctive Scottish culture to survive (3-6). Stories provide us with clues about not only the individual's identity but also about cultural identity and attitude on a collective level. Via those stories, the community establishes a record of memory and a shared vision. According to Smith, "[s]torytelling gives us back our ability to see ourselves and each other as characters in connected narratives" (3). He further claims that the Scottish oral tradition was a very rich one which nowadays still has an important function as it serves to reassert a distinctive political and cultural Scottish identity. Moreover, the connection between the story and the Scottish landscape is important since the land shapes the story and the story has an effect on how we perceive the world of nature. Nevertheless, with regard to Scottish storytelling, there is no clear distinction drawn between historical facts, legends and myths. What is more important is the 'truth-to-experience' of the narrative as well as its potential to entertain and to communicate personal and group values. Smith emphasizes that "unless it [the story] is told and retold [...] the story will fade from memory" (6). He further distinguishes between various types of tales that are especially prominent within the Gaelic and Highland traditions of storytelling. Those types include the Hero Tales and Romances, the Wonder Tales and the Clan Tales. (D. Smith 3-6, 31-45)

These kinds of tales are also woven into the narrative of the movie *Brave*. One of the Hero Tales is for instance that of Merida's father and how he lost his leg to the demon bear Mordru. As Merida tells us, the story became "legend" [04:85] and is enforced through the retelling by, mainly, her father. When the family sits around the dinner table and Fergus narrates his story we notice that the boys and Merida are familiar with every single word of it. By repeating the tale over and over again people remember it and it becomes legend.

Another central story of the movie is the one of the ancient kingdom. This story is primarily based on the myth about the three sons of the ancient king and about the eldest son being too selfish and turning against his brothers to rule the kingdom alone. We have already seen how myths function to create order and security and thus help to counter the unknown and chaos. This potential of myths is also developed in the narrative of *Brave*. The story of the ancient kingdom is used to create order, to establish a ground on which rules and conventions are based as that of the princess marrying one of the clans' princes. Especially Merida's mother uses this myth in order to teach her daughter a lesson. She insists on the importance of the story in creating peace, harmony and order among the clans. When Merida does not quite understand the purpose of the narrative her mother says, "It's not just a story, Merida. Legends are lessons they ring with truth." [13:07] She thus implies that if Merida refuses marriage and chooses to be as selfish as the oldest son of the ancient kingdom, war will break out. An argument which does not really seem to hold ground since Merida does not want to take over power and rule over the land on her own. This could be considered as a slight fault in the narrative of the movie. Nevertheless, at the end Merida echoes her mother and uses the story of the ancient kingdom to 'teach the clans a lesson'. She also tries to calm them down and reunite them by telling the story of how their kingdom came into being and how they fought side by side against the invaders that threatened them from the sea. Hence, she refers to glorious highpoints in their clan 'history' in order to unify and strengthen the community. *Brave* therefore also entails features of the Clan Tales.

Myths are also rooted in the magical and magic is a very common feature in Disney films and fundamental to the plot in *Brave*. Furthermore, as other cinematic representations of Scottishness have proven, Scotland offers a perfect location for the depiction of magical proceedings. As Petrie states, "[...] the representation of Scotland as a wilderness in cinematic fictions has facilitated a similar opportunity for the imagination of alternative worlds, emotions and possibilities" (54). Donald Smith highlights that Scottish storytelling tends to a personification and mystification of the landscape, "the invention of [...] maidens and giants in the making of lochs, mountains, islands, whirlpools and wells can be attested in all parts of Scotland, animating the landscape through a crudely powerful personification which still resonates with the worship of nature and its embodiment in now unknown myth and rituals" (7). The possibility of using Scotland as an alternative world and as an animated landscape is taken up by Disney. The main magical features integrated into *Brave* are the witch and her spell, the will-o'-the-wisps and also the mystic Standing

Stones. Witchcraft was a phenomenon of medieval times in Scotland and some approved of the witches' healing herbs whereas others thought they would curse people with evil spells (Lamont-Brown 34f). Although the witch in *Brave* does cast a spell on Merida and her mother, she only does so because Merida asks for her help and the witch's good intention by imposing the spell on them is clear. Donald Smith, in referring to the Scottish Wonder Tales, claims that they often include a kind of metamorphosis, "[...] which overcomes hostile supernatural powers and may reinforce, in an entertaining way, a wisdom about life [...]" (41). In *Brave* the witch's spell turns Merida's mother into a bear. In order to break the spell, Merida and her mother have to mend their bond. The solution to their problem seems to lie in an old Disney-wisdom, i.e. they have to follow their heart. The myth around will'-o'-the-wisps, at first glance, seems to be an invention by Disney, nevertheless, will'-o'-the-wisps are already existing mythical elements which are part of British folklore. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines a will'-o'-the wisp' as "a misleading or elusive object" (Morris 2928). A more detailed definition gives the Dictionary of English Folklore: "This is the commonest English name for faint, flickering lights seen in marshy areas. It implies a supernatural being, carrying a burning bundle of straw as a torch, to lead travellers astray; [...] some informants spoke of them as ghosts, others as fairies" (Simpson and Roud 391). Thus, in the Disney movie *Brave* another common feature of English folklore is adapted. It fits nicely into the narrative and shows again why Scotland itself is an appealing setting for Disney to choose, as the magical happenings seem natural in this peripheral nation. *Brave* can thus be considered as an addition to Disney's 'magical world'.

Roland Barthes' concept of myth can also be used to see how dominant meanings and values about Scottishness are being communicated in *Brave*. As we have discussed before, Barthes builds on the first level of signification, the level of denotation, a second level, that of connotation from which a myth emerges. In our case, all visual elements and sounds of the film *Brave* compose the level of denotation. The images (and sounds) can be related to 'real' objects in the world or to concepts of them in our mind: a mountain, a forest, a waterfall, a stone-circle, a girl riding on her horse through the wilderness and fighting for her independence, groups of people that wear a particular dress, play a particular kind of music, etc. Nevertheless, all these elements are laden with further meanings and values. The movie connotes meanings of Scottishness and the way in which all these images and sounds are represented support typical myths of Scottishness. It reaffirms the myth of the brave, heroic Highlander as well as the myth of the romantic

wilderness and the mystic land. Scotland is the land of the free and brave who live in harmony with nature. The myth is therefore a romanticized representation of Scotland, its landscape and people. An important function of myth is that it naturalizes itself. The denotative level helps to naturalize and disguise the myth hence it seems as if these connotations of Scottishness come up naturally with the images and sounds. Furthermore, *Brave* is not the only medium which communicates these myths about Scottishness. They are also propagated by other films (e.g. *Braveheart* (1995)), tourist information and activities, songs, news, educational material, etc. Thus, due to the fact that the myth is so widely spread, it seems natural and normal to us when it is essentially cultural and, therefore, constructed. What is more, myth always has a hidden intention. In *Brave*, for example, Scottishness is depicted under a particular light and thus it contributes to ideas like the brave heroic Highlander. So, on the one hand there is the intention to affirm and contribute to these characteristics of Scottishness and on the other hand, these characteristics also help to naturalize the behavior of the characters of the film. The wild nature and the openness of the land seem to reflect naturally the strong headed and for independence striving Merida. Barthes also points out that myth has to be considered under its historical and social circumstances. Thus, in *Brave* the myth of the heroic Highlander is not represented by a man, as it is common for films about Scottishness, but by a girl. The film thus adapts a position of female gender roles common for contemporary Western society. Nevertheless, we should not fall short in only considering the Scottish myths the movie communicates. *Brave* as a Disney film also implies myths about Disney itself. These include for instance the ‘innocence’ and ‘good-will’ of Disney movies as well as the dissemination of particular middle-class American values (see for instance Giroux 85; Bell et al. 3-7; Ayres 16). Thus, for example in *Brave* family and marriage play an important role as well as the deep-rooted American value of independence. Hence, it is not clear whether it was Disney’s intention to promote US American values or to represent ‘typical’ Scottish associations. Apparently, choosing Scotland as a setting for the movie coincided very nicely with Disney’s intention to promote their own values.

All in all, we can notice that in terms of Scottish traditions, myths and legends *Brave* fits again very well into the discourse of Scottishness or, in Barthes’ terms, the myths about Scottishness. However, there is one aspect in which the movie differs. Films on Scottishness or Scottish history often adopt the theme of the heroic Highlander, the noble savage. This is usually a male hero. In *Brave*, we find a male hero, Merida’s father, however, the principal character is Merida and she is the central heroine of the story. Thus,

the tradition of the heroic Highlander has been turned into the story of a girl adopting the Scottish hero's qualities.

2.2.4 Otherness and Stereotyping in *Brave*

Since difference, othering and stereotyping are important ways through which we identify ourselves and others, these mechanisms also play an important role in filmic representations. It has already been discussed elsewhere (chapter 2.1.4) how these aspects work and why they are sometimes even necessary or unavoidable. In movies simplifications, to some extent, need to be made since the often diverse and difficult-to-grasp relations between people cannot all be represented in a 93 minutes movie. Nevertheless, the characters should not fall out too simple and stereotyped since these flat characters only have little potential to thrill the consumer who would (and could) not identify with them. Thus, the plot should be more challenging than simply juxtaposing 'good' versus 'evil'.

Fortunately, *Brave* tries to avoid stepping into the trap of superficial distinctions like 'villain' versus 'hero'. The main rivalry lies between mother Elinor and daughter Merida. Although Elinor seems to be 'unfair' at times, she is never evil and seems to act in the interest of her daughter. We discover both favorable and less favorable character traits in her. Nevertheless, Elinor and Merida are marked with difference. Elinor is in control of her emotions, civilized, practical while Merida is emotional, wild and acts upon intuition. The question remains, who is the 'other' in *Brave*? Who is the odd one out? Especially due to differences in outward appearance, it is easy to notice that it is Elinor who is quite different from the rest of the family (and also from other clan characters).



Fig. 12: Elinor as the 'other' (DVD cover *Brave*)

By having a look at the DVD cover of *Brave*, one observes that Merida, her little brothers and her father all have bright red/orange, curly hair, while Elinor is the only one with dark-brown, sleek, ‘tamed’ hair. It seems as if she does not quite belong to them and the difference between her and the other family members is marked through their physical appearance. This outward difference seems to emphasize the differences in character traits between Elinor and the other family members, especially Merida. Elinor reflects characteristics which Richards describes as being constructed as Anglo-Saxon, as for instance being unimaginative, practical and stolid (181). Elinor embodies these characteristics by strictly holding on to the rules and traditions. On the other hand, Merida, her father and her little brothers are emotional, restless, imaginative, and poetic. Hence, they embody characteristics which were constructed as Celtic identity (Richards 181). Thus, in *Brave* there is an opposition between Scottishness versus Englishness at work. Whereas it is more typical to find representations of the English in the majority (often Englishness and Britishness are synonymously used) and the Scottish in the minority, in *Brave* the roles have been reversed. Elinor, the ‘English’ character, is represented as the ‘other’ and thus for the film *Brave*, one could outline the opposition as follows: Scottishness as the dominant pole versus Englishness as the inferior/marginal pole. As we have discovered with other filmic representations of Scottishness, it is quite common to conceal the opposition between English and Scottish. The villains are represented as bureaucrats under whose veil, however, one discovers ‘typical’ English characteristics. Similarly, Elinor enforces the rules and traditions and thereby attains ‘English characteristics’ although she is not explicitly represented as English. Interestingly, the character of Elinor is not cast by a Scottish actress but by Emma Thompson, an English actress. On the other hand, the voices of Merida and Fergus, for instance, do belong to Scottish actors.

Apart from this type of ‘othering’ within the movie, one can define the ‘other’ of *Brave* also by taking a step back and looking at the film from the producer’s/consumer’s perspective. In this case then the ethnic/national identity of the characters of the film, i.e. Scottishness, is represented as the ‘other’ in contrast to the majority of the audience of the movie. The target audience are most probably children of American/European cultural background. Thus, Disney creates a feeling of ‘us’ (US Americans/Europeans) versus ‘them’ (Scottish). The difference between those groups is marked by representing ‘typical’ Scottish features. These include, for example, the fair skin of the characters, the red/orange hair, the clothes they wear, the music they play etc. Furthermore, one of the primary

markers of difference is the Scottish dialect. Dialects and languages are easily distinguishable features which help us register from which part of the world people come and hence also define their ethnicity/nationality. The representations of these elements of difference prompt the consumer to perceive Scottishness as the 'other' and as a rather exotic culture. It thus triggers a sense of remoteness of the Scottish culture which is emphasized by setting the film in medieval times.

The picture of Scottishness presented in *Brave* also illustrates the partial and fragmentary nature of representations. One can only claim that the film captures aspects of Scottishness but not all there is to this ethnicity/nationality. Hence, it is obvious that stereotyping plays an essential role in representations of ethnic/national identities and, especially, in representations of 'others'. With reference to Richard Dyer's distinction of typing and stereotyping, Merida can be defined as a type of Disney princesses. The plot explicitly focuses on her and on her struggle to free herself. Nevertheless, Merida, as a Disney princess, deviates from more classical representations of Disney princesses. She is, up to now, probably the most strong-willed, independent-minded, determined and courageous princess of all. Thus, from a gender-perspective, we can clearly observe a development from rather passive princesses whose goal in life is to find romance, up to very active heroines who steer the plot into a direction that benefits their self-realization. Princesses like Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010) and Merida from *Brave* (2012) are able to take control of their situation. Stephens states, "The most recent princesses can identify their own desires through their own ideas, without being forced to heed to other's opinions about their lives or use men as their sole reason for existing" (101). Hence, Merida does not perform a stereotyped gender role, she is her own master, but she can still be recognized as a type of Disney princess.

Nevertheless, Merida's nationality is represented through common stereotypes of Scottishness. We have already defined stereotyping as a process by which "people [are reduced] to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature" (Hall, *Representation* 257). This applies to the representation of Scottishness in *Brave*: The Scottish elements are easily recognizable since most of them are visible (e.g. hair, clothes, idyllic landscape) or audible (music, dialect) and they seem to naturally 'belong' to the Scottish. Additionally, through stereotyping values and beliefs are expressed. In the case of *Brave*, Scottishness is connoted with values and beliefs such as the importance of every individual to be free and independent of confinements, the reward of bravery and courage to fight for your dreams as well as the possibility to change one's

fate. These values are rather stereotypical of Scottishness since they are repeated again and again in representations of the Scottish, be it in films, books or on the news etc. Moreover, as Richard Dyer claims, stereotypes imply certain narratives (358). Hence, the Scottish stereotype might, for instance, imply ‘the little people’ fighting against the powerful for their independence. This kind of narrative is reiterated in films like *Braveheart* (1995) but also by the news when they refer to Scottish-English conflicts. Scottish stereotypes like bravery, independence and freedom also influence the plot in *Brave*. Thus, it seems as if the stereotypical Scottish representation of Merida justifies her behavior and explains her actions. In a way, it also gives her the power to be that rebellious, determined and courageous Disney princess. Scottishness facilitates a different, more ‘feminist’ gender portrayal than the consumer is used to finding in Disney movies. We have to keep in mind that it is the Disney studios that choose to highlight these particular stereotypes of Scottishness, maybe with the specific idea in mind to create a more powerful Disney princess.

Otherness and stereotyping thus play a crucial role in constructing the characters’ identities in *Brave*. Differences are clearly established between the audience and the figures’ Scottishness. Their Scottish identity is reduced to a set of fixed, essential features which help the consumer to define them as ‘other’/Scottish and through which children learn to construct a particular (simplified) picture of Scottishness. In *Brave* the focus is on one single ethnic/national identity, namely the Scottish. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of the film has shown that Merida’s mother is represented as clearly distinct from the Scottish characters. This kind of otherness is illustrated via her physical appearance and her character traits which appear to conform to a different stereotyped nationality, namely the English. Most likely, this antagonism between Scottish and English is concealed in order not to put off the English audience of the film who are supposedly important for Disney to pull in more sales. Furthermore, it seems as if the characters’ ethnicities/nationalities of the movie (i.e. Scottishness and ‘Englishness’) determine their behavior. Merida seems to be heavily influenced by her nationality which at the same time supports her actions and, above all, naturalizes them. For instance, her Scottish identity seems to emphasize and naturalize her courage to stand up for herself and to fight for her freedom.

2.2.5 Key Points of *Brave*

Through the analysis of *Brave* we have discovered what kind of techniques the Disney studios use to represent the Scottish national identity. These are:

- landscape and territory
- historical memories, myths, legends, traditions and customs
- otherness and stereotyping

The depiction of landscape and territory play an especially prominent role in defining *Brave's* Scottishness. Disney contributes to dominant representations of Scottishness by offering a particular romanticized vision of the landscape. The action unfolds at a remote place at the edge of the world, a place where magic is possible. The wild, untamed nature moreover reflects Merida's character traits. The landscape is also inscribed with stories of legends and myths, an aspect which is very typical of Scottish folklore and storytelling. Another strategy of explicitly pointing towards a Scottish identity is the incorporation of 'typical' Scottish customs: bagpipe music, the wearing of kilts with tartan patterns, the Highland Games innuendo, etc. These Scottish traits are represented in a stereotypical way which feeds into the dominant discourse of Scottishness. They are, furthermore, used as markers of difference in order to draw a boundary between the characters of the film and a mainly American/Western audience. Other markers of difference are physical traits like the characters' fair skin and red hair as well as the Scottish accent. Besides the stereotypical depiction of the Scottish as the 'other', there is also a process of othering internal to the film. One character of the film is represented as different from the rest, i.e. Merida's mother. She differs in her physical appearance as well as her behaviors which seem to resemble quite stereotypical English attributes.

Another question which should be addressed at this stage is that of Disney's intentions in using these representations of Scottish identity in *Brave*. Does the use of Scottishness have any particular functions? From our analysis of the movie, we can already draw inferences that confirm the existence of such functions. First of all, the stereotypical representation of Scottishness initiates and promotes a certain plotline. The brave and rebellious Highlander fighting for his freedom and against the constraints enforced through powerful rulers and authorities is a theme that recurs in stories about Scotland. Disney adopts this 'Scottish' plot and applies it to Merida who fights for her freedom and independence against her mother. In Merida's case, it is not an invasion of land or the like against which she fights. She rather tries to fight off the attack on her right to live the life

she wants and dreams of, which means not being forced into marriage. Moreover, the magical proceedings within the movie also seem to fit very well because of Scotland's reputation as a mythical place. The use of Scotland as a location where the action unfolds therefore facilitates the incorporation of 'Disney magic'. Thus, attributes of Scottishness seem to steer the action into a certain direction – a direction which is most probably intended by Disney – and magical elements are easier to incorporate into the plot.

Furthermore, elements of Scottishness seem to influence Merida's character as a whole. Freedom, independence and bravery are all concepts that easily connote with Scottish identity and, crucially, they are exhibited in the central character, Merida. She is determined and dauntless like a 'true' Scottish heroine. The way she behaves naturally fits into the discourse of Scottishness and thus, normalizes her attitude. Hence, these aspects of her nationality also rub off on her depiction as a girl/Disney princess. The representation of her nationality influences how the audience perceives her from the perspective of gender representation. Thus, Merida's nationality emphasizes and supports the credibility of her strong personality as a girl. She is actively involved in the plot by fighting for her own interests and her Scottish identity gives her the right and power to do so.

Finally, the question arises whether Disney genuinely promotes values of Scottishness in their film or whether they rather address American/Western issues and thus inject values and beliefs of their own culture. Disney movies often entail 'typical' US American values such as freedom, independence, hard work, holding on to your dreams, individual self-realization, happy family perspectives etc. Many of these values are also reflected in *Brave*. Merida fights for her dream to be independent and free of her mother's rules. Through her actions she tries to achieve individual self-realization under the premise that nothing is impossible as long as you do not give up. Although at the end of the movie there are no prospects of Merida being in love with a man and sooner or later having children with him, the happy family life of Merida, her mother, father and brothers is restored. It is, however, also interesting to point out that all the potential 'princes' are depicted in a way so that the audience understands why Merida would reject them. None of them has the typical Disney-prince-attributes like strength, courage, wit and not even the looks to pass as an appropriate marriage partner for Merida. Since they do not fit into this dominant Western discourse of masculinity, the audience is encouraged to sympathize with Merida's decision to not marry any of the clans' sons. Furthermore, the plot resembles that of a modern-day teen drama typical for western/American families. Merida rebels against the traditions of the older generation – a theme which is quite familiar to the consumers of

the movie. Considering all these points, it is difficult to determine whether Disney tries to promote their own values or whether they intend to give a 'typical' representation of Scottishness. This is due to the fact that the values communicated in the movie can be described as both 'typical' American and 'typical' Scottish. Thus, the Disney studios made a good (perhaps deliberate) choice in representing Scotland and the Scottish identity in the film since this identity can be used very well to reflect their own values and beliefs.

3. Contextualizing *Brave*

So far, the analysis of the movie *Brave* has been kept on a rather textual level focusing on identity representation within the film. Nevertheless, confining our investigation to this aspect would leave out important background information which helps to understand why specific values and beliefs, such as independence, female empowerment and harmonious family life, are emphasized. Questions of production, regulation and consumption of Disney movies and specifically of *Brave* are considered in order to explain the process of encoding messages, how this process is represented by Disney itself as well as how these messages are decoded by the consumers and the effects of these messages on them.

The five cultural processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation as identified within du Gay's circuit of culture are all interrelated, effect one another and overlap. During the process of production, objects are encoded with meaning, i.e. identity. This process is only completed at the point of consumption, where the meaning is decoded by the consumer. The consumers are, however, not passive but actively engage in making sense of the symbols packaged in the object/film during the production process. This also means that there can be derivations from the meanings and uses as intended by the producers in terms of how the meanings of the product are ultimately understood and consumed by the consumers. Furthermore, one has to consider how the production process itself is represented by the media and also by the producers themselves, e.g. as 'innovative', 'American', 'profit-oriented', etc. Finally, regulation effects what is being produced and consumed. Regulation can be exercised on part of the consumers themselves, by either reaffirming or questioning the meanings of the product. Hence, via feedback and critique from consumers, producers are encouraged to react and implement new strategies to satisfy the consumers. Axel Bruns, therefore, coins the term 'produsage', derived from production and usage, to refer to the ways in which consumers

nowadays actively create content especially through internet platforms such as Wikipedia, blogs, social networks etc. (117-9). In addition to consumer-led regulation, regulation is often exercised on part of the producers when adhering to formal norms and informal values of society. Thus, they ask questions of what is appropriate and, at the same time, marketable. (du Gay et. al. XXVIII-XXXII, 37-54, 79-111)

3.1 Producing Disney Magic

Before going into more detail about production issues concerning the movie *Brave*, we will have a more general look at the Walt Disney Company's reach on the market, the beginnings of the studio, as well as the values which have been associated with it and with its founder, Walt Disney. The investigation into the production of meaning within Disney products as well as the representation of this production process, including the studio itself, offers new perspectives on Disney films and, therefore, enriches a purely textual analysis.

3.1.1 Building the Disney Empire

Bell et al. define five different ways which all refer to the name Disney (2). First of all, the Disney signature was designed by Walter Elias "Walt" Disney, the founder of the Walt Disney Company, which has its beginnings in 1923. Secondly, Disney refers to the Disney studios including various other American film distribution labels such as Touchstone, Caravan, Buena Vista Television, Miramax (until 2010), Marvel, Lucasfilm, Disneynature, Pixar Animation Studios as well as media networks such as the Disney Channel, ABC, A&E Networks, Freeform and ESPN (see *The Walt Disney Company: About*). Thirdly, Disney refers to a canon of popular movies reaching each year a greater audience. Fourthly, Disney stands for a multinational corporation, an entertainment and media conglomerate which increased its revenues to a record \$52.5 billion by the end of 2015 ("The Walt Disney Company Reports: Fourth Quarter and Full Year Earnings"). Disney constantly expands its market by, for instance, developing computer games and apps, selling books and music records, offering Disney cruises and planned vacations, as well as opening new Disneyland Resorts as in Shanghai on June 16th, 2016. Finally, as Bell et al. point out, Disney refers to a particular ideology that is inscribed into its films, theatrical productions, theme parks and resorts, merchandise and interactive media (2). Disney's

ideology of ‘the happiest place on earth’ has been worked upon and promoted by its producers from the beginnings of the studio until now.

This ‘happiest place on earth’ is often associated with the innocence of childhood, an escape for the whole family from everyday struggles into the wonderful world of Disney. This particular image which the Disney Company represents is not coincidental but rather intentionally constructed from the very birth of the studio. Ayres claims that although Walt Disney denied deliberately inserting political messages into his movies, he was not apolitical and clearly followed his own agenda (16). She exemplifies Walt Disney’s political intentions by referring to two accounts (16): Under J. Edgar Hoover, he worked as a spy leaking out information about communist movements in the film industry. Another time he was hired to create a movie that would ease the tensions between South America and the United States, resulting in the making of *The Three Caballeros* (1944). He was clearly aware of how to use his influence and power to promote his own ideals and values. He represented himself as down-to-earth, simple and as having no desire to express himself politically and intellectually (16). Nevertheless, his movies support a particular view on life, on right and wrong, on what it means to ‘live happily ever after’. He promotes a particular ideal via his movies for which everyone should strive, namely that of the white, middle-class, American, heterosexual, conservative nuclear family (16). Furthermore, a set of values is being emphasized on: “Regardless of setting or origin of fairy tale or folklore upon which they are based, Disney’s films convey the American ‘inalienable right’ of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (20). Disney’s cultural values are imposed on that of other cultures in a way that Richard Schickel claims:

He [Walt Disney] came always as a conqueror, never as a servant. It is a trait, as many have observed, that many Americans share when they venture into foreign lands hoping to do good but equipped only with know-how instead of sympathy and respect for alien traditions. (227)

Although this statement overgeneralizes American attitudes, our analysis of Disney films in chapter four confirms the imposition of ‘typical’ American/Disney values on other cultures. Stephen Buhler, following a similar idea, coins the term ‘Disneyfication’ to refer to the ways in which Disney colonizes the thoughts and behaviors of children and adults alike (Ayres 18).

The image of Disney being innocent and mere entertainment lives on and is endorsed by loyal audiences, film theorists, institutions and cultural critics. Bell et al. distinguish four pardons for not critically investigating the seemingly apolitical content of Disney products:

1. it's only for children
2. it's only fantasy
3. it's only a cartoon
4. it's just good business (4)

Hence, it seems as if Disney films are apolitical and ahistorical and that “the naturalized Disney text is ‘pure entertainment’, [...] is reducible to animated fairy tale classics, [...] [and] is exemplary of successful American free enterprise” (4). Disney has apparently successfully managed to conceal its agenda since many consumers have internalized its image of innocence. Generations after generations are becoming increasingly unaware of the films possible impact.

One of the reasons why Disney films are widely considered as benign is the fact that many are based on fairytales. Jack Zipes, in his essay “Breaking the Disney Spell”, traces back the origins of fairytales from the oral folk tale, over the literary fairy tale to Walt Disney’s use of the genre (21-42). According to Zipes’ essay, oral folk tales usually had the function of bringing together the community and they often served to teach a lesson, give a warning or to practice worship. With the emergence of the printing press, oral storytelling underwent crucial changes affecting its form, production and audience. Zipes claims that in contrast to an emphasis on communality and the folk, the literary fairy tale was read by upper classes in private and for the purpose of entertainment and education. First, the target audience were adults since the tale’s meaning was not unambiguous and one could read much into them. Later on, sanitized versions were created for children often having a moralistic tone. It is important to note that since the very beginnings of the fairy tale, they used to have a function (Zipes 22), i.e. they communicated beliefs and values, although probably in a more subtle way than other forms of education. It might have been exactly this aspect that appealed to Walt Disney. Walt Disney returned the fairy tale to the masses and tried to bewitch and seduce them with his detailed images: “The pictures conceal the controls and machinery. They deprive the audience of viewing the production and manipulation, and in the end, audiences can no longer envision a fairy tale for themselves as they can when they read it” (Zipes 33). Zipes further claims that it was Walt Disney’s goal to replace all other versions with his and that the consumers would perceive his version to be the original. Zipes concluding remarks criticize Walt Disney for not bringing about more radical changes to the genre of fairytales lamenting that

[i]nstead of using technology to enhance the communal aspects of narrative and bring about major changes in viewing stories to stir and animate viewers, he employed animators and technology to stop thinking about change, to return to his films, and to long nostalgically for neatly ordered patriarchal realms. (40)

Although many Disney movies after Walt Disney still adhere to the values coined and cherished by its founder, more recent films do indicate change as in *Brave*. Additionally, audiences are becoming more actively involved in commenting on the movies and, besides often labeling Disney films as pure entertainment, they are increasingly aware of the values communicated. Furthermore, Disney seems to adapt to social changes by, for instance, depicting women in more powerful and independent positions.

Henry Giroux warns about Disney's influential position as a multinational corporation since Disney is not merely fun and entertainment but also sends out pedagogical messages that shape its young audience. Due to the corporation's powerful and widespread reach, they can also control what is being offered for consumption, i.e. what values, beliefs and role models are being forwarded. Walt Disney believed that pedagogy was not confined to the realm of schooling but to a broader one, the one of popular culture. Consequently, Disney films and other products fuse entertainment and education and they also depict themselves as assuming responsibility towards better accessible education. Disney sponsors a teacher of the year award, grants Doer and Dreamer scholarships and offers internships and financial support within the United States. Although these offers by Disney as well as several pedagogical messages of Disney films are not purely hazardous, they are also not innocent. As Giroux states "[e]ducation is never innocent, because it always presupposes a particular view of citizenship, culture, and society. And yet it is this very appeal to innocence, bleached of any semblance of politics, that has become a defining feature of Disney culture and pedagogy" (31). There are always reasons and intentions behind the actions taken by Disney, they do have an agenda they follow and their image of innocent entertainment is a pretense to hide it. (Giroux 17-27, 30-35)

3.1.2 Issues of Production in *Brave*

Brave, released on June 15, 2012, is a Disney film that was produced under cooperation with Pixar Animation Studios. It is Pixar's first fairy-tale animation and first animated movie to feature a female lead. Due to these two decisive aspects, *Brave* shares more similarities with popular Disney princess movies than with other Pixar productions and, therefore, our analysis focuses on how the movie positions itself in the context of other

Disney princess films. Like every other Disney movie, *Brave* also entails meanings and values about life, society and human relations, meanings which are encoded during the production process. Information about this process, i.e. the ideas, concerns and needs of the animation studio that drive the production of a movie, is however, often guarded by the (legal) borders of Disney. Thus, Disney controls what is made public about the production process of a movie and, therefore, the sources that can be used to analyze *Brave*'s production process are limited to statements by the directors and producers of the film. Consequently, it has to be kept in mind that the production process cannot be analyzed per se but rather Disney's way of representing this process is analyzed.⁶

Brave's initial director, Brenda Chapman, was the first woman to direct a Pixar feature length film. As Chapman claims in an interview for an online magazine, it was her ideas that initiated the production of the movie which is inspired by her daughter and her relationship with her child (Diamond). She further explains that Merida should resemble her daughter whose strong-willed spirit was to be reflected in the heroine. She wanted to portray a different kind of mother-daughter relationship than the one known from many other movies which tend to assign mothers the role of villains. Merida's and Elinor's relationship should therefore be a positive and modern one, one that deals with common mother-daughter issues, which finds a positive solution and one with which both daughters/children and mothers/parents can identify. (Diamond)

Besides these aspects being reportedly based on Brenda Chapman's own experience, there have been unexpected changes during the film's production as Chapman was suddenly replaced by director Mark Andrews. Being questioned on the change in leadership, Chapman stayed reserved mentioning that "[t]here were just some creative differences" and that she occasionally got to see screenings of it ("Brenda Chapman Interview Part II: *Brave*."). The lack of information on this issue demonstrates Disney's and Pixar's power in regulating what can be said about the production process of the movie and shows that more dubious processes are being obscured and safely guarded behind the walls of the Magic Kingdom. The replacement of Pixar's first female director, nevertheless, triggered discussions about the male dominated animation industry, an issue which has started to change as more women attain high ranks, for instance, Disney's *Frozen* was directed by Jennifer Lee and Chris Buck (Diamond; De La O).

⁶ see also du Gay et al.'s discussion of the production of the Sony Walkman where the *representation* of the production process of the Walkman is analyzed by drawing on information from Akio Morita (founder of Sony who has often been called the 'father' of the Walkman) and Sony itself. (39-46)

While Disney and Pixar do not reveal information about such issues as director changes, they do offer insights into the production process, however, in a very controlled manner. Before Disney films are released, Disney brings *The Art of ...* books on the market where consumers can inform themselves about the (supposed) making of the film. In the case of *Brave*, the book, *The Art of Brave*, by Jenny Lerew offers behind-the-scene peeks of the production process of *Brave* with comments by the team working on the film and many additional images. Such information is also included in the additional material of the DVD in which each scene of the film is commented on by members of the production team. Both sources emphasize the two research trips that were carried out to Scotland, which serves to highlight the ‘authenticity’ of the material on which the film is based. Thus, the particular image of the Scottish as depicted in the film is represented as ‘true’ and ‘natural’ since it seems to be based on ‘reality’.

The Art of Brave particularly demonstrates the ‘heroic’ process of production of the movie setting out with Brenda Chapman’s initial ideas about the movie and the recruitment of her team, namely Steve Purcell as head of story; story writer, Irene Mecchi; production designer, Steve Pilcher; and producer Katherine Sarafian. By including some of the earliest drawings of Merida, which date back to 2004, it is being suggested that production time for the movie took about eight years. One of the most important aspects of *The Art of Brave* is the sources that the production team used to create the film, especially the ‘inspiration’ they took from the Scottish landscape. Lerew persuasively expresses the essential role the setting plays in *Brave* when stating that

It’s not incidental that *Brave* is set in Scotland. Far from being simply a backdrop, Scotland itself is a major character in the film. Directly or indirectly, the mercurial moods of its weather and the wildness of its countryside inform every scene. It was a key goal of the artists to capture that spirit in *Brave*’s design. (11)

This statement should exemplify that Scotland is an integral part of the film and thus seems to authenticate the movie’s representation of Scotland. Furthermore, by appointing the landscape such a pivotal role, the producers of the film seem to use particular representations of the landscape to regulate the ‘mood’ of the film, from joyous family time (see the opening scene, fig. 7) to dramatic and dangerous action scenes (see the representation of the ‘Standing Stones’ through a veil of mist, fig. 8).

In order to convince the consumers that the particular depiction of Scottishness in *Brave* is ‘true,’ *The Art of Brave* further mentions how the production team tried to capture every detail about Scotland and its people to achieve a ‘realistic’ image of Scotland. Pilcher, for instance, states, “I want audiences to say, ‘That was Scotland. That was

awesome.’ Mists, rock, ruggedness, skies that are changing all the time with the rain, snow, big patches of sunlight moving over large landscapes. That’s what has to come across” (in Lerew 32). A number of Scottish sites and landscape particularities are thus represented as the ‘real’ Scotland. For instance, Dunnotter Castle became the basis for King Fergus’ castle, DunBroch; the witches’ hut is based on a similar ‘hut’ in the woods of Scotland; and the Callanish Stones were supposedly the inspiration for the Standing Stones in *Brave* (Lerew 55). Hall, by referring to the iconicity of televisual images, claims that iconic signs, i.e. those that physically resemble the ‘real’ thing, are more likely to be “‘read’ as natural because [...] they are less arbitrary than a linguistic sign” and such practices have “[...] the (ideological) effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present” (“En/Decoding” 32f.). In the case of *Brave*, the information as described in *The Art of Brave* seems to validate the representations of Scotland and its people in the film. It makes the consumers believe that Scotland really is this romantic and mysterious place, and tries to convince them that their representation is ‘true’. In other words, by emphasizing the iconicity of the Scottish images in *Brave*, the consumer is urged to forget that they are represented from a particular perspective and lured into the assumption of the representation being ‘natural’ and ‘true’.

Apart from capturing the Scottish landscape, the artists also had to focus on the variety of characters featured in *Brave*. Lerew points out that one of the most important aspects in the creation of the characters is their “sense of appeal” so that the audience immediately responds to them and is able to identify with and relate to them (65). The central character, Merida, was supposedly the one whose qualities were defined right from the beginning as Chapman states “Merida will be a leader – a great leader – in her own right, in her own way. She doesn’t have to do it the same way her mom did it, but she needs to acquire a little more wisdom and judgment” (Lerew 70). Merida’s defining feature, her messy red hair, should represent her character as a whole, her wild and strong-willed spirit. It was, however, particularly this hairy aspect that posed the biggest technical challenge for animation and yet, the hair was such an integral part of Merida’s personality resulting in the artists developing a new form of animation software that rendered the depiction of Merida’s hair possible (66). By referring to this aspect of the production process, Disney and Pixar present themselves as innovative animation studios which work with the most recent technology available. Regarding the film’s title and the relationship between Merida and Elinor, Mark Andrews claims that “*Brave* is about facing up to who you are, facing up to your responsibilities – not just the responsibilities of a princess to be a

queen, but the responsibilities of a relationship;” and it is about admitting your mistakes as Andrews emphasizes “[t]hat she’s able to say ‘I was wrong’ is incredibly brave [...] the hardest thing is being brave in her heart” (74). Such statements about the title of the film, the characters and their relationships seem to validate the making of the movie by explaining the uniqueness of princess Merida and highlighting the modern approach to fairy-tale movies.

A final aspect which should be considered in the production of *Brave* is Disney’s rather aggressive advertising and marketing. Besides various trailers and posters, Disney also opted for a more recent advertising strategy via mobile phones. Thereby, a banner pops up on the consumer’s mobile phone and encourages them to “begin the adventure” (Johnson). When tapping on the banner one is forwarded to a fullscreen website about *Brave* where one can watch trailers, learn about the characters, find nearby theaters where the movie is played and, of course, buy tickets. This innovative way of advertising should rouse the target audience’s attention and engage them with the movie and characters. Apart from advertising the film *Brave*, Scotland’s tourism board also tried to profit from the movie by promoting their countryside and landmarks visible in *Brave*. Herald Scotland, for example, reported that “VisitScotland has invested £7m in a linked promotional campaign, the biggest in its history, to try to cash in on interest surrounding the movie. The worldwide campaign with Brave-themed TV advertisements will be in collaboration with Disney” (Miller, “Tourism Ready to Cash”). VisitScotland estimated a benefit of £140 million. The Scotsman also reports about Disney’s first tailor-made holiday to Scotland, a nine-day trip where families can visit iconic sites from the movie, try themselves in archery and take part in a mini Highland Games. The trip costs \$5000 each for adults and \$4749 for children (Ferguson, “Brave New World”).

Considering the amount of work that has been put into the production of *Brave* and all the details which supposedly were carefully thought about, it becomes obvious that an animated movie is far from innocent and mere entertainment. Furthermore, Disney’s representation and lack of representation of specific aspects of the production process illustrates Disney’s control over the sources and statements one can draw on to investigate the production process of a Disney movie. Hence, regulation seems to be an integral part of the Disney enterprise.

3.2 Regulating the Disney Output

Regulation is inextricably linked to production and consumption. Hence, during the production process of a Disney movie, elements are being regulated by the studio in order to encompass values and beliefs that are appropriate, i.e. appropriate to the Disney-image and appropriate to the values of its audience and society in general. Besides Disney's self-regulation efforts, the consumers can also act as a regulating force. Along with increasing possibilities to spread their thoughts about a film, via new forms of technology such as Web 2.0, the consumers have a say in what is, according to them, appropriate and what is not. Thus, the consumers themselves can regulate what is being produced. Both, Disney's self-regulation and the consumers regulating efforts, play an important part in the production of some elements of *Brave*. Before going into detail about these aspects, we will have a more general look at the Disney-empire's efforts in regulating their own self-image not only within the confines of the company but also outside what one would consider a regular sphere of interest.

3.2.1 Disney as Big-Brother?

Since Disney manages to conceal their agenda very well behind the veil of innocence, there are many who do not consider Disney products to be worth a more critical investigation. Thus, Bell et al. claim that "[w]ith no conventional system or vocabulary for approaching Disney film, film theory ultimately protects and preserves the inviolability of the Disney canon and its status as American metonym" (3). This has clearly changed as nowadays a growing number of cultural and film critics dare to venture into the Disney terrain and point out the studio's influence on society. Nevertheless, the Walt Disney Corporation's control over others using their name, images or other resource materials is immense and proves again what powerful machinery lies behind the doors of the Magic Kingdom.

Disney is very anxious about what is being said and written about them and therefore follows strict copyright and trademark laws. Bell et al., for instance, report that after declining a request by Disney to approve the book, they were not allowed to use the name 'Disney' in the title of their book since "[...] Disney does not allow third-party books to use the name 'Disney' in their titles – this implies endorsement or sponsorship by the Disney organization" (Disney correspondent in Bell et al.1). Similarly, Giroux states that "[...] Disney has aggressively prosecuted violations of its copyrights and has a reputation for bullying authors who use the Disney archives but refuse to allow Disney

censors to approve their manuscripts before they are actually published” (86). One of these ‘censored’ publications seems to be Brode’s *Multiculturalism and the Mouse* whose acknowledgement-section reads: “This [the use of photographs in the book] was done with the understanding that, under the existing rules of fair usage, the author would then employ all such unsolicited visual properties in order to positively publicize the films, television shows, and other entertainment media of Walt Disney in various print forms”. Hence, it seems that Brode’s book was approved or proofread by Disney and clearly supports Disney in the marketing of the corporation’s image.

Apart from these regulation issues, Disney is said to have sued a man for having 90 percent of his body being tattooed with Disney characters (Bell et. al 3). Disney’s attempts at regulating their theme parks are also meticulous (Giroux 47-55). For instance, when casting new employees, there is a strict dress code to follow. Men should wear suits with a color-matching shirt, they are not allowed to wear necklaces, bracelets, earrings or have a beard and their hair should not go beyond their ears. Women are supposed to wear a suit or a dress (no T-Shirts, sleeveless dresses/blouses), they are not allowed to wear more than one ring per hand, no more than two necklaces, etc. Thus, Disney seems to have a specific type of person in mind to work in their theme parks and indoctrinates them ‘Disney-mottos’ during their training like “We smile that extra mile” (Gardy in Giroux 50). Surely, this illustrates that Disney has strong ties to traditional gender roles.

These examples should give an insight into Disney’s regulation strategies to protect their borders and especially to protect their image of innocent entertainment company. Nevertheless, Disney also has to follow some confinements, particularly those posed on them by society. Hence, as society changes and old norms are being broken and new ones established, Disney has to adapt to continue appealing to their audience. A visible change in *Brave* is the depiction of women and their role in society, however, particularly this aspect caused discussions and triggered an effort of regulation on behalf of the consumers.

3.2.2 Issues of Regulation in *Brave*

On a more general level of regulation, *Brave*, as it happens to many movies, went through a rating by the Motion Picture Association of America. They rated the movie PG which means parental guidance suggested: “Parents urged to give ‘parental guidance.’ May contain some material parents might not like for their young children” (*Motion Picture Association of America*). While other Disney films usually receive the rating G for general audience, in the case of *Brave*, it most probably has been rated PG since there are scenes

that can be quite threatening and scary for children and, although triggering rather a lot of laughs, it shows a bit of nudity when the clan chiefs take off their kilts. Yet, this kind of rating implies a form of regulation since it states who is allowed to watch a certain movie and who is not.

In the case of *Brave* there has, however, been a more interesting issue of regulation, namely Disney's remodeling of Princess Merida. Disney changed the outward appearance of Merida which triggered a viral discussion about why and how they changed her and what those changes did to her character and what effects the new Merida would have on children.



Fig. 13: Merida makeover

Merida's makeover, as shown in figure 13, encouraged many of her fans to protest against these changes to her outward appearance and newspapers, such as The Guardian (see Child), The Washington Post (see Cavna), Herald Scotland (see Miller, "Merida Revamp"), and The Scotsman (see Ferguson, "Disney: Merida Makeover") etc., hopped in on the controversy. When the founders of a girl empowerment website, *A Mighty Girl*, found out about Disney's redesigned Merida on the website *Inside the Magic* (in an article by Ricky Brigante which states that Merida is crowned as the 11th Disney princess), they decided to start a petition on Change.org to "keep Merida brave" which over 200.000 people have signed ("Keep Merida Brave"). They, furthermore, interviewed Brenda Chapman on this issue who was outraged at Disney's redesign of Merida. As Chapman argues, Merida's character should be reflected in her looks and "was created to turn the regular Disney princess on its head" (in Danckaert). Hence, her personality is reflected in her wild fiery hair, she is not concerned with 'looking pretty' but is rather natural, wild, and strong-willed. Moreover, her body was designed to reflect that of a normal teenager. Disney made quite a few changes to those well-thought about characteristics of Merida. The way she poses in front of the camera, the come-hither look and off-the-shoulder dress are seemingly little alterations but convey a completely different attitude. More than that,

the new Merida has a tinier waist, an hourglass voluptuous body, and enlarged breasts transforming her rather into an adult and eliminating the child-like proportions and facial features of the original Merida. Chapman states that “they have sexed her up” and talks about her reaction when she first saw the makeover:

I was stunned when I saw it, but I wasn’t surprised. I was still just shocked because they never cease to amaze me on how low they got with these images intended for young girls. I was disappointed because I was hoping that Pixar would try a little harder to protect her since she was a Pixar princess, but I guess even they got outvoted if they even tried. (in the interview with Danckaert)

Disney’s influence on Pixar becomes very obvious from this statement and the fact that Merida is marketed as the 11th Disney princess and not the first Pixar princess.

Disney, of course, had to react towards this protest by its consumers. They claimed that the controversy was “blown out of proportions” and that this new, stylized version of Merida was only created for printed invitations to her coronation ceremony as the 11th Disney princess at The Walt Disney World in Florida (Ferguson, “Disney: Merida Makeover”) as well as for a specific line of products, the Disney Princess merchandise. Disney’s statement said: “We routinely use different art styles with our characters and this rendition of Merida in her party dress was a special on-time effort to commemorate her coronation. Merida exemplifies what it means to be a Disney Princess through being brave, passionate and confident and she remains the same strong and determined Merida from the movie [...];” while Chapman countered by stating that she would not let herself be fooled by this “smokescreen” (in Ferguson “Disney: Merida Makeover”). Another pretext for the transformation of Merida was that changes needed to be made when rendering her in 2D instead of 3D, which however does not seem to hold ground since this would not imply making her thinner and giving her a sexier look.

The petition “Keep Merida Brave” also got responses from other people who used a common argument regarding the critique of Disney films when claiming that “it’s just a cartoon – what’s the big deal” (in Danckaert). Brenda Chapman, in the interview with Danckaert, counters by explaining that children relate to cartoons and start to identify with the characters. Those images and their underlying meanings do have an effect on how girls perceive themselves. Chapman did not want to send out the message that girls are simply eye-candy and judged by how they looked like – a message sent out to girls and boys alike. Disney’s remodeling of Merida, nevertheless, threatens to put the focus (back) on the outward appearance of the princess. Chapman, therefore, emphasizes the importance of the petition stating that “[i]magery is an incredibly powerful subconscious message to children

and to people in general. Children love cartoons so they're gonna soak that in" (in Danckaert). Despite these attempts to prevent Disney from using the images of the new Merida, they did not remove the remodeled Merida from all products such as the "Disney Princess Storybook Collection", or "Merida. Legend of the Emeralds" (see "Disney Publishing Worldwide"). Disney's way of dealing with such issues illustrates their lack of integrity and the company's essence as profit-oriented business.

3.3 Consuming Disney Magic

The last part of the circuit of culture which has to be considered is how the meanings and values formed in the production process are consumed. Consumption should, however, not be regarded as the end point in the circuit of culture since it is a process which effects the other elements. The consumers are actively engaged in working out the meanings of the film and sometimes their interpretation differs from the meanings as encoded by the production team of a Disney film. Hall explains the correlation between the processes of encoding and decoding in the following way:

[...] there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding, the former can attempt to 'pre-fer' but cannot prescribe or guarantee the latter, which has its own conditions of existence. Unless they are wildly aberrant, encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate. If there were no limits, audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any messages. ("En/Decoding" 35)

Hence, the meanings as encoded by the production team of a film, direct the consumers in the process of decoding the meanings and yet, the process of decoding, i.e. what consumers read into the messages, is not identical with encoding, i.e. the production of these messages. In addition, the consumers' reaction towards the movie affects further production issues such as those of other films or merchandise. Following the differentiation between more general information about the Disney consumers and a more detailed investigation into *Brave's* consumption, the analysis first focuses on who consumes Disney products and why, and then goes into detail about consumers' reactions towards *Brave*.

3.3.1 The Disney Hype

As Disney spreads its wings wider and wider, the number of children who see Disney films grows continuously. The movies and their characters are, nevertheless, not only cherished by children but also adults. It seems as if it were Disney's goal to make everyone "a

potential lifetime consumer of all things Disney, from stuffed animals to sitcoms, from Broadway musicals to three-bedroom tract houses” (Hiaasen in Giroux 33). Everything possible is turned into a product offered for consumption.

Giroux goes into more detail explaining why Disney appeals to both children and adults (5-7). He claims that for adults the Disney cultural apparatus offers a possibility to escape from life’s mundane tasks into adventure tinged with joy and happiness. Disney awakens the ‘child in all of us’ and many adults who grew up with Disney have established a nostalgic longing for their ‘Disneyfied’ past. He states that “Disney’s power lies, in part, in its ability to tap into the lost hopes, abortive dreams, and utopian potential of popular culture” (5). Children, on the other hand, indulge in Disney magic because they can experience different worlds and fantasies full of creative imagination. The stories and images are captivating as they lead children on adventurous journeys provoking strong emotions about love, death, separation and loss. Furthermore, they offer them points of identification and thus children empathize with the heroes/heroines and, in turn, they often become their role models. (Giroux 5-7)

Over the past years, consumers have become more active especially due to technological developments via the internet and often use Disney content/products to create something new. The Walt Disney Company has also acknowledged this trend and, for instance, offers young children to engage with their princesses on their website, to learn more about them and to play with them (“Disney Princess”). More interestingly, adults have also started to remodel original Disney princesses and at times achieve to challenge Disney’s cultural messages by representing the images in a different light. Loryn Brantz, for instance, has uploaded pictures of Disney princesses with realistic waistlines stating “Healthier waistlines for them and healthier self-esteem for us growing up”. T.T. Bret, transformed Disney characters as well creating a series of “Genderbent Disney” where female characters are drawn as males and vice versa, a series of “Gay Disney”, “Curvy Disney”, “Modern Disney” and one of “Racebent Disney” featuring familiar characters but being of different ethnicities/races as their original. These images circulate on various websites (see Thomas for Huffpost or Koman for Cosmopolitan), blogs (see Brantz) and social media networks like Facebook (see for instance Virgin Radio LB via Facebook) and consequently reach a broad audience. They also direct the audience’s attention towards typical Disney trends such as Disney’s rather narrow definition of beauty, the depiction of exclusively heterosexual romance and their mostly white heroes and heroines. Although

sometimes not having an intentional message, these transformed Disney characters raise awareness about the ‘Disney ideal’ among the consumers.

3.3.2 Issues of Consumption in *Brave*

Brave’s box office results speak for the film’s success: They achieved a domestic total gross of \$237,283,207 which positions the movie on rank 26 of Disney’s all time box office results (rank 10 of Pixar’s total grosses) and on rank 20 of animated movies from 1980 to present. With a foreign total gross of \$301,700,000, the worldwide gross amounts to \$538,983,207. Having a closer look at the foreign gross intake, the United Kingdom, interestingly, (including Ireland and Malta) takes the lead with an intake of \$34,789,692 followed by France (including Algeria, Monaco, Morocco and Tunisia) with \$26,824,834. *Brave*, furthermore, won several awards including an Oscar for Best Animated Feature Film in 2013, a Golden Globe again in the category of Animated Feature Film and a BAFTA award. (see *Box Office Mojo* results for “Brave”, “Animation”, “Disney”, and “Pixar”; “Brave Awards” on *Pixar Wiki*; and Rizvi;)

Besides *Brave*’s success according to the numbers, there has also been much critique. Many lament the merging of Pixar Studios with Disney and feel that *Brave* does not live up to Pixar’s standard of greatness particularly because of Disney’s influence. Hence, one reviewer on the popular film website IMDb writes, “[...] However, this movie is not among the top Pixar films, by far. I felt the sickening presence of Disney all over the film – weird politically correct preaching, overdone action scenes, and generally random and weird plot” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). Another comment reads: “Pixar execs used to say that the story was indispensable in their filmmaking. They were right. It is too bad they didn’t follow their own advice in making *Brave*. As a formulaic Disney movie, it would be average (though with above average visuals)” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). Another commenter agrees stating that “[a]lthough this is being touted as a Pixar movie release, it’s the first Pixar release to have a very Disney-esque quality. The story of a young princess, not happy with the ‘life’ path laid out before her, asks for help from a wicked witch to ‘change’ her mother” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). Peter Bradshaw from The Guardian also heavily criticizes *Brave*, particularly its plot, writing that “[i]t looks as if their [Brenda Chapman’s and Mark Andrews’] script has been reworked pretty often, though perhaps not quite often enough. It is eerily bland, with none of the zingingly funny lines and smart self-awareness we’ve come to expect from Pixar; yet it doesn’t obviously appear to be pitched at very young kids, either, and doesn’t quite have the

necessary unforced simplicity.” Thus, it seems as if people who strictly regard *Brave* as a Pixar movie expected something different from Pixar’s first film featuring a female protagonist than a princess story.

In addition to the consumers’ perception of the Disney/Pixar cooperation, a more detailed investigation into the reception of the film can be carried out through IMDb. The popular web page offers a wide range of information about movies including plot summaries, trailers, photos, videos, information about directors, writers and cast. Particularly interesting to our analysis, IMDb gives consumers the possibility to rate and review the films. In the case of *Brave*, at least 262, 428 users have rated the movie arriving at a weighted average vote of 7.2 out of 10.

Votes	Percentage	Rating
24840	9.5%	10
26419	10.1%	9
64622	24.6%	8
81753	31.2%	7
40793	15.5%	6
13944	5.3%	5
4864	1.9%	4
2084	0.8%	3
1065	0.4%	2
2044	0.8%	1

Fig. 14: IMDb *Brave* rating

Fig. 14 illustrates that about one third of the voters rated *Brave* as a 7 out of 10. Approximately 25% assigned it a score of 8, followed by 16% who rated it a 6. Hence, most people rated the movie above average, believing that it deserved at least a score of 6 or above.

Taking a closer look at the reviews on IMDb, one can find out about the aspects of the movie the consumers liked and what they were disappointed about. Out of 423 reviews in total, 27 have been analyzed in more detail. The total number of reviews has been filtered according to ‘Best’ referring to the best reviews, i.e. those that most people found useful. Among these 27 reviews, a minimum of 11 people considered the less liked review useful and 344 people regarded the most liked review as useful. First of all, we will take a look at the aspects these 27 reviewers commented the most on, which are story, characters, animation technique and voice acting/soundtrack in *Brave*.

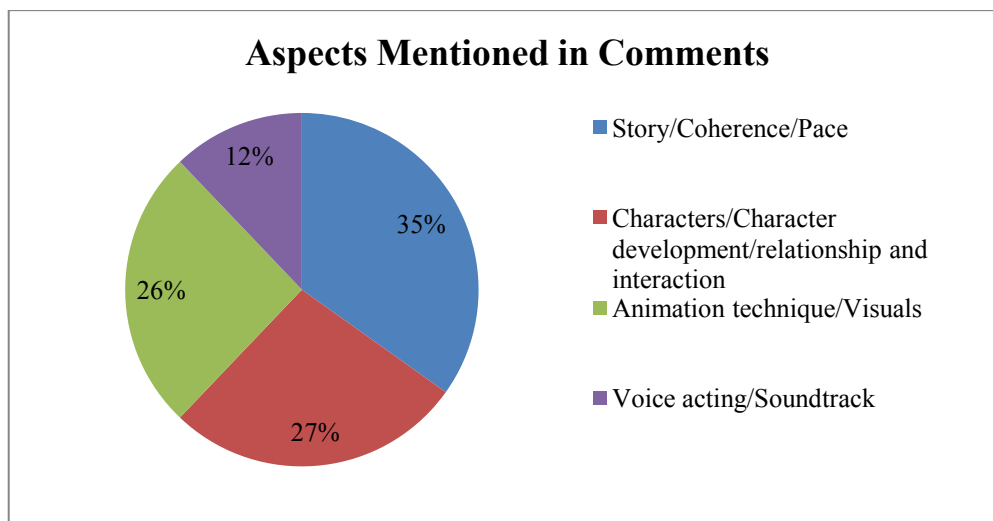


Fig. 15: Analysis of *Brave* Reviews 1

Fig. 15 shows that four aspects have been referred to repeatedly which are story/coherence/pace, character/character development/relationship and interaction, animation/visuals, and voice acting/soundtrack. Most of the reviewer's comments mentioned issues concerning the plot, incoherence within the storyline and pacing issues. Almost as many comments about the characters, their development and relationships are made as those regarding the animation technique and visuals of *Brave*. Although the least mentioned aspect is voice acting and soundtrack, there is still a visible trend in reviewers highlighting this issue in the movie. By further breaking down the data, it has been analyzed how many reviewers, of those who mentioned a specific aspect, made a negative, positive or an average comment on a particular aspect.

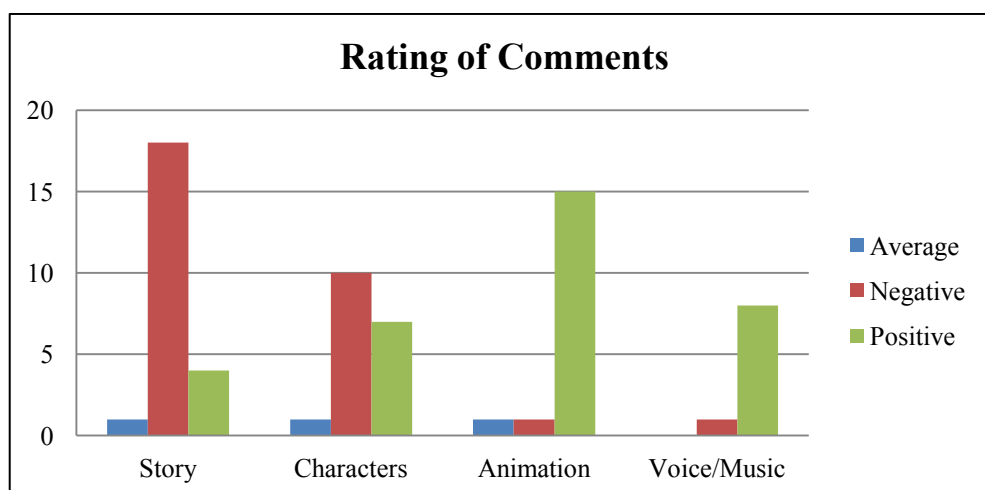


Fig. 16: Analysis of *Brave* Reviews 2

Fig. 16 indicates that among those reviewers who referred to *Brave's* story, 18 were clearly disappointed by it and only four made a positive comment. Regarding characters, their development and interaction, more people expressed themselves negatively than

commenting on it in a positive manner. On the other hand, references to the animation technique/visuals and voice acting/music are overwhelmingly positive.

A deeper analysis into the reviewers' comments demonstrates what exactly they liked about the movie and what they disapproved of. Concerning the story of *Brave* and its mainly negative critique, most of the reviewers thought of it as dull, pale, predictable, formulaic and lacking funny moments. For instance, one reviewer writes, "When you get right down to it, it's yet another misfit princess story. It's about a somewhat unruly princess who wants something different in life than what her parents want for her. Now how many times have we seen this story before" ("Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*"). Another point of critique, mentioned nine times, concerns the structure of the plot which was considered to be confusing, incoherent and random. Thus, one commentator argues that "[it] feels like two completely different stories [are] taped together to make up the time" ("Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*"). Another one attributes the incoherencies of the story to the change in directors, i.e. from Brenda Chapman to Mark Andrews. A third issue which arose were the questions of what makes Merida brave and why the movie was called *Brave*. Four reviewers failed to see Merida's braveness and thought she was rather selfish and petulant than brave. For some reviewers, it was also not clear what the message of the movie was and what kind of moral message one should learn from the movie. As a result one comment reads that "[t]he basic story and message was if you are a young woman with serious mother issues, don't worry. Do something really nasty to your mother, then say you are really sorry then your mother will change her mind and you can have it all your own way!" ("Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*"). A further issue, which ties in with understanding problems of the plot, was pacing to which one reviewer refers to when claiming that "a lot of the more serious info was glossed over or rushed in the movie [...]" ("Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*"). Among the positive feedback regarding *Brave's* story, the attention grabbing and unique plot was mentioned which did not turn out to be a "soppy love story" ("Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*"). Moreover, one reviewer reacted to the negative critique claiming that being brave does not mean fighting monsters but doing something that requires your courage, admitting your mistakes and protecting your family. ("Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*")

Positive and negative comments about the characters, their development and relationship are more balanced, yet, the negative remarks slightly dominate. Two aspects about the characters were criticized the most: Firstly, reviewers disapprove of Merida's behavior and see her as selfish since she does not work on her own attitude but wants to

change her mother. One of the reviewers expresses his conception of Merida in the following way: “She’s selfish, and the entire plot is about how she can get out of the results of her selfishness while remaining selfish” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). They further argue that Merida’s character shows no development, instead, rather her mother Elinor is the one who changes and grows. Hence, one commenter argues that “[...] Merida doesn’t fight for what she believes is HER destiny. Merida, instead, decides to change her mother! [...] [Elinor] is the person who makes the biggest emotional sacrifice [and] undergoes the most profound transformation” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”, emphasis given). Another point of critique was the portrayal of male characters that lacked depth, especially, the depiction of Merida’s suitors was emphasized and some reviewers questioned what would have happened if the princes were handsome and charming. The positive remarks about *Brave*’s characters mainly focus on Merida as Pixar’s first female lead and her relationship with her mother. Many were delighted that Merida is a different kind of princess, a unique and multifaceted heroine and “not a damsel in distress” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). It was also pointed out that she continually drives the plot forward and makes her own choices. Many reviewers also approved of the depiction of the mother-daughter relationship and the family problems to which they could relate easily. Hence, it seems as if opinions about the relationships of the characters diverge immensely. While some question Merida’s behavior and attitude towards her mother, others think that the depiction of their relationship is realistic and easy to identify with.

The aspects of animation/visuals and voice acting/soundtrack have won high praise from the reviewers. With regard to *Brave*’s animation technique, most commenters thought that it is spectacular, dazzling, inspiring and that the company has reinvented the standard of animated visuals. Many also claim that the film’s setting in the Scottish Highlands was very well chosen arguing that “[t]he environments are based on real Scottish landmarks, adding real depth to the story, and the colors are as bright as they are grounded, creating a wonderfully real world” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). Another reviewer similarly states that “[u]sing the Scottish highlands is both an inspiring choice and allows them to craft a beautiful film. With sweeping mountains, water, and thick and colorful forests, this is one of Pixar’s best looking films to date” (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”). Other comments emphasize the attention which was given to detail which facilitates the natural motion of characters and made Merida’s curly red hair possible. However, one reviewer thought that they should not have focused so much on her hair but rather should have put more work into the development of the story. Among the nine reviewers who mentioned

aspects about voice acting and the soundtrack, only one left a negative remark while all the others remained positive. They thought that the voices were well-cast and the Scottish accents and slang words added to give a realistic representation of the characters which blended nicely into the scenery and visuals creating a completely immersing environment. (“Reviews and Ratings for *Brave*”)

In sum, the IMDb analysis demonstrates that most consumers seem to be satisfied with the movie as it achieved a rating of 7.2 out of 10 points. The close investigation of 27 reviews has shown that there are four aspects of the film that reviewers repeatedly referred to, i.e. story, characters, animation and sound. While most of the reviewers criticized *Brave* in terms of story-issues, they were generally impressed by the animation and voice acting/soundtrack. The comments regarding the characters of the film do not reveal a clear trend towards either negative or positive poles. Some see faults in the characters’ development and relationship where others emphasize that the film portrays characters and their interaction very realistically and one can easily relate to them and their struggles.

Concerning *Brave*’s reception in Scotland, the film was praised overall, especially its representation of the Scottish landscape as well as the voice acting by Scottish actors. Media coverage of *Brave* was generally big and, in terms of newspapers, one can find articles in many of the most popular Scottish newspapers such as the Scotsman, the Herald Scotland, the Scottish Sun and the Daily Record (see the following articles). Tim Cornwell of the Scotsman, for example, points out the authentic Scottish dialects the characters use, especially, actor Kevin McKidd’s thick incomprehensible dialect, native Doric, which was used for Lord MacGuffin’s son. The Scotsman also seems to approve of the Scottish colloquialisms, such as Merida’s “Jings, crivens, help ma boab”, which add to the authenticity of the movie (Cornwell). The Herald Scotland also praises the movie stating that “[t]his is a brave, bold, gorgeous movie” that depicts Scotland as heaven on Earth (Rowat). Both newspapers also comment on everything that is happening around the movie as, for instance, the boost in tourism triggered by the film. A more recent article by the Scotsman states that Dunnottar Castle has to hire more staff due to the increasing amount of tourists visiting the iconic site, mostly, because they have seen *Brave* and another Scottish based Hollywood film, *Victor Frankenstein* (2015) (Stewart). Moreover, Alex Salmond from the Scottish Sun writes “This image of our beautiful nation will travel far ... it’s invaluable for Scotland” and Garry McConnachie from the Daily Record states that “Pixar’s *Brave* bears all the hallmarks of classic Disney princess stories but with a 21st century aesthetics”.

The analysis of the processes of production, regulation and consumption has illustrated that in order to get the full picture of the implications surrounding a movie one also has to consider its context. The issues of production have shown that meanings and values communicated in an animated movie are not coincidental but carefully selected, processed and expressed. Disney's (and Pixar's) messages are, therefore, not free of ideology, quite on the contrary, they support certain discourses through which they express their beliefs about life, society and happiness. In addition, Disney tries to keep control of their cultural output by regulating others and what statements they make about them, as well as themselves. Nevertheless, consumers can also act as a regulating force such as the consumer-initiated petition "Keep Merida Brave". Finally, it has been highlighted how consumers critically engage with Disney's output in general and *Brave's* reception in particular. After all, one arrives at the conclusion that animation is rough business and not sealed off in the happily-ever-after. The following part sheds light on other Disney movies featuring a princess story with a particular focus on representation and identity in those films including also some relevant details about their context.

4. Ethnic and National Identities in Other Disney Films

We now turn to other Disney animated productions which represent ethnic and national identities in order to find out how the film *Brave* positions itself in the context of those films. There are, of course, Disney movies in which ethnic identity is not as prominent as in *Brave* (e.g. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989) etc.). Therefore, the focus of this analysis is rather on films that use ethnic identities to steer the plot into a certain direction and to give the characters specific qualities. The selection of films includes *Mulan* (1998), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Aladdin* (1992). The investigation intends to answer the question of how ethnic and national identities are represented and constructed and whether in those films the same tools are used as in *Brave*, i.e. landscape, stories of legends, myths, traditions and customs as well as stereotyping and otherness. In addition, we will look at the functions of the ethnicities/ nationalities represented in these movies. Thus, we want to find out whether they steer the plot into a certain direction, influence the perception of the characters and whether Disney's values and beliefs penetrate the movie and therefore also the characters' culture.

4.1 *Mulan*

Mulan is the 36th animated movie of the Walt Disney Animated Classics and was released in 1998. The story is based on the Chinese legend of Mu Lan Hua (or in some versions, as in the Disney movie, her last name is Fa). It is one of the first Disney movies which departs from the typical romance formula and depicts a heroine whose primary motivation for her actions is not finding a man. It is rather her love for her family and country that encourages her to sacrifice herself and go to war against the Huns. Although Disney does include the (up-to-then) obligatory touch of romance at the end, *Mulan* is not driven by romantic love but rather a self-empowered and strong Disney princess. Nevertheless, the movie has been under critique for the mixing of Eastern and Western cultural elements. Disney's intention to reach as many consumers as possible, led them to include something for everyone. *Mulan* was clearly an attempt to expand into the Chinese/Asian market and to make themselves more popular there, while at the same time keeping an American/Western audience interested in their products (Dong *Hybrid Mulan* 156; Byrne and McQuillan 163-165; Ward 96). Nevertheless, by trying to appeal to an international audience, *Mulan* communicates Chinese as well as Western cultural elements ending up in a *mélange* of both. This aspect will also be revealed in the analysis of especially the Chinese traditions and customs included in the movie as well as their stereotypical depiction. First, we will however turn to the use of landscape in *Mulan*.

4.1.1 Setting the Scene in *Mulan*

The film starts with a very iconic image of China, that of the Great Wall. The Great Wall clearly serves as a marker of boundary and of protection of the Chinese people. The imminent invasion of the Huns is established right from the beginning as they capture the Wall. Thus, the villains are set apart from what has to be protected, i.e. everything inside the Wall, the Chinese people and especially the emperor. Another iconic Chinese site appearing in *Mulan* is The Forbidden City where *Mulan* saves the Emperor from the Huns' chief Shang Yu. The architecture of the 'Imperial Palace', as it is called in *Mulan*, serves to remind the consumer immediately of China and Beijing's Forbidden City (see fig. 17).



Fig. 17: The Imperial Palace from *Mulan* and Beijing's Forbidden City

Especially the pointed roofline is taken up by Disney and also applied to Mulan's home. Apart from these buildings, the representation of nature also plays a role in conveying the Chinese setting. Mulan's garden is an idyllic place where we find the 'typical' plum blossoms, a pond with water lilies, bamboo and the temple of the ancestors where her family prays. The vast interior of the land is called 'The Middle Kingdom' which is represented through hills, reminiscent of the Guilin area, and rice fields. Anywhere possible Disney also includes dragon stone sculptures. They are especially prominent in Mulan's garden and at the entrance to the Imperial Palace. Through the bonus material on the *Mulan* DVD Disney proudly informs their consumers about their three-week research tour through China and thus attempts to validate the authenticity of the cultural representations done in *Mulan*. Dong, however, questions Disney's way of legitimizing the authenticity of their movie, i.e. by travelling through the country and visiting places where Mulan might have lived (*Chinese America* 228). Since Mulan is 'only' a legend and not a historical figure, the places related to her tale are most likely "imaginative approximations" (228). Apart from these considerations, landscape in *Mulan* does play a role in drawing the audience into a specific place and culture, nevertheless, it is by far not as crucial as it is in *Brave*. Rather, other mechanisms have a more powerful force in communicating the Chinese nationality and one of them is Mulan the legend itself.

4.1.2 Historical Memories, Legends, Traditions and Customs in *Mulan*

It is believed that the earliest writing about the legend of Mulan is the classical Chinese poem "Ballad of Mulan", which appeared in between the fourth and sixth century (Dong *Chinese America* 219-222). Since then, the story has been adapted and transformed into different genres and became one of the most famous in China. Dong observes that the ballad cannot be considered a historical document as this claim lacks evidence. Yet, the tale of Mulan is a legend since her existence and story can be supported through some conjectures. Dong also explains that the main themes and the moral of Mulan's tale are filial piety and loyalty. One of the more recent and popular adaptations of Mulan's story is that of Maxine Hong Kingston's work *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976). Kingston, a Chinese American writer, has explicitly stated that the chapter on Fa Mu Lan, "The White Tiger", is a transformation of the Chinese myth by Americanness (in Dong 221). Thus, Kingston combines her Chinese cultural heritage with her life experience in America. This is an important point since the Disney movie was most likely inspired by Kingston's version (Ma 149).

The original “Ballad of Mulan” deviates in some points crucially from the Disney version. Some of the invented features are the scene of Mulan at the matchmaker’s, the training camp as well as Mulan’s secret decision to substitute for her father at war. Quite on the contrary to the Disney version, in the original ballad Mulan and her family make this decision together. They together make the preparations and purchase a horse and her equipment. Furthermore, Mulan does not steal the armor and run away during night, but she bids her parents farewell. Ma claims that these changes contribute to the transformation of the story from one about filial piety to one about living the teen dream of the Western audience. (Ma 154-161)

Adolescence is an idealized age which children are eager to reach but also adults wallow in memories about it. Disney takes up this fantasy of being free of obligations and able to indulge in adventures and plays it out in *Mulan*. Thus, Ma emphasizes the importance of the ‘running-away’ scene and claims that it “[...] mirrors the routine behavior of rebellious teenagers – slouching and pouting by oneself, tiptoeing to sneak off” (157). In Dong’s opinion, it seems as if Mulan takes the war enrollment as an opportunity to bring honor to her father but at the same time “[...] to escape from a disappointing reality in which the family honor is in danger and in which she is identified as a misfit and a ‘disgrace’” (*Hybrid Mulan* 160). She is disappointed with her situation and tries to escape society’s expectations of her by embarking on a journey of self-discovery. Moreover, after the adventure has begun, Disney’s Mulan hardly spares a thought for her parents. Ma therefore accuses Disney of leaving out the “[...] heavy didactic, moralistic tone of the Chinese Mulan” (159).

Disney’s teen adventure is further accentuated by the cross-gender dressing, which is depicted in a very playful manner, and various action scenes. In the ballad, there are no descriptions of the fights. Disney’s Mulan however almost seems to be involved in an action thriller. Another load of dramatic tension is added to the scene of Mulan’s imminent beheading, which is also absent in the original ballad. In sum, Disney’s deviations from the original change the story into one about the pursuit of teenage dreams and adventures loaded with dramatic action scenes. (Ma 159-160)

In addition to these alterations, one of the main issues about Disney’s *Mulan* is the representation of Chinese traditional values and customs. There is an obvious mixture of Eastern and Western cultures, which is very well analyzed in Annalee Ward’s essay on Disney’s *Mulan* (94-112). She argues that this intermingling of cultures is visible through the investigation of the poles of individualism/collectivism, the differences in

communication styles as well as general distinctions between Chinese and American cultural values. A mix of these aspects causes inconsistencies and moral tensions in the Disney movie.

The opposition of individualism versus collectivism is often referred to when talking about differences between East and West. Although they are generalizations, they are useful in a way that they act as a guide to understanding this issue. Western cultures are usually defined as rather individualistic cultures in which the emphasis is “[...] on concern for the self before the group, on independence, and on individuality” (Ward 97). Eastern cultures, on the other hand, are considered as collectivist cultures which “[...] put the group’s welfare before the individual’s, are more interdependent, and are concerned about other’s perceptions” (97). Hence, they would try to avoid any conduct which results in embarrassment of oneself and consequently the family or others. At first glance, Disney’s *Mulan* seems to act within the collectivist construct as she wants to bring honor to her family. Nevertheless, there are various scenes which represent rather individualistic values. For instance, she appears late to the preparations before meeting the matchmaker and does not seem to care about her mother’s concerns. At the matchmaker’s, she is represented as an individual that is different from the others and sticks out. After the debacle, she does not seem to be embarrassed but simply disappointed for not being accepted for who she ‘really’ is. At the training camp *Mulan*’s individuality is highlighted again since she does not fit in. Of course, this is also due to the fact that she is a woman. Yet, it also seems that she does not act in accordance with the group but rather follows her own agenda. When she fails to complete the tasks, she does not give up and her persistence is rewarded with respect. The message of not giving-up and believing in oneself is one often communicated by Disney, one which we have also encountered in *Brave*. Ward states that this is “a message that corresponds to Western emphasis on self-help and self-esteem, but it contrasts to an Eastern mind-set of being other-focused and concerned about not losing face” (98f.). The scene which probably most significantly highlights the individualistic mind of Disney’s *Mulan* is when she admits that she might not only have done it for her father but also for herself. She wanted to demonstrate that she could do something right. Thus, the goal of her journey is an individual achievement and discovery of her identity. As Ward puts it, “Disney’s *Mulan* is motivated ultimately more by the goal of self-discovery than the duty of service to family and emperor. Perhaps the strongest message in the film, the moral to the story, is the familiar Disney refrain – to follow your heart” (110).

Disney's *Mulan* thus rather acts in a way to serve her own interests and desires than caring about the collective's needs. (Ward 97-110)

Another aspect, through which the mixing of cultures is visible, are the different communications styles of Western and Eastern cultures. Gudykunst et al. (511) explain that one can generally differentiate between high/low context communication whereas high-context messages are usually used by collectivist cultures and low-context messages prevail in individualistic cultures. High-context messages are more indirect and implicit and non-verbal communication is pivotal. Low-context messages, on the other hand, are characterized by a more direct, explicit and assertive manner. Ward explains that *Mulan's* father and the Emperor adhere to Chinese high-context communication style (101). When *Mulan* returns from the meeting with the matchmaker, her father attempts to console her by drawing an analogy: "This one [blossom] is late. But I'll bet when it blooms, it will be the most beautiful of all" [*Mulan* 13:24]. Thus, he communicates his message in a very indirect way. The same applies to the Emperor's communication style when he encourages Shang to go after *Mulan*, "The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all" [01:15:22]. Nevertheless, we also find instances of low-context messages especially on behalf of the dragon-lizard Mushu but also by *Mulan*. At the matchmaker's she speaks without permission and generally she says what is on her mind. In the song "A Girl Worth Fighting For" the warriors suggest characteristics of their ideal future wives. *Mulan's* suggestion of "a girl who always speaks her mind" is shrugged off by the other men since traditionally Chinese women were expected to act in a more reserved manner (Ward 102).

Furthermore, traditional Chinese values seem to collide with what is being represented in Disney's *Mulan* (Ward 102-107). These values and their difference to Western values can partly be explained through the influence of Confucianism on Chinese culture. Although the traditional values have been under development and nowadays some aspects might not be as prominent in Chinese culture as they were formerly, some core values can still be identified. Pan et al. explain the lineal hierarchy which rules the three main values, i.e. "family structure, political structure, and the supernatural world" (21). Under the aspect of family structure filial piety plays an important role, which is also a theme in *Mulan*. One of the values of political structure demands "complete devotion and self-sacrifice" to the emperor (21). Moreover, male/female relationships are reflected within the hierarchy where women take a more submissive role (21f.). Ward emphasizes that at *Mulan's* time these values were crucial and "would have been strongly held" (103).

Some of the elements in Disney's *Mulan* adhere to these traditional values: the worship of ancestors, her father's willingness to fight for the emperor, men's general attitude towards women, Shang's reaction when he realizes that Mulan has deceived him and dressed as a man, as well as the fact that nobody is listening to her, a woman, when she tries to convince the crowd at the Imperial Palace that the Huns are still alive and about to capture the emperor. Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies where American/Western values are infused into the plot and characters. First of all, Ward points out that Mulan's behavior is not in conformity with traditional Chinese manners that would be expected of her (107). She is not one of the Disney princesses who waits quietly and timidly for her prince but is courageous, intelligent and actively involved in the plot. These qualities are surely desirable of a Disney princess but at the same time quite untypical of women in the traditional Chinese context. However, the legend of Mulan is about an unconventional woman and therefore portraying her in this way works out. As Ward claims, "Because this Chinese legend was about an unconventional female, many of the plot elements that could be categorized as Western were simply related to the actual unconventional character" (109). Yet, what triggers tensions and critique from the Chinese audience is *Mulan's* motivation behind her actions, namely the search for self-discovery instead of an emphasis on filial piety. Another Westernized aspect which Ward identifies in the movie is Mulan's willingness to cheat. She gets the dog to do her chores, cheats at the matchmaker's as she writes down notes on her arm and steals away from her parent's home. The dragon-lizard Mushu is another Americanization smuggled into the movie. He does not show any respect for the ancestors and others as he is constantly making fun of them. Moreover, the motivation behind his actions is also driven by individualistic goals since he intends to rise in position at the ancestors' temple via helping Mulan. Ward concludes that "Mulan presents a conflicted version of Chinese culture, one that attempts to acknowledge the collectivist mind-set but in reality sets it within a Western idea of individualism" (112). (Ward 102-112)

4.1.3 Otherness and Stereotyping in *Mulan*

The final aspects which remain to be analyzed in Disney's *Mulan* are stereotyping and otherness. Although from a gender-perspective Mulan is not a very stereotypical Disney princess, the representation of Chinese cultural elements adheres to stereotyped images of Orientalism.

Apart from iconic Chinese sites such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, Disney promotes the typical Orientalist discourse by applying to all objects possible a dragon figure: the dragon flags on the Great Wall, the dragon statues in Mulan's garden and in front of the Imperial Palace, the emperor's dragon wall covering, the dragon cannon which Mulan shoots at the Huns with, etc. Other markers of the Chinese identity are the traditional Chinese lanterns, the fireworks, rice bowls and chopsticks, Mulan's comb, the ink brush as well as the training of the recruits in martial arts. In addition, animals play an important role in representing 'typical' Chinese elements: the diminutive dragon Mushu, the cricket which should bring good luck as well as Mulan's horse Khan drawn with very thin legs. Ma argues that "[a]lthough playing second fiddle to Mulan, these familiars are instrumental in moving the plot, in generating fun, and in Orientalizing this Disney product for consumption" (151). Hence, the exotic 'other' is used to create a more attractive product for Western consumption. The case of Mushu is a special one since on the one hand the animal of a dragon is 'typical' Chinese, on the other hand, he is dubbed by Eddie Murphy whose accent is clearly decipherable as black American (Ma 152). Thus, in the character of Mushu, we find the exotic 'other' being made consumable for an American/Western audience through his use of language and jokes. Other quite obvious markers of the Chinese nationality are the outward appearances of humans. Most of them are represented with round moon faces, most women are slim and have long straight hair and men wear their hair in buns and usually have a goatee. Ma also emphasizes how some of the main characters' names have been transformed in order to be pronounceable and hence consumable by an American/Western audience (149f.). Thus, the original Chinese legend's name Mu Lan was simply changed to Mulan "[...] ridding it of the more defamiliarizing space and capitalization" (Ma 149). Mushu is another example whose name refers to the popular dish Mooshu Pork. Nevertheless, the names of other characters resemble the exotic Orientalist look as for instance Fa Zhou, Mulan's father and Fa Li, her mother. Ma concludes that "[...] Disney offers simplistic visions of the exotic Other – China – to allay the audience's fear. Bent upon 're-orienting,' pun intended, rather than 'dis-orienting,' Mulan draws from Orientalist fantasies of yore, notwithstanding the inflections of contemporary youth culture" (150). Disney's *Mulan* thus includes the exotic 'other' which adds excitement and thrills and adds American/Western aspects in order for such an audience to be able to identify with the movie.

As we have seen in *Brave*, there is also an internal othering within the movie of *Mulan*. The distinction between Huns and Hans is made quite explicitly in contrast to the

more subtle differences in *Brave* between Merida's mother and the rest of the characters. Especially the use of dark colors help to depict the Hun invaders as villains as they usually appear at night or set against a dangerous background of black/grey high rising mountains. Their skin tone is also kept in a grayish color while their hair, in comparison to the Hans' neat buns, is loose and wild. The villains' stereotypical representation is driven to a maximum. They do not possess any good qualities rather their barbarism and relentlessness is emphasized. The Hun's chief, Shan-Yu, is characterized through animalistic traits (Ma 162). His eyes come forth from the dark like the eyes of a wild animal, he sniffs at the doll like a dog and climbs the Great Wall like an ape. Ma, however, points out that such a depiction of the Huns is also common in Han Chinese representations of them (162). It is of course easy for Disney to take up this distinction between Huns and Hans and portray the enemy in a similar barbarian way.

4.1.4 Key Points of *Mulan*

We will now turn again to the question of what use it is to Disney to represent the Chinese national identity. The overall aim of transforming the legend of Mulan into a Disney movie was to expand their influence on an international level. Nevertheless, by trying to appeal to the Chinese as well as the American/Western audience, the movie ended up in a mixture of both cultures.

A crucial function of the representation of national/ethnic identity, which we have discovered in *Brave*, is that the nationality's characteristics trigger a certain plotline and have an influence on the perception of the movie's characters. In *Mulan's* case, such a claim cannot be made as easily as in *Brave* due to the very mingling of Chinese and American cultural values. On the one hand, Mulan's Chinese identity furthers a plot in which she sacrifices herself to protect her father and to bring honor to the family. On the other hand, US American values, such as the strife for individual self-realization, turn the story into one about teenage adventure and finding out who she really is. Furthermore, traditional Chinese values imply a hierarchy within the family, the political field and the relationship between men and women (Pan et al. 21). Thus, Mulan would have been expected to obey her parents and other authorities like Shang, she should subordinate to men, she should be demure and quiet and she should not lie to others. Nevertheless, Disney's Mulan does not possess these characteristics. In part, the deviations from this behavior can be traced back to the fact that Mulan was an unconventional woman. However, the more powerful force behind this conflict is the way in which the character of

Mulan has been Americanized or Disneyfied. The original legend of Mulan epitomizes loyalty and filial piety but in Disney her journey as an individual is foregrounded and her interest lies in proving herself.

Another point which was made in the analysis of *Brave* is that Merida's Scottishness influences her gender representation. In traditional Chinese culture women would not have been expected to behave in the way Mulan does. However, since the legend of Mulan portrays an unconventional woman, it is easier for Disney to present a rather unconventional princess. She is courageous, self-disciplined and takes action. Despite depicting an unconventional woman, Disney still incorporates personality traits which are not compatible with Chinese values such as the pursuit of individualistic interests. Furthermore, at the end Disney resorts to its typical formula of romance, which has been under critique by scholars like Henry Giroux who claims that "[...] Disney reminds us at the conclusion of the film that Mulan is still just a girl in search of a man, [...] Mulan becomes an exoticized version of the All-American girl who manages to catch the most handsome boy on the block, square jaw and all" (103).

All in all, Disney's *Mulan* is an Americanized and Disneyfied version of the Chinese legend. The unconventional story and character of Mulan helps Disney to bring through their agenda and to include American/Disney values. The most prominent ones are those of self-realization, her individualistic attitude, her refusal to give up, listening to her heart and staying true to herself. Ma compares her gender cross-dressing with a kind of cultural cross-dressing visible in Disney's *Mulan*: "Masculinity becomes a role that Mulan assumes, in the same way that Caucasian youngsters would identify with a Chinese-looking yet American-acting Mulan" (162). Hence, whereas in *Brave* it was difficult to say whether Disney intends to promote Scottish values or their own, in *Mulan* it is quite obviously their own values that dominate.

4.2 *Pocahontas*

Three years before *Mulan* was released, Disney created its first multicultural tale in *Pocahontas* (1995). The movie, set in 1607, retells the story of a group of British colonists' first encounter with Native Americans and revolves around the famous historical figure of Pocahontas, the American 'Indian Princess'. The focus is therefore on the two different ethnicities, British and Native American, and how their differences as well as similarities are represented. Released during the time of Hollywood's strife for political correctness, Disney tried to take a stance on multiculturalism featuring a stunning Indian Princess and

her determination to mediate between the two cultures and to prevent war. In contrast to Merida and Mulan, Pocahontas's search for romantic love is emphasized resulting in the typical Disney formula of 'love conquers all'. Again, representations of landscape, the particular interpretation of and changes to the story of the historical figure, traditions and customs as well as stereotyping and otherness play a crucial role in defining the Native American and British characters of the film.

4.2.1 Setting the Scene in *Pocahontas*

The representation of landscape in Disney's *Pocahontas* serves to reflect the American Indian's bond with nature. The Powhatan tribe with their leader, Pocahontas' father Powhatan, moves smoothly through the thicket, cultivate corn fields and know every tree and stone. The opening song, "Steady as the Beating Drum", introduces the audience to their harmonious life with Mother Earth: they show respect for their environment, perfectly adapt to its seasonal changes, use it ecologically and honor the spirits who live in their surroundings. In *Pocahontas*, similar to *Brave*, not only the landscape is romanticized but also the Native Americans who are depicted as 'noble savages', a very common Hollywood representation of the natives (Parekh 167). Their philosophy of living a life in balance with nature culminates in the very character of Pocahontas. As someone who cherishes each animal and tree, she is accompanied by the raccoon Meeko, the hummingbird Flit and Grandmother Willow, a willow tree, which offers her spiritual guidance. Like Merida, Pocahontas is one with nature, which emphasizes one of her most fundamental character traits. She strives for harmony not only with nature but also with other people such as the British colonists. Thus, the depiction of her as a 'noble savage' encourages her role as mediator between the two ethnicities.

Besides the Native Americans' identification through landscape, nature is also important in terms of drawing boundaries between the Indians and the British. In contrast to the Indians, the British have no respect for the environment. Shortly after their arrival, they log down the trees and start digging for gold. From their perspective, the savage nature needs to be tamed, an undertaking which resembles their intention to civilize and tame the 'barbarians'. This dichotomy is emphasized in the song "Colors of the Wind" in which Pocahontas teaches Smith a lesson about the diversity of people and things.

You think you own whatever land you land on.
The Earth is just a dead thing you can claim.
But I know every rock and tree and creature
has a life, has a spirit, has a name.

You think the only people who are people
 are the people who look and think like you.
 But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger
 you learn things you never knew you never knew.

(*Pocahontas*, “Colors of the Wind”)

The British’ inability to cherish and honor the land they landed on and to use it in the way the natives do, is also addressed when one of the colonists complains about the lack of sufficient food supply. Governor Ratcliffe is, of course, the one character that seems to be totally out of place considering his mannerism and style of dress. He is depicted as the arch villain and does not manage to adapt to the new environment until the end of the movie.

Ward points out another difference between the colonists and the natives namely the dichotomy nature versus technology. The Indians’ sensitivity to their environment is contrasted with the colonists’ obsession for technology. Instead of valuing nature they use cannons to destroy the woods and guns to kill people. These boundaries establish clear distinctions between the Native Americans and the British whereas the latter are portrayed as the villains, though not all of them are depicted as evil. (Ward 53f.)

4.2.2 Historical Memories, Traditions and Customs in *Pocahontas*

An important aspect for the analysis of Disney’s *Pocahontas* is the representation of history and especially what has been changed, omitted and added to the story of Pocahontas. Disney artists do not claim to be historians, however, the liberties they took in producing the film give us insights into their ideologies and the values they want to communicate. Most obviously, Disney changed the age and looks of Pocahontas since historians widely agree that she was a girl of eleven or twelve years, naked and bold (Ward 36). A romantic relationship between her and John Smith, who was about twenty-seven at the time of his expedition, seems very unlikely considering their age difference. Lin, moreover, questions whether Smith would be as paralyzed by Pocahontas, would she not be the beautiful creature Disney came up with (37). If he were not attracted to her, he probably would not have hesitated to shoot her when he first caught sight of her. Another decisive scene is the moment when Pocahontas throws herself over Smith to save him. Researchers criticize that this rescue scene has been widely misunderstood due to the fact that it was an adoption ritual by the Powhatan tribe and therefore only a mock execution (Edwards 150; Byrne and McQuillan 114). Edwards points out that the English misinterpreted Pocahontas’ actions as a “validation of their culture” when it actually dealt with “Powhatan’s attempts to subordinate Smith” (150). Nevertheless, in the Disney

movie, Pocahontas rescues Smith and her primary motivation for doing so is love. Hence, she is not celebrated as a heroine because “she represents the power and wisdom of Powhatan women, as subject-agents in specific historical processes, to influence and mediate in matters of political and economic importance, but because she loves John Smith [...]” (Parekh 171). Kutsuzawa criticizes this love-driven motive in a similar way: While her sacrifice is simply depicted as a by-product of love, Smith’s sacrifice, in saving Pocahontas’ father, goes beyond love as he does it for the greater good of humanity and peace (57f.). Hence, the heroic status shifts from Pocahontas to John Smith, which is further emphasized when the Indians offer the English food as a sign of forgiving. The English however never thank Pocahontas for her sacrifice and willingness to forgive them for having shot the Powhatan warrior Kocoum.

Apart from these aspects, the Disney movie has been strongly criticized for sanitizing colonial imperialism by erasing the constant conflicts and tensions between the Native Americans and the English and the genocide on behalf of the colonists. Henry Giroux claims that Disney rewrites history and the American collective identity of the past by using strategies of “escapism, [and] historical forgetting” (127). Furthermore, “[t]he Disney Company is not ignorant of history; it reinvents it as a pedagogical and political tool to secure its own interests” (124). Hence, Giroux strongly holds the opinion that Disney uses their power to control what and how historical memories are represented in order to secure their position. In *Pocahontas*, the exploitation of people and land is being downplayed. Ward (40f.) identifies a crucial point in the characterization of the colonists when she notes that different degrees of villainy apply to different characters. Governor Ratcliffe is represented as the arch villain who manipulates the other colonists by instigating the idea of the barbaric, blood thirsty Indian. John Smith stands in stark contrast to Ratcliffe, not only physically but also in the way that he is willing to change his ideas about the Native Americans. He gives biscuits and a compass to Pocahontas’ raccoon Meeko which serves to highlight his friendly and generous character. Furthermore, Smith’s friend Thomas, although not being a main character, does carry a fundamental message. Sympathy is created for Thomas since he is represented as a caring friend and a young boy who does not dare to object to the Governor’s orders. Ward defines him as “a representative of innocent imperialism” as “[...] the audience is led to understand that he is not responsible for his attitude toward the Indians; he was part of an unenlightened group” (41). Hence, although the overall message is racism and greed are wrong, the colonization and killing of Indians is sanitized. The commoner of the English is not guilty and

responsible for what he did. It is not their fault since nobody told and taught them any better. They simply have to be enlightened. In addition, the song “Savages” illustrates both parties, the English as well as the Native Americans, as violent and not trustworthy. Greed and violence are thus not associated with one ethnicity but with villainy and savagism in general. In Lin’s words, “[...] savage behaviour is [represented as] irrespective of race” (37). Kutsuzawa concludes that *Pocahontas* is “[...] a self-serving and self-justifying interpretation and presentation of colonial history” due to the fact that “instead of emphasizing the wisdom, self-sacrifice, and humanity of the indigenous people, the redemption of the sins of colonial expansion and the courage of the colonists in admitting to these are highlighted” (59).

Disney’s *Pocahontas*, similarly as in *Brave*, contains a sort of marriage tradition. In Pocahontas’ case the bravest of all warriors, Kocoum, asks Powhatan for the hand of his daughter. Powhatan thus wants to hand over Pocahontas to Kocoum. The necklace which Pocahontas receives from her father and which her mother wore at their wedding symbolizes the need to marry a powerful Indian warrior and the process of passing into womanhood. Hence, it seems as if Indian wedding traditions are based on patriarchal values and Pocahontas needs to be socialized into this system. Yet, this is an invented aspect of Indian social life and is not part of their customs. In fact, Powhatan women held quite powerful positions and could choose for themselves whom to marry. Thus, typical American patriarchal values are incorporated into the story. Edwards concludes that the film places “[...] American Indians into patriarchal family units, while in fact native cultures represent a real contrast to the litany of patriarchy, property, and nuclear family repeated at the core of American national identity” (156). (Edwards 155f.)

4.2.3 Otherness and Stereotyping in *Pocahontas*

With reference to otherness and stereotyping we have already defined some difference between the Native Americans and the English as, for instance, with regard to nature and technology. In addition, the Indians are represented as the noble savage since they live in harmony with nature and cherish their land. Nevertheless, they are also represented through another stereotype namely that of the “savage reactionary”. Marsden and Nichbar explain this stereotyped image of the Indian in the following way: “The Indian fitting this image is a killer because he detests the proper and manifest advancement of a white culture clearly superior to his own and often because of his own primal impulses. He must be annihilated for the good of civilization” (609). In Disney’s *Pocahontas* the Powhatan tribe

is suspicious of the white colonists and feels threatened by the weapons they carry. Their reaction manifests itself in war preparations and the transformation from nature honoring and peaceful people into ferocious warriors.

Obviously, the Native Americans are depicted as the exotic Other of the film. They have darker skin, long brown or black hair and wear the 'typical' Indian costume and headdress. Other 'typical' markers of their Otherness and Indianness are rituals practiced by a shaman, the beating of the drums and the war-screams. However, Edwards observes that Pocahontas is one of a kind as she physically differs from the other Native American women. Her face is not as round as the others, her hair blows full-bodied in the wind and in general her outward appearance resembles characteristics from multiple ethnicities. Glen Keane, a Disney animator, explains that he used models from various ethnicities to create Pocahontas as for instance Irene Bedard, an Indian actress, black supermodel Naomi Campbell and white supermodel Kate Moss. Hence, Disney's Pocahontas is not specifically American Indian but rather a mix of all sorts of ethnicities. Edwards therefore argues that she becomes an "icon of Western standards of exoticized female beauty" (154). Furthermore, she claims that actual miscegenation is oppressed, since Pocahontas and Smith are separated at the end of the movie, and instead multiple ethnicities are projected onto her body. Disney, hence, only deals with a superficial form of multiculturalism leaving out actual racial mixing and the complications it would imply. (Edwards 151-154)

Lin also argues that *Pocahontas* is a simplified depiction of the Other represented from a Western perspective and thereby only dealing with superficial cultural differences. Lin shows how Stanley Fish's concept of 'boutique multiculturalism' can be applied to the Disney movie. Fish explains that boutique multiculturalism is "characterized by its superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection" (378). Furthermore, the boutique multiculturalist simply sees cultural differences as "matters of lifestyle", like clothing, music or other peculiar behavior such as table manners, and hence our universal identity as humans is being emphasized instead of a deeper understanding of cultural differences (Fish 384). Disney's *Pocahontas* mirrors this view when it comes to the representation of the exotic Other. While cultural differences are being downplayed, the sameness of Native Americans and British as human beings is foregrounded. Thus, superficial markers of difference such as the clothes they wear, the food they eat, etc. are simple matters of lifestyle which are readily consumable for the audience. Ratcliffe's dog Percy, for example, becomes Native American at the end of the film by merely putting on the Indian dress and headgear. Nevertheless, Lin notes that "[b]eneath their appearances

and activities, their attitudes and motivations are little different from those of Western stock characters, reducing their cultural uniqueness to a list of physical and material attributes” (36). Pocahontas’ strife for romance and the development of her personality are similar to typical coming-of-age stories. She is confronted with the struggle of not disappointing her father while at the same time following her dreams, a struggle with which a Western audience can identify and sympathize. Another marker of difference, which is dealt with on a superficial level and which seems to be another matter of lifestyle, is language. Pocahontas magically overcomes the language barrier when she ‘listens with her heart’ while John Smith simply acquires the greeting customs of her tribe. Thus, their assimilation in terms of language only achieves an uneven level since Pocahontas’ fluency is contrasted by Smith’s two simple gestures and their accompanying sounds. Hence, Pocahontas and the Native Americans are reduced to the exotic Other, a simplified version of their culture since their otherness is represented as an interchangeable lifestyle, a fashionable trend that one can put on or off whenever one pleases. (Lin 36-39)

4.2.4 Key Points of *Pocahontas*

With the help of *Pocahontas* Disney attempted to ‘become multicultural’. Nevertheless, the depiction of Native American culture is reductive and simplified. Disney uses common stereotypical images to represent the Indian, i.e. the noble savage and the savage reactionary. Although the plot is, to a certain extent, predetermined by what is known about colonial history and the legend of Pocahontas, these two stereotypes still influence the plot and the audience’s perception of the conflict between the two parties. Thus, Pocahontas’ character as living in balance and harmony with nature seems to be an innate character trait of her and therefore she is also eager to make peace with the British. Her father and the other Powhatan tribe members adhere to the stereotype of the savage reactionary since they fear the colonists and their resolution to the conflict is war. The British, on the other hand, are at first depicted as intruders to Pocahontas life and land. However, they are not unexceptionally represented as villains, quite on the contrary, apart from Governor Ratcliffe at the end all of them seem to be good at heart. They simply have to be enlightened by Pocahontas in order to understand that the Native Americans are not savages or barbarians. By representing the British in this way, many critics have accused Disney of downplaying the conflicts and genocide of colonial history.

We have also seen that Pocahontas’ outward appearance is different from the other Native Americans. Her body seems to be a blend of multiple ethnicities and her beauty

seems to adhere to Western ideals. Lin therefore claims that she is “the white man’s Indian princess” who “[...] embodies the exoticism and sexualisation of the ethnic Other” (37). Thus, she becomes an image of the white male’s gaze, a woman whose appearance instantly captures Smith and the Western audience. Although Pocahontas’ role as mediator and educator is promoted by her ethnicity, it is also encouraged from a gender perspective since these roles are typically related to women.

Furthermore, it has been argued that Disney takes up a boutique multiculturalist attitude towards the Native Americans’ culture. Otherness is marked in a superficial way and as a matter of lifestyle while at the same time universal human characteristics are foregrounded. Edwards therefore claims that “[...] non-white peoples and cultures exhibit only superficial differences while gradually becoming homogenized into an Americanism defined by universalized Western concepts such as individualism and capitalism” (148-9). This argument is already familiar to us from the analysis of *Mulan* where the heroine’s individualistic self-realization is emphasized. Pocahontas’ individuality is also highlighted by giving importance to following her dreams and choosing her own path. Thus, the Disney movie *Pocahontas* also mirrors Western/Disney ideas and values such as self-realization, patriarchal family units and freedom of choice. Lin aptly summarizes:

Disney thus advocates an ethnocentric brand of boutique multiculturalism, establishing a universal identity that resonates with American ideals, upon which each culture drapes a thin veil of superficial attributes to mark their uniqueness. Such an ideology facilitates Disney’s commodification of non-Western cultures into experiences readily purchased at a whim [...]. (40)

Hence, it seems that Disney follows a particular agenda: While superficially representing other ethnicities/nationalities and their cultures and profiting from their exotic ‘lifestyles’, they equip them, as inconspicuous as possible, with Western and essentially their own values.

4.3 *Aladdin*

Disney’s *Aladdin*, the 31st animated feature film of the Walt Disney Animated Classics sequence, features the first non-white protagonists. The characters’ ethnicity can broadly be defined as Arabic, a specific nationality can, however, not be assigned to them. *Aladdin*’s success is often attributed to its Broadway music elements, the extraordinary comedic achievements of Robin Williams as Genie and the action-filled romance between Aladdin and Jasmine. Yet, many academics criticize the negative stereotypical representation of Arab culture and its coupling with the depiction of the villains, especially

the Grand Vizier Jafar (Staninger; Wise; Addison; Mitchell-Smith). The illustration of Arab culture and ethnicity in *Aladdin*, therefore, connotes sinister figures and their devious behavior. Nevertheless, Macleod argues that the audience of the 1992 released Disney movie has already been prepared and made familiar with such stereotypes because of television broadcasts of the Gulf War which took place at the time of the production of *Aladdin* (179). Hence, the Disney movie echoes popular stereotypes of the Arab culture and again resorts to orientalist images of the East to construct the Arab ethnicity as the exotic Other.

4.3.1 Setting the Scene in *Aladdin*

Right from the beginning of the movie, the setting of the plot is clearly defined. The song “Arabian Nights” introduces the audience to an orientalist landscape that is characterized by huge dunes, the immense flat openness of the land and the intense heat. Other orientalist icons that are integrated into the opening song are camels, turbans, fire-eaters and a peddler. Although the illustrations of the desert draw the consumer into a vacant mystic land, only the lyrics help to locate the action into a more specific, Arab territory. One stanza of the original lyrics of the song was changed after criticism from the American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee as it read “Where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face” and were then changed to “Where it’s flat and immense and the heat is intense” (Ashman and Menken; Wise 105). When Disney was pressured to take a stand on the racist accusation, spokesperson Howard Green used the frequent “animations-are-fantasies” excuse and claimed that “[...] it’s talking about a different time and a different place. [...] It’s a fictitious place” (Macleod 185). In this way, Disney denies the impact such racist lyrics might have on the audience and tries to emphasize its innocence. Nevertheless, this overt reference to Arab culture being violent and irrational is not the only instance of this stereotype as we will see in our analysis of traditions portrayed in *Aladdin*.

After the opening song, the action is transferred to the marketplace of the city of Agrabah, which has been argued to be a rough anagram of Baghdad (Wise 106; Macleod 182). Due to the similarities between princess Jasmine’s palace and the Taj Mahal (see fig. 18), the name of the city Agrabah could however also be a combination of Baghdad and the city of Agra, which is located closely to the Taj Mahal.



Fig. 18: Princess Jasmine's palace and the Taj Mahal

Hence, the setting of the plot is not as unambiguous as previously determined in the opening song since various iconic sites of the East merge in the movie, i.e. they become an undifferentiated landscape and territory of Orientalism. This mixture of Oriental landscape culminates in the song "A Whole New World". Aladdin takes Jasmine on a ride on the magic carpet showing her the pyramids and sphinx in Egypt as well as flying over Beijing's Forbidden City where people are celebrating the Chinese New Year. As a result, Addison notes that "[...] the whole field [of the distinctive cultures] is consigned to an exotic Other position: it is all the Orient, it is not-us. In the Disney-Orient Arabia, China, India and the rest are more similar in their otherness than their cultural systems are distinct from one another" (7). Hence, the amalgamation of elements from various cultures as well as landscapes from various nations is fundamental in the depiction of them, the Other, versus us, the (US American/Western) audience. The exotic setting, moreover, seems to encourage the use of magical elements like the genie of the lamp and the magic carpet.

Addison further claims that the immense open and deserted land of the Orient was an image often represented by scholars and painters of Orientalism from the eighteenth until the early twentieth century (7f.). The apparent vacant land should symbolize "an invitation to settlement and missionary ventures" by European colonists (8). Similarly, *Aladdin* refers to this empty wasteland with the exception of the city of Agrabah which is primarily defined through its marketplace. The missionary venture in *Aladdin* takes place on a more symbolic and ideological level since Islamic beliefs and traditions are replaced with US American values of freedom, individualism and romance, which will be discussed in the following part.

4.3.2 Legends, Myths, Traditions and Customs in *Aladdin*

Disney's *Aladdin* is loosely based on the tale "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp" which is often associated with *The Arabian Nights* tales. Nevertheless, the story does not belong to the original compound of tales since its roots are Chinese and not Arabic. During the

fifteenth century, the tale became part of the Middle Eastern oral storytelling tradition. In contrast to the Arabian legend, which locates *Aladdin* in Persia, Disney creates the imaginary city of Agrabah. Other changes made by Disney are the absence of Aladdin's widowed mother and the evil African magician is exchanged by an Arab villain, the Grand Vizier Jafar. (Macleod 182)

Disney's *Aladdin* resorts to various 'traditional' Arab icons such as sword swallows, camels, acrobats, belly-dancers, veiled women, cobras, Jasmine's Bengal tiger, Aladdin and his monkey wearing a fez and the other men's turbans. Especially Jasmine's costume is worth a closer look as it rather seems to be an American imagination of the Orient than sharing any resemblance with traditional Arab clothing. Macleod points out that her appearance is rather designed according to Western standards of beauty and to satisfy the male gaze: Instead of a more realistic modest clothing, the illustrations of her "[...] devalue and sexualize the Middle East female. [Moreover,] Jasmine's bare midriff is ridiculously at odds with her character as a princess" (181-182). She further argues that attention to detail is given to Jasmine's design in order to suggest truthfulness and authenticity of her looks. Staninger also notes that "Jasmine is a typical teenager in the trappings of an Arab princess [...]" when comparing popular Southern California fashion at the time of *Aladdin*'s release, which also featured baggy pants, see-through materials, halter tops and the 'scrunchies' to hold her long hair (67). Addison refers to the dress of other women besides Jasmine, who make up about twelve minutes of the film, and observes the use of the hijab in *Aladdin* (10-11). Hijab usually refers to 'veiling' or 'seclusion' thus symbolizing modesty or segregation of men and women. In *Aladdin* seclusion is, however, rather interpreted as imprisonment since Jasmine is confined to her father's palace (Addison 11). The custom of veiling, moreover, is represented in a ridiculous way as the tiny veils barely cover the women's faces and, at the same time, their voluptuous bodies are covered with little fabric (11). As a consequence, Addison concludes that "[i]n this presentation of *hijab* the veil is an erotic prop for American fantasy, rather than a recognizable system of social order. 'Veiling' in *Aladdin* is reduced to coquetry: it signals beauty and promises to reveal, not to cover" (11). Hence, traditional Arab customs and costumes are changed for the benefit of exotic fantasies that trigger the audience's imagination of Arab culture.

Aladdin contains a tradition almost identical to that in *Brave* which is inherent to the movie, namely that Jasmine has to marry a wealthy prince before her birthday. Jasmine, like Merida, considers this tradition as outmoded and tries to escape from her

prescribed life. Hence, Jasmine's main goal is freedom, i.e. to see the world and to marry a man she really loves. In order to achieve independence, she has to overcome the law which becomes the biggest hurdle. Many critics have addressed this opposition between US American values of independence and freedom of choice and the presentation of the Islamic law and customs as outmoded and irrational. Wise, for instance, argues that not only Jasmine but also Aladdin and the Genie strive for freedom since they are victims of the law, social system and outdated customs (106). Jasmine dreams of romance, Aladdin of being a wealthy prince and the Genie simply wishes to be free. Wise extends the notion of freedom to an economic level claiming that "[...] the film vilifies Islamic Law, or *sharia* (law that is based upon the Qur'an), promoting instead a largely Western notion of 'freedom' – which means essentially the freedom to exchange goods [...]" (106). Especially the Genie brings in various US American/Western elements of consumptions and turns Aladdin into a wealthy prince. Aladdin is thus able to 'play a trick' on the law and to evade its outmoded prescriptions and customs. Furthermore, Islamic law is represented as cruel and irrational by emphasizing corporal punishment for stealing. Aladdin is permanently at risk of having his hand cut off when he steals from the market (of course his good intentions are made clear right from the beginning when he gives away food to hungry street children). Even Jasmine is captured by the guards when she naively takes an apple to give it to a child. Wise therefore claims, "[a]s *Aladdin* makes clear, Islamic or Qur'anic law is archaic, stultifying, terroristic, evil, and corporeal: It may cut off your head just as easily as your hand" (107).

Standinger further analyzes whether Jasmine's behavior and values are typical of a Western/American young woman or whether she is rather a representative of women in Islam (65-77). At first glance, it seems as if her story was that of an "up-town" girl seeking independence, rejecting her suitors, and running away from home. She observes that "While her behavior might be stereotypically American teenager, her desires are not. [...] It is the West's prejudiced perception that Middle Eastern women are submissive, passive and quiet" (71). Hence, she argues that women in Islam have similar struggles and dreams as those of Western women and Jasmine's desire for independence and equality is therefore not that far from the truth. Nevertheless, she claims that the audience would not be aware of this aspect but would perceive Jasmine to be rather exceptional and outstanding and, as a consequence, the stereotype of the submissive Arab woman is not broken. (Standinger 65-77)

While Jasmine's dream of freedom and independence at first suggests a strong, self-empowered female lead, a closer investigation does not underpin this claim. Addison emphasizes that "[w]hereas romance is a means to other ends for Aladdin, for Jasmine 'freedom' is romance" (19). For Aladdin freedom signifies to rise in social status and to gain wealth and his romance with Jasmine makes this possible. Jasmine, at the beginning, has quite ambitious goals: she wants to see the world, get to know new people, do whatever she pleases to do and, of course, marry the man she chooses. In the end, however, all these desires seem to be reduced to one aspect, i.e. she finds happiness and 'freedom' in the romance with Aladdin. Addison makes a similar comment as Staninger when stating that these desires are what "[...] Americans imagine Arab Muslim women cannot do, but wish to" (19). Hence, Disney builds on common American perceptions of Arab culture implying that Arab women have to be rescued by US American beliefs and values, i.e. "Disney-freedom [in the form of Aladdin] liberates Jasmine 'out of' Islam and 'into' American coupling systems" (Addison 18). Thus, the emphasis is again on the representation of Arab/Islamic culture as a retarding force, not allowing women to do what they desire. Only Americanism/Disney, personified via Aladdin, can guarantee to fulfill the dream apparently all woman share, i.e. (an American) romance.

4.3.3 Otherness and Stereotyping in *Aladdin*

Disney's *Aladdin* focuses on one ethnicity, the Arab, which from the perspective of a Western/American audience is the 'other'. We have already discovered various ways in which this otherness is marked, mainly through stereotypical images such as the desert, the marketplace, camels, belly-dancers, turbans, fire-eaters etc. In addition, the depiction of the Islamic law as retarding and cruel force triggers negative connotations as it portrays Arab culture and people as irrational, uneducated and violent. Nevertheless, Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie stand out, not only because they are protagonists, but they also differ from the rest of the Arabs.

As pointed out above, Jasmine's appearance, especially her clothes, seem to have an American resemblance. Even more surprisingly, Aladdin too turns out to be rather American when considering that he was drawn after film star Tom Cruise and the inspiration for his baggy pants came from M.C. Hammer. Furthermore, Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie speak with an American accent whereas the other characters have foreign accents, like Jafar and the peddler, or somewhat British accents, like the Sultan. Disney even tinged Aladdin's and Jasmine's skin color lighter and deepened Jafar's skin tone. In

contrast to the other men, Aladdin, moreover, is not bearded, has not got a big nose and does not wear a turban. He is set apart from the other men, especially the arch-villain Jafar, but also from the salesmen and the palace guards who appear as grim, aggressive and ignorant men. (Macleod 182; Addison 9-10; Staninger 68)

Aladdin's rival, Jafar, is represented via dark colors, sinister eyes, a big nose and carrying a scepter in the form of a snake, probably a symbol for his treacherous behavior. Addison emphasizes another difference between the two antagonists: Jafar strives for power, while Aladdin wants wealth (and being married to the princess) (15). Whereas Aladdin's ambition triggers positive connotations, Jafar's does not. When Aladdin is in power of the Genie, he is productive and creative, producing money, clothes, transportation, female dancers, etc. Under Jafar's rule the Genie turns into a destructive force. The conclusion which can be drawn is that "Wealth is never identified with power, and especially not destructive power: it is always delightful, always innocent, always friendly. Jafar's desire for political power is evil, [...]" (Addison 15). On the basis of this opposition between 'American' wealth and economy, the 'rags-to-riches' dream, and 'Arab' political power, some academics see the worst traits of two Arabs from the 'real world', Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein, combined in the character of Jafar (Macleod 182; Byrne and McQuillan 76). The Genie, Aladdin's helper in being successful in terms of wealth and consequently winning Jasmine's hand, resembles America the most. He refers to parades, American game shows and caricatures Groucho Marx, Peter Lorre, Robert De Niro, Jackie Mason and Jack Nicholson. Byrne and McQuillan highlight that the Genie makes sure Aladdin wins and state that he is "[...] the spirit of American cultural imperialism, the genie is Disney itself" (81).

Hence, similarly as in *Brave*, there seems to be only one ethnicity represented in *Aladdin*. Nevertheless, when taking a closer look it becomes obvious that Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie differ from the other characters, especially from Jafar. While the 'good' characters embody US American values and beliefs, the villain Jafar is represented via negative attributes that denote common stereotypes about Arabs.

4.3.4 Key points of *Aladdin*

Disney's first attempt in featuring non-white protagonists received mixed responses. While some are captured by its music, animation style and love story, others lament the offensive stereotypes about Arab culture and people. Among our analysis of Disney movies, *Aladdin* is clearly the most hazardous one since it sends out negative messages about the Arab ethnicity.

The Arab ethnic identity and its customs are depicted as violent, outmoded, irrational and backward. These stereotypes offer scripts of behavior for the evil characters such as Jafar and the palace guards. It seems to lie in Jafar's nature to be treacherous, to forge out evil plans, to overturn the Sultan and to seize power. The palace guards are represented as aggressive and ignorant. They are not able to capture Aladdin, do not recognize him as Prince Ali and follow their orders blindly. The Sultan is depicted as childish and innocent, not intelligent enough to sense Jafar's treason. Furthermore, the representation of Islamic law as a retarding force helps to set up the main theme, i.e. the protagonists' enslavement by the law and customs (Wise 106). Jasmine is denied to exercise her free will, Aladdin is denied to ascend in the social hierarchy and the Genie is denied to be his own master. They are trapped by Arab traditions and the law. Only by allowing US American ideas, values and beliefs to penetrate their world can they be freed.

The negative aspects of Arab culture are contrasted by the positive influence of US American values embodied by Aladdin, Jasmine and the Genie. They strive for freedom, independence, self-realization and try hard to make their dreams come true. Aladdin is a stark contrast to other Arab men and is considered to be "a diamond in the rough" [0:03:07]. His strive for wealth is portrayed as a positive goal and even lying to Jasmine and the Sultan is represented as harmless and innocent in comparison to Jafar's malevolent intrigues. One of his final statements, "Call me Al", shows how his rather exotic name is made more familiar and apt for an American audience, similarly to the changes carried out in Mulan's case. The Genie, Aladdin's helper in achieving his goals, either produces goods that connote US American/Western styles or he produces Western imaginations of the Orient such as the belly-dancers, exotic costumes etc.

Jasmine, although having desires that are similar to those of 'real' Arab women, would still be considered as rather American by a Western audience since her representation does not adhere to their prejudices about Arab women (Staninger 65-77). She is rather a modern teenager following the same dreams as an American/Western youth. Moreover, her outward appearance is an exoticized and sexualized image of Oriental women that should appeal to the male audience. At the beginning, her dreams are quite ambitious, however, at the end, she simply seems to be satisfied with living (an American) romance. Furthermore, while the Genie and Aladdin refer to her as being "smart", her words are often not taken seriously (Addison 13). When the palace guards capture Aladdin, Jasmine orders them to set him free, which, despite the guards' apologies, does not happen. When Jasmine gets furious because the men treat her like 'a prize to be won', the Sultan

minimizes the impact of her words by attributing them to her temperament. By having Aladdin rescue Jasmine from her enslavement, one can conclude:

Power in the Disney Arab world is transferred with the ownership of Jasmine: Aladdin/America becomes ruler of Agrabah/Arabia by saving the Arab woman from marriage to an Arab man, and by changing the laws that stipulate that she marry within her culture and class. (Addison 14)

Disney's *Aladdin* can, therefore, be considered another example of Disney superimposing American values of freedom of choice and independence onto the Other. While attributing heroism to these qualities, the representation of Arab culture through mainly negative stereotypes is reductive and dangerous. Macleod's anticipatory remark sounds familiar to us: "Disney's global reach is cause for alarm: What mythic version of American values will it beam across its empire of Others?" (190).

The analysis of Disney movies from *Aladdin* to *Brave* has shown that Disney intends to pay more attention to the representation of ethnic and national identities. In order to avoid criticism and to reach the largest audience possible, they have become more careful in depicting different ethnicities and nationalities by evading negative stereotyping. Nevertheless, stereotyping of the Other still has an important function in setting apart the main American/Western audience from the exotic and cultural Other of the film. At the same time, Disney has to cater to the needs and expectations of the American/Western consumers by offering them character traits or plotlines through which they can identify with the protagonists and their situations.

The investigations of characters, their motives and the stories' conflicts in *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Mulan* and *Brave* have revealed common elements which run like a golden thread throughout the Disney films. These elements are primarily based on US American beliefs and values, and should mainly appeal to the American, white, middle-class, heterosexual family, Disney's target audience since Walt Disney brought the company into being (Giroux 41). The focus of all movies analyzed was on the individual and their individual self-realization. They are all in search of some kind of freedom and independence from the cultural confinements which pose a problem to them right from the beginning of the films. As a consequence, they embark on a journey of self-discovery during which they have to hold on to their dreams, work hard to achieve their goals and listen with their hearts. At the end, order is restored, usually via a romantic outlook between the heroine and the hero or, in *Brave's* case, harmony is restored through the

reunion and reconciliation of the family. Raffaelli defines Disney's slogan as "One for all" and explains

In a nation which extols freedom and openness and exalts the individual and his potential, one can see how Disney's philosophy manages to unite, in the same story, the success of the individual and the apotheosis of the group. All celebrate the winner's (often the two winners') good fortune together. (112)

The individual is at the heart of each story and the successful accomplishment of their goals is celebrated by the whole community no matter whether it has bigger or lesser impact on their lives.

Mitchell-Smith (211) distinguishes between two camps of criticism. While the first group argues that Disney films promote an American/Eurocentric agenda, the second line of argument criticizes that after the princesses have been depicted as feisty and strong characters, at the end they again retreat into the traditional order/culture. However, these two lines of argument are not entirely exclusive. It is true that at the beginning the heroines seem to be more feisty and empowered than at the end where they appear to be 'tamed', with the exception of Merida. They want to escape the traditions and rules set up by their culture and achieve this goal via a rather American philosophy of holding on to your dreams. At the end, they succeed in gaining a 'sort of' freedom and independence, however, one that is defined again through American values of romance and family happiness. Thus, the message seems to be that the problems posed by the outmoded traditions of the princesses' culture can only be overcome in 'the American way'.

5. Conclusion

Why should I run for mayor when I'm already king?
-Walt Disney-

The examination of different ethnic and national identities as depicted by the Walt Disney Company reveals how such identities are represented, the functions they fulfill in the movies and, crucially, Disney's powerful position enabling them to represent these ethnicities and nationalities from their perspective. Yet, to completely capture the influence which 'The King of Animation' exercises means going beyond an analysis based on the content of the films. This second aspect deals with the producers' and consumers' perspective on the movies.

The analysis and comparison of four Disney princess movies, namely *Brave*, *Mulan*, *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin* confirms that Disney's animated films are laden with US American, and especially the Disney Company's, values and beliefs about life, society and happiness. This aspect has been emphasized by previous studies such as various articles from Ayres et al.'s *The Emperor's Old Groove*; Ward's *Mouse Morality*; Dong's articles on the mixing of American and Chinese culture in *Mulan*; Edwards' and Lin's articles on *Pocahontas*; as well as Addison's study on *Aladdin*. Stanley Fish's concept of 'boutique multiculturalism' can easily be applied to all four Disney movies. The Disney princesses' cultures are reduced to a few essential and fixed attributes which seem to be rather a matter of lifestyle compared to the actual complexity and depth of each culture. Behind the thin veil of otherness, all princesses possess a kind of universal identity that coincides with US American ideals. Each movie repeatedly emphasizes the US American myths of freedom and independence, individual self-realization, the importance of holding on to your dreams and hard work as well as the fulfillment the princesses find in romance and the nuclear family.

In addition, many works take a more general approach to issues of production, regulation and consumption, thereby, referring to the Walt Disney Company's reach on the market and their image of innocent family entertainment (see Bell et al. and Giroux). Particular information about aspects of production, regulation and consumption is rather limited and scattered in Ward's analysis of *Mulan* as well as Staninger's, Wise's and Macleod's essays on *Aladdin*. This study, however, emphasizes that the contextualization of each Disney film is indispensable in order to fully grasp the struggles over the cultural meanings of the movies. Issues of production of the Disney/Pixar film *Brave* illustrate the detailed work that goes into the creation of an animated movie and, thus, the messages that

are communicated are by no means coincidental. Nevertheless, the analysis has further highlighted the role the consumers play by suggesting that they are not passively accepting Disney values and beliefs but are also engaging critically with the content of the movies. While consumers' reviews offer insights into how they perceive Disney films, further research should particularly focus on children's perception and the influence that Disney's cultural messages have on them.

Via a close-content analysis of the Disney/Pixar production *Brave* and a comparison with three other Disney films, this study offers new perspectives on how ethnic and national identities are represented in Disney's animated movies. The findings illustrate that, first of all, specific tools are used to represent ethnic and national identities and, secondly, the rather stereotypical representations of ethnicities and nationalities carry out certain functions within the movies.

With regard to the tools used in the representation of ethnic and national identities, the analysis of *Brave* lays the foundation for the investigation of the three other Disney movies, namely *Mulan*, *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin*. The tools for representing nationality in *Brave* have proven to be iconic landscapes, historical memories, myths, traditions and customs as well as stereotyping and otherness. These aspects seem to be fundamental in order to navigate the audience into a specific place and to make them familiar with the people inhabiting such place. While the representations of ethnic and national identities in the three other films work along the same lines as in *Brave*, the aspect of landscape is most prominent in the depiction of Scottishness. The two aspects that are determining in all movies are, however, stereotyping and otherness. A general dichotomy can be observed between the main target audience, i.e. primarily American/Western audiences, and the ethnicities/nationalities of the movies, i.e. the exotic and stereotyped 'other'. Additionally to the contrasting between consumers and characters of the film, there are also boundaries drawn between the characters within the movies themselves. While in *Pocahontas* and *Mulan* the opposing ethnicities are very obvious, in *Aladdin* and *Brave* the opposition is indirectly expressed via innuendos.

Concerning the functions the particular ethnicities and nationalities have on the animated movies, the analysis shows that ethnic and national identities seem to steer the plot into a certain direction and often predetermine or encourage certain expectations from the Disney princesses. Their ethnic/national identity explains their behavior and the motivations behind their actions. For instance, the stereotyped representation of Scottishness in *Brave* explains and naturalizes Merida's fierce character and her striving

for freedom and independence. Nevertheless, due to Disney's imposition of their own values and beliefs, the characters' behavior cannot always be explained through their ethnicity/nationality. In *Brave*, Scottish ideas of independence and freedom coincide nicely with the same US American values and resonate in the strong-willed character of Merida. Mulan's Chinese nationality explains her loyalty to her family and the importance of filial piety but American values of individualism are not as easily combined with Chinese culture as with Scottishness, which therefore creates tensions in the film. Pocahontas' Native American ethnicity, depicted as a harmonious-seeking individual, furthers the plot of peace-making with the British colonialists. Finally, in Jasmine's case, her ethnicity is rather emphasized via her exotic looks but her strive for freedom and independence would not be perceived as a typical Arab trait by most of the audience.

All in all, the messages of Disney's animated princess movies are not innocent. They teach their young target audience about how to achieve happiness and what roles society offers them. This is not to suggest that we should stop watching Disney films but it is important to dismiss the idea of their movies being pure entertainment and fun as they do convey powerful pedagogical messages. When the 'Magic Kingdom' is entered, one indulges in its fantasies but its effects on our perspective on life and different cultures should not be forgotten.

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Figures:

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Appendix

English Abstract

Although Disney movies are usually considered to be ‘safe’ family entertainment, their messages are not innocent but have pedagogical functions in as far as they teach their relatively young audience about desirable and undesirable behavior, societal roles, as well as a certain idea of happiness. In light of these aspects, this study explores the messages Disney’s animated princess fairytales communicate about ethnic and national identities by focusing on the Scottish nationality in *Brave* (2012) and comparing this movie with the representations of the Chinese nationality in *Mulan* (1998), the Native American ethnicity in *Pocahontas* (1995) and the Arab ethnicity in *Aladdin* (1992).

A close investigation of the Disney/Pixar production *Brave* is conducted by making use of Paul du Gay’s concept of the circuit of culture which consists of five interrelated cultural processes: representation, identity, production, regulation and consumption. Thereby, the analysis does not only examine how the Scottish identity is represented in *Brave*, but it also uncovers Disney’s efforts in protecting their image and the consumers’ increasingly active engagement with Disney movies.

This study shows that particular tools and strategies are used to represent national and ethnic identities in Disney films, namely the representation of iconic landscapes, historical collective memories, myths, legends, traditions and customs as well as stereotyping and otherness. Furthermore, stereotypical depictions of the nationalities/ethnicities support dominant Western discourses of these identities. In addition, the particular representations of ethnic/national identities, have functions within the movies, i.e. they explain and support the characters’ motivations and behavior. Nevertheless, the Disney Company manages to instill their own values and beliefs, i.e. predominantly US American values such as freedom, independence and the pursuit of individualistic dreams and goals.

German Abstract

Obwohl Disney-Filme gerne in die Schublade der ‚harmlosen‘ Kinder- und Familienunterhaltung geschoben werden, vermitteln sie eine bestimmte Weltanschauung und haben auch pädagogische Funktionen. Dem relativ jungen Publikum wird in diesen Filmen vorgezeigt, wie es sich in der Gesellschaft zu verhalten hat und es wird eine bestimmte Vorstellung von Glück und Zufriedenheit kommuniziert. Hinsichtlich Disneys Einfluss auf das Publikum, untersucht diese Arbeit die Darstellungen von ethnischen und nationalen Identitäten in animierten Disney-Prinzessinnen-Filmen, wobei der Fokus auf der Darstellung der schottischen Identität in dem Film *Brave* (2012) liegt. Anschließend wird dieser Film mit der Darstellung der chinesischen Nationalität in *Mulan* (1998), der indianischen Ethnie in *Pocahontas* (1995) und der arabischen Ethnie in *Aladdin* (1992) verglichen.

Eine detaillierte Untersuchung der Disney/Pixar Produktion *Brave* wird mit Hilfe von Paul du Gays „Circuit of Culture“ durchgeführt, welcher aus fünf zusammenhängenden Prozessen besteht: Repräsentation (oder Darstellung), Identität, Produktion, Regulation und Konsum. Mittels dieser Methode wird nicht nur auf die Darstellung der schottischen Identität in dem Film eingegangen, sondern es wird auch aufgezeigt, mit welchen Mitteln die Walt Disney Company ihr Image schützt und dass sich das Publikum zunehmend kritisch mit den Filmen auseinandersetzt.

Diese Studie zeigt, dass spezielle Mittel und Strategien in Disney-Filmen verwendet werden, um ethnische und nationale Identitäten darzustellen: die Darstellung von Landschaften, Erinnerungen an die gemeinsame Vergangenheit, Mythen, Legenden, Traditionen und Bräuche, so wie der Gebrauch von Stereotypen und die Abgrenzung zwischen uns (dem Publikum) und den anderen (die ‚exotische‘ Ethnie/Nationalität des Films). Durch die Verwendung von stereotypischen Darstellungen der ethnischen und nationalen Identitäten, werden vorherrschende kulturelle Ansichten des Westens bekräftigt. Des Weiteren üben die Darstellungen der einzelnen Ethnien/ Nationalitäten Funktionen in den Filmen aus, da durch ihre Verwendung das Verhalten der Charaktere und deren Beweggründe erklärt und untermauert werden. Trotz der Darstellung verschiedener Ethnien/Nationalitäten, gelingt es der Walt Disney Company ihre eigenen Werte und Ansichten einfließen zu lassen. Vor allem finden US-amerikanische Werte wie Freiheit, Unabhängigkeit und das Streben nach der Erfüllung von persönlichen Träumen und Zielen in den Filmen Platz.