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Colonial Narratives of the Hollywood Film Industry

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1. Introduction

Disney's *Pocahontas* is a film that has captivated audiences with its vivid animation and memorable soundtrack, yet it also presents a complex narrative that intertwines themes of nature, culture, and colonization. This analysis aims to delve into the film's portrayal of interactions between humans and the natural world, particularly focusing on key scenes involving Grandmother Willow, various animals, plants, and the river. Also, it examines how songs serve as a powerful mode of communication, revealing deeper ideological messages. Through a thematic analysis of these elements, this study seeks to identify and critique eco-racist themes that arise from the film's depiction of Native American culture and their relationship with the environment.

While there is significant discussion on the portrayal of Native Americans and the environmental themes in *Pocahontas*, a deeper intersectional analysis could provide new insights. This would involve exploring how the film's environmental messages interact with racial stereotypes and representations. There is a lack of thorough examination of how Indigenous environmental philosophies are portrayed versus Western environmental narratives. Research could focus on comparing these perspectives and analyzing how the film aligns or diverges from authentic Indigenous views on nature. In *Pocahontas*, the natural world is not merely a backdrop but a central character that interacts with the human protagonists. Scenes featuring Grandmother Willow, a sentient tree who offers wisdom, and Pocahontas's interactions with animals and the river, illustrate a deep connection with nature that is depicted as both mystical and intrinsic to Native American identity. However, these portrayals often slide into the romanticized "noble savage" stereotype, which simplifies and distorts Indigenous relationships with nature. The film's soundtrack, particularly songs like *Colors of the Wind* and *Savages*, plays a crucial role in conveying these interactions and the underlying themes. Through lyrical content and musical composition, these songs communicate messages about harmony, respect for nature, and the clash between Indigenous and colonial values. A critical analysis of these songs will help unravel how they contribute to the narrative and reinforce or challenge eco-racist stereotypes. In the context of eco-racism, this analysis will also examine representations of Otherness and the Western gaze in *Pocahontas*.

The Western gaze often exoticizes and objectifies Native American characters, portraying them through a lens of primitivism and mysticism that reinforces a sense of cultural and racial superiority. This gaze constructs Native Americans as the "Other," positioning them as fundamentally different and separate from the Western, civilized norm. By exploring these themes, this study will highlight how *Pocahontas* reflects and perpetuates eco-racist narratives through its depiction of Native American interactions with nature and the cultural dynamics at play. By examining these interaction scenes and songs, as well as the representations of Otherness and the Western gaze, this analysis will uncover how *Pocahontas* constructs its environmental and cultural discourse. The film's portrayal of nature, while ostensibly celebrating its beauty and significance, often falls into patterns of eco-racism. This occurs through the lens of the Western gaze, which tends to exoticize and oversimplify Native American ecological knowledge and practices. Ultimately, this study will provide a nuanced understanding of how *Pocahontas* reflects and perpetuates eco-racist themes, contributing to the broader conversation about representation and ideology in media. Considering all the before-mentioned aspects, this thesis states that while Disney's *Pocahontas* is often celebrated for its environmental themes and portrayal of Native American perspectives, a closer examination reveals that the film perpetuates eco-racist narratives by framing Indigenous people and their connection to nature through a Western lens. This subtly reinforces stereotypes, legitimizes the Othering of Native Americans, and trivializes the violent realities of colonial history, thus reflecting and perpetuating modern Western perspectives on nature and Indigenous cultures under the guise of progressive storytelling.

This thesis explores the complex and multifaceted narratives surrounding *Pocahontas*, focusing on the tension between historical facts and the myths that have been constructed over time. It delves into the accounts of key historical figures such as John Smith, Ralph Hamor, and John Rolfe, analyzing how their portrayals have influenced the romanticized and often misleading story of *Pocahontas* that persists today. This examination sets the stage for a critical analysis of Disney's *Pocahontas* feature animation film, with particular attention to how the film is perceived within contemporary media studies through the lenses of eco-racism and eco-criticism. To critically engage with these portrayals, this thesis applies theoretical frameworks on eco-racism, the Western gaze, and eco-criticism.

These theories are essential for deconstructing the film's underlying messages about nature, culture, and race, as they reveal how *Pocahontas* subtly reinforces colonial ideologies and contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes. By examining the intersection of eco-racism and ecocriticism, the thesis offers a more nuanced understanding of how environmental narratives can be complicit in sustaining colonial attitudes. The relevance of these theoretical frameworks lies in their ability to challenge mainstream narratives in popular culture and to offer alternative perspectives that move beyond traditional Western views of Indigenous peoples and their relationship with the environment. The thesis ultimately seeks not to condemn the film but to encourage a critical reflection on how stories like *Pocahontas* are told and understood, advocating for portrayals that are historically accurate and that respect the complexity of Indigenous cultures and their ties to nature.

2. The Many Narratives of Pocahontas

Considered as the first American myth, the tale of Pocahontas has been retold over the centuries and been part of contemporary media and literature. The legend and figure of the “Indian princess” has been remolded and reshaped in numerous plays, stories, and visual representations. To match political correctness of Western society, the tale has been adjusted and adapted to modern political and social values (Preda 317). Through this retelling of the myth of Pocahontas, competing versions of narratives, memory, and history developed (Hall 452). Thus, myth and history blended, and the story of Pocahontas is constantly changing and adjusting to the purposes of politics, literature, or movie industries.

Today’s most dominant version is the Disney movie *Pocahontas* from 1995 which focuses on a fictional intercultural romantic love story between the Native American icon and the White colonizer John Smith. Meanwhile, the film does not mention the tragic historical facts of Pocahontas’ kidnapping and shipping to England, leading to her death at the age of 21. This narrative of a romance between the colonizer and the colonized was first introduced by novelist John Davis in the 19th century and since then, plays a significant role in real-life marriage between Indigenous people and Euro-Americans (Baringer 42). This thesis suggests the utilization of the stories surrounding the Native woman to legitimize genocide, colonialism, and American identity to this day. Other associations with Pocahontas emerged through the centuries such as the melting-pot-model of American history constructed by Pocahontas’ Christianization, her marriage, her interracial heir as well as her trip to “mother” England. In this context, she is identified as the original American “mother”. The mythology of Pocahontas even encourages people to claim they are descended from her, and she is their grandmother. This identification again attempts to validate an indigenous mythical consent and approval of Europeans settling in America (Baringer 44). In general, the many rewritings of Pocahontas follow a certain canon, which is mainly determined by the Western canon. Being aware of the myth that was created and adapted throughout centuries as well as of the many narratives surrounding her legacy, is a requirement for conducting an analysis of the 1995 Disney film. The preparations and intentions of the Hollywood film industry and the existing contemporary canon and political as well as social values shape the essence of the film.

To gain an overview of historical facts and myths of Pocahontas, which are partly used in the movie, letters and diary entries of the three settlers John Smith, Ralph Hamor, and John Rolfe are investigated. These texts are the foundation of the historical and mythological study of Pocahontas and are thus compared to the portrayal of Pocahontas in the film. A specific focus lies on the representation of Pocahontas in connection to that of nature and the land and how the link of humans and nonhumans shapes the imagination and identity of Pocahontas and Native Americans.

2.1. Historical Facts and Myths about Pocahontas

In American fiction, the story of Pocahontas has been told and retold over centuries in many ways. Consequently, historical facts and myth became blurred and new versions of the narratives surrounding the Native American legend emerged. The chosen storylines and the selected historical fragments reflect temporary political and social intentions of the writers. In these narratives the Western concept of primitiveness and the idea of the “noble savage” are recurring themes (Baringer 42). Pocahontas is depicted as a heroine, an exotic princess, a savior of the settlers or a victim of colonialism. Although the writings of the historical figure vary significantly, they all depict a certain canon (Baringer 42). The narratives suggest that American writers seem to be fascinated by Indigenous women which led to the over-romanticization and sexualization of Pocahontas. Still, not only American authors were interested in the Native American princess but also contemporary writers with both Indigenous and Euro-American descents, such as N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, and Paula Gunn Allan, interpreted the historical fragments. Thus, a “cross-cultural literary production” was established (Baringer 42). These writers try to expose contradictions and stereotypes of Native Americans, especially women, as an object of desire (Baringer 42). Although the facts and myths of Pocahontas are mostly interpreted by White male authors, studies from American Black women do exist as well. As Dearborn refers to in *Pocahontas’ Daughters*, American women fiction can best portray what it means to be a woman and an outsider in Western culture (1).

Taking ethnicity into account is essential to grasp the story elements of Pocahontas, her way of life in a natural pre-industrialized world, and her intermarriage with a White colonialist. Still, the most prominent narratives from Pocahontas stem from American male writers of the antebellum literature.

Here, she was portrayed as the beautiful Native princess in frontier romances or the heroine in many “rescue” scenes (Tilton 1). Beside romantic stories, the Pocahontas materials were also used for political intentions in the years of the Civil War by abolitionist writers. In this context, she was a symbol for safety and reassurance for the captured soldiers and slaves. Further, the writers tried to exemplify a “possible peaceful coexistence of two distinct races” by using the narratives of the Native women (Tilton 4). As this thesis suggests, one of the most common themes in Pocahontas narratives was the romanticization and heroism of the Native figure which was used to legitimize and glorify the colonization of America. This assumption becomes apparent in various texts from the 19th century such as William Wirt Henry’s *The Settlement at Jamestown, with Particular Reference to the Late Attacks Upon Captain John Smith, Pocahontas, and John Rolfe*. Henry was a lawyer, politician, historian, and writer in Virginia and was president of the Virginia Bar Association as well as of the American Historical Association (Grey 15). His text contains excerpts referring to Pocahontas and her first encounter with the settlers. He describes the arrival of the colonists and raves about the majestic ships and sails and how impressive this sight must have been to the Indigenous people. The style of Henry’s writing gives the impression of a glorification and that he views this event as the triumphant beginning of a better, even divine world. Particularly, he describes the Natives as ignorant of anything that is beyond their land and assumes they are nothing but moved and happy about the sight of the Europeans arriving. The fact that Indigenous tribes had ships themselves and a vast understanding of the world is not considered at all by the author. Thus, Pocahontas and her kin are portrayed as primitive, stupid, and poor, merely due to their ascribed Otherness and living strongly connected to nature.

Not only did the myth of Pocahontas interest writers of the last three centuries, but it still plays an important role in contemporary popular culture and social life (Mansky). Her function is that of a role model, or a compassionate companion. Hence, Pocahontas represents a figure that people can relate to. The many associations and attributions of Pocahontas shape her myth and legacy which change and modify over the centuries matching contemporary political and social values and beliefs.

Pocahontas' mythology and the fictional narratives are based on a modicum of historical facts. Only a few are considered as reliable, and some are still debated and questioned by historians of Native American studies. It can be said that she was born around 1595 in the Tidewater region of today's US-state of Virginia. While Pocahontas was only her pet name, meaning "playful one", she was also called Matoaka. Her father Powhatan was chief of a powerful Native American confederacy, which was assembled by tributary tribes in the Tsenacommacah, the homeland of the Powhatan people. The child's mother remains unknown since her father traditionally had many wives, who were sent away after giving birth and stopped breast-feeding. In 1607, when the first English settlers arrived at the site that would later be named Jamestown in honor of King James I of England, Pocahontas was just about 12 years old. (Mark). The most prominent version of this story includes the encounter with Captain John Smith right after his arrival in the "New World", who was supposedly rescued by Pocahontas from her father later. It is further said that the Native girl visited John Smith and Jamestown regularly and maintained a good relationship with the settlers there. She allegedly helped the Europeans to communicate with her tribe and thus, received the role of a diplomat and mediator. Undoubtedly, the best-known event of the life of Pocahontas describes John Smith's rescue from the Powhatan people. Though, the attempted murder of Smith through her father's hands and the child pleading for mercy, is at the same time the most controversial record. These events are further examined by regarding the letters and diary entries of Captain John Smith. Allegedly, the rescued settler was injured in an accident and was brought back to England in 1609 about five years after his release from the Powhatan. Pocahontas, believing him to be dead, was captured and abducted by Captain Argall and imprisoned in Jamestown.

There she was held for a ransom of five hundred bushels of corn. It is assumed that either Powhatan could not pay the ransom, or he was unwilling to do so (Baringer: 43-44). Eventually in 1613, Pocahontas had to convert to Christianity and denounce her Native heritage. In 1614 she married John Rolfe, an English explorer, farmer, and merchant as well as the first settler in the colony of Virginia to successfully cultivate tobacco crops for export (Mark). With her husband being the father, Pocahontas gave birth to her son Thomas in 1615. A year later in 1616, the Native woman traveled to England, never to see her homeland ever again.

After she had crossed the Atlantic and arrived in London, the “Indian princess” was a great success as a popular exotic figure of noble descent.

By 1617, known at the English court as “Lady Rebecca,” she attended the renowned Twelfth Night masque (Mark). During her stay in London, Pocahontas was visited by John Smith and had one last exchange before she died in the same year at the age of 22. Reportedly, she died of an infectious disease, probably tuberculosis, on her way back to America and was buried at Gravesend (Paul 90).

Although historians agree on most of these facts about Pocahontas, there are still conflicting inconsistencies that led to ongoing debates about the historical figure.

2.2. The Narratives of John Smith, John Rolfe, and Ralph Hamor

Pocahontas is often regarded as a key figure in the foundational mythology of America and is frequently depicted as part of the earliest love story of the “New World.” (Paul 89). Most narratives ignore her age of 12 years, when the romance between her and John Smith allegedly had occurred. Despite the romanticization and subjective narratives of three settlers who encountered the legend, this thesis describes the stories about Pocahontas as a colonial narrative of assimilation. Further, since all sources and reports of her existence were passed down by White men, she becomes an object of male dominance. Hence, the “American heroine” is a voiceless figure without records of letters or diaries of her own (Paul 89).

Following, this thesis takes a close look at fragments from the narratives of three men: John Smith, John Rolfe, and Ralph Hamor.

While Pocahontas left no evidence of her existence herself, John Smith is the only writer who referred to words she supposedly had uttered (Paul 89). He first mentioned his encounter with the Native girl in his work *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Happened in Virginia* in 1608. Still, Smith only reports about the rescue incident in his later texts in 1624, seven years after she died. This led to speculations about the truthfulness of John Smith's account of the event, and whether it is merely fiction (Preda 1).

The narratives begin with his first sight upon the Native Americans, his capture by the Algonquians and the early armed conflicts between the Indigenous people and the English settlers. Pocahontas is only documented as a messenger between Powhatan and the English without crediting her of ostensibly saving his life. Also, in his *Proceedings of the English Colony in Virginia* written in 1612 are no references of it. While Pocahontas is mentioned, the references to her are often brief and within the context of larger narratives. Since Pocahontas was known to visit Jamestown frequently, Smith refers to her bringing food and helping the colonists. To make the narratives sound less self-centered and more scholarly, John Smith writes about himself from a third-person perspective. "Pocahontas with her attendants brought him [Smith] so much provision that saved many of their lives, that else for all this had starved with hunger." (Smith, ch. 2) Captain Smith further mentions Pocahontas referring to her as an intermediary who often acted as a go-between for the English settlers and the Powhatan people, facilitating communication and trade. "During the time of two or three years, she next under God, was still the instrument to preserve this colony from death, famine, and utter confusion." (Smith, ch. 10)

This passage depicts Pocahontas as a knowledgeable local, who helps the settlers how to deal with the environmental circumstances and how to gather food. Considering the usual harsh treatment and attempt to destroy the Indigenous ways of life and nature, it seems contradictory and hypocritical that the settlers appreciate the help of a young Powhatan girl.

Still, Smith's reports reflect the English's dislike of Native Americans living in harmony with nature without European religious and social values. This becomes apparent when he tells the story of her marriage and baptism, which is described as the ultimate goal and successful transformation of a Native girl into a Christian woman.

“Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, was taken prisoner; and being well instructed in the Christian faith, was baptized with the name Rebecca.” (Smith, ch. 5) Smith further expands on this matter as follows. “About the last of April, followed Pocahontas’s marriage with Mr. Rolfe, which made her become very formal and civil after our English manner.” (Smith, ch. 7)

These excerpts highlight Pocahontas’s significant role in the early years of the Virginia Colony. Her interactions with the English settlers, particularly with John Smith and John Rolfe, form the draft for later literary processing of the stories (Paul 96).

The narratives of Captain John Smith are part of the main historical sources of Pocahontas. Although the English writers had a specific agenda in documenting the events of the early colonies, these texts are not less relevant or authentic than the romantic narratives about Pocahontas from the 19th century (Paul 96). Only in 1624, John Smith first mentions the famous rescue scene in *The Generell Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*, again referring to himself in the third person:

“At his entrance before the King, all the people gaue a great shout. The Queene of Appamatuck was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, instead of a Towell to dry them: having feasted him after the best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could layd hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs to beate out his brains, Pocahontas the Kings dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevaile, got his head in her arms, and laid her owne upon his to saue him from death.” (Smith, ch. 3)

Although scholars speculate about whether this account occurred, due to the timing of the story’s writing and the lack of a convincing explanation for why the young girl rescued Smith, the story remains a significant part of American mythology. Another indicator of the story lacking authenticity, is the fact that Smith claims to have been rescued by beautiful women at least twice on his travels to foreign countries (Paul 98). These stories of female rescuers appear often as a literature trope (Paul 99).

Another common trope in the narratives of the English colonizers is the association between Indigenous people and the natural world and equating it to savagery, primitivism, and barbarism. Thus, John Smith uses the word “barbarous” to refer to their “uncivilized” manners. Although the Native American way of life and their strong connection to nature was devalued by Europeans, it was a common phenomenon during the early period of North American colonization that settlers lived in the wilderness among “primitive savages” and even had interracial families. Because of English settlers “going native”, the tale of the anglicized Indigenous heroine came in handy, since it represents someone who chose the way of the colonizers and abandoned her heritage freely (Paul 98).

Hence, Pocahontas is the only Native American known to have crossed cultures, which is why the tale is exploited so much and retold to validate English colonialism (Paul 98). This validation becomes apparent in Smith’s letter to Queen Anne from 1616 in which he reflects on Pocahontas’ importance to the colony and her family life. “Her marriage with Mr. Rolfe, whom she dearly loved, and by whom she had a child, made peace and friendship between her father and the Colony, which endured till her death.” (Smith, ch. 9)

While Captain John Smith mainly focuses on the story of his rescue by Pocahontas and his first encounter with the Powhatans, John Rolfe narrates from different perspectives. Because he married the Native woman, the pair came to symbolize the archetype of an “Indian-White union” and were credited with fostering several years of peace between the Powhatans and the English settlers in Virginia. (Paul 101). His writings are crucial primary sources that shed light on their relationship and of early colonial Virginia. Hence, Rolfe discusses in his letter to Sir Thomas Dale from 1614 his intentions and feelings regarding his marriage to Pocahontas.

“It is Pocahontas to whom my hearty and best thoughts are, and have a long time been entangled, and enthralled in so intricate a labyrinth, that I was even awearied to unwind myself thereout. But Almighty God, who never faileth his, no not in greatest extremities, hath opened the gate and led me by the hand that I might plainly see and discern the safe path, which I humbly pray to make me thankful for, and forever to preserve me his servant.” (Rolfe 61-68)¹

He then continues to explain his motivations, addressing concerns about marrying a “heathen”.

“Nor am I in so desperate an estate that I regard not what becomes of me; nor am I so void of friends, nor mean in birth, but have reason to obtain a match of greater wealth ... yet for the good of this plantation, for the honor of our country, for the glory of God, for my own salvation ... it is this alliance which I must seek.” (Rolfe 61-68)

In this excerpt, Rolfe utters his concerns about the religious discrepancies. Still, he continues to emphasize the advantages of this marriage for the plantation, his country, and his faith. Although the settlers continuously call the Native Americans barbarians and uncivilized savages and devalue their harmonious way of living with nature, they still seek to use their knowledge to exploit their natural environment. Again, the English colonists’ contradictions and hypocrisy as well as their eco-racist treatment of the Indigenous people become apparent.

Further, John Rolfe also acknowledged the potential benefits of his marriage to Pocahontas for the colony. “It will be a tie of surety and friendship between her father and us ... whereby the better and sooner may we come to effect the conversion of that people to the true knowledge of God, and to assist our long desired project for the good of the country and ourselves.” (Rolfe 61-68)

Beside Rolfe’s goal to achieve good relationships between the Powhatan and the settlers, he further refers to the plan of converting the Indigenous people. Although he merely mentions a religious conversion, meaning the Christian missionary work, it can be assumed that Rolfe was referring to the “civilizing missions” as well. According to the English, the Indigenous people should be instructed in British values, technologies, and culture. As the following excerpt from Rolfe’s letter to Sir Thomas Dale suggests, he was aware of the cultural and religious barriers between himself and Pocahontas. Thus, he justified his decision to marry her by framing it within a religious and moral context.

¹ Transcription Source: Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606–1700*, revised edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 270–274. From Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia, and the Success of the Affaires There till the 18 of June 1614* (London, 1615), 61–68.

“Let therefore this my well-advised protestation be acceptable before the Almighty God, wherein I protest that my chiefest endeavors are to strive with all my power of body and mind, in the undertaking of so mighty a matter, so to walk as to bring a glory to him for his mercy, and to nourish the true knowledge of him, and his fear in the heart of this barbarous nation.” (Rolfe 61-68)

Again, the Indigenous people are referred to as barbarians by the English settlers. Rolfe depicts himself as noble for striving to civilize and christianize the Natives, and uses this agenda to legitimize marrying Pocahontas. Although John Rolfe seldomly describes Pocahontas’ character but merely focuses on the benefits and reasons of their marriage, he expresses admiration for Pocahontas and highlights her virtues in the following excerpt of his letter.

“For she hath a great spirit and is very valiant, and hath been accustomed to show much respect to our people. She doth not only possess herself with a great spirit and a strong passion of affection, but also with a great strength of judgment and wisdom, as appears by her constant and dutiful perseverance in the love she hath openly professed unto me.” (Rolfe 61-68)

Since the Indigenous people are usually depicted as primitive and mindless, this description from a colonist about a Native woman is exceptional. Rolfe not only compliments her love, affection, and passion to himself as well as to the English in general, he even points out to her knowledge and judgmental abilities. These competences were usually attributed to Western civilization due to their technological advances as well as moral and religious ideologies. As opposed to Western standards, Indigenous people were seen as less wise and rational which was mainly derived from their closeness to the natural environment.

The excerpts provide a more comprehensive view of John Rolfe’s thoughts and motivations regarding his marriage to Pocahontas. His writings reflect a mix of personal affection, religious justification, and strategic considerations aimed at benefiting the Virginia colony. Further, these letters are significant for this thesis’s analysis due to their references to Indigenous people, being judged for their appreciation of nature.

Just as John Smith and John Rolfe, who encountered Pocahontas, Ralph Hamor contributed to the repertoire of reports about the Native legend. He was an English settler and author living in the Virginia Colony.

His writings, particularly *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virgina* from 1615, provide valuable historical insights into the life of Pocahontas. As observed by myself, his accounts concerning Pocahontas give additional information about the relationship between the settlers and the Powhatan. Although Hamor did not have intimate experiences with her, his reports are just as relevant for this thesis because of his detailed descriptions of the events surrounding Pocahontas. Whether the accounts of the three English men and their discriminative and eco-racist undertone towards the Indigenous people resonate in the Disney movie *Pocahontas*, is part of my analysis of this thesis. Although the narratives about the Native woman and the Powhatan changed over the centuries, the early sources about her life are essential to understand the literary discourse and process of the film adaptation of the 20th century.

In the following excerpt of Ralph Hamor's narratives, he describes Pocahontas's peace efforts through her conversion to the Christian faith and marriage to John Rolfe.

"Pocahontas, being thus detained, was used with extraordinary care and kindness, and before long, began to see her father's treacheries, to forsake her country idolatry, and embrace the Christian faith, and was accordingly baptized and called Rebecca, being newly instructed by our Minister, Master Alexander Withaker. Shortly after, she was married to an English gentleman of good understanding, Master John Rolfe, by whom she had a child." (Hamor, ch. 7)

Although his account that Pocahontas left her father, converted, and married an English settler freely, is doubtful, this passage of his narrative reveals Hamor's antipathy towards chief Powhatan and his tribe's spiritual beliefs. Further, the author does not give a more detailed explanation on the alleged treacheries of Pocahontas's father. Still, it becomes clear that Pocahontas is the Indigenous exception who forsakes and renounces her homeland and heritage to live among English colonists. As the primary source reveals, Powhatan, by contrast, is portrayed as the antagonist who must be persuaded, if needed, through force, to enter into peace negotiations.

Although the English settlers exploited the land and destroyed the Indigenous way of life early on, these texts merely foreground the achievements of colonialism, which are ostensibly ordained by God, as well as the supposed kindness and gentleness of the settlers. Hence, a noble human-being could only be created by embracing Christianity and being anglicized. Those who are not willing to submit to English values and live among Indigenous people in a natural environment, represent the Other.

John Hamor further continues mentioning Powhatan and his hatred towards the English settlers. It becomes apparent that he portrays the Native chief as the villain, who needed persuasion to help the colony, and John Rolfe as the hero, who achieved peace and agreement between the indigenous tribes and the colonists.

“her father’s inveterate hatred against us might by no means be appeased, notwithstanding that many were the diligent laborers of the worthy gentleman Master John Rolfe, but that through her marriage, we gained such favor in his sight as we were, by his means, comforted, relieved, and supplied in our extreme wants, and that peace and commerce were concluded and maintained between us.” (Hamor, ch. 10)

This excerpt underlines the assumption that the marriage served only economic purposes, since love between Pocahontas and John Rolfe is not mentioned. Thus, the exploitation of the land and the resident communities for the benefit of the colonies was the main goal behind their marriage. Lacking respect for Powhatan and his tribe’s way of living is another indicator for a discriminative and eco-racist treatment from the colonists. Even the Disney version of Pocahontas depicts Powhatan as stubborn and as someone who still needs to be persuaded to do the right thing.

Ralph Hamor gives detailed descriptions of the Indigenous people and their natural environment and provides a glimpse into the early interactions between the English settlers and Native Americans. In his *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia*, Hamor reports about various aspects of the Indigenous way of life and their relationship with the land, as the excerpt below reveals.

“The country itself is large and great assuredly, though as yet, no exact discovery thereof can be truly made. It is full of woods, and those very thick and tall, great meadows, and goodly pastures, full of timber and trees of all sorts to build ships and boats. It is full of minerals, plenty of springs and fresh streams, fine rivers, and great running brooks, and most pleasant fountains.” (Hamor, ch. 2)

Despite the writer expanding on the beauty of the natural world he encounters, it is only seen as a resource that can be exploited and used for economical profits. On the one hand, Hamor seems amazed by the idyllic flora he observes, and on the other hand, the colonist already plans how to use the natural materials for ships and boats.

According to the primary source, this passage illustrates the colonial agenda of appropriating and utilizing the natural resources of the “New World” for economical purposes, such as trading and building settlements. Given that the English settlers appeared to have no regard for preserving the environment, it can be concluded that they also had no intention of respecting the Native American way of life or leaving the rural communities untouched. Consequently, the settlers aimed to Europeanize the newly encountered land and their inhabitants by imposing English values and ideologies on them.

As in most colonial narratives about indigenous people, they are labeled as simple-minded and “primitive”. Thus, Hamor probably expected to encounter humans living in a community of no order or customs, who barely survive. The following excerpt describes the Indigenous people living in perfect harmony with nature and highlights Shepard Krech’s concept of the “myth of the ecological Indian”, which refers to the misleading image of Indigenous people living harmoniously with their environments (Mohawk 183).

“The natives are very skillful in managing their grounds, in planting maize, and in ordering and dressing their gardens and orchards. They know the season and times to plant and gather, and they have a perfect understanding of the nature of the soil and the climate, which is temperate and very healthful.” (Hamor, ch. 1)

As interpreted by myself, these excerpts reflect Hamor's observations of the Indigenous people's agricultural practices, their relationship with the land, and the initial interactions and exchanges between the settlers and the Natives. His accounts provide valuable historical context for understanding the early colonial period and the dynamics between the European settlers and the indigenous populations. Further, Hamor's narratives illustrate the hypocrisy of the colonists clearly. Although the English settlers feel superior over the Native Americans and view themselves as civilized while the Indigenous people are seen as "primitive" and backward, they are not averse to receive their help and advice on survival techniques in a foreign country (National Geographic Society). Notwithstanding that Hamor seems impressed by the Indigenous skills and lifestyle, the Natives are not complimented on their cognitive abilities. Instead, their understanding of nature is assumingly due to their inferiority itself. Indigenous people were considered as not fully human and not different from animals, indistinguishable from any other kind of wildlife.

These comparisons of Native Americans and animals to explain the Indigenous knowledge of nature is part of the eco-racist notion of the European colonists. Thus, the analysis of this thesis examines whether such notions and stereotypes still exist in the contemporary Hollywood production of *Pocahontas*.

2.3. Disney's *Pocahontas*

The primary sources about Pocahontas depict her as the beautiful “Indian princess”, a messenger and diplomat, a rescuer and helping hand, a Native heroine, and a Christian adjusting to English beliefs. While the colonial writers reveal their amazement by the Indigenous encounters and the strange land, they merely seek to exploit the environment and the female protagonist. Still, even the early settlers romanticized the wilderness and the Natives living in harmony with their environment. Hence, Pocahontas was also referred to as the “forest princess” by William Strachey, an English colonist who points out to her connectedness to nature, in particular the woods of her surroundings (Paul 95). These attributes of Pocahontas have been used as a template for literary texts and film adaptations, such as the Walt Disney version of *Pocahontas* from 1995.

Disney's *Pocahontas* is an animated feature film that offers a loosely fictionalized portrayal of the historical figure Pocahontas and her interactions with English settlers during the early 1600s. The film blends history with fantasy, presenting a romanticized version of the interactions between Native Americans and English colonists. The film is set in the early 1600s in what is now Virginia, where a group of English settlers, led by Governor Ratcliffe, arrive in search of gold and new land. The story primarily follows Pocahontas, the spirited and adventurous daughter of Chief Powhatan. Upon viewing the film, it becomes apparent that she is portrayed as being in harmony with nature, often looking for guidance from Grandmother Willow, a wise old tree. As the settlers establish their colony, Pocahontas encounters Captain John Smith, one of the leading adventurers among the settlers. Despite initial misunderstandings and cultural differences, Pocahontas and John Smith develop a deep bond, learning from each other and sharing their respective views of the world.

Tensions rise, as Governor Ratcliffe's greed for gold leads to increasing hostilities between the settlers and the Native American tribe. Pocahontas and John Smith work together to prevent a violent clash, advocating for peace and understanding between their people. As evidenced in the film, the climax depicts Pocahontas courageously stepping in to save John Smith's life, an act that results in a brief truce between the English settlers and the Native American tribe.

The fictional Pocahontas in the film is portrayed as a mediator between two cultures, trying to achieve peace and understanding. Her primary role is to reconcile the environmental and racial conflicts initiated by the settlers. She is willing to compromise and negotiate, which resembles the colonizer's fantasy and twisted narrative of the first encounters with the Native Americans (Kent, Buescher 34). This thesis argues that the portrayal of Pocahontas accomplishing agreement and a will to compromise, obscures the agency and resistance of real Indigenous peoples against colonial and environmental injustices. Thus, the movie's storyline and the characters' ambitions contribute to an eco-racist representation of Native American history through the compliant behavior of the Indigenous characters towards the colonists. The oversimplification of racial and environmental issues becomes apparent when Pocahontas assumingly ends racism, which is partly achieved by her "over-determined communion with nature" (38). This argument is pointed out by Kent and Buescher in their article on "Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the commodification of a native American woman", which examines the popular cultural discourses about *Pocahontas*.

Beyond her role as a peacemaker and mediator, the female protagonist is portrayed as a physically capable and athletic figure, possessing profound knowledge of nature, animals, colonial dynamics, and romantic relationships (Kent, Buescher 35). Thus, the strong and agile woman is often shown while running through forests, diving from cliffs, and navigating rivers with ease. Her athleticism is a significant part of her character, symbolizing her free spirit and deep connection to the natural world (Kent, Buescher 32). Still, the Disney version of Pocahontas represents a traditional, sacrificial, and sexualized object desirable for men (Kent, Buescher 32-34). Her looks match Hollywood's beauty standards and are supposed to fascinate and capture the audience. She is even compared to Barbie due to her over-sexualized appearance (Kent, Buescher 32).

However, the portrayal of Pocahontas breaks away from conventional, more passive representations of female characters in animation, showcasing her as an active and dynamic individual. Another central theme in the film is Pocahontas's deep connection with nature. She communicates with animals, such as her raccoon friend Meeko and the hummingbird Flit, and seeks advice from Grandmother Willow, an ancient and wise tree. Her understanding of nature goes beyond mere affinity, and it symbolizes a harmonious way of living that contrasts sharply with the settlers' exploitative approach.

Hence, Pocahontas becomes the "ecological Indian", who reflects the eco-racist approach to Native life through romanticization (Mohak 183). The Native Princess is also depicted as knowledgeable and adjustable to new situations and people. Despite having limited direct exposure to the English settlers before meeting John Smith, Pocahontas quickly grasps the complexities of the colonial relationships. She understands the potential for both conflict and cooperation. These depictions of intercultural relationships are mostly fictional and represent no historical truth. Therefore, the naive message of the unimportance of race and ethnicity, such as in the film's theme song *Colors of the Wind*. The song implies to simply ignore color differences to achieve racial acceptance and social accord. This problematic message is further aggravated by the fact that it is conveyed by White voices. Namely, the singing voice of Pocahontas is the White actress and Broadway star Judy Kuhn. Moreover, the two male composers of the soundtrack are White, as well as the two male directors. As Flynn and Marrota point out in their book "Critical Pedagogy, Race, and Media", the film's central idea is to "embrace the Other by ignoring any sense of Otherness" (168). This stance is conveyed by White males through puppetry of the Powhatan princess. The intercultural relationship is further interpreted through John Smith's perspective. He understands Pocahontas out of sexual desire instead of compassion or curiosity. Thus, the film follows common narratives and female representations of the Hollywood industry. This has sparked criticism that the film oversimplifies, romanticizes, and stereotypes both female heroines and the complex, often painful history of colonial encounters. (Flynn, Marrota 168). John Smith's wounding and Pocahontas's beauty serve a romantic and dramatic function, which does not orientate on historical accuracy or cultural sensitivity.

This analysis is supported by Baringer's studies on the various narratives on Pocahontas (44). The romanticization of the narratives of the Native women reached its peak with the Disney version of 1995 erasing the death and discomforts of being replaced and captured by English colonists (Baringer 45). While the themes and messages of *Pocahontas* include cultural acceptance and obliteration, the interpretations of social conflicts are rather distorted (Flynn, Marrota 169-170). It appears that the film rather focuses on language, not on systematic methods of Othering. Therefore, the film is critiqued for racism through insensitivity and cultural ignorance (Flynn, Marrota 168).

Apparently, John Smith's motive is not to embrace and accept the Indigenous way of life, but to anglicize Pocahontas and her tribe (Flynn, Marrota 168). As he talks to Pocahontas at one of their first meetings in the film, Smith explains the colonial ambitions:

SMITH. We've been improving the lives of savages all over the world. (Pocahontas 00:37:06 – 00:37:08)

In that scene, Pocahontas takes greater issue with the word "savage" than his intentions to impose his culture over hers (Flynn, Marrota 168).

Besides presenting himself as a intruder, colonist, and a White male of sexual desire towards a female Native American, John Smith embodies the White savior trope in the Disney movie (Flynn, Marrota 173). The "White savior" is a narrative device wherein a White character rescues non-White characters from their plight, often portraying the White character as the hero while diminishing the agency of the non-White characters (Merriam-Webster). In the context of Disney's *Pocahontas*, this trope can be identified and analyzed in several ways. Despite Pocahontas's significant contributions, the narrative often centers on Smith's actions and decisions as pivotal to achieving peace. Firstly, the film empathizes John Smith's willingness to sacrifice himself to protect Pocahontas and her people, reinforcing his role as a heroic savior. Secondly, Smith's transformation is depicted as a result of his relationship with Pocahontas and his exposure to her way of life. This dynamic often shifts the focus from the female protagonist's leadership and wisdom to the Captain's personal growth and enlightenment.

Thus, the Native wisdom of the environment and the relationship between people and nature is not depicted as the driving force to achieve peace and harmony (Flynn, Marrota 173). It is rather John Smith's personal development that drives the negotiations forward. This intersection of the White savior trope and eco-racism in *Pocahontas* reinforces colonial narratives by centering the story around John Smith's heroism and transformation while simultaneously romanticizing and simplifying Indigenous connections to the environment. The portrayal of Native Americans as noble environmental stewards and the settlers as purely exploitative oversimplifies the reality of colonial interactions and perpetuates stereotypes that can be harmful.

Disney's 33rd full length animated feature depicts romantic fantasy and cultural zeitgeist (Flynn, Marrota 168). The film reproduced the White man's story of Pocahontas and is part of American narratives as well as of popular culture, history, and the memory of history. The tale has been retold in a way to match contemporary political and social values to satisfy political correctness of the West (Preda 318). Thus, Hollywood cinema is shaped by culture and society as well as the competing versions of narrative, memory, and cinema, as Stuart Hall refers to this phenomenon (452). Although *Pocahontas* was one of the most successful feature films at the box office in 1995, it was highly critiqued by Tilton and the National Congress of American Indians NCAI, to name a few (Preda 318). These critiques include historical inaccuracies, cultural stereotyping, the White savior narrative, as well as commercialization and exploitation. Furthermore, dishonor and appropriation of traditional Native American culture is suggested (Kent, Buescher 26). Instead, a firmer attitude towards racism and colonialism was hoped for (Preda 318). As a result, the broader issues of representation, historical accuracy, and cultural sensitivity and media are highlighted, emphasizing the need for more authentic and respectful portrayals of Indigenous histories and experiences. While most analyses focus on the relationship between social conceptions of race and media, this thesis attempts to include a third paradigm, which is the representation of the interplay between racial, medial, and ecological issues.

3. Eco-racism and the Perception of Native Americans

To understand eco-racism towards Native Americans, a definition of the term is given as well as an overview of Western perception of Indigenous people. Thus, the intersection of racial and environmental issues is examined as well as its relevance and link to theories on the Western gaze, the “noble savage”, and ecocriticism. All these intertwined topics relate to Otherness and Stereotyping of Native culture. Eco-racism describes the intersection of environmental and racial issues. Since this thesis focuses on eco-racist themes in the movie *Pocahontas*, the presented theories surround eco-racism towards Native Americans in media, particularly in Hollywood film productions.

The term eco-racism in the context of Native Americans refers to the perpetuation of stereotypes that either idealize or vilify Indigenous environmental practices and cultural relationships with nature. This phenomenon is rooted in the myth of the “Ecological Indian”, as Krech describes it, which romanticizes Native Americans as inherently noble, primitive environmentalists living in perfect harmony with nature (211). Such stereotypes simplify the diverse and complex ways Native American communities interact with their environments. These misconceptions justify environmental exploitation and colonial policies by framing Indigenous peoples either as ecological exemplars who need protection or as obstacles to progress who must be subdued or assimilated. Shepherd Krech III’s work deconstructs these myths, revealing the nuances and historical realities of Native American ecological practices, and criticizes how these stereotypes have been used to marginalize Native American voices in environmental discourse (Krech 212).

To comprehend the Indigenous people’s connection to nature and the resulting discrimination by White societies, a closer look at the link of land and identity is necessary. For Native Americans, the land is the basic source for developing an identity and a sense of belonging (21). Clara Sue Kidwell expands on that idea in her work “Native American Studies”, which elaborates on Native American culture as well as on the Western perception and process of Othering. The Indigenous people viewed themselves as “casual agents in the processes of the world,” believing that living in harmony with the natural cycle was essential to their existence (Kidwell 21).

However, this attitude does not mean to be passive and not participate actively in personal growth and respectful treatment of nature and people. Therefore, gaining knowledge about the world and carrying out appropriate and respectful behavior is necessary to “establish an appropriate relationship with the non-human beings of the world and the maintenance of social harmony” (Kidwell 21). Since the term “land” is rather vague, the meaning of it for the Indigenous tribes must be specified. Their notion of land encompasses earth and sky, the physical phenomena of oceans, rivers, lakes, rocks, and mountains, as well as the totality of flora and fauna. Even their spirituality is manifested in the environment and established a relationship to the land. They further refer to storms and drought as the unstable and capricious essence of the natural environment, which is evidence for volition in human and non-human beings as well as nature and spirits (Kidwell 22).

Consequently, nature possesses power that is rooted in winds, plants, animals, rocks, and others. Due to being powerful, nature can be harmful to those who do not understand it and know how to treat it (Kidwell 31). This relationship between land, spirituality, and identity is part of the Indigenous culture and essential for them to structure the world (Kidwell 37.) Even speech is viewed as manifested in breath, which is the result of wind. Thus, wind is called the breath of the world and the force that gives humans the ability to produce language (Kidwell 83). Just as Indigenous cultures in America emphasize the impact of wind, the animation film *Pocahontas* uses this trope consistently in the storyline as well. The film illustrates that Grandmother Willow tells Pocahontas to listen to the wind to understand the language of the settlers and to know what decisions and actions she needs to make next. Hence, a spiritual relationship between nature, in particular the wind, and language is established. In this scene, possible eco-racist notions due to the manner of representation of Indigenous values and beliefs are considered in the analysis of this thesis. Here, the examination detects over-romanticization and simplification, resulting in stereotyping and stultifying Native American spirituality and understanding of nature. Establishing relationships between nature, human, and non-human beings is a ubiquitous narrative in Indigenous culture. For instance, this becomes apparent in Native American stories about the origin of the world. Whereas such tales usually illustrate its creation, the Indigenous versions focus on how a relationship between humans and nature was established and consequently, the world formed itself (Kidwell 24).

Native American cultures possess a profound and holistic understanding of nature, characterized by deep respect, interconnectedness, and sustainability. Central to this perspective is the belief in animism, where all elements of the natural world, such as animals, plants, rivers, and mountains, are seen as possessing a spirit or life force (Kimmerer 143). Robin Wall Kimmerer elaborates on the Native wisdom and knowledge of nature and refers to spiritual connections with science. This spiritual connection fosters a sense of kinship and reverence toward nature. Firstly, interconnectedness is one of the core principles, with humans viewed as part of a larger web of life (Kimmerer 2). This worldview emphasizes balance and harmony between humans and the environment, guided by the ethic of reciprocity. Indigenous traditions frequently include expressions of gratitude and the giving of offerings as a means of preserving harmony and balance within the natural world (Kimmerer 2). Secondly, sustainability is integral to Native American life (Kimmerer 2).

Traditional ecological knowledge includes sustainable practices such as controlled burns, rotational hunting and fishing, and careful harvesting of plants (Kimmerer 3). These methods ensure that resources are used in a way that maintains ecological health and abundance for future generations (Kimmerer 3).

The stereotypes and processes of Othering concerning Native American culture are manifested in their connectedness to nature and understanding of environmental issues. Addressing eco-racism requires recognizing and respecting Indigenous ecological knowledge and practices, and dismantling the harmful myths that perpetuate environmental and cultural injustices.

3.1. Western and Indigenous Perceptions of Nature and Culture

Western and Indigenous perceptions of nature differ fundamentally in their approach and values. While Western views often separate humans from nature, Native Americans foreground the interconnectedness between all beings and the environment. Thus, Western beliefs see nature as a resource to be controlled and exploited for economic gain, with a focus on scientific and technological solutions (Nelson 454). This perspective is characterized by dualism and hierarchy, viewing humans as superior to nature. As a result, this hierarchy leads to exploitation and environmental degradation. In contrast, Indigenous cultures perceive humans as an integral part of the natural world, emphasizing interconnectedness and kinship with all living and non-living elements. Nature holds spiritual and cultural significance, with a focus on reciprocity and stewardship. Indigenous practices prioritize long-term ecological health and sustainability, reflecting a deep understanding of ecosystem dynamics and the importance of maintaining balance (Nelson 455). Recognizing these differences highlights the importance of integrating Indigenous ecological knowledge into environmental practices for sustainable and holistic conservation efforts (Nelson 455). Within these differences lies the foundation of Othering and eco-racist approaches towards Native American values.

The discussion and recognition of Native American culture and their understanding of nature opposed to Western views has long been neglected in scholarly research theories. Thus, the rather recent phenomenon of Native American Studies has attempted to give understanding of Indigenous values and their way of life. Further, it examines how stereotypical and discriminating treatment of White societies led to marginalization of Native American Studies in the academic context. Further, Indigenous traditions and narratives are hardly part of White American culture and find little interest. Hence, an insight into the lives of Native Americans through the lens of Native American Studies is given. As already mentioned, this research field is quite young and originates in Native American intellects of the 20th century. Their first studies included the topics of Native American rights, policies, identity, and preserving their cultures.

These studies developed in the United States of the late 1960s and early 1970s, having little budget or support from universities and history and culture departments (Kidwell 3). During the process of establishing a distinct field of Native American studies, the term Native American slowly replaced “American Indian” (Kidwell 3). In the end, the scholars attempted to present distinctive perspectives, challenge stereotypes, such as the hostile savages of the Frontier or the drunken poverty stricken “Indian”. The latter is a stereotypical narrative that was still relevant throughout the 20th century. Therefore, presenting Native Americans as real people and not stereotypes was part of the scholarly work as well as of the Civil Rights Movements of the 1950s and 1960s (Kidwell 4). Although the movement in the United States was primarily associated with African American struggles, it also influenced and intersected with the fight for Native American rights (Kidwell 5). Indigenous peoples sought to reclaim their sovereignty, protect their lands, and secure civil rights through various protests and legal battles. Consequently, cultural studies favored a new approach, which was “making the marginal central” (Kidwell 6). During this development, the work of “dead White men” was criticized, which ignores Native American perspectives (Kidwell 7). Stereotypical and superficial mentioning of Indigenous culture and history was challenged. These misconceptions and stereotypes become especially apparent with eco-racist tendencies in literature, media, and scholarly works. For instance, the New Age movement and environmental groups often appropriated Native American symbols, detaching them from their cultural and spiritual contexts.

Also, movies and literature from the 20th century frequently depicted Native Americans as mystical environmentalists, which, while seemingly positive, perpetuated a simplistic and static image that ignored the real socio-economic and political issues they faced. Scholars have critically examined how literature and media perpetuate eco-racist stereotypes. For example, in the analysis of films like Disney’s *Pocahontas*, critics highlight how the narrative simplifies and romanticizes Native American culture while ignoring historical and ongoing injustices. Still, Native American studies were necessary, since Western tradition did not conform to Indigenous life and written historical records. Thus, the processing of Native historical past has no accuracy (Kidwell 8). Even for Indigenous scholars, documenting and understanding the diversity of cultures was difficult.

It was impossible to speak of “*the* Native American” due to extraordinary varieties of the Indigenous tribes, number of distinct cultures and languages, differing physical environments to which the Natives adapted, and physical and genotypic differences. So, the task of Native American studies is to demonstrate how shared themes and experiences have contributed to shaping the unique character of Native American identity (Kidwell 9).

Native Americans have their own unique understanding of nature as opposed to Western perspectives. Their cultures emerge from the deep connection between people and the land they inhabit. (Kidwell 11). Preserving harmony in relationships with nature and all living beings is a core value (Kidwell 11). This connection to the environment plays a vital role in shaping intellectual growth and the structure of social organization (Kidwell 12). Highlighting the Indigenous idea of interconnectedness, identity comes forth from aesthetics and arts, traditions, as well as interdependence with the land (Kidwell 14). Especially Native American art and aesthetics reveal perceptions of nature and the earth. Many paintings illustrate the connection to nature, land, and animals, which depict the “cyclical nature of time” (Kidwell 123). The Hopi for example, have specific ceremonies to honor the spirits of rain and agriculture, emphasizing their reliance on and respect for natural cycles. Another ceremony is performed by the Haudenosaunee, better known as Iroquois, practicing the “Thanksgiving Address”, a series of thanks to all elements of the natural world, illustrating their deep gratitude and respect. The ritual acknowledges the earth, people, plants, animals, waters, sun, moon, stars, and the unseen spiritual forces. The Iroquois stress the multitude of connections between human beings and other living beings in the world.

Another example of the ceremonial valuing of nature is the sacred place called the Black Hills (MacLaughlan). Each part of this landscape holds significant spiritual meaning. This landscape is an isolated mountain range rising from the Great Plains of North America in Western South Dakota and extending into Wyoming. This region and its spiritual importance are reflected in various religious practices, stories, and historical events that continue to shape the identity and spiritual life of the Lakota and other Native American tribes. The Black Hills are home to many spiritual beings and are considered a place where the spirits dwell (MacLaughlan).

These beings play crucial roles in the myths and stories that convey moral lessons and cultural values. This mountain range further is a cornerstone of Lakota cultural identity (Maclaughlan). Efforts to preserve and revitalize Lakota culture include the protection of sacred sites and the practice of traditional ceremonies in the Black Hills. These efforts are essential for maintaining the spiritual heritage of the tribe (Maclaughlan).

Beside landscapes and ceremonies, Native Americans value and celebrate animals. Usually, the portrayals of animals in artwork include deer and buffalo, the most hunted (Kidwell 125). Native American hunting practices are guided by principles of balance and reciprocity. Traditional ecological knowledge includes practices that ensure sustainable interactions with animal populations. For example, hunting seasons and methods are designed to maintain animal populations and ecosystems. Native American perceptions of animals are deeply rooted in a spiritual, cultural, and ecological framework that points out to respect, reverence, and interconnectedness. These perceptions foster sustainable interactions with the natural world and highlight the profound respect for all living beings (223). This understanding of animals is described thoroughly in Vine Deloria's "God is Red: A Native View of Religion". Being part of the Sioux tribe, Deloria discusses the spiritual significance and cultural views of animals in Native American traditions from an Indigenous perspective. Also, she points out the different perceptions of nature between Native Americans and Western society. According to Deloria, the core philosophical difference between Native Americans and Western European immigrants lies in their perception of land and history.

For the Indigenous population, their lands hold the utmost significance, and their perspectives are rooted in this deep connection to place. In contrast, immigrants view their ancestors' journey across the continent as a continuous sequence of positive events and experiences, thereby emphasizing history and time in the most favorable light (Deloria 105). In short, White people value the concept of time the most and Natives value and prioritize space, that is the land on which they live (Deloria 104). The author further utters critique on White perceptions and treatment of land.

While Native Americans feel they belong to the land, Western cultures think they own it rather than being controlled by it (Deloria 105). Due to the contrasting ways in which Indigenous peoples and European settlers perceived and interacted with nature, eco-racism towards Native Americans emerged. The Native American perception of nature, characterized by deep respect, interconnectedness, and spiritual significance, clashed with the European colonial mindset, which viewed nature primarily as a resource to be exploited (Deloria 244). This clash of worldviews led to the development of eco-racist ideologies and practices. Although eco-racism towards Native Americans is rooted in historical perceptions and interactions with nature, this thesis suggests that it is still relevant today through various contemporary issues and practices. This enduring relevance is evident in ongoing environmental injustices, cultural misappropriation, legal battles, and the broader environmental movement. These modern eco-racist issues are analyzed in the Disney film *Pocahontas*. The analysis examines whether the movie depicts eco-racist themes and stereotypes that developed from Western perception and treatment of Native Americans.

As opposed to the American Indigenous perception of nature, Western society characterizes it largely by exploitation, control, and a sense of separation from the natural world, driven by economic and technological imperatives. The Western approach to nature has led to large-scale industrialization and intensive agricultural practices aimed at maximizing productivity and economic gain. Being mainly shaped by anthropocentrism, human beings are seen as separate from and superior to the natural world (Boslaugh). This view places humans at the center of the universe, with nature existing primarily to serve human needs (Boslaugh). The belief of continuous progress and development has driven Western expansion and colonization. Nature is seen as something to be conquered and improved upon (Boslaugh).

Thus, the spiritual attribution to the natural world is omitted. Rocks, for example, are seen as inanimate, while Natives refer to them as sentient and a “source of memory” (Kidwell 22).

Though exploitation and over-use of natural resources are still taking place, new movements, such as environmentalism, emerged.

As the Encyclopedia Britannica states, environmentalism is a broad social and political movement focused on protecting the natural environment from degradation and promoting sustainable practices (Elliot). It encompasses a range of ideologies, activities, and organizations aimed at addressing issues such as pollution, climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the conservation of natural resources. As an advocate for environmental justice and ecocriticism, the author Joni Adamson suggests that the concept of the “ecological Indian” in films as well as romantic depictions of wilderness, animals, and idyllic landscapes served as an apology and desire for absolution for the industrialization and destruction of nature (143-144). Thus, the wish for the “re-enchantment of nature” (Adamson 144) should be evoked. Promoting environmentalism in movies led to over-romanticized Indigenous portrayals, such as in *Dances With Wolves* and Disney’s *Pocahontas*. Seeing nature as something to protect and preserve was a goal that linked Native American and White intentions and opened a path to new understandings of the interrelations of nature and culture. In this context, Adamson refers to the term cosmopolitanism, which is a philosophy that considers the whole world as one homeland (147). It is a philosophical and cultural outlook that posits that all human beings belong to a single global community, transcending political and geographical boundaries (Adamson 147). Cosmopolitanism emphasizes universal values, human rights, and global citizenship, advocating for a world where individuals see themselves as part of a larger human family, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background (Appiah 15). Due to its parallels to Native American perception of nature being interconnected with all human and non-human beings, this perspective offers a framework for understanding and addressing the complex relationship between Indigenous peoples and nature. Hence, cosmopolitanism promotes recognizing and respecting the deep spiritual and cultural connections that Native Americans have with the land, standing up for environmental justice, and fostering intercultural understanding.

Encouraging the unique cultural perspective of Native Americans regarding nature includes acknowledging traditional ecological knowledge and practices that have sustained Indigenous communities. Also, cosmopolitanism supports addressing the historical injustices faced by Native Americans, including land dispossession and environmental degradation (Miller 34).

Although these movements and philosophies advocate respect for nature, this thesis suggests that its use in Hollywood productions are still problematic due to the over-romanticization and further eco-racist tendencies through a simplified and idealized representation of Native Americans and their relationship to the land. The Western perception of nature and Indigenous people are discussed in more depth in the following section on the Western gaze, Othering, and ecocriticism.

3.2. The Western gaze and eco-racist forms of Othering

To further explore the Western perspective on Native Americans, crucial concepts such as the Western gaze, Europeanization, and Othering are examined in more detail. These concepts provide a starting point for the analysis of *Pocahontas* and its eco-racist aspects.

To understand eco-racism, the Western gaze and its impact are described. The Western gaze encompasses the perspectives of Western society on Indigenous peoples and nature, as well as the resulting eco-racist attitudes and practices. Thus, eco-racism and the Western gaze are interrelated concepts that help explain the systematic marginalization of Native Americans and their relationship with nature. The Western gaze, which has developed from Eurocentric and imperialistic perspectives, views non-Western cultures through a colonial and, at best, paternalistic lens. E. W. Said, in his 1978 work *Orientalism*, introduces the concept of Orientalism, highlighting how Western perceptions have shaped and defined Eastern cultures. This foundational understanding is crucial for interpreting the Western gaze in the context of Native Americans and colonialism (Said 3). Said refers to the Western gaze as a concept that enables ethnocentrism (3).

This means that a cultural superiority of Western culture and values is assumed, viewing non-Western societies as backward or inferior. Edward Said's concept offers a lens to interpret how cultural superiority and ethnocentrism shape portrayals of non-Western peoples. In this context, the portrayal of Native Americans in Hollywood films reflects a similar dynamic, where Indigenous cultures are romanticized and reduced to stereotypes, such as the "noble savage" or the "ecological Indian" (Said 3). These depictions mystify Indigenous relationships with nature and perpetuate the idea of the colonized as the naturalized Other (Said 3). Such narratives serve to reinforce Western cultural dominance, oversimplifying complex histories and relationships while framing non-Western peoples within a Eurocentric understanding of identity and environment.

A Eurocentric perspective judges other cultures by Western standards, failing to appreciate their unique contexts. It also imposes a hierarchical framework, positioning Western norms as universal benchmarks of progress and civilization. This reductionist view erases the intricate histories, social structures, and philosophies of non-Western cultures, replacing them with static, oversimplified stereotypes. Such portrayals, whether of "noble savages" or "backward societies," serve to dehumanize and marginalize, legitimizing colonial domination and systemic inequality. By ignoring the diversity and agency within these cultures, a Eurocentric lens causes misrepresentation and hinders authentic intercultural understanding (Said 21).

Consequently, the Western gaze exoticizes Native Americans, treating them as curious or quaint, rather than as vibrant and dynamic societies (Said 3). Similarly, Andrea Smith, an American academic and activist, examines how Indigenous cultures are dehumanized by Western perspectives. In her book *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, she refers to the colonial racist beliefs that Native Peoples are "inherently impure and dirty" (77). The lack of visibility of Native communities, traditions, art, or literature strengthens the dominant perspective of Western society and "solidifies the presumption that Indigenous peoples are absent" (Whyte 138). This includes the marginalization of Native languages and aesthetics (Kidwell 14).

Although languages are essential for cultural understanding, Native languages were suppressed in American boarding schools until the 1970s and parents no longer teach them to their children (Kidwell 14). As a result, an enormous part of Indigenous culture is lost.

Through the Western gaze, a restricted view on the multitude of Indigenous art and literature develops and most of it remains unseen for European and American societies. Although Native paintings are more known to the White public than Native literature, their artwork is quickly shaped by Western stereotypes. Still, Native American aesthetics are probably best known for their music and dance. White audiences have been fascinated by Indigenous ceremonial festivities for decades and associate Native Americans mainly with their drums, chanting, and dancing around a campfire (Kidwell 126). For instance, the pow-wow, a pan-tribal dance and singing gathering, in which various tribes come together exchanging cultural values, experiences, and meeting new people, is well known among the White public (Kidwell 128). Music and dance are part of contemporary Native American culture and are used to connect with other tribes and create understanding (Kidwell 128). However, the Western fascination with Indigenous music and dance can be problematic. First, when White people are interested in Native American artforms, they often engage in cultural appropriation, for instance taking elements of Native American culture out of their original context, using them in ways that strip them of their cultural significance and meaning (Deloria 121). This appropriation can lead to the commodification, where music and dance are treated as exotic spectacles rather than sacred cultural practices (121). This problem is described in detail in Philip J. Deloria's book *Playing Indian*. Also, Native American music and dance might be viewed as monolithic and exotic, reinforcing the "noble savage" stereotype (Deloria 3). Such a perspective fails to recognize the rich diversity within Native American cultures and the specific cultural, historical, and spiritual contexts of their music and dance (Deloria 4). Another issue with the Western preoccupation with Native American traditions is how it has led to distortion and erasure of their true cultural meaning. The obsession with Native music and dance easily overshadows the painful history of colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural oppression that Native communities have faced (Deloria 104).

The Western gaze often romanticizes and sanitizes these cultural expressions, ignoring the ongoing struggles and resilience of Indigenous peoples in preserving their traditions (Deloria 188). Additionally, the Western gaze also tends to overlook the agency of Native American communities in defining and sharing their culture (Deloria 188). White fascination often centers on how these cultural elements serve Western interests and curiosities, rather than respecting the autonomy and intentions of Native American people (Deloria 188). Indigenous voices and perspectives are often marginalized in the process, leading to a one-sided narrative that does not fully represent the cultural significance and meaning behind the music and dance (Deloria 188).

The Western gaze towards Native Americans is fueled by both racism and eco-racism, rooted in the colonial and imperialist histories of the “West”. This development is linked to Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and the process of colonial expansion, as discussed by Stuart Hall in his analysis of cultural power and racialized ideologies (Hall 428). Civil hegemony, as conceptualized by the Italian Marxist philosopher and political theorist, provides a framework for understanding how racism and the Western gaze are maintained in society. Gramsci points out that through cultural and ideological dominance, the ruling class perpetuates racial hierarchies and a Western-centric worldview, gaining the consent of the governed and making these power structures appear natural and inevitable. Recognizing these mechanisms is crucial for challenging and dismantling the racial hierarchies and Western-centric worldviews that constitute these forms of oppression. (Gramsci 257-258).

These structures and processes of civil hegemony are also evident in Disney's *Pocahontas*. Racism, as a key component of civil hegemony, plays a central role in understanding the Western gaze, its origins and functions. Stuart Hall emphasizes that racism is not a monolithic force; it takes different forms depending on time and place (436). Moreover, racism intersects with and is shaped by other social structures and processes, with varying effects across different contexts. However, Hall argues that, regardless of its form, all racism is fundamentally anti-human and anti-social (436). The Western gaze fails to acknowledge the diverse historical trajectories of different regions, further entrenching its reductive view of non-Western cultures (Hall 436).

My analysis engages with Stuart Hall's theories of racism as they relate to fetishization, objectification, negative figurations, simplification, and stereotypical characterization (443). It will be examined whether these categories apply to characters and representations of nature in the film *Pocahontas*. For understanding eco-racist issues, Stuart Hall's insights into intersectionality, the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and other social categories are vital (443).

Environmental stereotypes and injustices often intersect with other forms of discrimination, amplifying the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities, such as Native Americans. Building on Hall's analysis of media representation, this study will explore how *Pocahontas* portrays environmental issues through a Western-centric lens, reinforcing eco-racism. Specifically, the film reflects the Western gaze by depicting Indigenous peoples as inherently connected to nature, while simultaneously presenting nature itself as something to be tamed and controlled by Western, colonizing forces. This analysis will show how the film simplifies and distorts the relationship between race, nature, and power, reflecting deep-rooted racial and environmental inequalities. Hall's theories on cultural representation as well as power dynamics are instrumental in understanding these issues, highlighting the need for more respectful and mindful depictions of marginalized communities in the media.

The Western gaze and eco-racism are strongly connected to the process of Othering. Eco-racism involves the marginalization of non-White communities in environmental contexts. These communities are treated as the Other, whose needs and voices are ignored in environmental issues. This marginalization is justified through stereotypes and dehumanization, which frame these communities as less deserving of protection and resources. Just as eco-racism enables the process of Othering, the Western gaze constructs non-Western cultures as the Other as well. This gaze sees these cultures through a lens of exoticism and inferiority, reinforcing stereotypes and cultural hierarchies (Hall 225-279).

The process of Othering becomes apparent in the film *Pocahontas*, where Native American characters are portrayed as fundamentally different from and inferior to Europeans. As analyzed by me, this portrayal underpins their status as the Other, whose culture and experiences are not fully understood or respected by the dominant society. As Hall defines the term Otherness, he positions it as the conceptual opposite of belonging (476). He continues his argument by stating that racism is the force that tries to naturalize the difference between these two terms (476). Hence, Stuart Hall argues that racism creates a binary opposition between those who belong and those who are othered. This distinction is upheld through exclusionary practices such as discriminatory laws, unequal access to resources, social segregation, and is further reinforced by media, education, and cultural narratives. (Hall 476). Hall describes a range of violent discourses about the Other, including those related to the colonized, Orientalism, primitivism, the exotic, imperialism, anthropology, and folklore (476). First, the discourse of colonization frames the colonized people as inferior, needing guidance and control from the colonizers (Said 44). It legitimizes colonial domination by depicting the colonized as primitive, underdeveloped, and reliant on Western intervention to achieve "modernity" and "civilization" (Said 44). In the context of eco-racism, Hall's third discourse, the primitive (476), is the most significant one. This discourse depicts Indigenous and non-Western peoples as primitive and closer to nature. It often romanticizes their simplicity and spirituality while simultaneously positioning them as less advanced and less capable of rational thought than Western peoples (Said 40). Lastly, Stuart Hall's reference to the folklore discourse (476) is particularly pertinent for the analysis of the Disney film *Pocahontas*, as it illustrates how non-Western cultures are often commodified within Western media. Hall argues that folklore, in its dominant representation, reduces complex traditions and practices into simplistic, consumable artifacts designed for Western entertainment. This commodification process strips these cultural elements of their original significance, repackaging them as quaint curiosities that exist to serve the entertainment and exotic interests of a Western audience (Hall, 476). In *Pocahontas*, this process is evident in the portrayal of Native American culture, which is presented through a Western lens that often simplifies, distorts, and romanticizes Native identity and traditions. The film, for example, turns rich spiritual and cultural practices, such as the relationship between the Native Americans and the land, into a reduced, digestible narrative that aligns with mainstream Western ideals of nature, harmony, and mysticism.

Rather than presenting these traditions as living, evolving practices, the film often frames them as timeless and unchanging, serving a narrative that positions them as both exotic and otherworldly.

In the theoretical frameworks explored in this thesis, the “noble savage” trope and the portrayal of Native Americans through practices of Europeanization in the media serve as central tools for reinforcing Othering and eco-racist ideologies. The “noble savage” stereotype is a complex and contradictory construct that has been deeply influential in shaping Western representations of Indigenous and non-Western peoples (Baringer 44). This trope embodies a dichotomy, portraying naive individuals as both idealized and infantilized, noble and savage. As in *Pocahontas*, this trope becomes visible by the dichotomy of the main character and the Powhatan tribe (Baringer 44). Baringer refers to the exotic peacekeeper contrasting the bloodthirsty savages or the beautiful princess contrasting the homely squaw (44). Similarly, Stuart Hall points out to the “noble savage” as well-being, contrasted to the “wild avenger” (476). While the “noble savage” is characterized by innocence, purity, idealized simplicity, and spiritual connection to land and environment, the “savage wild avenger” is depicted as primitive, uncivilized, and barbaric. Indigenous peoples are often portrayed as violent, savage, and a threat to civilized society. Additionally, they are characterized as static and unchanging, stuck in a primitive state without the advancements of modern technology and social organization. This portrayal evokes the idea that they are inherently inferior to Western society, justifying colonialism and domination as necessary for bringing civilization and enlightenment (8). This idea of the “noble savage” is discussed in Ellingson’s “The Myth of the Noble Savage” in detail, wherein he delves into the origins and implications of this stereotype. Another dichotomy that can be found in *Pocahontas* is fear and desire of the Native Americans, especially of the main female character, which plays in the structures of Otherness as well (Hall 476). The Indigenous North Americans are featured as “noble natives” opposed to the beneficent White savior, depicted by John Smith (Flynn, Marotta 168).

To make the Native tribe more likable and relatable to Western audiences, the film uses Anglicization and Europeanization to reduce Otherness and exoticism to some extent. Anglicization describes the process through which non-English peoples and cultures are assimilated or altered to embrace English customs, language, and ways of life (Gallup-Diaz, Shankman, and Silverman 1). This phenomenon has historical roots in the British Empire's expansion and its efforts to impose English norms on colonized regions. The Disney version of *Pocahontas* reveals this Anglicization process when the female heroine starts speaking English, while John Smith makes no attempt to learn her language. Through these processes, Pocahontas becomes relatable and fulfills the well-established image of the "Hollywood Indian" (91), as Edgerton and Jackson argue in their article "Redesigning Pocahontas: Disney, "The White Man's Indian", and the Marketing of Dreams". This image is afflicted with stereotypes, in which men function either as a noble anachronism or a savage reactionary and women as "Indian princesses" (Edgerton, Jackson 91). Thus, the "Hollywood Indian" resembles the stereotyped and racist "White man's Indian" or the "imaginary Indian", which only reflects products of White needs, purposes and intentions (Edgerton, Jackson 98).

The representation of relations of race, dealing with Otherness, cultural differences, and identity started being popular in film culture in the 1980s (Hall 452). The conflicting narratives, memories, and histories contributed to a re-mythologizing of the colonial past in mainstream films (Hall 452). In the context of the colonial past, the term mythification refers to the process of creating or reinforcing myths, often by romanticizing or idealizing past events or periods (Leavitt et al. 39). It involves reinterpreting colonial history in ways that downplay its negative aspects, such as exploitation and violence, and instead emphasize a more sanitized or glorified narrative. Peter A. Leavitt, Rebecca Covarrubias, Yvonne A. Perez, and Stephanie A. Fryberg discuss the problems of media representation of Native Americans in "Frozen in Time: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding". They state that Native Americans are rarely mentioned in mass media and if so, in a stereotypical historical fashion (Leavitt et al. 39). As a result of no contemporary representation, they do not see a place or identity for them in modern society. Consequently, this leads to homogenization of Native American identity, deindividuation, and self-stereotyping (Leavitt et al. 39).

These phenomena are significant issues in film productions that contribute to the ongoing misrepresentation and marginalization of Native cultures. Tackling these issues demands a collective effort to encourage authentic and diverse portrayals of Native Americans in the media, fostering greater recognition of their individuality and cultural richness (Leavitt et al. 40). However, there are limited positive attributes from media for racial-ethnic minorities (Leavitt et al. 40). Changing this fact is difficult, since mass media displays and perpetuates shared ideas, images, and representations of the social world that cannot be escaped from (Leavitt et al. 40). In short, non-Western cultures are often misrepresented or appropriated in Western media, stripping them off their original meanings and contexts. Moreover, Western perspectives often dominate the narratives about Native American cultures, marginalizing Indigenous voices and stories.

The Western gaze, the concept of Othering, as well as the process of Anglicization of Native Americans in media are interconnected phenomena that contribute to the perpetuation of eco-racism. The Western gaze views non-Western cultures through a Eurocentric lens, often romanticizing or demonizing, which leads to Othering, a process that marginalizes and dehumanizes these cultures. Anglicization further reinforces this marginalization by imposing English customs and norms, erasing Indigenous identities and practices. In mass media, particularly films like Disney's *Pocahontas*, these dynamics are vividly illustrated. Native Americans are often depicted through a simplistic and homogenizing lens that strips them of individual and cultural diversity. Such portrayals reinforce stereotypes and diminish the rich, complex realities of Indigenous peoples. These representations are closely tied to eco-racism, where Native Americans are either romanticized as noble eco-warriors or dismissed as obstacles to progress. In *Pocahontas*, the protagonist is idealized as a bridge between the "savage" natural world and the "civilized" colonizers, underpinning a binary that simplifies and distorts the true nature of Indigenous relationships with the environment. Ultimately, these depictions serve to justify historical and ongoing exploitation of Native lands and cultures, sustaining a narrative that supports colonial and environmental domination.

3.3. The Intersection of Ecocriticism and Eco-racism

Since this thesis revolves around nature, its representation in film, and its connection to Native Americans, the theories of ecocriticism are fundamental for the analysis of Disney's *Pocahontas*. Its relevance for eco-racist issues becomes apparent through studies of Derrida, Plumwood, and Glotfelty, which is discussed and examined as follows. Ecocriticism, a scholarly approach within literary and cultural studies, examines the relationships between literature or media and the natural environment. This interdisciplinary field seeks to understand how environmental issues are represented in texts or film and how it can influence our understanding of and interaction with the natural world. Ecocriticism challenges the anthropocentric perspective prevalent in much of Western society, advocating for a more eco-centric view that recognizes the intrinsic value of nature. In the introduction of the book "*The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty" offers a concise definition of this study: "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, Fromm 18). Ecocriticism explores a range of themes, such as the depiction of landscapes, the effects of industrialization, and the interconnectedness of all forms of life (Glotfelty 18). By analyzing these themes, eco-critics aim to raise awareness about environmental degradation and inspire more sustainable ways of living. This thesis suggests a close link between ecocriticism and eco-racism, which is relevant for understanding the representation of Indigenous people in Hollywood film productions. In the context of Native Americans, the intersection of ecocriticism and eco-racism is particularly poignant. Indigenous communities in North America have traditionally upheld a profound spiritual and cultural bond with the land, regarding it as a sacred being rather than simply a resource for exploitation (Glotfelty 18). However, colonization, industrialization, and modern environmental policies have often disregarded these Indigenous perspectives, leading to significant environmental and cultural harm. Ecocriticism of Native American literature reveals how Indigenous narratives often foreground the relationship between humans and nature, emphasizing harmony and respect. These works challenge dominant environmental discourses that prioritize economic growth over ecological balance. By highlighting the voices and experiences of Native Americans, ecocriticism can expose the systematic eco-racism that perpetuates environmental injustice.

One main aspect of ecocriticism, which is an essential theory for this thesis' analysis, is Jacques Derrida's "Eco-Deconstruction". His idea of deconstruction involves analyzing and exposing the inherent instability and contradictions within texts and concepts. It challenges binary oppositions and fixed meanings, revealing the fluidity and complexity of meaning. Subsequently, eco-deconstruction applies these principles to ecological and environmental discourses. It challenges how conventional environmental narratives and practices depend on strict binaries, like nature versus culture or human versus non-human, aiming instead to highlight the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all beings (Barad, Clark, and Colebrook 41). Derrida's eco-deconstruction challenges anthropocentric views that place humans at the center of the universe and above other forms of life. It advocates for recognizing the agency and intrinsic value of non-human entities. By deconstructing the binary opposition between nature and culture, eco-deconstruction promotes a more integrated understanding of the environment. It recognizes that human actions are closely intertwined with natural processes and that cultural practices both shape and are shaped by the natural environment (Fritsch, Lynes, and Wood 391). This theory on eco-deconstruction, grounded in Derrida's deconstructive philosophy, is highly relevant for analyzing eco-racist themes in Disney's *Pocahontas* due to its emphasis on challenging binary oppositions, questioning anthropocentrism, and critiquing dominant environmental discourses. The film often depicts Native Americans as "one with nature" and Europeans as "cultured" and "civilized". This dichotomy can be analyzed to reveal how such portrayals simplify complex relationships and reinforce stereotypes. Further, *Pocahontas* anthropomorphizes nature and animals, for instance Grandmother Willow, which can be seen as a way of making nature serve human narratives. Examining these portrayals can show how the film maintains human-centered views even while seeming to valorize nature. Concerning simplified environmental narratives, the film represents a romanticized version of Native American life and a simplistic narrative of environmental harmony. This can be critiqued for glossing over the real historical and ecological complexities and perpetuating eco-racist stereotypes. The portrayal of Pocahontas and her people can be analyzed to show how the film reinforces the "noble savage" stereotype and uses their connection to nature to both exoticize and marginalize them. This examination can reveal how the film's environmental message is intertwined with racial stereotypes.

Although nature plays a powerful role in organizing human life and thought, Derrida refers to its opposition to and separation of culture (Wood 33). Still, he states that nature is seen through cultural constructions which change over time in history (Wood 33). This leads to a transformation of nature to being treated as a resource. Hence, a mountain, for instance, becomes a pile of quarry stone to be used for building something (Wood 34). Val Plumwood, a philosopher and eco-feminist, refers to Western culture not acknowledging the dependency on nature, which is defined as the inferior Other (1). She elaborates on nature having a shifting and integrating role with several areas of oppression, such as Otherness (Plumwood 1). The Western construction of the human world often positions it as separate from and outside of nature (Plumwood 2). This perspective creates a dichotomy between the self and the other, as well as between reason and nature (Plumwood 4). Within this framework, being defined as part of nature equates to being seen as a passive, invisible background, with reason and culture, typically associated with being White, Western, and male, occupying the foreground (Plumwood 4). This mindset leads to the classification of nature as “terra nullius”, or land belonging to no one, perceived as a resource devoid of purpose or meaning and relegated to a separate, alien, and lower realm (Plumwood 4). Hence, this perception underscores the exploitation and marginalization of natural environments, treating them as mere commodities for human use rather than entities with intrinsic value. Social ecology challenges this dualistic perspective by examining how individuals’ interactions with their environment influence both society and the environment itself (Plumwood 18). It asserts that environmental problems are, at their core, social problems, rooted in the structures and relationships within society (Plumwood 18). Using Derrida's eco-deconstruction and Plumwood’s theories on the cultural construction of nature to analyze *Pocahontas*, allows for a deeper understanding of how the film perpetuates eco-racism by maintaining binary oppositions, reinforcing anthropocentrism, and presenting romanticized environmental narratives. These theoretical approaches help to uncover the underlying assumptions and stereotypes that shape the film's portrayal of nature and Indigenous people, offering a more nuanced critique of its environmental and racial messages.

Ecocriticism encompasses critique on the representation of nature in literature and media. Thus, it is relevant for analyzing Disney's *Pocahontas* and its portrayal of the natural world. Since the Powhatan tribe and their residences are set in the forest, its symbolic representation and historical meaning is a significant aspect of eco-critical and eco-racist themes. To understand the development of the symbolic representation of the forest, historical deforestation and its civilizational narrative must be considered. By the mid-17th century, deforestation in England had reached alarming levels. Forester John Evelyn, recognizing the dire implications of this trend, called for the preservation of the woods 1664 (Hutchings 164). He argued that preserving forests was crucial for the future of English civilization (Hutchings 164). However, this perspective was not universally shared. Woods were also seen as dangerous territories where "enemies" could find shelter, leading to an association of forests with "savages" (Hutchings 164). This perception contributed to the construction of the woodland "savage" as the Other, opposed to the civilized individual living in the city (Hutchings 164). The term "civilian" itself derives from "civitas", meaning "city". Forest-dwellers were seen as antagonistic to law and order, reinforcing their status as the uncivilized counterpart to urban inhabitants (Hutchings 164). The moral progress of Christian society at the time embraced the notion of a God-given dominion over the natural world (Hutchings 165). In this worldview, advancing civilization was equated with exerting control over nature. In North America, this belief manifested in the notion that progress could only occur with the removal of Indigenous peoples (Hutchings 165). Native Americans were perceived as lacking humanity, a condition attributed to their environmental circumstances (Hutchings 165). Deforestation in the New World was thus seen not merely as an act of resource extraction but as a necessary step in "cultivating savage landscapes" to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples (Hutchings 166). This cultivation was framed as the only way to bring moral and civilizational progress to the "New World", reinforcing the idea that the displacement and transformation of Native American lands were both justified and essential for the advancement of European settlers (Hutchings 166).

Ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment, revealing how environmental narratives reflect and shape societal attitudes (Gladwin). At its intersection with eco-racism, it critiques how marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous peoples, are portrayed in relation to nature, often perpetuating harmful stereotypes and justifying exploitation. Derrida's deconstruction theory and Plumwood's critique of dualisms underpin these analyses. Jacques Derrida challenges binary oppositions, such as nature versus culture, revealing their constructed nature and inherent biases. Plumwood further critiques the logic of domination that places humans above nature, which often translates into racial and cultural hierarchies. Deforestation, historically and in contemporary contexts, exemplifies eco-racist practices. In 17th century England, forests were seen as dangerous and associated with "savages", justifying their destruction for civilization's progress. Similarly, in North America, deforestation was linked to the displacement of Native Americans, deemed necessary for "improving" the land and bringing about moral progress. Through these lenses, ecocriticism exposes how environmental degradation and racial injustices are intertwined, urging a reevaluation of how we perceive and interact with the natural world and marginalized communities. Disney's *Pocahontas* can be analyzed through this eco-critical and eco-racist lens to uncover how the film perpetuates harmful narratives. The film embodies the logic of domination critiqued by Plumwood, where the arrival of European settlers and their attempts to cultivate the land are seen as a civilizing force. The romanticization of Pocahontas's connection to nature and her eventual acceptance of John Smith symbolize the perceived need for Indigenous peoples to assimilate into European culture for progress to occur. By analyzing *Pocahontas* through the frameworks of Derrida's deconstruction, Plumwood's critique of dualisms, and the historical context of deforestation and eco-racism, it becomes apparent how the film both reflects and sustains eco-racist ideologies. It highlights the need to critically examine cultural narratives to understand and challenge the environmental and racial injustices they may subtly endorse.

4. Methods

Analyzing Disney's *Pocahontas* for eco-racist themes, particularly focusing on interactions and communication between human and non-human beings, as well as the depiction in songs, involves several methods. These methods include qualitative thematic and discourse analysis. As Maguire and Delahunt point out, "thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data" (3352). It involves systematically searching for themes that emerge from the data set, and then interpreting these themes to understand underlying meanings and insights (Maguire, Delahunt 3352). For this thesis, it entails interpretation of recurring themes related to eco-racism and interactions with nature. As a result, patterns are found that reveal how Native American characters are depicted in relation to the environment.

In addition, the methods include a discourse analysis, which focuses on examining the language and dialogues used in interactions with non-human beings and in songs. Here, special attention is paid to words, metaphors, and phrases that reflect eco-racist ideologies. Film discourse encompasses the concepts through which the unique value component of the message is crafted by the director, cameraman, and screenwriter (Baxtiyorovna 6). This creation is further enhanced by the imaginative perspectives of film artists, including the lead artist and their team of assistants, such as decorators, custom designers, and make-up artists (Baxtiyorovna 6). In sum, discourse analysis is a qualitative research method that considers both content and structure of communication, exploring the ways in which language reflects and shapes power dynamics, ideologies, and social norms. In the beginning of the analysis of *Pocahontas*, key scenes that prominently feature interactions between characters and nature are selected, paying attention to dialogues and visual elements. Furthermore, the lyrics of songs are included in the discourse analysis, as they often carry significant thematic messages. Relevant parts of the film are transcribed, noting body language and oral speech, as well as songs that contribute to the discourse. Especially music and sound analysis is a main element of this thesis. It examines the lyrics of songs for reference to nature, culture, and eco-racism, and identifies how the songs frame the relationship between humans and the environment. Also, it is considered how the music sets the tone for scenes involving nature and Native American characters, and what emotions or ideas it evokes.

Using discourse and thematic analysis with a special focus on interaction and singing scenes, this thesis attempts to uncover and critique eco-racist themes embedded in the film. This methodological approach will provide an understanding of how the film portrays Native Americans and environmental issues, contributing to broader discussions on media representation and cultural narratives.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This analysis explores Disney's *Pocahontas* through the lens of eco-racism, focusing on how the film portrays interactions between Native American characters and the natural world. Central to this examination are scenes featuring Grandmother Willow, various animals, plants, and the river, alongside an in-depth look at the film's songs and sounds, and their thematic implications. By scrutinizing these elements, the analysis aims to uncover the film's eco-racist themes, particularly how it perpetuates stereotypes and reflects the Western gaze.

The study delves into how the film romanticizes and distorts Native American relationships with nature, presenting a simplistic and often exoticized view of Indigenous cultures. It also addresses how the Western gaze shapes these portrayals, constructing Native Americans as the Other through a narrative of primitivism and mysticism. By examining the film's depiction of nature and cultural interactions and analyzing the role of music and song in conveying these themes, this analysis seeks to reveal the underlying ideologies and power dynamics at play.

Ultimately, this analysis seeks to enhance our understanding of how *Pocahontas* reflects and sustains eco-racist narratives, providing valuable insights into the film's portrayal of environmental and cultural themes.

5.1. Interactions between the Native American Characters and Nature

To gain insights into the representation of Native Americans and their relationship to nature in Disney's *Pocahontas*, this thesis takes a close look at film scenes, which depict interactions between the Powhatan characters and nature. First, the communication between Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow, who plays a significant role in the film's depiction of nature and Indigenous spirituality, is examined. Her portrayal raises important issues related to eco-racism, ecocriticism, Othering, and the Western gaze. Other modes of interaction between humans and the river, animals, and plants are also analyzed to illustrate various forms of the representation of nature as a magical entity, romanticized and stereotyped Otherness, exoticization, and cultural appropriation. As explored by myself, the process of Europeanization is also evident in the film's narrative, where the natural world and its Indigenous stewards are depicted as needing to be tamed and civilized by European settlers. This dynamic reinforces the notion of Western superiority and the supposed primitivism of Indigenous cultures. Scenes involving the river, for example, symbolize the imposition of European values and control over natural resources, reflecting broader colonial ideologies. I suggest that Othering is another key theme in the film's portrayal of Native American characters and their relationship with nature. By positioning Indigenous characters as the Other, the film creates a dichotomy between civilized Europeans and mystical, nature-bound Native Americans. This binary not only marginalizes Indigenous perspectives but also reinforces stereotypes that depict Native Americans as timeless and unchanging, rather than as dynamic and complex communities.

Through the lens of ecocriticism, this analysis examines how *Pocahontas* constructs its environmental narrative and the implications of these representations. Ecocriticism provides a framework for understanding how literature and media shape our perceptions of nature and environmental issues. In *Pocahontas*, the natural world is depicted as a pristine, Edenic space that is threatened by European colonization. This portrayal, while highlighting the destructive impact of colonization, also risks perpetuating a simplistic view of Indigenous ecological practices and their relationship with the land.

By combining these theoretical perspectives, this analysis aims to uncover the underlying eco-racist narratives in *Pocahontas* and how they are reinforced through the Western gaze, Europeanization, and Othering. The interactions between Pocahontas and the natural world are not merely aesthetic choices but are deeply embedded in cultural and ideological constructs that reflect and perpetuate historical power dynamics. This study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how *Pocahontas* both critiques and reinforces these narratives, contributing to the ongoing conversation about representation, environmental justice, and cultural appropriation in media.

5.1.1. Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow

Delving into the analysis of the interaction between Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow, the selected scenes include recurring themes and metaphors. These scenes were chosen because of their rich symbolism and key dialogues for understanding the characters' relationships to nature. The following transcript refers to a conversation between Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow talking about Kocoum, the film's antagonist, and the Native woman's recent dream.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Is that my Pocahontas?

POCAHONTAS. Grandmother Willow, I need to talk to you.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Good morning, child. I was hoping you'd visit today.

Oh, wow! Your mother's necklace.

POCAHONTAS. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. My father wants me to marry Kocoum.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Kocoum? But he's so serious.

POCAHONTAS. I know. My father thinks it's the right path for me, but lately I've been having this dream and I think it's ...

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Oh, a dream! Let's hear all about it.

animals cheering

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Quiet! QUIET! ... Now child you were saying?

POCAHONTAS. Well, I'm running through the woods and then, right there in front of me is an arrow. As I look at it, it starts to spin.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. A spinning arrow. How unusual.

POCAHONTAS. Yes! It spins faster and faster and faster until suddenly, it stops.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Hmm. Well, it seems to me, this spinning arrow is pointing you down your path.

POCAHONTAS. But Grandmother Willow, what is my path? How am I ever going to find it?

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Haha. Your mother asked me the very same question.

POCAHONTAS. She did? What did you tell her?

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. I told her to listen. All around you are spirits, child. They live in the earth, the water, the sky. If you listen, they will guide you.

POCAHONTAS. I hear the wind!

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Yes. What is it telling you?

POCAHONTAS. I don't understand. (Pocahontas 00:14:53 – 00:16:43)

In this scene, Pocahontas talks to an anthropomorphic willow tree with the human face of an old woman. Grandmother Willow serves as a wise mentor, offering Pocahontas spiritual and practical guidance. To strengthen her credibility of her wisdom, she exudes authority when screaming at the forest animals for cheering and making too much noise. Opposed to the forest animals, Grandmother Willow appears sedate, thoughtful, and patient, and thus, she stands out in her superiority. On the other hand, the animals seem rather childlike, being overly excited about listening to Pocahontas telling her dream. This excitement of the animals about Pocahontas's dream positions nature as a backdrop for human stories and concerns. It reinforces the idea that nature's primary role is to serve human narratives rather than being a complex, autonomous system with its own dynamics.

As a result, a human-centric narrative is established where animals exist primarily to react to and support human experiences and emotions. This perspective can be critiqued from an eco-critical standpoint as it marginalizes the animals' own ecological roles and intrinsic value. While the animal characters are depicted as less relevant than human concerns, being almost ridiculed by their childish behavior, the excitement of the forest dwellers simultaneously reflect an idealized view of nature. This perspective portrays the animals as inherently supportive and joyful, aligning with the "Ecological Indian" stereotype. This depiction can gloss over the complexities and realities of animal behavior and ecosystems, reducing them to mere cheerleaders for human narratives.

As observed while watching the film, during the interactions between the species, Grandmother Willow stands out for being the sentient tree that represents the spiritual and living essence of nature, reinforcing the theme of interconnectedness between humans and the environment. This representation can be critiqued as eco-racist because it romanticizes and essentializes Indigenous relationships with nature, framing them as mystical and otherworldly rather than practical and multifaceted. Grandmother Willow tells Pocahontas to rely on spiritual beings that are part of nature. These spirits can be heard if she listened carefully to the wind, which would tell her what to do. Thus, Pocahontas merely needs to be guided by nature without using rational thought to find her path. This interaction with nature implies that Native Americans are not in the need for rational thought to reach their goals in life but only need a strong connection with and understanding of nature. Clearly, this distinguishes them from Western society, especially in the 17th century, when enlightenment and rational thinking was perceived as the key to live a meaningful life. Pocahontas trying to communicate with the wind, symbolizing guidance and wisdom, suggests that Indigenous people have an almost supernatural relationship with nature. This relationship depicts nature as a source of mystical wisdom, reducing its complex and essential function in the ecosystem. To link this element of nature even closer to humanity, the wind is personified and given agency to communicate important messages. This can imply that nature exists primarily to serve human needs. As Pocahontas closes her eyes and listens, the scene emphasizes a serene and magical connection with the environment. The wind stirs the leaves and carries soft whispers, evoking a sense of spiritual connection.

The scene suggests that this kind of understanding and interaction with nature is unique to Indigenous people, setting them apart from Western characters in the narrative, who do not exhibit the same level of connection with the natural world. Through this representation of Otherness, this thesis suggests that the scene serves to enhance the romanticized and idealized view of Indigenous people as “noble savages”, who live in harmony with nature and possess otherworldly wisdom. By framing Indigenous knowledge as something that can only be accessed through a deep spiritual bond with nature, the film perpetuates the stereotype that Native American cultures are fundamentally different and separate from Western rationality and modernity. Moreover, this depiction aligns with the Western fantasy of a pristine, untouched wilderness where noble, mythical figures like Grandmother Willow hold the keys to ancient, secret wisdom. It simplifies and distorts the complex and varied ways Indigenous peoples interact with their environment, reducing their rich cultural traditions to a set of exotic and esoteric practices that serve to highlight their Otherness in contrast to Western characters and values.

As Pocahontas speaks about her dream, she mentions a spinning arrow. Although she cannot guess its meaning, she seems fascinated by it, just like Grandmother Willow. For the audience, it quickly becomes clear that the spinning arrow is a compass. Obviously, Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow have never seen a compass and therefore describe the object differently. The wise old tree interprets the spinning arrow in a mystical way and refers to it as a guide for Pocahontas showing her the way. This mystification of the symbol in her dream aligns with eco-racist narratives that frame Indigenous knowledge as mysterious and inaccessible to outsiders, further exoticizing and Othering Native American cultures. Thus, the advice to follow the spinning arrow fits neatly into a Western narrative structure where nature serves as a benevolent guide. This storytelling device makes Indigenous spirituality accessible and relatable to Western audiences but does so by imposing Western values and frameworks and frameworks onto Indigenous beliefs, thereby distorting their true meanings and significance. The thesis suggests that Pocahontas's lack of recognition of a compass, a common Western tool, portrays her as simple-minded. This characterization implies that Native Americans lack the rationality and technological understanding that define Western progress, reinforcing stereotypes of Indigenous people as primitive and uneducated.

Additionally, the scene suggests that Native Americans only rely on dreams and nature for guidance. This portrayal can be seen as eco-racist because it dismisses the sophisticated knowledge systems and technological advancements that many Indigenous cultures possess, reducing them to mystical and supernatural beliefs. Hence, by depicting Pocahontas's confusion over the compass, the scene subtly asserts the superiority of Western technology. It suggests that nature's guidance, as understood by the Native Americans, is insufficient and that Western tools and rationality are necessary for clear direction and progress. Furthermore, the portrayal of Pocahontas as unable to understand a basic Western tool infantilizes her character, positioning Indigenous knowledge as naive and childlike in comparison to the sophisticated and rational knowledge of Western society. Concerning Othering, the juxtaposition of Pocahontas's dream with the Western compass creates a dichotomy between nature and technology. This dichotomy reinforces the stereotype of Indigenous people as being inextricably tied to nature and disconnected from technological and scientific progress. From an ecocritical perspective, the scene can be interpreted as a critique of colonialism's impact on Indigenous knowledge systems. Pocahontas's need to rely on Western technology to understand her dream highlights how colonialism undermines and devalues Native ways of knowing. In addition, the scene underlines the interconnectedness of humans and nature. However, it also critiques the Western tendency to dismiss this relationship as insufficient, requiring augmentation by technological advancements.

The over-romanticization and idealization of Native Americans becomes apparent through another aspect of this scene as well. Pocahontas speaking with Grandmother Willow can be seen as engaging with the ancient wisdom of nature, utilizing it as a source of knowledge. As analysed by myself, this scene conveys to the audience that Native Americans hold such deep love and respect for nature that they would never disrupt its natural processes. The willow tree, depicted as an anthropomorphic being, is highly revered and protected by the Natives. However, this implies that Indigenous people would never cut down a tree, which is not accurate, as they did use natural resources. This portrayal is an over-romanticization and idealization of Indigenous people, suggesting they would preserve everything in nature without exception.

Paying attention to the mentioning of Kocoum in the scene, the theme of the “ignoble savage” is detected. Kocoum is referred to as being “so serious” by the characters and thereby, being seemingly ridiculed by them. He embodies the antagonist of the story and is portrayed as undesirable for a young woman, a sentiment shared by Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow. Thus, Kocoum represents the stereotype of the stoic Native American, lacking humor and appearing narrow-minded. He embodies the trope of the “ignoble savage”, by being characterized as not likable and not fun to be around. Here, the Western gaze is evident in how Kocoum’s character is framed, Othering him and positioning him as a barrier to Pocahontas’s happiness and progress, thereby marginalizing Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

In the analysis of the scene from Disney's Pocahontas, Grandmother Willow is depicted as the wise guide, embodying the ancient wisdom of nature and providing spiritual guidance to Pocahontas. This portrayal, however, contributes to the exoticization of Indigenous knowledge, framing it as mysterious and arcane. The spinning arrow, which Pocahontas interprets as part of her dream, symbolizes Western technology and rationality, suggesting that Indigenous reliance on nature and spirituality is insufficient without Western inventions. This scene subtly implies that Native Americans lack rational thought and technological advancement. Further, Kocoum is depicted as the ignoble savage, characterized by his seriousness and stoic demeanor, making him undesirable to Pocahontas. This portrayal reinforces negative stereotypes of Native Americans as humorless and narrow-minded, aligning with eco-racist themes by depicting Indigenous people as primitive and in need of Western intervention. Together, these elements highlight how the film perpetuates the Western gaze and the process of Othering, marginalizing Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

5.1.2. Pocahontas and Animals

In the movie, interactions with animals play a significant role in shaping the narrative and reinforcing various themes. Pocahontas is frequently depicted in harmonious interactions with a variety of animals, including her companions Meeko the raccoon and Flit the hummingbird. These interactions are used to highlight her deep connection with nature and to emphasize the romanticized notion of the “ecological Indian”. However, these portrayals also contribute to eco-racist themes by idealizing and oversimplifying Native American relationships with nature. Often, the animals in the film display human-like intelligence and emotions, which, while charming, can trivialize the complexity and reality of Indigenous ecological knowledge and practices. This anthropomorphism serves to create a magical, almost fairy-tale-like connection between Pocahontas and the natural world, which aligns with the Western gaze’s tendency to romanticize and exoticize Indigenous cultures.

The scene of John Smith’s first encounter with Meeko reveals significant eco-racist and ecocritical themes relevant for this analysis. Upon arriving in the "New World," John Smith ventures out alone to explore the landscape. While he inspects the environment, Meeko crawls out of the bushes, Pocahontas’s hiding place, and ignores her command to stay hidden.

JOHN SMITH. Hey! Well, you’re a strange looking fellow. You hungry? There you go. It’s a biscuit. It’s food. Well, sort of.

Meeko eating the biscuit with joy

JOHN SMITH. You like it, eh? Well, try eating it for four months straight.

Meeko waving at Pocahontas who hides in the bushes

JOHN SMITH. You’ve got a friend back there?

John Smith approaches the bushes and Flit comes out attacking him

JOHN SMITH. Hey! What! Watch out! Look out!

THOMAS. John! You better get down here! The Governor’s coming ashore!

JOHN SMITH. Alright, alright. I’m leaving.

Meeko continues eating and Pocahontas remains unnoticed (Pocahontas 00:20.47 – 00:21:44)

In the scene when John Smith encounters Meeko, his reaction is revealing of the Western perspective on animals and Indigenous life. Smith, despite never having seen a raccoon before, does not feel threatened by Meeko. Instead, he refers to Meeko as a "strange-looking fellow" and immediately offers him food, demonstrating a condescending sense of superiority and control. This behavior underscores a Western underestimation of animals, seeing them as non-threatening and easily dominated.

Smith's surprise at Meeko's lack of shyness further highlights this underestimation, reflecting a Western belief that wild animals should naturally be fearful of humans. His animal-friendly demeanor and the act of feeding Meeko can be seen as patronizing, suggesting a one-sided benevolence where Smith feels magnanimous in offering sustenance.

The scene takes a deeper eco-racist turn when Smith gives Meeko the biscuits. Smith's comment about the food being dull and tasteless because he has been eating it for months implies that the raccoon, and by extension the Native Americans, are unaccustomed to and thus overly appreciative of even the colonists' most basic provisions. This moment subtly suggests that the colonists are bringing superior food and culture to the Indigenous population, who supposedly lack such "civilized" amenities. It implies that Indigenous people only eat to survive, without access to tasty or desirable food, reinforcing a colonial narrative of bringing "progress" and "civilization" to the "savages". Overall, this interaction subtly conveys themes of Western superiority, underestimation of Indigenous knowledge and resources, and the supposed benevolence of the colonizers, all elements that contribute to the broader eco-racist narrative within the film.

This scene also exemplifies the process of Othering, where Meeko, as a representative of the Indigenous environment, is treated as a curiosity and novelty. Smith's reaction to Meeko as a "strange-looking fellow" highlights the exoticization and marginalization of the unfamiliar. This act of Othering extends beyond the animal to encompass the broader indigenous culture, reinforcing a dichotomy between the civilized colonizers and the primitive natives. By positioning Smith as the superior figure who bestows food upon Meeko, the film reinforces a hierarchical worldview where the Western perspective dominates and devalues Indigenous experiences and relationships with nature. In summary, this scene reveals eco-racist themes by implying Western superiority over Indigenous ecological practices, demonstrates Othering by exoticizing and marginalizing the unfamiliar, and reflects anthropocentric attitudes in its depiction of human-animal interactions. Together, these elements contribute to a narrative that undermines Native knowledge and agency, positioning Western perspectives as the ultimate authority on civilization and progress.

The character of John Smith has the desire to explore the "New World". His curiosity and willingness to learn are prominently highlighted in this scene. This portrayal suggests that the English motivation for colonization was driven by a genuine curiosity and a desire for knowledge, rather than by greed and exploitation. However, this characterization is problematic as it oversimplifies and romanticizes the historical context of colonization. I suggest that by presenting Smith as an exception among the colonists, the film creates a narrative that can be seen as misleading. It portrays a more benign and benevolent image of colonial intentions, diverting attention from the widespread greed, exploitation, and violence that characterized much of the actual colonial endeavors. This depiction could be argued to distort historical education, as it downplays the harsh realities of colonization and the severe impacts it had on Indigenous populations and their environments. Overall, while the character of John Smith in this scene is shown as curious and open-minded, this depiction serves to obscure the true nature of colonial motivations, contributing to a sanitized and romanticized version of history that fails to acknowledge the systemic exploitation and oppression inherent in the colonial process.

While John Smith is portrayed as being proud, sovereign, and confident, Meeko's character can be described as clumsy, nosy, funny, and simple-minded. He is depicted as a humorous and almost comical character, often finding himself in situations that generate laughter but also undermine his seriousness and agency. This portrayal contributes to his being seen as almost ridiculed, which reflects a broader tendency in media to render animal characters as sources of entertainment rather than as beings with intrinsic value and agency. Meeko's depiction as funny and accidentally helpful serves several functions in the scene. Firstly, as I examined, it lightens the mood and adds a layer of entertainment, making the narrative more engaging for a broad audience, especially children. Secondly, it subtly diminishes the perceived seriousness and capability of both Meeko and, by extension, the native characters he is associated with. This diminishment aligns with eco-racist themes, as it portrays Indigenous life and nature as whimsical and less competent compared to Western rationality and innovation.

The following scene surrounds another communication between humans and animals in *Pocahontas* and includes again the compass, which functions as a symbol for guidance, destiny, and cultural interactions.

Flit chirping angrily at John Smith

JOHN SMITH. Yeah, I remember you.

POCAHONTAS. Flit doesn't like strangers.

JOHN SMITH. But I'm not a stranger anymore. Hm, stubborn little fellow, isn't he?

POCAHONTAS. Very stubborn.

Flit sticking out his tongue towards John Smith and smirking

JOHN SMITH. Hey!

Meeko running away with John Smith's compass

POCAHONTAS. Meeko! Come back here.

JOHN SMITH. Don't worry. He can't hurt it.

Meeko banging the compass against rock

JOHN SMITH. Hey! What are you doing?

POCAHONTAS. Meeko, bring that back!

JOHN SMITH. No, it's alright. He can keep it. Call it a gift. (Pocahontas 00:35:50 – 00:36:16)

Pocahontas mentions that her hummingbird Flit does not like strangers, meaning John Smith. Flit acting hostile towards him provides insights into the film's exploration of themes such as the representation of nature's guardians. In this context, the hummingbird represents a guardian of nature, embodying the protective instincts of the natural world. His hostility towards John Smith symbolizes the environment's initial resistance to the intrusion of outsiders, reflecting the broader theme of eco-racism. This portrayal can be interpreted as nature's defense mechanism against exploitation and harm by colonizers. Another theme that is detected in the scene is distrust and Othering. The bird's behavior mirrors the apprehensions and fears of Indigenous people towards the European settlers. This scene underscores the cultural and personal boundaries that exist between the Native characters and the colonizers, highlighting the theme of Othering through the lens of non-human interactions. Smith, representing the Western perspective, might see Flit's behavior as irrational or overly aggressive, failing to understand the deeper cultural and natural significance behind the bird's actions. This misunderstanding underscores the Western tendency to misinterpret or dismiss Indigenous perspectives and behaviors as inferior or less rational. Concerning the theme of distrust, Flit's alleged dislike of strangers in the scene with John Smith can be interpreted as a subtle endorsement of xenophobic attitudes, framing them as natural and universal. This portrayal risks legitimizing aversion to foreigners within Western society, misrepresenting Indigenous openness, and undermining efforts towards cross-cultural understanding. It aligns with broader themes of eco-racism and Othering by portraying the natural world and its inhabitants as inherently distrustful of outsiders. The depiction of Flit's behavior may reflect Western attitudes projected onto Native characters and their environment. This projection serves to rationalize xenophobia by implying that it is a natural response shared by all beings, not just humans. This can contribute to the idea that distrust of strangers is a fundamental aspect of human and even animal behavior, which aligns with Western prejudices.

When John Smith asserts, he is not a stranger anymore, but Flit continues to resist, leading Smith to call Flit a "stubborn little fellow," several layers of meaning emerge that reveal Smith's colonial intentions and broader themes of eco-racism, Othering, and imposition. Smith's declaration that he is no longer a stranger signifies his attempt to appropriate the land and make it his own, reflecting a colonial mindset. This assertion implies that, in Smith's eyes, he has already claimed ownership and dominance over the land and its inhabitants. The fact that Flit, representing the indigenous environment, refuses to accept Smith's presence undermines the resistance of the natural world to colonial imposition. Thus, Flit's persistent hostility is a metaphor for the Indigenous peoples' and nature's struggle against foreign domination and exploitation. When Smith labels Flit a "stubborn little fellow," it trivializes the bird's resistance and frames it as unreasonable stubbornness rather than a legitimate defense of its territory. This reflects a common colonial attitude of dismissing Native resistance as irrational or inconsequential. Smith's comment highlights his expectation that the Indigenous environment should readily accept and conform to the presence and desires of the colonizers. This scene can be analyzed to reveal the theme of imposition. Smith's belief that he is no longer a stranger implies that he sees himself as an integral part of the land, irrespective of the natural world's acceptance. This imposition is a core aspect of colonialism, where colonizers impose their will, culture, and ownership on lands and peoples they encounter, often disregarding existing relationships and sovereignties.

When Meeko runs off with the compass, he is once again characterized as a child-like rascal who neither understands the value of the item nor the disrespect involved in stealing someone else's property. Consequently, nature and its inhabitants are relegated to the roles of side-characters. They are portrayed as funny and almost ridiculed, highlighting their lack of significance in the narrative. Further, they do not genuinely help or contribute to the outcome of the story. Instead, their actions are more incidental and comedic, reinforcing their marginalization and trivialization within the context of the film.

Eventually, John Smith gives up the attempt to reclaim his compass from Meeko. Reluctantly, he lets the raccoon have it and Meeko runs off up a tree. The act of giving the compass to Meeko, an animal, can be viewed as a symbol of the Western perspective on ownership and control. By bestowing the compass, an object of significant technological value and navigational importance, Smith implicitly asserts his superiority and authority. This action can be seen as a subtle form of colonial imposition, where Western technology and artifacts are positioned as gifts or offerings to the less civilized, reinforcing a hierarchy between the colonizer and the Indigenous, represented here by Meeko. Moreover, Meeko's reception of the compass without understanding its true significance can be interpreted as a commentary on the perceived simplicity and child-like nature of Native characters and their environment. This portrayal aligns with eco-racist themes, suggesting that the natural world and its inhabitants are not capable of comprehending or valuing Western advancements. I suggest that it perpetuates the stereotype that Indigenous people and their surroundings are primitive and in need of Western guidance and benevolence. The scene also highlights Othering through the lens of the Western gaze. Smith's gesture of giving the compass is framed as an act of kindness, yet it underscores a deeper narrative of cultural superiority and domination. The Western gaze positions Smith as a benevolent figure, while Meeko, and by extension the Indigenous environment, is depicted as naive and dependent on Western generosity. Also, viewing the compass as a gift can be seen as an effort to create a pseudo-harmonious relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. However, this relationship is inherently unequal and patronizing. Hence, it implies that the Native characters can only benefit from Western intervention and that their cultural practices and knowledge systems are inadequate without Western contributions.

In the scene where John Smith encounters Flit and Meeko, various themes of eco-racism, Othering, Indigenous distrust, colonial imposition, the representation of natural guardians, legitimization of Xenophobia, and misrepresentation of Indigenous openness are evident. Flit's hostility towards Smith can be interpreted as a legitimization of aversion to strangers, reflecting Western societal norms. Smith's dismissal of Flit as a "stubborn little fellow" reveals his colonial intentions, suggesting that Native people and their environment must accept Western dominance. Meeko's behavior, characterized as child-like and mischievous, reinforces stereotypes of Indigenous simplicity and dependence on Western artifacts. These interactions portray Indigenous nature as humorous and inferior, underscoring themes of colonial superiority and marginalization.

5.1.3. Pocahontas and the River

While watching the movie, I interpreted the river as a central element of nature, symbolizing the deep connection Indigenous people have with their environment. By analyzing Pocahontas's interactions with the river, this thesis explores how the film portrays Native knowledge and spirituality, often romanticized or misunderstood by Western perspectives. The portrayal of the river as a character in its own is dissected, influencing Pocahontas's decisions and reflecting broader themes of environmental harmony and conflict.

The characters interact with the river in a non-verbal way and speak about it in third person, as an active participant in the natural world.

POWHATAN. Pocahontas, come with me. You are the daughter of the chief. It is time to take your place among our people. Even the wild mountain stream must someday join the big river.

Powhatan points to the river and sings

POWHATAN. As the river cuts his path, though the river's proud and strong.

He will choose the smoothest course, that's why rivers live so long. They're steady, as the steady beating drum.

Your mother wore this for our wedding. It was her dream to see you wear it at your own. It suits you.

POCAHONTAS. He wants me to be steady. Like the river.

Pocahontas looking in the water and two beavers appear

POCAHONTAS. But it's not steady at all. (Pocahontas 00:11:22 – 00:12:20)

As analyzed by myself, Powhatan talks about the river as if it is a sentient being that makes decisions, such as which way its water will flow. He compares the river's choices to those Pocahontas must make regarding her path and place in the tribe, emphasizing her role as part of a larger community. Additionally, Powhatan describes the river as steady, which is contradictory since a river is always in motion, constantly changing the riverbank and the ground it flows over. Thus, Powhatan uses this contradictory comparison to legitimize his stance on Pocahontas getting married and becoming a respected member of the tribe with a high rank. Although the river is described as an active participant in the world, it ultimately becomes passive, used to substantiate human politics and social issues. However, Pocahontas realizes that her father was wrong, and that the river is not steady. Consequently, she uses this realization to oppose her father's will, desiring the freedom to go wherever she wants and to align with nature's motions instead of conforming to human rules and systems. This interaction reflects the broader theme of eco-racism, where Indigenous connections to nature are romanticized, yet ultimately subordinated to human concerns. The river, initially portrayed as a symbol of natural wisdom and freedom, is co-opted to enforce traditional social structures. Eventually, Pocahontas reclaims it as a symbol of personal freedom, thereby challenging her father's authority. This portrayal of how the Powhatans interact with and talk about the river can reinforce stereotypes that Native peoples are primitive and overly reliant on nature, which Western societies often view as needing guidance or intervention. While the river is given a voice and agency, it is ultimately used to support Powhatan's patriarchal and social agenda. This framing reflects the Western tendency to view nature as a tool for human ends, rather than a domain with its own intrinsic value and rights.

Further, Pocahontas's struggle against her father's wishes can be seen as a metaphor for Indigenous resistance to Western imposition and control.

Her ultimate decision to follow the river's course rather than her father's prescribed path can be interpreted as a rejection of Western norms and a reclaiming of Indigenous autonomy and ecological wisdom.

From an ecocritical perspective, the river in this scene symbolizes the natural world's agency and fluidity, challenging the human desire to control and categorize. Powhatan's description of the river as "steady", despite its inherent dynamism, reflects the human tendency to impose static interpretations on nature, which is in constant flux. Pocahontas's realization that the river is not steady, and her subsequent desire to follow its unpredictable course, underscores a fundamental ecocritical theme: the importance of respecting and aligning with the natural world's inherent changeability rather than imposing rigid human structures upon it.

When these perspectives are combined, the scene reveals the complex dynamics at play in the representation of Native relationships with nature. Powhatan's use of the river to legitimize social expectations illustrates how Indigenous knowledge is often co-opted to fit colonial and patriarchal narratives. Meanwhile, Pocahontas's recognition of the river's true nature and her desire to align with it reflect an assertion of Native identity and resistance to colonial constructs. This layered portrayal exposes the eco-racist tendencies to both romanticize and subjugate Indigenous ecological knowledge, while also highlighting the potential for reclaiming and asserting Indigenous perspectives within a framework of ecocriticism and resistance to the Western gaze.

The river is described as a "wild mountain stream," and Pocahontas is similarly attributed with being "wild." This comparison suggests that both the river and Pocahontas embody untamed, natural forces that eventually need to be subdued or guided into a larger, more controlled entity. In the narrative, the wild mountain stream joining the big river signifies a convergence and unity, implying that ultimately, everything and everyone must come together within the prescribed social order. By equating Pocahontas with the "wild mountain stream," the narrative reinforces the stereotype of Native peoples as being inherently wild and untamed, in need of direction and assimilation into the dominant societal norms represented by the big river. This metaphor aligns with colonial views that saw Indigenous lands and peoples as chaotic and in need of Western governance and civilization.

The notion that the wild stream must eventually join the big river reflects the colonial mindset that Indigenous cultures must be absorbed into the larger, dominant culture. This absorption implies that Native ways of life are incomplete or inadequate on their own and require integration into the mainstream to achieve value or purpose. This perspective perpetuates the idea that Native peoples and their connection to nature are primitive and secondary to the rational, structured world of Western society.

Another scene that involves the interaction between the river and water and Indigenous people as well as non-human beings represents nature again as a tool to explain and validate human actions. In this scene, Grandmother Willow speaks with Pocahontas and John Smith about their struggle to prevent a war between the English colonists and the Powhatan tribe. Thereby, the wise old tree guides them to a solution by using ripples on the water surface as a symbolic clue to find their answer.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Now then, there's something I want to show you.

Look!

Uses one of her branches to create ripples in the water

POCAHONTAS. The ripples.

JOHN SMITH. What about them?

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. So small at first, then look how they grow. But someone has to start them.

JOHN SMITH. They're not going to listen to us.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Young man, sometimes the right path is not the easiest one. Don't you see? Only when the fighting stops, can you two be together.

JOHN SMITH. Alright. Let's go talk to your father. (Pocahontas 00:54:56 – 00:55:34)

In the scene where Grandmother Willow advises Pocahontas and John Smith on how to avoid war, she is once again portrayed as the all-knowing guide, possessing solutions for every problem, even when confronted with unfamiliar people and their intentions.

Her wisdom, which is depicted as stemming directly from nature, is demonstrated through symbolic acts such as creating ripples on the water's surface to illustrate the impact of human actions. However, it is important to note that the film does not provide any clear rationale for how Grandmother Willow acquires such knowledge, particularly in completely new situations where she has no prior experience. Thus, nature, in this context, is reduced to a mere symbol or illustration that serves to support the ongoing plot rather than actively contributing to the resolution of human conflicts. Moreover, although the narrative suggests that the Native characters derive strength and wisdom from nature, a closer examination reveals that nature is primarily used as a passive backdrop. It serves little more than to provide a beautiful and mystical landscape, rather than being a dynamic force with its own agency. Also, the symbolic function of the water ripples is inadequately explained, as the film draws conclusions and makes comparisons without offering a deeper explanation or logical argument.

As a result, these interpretations are primarily employed to describe human actions, yet they fail to reflect the actual power, knowledge, or functional significance of nature itself. Consequently, nature remains a passive element within the story, its role limited to serving as an aesthetic or symbolic feature rather than as an active participant in the narrative.

The scene where Grandmother Willow creates ripples in the water to illustrate the consequences of human actions is rich in symbolism and offers multiple layers for interpretation. While the film doesn't explicitly define the meaning of the ripples in the water, my analysis seeks to explore their deeper significance and examine their connection to eco-racism. The ripples represent the wide-reaching effects of individual actions, illustrating how a single, seemingly minor event can trigger larger, far-reaching consequences. Grandmother Willow uses this metaphor to demonstrate the interconnectedness of all things, emphasizing that actions taken by Pocahontas, John Smith, or any other character will inevitably affect the world around them. This idea aligns with the concept of social ecology (3), as articulated by Murray Bookchin where environmental and social systems are seen as deeply intertwined. The act of creating ripples with just a touch suggests a level of control or influence over nature, which is ironic given that the character doing this is a representation of nature itself. This dynamic can be interpreted as a subtle reinforcement of the idea that humans, or in this case, the personified nature, can predict and perhaps even control the outcomes of natural events.

Yet, the very nature of ripples is that they spread uncontrollably, symbolizing how actions, once taken, are beyond anyone's full control. This reflects a Western attitude toward nature, where there is a desire to control and predict natural processes, often at the expense of understanding the true complexity and autonomy of the natural world. This analysis suggests a diminished role of nature in the film, although the storyline refers to it many times. As mentioned in the secondary literature of this thesis, in many Indigenous cultures, nature is not merely a backdrop or a passive force but is seen as a living entity with its own will and agency (Kidwell 21). However, in this scene, the ripples are used primarily as a tool to explain human concerns and consequences, rather than to express nature's own narrative or agency.

This reduction of nature's role aligns with eco-racist tendencies to undervalue the active relationship indigenous people have with their environment, portraying nature as something to be understood and managed by humans rather than as an equal partner. The simplicity with which Grandmother Willow demonstrates the ripple effect can also be seen as an oversimplification of Indigenous knowledge. By reducing complex ecological relationships to a simple visual metaphor, the film potentially underestimates the depth of Native ecological wisdom. This portrayal aligns with the Western gaze, making it seem primitive or quaint, rather than acknowledging its complexity and sophistication. Further, the ripples can be seen as a moralizing tool, meant to teach Pocahontas, and by extension, the audience, about the consequences of actions. This reinforces a didactic view where nature serves to impart lessons to humans, often framed within a moralistic narrative. Yet, this use of nature as a moral guide can also obscure the real-world complexities of environmental stewardship and Indigenous ecological practices, reducing them to simple moral lessons rather than recognizing them as nuanced systems of knowledge and practice. Finally, the ripples emphasize nature's role as a passive witness to human actions. Although Grandmother Willow can foresee the consequences, she does not act to prevent them, reflecting a common trope in Western narratives where nature is seen as a silent, passive witness to human progress and conflict. The passivity reinforces a view of nature as something to be observed, studied, and used for human purposes, rather than as an active agent. This perspective not only marginalizes nature's role but also diminishes the perceived agency of Native peoples who are closely connected to their environment.

The scene encapsulates several interrelated themes, all of which contribute to the broader narrative. First and foremost, the ripples symbolize interconnectedness, illustrating how individual choices and actions extend outward, affecting the broader environment and community. This visual metaphor underscores the idea that every action has consequences, thereby linking personal decisions to larger environmental and social impacts. Also, the scene emphasizes the theme of wisdom and guidance, with Grandmother Willow serving as a repository of ancient knowledge. Her ability to impart moral lessons through natural phenomena highlights the perceived connection between Native wisdom and the natural world. However, this portrayal also subtly reinforces themes of eco-racism and the Western gaze.

The film tends to romanticize and oversimplify Indigenous knowledge, reducing it to easily digestible symbols like ripples on water, and in doing so, it uses nature as a passive backdrop rather than an active participant in the narrative. In addition, the scene intertwines themes of fate, tradition, and change. As observed by my own analysis, by framing nature as a source of wisdom that guides human actions, the film suggests that there is a predetermined path or destiny that must be followed, yet at the same time, it hints at the possibility of altering this course through conscious decisions. As a result, the scene not only moves the plot forward but also examines the moral consequences of human behavior in relation to nature, connecting the personal with the universal, the individual with the collective, and humanity with the environment.

5.2. Music and Sound as a Mode of Communication

Analyzing music and sound as a mode of communication in Disney's *Pocahontas* provides a rich lens through which to explore eco-racist themes, Othering, and ecocritical perspectives. The film's soundtrack and sound design are not merely aesthetic choices but serve as tools to convey cultural messages, evoke emotional responses, and reinforce narratives about the relationship between humans and nature (Preda 330).

One of the most prominent elements is the use of beating drums, which often accompany scenes of Native American life. While these drums are intended to evoke a sense of authenticity and connection to Indigenous culture, they also risk reinforcing stereotypical representations. Moreover, the sound of the wind plays a crucial role in the film as a mode of communication between Pocahontas and nature, as examined in my analysis. The wind is often personified, carrying messages or guiding Pocahontas in her decisions. This depiction reinforces the idea that Native people have a mystical connection with nature, which, while seemingly positive, can also be a form of Othering. The sound of the wind also carries ecocritical implications. It symbolizes the voice of nature, which in the context of the film, often serves as a guide for the protagonist. However, as I suggest, this portrayal can also be seen as diminishing the agency of the Native characters, as their actions and decisions seem to be heavily influenced or even dictated by nature, rather than their own free will.

In addition, I observed that the film's use of nature sounds, such as rustling leaves or flowing water, often creates an atmosphere of peace and harmony that aligns with the idealized vision of Indigenous life as being in perfect balance with the environment. While this might appear to be a positive depiction, it can also oversimplify and romanticize Native relationships with nature, ignoring the complex realities of survival, resource management, and the impact of colonization on these practices. By presenting nature as a benign, guiding force, the film glosses over the struggles and adaptations Indigenous people had to make in response to environmental changes and colonial pressures. Further, the soundtrack, with its recurring motifs and themes, often underscores moments of cultural conflict and resolution. For example, when the English settlers arrive, the music shifts to more dissonant and aggressive tones, contrasting with the harmonious melodies associated with Pocahontas and her people. This musical dichotomy can be seen as reinforcing the Othering of both groups.

The settlers are portrayed as invaders through harsh, discordant sounds, while the Indigenous people are idealized through serene, melodic music. This contrast, while effective in storytelling, can also simplify the complex dynamics of colonization, reducing it to a binary opposition of good versus evil, nature versus civilization.

In conclusion, the music and sound in *Pocahontas* play a critical role in communicating and reinforcing the film's narrative, but they also reveal underlying eco-racist themes, tendencies to Other Native cultures, and a romanticized, ecocritical view of nature. The film's use of sound and music creates a sensory experience that guides the audience's emotions and perceptions, subtly shaping their understanding of the relationships between humans, nature, and culture.

5.2.1. The Sounds of Nature

Looking at various sounds in the film, this thesis suggests rich symbolism and thematic implications in their functions. Sounds created by the natural environment as well as by people are analyzed and interpreted by myself according to their purpose in a scene. Thereby, Othering and stereotyping in the context of eco-racism can be identified.

In one of the introduction scenes of the feature movie, the audience hears the blowing of a horn and sees a Native American with a conch shell in his hand. The sound immediately resonates with Indigenous culture and exoticism and thus creates Othering of the Native tribe. By creating the sound, the Native man gives a certain signal and communicates with the rest of the tribe. In the following scene, as observed while watching the film, the audience sees the arrival of chief Powhatan, which could be the message of the sound of the horn. I see the use of the conch shell as a horn functioning as a representation of the close relationship between Indigenous people and nature. The shell, a natural object, is transformed into a tool for communication, symbolizing the idea that Native Americans are in harmony with their environment and can use what nature provides in a functional and meaningful way. In particular, the shell horn serves as an auditory symbol that conveys a sense of the "primitive" or "exotic" to the audience.

By beginning the film with this sound, the filmmakers immediately signal to the audience that they are entering a world that is fundamentally different from their own, a world that is "Other."

This aligns with the concept of the Western gaze, where Indigenous cultures are often portrayed as mysterious, ancient, and fundamentally different from Western modernity. The sound of the shell horn, while culturally significant within the narrative, also functions as a cue that places Native Americans in a distinct, separate category from the presumably Western audience, emphasizing their Otherness. From an ecocritical perspective, the scene may also suggest an idealized view of Native people's connection to nature. The horn, derived from a natural object, contrasts with the more industrialized and technologically advanced means of communication that would be associated with the English settlers.

This dichotomy between natural and industrialized tools reinforces the notion that Indigenous people are closer to nature, while Westerners are associated with civilization and progress. This framing can contribute to eco-racist narratives by implying that Native cultures are static and inherently linked to a "primitive" past, whereas Western cultures are dynamic, progressive, and separate from nature. Finally, I interpret the act of using the shell as a horn as a symbol of Indigenous resistance and intra-community communication. The sound of the horn may be perceived as a call to action or a way to rally the community, symbolizing a sense of agency and autonomy. However, within the context of the broader narrative, this agency is often overshadowed by the dominant colonial storyline, which ultimately frames Native resistance as futile or subordinate to the inevitability of Western expansion.

Although the conch shell trumpet, also known as a conch shell horn or seashell horn, is a powerful tool for communication among Indigenous people, a sacred instrument for rituals, and a source of musical expression, it is rather unfit for the Disney film *Pocahontas*. The conch shells, particularly the large, vibrant Queen Conch shells as depicted in the film, are typically found in warmer, tropical waters, such as those in the Caribbean and parts of Florida. Hence, on the East Coast of the United States, where the English settlers landed, the water is much colder, making it an unsuitable environment for conch species that thrive in tropical climates.

The depiction of shells used as horns in *Pocahontas* is not only historically inaccurate but also serves to reinforce a narrative of Othering and exoticism. This inaccuracy is not just a minor oversight but rather a deliberate choice that contributes to the portrayal of Native Americans as fundamentally different, exotic, and primitive.

By showing a Native man using a conch shell as a horn, the film taps into a stereotypical image of Indigenous peoples as being inextricably linked to nature, using natural objects in ways that seem mysterious or novel to a Western audience. This choice reinforces the idea that Native Americans are part of a timeless, unchanging world that is separate from the modern, civilized world of the settlers. Consequently, this depiction feeds into a broader narrative of Othering, where Indigenous peoples are cast as the Other, strange and distant from the familiar norms of Western society.

Also, the use of the conch shell as a horn functions to homogenize Native cultures, measuring them all with the same yardstick. The film does not differentiate between the diverse cultures and practices of various Indigenous groups but instead creates a universal association with Native people as a monolithic group. I suggest that this portrayal ignores the rich diversity of Indigenous cultures and traditions across different regions and climates, simplifying them into a single, exoticized image that serves the narrative needs of the film. In addition to this, the use of the conch shell also subtly reinforces the Western gaze, where Indigenous peoples are depicted through a lens that emphasizes their differences from Western norms. The choice of a conch shell, an object that is unusual and exotic to the Western eye, serves to highlight the perceived primitiveness of the Native Americans, positioning them as part of a natural world that is both fascinating and alien to the settlers and the audience. Ultimately, the use of the conch shell as a horn in *Pocahontas* is not just a minor detail but a significant element that contributes to the film's broader themes of Othering, exoticism, and the homogenization of Native cultures. By presenting this inaccurate and stereotypical image, the film reinforces harmful narratives that diminish the complexity and diversity of Indigenous peoples, casting them as an undifferentiated Other defined primarily by their relationship to a natural world that is itself romanticized and idealized through the lens of Western colonialism.

This thesis implies that throughout the storyline of *Pocahontas*, the sound of the wind also plays a significant role as a symbol for guidance, wisdom, and the “wonders” of nature. Firstly, the wind functions as a mode of communication between Pocahontas and the natural world.

It is often portrayed as a messenger, carrying voices, guidance, and wisdom from the environment to Pocahontas. For example, when Pocahontas is faced with a decision or is uncertain about her path, the wind seems to offer her direction, often leading her to new insights or encounters.

This portrayal suggests that the natural world, and specifically the wind, holds an intrinsic connection to Indigenous wisdom and spirituality, implying that the environment itself is sentient and capable of guiding human actions. Thematically, the wind represents the voice of nature, an unseen but ever-present force that influences the course of events. Its role as a communicator between Pocahontas and nature aligns with ecocritical themes, emphasizing the idea that the natural world is active and participatory in the human narrative. However, this also ties into eco-racist themes, as it romanticizes and simplifies the relationship between indigenous people and their environment, suggesting that their knowledge and decisions are dictated by mystical or supernatural forces rather than by reasoned thought or human agency. Symbolically, I interpret the wind as an element often carrying the whispers of ancestors or the spirits, embodying the idea that Indigenous people are in tune with the voices of the past and the natural world. This connection is frequently portrayed as a positive, almost magical, attribute of Native culture, reinforcing the stereotype of the "noble savage" who lives in harmony with nature. However, this also serves to Other Indigenous characters, positioning them as fundamentally different from Western characters who rely on technology, science, and rational thought. The wind's guidance can be seen as both empowering and limiting, while it provides Pocahontas with direction, it also suggests that her agency is not fully her own, but rather an extension of the natural world's will. Moreover, the sound of the wind is often used to signal moments of change or pivotal decisions, symbolizing the shifting tides of fate and the inevitability of Pocahontas's journey towards a preordained destiny.

In sum, the sound of the wind in *Pocahontas* serves as a powerful symbol of communication, connection to nature, and ancestral wisdom. I suggest that it carries significant thematic weight, highlighting both the ecocritical perspective of nature as an active participant in human affairs and the eco-racist undertones of portraying Native people as mystical and otherworldly. The wind's role in the film underscores the tension between romanticizing Indigenous relationships with nature and perpetuating stereotypes that ultimately Other these characters, framing them as fundamentally different from the Western worldview.

In the scene where John Smith is leaving with the ship, the sound of the wind plays a crucial role as a tool for communication, embodying the emotional tension and the unspoken messages between the characters and the natural world. As the ship prepares to depart, the wind intensifies, swirling around Pocahontas and John Smith, creating a palpable sense of urgency and farewell. The wind in this scene acts almost as a carrier of unsaid words and emotions. In my interpretation, it serves as a non-verbal form of communication, reflecting the deep, unspoken connection between Pocahontas and John Smith. The wind's presence at this critical moment underscores the idea that their bond transcends spoken language, relying instead on the natural world to convey their feelings. As the wind picks up, it seems to echo the sorrow and loss felt by both characters, emphasizing the gravity of their separation. Further, the wind's role in this scene can also be seen as a symbolic representation of the forces of nature responding to human actions. The wind does not merely serve as background noise, it actively participates in the narrative, as if nature itself is mourning the departure or acknowledging the significance of the moment. This suggests a reciprocal relationship between the characters and the environment, where nature reflects and communicates the emotional states of the characters.

In *Pocahontas*, the sounds of nature, such as the conch shell trumpet and the wind, are key communicative elements that contribute to the film's themes. The conch shell, despite being historically inaccurate, is used to Other and exoticize Indigenous people, reinforcing stereotypes. The wind serves as an emotional and symbolic connection between Pocahontas and nature, especially in key moments like John Smith's departure.

However, these natural sounds also perpetuate eco-racist themes by romanticizing and oversimplifying the relationship between Native cultures and the environment.

5.2.2. *The Colors of the Wind*

The song *Colors of the Wind* in Disney's *Pocahontas* serves as a powerful mode of communication, conveying themes of environmentalism, cultural understanding, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Through the lyrics and melody, Pocahontas communicates her worldview to John Smith, challenging his Eurocentric perspective and his assumptions about the land and its people. As intended by the film producers, the song uses vivid imagery and metaphors, such as "painting with all the colors of the wind," to emphasize the idea that true understanding comes from embracing the natural world and respecting its intrinsic value. However, In *Colors of the Wind*, nature is depicted as something sacred and almost magical, which aligns with how Pocahontas and her people are portrayed as being in harmony with it. This reflects the Western gaze that views nature, and by extension Indigenous peoples, as the Other, something exotic and different from the Western norm. This exoticization reinforces a separation between the Western and Native worlds, suggesting that the latter is not only different but also fundamentally separate from the modern world.

Focusing on themes, the song provides several eco-racist aspects that can be identified within the scope of Othering, stereotyping, and processing Western perspectives. Firstly, the theme of possession and ownership is central to its critique of colonialism and eco-racism, yet it also subtly perpetuates the very stereotypes it seeks to dismantle. By examining this theme closely, the song reveals the complex ways in which it addresses, while simultaneously reinforcing, problematic ideas about land, nature, and Indigenous people. When Pocahontas sings, "You think you own whatever land you land on," she directly challenges John Smith's, and by extension, the colonizers' perspective that land can be owned, measured, and controlled. I suggest that this critique of the Western notion of land ownership confronts the idea that the earth is merely a commodity to be exploited.

However, while this line seeks to highlight the destructive nature of colonial attitudes, it also implicitly reinforces a binary opposition: the colonizers as possessors and the Indigenous people as non-possessors, or even as part of the land itself. With support of the second literature mentioned in this thesis, it can be said that this dichotomy between ownership and stewardship is further emphasized as Pocahontas' perspective is portrayed as one of stewardship rather than ownership, where the land is seen as a living entity to be respected and cared for, rather than a resource to be exploited.

While this perspective is indeed commendable, it also subtly implies that Native people are inherently different from Westerners in their relationship to the land. This, in turn, reinforces the idea of the Native American as the noble, eco-conscious Other, suggesting that Indigenous people are spiritually connected to the earth in a way that is inaccessible or alien to Westerners, thereby maintaining the exoticization of Native American culture. Moreover, by presenting the idea of land ownership as a distinctly Western concept that Pocahontas critiques, the song suggests that Indigenous people lack this understanding or have rejected it in favor of a more "primitive" or "natural" way of life. This characterization can be interpreted as infantilizing or patronizing, implying that Native Americans are unaware of or resistant to the complexities of modern economic systems. It subtly positions Western knowledge and systems as more advanced or sophisticated, even as it critiques their moral and environmental implications. The song's exploration of land ownership also touches on the deeper issue of how land is tied to identity. For the colonizers, land ownership is a source of power and identity, it defines their place in the world and their social status. Yet, for Pocahontas, the land is not something to be owned, but something that owns her and her people, shaping their identity and way of life. This portrayal underpins the idea that Indigenous identity is inextricably linked to the land in a way that Western identity is not, which can be seen as reductive. It suggests that Native American identity is static and tied to a specific place, while Western identity is dynamic and mobile, able to transcend geographical boundaries. Further, the rejection of ownership in favor of stewardship aligns Pocahontas with the "noble savage" trope, which romanticizes Native Americans as pure, uncorrupted, and living in harmony with nature. I suggest that this trope, while seemingly positive, is ultimately dehumanizing because it denies the complexity and diversity of Indigenous cultures.

It presents Native Americans as living in a timeless, unchanging state of nature, in contrast to the dynamic, progressive Western societies. This not only Otherizes Indigenous people but also freezes them in an idealized past, ignoring the realities of their lives, both historically and in contemporary contexts. While *Colors of the Wind* attempts to subvert the colonial narrative by critiquing the idea of land as a commodity, it inadvertently reinforces the very dichotomies it seeks to challenge. As analyzed by me, the portrayal of Pocahontas as a guardian of the earth, in contrast to the colonizers who seek to exploit it, simplifies the complexities of Indigenous and colonial interactions with the land.

This simplification can obscure the historical realities of Native land management practices, which were often sophisticated and involved forms of territoriality and resource control that do not fit neatly into the binary of ownership versus stewardship.

Secondly, the metaphor of the "Wolf Cry" serves as a theme of the song as well, suggesting a problematic closeness between nature and the Native Americans. The wolf, often symbolizing wilderness and untamed nature in both Indigenous cultures and Western imagination, serves as a bridge between the human and non-human world. This metaphor also highlights the concept of communication beyond the human realm, suggesting that true understanding and harmony with nature require one to attune to its voices, to the cries of creatures like the wolf, who are seen as guardians or embodiments of the wild. Still, within the context of eco-racism, this metaphor can also be interpreted as reinforcing the idea of the "noble savage", the Native person as one who is inextricably linked to the natural world, yet in a way that is romanticized and oversimplified. The wolf cry becomes not just a symbol of nature but also a symbol of the Native person as inherently wild, primitive, and in tune with a world that is often positioned as opposite to the civilized, rational world of Western society.

Moreover, this metaphor functions to both elevate and diminish Indigenous knowledge. On one hand, it suggests a depth of understanding that Western characters in the film are portrayed as lacking. On the other hand, I would say that it subtly reinforces the Western gaze that sees this knowledge as mystical and exotic rather than as legitimate, rational, and complex. The "Wolf Cry" metaphor, therefore, serves as a double-edged sword, celebrating Native connection to nature while also othering it, positioning it as something distant from the Western experience and thus less accessible or valid.

Additionally, the use of the wolf in this metaphor taps into Western fears and fascinations with the wilderness and the wild. The wolf, often feared in Western folklore as a dangerous predator, here is recontextualized as a teacher, a voice of wisdom that the Western listener is invited to hear and understand. This invites the audience to reconsider their own perceptions of nature and the wild, challenging them to listen to voices they may have previously ignored or feared. Yet, this also perpetuates the notion of the Indigenous person as someone who can mediate between the human and the wild, someone who is not fully of the civilized world but instead occupies a liminal space between it and nature.

Thirdly, In *Pocahontas*, the use of color as a theme is integral to both the visual storytelling and the film's broader narrative, particularly in the song *Colors of the Wind*. Through this song, color transcends its usual visual function and becomes a powerful mode of communication, expressing complex ideas about nature, identity, and the relationship between different cultures. The theme of color is utilized to bridge the gap between Pocahontas's world and John Smith's, while simultaneously highlighting the stark contrasts between them. First and foremost, the reference to "colors" in the song functions metaphorically to represent the richness and diversity of nature. Pocahontas sings of colors not just as visual experiences but as embodiments of life itself. It is a symbol of the living, breathing world that cannot be owned or commodified, a world that is experienced through feeling, seeing, and being part of it rather than through domination. This contrast is starkly communicated to John Smith and, by extension, to the audience, emphasizing the difference in how nature is perceived by Indigenous cultures versus Western colonizers.

Likewise, the use of color in the song extends to the depiction of cultural differences. Pocahontas challenges John Smith's limited perspective by asking him to "paint with all the colors of the wind." This phrase is not merely about the literal act of painting, rather, it symbolizes the need to embrace the full spectrum of human and natural experience, to understand and appreciate the diversity of life.

The wind, often invisible and intangible, becomes colorful in this context, suggesting that understanding and communication require seeing beyond the obvious, beyond what is traditionally valued in Western culture. I suggest that the song uses color as a linguistic and symbolic tool to advocate for a broader, more inclusive understanding of the world, one that recognizes the value in what is unseen and unacknowledged. In addition, the song employs color to critique the Western gaze. While John Smith views the land as something to be subdued and utilized, Pocahontas views it as a vibrant, living entity, rich with colors that symbolize life, connection, and balance. The contrast between Smith's monochromatic view of the world, where everything is either black or white, owned or unowned, and Pocahontas's multi-colored perspective serves to highlight the limitations of the Western gaze.

The film uses color not only to celebrate Native American perspectives but also to question the ways in which Western culture has traditionally dismissed or misunderstood these perspectives. Also, as this thesis suggests, color in *Colors of the Wind* functions as a mode of communication that transcends language. Through the imagery of colors, Pocahontas communicates ideas and emotions that words alone cannot convey. The song becomes a form of dialogue between cultures, with color as the central medium. Hence, it invites the audience to experience the world through Pocahontas's eyes, to see the beauty and complexity of nature as something that cannot be fully captured through Western concepts of ownership and control.

Lastly, the song illustrates the theme of anthropomorphization of nature by giving voice to the elements of nature, allowing them to "speak" through Pocahontas. The wind, the rivers, and even the animals are portrayed as communicative beings with their own perspectives and wisdom. This personification of nature serves to emphasize the idea that the natural world is alive and interconnected, a central tenet of many Native American worldviews. Nevertheless, the way the film anthropomorphizes these elements also might simplify and universalize these beliefs, potentially obscuring the diversity of Indigenous cultures and their unique relationships with nature. By presenting nature as a monolithic entity that shares a single, human-like consciousness, the film risks homogenizing the rich tapestry of Native ecological knowledge into a simplistic, easily digestible narrative for Western audiences.

The song also employs anthropomorphization to make complex ecological and philosophical concepts accessible to a broad audience, particularly young viewers. By attributing human-like qualities to natural elements such as the wind, rivers, and animals, I suggest that the song bridges the gap between Indigenous worldviews and Western sensibilities. This technique enables audiences unfamiliar with Native perspectives to engage with the idea of nature as a living, sentient entity. However, while this approach facilitates understanding, it can also oversimplify and distort Indigenous beliefs, reducing them to a single, generalized interpretation that may not accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of Native American relationships with nature. Finally, the song uses anthropomorphized nature as a pedagogical tool to teach values of respect, empathy, and interconnectedness. By personifying nature and giving it a voice, *Colors of the Wind* seeks to instill a sense of moral responsibility and environmental stewardship in its audience.

In Disney's *Pocahontas*, the song *Colors of the Wind* functions as a crucial communicative tool, highlighting themes of environmental respect, cultural insight, and the interconnectedness of all living things. Pocahontas uses its lyrics and vivid imagery to challenge John Smith's Eurocentric perspective on land ownership, advocating for a view of nature as something to be revered rather than exploited. The song critiques Western commodification of land but inadvertently upholds certain stereotypes by contrasting Indigenous land stewardship with Western notions of ownership. The "Wolf Cry" metaphor romanticizes and exoticizes Native people, portraying them as inherently linked to nature while positioning them as fundamentally different from Western norms. Additionally, the theme of color in the song critiques Western perceptions of nature and promotes a broader, more inclusive worldview. Nevertheless, the song's anthropomorphization of nature simplifies complex Indigenous beliefs, potentially distorting their diverse ecological knowledge. Overall, while *Colors of the Wind* encourages environmental and cultural appreciation, it also perpetuates some stereotypes and simplifies Native perspectives.

5.2.1. *Savages*

As interpreted by myself with support of the secondary literature, the song *Savages* in Disney's *Pocahontas* serves as a powerful, albeit problematic, portrayal of mutual hostility between the English settlers and the Native Americans. The lyrics reveal deep-seated prejudices and biases that reflect eco-racist attitudes, where the natural environment plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of Indigenous people.

When the Native Americans are referred to as "filthy little heathens," this language reflects the settlers' view that living in close harmony with nature is synonymous with being dirty or uncivilized. The settlers, coming from a European background where cities and cleanliness were associated with civilization, perceive the Natives' connection to the wilderness as a mark of their inferiority. This perception equates their lack of urbanization with a lack of humanity, further demonstrated by the dehumanizing phrase "barely even human." Here, the song suggests that the Natives' closeness to nature, which the English settlers view as untamed and wild, makes them appear less than human, aligning them more with animals than with civilized society.

Even more, the song presents a disturbing parallel between the biases held by the settlers and those held by Powhatan and his people. As Powhatan denounces the colonists in a similarly derogatory manner, the film appears to equate both sides' prejudices, suggesting a moral equivalence between them. This comparison downplays the impact of Western racism and eco-racism, as it implies that both groups are equally at fault in their Othering of one another. By doing so, the song risks trivializing the real historical consequences of colonialism and the tragic fate that befell Native Americans. The use of the word "savage" by both groups underscores this problematic equivalence, as it implies that both sides are equally prone to dehumanizing the other. Nevertheless, I suggest that this overlooks the power dynamics at play, where the colonists' views were part of a larger system of oppression and exploitation. By presenting both sides as equally culpable in their racism, the song dilutes the specific harm done by colonial attitudes and actions.

In contrast to this hostility, Pocahontas seeks guidance from the Earth, highlighting her connection to nature as a source of wisdom and strength. Still, in the context of the song, this connection is overshadowed by the broader portrayal of nature as a factor that diminishes the Natives in the eyes of the settlers. I argue that the song thus becomes a complex and troubling reflection on how eco-racism and cultural bias are intertwined, ultimately leading to a narrative that, while attempting to show both sides of the conflict, risks minimizing the real historical injustices faced by Indigenous peoples.

The song touches on several significant themes, each contributing to the narrative's portrayal of conflict, prejudice, and cultural misunderstanding. By using the term "savages" to describe each other, both sides engage in a rhetorical strategy that denies the other's full personhood. This not only fosters hostility but also reflects a broader pattern of mutual dehumanization rooted in colonial discourse. The settlers call the Natives "filthy little heathens" and "barely even human," reflecting deep-seated racism and the belief in the superiority of Western civilization. I suggest that this theme highlights the destructive power of racism and the ease with which it can lead to violence and conflict. The song also explores the theme of mutual hostility, where both groups view the other as a threat to their existence.

The lyrics express fear, hatred, and a sense of impending doom, as each side prepares for war against what they perceive as a monstrous enemy. This theme underscores the tragic consequences of misunderstanding and fear, showing how it can escalate into violence and warfare. Another theme present in *Savages* is eco-racism, where the Natives are depicted as being inferior because of their close relationship with nature. The settlers' disdain for the Natives is partly based on their perception that living in the wilderness makes them "uncivilized" and "primitive." This theme highlights the cultural biases that equate urbanization and separation from nature with superiority, while viewing those who live in harmony with nature as lesser or backward. Further, the song emphasizes the deep cultural rift between the English settlers and the Native Americans. Both sides are depicted as holding onto stereotypes and biases, with little effort to understand the other's way of life. This theme illustrates the tragic consequences of cultural misunderstanding, where differences are not explored or respected, but rather used as justifications for conflict. *Savages* also touches on the theme of the cycle of violence, where hatred and fear on both sides fuel a never-ending spiral of aggression.

The song suggests that violence begets violence, and that both groups are caught in a destructive loop that dehumanizes them both and leads to inevitable tragedy. Finally, the song presents a theme of moral equivalence, where both the settlers and the Natives are shown as equally guilty of prejudice and dehumanization. This theme is controversial because it downplays the historical reality of colonialism and the power imbalance between the two groups, suggesting that both sides are equally at fault, which can obscure the specific injustices faced by the Native Americans.

6. Results and Conclusion

This analysis reveals how the film's depiction of Indigenous characters and their connection to nature plays a key role in reinforcing the concept of Othering.

It marginalizes Native perspectives by depicting them as exotic and less advanced, while also reinforcing the Western gaze that positions Indigenous knowledge as mystical and inferior. Moreover, the analysis highlights how the film's romanticization of the Native connection to nature oversimplifies and distorts the complex realities of environmental practices, ultimately perpetuating eco-racist themes.

This analysis of the scenes on Pocahontas interacting with Grandmother Willow from Disney's *Pocahontas* reveals how the film perpetuates eco-racism by romanticizing and essentializing Indigenous knowledge and relationships with nature. By depicting Grandmother Willow as a mystical guide and Pocahontas as reliant on spiritual rather than rational guidance, the film reinforces harmful stereotypes that Native Americans are inherently connected to nature but lack technological understanding and rationality. This framing aligns with eco-racist narratives that position Indigenous knowledge as inferior to Western rationality. Additionally, the portrayal of Pocahontas's confusion over the compass, which she sees as a mystical spinning arrow, underscores the idea that Indigenous people are naive or less advanced compared to Western characters. This scene suggests that their spirituality and connection to nature are insufficient without Western technology, further reinforcing the superiority of Western knowledge.

Pocahontas' interactions with animals show how the film subtly reinforces eco-racist themes through its portrayal of Indigenous characters, animals, and their interactions with the environment. By examining scenes where Pocahontas and animals like Meeko and Flit engage with John Smith, the analysis uncovers the ways in which their relationships with nature are romanticized and trivialized. The portrayal of Pocahontas's harmonious interactions with animals, while meant to highlight her connection to nature, oversimplifies and exoticizes Indigenous ecological knowledge, aligning with the Western gaze that tends to view Native cultures as mystical yet less rational.

Moreover, John Smith's condescending behavior toward Meeko, and his dismissal of Flit's resistance, reflects a colonial mindset that positions Western knowledge and technology as superior. These interactions underscore a narrative where Indigenous characters and their environment are seen as naive and in need of Western intervention, perpetuating stereotypes of Native inferiority. The results demonstrate how *Pocahontas* contributes to eco-racism by framing Indigenous characters and their environments within a Western hierarchical perspective that marginalizes and exoticizes their knowledge and practices. The insights gained highlight the importance of critically examining popular media for subtle forms of racism and colonialism, revealing how even well-intentioned portrayals can reinforce harmful stereotypes and undermine the complexity of cultures.

In *Pocahontas*, the river is depicted as a central element of nature, symbolizing the deep connection between Indigenous people and their environment. The characters' interaction with the river suggests a view of nature as animated and intentional, treating the river as an active presence rather than a passive landscape. Pocahontas and her father, Powhatan, engage with the river as if it were an active participant in their world, reflecting broader themes of environmental harmony and conflict. However, while the river initially serves as a symbol of natural wisdom and freedom, it is ultimately co-opted to reinforce traditional social structures. Powhatan's dialogue about the river underscores how the community's knowledge is often romanticized yet subordinated to human concerns. He compares the river's supposed steadiness to the role he envisions for Pocahontas within the tribe, using this analogy to legitimize his expectations for her to conform to societal norms. However, Pocahontas's realization that the river is not steady, indeed, it is ever-changing, leads her to question her father's authority and reject the imposed social order.

This shift highlights a critical tension in the film: while the river is initially portrayed as a source of wisdom, it is ultimately used to justify human decisions, reducing its role to that of a passive symbol rather than an active force. This dynamic is further explored in the scene where Grandmother Willow uses ripples in the water to teach Pocahontas and John Smith about the consequences of their actions. Here, nature is again depicted as a tool to explain and validate human behavior. Although Grandmother Willow is portrayed as a wise, all-knowing figure connected to nature, her wisdom is presented in a way that simplifies and diminishes the complexity of Indigenous ecological knowledge. The ripples serve as a visual metaphor for interconnectedness, but the film's failure to provide a deeper explanation or context for this symbolism reflects a Western tendency to oversimplify Native wisdom, reducing it to mere moral lessons rather than recognizing it as a sophisticated system of knowledge. The film's portrayal of nature and relationships with it can be seen as a subtle form of eco-racism. By reducing the river and other natural elements to passive symbols used to support human narratives, the film reinforces stereotypes that Indigenous peoples are primitive and overly dependent on nature. This framing aligns with colonial perspectives that view Native American cultures as needing assimilation into Western norms. Moreover, I argue that the film's tendency to depict nature as a backdrop for human concerns, rather than as an active agent with its own intrinsic value, reflects a broader pattern of eco-racism where the environmental knowledge and practices of Indigenous peoples are marginalized. The analysis of *Pocahontas* reveals the dual role the river plays in the narrative, as a symbol of both Native wisdom and Western domination. While the film does offer moments of resistance, where Pocahontas asserts her autonomy and challenges colonial constructs, it simultaneously perpetuates eco-racist views by simplifying and romanticizing Indigenous connections to nature. The way the river and surrounding landscape are shown—as objects to support the human story, reveals a deeper neglect of ecological agency, pointing to the importance of more inclusive and accurate environmental narratives. Such representations should acknowledge the complexity and agency of both nature and the peoples who interact with it, moving beyond the simplistic and often harmful tropes that have dominated Western narratives.

Examining the sounds of nature, this analysis reveals that *Pocahontas* uses natural sounds like the conch shell trumpet and the wind to symbolize Indigenous culture and reinforce themes of eco-racism. The conch shell, inaccurately portrayed, serves to Other and exoticize Native Americans, suggesting they are inseparable from nature and reinforcing stereotypes of them as "primitive" and fundamentally different from Western characters. The wind, while symbolizing a deep connection between Pocahontas and the environment, also romanticizes and simplifies Native relationships with nature, presenting them as guided by mystical forces rather than rational thought. This portrayal contributes to an eco-racist narrative by depicting the Powhatan tribe as static and eternally linked to an idealized natural world, contrasting with the Western association of progress and civilization. A key insight gained is how the film subtly perpetuates eco-racism by using natural sounds to reinforce the stereotype of the "noble savage" and the Western gaze. This analysis fills a research gap by focusing on the symbolic and thematic roles of sound in perpetuating these narratives, an area often overlooked in critiques of the film. It highlights the need to critically examine not just the visual portrayal of Indigenous characters but also the auditory elements that contribute to their Othering. The findings suggest that the film's use of sound plays a significant role in constructing a simplified, exoticized image of Indigenous culture, which aligns with broader patterns of eco-racism.

The analysis of *Colors of the Wind* from Disney's *Pocahontas* shows the complex ways in which the song communicates themes of environmentalism, cultural understanding, and the interconnectedness of all life while also exposing underlying eco-racist tendencies. The song critiques Western views of land as a commodity, contrasting them with Native perspectives of stewardship. Despite its apparent effort to challenge harmful clichés, the film ends up presenting Native Americans as idealized guardians of nature, which ultimately perpetuates a simplistic and stereotypical image. The song's use of metaphors, such as the "Wolf Cry" and the vivid imagery of colors, serves to critique Western attitudes but also subtly upholds a binary opposition between Native and Western identities, suggesting a fundamental difference that exoticizes Indigenous culture. Additionally, the anthropomorphization of nature, while making Native American ecological knowledge accessible to a Western audience, risks oversimplifying and distorting the diversity of Indigenous beliefs.

The insights gained from this analysis underscore the tension between the song's environmental message and its reinforcement of cultural stereotypes. While it promotes respect for nature and cultural diversity, it also perpetuates problematic portrayals of Native Americans as inherently different from Western norms. This analysis addresses a gap in current scholarship by showing how well-meaning media can unintentionally reinforce eco-racist narratives, and emphasizes the importance of representing Indigenous voices more thoughtfully in mainstream storytelling. The song *Savages* offers a stark depiction of the hostility between English settlers and Native Americans, revealing deep-seated eco-racist attitudes. The lyrics reflect the settlers' view of the Native Americans' close relationship with nature as a sign of inferiority, equating their lack of urbanization with a lack of humanity. Terms like "filthy little heathens" and "barely even human" underscore this dehumanization, suggesting that the Natives' closeness to the wilderness renders them less than civilized. The song also presents a troubling moral equivalence, depicting both the settlers and the Native Americans as equally prejudiced. This portrayal risks trivializing the real impacts of colonialism, as it equates the biases of the colonizers with those of the Powhatans, thereby downplaying the systemic oppression and exploitation experienced by Native Americans. By implying that both sides are equally culpable in their racism, the song dilutes the historical realities of power imbalance and colonial violence. Moreover, while Pocahontas's connection to nature is portrayed positively as a source of wisdom and strength, I argue that this positive view is overshadowed by the broader portrayal of nature as something that diminishes the Natives in the eyes of the settlers. The song's depiction of eco-racism, where the Natives are seen as inferior due to their harmonious relationship with nature, reveals how cultural biases intertwine with environmental perceptions. Overall, *Savages* highlights themes of dehumanization, mutual hostility, eco-racism, cultural rift, and the cycle of violence, while presenting a controversial moral equivalence.

Pocahontas's interactions with the natural world, especially with Grandmother Willow, the river, and local animals, are central to the film. Although these scenes emphasize her closeness to nature, they also reinforce a one-dimensional view of Indigenous people as naturally spiritual and environmentally wise. This approach reinforces the Western gaze and Othering by portraying these relationships as exotic and fundamentally different from Western norms. The film also uses the sounds of nature to enhance its themes. The wind's sound and the blowing of a seashell horn symbolize the deep connection between Pocahontas and the natural world, illustrating her role as a mediator between nature and humans. Her interactions with Grandmother Willow, animals, and the river further emphasize this bond, suggesting a harmonious relationship with nature. However, these elements also contribute to a simplified and idealized image of Native Americans, reinforcing the Western gaze and the trope of the "noble savage." The analyses of *Colors of the Wind* and *Savages* from Disney's *Pocahontas* highlight how nature and Indigenous cultures are portrayed, revealing both insightful and problematic elements. In *Colors of the Wind*, the vivid imagery and metaphors challenge Western notions of land ownership and exploitation, emphasizing a romanticized view of the Indigenous relationship with nature. This portrayal aligns with the "ecological Indian" trope, depicting Native Americans as inherently mystical and spiritually connected to nature. Such representation reinforces eco-racist perspectives by simplifying and exoticizing Native cultures. Similarly, *Savages* portrays mutual hostility and prejudice between English settlers and Native Americans, presenting both sides as equally dehumanizing. This approach risks minimizing the historical impact of colonialism by equating both sides' biases and overlooking the power imbalances that defined their interactions.

This thesis explores how these representations question dominant Western narratives, while also opening space for more inclusive and diverse viewpoints. By scrutinizing how historical facts and myths are represented in *Pocahontas*, the analysis seeks to question and critique mainstream portrayals that perpetuate stereotypes. The aim is not to dismiss the film entirely, but to draw attention to the ways it may unintentionally support simplified ideas about Indigenous peoples and their connection to nature, while encouraging more thoughtful portrayals.

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8. Appendix

Excerpts from *The Generell Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624):

“Pocahontas with her attendants brought him [Smith] so much provision that saved many of their lives, that else for all this had starved with hunger.” (Smith, ch. 2)

“During the time of two or three years, she next under God, was still the instrument to preserve this colony from death, famine, and utter confusion.” (Smith, ch. 10)

“Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, was taken prisoner; and being well instructed in the Christian faith, was baptized with the name Rebecca.” (Smith, ch. 5)

“About the last of April, followed Pocahontas’s marriage with Mr. Rolfe, which made her become very formal and civil after our English manner.” (Smith, ch. 7)

At his entrance before the King, all the people gaue a great shout. The Queene of Appamatuck was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, instead of a Towell to dry them: having feasted him after the best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could layd hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs to beate out his brains, Pocahontas the Kings dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevaile, got his head in her arms, and laid her owne upon his to saue him from death. (Smith, ch. 3)

“Her marriage with Mr. Rolfe, whom she dearly loved, and by whom she had a child, made peace and friendship between her father and the Colony, which endured till her death.” (Smith, ch. 9)

Excerpts from *Letter to Sir Thomas Dale (1614)*:

“It is Pocahontas to whom my hearty and best thoughts are, and have a long time been entangled, and enthralled in so intricate a labyrinth, that I was even awearied to unwind myself thereout. But Almighty God, who never faileth his, no not in greatest extremities, hath opened the gate and led me by the hand that I might plainly see and discern the safe path, which I humbly pray to make me thankful for, and forever to preserve me his servant.” (Rolfe 61-68)²

“Nor am I in so desperate an estate that I regard not what becomes of me; nor am I so void of friends, nor mean in birth, but have reason to obtain a match of greater wealth ... yet for the good of this plantation, for the honor of our country, for the glory of God, for my own salvation ... it is this alliance which I must seek.” (Rolfe 61-68)

“It will be a tie of surety and friendship between her father and us ... whereby the better and sooner may we come to effect the conversion of that people to the true knowledge of God, and to assist our long desired project for the good of the country and ourselves.” (Rolfe 61-68)

“Let therefore this my well-advised protestation be acceptable before the Almighty God, wherein I protest that my chiefest endeavors are to strive with all my power of body and mind, in the undertaking of so mighty a matter, so to walk as to bring a glory to him for his mercy, and to nourish the true knowledge of him, and his fear in the heart of this barbarous nation.” (Rolfe 61-68)

“For she hath a great spirit and is very valiant, and hath been accustomed to show much respect to our people. She doth not only possess herself with a great spirit and a strong passion of affection, but also with a great strength of judgment and wisdom, as appears by her constant and dutiful perseverance in the love she hath openly professed unto me.” (Rolfe 61-68)

² Transcription Source: Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606–1700*, revised edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 270–274. From Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia, and the Success of the Affaires There till the 18 of June 1614* (London, 1615), 61–68.

Excerpts from *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia* (1615):

“Pocahontas, being thus detained, was used with extraordinary care and kindness, and before long, began to see her father’s treacheries, to forsake her country idolatry, and embrace the Christian faith, and was accordingly baptized and called Rebecca, being newly instructed by our Minister, Master Alexander Withaker. Shortly after, she was married to an English gentleman of good understanding, Master John Rolfe, by whom she had a child.” (Hamor, ch. 7)

“her father’s inveterate hatred against us might by no means be appeased, notwithstanding that many were the diligent laborers of the worthy gentleman Master John Rolfe, but that through her marriage, we gained such favor in his sight as we were, by his means, comforted, relieved, and supplied in our extreme wants, and that peace and commerce were concluded and maintained between us.” (Hamor, ch. 10)

“The country itself is large and great assuredly, though as yet, no exact discovery thereof can be truly made. It is full of woods, and those very thick and tall, great meadows, and goodly pastures, full of timber and trees of all sorts to build ships and boats. It is full of minerals, plenty of springs and fresh streams, fine rivers, and great running brooks, and most pleasant fountains.” (Hamor, ch. 2)

“The natives are very skillful in managing their grounds, in planting maize, and in ordering and dressing their gardens and orchards. They know the season and times to plant and gather, and they have a perfect understanding of the nature of the soil and the climate, which is temperate and very healthful.” (Hamor, ch. 1)

Transcripts from *Pocahontas*:

Scene 1:

SMITH. We've been improving the lives of savages all over the world. (Pocahontas 00:37:06 – 00:37:08)

Scene 2:

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Is that my Pocahontas?

POCAHONTAS. Grandmother Willow, I need to talk to you.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Good morning, child. I was hoping you'd visit today.

Oh, wow! Your mother's necklace.

POCAHONTAS. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. My father wants me to marry Kocoum.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Kocoum? But he's so serious.

POCAHONTAS. I know. My father thinks it's the right path for me, but lately I've been having this dream and I think it's ...

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Oh, a dream! Let's hear all about it.

animals cheering

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Quiet! QUIET! ... Now child you were saying?

POCAHONTAS. Well, I'm running through the woods and then, right there in front of me is an arrow. As I look at it, it starts to spin.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. A spinning arrow. How unusual.

POCAHONTAS. Yes! It spins faster and faster and faster until suddenly, it stops.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Hmm. Well, it seems to me, this spinning arrow is pointing you down your path.

POCAHONTAS. But Grandmother Willow, what is my path? How am I ever going to find it?

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Haha. Your mother asked me the very same question.

POCAHONTAS. She did? What did you tell her?

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. I told her to listen. All around you are spirits, child.

They live in the earth, the water, the sky. If you listen, they will guide you.

POCAHONTAS. I hear the wind!

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Yes. What is it telling you?

POCAHONTAS. I don't understand. (Pocahontas 00:14:53 – 00:16:43)

Scene 3:

JOHN SMITH. Hey! Well, you're a strange looking fellow. You hungry? There you go. It's a biscuit. It's food. Well, sort of.

Meeko eating the biscuit with joy

JOHN SMITH. You like it, eh? Well, try eating it for four months straight.

Meeko waving at Pocahontas who hides in the bushes

JOHN SMITH. You've got a friend back there?

John Smith approaches the bushes and Flit comes out attacking him

JOHN SMITH. Hey! What! Watch out! Look out!

THOMAS. John! You better get down here! The Governor's coming ashore!

JOHN SMITH. Alright, alright. I'm leaving.

Meeko continues eating and Pocahontas remains unnoticed (Pocahontas 00:20:47 – 00:21:44)

Scene 4:

Flit chirping angrily at John Smith

JOHN SMITH. Yeah, I remember you.

POCAHONTAS. Flit doesn't like strangers.

JOHN SMITH. But I'm not a stranger anymore. Hm, stubborn little fellow, isn't he?

POCAHONTAS. Very stubborn.

Flit sticking out his tongue towards John Smith and smirking

JOHN SMITH. Hey!

Meeko running away with John Smith's compass

POCAHONTAS. Meeko! Come back here.

JOHN SMITH. Don't worry. He can't hurt it.

Meeko banging the compass against rock

JOHN SMITH. Hey! What are you doing?

POCAHONTAS. Meeko, bring that back!

JOHN SMITH. No, it's alright. He can keep it. Call it a gift. (Pocahontas 00:35:50 – 00:36:16)

Scene 5:

POWHATAN. Pocahontas, come with me. You are the daughter of the chief. It is time to take your place among our people. Even the wild mountain stream must someday join the big river.

Powhatan points to the river and sings

POWHATAN. As the river cuts his path, though the river's proud and strong.

He will choose the smoothest course, that's why rivers live so long. They're steady, as the steady beating drum.

Your mother wore this for our wedding. It was her dream to see you wear it at your own. It suits you.

POCAHONTAS. He wants me to be steady. Like the river.

Pocahontas looking in the water and two beavers appear

POCAHONTAS. But it's not steady at all. (Pocahontas 00:11:22 – 00:12:20)

Scene 6:

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Now then, there's something I want to show you.

Look!

Uses one of her branches to create ripples in the water

POCAHONTAS. The ripples.

JOHN SMITH. What about them?

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. So small at first, then look how they grow. But
someone has to start them.

JOHN SMITH. They're not going to listen to us.

GRANDMOTHER WILLOW. Young man, sometimes the right path is not the
easiest one. Don't you see? Only when the fighting stops, can you two be
together.

JOHN SMITH. Alright. Let's go talk to your father. (Pocahontas 00:54:56 –
00:55:34)

9. Abstracts

9.1. English Abstract

Considering that movies of the Hollywood film industry have a great impact on cultural perceptions, this thesis attempts to shed light on potentially eco-racist themes in the Disney film *Pocahontas*. Native American studies and eco-critical studies suggest that the movie romanticizes a “noble savage” narrative and depicts nature as a mystical, almost sentient force through the character Grandmother Willow. This portrayal invokes stereotypes of Native Americans being inherently connected to the Earth in a mystical way, which is referred to as the “myth of the ecological Indian”. Furthermore, critics have highlighted the oversimplification of complex themes like colonization, environmental stewardship, and intercultural relationships. Although the movie does not advocate visible racism, unlike *Peter Pan* and others, this thesis suggests concealed eco-racist themes existing in the film *Pocahontas*. Such eco-racist themes are revealed by analyzing how the depicted Native Americans interact with nature as well as non-human beings and what modes of communication they use. Since music is one way of interaction in the film, songs and sounds are also examined in this context. The analysis of this thesis aims at understanding eco-racist themes and how Europeanization and Hollywood film techniques as well as the contemporary styles of the movie industry create a representation of the colonized as the naturalized Other. These aspects are examined by using an eco-critical lens and analyzing scenes in which Indigenous people interact with nature and non-human beings. Here, the thesis focuses on music, sounds, and dialogues, which represent eco-racist themes and stereotypes. The film analysis is supported by theories from Native American studies about Otherness, eco-racism, and ecocriticism. Furthermore, theories from film and media studies are cited which critique the depiction of Indigenous peoples in the Hollywood film industry and comment on the Europeanization of Indigenous characters. These discussions underline the importance of critically examining media representations, especially in the context of Indigenous cultures and environmental themes and being mindful of potentially harmful tropes and narratives.

Keywords: *Pocahontas*, eco-racist themes, ecocriticism, Otherness, “The Noble Savage”

9.2. German Abstract

Angeichts der Tatsache, dass Filme der Hollywood-Filmindustrie einen großen Einfluss auf kulturelle Wahrnehmungen haben, versucht diese Arbeit, potenziell öko-rassistische Themen im Disney-Film *Pocahontas* zu beleuchten. Studien zu den amerikanischen Ureinwohnern und ökokritische Untersuchungen deuten darauf hin, dass der Film ein romantisierendes „Edler Wilder“-Narrativ fördert und die Natur durch die Figur der Großmutter Weide als eine mystische und fühlende Kraft darstellt. Diese Darstellung ruft Stereotype hervor, dass amerikanische Ureinwohner auf eine mystische Weise von Natur aus mit der Erde verbunden seien, was als „Mythos vom ökologischen Indianer“ bezeichnet wird. Darüber hinaus haben Kritiker die Vereinfachung komplexer Themen wie Kolonialisierung, Umweltverantwortung und interkulturelle Beziehungen hervorgehoben. Obwohl der Film keinen sichtbaren Rassismus propagiert, im Gegensatz zu Filmen wie *Peter Pan*, schlägt diese Arbeit vor, dass versteckte öko-rassistische Themen im Film *Pocahontas* existieren.

Diese öko-rassistischen Themen werden durch die Analyse der Art und Weise aufgedeckt, wie die dargestellten Ureinwohner mit der Natur sowie mit nicht-menschlichen Wesen interagieren und welche Kommunikationsmodi sie verwenden. Da Musik im Film eine Form der Interaktion darstellt, werden in diesem Zusammenhang auch Lieder und Klänge untersucht. Die Analyse dieser Arbeit zielt darauf ab, öko-rassistische Themen zu verstehen und wie die Europäisierung und Hollywood-Filmtechniken sowie die zeitgenössischen Stile der Filmindustrie eine Darstellung der Kolonialiserten als das naturalisierte „Andere“ schaffen. Diese Aspekte werden durch eine ökokritische Linse untersucht und durch die Analyse von Szenen, in denen indigene Völker mit der Natur und nicht-menschlichen Wesen interagieren. Dabei konzentriert sich die Arbeit auf Musik, Klänge und Dialoge, die öko-rassistische Themen und Stereotypen repräsentieren. Die Filmanalyse wird durch Theorien aus den Studien zu amerikanischen Ureinwohnern über „Otherness“, Öko-Rassismus und Ökokritik unterstützt.

Darüber hinaus werden Theorien aus der Film- und Medienwissenschaft zitiert, die die Darstellung indigener Völker in der Hollywood-Filmindustrie kritisieren und die Europäisierung indigener Charaktere kommentieren.

Diese Diskussionen unterstreichen die Bedeutung einer kritischen Prüfung von Medienrepräsentationen, insbesondere im Kontext indigener Kulturen und Umweltthemen, und mahnen zur Achtsamkeit gegenüber potenziell schädlichen Tropen und Narrativen.

Schlagwörter: Pocahontas, öko-rassistische Themen, Ökokritik, Otherness, „Der edle Wilde“