

## **Between Gender and History: The Feminine and the Masculine in Disney Princess Animated Films**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Is the distinction between man and woman natural or is it a social construction? Bourdieu (2002), when discussing the differentiation between the sexes, points out that the anatomical opposition between the male and female bodies would have been used to justify and naturalize the different social roles attributed to men and women. When we think about history, an inevitable element over time is always present: transformations. The relationships established between the male and the female are no different. These relations were many until the twentieth century and it is at that moment that changes are perceived concerning the roles assigned to both genders. The aim of this work was to analyze the transformations of the feminine and the masculine in the Disney princess films during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The methodology used was bibliographic research, with Bourdieu (2002), Chartier (2002) and Castells (2006) being the main references. Two moments of the representation of the female and the male were observed in the analyzed animations: until the 1960s, an image constructed by the patriarchy predominated; after 1980, one for feminism, enabling a new representation of women and men.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Representations. Social roles. Disney princess animations. History and Gender.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

What is a man? What is a woman? What differentiates the two sexes in society? Is this distinction something natural or is it something built by society over time? Bourdieu (2002) when discussing the differentiation between the sexes in society points out that the biological factor, that is, the anatomical opposition between the male and female body, would have been used to justify and naturalize the different roles attributed to men and women in society.

Thus, when we think of history, when we think of society, of the men and women who compose it, an inevitable element over time is always present: transformations. In the specific case of the relations established between the male and the female, it is not different. These relations were many until the beginning of the 20th century and it is mainly at that moment that we perceive the changes concerning the roles attributed to both genders.

These changes can become noticeable from the observation of the cultural production of society itself. In the case in question, this modification of the feminine and the masculine representations is discussed based on the animations of princesses produced and created by Disney during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So, has there been a change in the representation of women and men in Disney princess audiovisual productions? And if so, what would have led to it? What were these changes? What is its significance today?

Considering the context in which the West, particularly the United States, is inserted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the relevance of the study of Disney princess animations is understood, in order to recognize how the representation of the feminine and the masculine has been transformed, the reasons for such transformation and the possible resulting discussions that can be generated in society.

Thus, the general objective of this research was to analyze the representation of the femaleness and maleness from the series of princesses animations produced by Disney, having as specific objectives to approach the representation of the female and male from the perspective of Chartier (2002), as well as to identify the possible transformations of perceptions about the feminine and masculine that occurred over time in the audiovisual works in question.

The methodology used in this work was bibliographic research, "modality of study and analysis of documents of scientific domain such as books, encyclopedias, periodicals, critical essays, dictionaries and scientific articles." (OLIVEIRA, 2010, p. 69, my translation), whose purpose allows to the researcher the direct

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contact with the proposed theme, using the contents that are of his/her interest, organizing and analyzing them according to the work's objectives and problems.

Therefore, it was first proposed the elaboration of a theoretical framework of works whose concepts can dialogue and discuss with the research study object, as well as the realization of records of each one for a better understanding of the theme and the possibility of a confluence of ideas with the approached authors.

In a second moment, after the bibliographic research, the analysis of the indicated sources was carried out for the accomplishment of the study, using, mainly, audiovisual sources, to understand the representation of the feminine and the masculine, from its analysis.

Finally, considering the construction of a theoretical-methodological framework referring to the topic addressed, and issues raised, and based on the dialogue between the sources and the bibliographic study, a discussion was established that contributes to the achieved results.

It is hoped, then, with this work not only to contribute to the dialogues between History and Gender, but also to expand the historiographical production that works with the theme.

## **II. HISTORY, GENDER AND REPRESENTATIONS**

History is made of changes; it is the result of continuous transformations over time and space. Not only does this statement refer to human experiences over the centuries and from the most different environments, but also to the very way of producing and writing history.

It is important to remember that the possibilities of study experienced today were not always possible. According to Burke (2011) in the traditional paradigm, History, as a science, during its initial moments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was mainly concerned with political facts, with the "great men" of History, and was produced almost exclusively based on documents considered "official", that is, those made by the State.

With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the writing of history has changed dramatically. New study possibilities start to appear and, practically, everything becomes subject to be studied by History. History becomes interested in "[...] virtually all human activity." (BURKE, 2011, p.11, my translation). It is in this context that the study of History and Gender becomes possible, as well as the representations about the feminine and the masculine.

Not only that, but new documents to be used by History are also being revealed. According to Napolitano (2008), the transformations that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will lead to the emergence of new sources for historians, these being audiovisual sources, which must be taken care of when using them in the writing of History. For the author it is:

[...] necessary to articulate the technical-aesthetic language of audiovisual and musical sources (that is, their internal operating codes) and the representations of the historical or social reality contained therein (that is, their narrative "content" itself). (NAPOLITANO, 2008, p.237, my translation).

In other words, it is necessary for the historian to understand how a given source is constructed and how it is linked to a given socio-historical context, remembering that every work will always be linked to that social place of production. About this, Certeau (2011, p.57) tells us that

The history book or article is both a result and a symptom of the group that functions as a laboratory. Like the vehicle from a factory, historical study is much more linked to the complex of a specific and collective manufacture than to the effect status of a personal philosophy or the resurgence of a past "reality". It is the product of a place (my translation).

Thus, similarly to the writing of History, the historical source will also be connected to a specific time and space, being their result. This perception is necessary when analyzing any type of source, avoiding anachronism or a misinterpretation of the documents used.

It can be said, then, that the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought significant changes in the writing of History, but not only in it, but in the society itself. Regarding the feminine and masculine, the idea previously considered natural of the roles attributed to both is questioned. The division of the sexes in society is understood from the perspective of Bourdieu (2002). For him

The division between the sexes seems to be in the "order of things", as it is sometimes said to speak of what is normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable: it is present, at the same time, in an objectified state in things (in the house, for example, whose parts are all "sexed"), in every social world and, in an incorporated state, in the bodies and *habitus* of agents, functioning as systems of perception, thought and action schemes. (BORDIEU, 2002, p.15, my translation).

It is inferred, then, that in society we have the naturalization of the roles attributed to the male and female universe, not only what to do and how to behave, but even the spaces destined to both become natural. This naturalization, however, started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the feminist movement began to be deconstructed. It is understood that the assignment of different roles to men and women is nothing more than a social construction, justified from the biological distinction between the sexes, as Bourdieu (2002, p.18) states:

The *biological* difference between the *sexes*, that is, between the male and female bodies, and specifically the *anatomical* difference between the sexual organs, can thus be seen as a natural justification for the socially constructed difference between the *genders* and, mainly, of the division of work. (BOURDIEU, 2002, p.18, my translation)

This naturalization, pointed out by Bourdieu (2002), seen as a justification for the assignment of different roles to men and women, begins to be deconstructed from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly from the feminist movement itself, which, along with other social movements, increases from that century on.

Pinsky and Pedro (2013) corroborate when stating that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by women's struggle in search of their full citizenship. Not only that, but also the deconstruction and the end of the idea of a natural hierarchy between men and women. The authors also claim that full equality has not yet been achieved, but many changes resulting from women's social struggle have taken place.

It is in this troubled and disparate context that Disney animations about princesses, as well as their representation<sup>2</sup> of male and female, are produced. These being: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937), "Cinderella" (1950), "Sleeping Beauty" (1959), "The Little Mermaid" (1989), "Beauty and the Beast" (1991), "Aladdin" (1992), "Pocahontas" (1995), "Mulan" (1998), "The Princess and the Frog" (2009), "Tangled" (2010) and the last "Valente" (2012), constituting the "Disney Princesses" product line.

Considering these perspectives, we seek to understand how the representation of the feminine and the masculine has been transformed over time from the Disney princess animations and how these modifications are due to the social struggles of women, expanded during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is intended to produce this analysis bearing in mind the selection of the animations considered most relevant in the light of the proposed study, which are: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Cinderella", "Mulan" and "The Princess and the Frog".

### **III. BEAUTIFUL, MODEST AND AT HOME: FROM SNOW TO SAND DUST**

The first animated feature of Disney princesses, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", presents us with the first representation of the female and male in the universe of animated Disney princess films, Snow White.

Who is Snow White? A woman. A Princess. A damsel in distress. A Housewife. This is the first perspective on the feminine that is presented to us in this animation. A reflection of the time of production of animation, the year 1937, made at a time that, in spite of changes in the roles established for women and men being transformed in the West, it was still possible to observe many of their permanencies, that is, we could still- to note the "naturalization" of the division of the sexes in the social world, as stated by Bourdieu (2002).

In "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", this division can be pointed out, consequently the representation of femininity and masculinity, from the moment Snow White escapes from the Queen and her eventual meeting with the Dwarves' home. Her first reaction when entering the Dwarves' house is to notice its mess and soon after she concludes that, most likely, who lived there did not have a mother, that is, there was not a woman to take care of the home and that was the reason for the calamitous situation. Soon after, Snow White started cleaning the house, hoping that it would be accepted by those who lived there. The feminine here is linked to the home, to the dedication to the masculine.

At the end of the cleaning, Snow White finally meets the dwarfs and there are more elements that corroborate the female's attachment to the home. She is responsible for dinner, in addition to asking them to bathe, thus worrying about their hygiene. After dinner the dwarves ask the princess to tell a story, but it couldn't be any story, it would have to be a love story. The princess, starting with a song, soon begins the story of her love, the prince charming, her idealization as a romantic man and, finally, marriage with him. Therefore, the feminine imagery is also linked to love, passion and marriage.

The next day, after the dwarves left to work at the mine, Snow White starts cooking again and, meanwhile, once again exposes her feelings by singing the same song as the night before. At the end of the song the queen appears with a poisoned apple for the princess and, after convincing her to eat the fruit stating that Snow White's dreams would come true, that is, marry the prince and live happily ever after, the princess dies. After her death, the dwarves corner the queen, causing her to fall off a cliff and place Snow White in a glass and gold coffin, leaving her in the forest where they could visit her. A few seasons later the prince hears rumors about the maiden in the forest, finds her and kisses her, making Snow White come back to life. The animation ends with both going towards the castle so dreamed by Snow White and with the sign that they lived happily ever after.

But, why? What is the need to emphasize Snow White's "dreams"? Can it be said that the princess's "dreams" are a representation of the role that the ideal woman should have in society? An idea of a concern only

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<sup>2</sup> Representation is understood from the perspective of Chartier (2002, p.17), that is, "The representations of the social world [...]", in this case of the female and male "[...] although they aspire to universality of a diagnosis based on reason, are always determined by the group interest that forges them." (my translation). Thus, it can be said that representation is socially constructed and, many times, it may not represent the real, but rather the perspective of someone or a certain group about the Other, that is, it is a perspective on reality, but not the real one.

with love, marriage and the masculine? And, furthermore, would it be possible to think of Snow White's own concern with taking care of household chores as well as a representation of this feminine in society, of how women should behave? Can it also be questioned whether Snow White is not representing the feminine while fragile, needing the masculine to save her? Could it be that, considering all these points, we can think of a reaffirmation of a female representation built over time by patriarchy<sup>3</sup>?

According to Castells (2006, p.212) after winning the suffrage for women in the United States of America in 1920

[...] feminism has remained behind the scenes on the American scene for almost half a century. Not that women had stopped fighting. [...] However, mass movements that were explicitly female only emerged from the 1960s onwards, originating from social movements both for their component concerning human rights and for their revolutionary countercultural tendencies (my translation).

From this, it can be questioned to what extent feminism was already influencing society and how it was reacting to the movement. Would it be possible to state that, considering the release date of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", 1937, and the representation of woman and man present in it, it could be a reaffirmation of the feminine and masculine produced by the patriarchy in the face of changes in the social roles that began to take shape from the struggle of feminism?

Maybe yes, maybe no. The truth is that the feminine and masculine that were represented in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" had their continuity in the Disney princess animations. Almost twenty years later, in the year 1950, there was the release of the second animated Disney princess film, "Cinderella".

Like "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", the representation of the feminine in "Cinderella" is also that of the woman turned to home, love and man. "Cinderella" tells the story of a girl who loses her mother, and whose father, so that she would not grow up without a mother, marries again with a woman who had two daughters the same age as hers. Soon after his marriage, Cinderella's father passes away and her stepmother and daughters begin to treat her as their slave.

Cinderella then takes care of all the housework, the food, the cleaning, the clothes, the whole house. When Cinderella becomes an adult, the king, wanting his son, the prince, to marry, organizes a ball so that a young single woman could meet him and captivate him. Cinderella's foster sisters, along with her stepmother, soon get excited to go to the ball and get the prince's love, as well as Cinderella herself. However, her stepmother and her foster sisters make it impossible for Cinderella to go, giving her more housework and tearing up her dress.

Cinderella is devastated, believing that she could no longer go to the ball and fulfill her dream, that of meeting her great love, until her fairy godmother appears and presents her with a dress, carriage, horses and a coachman, enabling her to go to the ball. Upon arriving at the ball, Cinderella meets the prince, dances with him and fulfills his dream, that of meeting his great love.

After that, the magic time limit, at midnight, forces Cinderella to flee and return home, leaving only her crystal shoe behind. The king, the next day, launches a decree in which all women of the kingdom should put on the crystal shoe to find out who was the woman who had danced with her son and made him fall in love. Cinderella, even with the problems imposed by her stepmother and foster sisters, manages to put on her shoes and ends up fulfilling her dream, marriage with her great love and thus ends the animation with the sign of happy ever after.

Who is Cinderella, then? Once again, the representation of the ideal woman in Disney animation runs through the idea of a woman who knows how to take care of home, who loves and, in the end, dedicates herself to her husband, to a man. Cinderella, like Snow White, spends the entire animation commenting on her dream, that of meeting her true love, which in fact happens when she meets the prince. In addition, a distinction can also be made between the representation of women in comparing Cinderella with her sisters. Her sisters are presented as ugly as well as lazy women, leaving all the housework to Cinderella.

Thus, Cinderella, while a princess, represents the ideal woman, the one who knows the house chores, who is concerned with love, marriage and, finally, with man. As for the question of representation of man, there is a perspective quite similar to that of Snow White. This is also seen as the one responsible for saving the damsel in distress, since without his presence, Cinderella would not have been saved from her stepmother. And, finally, the ideal man here is also perceived as concerned with love, with romance.

The woman, then, in the first three Disney princess animations needs to know how to take care of the home, how to do the housework, she must also dedicate herself to love, marriage and, finally, the man, the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Castells (2006, p.169) "Patriarchy is one of the structures on which all contemporary societies are based. It is characterized by the institutionally imposed authority of men over women and children in the family. For that authority to be exercised, it is necessary that patriarchy permeates the entire organization of society, from production and consumption to politics, legislation and culture." Thus, it is understood that their influence on cultural production, consequently on animations, directly influences the representation of women and men, representing them from the interests of patriarchy.

masculine. The man, in turn, is always portrayed as a prince charming, as a romantic man who would ultimately be able to save his beloved, the damsel in distress. Perhaps, even, we can ask ourselves another question: Considering the period of launch of these animations, could marriage not also be seen as a way of saving these women? How can a man save a woman?

This is the representation of the woman and man that can be seen in this first moment of Disney's animated princess films. And why is that? Why are women and men represented in this way? Considering the years of launch of the three animations, that is, 1937, 1950 and 1959, it can be inferred that the representation of the feminine and the masculine here refer to a reaffirmation of the social roles imbued with the man and the woman to the detriment of the changes that were being provoked by the feminist movement and also by the post-war<sup>4</sup> in the United States.

Was society changing? It was. Was the thought changing? It was. But were there no movements against that? Can we not point to these first three animated Disney princess films as an attempt to avoid change, to protect patriarchy? Could it be that the changes brought about by the war in the daily lives of women combined with the feminist movement, now much more strengthened and attracting more and more women to their struggle, did not contribute to such a movement?

The point is that, after the production of "Sleeping Beauty" in 1959, we only had another princess animation in the late 1980s, that is, thirty years later. In 1989 we had the launch of "The Little Mermaid" and with it a new representation of the feminine and the masculine was presented. It should be noted, however, that in this work we will focus on "Mulan" and "The Princess and the Frog", as we consider the most relevant animations of this second moment of female and male representations in the Disney princess animations that starts from 1989.

#### **IV. WHO ARE WE? A NEW REPRESENTATION OF FEMALENESS AND MALENESS IN DISNEY PRINCESS ANIMATIONS**

With "The Little Mermaid" in 1989, a new representation of the feminine and masculine appears in Disney's animated princess films. There is a rupture with that representation previously mentioned and it is possible to perceive a greater dialogue with the transformations that have been on the agenda in society, especially since 1960, with the post-war period and the feminist movement.

The Disney princess animations are beginning to discuss not only the social roles assigned to both genders, but also the very question of ethnic diversity present in them. After all, is there only a white woman? Can only she be a princess? Or can all women be princesses?

In the same way there is this question about women, a similar question is made concerning the role played by men. Should a man always save a woman? Can it not be the other way around? And besides, who is the prince? Always a white man? Could other ethnic groups be princes? Can men from different social classes also become princes or live a "fairy tale"? You can see all these issues in Disney princess animations after the 1980s, especially in "Mulan" and "The Princess and the Frog".

First, who was Mulan? What is the "Mulan" animation produced by Disney in the 1990s? Does the narrated story refer to a "faithful" portrayal of the Chinese poem on which the film is based? Or did the animation have another intention?

According to Sun (2008, p.1) Mulan's best-known story says the following:

She is a fearless Chinese heroine who disguises herself as a male warrior and goes off to battle in her father's stead. She fights valiantly for twelve years without her true sex being discovered by her fellow soldiers. At the end of the war, the ruler wants to reward her for her excellent performance, but she refuses and returns home as soon as possible. She is a symbol of filial piety, a role model of female heroism. This is the most well-known story of Mulan

The narrated story depicts the most famous version of Mulan, referring as well to the one adapted by Disney animation. However, it must be remembered that, according to Sun (2008), there is no certainty about the origin of the poem or the period of its publication, with divergences about it. According to Sun (2008), some researchers attribute the period from 386 to 534 AD and others from 618 - 906 AD. In addition, Sun (2008) also tells us that in addition to the story described here, there are at least four more versions about the character Mulan.

Mulan, then, is a Chinese poem written almost 2000 years ago about a character that, most likely, did not exist, that is, a fictional subject, and it is based on this story that Disney animation builds its narrative. But, after all, what is the animation "Mulan" about?

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<sup>4</sup> Pinsky (2014) points out how the post-war brought change during the period known as "Golden Years" in gender relations in Brazil. A parallel can be drawn with what happened in Brazil with the United States regarding the transformations in these relations after the victory in World War II by the Allies. In a similar way to Brazil, the United States also experienced changes.

Like the poem, the Disney animated film also tells the story of a woman who disguises herself as a man and takes her father's place to go fighting in the war. As in the poem, she is also rewarded at the end of the war and returns to her home and family, becoming a hero for China.

To the unsuspecting viewer, the film may seem like an attempt at a faithful "portrait" of the poem and, perhaps, try to represent a little bit of China from the period in which the poem is believed to have been published. However, I think that animation, far from talking about the history of China, has a much greater concern in discussing some problems of Western society, in which the film is inserted.

Thus, we cannot perceive "Mulan" as a work to discuss the History of China, not least because it is a film produced in the United States in the 1990s and aimed at children, but we can use it to discuss issues raised by the animation and perceived in society at the time, in this case, gender relations.

The first point that we can see how these roles are established in society in the animated film is at the beginning when Mulan, together with other women, is getting ready and going to the matchmaker, that is, to learn how to be a good wife.

First, we can perceive the role established for the woman, that of a good wife and, the characteristics that she should have, being obedient, with vigor, good manners and great fervor. The insertion of women in this role would bring honor to the whole of society, that is, this is nothing more than the naturalization of the pre-established function of women by society.

It is within this context that we find Mulan and realize her concern to become a good wife, that is, to assume the pre-determined role by society for her, as seen in the moment of music when she asks to find someone, a man, and the importance of that to honor her family as well as society. Mulan's identity crisis begins. Remembering that according to Hall (2005, p.39)

[...] instead of talking about identity as a finished thing, we should talk about identification, and see it as an ongoing process. Identity arises not so much from the fullness of identity that is already within us as individuals, but from a lack of wholeness that is "filled" from outside, by the ways in which we imagine ourselves to be seen by others. (my translation)

Identity, then, is a process that is constantly changing, not only depending on us, but also on the way we think we are seen by society. In the case of Mulan, there is a discussion about the identity and representation of the feminine in the character, pointing her out as a rare case, but that after a perfumed bath, or better, after being well worked, she could become a good wife. Mulan, obviously, does not fit the standards set for the woman and this becomes evident when he finally meets the matchmaker and goes through his evaluation.

The result was obvious: failure. Mulan is not suited to the socially constructed representation of women, much less the identity linked to the feminine, thus failing in the aspects considered essential for a good wife and returning home with the social stigma that she will never find a husband, failing in fulfillment of her role before society and reaching the peak of her identity crisis, questioning who she really is.

This crisis experienced by the character is the internalization that she will never be able to assume the identity of a good wife, as required by society, and neither does she identify herself as a good daughter. Mulan wonders who she is and who, perhaps, needs to change to suit not only her family, but also the role required of her by society, her role as a wife.

While the film addresses the place established for women in society, it begins to question Mulan's identity crisis. Soon after her internal conflict, her father is called to war again. Mulan, upon seeing her father's summons, opposes it, asking the officer responsible for it and reminding him that her father is already old and sick and cannot fight in the war again.

When questioning the order of the military, Mulan is reminded of her social position as a woman, who should not speak in the presence of men. Her own father points out her behavior as something dishonorable, that he knows his place and that it is time for Mulan to know hers.

Fearing for his father's life, Mulan makes a decision that would be essential for the construction of her identity and that puts in check the roles delegated to the male and female universe, as well as the representations constructed to each one. Mulan cuts her hair, a symbol of her femininity, steals his father's armor and goes off to war, assuming her male identity, Ping. Upon arriving at the war camp Mulan needs to behave like a man to avoid being discovered and it is at this moment that male representation and identity is discussed.

This part of the film portrays the transformation of those summoned to war into men, as well as the representation of man in society. It is acceptance and identification with the values established by society to be considered as men. As the song is sung, we see the change of the soldiers, starting from a moment when they did not know how to do anything, until another time when they were able to accomplish everything that was expected of a good soldier, that is, a man.

In this sense, training for war would be the culmination of the biological distinction pointed out by Bourdieu (2002), seeking to naturalize the role that women and men should play within society. And how does Mulan fit in here? Mulan, despite being a woman and failing in what was required of soldiers at the beginning,

at the end of the training she becomes better than the men themselves, being able to carry out everything that was required of them.

The question is, then, what does it mean to be a man? Are there, really, natural functions for the male and female determined by biological distinctions? This point of Disney animation is crucial to ask about it, from the moment that it puts a woman not only capable, but better in everything that the man should accomplish. It is clear, then, that the roles of male and female are not natural, but a social construction.

At this point, Mulan actually assumes a masculine identity, marches to war with her companions and, during the battle, is wounded, ending up being unmasked at the end of the battle. At this point, the character is accused of treason, but her life is spared by her commander because of a debt he would have with her male alter-ego, Ping.

After discovering that, in reality, Mulan was a woman, her companions set out for the imperial city to receive the glories for victory in the war. Mulan, staying behind, realizes that some of the Huns remained alive and listens to their plan for revenge against the emperor and China.

When trying to warn her commander and her companions in the imperial city about the situation again, Mulan, in a world dominated by men, hears that her place was not that, that is, there she has no voice. Mulan then asks what the difference between her and Ping, her male alter ego, is. Why did her commander trust Ping, but he couldn't trust her?

Mulan's questioning at this point is much deeper and goes beyond trust. Her inquiry brings us to the relationships established between the masculine and the feminine. Why would they hear Ping, but not Mulan? Precisely because Ping "is a man".

Not only her commander, but no other man listens to Mulan, culminating in the eventual attack of the Huns and kidnapping of the Chinese emperor. At that moment, when no man can resolve the situation, Mulan, as a woman, intervenes, saving the emperor and eliminating the threat from the Huns. In this way, Mulan represents women with capacities equal to those of men and, in some points, even better, criticizing the fallacy of biological distinction and presenting this as a social construction.

It can be said, then, that "Mulan" represents, in the Disney princess animations, "[...] the essence of feminism, as practiced and reported, is the (re) definition of the woman's identity: now saying there is equality between men and women, disconnecting biological and cultural differences from gender [...]"(CASTELLS, 2006, p.211, my translation).

With "Mulan", the 20<sup>th</sup> century ends, and, with the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Disney begins its princess productions with the animation "The Princess and the Frog" in 2009. "The Princess and the Frog" tells the story of Tiana, a humble black woman who lives in New Orleans and dreams of opening a restaurant. The story begins with the arrival of African prince Naveen, heir to the throne of Maldonia, in New Orleans. The prince's goal is to know the birthplace of Jazz, as well as marry a wealthy woman who can support him.

Throughout the story the prince meets a "voodoo" wizard and, in his naivety, makes an agreement with him. After that, the prince is transformed into a frog, only being able to break the spell with the kiss of a princess. Naveen, looking for his princess, ends up finding Tiana and convinces her to kiss him. Tiana, being not a princess, ends up becoming a frog too.

The film, like all Disney princess animation, follows a similar path. The protagonists as frogs go through many problems, but at the end of the animation they manage to defeat the villain and return to being human. In addition, Tiana fulfills her dream and Naveen ceases to be a worthless prince, ceases to be a man concerned only with having fun and finding a wealthy wife to keep him. The film ends with Naveen helping Tiana at her restaurant.

"The Princess and the Frog" maintains this new perspective on female and male representation in Disney's princess films after 1980. In other words, as in the other films of this period, we have a woman not subordinate to the male. In this sense, it can be said that it is the ethnic representativeness that differentiates it, as well as "Pocahontas". "The Princess and the Frog" is the first Disney princess film to have a black woman as the protagonist, as a princess, as a woman. In addition, it is the first animation to also have a black prince.

So, what was the impact of this animation at the time of its release in 2009? What made it possible to represent a black woman as a princess and protagonist? Can we attribute this change solely to the issue of the inclusion of feminism in ethnic issues in the United States, as Castells (2006) states? Thompson (2009), in the British electronic newspaper *Dailymail*, considers it pertinent to state that:

With America's first African American president in the White House, Disney is counting on an African American princess to be a big hit in Hollywood. [...] While some have hailed Disney's decision as a reflection of melting pot America, others say the company is sending out a mixed message. [...] Since announcing their plans for the first black princess in 2006 the production of Hollywood studio's 49th animated film has been dogged by racial controversy. [...] Disney has insisted its choice of a black princess was part of a policy to give characters as much diversity as possible.

It is interesting to note how changes in society influence cultural productions. The year 2009 marks the beginning of the term of the first American president of African descent, Barack Obama. Obviously, Obama was already in evidence in American politics for some years, making possible his victory in the Democratic party's primaries and culminating in his election as president. In the same period, the production of "The Princess and the Frog" started and it is not for nothing that the film is released in the same year that Obama takes office. Obama's election is a milestone for American society, it is a message that there are also blacks in the United States and that they also have a voice. This, together with the social movements that took hold after the 1960s, fostered the creation of a black princess by Disney.

The creation of a black princess, as well as those that came before, obviously had an interest in reaching a new audience, which was adhering to the ideas defended by feminism and ethnic movements. Thus, the election of Obama, as pointed out by Thompson (2009), was not the only reason for the emergence of Tiana, although it may have collaborated. Disney's answer to the question is also emblematic. This policy to which it refers was the same that started with "The Little Mermaid", with the change of representation of the feminine and the masculine. This policy of ethnic diversity reflects social changes, as well as Disney's need for exploration of this new market.

In addition, "The Princess and the Frog" was, without a doubt, the most controversial Disney film. In the text by Thompson (2009), published in the British electronic newspaper *Dailymail*, we can see precisely this controversy. The journalist highlights the split of opinions about the animation, because while some saw this animation as a production that reflected the multiculturalism and the multiple ethnicities present in the United States, others criticized the work as racist, besides other problems. This situation can be seen in some interviews conducted by the American electronic newspaper CNN after the release of the film. Thus, Denene Millner (2009)<sup>5</sup>, an African American author, commenting on her children and the new Disney animation said:

When I had them, I had to consider how I was going to get them to navigate the low self-esteem that black girls end up having when you're constantly bombarded with images that don't look like you and people are constantly telling you that beautiful is not what you are. [...] I'm bothered by the criticism because as a mom, my heart is full. Finally, there's a princess that looks like my little girls.

The author then highlights the importance of having a black woman as a princess. The importance of having not only the princess, but the woman with representations other than white. After all, women are not only white, they are multiple, and it is necessary to have this represented in cultural productions.

However, even though Tiana was well received by the black community, Prince Naveen did not share the same fate. In an interview with CNN, blogger Kimberly Coleman (2009), about Naveen highlights: "Hmm. OK. Not only is it not a black love story, it's not even an interracial love story. What does that say to little black girls...that [her prince] doesn't exist? That we would have to make up someone for you because no one of any race exists to be your prince?"

Although Prince Naveen is black, the fact that he is not African American, but from a fictional country in Africa has raised these controversies. This idea that not only would not exist a man for the black woman, but also for the masculine himself to identify himself, that is, a representation for the African American. It is interesting to note from this that even though the intention of the work and the production company was to present and represent ethnic diversity, as seen in the article by Thompson (2009) in the *Dailymail* newspaper, it was not in this way that the work was perceived by some sectors of society, especially those who should identify with the characters in the film, that is, African-Americans. The representation of the black, that is, of the Other, created by Disney in "The Princess and the Frog", even though it meant a rupture with regard to the representation of the prince, of the man, in the princess animations, was not shared by the Afro-descendant community in the United States, giving rise to criticisms.

In this way, it can be said that there are two moments regarding the representation of female and male in Disney princess animations. The first moment going from "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" in 1937 to "Sleeping Beauty" in 1959, with a woman turned to the home, to the housework, to the marriage and, finally, to the husband. And the man, being romantic and always needing to save the maiden, the woman.

The second moment, starting from "The Little Mermaid" in 1989 and going to "Valente"<sup>6</sup> in 2012, with an intelligent, strong woman, of different ethnicities, no longer needing the male to be saved and, many times ,

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<sup>5</sup> Interview by Denene Milner, American writer and journalist, to the CNN newspaper in 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Although it was not the focus of this work, it may also be interesting to point out that, starting from "Valente", there is a novelty and rupture in the Disney princess animations. From "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" to "Tangled" all Disney princess animations, even though the representation of the female changed, at some point they worked with the love between man and woman. Even in the animations that the woman does not think about love or falling in love, as is the case of "The Little Mermaid", "Beauty and the Beast", "Mulan", "The Princess and the Frog" and "Tangled", they end up falling in love and ending up with your love. In "Valente", although there is a discussion about Mérida's marriage to some son of an allied clan chief, the discussion that permeates the film is the love between mother and daughter, between Mérida and her mother. In the latest animations produced by Disney "Frozen" (2013) the discussion is about true love, ending up being love between



being responsible for saving him, which the most relevant animations were “Mulan” and “The Princess and the Frog”. In the case of the masculine one also happens to have a different man, breaking the image previously constructed about the prince charming and building a new one.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is emphasized that the analysis constructed throughout this text is one of many possible ones, after all, History does not share only one truth, but several. In addition, it is inferred that, in future works, other sources produced at the time of the release of the films should also be analyzed for a better understanding of the representation constructed by the animations and how society reacted to them.

It is also necessary to say that “Moana” marks the last Disney princess animation to be included in its line of princesses, but it is not the last Disney animation to have princesses, since in 2019 there was the launch of “Frozen 2”, which maintains this new perspective of representation of the female and male that emerged after the 1960s.

In this way, eighty years after the release of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” it is possible to observe how the representations of the feminine and the masculine in the Disney princess animations have changed over time. What, then, is woman and man, if not a socially constructed representation that serves the interests of the group that built it? Often not sharing the identification by the groups that are represented there, as we have seen throughout this work.

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sisters. In “Moana” (2016) and *Frozen 2* (2019), love is no longer the guiding thread of the narrative and a new proposal for Disney princess films is perceived, that is, the possibility of having a story, an adventure, without necessarily being linked to the search for true love. Thus, in these last films, love, whether romantic or fraternal, takes on a secondary role.

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