"The Ocean chose me":
How disneyfication has affected the Disney movie Moana

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Globalisoituvassa maailmassa erilaisten kulttuurien kohtaaminen on entistä arkipäiväisempää. Ihmiset haluavat tutustua uusiin kulttuureihin ja laajentaa maailmankuvaansa. Disney pyrkii vastaamaan kasvavaan tarpeeseen ja esittelee uutena aluevaltauksenaan Polynesian. Elokuva Moana (2016) kertoo tarinan nuoresta tytöstä, joka haluaa pelastaa kotisaarensa uhkaavalta tuholta. Hän saa matkaseurakseen puolijumala Mauin ja yhdessä he pelastavat maailman uhkaavalta pimeydeltä. Välttääkseen kulttuurista omimista, Disney pyrki tekemään perusteellista pohjatyötä vierailemalla Polynesian saarilla ja tutustumalla ennakkoon alueen kulttuuriin ja mytologiaan. Lähes kaikki Disneyn elokuvat pohjautuvat muiden kirjoittamiin satuihin ja kansantaruihin ja niiden pohjalta tutkijat ovat luoneet käsitteen *disneyfikaatio*. Sen mukaan on olemassa tietty kaava, jolla Disney tekee elokuviaan ja muokkaa niitä omaan brändiinsä sopiviksi. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää miten disneyfikaatio on vaikuttanut Polynesian kansantarujen esittämiseen elokuvassa Moana. Tutkimus pohjautui Maria Nikolajevan luomiin disneyfikaation kategorioihin. Tutkimuksen aineistona käytettiin Polynesian kansantaruista tehtyjä kokoelmateoksia ja niitä vertailtiin elokuvaan.
Tutkimus osoitti, että disneyfikaatio on vahvasti vaikuttanut elokuvan syntyyn ja tarinan muokkaamiseen. Disneyfikaatiolle ominaista on esimerkiksi lisätä mukaan koomisia lisähahmoja sekä luoda hahmoja, jotka tarjoavat auktoriteettia ja toimivat eräänlaisina omatuntoina päähenkilölle ja nämä kaikki olivat löydettävissä Moanasta. Olennainen osa Disney-elokuvaa on myös onnellinen loppu tarinan päähenkilöille, siksi myös Moana päättyy kohtaukseen, jossa hahmot ovat onnellisia ja toteuttavat itseään haluamallaan tavalla. Tutkimuksessa kuitenkin löytyi myös asioita, jotka erosivat alkuperäisestä mytologiasta, mutta eivät sopineet disneyfikaation kategorioihin. Tulokset osoittavat, että vaikka Disney pyrkii aiempaa autenttisempaan materiaaliin ja monipuolisempaan tarjontaan, elokuvan käsikirjoitus seuraa aiempien elokuvien kaavaa.

Asiasanat – Keywords disneyfication, folklore, Disney, content analysis, Polynesia, Moana
Säilytyspaikka – Depository
Muita tietoja – Additional information

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Today, globalization is a concept that is present in all the areas of life. As Hirst, Thompson and Bromley (2009) state, we live in an era where cultures, borders and territories dissolve and majority of our social life is defined by these global processes. Globalization allows different cultures to be closer and makes it easier for people to familiarize themselves with them. One of the ways to introduce different cultures is film production. Gao (2009: 423) notes that film production and consumption play an important role in "negotiating cultural identity and articulating social consciousness". That is why it is important to study those who produce globally successful films, such as Disney.

Disney is one of the world's largest media corporates which produces specific and coherent products under the title of family entertainment (Krämer 2000). Disney products are recognized worldwide, and they hold a great significance to how especially children see the world (Belkhyr 2012). As a way to connect with different parts of the globe, Disney has created its own versions of stories from different cultures and reformed them into Disney's own products, a phenomenon called disneyfication (Schickel 1968). As Disney's products have been recognized influential among researchers, the company and its products have been studied quite a bit. The majority of Disney's movies are based on fairy tales written by European writers, such as Cinderella and Snow White by Brothers Grimm or The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen (Zipes 1995). Researchers such as Yin (2013) and Anjirbag (2018) conclude that those Disney movies that are situated outside the American culture often still represent American and western values rather than the values central to the culture in question. Newest culture represented is Polynesian culture in Disney film Moana (Shurer 2016). As movies have a great impact on how different cultures are seen, it is important to study what values and lifestyles Disney is transmitting to children around the world. Culture representation has also raised the issue of cultural appropriation (Lenard and Balint 2019).

My research question for this present study is: How has disneyfication changed the Polynesian folklore in Disney's movie Moana? In this study I will investigate what actions have been made

when Disney has created a movie based on Polynesian mythology through comparing the movie Moana and the Polynesian mythology. I will base my analysis on Maria Nikolajeva's theory of disneyfication that illustrates the changes that Disney consistently makes when creating a traditional Disney movie. I will show that disneyfication does play a part in the process, but it does not explain all the differences in the movie.

2. Disney and cultural representation

In this literary review, I will discuss the important concepts regarding the topic of Disney and culture. I will first explain important aspects connected to Disney and research made around disneyfication. Secondly, I will demonstrate folklore and introduce Polynesia. Finally, I will discuss the concept of cultural appropriation. I am aiming to explain important concepts related to the topic of disneyfication and its connection to Polynesian folklore in Disney film Moana (2016) and why it is important to study especially Disney's non-American products.

2.2 Disney and film industry

The main mission of The Walt Disney Company (Official website, 2020) is to "entertain, inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling". Their aim is to create international family entertainment experiences for children and families (ibid.). Belkhyr (2013) raises an important point that children lack the ability to consume films with a critical eye and are therefore more vulnerable to the ideologies presented in the films. According to her, it is important to analyze the impact of Disney products in order to understand how cultural values transmit to other regions. Belkhyr explains that the films can affect how children see themselves and others around them. If the films are not presented authentically, they can reinforce positive and negative stereotypes and simplifications of the cultures and their members (ibid.). According to Scott (2012:15), filmmakers use films to demonstrate how stereotypes, racism and fear can have negative consequences. Disney has also created a social vision for their products; they aim to "create moments that matter to help build emotional resilience for children" (Official website 2020). It could be concluded that through their movies, Disney aims to teach about social responsibility but also about acceptance towards one another.

2.3 Disneyfication

The concept of disneyfication has been used by many (Giroux 1994; Schickel 1964). In these studies, disneyfication has been used as a way to explain the changes made rather than studying the concept itself. Schickel (1968:237) criticizes that all the individuality of the story was reduced to include only the aspects that Walt Disney found important and relevant. He describes that the process diminished the magical and unique parts of the story. Overall, the basic meaning of disneyfication is the process that Disney does to the original stories and folklores when they turn them into a part of the Disney product family. When Walt Disney started the company, his aim was to celebrate the American myth; the story about perseverance, hard work, dedication, loyalty and justice (Zipes 1994). The storyline lied on the acts of the male characters; female characters are often beautiful but inactive. According to Zipes (1996) the basic format of a Disney story included a protagonist, who will quickly get into trouble and must be rescued (females) or must rescue himself. However, it must be noted that this storyline has changed overtime into more female-driven, for example movie Frozen (2013) where two sisters save each other instead of a prince or other male character. In most Disney stories, world is divided into good and bad and once the bad has been conquered, there is an everlasting true love waiting for the good (Zipes 1996). However, Davis (2019) discusses the change in the concept of "traditional Disney" as being warm and gentle representation of love, romance and adventure. She explains that as Disney has expanded more broadly to the film industry, for example with Star Wars and Marvel franchises, it is yet to be seen how scholars will summarize the present Disney.

There has been some previous research conducted on Disney and how they have changed the original stories. The research does not necessarily use the term disneyfication, but the principles used in the analysis process are the same. Mainly the studies have focused on explaining the changes made in different films, such as Jing Yins article "Disney vs. Chinese Stories of Mulan" (2013). Yins article explains how the changes have modified the original message of the story. Yin shows that while making the story a universal classic, Disney projects Western individualism as universal and Chinese culture as Oriental despotism. As Yin states "the altruistic, dedicated, filial, and loyal heroine Mulan was reduced to the individualistic girl who is crying to get out of the Chinese system". The present study takes a similar point of view. Maria

Nikolajeva (2005) has summarized the changes that Disney often does when making a movie and created six categories to illustrate the process. I will discuss the categories later in the methods section. Other films studied are for example Little mermaid (Trites 1991) and Pinocchio (Zipes 1996). No prior research has been done about Moana from this point of view and that is the gap that I will fill with my research. Other studies about Moana have concentrated on for example the gender roles (Streiff and Dundes 2017) or colonialism (Anjirbag 2018).

2.4 Folklore

Disney did not create all its stories alone. Many of its stories are borrowed from writers such as Hans Christian Andersen and Brothers Grimm, who were a part of transforming legends and folklore into fairy tales (Zipes 1994). According to Alan Dundes (1965) in order to understand folklore, one must define the concepts folk and lore. According to him, folk "can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" (Dundes 1965:2). The group should have something that they can call their own, some traditions that they all know and that help them create a sense of group identity. These traditions are the lore; they can be customs or stories about life. Dundes provides an example of a family, who have a special whistle in case of getting lost in a crowd. Another example could be the tradition of telling the story about tooth fairy. However, folklore has many subthemes, such as myths, jokes, tales and proverbs (Dundes 1965:21). Due to the lack of space, I cannot define all possible subthemes. However, one of these subthemes is relevant for this research; myths. What differs myths from other forms of folklore is that they include gods, goddesses and other creatures with supernatural powers (ibid.). Later in this text, when discussing folklore, I will be using terms such as myths or stories, but they all refer to folklore and the definition provided above. Zipes (1996) clarifies that the most commonly shared understanding about folklore is that they are myths and legends from the history of a certain group. In the case of this paper, the folk consists of hundreds of thousands of people. The common factor of these people is that they live in Polynesia and share the same mythology. In addition, Black, Wright and Erickson (2001) remind that folklore is created around the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of people. They note that tales and legends preserve the cultural history and teach about the values and customs of everyday life.

2.4.1 Polynesian folklore

Polynesia is situated in the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean. The Polynesian islands create a triangle, also called the Polynesian Triangle (Craig 1989). The Triangle extends from Hawai'i in the north, New Zealand in the southwest and Easter Island in the southeast. Figure 1 shows the borders of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia in reality. It also shows the uneven boundaries between the areas. Polynesian folklore covers subjects such as creation of the world and the islands, Polynesian Gods and Goddesses, the flora and fauna of the islands, natural phenomena and their forefathers (Craig 2004). Because Polynesia is situated in the Pacific Ocean that is highly volcanic area, and the climate is tropical, meteorological forces are often encountered and therefore a common topic in Polynesian folklore (ibid.:172). Craig (1989) explains that there are many different versions of the same parts of the mythology. According to him, the different versions can be explained through the Polynesian area which contains a vast number of islands. When the Polynesians first entered the islands, they were separated and through time, the stories began to change (ibid.: xvii). Most of the stories have a similar storyline but the details vary. When developing the movie, the producers Ron Clements and John Musker travelled to Pacific to study the environment and familiarize themselves with the communities and cultural landscapes (Ketekiri Tamaira 2018). It must be noted that they only visited Fiji, Sāmoa and French Polynesia, but the story reaches to all parts of the Polynesia.

Figure 1. Map of the Polynesian area, showing The Polynesian Triangle
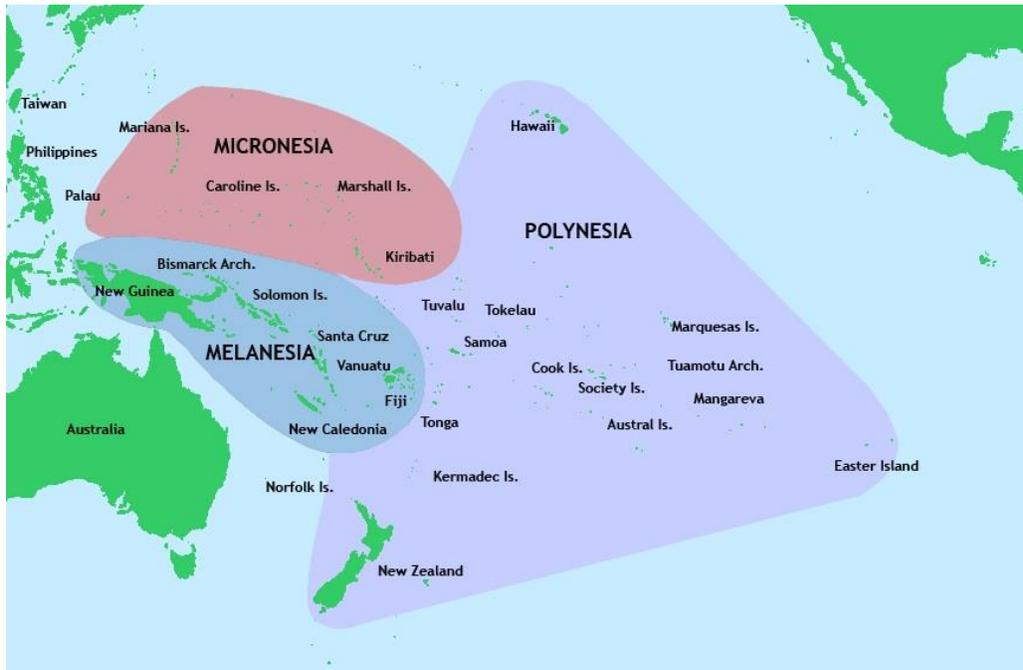
Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pacific_Culture_Areas.jpg.
In the public domain. Created 9 November 2010. Retrieved 2 April 2020.

2.5 Cultural appropriation

When discussing the representation of other cultures, one important concept to discuss is cultural
appropriation. Lenard and Balint (2019:1) have defined cultural appropriation "as the
appropriation of something of cultural value, usually a symbol or a practice, to others." Based on
parameters of cultural appropriation created by James O Young (2010, cited in Lenard and Balint
2019) Lenard and Balint see cultural appropriation as content appropriation. Content
appropriation takes some reusable content, such as music, practices or a story, from another
culture (O Young 2010). Lenard and Balint (2019:8) define that cultural appropriation is taking
(some) culturally valuable content from another culture for their own use and for their own
advantage while knowing its importance to the original culture. Also, this action must be
contested by the members of the culture from whom the practice is appropriated. Lenard and
Balint (2019:6) note that insulting others' cultural practices or providing false depictions of other
cultures are not cultural appropriation but cultural offence and misrepresentation. These acts are

about negatively characterizing other cultures. The difference to cultural appropriation is that cultural appropriation is aiming for some kind of gain using symbols or practices from another culture. Although Disney does not claim the original stories as their own, they do transform the original story into a product of theirs and benefit from this product. Therefore, disneyfication can be seen to be in the borderlines of cultural appropriation.

In order for the movie to be accurate and respect the Pacific folklore, Disney collected members from the native communities and created the Oceanic Story Trust (Ketekiri Tamaira 2018). Ketekiri Tamaira notes that the film industry has repeatedly represented Polynesia as a "paradise" with white beaches and turquoise waters. She explains that the Oceanic Story Trust was to shift the "for outsiders by outsiders" point of view into a more meaningful representation of the culture.

Overall, in the globalized world, there is a growing need for culturally accurate products, such as movies, because people are more interested in different cultures and films are way to explain the world around us even though they might not always be true. Disney has answered to this need by creating films from cultures outside western countries. However, as Disney's main audience are children, it must be studied what values and ideologies these films transmit and if these values are even accurate. Earlier research has shown that disneyfication has clearly affected the creation of Disney films, for example Trites (1991) and Zipes (1996) as stated above. Despite Nikolajevas summary of steps taken in creating a Disney film, there is a need for studies that explain the reasoning and process behind a Disney film. The film Moana is Disney's view of the Polynesian culture and therefore it should be studied whether this film is accurate and respects the culture.

3. Data and Methods

### 3.1 Data

The data for this thesis is the Disney movie Moana (Shurer 2016). The movie Moana (or in some countries named Vaiana or Oceania) tells a story of a young girl Moana. She is the daughter of the Polynesian village chief and she sails across the sea to search for new fishing and living areas because her home island is dying. In order to save her village, she seeks out to find the demigod

Maui, who has stolen the heart of Te Fiti (the Mother Island). With the help of Maui, she restores the heart and saves the islands. Figure 2 displays the important characters in the movie. Moana is situated in the middle since she is the main character in the movie. On her right is Maui, the powerful demi-god with his magical fishhook. On Moana's left side are the pig *Pua* and the chicken *Heihei*, Moana's sidekicks.

Figure 2. The official movie poster
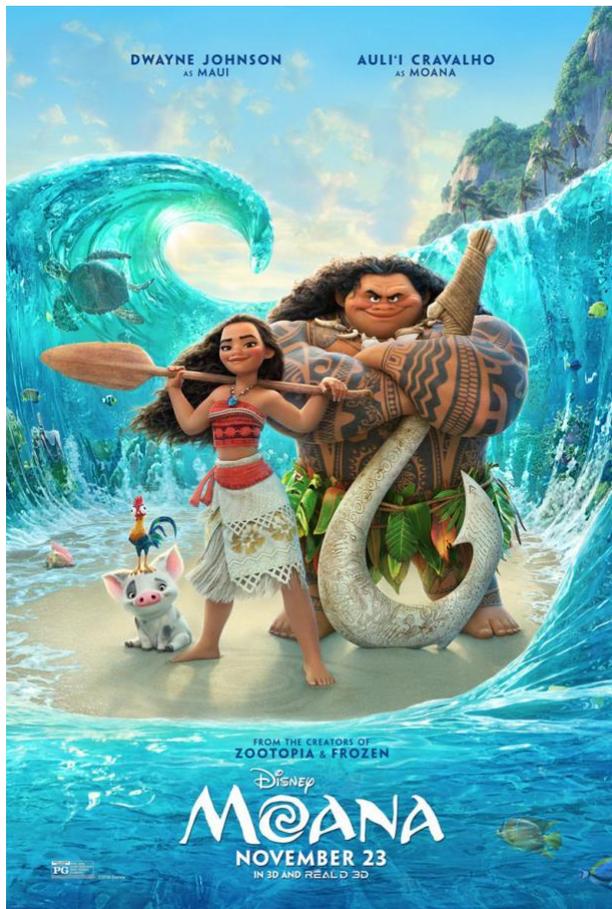
Retrieved from Internet Movie Database. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3521164/. © 2016 Disney. Retrieved 2 April 2020.

I collected the data by watching the original, English-spoken version of the movie and consulting the Disney's official website. Nikolajeva does not provide a method for gathering the data, so I did not have any specific way of collecting the data. I chose all the instances that seemed to fit the categories. I also chose some instances that did not fit the categories but are different from

the original mythology. Almost all the categories were present in the film and some even with several differences. As a support for my analysis, I also studied the Dictionary of Polynesian Mythology by Craig (1989) and various other articles about Polynesian folklore. I chose Graig's book because it is a collection of the stories all around Polynesia. Graig (ibid.) has created a summary of the similarities and differences of the different versions. In addition, I will use Graig's later work the Handbook of Polynesian Mythology (2004), because it covers the topic more broadly. I will analyze the data by comparing the movie to the stories provided by Graig (1989 and 2004). I will seek to find the differences between the movie and the original stories and whether these differences are consistent with the changes made to the earlier movies.

3.2 Analysis method

For this thesis I will use content analysis as my analysis method. Because there are many different definitions about disneyfication, I decided to use the one that has collected them all into one theory. In this present study, I will use Maria Nikolajevas (2005:230-232) summary of the aspects of disneyfication. Her analysis of disneyfication is based on content analysis. Content analysis is an analytical method of classifying qualitative textual data into conceptual categories to discover consistent patterns and connections between variables or themes (Julien 2012). Content analysis is often used when analyzing a wide range of textual data which makes it a suitable analysis method for this study. When using content analysis in qualitative research, it must be recognized that the data represents multiple meanings and depends on the context and is therefore open to subjective interpretation (Julien 2012). When analyzing the data, there are often clusters or categories that can be formed based on the data. In the case of the present study the categories are already identified. In Nikolajevas article (2005), she has created a summary of the observations made around the concept of disneyfication. According to Nikolajeva, there are six steps that are taken in the process of making a Disney movie: picking the most child-friendly version, amplifying conflict and action, adding a happy ending, changing human characters into animals, adding comic characters/sidekicks, adding authoritative narrative character to provide judgements. When original story is transmediated into a movie, there must be changes made into the story (ibid.). As a result of the process of making a Disney movie the story might change, for example by simplifying or complicating the plot and emphasizing the action parts and reducing

the psychological parts of the story. However, Julien (2012) notes that there might be themes that do not fit the initial categories.

4. Analysis

In the earlier movies Disney has used an original story that would be changed into a Disney story through the process of disneyfication. In this case, since the story is original Disney story, the comparison must be done differently. Instead of comparing the storyline of the movie and the original folklore, I must compare the movie to parts of the Polynesian folklore. Thus, the changes do not relate to the story but to the details within the story. However, the changes still follow closely Nikolajevas categories. I found that almost all categories were present in the movie. Only one category was not present in the movie; changing human characters into animals. I will go through the categories that I found are used in making Moana. I will also briefly discuss the category that was not relevant in the movie. Finally, I will present some aspects that do not fit the categories but do differ from the Polynesian folklore.

4.1 Choosing the most child-friendly version

First of Nikolajevas' categories (2005:230) is choosing the most child-friendly version to suit the family entertainment that Disney targets. According to Nikolajeva (ibid.), this means that all graphic and gruesome details are reduced or softened. The details of the original Polynesian stories that I analyzed are gruesome, but they are not relevant in the movie and therefore I will not address them here in detail. However, there are two exploits of Maui that are relevant, and I will discuss those here. The changes made for the movie all relate to Maui's actions and their details. As discussed above, Polynesian mythology provides numerous different stories that differ from each other more or less. The main story that Disney had to choose, was the story about Maui. In Polynesian folklore, Maui is one of the most popular and respected characters and his actions are known in almost every island (Craig 2004:167). Overall, in the folklore Maui is known to be a trickster, whose deeds include separating the earth and the sky, catching the Sun thus making the days longer, discovering the secret of fire-making, fishing up island from the

bottom of the sea and fighting against several demons and monsters. Even though Craig does not mention it, Westervelt (1910) explains that in Hawaiian mythology Maui is also somewhat responsible for calling out the winds. Some stories include also the unsuccessful attempt to seek immortality for humankind as his last deed (Craig 2004). The movie shows that Maui has completed almost all of the actions mentioned above and is extremely proud of those; in the song "You're welcome" he tells about his actions:

Excerpt 1

"What has two thumbs that pulled up the sky
When you were waddling yay high
This guy!
When the nights got cold
Who stole you fire from down below
You're lookin' at him, yo
Oh, also I lassoed the sun
You're welcome!
To stretch the days and bring you fun
Also I harnessed the breeze
You're welcome!
To fill your sails and shake your trees
So what can I say except you're welcome
For the islands I pulled from the sea…
Well, come to think of it
Kid, honestly I can go on and on
I can explain every natural phenomenon
The tide, the grass, the ground, oh
That was Maui just messing around" (Shurer 2016; 00:38:30)

The relevant differences consider two of Maui's exploits and their details. The first difference is omitting the tale of Maui seeking immortality. Even though story is not known in every island, it however is a part of the most known stories about Maui (Craig 2004). The quest of seeking the immortality ends in Maui's death when he tried to enter the body of the goddess of death between her thighs while she sleeps. However, the goddess awoke, crossed her legs and crushed Maui to death. These violent actions might be too frightening for young children and are therefore omitted. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in the movie, Maui seeks to find the heart of *Te Fiti* (Mother island), a stone which bears the power of creation. The movie tells that Maui steals the heart from inside *Te Fiti*. In the movie, Maui disappears for thousands of years

after the theft but in the mythology, he is unable to succeed in the task. There seems to be a connection between the two quests.

The second difference considers the origin of Maui's magical hook. According to the original mythology, Maui went to the underworld and obtained control of his grandmothers' magic jawbone. This jawbone became the magical fishhook that Maui used in his deeds (Graig 2004). The representation of a skeleton or handling a cadaver might be too disturbing for children and is therefore removed from the movie. Instead, in the movie Maui explains that the hook was given to him by the gods thus making it magical.

4.2 Amplifying conflict and action

The second of Nikolajevas categories is amplifying conflict and action, for example adding an antagonist. Nikolajeva also mentions that Disney seems to prefer person-against-person conflicts instead of more complex person-against-oneself conflict. However, the movie Moana does include also battles against oneself, for example when Moana is on the verge of giving up the task and has to choose whether to give up or continue the difficult journey (Shurer 2016: 01:18:30). It seems that Disney has added different conflicts since Nikolajevas' categories (2005). This category provided also three major differences to the original folklore. One of the aspects that was most criticized by scholars was the representation of the *Kakamora* (Herman 2016). In Polynesian mythology, the *Kakamora* are small goblin-like men who live in holes and caves and wander around the forests (Fox & Drew 1915). They are considered to be harmless but attack humans with their long and sharp nails when irritated. In the movie, the *Kakamora* are presented as mean coconut pirates. They live on a grand wooden vessel that seems to have some sophisticated features. They are vicious and determined to get what they want. They attack Moana and Maui and try to steal the heart of *Te Fiti* (Shurer 2016: 00:45:30). By adding the violent *Kakamora* into the movie, there is more action and more conflicts between the characters. Maui and Moana are forced to survive together through yet another conflict both as individuals and as a team.

Action is also added with Maui and Moana entering *Lalotai* "the realm of monsters" when they try to retrieve Maui's hook (Shurer 2016: 00:57:10). There they meet yet another villain, a crab

called *Tamatoa*. Both *Lalotai* and *Tamatoa* are creations of Disney and they do not have equivalents in the Polynesian mythology. In addition, there seems to be no stories about Maui even losing the hook. It could be seen that the battle was created to show the importance of Maui's hook.

The third conflict added is the battle between Moana and *Te Ka* "the lava monster" (Shurer 2016: 01:25:30). *Te Ka* was born when Maui stole the heart of *Te Fiti* and has been spreading chaos ever since. Neither *Te Fiti* nor *Te Ka* is found in the Polynesian mythology but *Te Ka* seems to derive from the fire and volcano goddess *Pele*. This battle is the main conflict of the movie, the ultimate battle where the hero meets the villain. *Te Ka* has been destroying area and finally, Moana ends the darkness.

4.3 Adding a happy ending

The third of Nikolajeva's categories is adding a happy ending instead of a sad or an ambivalent one. Since the movie is an original and its story itself does not correlate with the Polynesian folklore, any comparison about the ending cannot be done. According to Olrik (ed. By Dundes 1965) folklore must have some sort of closure in the story. The ending does not necessarily have to be a happy one, but the story cannot end abruptly. As mentioned before, according to the Polynesian folklore, Maui dies as he tries to steal immortality. The story ends with Maui's wife declaring a war against the gods and revenging the death of her husband thus bringing the story to a closure (Westervelt 1910). The ending of the movie, however, is happy and hopeful, hence fitting Nikolajeva's category. In the movie, Moana sails the seas with her family continuing the legacy of her ancestors and Maui being around ready to lend his helping hand (Shurer 2016: 01:35:00).

4.4 Adding comic characters or sidekicks

The next category on Nikolajeva's list is adding comic characters or sidekicks to the story. Folklore often does not include sidekicks perhaps because there seems to be no need for comic relief in the story. As discussed previously, folklore tells about the values and customs of the culture through the deeds of gods and heroes (Black, Wright and Erickson 2001). In folklore, the

focus is more in the action than in the story around it. Artz (2002) notes that comical animal characters are created for making the film more appealing to children and for comic relief for the older viewers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the sidekicks in Moana are made purely for entertainment.

There are two sidekicks in the movie; A pig *Pua* and a chicken *Heihei*, both displayed in Figure 2. Graig (2004) explains that almost all of the main plants and animals, including pigs and chickens, were brought to the islands by humans. Since Disney's goal was to make the movie as authentic as possible (Ketekiri Taimaira 2018), it seems only natural that the animals chosen as sidekicks are a pig and a chicken. Pigs have a special status especially in the Hawai'ian folklore (Graig 2004:144). The stories include a pig god *Kamapua'a* and there are often sacred pigs present in the stories. In the movie, the name of the pig, *Pua*, is derived from Hawai'ian language where *pua'a* means pig (ibid.). *Pua's* significance to the story is small and it does not provide much comic to the movie. However, it does show the importance of pigs to the Polynesian culture. The role of chicken is somewhat smaller in the mythology but there is a tale that tells the origin of chickens. According to Craig (1989:107) the chickens were a gift to the mortals from the underworld god. According to Maori dictionary, *heihei* means both chicken and disturbance. Since in the movie, *Heihei* is extremely dumb and more often than not causing a disturbance, for example, when *Heihei* swallows a big rock that is clearly unsuitable for eating (Shurer 2016: 00:13:03), thus the name seems only fitting. It can be argued that even his appearance, skinny body and unusually big eyes, highlights his role as a dumb and amusing sidekick. As a character, *Heihei* seems to provide only comic to the story.

4.5 Adding an authoritative character

The fifth of Nikolajevas categories is adding an authoritative character who provides judgement and reasoning. In Polynesian mythology, the stories themselves provide judgement for children and show what is desirable within the community (Black, Wright and Erickson 2001). The authoritative characters in the mythology are often gods or elders who guide the heroes and other gods (Graig 1989). In the movie, there are two authoritative characters, *Gramma Tala* and *mini-Maui*. *Gramma Tala* (tala meaning story in Hawaiian) is Moana's grandmother, her father's mother, who also describes herself as "the village crazy lady". From early on in the movie, she is

often near the ocean and present when something strange happens to Moana. For example, *Gramma Tala* reveals the true nature of their ancestors as voyagers and is present when Moana first encounters the personification of the ocean (Shurer 2016: 00:21:30). As an authoritative character, she encourages Moana to listen to her heart and pursue her dreams. After her death, *Gramma Tala* transforms into a stingray and symbolically follows Moana in her journey (ibid.: 00:31:30). The turning point in the movie is when Moana has encountered *Te Ka* for the first time and failed. She is disappointed and lost her self-confidence. *Gramma Tala* appears and reminds her to listen to her heart and do what she feels is right (ibid.: 01:18:30). Encouraged by her grandmother, Moana decides to try again and continue her journey. It seems the *Gramma Tala* serves as a reassuring and comforting character who aims to help Moana find her true competence. Her authority is based on her old age but also to her gentle approach to difficulties in life.

The other authoritative character is a small version of Maui, mute *mini-Maui*, that is tattooed in his body. *Mini-Maui* serves as a conscience for Maui and reminds Maui not to focus only on himself. *Mini-Maui* does not approve of Maui's selfish actions. For example, when Maui tries to leave Moana alone in a deserted island, *mini-Maui* pulls Maui from his other tattoos trying to make him stop (Shurer 2016: 00:42:00). *Mini-Maui* does not have authority over Maui, but he affects Maui's choices and actions. For younger viewers, *Mini-Maui* demonstrates the function and significance of conscience.

4.6 Changing human characters into animals

Nikolajevas sixth category, changing human characters into animals, seems to be a bit ambiguous in Moana. There are no characters from the folklore that were changed into animals, but there are two significant characters who are not human; *Tamatoa* and the ocean. According to Nikolajeva (2005: 231) human characters are often changed into animals because children prefer animals to humans. As mentioned earlier, *Tamatoa* is a crab who rules "the realm of monsters". In Polynesian mythology the underworld can take many forms and be a home for both good and bad creatures, one definition being that it is a dark place where monsters live (Craig 2004). There is no clear ruler for the underworld hence making *Tamatoa* an original character. It could be possible that *Tamatoa* was made an animal because the character would be

then more understandable for children. This might also be the reason why the ocean was personified into a wave. The ocean plays a significant role in the movie because it chooses Moana to be the one who restores the heart of *Te Fiti*. The ocean itself is a vast mass and the personification might make the ocean more understandable to the audience. For example, when Moana communicates with the ocean, the ocean takes a form of a wave and nods its "head". The ocean itself does not have any significant role in the mythology, it is mainly a surrounding for the stories (Graig 2004).

4.7 Additional differences

There are also differences that do not fit Nikolajevas categories but do differ significantly from the original folklore and are somewhat relevant to the topic. The first clear difference is the story of the creation of the world. The movie explains that "in the beginning there was only ocean, until the Mother Island emerged" (Shurer 2016: 00:01:30). After that the Mother Island (Te Fiti) shared its power and created life, but when Maui stole her heart, she "began to crumble and gave birth to a terrible darkness". That "darkness" has continued to the present. The mythology explains that in the beginning there was only darkness *pō* which later caused light, the light caused daylight and so forth (Graig 2004). The first male was Sky Father and female was Earth Mother that joined and created the great gods (ibid.).

The second difference is Maui's appearance. In the movie, Maui is a big and muscular, almost overweight, curly haired demigod. He is also a funny character but often pursues his own advantages. In the mythology, Maui is a thin but strong man (Graig 1989). Some Polynesian scholars have criticized the movie for implying that Polynesian men are arrogant and overweight (Herman 2016). The movie makers have defended themselves by explaining that the character was based on Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's grandfather who was Samoan (Official Disney website 2016). Dwayne Johnson is the voice actor for Maui (ibid.).

The third difference is that in his song (excerpt 1) Maui mentioned the tide, the grass and the ground, but there seems to be no tales about Maui dealing with any of these three things. Thus, the movie seems to connect Maui to many similar aspects, perhaps to emphasize Maui's godly features.

4.8 Criticism

As discussed earlier, when discussing the representation of a certain culture, cultural appropriation is an aspect that cannot be disregarded. Many Polynesian scholars have criticized the movie for cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. The criticism concerns mainly the appearance of Maui, the representation of *Kakamora* and the role of Oceanic Story Trust in the moviemaking (Herman 2016). According to the critics, such as New Zealand Member of Parliament Jenny Salesa and a native Hawaiian Trisha Kehaulani Watson-Sproat, Maui is illustrated as a "huge buffoon" and this perpetuates disrespectful pictures of Polynesians as being overweight. Obesity is a recognized problem in Polynesia ja the critics believe that the movie only strengthens the stereotypes about Polynesians. They note that for Polynesians themselves, Maui does not represent a man that they are proud of or what they want their children to admire. Another criticized aspect is the misrepresentation of *Kakamora*. Coconuts are an essential part of the Polynesian life, but they are often treated as stereotypes. Critics find the *Kakamora* insulting because they do have actual origin in the folklore that differs greatly from the movie (ibid.). Also, coconut is sometimes used as a racial insult and therefore the coconut shaped pirates can be seen as offensive. The Oceanic Story Trust has caused mush discussion and criticism among the Polynesians (ibid.). As mentioned earlier, the Trust was formed in order to ensure that the Polynesian culture was represented as respectively and correctly as possible. The criticism is aimed to the members of the Trust. Many critics, such as Pacific Island Scholar Vicente Diaz, note that Polynesia is a vast region and the culture and folklore is diverse. It is debatable who can choose which parts are represented in the movie and how they are generalized. Some people are extremely offended that their version of the myth was not included in the movie. For example, Tongan cultural anthropologist Tevita O. Ka'ili (2016) explains that in the Tongan version, Maui is accompanied with a goddess *Hina* and Ka'ili sees her absence is seen as a "colonial erasure". However, these discussions have not significantly affected the success of the movie unlike when Disney's Mulan appeared in 1998. Mulan did not succeed in China because the public claimed the depiction and storyline to be too different (Yin 2013). Moana, however, has been popular all around the world, and it has been thanked for its realistic representation and attention to detail, such as clothing and the canoes (Herman 2016). Thus, it would seem that Disney has made some improvements in cultural representation.

5. Conclusion

Disney films have been a part of children's lives all around the globe for decades. Globalization has been a growing trend and brought different cultures closer. This has led Disney to widen their spectrum and adventure more cultures and find stories from these surroundings. The result of this can be seen in one of the latest Disney movie Moana (2016), which represents the Polynesian culture and mythology. Since Disney has such a significant influence in how the cultures are represented, I wanted to study the process of how Polynesian mythology is transformed into a Disney product. Previous research has showed that Disney movies often follow a certain pattern called disneyfication. For this research, I used categories of disneyfication provided by Nikolajeva. In my research I wanted to find out how disneyfication affected the moviemaking of Moana and how the Polynesian folklore is changed in the hands of Disney.

My findings suggest that Moana closely follows the guidelines of a Disney movie. Disneyfication has had a significant impact on Moana but there are still aspects in the movie that fall outside the categories of disneyfication. All but one of Nikolajeva's categories were present in the movie and I discovered many examples to illustrate the differences and additions. Many of the changes that were made considered Maui and his actions. The differences included Maui's appearance and deeds. Against the image made by the mythology the movie portrayed Maui as a big and a powerful, almost overweight. Also, the movie omitted the story of Maui's unsuccessful deed which ended with Maui's death. It can be concluded that this was done to make the movie more child-friendly and to fit to Disney's frame of family entertainment. Furthermore, perhaps to highlight Maui's difference to Moana and other "normal" people, Maui gained few additional achievements to his list of deeds. In line with Nikolajeva's categories, there was also several added conflicts and extended actions. These included the battles against the *Kakamora* and *Te Ka*. In addition, the movie misrepresented the Kakamora and changed their nature into evil and mischievous. Like in almost all other Disney movies, Moana too was added both comic and authoritative characters. *Pua* and *Heihei* represented the main animals of the Polynesian islands and brought some situational comedy to the movie. As mentioned earlier, stories are a way to

teach children about the values, customs and beliefs of the culture. The movie had two characters to fulfill the need for an authoritative character. Gramma Tala's focus is more on the bigger picture whereas Mini-Maui represents more everyday conscience. Overall, there seems to be no clear line regarding what pieces of the mythology were changed and what were kept. Disneyfication has had its impact on Moana but it does not explain all the differences between the movie and the Polynesian mythology.

The concept of cultural appropriation is present in the discussion around the movie. Even though many scholars found much to criticize, the discussion has remained lesser than for example around the movie Mulan. It seems that to some extent Disney has been able to improve their representation of cultures.

Due to the length of this study, I was only able to study the movie from one side of the story; what was changed. I was also not able to study what parts were made with respect to the Polynesian culture and mythology. Moviemaking and writing the transcript are clearly more complex than merely choosing pieces from a story. Further studies might focus on the other side of the movie; what details were kept. Future research could also study and compare if there are any differences between movies that are based in something and those that are original stories. There might be also differences between different media producers. There are multiple reasons and explanations for why certain changes were made and I do not claim that my findings are inclusive. I based my analysis to the earlier research and what was found relevant in them. My results are mostly in line with those. In the future it might be interesting to study if the representation of non-American cultures in Disney movies has evolved. New Disney movies are produced constantly, and they provide an ongoing supply of research material of how different cultures are represented.

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