Colonialism and Racism in Heart of Darkness and Lilo and Stitch

Posted on January 5, 2024

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/colonialism-and-racism-in-heart-of-darkness-and-lilo-and-stitch/

A social theory that is directed toward the transformation and critique of society as a whole is regarded as a critical theory. It presents a contrast to other traditional theories that merely seek to understand and explain social phenomena (Crossman). As a critique of society, postcolonial and critical race theories emerged within the context of racial oppression. This essay aims to identify the elements of colonialism and racism as reflected in Joseph Conrad's infamous novella, ".*Heart of Darkness*", and an American animated movie, *Lilo & Stitch*. Through excerpts from the novel and examples from the movie, the essay attempts to employ the post-colonialist perspective.

Heart of Darkness

"Heart of Darkness" is a novella written by "Joseph Conrad". The novella highlights various social problems, including racism and colonialism. The writer explored colonialism and racism through the lens of a post-colonialist perspective. *Heart of Darkness* has depicted the phenomenon prevalent in the 19.th century (Marfu'Ah). Colonialism is predominantly concerned with the political and economic linkages that might wither away as the state gains independence. Conrad highlights the unfair means, including plundering and robbery, that was prevalent to augment earnings. The only concern was to increase earnings irrespective of the source, as "they grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle darkness." (Conrad 9–10).

The novel highlights the atrocities faced by black people. They were oppressed, marginalized, and subject to inhumane treatment, which caused intense physical and mental suffering. By representing the "dark" continent, the author skillfully highlights the racist traditions that has been a part of the West for centuries. The character of Kurtz is a symbolic representation of commercialism, greed, power, and the impact of barbarism on a civilized society. In contrast, the author highlighted a spirit of adventure and a thirst for knowledge in the character of Marlow. The colonialist ideology was rooted in an assumption that the inhabitants of the invaded land were inferior as compared to the colonizers, who regarded themselves as superior. The brutalities that followed are highlighted in the novel as the "clink kept time with their footsteps," signifying their chained feet and necks, as "each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking… they were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea" (Conrad 28–29).

The author highlights the social classification of human beings on account of physical and biological characteristics. Even today, societies are stratified based on race in an attempt to maintain power and hierarchy. The colonial era is a period marked by the atrocities faced by Black people. They were physically weak and burdened: “their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks – these chaps; , but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement” (Conrad). White men were comforted at the expense of the well-being of black men.

Grounded in the post-colonial evaluation conducted above, it can be inferred that post-colonial theory comprises imperialism, colonialism, and racism. In this novella, the white men were imperialists. A prominent example of imperialism is Mr. Kurtz. He migrated to Africa for business and trade. However, he was not only involved in trading; white men attempted to exploit the resources to accumulate wealth. In this novel, black men were represented as subalterns. They were colonized, and their lands were occupied by white men. Moreover, white men also coerced black men to engage in unpaid labor and made living conditions hard for them. Black men were viewed as fools and a burden to society. The writer shows how Black men were left to suffer unattended when a tropical epidemic hit the state. In *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad realistically depicted the social realities of the 19.th century (Hasan et al.).

Conrad has artistically shown the adverse effects of colonialism on African people. The author writes about the atrocities that Africans faced as the British colonizers captured their land and fought for their ambitions while damaging the local culture, ethics, and economy. Conrad has revealed the hypocritical side of colonialism. The British colonizers’ influx was backed by their claim to train and educate the Africans; however, after capturing the land, they marginalized the colonized, enslaved them, and exploited them for their gains. British colonizers were shown to be capturing and exploiting the resources of the locals aggressively and practiced sheer savageness against the Africans. Africans were treated like animals and left on their own to fight against the epidemic. It was a common practice among the British to degrade Africans and call them names. Poor Africans were coerced to engage in labor, and all prominent positions were captured by the British.

Lilo and Stitch

Lilo and Stitch is a story of a little indigenous girl named Lilo who lives with her elder sister Nani, who is struggling to make ends meet after their parents pass away in a car accident. Nani faces trouble in managing her job and caring for Lilo (Rollison). Both the movie and series *Lilo and Stitch* depict the effects of post-colonialism. Through the adventures of the main characters of this cartoon, the artist has attempted to celebrate the differences between geographically remote Hawaii and America. *Lilo and Stitch* romanticizes Hawaiian culture while the cartoon presents the challenges due to American imperialism. The makeup of the cartoon’s characters is multi-ethnic and includes Hawaiian as well as non-native Hawaiian characters. The non-native Hawaiians are White people who were depicted as being more similar to mainland Americans (Rollison). An important concept in the context of colonialism is that of “indigenous absence” (Denbroeder). For centuries, geographic and economic

expansions have been carried out at the cost of land and labor from indigenous communities. The colonists justified it by portraying these lands as empty and available to be occupied. This notion of indigenous absence is illustrated in. *Lilo and Stitch* through Lilo's family and the presence of aliens. With the illustration of social workers, the story aims to further the narrative of justified state intervention.

The audience can notice 'othering' as Lilo interacts with the non-natives. For example, Lilo's enemy Mertle was a white girl who belonged to a wealthy family and had a particular interest in building a sound career. Mertle was portrayed as an antagonist with a sound background, in contrast to Lilo, who was a poor Hawaiian with a lone family member (her sister) who struggled hard to find a source of employment to support her younger sister. The artist has sharply contrasted the characters based on their mainland and native Hawaiian backgrounds. For example, an African American social worker, Cobra Bubbles, and a white hotel inspector were shown to be insensitive and unsympathetic towards Lilo and Nani's miserable life, while Lilo's teacher was portrayed as a kind, warm, and empathetic character (Rollison). Another character, Mr. Jameson, who was portrayed as a rich white man who owns several businesses on the island, is kind towards Lilo and Nani and offers employment to Nani. Mr. Jameson extended his help to the sisters because his son had a liking for Lilo. The writer has also mocked white tourists who came to the island and seemed oblivious to the happenings of the island.

The writer has distinctly depicted the nature and attributes of all characters. He shows that despite being victims of racial discrimination, Lilo and Nani avoid cultural clashes and accept both Hawaiian and mainland American culture openheartedly. Mr. Jameson's character was also accommodating and not only helped and supported Lilo and Nani but also named his son 'Keoni' – a name of Hawaiian origin. The extraterrestrial beings were shown to leave their planet and accept Earth as their new home after getting fired from their mission to capture Stitch. They accept the people of Hawaii and become a part of Lilo's family.

The writer has tapped some typical symbols of the post-colonial era; for example, Kauai's possession of sugar crops also appeared in the series. This was depicted as an important symbol of the British colonization of Hawaii. During that time, the British colonizers industrialized the production of sugar. In a few instances, the writer has deviated from the typical portrayal of Hawaii. Whenever the characters are shown being on vacation, the onscreen portrayal of Hawaii was actually from mainland America. In *Lilo and Stitch*, the writer has portrayed the mediocre lifestyles of the characters as they attended school and searched for employment, while Hawaii constantly struggles to become a prominent tourist destination (Parent).

Lilo and Nani were portrayed as patriotic Hawaiians who stick to their traditions and strongly uphold the local culture. Throughout the film, the saying 'Ohana' was used again and again, which means 'family'. Lilo and Nani were found using this term again and again to reaffirm their love for Hawaii. Lilo and Nani emphasized that Stitch should remain with them. In some instances, the family was shown celebrating their traditions, including Aloha, in which the newcomers were welcomed home.

Works Cited

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Green Integer; Distributed in the U.S. by Consortium Book Sales and Distribution, 2003.

Crossman, Ashley. "What Is Critical Theory?" *ThoughtCo*, 2019, https://www.thoughtco.com/critical-theory-3026623.

Hasan, Mariwan, et al. "Imperialism, Colonialism, and Racism in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: A Postcolonial Approach." *Acuity Journal of English Language Pedagogy Literature and Culture*, vol. 6, Dec. 2020. *ResearchGate*, https://doi.org/10.35974/acuity.v6i1.2385.

Marfu'Ah, Itsnaini Baroroh. *Colonialism and Racism Reflected in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902): A Postcolonialism Perspective*. Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

Parent, Gabrielle. *Disney Storytelling as Another Form of Settler Colonialism: As Seen In The Movie Lilo & Stitch*. Jan. 2020. *www.academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/44608966/Disney_Storytelling_as_Another_Form_of_Settler_Colonialism_As_Seen_In_the_Movie_Lilo_and_Stitch.

Rollison, Crysta A. *We Are Not Alone: Finding Family Across a Universe of Differences in Lilo and Stitch*. 2020, p. 18.

Copyright © 2026 Academic Master.