

Ideology and Hidden Morality in The Lion King

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Abstract

Ideology is defined as the way of thinking and thoughts of a certain individuals, society , or culture. Further, it refers to theories and intended aims that form a sociopolitical program. The term ideology was originally coined by the French writer and sociologist , Antoine Destutt de Tracy, in the period between 1796 and 1798. In order to truly understand any human community , first, one have to understand the cultural ideas and the way this community stick to. Since a film mirrors a certain culture of a particular nation, there is a close connection between the film and implied ideological thoughts to prevail an intended potential culture . In any film, ideological beliefs, concepts, and notions can be universally pervasive by being disguised in entertainment. A Filmmaker, like a storytelling , is capable of not only conveying or reflecting reality, but also reconstructing and portraying new pictures of reality by ways of conventions, or codes of other cultures. Thus, through ideology, conflicting systems, struggling for a cultural dominance on the Third World as it is reflected in Disney's *The Lion King* movie(1994).

1.Introduction

Today, all the conflicting systems, race in a frenzied campaign for acquiring power and making some nations under their domination . In order to make such dominance to come true, Disney's Incorporation, through entertainment, succeeds to permeate to various children's societies in the whole world. Disney was preoccupied with how to attract children and gain predominance over his rivals. The weapon by which Disney realizes his goals through implied ideological thoughts, is animation(a process in which pictures are treated to be seen as lively moving images) Tiffin (in Hasse et al 42). Tiffin states that the dominance of Disney is caused by the close correlation between fairytales and animation:

The relationship between animation and fairytale is also interesting in that animation shadows the fairy tale's problematic association with children. The generally childlike concerns of many animated works , together with the influence of Disney's clean-cut family values, echo the Victorian tendency to relegate folkloric, magical narratives to the nursery(43).

The main impulses for Disney's releasing animated movies, were to virtually create a higher artistic realism , to construct pedagogical background, and to commercially reap huge profits (Watts 36). At first , it was done by traditional methods such as classical ways of hand- drawing , puppet or cell animation.

Thus, for the sake of hyper reality, Disney continues developing technical means which finally culminated through application of three dimensions digital technologies (Tiffin 45). Evely points out that screen literacy enriches children with vast imagination and variety of ideas which enable young viewers to understand the world around them:

Screen literacy helps us to know, understand and appreciate the ways in which screens communicate through a compelling mix of moving image , sound and graphics . To have control over our stories , we need to understand more about how such powerful , and mysterious storytelling works (9).

Moreover, Evely emphasizes the making of characterization in animating folktales as:

A key element of Disney fairy tales is the creation of rich characters with distinctive personalities and a depth that is reflected in artwork, from concept drawings to final design. Even in the earliest animated feature , Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, each dwarf is fully formed character(13).

As a result , the twenty-first century has witnessed amazing artistic integration in the field of children's literature by using the technology of animation in filmic fairytales for better virtual reality.

The present research paper explores implied moral lessons in *The Lion King* children can learn from as well as the hidden ideology Disney prevails beyond enjoyment. *The Lion King* shows how ideology has negative effects on children's innocence. In such process, the filmmaker employs the film as a medium through which he can pass his own ideology or other ideologies (Turner 155).

2. Ideology: Definition and Origin

According to *Merriam Webster Dictionary Online*, **Ideology** is defined as:" a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture ". Further, it is defined as " the integrated assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program." or " a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture ". The term "ideology" was first coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy between 1796 and 1798 (Turner 93).Graeme Turner defines ideology as a "theory of reality that describes the system of beliefs and practices that is produced by this theory of reality"(155). Ideology is obviously recognized in a certain culture and defines the social, cultural and political feature or formation for each nation. Ideology is behind all the forms and concepts that constitute the representation of culture, gender, class structure and individuality. Since a film reflects a certain culture of a particular nation, there is a close connection between the film and implied ideological thoughts which are

marketed to prevail an intended potential culture . In any film, ideological beliefs, concepts, and notions can be universally pervasive by being disguised in entertainment. In *The Lion King* movie , the embodiment of the ideology is represented by metaphor of the cycle of food, by social class hierarchy in which creatures are classified into two main classes: elites and inferiors. Turner states that " film is seen as a " reflection " of the dominant beliefs and values of its culture" (52).

3. The Lion King

Unlike other Disney's animated movies, *The Lion King* (1994) animated film is not an adaptation of a certain tale. Both the original story and the animated one are without any required adaptation (Lee and Madei 98). It is basically written by three screen writers: Jonathan Roberts , Irene Mecchi and Linda Woolverton (Miller 53).The story of *The Lion King* according to filmmakers is inspired by two real stories: the first story is the lives of Joseph and Moses from the Bible and the second one is William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. *The Lion King* movie is about a lion king's young cub named Simba. The film shows how Simba is conspired against by his envious uncle, Scar(*Disney's The Lion King 1994*).

Scar, the villain of the film, arranges with the gang of evil hyenas a murdering scheme of Simba since he is the only heir of his father's kingdom, King Mufasa. Wishing the throne for himself, Scar ensnares Simba to work against his father's will and warning "You must never go there, Simba". (*Disney's The Lion King 1994*). By alluring Simba to go to the Elephant Graveyard (a dark and mysterious place),Scar entraps both Simba and Mufasa. He overthrows Mufasa into the abyss below saying " Long live the king"(*Disney's The Lion King 1994*). To cover up his crime, Scar makes Simba convinced that he is the only responsible for his father's death. In order to take the throne, Scar convinces the animals of the Pride Lands that both Mufasa and his son met death in that stampede. Then he claims his right to have the throne. At the end, Simba returns home and takes his right place as a king, after a final duel in which Simba wins over Scar by flipping him over a low cliff (*Disney's The Lion King 1994*).

This brief plot of the Lion King is based on both the biblical story of Joseph and Moses and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* due to the similarities between them. As it was related in *Genesis* of *The Old Testament Book*, the story of Joseph is iterated in the plot of *The Lion King*, but in a different new inspired style that serves the morality of the animated film. According to the Bible, Joseph, the dearest and favorite youngest son of Jacob was plotted against by his brothers due to jealousy and envy (Nelson 56) . Like Joseph, Simba who is the dearest son of his father, the lion king Simba, is also envied, but not by siblings since he was the only heir, but by his villainous evil uncle , Scar who was planning to

usurp the throne from his brother king Mufasa (Capaccio 9). When Simba joyfully sings "I Just Can't Wait to be King" (*Disney's The Lion King* 1994), Scar becomes too enraged to the extent that he commands his supporters, the three hyenas to get rid of Simba forever.

Like Joseph, when Simba is banished abroad his homeland, his family and people thought that he must have been dead. Under the leadership of Scar, the country witnesses terrible deterioration in all fields of life. Unusual policies are practiced in which all creatures undergo a miserable period of fear, drought, starvation, and destruction (Reiter 175). Such calamities of famine which were prophesied by the Pharaoh's dream, simulate exactly what happens in the Pride Lands. When Simba topples down his uncle's ruling and regains his throne as king, the country recovers its glorious days of prosperity. Similarly, Joseph possessed a powerful estate in Egypt which makes him capable of punishing his brothers. Finally, Joseph is reunited with his father and establishes the order in the country where all people live in prosperity (Palmer 154).

In addition to Joseph, *The Lion King* film includes some allusions to the story of Moses in the *Book of Exodus*. Dolo states that "It is said upon Moses birth, his mother placed him in a basket, and set him adrift on the Nile" (352) to protect him from the Pharaoh's infanticide. Then, Moses had become a powerful and respectful figure in the Egyptian society. Simba, in *The Lion King*, mimics Moses who "experienced pain, difficulties...taught them [his people] the meaning of life" (Whiting 10). Simba, like Moses, was also adopted by a good family when he successfully ran from the hyenas. His friends Nala, Timon and Pumbaa help him and teach him the philosophy of life. Both Moses and Simba fated to rescue their people from tyranny and oppression of their cruel rulers. The purpose behind including religious inspiration in this film, is to enhance moral values both kids and adults can learn from (Sealey 133).

Accordingly, the allusion made to such biblical stories in *The Lion King* is considered an invitation for all those who govern to establish justice, peace, love and harmony among all their subjects. Future rulers should be fair like Simba, and not like oppressive Scar, the symbol of slavery and persecution. The second allusion is made to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* due to many joint similarities between Simba, the young protagonist of *The Lion King* and Hamlet, the adult protagonist of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (Mittelstaedt 179). Both Simba and Hamlet belong to royal families. Both protagonists have no siblings, the only heirs of their fathers and having shadowy evil uncles who are envious and jealous. Scar is jealous of his brother, Mufasa that he aspires to take the throne and be the king. Claudius has been already shown as a king by killing his brother (Shelton 10). They both have friends that Simba has deep friendships with the Timon and Pumbaa, who support him when he is exiled and teach him how to live his life. Like Simba, Hamlet has a true friend, Horatio, who supports him in many occasions.

Concerning love and romantic affairs, both Simba and Hamlet have love interests. Simba has a playmate named Nala when they were children, then she becomes his love interest in adulthood. Hamlet also has a love affair with a noble beautiful girl named Ophelia. Both protagonists have been afflicted by having their fathers killed by their uncles. Mufasa is killed by his brother, Scar for the sake of the throne. Likewise, Prince Hamlet was also killed by his brother, Claudius for the same intention. Both Simba and Hamlet are sent to exile. Scar convinces Simba to run away out of the Pride Land when his father died and so does Claudius. Claudius also persuades Hamlet to travel to England in order to get rid of him there. Both Simba and Hamlet have their fathers appeared as ghosts after death. Mufasa appears to Simba in the stars asking him to take his suitable position as king in the circle of life. Hamlet's father also appears as a ghost telling Hamlet that he is murdered by his brother, Claudius and asks him to take revenge from his uncle (Patten 180).

Concerning the psychological condition, both Simba and Hamlet undergo crucial internal struggle which results in confrontation with their criminal uncles. Simba overcomes both carelessness and irresponsibility and is in due time able to regain the throne against his uncle's villainy. Thus, he goes back to Pride Land to free his people and take his right position as a king. The same as Simba, Hamlet, hesitated for a long time as whether or not he would regain his extorted crown. But at the end, Hamlet overcomes his hesitation too, and decides "to be or not to be" (Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act3, Scene1, 96). He also takes the decisive decision of taking his right position by killing his uncle. Thus, at the end, both Simba and Hamlet retaliate for their fathers. Simba duels with Scar and pins him to the ground leaving him to the hyenas to kill him. While the enraged Hamlet sentences his uncle at last with both poison and sword.

Morality in *The Lion King* film lies in the so-called "Circle of Life" which inspires its ideas from the Hindu tradition as a dominant ideology. Accordingly, "earthly existence is part of a never-ending cycle" (Pinsky 154), as it is emphasized in the song when animals sing that "from the day they are born, they begin moving through this cycle, and that through 'faith and love' they find their proper place" (*Disney's The Lion King 1994*). Mufasa teaches his son that life is mortal even for kings and that the time of any ruling king "rises and falls, like the sun" (155). As for the concept of Circle of Life, Mufasa instructs his son that "Life in the wild exists in a delicate balance" asking to respect all creatures even beasts. Arguing the ideology of the "Circle of Life" through Mufasa's speech to his son, it is clear that "Mufasa, the king spends half the movie impressing on his son, Simba, the duties and indispensability of the king, on whom the entire natural order seems to rest: in bland eco-speak" (Zorando 213).

In the *Lion King* movie, the metaphor of the cycle of food, is the ideological representation of social class hierarchy in which creatures are classified into two main classes: elites and inferiors. In this high social position, the lions embody the wealthy people, higher classes as well as influential

political power in human society. On the contrary, the inferiors are represented by the hyenas which embody the bad and very poor class in society. The hyenas are shown as violent, bad, greedy, and savage gangsters. They are too brutal and are ready to kill for food and water (Pinsky 155). The hyenas are also depicted as living in the elephant graveyard which is a dark shadowy place lies on the edge of the Pride lands. This place is shown as a desolate wasteland which has no water or food (Reiter 178).

Like the hyenas, the low social class suffers from poverty and lives at the bottom of the social ladder. The elite people represented by the royal family are shown as speaking in a good pure English with British accent. Whereas the inferiors, embodied by the hyenas, are depicted as speaking low English through "the voices of Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Marin in racially coded accents" (Giroux 82). These accents of discourse signal the blacks and Latinos. Through this racially coded language, Disney displays, is seeking for the Third World materialism when Africa is shown as a place of "exotic jungle animals rather than human beings" (Booker 188).

John Zornado argues that by representing both cultural and racial superiority aspects under the cover of "child rearing", Disney's constructs a negative pedagogy by depicting the superiors as having the right to dominate the inferiors. In this portrayal, Disney emotionally appeals to children to make them unconsciously satisfied and realize the need for the adult's acceptance. As a result, children react happily and willingly to obey the adults. For instance, Simba has matured, he directly accepts the responsibility and obeys his father's order. So the dominant ideology in *The Lion King* does not mean disobeying the father, but emphasizes the "inevitable turning" according to the Circle of Life that "rolls through all things" (Zornado 158).

Lola Young (in Les Back and Solomos 282) confirms the ideology of imperial culture by depicting the African blacks as the other directly or indirectly. For example, the white color represents advancement, modernity, reason, stability and order. On the contrary, the black color refers to violence, backwardness, chaos, and the abuse of power. Disney, by acquiring the influential power of ideology, he successfully transmits its ideological concepts, beliefs, and values from adults to children within the pedagogical allegation since he is able to "code even the most horrific violence as a story of progress and civilization" (Zornado 136). According to Zornado, the ideological transposition is defined as "the psychodynamic process by which a traumatic and violent culture reproduces itself first and foremost in the lived relations between the adult and the child" or it can be understood as "an intensification and refraction of the ordinary generational transmission of the adults' beliefs, values, and desires" (139).

In *The Arizona Quarterly*, Matt Roth (in Elahi 127) argues that *The Lion King* is "as an allegory of suburban resentment against a racialized inner city".

According to Roth, there is a clear hint at a fascist tendency in Disney's characterization in 1990s such as Jafar in *Aladdin* and Scar in *The Lion King*. In his critique concerning *The Lion King*, Roth calls Disney as "fascist" due to the evident connotations which explain the connection in this movie between the predator and the prey (130). Scar embodies fascism when he despises the hyenas and considers them inferiors because fascism is based on the race distinction. Scar employs the hyenas' hunger for his favor because he knows that the hyenas are ready to eat each other and even their legs when they feel hungry. Therefore, Scar uses them as an instrument for seizing power regardless of the crime and the terrible oppression the hyenas committed. On the other hand, Scar represents communism when he equates the hyenas which are of a scavenger race, with the lions, to balance the social structure.

The portrayal of communism is also embodied in the hyenas which live off the work of others by force. Whereas the lions take their traditional place at the top of the hierarchal royal throne as inherently the leader of the nature having authority, strength, and are with cunning superior skills the hyenas do not. On the contrary, Scar in his song describes the hyenas as "I never thought hyenas essential/They're crude and unspeakably plain"(Modenessi 193). As quoted in Modenessi, Arthur L. Little states that "*The Lion King* is very much a popular (a mass) treatise on the social and political philosophy of place – of existence – of self". Accordingly, some critics criticize Disney for adopting racial and social stereotypes represented by the hyenas as inferiors. Some others find out that Disney shows strong inclination to depict colonialism by portraying the white Americans as superiors to others. Such negative ideology affects the innocence of childhood. Little furthers that "*The Lion King* is an indulgence in a nostalgic imperialism and colonialism right here at home" (qtd. in Modenessi 188).

4. Moral Lessons

The movie of *The Lion King* (1994) conveys many important moral lessons children are meant to learn. Children should be taught that they have to be patient and strong when they face hard circumstances. They must not give up their rights, responsibilities, self-worthiness and their leading role in society. For example, when Simba is charged as guilty due to killing his father, he soon relinquishes his position as a royal heir and runs away trying to forget his past and his royal position as a king. It would have been much better for Simba to search for the truth than receive Scar's warning (Pinsky 155). In the scene when Simba meets his new friends Timon and Pumbaa, he changes his mind and turns his worries into hope, insistence, and love because they teach him how to overcome his worries (Reiter 175). Kids should be instructed that running away from problems is not the right decision to take. When Simba escapes from his past he gets no lesson till he meets his friends Timon and Pumbaa. Avoiding evil people is very important to be instilled in kids' mind. For instance, when Scar artfully tricks Mufasa's murder, he deceives Simba to think that the killing was

an accident. The lesson behind this scene is that children must be in a safe separation from villainies

When Simba disobeys his father's command, he is lured by Scar to elephants' graveyard to be murdered there and Simba is involved in his father's death, then Simba willingly goes to exile (*Disney's The Lion King* 1994). Having good friends and listening to their advice must be implanted in children. Nala and Rafiki play a vital role in guiding and enlightening the astray Simba by instructing him the right path in life. They support Simba and encourage him to take over his righteous throne if he murders his wicked uncle, Scar (Reiter 176). Respect all people equally is important lesson children have to learn from this movie. For instance, according to the metaphor 'Circle of Life', Mufasa explains to his son that people on top of the food chain should respect all the animals for their own dignity and contribution. Mufasa instructs his son that all people regardless of their authority, color, class, possession, race, and profession, must be respected and well treated. According to Mackey-Kallis, Mufasa advises his son to "respect all the creatures, from the crawling ant to the leaping antelope" (95), which is a deep moral lesson parents have to infuse their children with.

Conclusion

This research paper, through its discussion, is attempted to identify both positive and negative messages Disney's Incorporation markets through its animated movies. Disney's animated cartoons are not only chosen to provide children with entertainment, but also they are meant, by numberless worldwide parents, as children's providers with educational and moral impulses. Positively, these films enhance kids with ethical values, teach them life lessons, give them psychotherapies and make them active members in their societies. Having good friendships with people, respecting all people equally and listening to parent's advice must be implanted in children.

Negatively, it is also noted that Disney spreads negative messages which are deeply framed in ideological notions. Such noxious ideas are found in *The Lion King* (1994). The hidden ideology under Disney's enjoyment hurts the feelings of the non-whites. For example, in the film *The Lion King*, the implied ideology of the 'Other', is ethnically represented by the black hyenas, in reference to the African race in terms of black color, laziness and poverty. The ideological portrayals of social class hierarchy, is not morally favorable for children to watch because it divides classes into elites and inferiors. As a result, many of Disney's animated films are considered a double-edged sword which may lead to cultural or racial clashes.

الايديولوجية والاخلاقية الضمنية في قصة الاسد الملك

الكلمات المفتاحية: الايديولوجية ، الاسد الملك ، الدروس الاخلاقية.

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الملخص

تعرف الايديولوجية بانها طريقة تفكير وافكار افراد او مجتمع او ثقافة معينة. علاوة على ذلك، فهي تشير الى النظريات والاهداف المقصودة التي تشكل برنامجا اجتماعيا سياسيا. ان اول من صاغ مصطلح الايديولوجية هو الكاتب وعالم الاجتماع الفرنسي انطوان ديستوت دي تريسي في الفترة ما بين عام ١٧٩٦ و عام ١٧٩٨ . ولفهم اي مجتمع بشري بصورة واقعية ، اول ما يتوجب على المرء هو ان يفهم الافكار الثقافية والطريقة التي يتمسك بها هذا المجتمع. بما ان الفيلم يعكس ثقافة معينة لامة معينة، توجد علاقة وثيقة بين الفيلم والافكار الايديولوجية. في اي فيلم، يمكن ان تنتشر المفاهيم والمعتقدات الايديولوجية عالميا من خلال تضمينها في الترفيه. ان صانع الافلام مثل راوي القصص، فهو ليس فقط يستطيع ان ينقل الحقيقة او يعكسها، وانما ينشر أيديولوجيته من خلال تقاليد ورموز الثقافات الاخرى. وهكذا، من خلال الايديولوجية ، فان الانظمة المتناقضة، تتصارع من اجل الهيمنة الثقافية كما عكسه فيلم الاسد الملك (١٩٩٤) الذي انتجته شركة ديزني .

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