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From Outer Space to Paradise? Remapping Hawai'i in *Lilo and Stitch*

Introduction

Ever since the European discovery of the Hawaiian Islands by Captain James Cook in 1778, this island state has been shamelessly exploited economically and reimagined for a wide, mainly white, audience in the media. The island state continues to occupy a unique place in public consciousness, evoking escapist fantasies of dazzling long, sandy beaches, spectacular sunsets, swaying palm trees, and beautiful hula dancers as well as skilled surfers enjoying perfect waves. Numerous novels, TV series, and movies have helped to foster this positive image, at the same time suppressing the dark side of colonial Hawaiian history in favor of a more convenient paradise image. Especially the American movie industry with films such as *Waikiki Wedding* (1937), *Blue Hawaii* (1961), *Paradise Hawaiian Style* (1966) or more recently *50 First Dates* (2004) and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008) has helped to create Hawai'i as a 'fantasy-scape' for a larger audience. The majority of movies set on the island state imagine this place as a tropic paradise resort, mainly for wealthy white Americans, thus almost completely erasing the native population from the screen.

Disney's animated movie *Lilo and Stitch* (2002) can be read along the lines of those preceding movies representing the islands solely as an ideal holiday destination and multicultural paradise as well. Thus, it seems not surprising that in 2002 Disney signed a \$3.9 million marketing contract with the Hawaiian Visitors and Conventions Bureau (HVCB), which markets the islands under the control of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, to promote Hawai'i as a family destination.¹ However, on closer scrutiny, the movie indeed depicts trouble in paradise as it does not only depict Hawai'i as a heterotopic space where intergalactic immigration is possible but – on a more subtle level – criticizes American colonial practices and the forced annexation of the former independent kingdom, thereby rendering the island state still a highly contested space.

¹ Sue Beeton: *Film-Induced Tourism*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications 2005, p. 64.

Space and Representation

The alluring, sometimes almost enchanting visual representations of Hawai'i have been carefully invented and cultivated by both the movie and the tourist industry, the latter being the most profitable and consequently most influential agency on the Hawaiian Islands. Tourism started to thrive after the islands became the 50th state of the United States of America, when post-war Hawai'i was keen to build a striving tourism economy to replace the boom of the war years. By representing the islands as a perfect place without sorrows, the tourist industry indeed managed to ensure Hawai'i a position among the most popular travel destinations in the world.²

While tourism cannot be dismissed as an important income revenue, the enormous influx of visitors from all over the world has a significant, not only positive impact on the islands and its inhabitants. In 2012, According to the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, approximately eight million tourists, most of them from the United States and Japan have visited the islands³ leading to the building of more hotels and sky-rocking prices for groceries. Moreover, as tourist brochures and marketing movies, alongside commercial films, continue to represent Hawai'i as the "Aloha islands" – a beautiful sunny place inhabited by always smiling and friendly natives – social problems such as for instance unemployment, homelessness, and drug abuse, especially predominant among the native population, are rendered absent. Instead, Native Hawaiians are commodified within the "Aloha Spirit" package for tourists. Hence, it can be observed that Hawai'i and its inhabitants have suffered from what Edward Said has termed Orientalism.⁴

According to Said, ethical 'Others' are time and again denied the power and agency to represent themselves. Instead they are represented by mainly white, Westerners who project their ideas and ideals on the supposedly 'Other', representing them as subordinate and inferior to the West. Said argues that "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either" but "such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" and consequently they are imagined ideas that have "a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given [them] reality and presence in and for the West."⁵ Said's notion implies that geographical spaces, especially in narratives, are constructed and idealized and that those who have the power to represent another culture also have the power

² James Mak: *Developing a Dream Destination: Tourism and Tourism Policy Planning in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2008, p. 1.

³ Hawai'i Tourism Authority: *2013 Annual Report*. <http://www.hawaii-tourismauthority.org/default/assets/File/HTA%20AnnuRepFINAL%20WebPosting.pdf> (12.03.2014).

⁴ Edward Said: *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon 1978.

⁵ Edward Said: *Orientalism*, p. 4–5.

to define this culture. As representations in general and within the field of visual media in particular continue to be powerful in shaping normative ideas about a nation or culture, a critical evaluation of these representations is necessary.

Disney's *Lilo and Stitch*

Especially when it comes to huge media corporations such as the Walt Disney Company, which targets its movies mainly at children, their influence cannot be underestimated. While to many consumers Disney remains synonymous with innocent and safe family entertainment; an increasing number of scholars have outlined the potentially misleading sexist, racist, and ideologically charged messages of Disney's animate movies.⁶ Furthermore, terms like 'disneyization' or 'disneyfication' derive from the notion that this American company spreads its sanitized fairy tale versions consequently, homogenizing different indigenous fairy tales and folk tales from around world when removing cultural characteristics that seemed not fit Disney's ideals.

Within this context, *Lilo and Stitch* is unique as it does not refer back to a fairy tale or folk tale, but it is the first Disney movie with a story that was written for the film. Revolving around the story of a little Native Hawaiian girl and an alien protagonist from outer space, this movie diverges in many ways from former Disney productions. This notion is echoed in the promotional poster for the movie that shows the alien protagonist Stitch positioned at the center of the poster, surrounded by classic Disney characters such as Pinocchio, Mickey Mouse, or Aladdin. However, despite his central position, it is clear that this new member of the Disney family is an outsider, since the other Disney characters seem to back away from Stitch and look rather terrified. This idea is underlined by the tagline "There is one in every family" alluding to the idea that there is always a black sheep in every family. Hence, the poster does not only position Stitch as an outsider within the context of this movie, but hints as well to the fact that this movie is not a usual Disney film. At the same time, the headline emphasizes the idea of family, and bonding, thereby including the movie within the classic Disney canon.

This sentiment of inclusion and exclusion is particularly interesting when relating the movie and its setting to the position of Hawai'i in the historico-cultural context of the United States. Although Hawai'i was an-

⁶ See for example Brenda Ayres (ed.): *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*. New York: Peter Lang 2003, Elizabeth Bell and Lydia Hass (eds.): *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1996, and Douglas Brode: *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*. Austin: University of Texas Press 2005.

nexed as a state of the United States in 1959, due to its rather remote location in the Pacific Ocean, it remains often invisible within the American national consciousness – thus being both included and simultaneously excluded from the national historical discourse and reduced to the role of a paradise resort.

The role of Hawai'i in *Lilo and Stitch* is similarly ambiguous. The movie opens on the fictional planet of Turo, located in outer space, where an extraterrestrial scientist has illegally created Experiment 626, a “monstrosity”⁷ designed to wreak havoc. When the Galactic Federation orders that the experiment is to be sent into exile, the experiment escapes and coincidentally lands on Hawai'i, where he is adopted by the little Native Hawaiian girl Lilo, who mistakes him for a dog and renames him “Stitch.” This rather unusual opening of a Disney movie is followed by the fading in of the opening credits, accompanied by Hawaiian music. The visual images change from a dark, alien, unfamiliar setting to a more familiar place, Hawaii, and a noticeable cultural practice: The hula. Despite the fact that Hawai'i is a liminal American space, a state that is far away from the American mainland, the visual shift from the unknown, unfamiliar outer space to Kauai rather as a part of the familiar, the human world and the United States.

However, although the island is introduced to the audience with cheerful music and in bright colors, it is not presented as a place without problems or sorrows. Instead, the audience learns that the human protagonist Lilo is an outsider at school due to her Hawaiian ethnicity and is frequently bullied by the other children. Moreover, she and her older sister Nani just recently lost their parents in a car accident and struggle to keep their family together, as a social worker considers putting Lilo into foster care. For the alien protagonist, Hawai'i is also far from paradise. Loving urban conglomerations where he can cause havoc, Stitch considers the island of Kauai, which is devoid of any big cities, a place of exile and isolation. Hence, although visually fulfilling the stereotypical ideas of Hawai'i by including images of the hula, colorful fishes, the ocean, and a beautiful lush vegetation, the narrative suggest that this space might be much more complex and contested.

Aliens and ‘Others’

Unlike most other movies set on the Hawaiian Islands, *Lilo and Stitch* does not eradicate the native population from the screen. On the contrary, the story focuses on two Native Hawaiian sisters, who struggle through their everyday life. The opening credits and song further literally give Native Hawaiians a voice, as the first voice that we hear in forms of lyrics, sings in

⁷ Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders: *Lilo and Stitch*, movie, Walt Disney 2002.00:10:55.

the Hawaiian language. Representing Lilo and Nani as natives of the island who have to master their everyday life by finding a decent job and being accepted by fellow children, the movie hints to the many hardships that many Native Hawaiians have to face. Indeed issues of race and exclusion are addressed via Lilo, who already differs visually from the other children, as she is the only child wearing a Hawaiian dress. Furthermore, her behavior puzzles both the other characters in the movie and the audience when, for example, she insists on feeding a fish a sandwich every Thursday. When Lilo is asked why this ritual is so important to her, she simply replies "Pudge controls the weather,"⁸ rendering her behavior to be common sense. What might be dismissed as a childish superstition at first sight, can indeed be explained with the close emotional and spiritual connection that Indigenous Hawaiians have to their land and nature. Different from the other children, who declare her to be "crazy"⁹ Lilo tries to live according to the traditional Hawaiian ways. The fact that she is an outsider within her own community because of her close connection to Hawaiian traditions is telling in so far, as the other children are mainly depicted as *Caucasian* children, who play with Barbie dolls and do not want to become friends with the supposedly strange girl. Ironically, Lilo is an Indigenous Hawaiian and thus a native to Hawai'i, whereas Myrtle, the leader of the other girls, is of Caucasian descent and therefore by definition has immigrant roots. Yet it is this little Caucasian girl who does not accept Lilo and instead makes her an outsider, defining the normative parameters for the other children. In the movie, Lilo epitomizes the Hawaiian, who is no longer accepted on his/her home island, but instead becomes an alien from within and has to adapt to the Western, American way in order to be accepted and to become part of the community.

The alien protagonist Stitch is an outsider in two ways. First, he is an extraterrestrial, an alien from outer space and thus by definition different from the human species. Additionally, due to the fact that he is an artificially created being, he is also an outsider within his own alien community. His fellow aliens want send him to exile as they cannot handle his unnatural status as a clone, an artificial creation, disturbing the natural order and because they cannot control his behavior. Once on Kauai, he is first and foremost constitutes a threat because of his violent behavior and less because he is an unknown species from outer space that refuses categorization. It is only Lilo, an outsider within her community herself, who has a different approach to Stitch and declares him part of her *'ohana*.

This supposedly Hawaiian concept extends the notion of 'family' by not restricting this idea to blood-related members but basically to everyone, whom one *considers* to be part of ones family. In the movie Lilo repeats the line "'ohana means family, family means no one gets left behind or

⁸ Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders: *Lilo and Stitch*.00:13:15.

⁹ Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders: *Lilo and Stitch*.00:13:17.

forgotten¹⁰ again and again, thereby, stressing the importance of family and the possibility to include everyone into your family and linking this idea to the Hawaiian culture. Yet, this modern notion of 'ohana that is not restricted to blood-related family members, is not (as it is often suggested) an ancient Hawaiian concept. Indeed it was modeled in the 1950s to explain the complex Hawaiian social ties according to *Western* concepts and was subsequently appropriated by the tourist industry in order to reinforce the idea of Hawai'i being an inclusive, friendly island group.¹¹

On a historico-cultural level, Lilo's unbiased attitude towards Stitch and the integration of the extraterrestrial into her family can be interpreted as an allegory of the integration of an alien 'Other' into American society. As Emily Cheng has argued in her article "Family, Race and Citizenship in Disney's *Lilo and Stitch*," this Disney movie suggests that "the alien can be assimilated through its inclusion into a family."¹² Thus, the character of Stitch is not only literally an extraterrestrial, but has to be understood as symbolically embodying the threats that ethnic and racial 'Others' constitute to the United States.

In a similar vein, Ziauddin Sardar elaborates in the introduction to *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema* the concept of the alien, central to science fiction narratives. He outlines the idea that these creatures from outer space, which exist beyond the borders of the known, are being used as metaphors of binary oppositions, because "difference and otherness are the essence of aliens"¹³ and according to most science-fiction narratives, the only way to prevent chaos and to restore social order is to relentlessly eliminate these aliens.¹⁴

In Disney's movie, the alien Stitch indeed can easily be interpreted as standing for Asian, more precisely Japanese immigrants, who started to immigrate in great numbers to Hawai'i from the 1860s on to work on sugar cane plantations.¹⁵ Not only does Stitch visually resemble the popular Japanese pocket-monster Pikachu from the *Pokémon* series but he literally crashes in his little space ship on the island, echoing the destructive force

¹⁰ Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders: *Lilo and Stitch*.00:36:15.

¹¹ Heather A. Diamond: *American Aloha: Cultural Tourism and the Negotiation of Tradition*. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press 2008, p. 69.

¹² Emily Cheng: "Family, Race and Citizenship in Disney's *Lilo and Stitch*". In: Niall Scott (ed.): *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*. Amsterdam: Rodopi 2007, p. 123–131, p. 124.

¹³ Ziauddin Sardar: "Introduction". In: Ziauddin Sardar and Sean Cubitt (eds.): *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*. London: Pluto Press 2002, p. 1–17, p. 6.

¹⁴ For instance, the movie *Men in Black* (1997) substitutes illegal immigrants, mainly from Mexico, who live somewhere in the underground invisibly among 'us' with aliens from outer space. Adilifu Nama: *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press 2008, p. 110.

¹⁵ John Van Sant: *Pacific Pioneers: Japanese Journeys to America and Hawaii, 1859-1880*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2000, p. 97.

of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 that led to the entry of the United States into World War II and suiting his destiny as he was constructed to destroy and wreak havoc. Moreover, when later Stitch mimics the Japanese monster Godzilla, destroying a miniature version of San Francisco in Lilo's bedroom, he once more underlies his destructive nature. Yet, always striving for a happy ending, within this Disney movie, the alien does not need to be exterminated but can be domesticated. Stitch is indeed first representing a monstrous 'Other' that does not want to become part of the human, American, or Hawaiian culture and almost leads to the destruction of Lilo and Nani's family, exacerbating the situation when a social worker visits the sisters. As a consequence, the social worker demands that Nani finds a "decent job" and Stitch to become a "model citizen" if Lilo is to stay in her family, clearly connecting the issue of living in a proper family to issues of proper citizenship and becoming an integrated member of the community. As the social worker, representing state authority is *American*, it is implied that the alien has to become a model citizen within the norms of the American nation, hence defining Hawai'i clearly as part of the United States. The fact that Lilo tries to convert Stitch into a proper American citizen by introducing him to Elvis Presley, a Caucasian icon of American culture, that "[l]ike baseball and the Statue of Liberty, [...] guards the way into America"¹⁶ underlines once more the idea that the alien has to conform to American standards. Moreover, her choice is significant in so far as it was Elvis Presley, who imagined Hawai'i in the 1950s and 60s for a large American audience in his movies set on the islands, hence helping to popularize them as a tourist destination.

When finally, after some difficulties, Stitch manages to find his place in Lilo's family and has proved himself to be worthy of becoming a member of the American community, the movie suggests that Lilo's quest for a functional family is complete. The closing credits include photographs on Lilo's wall which show the sisters, Nani's boyfriend and Stitch visiting Graceland and participating in American traditions such as trick or treating and celebrating Thanksgiving as a happy patchwork family. These pictures confirm once more that the Hawaiian sisters – and by implication the islands of Hawai'i are part of the larger American family. Furthermore, the fact that Lilo has succeeded in converting the alien into a member of the American community once more projects "U.S. claims [of] being a multicultural nation [...] onto Hawaii [sic] as an imagined racial paradise."¹⁷

By making it possible for an alien to become part of an American family, Hawai'i is depicted as a heterotopia, a space which according to Michel Foucault's sense, is a utopian counter-site in which all real sites "that can

¹⁶ Eric Lott: "All the King's Men: Elvis Impersonators and Working Class Masculinity". In: Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (eds.): *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*. Durham: Duke University Press 1997, p. 192–230, p. 192.

¹⁷ Emily Cheng: "Family, Race, and Citizenship in Disney's *Lilo and Stitch*", p. 124.

be found within culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”¹⁸ Foucault further defines heterotopic sites, which he also calls “other spaces,” as actual places of differences, with “a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable”¹⁹ hinting to the fact that these sites are often not freely accessible and require the individual to earn his or her access to this space. This proves true for Stitch, for whom initially Hawai‘i is more a “heterotopia of deviation”²⁰ where he, as an abnormal individual is removed from his alien society. Tellingly, his first ‘home’ on Hawai‘i is the local animal shelter that visually closely resembles a prison with the cages and bars in which the animals are kept. However, by controlling his violent moods and *performing* as a dog, he is released from this space when Lilo adopts him. Yet, once confronted with the heterotopic, potentially liberating space of the island state, he has to learn and adapt to human, more precisely white American rules. Whereas due to his behavior, the alien is first denied access to the human habitat, finally he earns his place in this heterotopia and is allowed to become a citizen of the state. His example shows the potential for social action to remake and redefine spaces, thus creating an “other space” within an established spatial order, in this case, the human spatial order.

At the same time, taking the historical legacy of Hawai‘i into account, the islands become a contact zone in Mary Louis Pratts’ sense, a social space “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.”²¹ Lilo and her sister have already adapted partly to the American way of life as they are respected and functioning members of society. Even, Lilo, the slightly peculiar Hawaiian girl listens to Elvis Presley and has Disney toys in her bedroom, signifying her adaptation of American (popular) culture. For both Lilo and Nani, Hawai‘i is a contact zone in the sense as they have to handle their everyday life on an island that mainly caters to needs of tourists, while maintaining parts of their Hawaiian heritage, thus rendering the island state a contact zone between the United States and Hawai‘i.

However, the island further becomes a contact zone between the human and alien world. Although, Stitch has to neglect some of his alien characteristics and has to be ‘civilized’ and ‘domesticated’ by Lilo, he is allowed to retain some markers of difference, as for example his outward appearance, his plasma gun or a little space ship. Thus, it is indicated that as long as he *behaves* properly according to the human code of conduct, he is not only

¹⁸ Michel Foucault: “Of Other Spaces”. In: Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.): *The Visual Culture Reader*. 2nd ed., London: Routledge 2002 (1998), p.229–236, p. 231.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

²¹ Mary Louis Pratt: “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession* 91 (1991), p. 33-40, p. 34.

allowed but even encouraged to maintain some of his unique features as he enriches the human world with his particular character. Therefore, once more the narrative of an alien in exile, longing for a place to call home, locates Hawai'i within the national discourse of difference and multiculturalism and reinvents the myth of Hawai'i – and by inclusion America – being the land of opportunity and freedom, where everyone gets a second chance and can start over again and become part of the large, national family – even an alien.

Criticizing American Colonialism

The image of Hawai'i as a multicultural and intergalactic contact zone is indeed highly idealized in the movie. Yet, at closer scrutiny, the film also voices criticism of suppressive American colonial practices. The tension of the plot, revolving around the social worker threatening to separate the sisters can be understood as an allegory of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the subsequent forced annexation of the Hawaiian kingdom by the United States.

When Nani has to tell Lilo of the social worker's decision that the girl will have to live in a foster home, both sisters are sitting in a hammock, surrounded by torches. The otherwise pastoral setting is only disturbed by Nani's sad facial expression. Unable to tell her sister the truth, instead she starts to sing the chorus of the famous Hawaiian song "Aloha Oe", a tune that was written by Queen Lili'uokalani, the last monarch of the Hawaiian kingdom. The title of the song that can be translated as "Farwell to You" at first glance describes the poignancy of a separated couple. However, the *kaona*, the "poetic strategy of intimacy, concealment, and disclosure"²² hides another, rather political message of the song, as "Aloha Oe" is understood as a farewell song to Hawai'i as it was taken away from the native population to become part of the United States, hence losing its former sovereign status.

It is significant that Nani sings this song to her little sister, when she is about to be taken away from her as well. On the one hand, the song functions as a parting song for the sisters. On the other hand, it amplifies the underlying message of the scene that the forced separation of the two Hawaiian sisters by a representative of the *American* nation, the social worker, can be understood as an allegory of how Hawai'i was taken away from the indigenous Hawaiian people. Lilo is literally uprooted, when a state institution claims to know what is best for her. At the same time, the social security worker denies Nani agency, insisting that she is not capable of taking care of her younger sister.

²² Adria L. Imada: *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Through the U.S. Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press 2012, p. 123.

This social institution ignores the fact that the child wants to stay with her sister, despite the fact that their household is slightly dysfunctional. Transferring these ideas to Hawaiian history, it can be argued that Hawai'i was similarly taken away from the indigenous people as missionaries and colonizers who were unfamiliar with the land and habits, decided that they knew better how to use the land. Furthermore, they believed that they would 'civilize' and 'domesticate' these supposedly strange, heathen people to make model citizens of them, again reinforcing white, Western normative parameters. Hence, it can indeed be argued that the movie questions American colonial politics and the idea of the superiority of a certain culture or nation.

Conclusion

For children, Disney's *Lilo and Stitch* functions like their other animated movies, as it entertains and teaches moral lessons about love, tolerance, and the importance of family. Yet, on a more subtle level, the movie includes multiple, sometimes even contradictory meanings.

On the one hand, *Lilo and Stitch* clearly sets and reaffirms Hawai'i as part of the United States. Throughout the movie, the audience is reminded of the fact that the story is set in Hawai'i, which is clearly presented as part of America just as Lilo and Nani are Hawaiian, yet at the same time American characters. This is underlined for instance by the fact that both characters speak with a standard American accent while Lilo considers peanut butter a staple in every average American household. Nevertheless, the movie elides the unequal political and economic power relations by for example taking for granted that Nani only looks for blue collar jobs in the tourist or service industry, thus belittling the issue of the commodification of the islands for tourists. Finally, the successful domestication of a former "alien" into American culture is accomplished by helping him to embracing Elvis Presley, the epitome of American culture, as a role model, thereby projecting the hyperbolic fantasy of a multicultural, racial paradise onto Hawai'i.

On the other hand, the movie criticizes American colonial practices and the notion of Manifest Destiny as it questions state authorities and asks who has the right to decide what is a proper, working family, what culture is civilized or uncivilized, and who is an outsider or not. The perception of 'aliens' or 'the Other' is further challenged as the movie audience is invited to rethink its prejudices and social fears, since Hawai'i is positively depicted as a heterotopic contact zone, where different even intergalactic cultures can meet and mingle, thereby enriching the lives of each other.

Last but not least *Lilo and Stitch* is one of the rare movies that does not ban Hawaiian characters from the plot or reduces them to sidekicks of white protagonists. Instead, this animated feature rejects a touristic point of view of Hawaii by shifting to the troubled perspective of a little Hawai-

ian girl. Lilo even reverses the white, male tourist gaze by taking pictures of sunburned clueless, sunburned tourists with extremely white bodies, whom she finds exotic and beautiful. In this Disney vision of Hawai'i tourists remain largely invisible or serve as funny sidekicks. However, being written and produced by Caucasian Americans this movie remains a Caucasian representation of Hawai'i, one that possibly yearns for a pre-touristic Hawai'i.

Although the movie does not depict Hawai'i merely as an ideal model for a lost Edenic past or sexualizes Hawaiian woman, as previous movies did, it still mainly focuses on the beauty of the islands and the alluring lifestyle, hence rendering the island state an ideal space. Furthermore, the movie asserts that a successful integration of aliens both literally and metaphorically in the sense of immigrants coming to the United States might be possible only on this remote island state, far away from the American mainland, thus granting Hawai'i the status of a heterotopic fantasy-scape.

It is probably most telling that the story of *Lilo and Stitch* was originally set in Kansas²³ – a state that significantly is the geographic center of the United States and the place that the white, all American farmgirl Dorothy in Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) deemed her home – a familiar space. By consciously removing the story from the American heartland and main continent to a remote island in the Pacific signals that the majority of America might still not be ready to allow a complete assimilation of aliens. This seems only fully possible in the heterotopic space of Hawai'i. Nevertheless, numerous Native Hawaiian sovereignty movements continue to protest the overthrow of their former kingdom, arguing for the reinstatement of an independent Hawai'i nation. Posters in the streets of Honolulu reading: "We are not Americans. We will never be Americans. We will die as Hawaiians!" once more emphasize the notion that Hawai'i remains a highly contested space. Obviously, we are not in Kansas anymore.

²³ Wayne Harada: *'Lilo & Stitch' creators fall for Hawai'i's 'ohana*. <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2002/May/01/il/il01a.html> (13.03.2014).