

The Symbolic White Supremacy Towards Native American in *Avatar* (2009) Movie

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Abstract

This research investigated *Avatar* movies by James Cameron to show the symbolic expressions of white supremacy towards Native American. The domination leadership was carried out by European that is represented by the military department while intellectual and moral leadership or hegemony was carried out by European in the scientific department that is represented by Jake, Grace, Norm and Dr. Max Petel. Europeans carry out hegemony and domination to Native American who became the subordinate class. The purpose of Europeans in doing hegemony and domination is based on the desire to take on the natural wealth in Pandora. In carrying out the hegemony, the scientist department opposes the European and defends the Native American, this process is called opposition. The opposition resulted in a crisis of hegemony and in the end the class subordinate resisted, this is what Gramsci meant as the War of Position. *Avatar* movies show that supremacy in the way of hegemony is more successful than the way of domination, but the hegemony and dominance were not successful when the allies carried out the opposition.

Keywords: *domination, hegemony, opposition, supremacy*

INTRODUCTION

The human mind grows with the times. The problems become triggers for development of technology. All access which goes to the traditional and spiritual dimensions are seen lost by technology. Likewise, Literary works are not just about the text, or related to writing form such as poetry, prose, novel or short story, but theater, drama, and even movie can be called literary work. According to Greil Marcus and Werner Sollor, literary means not only what is written but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form (Greil Marcus and Werner Sollor, 2009:1030-1034).

Avatar (2009) movie tells about a company in which there are two departments, the first department of defense (military) function to keep the company and the second department of science (researchers) functioned to create a creature that resembles the nation of Na'vi named

Avatar, the purpose of this company is to take Unobtainium in Pandora. There are many creatures living in Pandora called the Na'vi people, they have such human features but they are taller like a giant, blue skin, and have a tail. There are some members from the Science department sending their members to Pandora, one of whom is a man named Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), who works to become a spy in the Na'vi nation in Pandora. Jake does his job by getting into a body that resembles the Na'vi people named Avatar. The reasons for *Avatar (2009)* as the objects of this study are: first, *Avatar* the best-selling movie of all time and a wide range of fields namely technology, science, myth, and politics. Second, the writer suspected there is a relation between the object and the theory. As Gramsci explained that there are two ways of supremacy, firstly "domination" in which the way of this domination using violence in *Avatar* movie domination is done by the Military department. Secondly, in the "intellectual and moral leadership" way that is supremacy by non-violence, even the subordinate class approves whatever is done by the lead class and can maintain the leadership continuously, this is what the department of science and this is hegemony according to Gramsci.

From the description in the previous background, the writer formulates the research question as follows: "How is symbolic white supremacy towards Native American in *Avatar* movies?", and Based on research question, the objective of this research is to analyze how is symbolic white supremacy towards Native american in *Avatar* movie by using hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci. Significances of this research are: This research can enrich the research in literature field, especially hegemony theory, which becomes a bibliographical resource to the next relevant type of research, this research can give better understanding in the analysis of hegemony theory in *Avatar (2009)* movie, to give information for the readers about the approaches used in supremacy a society or country according to the concept of hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci and the writer hopes this thesis can be useful for every reader, especially for students of English Literature Study Program, Language and Literature Department, Cultural Studies Faculty, Halu Oleo University.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the writer used qualitative descriptive. Sources of data that was taken in this research, there are two kinds of data sources: The primary data is *Avatar* movie and the secondary data are the necessary sources of data in the preparation and completeness of this

research, which are primarily references related to Antonio Gramsci's Hegemony theory such as books, journals, thesis. The steps that is done by the writer in analyzed the research: The writer watched the movie repeatedly and uses subtitles, collected the dialogue and screenshot of screen concern with the scene in the movie that is used as data to analyzed, Classification; the writer classified the data already collected and the writer identified data, the data in the form of text utterances that explained of symbol and described the forms of hegemony contained in the *Avatar* movie by James Cameron. Data analysis technique in this research is done with three stages as follows: Data Classification:

In this step, the movie that becomes the object of research is divided according to the scene, description: In the step, the writer described and explained the scene or situation treated to data analysis, Interpretation: In this step, the writer found the significance of the text by interpreting of symbols, sign, and phenomena in *Avatar* movie related with hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci and the last conclusions: In this stage, the writer tried to make a summary and the main idea contained from the stages that have been undertaken to find how that representation is represented by a media that is in terms of this is *Avatar* movie.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The representation of Sky people and Navi people

The *Avatar* movie showed the relationship between European and native America. Europeans are represented by sky people. Sky people in movies are portrayed as figures that have mastered technology and are highly intellectual. This has been associated with Europeans who are known for their technological advancements and rapid intellectual development. Meanwhile the Native Americans in the *Avatar* movie are represented by Na'vi people. This is shown from several scenes below.

Dialog 01:05:55 – 01-06-17

Situation : Neytiri taught Jake how to ride Ikran, an animal that has wings and can fly.

Neytiri : Do not look into her eyes. Ikran is not a horse. Once shahaylu is made, ikran will fly with only one Hunter in the whole life. To become Taronyu -- Hunter -- you must choose your own ikran. And he must choose you.

Jake : When?

Neytiri : When you are ready.

From the conversation between Jake and Neytiri, they talked about animals called Ikran, the animals that can fly like hawks. Ikran is an animal used for hunting and fighting enemies or protecting them from danger. This is related to Native American Mythology about Hawks. Hawks are often seen as a symbol of power in Native American cultures. Hawks are symbols of courage and strength. In some tribes, such as the Cheyenne, hawks are associated with protection from enemies, and seeing or dreaming about a hawk showed as a warning of danger. It is seen from the lives and beliefs of Na'vi people, such as the way they live in trees, close to nature, wearing clothes from bird feathers, believing in gods and hunting using traditional tools are all the same as the life of Native America. The writer concludes that Na'vi people in the *Avatar* movie represent Native American (Indians).

Supremacy of Sky people to Na'vi people

In the *Avatar* movie there is also a relationship of leadership of sky people (European) to Na'vi people (Native American) which showed through supremacy which uses the hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci. Sky people did some ways to gain supremacy over the Na'vi people (Native American). Gramsci said that to get supremacy is done in two ways, through domination or coercion and through intellectual and moral leadership or what Gramsci calls as Hegemony.

Domination of Sky people to Na'vi people

Gramsci said that one way to get supremacy is through domination. Domination is done by force to get what you want. Ruling class forces the subordinate class, if the subordinate class does not follow what is desired by the ruling class, even the ruling class does violence in forcing the subordinate class. This event showed in *Avatar* movie from several scenes:

Dialog in duration 01:13:24 – 01:

Jake : What did happen at the school, Grace?

Grace : Neytiri's sister, Sylwanin, stopped coming to school. She was angry about the clear-cutting. And one day, she and a couple of other young hunters came running in all painted up. They had set a bulldozer on fire. I guess they thought I could protect them. The troopers pursued them to the school. They killed Sylwanin in the doorway. Right in front of Neytiri. And then shot the others.

Grace says that Sky people persuaded Na'vi people to go to school using coercion, they even killed several children of Navi people because they did not follow their orders. Sky people attack Na'vi people. Not only that, Sky people attack Na'vi people after knowing the weakness of Na'vi people's defense. Sky people from the military department are forced to lead. The forced control

by Sky people, which was later called Gramsci as domination, was controlled using force. According to Gramsci “Where the former strain of supremacy involves subjugation by force, the latter involves leading allied groups” (Gramsci,1971:57).

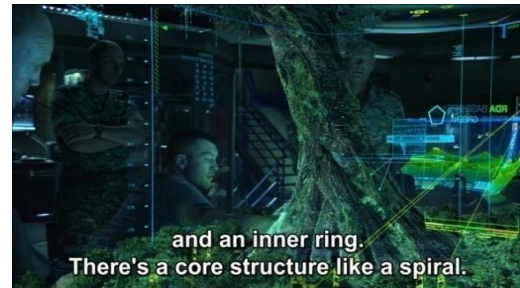
Hegemony of Sky people to Na’vi people

Hegemony is a way to control the state without the use of force, violence and even approval of the class subordinate. Gramsci said that the power of the ruling class rests not only on violence, but also on consent. Hence, the mechanism of power is not only the threat of force, but also of conviction. Ruling class must do several ways to get the conviction of the subordinate class. The ways of ruling class in *Avatar* movie showed in the scenes:

In duration 00:59:23



In duration 01:01:08



In duration: 00:26:17 – 00:26:39

Colonel Quaritch: A recon gyrene in an Avatar body. That's a potent mix. Give me the goosebumps. Such a Marine could provide the intel I need, on the ground, right in the hostiles' camp. Look Sully. I want you to learn these savages from the inside. I want you to gain their trust. I need to know how to force their cooperation or hammer them hard if they won't.

Jake : Am I still with Augustine?

Colonel Quaritch : On paper. Yeah, you walk like one of her science pukes, you quack like one, but you report to me. Can you do that for me, son?

Jake : Hell, yeah, Sir.

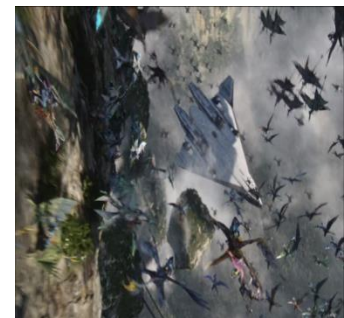
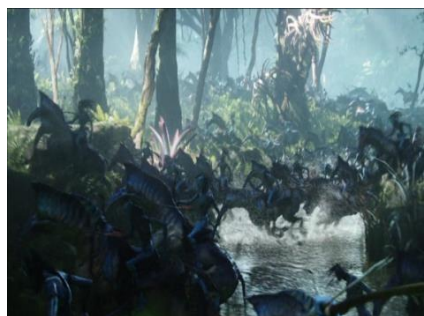
In the pictures above, Jake learns how to ride an animal like a horse in Pandora (picture 10), this is one of the agreements of Jake and Na'vi people, teaches Jake to learn the life of the Na'vi people and Jake succeeds in get the trust of Na'vi people. Na'vi people do the ritual of receiving Jake in Pandora and Jake as part of them. From picture 12, above Jake reports on the defense and weaknesses of Na'vi people to Colonel Quaritch and Selfridge, this proves that Jake succeeded in getting information that could endanger Na'vi people. From the conversation above, Col. Quaritch asked Jake to learn the life of Na'vi people intensely, Jake had to enter the Na'vi people camp and Jake had to get the trust of Na'vi people. As Colonel Quaritch said " *Look Sully. I want*

you to learn these savages from the inside. I want you to gain their trust. I need to know how to force their cooperation or hammer them hard if they won't", Learning from within, Sky people will know what weaknesses and strengths Na'vi people have. Sky people try to find out what Na'vi people need so that Sky people will easily collaborate with Na'vi people. Sky people aim here Jake must enter Camp Na'vi people, learn the life of Na'vi people and get the trust of Na'vi people then invite them to work together. This is what Gramsci meant that in gaining leadership people's trust is very important to make consensus or cooperation. According to Gramsci, the power of the ruling class rests not only on violence, but also on consent. Hence, the mechanism of power is not only the threat of force, but also of conviction. (Piccone, (1976: 460-462). Gramsci said that the only way to control the working class is to attract the attention of other groups and find ways to combine with their interests (Gramsci 1971).

Opposition of Scientific Department to Sky people

There are several reasons why Jake is making opposition to the sky people. Jake started enjoying his life on Pandora. One of the reasons Jake preferred himself to Pandora was because in real life he had broken legs and had to use a wheelchair while in Pandora he had perfect legs and even freely carried out various activities. Here the process has begun to be seen from the opposition. Showed at the scene below.

In duration: 02:16:14 – 02:17:26



From pictures above, it showed that Jake led Na'vi people to fight Sky people. Na'vi people don't just keep quiet when they know Sky people will destroy them. Na'vi people plan to strike back Sky people with help from Jake. This is what Gramsci calls the War of Position. War of position is based on the idea of besieging the state apparatus with counter-hegemony, created by the working-class mass organization by building institutions and developing a proletarian culture. *In*

duration 01:51:25 – 01:51:42

Dialog

Neytiri : Traitor! You will never be one of the people!

Jake : I shouldn't have.....

Neytiri : We tried to stop them!

Jake : Neytiri, please! Please.

Neytiri's father : Bind them.

From the conversation above we can see, Na'vi people are very angry when they know the truth that Jake entered Pandora at a specific destination. From this incident it showed that Jake and Grace are no longer trusted by the Na'vi people. This is what Gramsci meant as Crisis of Hegemony. According to Gramsci If the ruling class has lost its consensus, e.i. no longer leading only domination, exercising coercive force alone, etc. The crisis consists of the old dying and the new cannot be born (Gramsci, 1976: 25-26). Their belief in Jake has been lost after they learned that other Jake and Sky people would destroy them.

CONCLUSIONS

This concluded that the *Avatar* movie shows two ways of leadership, dominant or coercion and intellectual and moral leadership or what is referred to as hegemony. The domination leadership was carried out by European in the military department that is represented by Parker, colonel Quaritch, and the other soldier while intellectual and moral leadership or hegemony was carried out by European in the scientific department that represented Jake, Grace, Norm and Dr. Max Petel. Europeans carry out hegemony and domination to Native American. The Na'vi are the subordinate class that is represented by Neytiri and Pandora people. Europeans are represented by Sky people and Native American is represented by Na'vi people. *Avatar* movies show that the leadership in hegemony is more successful and worn well than the domination leadership. This was seen when Jake led the Native American by hegemony and defeated the military department. The European failed to outperform Na'vi when using domination, and almost succeeded when using the hegemony but both failed when Jake as the European ally did the opposition. The *Avatar* movie showed that hegemony and domination will fail when allies oppose their partner.

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