

REVEALING ORIENTALISM AND OCCIDENTALISM IN AVATAR: NA'VI CONQUEST THROUGH ITS DISCOURSES

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Abstract

The film entitled Avatar: Na'vi Conquest (2009) is a science fiction movie that set in the year 2154 in which human look to colonize the Pandora Planet because the human race has depleted the resources on the earth. Pandora is a Planet that densely forested and inhabited by a species called Na'vi, the indigenous people of Pandora who are ten feet tall blue skinned. The human invades Pandora in order to exploit Pandora. It causes the indigenous people do the fight against to the human. This paper aims to portray the Orientalism and the Occidentalism in Avatar: Na'vi Conquest (2009) film through its discourses. This paper applies the theory of Orientalism and Occidentalism by Edward Said. This paper employs descriptive qualitative method. The object of this research is Avatar: Na'vi Conquest (2009) film by James Cameron. The data collection is done by doing the library research. The researcher does three steps in data analysis. The first step, the researcher watches the film for several times. The second step, the researcher selects and sorts the discourses containing Orientalism and Occidentalism. The third step, the researcher analyses the data by applying the theory of Orientalism and Occidentalism by Edward Said (1978). The results of this study show that there are some discourses that portray the Orientalism by the human to the Na'vi and the Occidentalism by the Na'vi toward the human and the representation of the human and the indigenous people through the Orientalism and Occidentalism in Avatar: Na'vi Conquest (2009) film.

Keywords: postcolonialism; orientalism; occidentalism; Avatar

A. Introduction

There is an image that has been formed in our minds that the Western is considered as a dominating nation in bringing the progress of civilization and the nation that is more advanced and civilized than the Eastern. These images are the legacy of colonialism and imperialism and it creates a distinction between the Western and the Eastern. As the Western, they want to be different from the Eastern in the sense that they are better. Tyson (2006) states that the colonizer see themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper "self"; native people are considered as "other" and different (p. 419). It means that the Western creates a dichotomy that separates between the realities of the East and the imaginative, fictional realities of the Orient. The "othering" practice is also called as Orientalism, the depiction of the Eastern by the Western. Said (1978) states that Orientalism is a way to coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience (p. 1)

As a form of nationalism that opposes the images that are created by the Western, the Eastern also creates images toward the Western. Lary (2006) states that Occidentalism is founded on the

nationalism that grew in Asia in reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism (p. 9). These two conflicting views are the legacy of colonialism and imperialism in which the colonizer and the colonized have conflicting views of each other. In the digital era, the phenomenon like this can be expressed in the form of films which are not only as an entertainment media but also media that provide the image of social phenomenon. Turner (1999) states that the development of the moving picture from the still camera was a movement towards realism, towards the apparent replication of the experience of viewing life (p.14). One of films that reflects the phenomenon of Orientalism and Occidentalism is *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* (2009).

Avatar: Na'vi Conquest is an American science fiction film written by James Cameron and released in 2009. This film is set in 2154 in which human invades the Pandora Planet because the resources on the earth have been depleted. Pandora is a Planet inhabited by indigenous humanoid people called Na'vi, and varied flora and fauna. Na'vi is ten feet tall blue skinned. The invasion to the Pandora has been prepared in such a way by human in order to exploit the natural resources in Pandora. They are confident and feel that they are more advanced, civilized, and powerful than the indigenous people, Na'vi. Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (2007) states that "those who have power have control of what is known and the way it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not. This link between knowledge and power is particularly important in the relationships between colonizers and colonized" (p. 63).

Human uses the avatar technology in order to be able to communicate and win the hearts of the indigenous people of Pandora. Jake, the main character in this film, is infiltrated into the Omiticaya clan in order to win the hearts of the residents to be able to move so that the humans can mine unobtainium. In this process, Jake knows how the humans depict the indigenous people and how the indigenous people of Pandora portray the human. Therefore, it is relevant to reveal the Orientalism and Occidentalism through the discourses in the film. This research is worth researching because the invasion of the humans to Pandora which only intends to exploit unobtainium, expel, and wipe out the indigenous people there reminds us to the arrogance of the Western in the past. They carried out massive expansion throughout the world. As a result of that, Orientalism and Occidentalism are the legacy of colonialism and imperialism that still remain until today. In response to this and the fact that stated earlier, two research questions are formulated in accordance with the objectives of the study: (1) Which discourses in the film show Orientalism and Occidentalism?; and (2) How are the human and the indigenous people of Pandora represented through Orientalism and Occidentalism?

Past studies focused on Orientalism the Orientalism of Arabs in Larry Charles film's: *The Dictator* (Brammastian, 2019). His journal article examines the portrayal of Orientalism of Arabs in Larry Charles's film entitled *The Dictator* (2012). He applies the Orientalism theory by Edward Said and the postcolonial discourse to define the Western perspective in presenting the awful images of Arabs in the film. The researcher is enlightened to conduct a research on Orientalism in different field. Even though this research and Brammastian's research have similarities, the researcher does not only employ the Orientalism theory, but also the Occidentalism.

The second study belongs to Ronald Maraden Parlindungan Silalahi entitled *Western Capitalism and Eastern Exoticism: Orientalism in Edward Said's Perspectives* (2018). His article journal examines the Western's views on Orientalism in the comic strips "The Adventure of Tintin." He reveals the thoughts of postmodernism and then associate them with the Orientalism concept by Edward Said. Silalahi's study helps the researcher find some Orientalism depictions that can be developed and applied in this research. Although between Silalahi's study and this research have similarity that is discussing about Orientalism, this research examines the Orientalism in film.

The third study belongs to Sandra Nasser El-Dine entitled *Arab Youth Occidentalism: Images of the West and the Negotiation of Gender Relations in Syria and Jordan* (2016). This study examines the Occidentalism phenomenon among Syrian and Jordanian young adults. He applies the theory of Occidentalism by Edward Said. The researcher found some theories that are applicable in this research. Even though this research and El-Dine's research have similarity that is discussing about

Occidentalism, this research is not relating the Occidentalism to gender while El-Dine's research is relating the Occidentalism to the gender.

The fourth study entitled *Images of Non-Arabs in West of the Jordan* by Laila Halaby (2019) belongs to Najoua Stambouli. Stambouli's study draws on Orientalism and Occidentalism in *West of the Jordan* (2003) by Laila Halaby. Stambouli's study enlightens the researcher to conduct a research on orientalism and occidentalism in different field. The different between this research and Stambouli's research is this research conducts to examine the Orientalism and Occidentalism in film while Stambouli's study is on novel.

B. Methodology

This study employs descriptive qualitative method. The researcher employs the qualitative method since it prioritizes the depth of the researcher's interpretation of the concepts used to analyze a phenomenon. This statement is in accordance with the statement of Creswell (2009) that qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand (p. 176). The researcher employs the Postcolonialism approach and the theory of Orientalism and Occidentalism by Edward Said (1978) is employed since this research aims at describing the Orientalism and Occidentalism in *Avatar* film.

The source of the data in this research is *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* film that was released in 2009 and directed by James Cameron. The data of this research is in the form of discourses that show the problems regarding to Orientalism and Occidentalism. The discourses are in the form of narratives and the dialogue between characters that show that show behavior, thoughts, and actions regarding the Orientalism and Occidentalism in the *Avatar* film.

This research is library research in gathering the data. The primary source in this research is the discourses of *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* (2009) film directed by James Cameron as the primary source. Secondary sources are relevant journal articles, essays, and books related to this research.

Data analysis of this research was done in several steps. The first step, the researcher watched *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* film for several times. The second step, the researcher selected and sorted discourses containing Orientalism and Occidentalism.. The third step, the researcher analyzed the data by applying the theory of Orientalism and Occidentalism by Edward Said.

C. Results and Discussion

The presence of colonizers in a colonized area not only causes physical suffering for the colonized people, but also causes identity suffering because the colonizers, who feel superior, make efforts to differentiate based on a standardization to distinguish and demarcate between the colonized and the colonizers. As the colonized, they fight against the colonizer, either physically or non-physically.

According to Said (1978), Orientalism is related to the West's attempts to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the East (p.3). It is through these efforts that the West uses the East as an object of colonialism and imperialism. In the process, the West depicts the East as "the other" from the West that is under developed and uncivilized. This depiction of the West towards Eastern people as "the other" is what is called as Orientalism. As the resistance to the depiction of the West, The East tries to project west from perspective of the East and East's position against the West. The East has the counter-discourse of Orientalism. This counter-discourse is called as Occidentalism. Occidentalism rejects all of depictions of the West toward the East. The East depicts the West as rootless, arrogant, cruel, and greedy.

In *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* (2009) directed by James Cameron, the phenomena of Orientalism and Occidentalism are very clearly represented. Colonialism and Imperialism that committed by the humans against the indigenous people of Pandora greatly affects the lives of the indigenous people of

Pandora. In the process of Colonialism and Imperialism, the humans do Orientalism to the indigenous people of Pandora. As the resistance, the indigenous people of Pandora do the Occidentalism as the counter-discourse of Orientalism.

1. Eastern Stereotype through Orientalism Discourses

In the *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* (2009) film, these Orientalism discourses are expressed by Parker, the head of mining program in Pandora, and Col. Quaritch, the head of security mining. These two characters express Orientalism discourses since they want to dominate and control the land of the indigenous people.

Col. Quaritch tries to warn the new citizens that have just arrived to the Pandora. He describes condition around the mine outside the fence. The Orientalism can be seen in the following quote.

Col. Quaritch: "Out there, beyond that fence, every living thing that crawls, flies or squats in the mud wants to kill you and eat your eyes for Jujubes." (10:47-10:57)

The Orientalism can be seen very clearly in the discourse above. Col. Quaritch describes the condition around the mine that is very dangerous since they are killer. The description that is given by colonel Quaritch is an arrogant one. Through his description, He conveys that there are primitive, immoral, and undignified creatures that are ready to pounce on the humans. Furthermore, Quaritch uses the word "crawl and squat" instead of "walk". It is to show that the indigenous creatures of Pandora cannot walk as human beings. Thus, the new citizens are indoctrinated that they will coexist, even face off, with the indigenous creatures that are primitive.

The confidence of the colonizer that is too high, it becomes arrogance. They feel that they have the rights of everything, and they feel higher than the colonized. The colonizer comes to the colonized area and they do whatever they want to do, even worse, they create a cultural dichotomy that separates the colonizer and the colonized.

Parker, the head of mining program, explains to Dr. Augustine Grace, the head of avatar program, why they are have to be Pandora. Parker tries to convince what Dr. Augustine has to do because that fact on the mine ground that there are some problems related to the indigenous people of Pandora. Parker portrays that the indigenous people of Pandora are scary and they are nuisance creatures. It can be seen in the following discourse.

Parker: "Now, those savages are threatening our whole operation." (17:42-17:45)

In the discourse above, it is very clear that the indigenous people of Pandora are considered as the disturbers of the mining operation in Pandora. They are considered as disturbers since the humans are threatened by the Na'vi. The word "threatening" as if to give us a depiction that they are indeed scary. Furthermore, the indigenous people of Pandora are represented as savages, means they are uncivilized and barbarians.

One of the main reasons why the colonizer invades an area is to exploit the natural resources. The colonized conducts operations in order to exploit the natural resources. As the colonizer, they feel that they are higher than the colonized. The colonizer considers that the colonized is just beast that threaten the operations.

Even worse than that, there is racism on color of the Na'vi's skin that is committed by Parker. When Jake reports what he has done in the jungle and he is able to get in to the Omiticaya clan, He is asked by Parker to find out what the indigenous people of Pandora want. It can be seen in the following discourse.

Parker: "Look, Sully. Sully. Just find out what the blue monkeys want. You know, I mean, we try to give them medicine, education, roads. But no, no, no, they like mud." (55:54-56:07)

The racism on skin color also emerge here. Parker calls the Na'vi as "blue monkey". It means that they are colored skin and are considered as "other". Furthermore, the indigenous people of Pandora are considered as blue monkey that need help to fulfill their necessities that can be provided by the humans. The indigenous people of Pandora are represented as creatures that are lower than human and they need human to fulfill their necessities.

This is the depiction of the Western toward the Eastern that the Western feels that they are stronger than the Eastern and as if the Eastern needs the Western in order to help them to fulfill the necessities of the Eastern. The Western feels that the Eastern can do nothing without the Western.

2. Western Stereotype through Occidentalism Discourses

In *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* (2009) directed by James Cameron, there are also several discourses that emerge as the resistance of the Orientalism. It is Occidentalism discourses that emerge as the counter-discourses of Orientalism. These discourses are expressed by the Na'vi as the counter-discourses of the Orientalism.

When Jake is attacked by viperwolves and he is saved by Neytiri, the daughter of the Omiticaya clan leader, Jake tries to follow Neytiri but he is rejected. Neytiri asks Jake to go back to the humans. However, Jake rejects Neytiri's request. Neytiri rejects him since she has depiction of the creatures that come from the humans. The following discourse is the Neytiri's depiction about Jake who is from the humans.

Neytiri: "*Sky People* cannot learn. You do not See." (45:23)

Neytiri asks Jake to do not follow her and go back to his homebase. Neytiri depicts Jake who is from the humans as *sky people* as well since the humans fly by aircrafts and choppers. Furthermore, Neytiri depicts that the sky people cannot learn. The emergence of depictions that the sky people cannot learn because the indigenous people of Pandora consider them as stubborn and feel that they are the most advanced so that they do not need to learn anymore.

It is in line with the Occidentalism in real. In response the fact that the Western feel that they are the most advanced that the Eastern so that they do not need to learn anything from the Eastern, the Eastern then consider them as stubborn or hard-headed.

Jake is fanally brought by Neytiri to the hometree which is the basecamp of the Omiticaya clan. He is rejected by the leader of Omiticaya clan and he will be killed since the leader of Omiticaya clan knows that Jake is from the humans. Because Jake is a former marine and there as never been a warrior come to Omiticaya clan , Jake is finally accepted and would be taught by Neytiri how to be a member of Omiticaya clan. Moat who is the wife of the Omiticaya clan leader gives a speech and depicts Jake with the following discourse.

Moat: "Then we will see if your *insanity* can be cured." (52:29)

In the discourse that is spoken by Moat, it can be seen that even the indigenous people of Pandora do not know Jake yet and the only thing that the indigenous people of Pandora know about Jake is that Jake is from the humans, they depict Jake as insane. It is the depiction of the Na'vi to the humans that human is so insane.

It is relevant with the depictions of the Eastern toward the Western. The Eastern depicts the Western that they are insane and lunatic.

In the end of the film, Jake and the Na'vi are succeed to defeat the humans and force them to go back to their planet, earth. Jake is now part of the Omiticaya clan. When he force the humans, he depicts the humans as the following discourse.

Jake: "*The aliens* went back to their dying world." (2:49:01)

Jake as Na'vi depicts the humans as aliens. It means that the indigenous people of Pandora consider the humans that they are immigrants and they do not belong to Pandora. The humans are forced to go back to the earth that is dying.

This depiction also happens when the colonialism and imperialism that done by the Western toward the Eastern is failed and the Eastern forces the Western to go back to their own land. The Eastern will have the same depiction as is Jake's depiction.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the film entitled *Avatar: Na'vi Conquest* (2009) directed by James Cameron is about the invasion of humans to Pandora planet in order to exploit the valuable mineral called Unobtainium. The presence and the purpose of humans in Pandora are arrogant. The humans use the depictions of Orientalism in order to dominate the Na'vi. These depictions are opposed by the indigenous people of Pandora, the Na'vi, by the depictions of Occidentalism.

The researcher found three discourses that contain of Orientalism. The Orientalism discourses are spoken by Parker, the head of mining program in Pandora, and Col. Quaritch, the head of security in Pandora. The Orientalism discourses show that the humans are arrogant by depicting the indigenous people of Pandora as savages, uncivilized, and blue.

The researcher found three discourses that contain of Occidentalism as the resistance of the depictions of the humans to the indigenous people of Pandora. These Occidentalism discourses are spoken by Neytiri, Mo'at, and Jake. Jake becomes a part of Na'vi after the transference of the soul from the humans to the avatar (Na'vi). The Occidentalism discourses show that the indigenous people oppose the depictions of the humans toward the Na'vi. The Na'vi depicts the humans as sky people, insane, and alien.

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