
Analyzing and Interpreting the Avatar

Set in 2154, the film Avatar explores the mining of precious minerals called 'unobtainium' on Pandora. Jake Sully is a marine who has his consciousness transferred on to a genetically engineered hybrid body of Na'vi, a sentient humanoid species, indigenous to Pandora. He is ordered to interact and integrate with the Na'vi to earn their trust and eventually persuade the Na'vi to move and extract the mineral. After the humans fail to compromise with the Na'vi, they decide to take the land by force. During the battle, Jake and the team he led, join the indigenous people instead of the humans. In the end, Jake abandons his human body and his consciousness was transferred by the Goddess to make him a real Na'vi. This essay discusses how does the film Avatar represents colonialism, ethnocentrism and romanticism.

Colonialism is the policy or practice of a wealthy or powerful nation's maintaining or extending its control over other countries, especially by establishing settlements or exploiting resources (American Heritage Dictionary, n.d.). In the film, humans go about killing and supplanting the indigenous population of another planet or places in order to attain a precious mineral. From this, parallels can be drawn as the Na'vi can be seen as a fictionalized version of the indigenous populaces who also experienced colonization by the Europeans.

Beneath the surface of this film, there also lay a deep undertone of ethnocentrism which is the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture. (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.) The humans and the Na'vi in the film think that their culture is superior to each other. This can be seen when the humans address the Na'vi as "blue monkey", "savage" and "the natives" while the Na'vi refer humans as "smelly alien", "creatures" and "demon" (Cameron and Landau, 2009).

Avatar has also showed the concept of romanticism which is connected to ethnocentrism. Romanticism involves traditional people being seen as presenting a better past when humans were at one with nature (Lundberg, 2016). There are plenty of evidences in the film. One of the main character, Grace Augustine, the biologist in charge of the study of Avatar, criticizes soldiers with guns, which can also be described in another way as people who overuse technology, in the film nearly most of the time. This can be seen from her lines such as "trigger-happy morons" and "idiot with gun". Besides that, her acts of teaching the Na'vi, caring and still trying to protect them even after she loses their trusts and loves have shown her romantic view of the Na'vi. It is clearer when Grace says that she is with the goddess of the Na'vi, Eywa, before she dies.

The romanticism is particularly distinct when the Na'vi interact with the nature. They pray for

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the animals killed and feel their sadness. They use their plait to build the bond with animals and feel their emotions and mind instead of forcing them to obey. There is a scene where Neytiri and Jake are surrounded by the Tree of Souls and listen to the voices of the indigenous' ancestors and the spirits. They feel the spirits of the nature and they listen to them. The Na'vi treat the nature as an inseparable part of themselves which show a dramatic dissimilarity with humans.

In conclusion, Avatar is one of the most films that has criticized and re-evaluated the concept of colonialism and ethnocentrism. The film forces watchers to think about the way in which we interact with nature and our views on other culture as well as ourselves. We are all equal in the fact that we are all different (Joybell, n.d.). Learning to accept other cultures without the feel of superiority is a tough lesson that lasts a lifetime.

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