

The Impact of Colonialism to Pandora Society in James Cameron's Film Avatar The Way of Water 2022

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the causes and impacts of colonialism on the Pandora society in James Cameron's film Avatar: The Way of Water. The study employs a literary sociology approach with a qualitative descriptive method, allowing the researcher to explore the relationship between social structures and the film's narrative. The main theoretical frameworks used include Miftakhuddin's theory of colonialism and Ziltener & Künzler's framework on the impacts of colonialism. Data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed based on categories of colonial causes (economic, political, socio-cultural, and technological) and their impacts (political, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental). The findings reveal that colonialism in the film is depicted through natural resource exploitation, military domination over local political structures, cultural erosion and identity loss among indigenous communities, and the use of advanced technology as a tool of domination. The film symbolically reflects real-world colonial dynamics and offers a critique of the exploitative practices and erasure of local identities by imperialist powers.

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Introduction

Colonialism has historically been one of the main causes of various social problems in society, both in the past and its lasting effects today. One social issue that arises is the significant social and economic inequality between groups that benefited from the colonial system and those who were marginalized. Additionally, colonialism often imposed cultural and value changes, leading to the loss of indigenous cultural identity and the emergence of intercultural conflicts. The exploitation of natural resources and human labor during the colonial era also resulted in environmental degradation and social oppression, including labor exploitation and human rights violations. This colonial legacy continues to influence social and economic dynamics in many countries today, creating challenges in achieving justice and social welfare. Horvath (1972).

Justice and social welfare remain pressing issues today. Social problems, often referred to as social disintegration, are long-standing polemical discourses that continue to emerge in society. Social life is influenced by advancements in technology, industrialization, globalization, and urbanization. Contemporary social issues are diverse, including poverty, crime, youth-related challenges, bureaucracy, environmental concerns, and more. The emergence of social problems can lead to evaluations and critiques. (Wilbert E. Moore) Social change is defined as transformations in social structures, behavioral patterns, and social interactions. Any alteration in societal structures or social organization is considered social change. Social change differs from cultural change, as cultural change pertains to elements of existing culture. Boeken (1965).

In this era, social issues and representations of colonialism can be found in literary works such as films, novels, and other forms of literature. The creation of

literary works cannot be separated from the socio-environmental conditions of the author's time. This forms the foundation of the sociology of literature theory, which states that literary works have a relationship with the surrounding social conditions. These social conditions may include norms, social groups, social processes, and social and cultural changes. However, not all of these conditions function as expected by society. Defianti (2020).

The relationship between these three fields creates a dynamic cycle. Sociology provides a theoretical framework for understanding literature and film, literature provides rich raw material for stories and characters, while film popularizes these stories and messages to a wider audience. For example, Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* not only provides a picture of social life in 19th-century England, but also sparks discussions about love, marriage, and the social role of women. Through its various film adaptations, the story continues to be relevant and inspires new generations Gilbert & Gubar (1979).

In addition to the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which is very complex. Film as an aesthetic work and information media is sometimes informative and educational. However, we must know that a film cannot only be seen from a cultural perspective, but can also be seen from a social, historical or political perspective, even from an educational perspective. "Film is an effective communication tool and has advantages over other media in the learning process so that it has its own appeal to its audience, such as being more memorable and being able to improve their thinking skills" Widiani, Darmawan, & Ma'mur (2018). However, of course not all films can be educational media and learning resources. Films that can be educational media are those that contain story values that educate humans as a whole, while a good story is a story that can educate a person's reason, imagination and ethics and develop the potential for educational knowledge.

Avatar: The Way of Water by James Cameron is a 2022 American adventure science fiction film directed by James Cameron and produced by James Cameron and Jon Landau, produced by 20th Century Studios TSG Entertainment Lightstorm Entertainment. This film is the second film of the Avatar film produced by 20th Century Studios TSG Entertainment Lightstorm Entertainment from the previous film. Avatar: The Way Of Water by James Cameron is a film that is highly anticipated by the public, especially teenagers, because this film is one of the most expensive films in 2022, for the release of the film alone it had to wait 13 years, therefore the Avatar film is in great demand by the public. (CNN Indonesia. (2023.))

Avatar: The Way Of Water by James Cameron is different from the previous Avatar films because in the film Avatar: The Way Of Water by James Cameron it depicts more family stories. Avatar: The Way Of Water by James Cameron. very suitable for all ages, especially teenagers. (Pujawati, R. D., Munir, S., & Noviandi, A. N. (2024). The film "Avatar: The Way of Water" tells the story of the life of Jake Sully and Neytiri who are married and settled on Pandora. However, they face a new threat from humans who return to Pandora with a worse threat. When the threat becomes more dangerous for Jake Sully's family and their home, they are forced to leave their home in the forest and flee to an area inhabited by the water Na'vi tribe. They explore the water Na'vi tribe's territory, get to know new Na'vi tribes, learn their cultures, and adapt to a different way of life.

Method

In this study, the researcher applied a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the issue of colonialism in the film Avatar: The Way of Water. This method was chosen because it allows for a deep interpretation of complex social phenomena and subjective perceptions. According to Judith Preissle in Creswell (1998), qualitative research involves collecting verbal, visual, and written data in the form of

descriptive narratives such as field notes, recordings, or other transcriptions. Additionally, based on Gay in Melaningsih (2010), the descriptive method aims to capture facts accurately and answer research questions through word-based data presentation. Therefore, this method is suitable for explaining the nature of colonial practices and their socio-cultural impacts as reflected in the film.

The data source of this research is *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), directed by James Cameron. The film focuses on the environment, indigenous culture, and human relationships with nature. It explores the impacts of human exploitation and colonialism on Pandora's native population. The data used in this research consist of selected scenes, dialogues, and film narratives that reflect colonial behavior and its consequences. The researcher used documentation techniques to collect data, which include downloading the film, watching it repeatedly, noting important dialogues and actions, and categorizing them based on their relevance to colonialism themes. The primary reference for the film is: Cameron, J. (Director). (2022). *Avatar: The Way of Water*. 20th Century Studios.

The technique of data analysis used in this study is descriptive analysis. Based on Nawawi, descriptive analysis is a problem-solving technique that describes the condition of the research subject or object as it appears in the present. Siswantoro (2016) also emphasizes that descriptive techniques help researchers find answers to research problems through structured analysis. The steps involved in the research process include: (1) Identification, identifying relevant scenes or dialogues related to colonialism in the film, (2) Classification, grouping the data into categories such as actions, conversations, or symbolic expressions, (3) Analysis, Description, and Explanation examining the types of colonial conflict, their impacts on the Na'vi, and how the characters respond, and (4) Conclusion, drawing final interpretations based on the analysis.

Finding and Analysis

B.1 Causes Of RDA'S Colonization On The Na'vi Tribe

1. Economic Factors

Economic factors arise as a consequence of the pressing economic needs of imperialist countries. These nations are driven by ambitions to control productive assets in other regions, such as fertile agricultural land, manufacturing facilities, and existing infrastructure. Additionally, they seek cheap labor to power their industries and exploit abundant natural resources such as minerals, timber, and spices that are not sufficiently available in their own territories.

In the film *Avatar: The Way of Water*, colonization is not only focused on ensuring human survival on Pandora but also on achieving massive profits through the exploitation of the planet's natural resources.

Datum :

General Ardmore:

"We are not here to run a mine. I have a far more important mission. The Earth is dying. Our task is to tame the wilderness to make Pandora the new home for humanity."

(00:23:57 – 00:24:20).

This dialogue illustrates that the colonization of Pandora is fundamentally driven by an urgent and existential economic need rather than mere expansionism or curiosity. The Earth's ecosystem, having been pushed to the brink of collapse due to overexploitation and environmental mismanagement, can no longer sustain human life. As a result, humanity turns its gaze to Pandora a planet rich in natural resources and ecological potential as a viable alternative for long-term survival. This context reframes colonialism not only as a matter of resource acquisition but also as

a desperate response to ecological failure, where colonization becomes a tool for species preservation.

The phrase "*tame the wilderness*" is especially revealing. It echoes the language historically used by colonial powers during the age of imperial expansion, where unfamiliar lands and their inhabitants were depicted as wild, savage, and in need of control or transformation. This colonial rhetoric implies that untamed environments have no inherent value until they are subjugated, systematized, and made profitable under the guise of civilization or development. In doing so, the colonizer assumes a moral and practical superiority over both nature and the native inhabitants.

Furthermore, the RDA's mission to dominate Pandora's land, water, air, and energy indicates a totalizing economic agenda. It is not merely about selective exploitation, but the complete restructuring of the planet's natural systems to fit human needs. This aggressive economic imperialism disregards the existing ecological balance and spiritual symbiosis maintained by the indigenous Na'vi people. Their relationship with Pandora, which is built on harmony and mutual respect, is overwritten by a worldview that sees nature as a passive reservoir of capital.

This scene encapsulates how capitalism, militarism, and technological dominance intersect to form a modern manifestation of colonialism. The film suggests that colonization in the name of survival still carries the same oppressive logic of domination and displacement only now masked under the justification of necessity. In this sense, the colonization of Pandora is not just a plot device; it serves as a symbolic critique of humanity's ongoing tendency to treat environmental and social collapse not by reforming behavior, but by seeking new frontiers to exploit.

2. Political Factors

Political factors play a crucial role in shaping the paradigm of colonialism. The rise of nationalism in colonized countries becomes a driving force behind resistance to foreign domination, while at the same time, imperialist nations expand their power to achieve broader territorial hegemony. This expansion is often seen as a means to enhance political prestige, global influence, and secure strategic interests, which in turn fuels competition and conflict among imperial powers.

In *Avatar: The Way of Water*, colonization is evident not only through physical expansion and resource exploitation but also through the destruction of local political systems that have long maintained social harmony on Pandora such as the internal political principles of the Metkayina clan and the tulkun, both of which deeply value peace.

Datum :

Olo'eyktan :

"Hear my words, boy. In the time of the first songs, the tulkuns fought among themselves to gain territory and to get revenge. But they realized that killing, justified or not, just leads to more killing. Therefore, it was forbidden to kill. It is the way of life of the tulkuns."

(01:52:05 – 01:52:32).

The words *"Territory"* and *"Revenge"* in this dialogue indicate that the tulkuns in the past once fought to seize land, which represents an expansion of power. *"The way of life of the tulkuns"* is an internal political principle of the Metkayina clan and the tulkuns that deeply values peace. They built a civilization based on moral laws that prohibit killing even in the name of revenge. This

prohibition against killing became a political pillar in their social life, serving as a foundation for stability and the continuity of their community.

However, when the humans (Sky People) arrived and began hunting tulkuns for their biological resources, they violated this local political order. Colonization occurred not only physically but also by destroying the political principles long upheld by the Metkayina clan and the tulkuns across generations.

By hunting tulkuns, humans did not merely attack individual lives, but also dismantled the political structure and customary laws that preserved the balance of Pandora's society. This illustrates that colonization is not merely about military or economic power it also involves the destruction of local political systems in favor of colonial interests.

In addition, the global ecological crisis on Earth is the main reason humans continue to seek alternative planets like Pandora as a new place to live. In the film, Earth is portrayed as a planet suffering from destruction due to overexploitation and environmental degradation. Therefore, the human government supports the colonization mission of Pandora as a long-term solution to ensure the survival of the human species. This colonization goes beyond resource exploitation it also involves political domination.

3. Socio-Cultural Factors

Colonial powers tend to spread their cultural values, norms, and institutions, which are often adopted either forcibly or voluntarily by the colonized societies. This process encompasses various aspects of life, including political systems, language, religion, education, and economic practices. Ultimately, it can lead to changes in identity, the erosion of local cultures, and the emergence of cultural hybridity.

In Avatar: The Way of Water, colonization occurs not only through economic and political means but also through socio-cultural factors. The presence of humans brings new values, habits, and behavioral patterns that threaten the existence of the Na'vi's cultural traditions and identity, particularly those of the Metkayina clan.

Datum :

Ronal:

"Their arms are thin. Their tails are weak. You will be slow in the water. The kids aren't even true Na'vi. Yes, we are. There is demon blood in them!"

(00:53:22 – 00:53:42).

This excerpt of dialogue highlights how cultural and racial differences become sources of discrimination and tension between humans and the indigenous tribe. Jake Sully's children, who are of mixed human and Na'vi heritage, are considered "impure beings" or not truly Na'vi by some members of the Metkayina clan. The phrases *"not even true Na'vi"* and *"demon blood in them"* indicate that they are seen as illegitimate both culturally and in terms of identity.

This reflects a form of socio-cultural colonization where the original identity of the local inhabitants and individuals resulting from cultural blending are shamed or rejected. This viewpoint closely mirrors realities in colonial history, where children born from relationships between colonizers and natives were often seen as having no place in either culture, experiencing identity crises and discrimination.

It illustrates how colonization impacts the construction of social identity, in which new values brought by outsiders are seen as polluting the purity of local culture. This conflict affirms that colonization does not only bring physical changes but also creates social fragmentation through the stigmatization of differences. The

cultural identity of the Na'vi begins to erode due to the presence of foreign influences, symbolized by the humans and their descendants.

In addition, the strategy of colonization in the film is also carried out through more subtle approaches, such as cultural infiltration.

4. Technology Factor

As time progresses, technology continues to advance, giving imperialist countries a significant advantage in conquest and territorial control. The increasing sophistication of technology has led to innovations in weaponry, transportation, communication, and medicine, enabling these nations to project military power effectively, exploit natural resources efficiently, and manage vast colonial territories. These technological advancements not only facilitate colonial expansion but also deepen the inequality between imperial powers and the colonized regions.

Technology is no longer merely a tool to support modern human life; it has evolved into a highly effective instrument of domination in the context of colonization and imperialism. In *Avatar: The Way of Water*, this aspect is strongly emphasized through the representation of the military and technological power possessed by the Resources Development Administration (RDA) in their efforts to conquer and exploit the world of Pandora and subjugate its native inhabitants, the Na'vi.

Unlike the Na'vi who uphold harmony with nature and rely on local wisdom, hunting skills, and traditional weapons such as bows and spears humans arrive with destructive power derived from advanced technologies, including heavy firearms, aerial combat vehicles, automated armed robots, and even genetic engineering and the digitalization of human consciousness.

This contrast creates a vast imbalance on the battlefield, where the natural and spiritual abilities of the Na'vi become disproportionately overpowered by RDA's high-tech weaponry and military strategies.

One of the dialogues that strongly represents technology as a tool of colonization appears in the following line:

Datum :

Colonel Miles Quaritch (in recorded form):

"Your memories and your personality are sent back to Earth, where you are being cultivated. You are a recombinant souled with my memories and my charm."

(00:22:00 – 00:23:00).

In this scene, Quaritch the main antagonist from the first film who had previously died is brought back to life as an avatar through advanced genetic technology known as a recombinant. The line *"You are a recombinant souled with my memories and my charm."* highlights that his new form is not just a physical reconstruction resembling a Na'vi, but one embedded with his old memories, personality, and mental faculties. This underscores how colonization in *Avatar: The Way of Water* extends beyond physical and military means, using cutting edge technology to invade deeper aspects such as consciousness and identity.

This kind of technology functions not only as a weapon but as a core mechanism for reviving and continuing the colonial agenda. As a recombinant, Quaritch becomes a metaphor for a form of colonialism that adapts and survives through scientific progress. The Na'vi body deeply sacred and symbolic within Pandora's cultural and spiritual traditions is stripped of its intrinsic meaning and reduced to a controllable shell occupied by the mind of the colonizer. This illustrates

a radical form of colonization: one that doesn't just dominate territory and resources, but takes over the very bodies and identities of the native population.

By assuming Na'vi form, Quaritch and his team gain the ability to blend in with the indigenous people, masking their true intentions while continuing their colonial mission. This blurring of physical and ideological boundaries raises serious ethical and existential questions. It reveals a more covert and insidious form of colonization one that is harder to detect, yet more destructive because it penetrates the most intimate layers of being: the mind, the self, and the spiritual core.

B.2. The Impact Of RDA's Colonization On The Na'vi Tribe

1. Political Impact

The colonial project undertaken by the RDA in Pandora has profound political repercussions, demonstrating how colonial powers can dismantle local sovereignty and transform traditional governance structures. Through the establishment of Bridgehead City, the RDA sought to replace the existing governance system led by the Na'vi with a centralized authority controlled by humans. Consequently, the political autonomy of the Na'vi was supplanted by a system designed to serve colonial interests.

Datum :

General Ardmore:

We're not here to negotiate. We're here to secure the future of humanity.

Selfridge:

Right. That's why General Ardmore is overseeing the entire operation. We're bringing civilization here.

(00:06:10 – 00:07:30).

The dialogue *"General Ardmore is overseeing the entire operation. We're bringing civilization here."* spoken by Selfridge serves as a strong entry point for understanding the political impact of colonization in *Avatar: The Way of Water*. This statement uses classic colonial rhetoric, in which the phrase "bringing civilization" is used as justification for occupying and dominating the territory of Indigenous peoples.

In this context, the Na'vi are positioned as a group perceived to be *"uncivilized,"* thereby framing the colonizers' presence as a moral mission to improve what they deem a backward social order. However, this claim conceals the fact that what is actually taking place is the forcible takeover of a local political system that is communal and spiritual in nature. The mention of a military figure like General Ardmore as the primary overseer of the operation reinforces that political power is being exercised in a militaristic manner.

This shows that colonization is not carried out solely through military force, but also through the erasure of local political structures and the imposition of a new power system oriented toward control and domination. Thus, the dialogue illustrates how colonialism cloaks political violence behind the narrative of civilization, actively destroying the sovereignty and political identity of the Indigenous people of Pandora.

2. Economic Impact

Natural resources lie at the heart of the economic motivation behind colonization, where the wealth of a land such as minerals, forest products, rare animals, or even living beings with high commercial value is commodified to serve the interests of the colonizers' markets. Colonizers exploit these resources on a massive scale, using advanced technology and military power, with little regard for environmental balance or the rights of local communities. This is clearly illustrated

in the dialogue between the scientist and Miles Quaritch after they successfully kill a tulkun, where the extraction of amrita an extremely valuable substance is prioritized over the sanctity of life and the ecological and cultural significance of the creature.

Datum :

Scientist:

"This amrita... it's the most valuable substance known to man. It's why we're really here."

Ship Captain:

"One vial of that pays for this whole damn trip."

(02:02:18—02:02:50).

The dialogue, *"This amrita... it's the most valuable substance known to man. It's why we're really here,"* explicitly reveals that the primary motivation behind the colonization of Pandora is no longer mere exploration or survival, but rather driven by strong economic interests. Amrita is a substance extracted from the brain of the tulkun, considered by humans as the most valuable commodity due to its ability to halt the aging process. The fact that this substance is the main reason for their presence on Pandora indicates that the entire colonization operation is guided by the logic of extractive capitalism: taking whatever is most profitable without regard for the ecological, cultural, or ethical values of the living beings involved.

In this context, the tulkun is not just a massive whale-like creature but symbolizes the harmony between the Metkayina people and nature. The hunting of tulkun to obtain amrita represents a form of economic violence that disrupts the ecological balance and spiritual values of the indigenous community, all for the benefit of a few humans.

The impact is significant: the tulkun population declines drastically, the spiritual connection of the Metkayina with the ocean is disrupted, and collective trauma emerges from the loss of creatures regarded as siblings and protectors. Moreover, the exploitation of amrita triggers open conflict between the colonizers and the native tribes, intensifying political tensions and creating social instability.

This practice mirrors historical patterns of colonialism on Earth, such as European colonization in Africa and Asia for spices, gold, and oil where local values were ignored for the sake of global economic profit. In other words, the scientist's statement exposes the true face of colonization as an economic project cloaked in the narrative of salvation or human advancement, when in reality it is driven by greed and disregard for the rights of other living beings.

4. Environmental Impact

Massive exploitation carried out by the Resources Development Administration (RDA) has caused severe ecological damage on Pandora. Activities such as mining, the hunting of Tulkuns, and the construction of industrial cities have led to habitat destruction and a disruption of the ecosystem, which was once rich in biodiversity. Areas that were once fertile and full of life have turned into barren lands due to unsustainable exploitation. Pollution generated by industrial and military activities has further worsened environmental conditions, pushing many native species to the brink of extinction.

Datum :

Gendral quaritch :

"This man, we know he is in these islands. Here this village."

Tonowari :

"We are a totally separate clan. This man in the reflection I from the forest. He needs to leave here and go to the forest to find this man".

Spider :

"They don't know anything".

General Quaritch :

"Shoot that animal".

(01:43:44 – 01:44:21).

In the dialogue between General Quaritch, Tonowari, and Spider, the environmental impact of human colonization on Pandora is vividly portrayed, particularly in the oceanic region inhabited by the Metkayina clan. Quaritch and the RDA forces invade the archipelago in search of Jake Sully, without any regard for the fact that the area is a natural habitat for various marine species and home to the Na'vi community, who live in harmony with nature.

When Quaritch states, *"This man, we know he is in these islands,"* and points to the village, he directly brings violence and chaos into an ecosystem that was once peaceful. Tonowari, the chief of the Metkayina clan, attempts to defend his tribe's territorial boundaries and identity by asserting that his people are a separate group and uninvolved in the conflict, but his statement is disregarded by Quaritch. This illustrates how colonial powers often ignore local social and ecological structures for their own interests.

Conclusion

- 1) This research identifies four categories of colonialism in the film 'Avatar: The Way of Water': economic, political, socio-cultural, and technological factors.

Economic factors involve imperialist countries' need to control resources like land, facilities, labor, and natural resources. Political factors include the drive for territorial expansion, political prestige, and the suppression of resistance in colonized regions. Socio-cultural factors involve the imposition of colonizers' values and the resulting changes to the identity and culture of the colonized. Technological factors highlight how advanced technology enables imperialist countries to exert control and exploit resources. This thesis is dominant on economic factors because the main motive of colonialism in the film *Avatar: The Way of Water* focuses on the exploitation of Pandora's natural resources for financial gain. Colonization is carried out by humans through the invasion and control of valuable assets such as tulkun liquid (amrita), which reflects imperialist economic interests. The main conflict in the story centers on the struggle for resources, and the social and cultural impact that occurs is rooted in economic exploitation. Therefore, economic factors are the most prominent foundation in the analysis of colonialism in this film.

- 2) The researcher identified four categories of the impact of colonialism in the film *Avatar: The Way of Water*, namely: political impact, economic impact, environmental impact, and socio-cultural impact. The most dominant impact of colonialism in *Avatar: The Way of Water* is the social and cultural impact, which reflects how colonialism damages the relationship between humans and their environment, as well as weakens the identity and sovereignty of indigenous peoples.
- 3) The RDA's colonization of Pandora in "*Avatar: The Way of Water*" demonstrates a multifaceted assault on the Na'vi people, encompassing political subjugation through the dismantling of their governance, economic

exploitation of resources like amrita, socio-cultural disruption via the erosion of their identity and traditions, and severe environmental devastation that threatens their existence.

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