

The image of the "other" in children of men, babel, and cronos



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In filmmaking, directors have subtly ascribed roles of the Self and the Other in discourse. Examining the movies, Children of Men, Babel, and Cronos, one sees the Self as the one who prevails in forming the worldview and conforming the viewers' opinion to his own perspective; whereas the Other who has a secondary role in the movie's discussion and an inferior part in the unfolding of the action. The Other is regarded as not retaining the rights of humans but are simply used as a way to accomplish an objective. The concept of the dichotomy between the Self and the Other is a challenging topic since the prejudiced statements are not made overtly. The self is positioned at the center, while the other borders on the periphery. The ethics of the movies are built on accepted and more superior views of a certain culture, while differentiating and discriminating against the Other who may not hold and wield such power. In the horror movie, Peter Hutchings in his book *The Horror Film* asserts that "in the typical narratives of paranoid horror the defenses protecting this world from the other have long since disappeared" (Hutchings). Hence the horror movie depicts a world which must come to grips with the invasion and threat of the Other, liked or not.

In *Children of Men*, the theme of the Other in racial terms are predominantly portrayed. "The *Children of Men* (delineates) two topics determine today's liberal tolerant attitude towards others: the respect of otherness, openness towards it, and the obsessive fear of harassment. The other is OK insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as the other is not really other.

Tolerance coincides with its opposite: my duty to be tolerant towards the other effectively means that I should not get too close to him" (Zizek). The plot of the movie deals with a woman, Kee, an African-American, who is

humanity's only hope of continuing the species in a sterile environment. The person who is the rescuer of the humans is Theodore Faron (European guardian) who has a key role in shielding Kee from attack of her unborn child. The land in which the action unfolds is England who becomes a haven for a world in turmoil and shattered by war. Therefore the Other in this movie are non-Europeans. Similar to the Euro-centricity of the early colonial times, this movie depicts the Other as a potential threat since foreigners in England are treated as scum. Hutchings observes that horror filmmakers "tended to locate their monsters at a safe distance from the everyday world-hence the European settings of many (horror) films" (Hutchings). At the same time, Europe is the birthplace of the Self and which has largely shaped 'American' thinking. The self is the American citizen who needs to be saved and the other is the foreigner or beast.

Moreover, foreigners have been dragged off to detention camps and enduring police brutality, the wave of illegal immigration to England only draws a parallel with First World European countries and the Third World lower classes who fight to enter for a better life. In one scene of the film, Kee tells Theodore that she was told that she could trust only him and no one else. This metaphorical assertion underlines that the survival and fate of the Other lay in the hands of the European. The leader of the rebel, paramilitary group who also protects Key is Luke (a Black terrorist captain)-this personification of the Other as the leading figure in rebellion also paints the Other in a negative light. Another instance where the Other is constructed disadvantageously is Marikipa, a gypsy woman who cannot speak English. Throughout the film, she aids to guide the protagonists to safety; however,

she has no part to play in the main discourse of the film. Her lack of knowledge in English, therefore takes power away from her, making her inferior.

Babel, which was orchestrated by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, is a production which has Amores Perros and 21 Grams as sequences of a trilogy. Babel which means confusion and that is exactly what the film deals with. One moving episode zooms in on the life of a Japanese adolescent, Chieko Wataya, who is a deaf-mute and who has to face rejection from her peers because of her disability. Here the Self is constructed on the basis of physical competence and social acceptance while the Other lacks both the aforementioned elements. Rejection comes from not only her friends but proceeds from other men to whom she is attracted. Another struggle between the self and the other unravels in the characterization of Amelia, the Mexican nanny and maid who works for a wealthy American couple, Richard and Susan. The maid is an illegal immigrant who has found opportunity in America doing menial work. Here, the categorization of the Other is based again on inferiority since the class structure has placed Amelia among the poor and underprivileged. The act of losing the children over whom Amelia are supposed to be responsible also prejudices the viewer against her as a negligent mother-figure who will always be an "illegal alien" and foreigner, regardless of years of service. The white Caucasian affluent American typifies that class of people who enjoy the rights of being an American citizen and who ultimately have the say as far as the foreign immigrant is concerned. On the Other hand (pun intended), As a representative of the Hispanic influx into America in search for opportunity,

Amelia symbolized the working classes who will always be at the wrong side with the law.

In *Cronos* directed by Guillermo del Toro alludes to the mythological character Cronus or Kronos is actually a male deity who would suck the blood of children the one who is classified as the Other is the woman and the colonized peoples. Hutchings states that " the popularity of the cinematic serial killer has been frequently seen as symptomatic of an increasing violent, dehumanized, and alienated society" (Hutchings). In this case the rise of the vampire culture in film evokes this same alienation for the self is the ordinary human being while the other is the sidelined, hated, and abominable. In *Cronos*, the maleness of the discourse is determined from the outset as the main characters clash: Cronos, Jesus Gris, Angel de la Guardia, Dieter de la Guardia. The women in the movie occupy secondary roles as they are relegated to that of passive assistants to the main characters. Moreover the Other in the film discourse is the Amerindian while Europeans maintain a central role. The metaphor of the European vampire paints a picture of the capitalism and economic motivations for seeking an ancient, valuable relic. "

European nations also benefited from colonial plunder for example Inca and Aztec gold - the same that made the Cronos device"(Kraniauskas). Cronos, as the vampire of the movie dehumanizes, attacks, and sucks the life blood from his victims while the Other is obligated to comply to his desires. The colonial discourse represents the parent country as the colonizer while the children-colonies are the colonized and exploited peoples. Also, the historical artifact of the *Cronos* movie is an Egyptian beetle which gives supernatural

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powers to the owner. Dieter de la Guardia symbolizes the greed of capitalism with its mercenary ends to capture a priceless and exotic work of art and magic. In no other way is the struggle between Eurocentric and indigenous cultures expressed as in the constant shifting in the film between English and Spanish. This interaction bears the mark of colonialism where European languages are imposed by force and necessity-thus a secondary language is adopted as the only way to communicate to the 'conquerors'.

Dehumanization of "The Other" is critical in colonialism, where bondage of the mind and soul is followed by the body's enslavement. The colonized person's will must be broken and invalidated as the colonial is at liberty to control, exploit and abuse the human being. The Spanish and English conquerors were the colonists of their day and once they constructed the Amerindians as a tribal and primitive people who existed below their culture.

One observes the custom of the different depictions of the Other in the film industry where the glaring image of a central philosophy stands in contrast against another fringe philosophy which does not gain the respect of the masses. The duality between the Self and the Other is further highlighted when the artist paints the other in any way that is substandard. The other can be trivialized, abused, and demoralized. Most times, the self holds the stage while the Other is forced to stay on the sidelines passively and unresisting. Equality is not present in the interplay between the Self and the Other since one must rise at the expense of the Other. Because of conflicting ideologies, one understands that controversy is bound to erupt and that power struggle lies at the base of the binary discourse. Hutchings also states in his essay, *Genre Theory and Criticism*, that "the iconographic approach

can and has been criticized for its unquestioning acceptance of form and content distinction...most of these accounts turn back to a form of autism and turn away from the other avenues which have opened up" (Rayner). Hence his work is all about opening up the spectator to alternative and different pathways away from the conventional; where the other will get mainstream play and gets the acceptance and cinematic merit and credit deserved. In the differentiation between the Self and the Other, early some covert and some blatant partial views breed separationist systems which imprison and isolate the Other. In the horror film genre, the Other was perceived as the one who would be the threat to the self therefore horrific plundering, violence, torture, and killings were justified

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