

Ethnocentrism in avatar essay



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Ethnocentrism in Anthropological perspective – Avatar Using highly advanced technology to replicate and to creating false bodies which humans use to walk amongst the natives known as the Na'vi living in the planet Pandora hence the name 'Avatar'. The story focuses on an ex U. S. soldier name Jake Sully who is wheel-chair bound, was called upon as a last resort to replace his late brother whom had trained for 3 years in a project which was invested with so much money that the researchers could not bear to make it go to waste. Thus, sharing the same DNA, Jake was then given the privilege to be part of the project as he was tasked to retrieve back an extremely valuable mineral known as "Unobtainium" (Cameron & Landau, 2009) and at the same time taking advantage of the false bodies to integrate with the Na'vi and to learn their ways and practices. The movie brings the audience through a journey at the same time identifying ethnocentrism through the aspects of exoticism, primitivism and romanticism in the wondrous world of Pandora. Ethnocentrism refers to a bias where one's own group is the center of everything. One's own culture is considered superior and all 'others' are scaled and rated as below it (Lundberg, 2012).

It was both the human race and the Na'vi who deemed each other as less superior, example when the human were using machines to destroy the forest and thus treating the Na'vi like animals, being chased out of their homes and disregard for their safety. Similarly, Eytukan the clan leader of the Na'vi also shared the same sentiment who regarded Jake Sully as to having an 'alien smell' and did not belong to the tribe (Cameron & Landau, 2009). This evidently shows that both were equally disrespectful towards each other's cultures. Analysing through exoticism which critique others

culture as exotic and alluring (Lundberg, 2009). It has shown that Pandora is filled with a wide diversity of life forms ranging from bright coloured plants blooming beautifully and plants that glow in the dark at night as well as living creatures although resembles many common animals like rhinos and monkeys, still have many unique and unknown features unfamiliar to the main character. The Na'vi that has similar human characteristics, having cyan-coloured skin and a lemur-like tail in human context was still known to be beautiful (20th Century Fox, 2009). The Na'vi are also primitive in nature which comes to the second area of ethnocentrism, primitivism referring that they are lower on an evolutionary or developmental scale (Lundberg, 2012), although they not only have half human like features, they also savage in nature examples of through the way they hunt for food and the well-known ritual of banshee catching whereby every young warrior Na'vi will have to go through to be proven as a true warrior, which honestly feels very much like getting your driving license. They were regarded as less developed when battling against the humans, the antagonist Miles Quaritch in charge of the security firm underestimates the Na'vi as they fire their spears and arrows effortlessly at their solid armoured battle ships (Cameron & Landau, 2009).

Romanticism, traditional people are seen as presenting a better past when humans were at one with nature (Lundberg, 2012). The Na'vi are highly appreciative of nature, as they believe that killing animal is merely to borrow what is needed from nature itself and their sacred tree is of high value to them but majority of the humans fail to understand as to them, ' they are just trees' (Cameron & Landau, 2009) just as " Science often violates simple common sense, ignoring the evidence of our senses." (Diamond, J, 1994) As

shown that humans are ignorant and showed disrespect to other cultures for their own greed.

In conclusion, although the humans and the Na'vi behave differently they still share similar traits and aspects of ethnocentrism, this film perhaps shows that 'it takes a cat to understand another cat' meaning other culture maybe strange or different but when you become part of it, then perhaps then, you will truly understand and respect it.