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**From Pax Britannica to Pax Americana :**

**Dialectic of Power/Knowledge in *Avatar* (2009), *Heart of Darkness*  
(1902), and *The Tempest* (1611)**

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## **Author's Engagement**

I Mr. **MOUHOUBI Mohamed**, declare on my honor to have written this work without any external help nor to have taken it from any other resource than those cited within. All the texts, published or not, including the electronic versions, are referred to as such. This work is not submitted to any other board of exam in a similar form, whether in Algeria or abroad, at the university or another institution, by myself or by another.

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## Abstract

This dissertation is set within Postcolonial framework. It studies James Cameron's *Avatar* in the light of Western literary tradition, namely William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It aims to show the constant transmutations and transformations of the imperialist elements of power through Western cultural productions. Moreover, it looks at how Otherness is transformed from the state of being considered as a counter-Self—all what the Westerner is not and has not—into a market exotic commodity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century society of spectacle. To do this, the present dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter One compares *Avatar* to *The Tempest*, putting focus on space (geography) and Otherness. Using Ashcroft's notion of “imperial gaze” (2001), it is put forward that the affirmation of identity needs to find a new “uninhabited” place. It explains that the main characters are portrayed as agents of power, heralding an apotheosis of imperialism. Chapter Two examines the same movie with *Heart of Darkness*. To reconsider Cameron's anti-imperialist assertion, comparing it to Conrad's. After that, it extracts the traditional means of colonialism within the movie, comparing them to those found in Conrad's novella. The Other here is seen as an interior one (like Kurtz). Focusing on Pratt's notion of anti-conquest hero (1992), it argues that though *Avatar* is set to uphold an anti-imperialist message; it mystifies new elements, which *passively* sustain the continuity of what Gramsci calls the hegemonic power (1999). The last chapter studies *Avatar* within its immediate context. Considering the use of both myths and exoticism, it sheds light on how this movie works as a new means of imperialist power, heralding what Alessio and Meredith prefer to call “monopoly imperialism” based on consumerism (2012). As this dissertation suggests, this is no more than the transmutation of the traditional imperialist power of the British imperialism into a more sophisticated power within Hollywood machine.

## Résumé

Cette dissertation s'inscrit dans le cadre de la théorie Postcoloniale. Elle a pour principal motif d'analyser Avatar (2009) de James Cameron à la lumière des travaux de fiction représentant la tradition littéraire Britannique, à savoir La Tempête (1611) de William Shakespeare et Le Cœur des Ténèbres (1902) de Joseph Conrad. Elle a pour but de montrer les continuelles transmutations et transformations des éléments du pouvoir impérialiste à travers les productions culturelles de l'Occident. En outre, elle tente de démontrer comment l'Altérité est transformée de l'état où elle est considérée comme « un contre-Moi »—tout ce que l'être occidental ne l'est pas et ne possède pas—à une commodité exotique du marché dans la société du spectacle du 21ème Siècle. Pour réaliser ceci, la présente dissertation est divisée en trois chapitres. Le premier aura à comparer Avatar avec La Tempête, focalisant sur *l'espace*\_(géographie) et *l'Altérité*. Utilisant la notion du **Imperial Gaze** d'Ashcroft (2001), il est supposé que l'affirmation identitaire a besoin d'un « espace vacant ». En outre, il est mentionné que les deux protagonistes sont montrés comme étant des agents du pouvoir *divinisés*, ce qui conduit à une apothéose de l'impérialisme. Dans le deuxième chapitre, nous examinons le même film avec Le Cœur de Ténèbres. Commenant à remettre en question l'assertion de Cameron sur le message anti-impérialiste de son film, il est ensuite comparé aux assertions divulguées par Conrad. Après cela, les éléments représentant le colonialisme traditionnel seront relevés du film et comparés avec ceux trouvés dans le roman de Conrad. Ici, l'Altéré (Other) est vu comme un élément intérieur (comme Kurtz). Focalisant sur la notion **anti-conquest Hero** de Pratt (1992), il est sujet d'argumenter que malgré Avatar porte en apparence un message anti-impérialiste, il mystifie des nouveaux éléments qui travaillent à faire continuer *passivement* ce que Gramsci appelle “le pouvoir hégémonique” (1999). Le dernier chapitre étudie Avatar dans son contexte immédiat. En effet, et prenant en considération l'utilisation des *mythes* ainsi que l'*exotisme*, il est question de démontrer comment ce film représente en lui-même un nouveau élément ou un support du pouvoir impérialiste ; c'est ce que Alessio et Meredith préfèrent appeler **Monopoly Imperialism**, ayant pour principale base le consumérisme (2012). Comme ce travail le suggère, nous pouvons dire que ce film n'est pas plus que la transmutation des éléments du pouvoir de l'impérialisme traditionnel du type Britannique vers en un système plus sophistiqué que la machine Hollywoodienne véhicule.

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## **General Introduction**

Sans doute il vous souvient de ce guerrier suprême  
Qui, comme un ancien dieu, se transforme lui-même,  
d'Hannibal en Cromwell, de Cromwell en César,  
C'était quand il couvait son troisième Avatar.

Victor Hugo, in : *Revue des Deux Mondes*, August 1<sup>st</sup> 1831, p. 252

## General Introduction :

You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,  
That hath to instrument his lower world  
And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea  
Hath caused to belch up you ; and on this island  
Where man doth not inhabit ; you 'mongst men  
Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad ;  
And even with such-like valour men hang and drown  
Their proper selves (Shakespeare, 2012 , III-iii : 65-6).

These words are uttered by Ariel, Prospero's servant in *The Tempest* (1611). Functioning as an invisible “airy spirit”, Ariel is urged by Prospero to punish “the three men of sin” (Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian) who have worked to overthrow his “master”. To do this, the latter, who is the dethroned Duke of Milan, has ordered “strange shapes, bringing in *a banquet* [...] [with] actions of salutations, inviting the King [Alonso] [and his followers] to eat [...]” (Ibid: 64, Mine Italics). Then, Ariel, “like a harpy, claps his wings upon a table[...] the banquet vanishes” (Ibid: 65). Ariel has said the above threatening words and adds that Ferdinand, son of King Alonso, is not dead (Ibid: 66). In the meantime, invisible from above the stage, Prospero is watching his enemies, “My high charms work and these mine enemies are all knit up in their distractions; they now are in my power” (Ibid: 67).

From the above scene, there are two important elements that one has to take into consideration. The first element is an aesthetic one which is the “banquet”. The latter refers mainly to two Western ideas: the death of Socrates and/or the famous last meal of Jesus Christ. The use of “banquet” by William Shakespeare is probably meant to put forward the idea of treason of the followers of a good and wise person but also a prelude, from the act of punishing the traitors, to another flourishing future. The latter is the second element and it is a symbolic one. It consists of seeing the space where this “new starting” has taken place. The uninhabited “island”. It serves, as Anne-Marie Bidaud remarks, as a place to begin History again (Bidaud, 1994: 16). To take the native inhabitants of “a new found” land for captives and then servants for the (re)affirmation of his master identity (the right Duke of Milan), is

what Prospero has done to assure the continuity of his reign and his offspring ( by the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand). This has to begin from the very beginning. To do that, a new civilization must start with a myth (Jung, *in* Segal, 2004: 94 ).

The Hollywoodian movies function on this dimension. To affirm and carry out the idea of the superiority of the American identity, a movie plays an important role—just like plays during Shakespeare's time—to validate this idea (or a wish) into a *statement*. This is generally accomplished with the use of myths. In her *Hollywood et le Rêve Américain : Cinéma et Idéologie aux Etats Unis* (1994), Bidaud makes an important remark concerning the duality between myths and identity;

Le Mythe introduit une temporalité propre, celle des récits du commencement, ou une conception cyclique du temps. Les Etats Unis n'ont cessé d'être hantés par le déclin des grands Empires de l'Antiquité et interprètent volontiers leur propre devenir en termes d'expansion, de décadence et de chute. La spécificité de l'espace dans le récit mythique permet aux Américains d'infléchir leur histoire [...] parce que la nouvelle humanité se fait toujours dans un espace vide (Bidaud, 1994: 15).

Myth introduces a special and unique timing, the one that is found in the narratives of the beginning of history, or a cyclical conception of time. The United States have not stopped to be inspired from the downfall of the antique empires and they interpret willingly their own future in term of expansion, decadence, and downfall. The specificity of space in mythical stories allows to the Americans to control their history [...] because a new humanity is always constructed in a new and blank space( *Ibid*, Mine translation).

In addition, myths work to accomplish, as Roland Barthes claims, an act of purification in nature and in eternity (Barthes, 1957: 239), offering always to civilization a fresh and a new beginning. It follows that the importance of the Western elements of culture, like myths, which work to fortify cyclically the narrative system, and assuring the continuity of the Western identity over history. These Western cultural elements operate as *regulators* of the narrative within the network of a literary discourse. They are what Michel Foucault considers as the “elements of knowledge” (Foucault, 1980: 52 ). Their act of regulation strengthens the

elements within the narrative (the characters) and keep them in a state of power.

James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) is a Hollywoodian cinematographic production whose narrative system functions as *a statement* in the Western discourse of identity affirmation. Just like Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the Western characters of Cameron's movie are set on a distant and exotic land where the events and master identity affirmation is tested. At a first glimpse, both narratives have a “happy end” and, more importantly, the main character of each one of them is a portrayal of positive and illuminated characteristics upon which the story is built. Besides, the first regulator is the *ahistorical* mythical elements. In this sense, *Avatar* can be regarded as an extension of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

However, as a twenty-first century's artistic production, *Avatar* is built on a complex dynamicity of narration. The rudimentary character, who is the narrator in the film, acts within an “alien” body which helps him to survive in the alien planet. This complexity of the literary discourse can be compared to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). The latter displays to the reader some “factual” realities of the Western identity experienced in “a blank space” and in a real place and time (Congo of the 1890s). The realistic depiction of violence, for instance, is represented so vividly to catch out the stigma of the Western subjects in the colonial landscape. Thus, the “elements of knowledge” are based on a *historical* accounts of a particular phase in history.

In Consideration to what has been said, the present work is an attempt to study Cameron's *Avatar* in the light of the Western literary tradition, namely Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It is conducted within the framework of postcolonial theory. In fact, a postcolonial scrutiny focuses on colonial texts (Shakespeare's, Conrad's) which embody what Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), calls “ideological formations” and “forms of knowledge” (Said, 1994: 50-4). These texts, whatever their artistic forms or genres, provide an accompaniment to imperialism and colonialism. An

ideological formation can be considered as a textual production of an imperial ideology. As for the form of knowledge, it is mainly related to character's depiction in which an ethnocentric language is displayed in order to support imperialism (Said, 1994: 5).

*Avatar* is going to be scrutinized to sort out its ideological formation and forms of knowledge in the light of the British literary tradition. There is a dialectic of power and knowledge between traditional imperialist rhetoric and new and more complex ones. This is the reason why I have given as a first title to this work *From Pax Britannica to Pax Americana*. This shift is politically palpable. Srinivasan Krishnan's remark is a pertinent one.

[Up from the 1960s] the Geopolitical map had changed, the supermacy of the United States was obvious, and the three circles were now wholly out of proportion. From the end of the Second World War onwards, the [British] Commonwealth had played a decreasingly audible second fiddle to the United States. So much so that in 1965, The Round Table proclaimed grimly, "We find ourselves within the American Commonwealth" (Krishnan, 2005: 37).

My assumption is that *Avatar*, beyond its immediate purpose which consists of denouncing colonialism and imperialism (Cameron, *in* Tang (2011) and *in* Bennet (2012)), carries a more complex form of knowledge that not only asserts the hegemony of Western power but functions as a vortex, absorbing Otherness and its means of resistance and manufactures it as a market product in the "American Commonwealth", a new form of imperialism.

There are two important reasons that have urged me to carry out this research. The first one is that it provides the postcolonial field with new perspectives concerning the fact of studying a 3-D Hollywoodian movie within the framework of Postcolonial theory. Thus, comparing a movie to a literary work, regardless to their genre or else, is an original and a pertinent way to explore in this field with new lenses. The second reason is related to the film itself. Indeed, *Avatar* is rarely compared to literary works related to the British Imperialism, like *The Tempest* and *Heart of Darkness*. Thus, I see an opportunity to explore the subject of colonialism, imperialism, and hegemony with new materials, more sophisticated and

aesthetically complex.

## **Review of Literature:**

Since its release in December 2009, James Cameron's *Avatar* has attracted many critics and commentators. Commentaries about the movie's message are controversial. I summarize some of the works which have a relation to the present issue, classifying them chronologically.

In *Living at the End of Times* (2010), Slavoj Žižek classifies ironically James Cameron's movie in the category of “Hollywood Marxism” (Marxism with human faces, as Žižek likes to call the pseudo-Marxists). The reason for this is that the movie is carrying the white man's fantasy (Žižek, 2010: 394). Calling the hero “the man who would be a King” (Ibid), he argues that the film's lesson is clear:

the only choice the aborigines have is to be saved by the humans or destroyed by them, to be either the brutal victims of imperialist reality, or to play their allotted role in the white man's fantasy—in both cases, they become a plaything in human hands. The very hyper-reality of the film, with its combination of real actors and 3-D digital animation, renders palpable the fantasmatic status of the life on the invaded planet (Žižek, 2010: 394).

Žižek associates Cameron's movie to the “Lefortian notion of democracy as relying on the empty place of power, on the logic of implying its own imperfection and endless self-correction” (Ibid: 393).

Tang Yong entitles his article *Avatar: A Marxist Saga on Far Distant Planet* (2011). In this paper, he claims that, like Cameron's major films, *Avatar* is a cinematographic manifesto of Marxism. He argues that “Cameron always stands with the warm-hearted and heroic proletarians in their fight against the evil capitalists” (Ibid: 664). For him, the film describes the RDA's [Resources Development Administration] military attack against the Na'vi as one of the “shock and awe” in which they will fight “terror with terror” (Tang, 2011: 660). He argues that “the similarity of wording indicates an implicit condemnation of the United States' occupation of Iraq and the U.S. Global war against terror” (Ibid). He concludes by saying that

the confrontational nature of the world view embedded in the movie has been used by audiences in China, Palestine, and elsewhere “as a weapon to fight against social oppression” (Tang, 2011: 664).

Kristen Meredith and Dominic Alessio study Cameron's *Avatar* in the light of the social-political context in which it is produced. Entitling their paper *Decolonising James Cameron's Pandora: Imperial History and Science Fiction* (2012), they study the movie from a postcolonial perspective. They think that even though the movie's immediate message is to denounce Bush's US foreign policy, “the film's plot is a blatant metaphor for the history of European-Indigenous colonial contact” (Ibid: 2-3). They argue that

In this vein Pandora's setting, despite all of the film's cutting-edge technology, largely resembles the conventional 'Lost Eden' utopian fantasy common to much of the literature and art of *Europe's nineteenth century high age of empire* (Ibid: 3, mine italics)

Having said this, Meredith and Alessio include the need “to rethink traditional definition and theories of empire” (Ibid). For them, *Avatar* “reminds us that empires, despite post-World War II decolonization, still exist, and that they do not have to be state-led actors as some have suggested” (Meredith, Alessio, 2012: 30). Ending the paper by showing their disagreement about the present day definition of empire, they insist on the strict necessity to redefine this concept. They suggest the following:

Empire is a formal/informal correlation wherein any kind of individual or organization (political, religious, or commercial) dominates a people's political autonomy, territory, culture, and/or economics (Ibid: 32).

The reason for this is simple: *Avatar* is, like many other Hollywoodian productions, a timely reminder that in a world of growing multinational power the traditional definitions of empire need reformulating because today's world is “Monopoly Imperialism”.

In *Going Native: Colonial Continuities and Discontinuities in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (2012), Stephen Trinder discusses three successful Hollywood movies, and *Avatar* is among them. He aims to show how Hollywood continues to disseminate

components of colonial and American imperialistic discourse in many of its most popular and peer-recognized features. He remarks that “the setting of the films [like *Avatar*] is important in the over-arching discursive underpinning each feature and the way in which filmic backgrounds are presented in their Otherness has changed under neo-colonialism” (Ibid: 64). Besides, Trinder claims that James Cameron “partly manifests Pandora and the Na’vi as the “fetish” to which the audience are able to articulate their anxiety (Ibid: 62). By calling *Avatar*'s flat character “the novelistic hero” (Ibid: 22), Trinder suggests that the hero absorbs all Otherness within his quest for self-affirmation. Trinder concludes that *Avatar*, *The Last Samurai*, and *Dances with Wolves*, are hiding imperialist subtext and paradigmatic models, maintaining a continuation of colonial discourse, from a postcolonial studies perspective (Ibid: 68).

Bruce Bennet entitles his paper: *Loving the Alien: Indigenous Protest and Neo-Colonial Violence in James Cameron's Avatar* (2012). Bennet classifies Cameron's *Avatar* within the category of anthropological Cinema. The reason for this is that the film tells the protagonist, Jake Sully's investigation and “exploration of this exotic, “savage” people and his transgression of scientific objectivity as he is “seduced” by the Na’vi (Bennet, 2012: 10). Comparing *Avatar* to Cooper's *King Kong* (1933), Bennet sets a parallel in the blend of anthropological exoticism and sumptuous hyper-realism. Moreover, in the sub-section entitled *Loving the Aliens: Going Native*, Bennet compares the movie's main character to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. He says

Like the colonial company agent, Kurtz[...]Sully has succumbed to the spectacular and dark pleasures of the jungle, losing a sense of stable, geographically anchored and racialized identity to undertake a sexual relationship with a local woman and “go native” (Ibid: 20).

To conclude his paper, Bennet hints at the final close-up shot of *Avatar*, where the “alien” eyes of the main character “suddenly flick open” (Ibid: 26) and stare back at the viewer. He interprets this final shot as an invitation to imagine viewing the film through his “third eye, a

*fingerly haptic eye*” (Ibid, mine italics) to have, probably, a three dimensional points of view on the movie.

## **Issue and Working Hypothesis**

The present work is constructed within the framework of postcolonial perspective. It is an attempt to extend the research that has been previously done about Cameron's *Avatar*. In order to further this research, and considering the present movie as a “utopian fantasy common to much of the literature and art of Europe's nineteenth century high age of empire” (Meredith, Alessio, 2012: 3), I will approach it in the light of the above cited English literary tradition, *The Tempest* (1611) and *Heart of Darkness* (1992). In doing so, I will study some forms of knowledge that sustain empire, considering the term “empire” with Meredith's suggested definition. Ultimately, the previous works which have dealt with *Avatar* (Zizek (2010), Tang (2011, Meredith (2012), Trinder (2012)) pave the way to work on some working hypothesis in order to study the *cyclical* transmutations of these forms of knowledge over a considerable period of time in history.

At first, I will attempt to see what are the imperialist characteristics of the rudimentary character in *Avatar*, called “ the novelistic hero” (Trinder, 2012) and the “man who would be a King” (Zizek, 2010), comparing him to the two English works' main characters.

The second point will give importance to space (setting). In fact, the colonial space, or the contact zone, is a place where the characters representing the Western powers are constantly developing (Pratt (1992), Ashcroft (2001)). I will see how this space is depicted and what is its importance in relation to the imperial continuity in the twenty-first century and post 9/11 world.

The third point deals with Otherness and how this latter is depicted within the three corpuses of study. My assumption is that *Avatar*, within the Hollywoodian cinematographic industry, transforms Otherness into an exotic commodity. This differs from Conrad's novella,

where Otherness is generally silenced, and in Shakespeare's play where it is satirized.

My last point is related to the importance of myth that functions to strengthen the main character in his quest for master identity (re)affirmation (Bidaud (1994)). Besides, I anticipate saying that exoticism is important because it operates to hide the hegemonic power within a mystified framework of aesthetic images of Cameron's movie.

As regards to the theoretical framework, I will focus on various critical theorists. The first one is Michel Foucault and his notion of Power/knowledge. In fact, Foucault says at the very beginning of his conference at *Collège de France* (1980) “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Foucault, 1980: 52). he claims that

power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of chain [...] power is employed and exercised through a network organisation [...] individuals are vehicles of power, not its points of application (Ibid: 98).

For Foucault, power is a system of relations spread continually throughout the individuals of one or many societies. Scientific knowledge, like biology, archeology, or/ and ethnology, is seen as “regulated practices that accounts for a number of *statements*” (Foucault, 1972: 80, mine italics). By statements, Foucault means the verified and validated scientific findings that become canonized within a system of discourse as “facts”. Consequently, knowledge has to be considered as a conjunction of power relations and information-seeking which he terms 'power/knowledge' (Foucault, 1980).

The second critical theorist is Edward Said and his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) which is another theoretical material used in this dissertation. It is worth mentioning that Said owes his discussion about Orientalism and “the imperialist complex” mechanism to Foucault's and his Power/Knowledge dialectics. In fact, Said sees that the consolidated vision of Otherness is the result of the accumulation of colonialist discourse heated by historical and scientific achievements.

In the closing year of the nineteenth century, with the scramble for Africa, the consolidation of the French imperial union, the American annexation of the Philippines, and the British rule in the Indian subcontinent at its height, empire was [becoming] a universal concern (Said, 1994: 76).

In this complex system of power, the empire “functions... as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households” (Ibid: 75).

Influenced by Foucault's notion of Power/knowledge, Said considers the impossibility to separate Imperialism and a literary text. He remarks “Imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible[...] to read one without in some way dealing with the other” (Ibid: 84). Consequently a literary text, such as *Heart of Darkness*, keeps the empire more or less in place, consolidating and fortifying the imperialist vision by a series of “overlapping affirmations, by which near unanimity of view was [and is] sustained” (Ibid: 89-90).

Additionally, Antonio Gramsci's notion of “hegemonic power” is used in this work. In *Prison Notebook* (1929-1935), Gramsci claims that power which is used in war and which is held by coercive and traditional means (direct and military occupation...etc) has passed to another form of mechanism which he calls “hegemonic power” (Gramsci, 1999: 57). Indeed hegemony is a whole network that exploits all possible ideological means to impose supremacy over people. Hegemony can include scientific knowledge that is an aspect of an entire system of values, which is now called “humanism” (Ibid: 60). He adds that hegemony “aims at authorizing the supremacy of intellectuals over warriors” (Ibid).

## **Methods and Materials**

To support my theoretical framework, I have borrowed some notions and concepts from postcolonial theorists who are Bill Ashcroft and his notion of “imperial gaze”, Mary Louise Pratt and her notion of “anti-conquest hero”, and Graham Huggan and his definition of “exoticism”. Respectively, in *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001), Ashcroft borrows the term “gaze” from Jacques Lacan and introduces it to Postcolonial theoretical field. He says

that the “imperial gaze” “[...]defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness (Ashcroft, 2001: 141). The second concept, “the anti-conquest hero”, is taken from Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992) Studying the protagonist in travel and exploration writings, the anti-conquest hero, sometimes referred as the “seeing-man”, is a figure, an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of “European landscape—he whose imperial eyes *passively* look out and possess” (Pratt, 1992: 7, mine italics). The notion of “exoticism” is defined in Huggan's *Post-Colonial Exotic* (2001) as a power system that “describes [...] a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures Otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery” (Ibid: 13).

The main materials that are used in this research are as follows: Cameron's *Avatar*, both the text written in 2007 and the movie released in 2009 by Twentieth Century Fox. Though I have focused mainly on the second corpus, the written scenario helps me to understand and to see how the actors are monitored with it in order to play their cinematographic roles. It is worth mentioning that many scenes have been suppressed by the producer for reasons that I cannot explain. The other materials are Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which I have used at length all along the first chapter of this work, and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in the second chapter.

## **Methodological Outline**

This work is divided into three chapters. They contain interdependent ideas which make them complementary. I have given to each one of them a symbolic title to distinguish the the three Imperialist stages: the apotheosis, the downfall (twilight), and the resurrection.

The first one compares Cameron's *Avatar* to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In doing this, my aim is to unearth within the film's subtext the colonialist paradigms that work to (re)define

the master identity of the Westerners and to glorify the Western imperialist achievement within a geographical blank space, or the contact zone. In this chapter, I use Ashcroft's "imperial gaze" to depict the elements that heralds colonialism, like geography and maps. Besides, I study the Other as an outsider who cannot integrate civilization. I refer to this as "outside Otherness".

The second chapter deals with the idea of the "inside Other" and the anti-conquest hero. Comparing *Avatar* to *Heart of Darkness*, my aim is to question the anti-imperialist assertions (or position) of both Cameron and Conrad. Here, my aim is to see how both texts, functioning as forms of knowledge that denounce the traditional forms of power (coercive violence), underscore mystified elements that sustain the Western hegemonic power within their subtexts. By the "inside Other" I mean the white character who turns to be not recognized both to the rudimentary character and to the Western audience to which the text is primarily addressed.

The last chapter centers on *Avatar*. In this chapter, even if I will keep hinting at the other literary materials, I will study the movie in relation to the idea of globalism and the American hegemony. I have already mentioned in the review of literature that Meredith and Alessio stamp this new form of imperialism as "monopoly imperialism" (Meredith, Alessio, 2012: 30-2). Focusing first on the idea of the myth to consider the cyclical repetition of an event in history, I will argue that the image of the Messiah, the Phoenix, and the spirits in *Avatar* are elements of Western knowledge to "resurrect" power. In other words, it is to study the reason why James Cameron has used these mythical images in a film that he judges as an anti-imperialist movie. After that, I will study the artistic side of the movie. Using Huggan's definition of exoticism, I will see how Otherness is absorbed within the movie and transformed into an exotic product for a consumering global society of spectacle (Huggan, 2001: 16-7). In doing this, I intend to prove how the British Imperialist system, labeled Pax

Britannica, has shifted to a more complex American global/hegemonic system, labeled Pax Americana.

In each chapter, I will use shots (pictures) that I have taken from Cameron's *Avatar* to illustrate and support my arguments. This, I hope, will offer to the reader palpable elements that help him to visualize clearly each one of the studied ideas. Additionally, I will mention the cited works after each chapter. This method has a practical purpose which consists of providing the reader with an immediate awareness of the sources which support the ideas of each chapter.

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## **Chapter One:**

### ***Avatar, The Tempest, or the Dawn of an Empire***

Give me a map; then let me see how much  
Is left for me to conquer all the world,  
Here I began to march towards Persia,  
Along Armenia and the Caspian Sea [...]

Christopher Marlow , *Tamburlaine* (1587), II-viii:123

## **I-Introduction:**

This chapter is entitled *Avatar, The Tempest, or the Dawn of an Empire*. In its pages, I intend to study the discursive elements of power that epitomize the beginning of modern Western colonialism. As a theoretical support, I will use Michel Foucault and his notion of “Knowledge and Power” (1980), as well as Bill Ashcroft's “Imperial Gaze” (2001). Speaking about the latter, Ashcroft borrows the concept of the “gaze” from Jacques Lacan (see *Le Stade du Mirroir*), who explains the gaze of the mother as the initial process by which identity is achieved. Ashcroft stipulates that “imperial gaze”

[...]defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness (Ashcroft, 2001: 141).

Having said this, I will study James Cameron's *Avatar* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) in the context of the Imperialist vision (gaze) embodied in their narratives. To do this, I will initially put emphasis on the settings and the characters of the two artistic products.

As a first point, the dream of owning a “space” has always been present within Western literary works (see Ashcroft (2001), Said (1979)). Indeed, for a long time Western man has had this “will to know” and to discover what is beyond his own space; first to know its existence and, *de facto*, to own it. William Shakespeare, apparently, has had this dream of owning a place abroad; a dream which can be found in *The Tempest*. The latter has vigorously given birth to this idea; a possessed exotic and dreamy “place” where the characters, from Prospero to Stephano, have achieved the construction of their colonialist “master” identity. Speaking about this, Bill Ashcroft says that the

[...] importance of one's 'place' in the business of forming cultural identity, the myriad connections it evokes, its importance as a context for cultural knowledge, make it particularly resonant in the experience of Colonialism (Ashcroft, 2001:125)

In other words, at the moment which consists in discovering a new place, the Westerner

names it, delimits its boundaries, and, most importantly, develops a mode of thinking which disrupts its original inhabitants and transcends them.

Ashcroft attributes primarily this role to geography. In *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001) he speaks about this form of knowledge as “the capacity to see the whole world, the capacity to survey the entire globe in a single view, which was first provided by Renaissance maps” (Ibid: 145). It supplies the owner of the map with practical information concerning “strange” places, their fauna and flora, and their inhabitants. The fact of knowing these areas is to claim power over them. Consequently, mapping

[has] generated the link between geography and empire, a link which became connected by what Africa, perhaps more than any other region, represented to European [Western] consciousness—a blankness which seemed to resist surveillance and knowledge and so could be controlled only by mythology and demonization (B. Ashcroft, 2001: 145-6).

Thus, geography embodies structure of knowledge which exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations. Besides, by its structured imagery set on form of maps, it proclaims power over the named places. J. Brian Harley says that “a book about geographical imagery which did not encompass the map would be like Hamlet without the prince” (J.B. Harvey, 1988:277).

The idea of dreaming about owning a “fiefdom”, as Harvey calls it, is engraved within the core of a force that Foucault labels “the will to know” ( Foucault, in Mark Poster, 1982: 115). In fact, a dream is but an idea which cannot exist outside the perimeters of the “Will”. As soon as one gives a linguistic referent to this dream, ie., naming it, it becomes limited and, to use Bhabha's concept (1994), “fixed” in space and time. As Wittgenstein has said: “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein, in Ashcroft, 2001:145). To put it plainly, one puts boundaries around this “dream” and claims it as his own.

The above mechanism operates in both Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Cameron's *Avatar*. The images of space (geography) in these two cited artistic productions demonstrate the constant fulfillment of the dream which consists of “owning geography”. The fact that

Shakespeare projects his imagination on an imagined island and proclaims, through Prospero, the owner of that island; and Cameron and his laborious plot in an imagined exotic planet urge us to think about these two connected elements as “the apotheosis” of Colonialism. In this chapter, I will begin to speak about this point.

The second point that I will discuss is about the characters of both *The Tempest* and *Avatar*. From the very beginning, I must say that I have selected only the characters that I judge necessary to the present issue. On the one hand, I will refer to characters like Prospero or/and Jake Sully as the epitomes of the “Subject-Who-Sees” who represents the Western Ideal self who affirms himself in the new “possessed territory”. On the other hand, I will speak about characters, like Caliban and Tus'tey, mentioning them as the “Outside Other(s)”.

Along this section, I am aiming to show how the Westerners, from Shakespeare to Cameron, work as the subjects of Power, using the objects of knowledge to (re)affirm their master identity.

### **I- Owning geography :**

At the very beginning of *Avatar* (2009), the Camera is moving horizontally forward over a huge and interminable green space: a forest (*see* picture 1). These sequenced shots herald a virgin area where the film's plot is going to be deployed. Additionally, the soundtrack of drums which accompanies this scene stimulates the curiosity of the audience and invites them into a journey to the place which comes to be known as “Pandora”. Then, at the same time, a man on Off-Voice mode says the following words: “ I always have this dream of flying” (Cameron,2007:2). “The voyage out” has thus begun and the invisible speaker embarks on a journey to fill this geographical blank space.



**Picture 1: A rain forest.**

As mentioned in the introduction, I intend first to discuss the colonial area (setting) in *Avatar* and compare it to the one in *The Tempest*. To do this, I suggest three main stages through which space is owned. The first one is the “dawn” of an idea: an interminable blank space that one can name a horizon. For instance, the idea of the sea or the cosmos is, at first sight, a limitless space where everything is “possible”. The second stage is a journey to this limitless space. With what material object one can explore this limitless area? On the one hand, the ship (or the boat) has long been considered as a means of exploration, quests and invasion, especially the English ship. On the other hand, “the spaceship” is the symbol of the US high-technological power which took L. Armstrong up to the moon where he set up the American flag on its ground in 1965. The third and last stage are the different nominations, selections, and demarcations of the explored space. The fact of studying, selecting, and naming the place and all what happens on it is a way to proclaim authority over it (Foucault (1980), Said (1991), Ashcroft (2001)).

### **I-1- Horizon:**

To come back to the opening scene of Cameron's movie, I have already said that the camera moves dynamically forward and horizontally over a deep-green forest, marking the beginning of a *journey*. In the meantime, there is a man's voice in off-screen who is talking about his dreams of flying someday and being free. Then, the voice says “but [...] there is always a time to wake up” (Cameron, 2007: 2-3) and the scene of the forest dissolves to let appear a white man's eye with camera-focus on it, opening abruptly (*see picture 2*)



**Picture 2: A white man's blue eye (Jake Sully)**

Let us now consider, as an elementary analysis, two imagery elements that the opening

scene heralds: the horizontal movement of the camera (*See picture 1*) and “the eye” (*see picture 2*). To begin with the camera, the dynamic movement of the sequenced shots suggests a panoramic dominance of the “virgin” space. In fact, just by the way of moving in a horizontal way, it displays a limitless area that demands only to be explored. This is on one hand. On the other hand, the eyes symbolize the *imperial gaze*. As one can notice, the eyes have been closed while the the horizon is displayed, and, as soon as they are opened, the space (the forest) has let its place to the white man's face. “The eye” moves systematically out to the horizon then returns to the ground which can be inspected as owning what it has dreamed about.

The existence of the these two elements at the very beginning of the movie is problematic. One has to ask what is the relationship between the camera movement and the “eye” that comes just after it. The “eye” is the subject who *sees* while the space is the object which *is seen*. The eye is opened just after the scene of the forest has dissolved and possesses its space.

The symbolism of the eye can be traced back to the Renaissance Ocularism. In fact, Renaissance is known for the revival of the ancient civilizations, namely the Greek and the Roman ones (Ashcroft, 2001: 133). For instance, the term *Video* comes form the ancient Latin and means “I see”. From it comes the discipline of Perspectivism ( from the Latin *perspicio*; meaning: “to see through”, “to behold”). Leone Batista Alberti (1404-72), an Italian Architect and theorist claims that

perception should be methodized (sic) and regulated, since human perception is prone to error [...] approximate, and get a fixed and immobile perception. (Alberti, *in* Ashcroft, 2001: 134)

This new “method” of observation has been developed later on during the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries by the works of René Descartes (1637) in France and John Locke (1690) in England. The point is to separate the seer from the seen, the subject from the object, and to

guarantee the universal and *absolute* perception of the true.

Coming to this, one has to notice how Renaissance has pictured and standardized many images of the Christian religion, especially by means of paintings and architecture (Ashcroft, 2001: 134-5). Indeed, the conception of heaven and hell, angels and demons, and so on, have passed from an idea of the “beyond” to the objectified entity that “we” can see—and, of course, own. For instance, angels are pictured like little white children with wings, and heaven is pictured like a pasture or a king's garden. In other words, it is during Renaissance that “ the political and religious importance of painting [and imagery] ensured influence and determined Europeans 'natural' way of seeing the world” ( Brantlinger, 1988: 43).

During the Elizabethan time, just to focus on this period, the sea was this horizon; this huge blank and limitless space that promises answering a huge numbers of questions. Something which science has seen as an optical illusion but which one understands as a constant perception. Still, the sea, just as the cosmos now, has long been this limitless space which has stimulated the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Western imagination and supplied it with permanent signs of territorial possibilities. Then, it comes to be very significant the idea of the sea in Shakespeare's literary works, especially *The Tempest*.

First performed in 1611 before King James I, and again for the festivities of the King's daughter, princess Elizabeth's wedding, *The Tempest* opens on the deck of a ship caught in a tempest, with the sailors fighting to bring down the sails. Soon all hope seems lost as the ship breaks apart; the passengers and the crew believe they are about to drown.

In the next scene the audience quickly understands—thanks to the conversation between Prospero, the white Magus, and his daughter Miranda—the storm is not natural but it is raised by Prospero himself, the true Duke of Milan. As he is imbued with magic, he tries to overtake his brother Antonio and all his courtiers, casting them on the shores of *his* island at the beginning of the play.

Life on the island follows a cycle of domination and rebellion, assassination plots, a marriage mask, entertainment and banquet.. All is made possible by Shakespeare's bringing together a set of differentiated characters: a dispossessed native turned into slave, political opponents, jesters, subjected spirits, and a witch from “Algiers” without a speaking role in the play.

The unfolding of the drama takes place in a far-flung geographical setting which is reminiscent of both the story of Naples and Milan, a world of usurpation, and of the New World mysteries and utopia. Yet, the Italianate and the overseas fictional version of Shakespeare is meant as a metaphor for Renaissance England and the apprehension of the Other. As a matter of fact, the primary source of *The Tempest* is said to be in 1609 shipwreck of an English boat in Bermuda and travelers' report about the event (Clark,1986: 22). It was the dawn of explorations and discoveries by means of “the sea”.

It is at sea, then, that *The Tempest* opens its first scene. It introduces a horizon, an open space where the characters are going to be known under their real identities. The use of sea-storm by the playwright turns the characters social identities upside down. The boatswain, for instance, is no longer recognizing the sovereignty of the King when he has been asked by Gonzalo, the honest old chancellor of King Alonso.

**Gonzalo:** Nay, good, be patient.

**Boatswain:** When the sea is. Hence!

What cares these roarers for the name of the King?

To the cabin: silence! trouble us not. (Shakespeare, Act I-i, 2012: 5-6)

In response to Gonzalo's request to remember who is on the deck of the ship, the boatswain dismisses him by saying that “None that I more love than myself” (ibid:6). This implies that the boatswain has re-seized and has regained his own freedom outside the boundaries of civilization. King Antonio and all other courtiers cannot do anything against the boatswain because they are not within the space of Naples or Milan.

The blankness of the space is then the blankness of the social status; it is the supression

of identity. The king's order is no longer respected, and this validates the idea that a title (King, Duke, chancellor etc) is respected only within the perimeters of a civilization. But the sea is emptiness where everything is permissible.

Nevertheless, the fear of the *blank* space and its unlimited horizon is what urges the subject-who-sees to identify, delimit, and to claim authority over that fearful space. In turns, this urges the “subject-who-sees” to gaze around and to have a *panoramic* glimpse. In fact, while everyone on the deck of the ship is praying with the king and thinking that everything is over, Gonzalo has a *wish*:

Now would I give a thousand furlongs  
of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath,  
brown furze, any thing. The wills above be done!  
I would fain die a dry death (Act I-i, 2012: 8).

Gonzalo's wish is to be concertized to the audience within the second scene of the same Act. His wish is about “a dry” trustful place, where feet can stand still and dominate the surrounding environment; a place where to proclaim authority on his own self and the elements which threaten this same self. For Michel Foucault, as soon as the object of knowledge (the sea) is defined the subject who defines it claims it as his own (Foucault, *in* Sara Mills, 2003:68). The blankness is then a space which both marks the apotheosis of an idea of *owning* a certain freedom by self-affirming it and, at the same time, urges the will-to-know process, starting by *the wish* to control that space. The fact that the boatswain has affirmed his identity and declares that he loves but himself *would* not be possible within a defined boundaries of a civilization. Then, Gonzalo's wish of a “dry” place is due to the anxiety of emptiness which stimulates his imagination and “will”. In my opinion, Gonzalo's wish is this imperial gaze that I have already evoked.

*Avatar* is James Cameron's nine Oscar winning science fiction movie, produced in 2009 by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. The script was written in 2007 by Cameron (Pattern, *in* Trinder,

2012: 20). Sets in the future, the film narrates a story of a two-legs-handicapped man and ex-marine, Jack Sully, who sets for Pandora, an exotic green planet, to replace his dead PhD brother who has been working for a scientific and mercantilist US company under the direction of Dr Grace Augustine. “Scientific” because of its quest to learn about the Na’vi, the aboriginal blue-skinned inhabitants of Pandora, their way of living, and their sources of “magical” power; and “mercantilist” because the earth is running out of raw materials and this planet can supply its demands.

The company is guarded by a well equipped high-technological US army which is portrayed by Cameron as ruthless, robotic individuals. The head of the security is named Colonel Quaritch. Jack Sully is then in Pandora because of two reasons: the first one is because he has the same DNA as his brother, thing that permits to the Scientific Program Avatar (SPA) to carry on its scientific research. The second reason is, thanks to his military training, he can also help Colonel Quaritch in providing him with information about the Na’vi and their modes of fighting, their habitations, territories, and so on. Nevertheless, Sully falls in love with the Na’vi chief’s daughter Neytiri, and becomes the leader of these aborigines after having succeeded to tame their “almighty” red flying bird. Ultimately, he helps them to win over the high-tech US army, and gets transformed into a Na’vi, at the end of the movie. The last scene shows the main actor’s own eyes opening abruptly, but this time they are Nav’i’s.

While *The Tempest* opens within a sea, *Avatar* reveals to the audience by the two scenes which I have already tackled above: the forest and the white man’s eyes. The audience is invited to watch the horizontal deployment of a virgin forest while listening to the man’s dream to “fly” and the scene cuts-off to show the opening eye. The eye typifies the *imperial gaze* while the landscape tends to represent the place to be explored.

According to Bill Ashcroft, the all-seeing eye owns everything it sees (Ashcroft, 2001: 143). The eye of the Western positivist observer has sprung from the idea of perspectivism.

The emergence of the 'landscape' and the concomitant desire for commanding view which could provide a sweeping visual mastery of the scene was an important feature of nineteenth century poetry and fiction[...] It became a significant method by which European explorers and travelers could obtain a position of *panoramic observation*, itself a representation of knowledge and power over colonial space (Ashcroft, 2001: 142-3, mine emphasis).

The act of obtaining the panoramic space is preceded by a desire, or a wish, to have it possessed; it is, in a way, to imagine it. The “emergence” of the forest, accompanied with the soundtrack of drums, has the role to stimulates the desire that is symbolized by the abrupt opening of the eye.

To contradict the idea of “the art for the art sake” which says that this opening scene with these exact elements at the very beginning is a mere entertainment, I intend to reproduce what Ashcroft says about the “eye”.

But[...] the eye has the special political task of overcoming the “vacuum” of the senses which the “wild” present to the colonizing subject. The act of seeing not only knows what is seen, it occupies space, *it becomes what it sees*, thus suggesting the incorporating ontological reach of the imperial gaze (Ibid: 144, mine emphasis).

As for Prospero who owns the island and claims authority over it and over its inhabitants without a given reason, and the crew who come their by *a mere accident*, *Avatar's* main protagonist, Jack Sully, is transported to Pandora as a wish fulfillment. 'The voyage out' process in the movie has started with Jack Sully lying on a bed-like vessel and being transported to Pandora.

In the light of what has been said, I can say that Sully's wish of flying and occupying the space (green space, and the cosmos) resembles Gonzalo's wish of having “an acre of barren ground” (Shakespeare,2012: 8) in the way that these two wishes come as a consequence of an extreme anxiety of the emptiness of the space. Sully's capacity of walking on his feet, after being handicapped and marginalized, reminds us about the boatswain in his own way of ignoring the King Alonso's sovereignty and affirming his freedom. The reason is that both of them manage to affirm their identities in a a zero-border area.

## I-2- From the Ship to the Spaceship:

What does one need to explore this zero-border area? This question, obviously, takes me to tackle the second stage of how to own a geographical space. At this stage, I think that the ship in Shakespeare's play as well as the "spaceship" in Cameron's film show a metonymy of power and leadership. This is for two main reasons: the first one comes from a historical perspective. Each vessel demonstrates skills and abilities of the "subject-who-sees" and reflects its power in a particular moment of history. The second reason is allegorical. In fact, the ship demonstrates the densely transformative process of infinite rehearsal and becomes a kind of a historical inheritance. So, the image of the ship transporting explorers to a far unknown area is then reproduced again and again over time. Consequently, the constant reproduction of an imagery assures the perpetual and lateral propagation and continuity of power of the "subject-who-sees" on the space which he occupies. As Arnold Toynbee puts it:

[...]this use of Ocean, first by sailing ships and then by steamships, enabled the West to unify the whole inhabited and habitable world, including the Americas (Toynbee, 1948: 70).

Thus, it is important to study the imagery of the ship within *The Tempest* and *Avatar* and to see what it stands for.

Western literary tradition is among the important vehicles which guarantees the imperialist continuity. In this regard, one cannot forget to speak about Ulysses, the famous Homeric hero in the *Odyssey*. Ulysses has twelve vessels and has explored many islands, like the land Lotophagos and of the one of the Cyclopes (Gomes & Tapanelli, 2006: 168) whose original name is "Polyphemus"; a name which one can find in *Avatar*. Ulysses undertook many adventures which have nourished greatly the Western imagination with images of marvelous lands, strange creatures, and an extreme desire for adventures and explorations.

Shakespeare is among the playwrights who have assured the eternal recycling of the allegory of the ship in the Western literary texts. His time was marked by the thriving power of

England at sea, announcing the beginning of what is to be known later on as the First British Empire. During the second half of the sixteenth century, exactly in 1588, the English Royal Navy, under the leadership of Sir Francis Drake, defeated the Spanish Armada which had controlled the majority of the sea trade routes. This, of course, marked the end of the Spanish domination in the Atlantic ocean. This victory pronounced the beginning of a new era of power to the England of Queen Elizabeth I. Soon, the ship was now the symbol of victory and strength.

Aubrey Newman speaks about this period. He argues about the practical causes of the “Royal Navy” victory over the Spanish Armada ( Catholic Spain was the number-one enemy of the “new” Protestant England of the Tudors) saying that

Most historians hold that the battle of Gravelines reflected a lasting shift in balance naval power in favor of the English, in part because of the gap in naval technology and armament is confirmed between the two nations [ England and Spain], which continued into the next century (Newman, 1989: 93-4)

Newman considers that the English sea power flourished during the Elizabethan era. This was not only sea power in terms of naval force, but also in the wider sense demonstrating the nation's ability to build and maintain a merchant fleet, conduct trade and open new routes to distant places.

In an article published in the *Mariner's Mirror* (Aug,1996), Geoffrey Parker speaks about the technological revolution of the Tudor England. He remarks that the building of ships was given a particular attention in the purpose to be powerfully “conquering”. He argues that

[...]the full-rigged ship was one of the greatest technological advances of the century and permanently transformed naval warfare [...] In 1573 English shipwrights introduced designs, first demonstrated in the “Dreadnaught”, that allowed the ships to sail faster and maneuver better and permitted heavier guns ( Parker, 1996: 269-70).

A painting under the name *Elizabeth I and the Spanish Armada*, attributed to Nicholas Hillard (1547-1619), shows the shape of these dreadnaughts that Parker is speaking about. One can

notice that contrary to the heavy Spanish war boats which cannot stand still and crash against the English coasts in Gravelines, the English Royal vessels “sail faster and maneuver better” even in a stormy weather (Parker, 1996: 269-70).

This defeat was also considered as the victory of Protestantism over Catholicism. Indeed, the repulsing of the attack of the Spanish naval force “may have given to the Protestant cause across Europe and the belief that God was behind the Protestant cause” (Parker, 1996: 176). On the medals coined for that occasion, one can read “1588, *Flavit Jehovah et Dissipati Sunt*” (He blew with his mind, and they were scattered). For many historians, like Geoffrey Parker (1996) and Douglas Knerr (1989), this marked the birth of the English national pride.

In *The Tempest* (1611), the presence of the ship is noticeable at the very beginning of the play. William Shakespeare could not have been indifferent to the above historical events marking his time. In the play, the ship symbolizes white Christian civilization bringing an unknown and uncivilized space under control. In fact, in the first scene of the fifth Act, the Boatswain answers King Alonso:

We were awaked; straightway, at liberty;  
Where we, in all her trim, freshly beheld  
Our royal, good and gallant ship, our master  
capering to eye her: on trice, so please you,  
Even in a dream, were we divided from them  
And were brought moping hither. (Shakespeare, 2012: 91)

In the passage above, one can easily grasp the feeling of the “national pride” expressed by the Boatswain when he is speaking to his king. By extension, it is also the pride of the playwright, Shakespeare. The expression “good and gallant ship” suggests a metonymy evoking the English power at sea and the dawn of an empire. One has just to consider the year when *The Tempest* was first performed to justify this pride.

It is important to remark that the boatswain who, at the very beginning of the play, has

rebelled against his superiors, seems now recognizing King Alonso as his own master. “The Best news is, that we have safely found our king and company; the next, our ship[...] is tight and yare and bravely rigg'd as when We first put out to sea” (Shakespeare, 2012: 90). For the boatswain, the reappearance of the ship is the reason which has reconstituted his “civilized” mind and becomes aware, once again, who he is. It becomes clear now that the image of the ship is like a flaming torch within a complete darkness.

The defeat of the Spanish armada offered Elizabeth I's as well as King James I's England the opportunity to explore the distant territories, to possess them, and to extend the borders of their empire. Here *The Tempest* can be seen as a prophecy of the flourishing British empire. James Town was founded in 1607 in what is to be known 169 years later as the United States of America, an event which has marked the beginning of this colonial expansion. Many ships became famous: the “Mayflower” and the “Speedwell” which, since then, become a cultural heritage of two nations: England and the United States of America.

When Fred McLeod Wilcox produced his famous Hollywood science fiction movie, *Forbidden Planet* (1956), as an interpretation of Shakespeare *The Tempest*, he managed to set the scenario in the cosmos (Caroti, 2004: 2-4). In this American cinematographic production, one can notice two important things. The first one is the radical transformation of the play's characters and settings: futuristic decoration, Caliban becomes Robby, a robot-servant of Professor Morbius the scientist who takes care of his daughter Altaira. The second one is the fixed structure of the plot. While Prospero is the master of the cosmic planet, Caliban the robot is his servant. The whole is set on a distant planet that one can reach only by a *spaceship*. This shift demonstrates the transformation of the symbols of power through a considerable period of time while the structure of the narrative is the same.

The majority of the American science fiction films, like *Forbidden Planet*, are imagined in a cosmic space where the characters are set in a journey on a spaceship. In this list

Cameron's movies have a considerable place. In fact, from *Terminator* (1982) to *Avatar* (2009), passing by *Aliens* (1986) and *The Abyss* (1989), the images of the aliens, the cosmos and the spaceship are widely present. These images embody the American highly advanced technological and scientific power. The image of the spaceship represents the US conquest of the cosmos. This idea is intensified greatly by cinema all through the Cold War to show the greatness of the American superpower. Indeed, Ali Mazrui sees that

The space ship was [...] born out of the rivalries of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. Sputnik in the firmament in 1958 put the Soviet Union first into orbit. The Soviets borrowed a lot from Western technology, but carried it further. The process of "Arusha" had been sparked out. Soviet Yuri Gagarin was also the first man in space. The West was temporarily beaten at its own game. The "Arusha" space enterprise had been accomplished (Mazrui, in Africa. ufl. Edu, checked on June 22<sup>nd</sup>,2013)

The race for power has accelerated the process of technological innovation. Like Spain and England, during the era of Elizabeth I and James I, which had disputed the sea routes of the Atlantic, the United States and the Soviet Union had to dispute the Space. The defeat of the URSS at the end of the 1980s, marked the victory of Capitalism.

To go back briefly, the origin of the American superpower had come at the aftermath of the Second World War, when The US military forces landed in Normandy and helped greatly in putting an end to the Nazi occupation of the entire Europe. According to many historians, this marked the birth of the American Heroism, an important point that will be discussed thoroughly in the second and the third chapters of this dissertation. For now, I just want to put forward that this shift of power, from Britain to the United States of America, is what is meant as the shift from "Pax Britannica to Pax Americana".

The Western profound desire of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries of exploring the oceans which has marked the literary texts of the time, is transformed to the will to explore the galactic space in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In *Avatar*, the importance of space and its exploration is the kernel of the movie. All through the story, one can hear names like 'Dragon-

Assault-Ship' which is “a heavy transport and assault aircraft used by the Resources Development Administration (RDA) as a support during small incursions into otherwise hostile territory [...]” (Source: [Avatar-James-Cameron-Avatar.wiki.com](http://Avatar-James-Cameron-Avatar.wiki.com)). This aircraft ship is used by the company to survey the “hostile” territory of Pandora and, of course, to eliminate any kind of resistance. Among other vessels used in space explorations there are SecOps (Security operation). These flying machines, like helicopters, are serving “a mercenary force on Pandora (Ibid). These materials can be regarded as tools of knowledge to control the “unknown” environment. Additionally, I suggest that the way the movie's producer, James Cameron, has managed to show the US military technological advancement in a futurist and fictional space is to affirm and assure the continuity of cultural discursive of colonial power in the current space and time.



**Picture 3: Spaceship in Cameron's *Avatar*. Its cylindrical form presupposes the masculinity of the Ideal Self (the West) penetrating the territory of “Pandora”, the green planet (the first woman in Greek mythology).**

From *The Tempest* to *Avatar*, the West has certainly used different ways to explore space. This “blank space” has to be embodied within, in Emmanuel Lévinas' words, the “universal history” (Lévinas, 1961: 46). Indeed, for this French philosopher, totalization is accomplished in history

when the historiographer assimilates all particular existences and punctual moments into the time of universal history, whose chronological order, it is assumed, outlines the plot of being in itself, analogous of nature (Lévinas, 1961: 47).

Both *The Tempest* and *Avatar* have appropriated the setting and have used the symbol of power of their epoch: the ship and the spaceship. Both of them announce a new era of discovery, i.e., from the discovery of America to the exploration of the space. Speaking about this, Noam Chomsky compares the space race of the present time to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century sea battles (Chomsky, 2003: 45). Therefore, both Shakespeare and Cameron can be this historiographer that Lévinas is talking about. Foucault's "will to know", the desire to discover, to measure, and to claim authority over a space, becomes evident in both the two narratives. In other words, something which is labeled as a fact is the result of power operating in the process of information. Each journey begins as soon as we, the audience, embark into a story.

### **I-3- Brave New World *We* Own:**

“SPACE:

Against the cold infinity of stars glides an INTERSTELLAR SPACECRAFT -- **ISV VENTURE STAR**. As it moves past like an endless train, we realize this thing is ENORMOUS -- over half a mile long. PAN WITH IT 180 to REVEAL – A GAS-GIANT PLANET called **POLYPHEMUS**, ringed with dozens of moons which cast beauty-mark shadows on its vast face. The ISV diminishes away from us toward the largest MOON-- a blue and surprisingly Earth-like world called **PANDORA**. The ship dwindles to a speck against the BLUE MOON.” (Cameron, 2007: 6).

The above passage is taken integrally from Cameron's 2007 script. In *Avatar*, this scene is fully reconstituted within the first fifteen minutes of the movie. It denotes the two stages that I have tackled till now: “the cold infinity of stars”, then the spacecraft which Cameron names “ISV”. After that, the camera diminishes the image of the ISV to let appear a “surprisingly Earth-like world called PANDORA”. The unknown becomes *nameable* to the audience. This marks the third and final phase upon which the space is owned.

Naming is the next step after the exploration of the space. According to Ashcroft, “the dynamic of naming becomes a primary colonizing process because it appropriates, defines, captures the place in language” ( Ashcroft, 2001: 134). To give a name to a particular

“foreign” place is to proclaim authority over it. furthermore, it is to

announce discursive control over it by the very act of inscription, because through names, location becomes metonymy of those processes of travel, annexation, and colonization which affect the dominance of imperial powers over non-European world” (Ashcroft, 2001: 134)

From the above passage, one can deduce that it is the anxiety for emptiness that urges “the subject-who-sees” to name this unknown space, to select it, and to control it.

The descriptions made by the Western traveler capture the place within the borders of his own language. As a matter of fact, when one looks at the maps of Renaissance Europe, he can easily confirm what I have said above. The example given by Brian Harley in *Maps, Knowledge, and Power* (1988) is pertinent. It is of Gerardus Mercator (1512-1594), the famous Renaissance geographer. In his map, he puts Europe on the center, thing which has contributed to the European superiority, by drawing white figures relatively larger than the “colored” ones (Ibid, 280-1). Mapping is in this way an *epistème* which depicts what has to be *known* concerning such and such a place. According to Ashcroft “the map itself in which names, numerous in some places and sparse in others, inscribe a pattern of knowing by metonymizing the act of seeing, establishes the authority of European consciousness and European [or Western] desire to enter the 'unknown'” (Ibid: 131). Consequently, the imperial gaze, evoked at the very beginning of this chapter, captures the desired place by language.

*The Tempest* and *Avatar* are a cultural entity which captures a particular space by the use of language and/or moving images (shots). In fact, they offer to the audience a set of descriptions and appellations which strengthen the picture that they have about the *beyond*. By giving detailed descriptions and by attributing names to the unknown place, the latter is systematically appropriated and objectified.

In *The Tempest*, the audience gets more information consisting of a set of descriptions about Prospero's island, especially in the first scene of the second Act. In fact, the dialogue

which happens between Alonso, Adrian, Gonzalo and others provides Us with many descriptive scenes of nature, and unveiling the obscurity of the place. At first sight, Adrian thinks that “this island seems to be desert...uninhabitable and almost inaccessible” (Shakespeare, 2012: 32). Nevertheless, he admits fact that the air is sweet and demands for “subtle, tender, and delicate temperance” (Ibid). Gonzalo, the old chancellor, sees many opportunities that can replace his King's grieving for the loss of his son, Ferdinand.

Here is everything advantageous to life [...]
How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green! (Ibid).

In this dialogue, one can notice the exotic descriptions of the island and the picture that the audience gets while listening to adjectives like “fresh” and “advantageous”, or to the expressions like “the rarity [...] which is indeed beyond credit” (Ibid:33).

The used diction is intensified so that to gain control by the white settler and to label his legitimacy. In response to Gonzalo's amazement, Sebastian, King Alonso's brother, says that he should “carry this island home in his pocket and give it his son for an apple” (Ibid: 34). This shows the possessiveness and objectification of the island which is compared to “an apple”.

Consequently, the island is seen as a place where Gonzalo's imagines “to excel the golden age” (Ibid: 37). The golden age may refer to The beginning of the world in the Greek mythology where no war, no starvation, and no pain is on earth (Gomes & Tafanelli,2006: 96-7). It may also refer to the biblical story of King Solomon and the age of innocence. It is clear how the space is appropriated and owned by these significant descriptions.

To return to *Avatar*, it is noticeable how the space is appropriated by the fact of naming it, describing it and classifying it. Pandora is the name given to the “earth-like” planet, a name which has its origin in the Greek mythology. In fact, Pandora is the first woman in earth. She is sent with a box as a punishment to Prometheus who has stolen the fire on the Mount Olympus. Described as a mere beauty and seduction, Pandora is married to Epimethius,

Prometheus' brother. This has created envy between the two brothers. Very curious to see what is within the box, Epimethius has insisted on Pandora to open it. Once done, all bad things, like war and poverty, get out of it except one thing: hope. According to Gomes and Tafennelli (2006), the myth of Pandora belongs to the somber interpretation of Man (Ibid: 156).

James Cameron's act of naming the unknown space "Pandora" suggests two reasons: the first one is related to the fertility and virginity that this planet symbolizes. The second one is—taking into consideration the evoked story above, i.e., the thriving competition between the two brothers, Epimethius and Prometheus—to win Pandora as a wife. All in all, this creates a binary opposition between masculinity and power, which is shown in the "ship dwindles [Spiral-built object] to a speck against the BLUE MOON." (Cameron, 2007: 6), and the femininity of the place (*see* picture 3).

The other evoked name, also Greek in origin, is Polyphemus. The latter is described in the movie's official website as "a gas-giant planet surrounded with twelve moons, among them Pandora" ([James-Cameron-Avatar.wiki.com](http://James-Cameron-Avatar.wiki.com)). In the Greek mythology, the name evokes the one-eye son of Poseidon, god of the oceans, who is killed by Ulysses in the island of the Cyclopes. Polyphemus is the symbol of violence, savagery, and cruelty. The fact that Cameron has attributed this name to the this space presupposes the idea of primitive and cruel world.

The camera plays an important role in cinema; it speaks by displaying images. In *Avatar*, just after the scene of the spaceship, the audience gets in touch with the nature of Pandora. As in *The Tempest*, where the characters are fascinated by the sweet air and the green-like soil, Cameron displays the exotic images of Pandora.

#### RAINFOREST - TWILIGHT

FLYING OVER A LANDSCAPE of massive cliffs and towering mesas carpeted in rainforest. Great scarves of cloud swirl around the mesa tops. A primeval landscape, vast and forbidding. The trees are alien, the color too cyan. There are waterfalls, rivers, and

distant flocks of WINGED CREATURES (Cameron, 2007: 7).

In this passage, taken integrally from the original script, Cameron describes “a primeval landscape” or, to say it plainly, an uncivilized area. The description shows an exotic landscape with “waterfalls” and “rivers” and it presupposes the Western fantasy of the distant places.

The ability to go beyond the borders of civilization (Earth==>Space) is the capacity to know what lies beyond it so as to own it just by the fact of recording all the perimeters of it. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault says that “power produces knowledge[...] knowledge and power directly imply one another” (Ibid, 1977:27). In the present case, power is manifested through the “subject-who-sees”, and the object of knowledge is what is seen. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the characters are the subject of power; they represent white Christian Civilization, and they are in a distant place which is outside the borders of Naples and Milan. The land is the object of knowledge, a new discovery. The same thing in *Avatar*, where the story is narrated from a white man's point of view, and describing what it is not familiar to him. In this case he is the subject of power who goes to a distant planet to report about it.

It follows from the above that the unknown space in both *The Tempest* and *Avatar* represents a blankness where the owner/owned (Master/slave) dialectic is displayed. In fact, the two artistic productions have not given the antecedent history of the occupied places. Additionally, through a constant reference to “Earth” (civilization) one can deduce the reasons why Shakespeare and Cameron go to set their stories beyond their respective territories. It is a need for re-identification and reaffirmation of the master-identity.

The Following table (Figure I) shows the constructed binaries of space (Earth==>Space) opposing a civilized yet corrupted world, and a primeval and virgin space. While the former is pictured as a lost world, the second is shown as an opportunity serving as a base for recovering the master identity. It is divided into two entities. The first one denotes

the civilized area where, in both *The Tempest* and *Avatar*, there are constant “flash-backs” of the civilized world; the master-hero is overthrown and gets back his right place and title within the uncivilized space. The latter is the second entity of the table, it is a romanticized place made to be as an area where the main characters—especially white ones—get back what they deserve best. For instance, Jake Sully realizes his dream of walking again, and also that of flying. Prospero, on the other hand, recuperates his true title.

**Figure I: Table representing the difference between a civilized space and an uncivilized one in both *The Tempest* and *Avatar***

The Tempest	Avatar
<b>In the civilized Area</b>	
Treason	Robotism
Corruption	Individualism
Greed	Pollution
<b>In the Unknown Area</b>	
Prospero's Island	Pandora
Innocence	Purity
Abundance	Spirituality

## **II- I Can be You but You *Can't* Be me:**

Geographical knowledge has always been shaped by heroes of colonial landscape. It is through their encounters, their experiences, and the different moralities that one can grasp from them that knowledge is constructed. Patrick Brantlinger states; “White heroes rarely doubt their ability to tame various geopolitical mistresses—Africa, the sea, the world—and to bring civilized order out of the chaos of the savage life” (Brantlinger, 1988: 44). Indeed, in the Western literary tradition, the white hero constitutes the Western ideal of morality. He gathers all the characteristics of a noble man who always seeks to bring back justice and order. He is always fighting against dark forces and monstrous beings who are threatening the world order. There are always names like Ulysses, King Leonidas, Beowulf, or Gulliver which come to

one's mind when one evokes a literary hero. What is noticeable is that this hero can be transformed and transmuted over time, depending on his place and role. His antithesis, the anti-hero, is technically fixed.

In the present section, I intend to shed light on the conception of a hero as a subject of power in both *Avatar* and *The Tempest*. I presuppose that both the two cited works have romanticized their main character and idealized it. In James Cameron's movie, I remark that the main hero, Jake Sully, reflects chivalric characteristics just as those one can find in Shakespeare's work. The existence of *magical powers* and obedient spirits in a fantastic and enchanted space motivate me to compare some white characters of the movie to those of the play. Additionally, I intend to study the characters and images which embody the notion of otherness that can be found in a form that epitomizes primitivism and servitude.

## **II-1- Magic, Science, and Self- Alleged superiority:**

One has to ask a question about the link between today's science fiction movies and Shakespeare's works. The answer is provided by David Hartwell in *Age of Wonders* (1984).

A sense of wonder, awe at the vastness of space and time, is at the root of the excitement of science fiction. Any child who has looked up at the stars at night and thought about how far away they are, how there is no end or outer edge to this place, this universe -- any child who has felt the thrill of fear and excitement at such thoughts stands a very good chance of becoming a science fiction reader [...] To say that science fiction is in essence a religious literature is an overstatement, but one that contains truth. Science fiction is a uniquely modern incarnation of an ancient tradition: the tale of wonder. Tales of miracles, tales of great powers and consequences beyond the experience of people in your neighborhood, tales of the gods who inhabit other worlds and sometimes descend to visit ours, tales of humans traveling to the abode of the gods, tales of the uncanny: all exist now as science fiction. (Hartwell, *in* Caroti, 2003: 7).

It does not need to be overtly underlined “that one of the best ways of generating a sense of wonder is by setting the story in an exotic place” (Ibid). Additionally, to say that science fiction is “a uniquely modern incarnation of an ancient tradition” is to affirm the transmutation of the elements that represent power. In the present context, this “incarnation” assures the continuity of Imperialist ideology within the different representations of power.

Magic in Shakespeare's time is, in a way, the high-technological science which is depicted in *Avatar*. Still, both are forms of knowledge and both provide authority and power to the one who possesses it. Foucault says that it is hard to distinguish between power and knowledge because

[they] directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitutes at the same time power relations (Foucault, *in* Barry Smart, 2002:70)

By deduction, one can say that magic is knowledge and power at the same time.

### **II-1-a- Gonzalo and Dr. Augustine:**

The reason why I intend to compare Gonzalo to Dr Augustine is that though both of them are not main “actors”, yet they are the rational motive which has pushed the main characters, namely Jake Sully and Prospero, into the fulfillment of their master identity. In this way, they epitomize the bearers of the Enlightenment ideal, especially in their utopian vision of the world. In other words, they represent the idea of empire. It is important to say that both Gonzalo and Augustine are epitomizing the new world, in a way that they get a vision which is a new one of the world government.

Gonzalo is an old chancellor to the King of Naples, Alonso. Through his dialogues, one can easily notice his wisdom and wittiness. At the very beginning of *The Tempest*, he shows patience while the rest of the crew does not, and he avows that he has “great comfort from this fellow [the boatswain]: methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him” ( Shakespeare, 2012, I-i: 6), while all the other nobles are beginning to be angry against the mariner. This shows his forbearance and wisdom in treating with all the crew. Besides, Prospero evokes his name, when he narrates his story to Miranda, and says that he is a charitable person.

A noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,  
Out of his charity, being than appointed  
Master of his design, did give us, with  
Rich garments, linens, stuffs and necessaries [...] (Shakespeare, 2012 : I-ii: 15).

Actually, it is Gonzalo who has helped Prospero to flee from Milan because King Alonso has given an order to Prospero's brother to "extirpate" him (Ibid:14). Moreover, Gonzalo supplies him with his books.

Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me  
From mine own library with volumes that  
I prize above my dukedom (Ibid: 15).

Ultimately, Gonzalo evokes a sense of wisdom. He sees justice and sovereignty not between the hands of those who are in power, like Antonio, but in the castaways like Prospero.

It is through Gonzalo that Shakespeare produces a set of images that demarcate him from other characters. These images come to hold the idea of an empire. First, it is through Gonzalo that the utilitarian vision is evoked. Indeed, at the beginning of the play, Gonzalo evokes or, more appropriately, has had a vision of the commonwealth. The idea of an empire is visioned to be the "golden age" (Shakespeare, II-1, 2012:37). Evoking this idea, Gonzalo is seen by Sebastian and Antonio as a dreamer, praying him to say no more: "Prithee, no more: thou dost talk nothing to me" (Ibid). The scene represents a dialogue between a utopian servant who fails to find interested ears; namely King Alonso and Sebastian, his brother. In other words, it is a confrontation between a "real world" marked by faithlessness and corruption and a "new world" calling for return to purity and innocence.

However, Gonzalo's utopian speech is heard by Prospero, who is away from the scene. One can notice this all through the third scene of the fourth Act where Gonzalo and the King of Naples, Alonso, hear the enchanted music played by Ariel. Gonzalo declares that "If in Naples I should report this now, would they believe me? If I should say so, I saw such islanders[...]" (Ibid, VI-3:64). Prospero remarks then the uniqueness of Gonzalo and his wittiness in having remarkable insights. In consideration of this, Prospero represents the continual fulfillment of Gonzalo's golden age (Ebner, 1965: 161). The fact that Prospero arrives to pardon his opponents in promising "calm seas" and "auspicious gales"

(Shakespeare, 2012: 94) is an evidence of the concretion of the idea that “sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine, would I not have [...]” (Ibid: 37). Consequently, Gonzalo has a remarkable role in constructing Prospero's master identity.

Doctor Augustine is the embodiment of scientific knowledge. Thanks to her, the whole colony come to know about the aboriginal inhabitants of Pandora. She has a friendly relationship with the Na'vi people, and thanks to the school built at the middle of the jungle, she has learned the aboriginal language while teaching them English. In the scene where Sully discovers the deserted school, Augustine remarks that “they have even studied Shakespeare” (Cameron, 2009). Besides, as a botanist, she classifies almost every natural entity of the “magical-like” world. Of course, the act of classification and nomination cannot be omitted from the already long list of imperialist strategy.

In attributing the name “Grace Augustine”, Cameron wants probably to refer to the patron saint of the Roman Catholic Church, Saint Augustine of Hippo. This latter considers that all human beings sprung from “one protoplast [...] [that] if they are human, they all descended from Adam” (Augustine, *in* Loomba, 2002: 26). As a matter of fact, Dr Augustine is not only symbolizing science but also the christian wisdom and insight.

All through the movie, Augustine is against the spoiling and harassing of the indigenous people by the US company. Seeing this, it is clear that she embodies the idea of peace and reason. It seems that Montaigne's essay *Of the Caniballes* (1603), which serves as an important source for Shakespeare in writing *The Tempest* (Clark, 1997: 29) and which synthesizes that man in his natural condition is happier and better off than in society, is embodied within Augustine. In fact, even though she is part of that company, which is a high-technological and scientific organization, she represents the good side of science and technology. Like Gonzalo who chooses to put himself in the good side in saving Prospero from an inescapable murder, Dr Augustine chooses not to serve the company's ruthless

interests and helps Sully in his quest to save the Omaticaya tribe from destruction.

The audience for whom the movie is made recognize themselves easily within Augustine's personality; it is the "Us". In the scene where Norm, the scientist who is working with her in Program Avatar, presents the scientific programme as well as the staff with Jake Sully, he says that

Grace Augustine is a legend. She's the head of Avatar Program, and she wrote the book—I mean she literally wrote the book—on the Pandoran botany. (Cameron, 2009)

Max, another scientific figure in the programme, continues saying that she "likes plants better than people" (ibid). In fact, this is meant by Cameron to show the ecological question which is another important theme discussed in the film. Yet, this represents a contrast to the other figure which happens to be introduced to the audience in the early scenes on Pandora, Colonel Quaritch, a character that I will discuss in the second chapter of this work. Just like Gonzalo who is portrayed like as a dreamer of peaceful world where there will be no "sword and no Pike" (Shakespeare, 2012: 37), Augustine is against the ruthless exploitation of Pandora and the killing of its inhabitants. One can remark this in the talk which is happened in the next scene between Grace Augustine and Selfridge, the head of the administration. Selfridge says that "you're supposed to win the hearts and minds of the natives. Isn't that the whole point of your little puppet show? If you look like them, if you talk like them, They'll trust you?" (Ibid). The audience comes to remark then that Augustine cannot be independent from Selfridge's scheme of exploiting Pandora because the whole reason of their being there is for Unobtainium, a rare and expensive metallic rock. Nevertheless, like Gonzalo who is not corrupted by the "real world" but who cannot be independent from it, Augustine regains her human innocence and purity when she is in Pandora. The scene where she asks for cigarettes as soon as she regains the "real world" is used by Cameron to draw the line between the world of corruption and insanity and the utopian world of innocence and purity.

It seems important to remark how the knowledge of Augustine and Gonzalo has worked laboriously to fortify the master identity of Sully and Prospero. It is their knowledge that renders white mastership possible. On the one hand, Gonzalo's vision of a better world is realized and cemented by Prospero. In fact, Prospero reveals in his afternoon naps and scholarly books, thereby allowing nature to provide every ounce of nourishment for his survival. Gonzalo's words regarding idleness, innocence and the abundance of nature are mirrored exactly by the rule and the daily life of Prospero and his daughter. Besides, and more importantly, it is thanks to Gonzalo that Prospero is alive, and with his books who loves more than his dukedom, regains his right place as a duke of Milan. On the other hand, it is thanks to Augustine's science, labeled "Program Avatar", that Jake Sully has succeeded to walk again and becomes master of the Na'vi people. Indeed, just like in Prospero's Island where almost everyone recovers his soul by the simple fact of being there, Augustine offers an opportunity to Sully to *stand on his feet* and "to find something worthy to fight for" (Cameron, 2009). Consequently, Augustine and Gonzalo are likely to illustrate what Slavoj Zizek considers as a modern Western society's craving for non-industrial authenticity (Zizek, in Trinder, 2012: 6-7), where the geographical space is blank so as to experience and put into practice a new idea and to *reaffirm* "their" master identity.

Consequently, I can say that the idea of fleeing the old corrupted world to a new fresh one can be seen not as two separates paradigms, like good and evil, but like as the dissolving of the old world within the new one. The fact that Augustine dies at the end of the movie under the Tree of Souls, the mother of all nature, cements the fulfillment of the master identity in a new "non-industrial authenticity". After that, Sully becomes the leader of all the Na'vi people

#### **II-1-b- Prospero and Jake Sully:**

Prospero and Jake Sully are the main protagonists of *The Tempest* and *Avatar*. Both of them have lost something significant which motivates each one of them to win it back. In fact,

both of them have rebelled against their rulers and, at the end, regain their master identity. And more significantly, both of them have been chosen by a superpower force to carry out their request. While the former has lost his dukedom, the latter his legs; the former is overthrown by his own brother, Antonio, the latter rebels against his military superior, Colonel Quaritch. Finally, while Prospero controls the Island's spirit, Ariel, Sully is protected by Eywa, the spirit of Pandora. Of course, the last shared point representing magic, wonder, and miraculous powers, can be considered as the backbone of white master identity, in portraying them as the *Chosen*. I will discuss this point further in the third chapter.

Edward Said, in discussion of Western literature, highlights the function of lead characters in their superior position over the Other as seen in *Avatar* as well as in *The Tempest*:

The novelistic hero[...] exhibits the restless energy of the enterprising bourgeoisie, they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go and what they can become. The novel ends...with the protagonists' accession to stability...in the form of confirmed identity (Said, 1991:71).

The paradigm of the novelistic hero is easily interchangeable with the term 'Hollywood hero' as the two emanate from the same colonialist roots. The novelistic hero is an individual who occupies a privileged position as the rational, enterprising protagonist whose adventure and identity confirmation occurs in the presence and often at the expense of an inferior Other who simultaneously exists to affirm the hero *via-à-vis* the Self's privileged superiority. One can remark that both Sully and Prospero have reached their master identity confirmation in a geographical blank space. While Prospero becomes the white *wizard* and the island's proprietor just after having put an end to Sycorax, the witch from Algiers and the mother of Caliban, and making of the latter his "slave" and a servant who "must obey: his [Prospero's] art is of such power"( Shakespeare, 2012: 24), Jake Sully tames the "mighty creature" which is venerated by all the aboriginal inhabitants of Pandora, and becomes "Toruk Macto". Moreover, the setting is presented as a virgin unexplored and exotic area, where the self's

privileged superiority, portrayed as lost in the old world—Milan and the Earth— is won back there. All in all, it seems obvious that both Prospero and Sully are chosen by “Providence divine” (Shakespeare, 2012:15) to educate and save the *fixed* and uncivilized Other.

There are many significant scenes in *Avatar* which can be compared to *The Tempest*. Jake Sully is marginalized in his own society, and the scene in the tavern demonstrates a drunken crowd shouting and clapping their hands to evoke within the audience a feeling of uneasiness. It is worth noting that this scene comes as an antithesis to the first scene where the virgin forest of Pandora is depicted. The fact of the main character's marginalization is fortified in the scene where he is thrown out from the tavern. There, lying on the ground, the camera flies horizontally over his body, there is no light out there, to show a man in a poster like Christ on the cross. These two scenes remind us about the speech given by the dispossessed Prospero while narrating his exile to his daughter, Miranda. In fact, Prospero uses terms like “treacherous” and “midnight” (ibid, I-ii:14) to show sadness and evil in the world not yet known to Miranda. The master self here is nullified, and just like Sully evokes in voice-off that “ [...] You're in the wrong planet. The strong prey on the weak” (Cameron, 2009), Prospero sees himself as the “dead of darkness” (Shakespeare, I-ii:14). Consequently, one can easily notice their guilt and worthlessness.

Another feature which can be noticed in comparing the two head characters is the presence of patriarchy. Ella Shohat, in *Gender and Culture of Empire* (1997), declares that “the masculinist desire of mastering a new land is deeply linked to colonial history” (Ibid:27). In fact, not only the self's alleged superiority is confirmed in a new land, far from a civilized geography, but it has to be portrayed as a *masculinist* depiction of superiority. At this level, one has to remember that Jake Sully is depicted as a well-built young man, and an ex US marine, who falls in love with Neytiri, the daughter of the Omaticaya tribe's chief, Eytukan—and just like Pocahontas—she saves him from death. Neytiri considers him as “a sign”

(Cameron, 2007:44) and orders Tsu'tey, the Omaticaya warrior who is supposed to marry her, not to kill him. Additionally, Mo'at , Neytiri's mother, orders her daughter “to teach him our ways, to speak and walk as we do” (ibid: 47). While Prospero overthrows a female witch (Sycorax) and takes over all the power of the island, Sully is the white male who takes power by marrying, the Na'vi chief's daughter. This clearly depicts the binary opposition between superiority and inferiority, and masculinity and femininity, which works to affirm the self's alleged superiority. So I can say that the presence of the feminine characters, like Sycorax and the airy spirit, Ariel, in *The Tempest*, and Neytiri and Mo'at in *Avatar*, is to help the hero 's accession to stability “in the form of confirmed [master] identity” (Said, 1994: 71).

Another feature which I can report here is the impact of nature on both the two main characters, namely Prospero and Sully. Indeed, exoticism, which is the main characteristic of both Prospero's island and Pandora, stimulates the white hero, serving him to affirm his identity. Just like Prospero who controls the powers of nature, like his act of provoking the tempest, Sully is heard by the spirit of Pandora , Eywa, in the final battle between the US forces and the creatures of Pandora. One can feel this from Neytiri's screams:“Eywa has heard You!” (Cameron, 2009). Obviously, just like Shakespeare who is inspired by Montaigne's well-known essay on the cannibals of the Americas, James Cameron wants to offer an escape from the Western industrial society/audience which suffers guilt for Planetary pollution (Rieder, 2011: 47). While Prospero, representing the white magician, contrasting the black magic held by Sycorax, Jake Sully uses science and technology to defend the peaceful inhabitants of Pandora. This pro-ecological act can be interpreted as a positive use of knowledge. Prospero's magic frees Ariel from Sycorax (Shakespeare, I-ii: 20) and he makes her work for him, just like Sully who has taken the place of the destroyed Hometree, which is the Na'vi's tree-like shelter and symbol of power, after being devastated by the Colonel Quaritch. Prospero is the right duke of Milan, who is not like his corrupted brother Antonio,

and Sully evokes the real, not corrupted US marine who always “fights for freedom” (Cameron, 2009). It goes to say then that knowledge which is presented here as white magic/science turns around the same axis which is power.

In consideration to all what has been said, I can say that Jake Sully is like a Prospero in a futuristic American hegemonic power style. His heroic moral and physical characteristics and chivalrous deeds can be seen as the reincarnation of Prospero. If Prospero is the prototype of a Renaissance man (Clark, 1986: 65), Jake Sully represents his second birth.

## **II-2- Primitivism and Servitude:**

I have already evoked Michel De Montaigne's reflections on what has been considered as cannibals in the Americas (specifically in Brazil). This French Renaissance humanist and thinker wrote an essay, *On Cannibals* (1580), where He states that the life of native Americans embodies the ideal primitivism (Clark, 1997: 29) and he compares their life, based on harmony with nature, to that of the Europeans where the church tortures people in public places for religion. Montaigne's essay has nourished the imagination of the Westerners, like Shakespeare in England and Rousseau later on in France. It has served as a *statement* where one can find a romanticized desire for a return to a traditional, pre-industrial way of life in the West.

This ideal primitivism that one can find in Montaigne's evoked essay is apparent in Cameron's *Avatar*. The first striking thing to notice while watching the movie is that the Other is overtly romanticized. In fact, Stephen Trinder looks at the Na'vi in Cameron's movie the personification of Rousseau's “noble savage” (Trinder, 2012: 38-9). There are many instances which strengthen Trinder's idea. For example the Na'vi warriors, dressed in Native American fashion, are depicted as free from corruption and deeply linked to Pandora and its virgin nature; their blue-skinned complexion, a color which stimulates the idea of a romanticized “other” both for the audience and for the white characters, drawing the line between “Us” and

“Them”; the spirits of the forest and the capacity to communicate harmoniously with them. The female character (actor) Neytiri has central role in the movie in helping to affirm the superiority of the main actor, Jake Sully. Surprisingly, the “other” in Cameron's *Avatar* can be seen as a reincarnation of Montaigne's cannibal, in his way of evoking wonders and mysteries and, at the same time, offering a patent idea of what is not to be civilized. The relationship between Jake Sully and Neytiri reminds us about captain John Smith and Pocahontas, a well known story which goes back to the first English settlement in today's America. A relationship in which we can consider as an allegorical marriage between the colonialist masculinity and the colonized femininity, marking the apotheosis of imperialism.



**Picture 4: Neytiri is riding with Toruk Macto (Sully is the “leading” warrior). The blue color of the skin amplifies the exotic image of the Na'vi.**

The personification of natural goodness and innocence which offers a sympathetic image of the Other (or the alien) can be seen as a nostalgic desire of the West to (re)conquer what is lost of its superior identity. In other words, the (re)affirmation of the superior self can only be achieved by confronting it to a totally opposed subject. In his article *The Primitivist and Postcolonial* (2005), Nicolas Thomas calls this necessary Other a subject of “primitivism”. According to him, primitivism is all this encompassing discourse that “attributes an exemplary status to simple ways of life and re-values its rudimentary character as something to be upheld” (Thomas, 2005: 448). It goes without saying that the role that the “primitive other” is playing is the one of a servant; servitude in helping the “rudimentary

character” to affirm his superiority. Consequently, primitivist character works as a subject that wins the audience sympathy in helping the main character to reach self-affirmation.

It is at this stage that I am going to compare *Avatar* to *The Tempest*. David Hartwell says that “science fiction is a uniquely modern incarnation of an ancient [narrative] tradition” (Hartwell, 1984:42). In fact, the first striking similarity between *Avatar* and *The Tempest* is the use of magical powers. For instance, Ariel, Prospero's obedient spirit, is found in *Avatar* as Eywa, Pandora's spirit (or the mother of all nature). The dispossessed Caliban can be compared to Tu'sey, the Omaticaya warrior. These objects of knowledge, as Foucault calls them, full of primitivist *clichés*, serve to strengthen the head character (Sully and Prospero, mainly) to fulfill their imperialist identity. Both in *Avatar* and in *The Tempest*, the “outside other” is fixed in a way that he cannot be in the same place as the rudimentary character who is the only subject of mutation and self-affirmation.

### **II-2-a- Eywa and Ariel: Obedient Spirits**

Remember I have done thee worthy service; Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, served without grudge or grumblings: thou didst promise to bate me a full year (Shakespeare, 2012, I-ii:19).

The above sayings are pronounced by Ariel while discoursing with her master Prospero. Ariel, after having performed the tempest, asks for her freedom which Prospero refuses because he has not finished using her supernatural services. Then, Prospero, angrily, reminds her from what torment he has freed her (Shakespeare, I-ii: 19), unfolding to the audience the past confinement of Ariel by the witch Sycorax of Algiers for a dozen years and how Prospero has managed to free her. “[...] it was mine art, when I arrived and heard thee, that made the gape the pane and let thee out” (Ibid: 21). At the end of this conversation, Ariel thanks her “noble master” who has promised to set her free in two days.

The first important remark which should be put forward here is that both Ariel and Eywa, even though invisible to the audience, speak in the place of the blank space (the

colonized area). In fact, both of them are set to represent the *invisible* guardians of the blank location. An invisibility which one can interpret as an important element that equals, in a way, the American concept of the Manifest Destiny. This point will be discussed in the third chapter.

Both the characters work to sustain the main ones, namely Prospero and Jake Sully, to realize their master identity. For instance, in *The Tempest*, it is Ariel who has caused the faked shipwreck, and also the one who has rescued king Alfonso from murder, etc. In *Avatar*, it is Eywa who has saved Jake Sully from death, and the scene where all the bright flying creatures surrounded his avatar body depicts clearly how the spirit of Pandora protects him. Of course, this has been considered as a “sign” by Neytiri and, later on, goes on to venerate the ex-marine at the end of the movie (Cameron, 2009). Moreover, Sully, in the Na'vi's eyes, is the *first* person who makes Eywa responds to his wishes. While all the creatures of Pandora are counter-attacking Quaritch's forces, Neytiri calls out joyfully, camera-focus is down up, showing her body and the sky, and yelling “Eywa has heard you” (Ibid). This tends to show the blank space's recognition (the act of showing the sky tends probably to represent transcendence) towards the Lead character, validating the notion of “the noble master”.

These two elements of knowledge have permitted the subject of power to regain his master identity, a position which he has lost in his “ancient” life. The obedience of nature of the possessed area in the behalf of the flat characters epitomizes the final step of conquering and *taming* the other and his space. The latter sees himself excluded from the centrality of the plot's structure

## **II-2-b-Caliban and Tsu'tey: The Dispossessed.**

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou takest from me,  
(Shakespeare, 2012, I-ii: 23).  
These words are uttered by Caliban, Prospero's *monstrous* slave. At the very beginning of the play, one can remark that he is considered as a “slave” and a “villain”. But, more importantly,

the spectator of the play is meant to understand that Caliban owes much to Prospero who has been treating him with “human care” (Shakespeare, 2012, I-ii, 23) until he has tried to “violate the honour” of his daughter, Miranda (Ibid). Besides, he is portrayed as an envious character.

In both *The Tempest* and *Avatar*, Caliban and Tsu'tey are two important characters representing the “Outside Other”. While the former is dispossessed of “his island”, the latter is deprived of becoming the head of the Omaticaya tribe and also, more significantly, to marry Neytiri. In this sense, they both display the image of an Other (Monster and Alien) who serve only the lead character to fulfill his master identity.

Caliban (anagram of Cannibal) lives in a world where nature is benevolent and he can enjoy what is freely available, but his own being is inherently bestial (Clark, 1986: 22). It seems that before Prospero's arrival to “the island”, Caliban has lived a free life and has only his own self as “king” (Shakespeare, 2012, I-ii, 23). He considers Prospero as a tyrant (Ibid: 50) and he seems to be envying him because “his art is of such power” (Ibid: 24).

Contrary to Caliban, Tsu'tey is portrayed as a warrior and a free character. He reincarnates Rousseau's “noble savage” (Trinder, 2012: 3). However, he is dispossessed of his title of a potential “leader” and of his mistress Neytiri, the chief's daughter. In fact, as soon as he has encountered Jake Sully he tries to kill him but Neytiri says that “there is a sign” and he must not disobey Eywa's signs, the Great Spirit of Pandora. Then, just like Caliban that Ariel, the island's spirit, obeys and chooses Prospero, Tsu'tey is dispossessed of both his title and his *fiancee* partly because Eywa chooses Sully instead of him.

In *Avatar*, Tsu'tey, just like Caliban, is portrayed as being always jealous and envious about Sully. As a matter of fact, jealousy is among the main characteristics of the non-Westerners. Ania Loomba claims that the West, during Shakespeare's time, considered jealousy to be the main criteria of the Moors, the Turks, and the Blacks (Loomba, 2002: 94-5). Loomba evokes books like Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and Richard Knolles'

*General History of the Turks* (1603) to argue about how stereotypes, like the jealous southern men, are constructed. For her, Shakespeare used Knolles' famous book to write *Othello*. In consideration to this, it seems that Cameron's *Avatar* reproduces and consolidates the same stereotypes as the ones of *The Tempest* to portray Tsu'tey. In doing this, it creates a binary opposition between a civilized rational Western character and a primitive emotional Other.

### **III- Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I have compared James Cameron's *Avatar* with William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. focusing on postcolonial theory, like Said (1991) and Ashcroft (2001) and Foucault's notion of Power/knowledge (1980), I have found many similarities between Cameron's and Shakespeare's works. Similarities that depict the apotheosis of Colonialism.

Dividing the chapter into two main sections, I have tried to shed light on two important elements of Colonialism: Geography and Otherness. In the first section, using Ashcroft's "Imperial Gaze", I have noticed that *Avatar*'s artistic elements—like the images of the spaceship, the cosmos, and the different names of the places in Pandora—show clearly that Cameron's movie embodies an imperialist subtext exactly like the one represented in *The Tempest*. While Shakespeare has used the sea, Cameron uses the cosmos. It goes the same for the ship and the spaceship that serve as a metonymy for Knowledge/power of the subject-who-sees to have control on the object which is seen (geography, the native inhabitants, and the natural resources). Examples given in this section from *Avatar* as well as from *The Tempest* help to provide clear linkages to ideas in postcolonial theory.

The second section of this chapter takes into consideration the idea of Otherness in both *Avatar* and *The Tempest*. It demonstrates the similarities between some "Western" characters like Gonzalo and Augustine. I have remarked that they are portraying the enlightened Western ideas and their need of a new beginning. Addition to this, portrayed as "positive-characters" who represent colonialism in its good way ( and gaining the sympathy

of the audience), characters like Gonzalo and Augustine help the main characters, namely Prospero and Jake Sully, to reaffirm their “master identity”. These main characters are pictured in an environment that seems operating only in their behalf. Both the Island of Prospero and Pandora of Sully serve like a frame, a blank space (colonial space) where the main character affirms his authority and power.

The outside other in both the analyzed corpus seem to be fixed, serving only the main character to achieve and regain what he has lost in “civilization”. In fact, Both Eywa and Ariel are invisible to the audience but serve faithfully Prospero and Sully, while Caliban and Tsu'tey are dispossessed from their “native space”.

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## **Chapter Two**

### ***Avatar, Heart of Darkness, or the Twilight of the Ideal Self***

“What more is possible? After us the savage god”

J.P. Sartre, *l'Etre et le Néant*, Paris: Gallimard, 1950, p. 44 (Mine translation)

## **I- Introduction.**

In this chapter I will compare Cameron's *Avatar* with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Contrary to the precedent one, where the focus is mainly on the utopian idealization of the Westerner, here my focus will be on the degenerated Western self by scientific and the technological developments. Besides, I will attempt to demonstrate how these elements of power cause the Westerner's pressing need to return to the first utopian and innocent self (Prospero's) that I have demonstrated in the previous pages. It is the reason why I have entitled this chapter *The Twilight of the Ideal Self*.

One cannot deny the fact that both Joseph Conrad and James Cameron, at least in these present productions, are denouncing what they consider as not representing their *ideal self*. Indeed, in many of his interviews (Bouzereau and Grane (2010, NPR.org (2010), and Rose (2010)), Cameron keeps saying that *Avatar* embodies an anti-imperialist message. The same thing that one can affirm about Conrad (Conrad (1912), Zins (1998), and Meyers (2001)) and his vision of Imperialism.

One important point which necessitates to be put forward is the *visual* depiction of brutality in a realistic mode. But, by doing this, both Conrad and Cameron alienate the audience (the West) by destroying what they used to think about their ideal self. This time, the “Other” is not an outsider but an insider. Furthermore, the realistic depiction of brutality is related to the scientific and technological empowerment of the West. Consequently, it seems that these technological development and scientific achievements, that Conrad's Europe as well as Cameron's America are living, alienate the Westerners and transform them into a state of *aliens*. It is not a coincidence that Cameron claims this, that “We are the aliens” (Bouzerneau and Grane, 2010).

Strangely, these elements of power in *Avatar* are epitomizing the Western scientific hegemony which maintains the dynamic continuity of the Western imperialist discourse. I

have borrowed the term “anti-conquest” from Marie Louise Pratt (1992) to label this continuity. Pratt defines this concept as follows:

the term “anti-conquest” was chosen because [...] in travel and exploration writings these strategies of innocence are constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era. The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call “seeing-man”, an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse--he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess (Pratt, 1992: 7).

The anti-conquest western discourse is characterized by an “unfriendly label” (Ibid) for the imperialist traditional elements of power (Military and economic ones) but, nevertheless, it exercises a *passive* but more effective conquest.

As far as Cameron's movie and Conrad's novella are concerned, the anti-conquest discourse is apparent within their narratives. Indeed, both protagonists, Sully and Marlow, express their dissatisfaction and anger at the looting of the Western trading companies and the brutality of the Western military forces in the colonial space (Congo and Pandora). Yet, in the meantime, because of these “older imperial” powers, they both regain their master identity, maintaining the continuity of the master ideal self. As a matter of fact, this contradicts the anti-imperialist assertions of both Cameron and Conrad.

Having said this, I intend to explain the nature of the technological power that works on alienating and distorting the western ideal self (Kurtz, Colonel Quaritch) and, in the meantime, sustains the continuity of Western hegemonic power. By using the term “hegemonic power”, I am referring to Antonio Gramsci's notion of power. For him, power which used to be held by traditional coercive means (wars) at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, took another form which he calls “hegemonic power” (Gramsci, 1999: 20). “This latter is a whole network that exploits all possible ideological means to impose supremacy over people” (Ibid). Hegemony can include scientific knowledge that is an aspect of an entire system of values, which is humanism (Ibid: 25-7). The hegemony of knowledge aims at authorizing the

supremacy of intellectuals over the warriors.

To achieve this task, this chapter centres on three main points. The first one tackles the historical background of both Conrad and Cameron. It is to shed an insight into the predominant historical events that shaped their ideas and, as a matter of fact, influenced their narratives. The second point concerns the idea of the distorted western self or, what one may call, the internal other. It is an attempt to see how the elements of power—namely the economic and the military— which are depicted in *Heart of Darkness*, are reproduced in the American movie, *Avatar*. The result of this is the degeneration of the “old imperial” subject-who-sees. The third and final point comments the scenes depicting the natives' resistance. It is an important stage because it underlines the incapacity of the natives (*read* the outside other) to resist by themselves and their need for the “anti-conquest” protagonists to help them resisting. It is worth noticing that this point will pave the way for the third and final chapter where I will speak about the idea of the American hegemony which I refer as Pax Americana. .

## **II- Joseph Conrad and James Cameron: the Anti-Imperialists?**

While speaking about Conrad and Cameron, what no one cannot refute is their remarkable capacity to reproduce exactly an event and the immediate emotion that springs from it. While Conrad sheds light on the dark side of Imperialism and its civilizing mission, Cameron shows with 3-D vivid images the atrocities of the US military forces against the Na'vi. Coming from this, to read *Avatar* with *Heart of Darkness*, and, more importantly, to understand the historical transmutation of the elements of power, one should first take into consideration the historical background of both the British writer and the American film producer. After this, the narrative dynamic of both is going to be analyzed in the light of the notion of the hegemonic power.

## II-1- Conrad and the Jingoist Empire.

Conrad (1857-1924) is considered as the first writer whose literary works, especially *Heart of Darkness*, heralds English depiction of reality outside Britain. Just like Cameron, he was not a politician or a journalist. He was looking for moral and artistic truth about the human condition, rather than documenting what he had found in the Congo, or elsewhere (Zins, 1998: 60). Yet, one may see him as a “colonial” writer, because colonial themes play an enormous role in his writings such as *Heart of Darkness*, *Victory*, *Nostromo*, and *The Rescue*.

Conrad “made English literature more reflective and mature because he called attention to the sheer horror of political realities overlooked by English citizens and politicians” (Ibid:61). The case of Poland, his oppressed homeland, was one such issue (Ibid). The colonial exploitation of Africans was another. His condemnation of Imperialism and colonialism, combined with sympathy for its persecuted and suffering victims, was drawn from his Polish background, his own personal sufferings, and the experience of a persecuted people living under Russian occupation.

At the turn of the nineteenth century in Britain, all the fiction written about Africa only the work of Joseph Conrad stands as a great literature (Ibid). By comparison with Rudyard Kipling and his followers, Conrad was keenly aware of the moral ambiguities of the empire (Ibid). He described imperialism as “robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale” (Conrad,1992:17) and thus took the opposite view to Kipling's jingoist celebration. His *Heart of Darkness* is based on his own experience in the Congo in 1890 when he commanded a river steamer and met Roger Casement. During his short stay in the Congo (only six months) Conrad did not get much opportunity to personally witness Belgian brutality and oppression (see Meyers (2001), and Zins (1998)). But it is the particularity of a great writer to understand and depict, even on the basis of an evidence, the whole dimension and nature of things.

This journey to the Congo helped him to discover another face of Europe. Indeed, in his *Personal Records* Conrad wrote that

an imperial view of humanity in all its degree of splendour and misery together with a special regard for the rights of the unprivileged of this earth, not on any mystic ground but on the ground of fellowship and honourable reciprocity of services, was the dominant characteristic of the mental and moral atmosphere of the houses which sheltered my hazardous childhood (Conrad, 1912:Vii).

In this sense, Jeffery Meyers, Conrad's biographer, writes that Conrad's "sympathies were always with the underdog [the oppressed]" (Meyers, 2001:208). Meyers remarks that albeit he had great sympathy for Rudyard Kipling, another great literary figure of British colonial period, he was profoundly against his *jingoist* political views and justification of colonialism (Ibid).

During Conrad's time, the British Empire knew sophisticated technological, economic, and military developments. After the partition of the African continent in Berlin in 1885, Britain had already occupied over 80 % of the world's lands. In the maps of that time, "[T]here was a vast amount of red [...]" (Conrad, 1995:14), a colour that represents the British Empire. Trading companies were implanted in many places of the world: Egypt, Australia, India, South Africa...etc. These companies supplied the raw materials of the British industry in huge scale, maintaining the first rank in economic competition with other European countries, especially France. The outside trading companies, like East India Company, was in need to be secured by Britain's military forces to put an end to any indigenous resistance. "The onward march of Empire", Seaman says, "was something of an unpremeditated scramble in the stormy late afternoon of the Victorian era. The Pax Britannica based on naval power was the long-lasting afterglow of Tatalgar" (Seaman, 1995: 8-9).

As far as Britain's naval power is concerned, it worked to maintain two important British institutions,i.e., the economic and the military ones. It had witnessed a great deal of technological developments. It had the capacity to transport an important quantity of different

raw materials from different colonies. Thus, it had contributed greatly to the economic development of Britain. Moreover, the royal navy could easily control sea routes, especially after the defeat of Napoleon in Waterloo in June 18<sup>th</sup> 1815 by the Duke of Wellington. Up from this, Britain became an importantly efficient Empire which was “good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work [was] done in there” (Conrad, 1995: 14).

Conrad's views on imperialism were influenced by two British critics of his time : Roger Casement (1864-1916) and E.D. Morel (1873-1924). These two pamphleteers and effective reformers, who had created the Congo Reform Association, denounced the atrocious deeds and ruthless methods in the Congo Free State of Leopold II of Belgium (1835-1910). Roger Casement's sixty-one-page record of his journey up the Congo River shocked deeply the European people who used to think positively about the idea of colonialism as a civilizing mission ( Zins, 1998: 61). Morel, just one year after Casement's record ( 1904), published a book bearing the title of *King Leopold 's Rule in Africa* where he depicts many examples of mutilations and a horrifying picture of colonial cruelty.

The soldiers let loose through the country [...] have been required to bring back tangible proof that proper punishment was inflicted, and the hands of slain, people were the readiest and most acceptable form of proof. (Morel, 1904: 119).

Conrad could not have been unaware of these writings and *témoignages*. This probably helped him more in his way of depicting violence and oppression in his masterpiece, *Heart of Darkness*. These works contributed greatly to the downfall of the Leopoldian colonial system in the Congo.

From what has been said, one can say that intellectuals like Casement, Morel, and Conrad had produced an anti-colonialist discourse, denouncing the traditional imperial rhetorics and the old elements of powers, that is to say, the direct and active colonialism. Leopold's rule in Congo is a perfect illustration of this traditional form of power. Yet, it seems that Conrad made a difference between a Belgian Congo, with its ruthless and

exploitative colonial administration, and the confident Britain with the superiority of its colonial administrative power (Hawthorn, 1990: 45) because some real work [was] done in there” (Conrad, 1995: 14). I suggest that this confidence is personified by Charlie Marlow. I will return to discuss this point later in this chapter.

## **II-2- Cameron and Pax Americana.**

In interviews Cameron has linked the events in *Avatar* directly to the American war in Iraq, as well as to Vietnam War, and imperialism in general. Consequently, there is no doubting the work's deliberate anti-imperialist message. He says “We went down a path that cost several hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives. I don't think the American people even know why it was done. So it's all about opening your eyes” (Cameron, 2010). He further states that “the Iraq stuff and the Vietnam stuff is there [in *Avatar*] by design—and references to the colonial period are there by design” (Cameron in Rose, 2010: 54-6). He concludes that all human history has been fashioned by imperial actions of one sort or another:

Human history is a series of invasions. One group invades another group. The military superior takes over and destroys the other culture [...] but we're seeing it from the standpoint of the people who are getting invaded [...] anybody who's going to take a position that a war is a right and moral path should understand what it feels like when it's an aggressive war and what it feels like to be invaded. We felt it in here with 9/11. (Ibid).

Today, no one cannot deny that the United States of America is the most powerful country in the world. This power was obtained mainly during and after the Second World War (1939-1945), when it had crossed the Atlantic and saved Europe from Nazism. This crucial event marked the downfall of the Second British Empire and the rise of America. Then, the idea of American heroism began. The United States “has diplomatic missions in 160 nations [...] founded the United Nations Organization and it is its single largest source of financial support as well as its home” (Sanders, 2011: 5). Indeed, these diplomatic missions are centered on the geostrategic, economic, and security issues. The American economy thrives

with the escalating number of countries “that *ask* only its divine protection” (Zizek, 2010: 46).

Strangely, the question of American support to African nationalism was a complicated one in the early period after the WWII. “Official American attitudes to the liberation of Africa were profoundly unsympathetic” (Krishnan, 2005: 43) . There was a deeply held belief in Washington in African political immaturity and that African nationalists were unready and incapable of governing themselves (Ibid). Nevertheless, the American international influence began to be remarked at the same moment with the British withdrawals from Egypt and Sudan in 1954 and 1956.

Post 9/11 USA witnessed a series of US military interventions especially in the Middle East from 2003 onwards. The W. Bush period has inspired many Hollywoodian scripts; *Avatar* is one among them. What is important in these movies is the association of the government with profit. This is not a new issue, since it was described as early as the beginning of the twentieth century by John Hobson in *On the Economic Basis of Imperialism* (1902) where he states that the “interests of the nation as a whole are subordinated to those of certain sectional interests that usurp control of the national resources and use them for private game” (Hobson in Meredith, 2012: 7). From *Apocalypse Now* (1979) to *Avatar* (2009), passing by *Platoon* (1986) and *Dances With Wolves* (1990), the Western (US) military and the economic elements of power are portrayed negatively to protest against the American foreign policy which glared only to profits, neglectful human of rights.

Technological power is another element that characterizes the United States of America. Many times attributed to the success of democracy in the West, technologies as a form of knowledge is now utilized to survey and control other countries' communications, such as phone calls and so on. In Post 9/11 Hollywoodian movies , “technology is associated with a dominating, controlling frame of mind, that harms the environment and obscures the

human experience” (Harris, 2005: 95). It appears to be another form of knowledge that sustains the continuity of what Gramsci labels “the hegemonic power”.

Cameron's views of imperialism is incontestably like those held by Conrad. Indeed, his Canadian background and that country's frequent tendency to pursue a deliberately independent foreign policy *vis-à-vis* its more powerful neighbor, is a possible rationale. Cameron's history of being bullied at school and a subsequent psychological desire to stand up against aggressors may also be relevant (Hedegaart *in* Meredith, 2012: 30); Cameron may also have had personal reasons for his anti-war position, as his younger brother John David served as a marine in Iraq during the first Gulf War (Ibid). Ultimately, Cameron may have chosen to make an anti-imperialist film because he was tired of pro-war propaganda like George Lucas' 1977 classic *Star Wars*.

However, as far as the narrative construction of *Avatar* is concerned, one can notice that Cameron reproduces another mechanism of cultural imperialism that fits what Žižek calls “the liberal position”:

[...]the classic self-congratulatory ideology of the beneficiaries of colonial expropriation who once blithely identified their private profit with the advance of civilization and now find it happily coincides with salvation of planetary ecology ( Žižek, 2009: 65-9).

In fact, besides the fact that *Avatar* has used the classical fixed and primitive “other” who needs to be saved, the story is narrated by the anti-conquest protagonist who, just like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, self-congratulates himself . Being a passive but effective subject of power, he assures the continuity of the Western Imperialist discourse.

### **1I-3- Marlow and Sully: The Anti-Conquest Heroes.**

It appears the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This was my chance, and it made me more anxious to go (Conrad, 1995:13).

These words are said by Charlie Marlow. He narrates eagerly his adventures of “into-the-

wild” order to the Nellie's crew. He speaks about how he has been accepted as a sea captain in a trading company in Brussels, after a long jobless period (Conrad, 1995:11). At the very beginning of *Heart of Darkness*, the reader is then conscious about the following adventure/journey which will be narrated by an agent of a Belgian Trading Company. He is going to tell what he has known and seen in Congo. Compared to Marlow, Jake Sully, the main protagonist in *Avatar*, seems to accomplish the same role, sustaining the same imperialist, but *passive* discourse.

In the Novella, Marlow is described as having “sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an *idol*” (Ibid: 6. emphasis is mine). He has the capacity to remark everything and to re-tell it with exactitude. In fact, “after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore *suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent*, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing” (Ibid:8. Emphasis is mine). Consequently, in front of the crew, the protagonist appears as “a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower” (Ibid: 10). yet, he treats himself as “an impostor” (Ibid: 18).

Moreover, Marlow addresses the crew, telling them what he has seen outside civilization “to throw a kind of light on everything about me-- and into my thoughts” (Ibid: 11). The “me” stands for the European *ego*; surely, Conrad speaks through Marlow. Indeed, the protagonist seems to be afraid about what he has seen in Congo, not because of the natives but mostly because of the white men's behavior which has completely degenerated into a primitive stage of “cavemen”. The fact of having to replace Fresleven, the murdered Danish captain who is killed “absurdly” for stealing hens, shows significantly the contrast between men inside Western civilization “who die for noble causes” and how they become once outside it. Furthermore, another important scene that catches the reader's attention is Marlow's visit to the company's doctor. The latter demands “in the interest of science, to

measure the crania of those going out there” (Ibid: 17). It demonstrates how science works for the benefit of the Company. Obviously, these medical measurements existed during Conrad's time.

As an outsider, Marlow finds himself drawn to the charismatic Kurtz, the agent dealing with ivory whom he is to meet at the end. Yet, after witnessing the malevolence and the oppression exercised on the natives, he is forced to look into his own soul and reassess his values.

Contrary to Kurtz, Marlow is what Mary Louise Pratt calls “an anti-conquest” agent or protagonist. Indeed, in the story he is a simple narrator of what he has seen in the Congo. His *témoignage* serves to underpin the imperial discourse. For instance, in the second chapter, Marlow describes the attitudes of the natives who are supposed to ensure the safety of the steamboat on its journey to the inner station that Kurtz is managing.

I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past. They had been engaged for six months (I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time [...] as long as there is a piece of paper written over in accordance with some facial law or other made down the river, it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live. (Conrad, 1995: 58).

Taking into consideration the above passage, it seems that Marlow (and Conrad) shares the same ideas with Kurtz's report which has been entrusted by the “International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs”. In fact, Marlow seems to be influenced by what he reads. The passage is found in this report where Kurtz claims that “[we] must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity” (Ibid: 72). Thus, one can conclude the Marlow is a *passive* version of Kurtz, an anti-conquest agent.

Jake Sully has replaced his PhD brother who is killed for “the paper in his wallet”. He says that “Tommy [his brother] is the scientist, not me... he was the one who wanted to get

shot light-years out in space to find the answers” (Cameron, 2009: 1:35). He is an ex-US marine soldier retired for his physical disability. “Me, I’m just another dumb grunt going someplace he’s gonna regret” (ibid: 2:09). Just like Marlow, he has not only replaced a dead person in the colonized area but he feels also anxious to go into it. This state of feeling demonstrates the characteristics of the anti-conquest protagonist.

While Marlow reports to the crew of the *Nellie* (the boat) what he has seen in the colonized area, informing them to what is beyond the Thames, Sully is narrating his adventure or experience to the US audience. Indeed, the reported happenings and information, the knowledge about the colonized land and its native inhabitants maintain the dynamic continuity of the story but, by extension, it sustains the same traditional colonial discourse of exotic lands that demand only to be explored.

One can easily deduce that Sully is helping the three traditional elements of colonial power. The first one is the scientific element. Indeed, it is the reason why he has replaced his brother. Without Sully, Avatar Program of Research initiated by Grace Augustine cannot be carried on. The Avatars are a mixed bodies of human DNA with the Na’vis’. As a matter of fact, the avatar’s body recognizes and reacts only to the one who has the same DNA. The second element is related to the economic institution. In *Avatar*, this element is hold by Selfridge, an opportunist American businessman. The main reason of Pandora Expedition is because of “Unobtainium”, a precious and very expensive metal. The latter is being sought for sale back on Earth by Selfridge’s RDA Corporation. As Unobtainium is available underneath Hometree, where the Na’vi live, Sully is supposed to convince them to leave this place. The third and the last element of power that Sully has fortified is the military one personified by Colonel Quaritch. Because he is an ex-marine, Sully is asked to report to him everything related to the Na’vi. Quaritch says “look Sully, I want to learn those savages from the inside...

I want you report to me” (Cameron, 2009: 21:56).



**Picture 4: Mapping in *Avatar***

The above image is taken from *Avatar*. It reunites these three elements of power. Quaritch in a military uniform is standing in front of Selfridge dressed in a white shirt . Both of them are listening to the reports of Sully, who turns his back to the main camera. The white shirt of Selfridge fortifies the difference between the military uniforms surrounding the map. The three of them are standing around a kind of 3-D digital Pandora map which represents the strategic places of Unobtainium. It is worth noticing that, as an element of knowledge, the *map* centers the image epitomizing its importance in a way of unifying and consolidating the three elements of power.

Later on, Jake Sully takes the side of Na'vi and rebels against these three elements of power and becomes one of the natives at the end of the movie. But, it is because of these three elements of power that Sully regains his feet and, more importantly his master identity. This point is going to be discussed in the third chapter of this work. For now, one can say that both

Sully, just like Marlow, has sustained the continuity of the master/slave dichotomy, contradicting the anti-imperialist claim attributed to *Avatar* and *Heart of Darkness*.

Having said this, it becomes clearer to say that by taking a “liberal position” Conrad as well as Cameron have produced the same anti-conquest narrative. Albeit their products are from two artistic genre (literary realism and science fiction genres), they construct their stories on a masculinist western narrative which, while depicting the horror of an *active* colonialism, sustains the continuity of a passive culture of imperialism. Thus, it maintains and consolidates the imperialist vision consisting in fixing the “other” and possessing it. This creates a paradox within the narrative's message. Speaking about this paradox, Pratt notes that

[...] all Euroimperialism faced a legitimation crisis. The histories of broken treaties, genocides, mass displacements and enslavements became less and less acceptable as rationalist and humanitarian ideologies took hold. Particularly after the French Revolution, contradictions between egalitarian, democratic ideologies at home and ruthless structures of domination and extermination abroad became more acute. Yet the demands of capital remained. Competition among Euroimperial nations would only intensify as capital expanded. And, as always, it was their own competition with each other that bound European powers together in finding new forms for Euroimperial interventions, a new legitimating ideologies: the civilizing mission, scientific racism, and technology-based programs of progress and development. (Pratt, 1992: 74).

In the context of the present chapter, one can remark that among the “new legitimating ideologies” there is the anti-conquest protagonist who, because the dynamic of the story centers on him and his experience, takes a self-congratulatory position in front of a crisis (the colonial and imperial ones). But, he wants to persuade the audience that he fights against it.

### **III- The Other within the *Us*.**

In this section, I am going to analyze *Avatar* and *Heart of Darkness* focusing on the idea of the “internal other”. The latter tends to mean the degenerated Western Self in the colonial area. The Western readers or spectators do not recognize themselves within him because he is portrayed as a robotic, cruel and a selfish side of the “*US*”. In what follows, I

tend to study the military and the economic (or trading) “internal other” focusing on what is used by Cameron and Conrad as images to claim their anti-imperialist views.

### **III-1- Kurtz and Colonel Quaritch: their colonialist Identity.**



**Picture 6 : Colonel Quaritch**

The above image is taken from the first ten minutes of *Avatar*. It shows Colonel Quaritch standing at the center, he is a sharp-nosed, thin-lipped, and a severe-looking colonel, with a horrifying three-scar face, epitomizing a fight with an untamed animal. He is instructing the Company's new comers about the dangers of Pandora. One can see how the soldiers are listening to him attentively. The only civilian who is dressed in civilian clothes is Norms Spellman, the new scientist who comes to explore Pandora's botany.

In the scene where this picture is taken, Quaritch informs the new comers, but also the audience, that “out of that fence, everything that crawls, flies, or squats in the mud wants to kill you and to eat your eyes for jujubes” (Cameron, 2009: 6:50). This warns the new comers that some cannibalistic beings are inhabiting Pandora. More importantly, Sully, who is listening to him (he is also a new comer), seems to be fascinated by Quaritch's masculinist stature and his warning instructions.

Comparatively, this fascination is depicted in *Heart of Darkness* where Marlow is reading Kurtz's report (or pamphlet). He says that his writings “gave” me the notion of an

exotic immensity ruled by an august benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words— of burning noble words” (Conrad, 1995: 72). Like Kurtz, Quaritch uses rhetoric for colonial persuasion. Referring to the native inhabitants as cannibals and animals he incarnates the traditional colonial rhetoric when it refers to what is not European or Western.

The origin of this kind of rhetoric arose during the nineteenth century by the new scientific discoveries. The positivist science works on classifications and experimentation of objects. Indeed, Darwin's works on the different species which he had found in Australia and in other places in the Pacific Ocean (1859) shaped greatly the Western mind. The naturalist's writings, like Darwin's, “was to continue to hold enormous ideological force throughout the nineteenth century, and remains very much with us today” (Pratt, 1992: 27-8). The theory of evolution claims that man's ancestor is the ape and, by deduction, all beings that have not yet reached the stage where the West stands, are stuck on the second stage of evolution: between the ape and man (Ibid:30). This helped the West to consider its “civilizing mission” which, along with Christianity, supposed to help “these beings” to reach the final stage of evolution: to become human. However, as Ian Watt remarks: “After Darwin, if man looked back at his own lineage, he discovered not created Adam, but a long succession of unplanned mutations leading to the higher apes” (Watt, 1996: 32).

In the traditional imperial rhetoric, the terms like “animals”, “brutes”, “monkeys”, and “cannibals” are *scientifically* justified. In *Descent Man* (1871), Charles Darwin speaks about “high” and “low races”, and of a “stronger” and “weaker” nations (Darwin, *in* Watt, 1996: 33-4). Just like Kurtz who writes “Exterminates all the brutes” (Conrad, 1995: 72), Quaritch seems to keep the same imperialist attitude. It seems then that the nineteenth century European trading agent in the wilderness is reincarnated within the body of US military agent. This rhetoric is used, both by Conrad and Cameron, to create an *alienated* western self.

Kristen Meredith says that Colonel Quaritch tends to symbolize what America, especially the one under G.W. Bush government, has done in the Middle East (Meredith, 2012: 7). The well-known US mercenary troops “the Blackwaters”, who killed many Iraqi civilians in Abu Gharib, are reproduced in *Avatar* to denounce their doings (Meredith,2012: 7)



**Picture 7: The Destruction of the Na'vi's Hometree**

The above shot is showing the destruction the Na'vi's sacred Hometree. Helicopters are bombarding the rain forest. It demonstrates the binary opposition between indigenous innocence symbolized by the green color of the forest and high-advanced technological military apparatus which shows US force's ruthlessness and brutality. This sequence epitomizes the American oppression in Vietnam and Iraq.

It is worth noticing that the visual depiction of violence and brutality in *Avatar* is a realistic one. The shots of violence, like the one illustrated in the above image, put the movie outside the genre it represents. Indeed, to say that this movie belongs to a Science Fiction genre (SF) not to the fantasy one is for one important reason: the film is “manifestly about science and scientific possibility—even probability” (Tellote, 2001: 3). Taking into consideration the definition given by Tellote, *Avatar* is incontestably a science fiction film. However, the realistic depiction of violence diminishes its futurist utopian settings and puts it in the category of the realistic cinema. This is used by Cameron to warn the real-present

World by futuristic events and places. Just like Conrad who used the atrocious reality described by Morel and Casement as an inspiration to his masterpiece, Cameron has used the reality of Post 9/11 “war on terror”.

Colonel Quaritch is portrayed as being against “scientific explorations” led by the Scientific department of Dr. Augustine. He calls the Avatar Program “ a bad joke. A bunch of limp-dick science majors” (Cameron, 2009: 21:16). He believes that “it does present an opportunity both timely and unique” (Ibid) because he manages to persuade Sully to go “right to the hostile camps” (ibid) and to report about the “enemy”. So, he has a characteristic of an active colonialist agent, totally different from the anti-conquest protagonist. Moreover, his antagonism towards Program Avatar, validates the Gramscian idea of “hegemonic power” where the intellectuals (like Dr Augustine) hold the upper hand over the warriors (Cl. Quaritch). Gramsci calls this transition “the hegemony of knowledge” (Gramsci, 1999:27). As a matter of fact, while Dr. Augustine's program is based on humanitarian agenda (she builds a school to teach the Na'vi people English language...etc), Quaritch, destroys the Hometree of the indigenous inhabitants of Pandora.

It is then obvious to say that *Avatar* praises hegemonic power rejecting the traditional *active* power which is represented by Quaritch. I consider this as a second paradox of *Avatar*'s anti-imperialist message. While the audience abhors the colonialist active ideas embodied by the internal other (Quaritch), it identifies itself, even unconsciously, with the hegemonic power embodied in the Avatar Program of Dr. Augustine.

### **III-2- The Eldorado Exploring Expedition in Pandora.**

The second “Internal Other” lies within commerce. As a colonialist element of power, the notion like “trading company” plays a crucial role in *Avatar* as well as in *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, each one of the three stations visited by Marlow are related to “trade”, “bargain”, and “commerce”. However, in both in Conrad's novella and Cameron's movie,

trade is portrayed as an element that causes the degeneration of the ideal self.

It is very important to note what are the other elements of power that work to maintain and sustain the development of commerce. Anders Sparrman, a well-known 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalist, claims that “ a well regulated commerce as well as navigation in general has its foundation in science [...] while this, in return derives support from, and *owes its extension to the former*” (Sparrman, in Pratt, 1992: 33-4 , mine emphasis). In other words, in Sparrmann's view, the extension of science is thanks to trade and commerce without which one cannot find financial means to finance his scientific research (Ibid). On the other hand, Pratt remarks that “commercial prospects placed science arguably within the general public interest, though in fact the benefits of mercantile expansion and imperialism occurred overwhelmingly to small elites” (Pratt, 1992:34). Though “commerce was understood as at odds with the disinterestedness of science” (Ibid) but the two “mirror and legitimate each other's aspirations” (ibid). In a colonial context, science and commerce can be viewed as two elements of power and each one's knowledge works to fortify the other in the colonial area.

In *Heart of Darkness*, I may say that commerce is the kernel element of the story. There are so many passages which depict commerce of “ivory”, the main trade in Congo. In one of the passages, Marlow speaks about the Eldorado Exploring Expedition. The reader understands that it is an expedition which deals with scientific research but, as the story goes, it appears that it is not:

It came in sections [...] each section headed by a donkey carrying a white man in a new clothes and tan shoes, bowing from the elevation right and left to the impressed pilgrims. A quarrelsome band of footstore sulky niggers trod on the heels of the donkey [...] It was an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but the human folly made look like spoils of thieving “ (Conrad, 1995:43).

After describing what he calls sarcastically “pilgrims”, Marlow remarks that the white men's talk is

of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of a serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work

of the world (Ibid: 43-4).

One can remark that the hollowness of the “pilgrims” talking is contrasted with their new European clothes as well as to the name that this expedition bears. Obviously, this demonstrates the hypocrisy of the trading as well as the scientific expeditions sent by King Leopold II into Congo in the name of *La mission Civilisatrice*.

Kurtz is named “the chief of the inner station” (Ibid:34). Conrad, through Marlow, describes him like a degenerated European who is shouting “my ivory” (Ibid: 98) at the moment where he is agonizing. This tends to show that commerce, among other things, works to drive him to delirium. Yet, Marlow is astonished by how all the people in the three stations, with the exception of the man in white suit, are admiring him. This fascination tends to serve as an epitome of their degenerated behaviors, loosing all the perimeters of a civilized European man.

In *Avatar*, the degeneration of the Western Self can be remarked within Selfridge's RDA Company. Obtaining the precious mineral Unobtainium (strangely sounds like “UN-obtainable”) is all what Pandora Expedition is set for. Indeed, the department of Augustine is making research to see the value of its energy, the department of Quaritch is ensuring safety, and Selfridge is ensuring the back-to-earth shipping of this raw material. Cameron portrays this commercial company as a exploitative one, not caring about the indigenous inhabitants and destroying Pandora's fauna and flora. The bulldozers which transport the precious mineral in this “new found” planet give to the company an image of a robot-like civilization that contradicts the spiritual innocence of the Na'vi. Besides, Sully remarks that the US Marines have had the “noble” task to fight for freedom once on Earth, and now he is surprised how they put aside this duty for money given by Selfridge's company (Cameron, 2009: 6:00).

Consequently, it seems that all the noble duties, which constitute the Western set of values like fighting for freedom, have disappeared within the colonial space. Just like the Eldorado Exploring Expedition in *Heart of Darkness*, the Trading Company in *Avatar* seems to be “greedy without audacity” (Conrad, 1995: 43-4).



**Picture 8: The Extraction of Raw Materials in Pandora**

The above shot shows how *Avatar* pictures to the audience the direct reason motivating the futurist US economic/scientific Pandora Expedition. At the center is a successive gigantic-wheel trucks transporting an important quantity of Unobtainium which is excavated by the giant machine that appears at the back. There are two soldiers walking besides the first truck. Besides this latter, the soldiers appear very small. It suggests the idea which consists in seeing the importance of “commerce” represented by the trucks full of raw materials over the military represented by the two “small” soldiers.

At the level of language, Selfridge reproduces the same traditional imperialist rhetoric where terms like “blue monkeys”, “the savages”, and “animals” are remarked in many scenes.

Represented like a Bourgeois-like young man—the scene where he plays golf in his office determines his social class—Selfridge (the name means “selfish”) has hired Quaritch's mercenaries and, of course, finance Augustine's research. Speaking to the latter, Selfridge says :

Look, look. You're supposed to be winning the hearts and the mind of the natives. Isn't that the whole point of your little puppet show? If you look like them, you talk like them, then they'll start trusting us. We Build them a school. We teach them English. But after, what, how many years? Relations with the indigenous are only getting worse (Cameron, 2009: 12:00).

Following Augustine's answer, that the indigenous are afraid of the “guns” which the company has hired, Selfridge shows her what is the main reason to be in Pandora: “the gray metal” (Ibid: 13:14). This indicates Selfridge's indifference towards the native's safety. The audience cannot but take the side of Augustine and considers Selfridge an “internal other”.

Selfridge resembles the chief of the middle Station encountered by Marlow. In fact, Marlow takes him as “a sort of a vision” (Conrad, 1995: 25). His Gentleman-like clothes attracted Marlow's attention. Discussing with him, he says that “I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work” (Ibid: 26). This shows the indigenous idleness for work. Additionally, the fact that he reads and writes almost indifferently besides a white sick man (Ibid: 27) shows his lack of moral and “christian” values of caring for the sick people.

The internal other is well embodied in Kurtz's identity. Indeed, in the third chapter of Conrad's novella, Marlow cannot recognize himself with Kurtz. He says:

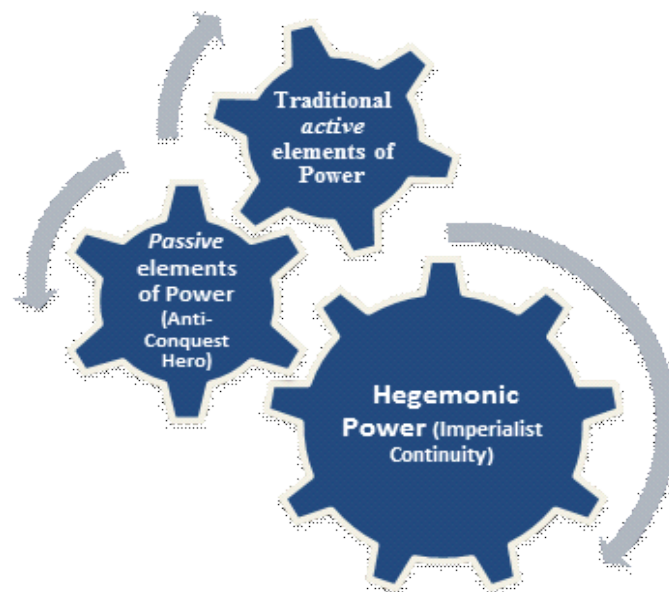
I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he managed to remain (Ibid: 78).

Kurtz is the personification of the degeneration of Western Self and his last words “the horror !the horror!” (Ibid:100) point to designate the darkness within and beyond the civilized

Western self.

Historically speaking, if Kurtz is an oblique reference to King Leopold II of Belgium and his greedy and abusive exploitation in Congo during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Zins (1998), Meyers (2001)), Selfridge depicts the exploitation in the Amazonian rain forest (*Survival-international*, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2010). The depiction of Western greed outside its frontiers redefines the concept of “Otherness” which is now characterized as a robot-like being. One can understand Cameron's saying, in the interview given to Bouzereau' documentary on *Avatar*, that “We are the *aliens*”. (Bouzereau, Grane (producer), 2010).

Both Conrad's and Cameron's description of this commercial exploitation in the colonial area creates a global imagining above and beyond commerce. It operates, just like what M.L. Pratt has said about science, as “a rich and multifaceted mirror onto which all Europe [the West] could project itself as an expanding “planetary process” minus the competition, exploitation, and violence being carried out by commercial and political expansion and colonial domination” (Pratt, 1992: 34). It appears that the third noticed paradox of *Avatar* is this: Cameron's deployment of US high-technological advancement in a futurist setting in the movie is, in a way, to celebrate the *current* American hegemony.



**Figure 1: Smart Art illustration representing the Imperialist Continuity in Cameron's**

#### **IV- Some Remarks Concerning the Indigenous Resistance.**

In this section, I will try to comment some of *Avatar's* shots depicting Pandora's natives as well as their resistance to the American futurist expedition. It is in order to shed light on how the “external other” is still fixed in the 9/11 Hollywoodian cinema even if this latter asserts its anti-imperialist position. Comparing *Avatar's* depiction of otherness to *Heart of Darkness's* imagery, I intend to show the continuity of the imperial vision of non-Westerners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywoodian movie.

In representing the Na'vi, James Cameron wants to give priority to three important elements which are primitiveness, exoticism, and spirituality. These three elements have contributed to create or to invent “the other”. Edward Said explains this “other” as

[...] almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences [...] the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (Said, 1991: 2).

At the level of images, the Na'vi are Cameron's invention that he uses to (re)define and to reassess the Western moral values. In doing so, the invented image of “the other” becomes what Raymond Lee describes as a “singular, faceless entity whose “membres” are indistinguishable from one another” (Lee, 1999:59).

While Conrad's has *de-voiced* the natives—Marlow keeps describing them as “black shapes” (Conrad, 1995: 24) and even using animalistic images like “crawling” and “squatting” to report their language—Cameron has created unified, “singular” natives, indistinguishable from one another. For instance, one can remark this in the scene where they are gathered to pray/chant in unison where one has the impression of seeing one single indistinct body. This is exemplified in the following shot taken from the last scene of the

movie.



**Picture 9: The Representation of a Prayer**

The blue color suggests an exotic landscape which stimulates the audience's imagination and helps them to escape the industrial urban polluted cities. The naked and almost indistinct bodies amplify the characteristic of primitiveness. Besides, the Na'vi are in a state of communication and communion with Eywa, the Great Spirit of Pandora. It demonstrates the spiritual characteristic of the Na'vi.

It is important to notice that Cameron's use of innocence and spirituality embodied within the natives is to contrast it with the Western state of mental delirium and degeneration and to show the need to recover from it. The portrayal of his film's protagonist as a paraplegic American soldier who has regained his walking capacity in Pandora exemplifies significantly this need to *regenerate*.

Ultimately, the exotic depiction of the “external other” by Cameron's maintains the

continuity of the Orient/West binary opposition. The Na'vi are another version of the creation imaginings of the West. This is corroborated by the fact that Augustine wrote a book about them. This allows me to say that the Na'vi are what Foucault calls “objects of knowledge” within a system of a hegemonic power (Foucault, 1980: 60).

The scenes depicting the resistance of the indigenous amplify the *clichés* that they are dependent on outside help to oppose an effective resistance. While the Na'vi warriors are epitomizing Rousseau's “the noble savage” (Trinder, 2012: 3) to contrast with the greedy US futurist marines (who have lost their duty which is fighting for freedom), they still need their imposed Western master to regain their lands. Zizek comments the film saying that “the film teaches us that the only choice the aborigines have is to be saved by the human beings or to be destroyed by them” (Zizek, 2010: 45-6). It seems that Cameron is repeating and fortifying the stereotypes already existing in the traditional American literature like the one of James Fenimore Cooper and his “Noble Red Man” (Meredith, 2012: 15).



**Picture 10: Norm Spellman defending Pandora's Aborigines.**

This shot is taken from the scene where the final battle is taken place. Norms Spellman's Avatar is fighting against the US forces of Colonel Quaritch. Contrary to Sully, he keeps his

European clothes and fights with an automatic rifle. It epitomizes the Western assistance of the indigenous resistance. Besides, and taking into consideration that Spellman is a scientific researcher in Pandora, I may say that this shot represents the hegemonic power's "re-appropriation" of the natives' resistance.

It must be noted that, in many Oscar-winning Hollywoodian movies, the indigenous resistance is led or assisted by the white American male. One can notice this in Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and in Edward Zwick's samurai drama *The Last of the Samurai* (2003) where the hero leads battles against his own "Western" race, and helps the indigenous resistance to be a success.

As far as the indigenous resistance is concerned, while the scenes represent high-advanced aesthetic images that amplify the image of "the noble savage", its sequences reproduce the same imperialist vision of non-Westerners.

## **V-Conclusion.**

Through the present chapter, I have discussed *Avatar* and *Heart of Darkness* with the Gramscian notion of "hegemonic power" and Pratt's notion of "the anti-conquest" hero. Focusing on the traditional colonial paradigms of power (the scientific, the commercial, and the military powers), I have discussed the reasons and the consequences of these elements on "the outside other" but, more importantly, on the "internal other". The latter is more affected by the military and commercial elements of power, ie., the more these paradigms take place in the colonial space, the more the Western self is affected and loses his human values.

James Cameron's anti-colonialist claim is a paradoxical assertion. I have discussed this claim as a first point in this chapter. Comparing his movie to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, I have noticed many similarities. The direct colonialism embodied within the concept of economy and of the military paradigms are used by both Conrad and Cameron to denounce imperialism. Still, these two elements, which are representing the traditional colonial power

are contradicted by the anti-conquest protagonist (Marlow and Sully) who passively continues to maintain a more and effective discourse of imperialism (*see* figure 1, p.77). In *Avatar*, the anti-conquest protagonist is the result of these three entities of powers which, even-though he fights against them, he regains his position as a leader. So, taking into considerations the different examples and demonstrations that I have used to verify this, Cameron's *Avatar* comes to appear to be “an anti-conquest movie”. It is enough to take into consideration the story, (like the one narrated by Marlow) which centres on the protagonist’s experience to confirm this.

I have also commented some shots taken from *Avatar* to question the indigenous resistance. In the first place, I have remarked that the Na'vi, as a representation of the non-Westerns, are Cameron's (Western) invention to reassess the Western self, characterized by guilt and degeneration. So, the idea of inventing them is, most importantly, to help to Western self to regain its place. Then, using some shots taken from the movie, I have shown that Cameron has reproduced the same *cliché* of the oppressed native who asks for the white man's assistance and guidance.

Finally, I have used Zizek's “liberal position” that distinguishes Cameron's protagonist, Jake Sully (a Hollywood exception) from Conrad's Marlow. In doing this, I have the intention to use this final point as a bridge to the third and final chapter.

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## **Chapter Three:**

### ***Avatar: “The Eternal Return of the Same”***

Exoticism is the aestheticizing means by which the pain of that expansion is converted into spectacle, to culture in the service of Empire. (Rivto *in* Huggan, 2001: 14)

## **I- Introduction:**

The present chapter will discuss *Avatar* in the light of the idea of the American global hegemony and monopoly imperialism. Considering Cameron's movie as *spectacle*, I intend to focus on two main elements: the first one is symbolic and it deals with Myths. The second one is aesthetic and it deals with Exoticism. Contrary to the previous chapters where the film is compared to two British literary works that serve as the marks of two historical points of the British Empire, I intend to analyze first why Cameron's movie, like the majority of Hollywoodian films, is constructed on some Western mythical figures. Besides, because myths develop themselves only in "an eternal present" (Barthes, 1957: 50), I wish to analyse in *Avatar* how they work to shape and to strengthen the American ideal self, and the consolidation of Pax Americana. I will also consider the exoticist system that, according to Graham Huggan's *Post-Colonial Exotic* (2001) works to manufacture Otherness and possess the core of its essence (Ibid: 15-6). After this, I will try to show how Otherness is then transformed into a market product within a global system of the Hollywood industry.

One cannot contest the fact that *Avatar* is a Western artistic product and, specifically, an American textual production. It embodies a set of imagery elements in its subtext that maintain the "Euro-American society in search for its moral self and one that holds ambivalent feelings towards the capitalist system to which it belongs" (Trinder, 2012: 68). In fact, the text of Cameron's movie is based on the "destiny" of the rudimentary character, Jake Sully, who has gone into a futurist world in the universe where there is no temporality, only "eternal present", and takes the side of the aborigines while, in the meantime, he rebels against the corrupted and robotic American corporation.

Having said this, it is useful to underline two points that the film's subtext is proposing. The first point takes into consideration the deep need for a return into wilderness,

the need for spiritual guidance, and the need for the *use* of the primitive “outside other” in post 9/11 Hollywoodian production. *Avatar* serves, as Anne-Marie Bidaud has remarked in speaking about the American movies, as a *corpus* that defines both the past and the present of the United States of America (Bidaud, 1994: 14-5). The second point is related to the quest for the American conception of freedom. The main character, working as a form of knowledge (Said, 1991:21), builds his own freedom, to use Robert Young's words, “through the comprehension and incorporation of the Other” (Young, 1995: 44). In consideration of these undelined points, one can remark that the Western self counts on an eternal present of myths and on the stereotypical images of the Other to reinvent its own hegemonic authority.

To do this, *Avatar* calls for the myth of the Phoenix and the image of the Messiah to symbolize resurrection of the Ideal Self; the image of the Promised land or *La Terre d'Abondance* that tends to create hope and optimism (Bidaud, 1994: 15); and the image of Pocahontas to seal the masculinist characteristic of the “Homo Americanus”.

As it is said from the very beginning of this chapter, my aim is to try to shed light on these imagery elements that work to fortify the cyclical process of the “Western self” (Sully) who plunges “into the wild” and goes native, like Kurtz (Bennet, 2012:20) to reaffirm his master identity. Speaking about this, Carl Jung's remark is a pertinent one. He says that the growth of civilization and culture consists in a

[...] progressive subjugation of the animal [...] separation from his instinctual nature inevitably plunges civilized man into the conflict between conscious and unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and faith, a split that becomes pathological the moment his consciousness is no longer able to neglect or suppress his instinctual side (Jung, 1988: 93).

However, and in consideration of *Avatar's* scenario and his “Happy End” shots, it seems to me that it is rather Prospero whom Sully reincarnates.

To realize this task, the present chapter is divided into two main sections. The first one deals with the conception of the American hero in the Hollywoodian movies in regards of the

American cultural heritage. I try to study the use of Western mythical images, like the Phoenix, in their relation to the building of the American hero's identity. I will use the shots taken from *Avatar* for illustrations and interpretations. In the second section, I will study *Avatar's* and the exoticist system. In this section, I will try to show how Otherness is transformed into a consuming commodities for the audience that I will call *spectators*. To do this, I will put emphasis on three points. Firstly, I will focus on the rudimentary character and the “going native” idea to show how the “other is dispossessed from his otherness. I will draw a brief comparison with David Thoreau's *Walden* (1857) to study the shift in the American cultural heritage in the question related to the American identity. Secondly, I will study the female character Neytiri at the light of Pocahontas's fable. Thirdly, and as a final point, I will study Pandora as reterritorialized setting for Otherness. Borrowing the term “reterritorialization” from Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995), I will try to show how Pandora, as a new Western system of power, functions as an absorbing machine of Otherness.

## **II- The American Hero and the Liberal Position**

Hollywood is about more than a simple movie; it is one component of an all-encompassing images of “*capitalist Americana*, and one that has partly reflected the wants, needs and anxieties of American society for over 100 years” (Trinder, 2012: 1. Mine emphasis). In *American Cultural/American Cinema*, John Belton defines a Hollywoodian film as a “coherent and consistent set of aesthetic and stylistic conventions that audiences readily understand” (Belton, 2011:11). Indeed, the socio-political link between this institution and the American society appears undeniable. In this sense, a Hollywoodian movie gets its primary sources from the American society which is considered as a melting point of European cultures. These characteristics are generally embodied within the main protagonist of the movie who is, in turn, the main element upon which the American society can

recognize itself.

The American hero can be seen as structure of a Western knowledge upon which the film's text is constructed. As a matter of fact, in many Hollywoodian movies, we see him like a well-built man, very intelligent, having the duty to defend freedom, and a duty to save the world from total destruction. He is portrayed fighting in China, Russia, Vietnam, and many other places considered as “sub-developed nations”; countries full of exotic settings and mysterious costumes; and even in other planets in the cosmos where various kind of aliens are threatening human beings. Names like Rambo (1982), Indiana Jones (1981-1984), and Dunbar (1991) who choose to fight for the Rights of the “oppressed people” around the world.

During the 1980s, the American hero is conceived as the portrayal of the WASP, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, (Bidaud, 1994: 182). In doing this, Hollywood puts forward the idea that the USA is essentially white and should be represented by Euro-American actors. It is also during the 1980s that Hollywoodian film production witnessed the emergence of the “Primitivist” cinema (Thomas, 2005: 451). This has been described by Nicolas Thomas in his article *The Primitivist and the Postcolonial* as “the attribution of an exemplary status to simple or archaic ways of life that revalues its lead character [a white character] as something to be upheld” (Ibid). During this period, the Outside Other tended to be portrayed in the ancient colonial dichotomies irrationality and inferiority versus rationality and superiority.

However, since the middle of the 1990s and the 2000s, there has been a total change in the film's text and the manner how the aboriginal people are depicted. Trinder remarks that the new *répertoire* of Hollywood “romanticized the 'native' cultures and appeared to denounce the excesses, lifestyle, moral codes and imperialistic practices of US capitalism” (Trinder, 2012: 16). Additionally, the flat character appears always as a savior who, serving generally as the main story's narrator, he (re)discovers that his destiny is to fight for freedom, and to save the natives from threats like Communism (Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea (1975-9), Red

Army in Russia—Cold War), Islamist Terrorists...etc

In this sense, *Avatar* is likely the model that belongs to this last category of films. James Cameron considers his 2009 movie as a piece entertainment that stimulates a global consciousness about what is happening around the world. It serves as social criticism.

The question remains, 'how much does a piece of entertainment—a movie—actually change the way people act?' One can hope that if people feel that twinge of conscience, that little sense of responsibility, it can only be a movement in the right direction. I just don't want to feel that I'm going through this process of making these movies just entertaining people and that it has no higher purpose. I'll settle for a small change (Cameron, *in* Bennett, 2012: 2).

Taking into consideration what has been said by James Cameron, *Avatar* is an “exotic film” that André Bazin defines like “the Western mind as it were taking over a far-off civilization and interpreting it after its own fashion” (Bazin, 1967: 155). In other words, the world's political and economic complexities are considered as the United States of America's problems and should intervene to solve them in her own way.

*Avatar* is containing too many images that are working as a subtext. These images are contradicting the message that Cameron wants the audience to consider. First, there is the image of the Messiah which is remarked by many critics (Cohen (2009) Brooks (2010), Desjardins (2010)) In fact, it is appeared in many shots where the main character, Jake Sully, take the posture of the Christ. Second, there are images of the American Eagle that stands for American hegemony (Desjardin,2010). Third, the spirits is also a characteristic of the American movies (Bidaud, 1994: 215) and deserve to be analyzed as elements of power and to see their conceptions.

## **II-1- The Messiah Complex**

I have borrowed the above title form the article published by the New York Times on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010, David Brooks entitles his critique *The Messiah Complex*. Brooks considers

James Cameron's *Avatar* as a movie which eulogizes War. He argues that “ it's just escapism, obviously, but benevolent romanticism can be just as condescending as “the malevolent kind” (Brooks, 2010). As a matter of fact, Brooks remark that

It rests on the stereotype that white people are rationalist and technocratic while colonial victims are spiritual and athletic. It rests on the assumption that nonwhites need the White Messiah to lead their crusades. It rests on the assumption that illiteracy is the path to grace. It also creates a sort of two-edged cultural imperialism. Natives can either have their history shaped by cruel imperialists or benevolent ones, but either way, they are going to be supporting actors in our journey to self-admiration (Ibid)

As a first elementary remark, I can add to what Brook has said that the portrayal of the rudimentary character as a savior who comes to Pandora to save them plunges Cameron's movie into the traditional imperialist discourse.

The Image of the “White Messiah” depicts the Eternal Present of the myths upon which the subtext is constructed. Indeed, the image of the Messiah suggests the divine as well as the heavenly innocence. Jesus Christ, in Christianity, suffered for the sins of his people. Besides, and more importantly, it demonstrates the idea of Resurrection. In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes says that the myth functions as a depoliticized *parole* that functions in the axis of the Eternal Present. For him, the myth

[...] ne nie pas les choses, sa fonction est au contraire d'en parler; simplement, il les purifie, les innocente, les fonde en nature et en éternité (Barthes, 1957: 239).

[Myth] does not deny things, his function is, in the contrary, to speak about them; simply, it purifies them, giving them the appearance of innocence, and founds them in nature and in eternity ( translation is mine).

In *Avatar* , The myth of the Messiah is portrayed by Jake Sully. It suggests the *noble* and even the divine mission of the rudimentary character in Pandora. Featured like a futurist US Forces, the Marines in in this planet have forgotten their duty to fight for freedom and

now are becoming greedy in plundering Pandora. Sully has to work for the restitution of the order of things and “punish” them for their lust and greed. Additionally, he reincarnates the posture of a savior and guides the Na’vi into “light”. Meredith remarks that “Sully’s message is, in essence, “you’re lost without me”. They are [Na’vi] the children, and he will lead/parent them” ( Meredith, 2012: 13). In this sense, it seems that *Avatar*’s main character is reincarnating Prospero in *The Tempest*, especially in his way of punishing and attributing his brother Antonio and offering to everyone present in “his” island a second chance. Ferdinand, Miranda’s lover and King Alonso’s son, thanks Prospero, considering him as a second-chance-giver saying: “[...] I have received a second life; and a second father [...]” (Shakespeare, 2012, V-i: 82). Thus, the image of the Messiah in *Avatar* perpetuates the idea that the White man’s mission in this world, to take Peter Roy’s words, is to re-invent civilization (Roy, 2000: 262). It seems that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), where the main character informs, instructs the natives, are re-incarnated in *Avatar*.

However, contrary to Robinson and Prospero, Sully goes native and does not return to civilization at the end of the story. In fact, he becomes Toruk Macto, the divine leader and warrior of the Na’vi, and fights against his people. In the scene where Sully fights with Colonel Quaritch, this latter says “what is like to betray your own race?” (Cameron, 2009) and the former produces an “animal” sound to show his complete integration with indigenous population of Pandora. Here, Sully resembles more to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Kurtz is like what has been defined by Jung in *The Undiscovered Self* (1988); his long isolation in the wilderness awakens the atavistic memory of savage passions and brutal instincts (Meyers, 2001: 93). In doing so, Kurtz reverses the evolutionary process of Man. In Ian Watt’s view,

[...]many had thought that man’s last evolutionary leap would be forwards and up into the bright throne that he had emptied: Kurtz’s destiny suggests that the leap would be in fact to be down and back into darkness” (Watt, 1996: 43).

Referring to Camus's *L'Homme Révolté* (1951), Ian Watt considers Kurtz as “a savage god” (Ibid:44)



**Picture 11: Representation of *Avatar's* principal character, Jake Sully.**

These shots are taken from *Avatar*: **up-left**: Jake Sully lying on the ground, wearing a black tee-shirt and the American Eagle is on it. He seems unconscious and beaten. The Extended arms suggest the first image of the “Messiah”. On the contrary, the shot (image) on **the right** suggests his “resurrection”. One can notice the light surrounding over his Avatar-body (the spirit of Eywa), and the posture of his arms. Moreover, the native character (Neytiri) seems to be in a state of amazement and admiration. The **down-left** image shows Sully in his wheeling-chair, wearing the same shirt as the one in the first shot where the American Eagle is painted.

In consideration of this, *Avatar's* flat character, who is an American hero, represent both Prospero and Kurtz. He is the consequence of two distinct conceptions and periods of colonialism. On the one hand, Sully is portrayed as the the bringer of light and salvation (see the above picture). In this sense, just like Prospero who has instructed Caliban and liberated

Ariel from Sycorax, Sully liberates the Na'vi from total destruction. On the other hand, Jake Sully becomes totally savage where, in the final scene of the movie, he is transformed under the Tree of Soul into a Na'vi. Just like Kurtz who has married a black African woman to seal his being as “primitivist” character, Sully marries Neytiri and becomes the Na'vi's “savage god”.

Having said this, the image of the Messiah in Cameron's movie represents the the Resurrection of the ancient system of Western power. Kristen Meredith considers that Sully “is an exemplary Orientalist. As he walks around in Pandora and records Na'vi 'idiosyncrasies' into a video recorder he inadvertently emphasis their passivity in relation to the humans [and himself]” (Meredith, 2012: 13). It is not wholly coincidental that the term “avatar” itself is from Sanskrit “Avatara”. In Hindu mythology, Avatara is a deity which is reincarnated/resurrected to remedy difficulties. Sully, in this sense, is just white American hero whose destiny is to lead the *oppressed* Na'vi into freedom.

## **II-2- The Myth of the Phoenix.**

My grandfather's grandfather was Toruk Macto—Rider of Last Shadow. Toruk chose him. It has only happened five times since the time of the First Songs. Toruk Macto was mighty—he brought all the clans together in a time of great sorrow. All Na'vi people know this story (Cameron, 2009).

The myth of the Phoenix is omnipresent within *Avatar*. In many mythologies (Greek, Egyptian,..etc), the Phoenix has the appearance of an eagle which, after five hundred years of his life, it builds a nest and inflames itself upon it. But, after three days, it rises completely from its ashes as a new one. Accordingly, many historians think that this myth symbolizes eternal power and glory.

As a myth, the Phoenix symbolizes the “cyclical return” to the beginnings of the world where everything has its own foundation. In *Avatar*, it is the “Toruk” that stands for this myth. It is described by Neytiri as an “almighty creature” that once he is tamed, he can gather

and unify all the Na'vi's tribes in Pandora. The fact that lead character has tamed it suggests the idea that Sully gets his “almighty powers” to govern Pandora (Cameron, 2009). So, Toruk(the phoenix) shows the divine duty of the “subject-who-sees” that he finds only in a distant place that depicts the very beginning of History and Time.



**Picture 12: The image of the Phoenix in *Avatar***

The above shots demonstrate the myth of the Phoenix in the image of Toruk. In the first one (left), Sully rides the Toruk and dominates all the Na'vi that seem to be astonished. The natives, just before the coming of Toruk, are praying. It suggests that the coming of Sully riding the Toruk as a “wish” or a prayer (calling for help) that comes true. Addition to this, one can notice the light upon Sully and the Toruk that suggests goodness and fortifies the image of the Messiah. The second shot (right) contrasts with the first one. The Toruk is pictured going away to the horizon at sunset. Toruk is released by Sully after he wins the battle against Quaritch's forces. Having done this, Sully resembles Prospero who, at the “happy end” of the play, he gives away his charms after becoming once again Duke of Milan.

In the Epilogue of *The Tempest*, Prospero says “Now my charms are all o'erthrown, and what strength I have's mine own” (Shakespeare, 2012: 95).

### **II-3- The spirits:**

As it belongs to Science Fiction genre, *Avatar* uses fantastic elements to create an environment of wonder and enchantment. The spiritual creatures of Pandora are among these elements that contribute to strengthen the lead character in his quest of self-affirmation of his master identity.

Functioning like nymphs and other good spirits in the Greek mythology, the spirits in *Avatar* “serves to reconcile humans to the unpleasanteries of life” (Segal, 2004: 126). In fact, after having replaced his brother, Sully has found a climate of big tensions between both the scientific and economic departments and the natives. Sully has the task then to rebuild a peaceful relation with them, so he has to infiltrate the Na'vi tribe. However, once lost in the woods of Pandora, Sully is saved by a wood spirit which flies over Neytiri's arrow's blade. It is in this scene where Sully is shown, for the first time, as protected by an “invisible” power. It suggests that the spirits serve as an element of power which justifies the rudimentary character's “will” to exercise power relations with the natives.

The use of the spirits in *Avatar* works to show the innocence and the purity of the principal character who, as an element of western knowledge, passes not as a colonialist character but as a savior. In the Western cultures, spirits are enchanted beings that work only for the service and the triumph of the good. In *The Tempest*, Ariel serves Prospero because he is a “wise” and “noble” man. Moreover, the spirits like Iris, Ceres, and Juno speak with musicality and display to the audience the world of innocence and purity, and celebrate the marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda. Words like “harvest”, “blessings”, “foison plenty”, and “joys” are repeatedly said to intensify the exotic image of the place. Considering Ferdinand's wish “to live here ever, so rare a wonder'd father and wife makes this place

Paradise” ( Shakespeare, 2012, IV-i: 74) is enough to remark not only the “the colonialist” will to possess the island but also the elements that justifies this will.

Finally, it is important to notice that by using mythological figures, Cameron's reproduces almost the same structure of the text as those of Shakespeare’s time. The fantastic elements, like the image of the phoenix and the spirits, contribute to give not only to the story a sense of wonder which enhance the curiosity of the audience to know and to discover what is beyond the horizon (*see* Chapter One) but also to overlap the imperialist cause with a divine duty which consists in bringing light into darkness. Anne-Marie Bidaud remarks that

le recours au mythes, dans l'idéologie Américaine, permet [...] de sortir constamment de l'histoire, de faire de ses composantes décontextualisées une permanence, alors que chacune d'elle peut être datée, inscrite dans un cadre factuel précis (Bidaud, 1994: 183)

The image of the white Messiah, the phoenix, and the spirits are among the elements that, by being mythical elements, guarantee the cyclical return of the same white master and work on the consolidation of the Western imperialist discourse.

### **III- Reinventing *Walden*: Exoticism as a system**

In the present section, I will try to link *Avatar* with some American literary heritage in order to see the exceptional characteristics of the American Imperialist discourse that mark the difference from the one used in the “English literary of Empire”. I will try to study the exotic elements of the movie as a market product in a global imperialist economy. By exoticism, I am referring to the definition given by Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), where he defines the exotic as a complex system of power that “describes [...] a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which manufactures effectively otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery” (Ibid: 13, Huggan's emphasis). Besides, it demonstrates a political as much as an aesthetic practice. Yet, this politics, characterized by its global expansionism, “is often concealed, hidden beneath layers of mystification” (Ibid: 14). By

doing this, the created the objects of knowledge (Na'vi, Pandora, and other creatures) are now becoming products to help the Western audience to forget about the different damages which has been done to them. As I intend to demonstrate, contributes to marking the shift from the traditional notion of Imperialism to the current American imperialism based mainly on a global mode of mass-market consumption which absorb Otherness within its system.

### **III-1- Going Native**

Analyzing Michael Mann's adapted film *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), Bidaud considers what she sees as the appropriation of the Amerindian culture within the mainstream white American one. She says: "Pour vivre dans l'intimité des blancs, un bon indien doit être un faux indien" (Ibid: 183). "in order to live within the Whitemen's intimacy, a good Indian should be a false Indian" (translation is mine). One can grasp two important points here. The first one is that there is but a representation of natives through the knowledge and understanding of the white man. Second, the principal character, in his quest of uncorrupted life, incorporates all the characteristics of the natives and tends to represent them best. In doing so, the native is serving just as a piece of furniture and he is generally reduced to silence. Thus, while the "Other" becomes a market product of the white man's imaginings, the latter becomes the consumer of these products.

*Avatar* is 237 million dollars movie (Pattern (2009) in Trinder, 2012: 20). Regarding its worldwide success, one can imagine how the "going native" story is still a very lucrative and interesting theme among the Twenty-First century audience. Considering today's global pollution, the chemical threats, and over-urbanization, one can understand why the movie is attractive. After being *space-shipped* to this exotic planet, the main protagonist who does not like his own "civilized area" sympathizes with the original inhabitants of Pandora and goes native at the end of movie. This is quite an "over-used" story in the Hollywoodian cinematographic production, where the main character rebels against his own people and

integrates the spiritual and “primitive” Amerindians (Trinder (2012), Bennet (2012)). The “going native” Hollywoodian productions gathers many movies: *Pathfinder* (2009), *The Last of the Samurai* (2003), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Little Big Man* (1970), *Broken Arrow* (1950)...etc. In all these productions, the main character is portrayed as being frustrated in the civilized world where he belongs. Then, he becomes marveled at the purity and innocence of the aborigines and becomes one of them (Ebersole, 1995: 193-4). He finds happiness and something worthy to fight for. More importantly, he becomes the defender of their rights and, *de facto*, their leader. Moreover, the exotic elements overlap him with the image of a “noble warrior” who fights for freedom. In doing this, the exotic elements of the movie become fetishist commodities (Huggan, 2001: 16) that urges the consumerist audience to be in the place of the main character.

The American cultural heritage is built on this binary construction between the natives and the *arrived* white settlers (Ebersole, 1995: 190-200). In fact, long before the cinematographic industry and the emergence of “the Western movie genre”, many literary discourses have been produced, centering on a white character's life within the area of the American aborigines. David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) demonstrates this fact. This transcendentalist “New England” writer calls for the necessity to go back to nature to save the essence of man from different corruptions of the industrial world. For Thoreau, the corrupted industrial city life has hindered the civilized man from attaining the state of real freedom.

It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them; or even to look over the old day-books of the merchants, to see what it was that men lost commonly bought at the stores, what they stored, that is, what are the grossest groceries. For the improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence; as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors (Thoreau, 1910: 10).

Thoreau constantly compares the “tax-payer” civilized man with the self-reliant Indian. While the former's world is regulated by Time, the latter's life is considered timeless and continually

present. In the chapter entitled *Sounds*, Thoreau narrates how he sees himself in the wilderness.

My days were not days of the week, bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, nor they minced into hours and fretted by the ticking of a clock; for I lived like *the Puri Indians*, of whom it is said “for yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow they have only one word, and they express the variety of meaning by pointing backward for yesterday, forward for to-morrow, and overhead for the passing day”. This was sheer idleness to my fellow-townsmen, no doubt (Thoreau, 1910: 94. Mine italics).

Reference to Indians is significant in the above passage. In fact, it shows not only the need of the civilized man (Thoreau) to flee from the city but also how the identity of the Indian and his model of life is transformed into a desired exotic product for the Western man. By seeing himself like “the Puri Indians”, Thoreau places himself at the center of the blank area (Wilderness) leaving the natives at the periphery and the margin of the the story. By doing this, his narration dispossesses the “Puri Indians” from their cultural differences. Thus, as it has been remarked by Bidaud, the narrator is the subject who, in order to live within the whitemen's intimacy, a good Indian should be a false Indian (Bidaud, 1992: 183).

Moreover, Thoreau reports to the American audience of his transformed self once he is in wilderness. Like Cameron who wants to take the American audience into a journey looking for, to use Zizek's words, “post-industrial authenticity” (Zizek, 2010: 101) and away from the polluted city life, Thoreau narrates his “going native” experience. In one of the passages, Thoreau seems to be thrilled and amazed about the savage being he has become.

I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and I was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wilderness which he represented [...] found myself ranging the woods, like a half starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me (Thoreau, 2010: 142-3).

This passage shows something very weighty in sense. Wilderness is *exoticized* and transformed into a product of temptation and desire for the whiteman's appetite for curiosity and wonder. Consequently, the American culture demarcates from this point. The notion of

“savage” is transformed from its traditional meaning that denotes barbarity, cruelty, and superstition to a fashionable product— *un produit de prestige*— and becomes absorbed within the the desire of the white American system of thinking.

James Cameron reproduces within the characteristics of *Avatar*'s protagonist the mechanism of manufacturing Otherness as an exotic commodity. The centrality of the text on the Sully's journey and his therapeutic transformation (walking again..etc) lays the American hegemonic power which, to use Ahmed's words, is more significant than the colonialism of the past (Ahmed, 1992: 222). Taking into consideration what has been just said, I can say that *Avatar* reinvents Thoreau's *Walden*. By expressing the need to reassess the Western values and to take nature as the best teacher, Cameron creates a “going native” character who finds a remedy within a spiritual and an exotic “alien” society. The savage native represents the uncorrupted character and the personification of natural goodness ( Ellingson, 2001:1). Contrary to the Na'vi who cannot go white and cannot afford a chance to get into the “civilized area”, the main character has the privilege to do it and to explore the exotic area. He functions more like a tourist, craving for exoticism and wonder. Consequently, exoticism is operating here as a mechanism of aesthetic substitution which “replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity” (Said, 1994: 159). The Na'vi are then, like the Puri Indians, absorbed within the principal character's quest for pleasure and happiness while they remain silenced and fixed. So, today's multiculturalism “experiences the Other deprived of its Otherness” (Zizek, 2002: 11). At the same time, the audience, described by Graham Huggan as “consumerist spectators”, are absorbed within the lead character's exotic journey and, marveled by the display of exotic images, they almost forget about the disastrous and spoiling deeds of the “civilized man”.

### **III-2- Pocahontas is back like an Amazon**

Another exotic element in *Avatar* is the female native character Neytiri. Falling in love

with the main protagonist, Jake Sully, she is portrayed like what Elizabeth Bells defines as the “performative enactment of gender and cultural codes for feminine sexuality” (Bell, 1995: 120). In fact, Cameron's movie centers also on the affective relation between Sully and Neytiri which is highly romanticized, producing a significant fusion between a “primitive” character and a civilized man who goes native. Considering this demarcation, I cannot anticipate saying that *Avatar's* text coincides with the well-known legend of Pocahontas. This comparison is already hinted by Trinder (2012) and Meredith (2012). Yet, in both texts, there is a primarily tension between the ideas of culture and nature which is dissolved with the upcoming love between Neytiri and Sully, as it is the same between Pocahontas and Captain John Smith. As an Anglo-Saxon creation, Pocahontas's voluptuous body “reflects the Western man's vision on exotic women: she has the body of a Western woman but has the exotic features that make her other than Western women” (Bothaiser, 2008: 9). In Eric Goldberg's eponymous film (1995) one can find all these sensual characteristics. This creates a binary opposition between masculinity and femininity which is, in this sense, a traditional colonial discourse.

When one compares her to Pocahontas, what Neytiri has as a capital difference is that she is portrayed as a warrior. Here, Neytiri has not only the voluptuous Pocahontas's body but she reincarnates the Amazons, the mythic women who “were created in order to be represented repeatedly being defeated by male Greek heroes” (Merales, 2007: 96). In fact, in many Greek utensils, the Amazons are portrayed kneeling before “the victorious Hercules” marking the domination of the civilized masculinist man over them (Ibid). Hence, Neytiri is a combination of two Western colonialist stereotypes: a sexually exotic woman and an “underworld barbarian” who ought to be pacified (Ibid: 53-4). By mixing the two stereotypes, *Avatar* tames the female character Neytiri and sets her to serve the cause of the

principal character. As she is the daughter of the tribe's chief, Sully has succeeded into a leading position within her society. Besides the fact of giving him an access to leadership, Neytiri satisfies his sexual needs, showing *recognition* and submission to him and not to Tsu'tey, the native warrior who is supposed to marry her.



**Picture 13: Sully and Neytiri.**

The above shot shows the Na'vi's recognition of Sully as a Toruk Macto. Neytiri is holding him his arm with her “alien” hand (four fingers) while Sully keeps his human hands and holds her arm. This demonstrates the fact that even though he goes native, Sully maintain the characteristics of his own race that demarcate him from the other Na'vi.

To sum up, I can say that *Avatar's* portrayal of the feminine character Neytiri consolidates the vision of imperialism and assures the continuity of the exotic women by manufacturing it at a large scale by Hollywood industry. On the one hand, the interracial love between Sully and Neytiri intensifies the *eroticization* of the contact zone (colonized area). This is a traditional colonialist narrative that goes back to the first Western accounts. One can find this complete female submission in John Stedman's *Narrative* (1796), François Le Vaillant's *Voyages dans L'interieur de l'Afrique* (1790), and many anti-conquest writers (Pratt, 1992: 86-7). For instance, in his famous book, Stedman narrates his love affair with a native

Joanna who, once he decides to return to England “throw herself at his feet”,(Stedman, 1988: 62) offering him body and soul. The state of the native female complete submission epitomizes the objectification of Otherness. On the other hand, the reproduction of the myth of the Amazons plunges the image of the Other into a cyclical and timeless reproduction of the same stereotype. Consequently, *Avatar* transforms and converts the paradigms of a submissive sensuality as well as of an exotic mystery into a cosumerist product for the global society of spectacle.

### **III- 3- Pandora: a Reterritorialized Territory**

*Avatar* is the “the expression of the imperial fantasy of discovery and conquest of a Lost Eden” (Meredith, 2012: 14). It portrays a world—Pandora—with the values and appearance of a utopia and renders this mythical landscape available to spectators. The explicitness of this image in Cameron's movie shows that imperial fantasies remain popular in the twenty-first century. The appeal of the Lost Eden awaiting colonization thus continues to be deployed in Hollywood industry, and “no amount of postcolonial rhetoric has managed to deconstruct it” (Ibid). However, I suggest that this popularity in a globalist world that uses the paradigms of edenic images modifies the traditional mechanism of “Empire”. The representation of utopia in Hollywoodian films like *Avatar* work to pave the way for a system of signs where spectators from all over the world are going to recognize themselves within it, and be incorporated within this system (Young, 1995: 44). By doing this, it “excludes” all what is outside this globalist system.

In what follows, I will try to demonstrate how this whirlpool system that Deleuze and Guattari stamps by the name of the *Capitalist Machine* (1972). Robert J. C. Young introduces this term into the field of the Postcolonial theory saying that

where capitalism differs from earlier forms such as despotism is that it does not simply encode and therefore control desire: it has to operate through a double movement because it must first of all do away the institutions of cultures that have already been developed. The basic need of capitalism is to engineer an encounter

between the deterritorialized wealth of capital and the labour capacity of the deterritorialized worker. The reduction of everything, including production and labour, to the abstract value of money enables it to decode flows and deterritorialize the socius. Having achieved a universal form of exchange, it then *reterritorializes*—institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginery, or symbolic territorialities such as states, nations or families (Young, 1995: 169, Mine Emphasis).

In relation to *Avatar*, Pandora is this “symbolic territory” that is given to the dispossessed and the deterritorialized Other. It is an “imaginery” planet where Otherness, recognizing itself in the Na'vi, is canalized and annihilated.

Since its release in December 2009, *Avatar* has gained “unexpected political significance in different areas of the world” (Tang, 2011: 167). In fact, in many countries, indigenous people protested by comparing themselves to Na'vi and that they are all Pandora's children (ibid). In January 2010, *Avatar* was banned from Chinese cinemas by government's decision. Speculation was that *Avatar* is based on the film's political sensitivity (Bates, 2010). Many Chinese moviegoers drew a parallel between the dislocation of the Na'vi and what China did to some farmers, depriving them from their lands.

During the winter of 2010, in the West Bank of the Jordan River, some Palestinian activists dressed up like Na'vi, painting all their bodies with blue color, to protest against the Israeli occupation. The demonstration was inspired by Liana Badr, a Palestinian documentary filmmaker in Europe who was “so moved by the Film's similarity to the Palestinian experience” and their dislocation by the Israeli government (Franzan, 2010).

In the Amazon rainforest, some chiefs of the indigenous tribes wrote a letter in April 2010 to *Avatar's* producer, James Cameron, “asking him to help in their battle to stop the building of a dam proposed by the Brazilian government” (Duke, 2010). These tribe leaders believe that a project of this magnitude “would displace indigenous people, devastate a large amount of rainforest and damage their indigenous cultures” (Tang, 2011: 167). In doing so they compared the Amazon Rainforest to Pandora in the movie.

What is very significant here is how Pandora, as a symbolic territory, has absorbed and incorporated all the indigenous protests around the world. The Palestinians, the Indigenous Amazon people, and some Chinese communities (like the the Buddhists) are all dispossessed from their *real* territory and are now *reterritorialized* within Pandora land. The latter, as it is a Hollywoodian creation, and by its over aesthetisation and exoticism, can be seen as the mystification of the dispossessed territory by the global capitalist powers. Moreover, it can be viewed as an exotic product which is given to the “dispossessed Other” in return to what he has been deprived of. This is shown in *Avatar*, where the fall of the Hometree is soon followed by the coming of Toruk Macto (Sully). The replacement by myth with another myth is what David Harvey considers in his book *Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) as “the struggle to reconstitute power relations is a struggle to reorganize their spatial basis” (Harvey, 1989: 238). *Avatar* is then working on the logic of capitalism which, to use Harvey's words, “is continuously reterritorializing with one hand what it was deterritorializing with the other” (Ibid).

From what has been said, I suggest that Pandora is a reterritorialized territory which functions as a system of power or a vortex that absorbs the Other's energy of resistance and incorporates it within its system.

#### **IV- Conclusion**

This chapter conceives the way that *Avatar* constructs an new dimension of Otherness. I have discussed the film within its immediate context, focusing on two main elements. The first one is the use of mythical figures. The second one is the study of Exoticism as a aesthetic means that mystifies the imperialist power, objectifies otherness, and transforms it into a market product for a consumerist society of spectacle. These two elements forms what Foucault labels as “statements”. In a system of power, statement is a form of knowledge that constructs a discourse which functions as an authoritative source in a given institution, and

absorbing what it states as a fact (Foucault, 1991: 59). In *Avatar*, the images of myths and those of exoticism operate fundamentally as a statement to assure the continuity of Imperialism.

I have begun to discuss the Messiah's representation in *Avatar* and how it works to epitomize the constant revival and the resurrection that perpetuates the continuity of the Western imperialism. I have demonstrated how the image of the Messiah in *Avatar* plunges the movie into a timeless eternal present of myths. In doing this, this movie perpetuates the superiority of the United States of America which “govern” the world by the “Manifest Destiny” (Hartz, 1955: 121).

The image of the Phoenix and the Spirits are used to reinforce the myth of the Western superiority. Functioning as *statements* which get their sources from the Western legends and mythology, they (re)structure the imperialist discourse and strengthen it.

In the second section, I have discussed the appropriation, objectification, and reterritorialization of Otherness. I have used the term “exoticism” which is defined by Huggan as an aesthetic perception that fix “objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which manufactures effectively otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery” (Huggan, 2001: 13). In “Going Native”, I have discussed the appropriation of the identity of the outside Other. By the fact of going native, Jake Sully has placed himself at the center of the Natives and absorbed all their differences. Comparing it to Thoreau's *Walden*, I have demonstrated how the Other becomes objectified (like a piece of furniture) within the narration of the main character. The objectification of Otherness is then converted into a consumer product for a spectators who crave for something new and exotic to flee from the polluted post-industrial society.

In “Pocahontas is Back”, I have shown how sensuality and mystery shape the female character Neytiri. Mixing between two myths which are Pocahontas and her sensuality and

Amazons and their danger and mystery, *Avatar* is *restating* and reproducing the same Western stereotypes of the sensual and spiritual Other. Besides, considering today's global consumerist system, I see this representation as a market product which helps the Post-industrial society (the West) to forget about the West's misdeeds and transgressions done in the world throughout modern history.

The last point that I have discussed in the second section of this chapter is the representation of Pandora as *reterritorialization* territory. I have borrowed this concept from Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995) that signifies “to act to inscribe, to trap, and to encode” within an artificial territory everything that threatens the capitalist expansion (Young, 1995: 171). I have tried to show how Pandora serves as a system that absorbs Otherness. Functioning like a vortex, *Avatar* gives a universal access to the “oppressed” to be within the realm of the Imperialism of the same. Many movements of resistance around the world have recognized themselves and theirs fighting within the structured system created in *Avatar*.

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**General Conclusion:**

## General Conclusion

This dissertation is realized within a Postcolonial framework. It has studied James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) in the light of Western literary tradition, namely William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Focusing on the Foucauldian notion of Power/knowledge (1980) as well as on a set of Postcolonial theories (Said (1994), Ashcroft (2001), Pratt (1992) and Huggan (2001)), my primary aim is To shed light on the mystified mechanism of Western imperialist power within the film's subtext and its cyclical transformations and transmutations through cultural means in the contemporary Western history. This transmutation of elements of the imperialist power from the tradition and direct colonialism, that Britain exercised, are now found in/with new shapes within the American hegemonic policy. I think that *Avatar* displays this transmutation of the Western imperialist power.

The above assumptions are disclosed by each one of the three chapters of this work. Their ideas are complementary and interdependent.

In the first chapter, I have compared *Avatar* to *The Tempest*, focusing on two important points: geography and Otherness. I have used Bill Ashcroft's "Imperial Gaze" to see why *Avatar*'s narrative, like Shakespeare's play, has to be displayed within a fresh and exotic space. I have remarked the significant similarities between these two narratives in their use of a "blank space" as a new and fresh starting point for Western master identity which seeks recognition and (re)affirmation. In addition, I have noticed that both the characters representing Otherness are "dispossessed" both of language and of "space". On the contrary, both the principal characters, (Prospero and Sully), (re)affirm their master identity which they have lost in their own civilized area. The environment where the two narratives are enacted is constructed to serve the lead characters for the quest to fulfill their master identity. The "Other" is here serving only as a piece of furniture, helping *him* in his achievements.

Moreover, I have pointed out to the use of myths in *Avatar* which are closely similar to those used in *The Tempest*. The reason for this is to keep going, in an “eternal present”, the reign of the main character and, by extension, the imperialist cyclical *apotheosis*.

In the second chapter, I have compared *Avatar* to *Heart of Darkness*. I have firstly started to reconsider Cameron's anti-imperialist claim, making a parallel between his time and the one of Conrad. Secondly, analyzing the different representations of power—the economic, the military and the scientific—I have considered these elements as paradigms of “direct” and traditional means of colonialism, comparing them to those found in Conrad's novella. Thirdly, I have studied the scenes where the “indigenous people” are portrayed resisting. Considering the fact that they are James Cameron's creation, I have suggested that their portrayal is serving more to *regulate* the “Western self” which has been degenerated by the already mentioned elements of power. Borrowing the term “anti-conquest” here from Pratt (1992) to show the *passive* but more effective imperialist power of the principal character (Sully and Marlow) but also of Conrad and Cameron.

In the third chapter, I have studied *Avatar* in relation to the twenty-first century global American hegemony. I have considered the way that this film constructs a new dimension of Otherness. Focusing on two important elements—myths and exoticism—I have discussed the movie within its immediate context. Taking the definition of “exoticism” from Huggan (2001), I have remarked that both myths and exoticism operate as *statements* (Foucault, 1980) to assure the continuity of white supremacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood cinematographic production. More importantly, the fact that *Avatar* has inspired much resistance around the world (Palestinians, Buddhists, Amazon aborigines...etc) and absorbed them within the “Pandoran system” of resistance, I have supposed that Cameron's movie works more likely as a vortex which absorbs Otherness within its system, offering only one system or manner of resistance, and transforms it into a market product for the society of spectacle.

*Avatar* assembles the mechanism of imperialist power of both *The Tempest* and *Heart of Darkness*, giving birth to a complex imperialist text with today's high-technological materials. Many critics, especially within the field of Postcolonialism, think that Shakespeare's *The Tempest* heralds the beginning of British colonialist expansion and first contacts with Native people in the Americas. I have underlined that for every “beginning”, a colonialist text uses myths to stamp the colonialist mission with a transcendental and divine mission. *Avatar* does exactly the same thing; it uses the image of the Messiah, the myth of Phoenix, and the Spirits to hide a colonialist subtext. However, the lead character “goes native” and does not return to “civilization”. He is the “outside other”, like Kurtz. In *Avatar*, the plundering machine of imperialism is shown with realistic depictions so that the audience (especially the Western one) can get a real view of colonialism. *Heart of Darkness* creates the same feeling within the audience of Conrad's time. Yet, this traditional means of power, as Gramsci calls them (1999), contribute, in a way or another, in constructing an effective agent of power, the anti-conquest hero. Consequently, *Avatar*, like most Post 9/11 Hollywoodian movies, functions in a *passive* (like pacifist) but more effective way, assuring and maintaining the continuity of the Western white superiority.

I can say that the traditional means of imperialism, those that one can find in analyzing British imperialist system, have not vanished and washed out after the Second World War (1939-1945) but transmuted and transformed into a new and more complex system of power which Meredith and Alessio prefer to call “monopoly Imperialism” (2012). This system, I suggest, centres neither on a group of persons in a society nor on in any institutional apparatuses. It centres rather on “discourse”; it goes beyond the individual and it regulates power within a system of thinking. The fact that some Palestinians recognize themselves as “children of Pandora”, they put themselves and their resistance within this hegemonic system, as if absorbed by it in a process of *reterritorialization*. I have used this concept in the last

sub-section of the third chapter, borrowing it from Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995). It is a fictional territory given to the dispossessed “Other” . In this sense, Pandora in *Avatar* is, in my view, no more than this fictional territory which serves as “a last refuge” for dispossessed people around the world.

The famous success of James Cameron's *Avatar* shows clearly the spectators' current interest on exoticism and “aliens”. In Monopoly Imperialism, Otherness is deprived from its otherness. It becomes a manufactured commodity in the *invisible* hands of the empire. That is what one may call the new form of slavery.

This dissertation demonstrates the complexity of power within a system of culture. *Avatar*, as a form of artistic knowledge, produces an impersonal and contradictory system which consists on an overlapping affirmations that strengthen the American hegemony while it criticizes its imperfections. It is, to use Zizek's words, a self-regulating system (2010). I say impersonal because Cameron and his 2009 production are here not as agents of this system but as the products of the monopoly imperialism.

I shall not conclude this dissertation without insisting on the apparent *inconclusiveness* of the methodology I had to follow to crystallize this issue. However, I shall confess though the dialectic of *Power/Knowledge* of Foucault (1980) may lead to a total miscomprehension as it may lead to a total confusion, it has afforded me with efficient sources to nurture my dissertation. The transmutation and transformation of the the imperialist means of power could not be understood without Foucault. Additionally, I shall confess that Cameron's *Avatar* is a complex artistic work where the visual and textual elements are combined to construct one meaning. Its 3-D characteristics, which is the *mark* of today's world, offers me another manner to live and to see the story at a point that I could hardly distinguish myself from the narration of the rudimentary character. This 3-Dimension narrative may provide me with new opportunities in the academic fields.

In the end, and though not recommended, I cannot help myself to go back to the very beginning of this dissertation and to reassess what Prospero's servant, Ariel, has said. "The Three men of sin" can be considered as the traditional Western imperialist power which, though depicted as sinful and corrupted characters, provoke the *resurrection* of the third and more complex agent of power "to purify" and to sustain the continuity of the White Western global hegemony.

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