

**JOHN PERKINS'S DESCRIPTION OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM AS PORTRAYED
IN AVATAR MOVIE**

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Graduating Paper



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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this thesis is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this thesis. Other researchers' opinions or findings included in the thesis are quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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Kami menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqasyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris. Atas perhatiannya, kami ucapkan terima kasih.

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John Perkins's Description of America Capitalism as Portrayed in Avatar Movie

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzed a movie entitled *Avatar*. *Avatar* movie by James Cameron tells about conflict in Pandora which inflicts war between human and native of Pandora. This movie is form of narrative manner, whereas in John Perkins's book entitled *Confession of Economic Hit-Man* is also part of narration. Those two narratives have similarity in the description of America Capitalism. This research aims to find similarity between American capitalism portrayed in *Avatar* movie and John Perkins's book entitled *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. *Confession of Economic Hit-Man* The method that uses in this research is qualitative descriptive. This research offers detail description. The method of collecting data uses documentation. By using comparative literature, this research analyzed about comparison between *Avatar* movie which contain of America capitalism and John Perkins's book entitled *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. The result of this research finds that there are some stages in the *Avatar* movie which have similarity with John Perkins's description of capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. The first stage is the Resources Development Administration which portrayed of corporatocracy or manifest destiny. The second stage is the avatar mission which describes as Peace Corp in John Perkins's description in *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. The third one is diplomacy solution which similar with the debt analysis in America capitalism system. From that stage there are two possibilities, accepted which resemble of debt realization and failed which has war consequence. In this stage, acceptance does not describe in the movie, beside the failure does.

Keyword: America, Capitalism, Film, Comparison

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John Perkins's Description of America Capitalism as Portrayed in Avatar Movie


Oleh: Nissa Fauziah

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisa sebuah film berjudul *Avatar*. Film *Avatar* karya James Cameron ini menceritakan tentang konflik di planet Pandora yang mengakibatkan peperangan antara manusia dengan penduduk asli Pandora. Film ini merupakan bentuk dari narasi, sama halnya dengan buku John Perkins yang berjudul *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. Dua narasi tersebut memiliki kesamaan dalam mendeskripsikan tentang Amerika Kapitalisme. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mencari tahu persamaan kapitalisme Amerika yang digambarkan dalam buku John Perkins berjudul *Confession of Economic Hit-Man* dan *Avatar*. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian ini memberikan deskripsi yang rinci. Metode pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah dokumentasi. Dengan menggunakan teori perbandingan sastra, penelitian ini menganalisis tentang perbandingan film *Avatar* yang didalamnya terdapat Amerika kapitalisme dengan buku John Perkins berjudul *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. Hasil dari penelitian ini penulis menemukan tahapan dari kapitalisme dalam *Avatar* film mempunyai kesamaan dalam John Perkins deskripsi kapitalisme di buku *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. Tahapan yang pertama adalah misi pengembangan administrasi sumber daya di dalam film digambarkan sebagai korporatokrasi atau manifest destiny. Tahapan yang kedua adalah misi *Avatar* yang mempunyai kesamaan dengan Peace Corp di dalam John Perkins deskripsi dalam *Confession of Economic Hit-Man*. Tahapan yang ketiga adalah solusi diplomasi yang dijabarkan sebagai analisis hutang di dalam kapitalisme Amerika. Dari tahapan ketiga tersebut terdapat dua kemungkinan, penerimaan yang berkaitan dengan realisasi hutang dan kegagalan yang pada akhirnya berakibat konsekuensi perang. Dalam tahapan ini, penerimaan tidak digambarkan dalam *Avatar*, hanya digambarkan kegagalan.

Kata kunci: Amerika, Kapitalisme, Film, Perbandingan

MOTTO



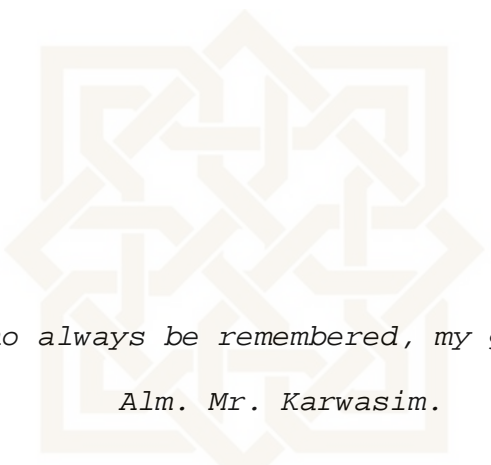
*If you want to fly, give up everything that weighs you
down.*

(unknown)



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DEDICATION



*To he who always be remembered, my grandfather,
Alm. Mr. Karwasim.*



To those who trust me, Dear mama and papa.

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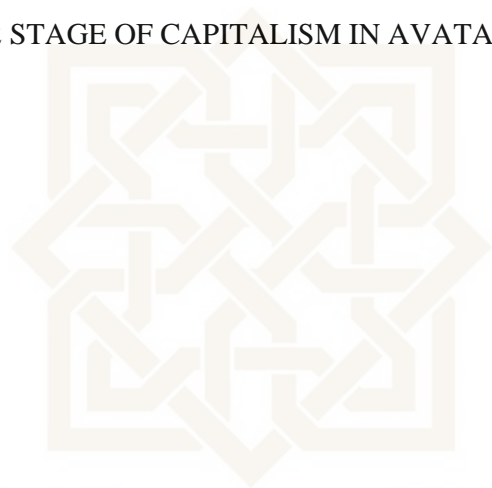
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Culture is identity of nation. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn, culture is a concept with an embarrassing variety of definitions. In the nineteenth century, the term was generally used to refer to the visual arts, literature, philosophy, natural science and music, while expressing a growing awareness of the ways in which the arts and sciences are shaped by their social milieu (as cited 1992:118, Bruke).

As the definition mentioned above, a culture can be portrayed in any ways, two of them are visual art and literature, through a research which describes language signs as its reference. This research concerns on the study of analysis a movie which contains of American culture.

This research analyzes American. It points out to America because America is a country which has many influences in the world. American culture, life style, entertainment, and history give many impacts to life. American entertainment in film industry is popular in this era. Many films mostly come from Hollywood. Laikwang Pang stated that among all film shown in China, only 12 percent of them were local production, yet American film comprised more than 80 percent, and Soviet movies represented a mere 2,4 percent (as cited 2010:228, Bolton). This research will be describe about American capitalism.

According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, Capitalism is economic system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by privat owner and not the state (2009:60). Hence, America is one of countries which follows capitalism. Capitalism can be one of American identities in economic aspect. This is interesting since the portray of an economy aspect in literature works seems catchy and unique. Besides of the American capitalism is interesting to be analyzed, film is one of good media to be analyzed because it is easy to be accepted in society. So, that is why this research focuses on movie as an object.

Movie that used in this research is *Avatar*. It wins in some prestigious film awards such as Academy Award, Golden Globes, Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Film, USA, and BAFTA Award (<http://www.imdb.com>).

This movie tells about Earth in 2154 which already destroyed because of human. This happens because Earth is in danger of energy crisis. An organization called The Resources Development Administration, RDA for short makes some science mission to explore a habitable moon named Pandora. In Pandora, there are valuable mineral, the unobtainium. Hence, Pandora's local tribes are Na'vi which looks like human. They live in harmony with nature. Unfortunately, human can life in Pandora's atmosphere. That is why, RDA makes a creature which looks like Na'vi's people. The creature is called Avatar.

One of Avatar user is Tommy Sully who died by robbed. Avatar is genetic synchronized with its user, so Tommy's avatar cannot be used again. Fortunately,

Tommy has twin who is genetically same with him. His name is Jake Sully, a paraplegic marine. He decides to take his brother role in Avatar program.

As an Avatar, Jake finally is accepted by Na'vi, he even falls in love with daughter of Na'vi chief. His conflict when he realizes that the programs are reflection of human's greedy. The RDA mission is all about researching Unobtanium. It means that Pandora's nature will be destroyed. As known that Na'vi harmonized with their nature, they even worship a God of nature, named Eywa.

This human's greedy is caused of energy crisis on Earth, Jake does not want that Pandora will be ended in the same way. So this is why, Jake and some scientists which include in this mission changes their alliance. For the sake of Pandora's harmonization and nature, the avatars against Colonel Miles Quaritch who has an ambition to get Unobtanium (<http://imbd.com/>).

The American capitalism can be seen from the highlighted plot above. RDA which is portray of antagonist organization, include Colonel Miles Quaritch has similarity with America which has manifestation from a capitalism system. This is why the research chooses *Avatar* since it contains of American capitalism which can be seen in RDA, The Resources Development Administration as antagonist character.

Further, this research describe about American capitalism which is represented in this movie, since this movie famously becomes the most expensive anti American movie ever. It is mentioned from an article that *Avatar* is also a

distinctly political work of art, with a strong anti-America and anti-Western message. It can be read on several level-a critique of the Iraq war, an assault on the US-led War on Terror, a slick morality tale about the 'evils' of Western imperialism, a futuristic take on the conquest of America and the treatment of native America-the list goes on (<http://freerepublic.com/>). The labeling of anti-American offers a strong highlight that this movie has many American capitalism content to be analyzed. Moreover, since capitalism is one of modern economy system, *Avatar* chooses because the movie portrayed some modern setting. The situation and condition in *Avatar* suit with the capitalism in this era.

As stated before, this research focuses on the Capitalism aspects. The researcher compares the Capitalism system which is portrayed in this movie with John Perkin's description of American Capitalism in his book entitled, *Confession of an Economic Hit Man*. Beside there are some other similarity of subject as this book, such as Adam Smith's books. Adam Smith's explanation is more theoretical and systematical. Hence, John Perkins's explanation is deeper into his real experience in capitalism work. Since, *Confession of Economic Hit Man* is partly autobiographical.

Perkins describes the role of economic hit man as follows; Economic hit men (EHMs) are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globes out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S Agency for International Development (USAID), and other foreign "aid" organizations into coffers of huge corporation and the pockets of a few wealthy families include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, and murder.

They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimension during this time of globalization (ix: 2004).

Researcher chooses *Confession of an Economic Hit Man* because in this book John Perkins explains American capitalism a more narrative manner. Whereas in *Avatar* movie, the American capitalism is also part of its narration. The researcher believes that John Perkins's explanations of capitalist system share a lot of similarity with the *Avatar* movie. By comparing these narrative works, the researcher expect that the discussion of capitalist system is not limited in economic areas but it could be discussed in other area such as popular culture.

1.2 Research Question

The research has two questions that will be solved in the end of this research. The research question is; How is American capitalism portrayed in John Perkins's *Confession of Economic Hit Man* and *Avatar*? The writer will analyze the problem statement which contains in this research.

1.3 Objective of Study

The problem statement is related with the goal of this research. The writer tries to make it reasonable and worth it to read. The objective of study that will be explained in this research is to know about comparison between *Avatar* movie and John Perkins's description of American capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hit Man*.

1.4 Significances Of Study

To make this research proper to be analyzed, the writer will be simplifying the significance of study. A good research should have advantages in theory and

practice. In theory, this research has benefit as a culture studies, especially about culture of America. This research may become important to students that want to go aboard or someone who will work or live in America. In practice, this research has benefit as a study about American's influence to people's life. It may be important to people to choose good or bad influence that made by America.

1.5 Literature Review

The movie *Avatar* that was released in 2009 has been analyzed in number of academic presentation or paper. Here, the writer finds three researches that use *Avatar* movie as the data source.

The first research is Viollen Winerta's thesis entitled "*An Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Requesting Used in Real Human and Non-human Conversation on Avatar Movie*". The research focuses on politeness strategies in requesting between human and non-human. This research finds out that the application of politeness strategies in this movie as much as 54.88 percent. Besides, the negative politeness is much as 32.93 percent. Here, politeness strategies in requesting used in real human and non-human is widely used.

The second research is Gracia Sudargo's article entitle "*Post-colonialism Ideology in Avatar's Plot: A literary Analysis on Movie*". This article focuses on some relevant and prominent issues dealing with post-colonialism in *Avatar* movie. It finds out that there are two plots at the same time run in this movie. The first battle happens physically in our visual; between the Na'vi representing the East versus the Sky People representing the West. The second battle happens deep inside Jake Sully's hidden mind. It is the battle between his identity as human

being, the West, against his new passion for Neytiri and the Na'vi, the East. As it is clearly seen in the plot, the East win those two battles.

The third research is Rohmha Romadhon's research entitled "*An Analysis of Environmental Issues Using Ecocriticism in James Cameron's Film Avatar*".

This research focuses on the environmental issues ecocriticism on *Avatar* movie through analyzing the different relationship between human and non-human character with environment. This research finds out that there are some differences attitude and appreciation toward the environment. Human feel superior toward nature and that makes them arrogant. On the other hand, nonhuman alien, the Na'vi people live harmonically with the environment.

The three researches above have different theory and focuses. The relation of this research with three researches above is lies on *Avatar* movie. Different to the previous research that used politeness strategies, post-colonialism and Ecocriticism, this research focuses on the analysis of John Perkins's description of America capitalism as portrayed in *Avatar* movie used comparative literature theory.

1.6 Theoretical Background

This research uses comparative literature theory as the main theory. Since, this research analyzed about comparison between John Perkins's description of American capitalism and *Avatar*. According to Steven tolosy, in principle of Comparative Literature is in toto a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, comparative literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of

other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, comparative literature has ideology of inclusion of the other, be that marginal literature in its several meaning of marginally, a genre, various text types, etc (1998:13). In other words, comparative literature is inter-discipline theory which analyzing a literature in across disciplines boundaries.

Further, Steven states there are tenth general concept of comparative literature. The first one is the postulate that in and of the study, pedagogy, and research of literature it is the 'what' but rather than 'how' that is of importance. The second general principle of comparative literature is the theoretical as well as methodological postulate to move and to dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines. The third is necessity for the comparatist to acquire in-depth grounding in several languages and literatures as well as other disciplines before further in-depth study of theory and methodology. The fourth is its interest to study literature in relation to other forms of artistic expression (the visual arts, music, film, etc.) and in the relation to other disciplines in the humanities and social science (history, sociology, psychology, etc.). The fifth general principle of comparative literature is its parallel recognition and study of single language and literature in the context of comparative conceptual approach and function but so with a special focus on English. The sixth general principle of comparative literature is its focus on literature within the context of culture. The seventh is its theoretical methodological as well as ideological and political approach of inclusion. The eighth general principle of comparative literature is its attention and insistence on methodology in interdisciplinary study. The ninth general

principle of comparative literature is its content against the contemporary paradox of globalization versus localization. The tenth is its claim on the vocational commitment of its practitioners. (1998:15-18)

In simple way, comparative literature is comparative between two literatures. Comparative literature analyses the similarity and the differences between two literatures. Comparative literature theory have been choose, because in *Avatar* contain of American capitalism similarities based on John Perkins's explanation in his book entitle, *Confession of Economic Hitman*. Hence, there is the dissimilarities between them. First, the *Avatar* movie is a product of modern culture. This includes foreign culture and lifestyle habits. In this case, American capitalism is dominant in this movie include in characters and plots. Third, American capitalism which contain in this movie will be analyzed based on John Perkins's capitalism characteristic explanation. Fourth, through these correlation of John Perkins's capitalism characteristic explanation and how its portrayed in *Avatar* movie, this movie want to explain how the comparison between them. It is discussed further in this research.

1.7 Method of Research

1.2.1 Type of research

This research include in qualitative research. Denzin and Lindcoln claim that qualitative research involves interpretive and naturalistic approaches: "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (2000:3). It is related to the

document (film) analysis that is analyzed to describe and understand the phenomenon as the case rather than the measurement of the case of analysis (Kothari, 2004:3). Further, According to Prof. Dr. Sugiyono, methods of qualitative research is a research method that is used to analyze natural objects, where the researcher is a key instrument. The technique of collecting data is triangulation method, because the data has character inductive, and the results from qualitative research further emphasized the significance than the generalization. Criteria data of qualitative research is definitive data. Definitive data is the data that is actually happening, so in a qualitative method studying to analyze the data to examine the hypothesis. (Sugiyono 2009: 1-2). This research tries to find the symbol of American capitalism by describing the plot and character in this movie.

1.2.2 Data Source

The data source of this research is the film entitled *Avatar*. The secondary, researcher selects the data from both the plot and the script film aspect that related to the American capitalism description by John Perkins in *Confession of Economic Hit Man*. Furthermore, the additional sources, such as some referential books and articles in the websites related to this topic are used to support the main data and secondary data in order to gain comprehensive understanding.

1.2.3 Method of Collecting data

The researcher uses one method to collect the data. The method is documentation method. It can be accepted for the library research with

some research techniques that can be applied such as recording of notes, content analysis, film listening, film analysis, and research records analysis, (Kothary, 2004:7). That is why in this research, the researcher documents the film by watching *Avatar* to achieve the understanding of the film in general. Furthermore, the researcher observes from the script in order to analyzing the content. In this film record and document, the researcher classifies the plot which is contain of American capitalism by John Perkins's explanation and *Avatar*. In this observation, the researcher also identifies how the comparison between *Avatar* and John Perkins's American capitalism description in *Confession of Economic Hit Man*.

From the first documentation the researcher chooses the plot through the proof of the dialog in *Avatar* that relates to John Perkins's description in his book which contain of the American capitalism representation. The researcher classifies the related things to *Avatar* representation of American capitalism as content analysis with the proof of citation in John Perkins's explanation in *Confession of Economic Hit Man*.

1.2.4 Method of Analyzing

After collecting the data, the data analysis is started classifying the similarity and the difference between *Avatar* and John Perkins's description of American capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hit Man*. Then next, the similarity and the differences between *Avatar* and John Perkins's description of American capitalism in his book are the answer the objective of the research.

1.8 Thesis Organization

The research is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explains about background of study, scope of study, problem statements, objective of study, significant of study, prior research, theoretical approach, method of research and thesis organization. The second chapter describes about intrinsic element, including plot, setting and characterization of the *Avatar*. The third chapter is the analysis of data with theory of semiotics. The last chapter contains of conclusion of this research.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

The objective of study of this research is to understand about comparison between *Avatar* and John Perkins's explanation of American capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hitman*. Further, this research finds that there are some similarity between John Perkins's description of Capitalism and *Avatar*. Moreover, there is the difference between *Avatar* and John Perkins's explanation of American capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hitman*.

As stated before, the analysis focuses on capitalism in *Avatar* through John Perkins's stages concept of American capitalism. For more, the data that containing in the movie explained such as stages in America capitalism system explaining in Perkins's book *Confession of economic Hit Man* as some of America capitalism approach. It can be seen from the table below;

Avatar	John Perkins's Confession of economic Hit Man	Comparison
Exploit Pandora for Benefit	Manifest Destiny	Similar
Avatar Mission	Peace Corp	Similar
Diplomatic Solution	Debt Analysis	Similar
Accepted	Accepted (Debt	Different

	Realization)	
	Failed (War)	Similar

From the table.1 above, it can be answer the objective of study.

The first one is corporatocracy or manifest destiny explanation based on John Perkins's which has similar concept as the RDA's mission. It have purpose to exploit Pandora for human benefit. The second is Peace Corp which has similar concept with avatar mission which is to observation. The third is the debt analysis, it has similarity concept with the diplomatic solution in the *Avatar*. From the debt analysis in John Perkins's description and the diplomatic solution in the movie, there are two possibilities, this possibilities includes into the last stages. The first possibility is accepted. In this stage Avatar has dissimilarity with John Perkins's explanation of American capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hitman*. The second possibility is failed, in this stage, both Avatar and John Perkins's explanation of American capitalism in *Confession of Economic Hitman* has similar in handling their failure. Both of them choose war as consequence.

4.2 Suggestion

This researcher finds that this *Avatar* movie is kind of smart spectacle, because it contains of many culture which portray in it, if considered in more detail. It the symbols inserted implicitly and calculating. As mention before in the first chapter that from the islamic perspective, when learning about a culture, sorting a good and bad is the important thing. The culture may have a large influence that makes people imitate in terms of aqeedah, worship and morals. In hadith that narrated by Abu Daud that it is authentic by Ibn Hibban says:

مِنْهُمْ فَهُوَ بِقَوْمٍ تَشَبَّهُ مَنْ

Which mean: “Whoever imitates a clan then he includes from them.”

(<http://www.suhaibwebb.com/islam-studies/a-working-explanation-on-the-hadith-of-imitation-suhaib-webb/>)

The researcher hopes that people in this era start smart and critical in choosing of entertainment. Every show has good and bad influence to viewer. So, the viewer can take the good thing and its moral value, besides the bad things.

Hence, the next researcher can be analysis Jake’s personality, especially his reason to stay in his avatar body beside his human body through psychoanalysis theory. Since his choice is unique and unusual. Furthermore, the research also suggests for the next researchers who are interested in analyzing *Avatar* movie, to relate Jake character using the leadership theory. Every point of view has different perspective about leadership aspect. The next research may focus on Jake as a main character which include in heroes based on the leadership perspective. Therefore, the research will get deep understanding of the *Avatar* movie in other perspective.

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