

狡猾な植民者それとも信頼にたる友 ——『アバター』にみる21世紀の植民地言説——

丹羽 敦子

成蹊大学非常勤講師

要旨

本発表では、ハリウッド映画『アバター』における植民者と先住民の関係を、ホミ・バーバが『文化の場所』(1994)で論じた「植民地的擬態」を参照しながら考察する。2009年に公開され世界的にヒットした『アバター』は、植民者である主要な登場人物が、先住民の世界との境界線を横断し、かつ先住民に敬意を表するという点で、90年代にアメリカで公開された映画——『ダンス・ウィズ・ウルブス』(1990)、『ジェロニモ』(1993)、『ラスト・オブ・ザ・ドッグメン』(1995)、アニメ『ポカホンタス』(1995)、アニメ『もののけ姫』(1997)など——と酷似している。これら90年代の映画における先住民に関する好意的な描写には、当時広く唱えられるようになった多文化主義が反映されている。同様の路線にある『アバター』も、植民者と先住民間の愛と和解を前景化した作品である。だが、植民者側に属する主人公が、先住民の姿を擬態して彼らと同一化しようとし、かつその主人公が、先住民とともに植民者を倒して勝利するという点で、21世紀に作られた『アバター』は90年代の作品を超えている。ホミ・バーバは、被植民者による植民地的擬態について次のように論じている。植民地的擬態は、「ほとんど同一だが完全には同一でない差異の主体としての、矯正ずみで認識可能な《他者》への欲望」であり、「擬態の言説はアンビヴァレンスのまわりに構築されている」。さらにバーバは、「擬態は植民地言説の権威に対して深刻な攪乱効果を持つ」と指摘する。『アバター』では、バーバの場合とは逆に植民者が先住民を擬態し、そこに生じた差異は、擬態した主人公が先住民の優位に立つという形で現れる。その結果、植民者による先住民の擬態は、矛盾する二つの意味を包含する。すなわち、植民者の一人であった主人公が、先住民の伝説的な力を搾取し彼らを統率するという点では、植民者が先住民の力を専有することを意味する。しかし一方で、戦闘には不適切な身体不自由者であった主人公と先住民が協力して、侵略する植民

者に勝利する結末は、周縁化された主体が中心化される可能性を窺わせる。以上のことを踏まえ、本発表では、21 世紀に植民者が植民地言説を覆す可能性／不可能性を検討する。

Tricky Colonizer or Reliable Friend? Twenty-First Century Colonial Discourse in *Avatar*

Atsuko Niwa

Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between the colonizer and the native in the Hollywood film *Avatar*, referring to the “colonial mimicry,” which Homi Bhabha discusses in his work *The Location of Culture* (1994). Interestingly, *Avatar*, released in 2009 and a big hit worldwide, closely resembles some films released in the 1990s in the US, such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Geronimo* (1993), *Last of the Dogmen* (1995), Disney animation *Pocahontas* (1995), and animated fantasy *Princess Mononoke* (1997). The main characters of these films, as the colonizers, not only cross the border into the native territories, but also pay honor to the natives. The reverential depiction of the natives in these films reflects multiculturalism emerging in the 1990s. *Avatar* apparently represents the friendship or reconciliation between the colonizer and the native along the same lines. This twenty-first century film, however, transcends those in the 90s because *Avatar*’s protagonist as a colonizer tries to identify himself with the natives through mimicry and help them defeat the colonizers. Homi Bhabha indicates that colonial mimicry by the colonized is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*.” He proceeds, “[t]he effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing.” In contrast, *Avatar* depicts the colonizer’s mimicry of the natives. Significantly, the displacement from the original produced by this kind of mimicry ends up with showing the protagonist’s superiority over the natives. The mimicry by the colonizer, then, has two contradictory implications. On the one hand, the protagonist, as a member of the colonizer, appropriates the native potentials, exploiting the native legendary power to command the natives. And on the other hand the marginalized are centered, for the physically disabled protagonist and the natives present a united front against the colonizers and conquer. This paper thus explores the possibility/impossibility of creating disturbance in the colonial discourse by the colonizer in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between the colonizer and the native in the Hollywood film *Avatar*. *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron, was released in 2009 and became a big hit worldwide. At first viewing, this film seems to portray the native defeating the colonizer to guard her/his own land. Significantly, however, the protagonist, as the colonizer imitating the native, ends up as a leader of the natives; thus, this ending has two contradictory implications. On the one hand, the protagonist, as a member of the colonizers, appropriates the native's potentials and exploits the native's legendary power to command the natives. And on the other hand the marginalized are centered, since the physically disabled protagonist and the natives present a united front against the colonizers and conquer them. This paper refers to the "colonial mimicry," which Homi Bhabha discusses in his work *The Location of Culture* (1994), and explores the possibility/impossibility of creating a disturbance in the colonial discourse by the colonizer in the twenty-first century.

I. The 1990s Films and Miscegenation

Interestingly, as many critics point out, *Avatar* closely resembles some other Hollywood films, particularly those released in the 1990s, such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990); *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992); *Geronimo* (1993); the Disney animation, *Pocahontas* (1995); and the animated fantasy, *Princess Mononoke* (1997). All of these films depict the conflict between the colonizer and the colonized, and they are remarkable for their sympathetic description of the native --- the main characters, as the colonizers, not only cross the border into the native territories, but also pay honor to the natives. The reverential depiction of the natives in these films reflects the multiculturalism emerging in the 1990s. In 1990 when the nation's quincentenary was only two years away and *Dances with Wolves* was released, Congress declared November as the American Indian Heritage Month, and passed the Native American Languages Acts, followed by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. In 1992, October 12 was declared as "Indigenous Peoples' Day" instead of Columbus Day in Berkeley, California --- as they did not regard Columbus the harbinger of progress and civilization, but of genocide, slavery, and the reckless exploitation of the environment. As the myth of Columbus was getting reversed, some films such as *Dances with Wolves* were released and they got a favorable response. "The film's loyal fans believed that Hollywood had finally said its long-overdue mea culpa" (Aleiss, 142), even though, particularly with *Dances with Wolves*, some critics scoffed at the glamorization of the Native American or considered the film too

childish and naïve.

Avatar apparently represents the friendship or reconciliation between the colonizer and the native along the same lines as the 1990s films. This twenty-first century film, however, transcends those films in the way miscegenation is handled --- though *Avatar*'s protagonist is a colonizer, he will probably get married to a native and settle with the natives permanently." In the 1990s *Dances with Wolves* was followed by many similar releases, and in common with the movie, they did not allow for miscegenation of the native and the colonizer. Dunbar, the white protagonist of *Dances with Wolves*, marries a white woman who has been captured and adopted by the Native Americans, so that this film, as Angela Aleiss argues, carefully avoids any issue of miscegenation. Furthermore in this film Dunbar and his wife leave the tribe, though in the novel *Dances with Wolves* (published in 1988) they remain with the Native Americans. According to the author Michael Blake, this was because Kevin Costner, the director and the leading character of this film, did not embrace the feeling of "going Native" (144). In *The Last of the Mohicans* miscegenation is also absolutely avoided. The white protagonist Hawkeye, who was brought up by the Mohicans, and white woman Cora finally get married, but another couple, the heir to the chief of the Mohicans, Uncas, and a white woman, Alice, die before a relationship can blossom (146). To avoid many of the offensive racial stereotypes, *Pocahontas* deliberately presented the heroine as "an ethnic blend" of "softened" features (150). Nevertheless, this heroine never marries the white hero John Smith, though she does marry an English colonizer in the sequel *Pocahontas II*. There is, thus, a crucial difference between the 1990s films and *Avatar* where interracial romance is allowed to blossom and develop into a marriage in prospect. *Avatar*, in which miscegenation wins unquestioned acceptance, subverts the racial incorrigible convention.

II. "Death of the Father" and "Recapture of the Mother"

The clash between culture and civilization and the discovery of something pure in endangered tribal cultures are some of the themes which *Avatar* shares with a few other previous films, according to director James Cameron. The romantic union between a native woman and a colonist man is also one of the important subjects of the film. Then these can be reduced to two significant themes, that is, "Death of the Father" and "Recapture of the Mother." The manifest signs designating these themes are interspersed through this film.

The story of this film is as follows: the protagonist Jake, a disabled former Marine, disguises himself as a native Na'vi, who inhabit a planet Pandora. Strictly speaking, Jake mentally links to an "avatar," which is a Na'vi-human hybrid body

looking identical to the Na'vi, and through the avatar he gets a healthy body. Jake's avatar, on the one hand, collects biological samples and data in the forest in Pandora on instructions from Grace, a scientist and head of the Avatar Program. On the other hand, he also serves Colonel Miles Quaritch who is hired as the private security force of the company mining the valuable mineral in Pandora and who demands information on the Na'vi from Jake. Losing his way in the forest, Jake comes across a female Na'vi, Neytiri, and is initiated into her tribe and learns their native ways. Jake falls in love with Neytiri, pays reverence to the natives and their goddess Eywa, and finally attempts to disable a colonizer's bulldozer trying to destroy the natives' dwelling. In the end, he summons all the Pandoran tribes to fight against the colonizers. After conquering the colonizers, Jake stays back at Pandora.

Throughout the story, the most explicit token of "Death of the Father" is shown through the death of Colonel Quaritch, a warlike man who exhibits his masculinity by attacking the natives violently and even delightedly. The death of Grace who sets up a school to teach English to the natives also suggests "Death of the Father," as it implies a clear refusal by the natives of the English language as well as colonialism because establishing the system of institute in the colony could be considered as one of the objectives of colonization. The refusal of not only language but also of masculinity and colonialism, usually associated with the Symbolic order, signifies the negation of the "Father." Among the Na'vi, the death of the chief of the tribe, Eytukan, and the heir to the chief, Tsu'tey, symbolize "Death of the Father" because their death is expected to interrupt paternity. Dying in the invasion of Na'vi's dwelling, Eytukan charges his daughter Neytiri to protect his tribe and hands her his bow as the token of her taking over as chief. It is also Neytiri who kills Quaritch in the last scene of the battle, to get a privileged status among her tribe. In addition to these representations of "Death of the Father," the capsule in which Jake or Grace can link their avatars is symbolical of "Mother." According to Freud, "[t]he female genitals are symbolically represented by all such objects as share their characteristic of enclosing a hollow space which can take something into itself:" for instance, "by vessels and bottles, by receptacles, boxes, trunks, cases, chests, pockets, and so on" (Freud, 156). For Jake, whose physical disability compromises his sense of masculine identity, "avatar" is a just proper device for escaping from the pressure of being a man. In other words, he can regain his freedom not only physically but mentally from such pressure through the "Mother." Jake also barely guards the "Mother" --- he destroys a bomber of Quaritch's forces just before it can reach the sacred Tree of Souls, where the spirit of the goddess that the Na'vi call "Mother" dwells. In passing, a legendary, enormous flying birdlike animal, which helps Jake to defend Pandora against the colonizers, may be also a metaphor for "Mother," since some myths represent a bird as a goddess

or “Mother.” Jake’s avatar, thus, is disobedient to the “Father” and close to the “Mother.” In this sense, he lingers on in the pre-Oedipal phase. Briefly, the death of Quaritch, Grace, Eytukan, and Tsu’tey, and the birth of Jake’s avatar indicate the refusal of the Symbolic order, or the “Name-of-the-Father” by which Lacan suggests the Father’s prohibition against incest between mother and son and submission to the Symbolic order. Therefore, *Avatar* is basically a story about “Death of the Father” and “Recapture of the Mother.”

III. The Colonizer’s Mimicry of the Native

Various events in the film convince us that the themes of *Avatar* are “Death of the Father” and “Recapture of the Mother.” This film, however, is not as simple as it seems to be. The story is very ambiguous, since Jake sometimes behaves in contradiction to these themes. He appeals to all the inhabitants of Pandora to battle against the colonizers, develops a masterly strategy for the battle, and fights aggressively. His military background helps the natives fight and conquer the colonizers. Therefore, although Jake refuses the “Father,” he still emphasizes his masculinity --- thereby not quite denying the Symbolic order. However, Jake can overcome enormous mental and physical stress and reaffirm his masculinity, only when he stays among the natives as an avatar. Jake can never come in contact with the natives without linking himself to his avatar, that is, he has to necessarily mimic the natives in order not only to make acquaintance of them but also to gain masculine confidence. The colonizer’s mimicry of the native is in marked contrast with the original discussed by Homi Bhabha. Significantly, the displacement from the original produced by this kind of mimicry ends up showing Jake’s superiority over the natives.

Bhabha points out the great potential for disturbance of the colonial discourse by the native mimicry. Bhabha suggests as follows: the colonized, on the one hand, are coerced into an appropriate imitation of the colonizer and are then appropriated by the colonizer’s discourse; on the other hand, the colonized imitate the colonizer inappropriately, express “themselves” through the excess or slippage produced by such mockery, and thus rupture the colonial discourse. Bhabha calls the function of such imitation by the colonized “the ambivalence of mimicry,” and phrases it as “almost the same, but not quite.” He says that “[t]he success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (86).

By contrast, *Avatar* depicts the colonizer’s mimicry of the native. The mimicry by Jake also shows two contradictory functions; he guards Pandora from the colonizers, while he uses the colonizer’s method to exhibit his own superiority. Jake’s

incoherent behavior is similar to the “infant” behavior in Lacan’s mirror phase, to which Bhabha refers in order to argue the “colonial mimicry.” Jake’s avatar, at first, is mocked because of his babylike way of speaking and walking, but finally he is declared a part of the Na’vi and he chooses Neytiri as a mate. Soon afterward, when he reveals his original mission, Jake is accused of betrayal. Jake as an avatar, however, conflicts with his former fellows for the natives. This transformation of Jake’s avatar almost corresponds to the mirror phase when the infant exults to identify with the mirror image, and then finds “an alienating identity” and “the aggressiveness” deriving from all her/his relations with the others. Jake’s avatar’s incoherent behavior, thus, shows that he is just going through the mirror phase; Jake as an avatar still stays in the Imaginary sphere. Therefore his masculinity or aggressiveness cannot be considered as a token of obedience to the Symbolic order. From the viewpoint of camouflage, however, his masculinity or aggressiveness may derive from him being a former marine. Bhabha, referring to Lacan’s argument about camouflage, mentions that “mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence” (90). In light of this comment, his masculinity or his aggressiveness as a former marine remains in his avatar, even though he stays in the Imaginary sphere. Nevertheless, it is such masculinity or aggressiveness that functions to guard the natives from the colonizers. Jake’s avatar seems to negotiate the tension between the colonizer and the native through his own masculinity or aggressiveness. In either event, at least in this film, the colonizer’s mimicry of the native could disturb the colonial discourse as much as Bhabha’s original mimicry.

Conclusion

This film represents subversion of the Symbolic order caused by Jake’s avatar with the Na’vi-human hybrid body, or Jake’s “hybridity,” in various ways. In this sense, *Avatar* offers the possibility of creating a disturbance in the colonial discourse by the colonizer, and Jake is a reliable friend of the natives. However, there is some question about this possibility, for the last scene suggests that Jake is no longer a hybrid avatar, but perfectly a native. It is not shown whether Jake as a native, too, can subvert the colonial discourse. In addition, this film actually implies the rupture rather than the reconciliation between the colonizer and the native because the colonizers are defeated and forced to retreat eventually. This twenty-first century film suggests the possibility of the colonizer disturbing the colonial discourse, but it also poses several new questions at the end.