

Humans, Humanoids and Animals in *Eywa*: An Eco-critical Reading of James Cameron's *Avatar*

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Abstract

One of the more interesting elements in *Avatar* is the neural connection fibers (Tsayaylu) that each living creature is born with on the planet –“Pandora, a densely forested habitable moon orbiting the gas giant *Polyphemus* in the *Alpha Centauri* star system”. Animals, humanoids and even the trees have these neural connection fibers, allowing all living creatures to “plug in” to each other's neural networks. Once connected through this neural connection, they can feel each other's emotions and thoughts. They are, in essence, operating as one single being with expanded sensory awareness. In this film Cameron tries to depict the relationship that the human from the Earth and the Na’vi of the Pandora have with the environment. Jake Sully, Grace, Dr. Augustine, Norm Spellman are those who came from Earth and Tsu'tey, Neytiri, et al. are of the Omaticaya tribe. The most interesting fact in *Avatar* is that the environmental issues, dealt in it, has some moral environmental values encrypted throughout the film. The subject of this paper is to investigate how these moral environmental values are intertwined with thematic and structural point of view of the film.

[Key-words: *Avatar*, James Cameron, Eco-criticism, *Eywa*]

Avatar shows the basic difference between the relationship of nature with human and that of with Omaticaya people. Irrespective of some human beings, most of the human beings are represented to be the villain that devastates the habitat – the Tree – and the Nature and the “blue monkey” of Pandora are supposed to be the victim. The film demonstrates the aspect of Deforestation. Colonel, Dr. Augustine and Parker Selfridge provide the thought from their own perspective that Nature is money; Nature is there for Human only. Cameron demonstrates that *Avatar* can be taken as one text which deals with the context of nature writing text with its strong environmental messages. And it is also true in the sense that at the end of the narrative, the Nature and the Omaticayan people send the human back to the Earth, showing that the ideological perspective, that Nature is powerful, is always true.



In “An Ecofeminist Analysis of *Avatar*” Heidi Rae Hosmer tries to analyse:

The military personnel (at least the grunts anyway) on Pandora are repeatedly objectified and dehumanized by their superior officers. This pattern is so ingrained, the grunts even sometimes dehumanized themselves. The main character, Jake, along with many of his colleagues, are frequently referred to as "meat" through the course of the movie. When Jake first arrives on Pandora, other soldiers see him in his wheelchair and call him "meals on wheels", dually dehumanizing him for his rank and for his disability.

The Na'vi population is very in touch with nature and that could be an understatement. Cameron emphasizes the connection between the Na'vi people and their bond with nature. They have a strong connection with the animals, plants, and just the planet itself. Most importantly, Neytiri is an extremely powerful woman and she is constantly shown as being connected to nature. The Tree of Voices is the tree where the Na'vi can access the bond, they can pray, and sometimes their prayers are answered. They call this tree - *Utraya Mokri*. When Neytiri considered Jake as the people of Omaticaya, he is permitted to make his bow from the wood of Hometree.



Another perspective can be attached to the film: the concept of Ecofeminism – the link between the opposition of women and the domination of nature by the inhumane human beings. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty defines eco-criticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". And after Glotfelty's collection came out, Lawrence Buell published *The Environmental Imagination*, where he defines "'ecocriticism' as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist



praxis". There are several mythological stories where Nature is supposed to be the all-mighty – the powerful force. Jake Sully tried to avoid the attack of the dogs with the torch he made. After expelling the dogs, he thought Neytiri would need that in the dark night so that she can go. But as soon as the torch is switched off, the flora and fauna of Pandora were switched on like the chloro-fluorescent light. In a way, the forest has the power to enlighten itself at night. Jake was shocked to

see that. Nature is not at all hostile to him or the Omaticayan Blue people. She knows whom to help. She knows when to help. Nature is hospitable with its own power – serving the light at dark.

Eco-terrorism usually refers to acts of violence committed in support of ecological or environmental causes. Even Mr. Cameron in an interview argues about this:

Entertainment Weekly: "'Avatar' is the perfect eco-terrorism recruiting tool."

James Cameron: "Good, good. I like that one. I consider that a positive review. I believe in eco-terrorism."

The background is that people on severely depleted Earth's natural resources in 2154. So

The Resources Development Administration (RDA) has found a valuable and costly resource – unobtainium in Pandora – Pandora, a distant moon in the Alpha Centauri-A star system. Set in 2154 on Pandora, the “Sky people” devise a way to transform themselves into genetically and technologically hybridized Avatar. Mission commander Col. Miles Quaritch utilizes Jake Sully as his undercover spy with the Na’vi. Colonel’s intention is to bridge the gap between the Na’vi people and the “Sky People”. Jake is building his own bridge of trust with the comely Neytiri – a lissome Na’vi warrior. The company promised Jake Sully to restore his legs if he gathers intelligence about the



Na’vi and the clan's gathering place, a giant arboreal called *Hometree*. Colonel Miles Quaritch found that the Hometree is standing on the huge disposition of unobtainium. So he and Selfridge ordered Hometree to be destroyed with bulldozer. Grace and Sully tried to convince Selfridge that the plan of destroying Hometree could damage the neural network system activated by the native of Pandora. The Na’vi can “upload and download data, memories” with their neural connection. But everything went in vain. Quaritch's



men destroy Hometree. They killed Neytiri’s father and many other. They shot poisonous gas and then missiles. The Hometree was completely burnt and destroyed. Though his two sidekicks (played by Sigourney Weaver and Joel David Moore) restate the scientist as ‘savior archetype’ nicely, the most engaging — and genuinely radical — character in *Avatar* is Marine Corps pilot

Trudy Chacón (played by Michelle Rodriguez). She steals a military helicopter and shoots

down to help Jake Sully from the military attack. Environmentalist and producer Harold Linde weighs in on the Hollywood-izing of the environmental movement – the proposition of *Avatar* was no doubt radical environmental propaganda. Cameron has spoken extensively with the media about the film's environmental message, saying that he envisioned *Avatar* as a broader metaphor of how we treat the natural world. The destruction of the Na'vi habitat to mine out the natural resources has also evoked parallels with the oppressive policies of some states often involving forcible evictions for development on some weak countries. The most important thing is that Russell D. Moore in *The Christian Post* argued that, "If you can get a theater full of people in Kentucky to stand and applaud the defeat of their country in war, then you've got some amazing special effects". Commentator Glenn Beck on his radio show said that *Avatar* was "an anti-U.S. human thing".

The people on Pandora respect the Nature and the animals living in the lap of nature. When Ney'tiri killed the dog in order to save Jake, he thanked her; but she did not grant that.

Jack: Hey, wait! I just wanna say thanks for killing those things.

Neytiri: Don't thank! You don't thank for this. This is sad. Very sad only.

Jack: Ok. I'm sorry. Whatever I did I'm sorry.

Neytiri: this is your fault. They don't need to die.

This shows that the Omaticayan people live with the animal. They are just like the sons of the Nature. And they should not die like this. But Parker Selfridge happens to be a Colonizer, often sounding like a business man.

Parker Selfridge: you know, I mean, we try to give them medicine, education, roads. But, no, no, no they like muds.



Eywa or Nature to them is the only God, and Grace at the time of her death bed utters that "I'm with her, Jake. She is real." This can prove that Nature is alive, both metaphorically and literally. The Seeds of the Sacred Tree or the Holy Spirit chose only Jake Sully only and Neytiri said that "There has been a sign, there is a matter for "Tсахик". This will help Mo'at – the dragon lady – to understand in near future that Jake will be the survivor for them from these inhumane conditions.

There are several references where the viewers come with the concept that Na'vi are very much dependent on the Nature. They sleep in web of the Hometree, drinks the juice of the flowers for the diseases. Even when the Na'vis were helpless, almost defeated, all the Ikrans and the Hammer-headed animals came to Jake Sully and Neytiri to help them in the fight. Neytiri was elated as Jake's prayer was heard by the Ewya. The "Earthly

demons” promised Jake Sully to restore his legs, but Eywa has provided a new life to him – a life which is of purity with Nature.

The connection of Na'vi with the Nature is worth to be discussed. The “Tsahaylu” or the neural bonding can help them to feel the orders from Eywa; they can interact with Eywa, send prayers. Even with this bonding they can control their animals, their pets. Ikrans and six-legged horses are also connected via this neural bond – the Tsahaylu. Jake also made the bond with his horse, Pale, he can feel her heartbeat, her breath, her strong legs; Neytiri said to Jake, “you may tell her what to do... inside.” Even the Ikrans choose only a particular Na'vi to fly with him/her throughout their lives. Seze is the name of the Ikran which flies with Neytiri. Dr. Grace found this to be an electro chemical communications. It can be so, but nobody can doubt the omni-presence of Nature. When they try to help Grace breathe back, all the Na'vi united to pray for her. The roots of the Holytree engulf both the Grace's body and her Avatar. Tsahik tried to transfer, what Grace has, into her Avatar.

At the conclusion, this is analyzed that the differentiation of relationship with Nature between Human and the Omaticayan people has led them to enmity, the film continuously shows the conspicuous hostility among the human as the Colonizers, invaders and the non-human Omaticayan people as the “Other” – the colonized. Harold Linde argues that “James Cameron's *Avatar* is without a doubt the most epic piece of environmental advocacy ever captured on celluloid, and it only very thinly veils its message which, on the heels of a failed Copenhagen summit, is more timely now than ever ... Nature will always win.”



Cameron has shown the Nature's power implicitly and towards the end of the movie, this is displayed explicitly. The Na'vi guards them to go back to the barren land – the earth. Only few human were chosen to stay on Pandora, who guarded and stood for the Nature and protected the environment. This shows very clearly that Nature has its own selection. Nature has selected Jake, Norm and Max to be the people of Omaticaya. Human may have intelligence, power, prowess, technology; but before Nature, these are nothing else. Jake Sully is now awake and protects the Pandora.

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