

THE REPRESENTATION OF NATIVE AMERICAN IN *THE LONE RANGER* FILM: A GENETIC STRUCTURALISM ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Racism is part of America's dark history. Racism seems to have never been resolved. This article examined how racism is narrated in The Lone Ranger Film. As genetic structuralism studies, The Lone Ranger film is exploited both intrinsically and extrinsically. At first glance, this film features American-Indian characters but with the white character. This is contradictory considering that American-Indians are native American tribes who have colored skin. Therefore, this film is used as an object of study to look at social construction, especially about native Americans, which actually wants to be conveyed to the wider community and the empirical reasons for this construction are shown. The research results showed that intrinsically, the character Tonto, played by Johnny Depp (a white), correlated to the economic purpose. As a mass culture, this film was produced to gain profits. choosing Johny Depp is a form of strategy to achieve the film's success because Johnny Depp is one of the top actors who has many fans. Portraying characters using well-known actors is one of the strategies in achieving the success of a film. Furthermore, this film showed how native American is reconstructed by a new image. White and smart native-American are positive stereotypes. It is contradictive due to This is very contradictory considering that Native Americans are a group that has a negative stereotype. Native Americans are also a minority that experiences a lot of discrimination, especially from white or European-American groups. In conclusion, the stereotype of native American in the film Lone Ranger is constructed in different stereotype showing how the white (European-American) have always occupied a high position in the social strata. This film shows that Native-Indians can have the same position in the social strata if their skin is colorless. This makes racism actually perpetuated through this film.

1.INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on how popular literature such film works not only for entertaining but also delivering values of life. The most values that can be found in the product of popular literature is ideology. Popular literature such film is believed not merely as a product of consumer culture but it is the depiction of reality. According to Dwight McDonald (in Gopinath, 2005), popular culture is mass culture that is most widely consumed by the wider community which uses a lot of media that can be reached by many people such as radio, films, comics, books, detective stories, science

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fiction, television, and new technologies such as the internet making it more easily accessible and attracting the interest of many people. McDonald's considers mass culture to represent all groups in society because "mass culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions" and "mass culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody". From the opinion above, it can be said that popular culture reflects what life is going on in the world and represents a broad group of people without boundaries. Adi (2015) stated that Popular fiction is a reflection of the desires of the people who consume it, and that is why popular fiction is produced. Thus, research on popular fiction can show the beliefs and values of the people who consume it.

The Lone Ranger film is one of the popular fictions. This film was directed by Gore Verbinski who also directed other popular films, such as the Pirates of The Caribbean series and Rango. The film stars Johnny Depp as Tonto and Armie Hammer as John Reid (The Lone Ranger). This 150-minute film premiered in 2013. This adventure genre film has a unique story. The depiction of Native Americans (hereinafter referred to as Indians) is shown differently in this film. Singer (2007:212), stated that the stereotype of the Indian tribe in society which is seen as a barbaric, warlike, uneducated, killing horse, screaming, scalping people, and uncivilized villain. On the other side, the Lone Ranger represented native American as the white, and culturally, the white symbolizes educated and civilized people and they are the anti-thesis of native. This issue is contradictory considering that in a historical context, America has always been surrounded by conflicts between Indian tribes and European groups (the Whites). This conflict always results in social class differences and disparities; the white dominant, native minority.

Historically, Europeans reaching America introduced a new concept that still haunts the world today and had not existed previously, the idea of race (Hall 2000, p.18). Isabel Wilkerson states in her book *Caste* (2020), "It was in the making of the New World that Europeans became white, Africans black, and everyone else yellow, red, or brown." (p.53) Most early chroniclers described America's natives as olive, tawny, or brown, occasionally russet or yellow. The earliest mention of "red skins" was a reference to Indians adorned with red paint on the war path (Berger 2009, p.611). During much of the colonial era it was believed that Indians were "born white," as



was declared by Captain John Smith, head of the first English colony, Virginia (Vaughan 1982, p.925). Dodge (2022) state that in the century following Columbus, the indigenous people of America were commonly referred to by European settlers as "Indians," often "West Indians" to differentiate them from residents of India. Other frequently used terms were "savages," "barbarians," "heathens," "wild people," "brutish people." The name "Americans" soon became reserved for European immigrants and their descendants. Europeans long claimed title to other peoples' land with two justifications, and these threads were bonded and strengthened by racism and white superiority. First was religion, arguing they were bringing the gift of Christianity to those doomed to hell. A second justification was bringing civilization to barbarians. This then becomes a justification that people outside of white skin are stupid, uncivilized people and therefore their position should be lower.

The incompatibility between social construction and the depiction of Indian characters in *The Lone Ranger* film makes this film interesting to analyze. Film has social and cultural impacts for the audience (Sihotang et al., 2020). In addition to the ideology that the film offers being very different, this film also penetrated the box office by achieving sales of around 260,502,115 US dollars as of the end of its worldwide screening date, which is on November 9, 2013 (IMDb, 2013). The calculation of the profits received does not include the number of films distributed in the form of CDs/DVDs and paid online films as well as screenings taken over by private TV stations to date.

This study uses Lucien Goldman's theory, namely genetic structuralism. This is because this theory is suitable for seeing the worldview depicted in the film *The Lone Ranger*. Goldman believes that literature is a structure. However, this structure is not something static, but is a product of an ongoing historical process, a process of structuring and de-structuring that lives and is internalized by the literary community concerned (Faruk, 2016: 56). This theory examines aspects of the socio-cultural background of the community. Sangidu (2004: 29), states that genetic structuralism is a discipline that pays attention to literary texts and socio-cultural backgrounds, as well as the subject that made them.



This theory is a structural analysis that pays attention to the origins of works so that it includes studies of intrinsic and extrinsic elements (Ratna, 2004: 122-123). Goldmann tries to unite structural analysis with historical and dialectical materialism. For him, literary works must be understood as a meaningful totality. He argues that the main works of literature and philosophy have total cohesion and that the elements that make up the text have meaning only if they can provide a complete and unified picture of the overall meaning of the work (Damono, 1979: 43). To support this theory, Goldmann built a set of concepts, namely human facts, collective subject or trans individual subject, world view, understanding, and explanation.

Goldmann believes in the existence of homology between the structure of literary works and the structure of society because both are products of the same structuring activity. Although the contents of literary works are different from life, the structure is the same. This homology is not direct. The structure of the work is not homologous to the structure of society but is homologous to the worldview that grows and develops in that society. Goldmann in Faruk (2016; 71) argues in his essay entitled *The Epistemology of Sociology* that literary work is an imaginary worldview and, in his attempt, to express this worldview, the author creates an imaginary universe of characters, objects, and relations. That is what distinguishes literature from philosophy and sociology. What is meant by structure here is the thematic structure, not the formal structure. What is of concern to the thematic structure is the relationship between the characters and the characters and the characters and the objects around them. In addition, this research will also use a historical approach, considering that this theory is also closely related to the structure of society and existing history.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Lone Ranger as a literature work has been studied in some research before. One of them is The Arbitrary Nature of Signs and Reduced Forms Seen in The Lone Ranger Movie by BuyunKhulel (2020). This study provided an analysis of the arbitrary nature of signs and reduced forms (gonna, wanna, and gotta) seen in the movie. The researcher focused on the dialogues between the main characters of the movie, John Reid and Tonto. This study revealed only one kind



of reduced form found in the dialogue between the main characters, which is "gonna". The reduced form "gonna" has been said three times by John Reid and the finding of this research also explains that the word "gonna" is usually spoken by young people and certain social classes.

Muhammad Fikri (2015) also studied Native American Representation through Tonto Character in *The Lone Ranger* 2013. This research uses the representation concept by Stuart Hall to see the character construction of Tonto. The findings of this research find out that the Native American is represented differently from other films that also have the Indian tribe in their film. If in other films, the Indian tribe usually does not have an important role and is always described as stupid people, but in *The Lone Ranger* Film, this character is different. It is described as smart or high intelligence and this changes the perspective of people who watch this film.

All the previous studies help the author to construct the framework of this research. Meanwhile, the approach used is in this research very different from previous research, thus providing a gap in research. This research used a Genetic structuralism theory. The theory gives attention to not only the intrinsic element but also the extrinsic one (Faruk, 2012). This research also used American studies as approach. Rowe (2010), underlined those American studies is a discipline focusing on how America constructs their social life and how their product interplays with another world. This approach is used to see how film *The Lone Ranger* shapes American perspective on Indian people and what kind of ideology can be found in the representation of white as Indian.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive qualitative methods. The research used genetic structuralism and American Studies as approach. Genetic structuralism was used to examine how social construction is represented in the film, while American Studies was to examine how the film is constructed based on the social phenomena in America. American Studies also used to explain that the story is not only imaginative but also realistic, based on the American experience. To gain the completed meaning of film analysis, there are several steps in this research. First, collecting data by watching film and taking note for the connected issues. Second, the data are interpreted based on theory and



author insight. In conclusion, all the data are validated by constructing the meaning of the film representation into academic narration based on the secondary data such as books, articles, online source and another document related to the topic.

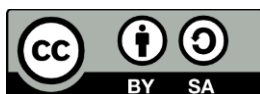
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Film as a literary work has a certain structure. In literature, films are treated the same as other literary works such as stories or novels. Films are seen from the narrative, not from the scriptwriting because the film is not a work made by screenwriters alone, but is the result of collective collaboration or teamwork that includes directors, screenwriters, actors/actresses, editors, and others. The structure of the film in literature can be seen through how the genre formula is contained in the film's story itself.

4.1 Structure of *The Lone Ranger* Film

The Lone Ranger film is categorized in the adventure genre. Based on the formula described in Ida Rochani Adi's book entitled *Fiksi Populer Teori dan Metode Kajian* (2011), the formula for the adventure genre has the following formulas:

1. In the opening part of the story, the unfortunate events that befell the hero are presented.
2. Introducing antagonists and hero activities.
3. The hero has a problem and is then made a scapegoat.
4. Hero escaped and became a fugitive.
5. The hero meets the helper (teacher, close friend, or even someone who hates or suspects the antagonist) and learns to deal with problems.
6. Presenting the story of the hero learning to solve problems, as the initial plan: the hero plans to face the antagonist.
7. The result of learning to solve the problem is the initial plan but this plan must fail.
8. Execute the contingency plan as a second, unexpected contingency plan that is used when pressed to solve a problem (this will create an element of surprise at the end of the story).
9. Problem-solving, usually with happy ending stories.



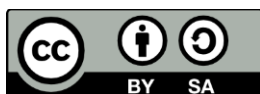
In this adventure genre formula, the characteristics of a hero are also described as follows: (1) there is no cowardice and cunning in him, (2) has a brave nature, (3) has strong humanitarian motives, (4) the murder is committed because he defends self, (5) a loner, (5) not dynamic and quiet although sensitive, (6) has high integrity, and (7) can control his abilities, thoughts, and feelings (Adi, 2008:173-182).

The whole formula of the adventure genre and also the characteristics of the hero are contained in this film. The film begins with the backdrop of the city of San Francisco in 1933 where a small child enters a show called *the Wild West Exhibition*. As with the festival, he is dressed like a cowboy with a white round hat and black mask, resembling the main character in the film. At the show, he meets old Tonto who tells him the story of a Lone Ranger. Then the film shows the true story which is set in Colby, Texas in 1869.

The story of The Lone Ranger begins when a lawyer is on his way back to his hometown by train. On this train, he finds oddities and eventually finds Tonto, an Indian, and Butch Cavendish, a criminal, both of whom are currently being held. John Reid found them just as Tonto was about to kill Cavendish. He stopped Tonto and insisted on solving the problem through legal means. However, this was in vain because Cavendish managed to escape with the help of his men and again detained John Reid and Tonto on the train. Finally, the ranger who is John's brother saved them and John Reid decided to keep Tonto in prison.

The unfortunate incident at the beginning of the story is one of the formulas of the adventure genre. This was shown when in the end John Reid was appointed as a ranger and took part in carrying out duties with his brother and other troops. However, in the middle of the task, they were all killed by Cavendish troops. Tonto, who was already out of prison, found seven bodies and buried them, but when he wanted to bury John Reid, John Reid came back to life and Tonto said that he was a Spirit Walker because he was chosen by a white horse who the Indians believed had supernatural powers. Here John Reid works with Tonto to track down Cavendish's whereabouts because he has lost his brother which makes them both have the same enemy.

After that, it was described how they found Cavendish by collecting various traces. Tonto gave a mask for John Reid to wear so it wouldn't be known that he was still alive. They meet Red,



a brothel owner who has legs made of ivory and can be turned into a gun. He told about Cavendish and how the city was at that time when the residents said that the Indians had broken the agreement and started exterminating the residents around the river. Then Reid and Tonto headed to the settlement where his brother's wife, Rebecca, also his ex-girlfriend, and their son lived. However, when they arrived there, Rebecca and her child had been kidnapped by Cavendish troops disguised as Indian tribes.

On their way in search of Rebecca and her son, Reid and Tonto are captured by a real tribe of Indians. He was made a scapegoat for allegedly not keeping a promise to an Indian tribe, which the Indians had made a promise to Reid's deceased brother. The Indians tell Tonto's past and say that they will fight against the white people even if it costs their lives. While the Indians rushed to war, they held Reid and Tonto prisoner until finally with the help of their horse named Silver, they were released.

After they are free, they continued their search for Cavendish and caught him. There was a bit of a fight between Reid and Tonto. Tonto asked that Cavendish be shot dead, but because Reid was a lawyer and upheld justice, he chose to hand Cavendish over to the authorities. This causes him to part with Tonto and comes to see a man named Cole who is the city's security chief and hands Cavendish over for trial.

However, this failed because it turned out that Cole was Cavendish's brother and turned to attack Reid. During the fight, he finds out that Rebecca and her son, Danny, are also being held on the train where Cole is. Reid tried to fight back, followed by Tonto who helped him. This battle was not easy, they finally got a gap to escape when the Indian tribes who decided to fight began to come to fight against Cole and Cavendish's troops but lost. The Cavendish people try to eliminate Reid and Tonto by setting fire to their hideout. However, they managed to survive.

Reid and Tonto plan another revenge by attacking when there is an award ceremony given to Cole for protecting the area from attacks by Indian tribes. In the middle of the event, they attack with help from Red, the brothel owner, they can finish off Cole and Cavendish who are metal miners, which is related to Tonto's past and many other corruption cases. At the end of the story, John Reid, as The Lone Ranger gets an award for being able to finish off the real criminal.



However, this was rejected by Reid and he preferred to continue his journey to become the only ranger left with his Indian friend, Tonto.

The hero character in this film fulfills all the characteristics of an adventure genre film. However, what's interesting is that Tonto, an Indian who is a Sidekick from The Lone Ranger is not like the Sidekick in other adventure stories. Tonto's character here does not voluntarily follow John Reid, as a hero. He also often dominates how the hero should act. As an Indian, he is also different from the Indian stereotypes that are often depicted in other western fiction.

4.2 The Change of Worldview towards Native American in *The Lone Ranger* Film

As explained in Goldmann's theory, the structure of works is homologous to the worldview of the structure of society. This is also seen in the film *The Lone Ranger*, especially the depiction of Indian tribes that are not following stereotypes in general. The worldview that this film tries to offer seems to want to break the existing worldview in society.

The topic of culture often appears in film (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Films with the theme of Indian tribes are not new in the world of cinema. Many films have Indian characters in them and raise issues between the tribe and the dominant society, namely white people. This is inseparable from the history of America which is a land that has been inhabited by Indian tribes. In other words, the Indians are Native Americans. This is supported by Howard Zinn's statement in his book, *A People's History of The United States 1492-Presents*. Zinn says:

Arawak men and women, naked, tawny, and full of wonder, emerged from their villages onto the island's beaches and swam out to get a closer look at the strange big boat. When Columbus and his sailors came ashore, carrying swords, speaking oddly, the Arawaks ran to greet them, and brought them food, water, and gifts. (Zinn, 1980:1)

From the quotation above it is proved that the Indian tribes existed before Columbus took over the American mainland. It is described at the end of the 15th century. Apart from that, the quote also shows how the Indians are described as naked when welcoming Columbus. This description explains how the condition of the Indians is considered uncivilized and very retarded. This assumption is still believed by some people today.



However, this is shown differently in *The Lone Ranger*. Although in this film, Indians are still depicted with their distinctive appearance, which uses feathers on their heads, streaks on their faces, and bare-chested. However, this film presents something different. This was shown when John Reid and Tonto were captured by the Indians. John Reid meets with the elders of the tribe and tries to communicate with them (Movie scene at 01.18.45):

John Reid: My name is John Reid. And I know that you didn't raid those settlements. If you let me go, I can prove. That doesn't have to be war, understand? ... no, of course not.

John Reid: Mmm... Good. Good. Me... spirit walker...from..from... great beyond... hunter of wendigo... and...and... other things.

Old Indian: (Speaking in Indian language to other Indian people, translated, "sunburned?" to which another Indian replied, "Or his mind has been poisoned with whiskey.")

From the scene above, it is illustrated that John Reid, *The Lone Ranger*, who is white, thinks that Indians cannot speak English. He then used gestures and broken English to communicate. However, the Indians were confused by John Reid's behavior, who used gestures and thought John Reid was a strange person whose mind might have been affected by sunburn or whiskey poisoning. This is followed by a scene at 01.20.23 when John Reid takes the drink that the Indian elder is about to drink. This he did because he was tricked by Tonto who said that taking drinks from Indians was a form of respect.

John Reid: Comache shows some respect.

Old Indian: What about the mask?

John Reid: (Surprised to learn that the Indians can speak English fluently.)

From this quote, it can be seen that John Reid, as a white man, can be fooled by Tonto who is an Indian, and from this quote, it is also proven that Indians can speak English well. This is like a reversal of the worldview that has been known that the Indians are people who are not educated.

The worldview that assumes that Indians are uneducated people has been depicted in many previous films, such as in the sequel film *Chronicles of America* (1990) and even in the radio series



(1933) and TV (1954) which inspired the film *The Lone Ranger*, which has the same title, still presents the figure of an uneducated Indian tribe with a depiction of an Indian tribe using broken English when speaking.

In addition, this film also describes how white people act who are greedy and just want to defend their pride (the scene at 01.24.47). This is contrary to the worldview that views the Indians as barbarians who only want to fight. This difference is presented with the reason for the war in this film (the scene at 01.22.31). The whites fought because of greed for silver mines and their pride, while the Indians fought because they defended their homeland and their families. It also shows the scene where John Reid and Tonto are left in the Indian settlement, and the white troops arrive:

Tonto : Cavalary.

John Reid: Oh, Thank God! Civilization! We should explain our entire situation and those misunderstanding clued up. United States army! Finally, someone who will listen to our reason. (then the white troops just passed John Reid and Tonto.)

John Reid thinks that white troops are civilized people and he hopes that they will help him and can listen to his requests. He assumed that he had finally found someone who understood his meaning. However, the irony returned. The white troops didn't stop and save John Reid, but just kept moving past him and ignored him.

However, the purpose of making the film must be questioned again. If in fact, this film wants to present a new worldview of Native Americans or Indian tribes, then why is Johnny Depp playing the character Tonto? This undermines the rationale that Indians could be in the same position. If the film wants to get rid of cases of racism, it should give the role of Tonto to another actor who has Indian blood. However, in reality, Johnny Depp was chosen to be Tonto's character. This can prove the perpetuation of power and a sense of white superiority over the Indians.

If analyzed from the point of view of popular literature, the portrayal of the character Tonto, played by Johnny Depp, is acceptable. This is because the big name Johnny Depp, who has many fans and is very famous in the world of cinema, can be used as a marketing strategy for the film *The Lone Ranger*. It is well known that in popular literature, the benefit received is the most



important thing. So that the change in people's worldviews depicted through this film and the strategy of using well-known characters made this film a success.

5. CONCLUSION

The Lone Ranger film is an adventurous film that has become controversial because the characters shown do not represent real life. Johny Depp as the main character with a Native American character does not meet the criteria considering he is a European American. This film roughly shows that racism is still a problem in America, although not explicitly. The election of Johny Depp implies that native Americans or Indians will get their social class if they are white. Indians can change their stereotype from primitive tribes to upper class, educated and intelligent if they can change their skin color to white. Johny Depp as main character implies that native Americans or Indians will get their social class if they are white. Indians can change their stereotype from primitive tribes to upper class, educated and intelligent if they can change their skin color to white. Johny Depp in the film is a symbol of racism but also as a means of promoting the film so that it sells well in the market. Popular cultural products such as films are capitalist products whose existence is based on economic profit. The issue of racism and the selection of characters are the tools that most fulfill the requirements to be used as bait so that the film can sell well in the market.

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