

WESTERN HEROISM AS CULTURE IDEOLOGY IN THE AVANGERS

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Abstract

This paper is about the heroism of the probe in a pop culture product is The Avenger movie depicting the ideology of western culture. The use of theory in a study of communication in the process of production of meaning, through the film as a product of pop culture that will depict heroism as an ideology of Western culture. The method used in this paper is a critical discourse analysis of Teun A. VanDijk. It refers to the three levels of discourse structure, namely the macro-structure, super structure, and micro structure. The results shown in this paper is the analysis by describing the mask of the hero who displayed is actually just a cover for attracting all mankind to enter the world of "American version" which is constructed to a western cultural hegemony as the American position as god or king of the world.

Keywords: *Heroism, Film, Ideology, Western Culture*

INTRODUCTION

The existence of globalization amongst the people of a society, now has had a major impact on the existence of the local cultures. The culture shifts from the environment, due to the emergence of a new culture that is seen as more attractive, flexible and easy to understand for some people. Thus it has brought up a term "popular culture" or the "Pop Culture", which has received support from the use of the advanced technology, resulting in the dissemination process so fast and "hit" and got a response from the majority of the community.

In discussing and putting a discourse on "Popular Culture", we always deal with multiple perceptual interpretations that would lead to diverse interpretations. One of discourse interpretations of popular

culture is a culture or cultural products that are liked and preferred by the public. Popular culture is often perceived as an instant culture that tends to oppose "a process", so that groups of people who oppose it, will assume popular culture as a shallow thinking civilization, without value, vague meaning, sensation, deviant, consumptive and hedonistic society.

In culture industry perspective, "popular culture is a culture that was born on the will of the media" (Sunarti 2003). From that perspective, it was supposed that the Media has been producing all kinds of products of popular culture influenced by the imported culture and the results have been disseminated through a global network of media to society and they unconsciously absorb it. The presence of the media in carrying out its functions—in addition to its

function as a disseminator of information and entertainment—the media also serves as creator and controller of the institution commodity product markets within the community. In each of its operation, the media will always instill ideology on every product creation, so that the target object provoked by propaganda hidden behind it. As a result, all kinds of products and in situations of circumstances produced and disseminated by the media on a continuous basis, will be absorbed by the public as a product of culture, and this has implications for the process of the interaction between the media and the community. This incident continuously takes place until the birth of a subsequent culture. Popular culture will always create new cultural forms as long as human civilization continues to transform the environment following the lap of times.

Through the development of media, audio visual concept can be said to convey a very powerful message to the audience a lot compared to other media. Effective communication is necessary in delivering the message. One of the audio-visual media to analyze is film. Because a film is a motion picture or often called a movie. Motion picture is a form of art, a popular form of entertainment and business. The film is produced from an object from the camera and it can also use animated effects. Film in the narrow sense is the presentation of an image onto a screen width (Cangara,

1998:138). The film is the work of art of the development of various technologies, including photography and sound recording technology. The film can also be a medium of communication, not only for entertainment but also for education and information, as mentioned previously.

Film has the freedom to convey a message or information. As an object of art, film in the process has been developed into one part of the social life, which would have a significant effect on society as a spectator. Good or bad of a film is subjective. Film makers are expected to understand the needs of communities. People have the right to determine whether the film is good or bad, happy or unhappy. Media workers basically construct a reality. The contents of the media—film—is the result of the selected reality construction made by media workers (Sobur, 2004:88). The film is one of universal pop culture products. Through audiovisual format along with the development of science and information technology in the world, the film is seen as a complex cultural product to entertain the people. In this capacity, the film has four basic functions, namely, (1) the information function, (2) instructional, (3) persuasive, and (4) entertainment (Siregar, 1985: 29). The film industry continues to evolve every time, especially when it highlights the development of the production of

Hollywood films. Beginning with the concept of silent film to the film with sophisticated visual effects, from the publication through a simple movie to show such a wide distribution network today, putting Hollywood films into one mass communication culture product as lucrative business.

Hollywood movie is a product of western pop culture that actually collaborates with the artistic side of entertainment. So that Hollywood movies are not just for entertainment media per se, but can also be enjoyed as a work of art. The expertise of the filmmakers of the film in Hollywood is keenly watching to find out what the audience wants to see in their work, of course, while maintaining the artistic side and the quality of their work. Those statements above could answer why American films are so beloved by audiences around the world, including in Indonesia (Adi, 2008: XV).

People's perceptions of what is created and displayed through Hollywood movies are also more likely to be perceived "American version", like the depiction of acts of heroism in American action movies. Hollywood movies often display the heroic elements that are hidden to give the message implied that the United States as a superpower, so dominating and even give the impression that the country was "not invincible" by other countries, in every

aspect of life. Superhero figures creation of Hollywood movies (American) is a perception of American version. So Hollywood has the power to shape reality that superhero films are creations of the discourse to represent the superior and dominant ideology of western culture. Without a doubt slowly western culture is poisoning innocence eastern culture. This study attempts to observe the results of western culture which is reflected through the audio-visual works, a movie. Film as a cultural product to reflect the character of a nation. According to Siti Nur Aisyiyah, national security of a country, culture and character of a nation, can be seen from its television programs.

So far, analytical approach to the study of the film is considered as an adequate approach. These efforts will be an understanding that will deepen our appreciation. If we can absorb more and in-depth to see at a film, new levels of emotional experience will appear (Sumarno, 1993: 83). This study is about the heroism of the ideology of western culture in the film *The Avengers*. *The Avengers* is the climax of the Marvel superhero film franchise, incorporating the various superhero like Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, and the Hulk. They are all united in a 200- million-dollar budget film production of Marvel Studios and Walt Disney directed by Joss Whendon.

The Avengers tells the story of seven superheroes consisting of Thor (Chris Hemsworth), Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.), Captain America (Chris Evans), Hulk (Mark Ruffalo), Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner), Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) and Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson). It is about global security which is threatened by the presence of the greatest evil force that has never existed. S.H.I.L.D director, Nick Fury, ask for help from the team "The Avengers" to prevent a disaster threatening the world. They banded together to fight the evil forces of the earth in order to keep the peace (Mathew Rogers / The Epoch Times / osc in <http://www.epochtimes.co.id/entertainment.php?id=612>, accessed on June 11, 2012). Through The Avengers—combining various heroic Hollywood production—this study has some suspicions that the heroism in this movie displays authority and dominance of western culture that is so strong and invincible.

This study focuses on the issue of how the discourse of heroism is as an ideology of western culture in the film The Avengers. The objective of this study is to find out, describe, and comprehend the heroism of the discourse as an ideology of Western culture in The Avengers.

Theoretical Framework

Realizing that every act of communication always contains interests especially communication through mass media such as film as one of the products of pop culture, it is worth to say that every act of communication is a form of non-language "stuff" that can be ideological, political, economic, and so forth (James P.Gee, 2005:26). Those non-language "stuff" forms differ how to act, interact, feel, believe, and judge from a communicator to another communicator to recognize or acknowledge him/her self and others. In communication as discourse perspective, communication is done in order to create "another reality" or "second reality" in the form of discourse of the "first reality". The way in which discourse formation (second reality) is a process called reality construction or construction of reality.

METHOD

The method used in this study is a discourse analysis model from Teun A.VanDijk. According to VanDijk, research on discourse is not enough merely based on the analysis of the text, because the text is only the result of a production practices that should be observed (Eriyanto, 2001:6-7). According to VanDijk, a discourse consists of structures or levels, each of which supports one another. The levels include

Macrostructure, superstructure, and Micro Structure.

DISCUSSION

a. Macro Structure Thematic

Literally, theme means "something that has been described 'or' something that has been placed '. This word comes from the Greek word 'Tithenai' which means to put in place. Thematic is expected to process textual arrangement so that readers can focus on the most important parts of the text, which is the theme.

The story of The Avengers closest to the story of Thor and Captain America. The film once again revolves around the power of Tesseract, blue cube constantly producing renewable energy, which comes from the planet Asgard, and sought after by those who want to have the power to control the world. And one of them, Loki (Tom Hiddlestone), who escapes from his planet and intend to dominate the human race by controlling Tesseract. Meanwhile, Earth peace keeping agency using a blindfold, Nick Fury (played by Samuel L. Jackson), must take advantage of the super-human abilities worth multi-million dollars to prevent intergalactic war.

Thematic is a macro-structure to the elements of Van Dijk discourse. It is a theme or topic that is being put forward in a discourse. The discourse in this study is the movie The Avengers. The themes put

forward in the film The Avengers about heroism, by combining various superhero in the story. The theme of heroism can be proven from the discourse of the characters, as follows:

"... You're the world's first super hero ...
The superheroes spread! ..."

"... Phill had died but he was very confident with the idea, of heroism ..."

"... Avengers, it names them as a team.
Earth's greatest heroes ... "

"... Those who are called heroes are responsible for the destruction of this city, it is their battle"

As written above, it is expressly illustrate the theme of heroism that is full of courage and never-give-up quality defending the truth. The themes of heroism has often been constructed in Hollywood movies such as Spiderman, Batman, Superman, etc. The hero figures creation in Hollywood movies are seen as a savior figure for family, friends, and the people in his neighborhood where their safety is at risk from malicious actions of the antagonist figures. The heroes who formed in these films are the ones who have the power not possessed by ordinary people. With such power, the hero can protect people around him/her from evil actions.

Another distinctive feature of the superhero of Hollywood creation is the

costume. Superheroes in *The Avengers* also have costume according to their respective characteristics. The costumes will show different figure of a man. The costumes give the hero cool and great impression, yet

the superpower within. The following picture is the figure of superheroes—members of *The Avengers*.



Figure 1. The hero figure in *The Avengers* Movie

From the picture, the superheroes wear their costumes in unique appearance. Heroism is strongly influenced by the effects of sophisticated technology. Steve Rogers figure behind Captain America costumes is a member of the American army who is courageous and disciplined then he volunteers in the experimental Super Soldier program created by the U.S. military. The experiment successfully made Rogers to have specific powers (<http://ceritafilm.com/captain-america-the-first-avenger.html> accessed on 14.06.2012).

Like Captain America, Dr. Banner as the Hulk is the victim of his own intelligence that made him a large green creature that will appear as his anger mounted.

Unlike the two previous heroes, Iron Man tells the story of a figure one man named Anthony Edward "Tony" Stark. It was old that he was a wealthy man, intelligent, often changing partners, and industrialists. Because of his intelligence, Stark was kidnapped and forced to create a Mass Destruction Weapon but he invent a power-saving armor. He uses the armor to escape and wears it and turns into Iron Man (Anne hira / Iron Man: Reincarnation Comics to Film / accessed via <http://www.anneahira.com/iron-man.htm> on date, 6/14/2012).

While the figure of Thor comes from the historical mythology. In the German paganism, Thor (from the old norsk) is a hammer-god associated with thunder, lightning, storms, oak wood, strength, destruction, fertility, healing, and

protection of the human race (<http://akudanmitologi.blogspot.com/2011/05/thor.html> accessed on 06.14.2012).

The theme of heroism is presented in the film, described by the discourse from the superhero figures' dialog to reinforce the impression of heroism in every appearance of the hero in *The Avengers*. The heroism emerges from the intelligence and with the help of technology wrapping the body as a costume. The costume accentuates the heroism showing the strength of the scientific experiments and sophisticated technology.

b. Superstructures Schematic

Schematic or superstructure illustrates the general form of a text. Forms of public discourse developed with a number of general categories such as introduction, content, conclusion, problem solving, cover and so on. Schematic may be a strategy of a communicator to support the general meaning by providing supporting statements whether the information presented at the beginning or at the conclusion is important depends on the meaning distributed in the discourse. In other words, the schematic structure emphasizes which part comes first or later as a strategy to conceal important information. Efforts concealment are done by placing an important part at the end to blur the information.

This article is to see an element of heroism in *The Avenger* whilst there is a hidden ideology discourse to be highlighted. The heroism is to show the dominance of the creator ideology. *The Avengers* as one of Hollywood films, implies discourses showing dominance and power to conquer anything. Discourses are described as follows:

"... The world will be his and the universe becomes yours. And man, what they can do is to get burnt..."
 "... I will lead them into a glorious battle..."
 "... The appeal of the light of freedom is reduced to living your joy in the mad scramble of power, for the identity, you were made to be ruled. In the end you will always kneel..."
 "... I am the King! ..."
 "... You all will bow to me..."
 "... Enough!! (Shouting) You're all underneath me! I am god, you're merely powerless creature and I will not be defeated..."

As the discourse above shows dominance about "...be yours...lead them...to master...Always knees...I am the king....Bow to me...You are all underneath me....! ...That I am God..." Further, those shows the mastery of a person having invincible power to make others powerless. The statements "I am the king and I am god" make the superhero figures on top position to dominate, be obeyed, be feared and be worshipped.

c. Micro Structure

1. Semathic

The most important thing in a discourse analysis is the structure of the text. In the conventional linguistic study, the meanings attributed to the word in the dictionary, whole in the discourse analysis the meaning of the word is the practice to be communicated as a strategy. The scheme in Van Dijk semantics is classified as a local meaning that is the meaning arises

from the relationship between words, the relationship between a particular proposition to construct meaning in a text structure as an explicit or implicit meaning, intentionally hidden meanings and how people write or talk about it. In other words, the semantics is not only important to define which part of the structure of discourse but also lead towards a particular side of an event.



Figure 2. Loki figure Domination

Microstructure, beginning with the element of semantics discourse is to watch what to be emphasized in a discourse. The media sometimes expose much on one side and at the same time conceal the other side. Semantics is the study of meaning of a language (Basoeki, 2009). Meaning in a code (language) or set code forms a discourse; thus there will be some meanings formed. Not just a real meaning written in the dictionary, but also metaphor in describing something. So the semantic in VanDijk discourse consists of elements

such as background, detail, purpose, presuppositions, nominalizations.

Semantics in this paper is associated with the discourse of heroism that inserts powerful ideology and the dominance of the filmmakers of The Avengers. It can be seen from the figure that people kneel down to worship Loki. And Loki said clearly to them all, "You were made to be ruled." World as a ruler in the palm of the hand, just because he has a Tesseract, blue cube constantly producing renewable energy, which comes from the planet Asgard, and

sought after by those who want to have the power to control the world.

The filmmakers of *The Avengers* make an illusion that an object full of energy—a blue cube-shaped object—can give power or throne to anybody who possesses it so that he or she can rule the world. There is meaning behind the creation of the blue cube that it implies intellectual dominance, sophisticated technology invention dominance as the world in a grip that once can be ruled or destroyed.

2. Syntax

Syntax is a strategy to present the self positively or negatively. Syntax is also used with political manipulation as the use of pronouns, grammar, the use of specific syntactic category, the use of active or passive sentences, clauses placement, complex sentences and so on. Syntax is the element observed in micro structure to find out how the message being conveyed in a discourse. Syntax is a linguistic branch that not die....The superheroes are everywhere!
Fortress was falling from the sky. I am invincible!..."

The discourse of "another personality ..." indicates dualism in *The Avengers*. On one side, a superhero is merely a human being but on the other side he or she is so powerful that she or he is invincible and immortal. In addition there is the more highlighted again behind the superpowers

studies the relationship between words with words, or with units greater, or between greater units in the language (Okke Kusuma Ayu Basoeki, 2009: xix).

"... We are running the biggest confidential security network in the world. And you'll put the destiny of human race to some weirds ... "

The discourse shows the existence of a secret mission relating to the lives of the human race in this world. At the beginning the film makers want to give a skeptical view of the existence of "hero" as it discourses in the term "...some weird...". The appearance of the superheroes is unique yet childish. But behind that superheroes weird costumes there are some expertise which make those superheroes immortal.

"... If you want to kill me, but you cannot ...I put a bullet in my mouth, but my another personality will spit it out..."

"... People think we can possessed by superheroes, namely technology, and intelligence to the technology. *The Avengers* constructs a reality of the incredible energy that comes from a blue cube called Tesseract, where the tool could be used to rule the world and makes human beings worship the Tesseract's owner.

"... Tesseract could be the key to the continuation of unlimited energy..."
 "... We're beyond Earth to the larger world and Tesseract will be successful..."
 "... I saw the true power of Tesseract...Tesseract to build Weapons of Mass Destruction! ..."
 "... In agreed of power, for the identity, you were made to be ruled. In the end you will always kneel..."
 "... I will lead them into glorious battle...the world is in my control..."

The filmmakers of the Avengers portray an imagination of weapon creation exceeding the greatness of the Creator of this Universe. It looks as if the technology or energy from the nature can be defeated by people who rule the world. But the portrayal of the dominance has been continuously exposed through their products, which sooner or later can "embed" the ideology of western superpower to control the world.

3. Stylistic

The concern of stylistic is style—the way in which a speaker or writer conveys his/her point by using language as a tool. Thus the style can be translated as style. The so-called language style is in fact exists in a variety of languages, various kinds of verbal and written, non-literary, and variety of literature. The style is a way of using the language in a particular context by a particular person for a particular purpose. However, the traditional style is always

linked with literary texts, especially literary writing.

The next level of micro structure is stylistic which is used to look at the choice of words (diction) like what is used in a discourse. The diction in a discourse structure is related to the use of code or language in the form of a discourse. This paper emphasizes the use of stylistic discourse about heroism ideology containing a powerful western cultural power.

"... Earth's greatest hero ..."

"... The human gods, super soldiers, living legend. A man who has a problem with anger management ... big angry green giant ... Some great killer ... Because if we can not protect the Earth, you would surely be damned, and we will get even to it ... "

Recognition that is always embedded in the film The Avengers is the hyperbole about the great heroic discourse, they are the "Earth's Most Powerful Heroes". The diction of the human gods, super soldiers, living legend, a man who has a problem with anger management ... big angry green giant ... Some great killer will direct the audience to interpret what superheroes are. The hyperbole is used to show the greatness of the superheroes. The superhero figures will lose at the beginning and win at the end.

4. Rhetorical

The strategy in the rhetorical level is expressed when a person speaks or writes. Rhetoric has a persuasive function, and are closely related, as the message to be conveyed to the audience. It is repetition style, alliteration, as a strategy to attract attention or to emphasize a particular side to attract the audience. Other rhetorical style is in form of self- mockery and to exaggerate the opponent's drawbacks. Rhetorical strategy also appears in the form of interaction, i.e. how the speaker places or positions him/herself among audiences. It is about whether he or she use the formal or even the casual style as self presentation.

"... I am a huge fan of how you lose control and turn into a giant green rage ..."

Discourse dialog shows a superhero fascination with other superheroes, but containing little mockery in his tone. Viewed from this rhetorical element, it surely indicate the competition between the superhero figures showing off who is more interesting and has more power and less shortcomings. The dialog above shows strong discourse meaning of mockery to exaggerate them shortcomings of others as in the dialog between Iron Man and the Hulk.

"... The appeal of the light of freedom is reduced to living your joy in the battle of power, for the identity, you were made to be ruled. In the end you will always kneel..."

"... I am the King! ..."
 "... You all will bow to me..."

"... Enough!! (Shouting) You're all underneath me! I am god, you're merely powerless creature and I will not be defeated..."

The above dialog shows more persuasive discourse by giving powerful dominance of the discourse users to defeat others and make clear distinction between the powerful and the powerless. Moreover, it becomes so ideological when the discourse is presented to show western culture dominance.

"... Let the Avengers roam the world, they are very dangerous It is true, and the whole world knows it, the whole world knows it ..."

The presumptions about the insertion of an heroism ideology strengthen in the above dialog as it is spoken by the important figure to emphasize the heroism. The Avengers heroes who roam the world could be positioned as western cultural ideology that has infiltrated control in every aspect of the world and it's hard to separate it with the existing eastern culture. Superpower of Avengers hero even discourse punctuated by very dangerous, and repeatedly said in the last dialog before the film was over, that the whole world knows that the Avengers are dangerous. So clearly the filmmakers want to reinforce the dominance of an ideology that is western ideology.

In the discussion of a pop culture product, film certainly has its own characteristics. Most of them contain the messages relating to the value of cultural traditions where the film is produced. Hollywood continuously creates imaginative figures of powerful hero like The Avengers. This study is to describe as the relationship between the issues related to the object of research in theoretical concepts so that the problem of this research which is the heroism as western culture ideology in the Avengers will be answered.

Through the analysis has been done previously on The Avengers, it shows hidden meanings behind the discourse of dialog created by the filmmakers. According to Siti Nur Aisyiyah, national security of a country, culture and character of a nation, can be seen from its television programs (Aisyiyah, 2008:92). Superhero created by Hollywood movies can certainly confirm this statement. Supported by the advanced technologic, Hollywood superhero looks cool and artistic. It forms a culture character that appreciating the heroism, showing off the unbeatable power or merely to divert others about their flaws.

The film makers are not willing to show the flaws in their culture products, heroism in this study indicates that there is some interest besides business. From the idea of capitalism, the union of the super

heroes in the Avenger not only to entertain but also to profit. There is also a hidden agenda—that is the interest of western culture ideology.

Heroism captured in The Avengers was trying to show the invincible power cultural products. The Avengers entertains people at all ages, any gender, any races that enable it to embed the hegemony in the audience perceptions. The ideology is about the power discourse to conquer the world.

“In the battle of power, for the identity, you were made to be ruled. In the end you will always kneel...”

You're all underneath me! I am god, you're merely powerless creature...”

The antagonist is given much dialog to make us aware that the position of each person with a leader that is in great distance, like a god with lesser beings. The human nature is primary to kneel and always seek help from the hero. In the broader perspective of a cultural product, the heroism ideology is from the American version of heroism. It is stated from the hero creation from The Avengers that the superheroes (read the U.S) are like God and others are like lesser beings.

Found in the analysis that the dialog discourse The Avengers Heroes who roam the world positioned as western cultural ideology i.e. "American version" that has infiltrated many parts of the world so that it

will be difficult to separate it from the existing eastern culture.

"... Let the Avengers roam the world, they are very dangerous....It is true, and the whole world knows it, the whole world knows it..."

The Avengers hero is even discoursed in dangerous ways and repeatedly said in the last dialog before the film was over, that the whole world knows that the Avengers are dangerous. So clearly the filmmakers want to reinforce the dominance of an ideology—western ideology of "American version" that America's position as ruler of everything in the world.

This will continue to be presented by the products of pop culture through Hollywood movies, especially in the "American version" to slowly but surely inculcate the ideology of western culture in dominating the world with their capitalism. Though they use a mask to cover the capitalism. Mask of the hero used to attract people to enter the American version of world constructed in a western culture hegemony that America (read: the US) is the King or God of this world. Slowly but surely, the entire world will obey western culture creation in American Version.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, in a pop culture product

which is film is used as a means of cultural hegemony. There, the ideology can be embedded, promoted to the audiences. This study is to awake people to be consciously aware of pop culture consumption. One of them is The Avengers. There is an ideology infiltrated in The Avengers—the American Version of heroism that the US is the King or God that possesses invincible power and willing to get rid or destruct those who threat them.

The masks (the costumes) of the hero is displayed to attract people to enter the world of "American version" that constructs a western cultural hegemony positioned the U.S. as the creator as a god or king of the world, that the whole world trapped in a unique cover-hero hero capitalist creation, slowly but surely going down in the grip of the capitalist western culture creation "American version".

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