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Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

COLONIALISM AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR

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2014-15

ABSTRACT

Avatar is not just a film, but a synopsis of many scenes and facts relevant for the history of the world. It was in the 16th and 17th century when many European settlers went to America, the new land at that time, to colonize it. After many years, in the 21st century, precisely in 2001, a group of jihadists attacked the most powerful country of the world which was also, by chance, America. This paper analyzes the representation of Colonialism and, also, the recent attack on the American Twin Towers in a unique film, *Avatar*. Through the texts of explorers and settlers like John Smith, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and William Bradford, a series of similarities between early Colonialism and the near future of Pandora in 2154 will be analyzed.

RESUMEN

Avatar no es única y exclusivamente una película de ficción, sino que ésta es una alegoría de escenas y hechos pasados relevantes en la historia del mundo. En los siglos XVI y XVII, muchos europeos emigraron a América para colonizarla, una tierra que en aquellos tiempos estaba aún por descubrir. En el siglo XX hubo un intento de cambiar el orden establecido cuando un grupo de yihadistas atacaron el centro neurálgico de la economía y la democracia, los Estados Unidos de América. En este artículo se mostrará la relación que hay entre el antiguo colonialismo y el ataque reciente de las Torres Gemelas de América con la película de James Cameron, *Avatar*. A través de los textos de John Smith, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca y William Bradford descubriremos una serie de similitudes entre el antiguo colonialismo y un futuro muy cercano, el de Pandora en 2154.

KEYWORDS

Avatar, colonialism, John Smith, William Bradford, Cabeza de Vaca, Twin Towers.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Avatar, colonialismo, John Smith, William Bradford, Cabeza de Vaca, Torres Gemelas.

INTRODUCTION

Though James Cameron's celebrated film, *Avatar*, is on first sight a science fiction film set in a hypothetical world in the not so distant future, it is also, as I propose in this analysis, connected to the early American chronicles written by William Bradford, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and John Smith. The film does not only connect the present American reality and the hypothetical future, but also incorporates the past in this blend. By the same token, *Avatar* focuses on Colonialism which is projected towards the future as well as towards the past and present, especially of America, but also of the whole world. The early colonial experiences in the New World are thus connected with the modern, presumably anti-colonial resistance represented by the Al Qaeda attacks on the Twin Towers, which makes of *Avatar* not only a science fiction film, but also an exploration of early European colonialism, modern American neocolonialism, and recent anticolonial resistance.

Avatar, James Cameron's science fiction film, is set in the year 2154 on Pandora, a fictitious moon. The Na'vi, also called *the natives*, is a society of blue-skinned humanoids of approximately three meters in height who live in the lush jungle of Pandora by the "Hometree" in the savage rainforest. Humans want their Unobtainium, an exclusive mineral in *Avatar* which will be the key to solve the Earth's energy problems. In order to tightly unify this relationship and get the appreciated mineral, humans manage to create fake Avatars and this way, get a better affinity to the Na'vi to obtain the mineral. However, this relation worsens as the Na'vi fight against humans in order to protect their land and avoid human's colonialism.

Immersing ourselves in the film's context and recalling all the past facts and stories to our mind can be of great help in order to find connections and intertexts that the film brings up. In the 16th century, many Europeans migrated to America in order to discover a new land of opportunity. Puritans went in search of a place to live in and freely practice their religion as they were oppressed in their home countries. Others travelled there looking for riches, so their aim was more aggressive than the religious

purpose as we know through the stories told by John Smith, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and William Bradford. All these historical experiences are variously reflected in the film by James Cameron.

John Smith helped establish the first successful British settlement in North America. In addition, he is also well known at present because of one minor scene in his *The General History of Virginia*, namely, the scene where Pocahontas, the leader's daughter of the Powhatan tribe, presumably saves his life. In the modern pop recreation of that scene, love ensues between Pocahontas and John Smith. Back to the film, Jake Sully is a marine who, unexpectedly, had to become an Avatar in order to get the Unobtainium and identically to Smith, Jake met the leader's daughter of the Omaticaya clan, Neytiri, and they fell for each other.

Another European settler whose text figures prominently in *Avatar* was the Spaniard Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Working for the Spanish crown, his aim was to discover and colonize as much territory as he could in America. Not only Jake Sully is related to John Smith, but also to Cabeza de Vaca. The native's descriptions by this explorer coincide with many aspects of the Na'vi clan of Pandora such as their appearance, rituals or even the names of the tribes.

And thirdly, there is yet another parallelism between William Bradford and Colonel Quaritch. Bradford was the leader of the Pilgrims who, in the year 1620 traveled across the Atlantic escaping from religious persecution in England and founded Plymouth Colony. Bradford would then become governor of Plymouth. Whereas in the film Jake Sully represents the positive aspects of the story of *Avatar*, Colonel Quaritch depicts the aggressive and exploitative side. Quaritch is in charge of an attack mission against the Na'vi if they do not provide the mineral to the humans. Both, Bradford and the character in the film, Quaritch, describe the natives as beasts or diabolical figures in order to justify their actions.

But *Avatar* does not only look back to American history in order to find intertexts and references. As in most science fiction, the story also connects directly with the present, and brings echoes of contemporary events and issues. This is clearly the case with the link between Pandora's Hometree, the most sacred place for its

inhabitants, and the New York's Twin Towers, the heart of the Western economy. The destruction of these two places was, at the same time, an attack against the inhabitants' feeling of both countries, Pandora and America, and the representation of the anti-colonial struggle. Significantly, the movie seems to indicate, the sacred place of mysticism and spirituality of the Na'vi is refracted on the Twin Towers, a similarly sacred place of American capitalism and neocolonialism.

It is often asserted that the past remains in the past, but as William Faulkner might remind us, all the facts that happened in the past recurrently reemerge and are brought to bear on the present and future. This essay explores the connections between early colonial experiences in the New World, the recent anticolonial resistance that resulted in the Twin Towers' attack, and a fictitious future set in 2154 in Pandora, as represented in *Avatar*.

AVATAR AND THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

Avatar represents the colonialism of the *Sky* people who travel to a foreign territory, Pandora, in order to get a worthy mineral which bears the ironic name of Unobtainium. This is a familiar pattern for the contemporary viewer of the film, who probably cannot help but connect such story to the history of early European colonial exploration and contemporary American neocolonial exploitation. However, the problem comes as this mineral is essential for all the citizens of this futuristic world, not for its economic worth but for its sentimental, mystical value. For the Omaticaya, all element in nature are connected. As doctor Grace states in the film, the roots of the trees in Pandora have “more connections than the human brain” (*Avatar*, 1:28:50). Grace was a doctor who, in a kind of scientific colonialism reminiscent of the nineteenth century, investigated every single element of nature in Pandora as well as the Omaticaya people. However, she was not a Na’vi but a human. The Na’vi lived around a tree called Hometree in a familiar atmosphere as they were in constant contact with the natural environment. What is more, they all lived in harmony and in a kind of spiritual utopia where there was no terror until humans intervened. Jake Sully was a marine who was selected for participating in the *Avatar* project. This plan consisted in transporting the mind of scientists to artificial bodies called Avatars (clearly, another form of colonialism, in that the foreign body is “inhabited” by the American mind). Having the same aspect as the Na’vi would ideally help the human communication with them and hopefully make it easier to get the Unobtainium. Jake was destined to Pandora with the mission of gaining the trust of the Na’vi. He managed it, and not only did almost all of the citizens trust him, but he also found his love, Neytiri, who was the Omaticaya leader’s daughter and the first person to trust Jake.

Nonetheless, the negative part of the film had to do with Colonel Quaritch who was the SecOp forces headquarter, a military troop whose aim was to secure the Unobtainium, even if it meant to destroy Pandora. At the beginning, Jake helped Quaritch by providing him with insider information about the places and the people of

Pandora. However, once Jake fell in love with Neytiri, he decided to defend Pandora from the military attack. As Jake disappointed Quaritch, the Colonel got furious and decided to attack Pandora with no warning. His attack was, as expected, directed against the Hometree, which is brought down in a particularly disquieting scene. Finally, the Na'vi with the aid of Jake, once their representative place had been destroyed, rebelled against the Sky people and defeated them in a final epic battle. This whole plot is loaded with elements that remind of early colonial experiences, both in American and elsewhere.

Back in American early history, as is well known Christopher Columbus sailed towards the West in order to find new commercial routes to the Far East. However, what he found in 1492 was a new land, the Americas. This fact was the starting point for many explorations, conquests and disputes among European countries for the possession and exploitation of the new territories. The first explorations and conquests were led by Spain and Portugal. Then, other countries such as England or Holland followed the same path towards the colonization and settlement of the Americas. This idea of a fresh start that might bring up a new life for the impoverished or persecuted European population is recreated in the film. Jake, who will become the protagonist, is initially a disabled soldier, whose future prospects are very uncertain, since his disability thwarts all possibilities for him. However, the colonial territories open up new possibilities, as he was told in *Avatar*, "It'd be a fresh start on a new world." (*Avatar*, 2:55) These colonial patterns are depicted in the futuristic film by James Cameron, *Avatar*. We find a similar setting in the film where humans-colonizers want to conquer Pandora as the Europeans did in America during the colonization but with a different ending, the conquerors were defeated.

In spite of the fact that humans had all the power to invade Pandora with the help of powerful tanks, fighter planes and weapons, Avatars did beat humans. Although they heavily armed soldiers try to destroy Pandora, they moved back as Jake Sully told the Colonel to give him another opportunity to reach a deal. The attacks ceased for a while and, in the meantime, the Na'vi with the aid of Jake and other tribes, decided to get ready to face a new and more powerful menace. Suddenly, humans, directed by Quaritch, decided to attack Pandora again but they did not know that the Na'vi were

already trained to confront the attack. Avatars were not alone, other tribes and also wild animals were summoned by nature in order to fight against humans. The economic ambitions of the humans are met by the more natural, spiritual resistance of the Na'vi. In the end, Pandora dwellers fought together against humans and won the battle even though many citizens died in the act.

One of the reasons the Europeans wanted to conquer the new land was related to religion. The Spaniards wanted to evangelize natives of the new land and convert them into Christianity. While others, like the puritans, were forced to migrate to the Americas as a result of the English Reformation. The other reason was economic, to increase their amount of raw material and open new commercial routes. Great Britain, governed by Elizabeth I in the 16th century, intervened in the maritime trade. Piracy was a great source of profit based on the attack to boats coming from the Caribbean to Europe. Just as Europeans were driven by economic reasons when they landed in America seeking new raw materials, the Sky people in *Avatar* wanted the mineral, Unobtainium. In the film, Parker explains, “This is why we’re here, Unobtainium because this little gray rock sells for 20 million a kilo.”(*Avatar*, 13:04)

Nevertheless, the American natives were against this conquest as Spaniards tried to invade their land and destroy it by stealing their goods. Moreover, they did not agree with the imposition that unknown foreigners had towards them. All these causes drove them to a guerrilla war. The Spanish side was a smaller group than the native's. However, the Spaniards had more powerful weapons, such as gunpowder and firearms while the natives only counted on the help of bows, arrows and spears. Native Americans could not face and win the combat, just as the natives in *Avatar* when one of them says, “we’re going up against gunships with bows and arrows.” (*Avatar*, 2:02:13) However, the ambition for political power increased and, soon, there were fights in order to be the leaders and own more properties and goods. All these issues brought also social and cultural changes that were imposed to natives by conquerors. We also see disputes between the Sky people leaders in the film. While Doctor Grace's interest is to investigate nature in Pandora respecting its environment, Quaritch and Parker only search for economic profit and they remind Grace of her role, “You’re supposed to be winning the hearts and the mind of natives.”(*Avatar*, 12:39)

Notwithstanding, not all the colonists conquered the land by force, some of them tried to gain the native's acceptance to live together by cooperating with them and that saved their lives in an unknown environment. As Grace says in the film, "The wealth of this world isn't in the ground. It's all around us."(*Avatar*, 1:29:18). Those who opted for the cooperation had the idea of adapting and getting along with natives: "If you want to share this world with them, you need to understand them" (*Avatar*, 1:29:28), Grace says to Parker. Also, the same idea is declared by Jake, "I needed their help, and they needed mine."(*Avatar*, 1:49:52) As Grace and Jake Sully comment in the film, not only did they need native's help, but also their aid was important for them. So the idea of cooperation and coexistence is a key point for knowing new places and cultures. The intertexts of American culture that are present in the film all point in these two directions of the colonial experience, towards the need of conquest of other peoples and the exploitation of their resources (as in the case of John Smith and Bradford) or towards the emphasis on cooperation and understanding (as in the case of Cabeza de Vaca).

AVATAR AND JOHN SMITH'S *GENERAL HISTORY*

John Smith was born in 1580 in Lincolnshire, England. He was a British soldier who decided to depart to America and start a new life. He was the founder of Jamestown, a British colony in America at the beginning of the 17th century. The fact of living many years in that town brought him many stories such as his relationship with Pocahontas, the daughter of the Powhatan leader, a native tribe. However, he had to face many trials in order to survive as some tribes did not accept him because he was a settler. It is in 1609 when he returns to his place of birth, Lincolnshire, and becomes a defender of colonization by writing and publishing works such as *General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Islands*.

Equally important for the Na'vi clan, Pandora's natives, was Jake Sully. He was part of a project called Avatar which consisted on the control of Avatars, a hybrid blend of Na'vi and humans, in order to negotiate the Unobtainium with the Na'vi. Jake's original function was to help Colonel Quaritch to discover the Pandora's inhabitants' weaknesses. Under those circumstances, Jake lived together with the Na'vi and learned all their traditions and ways of living. He also met Neytiri, the daughter of the Omaticaya leader, a clan of natives, and fell in love with her. Nonetheless, many Na'vi did not accept Jake as he was not a real Na'vi but an Avatar, so he had to overcome many difficulties and fights. At the end, the Na'vi accepted him and he defended Pandora against the Sky people as if he was originally one of the members of the clan.

John Smith was an English explorer who went to the Americas with the same aim as other settlers just as Jake Sully did in the film. However, once he knows and lives together with the natives, both, Jake and John, turn around the feelings towards natives in a positive way. This change of mind is not imposed by anyone, neither natives nor settlers, but it is voluntary as Smith declares in *From General History of Virginia*, "I have not been so ill bred, but I have tasted of plenty and pleasure, as well as want and misery: nor doth necessity yet, or occasion of discontent, force me to these

endeavors". (Smith, 115). As well as other settlers and human-avatars, Smith lived a unique and interesting story in the Americas full of dangers as well as attainments. He was born in 1580 in England and he became a soldier when he was young, very close to Sully's life who was a marine veteran of the North American army. Their life went on by embarking upon an adventure just after a member of their family died, Smith's father as well as Jake's brother. It was at this moment of their life when Sully in *Avatar* commented "One life ends, another begins." (Avatar, 4:26) and they decided to set forth on a new adventure. However, neither John nor Jake did know the land they were going to. In the case of John, Jamestown was his destiny whereas John's was Pandora. In fact, this was reflected by John Smith in his work:

First, the fault of our going was our own; what could be thought fitting or necessary we had, but what we should find, or want, or where we should be, we were all ignorant and supposing to make our passage in two months[...] (Smith, 106)

Just as Smith never thought of going to America, Jake admits in the film, "You grew up hearing about it, but I never figured I'd be going there." (Avatar, 2:22) Once in the vessel, the gentlemen on board were jealous of his military and naval experience and looked down on him because of his rural upbringing. This is another parallelism found in *Avatar* where at the beginning Norm Spellman, the other human converted into Avatar, is jealous of Jake Sully. John Smith said that the gentlemen of the boat had accused him of plotting to seize power for himself just as what happens to Jake in the film. Smith was selected as one of the leaders of the troop although he did not completely agree with it. Nevertheless, this was quite controversial as he was accused of staging a mutiny on the boat. In *Avatar* the story is replicated when Jake is selected to accomplish a mission which came up unexpectedly as his brother died. As John observes in his writings, "The new President and Martin, being little beloved, of weak judgment in dangers, and less industry in peace, committed the managing of all things abroad to Captain Smith" (Smith, 106). In the film, Grace and Norm paid no heed to Jake.

When the settlers arrived in Jamestown, there were a lot of problems with the natives and very difficult human conditions such as hunger or thirst. However, Smith managed to survive while the other Europeans were not capable on their own.

[Smith] (with some of his workmen) shipped himself in the shallop to search the country for trade. The want of the language, knowledge to manage his boat without sails, the want of a sufficient power (knowing the multitude of the savages), apparel for his men, and other necessaries, were infinite impediments yet no discouragement. (Smith, 107)

Likewise, Jake manages to survive in Pandora on his own with no knowledge of the Na'vi life or language. Besides, as John says,

everything of worth is found full of difficulties, but nothing [is] so difficult as to establish a commonwealth so far remote from men and means and where men's minds are so untoward as neither do well themselves nor suffer others. But to proceed. (Smith, 106)

Apparently, the real and the fictitious characters had similar ways of confronting life and facing this new adventure by applying their instinct and bravery. After some months, Smith and two councilmen managed to overthrow the president of the colony, Edward Wingfield, from his charge continuing with the designation of John Ratcliffe as the new president. Once Ratcliffe was appointed as president, Smith had to negotiate with natives in order to get food for colonizers. However, Europeans accused him. There had been "some idle exceptions being muttered against Captain Smith for not discovering the head of Chickahominy river and [he being] taxed by the Council to be too slow in so worthy an attempt". (Smith, 108) Again, Jake's adventure is very close to Smith's and as he is the one who negotiates with natives in order to get the mineral, Unobtainium. Also, Jake is accused by the commander of wasting his time on investigating and providing information about Pandora and the Na'vi clan to the soldiers but not on the agreement with the clan.

In the expedition in the river Chickahorniny, Smith and the rest of the troop were surrounded by the Powhatan tribe, a group of hunters. Being the only survivor, he was taken to the Powhatans' leader village, Werowocomoco. Depicted in the film, when Jake arrived in Pandora, he suffered an attack by beasts and he had to run away. He was alone and lost in the forest of Pandora when Neytiri, a female Na'vi, found him. She saved him from the beasts of the forest and when Jake told her, "I need your help", (Avatar, 38:37) she takes him to the clan where the Na'vi will decide what to do with him. All the Na'vi observed Jake carefully, just as the natives did with John Smith in the Americas in the 16th century, "more than two hundred of those grim courtiers stood wondering at him" (Smith, 112)

Yet, are there similarities not only between Jake and John but also between Neytiri, the daughter of the Omaticaya's leader, and Pocahontas. As Smith wrote in the *General Historie*, "Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death" (112 john). Jake was not accepted by the Na'vi as Neytiri's brother states: "These demons are forbidden here" (*Avatar*, 41:19). When they attacked Jake, Neytiri defended him with the same gestures as Pocahontas. She saved Jake and took care of him. She felt responsible for Jake as Pocahontas did with John Smith, "Now every once in four or five days, Pocahontas with her attendants brought him so much provision that saved many of their lives, that else for all this had starved with hunger." (Smith, 113) Moreover, just as in John Smith's story when he said, " then Powahatan more like a devil than a man, with some two hundred more as black as himself, came unto him and told him now they were friends,"(Smith, 113), it was also pronounced by the Omaticaya leader in the film, "You are Omaticaya now"(*Avatar*, 1.19.39)

Later on, Smith came back to Jamestown and realized that he had been substituted in his post. He was told that the other settlers felt that he had let them down and made him responsible for the deaths in the river. Consequently, he was condemned to the gallows. However, he was not killed as that night new settlers came with lot of food and reinforcement and, so, Smith's sentence was forgotten during the ceremony.

Owing to the fact that the Powhatans and new settlers helped Smith, his superiors sent him to explore Chesapeake Bay because it was thought there were big quantities of gold and a new way to cross towards the Pacific Ocean. However, he did not find gold, nor a new path but food. He also learned about the life of the natives and created new detailed maps of the territory. The new maps that Smith supplied were of great help to the settlers in the following explorations. In the film, Jake learns about the clan's language and habits to provide the soldiers with information about Pandora. However, his mission is not fulfilled as he does not reach an agreement with the Omaticaya in order to get the Unobtainium for the Sky people.

Smith wrote a letter where he declared his dissatisfaction with the leadership of the village and the policy of the Virginia Company. The letter, which was supposed to be private, was published in England, what gave him problems. In the futuristic film,

there are no letters but video blogs; however, the situation is the same. In the film, Jake shows his anger when he discovers he has been spied. The colonel had watched all the video blogs Jake recorded for Grace as part of the investigation. It is in this video that Jake declares his affection to the Na'vi, the opposition to the soldiers, and his need to get a deeper knowledge of their behavior to be part of the Na'vi.

John Smith departed to Chesapeake again in order to keep on exploring. What Jake does when he constantly returns to Pandora is to have a better knowledge about the Na'vi's life. However, he is not only interested in the clan's way of life, but also in Neytiri's, with whom he is in love. Jake gets the Na'vi acceptance and Neytiri tells him that he has become a real Omaticaya. Once he is part of the clan, Neytiri suggests to him, "you may choose a woman" (*Avatar*, 1:19:55). This is the moment when Jake declares his love for Neytiri, "feel[s] in love with the forest and with the Omaticaya people, and with you." (*Avatar*, 1:33:14)

In 1609, more settlers went to Jamestown and there was a gunpowder explosion as there was no agreement on who should be in charge of the colony. It is in this explosion where Smith is hurt and he has to go to England. However, he returns to America in 1614 and then again to England not to go back to what he called New England, America, ever again. Finally, Smith died at the age of 51 in 1631.

Jake Sully's story has a different ending. As he does not make an agreement with the Na'vi in order to get the mineral, colonel Quaritch and the army decide to provoke a gunpowder explosion in Pandora: "they've opened fire" (*Avatar*, 1:35:56). The Sky people attack Pandora and Jake is hurt as well as many of the Na'vi. However, the Na'vi manage to save their mineral and repel the Sky people. Notwithstanding, Jake decides to live the rest of his life as a Na'vi in Pandora and not to go back to his previous life. Nevertheless, John Smith left America and died without returning back to New England.

All things considered, Jake Sully was a parallel representation of John Smith. Although Jake's ending was quite different from John's, the stories of both characters have many things in common. Especially, they share their function as settlers and their relationship with a native female who saves them from a life-threatening danger.

AVATAR AND ÁLVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA'S RELATION

In the early sixteenth century, the Spanish explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca set course for America in search of the conquest of Florida. He wrote the first work about his American experience in 1542, under the title *The Relation of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*. This narrative has become the symbol of the western colonizer's conversion to the ways of the natives, known as the "going native" story. In this archetypal story, the member of the presumably "superior" western civilization gets to know the natives, spends time with them, and finally renounces his own civilized beliefs and values to assume those of the natives, and to even defend the natives against his fellow countrymen. This pattern is clearly replicated in *Avatar* in the figure of Jake, who by the end of the story has himself "gone native".

The Cabeza de Vaca expedition was headed by Pánfilo de Narváez, with Cabeza de Vaca as the crown treasurer of the fleet, and one of their aims was the discovery of the fountain of youth. The fountain of youth was a symbol of immortality. It was believed that whoever drank its water would be cured and youth would come to the person. It is represented in *Avatar* as the *Tree of Souls* which as Grace affirms, "It's their most sacred place." (*Avatar*, 1:11:42) It is in that tree that the Omaticaya clan can hear, as Neytiri explains to Jake, "The voices of our antecessors" (*Avatar*, 1:19:09).

Once they disembark at the coast of Florida, natives of the tribe Avavares told the expedition that the gold was not there but in Tallahassee, the now called Apalache province. Consequently, nearly the whole expedition, together with Cabeza de Vaca, advanced by boat and then on foot. They had to sail and swim in marshy areas which overcomplicated the progress.

This people we came to know there are tall and well-built. Their only weapons are bows and arrows, which they use with great dexterity. The men bore through one of their nipples, some both, and insert a joint of cane two and a half palms long by two fingers thick. They also bore their lower lip and wear a piece of cane in it half a finger in diameter. (Cabeza de Vaca, 60)

However, “the women cover some part of their persons with a wool that grows on trees” (Cabeza de Vaca, 62) as Núñez explains in *The Relation of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*. Something similar happens with the Na’vi clan who are also tall and well-built. Moreover, the Na’vi people cover some parts of their bodies with little cloths.

At the beginning, Álvar Núñez and his companion suffered an attack by natives carried out with arrows. “Their only weapons are bows and arrows, which they use with great dexterity” (Cabeza de Vaca, 60) explains Cabeza de Vaca, and, with these weapons, they managed to defend themselves. Then, after a long way, the explorers again suffered another attack by the natives in which all of them were injured, including Cabeza de Vaca, who was wounded in the face. All these facts are represented in *Avatar* when Jake appears in Pandora and the Na’vi attack him also with arrows. However, not only the attack is represented, but colonel Quaritch is also wounded in the face when he arrives in Pandora.

Although neither Cabeza de Vaca nor Jake Sully were natives, they had to look like them and adapt themselves to that society as Álvar explains, “we went naked through all this country; not being accustomed to going so, ...” (Cabeza de Vaca, 63) In addition, Cabeza de Vaca described the natives in his work as “These people love their offspring more than any in the world and treat them very mildly.” (Cabeza de Vaca, 61). They were very familiar and close to each other so “If a son dies, the whole village joins the parents and kindred in weeping.” (Cabeza de Vaca, 6) The same philosophy of life is seen in the film. The Na’vi love their tribe as well as their ancestors and all together are considered to be of the same family.

The similarities between the Omaticaya and the natives do not end here. They shared the rituals they followed when a person died as Cabeza de Vaca explained, “Everybody in the village dances and makes merry while the pyre of a medicine-man kindles, and until his bones become powder”. (Cabeza de Vaca, 61) In the case of Pandora, this ritual is shown when Grace dies and Jake asks the clan and their deity for help, “I beg the help of Eywa” (*Avatar*, 1:53:38) All the Omaticaya clan make a ritual in order to save Grace, but in the end she dies. However, her soul, as well as other dead Na’vi’s, moves to the Tree of Souls where Jake, later on, will try to hear it.

Apart from the parallelisms between the American natives and Avatars' appearance, they both talk two languages. The formers, Han and Capoque while in the case of the latter most of them speak English and the Na'vi language.

Avatars thought Jake and the others came from the Heaven as well as natives thought the same of Cabeza de Vaca and his company, "They were all convinced that we came from Heaven" (Cabeza de Vaca, 66) as everything they did not comprehend had to come from Heaven.

Referring to religion, Álvar teaches natives about their religion as he explains in his memories,

we taught all the people by signs, which they understood, that in Heaven was a Man we called God, who had created the heavens and the earth; that all good come from Him and that we worshiped and obeyed Him and called him our Lord.(Cabeza de Vaca, 66)

However, Jake converts to the Na'vi religion which is Eywa and it is Neytiri's mother "the one who interprets the will of Eywa" (*Avatar*, 43:46). While the God of the Christians is in Heaven, the Eywa of the Na'vi is in nature and both societies are guided by these two deities.

After some years living together with the natives, Cabeza de Vaca saved one of them by removing an arrow that this indigenous had hammered in his body. This fact made Cabeza de Vaca a hero adored by natives. Watching the film, a very similar scene is reproduced when Jake Sully manages to tame *Turuk*, the most savage animal of Pandora. This fact makes him being adored and respected by all the Pandora inhabitants. After getting the affection of the natives and living together with them, Álvar and his company adapted so well to the new environment, that they defended natives against Europeans.

The night before, our heralds had spied on the Christians from behind trees and seen them marching many Indians in chains. The intelligence terrified our escort, some of whom ran to spread the news that the Christians were coming, and many more would have followed if we had not managed to forbid them and to palliate their fright. (Cabeza de Vaca, 68)

Álvar Núñez provided the first news about the legendary seven cities of Cibola and Quivira which were full of gold as well as Jake Sully is, in a way, the army's tell-

tale who informs them about what happens in Pandora. Moreover, he describes the places and how the Na'vi behave in order to facilitate the army attack against Pandora. As the Spanish explorer later explained, he and his companion got familiarized with natives to the point that they felt like natives themselves. They tried to defend them from Europeans and avoid any fight, just as Jake Sully did in the film. Sully began his experience as an explorer who had to provide information to humans, but he felt so welcomed by the Na'vi tribe that he decided to defend them against the Sky people. Jake, in the end, became a Na'vi native and rejected any relation with anything which was not Pandora. In 1537, Cabeza de Vaca comes back to Spain. However, three years after, in 1540, he decided to set out again on a journey to America.

All the similarities are crucial as *Avatar* is completely reflected in the descriptions that Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca showed in *The Relation of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*. Given all these points, not only is Jake Sully the representation of John Smith, but he also takes numerous elements from Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Furthermore, the film director could have based some of his ideas such as religious rituals and the conversion to the native natural mysticism on Cabeza de Vaca's story.

AVATAR AND WILLIAM BRADFORD'S *OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION*

Of Plymouth Plantation was written by William Bradford as a diary of his life during the colonization of the new land by the pilgrims and the dearth they had to suffer in order to find their right place to live. At the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th, the king of Scotland and, then of Ireland and England, was James I after Elizabeth I's death. The three territories were completely politically separated; however, there were many rebellions against James because of religion. It is in 1605 when a group of Catholics conspired against the king in order to assassinate him, but the conspiracy broke down. As it was a failure, the reaction was a rise on the persecution towards every nonconformist group, and as Bradford affirmed, "Separating was, however, by English law an act of treason, and many believers paid a high price for their dreams of purity" (Bradford, 156). Consequently, many puritans fled the country to Holland in 1608, where they set up well. However, they thought it would be easier for them to defend and practice their religion in a different environment where pressure would no longer be their worry any more. So they decided that "Living in a foreign land was not easy, and eventually the Scrooby community petitioned for a grant of land in the New World." (Bradford, 156) This way, the pilgrims could escape from the king's pressure and have religious freedom as well as a more comfortable life.

It is in 1618, after all these persecutions and rebellions, when most of the so-called pilgrims migrated to Massachusetts. However, after a few problems with legal documents in the new land, they had to return to England. Then, in 1620, a group of a hundred people boarded the *Mayflower*, a cargo boat, from England to Massachusetts again. These people are the Pilgrims and they are the ones who founded the Plymouth colony, as it is described in the *Norton Anthology*,

William Bradford epitomizes the spirit of determination and self-sacrifice that seems to us characteristic of our first 'Pilgrims', a word Bradford himself used to describe the community of believers who sailed from Southampton, England, on the *Mayflower* and settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. (Bradford, 156)

They signed the *Mayflower Compact*, a document where all the members of the boat stated their own patterns of behavior and organization as if they were creating their own government. The Compact is crucial in the American society as it is a model of democracy in which all the members involved signed the document showing their agreement and determined not to disobey any rule. Once in the Americas, William Bradford and the rest of the passengers of the Mayflower were afraid of the natives and how to confront their new life in a new place. Nonetheless, Bradford affirms in order to reduce panic that,

all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate. The difficulties were many, but not invincible. (Bradford, 61)

However, not only the puritans were afraid of the new situation, but also the same kind of fear is perceptible in the film when the army is told to go to Pandora in order to destroy the land and its inhabitants. Moreover, what Bradford wrote in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, “coming to the scanning of all, it raised many variable opinions amongst men and caused many fears and doubts amongst themselves.” (Bradford, 160) is very close to what Quaritch states in the film, “Pandora will shit you out dead with zero warning” (*Avatar*, 20:19)

Nonetheless, the most outstanding relation between William Bradford and colonel Quaritch is the way and words they use when referring to the natives in the case of the former, and to the Na’vi in the case of the latter. Bradford and Quaritch descriptions towards both societies are made by using negative and discriminatory words. The British settler describes natives as “savage and brutish men (...) wild beasts” (Bradford, 160) and also as “savage barbarians” (Bradford, 168). But the colonel does not use more positive words and describes Avatars as being “fly-bitten savages that live in a tree.” (*Avatar*, 1:31:23) or as “These dumb bastards” (*Avatar*, 1:36:14)

Therefore, not everything is linked to Jake Sully, but also to other characters of the film. Colonel Quaritch can be understood as the representation of William Bradford who was also in search of a wealthy life. The previous settlers, John Smith as well as Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, are mostly reflected in Jake’s character in a positive way

towards the natives as they adapted to that society and, even more, some of them as John Smith found his love in Pandora. Moreover, these settlers, as Smith, “brought the clans together” (Avatar, 1:14:22) as well as Jake does in the film.

Nevertheless, William Bradford is the other side of the coin as he represents, as well as Quaritch, the negative and aggressive part of the conquest. Bradford’s adventure was focused on imperialism, colonialism and capitalism as most of the settlers’. Moreover, he depicted the natives as the devil due to the fact that he saw them as “savage and brutish men” or as “wild beasts” as he wrote in his diary (Bradford, 160). However, he did not attack the aboriginal as colonel Quaritch did in the film, but both, the colonel and Bradford, refer to them with disdain. “Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men- and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not.” (Bradford, 18) is Bradford’s description. So, not only the natives are represented with slight but also the Americas, the place, as Bradford describes it as wilderness full of beasts. Although Bradford is not much in favor of this new land and its society, it is colonel Quaritch that takes his anger to the extreme. In the film, he declares his contempt towards Pandora and the Na’vi, and his only objective is to destroy immediately both, the land and its inhabitants. He shows no feelings towards people and his only purpose is to fight no matter what the result is.

Nevertheless, the real leaders of the colonizers were not the ones that moved to the Americas nor to Pandora, but they stayed in their countries controlling all that the settlers did in the meanwhile. They were the ones that organized the routes and the purposes and how to achieve them. Not endangering their life, these leaders would get more than those who exposed themselves to danger. This is the case of Quaritch as well as it can be in a way of Bradford. This idea is perfectly summed up by Nathan Eckstrand when he says that “Selfridge never engages with the Na’vi himself, preferring instead to send Quaritch and his SecOp forces”. (Eckstrand, 2015)

As shown above, Bradford can be seen as colonel Quaritch’s alter ego. William Bradford had just arrived with a group of colonizers to a place full of natives, and he needed to justify his conquest and domination of the territory. In order to do that, he used his interpretation of the natives as diabolical or beasts, similar to the Colonel and his troop’s descriptions of natives and their need to colonize Pandora.

AVATAR AND THE TWIN TOWERS

“We will fight terror with terror.” (*Avatar*, 2:01:06) states Colonel Quaritch in the film *Avatar*. The idea this sentence provides readers is closely connected to George Bush’s speeches, the president of the United States of America at the moment of the Twin Tower’s attack. When the Twin Towers were already destroyed, the president of America as well as Quaritch, decided to initiate a war against terror. As George Bush declared to American citizens, “(...) the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!” (AmericanRhetoricOrig, 2015)

It is clear that there are many relations between *Avatar* and the European settlers, as we have already mentioned. But there is another resemblance, which we have not dealt with yet, between the film and the recent attack against the Twin Towers. The jihadists’ reaction towards the invasion of America in Iraq was an anti-colonialist reaction. The same that happened in the film where the inhabitants of Pandora, tired of being invaded by the Sky people, reacted and fought against them in order to defend their rights and land. Both scenes and reactions can be explained as a response of the citizens against the invasion and ambition of others, in this case Americans and the Sky people, in order to get their riches.

The morning of the 11th of September of 2001 a group of hijackers of Al-Qaeda crashed two airplanes, Boeing 767 and 757, against the World Trade Center, also known as the Twin Towers, in New York. It was a programmed attack in which the two airplanes crashed into the towers. Once the attack happened, the Twin Towers started to burn and then collapsed one after the other. As Vincent Dunn states in an article, “After the 767 jet liner crashed into the World Trade Center building creating the worst terror attack in history, a fire burned for 56 minutes inside the World Trade Center building number two.”(Dunn) The attack was carried out by Al-Qaeda, an Islamic terrorist organization led by Osama Bin Laden. Their main purpose was to group all the Muslim people together and govern them with strict policies following the Muslim rules. Many people coincide on the thought that the main reasons of the attack were an aggression

towards Iraq by the USA, the military occupation of the Arabic peninsula and the lack of American military support among others.

These two huge skyscrapers were not just two buildings, but a symbol of the city. Built in 1973, they were the tallest buildings in the world at the time of their construction. The World Trade Center, located at the heart of the city's financial district, was the symbolic icon of the American society as it represented the economic and the global power. In fact, it is believed that the Muslim terrorist group chose the Twin Towers for their symbolic importance for the American economy and the massive number of people that could be affected by the attack.

As the American's feeling is represented in the Twin Towers, the Tree of Souls and the Hometree are the Na'vi's soul in which they live, as Grace affirms in the film "The Tree of Souls. It's their most sacred place." (Avatar, 1:11:42) Not only had the city of New York suffered this attack, but also Pandora. Moreover, similar to the Twin Towers where two towers were destroyed, the Na'vi had also two sacred places. However, the army could only attack one, the Hometree as the Na'vi manage to save his other sacred place.

In the fictitious world, the village suffered several attacks led by Quaritch and the army. In one of those attacks against Pandora, Jake is unconscious, but, at last, he awakes and manages to stop it. However, it is impossible for him to halt the final attack. This late bombing resembles the attack on the Twin Towers.

While in New York the 767 and 757 jet liners crashed into the towers, the army bombards the Hometree. Although for the attackers the towers, as well as the tree, were not relevant objects, they did know that by destroying them, they would reach their purpose as both places were the hearts of both societies.

Not only the similarities are the ones mentioned, but the attack was also performed with aircrafts in Pandora as well as in the American city. Both were programmed by the Sky people army and Al-Qaeda and unexpected for the inhabitants. The attack caused a fire which destroyed both, the tree and the towers. Norm Spellman warns in the film that "If they get to the Tree of Souls, it's over." (Avatar, 2:02:48)

As a consequence, Pandora's tree and New York's Twin Towers had the same tragic ending, the death of many people. However, the death was not only physical, but also psychological, and the sense of nationhood was defeated as their national symbol had been destroyed. The Na'vi and New Yorkers had the sense of the end of the world as the heart of both nations had been devastated. Moreover, there can be a metaphor relating the Hometree to the Twin Towers in the sense that the former is the main place and the most important things are concentrated there and emanate from there through the branches. The same idea is captured in the latter as the Twin Towers are in the heart of New York's financial district and from there, many branches or streets are dispersed. Furthermore, most of the actual facts that occurred in the Twin Towers are illustrated in the film. The most remarkable image is how the Na'vi as well as the Americans fall off from the heart of their beliefs, the Towers and the Hometree. So, once destroyed the hearts of both centers, the whole population is hurt.

Another clear similitude between the Hometree attack in *Avatar* and the real story of the Twin Tower's attack is how both scenes are represented. The images of the Twin Tower's attack are engraved in most American citizens, even in the whole world population. The falling of the two massive buildings were shown on TV screens across the globe as in slow motion, mostly due to their grandiosity. However, the impressive images were not only the falling of the skyscrapers, but also how all the people were escaping with expressions of awe and pain, without forgetting that sense of fear due to the terrible situation. This scene is represented in the film with the falling of the equally massive tree in similar slow motion. Moreover, Pandora's inhabitants are seen escaping from the tree when it is falling, as well as in the real attack in New York.

Not all the facts that happen in life are negative; another clear parallelism is the solidarity shown by both populations as they helped wounded people. As Neytiri tells Jake in the film, the attack "brought the clans together in a time of great sorrow." (*Avatar*, 1:14:22). There was mutual support in the Omaticaya clan as well as in the American citizens and, nowadays, all people as well as "All Na'vi people know the story." (*Avatar*, 1:14:24)

All these points and scenes lead us to relate both attacks, the one of the Hometree and the one of the Twin Towers. All the images shown in the film could be a clear representation of the real attack which took place in New York.

Finally, there is an intriguing link yet to be solved. Taking into account that James Cameron seems to have read Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's work about Avavares (Avatar) and John Smith's love story of Pocahontas (Neytiri), would not it be possible that the origin of the word Na'vi came from the words native of Virginia to refer to the inhabitants of Pandora?

The citizens of the Americas were called natives as well as those of Pandora were the Na'vi. Both societies represent the same idea of colonization and it could be possible that James Cameron focused on the words "native" and "Virginia" and used only the first letters in order to create a word that reminds us of this historical fact. Nonetheless, despite the fact that there could be a relation, it is just a personal surmise.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that *Avatar* reflects not only a fictitious future world, but also a real present and past where colonialism is the main issue. James Cameron manages to deal with different historical facts described by important settlers in a futuristic setting. He made possible to relate different events from the 16th century to the 22nd century, all in a three hour film, *Avatar*.

Firstly, there are many relations between the main character of the film, Jake Sully, and John Smith, the English settler from the 17th century. Smith, as well as Sully, represent Nathan Eckstrand's statement: "A white man – in this case, Jake – is the one most capable of saving the natives." (Eckstrand 2014: 200) And also, there are connections between the feminine characters of both stories, Pocahontas and Neytiri as their lovers.

Secondly, James Cameron could have based many of his ideas when creating the film on the descriptions Cabeza de Vaca made of the tribes he encountered in his expeditions. Cameron inspired himself in the tribe rituals and lifestyle.

On the other hand, Colonel Quaritch in *Avatar* and William Bradford represent the other side of the coin, the colonization of a new land. Their aim is purely economic so they are not interested in the people but in the riches, whether in the form of minerals or of territory, that they can obtain in the new world. That is why Quaritch's description of the Omaticaya, as well as Bradford's of the natives, is so disdainful.

Conversely, even though early colonialism is the main idea illustrated in the film, the present is portrayed too with the appearance of the Twin Tower's attack and the sporadic reference to the war on terror. The advance of the SecOp troops towards Pandora's Hometree led by Colonel Quaritch symbolizes al-Qaeda's attempt to destroy the Western culture attacking the World Trade Center complex of New York.

Finally, James Cameron grounded most of his ideas when creating the film on historical facts which are relevant for the present to make us aware of the dangers of greed, racism and colonialism. Pandora is a synonym of Thomas More's *Utopia* which describes a world where nature and humans cohabit with respect. We are told that it is possible to live happily fulfilling the basic needs of the human being in an equalitarian world without the necessity of accumulating riches.

All in all, the lesson the film teaches us, as Cameron said, is that *Avatar* "asks us to open our eyes and truly see others, respecting them even though they are different, in the hope that we may find a way to prevent conflict and live more harmoniously on this world." ("*Avatar* Has a Racist Message?")

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