

Propaganda Analysis in the Movie Che: The Argentine

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, public opinion can form in quickly and with a vast reach due to the advancement of technology. One way to sway public opinion is through propaganda. One of the mainstream media that the public enjoys is the film. The film is also a media of propaganda that have a big impact on the public. Ever since its discovery, the film has been used as a tool of propaganda. This research aims to analyze how propaganda techniques used in the movie Che: The Argentine by one of Hollywood director Steven Soderbergh. The theory that is used is propaganda theory. This research also used a qualitative approach with the Sara Mill's discourse analysis method. In this research, the researcher dismantles the realities of the discourse and conclude the subject-object position along with the public position towards the discourse. After dismantling realities of the discourse, the researcher discovered that the reality of the discourse is being presented through the point of view of the subject that is Ernesto Guevara that held the position of the pinnacle of truth. The propaganda technique that are used in this the film includes card stacking, glittering generalities, plain folk, and the bandwagon effect. Those propaganda message delivered through the view of the subject only by precepting surrounding situation through their view of the pinnacle of truth.

Keywords: *propaganda, the film, Sara Mill's*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the present time, public opinion can form in a much faster time compared to the old days. Some of the factors that contributed to the present days situations are the development of speed and range in terms of information spreading in the fields of mass communication. The government always pays attention to public opinion that forms among the people because public opinion can affect the economic stability and also determine where the government is heading. Negative public opinion can affect the approval rate of the government. Therefore the government always try to sway public opinion through a variety of means. One of the means that the government used is propaganda. According to Harold D. Laswell, propaganda is a technique to manipulate the representation of a certain value to influence the human behavior. (Nurudin, 2008)

One of the media to conduct propaganda is through the film. The first the film is presented in 1895 by the Lumiere Brothers. At that time, the film was extraordinary to the European society, but it didn't take long for the film to become popular. Before long the film have found it self's a foothold and transformed into an excellent media. The oldest propaganda the film is a silent the film that showcase

the Spanish-American war in 1898. During the 20th century, the film was becoming something that is common, therefore countries such as The United States and the Soviet Union began using the films as their means of propaganda. (Stephenson&Klar, 2019)

In the days of the cold war, Cuba was one of the countries that fought against American Influence. In 1959, Fidel Castro expelled the ruling president of Cuba, Fulgencio Batista and founded a new country with Marxist ideology and was anti America. This triggers the American government to expel Castro from Cuba with many means.

One of the key figure of the 26th July 1969 revolution movement was Ernesto Guevara. Ernesto was an Argentinian that spent his youth riding his motorcycle through South America. Along his journey he witnessed poverty that was among the people of South America and because of this, Ernesto joined Fidel movement.

In present day, Ernesto is remembered as one of the symbol of anti imperialism. His face can be recognized through out the world and the society in Cuba remember him dearly. Even so he is being remembered as a murderer and terrorist in the United States. The United States also had done many propaganda to disfigured his legacy.

In 2008, a Hollywood director by the name of Steven Soderberg created a bibliography of Ernesto Guevara that consist of two movies. The bibliography is titled *Che*. The first part of the movie was titled *Che: The Argentine*. This first part showcased the struggle of guerilla fighting during the Cuban revolution. The second part was titled *Che: Guerilla* and showcased the failed guerilla effort in Bolivia. Both of these movies used semi documentary style.

This film could be one of the most genuine pieces in telling the story of Ernesto Guevara as a guerilla fighter and about Ernesto's personal life. Actor Benicio Del Toro spent seven years conducting research in order to act as Ernesto Guevara.

The film *Che: The Argentine* consist of many value that elevated the struggle and also the noble cause of Ernesto Guevara. These values are the opposite of the values that the American propaganda has told.

On the other hand, this movie could be a counter propaganda that was created to fight American propaganda and restore the reputation of Ernesto Guevara. As a propaganda film, *Che: The Argentine* has used many propaganda techniques in order to influence the public about precepting the value that the movie told. Therefore, the writer concludes a formulation of the problem: How are the propaganda techniques in order to represent Ernesto Guevara in the movie *Che: The Argentine*?

Propaganda

Harold D. Laswell states that propaganda is a technique used to manipulate the representation of people's behaviors (*or activities*) used to influence the people's behaviors itself. Meanwhile, according to Leonard W. Dobb, propaganda is an attempt systematically done by an individual to control other individuals' behaviors through suggestions for their own interests.(Nurudin, 2008).

Hardley Cantrill and Edward A. Filene established The Institute of Propaganda Analysis in 1937. The institution published a few books with the most famous being *The Fine Art of Propaganda* (1939). The following are seven techniques that are included in the book :

- a. *Name Calling*: Shaming an idea so the public detests it blindly.
- b. *Glittering Generalities*: Associating an idea with words that have good meaning, making the public assume the said idea is good.
- c. *Transfer*: Taking a major symbol and associating it with smaller ideas, making it easier to accept. For example, transferring influences.
- d. *Testimonial*: Using a credible person's statement to support an idea.

- e. *Plain Folks*: Associating an idea with the public, to leave an impression that the idea is a part of them.
- f. *Card Stacking*: Curating facts to achieve a certain effect.
- g. *Bandwagon Effect*: A phenomenon where someone does something because a lot of people are doing it.

The film

The motion picture is a series of still images arranged in a manner that is projected with light. It results in an illusion of the pictures moving smoothly and continuously. Originating from Thomas A. Edison's founding of the kinematograph and the kinematoscope, it then inspired the Lumiere brothers to create the first ever projector, launching film into a popular form of entertainment, resulting in the massive film industry. Ever since its beginnings, the film has been used as a medium for propaganda by several parties. For example, the Soviet Union used the film as a propaganda tool since the October Revolution. Nazi Germany also used film as a propaganda tool in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where they promoted the Aryan race's racial superiority.(Cook & Sklar, 2019).

Discourse Theory

According to J.S Badudu, the discourse has two definitions, the first one being that a discourse is a series of proposition sentences that form a *similar* meaning. Second, a discourse is a unity of language above clauses, with coherent and continuous sentences, and with a prefix and suffix that are either spoken or written. Stubbs state that discourse analysis is a study that researches spoken or written discourse for scientific purposes. Cooks argues that discourse analysis is a study on discourse, and that discourse is a language used to communicate. (Badara, 2012)

In analyzing discourse, we need to study symbols, as symbols are formed from social structures, lifestyle choices, socialization, social mobility, religion, and with all social behaviors, meaning that studying symbols will result in studying the social structure. (Bungin, 2011)

Sara Mill's defines discourse analysis as a reaction to formal discourse analysis (linguistic structural). In contrast to formal discourse analysis that generalizes and objectively analyzes texts, Sara Mill's made the method in accordance with postmodernist people, who are more subjective and pay close attention to the sentence level. (Sobur, 2012) In her methods, Sara Mill's dismantles the subject-object hierarchy structure of discourse, while also keeping in mind the reader's position. Sara Mill's argues that the hierarchy structure of discourse will marginalize the object party, because their side could not explain their background freely without doing so from the subject's point of view. Mill's also argues that the public does not purely accept the true meaning of a discourse, instead, it is a negotiation between

the writer and the public to form a meaning, and that meaning differs from person to person. (Eryanto, 2011).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach using Sara Mill's critical method of discourse analysis. Bogdan and Taylor, through Moleong argue that qualitative approach is a research procedure with results in either spoken or written words, from the samples and their behavior. The purpose of a qualitative research is to analyze a phenomenon, an occurrence, or other activities. (Moleong, 2017)

Sara Mill's discourse analysis technique focuses on the writing hierarchy in highlighting the relations between subject and object. This analysis model also has two levels of observation, the first being the relationship level of the subject and object, the second being the relationship between the discourse and the public. Sara Mill's states that the public is not a passive group, instead, can to decide its perception regarding a discourse. (Sobur, 2012) This method is chosen, for the writer feels that the the film *Che : The Argentine* uses Ernesto's point of view in depicting his surroundings may have made him a subject in a discourse hierarchy.

Data collection techniques used by the writer include observation,....., and documentation. The writer feels that these three techniques are sufficient to gather and analyze the propaganda techniques used in *Che: The Argentine*.

The writer has multiple stages in processing and analyzing data. First, the writer will curate the scenes that have enough significance to be researched. Next, the writer will describe the scene. The result will then be analyzed using the Sara Mill's discourse analysis technique to draw a conclusion of the propaganda technique used.

The triangulation technique is used by the writer to test the data's validity. Triangulation in this test means a review of data from various sources, methods, and time. Therefore, there is a triangulation of source, data collecting technique, and time. (Sugiyono, 2012) This research will use the triangulation theory by comparing the results with a theory that is relevant.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSION

The movie *Che* is a biographical film that tells the story of Ernesto's journey as a revolutionary figure. In total, the film is 257 minutes and is split into two parts, *Che : The Argentine* and *Che : The Guerilla*. The film, directed by Steven Sodenbergh, won the best actor award, given to Benicio Del Toro as the main role during the 2008 Cannes Movie Festival. Originally, the the film was to be based on

Ernesto's biography written by John Lee Anderson. However, Benicio Del Toro and a producer couldn't find the right scriptwriter in time to adapt the book into a the film script, which resulted in the licensing rights for the book to be expired. Eventually, Benicio took the matter into his own hands, did independent research and wrote a whole new script.

Che: The Argentine has two storylines. The first tells the story of Ernesto's struggles during his days as a guerilla soldier, fighting in the Cuban Revolution. The second one is about his trip to New York, where he represented Cuba in the United Nations General Assembly in 1964. The film shows the traditional values that the Revolutionary Armed Forces hold and their heroic acts from the eyes of Ernesto Guevara. On the other hand, the film also shows the greedy and cowardly acts of the Batista-ruled government, who are portrayed as the antagonists in this movie. The anti-American and anti-imperialist mindset of Ernesto and his men are always shown in the the film. This mindset is also present during the assembly session held by the United Nations in New York. The contradicting values are an intrinsic quality that makes the the film interesting.

Using Sara Mill's discourse analysis method, the writer succeeded in defining the connection between the subject and object in the discourse. The subject position is held by the main character, Ernesto Guevara, which is shown by how the story follows his every move, while also being the narrator of the the film. This shows that Ernesto can perceive the events around him based on his own point of view. It also shows that the people around him cannot tell their side of the story, based on their point of view. The object position in this the film is held by the government forces, Ernesto's comrades, the delegates who oppose Ernesto's statement in the assembly, and the other rebel front leaders. These characters are ones who are told from Ernesto's point of view. His comrades are also objects, for it was Ernesto who told them of the values held by the revolutionaries. Ernesto always became the center of attention from his interactions with his comrades. The antagonist is always told from Ernesto's side of the story. In this case, the antagonists are pro imperialists and those who do not side with the poor. This depiction marginalizes the characters, for they did not get the same chance as Ernesto to tell their story.

The reader's position will be right behind Ernesto. A detailed depiction of Ernesto's fight, along with an explanation of his traditional values will convince the audience to sympathize with his struggles, placing them right behind him.

The the film *Che: The Argentine* has an abundance of Anti-American elements. As a whole, many the films adopt events from Cuba's revolution, from Pro Castro to Anti

Castro. In this case, the the film is clearly Pro Castro, resulting in many Anti-American elements.

By putting in Anti-American elements, the writer has concluded that the techniques used for propaganda in this the film are card stacking, glittering generalities, plain folk, and the bandwagon effect. These techniques are placed in many scenes, which results in a Pro Cuba and Anti America message. The usage of these techniques not only portray the antagonists as weak and greedy, but also affects the depiction of characters who support the protagonist as strong and noble individuals. The techniques used in different scenes finally combine to be a continuous story, resulting in an Anti-American message where the public will sympathize with the message, for the propaganda techniques that were used caused a discourse hierarchy where the subject is at the pinnacle of good, and the object is evil.

4. CONCLUSION

There is a connection between the subject and object in the film *Che: The Argentine*. Ernesto Guevara fills the subject position. The object position is filled by the government forces, comrades, and delegates who opposed him and the other rebel front leaders. This is shown by how the story is told from Ernesto's point of view, and the characters who are objects have their background told by Ernesto himself, distorting their backgrounds. In terms of discourse hierarchy, Ernesto is at the pinnacle of good, for the the film is told from his point of view, making it seem like he is on the legitimate side, meanwhile those who do not share the same values with him are illegitimate. The public's position will be behind Ernesto, as they will sympathize with his values and purpose.

The propaganda techniques that are used include card stacking, glittering generalities, plain folk, and the bandwagon effect. These techniques are used in different scenes to convey an anti-imperialist message that will be supported by the public who are watching.

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