



Exoticizing the Other: Doing a Virtual Tourism on *Denias, Senandung di Atas Awan* (2006)

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Abstract. This research aims to reveal the process of exoticizing to naturalize the difference in *Denias, Senandung di Atas Awan* (2006), a movie about the life of Papuan children. Any pictorial representations seen as the spectacle of the others dismantle the ideology implied in the film, viewed in Denias' ethnic background in relation to the dominant culture and power. The visuality of this film serves a virtual tourism that are very pleasing on the eyes, but from Kress and Leeuwen's representational, interactive and compositional multimodal aspects, as the methods to analyze the visual data in this research, it gives us a critical insight on the way this movie represents Papuan people and land. Camera angles and shots in representing people and context in this film become the tool in showing how the exoticizing process takes place. By doing virtual tourism, spectators are led by the dominant culture to exercise power by reducing, classifying/spitting, essentializing, agreeing and disagreeing as forms of symbolic power over Papuan people and land as the represented. Those stereotypical representations produce knowledge that Papua is described ethnically different from other parts of Indonesia. The result of the analysis shows that apart from the intention in promoting multiculturalism, this movie still places the Papuan as subordinate other that is beautifully posed through its scenic scenes.

Keywords: exoticizing · virtual tourism · multimodality · movie on Papuan children

1 Introduction

From John Naisbitt's "Think globally act locally" in his book *Megatrends 2000* that was popular at the early of 1990's, we may infer that the more global we are the more local we long for. This also happens in tourism trends. As an effect of everything going and being global, where homogeneity of everyday life's affairs take place, people's interest on things related to minority and peripheral regions increases [3, 22]. Increasing demand for unique cultural experiences in peripheral regions as well as increasing attention for indigenous and minority groups have also been noticed in these decades [15]. In the case of minority indigenous people, it is generally the natural and cultural heritage of the area and the living culture of the local people that attract tourist [3]. The nature and culture that are inherited by the native local people are interesting for tourists to see and to visit.

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These isolated people and their places become tourists' popular destination due to their increasing scarcity [4]. This shortage of cultural sites elevates their favoritism among the visitors. It is also reported that Intangible Cultural Heritage is currently receiving a greater attention from cultural visitors, who want to experience the living heritage of a population [17]. According to UNESCO, what belong to Intangible Cultural Heritage are 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage' [21]. It highlights 'experiencing' as the key in connecting with the intangibility of the heritage by using human senses. By visiting those sites, tourists can touch, smell, taste, see, hear the natural and cultural way of life of the people living there and feel the ambience of the place. The living heritage that are different from the visitors' daily life.

Unfortunately, not all people have chances or financial ability to visit those remote places to see their attractiveness and experience of being in the middle of the community. Pandemic of Covid-19 is one of the causes preventing people from visiting people and places they want to. In such conditions, people owe to the technology developments giving possibility for them to keep visiting their destinations through movies, YouTube or by using VR technology, for the examples. These screens-related technologies produce armchair traveler. Armchair traveler is defined as a figure who is physically located in a domestic, bounded space, while imagining the space of the littoral in order to enrich and even alter the domestic situation [13]. The domestic situation that may be altered after seeing and enjoying the remote objects and venues could be resulted from feeling of nostalgic reminiscing the past or feeling of superiority since the objects of their spectacle are considered subordinate and seen as other. It is like what [9] says that they become armed-chair tourists seeing the tourism object through screens, take the spectator goes visiting his homeland and gives possibility to him to see the exotic others. Griffith points out the difference spanning between the viewer and the viewed, that the viewed could be the long-left countries of theirs/their ancestors or new places other than theirs. Both the physical and psychological distance may produce a feeling of strangeness or, in the other side, a feeling of fascination due to the difference. All they see is considered as the different "them" that are distinct from "us", that this polarization becomes the point of exoticism to happen.

Both nostalgia of the past and exoticism of other have triggered criticism for having them as the object of fetish and for making them into commodities to mass-market consumption on a global scale [7]. Further, Graham Huggan views that the 'the global "spectacularisation" of cultural difference' conceals 'imperial authority through exotic spectacle' (ibid, 15). In Huggan's perspective, promoting and glorifying all cultural difference of those living in distant places mask the exotic gaze privileged by the dominant authority. Visibility of objects seen through screens are closely related with how they are represented, in the gaze of the dominant culture. For example, in Indonesian television programs we have "Ethnic Runaway" and "My Trip My Adventure", both are Transmedia production, or South Korean reality-documentary show "The Law of the Jungle". The way the hosts address the people and places they visit oftentimes conforms the difference between the hosts' culture and the culture of the places they visit. These programs also invite various celebrities to appear on these shows. The hosts and the cast

celebrities go to natural and less habituated sites and experience life with local native people.

Because ethnic minorities are often perceived as a dying stock, the capturing of cultural images is believed necessary. Though for that reason, minority peoples' varied histories, cultures, and present-day living as well as the evolving nature of their culture are repudiated. They are reduced and simplified into a single essentialist entity. [7] argued that such representation further establishes the idea that minorities are of the past and 'less developed.' These representations help to maintain a tradition of accepted beliefs legitimizing an oppression system based on ethnic differences (page 562–563). This kind of representation for example can be addressed to cultural theme parks. These parks are commercialized entities where the ethnic heterogeneity of a nation or a region is represented for visitors in a single locality in one panoptic span, that are developed not only for a recreational experience, but the major goal is to show, preserve or restore some aspects of a nation or region's ethnicity, cultural diversity and heritage [7]. Displaying in order to preserve and restore certain elements of a nation's cultural richness becomes the primary reason other than economic reasons for the creation of these kinds of representation. It also happens in movies about the life of minority people.

2 Movies as a Site to Exoticize the Other

Movies, as one of the screen-related technologies, is a site where objects (people, things and places) are represented through their camera movements, sounds, lighting, dialogues and editing that all are defined as film language in making meaning. In other words, to make meaning, movies use more than one mode of semantic units. Movies can represent "reality" of this far people and geography to the arm-chaired travelers who will see them as different and strange, not always in fascination. Forsdick in [2]: *'The exotic gaze is a perspective "from the other side", from outside and across geographical [or cultural] boundaries.* Exoticism is an othering which relies on geographical issue between "us" and "they" which creates a symbolical material distance that works in human imagination where mental representation lies. How "we" look and perceive "them" defines them in a reducing and essentializing way. How a certain group of people is represented shows power relation that the representing is dominance and the represented is the subordinate. Reducing, essentializing, and simplifying are stereotypical activities that deny the ethnic dynamics and diversity. Repeated stereotypical representation is a kind of naturalization on the difference that then is perceived by the audience as truth. This process runs in hegemonic way. Cresswell in [22] states that 'hegemony is conserved in representations of minority culture. Through the representation of "otherness", the powerful are able to construct hegemonic discourse and reinforce their values and orders' (page 567). There is power of the authority/dominant culture in selecting on what kind of cultural difference represented and glorified, showing their preference that inserts their sense of dominance.

Representing people, their way of life, vegetation, animals, and their natural environment in popular culture is one another activity in showing and taking the Other to the context of culture and habitat of its viewers. Bill Ascroft et al. [1] see that the emergence of the exotic in the popular culture indicates the power of the dominance. This

perspective coined to the imperialism period. *Exotics in the metropolises were a significant part of imperial displays of power and the plenitude of empires* (Ascroft et al., 1998: 95). All images and scenes presented in popular culture, film for example, cannot be seen as innocent signifiers since, from both Ascroft and Forsdick perspective, they are imposed from the outside boundaries, which are the centers or metropolises, of those represented, which are periphery or primitive, showing the power relation of this binary opposition. Moreover, the viewers also have already had their mental system in categorizing what considered good/bad, moral/immoral, normal/abnormal, agreed/denied will develop their own imaginations on what they are watching. Therefore, enjoying any representations of those different from theirs confirms the binary opposition of the civilized and native/wild/strange.

3 Research Method

We discuss about how power relation of race/ethnicity operates in form of exoticizing. Or in other words how other is represented through film language. Different from the solely written or spoken texts, film language gives a greater possibility to learn multimodality since it involves several modes of communication. Multimodal critical discourse analysis is proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen that is used to analyze visual images such as advertisements, photos, movies, posters etc. Those belong to multimodal texts that are texts using more than one mode of communication to deliver messages.

As a social practice in which human do reflexional activities over matters, language in critical discourse analysis is seen in giving facilities to make social group of people contest their ideologies [10]. To see the discourse in a text is to see how ideology produces unequal power relation in let say gender and class in it. This analysis is used to see texts that are not neutral in representing any identities. Critical discourse analysis uncovers any injustice, unfair and inequal phenomenon. The topics analyzed are discrimination, sexism, racism, poverty and any inequality in class and gender. Since language is not neutral entity, like its linguistic structural elements, language expresses ideological and historical power relations in its any written texts and talks. Critical discourse analysis mediates between texts and society through its interpretive and explanatory on the issues of power, domination, hegemony, ideology, class, gender, discrimination, interests, race, social structures over the texts it analyzes.

What the audience/spectator sees in movie is representation that is a construction, not a reflection of reality. Images and any modes of visual communication in movie is seen as semiotic resources that work together in making meanings. They are analyzed in doing specific semiotic works to construct meaning. Kress and Leeuwen extends Halliday's language "metafunctions" into visual images. Any images do not only represent the world but also play apart some interactions and do the compositional work through its lay-out, placement and salience of picture. Kress and Leeuwen developed them into *representational meaning*, *interactive meaning*, and *compositional meaning*. These meanings are produced from the way the images represented in the scenes; the way they "have interaction" with the audience through the camera movement (*distance*), *Point of view* and *demand*; and the way they are arranged in a composition of centre-right-left-top-bottom.

4 Discussion

Denias Senandung di Atas Awan (2006) is a movie about the life of Papuan children whose natural scenes indulge the viewers (waterfalls, big river, woods, snowy mountain peak, *kus-kus*, endemic bird, open lands and lake). Beside the nature, its cultural setting also serves information and knowledge about Papuan people that are different from the viewers'. Stereotypical representation that reduces Papuan people into *Koteka ceremony* (moment for Papuan boys entering their puberty phase symbolized by their putting on *koteka* (a gourd-made penis cover) and living in male-honai, not in the same honai with their mothers anymore), *Upacara Potong Jari* (the spouse of a deceased has to cut his/her finger as a token of grievance and lost), *Upacara Mandi Lumpur* (mud-bathing done by the women in that tribe/village when there is a claimed life), *koteka*, *swanggi* (a sorcerer who gets his strength by killing somebody as his offering), *honai* (a round-shaped Papuan traditional house), Papuan male and female bare bodies; is a form of othering that produces knowledge about Papuan as strange and different. In the scenes showing *Upacara Koteka* and *Upacara Mandi Lumpur* there are captions written in the screens to give emphasis that the it is truly Papua. [16] *captions almost always deploy a rhetoric of realism—realism, the description of a world so lifelike that omissions are unnoticed, elisions sustained, and repressions invisible—which makes it difficult for visitors to question the kinds of knowledge they offer.* Giving sense that the movie is a reality, the viewers are convinced that what they are watching is truly Papua, authentic with its primitive rituals, that are different from them.

'Authenticity' is said as a 'primitive' concept, which stays unclear. MacCannell [4] assumes that tourists expect to undergo a sense of authenticity in a meeting with authentic sites, objects or events (page 270). Exoticizing exploits those differences into consumption of the tourists. Movie as one form of "staged authenticity" with its stereotypical representations may thwart the arm-chaired tourists' genuine desire for authentic experiences. For this reason, this using of caption in movie may work to naturalize the scenes and story, convincing the viewers/audiences that what they are watching truly happen and authentic. In relation with the arm-chaired tourists, any stereotypical depictions of native people serve their longing of authenticity.

In *Denias Senandung di Atas Awan* (2006), the local people are represented differently from the non-Papuans. They are, especially the supporting actors, performed in their traditional attires, exposing their bare bodies. The men are in their minimalist gourd-made penis cover with body-paintings and head accessories, put on in ritual ceremonies; the women are topless. It is different from the performance of the non-Papuans and the Papuan who become the main actors in the story: they are fully-dressed. Furthermore, they are shot as the background of the main actors having conversations, or in long-shot representing the native environments. These shows that they are present but absent at the same time. Their present is marginalized, and just exposed to conform their being different from the viewers' culture. This "choice" of representation serves the arm-chaired travelers/the audience their longing for authenticity or native life. [5] says that local culture generally provides as the primary example of similar commoditization. In particular, "colorful" local clothing and customs, rituals and feasts, and folk and ethnic arts become touristic services or commodities, as they come to be performed or produced for touristic consumption [5]. In a stronger opinion Cohen (ibid, 373) sees

that the more activity of tourisms, in my opinion arm-chaired travelers also belong to it, the more tourism activities the more the representations become a colossal deception. This is because the capture of the native does not represent them comprehensively. It reduces and simplifies them into stereotypical representations.

Exoticism is characterized by the asymmetry of power relationship [19]. Camera position in taking pictures in in this movie can be used to see this asymmetry. In describing Papuan nature, the shots are mostly taken in long shots indicating that the focus is the scenery that are 'purer' (less building and any traces of civilization: forests, big rivers, lake, snowy mountain peak, projecting distance from the environment of most of its viewers. Those are shot by using *aerial/eye-bird* shots showing the hierarchy that the looks are having more powerful position than the object shot. It is also found in the shot of Papuan people who are taken in long shot exposing the people in the middle of their traditional *honai* village and natural circumstances. Papuan people are represented almost always along with their nature environment. It is confirming the remote and primitive area they live. *Native themselves were repeatedly constructed as part of nature* [14]. Beside the physical contour of their lands, the animals are used to describe their exoticism. *Kus-kus* [11], *Rangkong* bird, two Papuan endemics, are animal shown in this movie as living freely in the nature, confirming that it is Papua whose nature is still pure and natural. The freely living animals are almost impossible to find in the viewers circumstance that it strengthens the assumption that Papua land is natural, different, that in this sense wild. Here, wilderness as object that is seen is positioned as subordinate in eyes of the civilized viewers.

The power relation is also seen in the relation between Papuan people and non-Papuan people. In the scenes of *Denias Senandung di Atas Awan*, Papuan lands are described living in their traditional ways, mostly illiterate while non-Papuan images are represented as teachers and soldiers. This exoticizes Papuan with their physical performance as different, and in other word subordinate and lower than non-Papuans in this movie. Dyer in *Heavenly Bodies* (2004: 135): "...power relations between the races realized through power relations between bodies...: race is an idea in the discourse of biology, a way of grouping people according to perceptions of bodily difference [6]. This technique of grouping people is called *conceptual structure* in Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's *Grammar of Visual Design* (2021), that is the meaning-making through classifying people based on the similarities. Papuan men are described in flock, so are the women. They are described as people living within their group and having simple life-style. There is no motor-transportation, no modern house-utensils, no electricity. All indicates that they still have pure and natural life, like all cultures thousand or hundred years ago.

In this movie there is also *self-exoticization* when Denias feels colds while oddly staring the waterfalls. He also feels inconvenient when he smells his own body odor after not taking a bath for days. [18] defines *Self exoticism*, as a process in which individuals native utilize orientalist elements, often originating in Western sources, the of looking themselves. *Orientalism is any distortion, exoticizing, or romanticizing of the Orient by Western*. Denias uses the way the viewers see to see himself: staring the waterfalls fascinatingly like never seeing it before and feeling unusual with the cold it results. He also uses the standard of cleanliness of the viewers so that he does not like his own body

smell. By doing this way Denias becomes the ‘spokesman’ of the dominant culture, not of his own people.

By giving Denias and his friends candies like the way feeding chickens, in order that they get rid of the army helicopter sending stuffs that Maleo needs, Maleo—an army officer who is assigned in Denias’ village, considers that those children are different from other children in other parts of Indonesia who have already got familiar with those very popular candies. They are children from primitive and isolated tribe therefore candies do work to distract their attention from the helicopter. The conversation taking place in the class also shows these children being different from common Indonesian children: they are asking about the different between Java and Papua that in Java there is no *Kus-kus* and the children go to school in their school uniforms. *Kus-kus* that these children familiar with represents nature, while school uniforms that they do not have represent culture. The nature and culture binary opposition addresses this imbalanced power relation. In another scene, Maleo takes these children to have a joy-flight, seeing the beauty of Papua land from the air. It can be inferred that it shows to the children that their big and beautiful land is under the surveillance of the army (the snowy mountain peak, the woods, the rivers, the house of tribe chief, all are in a clear coverage from above: the army helicopter). This is strengthened by another scene that shows Maleo in the flying helicopter leaving Denias’ village due to his new assignment, and the camera shots precisely to Maleo’s army booths and weapon with the snowy mountain peak as the background under the flying helicopter. Behind the fascination to the beautiful Papuan land served by this movie, there is a relation of power between the dominant center (government) and the periphery (Papua).

By representing Papua with those cultural objects in the middle of the nature, it deems particularly true for the nostalgic allure with what is considered as ‘primitive’ cultures, imagined as ‘being stuck in an earlier stage of “culture” when compared with the culture of the audiences. Exoticizing the People they see through the movie screen reflects the sense of their superiority expressing their fantasies of authenticity onto other cultures. Recognizing representation of ethnicity, we can find power relations between Papuan as the minority and the dominant expressing values, they prefer perpetuated in the representation in *Denias Senandung di Atas Awan*. This stereotypical representation of Papuan as minority people are form of cultural hegemony. Culture as a concept that is constructed and represented symbolically through representation not only reflect reality but help to constitute reality (Duncan (2001) in [22]). In other words, the constructed representations of the life and land of Papuans in the movie is hegemonic since it works ideologically through the film language, not through coercion.

5 Conclusion

Representing people, natural landscape, also animals living in Papua is the way of exoticizing them as different and living in the primitive way in the middle of nature. Seeing them in the movie that way means that we also do exoticizing that are represented through the work of the camera. While watching movies, arm-chaired tourists also do exoticizing to the Other they see in the films. They do that by consuming the representations served by the movies and then meeting with mental concept they have in classifying people

based on the difference. In the representations, the Other is constructed based on the dominant ideology which sees the filmed people as subordinated. Papuan people and land are also seen like that in *Denias, Senandung di atas Awan*. The captures on the Papuan physical appearance and their geographical landscape confirm the primitivity of the native Papuans.

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