Race, Colonisation, and Constructed Languages: The Case of James Cameron's Avatar

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Race, Colonisation, and Constructed Languages: The Case of James Cameron's *Avatar*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is of great importance to humanity, whether it is used as a means to escape from the difficulties encountered in life, to reach a better understanding of the world, or to recount historical events. As a result of how long storytelling has existed and its more recent commercialisation, many different genres have emerged around the world. One of the most prominent genres in current media, both written and visual, is science fiction, "a form of creativity that leaves scholars baffled in their quest to categorise it and artists stymied by trying to find a formula that replicates its highest form of artistic expression" (Evans 144). Science fiction is known for representing the world in ways that do not match reality but rather explore its numerous possibilities. Most of the time, this applies to technological advances, as the genre's name implies, but science fiction is not just about technology. It is also a way to analyse humanity, to understand why certain societal and structural problems, such as racism, or the need for dominance over others, exist and if – and how – they would vary, should the context change (Evans 145). In doing so, Evans believes that science fiction is a genre that can help understand the "Other" – as opposed to what Husserl, whose theory Evans bases her study on, calls the "Self" – without othering it (151). The identity of the Other is usually given negative traits: "deviant, abnormal, outside of the fathomable, and therefore, inhuman. Othering, therefore, is the practice of attributing all that one finds as deviant or unacceptable to people with cultural and/or phenotypic expressions that diverge from one's own" (Evans 151). Othering is thus directly linked to racial and ethnic biases but can also refer to different traits unrelated to the factors of race and ethnicity, as it can apply to any trait that a person considers to be different from those found within their Self. With this theory, since science fiction explores a realm of possibilities that can only happen if the world in which a story is set diverges from reality, it is only reasonable to believe that social inequities would not be experienced in the same way as they would be in a hypothetical world, due to consequent differences in social dynamics.

1.1. A history of speculative fiction

As science fiction is often likened to speculative fiction or described as a subgenre of the latter, one could expect that speculative fiction, could be used with the same purpose of understanding the Other without alienating him or her. In order to ascertain whether this is possible or not, it is

necessary to study several definitions of the two genres as well as understand their historical developments.

While it is perhaps easy for one to exemplify both speculative and science fiction due to the amount of written and visual media pertaining to these genres, it is certainly more difficult to give an accurate definition of these genres without oversimplifying them. As Wilkins writes, "Criticism of genre fiction usually revolves around taxonomy: identifying elements that are commonly used and suggesting that they are deployed cynically to fulfil the requirements of genre, rather than to achieve self-expression" (38). According to Marek Oziewicz, speculative fiction alone has no less than three different definitions (2). There is therefore an ongoing discussion about whether or not speculative fiction is definable at all, as its meaning has deviated – one could even say broadened – from referring to a single genre during the 1940s (Oziewicz 2). As the term "speculative fiction" was coined by Robert Heinlein, he was also the first to define it as a genre: speculative fiction "captures the highest aspiration of science fiction and includes its top quality works" (Oziewicz 3). Part of its definition also adds that speculative fiction is made of "narratives concerned not so much with science or technology as with human actions in response to a new situation created by science or technology" (Oziewicz 3). The very basis of speculative fiction, according to Heinlein, lies in its opposition to science fiction, which focuses on the scientific problem rather than humans (Oziewicz 4). However, this definition is problematic as it excludes many works that would fit the criteria listed by Heinlein were they not considered science fiction, and this new classification "was effectively an attempt to replace 'science fiction' off the map" (Oziewicz 4). It was therefore necessary to redefine the boundaries of speculative fiction.

The concept of speculative fiction was thus revised in the 1980s by Margaret Atwood, who defined it as a "[a term that] refers to narratives about things that can potentially take place, even though they have not yet happened at the time of writing" (Oziewicz 5). In opposition to speculative fiction comes once again science fiction, which is this time described as "stories about events that cannot possibly happen" (Oziewicz 5). The divide between science and speculative fictions is much clearer through these definitions as they are based on the factor of probability and works should not be as difficult to classify (Oziewicz 5). However, this definition is rarely taken seriously due to the difficulty that comes with knowing which events could happen in the

future and which ones are entirely impossible – whether they are in the realm of science or those of politics or society (Oziewicz 5).

The last major change in the description of speculative fiction worth mentioning came about in the early 2000s, during which speculative fiction became "a designator for the collective field of non-mimetic literature and art" (Oziewicz 9). Recently, the specifics of speculative fiction stay unclear, but Wilkins proposes a much easier definition of the genre and method to recognise it (39). According to Wilkins, speculative fiction is a genre that "speculates in a fictional way on things that are not true" and "is distinguishes by the use of the fantastic mode" (39). As for how to recognise it, it is necessary to rely on the person who consumes it: "Readers in the genre, like readers in any genre, know it when they see it," and as it is a genre that is applicable to many forms of media, this stays true for all forms of speculative fiction (Wilkins 40).

Therefore, speculative fiction is no longer opposed to science fiction or other genres that it could be confused with due to ambiguous rules, but rather encompasses multiple genres without erasing them from the literary map (Oziewicz 9). Speculative fiction creates links between various subgenres and can also be applied to other types of media, making it more than a minor literary genre and "giving primacy to the system of relations within the field rather than to individual works themselves" (Oziewicz 9). In 2011, the Internet Speculative Fiction Database recorded among its subgenres "science fiction, fantasy, utopian and dystopian fiction, magic realism, fantastic voyages, ghost stories, and the Gothic with supernatural elements" (Gill 72). As this study will focus on *Avatar*, a 2009 science fiction blockbuster, and its sequel, it is worth noting that this very category is a part of the twelve subgenres of science fiction, according to the 2009 edition of the *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oziewicz 17). The full list includes the following genres: alternate history, apocalyptic science fiction, arthouse science fiction film, blockbuster science fiction film, dystopia, utopia, feminist science fiction, future history, hard science fiction, slipstream, space opera, and weird fiction (Oziewicz 17). Through this list, one can understand that the various genres encompassed in speculative fiction also have their own subgenre categories. As a much broader category, speculative fiction allows for a discussion of the relationships between science fiction and many other genres and subgenres, and helps settle certain literary debates such as the difference between science fiction and fantasy (Oziewicz 16), as well as includes works that were not written with Western standards and civilisations in mind

(Oziewicz 17). Due to the number of possibilities that it has created for a more inclusive literary genre, speculative fiction is "the largest, the most diverse, and the most dynamic category of modern storytelling" (Oziewicz 19).

A characteristic that is most interesting in the speculative fiction genre is that because it has such a conflictual history, it is difficult to use traditional classification means to define it, hence the contradictory definitions explained above (Gill 76). Rather, speculative fiction relies on "fuzzy" sets of rules that are difficult to delineate properly but that are generally easily agreed on and understood by the public (Gill 76). As exemplified by Oziewicz's list of genre subsets, it is easy to use a classification based on graduation (Gill 76) –for example, speculative fiction includes science fiction, which itself includes alternate history, apocalyptic science fiction, future history, etc. (Oziewicz 17). They are related through sets of similar characteristics, which could not apply to fantasy genres, for example, but that still belong to speculative fiction as a whole. However, Gill also believes that determining genres and subgenres "[by] bringing them together, or separating them, according to values raises interpretive ideas rather than delimits types" (77). This new classification also introduces the idea that certain ideologies, usually progressive ones, can be associated with particular genres (Gill 78), which correlates with the introduction of non-Western literature into the literary map mentioned by Oziewicz (17). Gill uses all of this to create two categories of "value assumptions in speculative fiction", namely "categories of engagement or social critique" and "categories of replacement or surrogate experience (Gill 79). Alternatively, "The exploration of alternative worlds reflects one's mode of engagement with the ordinary world [which corresponds to the first category] or one's replacement of it," which would result in a work belonging to the second category (Gill 79). The ideologies that are conveyed in each work of speculative fiction can be put in either of those two categories (Gill 79). Works belonging to the first category tend to show a world that is closer to reality and engage with certain real-world issues openly (Gill 79), whereas works belonging to the second category will create parallels with real-world issues in a world that is entirely different from reality (80). However, as the second category relies on experience and because it is difficult to create specific limits as to what can or cannot be recognised as experience, this classification may not be infallible.

Each work of speculative fiction therefore engages with the real world in a different manner, and can be interpreted through various lenses, but one thing that all of speculative

fiction's subgenres appear to have in common is that they depict societal issues. In this respect, the theory that Gill formulates is very similar to Evans'; speculative fiction (including science fiction) can be used to find solutions to, or at least hints as how to deal with real-world problems through the observation of similar issues in fictional worlds and how they are handled compared to what is done in reality (Evans 145).

1.2. The origins of the concept of race

Humans have, throughout history, always been confronted with the Other. The Other is about who should be considered as the Other, however, is that he is not part of the same society, and looks different at first sight. These ideas have developed into concepts that are used to categorise the Other and justify the dislike that is often associated with him due to his difference: ethnicity and race, two terms that are "often associated [together but] are not synonymous" (Santos et al. 123). Santos and his colleagues note that "the word ethnicity stems from the Greek adjective [ethnikos] and means 'heathen'. The adjective is derived from the noun ethnos, which means foreign people or nation" (122). Ethnicity therefore refers to the belonging of an individual to a certain socio-cultural group which participates to creating this individual's cultural identity and includes factors such as "kinship, religion, language, shared territory and nationality, and physical appearance" (Santos et al. 122-123). In contrast, race is a concept that only appears much later, during the seventeenth century (Hirschman 392). Unlike ethnicity, race does not concern itself with socio-cultural factors, but rather with "phenotypic characteristics such as skin colour" (Santos 123). As can be deduced from the origin of the word ethnicity, the idea of classifying difference as Other is rooted in fear, as the Other is equal to the unknown. As for race, it has always been used as a means to persecute the Other by believing that he is lesser, and has especially been developed around the nineteenth century with the emergence of the Darwinian theory (Hirschman 393). As Hirschman writes, "According to this thesis, races (or geographically isolated populations) had evolved into separate subspecies over time" (393). While this theory has long since been denied and rejected, it created the basis for the modern concept of race, and subsequently, racism (Hirschman 394).

From the idea that what is different must be feared came the concepts of ethnocentrism and racism, encouraging the idea that the differences of the Other make him inferior (Hirschman 388-389). As Charles Hirschman argues, "Ethnocentrism may have some basis in the natural

predisposition of one's own kin group (or imagined kin group) over others" and may help "[reinforce] social solidarity" (388). However, as this belief is based on the elements that build a society, the otherness of someone that is outside of one's ethnic group can always be surmounted, if the Other adapts to the ethnic group's ways (Hirschman 388-389). As opposed to the idea that the Other can change to fit the expectations of society, racism is "the belief that social and cultural differences between groups are inherited and immutable," and thus the direct discrimination of individuals that do not belong to one's group (Hirschman 392). As Santos' team argues, "There is a widespread agreement among anthropologists and human geneticists that, from a biological standpoint, human races do not exist" (122). While this scientific denial of the concept of race should render it obsolete, it is still widespread – enough that it is still used as a "distinguishing characteristic in populations or individuals seeking medical assistance" even today (Santos 121). Thus, while race is no longer considered to be a real scientific criterion and "official racism" has subsequently been deteriorating, "prejudicial attitudes and discrimination lingered," giving place to modern racism, which continues to harm minorities (Hirschman 399).

1.3. Colonisation and superiority

Inherently tied to the history of humanity is man's desire to know and own more, and consequently, colonialism. Frederick Cooper writes that "at the heart of colonialism [are] the *politics* of difference" (23). As can be deduced, colonialism is naturally linked to the concepts of race and ethnicity discussed in the previous section. As civilisations built empires, they encountered the Other and "had to articulate difference with incorporation" (Cooper 23). They had to decide which differences to include in their society, and which to exclude – and as colonialism consists of geographical expansion, othering individuals coming or living in a foreign land became an easy solution (Cooper 23). Europeans in particular sought to colonise the world, and to justify taking the land and lives of others, spread the belief that they were biologically superior to the civilisations that they were colonising (Hirschman 395).

However, colonisation was not only excused because of this so-called biological superiority, but also because colonisers believed that "the culture and the nature of the colonised were one and the same" (Dirks 3). Nicholas Dirks adds that, more than a desire to expand empires and political power, colonialism "was itself a cultural project of control," and that "The anthropological concept of culture might never have been invented without a colonial theatre that

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both necessitated the knowledge of culture (for the purpose of control and regulation) and provided a colonised consistency that was particularly amenable to 'culture'"(3). Culture is therefore regulated by the coloniser and weaponised against the colonised, as it embodies the colonised's difference and Otherness. This concept of culture, at first colonial, spread so much that it left the boundaries of colonialist contexts, and "became fundamental to the formation of class society, the naturalisation of gender divisions in Western bourgeois society, and to developing discourses of race, biology and nationality" (Dirks 4). The coloniser is elite, biologically and culturally superior to the colonised, and these prejudiced standards are reflected in society, even today. However, as Cooper mentions, "colonial elites did not always agree on which direction they should lean. Among colonising elites – even if they shared a conviction of superiority – tensions often erupted between those who wanted to save souls or civilise natives and those who saw the colonised as objects to be used and discarded at will" (24). It is then possible to assume that certain colonisers viewed the colonised as part of a different ethnic group rather than race, and acted accordingly.

In recent years, decolonisation, and the deconstruction of colonialism through colonial studies, have elicited a lot of interest (Cooper 3). There are now, especially in the United States as its history is greatly impacted by colonialism and its society by ideologies of racism, "social movements to end discrimination, the empowerment of racial minorities, and a more antiracist social science agenda" (Hirschman 399). As Cooper explains, this recent surge in colonial studies "has been to ensure that this past is not forgotten," and that current and future societies may learn from it (3).

1.4. Creating worlds, creating languages

As mentioned before, there are two main types of fictional worlds that can be categorised as speculative fiction: those that remain rooted in reality but diverge from it in minor, but easily noticeable ways, and those that instead are entirely different from the real world. In both of these categories, there are works which include new civilisations and peoples that do not exist in reality. In order to highlight the differences between reality and fiction, and to make their works more realistic, certain authors have taken to creating entirely new languages for these fictional people. Although language creation is certainly of use to the authors who create fictional worlds for their audience to enjoy, the phenomenon is not recent, and neither does it only pertain to fiction.

According to David Peterson, "the earliest record we have of a consciously constructed language is Hildegard von Bingen's *Lingua Ignota* (Latin for 'unknown language'), which was developed sometime in the twelfth century CE" (7). While it was more of a "vocabulary list" than a language that could be used in everyday life, it was created to be used in songs, and was not part of any fictional work (Peterson 7). Following *Lingua Ignotia*, there are several other records of constructed languages being used by real people, with the most notable being Esperanto, which was created during the nineteenth century (Peterson 9). Esperanto, as an attempt to create a language that would spread widely enough to be used internationally, was very successful at first, as many wished to participate to this movement, but the world wars caused a loss of enthusiasm for an international language (Peterson 9). According to Wandel's analysis of the Esperanto-speaking community, estimates of the number of speakers of this constructed language once reached "up to 16 million" (319). In more recent years, the numbers have dwindled down to less than two or three millions (Wandel 320).

However, the twentieth century also brought about a rising interest in the invention of new languages (Peterson 9). This new interest created a new movement to define certain constructed languages, the "artistic language (or artlang) movement" (Peterson 9). Whereas the pieces constructed languages found in fictional works before this movement cannot be seen as real, usable languages, as they are "largely haphazard or circumstantial in construction," during the artistic language movement, authors started to elaborate the construction of these languages much more, adding language-specific grammar, syntax, etc. in addition to vocabulary (Peterson 10). The most notable author to participate in this movement and to create at least one almost complete constructed language is Tolkien, thanks to his own training as a philologist (Peterson 10).

Just as the sources of entertainment have evolved with time, so have the movements associated with them. With the development of television and film came new ways of representing constructed languages (Peterson 10). This did not happen at once, nor did it always bring about entirely developed constructed languages. In the beginning of their use in cinematographic works, constructed languages "would often [be] ad hoc invented vocabulary for fictional foreign nations […] or for languages the filmmakers [did not] bother to reproduce faithfully" (Peterson 10-11). In some cases, Esperanto was used in films as well but, more often than not, the quality of the language was very poor (Peterson 11). According to Peterson, the idea of creating entirely new

languages and developing them to have proper vocabulary, grammar, etc. came during the late twentieth century (11). In order to do this, conlangers – linguists focused on the creation of constructed languages – were hired by film or TV show producers (Peterson 11). While some of the earliest cases of conlangs created by linguists in visual media are also some of the best-known conlangs, such as *Star Trek'*s Klingon or *Dark Skies*' Thhtmaa, it is now common practice to hire conlangers for films and TV series (Peterson 11). From *Game of Thrones*' Dothraki to *Avatar*'s Na'vi, most constructed languages in recent cinematography are the result of a linguist's work (Peterson 11).

In some cases of visual works belonging to the category of speculative fiction, such as *Avatar*, constructed languages that are involved in a colonial context may behave in similar ways as natural languages do in real-world instances of colonisation. In such cases, it is impossible for even fictional languages to be neutral – just like natural languages such as English, French, Spanish – as they will always be used as a tool to assert or reinforce the dominance of a certain civilisation upon another. As speculative fiction often reflects real-life issues and brings about new possibilities as for how to deal with these issues, the link between constructed languages and colonialism may lead to a better understanding of the same socio-political phenomenon in real-world instances.

1.5. Methodology

The objective of this work is to analyse the universe of James Cameron's *Avatar* and, to a certain extent, of its sequel, *Avatar: The Way of Water*. This analysis will consist of four chapters. The first three chapters will discuss the first opus, whereas the fourth and final chapter will focus on the second opus. Each of the two films will be analysed from three different angles. The first chapter will discuss the concept and representation of race within *Avatar*, the second will focus on the models of colonisation represented in this film, and the third will discuss the roles that languages, Na'vi and English, play in the narrative. The fourth chapter, which discusses the second film, will use those same three angles of discussion as subsections. However, they will be condensed into one single chapter, as *The Way of Water* is not only a very recent film (a fact that has given me very limited time to examine it), but also a work on which very little scholarly literature exists. The section that deals with this film will therefore consist of avenues of research

into how to analyse it in relation to the arguments given for the first opus, rather than an in-depth analysis.

Since *Avatar* is a cinematographic franchise, parts of the chapter will include a visual analysis of some excerpts of the films . In order to give the reader direct access to the scenes and shots analysed, stills will be included within the text. Each of these shots will be discussed throughout arguments constructed thanks to the existing literature about *Avatar*, as well as analysed visually. Additionally, the methods used to conduct this visual analysis are partly inspired by the methodology that Ryan and Lenos present in their work titled *An Introduction to Film Analysis*, which outlines core elements needed to "close view" film shots (Ryan & Lenos 145). The visual analysis will thus focus on particular elements relevant to each argument: the characters, the colours linked to the elements they represent, and, in some instances, the parallels that can be made with real-world examples of events that happen in the franchises.

1.6. Synopsis of Cameron's Avatar and Avatar: The Way of Water

Avatar tells the story of Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), an ex-Marine soldier who, after the death of his twin brother, is sent to Pandora, a planet recently discovered by humanity and exploited for its rare mineral, called "unobtainium," which is said to be the solution to save a dying Earth. To find this material, it is necessary for humans to communicate with the alien species indigenous to Pandora, the Na'vi – literally translated, *the People* (Miller 57). Due to scientific progress, humans have created "avatars", which are artificial bodies made to resemble the Na'vi and to which trained scientists can transfer their consciousness in order to not only communicate with the Na'vi, but also to experience life on Pandora in the same way that the native Na'vi do. Since Jake's brother was part of the Avatar Program as an avatar driver and avatar are specifically created for a single human with his DNA, Jake decides to take his place and work with the scientists on Pandora after he is offered a surgery to cure his paraplegy. Mentored by Grace (Sigourney Weaver), head of the scientific Avatar Program, and Norm (Joel David Moore), another avatar driver, Jake learns to act as a Na'vi, the native humanoid species of Pandora and gets involved with the Omatikaya, a Na'vi clan, who live in the area that the humans want to exploit and are seen as the enemy by the military faction settled on Pandora. Jake is then used as a double agent, sympathising with the Omatikaya and working towards a more peaceful solution with the scientists, while the officer in charge of the military, Colonel Quaritch (Stephen Lang), wants to use him to get information on how to

subdue the Omatikaya. Jake's allegiances change when he falls in love with Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), a Na'vi woman, and he decides to side with the Omatikaya against the military and the exploitation of Pandora. After becoming the leader of the Omatikaya and rallying the Na'vi clans against the human colonisers, the latter are forced to leave Pandora, while Jake stays and, through a ritual, becomes entirely Na'vi.

The narrative of *The Way of Water* unfolds over a decade after the events of the first opus. Jake, now living as an Omatikaya, has settled among them and started a family with Neytiri. However, the peace that was instated after the Omatikaya succeeded in driving their colonisers out of Pandora does not last for long. The humans have returned to Pandora, and the efforts of the Omatikaya and of Jake, who acts as their leader, prove no longer to suffice, as the technology used by the humans has improved. Indeed, the colonisation of Pandora is now much faster, as a year has sufficed for the humans to create a much bigger base on the planet than their predecessors. In addition, the main antagonist of *Avatar* returns: colonel Quaritch, who was killed by Neytiri in the first opus, now leads a squad of recombinants, avatar-like technological hybrids, made of military personnel who were able to save their memories into avatar bodies before dying in the war for Pandora. As Jake knows that Quaritch has a personal vendetta against him and Neytiri because of their previous actions, he decides that the best solution is to flee. Jake and his family thus travel to the lands of the Metkayina – literally, *Reef People Clan* (Miller 58) –, and ask for their protection in the hope that Quaritch will not find them in the middle of the ocean. Jake's family must adapt to a new environment and clan. In the meantime, to find Jake, Quaritch captures Spider (Jack Champion), the human son that his death forced to lived orphaned on Pandora and who raised among the Na'vi. The Metkayina are attached to the sea and its creatures, and Quaritch decides to use this against them. A fight then erupts between the Metkayina clan, including Jake's family, and Quaritch's crew. With the aid of his children and of Spider, Jake defeats Quaritch once again – but this time, he is left alive, an act of mercy from Spider. Having broken his promise not to bring war to the Metkayina, Jake decides that he and his family will move on and hide somewhere else.

II. THE CONCEPTS OF RACE AND RACISM IN *AVATAR*

Avatar showcases the classical science fiction trope of space colonisation. In this specific case, humans exploit the planet Pandora, which is the home of the Na'vi, a humanoid yet animal-like species. This difference between the human and the Na'vi results in an opposition between the two, in which the humans consider the Na'vi to be a lesser race, whereas the Na'vi call humans "Sky People" (*Avatar* 00:51:54) and avatars "demons" or "dreamwalkers" (*Avatar* 00:48:52, 00:50:56). The Na'vi and the humans settled on Pandora live in a context of hostility because of their actions towards each other, which are due to the humans' invasion of Pandora, but also to racial differences. This chapter will thus discuss the concept of race and how it is represented in *Avatar*, both on screen and behind the scenes through the following aspects: the place given to racialised characters in science fiction, Cameron's work, and *Avatar*; the Na'vi as an symbol for Native Americans; the stereotypes perpetuated by *Avatar*'s narrative and the Na'vi's design; the position of the avatar, which is considered to be neither Na'vi nor human and functions as a racial and technological bridge between both species; and what the avatars, as hybrids, imply in relation to race.

2.1. Race and ethnicity: aliens as a symbol

2.1.1. A question of ambiguity

The criticism that *Avatar* has received makes for a strange mix of positive and negative reviews on the matter of race. Some judge it to be racist "because of the stereotyping and colonial presuppositions that support it" (Falquina 117). Others, in contrast, believe it to be "pro-ethnic diversity" (Young-Roberts 50). Young-Roberts studies the ambiguity of *Avatar* by applying film theory to both *Avatar* and the rest of Cameron's work. This angle of study therefore includes both what happens on screen in *Avatar* as well as behind the scenes, incorporating elements of the film that a lay viewer would not know about, considering that half the film's cast is represented as CGI (computer-generated imagery) aliens (50). In order to properly make the distinction between race and ethnicity, Young-Roberts uses the following definitions:

> The Oxford Dictionary defines race as 'each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics', while describing ethnicity as 'the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition'. Beyond skin colour, Robyn Wiegman in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* emphasises that 'to contemporary race theorists […] race and ethnicity are social

constructs linked to the specific discursive spheres within which they are used' (159). Benshoff and Griffin in *America on Film* explain that social groupings, race and ethnicity are 'powerful socio-cultural concepts embedded in many ideological state apparatuses, including the media' (48), making them a subject particularly worthy of study in film. (50-51)

According to these definitions, the Na'vi cannot be described as a race since the concept of race only pertains to humans. One could therefore refer to them as an entirely different species; having evolved on a different planet than mankind, they have no biological ties at all, and are inherently different from humans because of it. However, the word race is still used by many researchers, critics, and viewers, most likely because it is also the word used in the film to describe the Na'vi, regardless of their status as a different species. This confusion in the film may lead the viewer to see the Na'vi as a race rather than a species because this conflation is purposive. The Na'vi are an allegory for race, representing a non-white civilisation being colonised by the white American humans; they are an "exotic '[Other]'" (Young-Roberts 61).

This being said, "fair racial representation" is a rare occurrence in Cameron's work (Young-Roberts 51). As Young-Roberts elucidates, "While some of his work relies heavily on racial stereotypes of cartoonish proportions, others that appear conscious of social representations can be read as controversial subtexts" (Young-Roberts 51). One could take the example of *The Abyss* (Cameron 1989), which features a woman who "is possibly the first ever representation of an African-American woman in [the position of a pioneering deep-sea drill operator]" (Young-Roberts 51). This film also includes several elements that can be seen as nods to the genre of the Western, a "category of film traditionally void of African-Americans, reinforcing notions of natural white, male superiority" (Young-Roberts 51). One of the few other examples of non-white representation in Cameron's work is Miles Dyson, a scientist appearing in *Terminator 2*; "an African-American free of any stereotyping" (Young-Roberts 53). However, even *Terminator 2* eventually becomes problematic, as Dyson is "accused (by a white mother) of being responsible for the end of humanity in a film made by whites with white money for a (default) white audience" (Keller 56, quoted in Young-Roberts 54). As for *Titanic*, supposedly a historical film and one of Cameron's biggest successes, the narrative, due to being based on real events, ought to include an important amount of Irish people among the ship's passengers – whom Cameron puts aside (Young-Roberts 55). While 'Irish' points to an ethnicity/nationality, these characters are almost other movies. They only "play a minor part in the film, portrayed as drinking, dancing, gambling

immigrants who are the happiest when crowded together, as though they had a biological propensity toward poverty"; they are, like other ethnic and racial minorities, stereotyped (Young-Roberts 55).

In contrast, *Avatar* "seems to be Cameron's return to well-intentioned and conscientious racial representation" (Young-Roberts 55). The film shows white colonisation in a negative light, and attempts to give agency and justice to the oppressed – the Na'vi. However, the anti-colonialist narrative does not have the intended effect, as its racial representation turns out to be problematic on both the human and Na'vi sides. According to Silvia Martínez Falquina, many have claimed that *Avatar* has a "connection – even to the point of imitation – to movies like *Dances with Wolves* (1990) or *Pocahontas* (1995)" (116). The colonisers are almost exclusively white, the few exceptions being scientist Max Patel (Dileep Rao), ex-Marine pilot Trudy Chacon (Michelle Rodriguez) and a handful of Black people in the military corps, most of whom have very little screen time. In addition to this, of these few non-white characters, only Max and some of the military personnel survive – and the rest either die or are forced to leave Pandora when the Omatikaya win the war. While some of the Black military personnel also meet their end during the war on Pandora, Trudy's death is especially impactful. As Young-Roberts notes, Hispanic women, especially when they "go against the conventions" (56), are rarely represented in blockbusters. While she does embody some of the stereotypes – mainly the idea that Latino women have "a 'strong' presence" –, Trudy's position as a pilot stands out from the roles that are usually given to Hispanic women in blockbusters Indeed, choosing to make her a pilot rather than the stereotypical housemaid gives her "a highly skilled occupation reflective of Hispanic women in the media" (Young-Roberts 56). As Young-Roberts explains, it is important to contextualise the release of *Avatar* to understand the significance of Trudy's role, as, 2009 was the year in which Sonia Sotomayor was recognised as the "first ever Hispanic justice to sit on supreme court" (Young-Roberts 56).

*Image 1. Trudy's defection during the assault on Hometree. (*Avatar *1:56:33)*

In fact, Trudy is the only other character than Jake that is associated to the military and shown to be actively in disagreement with its ways. As demonstrated in this still shot, Trudy defects from the military during the assault on Hometree. As the other military ships are in positioned in formation, creating a simultaneous heavy attack on the tree with missiles and defiling it with the black colour associated with the military and red of fire, Trudy's helicopter is the only one that leaves its position. She pilots her helicopter so that it passes behind the biggest helicopter, in which stands Quaritch. This gives her the opportunity to leave unnoticed by anyone else than the other man who is stationed on her helicopter. Later, she uses the fact that no one knows that she is the one who abandoned this assault to dupe the guards standing by the cell of Jake's group, allowing them to leave and act on their own to help the Omatikaya. Her defection is foreshadowed by her friendship with Jake, and therefore does not come as a surprise; her death, however, does. In Young-Roberts' estimation, it "alerts [the viewer] to the limits of Cameron's ability to defy conventions" (57). While Trudy's role in the narrative seems significant, her death makes her a "token racialised character", a typical archetype of the war genre whose death is used to make the "white male protagonist" stand out as the ultimate survivor (Young-Roberts 57).

As for the representation of the Na'vi, the matter is not simply that of a difference between human and non-human, but it runs much deeper. As mentioned above, the Na'vi are racialised; in fact, they are designed to make the viewer see them as "primitive, childlike and [maintaining]

purer instincts about nature and the world due to a lack of a mosaic of European customs" (Young-Roberts 58). They are a stereotypical representation of the savage, uncivilised Other, even if the film makes an attempt at turning them into noble savages instead, another archetype that is problematic in its own right (Young-Roberts 58). According to Paul Ketchum and his colleagues, the Western genre is once again referenced by Cameron in *Avatar* due to this representation of the savage stereotypes, alluding to the representation of Native Americans that is usually made in films of the genre (199). Furthermore, there is also an issue with the actors cast as Na'vi. A great majority of the Na'vi, with the exception of Eytukan (Wes Studi), are played by African-American actors, with a focus on light-skinned actress Zoe Saldana in the role of Neytiri, and less important roles going to dark-skinned actors. Whereas this could be seen as an intention to give equal chances to white and African-American actors in the film, this becomes entirely null when the only roles of importance that African-Americans obtain are those of the oppressed Other (Young-Roberts 60). As Young-Roberts notes, "since [*Avatar*] highlights the Na'vi as an exotic ['Other'] from the perspective of an outsider, it only reinforces the definition of the (almost all white) humans in relation to them as the natural dominant hegemony, maintaining the centrality of white privilege and power" (61). The film's intentions to plead for the respect of other civilisations and their lands, and condemn colonialism as perpetuated by the United States, fail on the matter of fair racial representation, one of *Avatar*'s most important themes.

2.1.2. Science fiction and the representations of racialised minorities

Just as racial representation amongst the humans cast of *Avatar* must be analysed, it is of utmost importance to understand the fictional Na'vi and what they represent in relation to race, ethnicity, and species. As previously discussed, the Na'vi are entirely unrelated to humankind when it comes to biological evolution. Calling them a race, according to Young-Roberts, is thus an error often made, even in the film itself (50-51). Their presence in the narrative, however, places the Na'vi as an oppressed civilisation under the threat of colonisation. This gives them a similar role to many human civilisations in real-world instances of colonialism, and it is no wonder that they share traits with some of these civilisations, which are often described as races because of the differences that set them apart from their colonisers. As the imaginary always roots itself in reality, it would make sense that the creation of the Na'vi is inspired by one or several human civilisations, which is what Russell and Paliy discuss, each with their own theory.

Russell directly explains his own view of the concept of race by calling it a "scientific fiction" (193). As explained in the previous subsection, it is rare for Cameron to include non-white characters in his works – or at least to represent them in a way that does not perpetuate prejudices and stereotypes. According to Russell, this is however not an issue that is exclusive to Cameron, as Young-Roberts implies, but rather a problem linked to the science fiction genre (193). As there is an important and still growing tradition of Black authors and characters in literary works of science fiction, it is necessary to mention that Russell's criticism only applies to science fiction in film (Lavender 11):

> For the most part […], absence has characterised the genre's representation of non-whites. For aside from an early history of superstitious natives, restless zombies, and easily frightened domestics, non-whites in general and [Black people] in particular have remained invisible to the western cinematic science fiction, if somewhat less so to its literary counterpart which occasionally has featured [Black] characters. […] America's cinema of the fantastic continues to exploit western associations of blackness with atavism, buffoonery, and priapic hypersexuality, even as it camouflages them in technical wizardry (Russell 193).

Russell notes this problem in several movies that are anchored in popular culture as staples of the science fiction genre, such as Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) as well as its sequels – which feature Sigourney Weaver, who portrays Grace in *Avatar* as the protagonist –, the 1933 and 2005 versions of *King Kong*, or even the 1987 blockbuster *Predator* (193-194). In each of these films, blackness is related to the Other – and to negative traits only. Considering the years in which each of the films mentioned by Russell were released, this is not a new phenomenon; nor is it something that has disappeared in more recent cinematographic science fiction works. In fact, Russell believes that this very issue applies to *Avatar*; "in which a quartet of [Black], brown and red actors provide the voices and performance-captured movements for the film's computer-generated aliens" (194). Russell does not reduce the issue of racial representation in science fiction to simple racism on the filmmakers' part, but instead explains that it is mostly due to how films are marketed:

> The fact that [Black people] are absent from these films or are given circumscribed roles […] owes less to their fantasy trappings than to the realities of how films are financed and marketed for the transnational marketplace and the fact that American films with [Black] leads are not expected to be profitable and are thought to be a hard sell overseas. European and Japanese foreign investors who increasingly have come to finance American film production prefer to invest in films in which [white

people] are cast in leading roles (Munoz, Waxman). Such preferences impact decisions regarding not only the ethnicity/race of characters in live action and animated films but also the appearance of "synthetic actors." (200)

This mention of what Russell calls "synthetic actors" is extremely pertinent, as they make up half of the cast of *Avatar*. Whereas the actors cast to play Na'vi roles are mostly Black, their characters' appearance and relation to race is very interesting. *Avatar* makes use of a concept called "didactic blackface," which Russell defines as "a rhetorical style of racial mimesis whose objective is not simply to entertain but to forge a social critique and which is premised on the belief that in order to understand the other one must become (if only temporarily) the other" (207). Didactic blackface – or blueface, in this case –, is thus what Jake, Grace and other avatar drivers experience in order to study the Na'vi, get close to them and understand their culture. However, unlike most of the examples of science fiction used by Russell, *Avatar* does not make black the colour of the savage enemy; rather, "it is *colour* itself that is rendered warm, human, liberating, an anodyne to rapacious whiteness" (Russell 211, emphasis in the original). The real enemy can therefore be seen as the white human rather than the Na'vi, which are associated to the colour blue. *Avatar* thus presents an array of non-white characters, human and Na'vi alike (and avatars, "[white people] who on gaining colour regain the use of their atrophied humanity and are redeemed"), rebelling against white colonisers (Russell 211). This alliance of racialised characters is backed by the non-white actors behind the Na'vi's voices and faces. The "camouflage" of these actors is, for Russell, a necessity, "since having non-white actors play these roles unaltered would not only dampen the allegorical import of the film by making it an explicitly literal/liberal comment on race and race-relations, but in doing so undermine it by stripping it of all allegorical pretence and invite viewer discomfort" (211-212). In the use of the avatars and of technological tools to create the Na'vi rather than using the actors in those roles in a live action context, Cameron "strategically enables the transference of extant racial stereotypes upon reel others, lessening the risk of offending the real others on whom they are modelled, while simultaneously creating allegorical others with whom audiences can sympathise without having to confront directly with their own attitudes toward the groups they are meant" (Russell 212).

Russell's analysis of *Avatar* thus makes the Na'vi a symbol for "non-white otherness and stereotypes associated with it (primitivism, noble savagery, ecological utopianism)" – or, if one takes the possibility that *Avatar* could have expressed more explicit criticism if it were filmed

entirely as a live action work, an allegory for Black people (213). The actors play more than a role on the screen, especially in a film such as *Avatar*, which is a prime example of science fiction, a genre known for its representation of blackness as a symbol of evil. Since *Avatar*, as Russell suggests, is a film made for a primarily white audience, it is necessary to analyse both sides of the film – on the screen, and behind the scenes. The use of Black actors rather than actors coming from other racial groups is indicative of Cameron's intentions, and furthers the idea that the Na'vi are a simple disguise that could, under different circumstances, have been discarded to offer a different, live action version of the same film (Russell 213).

2.1.3. Similarities between human and alien beliefs

Russell's argument, of course, is not the only theory that has been formulated as to whom the Na'vi represent. In fact, only few scholars believe that the Na'vi are an allegory for Black people; the general consensus is that they represent Native Americans instead. Many of the elements that make up Omatikaya culture as shown in the film are very similar to concepts that are essential to various Native American cultures, if not sometimes directly borrowed from them (Paliy 1). From the Na'vi's appearance (which will be discussed in the next subsection) to their beliefs, the allusions to Native American cultures are numerous. Unlike their human colonisers, the Na'vi live in harmony with their planet, environment, and deity, all of which almost behave as one being, and the Na'vi are nothing more than another element in this realm based on cohabitation. There is a reciprocity between the inhabitants of Pandora and their deity, Eywa – who is, as Paliy argues, based on the Native Americans' Faith: "[just] as there is one Faith, there is only one Eywa" (3). The relationship between the Na'vi and the rest of Pandora is all-encompassing and reciprocal, exactly like the one that many indigenous American tribes have with their land, which also uses that same concept of reciprocity. Paliy writes that "It is the ebb and flow of the universe that is so seldom acknowledged in First World discourse. [… It] is the union of the earth, the sky, and the underworld in one entity, from which the human is not discounted" (3). An even more obvious reference to the Native Americans' relationship to the land is the use of trees as a physical link between the Na'vi and Eywa. In order to back her argument, Paliy cites Rice's research on Native American cultures and traditions; in his work, Rice mentions that "[in] some Aboriginal cultures the linkage of these realms is via a cosmic pillar whereas in others, the connection is by a great celestial tree […], the World Tree of Life, [which

rests] at the centre of the dimensional worlds and acts as a channel. Thus, it is the channel that connects the physical realm of existence with the metaphysical realms of existence for its parts exist in all the worlds" (12, quoted in Paliy 3). Both the Tree of Souls and the Tree of Voices play this role on Pandora, functioning as a direct link not only between the Na'vi and their divinity, but also between them and their ancestors and, as demonstrated by the last parts of the film, to the wildlife of Pandora as well. The link with the ancestors of the Na'vi through nature also works as a reminder of what life is, according to the Na'vi (and to the concept of reciprocity used by Native Americans): "[Neytiri] talks about a network of energy that flows through all living things. All energy is only borrowed, and one day, you have to give it back" (*Avatar* 1:11:20). Thanks to Eywa, the Na'vi are able to communicate with their ancestors if they bond with the branches of the Tree of Voices; this reinforces the idea that the deceased have simply gone back to Eywa, and are only physically gone.

As the relationship between the Na'vi and Pandora includes all living beings on the planet, what the Na'vi call *tsaheylu* – literally translated as bond, neural connection (Miller 44) – allows them to, as the translation suggests, physically bond with the animals of Pandora. By doing this, the Na'vi are able to use the animals they bond with as mounts, both on land and in the air; they do not need to communicate verbally to give them directions, and the bond is, with some species such as the *ikran*, exclusive, as the animal will not bond with another Na'vi. Paliy relates this bond to the Native American concept of *nahual*, which "is like a shadow, [a] protective spirit […] representative of the earth, the animal world, the sun and water, and in this way the child communicates with nature" (Menchú Tum 18, quoted in Paliy 4). The 'neural whips' that the Na'vi possess allow them to tie their own souls with their *nahual* – which is, in *Avatar*, best represented as the *ikran*, but can also take other forms (Paliy 4). The lack of verbal communication also alludes to the fact that, as Paliy explains, "many believe that animals do not have a language at all – this kind of view of speech is clearly a very literal one, and incredibly limiting" (4). The physical bond, which allows the Na'vi and the animal to understand each other without words, compensates for the lack of language on the animal's part.

This bond, however, is not the only way in which the Na'vi are connected to the Pandoran wildlife, as they value animals as much as they value their Na'vi peers. Once again, Paliy bases

her argument on Rice's explanation of the same concept of connection to the animal kingdom in native cultures:

Aboriginal people learned they owed a sense of gratitude to the animals for providing the means to live on earth. The animals gave means to sustain life and people reciprocated by showing their gratitude in specific ways. Today [this] is shown in hunting rituals and ceremonies followed after slaying an animal. Care is taken with the animal bones and prayers are offered prior to and after the killing" (Rice 30, quoted in Paliy 4).

The following still shot shows a particular scene during which Jake learns to respect this exact concept.

*Image 2. Jake praying for the animal he is killing (*Avatar *1:02:09).*

Jake is kneeling over the animal he has just shot with an arrow, and is reciting a prayer in Na'vi as he finishes off the creature in a merciful act. Neytiri, next to him, observes his actions. She praises him, telling him that he is ready. As the next scene moves on to a ceremony during which Jake is accepted as one of the Omatikaya, the viewer understands that Jake's actions were the final step for him to be considered as worthy of being a member of the clan, as he finally understands the Omatikaya's philosophy and the balance of life on Pandora. Whereas Jake first acted aggressively toward the wildlife of Pandora, both in situations of self-defence and overconfidence, Jake then learns to understand that the animals of Pandora have as much right to exist as he and the Na'vi do, and that they are worthy of respect and prayer when they die, similarly

to the Omatikaya. These are, as Paliy explains, fundamental concepts for many Native American tribes (7). In *Avatar*, the clear and numerous references to Native American cultures render evident the fact that the Na'vi civilisation is based on several Native American civilisations put together, thus creating a retelling of the colonisation of the Americas via the presence of an almost identical indigenous culture.

2.1.4. Animalising the Other

While it is easy to link the Na'vi to Native Americans through their cultural similarities, there is more to the Na'vi than their spiritual beliefs. Their physical features are also worth studying, from their build to their clothing. The official *Avatar* Wikia's description of the Na'vi physiology reads as such:

> The Na'vi are overall humanoid in their anatomy, though they also possess feline features such as flat, bifurcated noses, large, round eyes, pointed ears that can move independently, and a long, prehensile tail used for gripping and balance. The neck is long and body slender, with a narrow, elongated waist and wide shoulders that create a V-shaped upper back. Despite their thin proportions, their musculature is sharply defined and they have roughly four times the strength of a human in peak physical condition. [… Their] bones are reinforced with a type of naturally occurring carbon fibre. Distinctly separating them from humans, native Na'vi possess only four digits on each hand and foot, including an opposable thumb and thumb toe. The skin of the Na'vi is smooth and iridescent, appearing within the blue colour spectrum. […] Na'vi have dark brown or black hair on their heads, part of which is sectioned off and braided around their queue for protection. […] They appear to have no other body hair except eyelashes and a small bob of fur on the end of their tails. ("Na'vi")

As mentioned above, and as Fritz writes, "[the Na'vi's] alien-ness should place them in a distinct evolutionary line from humans" (75). As the description shows, their build and traits, even as aliens, strongly resemble those of humans, and this could "either [be] due to Cameron's lack of imagination or because of his desire to elicit a certain response from his audience" (Fritz 75). However, as discussed previously, making the aliens appear through technological means rather than filming their actors in live action settings is a choice in itself (Russell 213). This choice enables Cameron to give the Na'vi an appearance that is not restricted to the actors behind their voices, an appearance that shows more animalistic traits than human ones, as an attempt to widen the gap between the civilised humans and the uncivilised, alien Other.

As Pop argues, the Na'vi are a "double mirror" of humanity; that is to say, they are anthropomorphic because "any alien life form [is] just another expression of our own selves" (31). The Na'vi also display behaviours similar to humans, the reason being that they are "the projection of an anthropocentric view into a non-human context" (Pop 31). Nevertheless, in order to make them different, Other, Cameron asked the concept artists of *Avatar* to design them as "humanoid cat creatures, superimposed with 'beautiful ethnic women' – amongst them Mary J. Blige and Q'Orianka Kilcher" (Pop 33).

*Image 3. Neytiri's first appearance, displaying feline characteristics (*Avatar *00:34:48).*

Neytiri's first appearance (see image 3), during which she saves Jake from the Pandoran wildlife, is one of the scenes that best demonstrates the animalistic characteristics of the Na'vi. In order to scare off the animals attacking Jake, she displays an attitude that is very similar to that of an aggressive cat: her ears are pushed back, her feline nose is frowned, and she is hissing, prominently showing her fangs. This is only one example of the characteristics that liken the Na'vi to felines, making them seem animalistic and savage rather than an organised civilisation – and in doing so, validating some of the insults that the human colonisers use to describe them, such as "blue monkeys" (Pop 32).

In addition to this, female Na'vi are explicitly designed to be physically attractive, and, according to Schell, the concept artist behind their design, "Cameron's ideal for the main female

character was for the audience 'to want to [fuck] her' (quoted in the Schell interview)" (Pop 32). The Na'vi were thus inherently designed as sexual beings, especially because of their appearance, wearing few clothes apart from a loincloth and necklaces – with the exception of Mo'at (CCH Pounder), the spiritual leader of the Omatikaya, who wears a shawl covering her whole chest, as, in Native American cultures, the breasts of older women are not regarded in the same way as younger women's but rather as a taboo (Fritz 76-77). The decision to represent the Na'vi as sexual beings is unsettling for two reasons. The first is that it is purely a personal decision on Cameron's part, as Fritz cites one of his interviews in which he says the following: "Right from the beginning I said, '[She has] got to have tits,' even though that makes no sense because her race, the Na'vi, [are not] placental mammals" (Cameron). So far, most of the description that Cameron has made of the Na'vi, especially the females, are crass and sexual, which adds to the sexualisation of the Na'vi in the film. Furthermore, the way in which the Na'vi sexuality is presented shows no coherence with their appearance: they are shown to wear loincloths hiding their groins, but their chests are bare, similarly to certain Native American civilisations (Fritz 76). They are told to only accept one "mate" for life, which becomes a problem when Jake mates with Neytiri as his relationship with her destroys the balance of the Omatikaya clan. Neytiri is expected to mate with Tsu'tey, as they have both been prepared for the roles of clan and spiritual leader. By mating with Neytiri, Jake makes it impossible for Tsu'tey to access this position, and must take the role in his stead. The gender and sexuality-based system that the Omatikaya follow is very human: men are given positions of responsibility related to war, whereas women are given those related to spirituality (Pop 32). However, the rest of Pandora does not seem to function within this same dichotomy. For all the Pandoran animals shown in the film, it is only possible to notice whether one is male or female if one is told. The physiology of the Na'vi is the only one that shows clear differences between genders; differences that follow "cultural gender stereotypes" and subsequently "[make] the Na'vi females look like the pre-Renaissance women, with their concealed [genitalia]" (Pop 32). The only way that the Na'vi can mate is, as Pop explains, "de-sexualised": they must initiate the *tsaheylu* with another Na'vi, thus creating a bond that is seen as non-sexual on many other occasions, as they regularly initiate it with Pandoran animals (Pop 42). Mating is thus seen as a spiritual act rather than a sexual one, as the Na'vi are "connecting with their fellow Pandorans, with the animals and with the spiritual energy of their planet through

the same organ, thus making their bodily functioning a merely prosthetic, unimportant extension of their existence" (Pop 42).

The fact that the Na'vi females are explicitly sexualised physically yet non-sexual when it comes to mating leads Fritz to associate the representation of the Na'vi with stereotypical representations of indigenous women (77). Fritz also argues that according to Judeo-Christian religion, clothing constitutes an important detail about the perception of civilisation:

> This "basic cultural trait" is assumed to represent the dividing line between "man" and "nature" as it was said to have been given by God to humans when Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden of Eden. Conjuring polygenetic theory, […] the bare-breasted Indigenous woman is thus taken to be of a different genetic line. So, despite her sexualisation, the bare-breasted Indigenous woman is cast as animalistic. For Cameron, she is both loved and feared – part human and part animal. (77)

To the human colonisers, the Na'vi's loincloths are not real clothing, and contribute to the perception of the Na'vi as uncivilised and sexual savages as opposed to civilised humans. Moreover, by making the Na'vi wear loincloths inspired by the Mayan taparrabo, Cameron renders explicit the link between the appearance of the Na'vi and Native Americans – although they are this time situated in Central America (Fritz 78). Fritz argues that Cameron's use of the taparrabo is significant in that it not only works towards the assumption that it is acceptable to other indigenous people by making aliens wear the traditional clothes of Native Americans, but also that it "is a function of the film's homogenisation of all Indigenous peoples" (78).

The Na'vi are thus treated like a caricature of many Native American civilisation – making them interchangeable and grouping them together when, like any cultural group, they have major differences. Moreover, their appearance perpetuates harmful stereotypes that are usually associated to indigenous and Native Americans. Indeed, the film implies that the Na'vi, through their characteristics, sexuality, and clothing, are closer to animals than they are to humans. Many of these traits are based on the cultures and habits of several Native American peoples. By making the Na'vi look like an animalistic, uncivilised people, the film perpetuates the same stereotypes about Native Americans, even without including a single Native American actor or character in the narrative. The Na'vi are depicted as savage and sexual animals, objectified rather than humanised.

2.2. Avatars and race: the in-between

2.2.1. Technological camouflage

Whereas the Na'vi represent the Other, Cameron creates an interesting concept that is neither human nor completely alien (or Other): the avatars. The avatars are artificial bodies, designed based on the Na'vi, which are linked to the humans' consciousness and thus allow them to explore Pandora in the same way that the Omatikaya do. In this regard, the avatars are also a means for the humans to walk among the Omatikaya, and to learn as much as possible about and from them. The avatars therefore complicate the representation of race within the narrative. As the avatar drivers are, essentially, humans borrowing the bodies of people from a different species – or race, as the film would like the viewer to believe –, the avatars act as a bridge between human and alien, between human and Other.

However, simply describing the avatars as a racial bridge is not enough; one must also consider all the implications and complications that derive from the position taken by the avatars in order to really understand what they mean in terms of race and relations between two different peoples, both of whom view each other as the Other. The role that Jake must take on is a good example of how complicated the situation of an avatar can become. James and Ue plainly explain that Jake's appearance as an avatar is only a disguise, and that "[although] the Na'vi recognise that Jake is a human from the outset, the Jake they think they know maintains ulterior motives" (186). To the Omatikaya, Jake only seems like another dreamwalker, a scientist given the opportunity to explore Pandora, yet one who seems more interested in learning the Omatikaya's ways and befriending them. They believe that, for all intents and purposes, Jake's role is the same as Grace's, which is to learn about the flora and fauna of Pandora and to study it scientifically. In reality, Jake's role is very different, as he is a double agent for the military, giving them strategic information about the Omatikaya that can be used against them if they do not cooperate. As James and Ue write, "the deep sense of betrayal expressed by the Na'vi becomes more than warranted when Jake confesses that he has known all along about the Colonel's plan to destroy Hometree" (186).

Jake's role as a double agent thus means that he twice betrays people who consider him one of their own: once when the Omatikaya learn that he was working with the military, and the second time when he decides to side with the Na'vi during the war that follows the assault on

Hometree (James and Ue 186). Jake, as a character with agency and influence pertaining to both the humans and the Omatikaya, is privileged, especially when it comes to his relationship with the Omatikaya (James and Ue 187). James and Ue, in their analysis of Jake's character, argue that "Jake, in his incorporation of the [Omatikaya] lore, obeys the clan's traditions only when it benefits him, ignoring the customs that fail to satisfy his own objectives" (192). There are several instances in which Jake is shown bypassing Omatikaya traditions – one example being his relationship with Neytiri, which has an impact on the entire structure of the Omatikaya clan (James and Ue 192). In each of these instances, the Omatikaya are forced to accept his decisions because he is not truly a part of them; he is only learning, and when learning, one is expected to make a few mistakes in the process. The real problem with Jake is that none of his "mistakes" can be considered as such. They are usually thought-out decisions, and while some of them have greater consequences than Jake could have foreseen, he is aware that his agency prevails over the Omatikaya's because he is in reality only a human camouflaged as one of them. Thus, because the avatars are a state between human and Na'vi, even if they are supposed to work as a positive link between both peoples and allow them to exchange information and learn from each other, they are also made to resemble the Omatikaya as a means to infiltrate their civilisation more easily. It is a strategic decision on the colonisers' part, as it is easier to make the Na'vi lower their guard if the colonisers look like natives. The avatar bodies are thus a clever camouflage for humans to influence the Na'vi from within, and it is exactly what Jake does at first, without the Omatikaya realising it.

Moreover, the state of the avatar as a hybrid of two species is also what puts the avatar drivers in a difficult position. Just as they are expected to walk among the Na'vi and gain their trust, so they are expected to aid the colonisers until the end, going against their own morals and ethics to assert the domination of the humans on Pandora. If they decide to follow their sense of loyalty to the humans, they betray the Na'vi, and will no longer be seen as Na'vi. If they betray the colonisers, "their own race" as Quaritch puts it, they are no longer seen as human either (*Avatar* 2:43:03). The avatars' relationship with race is thus an interesting one; they are both, yet neither. They are privileged compared to the Omatikaya because of their ability to do what native Na'vi cannot, as they are not restrained by the laws of their clan to the same extent as Na'vi. Nevertheless, this position between both civilisations is also one of weakness: any action that does not suit one of the two sides can be seen as a betrayal and will be punished. This is especially true

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for Jake, as his identity as an ex-Marine makes him closer to the military than other avatar drivers – his betrayal of the humans is seen as a betrayal of the military in particular. In addition to this, Jake is "the only person who succeeds in gaining the Na'vi's trust […], and this is only after living with the Omatikaya for long enough to be initiated into the tribe" (James and Ue 189). He is the only avatar to reach this status, which is surprising considering that others, such as Grace, have been on Pandora for years whereas he has only arrived a few months prior to his initiation ceremony. His role is thus even more delicate than that of other avatars, and this is reflected in the consequences of both of his betrayals: the Omatikaya leave him for dead after the humans assault the heart of their civilisation, and the humans view him as one of the "hostiles," and make use of violence towards him just as they do towards the Omatikaya. Because he is part of both sides, neither trusts him; and both view him as the Other, although differently than they view their enemies. Ultimately, it is Jake's position and agency that triggers the war, but as he is the protagonist of the film, "[the viewer is encouraged] to sympathise and overlook […] Jake's ethical flaws," which directly affect his actions and the way he acts with each of the peoples he is affiliated to prior and during the war for Pandora (James and Ue 186). Since the narrative focuses on Jake and his perspective of both humans and Na'vi, the viewer, just like Jake, tends to favour the Omatikaya over the humans, and to understand Jake's betrayal of the humans, whereas they may judge his betrayal of the Omatikaya more harshly (James and Ue 186).

2.2.2. To adapt, to connect

Whereas James and Ue explore the concept of the avatar body as a sort of middle ground between the humans and the Na'vi, Potter also considers the avatar in its more technical sense: as a technological tool. Potter bases her study of *Avatar* on the idea that "[humans] simultaneously occupy a mediatory position in relation to Nature and Technology, while also having unique and separate modes of engagement with each" (2). As avatars control a body created through technology and add a human factor to it by transferring the latter's consciousness to this technological body, Potter argues that avatars function as hybrids – beings made of two different components (8). In this case, the components are Human and Technology; however, the technological part is othered, as it is a stand-in for the Na'vi, who are the original Other in the narrative of the film. In addition to this, Potter believes that the avatar in fact appears to fit Haraway's definition of the cyborg, which is the following:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction [...] Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience […]. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (Haraway 5-6, quoted in Potter 8)

Thus, Potter defines the avatar as an "animal that is born of the Human consciousness interfacing with the Technology cocoon, [which] exists in an in-between state: its own physical form interfacing with the Other in such a way as to make the two constituent parts indiscernible from each other" (9). The two components of the avatar, at first entirely different, become one in order to resemble a third, entirely different being, the Na'vi; a being that is, in fact, more akin to Nature (Potter 9).

The scene that introduces the avatars "in the flesh" actually depicts their hybrid state quite well. Jake is led by Norm (Joel David Moore), another new avatar driver recruit, to the room where they will later be connecting to their avatar bodies. Through voiceover, Jake starts explaining what an avatar is, clearly stating that it is a hybrid/cyborg: "Me and Norm are here to drive these remotely controlled bodies called avatars, and they're grown from human DNA mixed with the DNA of the natives" (*Avatar* 00:12:17). In this same room, the viewer gets the first images of what an avatar looks like: several avatar bodies are in vats of blue liquid, seemingly in a stasis and with cables connected to them. The first avatar that the viewer can fully look at is Norm's; the shot (see image #) shows Norman right next to it, thus allowing the viewer to note the fact that avatar bodies are more technological than organic, even if they are made using the DNA of two different people from two biologically different species. Additionally, the presence of blue liquid in the vat makes the avatar look as if it were in a test tube, even with the colour that is associated to the Na'vi. The colour of the avatar and the vat contrasts with Norm's clothes, and since the characters are in their human bodies, this contrast between the two others the avatar.

*Image 4. Norm next to his avatar, which is in a vat of blue liquid. (*Avatar *00:12:35)*

The viewer can, with this scene, understand everything that the avatar represents: a clever mix of Human, Nature/Na'vi and Technology. The role of bridge of the avatar is therefore highlighted since the very beginning of the film, yet only reveals its true meaning to the viewer later in the film. Indeed, in addition to being a bridge between two races (or, rather, two species), the avatar also becomes a bridge that allows humans to reconnect with Nature (Potter6). As the avatar is a hybrid of all three of the elements mentioned, it succeeds in doing what a normal human cannot: it reconnects Humanity to Nature while functioning thanks to Technology. Whereas science fiction as a genre usually describes Technology as an obstacle to the rekindling of the Human-Nature paradigm, *Avatar* does the complete opposite, making Technology the necessary component to achieve this reconnection (Potter 6).

The avatar therefore primarily functions as a tool of communication and connectivity. It enables the human who drives it to become an Other to his own, all the while staying Other enough to the Na'vi that they will not see him as one of them, Jake being the exception as he is later accepted as a member of the Omatikaya clan. It also introduces an interesting idea about race. Since avatar drivers have the possibility of being perceived as non-human, and to impersonate Na'vi to the extent that, in some rare cases, the latter will accept the driver as part of their clan, one could understand the double lives that avatar drivers live as switching their own race, and subsequently, changing their entire way of being. As a human, they live and behave according to

human traditions, customs, and laws. As an avatar, they learn to live and behave just like native Na'vi would, and are made to abandon their human ways, at least to the extent that they are no longer recognised as fully human. Avatar drivers thus adapt to the situation and context that they are in, and to the people that surround them. Adding to this that the Na'vi are an allegory for real oppressed racialised groups, it is possible to apply what the avatar drivers experience to reality and view them as "passers."

This is very similar to what certain racialised people, particularly people of mixed background, experience in reality, according to the communication accommodation theory discussed by Young Yun Kim: "individuals of differing social identities do (or do not) accommodate each other when they interact and […] the willingness to accommodate depends on sociohistorical factors (intergroup history, interpersonal history, and societal/cultural norms and values) as well as individual factors" (290-291). These individuals may then choose to adapt to the other, and adopt different behaviours that will help them cross the "ethnic distance" that exists between them and the other (Kim 292). The question of adaptation resulting from the ethnic distance mentioned by Kim is applicable to the avatars, since they are beings created to resemble the Na'vi but lack the proximity that shared experiences would give the human driver. As most avatar drivers are trained before travelling to Pandora, the ethnic distance is already somewhat reduced: they have some knowledge of the Na'vi language and culture, and only need to apply what they know to real-life situations with real Na'vi. However, the situation is different for Jake: he was never meant to drive an avatar, and has no educational background pertaining to Pandora or the Na'vi. He is expected to learn on the spot, which, to the rest of the scholars and scientists, seems likely to fail. Nevertheless, Jake's complete lack of training may be the reason that he succeeds where all the others have failed. He is not a scholar, meaning that he does not view the Na'vi as a people that need to be studied; he simply views them as a different people, one he must learn to communicate with. Because of Jake's own background and of his status as a "blank slate," it is easier for him to adapt and take in the practical knowledge that he needs than it is for other avatar drivers, who may have much more theoretical knowledge, but do not know how to apply it in reality (Bökös 197). Since he is not influenced by either the Na'vi or the scholars in the beginning of the film, Jake is thus the perfect person to be used as a mediator between both species, as he is able to adapt to both through experience.

2.3. Conclusion

The theme of race is central to the narrative of *Avatar*, and a necessary subject of discussion if one wants to understand the film. However, it is also necessary to understand the relationship between science fiction and race, and how it is reflected in Cameron's work. Science fiction as a genre tends to vilify and/or stereotype racialised characters, especially when it comes to Black characters. Cameron is no exception: his films rarely include racialised characters, which is already problematic in itself, but when racialised characters do appear, they are no different than others in science fiction, as they are either stereotyped or meet their end earlier than non-racialised characters. This is also demonstrated in *Avatar*, in which one of the rare racialised human characters, Trudy, is one of the first among Jake's allies to die. The issue of race is also a behind-the-scenes matter. The ethnic identity of the Na'vi's actors does not match the Native American tribes that inspired the Na'vi's culture and design. Additionally, the design of the Na'vi, and especially of the females, creates an issue as for the representation of indigenous peoples, as it reinforces stereotypes such as the sexualisation and animalisation of indigenous groups. It is thus possible to conclude that, in terms of racial representation, *Avatar* may not be considered as successful, as the representation turns out to be more damaging for racialised groups than it is positive, even with a narrative that favours the natives.

As for the avatars, they are in a peculiar position due to their nature. They are both human and Na'vi, which also means that they are, as a hybrid, neither. As this third being, they are otherised by both the humans and the Na'vi, but both species rely on them for interspecies communication, which signifies that they have a bridging role. However, since the relationship between the two species shows a power imbalance in favour of the humans, the avatars also function as a camouflage, which puts the avatar drivers at an advantage when they interact with the Na'vi. Thus, the avatars do not simply act as a bridge between races, but also as a means of dominating the Na'vi more subtly than the humans can in their own bodies. In addition to linking two different species, the avatars are also a technological product, and can be described as cyborgs. As such, they are not only a bridge between humans and Na'vi, but also one between all the elements that compose them: Human, Nature, and Technology. Their hybridity gives them the opportunity to cross the distance that exists between all that they represent, which leads to situations very similar to those that people of mixed racial backgrounds may face in reality. As

the in-between, the avatar thus plays a very important role for race and race-relations, which brings an interesting perspective to the representation of race and ethnic minorities in science fiction.

III. THE COLONISATION OF PANDORA

While *Avatar*'s plot is, on the surface, rather simplistic in that it follows the traditional codes of blockbusters and does not stray from that path, there is not only one model of colonisation included in the narrative. Instead, the film showcases a dichotomy: 'good' colonisation versus 'bad' colonisation, depending on the agency of the characters and parties involved in each of these two models. Whereas Jake and Grace, as well as their patchwork team of rebels, represent the 'good' colonisers, the military – especially Colonel Quaritch – and the Resources Development Administration (RDA) are considered to be the 'bad' colonisers. There is, however, much more to consider than the use of violence against Natives employed by the military and the RDA. This chapter will explore in detail the models of colonisation used by Cameron, and the dangers of each model. In order to do this, the following angles will be studied: the intentions of the human colonisers present on Pandora; the identities of the protagonist and supporting characters involved in colonisation; whether these characters are representative of archetypal figures that are often involved in colonialist narratives; and whether there are references to any real-life events or instances of colonisation.

3.1. Human greed and fear of the Other as motives for colonisation

3.1.1. Gold from the New World

The situation that *Avatar* presents to the viewer is that of a forced exile from Earth, for both the protagonist and mankind. While most people are stuck on Earth, which is quickly dying, Jake is asked to be part of the Avatar Program in his twin brother's stead. The project is presented to him as a necessity and a means to save the world, as he will be part of the few select people chosen to help find unobtainium, the miraculous mineral that will help restore the Earth to what it once was. However, as Jake arrives in Pandora, he learns that the people involved in the search for unobtainium are not doing it to save planet Earth, but rather for the money that unobtainium is worth. The mineral may be a means to save humanity's home – or rather, delay its death – but it is also used as a reason to destroy another planet, its people, and ecosystems. *Avatar* is therefore a classical story about colonialism: (the white) man wants more and better than he currently has, and he is willing to go to the greatest lengths to reach his goals, no matter the consequences that his actions will have on others (Paliy 2). While space colonisation is, in our reality, a dream that may soon be achievable and that has already been initiated through various projects, Cameron

gives it a twist by adding the imminent death of Earth. The sense of urgency given to the Avatar Program conceals the greed that motivates most of the people working on it under the ideal that saving Earth is possible if the project succeeds.

*Image 5. Unobtainium. (*Avatar, *00:17:28)*

Paliy, as mentioned in the previous section, believes that *Avatar* is a modern/futuristic retelling of the colonisation of the Americas (mostly, of North America), and the presence of unobtainium in the narrative only furthers that idea (2). As Paliy notes:

> [the] role of the now notorious 'gold' is quite cardinal in the [sixteenth-century] picture of the voyage to the Americas. It is not merely a sign of prosperity. More so, it is an emblem of the 'civilised' human's constant dissatisfaction with the present, and subsequently, his incessant search for *more* (read: a better future). (2)

Unobtainium is a futuristic gold, except that it serves a much bigger purpose than wealth; it is supposed to bring back an entire planet back to life. Its cost is only brought up for two reasons: to show that no matter the circumstances, man will give in to his greed, and to give unobtainium the same figurative role as gold. That is to say, "'gold' can be virtually anything the human sets his mind upon, and in the end, it is this very nature of interchanging for the sake of novelty that uncovers the simple truth that its price is nothing more than a fleeting illusion" (Paliy 2). In the case of unobtainium, the stakes are much higher, not only because of the imminent death of Earth, but also because of the consequences that mining it may have. Paliy calls unobtainium a "spiritual

gold", albeit a physical material (2). Whereas humans want the mineral to save their planet, it is the very same material that keeps Pandora alive; "it is the spirit of the Na'vi, and of Pandora" (Paliy 2). It reflects the harm that was done to the lands during the colonisation of North America, and the link that Native Americans have with nature that suffers from it (Paliy 2).

In a way that is similar to the Native American communities they are inspired from, the Na'vi have a very close bond to nature and even worship it as their deity, which they call Eywa. Everything belongs with Eywa; anything that exists on Pandora is a part of her (Paliy 3). This spiritual relationship between the Na'vi and Eywa functions through what Paliy calls "the theory of *reciprocity*" (3). Rice, on whose work Paliy relies, defines the theory of reciprocity as "the process by which, if one receives or takes away, one must also give back. This is a living statement of the importance of the cycle that permeates all of life: the cycle of life and death, of life leading to old age and then coming back to life again […] Relationships follow a circular pattern" (84, quoted in Paliy 3). Whereas this specific quotation was meant to describe the relationship between Native American tribes and nature in the real world, it can also be applied to the fictional Na'vi. The scepticism that humans have in relation to Eywa, spirituality, and the role that nature holds in the lives of the Na'vi implies that they are unable to have this relationship with their own planet (Paliy 4). Whereas the Na'vi thrive on Pandora thanks to their mutual relationship with Eywa, the fate of humanity is tied to Earth's own fate. Because humans were unable to connect with nature and use the concept of reciprocity in the same way that the Na'vi do, their planet is dying; unless they take Pandora's unobtainium and exploit other planets' resources, therefore stealing the life forces of these New Worlds, there is no way to save Earth from its certain death (Paliy 4).

3.1.2. "Toto, I have a feeling we are not in Kansas anymore"

Working in tandem with the corporate part of the Avatar Program is the military faction instated on Pandora, which takes care of most of the manual labour that is involved in the colonisation and exploitation of the planet. The first sentence that is uttered by Colonel Quaritch (Stephen Lang), the leader of the military faction, is one that is inscribed in popular culture: "[you are] not in Kansas anymore" (*Avatar* 00:10:25). This reference to the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* is meant to make the viewer understand that anything that may happen on Pandora is unfamiliar and may even be dangerous. This is directly followed by a pejorative description of the species native to Pandora; just as the Native Americans were deemed to be dangerous during the colonisation of

the Americas because of their will to defend their people and their land, so the Na'vi are described as a threat to the humans, as animalistic beings "fond of arrows dipped in a neurotoxin that will stop your heart in one minute" (*Avatar* 00:11:09). Equating aliens to a threat is not a strange phenomenon: it is common for people to believe that if Earth were visited by an extra-terrestrial species, this foreign species which humans would know very little about would pose a threat to humanity by invading Earth. In fact, it is so common to think of imaginary alien species as a threat that it has been a common trope in science fiction works (Bökös 190). *Avatar* uses this trope in a more ambiguous way: whereas the humans still believe that the Na'vi, who are alien to them, are the threat, the same can be said as to how the Na'vi view the humans. In fact, in the situation presented by Cameron, the alien conquerors are human, while the planet being invaded is Pandora. The "Wellsian invasion pattern," as Bökös says, is therefore reversed in favour of the Na'vi (190). By using the inverted pattern, Cameron conveys that the main point of the film is the dangers of colonisation, and while most of the human characters are against the use of violence, they still participate in the destruction of Pandora. Only a few of the most important human characters, such as Selfridge or Quaritch, do not seem to feel any remorse for the violence that they are instigating. Consequently, Quaritch is seen as the main antagonist in the film, although he is only a representative of the colonisers. As the person in charge of the military faction on Pandora, he plays an important role in deciding what actions will be taken to strengthen the hold that humans have on the planet and its inhabitants. Although humans are the ones invading Pandora, they believe that the indigenous civilisations are a threat to them (similarly to how Native Americans were perceived by European colonisers), rather than the opposite, which becomes clearer as the narrative moves on to scenes that give more information on the Omatikaya as well as a second perspective to the war for Pandora.

According to Bökös, while the inversion of the invasion pattern is rather recent (dating back to the 1940s); compared to the Wellsian invasion pattern itself, it brings a new perspective to the idea of space colonisation, as the humans "try to colonise less advanced worlds. In one way or another, the encounter with the alien Other is always a disturbing and life-changing, not to mention culture-changing experience" (Bökös 190). This trope serves as the main intrigue in *Avatar* yet is more ambiguous because of the protagonist's journey to becoming part of the Omatikaya tribe. Indeed, Jake experiences Pandora differently from the rest of the humans colonising the planet. At first a simple soldier on the colonisers' side, he is later used by them as

a source of exclusive information on the Omatikaya, and later entirely turns against humans because of the harm that they are doing. Bökös believes that the development that Jake undergoes as a character is only possible because Turner's concept of "liminal personae" applies to him (197). As Bökös explains, "[This term] could stand for either a person or a whole group who is in transition from one phase to another," therefore beings that are seen as the in-between of two states or identities, as this mainly pertains to "self-identification" (Bökös 197). About liminality in human cultures, Turner also says the following:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (Turner 95).

Jake fits the criteria entirely: no longer a Marine, yet not trained enough to be a scientist, he is not adapted to either of the human factions presented to him on Pandora. The reason he was chosen is not because of his qualities, but because his brother died, and he seemingly has nothing else to live for on Earth. For all intents and purposes, he is a "blank slate," or the perfect person to undergo a process of transition (Turner 103, quoted in Bökös 197). However, Jake is not just stuck between the two human factions. Due to his integration into the Omatikaya tribe, he starts experiencing liminality between human and alien states, going as far as giving up his human body in favour of his avatar and calling the humans who leave Pandora after their failure to subdue the Na'vi "aliens" (*Avatar* 2:49:03).

The role that Jake assumes once he learns the ways of the Omatikaya is not simply that of a messenger between the two species. Rather, due to his identity as a liminal figure he is able to fully become Na'vi, as Turner's concept is based on the liminal entity going through rites of passage (Bökös 198). In Jake's case, the rites of passage happen in the most literal way, and he goes through them on two different occasions. The first ceremony happens before the colonisers decide to take down the Tree of Souls, when the Omatikaya deem Jake to have learned enough of their culture to be considered one of them, albeit only spiritually. After this ceremony, Jake is considered "part of the People" (*Avatar* 1:17:45). By doing this, Jake essentially embodies a colonial stereotype: the white man "going native" (Mitchell 14). Whereas this is an easy way for Jake to side with the Na'vi on the matter of Pandora's colonisation, the implications that come

with the stereotype that he now represents are even more problematic. According to Huhndorf, "[in] its various forms, going native articulates and attempts to resolve widespread ambivalence about modernity as well as anxieties about the terrible violence marking the nation's origins" (2, quoted in Mitchell 15). Furthermore, in the US context, "modern formulations of going native demonstrate the 'changing relationship of the dominant, colonising culture to Native America' (Huhndorf 15) and remain connected to more explicit and familiar modes of colonialism" (Mitchell 15). This specific stereotype is often demonstrated in fictional works. In the following still shot, Jake is surrounded by members of the Omatikaya clan. Those directly next to him are touching him with their hands, and touched themselves by other Omatikaya in a formation that resembles a flower, making Jake the centre of the shot. He is bathed in light, which attracts the attention of the viewer even more intensely on him. The scene presented is a ceremony that marks the acceptance of Jake among the Omatikaya, and makes him a member of the clan.

*Image 6. Jake's ceremony of integration within the Omatikaya. (*Avatar *1:18:05)*

As the Na'vi and their culture, traditions, and spirituality are inspired by Native American tribes, the consequences of a character "going native" are remarkably similar to those of real-world occurrences. At this precise point in the narrative, Jake is still human, although living a second life as an avatar among the Na'vi. He only becomes a full Omatikaya thanks to the second ritual that is performed after the war, during which Mo'at, with the help of the Omatikaya tribe and of Eywa, transfers his consciousness into the avatar with no possibility of ever returning to his human body again. This second ceremony entirely transforms Jake in continuity with the journey of the

liminal personae: starting as a human with nothing to his name, he becomes the leader of a community that he once helped destroy. Bökös explains that "[Jake's choice] to be one with the Na'vi deconstructs the very notion of race as the sole means of identity formation" (198). Yet, he also perpetuates the colonisation of Pandora and of the Na'vi, albeit in a way that is much more subtle and apparently unconscious on his part (Mitchell 15).

3.1.3. A planet for hope

The Na'vi also represent the possibility of hope for colonised civilisations. Indeed, the original inhabitants of Pandora succeed in driving out their colonisers, forcing them to leave for Earth once again. As the victors of the war for Pandora, they are a reminder of another tale that the planet Pandora was conveniently named after (Potter 11). In the myth of Pandora's box, Pandora is given a jar, and told not to open it. Overcome by curiosity, she disobeys and opens the jar, allowing the evils that were confined in it to roam free and taint humanity. When the jar is closed once more, only one element is left in it: Hope (Hesiod, quoted in Potter 11). Potter adds that Hesiod's account of Pandora explains her name as meaning 'she who is given all gifts' (cited in Scott Littleton 1082)" (11). This planet is abundant in resources, and is home to all life" (Potter 11). In this sense, Eywa can be equated to Pandora: everything that lives and is a part of Pandora, is also part of Eywa. However, Pandora is named as such by the colonisers; the word Pandora does not seem to exist in the Na'vi language – instead, the Na'vi name their planet Eywa'eveng (Miller 57). In doing so, the film reverses the myth of Pandora's box: instead of making her the instigator of evils unleashed upon humanity, she becomes the victim of these evils (Potter 11).

In the original version, Pandora is the one who opens the jar, only closing it in time for Hope to stay in it. In the film, however, Pandora is a planet: its resources are gifts that she gives to her inhabitants, rather than that she is given herself (Potter 11). Due to the abundance of those resources (and one of them being unobtainium), they are coveted by the colonisers, who wish to use them for their own benefit. The issue comes with the fact that instead of using Pandora's resources in harmony with her, as the Na'vi do, they exclusively take without caring about balance or consequences. By reversing the roles, Cameron "[creates] a postcolonial counterpoint [to Hesiod's version of the story]" (Potter 12). The colonisers' actions are therefore the only reason why both Pandora and the Na'vi are hostile to them (Potter 12). While an argument can be made for the environment in which the humans are thrown – living beings growing on a bigger scale, a

poisonous atmosphere which requires them to wear oxygen masks –, the planet is not inherently hostile to humans (Potter 12). The fact that the atmosphere is unbreathable for humans, however, does suggest that their presence on Pandora is unnatural, but the planet is simply adapted to its original flora and fauna, which have no issue breathing or surviving in the environment that is given to them (Potter 12).

If Pandora is a victim of evils unleashed against her in this version, there is one element of the myth that has not been mentioned yet: Hope. The moral of the myth can be interpreted as follows: as the last element, the one that stays inside Pandora's box, hope is never lost. While it is certainly difficult to keep hope in situations of violence like those presented in the film, the addition of Jake to the Omatikaya tribe plays an important role. Although he is at first considered a traitor for giving information to the colonisers, when war breaks out and Pandora seems lost, his decisions and actions give the Na'vi renewed hope. By becoming Toruk Makto, "rider of last shadow," Jake uses a creature that the Na'vi greatly respect (*Avatar* 1:29:43). As Neytiri says, Toruk Makto is revered, both because of their rarity – Jake is only the sixth person to have ridden Toruk "since the time of the First Songs" (*Avatar* 1:29:54). The previous Toruk Makto, Neytiri's ancestor, "brought the clans together in a time of great sorrow" (*Avatar* 1:30:02). After choosing to use Toruk Makto's fame to be forgiven by the Omatikaya and help them, Jake does the exact same thing as Neytiri's ancestor: he suggests asking other clans to fight with the Omatikaya, and becomes the clans' war leader and driving force against the human colonisers. As the protagonist, it is an evident writing choice that Jake should represent Hope. However, the hope that he gives the Na'vi is transferred to them: they become Pandora's hope, something that Jake alone cannot achieve. They represent the best-case scenario of a fight against colonisation on the victims' side: a civilisation that is not only able to defend its land, but also to entirely drive out their colonisers. Even if this is a hopeful ending, the fact that Jake is the one giving hope to the natives is rather problematic. It is once again the white man who went through the process of going native who brings a solution to the issue at hand – to the extent that Jake can be categorised as the stereotypical white saviour. As mentioned in the previous subsection, this is a way of perpetuating the colonisation of the Na'vi, although more subtly (Huhndorf 2, quoted in Mitchell 15). Without a white man to join hands with them against his own people, the Na'vi are unable to save themselves, regardless of their skills as hunters and warriors.

3.2. Finding humanity in humans: affiliations, gender roles, disability, and spirituality

3.2.1. Grace, scientist of the divine

As mentioned in the previous section, the characters of the main cast who wish to use violence to colonise Pandora are only a minority. Although this is obviously because part of the cast plays Na'vi roles, even among the humans, violence is not the answer for most. For some of them, it is a last resort; for others, it is something that they are forced to take part in or to witness. Grace Augustine, Jake's supervisor, and the head of the scientific department of the Avatar Program, belongs to this second category. While her exact training and function is not described, she mostly seems to act as a botanist and linguist, and is an expert on the Pandoran flora and Na'vi language. Her introduction is one of the most interesting: she first appears to dislike Jake's addition to the avatar pilots because of his lack of scientific education and his past as a Marine, associated with the military.

*Image 7. Grace's first appearance. (*Avatar *00:10:38)*

In fact, her introduction scene lays out a variety of elements that help understand the purpose that she will serve. As shown in the frame above, she is dressed in green, wearing a white laboratory coat on top of it. Whereas the laboratory coat is an evident sign of her function as a scientist, the use of green in her outfit marks her affiliation with nature . Indeed, Grace is the human character who has the most respect for, and interest in, the Pandoran environment, albeit mostly from a scientific perspective. Unlike Jake, Grace is not in transition from one side of the war to another;

she works to satisfy her own scientific curiosity and does not wish to harm the Na'vi or take their resources. Neither does she believe herself to be superior to the Omatikaya; she is even friendly with them, hoping to learn as much as possible while still seeing them as intelligent beings. Therefore, her affiliations never change: she is on the side of science, and does not condone the violence used by the military in order to subdue the Omatikaya. Yet, considering that science is inherently linked to technology, it is still possible to describe Grace as a liminal entity, "[a role that she] assumes […] as scientific/Technology and feminine/Nature/Human intermediary" (Potter 10).

Just as Jake experiences liminality between the two civilisations he finds himself to be part of, Grace experiences liminality pertaining to the different human parties that are presented in the film while still taking in some of Pandora's elements, which have a great impact on her. As Potter notes, "Grace facilitates an interfacing: that of herself as a scientist, her Technology, and Eywa's divinity and her creation, Nature" (Potter 10). By being associated with science and nature, she is directly linked to Eywa, and thus to spirituality. Another hint about Grace's ties to spirituality is her name, which is "derived from Old French and Latin, and [is] associated with '[divine] mercy, favour' (Skeat 246)" (Potter 10). Consequently, because of her dual relationship with science and Eywa/Nature, Grace is able to [observe] the interconnectedness of all beings" (Potter 10). In addition to this, her role as mentor to Jake and the other scientists whom she is leading is likened to maternal instincts, thus creating a parallel between Grace and Eywa (Potter 11), whom the Na'vi call the Great Mother (*Avatar* 2:13:25). The title of mother also shows a direct connection between femininity and spirituality, whereas technology is primarily associated with masculinity (Potter 10). In studying the association of spirituality with Nature, Potter writes that "the divine [is a] part of Nature, because Eywa, the central divinity of Pandora, establishes her authority through Nature as her creation" (11). As a matter of fact, Grace's affiliation to Pandora's spirituality is expected, considering her role as a scientist. While she says herself that "a scientist stays objective. [They cannot] be ruled by emotion" (*Avatar* 1:14:35), science is to humans what Eywa is to the Na'vi. Some of the humans, such as Quaritch, do not seem to believe in Eywa because they do not accept the mysticism that surrounds it and believe that the Na'vi are inferior and therefore do not understand science. Contrary to them, Grace applies the reasoning of a scientist to everything, including Eywa. Her reasoning does not only come from what the Na'vi say about Eywa, but also from the scientific observations that she has made by studying

samples of the wildlife that she has encountered after spending over ten years on Pandora (*Avatar* 1:14:45). Her position as a scientist is thus one of the main reasons why she can connect so well with the Omatikaya and is one of the most humane participants in the colonisation of Pandora.

As was already mentioned, Grace partly represents Technology, albeit a different kind than the technology associated with the military. She is an avatar driver: the technology she uses works as a tool to communicate and interact with the Na'vi, consequently "establishing the Other as hybrid" (Potter 8). As Jake's mentor, she shows him a different way to make use of technology, one that does not operate through violence (Potter 9). According to Potter, "both Human and Technology initially serve patriarchal capitalist interests. They are, as Haraway (9) intimates, 'the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism.' And so, the Avatar provides Grace and Jake with a means of liberating themselves from this order" (9). The role that the avatars hold is thus contradictory. As the product of capitalism and a tool of colonisation, the avatar is primarily not designed for peaceful purposes, but rather to conquer the Na'vi from within – which is what the military faction expects Jake to do. Grace's intervention is what makes Jake understand that the avatar does not have to fulfil this role. Through her, Jake realises that militarised technology, including avatars, will destroy Pandora rather than save Earth, which is counterproductive if the humans' main mission is the latter. Using technology for more scientific purposes, however, does not present the same problem as after all, any kind of technology is simply a utensil for its user to wield in order to act on his or her intentions (Potter 9).

3.2.2. Gender roles and colonisation

As mentioned in the previous subsection, there is an opposition between two factions of the humans' settlement on Pandora. First comes the military faction, which works in tandem with the corporate department of the Avatar Program and is mainly represented by Quaritch. Next is the scientists' faction, which is represented by Grace (and, to an extent, Jake). The military is associated with violence and destruction; science, by contrast, is linked to nature and spirituality (Potter 10). In addition to this, another opposition between the two parties appears: science leans towards femininity, whereas the military leans towards masculinity (Potter 10). This analysis suggests that "the division between the feminised scientists […] and the masculine military based on gender stereotypes highlights the text's superficial engagement with colonial discourse"

(O'Connor 63). As a recurring element through the film's narrative, it also affects the very methods used by both the military and scientists to colonise Pandora. As opposed to the association of the military with violence and dominance, the scientists "are not explicitly associated with dominance over the territory [even if some studies] would suggest they should be due to their efforts to systemise information about the planet (which is notably funded by the Research Development Agency for the purpose of more efficient capital extraction)" (O'Connor 63).

Grace's character, who was already discussed in the previous subsection, is opposed to Quaritch, the Avatar Program's head of security and therefore leader of the military (*Avatar* 00:11:19). In terms of personalities, Grace and Quaritch are total opposites. Whereas Grace believes in science first and foremost, wishes to reconnect humanity with nature and wants to work with the Omatikaya rather than against them, Quaritch is a prime example of the racist white man stereotype, using insults to talk about the Na'vi and antagonising them constantly through violent acts. He does not believe that Jake can persuade the Omatikaya to leave Hometree, and is unwilling to find any alternatives that would not lead to the full destruction of the Omatikaya's home. All in all, Quaritch plays the role of the dominant male perfectly due to his responsibility for most of the violence that is used against the Omatikaya. In view of this, O'Connor deduces that "Avatar does not engage gender in a critical way that considers its role in colonial discourse […]. Instead, it appropriates Said's conceptions of colonial notions of difference into a heteronormative gender binary" (63).

The actions of the military reveal its characteristics – dominant and violent. Destruction is thus expected to happen. However, whereas the scientists do not seem to do much more than compile knowledge during Jake's first months on Pandora, they are not as innocent in relation to Pandora's colonisation as O'Connor makes them out to be (63). While it is true that they do not use or condone violence towards the Na'vi – rather, they are powerless against the military, as Grace suggests (*Avatar* 1:14:35) –, they perpetuate the cycle of colonisation in other ways. Through their actions, the scientists give themselves two different roles. Whereas the Na'vi embody Native Americans, the scientists become white scholars; they believe themselves to be experts on matters regarding a colonised minority that they technically know and understand very little about. This can, at first glance, be viewed as a model of colonisation that is less involved

and has little incidence compared to the extreme violence that is being used by the military. However, this is where the scientists' second stereotypical role comes in: the scientists act as missionaries (Nesbitt 22).

One of the important events that happen before those depicted in the film and that the viewer learns about thanks to a conversation between Jake and Grace is what happened to Sylwanin, Neytiri's deceased sister (*Avatar* 1:13:00). Preceding Jake's arrival on Pandora, Grace and other scientists had built a school, in which they taught the Omatikaya people English and other disciplines. Grace's leading a missionary school and, especially, teaching the Omatikaya English, reminds one of the colonisation of North America and of other territories, for example in Africa. In these real-world instances of colonialism, the English language and Christianity were both tools used by European people to further colonisation, "teaching natives to imitate their conquerors – in customs, in worldview, in reasoning, in language, in being" (Nesbitt 22). Christianity is of no interest to the Omatikaya, as the worship of Eywa is too ingrained in Na'vi culture to be replaced. In a way, teaching the Omatikaya English is also pointless since avatar drivers are expected to have studied the Na'vi language before being transferred to Pandora (*Avatar* 00:15:00). The school may have served as a place in which both humans (in avatar bodies) and Na'vi could cohabitate without violence and where there was mutual respect between both species, but it still maintained a power imbalance in favour of the colonisers. Moreover, even as the head of the Avatar Program, Grace is powerless once the military decides to instate violence; this is precisely the cause for the school's destruction as well as Sylwanin's death (*Avatar* 1:14:35). Even though Grace is an active participant in the (ostensibly less violent) colonisation of Pandora and in dominating the Na'vi via her position as a role model and a knowledgeable scientist, she herself is dominated by Quaritch and the military. This is due to her being a character associated with elements that are feminised by the narrative, such as science, nature, and spirituality (Potter 10). In contrast, the military and Quaritch are more powerful for this exact same reason; they do not make use of the same rational reasoning as Grace because they are associated with masculinity, violence, and weaponised technology. Thus, one can conclude that, while to some, the intention of *Avatar*'s narrative is indeed to "discredit feminism and female agency," it is in fact the opposite. Masculinity, due to its association with characters that are depicted as villainous, violent, and almost thoughtless, femininity is shown as harmless and rational, and this is best demonstrated by Grace's story (Nesbitt 22).

Whereas Grace's role is easily associated with femininity, Jake's role is more complex, as he is a liminal entity. In fact, his liminality is also demonstrated in the transition that he experiences from being an ex-Marine, part of the military – which Quaritch discusses with him in what can be considered an attempt to relate to his own experience as a soldier and sympathise with him (*Avatar* 00:25:14) –, to learning how to use a scientist's rationale and consequently becoming more feminised. Doing this while simultaneously trying to adapt to life among the Omatikaya, which is a "feminine-primitive" civilisation (Norton 131, quoted in Nisbett 26), means that Jake leaves a masculine environment to join a more feminine one (Potter 10). This ties in with Turner's concept of liminality as a figurative rebirth, which becomes literal in Jake's case (95). The viewer is presented, during the later part of the film, with two different attempts at rebirth; one for Grace, which happens in the early moments of the war after she is shot and on the brink of death, and one for Jake, which doubles as the final scene. Turner's concept is particularly fitting to these scenes, as they both show the character going through a literal transition of their mind to the avatar bodies – the last transition each of them will go through. It exploits two of the elements mentioned in Turner's definition: "likened to death, to being in the womb" (95). As demonstrated in the still shot, the ritual to transfer a human's mind to their avatar body requires both bodies to be placed in foetal position. Branches connect the two bodies from their abdomens, resembling an umbilical cord, as if they were being fed by Eywa or Pandora.

*Image 8. Grace and her avatar in a foetal position during her transition ritual. (*Avatar *2:14:14)*

Grace's ritual fails, resulting in her death; according to Mo'at, this is because "her wounds were too great" (*Avatar* 2:15:34). A more symbolic interpretation would be that she is unable to complete the transition that a liminal entity is supposed to go through, and that the spiritual growth she experienced was not enough. Unlike her, Jake is capable of transitioning to his avatar successfully.

Before his physical transition, however, he must complete spiritual growth and accept the existence of Eywa. He turns to her in the midst of war, after having been abandoned by the Omatikaya near the destroyed Hometree. While, before this scene, he had prayed for the souls of departed beings in the same way that the Omatikaya do, this is the first time that he has prayed to Eywa alone, and by bonding with one of the branches of the Tree of Souls, which is said to be the closest link to Eywa. Ignoring Neytiri's words about Eywa not involving herself in conflicts, he asks for her help. Later, the creatures of Pandora join the Na'vi in the fight, showing that Eywa has bypassed her usual principles in favour of defeating the colonisers who harmed her.

Jake's success in making Eywa participate in the war is a rare feat. Added to this his new, almost legendary role as Toruk Makto, Jake inscribes himself in Na'vi history and, additionally, makes himself known as Eywa's chosen one – turning the film into a "White Messiah fable" (Brooks 2010, quoted in Cammarota 247). Jake is different from the Na'vi in the sense that, as he was born human, he has more agency than the natives, "[which] resemble elegant, graceful animals more than competent human agents" (Cammarota 248). Having more agency is what really allows Jake to become the Omatikaya's saviour – Eywa's support is only an advantage that makes the Omatikaya believe that following him is the only solution to win the war.

3.2.3. The White Hunter, disabled

Jake opens the film with the following words: "When I was in the VA hospital with a big hole blown through the middle of my life, I started having these dreams of flying. I was free. Sooner or later though, you always have to wake up. They can fix a spinal, if you got the money, but not on vet benefits, not in this economy" (*Avatar* 00:01:11). Jake's introduction tells the viewer two very important details about him: he used to be a soldier, and he is now disabled – paraplegic – due to an accident during one of his campaigns with the army. One of the first scenes that show him in his wheelchair is when he arrives on Pandora. As his wheelchair makes it impossible for him to get off the ship at the same time as the other people that were on it, he is forced to wait.

*Image 9. Jake in his wheelchair upon arrival on Pandora. (*Avatar *00:10:13)*

Seeing him alone in his wheelchair, however, allows the viewer to note an interesting parallel in the colour scheme: his wheelchair is black and yellow, as is the bulldozer next to him. Throughout the film, these two colours appear mostly on elements associated with the military, such as bulldozers, robots, and other machinery. Presenting Jake as part of that scheme introduces him as someone who is affiliated with the military – although he is at times disillusioned, he is not unlike the usual representation of the wounded war veteran (Belton 171, quoted in Young-Roberts 26-27). In addition, he also appears as a being that is not only human but also partly technological – a "masculine cyborg" (Potter 9). However, whereas Potter recognises Jake as a cyborg because of his role as an avatar driver, one could relate this to his disability and his consequent dependency to his wheelchair, which may not be automated in the same way that a machine is, but remains a technological tool.

Jake, as a human, is thus powerless without technology. While his connection with his brother's avatar body allows him full body movement, this movement is not permanent, and he is constantly reminded that his human body does not have proper motor control. The military, knowing that the Omatikaya favour him, decide to use his disability to their advantage: "[in] return for the medical treatments that will repair his 'real' legs, Jake promises Colonel Miles Quaritch […] that he will negotiate colonisation with the Na'vi and pave the way for the rapacious RDA Mining Company to pillage Pandora's natural resources" (Jalilvand 92). Jalilvand associates the

process of transition from human to Na'vi that Jake goes through to his disability; in making Jake paraplegic, Cameron gives him a reason to prefer his avatar body to his human one (Jalilvand 100). As Jake's human body is disabled, his avatar body gives him the opportunity to become the Other, which is naturally stronger than a human, but at the same time stay himself, as the avatar is tailored to its driver (Jalilvand 100).

Thanks to his disability, "Jake is capable of (has room for) consuming/absorbing the Other because his disability is defined as a lack that needs to be filled and sated" (Jalilvand: 100).

One of the staples of Omatikayan culture that Jake must learn to do is hunt; as an ex-Marine/soldier, he already knows how to fight and kill, and has some knowledge about the dangers of being thrown into the wild. While he is now unable to do fight in his human body, "[there is] no such thing as an ex-Marine"– a man who once was a soldier can never lose certain habits and reflexes that he gained because of his experience (*Avatar* 00:09:13). Mixing the hybrid Other that gives Jake access to a fully abled body with his past as an ex-Marine, "Jake's avatar passes itself off as a primitive being who follows the traditions of Na'vi people in hunting and lassoing for the basic needs, [and allows him] to become a legitimate hunter again" (Jalilvand 103). Jake thus symbolises yet another of the "most popular archetypal figures of colonial adventure, the Great White Hunter" (Jalilvand 94). This figure, as Jalilvand explains, has been inscribed in America's – specifically Hollywood's – cinematographic history for decades, going as far back as the earliest years of the twentieth century (Jalilvand 95). He is traditionally depicted as a positive figure, representing a "good coloniser," braving the dangers of the indigenous wildlife (Jalilvand 96). By contrast, *Avatar* does not depict animals as monsters to the same extent as they were in the early films that represented the white hunter. This may be due to the presence of spirituality and Eywa/Nature as a divinity, which ties Pandora's animals to the Na'vi – sometimes literally, since the Na'vi are able to bond with animals physically by using their braids – and of Cameron's wish to convey a "pro-environmental message […] prevalent in colonial fantasies" (Doughty and Etherington-Wright 261, quoted in Jalilvand 100). The viewer is thus presented with a "binary arrangement of good coloniser/bad coloniser, [in which] the caricatured vicious RDA and Colonel Quaritch force death upon the Na'vi so they have no choice but to embrace angelic Dr. Grace and Jake Sully as redeemers" (Jalilvand 99). They are evidently not as virtuous as the dichotomy suggests, as explained in previous sections. In addition to this, as a white man integrating an

indigenous clan, Jake's "becoming of the Other [...] requires the sacrifice of the Na'vi male leaders, Eytukan (Neytiri's father and the clan chief) and Tsu'tey (Jake's indigenous rival for both Neytiri and the leadership of the Navi)" (Jalilvand 100). Eytukan dies during the assault on Hometree, and Tsu'tey, after Jake's return to the Omatikaya, is downgraded to acting as Jake's interpreter and second in command, a position he shares with Neytiri. Jake only obtains the position of leader to the Omatikaya because of these sacrifices, and his role as a white hunter reinforce his problematic identity as a white man leading an indigenous tribe.

3.2.4. The Pandoran War on Terror

It is evident that Cameron wishes to recount, to an extent, the colonisation of the Americas. However, the Native American genocide is not the only major event of the United States' history being referenced in *Avatar*. This second, more subtle retelling pertains to a much more recent catastrophe and the war that surrounds it – the 9/11 attacks, which happened in 2001 in New York, and the subsequent "global war on terror" launched by then President Bush ("President George W. Bush's address" 14:20). As *Avatar* was released in 2009, less than a decade later – and, coincidentally, "the same year George W. Bush [...] left office" –, the context of the war on terrorism is still fresh in the memory of Americans (Young-Roberts 16). According to Young-Roberts, while the Na'vi are an alien caricature of Native Americans, "they are still a substitute for all foreign societies in conflict with the United States" (18). The stance that Cameron takes during an interview with Fox News after the release of his film is thus surprising: he describes himself as "pro-America, [...] pro-military [and having a] brother [who] is a former Marine" (Alford 121-122, quoted in Heuston 9). Heuston notes that, in a similar interview only a day prior, Cameron expresses a different opinion, which is no longer in favour of the military but rather of Jake's group (Alford 192, quoted in Heuston 9). Cameron, in the interview mentioned by Alford, may thus have decided to be politically correct and adapt to the channel's audience and own political agenda rather than reply truthfully.

If one is to take the film at face value, the references to the Global War on Terror are shown in an interesting light. Whereas the 9/11 attacks happened in the United States and were carried out by extremist group al-Qaeda, in *Avatar*, the symbol attacked is the Omatikaya's Hometree.

*Image 10. Hometree falling. (*Avatar *1:57:55)*

The manner in which the tree falls is the exact same as the World Trade Centre's Twin Towers – and the method of attack, missiles coming from aerial ships, is also extremely similar to the 2001 catastrophe (Heuston 9-10). The colour scheme used in the film also changes during this scene. Instead of using bright colours and a dominating blue, Pandora turns grey and orange – the colours of fire and smoke, reminiscent of the destruction inflicted upon the Omatikaya and Pandora. These colours stay dominant for almost a third of the film – that is to say, until the end of the war. Some of the shots also "strongly resemble well-known television news shots from [9/11]" (Heuston 10). The frame above exemplifies this, but there are many more which show the Omatikaya escaping, "falling and/or jumping from the skyscraper-like tree; […] being crushed to death as [Hometree] collapses; and dazed, bloodied survivors staggering away through smoke and drifting ash and embers" (Heuston 10).

By associating the Na'vi with the victims of 9/11, Cameron makes his stance clear. In making the military the cause of such a traumatic event, he associates them with the terrorists that carried out the 2001 attacks. Thus, "with this in mind, *Avatar* could be viewed as an attack on the Bush administration for going to war with Iraq under the false pretences of their harbouring terrorists and weapons of mass destruction (Blix 2004)" (Young-Roberts 29). It is even possible to view Quaritch as a caricature of Bush:

"While their [Quaritch's and Bush's] basic physical appearance is the same (white, male, middle-aged, and grey hair) and they share a Texan accent, [Quaritch's] uniform is reminiscent of that which Bush wore during his flight aboard the USS Lincoln in May 2003 […]. Although [Quaritch] is scarred and has a much bulkier frame than Bush, it only emphasises Bush's neoconservative role in the Iraq War […] (Koppes 1995). At times [Quaritch] even has hints of Bush's flippant casual manner during inappropriate moments, saying things such as 'let's boogie' just after destroying the Na'vi home, 'boogie' being particularly fitting considering the former president's tendency to dance in public" (Young-Roberts 30).

The language that Quaritch uses is also very similar to Bush's in relation to the Iraq War, so much so that "it may even have been cut and pasted into the film script from one of [Bush's] Commander-in-Chief speeches" (Young-Roberts 30-31). The most direct example of this is Quaritch's speech after the assault on Hometree and the beginning of the war. He tells his personnel that "we will fight terror with terror" (*Avatar* 2:20:14), which directly refers to the nickname Bush gives to the war on terrorism. A few seconds earlier, Quaritch also mentions a "pre-emptive strike" – as Bush did in Iraq (Young-Roberts 31). Young-Roberts also discusses the opposition between Quaritch and Jake as leaders: "the Colonel stands alone like a dictator when addressing his troops, while Sully does so backed by some of 'The People'" (31). Young-Roberts also makes a correlation between Jake's win – and the way in which he wins, with the support of the Na'vi – to Obama's election as president of the United States in 2008, after which the American troops stationed in Iraq were sent home (31).

There is also the matter of In addition, the Resources Development Administration, the corporation that is involved in Pandora's colonisation, is also a reference to the events that happened in the early 2000s. Similar to Blackwater and other "private military contractor organisations" that actively participated in the Iraq War, it is another nod to the "issues of corporate power and to the social-class issues in ways that resonate with the Global War on Terror and related controversies" (Heuston 6). The RDA is violent and greedy, and works with the military in order to mine unobtainium. They do not hesitate to go to the greatest lengths to do so, ready to attack innocent people if it means accessing the resources they are seeking (Heuston 7). Quaritch tries to recruit Jake to work for the military's cause via two different approaches: the first is the past campaigns in which they have both taken part as soldiers. Venezuela and Nigeria are mentioned and, as Heuston suggests, Cameron may have decided to use these two specific

countries due to "the U.S. military [being] involved in those places because of oil" (7). During another conversation with Jake, during which Quaritch uses the appeal of having a fully abled human body again, he states that he has obtained "corporate approval" for a surgery on Jake's spinal cord – yet another reference to Bush's words in relation to the Iraq War (Heuston 7).

The parallels to the Global War on Terror are thus constant, and arranged so that there is no other possibility for the viewer than to side with the Na'vi – and against the colonisers, which are suggested to be American (Heuston 7-8). As Young-Roberts explains, "this is the first of [Cameron's] films to draw parallels with atrocities committed under a particular administration during a specific war" (33). It was decided for a reason – and *Avatar*'s criticism of the American ways of waging war are too obvious for the film to be anything but a side-eye to pro-militarism.

3.3. Conclusion

Avatar presents colonisation in the form of a dichotomy: there are bad, hyper-masculine colonisers, and there are good, feminised colonisers. The bad colonisers, namely the military faction and the RDA, are described as power-hungry, violent, and greedy. Their quest for unobtainium, Cameron's symbol for gold, is no longer a means to save the Earth but to make money, with no regard for the consequences that it has on Pandora and its inhabitants. Humans are associated with the vices that the mythological Pandora suffers, reversing the Greek myth in which she is the one to unleash strife and destruction upon humanity. The "bad" colonisers, as the tradition inscribed in the science fiction genre wills it, also make it their task to paint the Na'vi in a negative light. Their characters and agency are a parallel to the Bush administration and the Global War on Terror, with a specific retelling of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in the assault on Hometree.

On the other hand, Jake, Grace, and their group of rebels are depicted as good colonisers. They are much more humane characters; they show empathy for the Na'vi and actively try to help them. These qualities are partly due to their positions as liminal personae, at least for Jake and Grace. Grace, the white scholar, experiences liminality between Human, Technology and Nature, but fails to achieve the full transition that would have made her an Omatikaya. In turn, Jake achieves that same transition from human to Omatikaya; from masculine, incomplete (disabled) cyborg ex-Marine to part of a feminised scientific team, in tune with science, nature and spirituality. Jake, as the protagonist, also represents a list of archetypal figures: he is the white

hunter, going native in order to achieve this status; he is also the Omatikaya's white Messiah, due to his newfound connection with Eywa that force the Omatikaya to accept him as their leader. Although "good" characters are depicted as empathetic, they perpetuate the colonisation of Pandora, growing as people without entirely freeing the planet of its tormentors.

IV. THE LANGUAGES OF PANDORA

The narrative of *Avatar* focuses on humans leaving their home planet and colonising another, which is already home to a species that is, all biological evolutive differences aside, quite similar to humankind. With the appearance of a new civilisation capable of speech, it is evident that the film should include the language that these aliens speak. In fact, *Avatar* does more than simply showcase a few conversations between Na'vi. The film gives the Na'vi language an important place in its narrative, as the protagonist must learn to behave like the Omatikaya, and thus, talk like them. The Na'vi language therefore plays an important part in the way that the Omatikaya and humans interact. However, one must not forget that *Avatar* is a tale of colonisation. It is necessary to think of the two languages that *Avatar* makes use of, Na'vi and English, in this specific context, and to study the use of each of these languages in relation to the narrative and to each other to understand if they play a role in the colonisation of Pandora, and if so, what the consequences are. This chapter will discuss the role of language in a bilingual film that has for theme colonisation, the evolution of the protagonist through the acquisition of a second language and the differences that exist between him and other avatar drivers, the meanings and consequences of particular words such as "I See you" and "alien," and the position of Jake as a leader who is not fluent in his people's language.

4.1. Tools of colonisation

4.1.1. *Avatar*, an example of bilingualism

It is not rare to watch a film that makes use of two or more different languages. Especially in more recent times, one could say that "multilingualism exists in the nature of cinema" (Atay 141). Atay follows this statement with an explanation of the link between the film industry and multilingualism: "Global film industry is a multicultural and polyglot organisation. Cinematographically multilingualism includes ancient languages, lost languages, rare languages, even invented languages besides living languages" (141). As the borders between cultures and countries become less and less defined due to global migration and multiculturalism, it is natural that the film industry, which often reflects the reality of society, follows this same movement (Atay 141). According to Atay, any film that includes several languages in its narrative can be categorised within one of the five sub-genres that make up the multilingual movie genre: the fraternisation film, the globalisation film, the migration film, the colonial film, and the existential

film (De Bonis 23-24, quoted in Atay 142). Thus, every film that can be described as multilingual uses several languages for a particular reason. In fact, Atay also notes that "as a genre, [the] multilingual movie represents now a particular aesthetic, a particular critical vision, and a cosmopolite irony. Multilingualism is a perfect environment for film directors to create hyper-realistic historical atmospheres, cultural chronotopes and briefly artistic aura, moreover it provides possibilities to make historical and political criticism. In the same way, film directors can create metaphors and metonymies by using different characteristics of different languages" (142). It is, however, important to note that only films that include at least three languages can be considered as multilingual (Atay 142). Films using only two languages such as *Avatar* are bilingual movies, although they can sometimes have the same properties as films that are truly multilingual (Atay 142).

As *Avatar* only includes two languages – English and Na'vi, one natural language and one constructed language –, it would be wrong to assume that it has the same nature and aim as a true multilingual film. However, Atay believes that because Na'vi is a constructed language, the film "has a significant place in multilingual movie context" (156). As mentioned in the introductive chapter of this work, the place that constructed languages have taken in recent cinematography cannot be ignored (Peterson 11). Na'vi is a language that has depth, and that is very well constructed – it has a grammar, a rather large vocabulary, and its own phonetical system. Considering that it was only created for a cinematographic universe that, as of now, only consists of two films, the work that was put into constructing the language is of great magnitude. However, this was only possible because Cameron, in order to create a language that would not sound nonsensical, hired conlanger Frommer. In relation to the specifics of what Cameron asked of Frommer, Scudder mentions the following: "Frommer explained that there were several requirements for the Na'vi language. It needed to be exotic, coherent so that people hearing it would recognise it as a language while not understanding it, and be learnable by humans" (1, quoted in Atay 156). All of these requirements highlight Jake's journey to become an Omatikaya; as he integrates the clan, he learns their ways, and most of all, their language.

The Na'vi language was thus tailored to the protagonist, and the fact that Cameron asked that it be learnable by humans and, of all characteristics, exotic, shows that the Na'vi were after all never supposed to be their own species. They are humanoid, because humans are the frame of

reference; their language is exotic because English speakers are at its origins. Indeed, the physiology of the Na'vi influences greatly the way that they communicate, and because they are based on humans, so is their language. As Peterson explains, humanoid aliens are "simply not *linguistically* alien enough to warrant anything other than a spoken human language" (82). Even if the Na'vi should be fundamentally different from humans biologically, they are too strongly based on humans to communicate through other means than speech. However, as the Na'vi are represented as more animalistic than humans, a few scenes of the film show them calling and signalling each other through sounds that are similar to how certain animals communicate. Peterson mentions that "in order to actually need different speech sounds, the aliens will need to have a different vocal anatomy," such as a different vocal tract (82-83). The design of the Na'vi does not seem to differ in any way from humans when it comes to their vocal anatomy. They can produce the same sounds as those used in the English language, which is why language learning in the film can be mutual; humans learn the Na'vi language, the Na'vi are made to learn English, and neither has much difficulty learning another language. Whereas one may think that designing the Na'vi as beings so similar to humans shows a lack of imagination on their creators' part, it is this same similarity to humankind that allows *Avatar* to be a bilingual film, and especially, to give such importance to the use of language in its narrative.

4.1.2. Evolving through language

As discussed in the previous chapters, Jake undergoes development as a character by learning to behave like and understand the Omatikaya. This journey of self-growth also implies that Jake must learn their language in order to be seen as one of them, and, unlike the other avatar drivers, he has no formation in the Omatikaya culture or language previous to his stay on Pandora. Therefore, although he is working among scientists and scholars, Jake does not learn the Na'vi language in the same way as they did. Whereas the rest of the avatar drivers have learned the Na'vi language in an academic context that may not have included interaction in natural contexts and thus makes them sound too formal – as Grace tells Norm during their first meeting (*Avatar* 00:15:08) –, Jake does the opposite. With no formal education, he is forced to learn on the field, and relies on the teachings and interactions that are provided by his environment, which includes the Omatikaya themselves.

*Image 11. Neytiri teaching Jake the Na'vi language. (*Avatar *1:07:35)*

This particular scene shows Neytiri teaching Jake's avatar form how to pronounce certain words in Na'vi. As Jake explains with his voiceover scientific log, "it's like field-stripping a weapon. Just repetition, repetition" (*Avatar* 1:07:35). In order to make him understand what she is teaching him, Neytiri relies both on gestures – in this shot, she is making him repeat words such as *mikyun*, ear, and *nari*, eye (Miller 21, 22) – and context, as the following scene shows her teaching Jake to say *txurnì'ul* – stronger – while he is learning how to hold a bow (*Avatar* 1:07:44). Her teachings are thus simple, but effective.

However, it is also possible to notice that in addition to learning the Na'vi language, Jake also evolves in the way that he speaks. In his first interactions with the Omatikaya, Jake is shown to be immature (Paliy 5). Like other humans, especially those that, like Quaritch, do not see the Na'vi as equals, Jake uses pejorative expressions to refer to them and their beliefs. According to Paliy, there is an important difference between the language used by humans, and the one used by the Na'vi:

> Cameron makes a very relevant subtle commentary in the discrepancies between the brute speech of humans […] and the majestic, eloquent communication methods between the 'aliens' […]. In contrast to the latter, the verbal interaction of the colonisers amongst each other, as well as with their environment, becomes not only vulgar but innately destructive (and *self*-destructive). They do not appreciate their environment, and their careless use of words is proof of it. (Paliy 5).

Just as the Na'vi's appearance and culture is inspired by Native American tribes, so is the way that they speak, especially of nature. Paliy makes a parallel between the education that Jake receives amongst the Na'vi and the description that Menchú Tum makes of her own culture's language: "As we listen to her voice, we have to look deep into our own souls for it awakens sensations and feelings which we, caught up as we are in an inhuman and artificial world, thought were lost forever" (Menchú Tum xii, quoted in Paliy 6). As Jake gets to know Neytiri and the rest of the Omatikaya, he is under the same effect (Paliy 6). The Omatikaya help him reconnect with nature, and get rid of the perversion that affects the language that is used by humans (Paliy 5).

Language reflects society; it is thus normal that for a species such as humanity, which is constantly at war and looking to own more than it is due, the language they use is charged with harshness and obscenities (Paliy 6). However, unlike humans, the Na'vi are so connected to their environment that they believe in nature as in a deity. Not only are they connected to Eywa and everything that she represents, but the Na'vi also communicate with nature in their own way, sometimes even physically through the *tsaheylu*. Whereas the colonisers are loud, communicate almost only verbally and with words that convey the harshness and violence that humanity is capable of, the Na'vi are their total opposite. Paliy explains the following:

> The Na'vi language and many remaining indigenous dialects on Earth [...] have a special respected place in the assembly of the culture puzzle as a unit of identity, and 'given this sacred nature of language, it is impossible to engage in profanities,' says Brown (46). Here, language is used for beauty, spirituality, and communication with the earth, sky, and sea. Perhaps that is why so called 'ululations' (cries of exertion/exasperation) are Na'vi substitutes for harsh words (cursing and blasphemy) used impulsively by the human characters in the battle episodes of the film. Meanwhile, the esteem of *silence* as a means of spiritual illumination is equally as powerful as vocalisation. (Paliy 6).

In fact, it is worth noting that silence is fully included in the Na'vi language (Paliy 6). While it is, most of the time, demonstrated as a means of prayer, or during the *tsaheylu*, both of these specific instances show the Na'vi communicating. When praying, they are communicating their desires with Eywa or their ancestors; when a *tsaheylu* is made, there is a silent communication between the Na'vi and the other being they are connecting to, which can be likened to telepathy. In both of these cases, silence is a means to communicate with parts of nature, whether they are physical or spiritual (Paliy 6). In fact, all of the instances that show silence as a language in and of itself in the film make the context and the conversations that make use of it more intimate than if verbal

communication were used instead (Paliy 6). By becoming Omatikaya, Jake learns all of the dimensions held by the Na'vi language: the purity of its words, and, in contrast, the aggressiveness conveyed by those he and others use in English. He learns that silence is a comfort, and gives a place to vulnerability and intimacy; and that listening to nature is of the utmost importance if one wants to survive (Paliy 7). Through Jake's journey, the viewer can also understand all of this. In fact, Paliy believes that the purity of the Na'vi language is intended on Cameron's part for this specific reason: "[Jake's prayer to Eywa at the end of the film] is Cameron's act of imploring the viewer, particularly the American demographic, that there is a way of being that does not involve perversion" (7).

As discussed previously, Jake does not only learn the Na'vi language; he fully abandons his human nature and body in order to become part of the Omatikaya clan. However, the process of learning that he goes through in order to achieve this new status makes Jake's relationship with languages all the more interesting. Consider the hypothesis of language relativity as formulated by Sapir:

> Language is a guide to social reality, […] it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. […] The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (Sapir 68-69, quoted in Kramsch 32).

Although linguists tend to reject Whorf's initial hypothesis as it is rather problematic, according to this less controversial version of the concept of linguistic relativity, an individual's perception of the world changes in accordance with the language that this individual speaks as well as the culture that they are a part of (Kramsch 32). It is, to a certain extent, what happens to Jake. As he learns the language of the Na'vi as well as their culture, Jake's perception of the world, of humanity, and of the Omatikaya themselves changes. Since he spends as much time as possible living among the Omatikaya, he adopts their view of the world. While it is of course impossible for him to experience everything in the same way that a native Na'vi would, he gets closer to it than any human or avatar driver before him ever could. As Neytiri tells him when they first meet, because of his lack of experience and his human nature, as a Na'vi, Jake is "like a baby; making noise, [he does not] know what to do" (*Avatar* 00:44:30). At this point in the narrative, Jake has never had any contact with a native Na'vi; it is his first interaction with one. In all aspects

pertaining to the Na'vi, her statement is true. Jake does not know anything about Pandora. As this incident happens during his first outing as an avatar, he has not had time to experience much of anything, whether it is the life on Pandora as a human, as an avatar or as a Na'vi. Unlike other avatar drivers, he does not know the Na'vi culture or language, and it reflects in the manner that he interacts with the wildlife and with Neytiri when first faced with them. To him, Pandora and the Na'vi are the unknown. It is only after meeting Neytiri and being accepted by the clan with her help that he starts to grow past the stage of figurative baby.

By the end of the film, Jake has learned the language of the Na'vi – or at least, learned as much as is possible in the course of a few months – as well as their philosophy and, to a certain extent, their perspective of the world. While one could argue that language is not what changed Jake and that it is instead the people he comes to know and the culture he is immersed in, it is also necessary to consider the nature of the two languages that Jake speaks. English, as spoken by the human characters of *Avatar*, is a language that is representative of the violence and disdain for the Other that is displayed by its speakers (Paliy 6). In contrast, Na'vi is a language that is pure – as in devoid of any profanities – because its speakers are appreciative and respectful of their surroundings, and of everything that lives beside them (Paliy 6). Jake goes from only knowing English and the violence of war, to learning Na'vi and the peace that can exist if one learns to respect nature and others. It is thus possible to argue that he has learned to understand the worldviews of the Na'vi through their language, as it contains many concepts that were at first unknown to him; however, it is not the only reason for his newfound understanding of the world. Indeed, it is mostly because he is surrounded by people, Omatikaya and humans alike, who disagree with the violence that is used by the colonisers, and they act as guides for Jake. As English speakers, they may sometimes use harsh words and profanities, but they are also able to step back from violence and to give their words non-violent meanings – which is impossible in the case of characters such as Quaritch or Selfridge, who perpetually harm others. It is these English-speaking characters who are, more than learning the Na'vi language, responsible for Jake's growth as a character, and his rebirth as a Na'vi.

Additionally, Kramsch raises an important point pertaining to the meanings given to words in a language: "As citizens of our languages, we must be aware that words [do not] change meaning on their own; they can be made to change meaning in order to arouse different emotions

and thus serve different political interests through discourse" (36). This very statement is also applicable to *Avatar*. In the narrative, the humans arrive on Pandora with a political agenda: they are the saviours of Earth, their mission is of utmost importance, and, as Quaritch tells Jake and his men in their first meeting, "every living thing that crawls, flies, or squats in the mud wants to kill you and eat your eyes for jujubes" (*Avatar* 00:10:54). A few seconds later, Quaritch describes the Na'vi; the very first characteristics that he mentions is their humanoid physique, the weapons they use, and that they are "very hard to kill" (*Avatar* 00:11:14). By applying Kramsch's argument to Quaritch's speech about Pandora and its inhabitants, one can understand that it is the intention given to the speech that makes the Na'vi seem so dangerous. However, when he learns to know them, Jake also understands that they are not *only* dangerous; they are dangerous to humans by necessity, because it is the only way for them to protect the home that the colonisers wish to destroy. The Omatikaya's aggressiveness only comes from a place of self-defence because they were forced to act in order to keep their home safe. Unlike them, the violence demonstrated by the colonisers does not come from self-defence, as they are the first offenders. The Na'vi are a peaceful people; given their nature, if the circumstances had been different, cohabitation between Na'vi and humans could have happened, as demonstrated by the almost friendly relationship that Grace has with some of the Omatikaya. However, because the colonisers' acts and words always conveyed their intentions to violate the Omatikaya's home and to destroy their environment, this cohabitation was never given a chance. Jake is able to understand all of this because he can communicate with the Omatikaya; and as he learns their language, he also learns their true intentions, which are just an act of protection whereas the colonisers made it seem like the Omatikaya have always had hostile intentions.

4.1.3. Grace, linguist and teacher

As discussed in the previous chapter, Grace, unlike Jake, does not succeed in fully integrating the Omatikaya clan; as a result, she is not able to complete the transition from human to Na'vi. However, even if she is not considered as part of the clan, she still has a close relationship with its members, and this relationship is built in great part on Grace's role as a linguist, and missionary teacher. As soon as Grace's character is introduced in the narrative, the viewer learns that she has been on Pandora much longer than Jake; in fact, she assumes a position similar to Selfridge's or Quaritch's, only related to research and communication with the indigenous people rather than

working in a human-only environment. As Potter writes, "Grace is the character who observes the interconnectedness of all beings, and this awareness is facilitated by her empirical gaze" (11). While she is mostly represented as a scientist researching the wildlife of Pandora, it is important to remember that Grace also has a very interesting relationship with language. As an expert on the indigenous civilisations of Pandora, her knowledge of the Na'vi language seems evident; she is even able to judge the new avatar drivers' language skills in the same way that a native Na'vi would (*Avatar* 00:15:08). However, her role as a scholar, her proficiency in English, and her relationship with the Omatikaya as an avatar driver lead her to use, over her time on Pandora, her linguistic skills, in a very different way. The viewer discovers this in the same way that Jake does; with hints, both from what Grace is willing to say about her past on Pandora, and from photographs that show captured moments of her time as a teacher.

*Image 12. Jake discovering photographs of Grace and Omatikaya children, one in which they are posing outside a building, and another in which Grace shows an open book to children (*Avatar *1:04:14)*

According to the explanation that Grace gives to Jake later, the building that she is posing in front of with the Omatikaya children is a school, which is now closed (*Avatar* 1:13:00). It is a school that Grace helped build, and in which she taught the Na'vi English for what seems to be a decade. As mentioned previously, while Grace's intentions towards the Na'vi seemed good, her role as their teacher – especially one who solely teaches them English – is problematic (James and Ue

189). Indeed, "[the viewer recognises] that the school only teaches the Na'vi English so they can trade away their natural resources and become better colonial subjects" (James and Ue 189). As an avatar driver, Grace is placed as an intermediary between humans and Na'vi (Potter 11). However, by becoming the Na'vi's teacher, Grace leaves that role of intermediary and instead, places herself in a position of power, in which she is allowed to give the Omatikaya orders in the context of the classroom (James and Ue 189). In doing so, Grace shows who she really is affiliated to: as she teaches the Na'vi her own people's language and worldviews, she is contributing to the submission of the Na'vi (James and Ue 189). The context of the classroom as it is presented in *Avatar*, which places the human coloniser as the teacher/knowledgeable person, and the Na'vi as the student who must be educated contributes to making the Na'vi obedient subjects, thus reinforcing the power imbalance between colonisers and colonised (James and Ue 189). While the viewer understands through the narrative that perpetuating the colonisation of Pandora is not Grace's objective from a linguistic perspective, the similarities that her actions have to those of missionaries in real instances of colonisation undermine her sympathy towards the Na'vi.

However, Grace's proficiency in the Na'vi language and her closeness to the Omatikaya, and particularly to Mo'at, benefit her in the end. While her words do not have as much weight as Jake's among the Omatikaya when Hometree is about to be attacked, her presence – and her acknowledged rationality – push the Omatikaya to listen to Jake's warning (*Avatar* 1:50:52). In fact, the reason why Mo'at saves them as the Omatikaya attempt to run away from Hometree during the assault may be because of Grace rather than Jake. As Grace's friend and her equal – as they both are females in positions of power among their own people and both represent their people's connection to spirituality –, she is aware that not all humans and avatars wish to harm the Na'vi. In parallel, as Neytiri's mother and one of the leaders of the Omatikaya clan, she understands that Jake, as an individual who integrated the Na'vi, truly has no ill intentions towards them, and that he is caught in a situation that he has tried to prevent.

4.2. The alien Other versus the human alien

4.2.1. "I see you": to accept and to other

The act of seeing is of the utmost importance in *Avatar*. From the first moments of the film to its very last shot, the narrative and imagery of *Avatar* focus on this act – as demonstrated by the following shots.

*Image 13. Zoom on the upper part of Jake's face as he is waking up from his cryostasis. He is bathed in a blue light. (*Avatar *00:05:29)*

*Image 14. Jake waking up in his Na'vi body after the ritual during which he abandoned his human body. (*Avatar *2:51:30)*

The similarities between these two scenes – and these two specific shots – are striking. They show Jake through the various stages of his transition: at first, entirely human, and in the end, completely Na'vi. The blue light that surrounds Jake in the first shot is also a way to imply what is about to happen to him, as, in *Avatar*, the colour blue is constantly associated with the Na'vi.

However, what is truly interesting is that both of these shots focus on Jake's eyes, first as a human and then as a Na'vi. In both scenes, Jake is shown waking up. In the first scene, he has spent years in cryostasis, travelling for Pandora in a spaceship. His awakening thus signifies the beginning of his journey on Pandora, as both a human and an avatar driver. At this point in time, Jake is not yet aware of the importance of the act of seeing, but the composition of the shot is what leads the viewer to guess that it will be significant. In the second shot, however, the composition only reaffirms what Jake and the viewer have both learned: seeing is not only a matter of seeing things with one's eyes, but rather of acknowledging and accepting the other. It is why the sentence "I see you" is so important to the Na'vi: as Norm explains to Jake, "[it is] not just 'I'm seeing you in front of me,' [it is] 'I see into you. I see you. I'm accepting you. I understand you'" (*Avatar* 1:08:00). Paliy defines the act of seeing in *Avatar* as "the seeing of essence," because "to say 'I See you' is to expose the soul to the recipient of the words, and to admit a profound understanding of the other's 'heart' (essence)" (1, 6). In the beginning of the narrative, Jake knows nothing about the act of seeing as perceived by the Na'vi. Therefore, it is necessary for him to understand this important part of the Na'vi philosophy in order to become one of them.

The first time the act of seeing is explicitly mentioned is during Jake and Neytiri's first meeting. When Neytiri makes Jake aware of his ignorance pertaining to the laws of Pandora, he asks her to teach him. She replies with the following statement: "Sky People cannot learn. You do not See. […] No one can teach you how to See" (*Avatar* 00:45:22). According to her, the possibility of Jake understanding what the act of seeing means to the Na'vi is impossible. In fact, her amalgamation of humans as a whole being unable to learn to See suggests that she does not believe that even formally trained scholars like Norm, or scientists that have worked in tandem with the Omatikaya for years, such as Grace, could ever learn to See either. Albeit closer to the Omatikaya and to Na'vi than the rest of the colonisers, due to their human nature, they are still too different, and no amount of education is going to change this fact. As Paliy explains, Neytiri's belief that no human can ever learn to See, if one makes a parallel between the Na'vi and Native Americans, "[stems] from the white man's inability to grasp concepts like [the act of Seeing], or rather his inability to attribute *value* to such ideas" (1, emphasis in the original). This implies that although avatar drivers are supposedly educated on the Na'vi culture and language – including the nuances present in phrases such as "I See you," as demonstrated by Norm's explanation –, there are too many fundamental differences between their beliefs and values, and the Omatikaya's.

As they retain their humanity and their roles of colonisers, they cannot separate from the values of the people that they are associated to, and therefore, can never reach the level of understanding that is asked of them by the Omatikaya.

However, Jake is not in the same situation as his fellow avatar drivers – and Neytiri's presumption that no human can learn how to See is wrong. Jake is not formally educated, and therefore does not view the Na'vi as a subject of science, but instead, as people. In addition, his role as a liminal persona enables him to detach himself from the humans' influence and to relate to the Omatikaya on a more profound level than (Bökös 197). Additionally, Jake's teachers for Na'vi culture, traditions and language are not human – they are Na'vi. By immersing himself directly into their culture, there can be no judgments or assumptions made on what is being taught to him, as he learns from the source. Jake is therefore capable of learning how to See because his circumstances are different from all of those who have tried before him. Consequently, the few instances in which Jake says "I See you" are amplified in meaning, as the Omatikaya deem him to be the only foreigner who truly understands the significance of these words. The first scene in which Jake says "I See you" is one in which he effectuates his first clean kill – it is said in order to thank and honour the animal he has just killed, and demonstrates that he finally sees the worth of this animal's sacrifice. It is during this same scene that Neytiri claims Jake to be ready to be initiated as one of the Omatikaya clan's members. This reveals just how important the act of seeing to the Omatikaya: an individual that does not understand the depth of this act, and that does not say "I See you" as a show of their own sincerity does not deserve to be called a member of their clan. The only other instances of Jake saying "I See you" are to Neytiri, when he rallies the Omatikaya after taming the Toruk, and thus achieving a legendary status among the Na'vi, and when Tsu'tey is mortally wounded (*Avatar* 2:11:18, 2:47:08). Interestingly, neither of these scenes show Jake saying it in the Na'vi language – instead, in the first, the dialogue is initiated by Neytiri in English, and during the second scene, he replies to Tsu'tey's Na'vi with "I See you, Brother" in English as well (*Avatar* 2:11:18, 2:47:08). Therefore, the viewer can conclude that although Jake is able to speak and understand the Na'vi language, he is still more at ease with the English language, even in contexts that call for Na'vi.

However, the fact that Jake is accepted among the Omatikaya as one of them and is able to relate to them more than he relates to the other humans on Pandora is of incredible significance.

The manner in which Jake perceives both humans and Na'vi has changed – whereas he considered the Na'vi to be alien in the beginning of the narrative, and humans as his own people, to him, their roles switch over time. The word *alien* has a pejorative meaning, and while Jake never says it as a human to describe the Na'vi, his actions in the beginning of the narrative and his affiliation to the military imply that he does think of the Na'vi as alien – which is rather ironic as humans are intruders on Pandora, and thus alien to all of Pandora. In contrast, the word alien is used by Na'vi twice. The first person to use this word is Eytukan, Neytiri's father and the leader of the Omatikaya. When Jake is first brought to the Omatikaya clan by Neytiri, Eytukan refuses his presence and states "I have said no dreamwalker will come here. His *alien* smell fills my nose" (*Avatar* 00:50:54, emphasis added). The negative connotation of Eytukan's speech is clear: the avatars, who represent the human colonisers, are outsiders, regardless of their physical resemblance to the Na'vi. As outsiders, all humans are alien and Other. Although the words of Eytukan are the result of prejudice caused by the hurt and suffering that the colonisers have brought on the Omatikaya, they perfectly represent the opinion that the Na'vi have of the humans (James and Ue 193). At this point in the narrative, however, Jake does not have any knowledge on the Na'vi language. He cannot understand what Eytukan says about him, as the conversation between Neytiri and her father is completely in Na'vi. It makes Jake's use of the word alien at the end of the narrative all the more interesting, as he says "The aliens went back to their dying world. Only a few were chosen to stay" (*Avatar* 2:49:03). In the following still shot, Jake stands next to Neytiri, watching over the ranks of humans that are being forced to leave Pandora. Norm, in his human body, and Max accompany them; the viewer can therefore deduce that they are two of the few "aliens" that were chosen to stay on Pandora, as they sided with Jake and the Omatikaya during the war for their planet. All of them are armed, and so are the few Omatikaya on mounts behind their group.

*Image 15. Jake – as an avatar –, Neytiri, Norm – as a human –, Max and a few Omatikaya standing guard while the rest of the colonisers embark on a spaceship. (*Avatar *2:49:11)*

Jake's use of the word *alien* is interesting, as it mirrors Eytukan's words about Jake in the beginning of the narrative (James and Ue 193). In saying that the humans are alien to him, Jake separates himself from them entirely – in fact, what is even more surprising is that he does not seem to make the difference between humans who once stood as enemies and humans who stood alongside the Omatikaya. To Jake, all of the humans, friends or enemies, are aliens in the same way that to Eytukan, even an avatar who has not had the time to be truly influenced by his fellow colonisers is alien. In the colonisers' quest to dominate the Other, Jake has succeeded in otherising himself from them – which is what prompted Quaritch to tell Jake that he has "[betrayed his] own race," as he does not see Jake as a human anymore, but rather as a Na'vi (*Avatar* 2:43:05). However, while Jake has become Other to the colonisers, they have become Other to him in return. In joining the Omatikaya, he has adopted their worldviews, including their perception of humankind as the Other. This can be seen as an argument that validates Basu Thakur's theory that "*Avatar* is not about the Na'vi, the Other in the film. It thematises our relation to the Other only to repossess otherness as what we already are or could be while excluding '*the real otherness of the Other*' [(Benvenuto 2009)]" (Basu Thakur 11). This is especially well demonstrated by Jake's inclusion in the Omatikaya clan and his use of the word alien: they decide to ignore that he is an avatar and human in order to accept him as one of them. In return, Jake ignores the Omatikaya's

otherness to him, and instead adopts their values, repossessing his own otherness by otherising the humans instead.

4.1.3. The saviour, translated

Jake's acceptance as a member of the Omatikaya is a rare feat since, as James and Ue mention, he is "the only person who succeeds in gaining the Na'vi's trust" (189). Whereas scholars like Grace have dedicated years to working with and studying the Na'vi, the fact that their interactions with Na'vi were almost only in academic context and their participation in perpetuating the colonisation of Pandora have prevented them from being accepted in the way that they have accepted Jake (James and Ue 189). Therefore, Jake is an exception to the longstanding tradition of humans and "dreamwalkers" who have attempted to work so closely with the Na'vi (*Avatar* 00:50:54). Additionally, he is not simply accepted as a member of the Omatikaya clan, but instead takes the place of their leader – both in the war for Pandora and in the fundamental organisation of the clan. When Eytukan dies, the role of *olo'eyktan* – literally translated as male clan leader (Miller 27) – is left empty, and the next person to inherit this title is, in all logic, the mate of the next *tsahik* (matriarch doubling as the high priestess of the clan), Neytiri (Miller 59). As Neytiri has mated with Jake instead of Tsu'tey, Tsu'tey can no longer access the position of *olo'eyktan*, and this position is given to Jake instead. However, due to his knowledge of Quaritch's plan to destroy Hometree and his betrayal of the Omatikaya, Jake is at first not accepted as the clan leader and instead restrained and abandoned under Hometree with Grace until Mo'at frees the both of them. In order to force the Omatikaya to listen to him and accept his help in the war for Pandora, Jake decides to become the one person that Neytiri told him is legendary among the Omatikaya: Toruk Makto, "rider of [the] last shadow" (*Avatar* 1:29:43). As James and Ue argue, "[Jake] mounts and rides on Toruk to display his skill, and fortifies himself in the eyes of the Omatikaya" (192). His reappearance among the Omatikaya is, as a matter of fact, very contradictory to the moment during which he was separated from them. Whereas the Omatikaya had no qualms in leaving him and Grace to die in the assault on Hometree, when Toruk lands, Jake is revered. The Omatikaya bow to him, as if he were their saviour – thus playing into the Messiah complex that is attributed to Jake (James and Ue 191). Mitchell adds to this representation of Jake as the obvious saviour, or Messiah figure, as she discusses the arrival of Jake as he rides the Toruk: "The protagonist is so aggrandised that his past betrayal is immediately forgotten and his assumption

of leadership is unchallenged, even by his former rival and the Omatikaya chief, Tsu'tey […]. This is symbolically conveyed a couple of scenes later when Jake […] approaches the chief [and] says to him: 'with your permission, I'll speak now. You would honour me by translating' [(*Avatar* 2:16:13)]" (Mitchell 18).

Indeed, while Jake's actions as the Toruk Makto are those of a leader – yet because he is not completely fluent in the Na'vi language, he is obligated to rely on the help of the natives in order to translate his words as he speaks to the clans in English. In fact, James and Ue deem Jake's language when rallying the Na'vi as "deeply problematic, triggering the viewer to reassess his culpability" (192). James and Ue make a comparison between Jake's speech to the Omatikaya and Quaritch's speech to his men a few minutes later:

> The Sky People have sent us a message[:] that they can take whatever they want and no one can stop them. Well, we will send them a message. You ride out as fast as the wind can carry you. You tell the other clans to come. You tell them Toruk Makto calls to them. And you fly now with me! My brothers! Sisters! And we will show the Sky People that they cannot take whatever they want, and that this, this is our land! (*Avatar* 2:16:20, quoted in James and Ue 192).

According to James and Ue, the language used by Quaritch in his own speech is very similar. Furthermore, if one looks back to Young-Roberts' analysis of this same speech given to the military personnel by Quaritch, there are numerous similarities to Bush's own speeches as Commander-in-Chief during the Iraq War (30-31). Consider the aforementioned speech given by Quaritch:

> Our only security lies in pre-emptive attack. We will fight terror with terror. Now, the hostiles believe that this mountain stronghold of theirs is protected by their… their deity. And when we destroy it, we will blast a crater in their racial memory, so deep that they won't come within [one thousand] klicks of this place ever again. And that, too, is a fact. (*Avatar* 2:19:39, quoted in James and Ue 192).

James and Ue argue that for this speech, "[it] is no coincidence that [Quaritch] selects the culturally- and socially-important symbol of the Tree of Souls to launch his attack, just as Jake selects Toruk: this war transcends the physical, and moves to the level of symbols and narratives" (193). However, whereas Quaritch is able to speak to his troops in a language that they understand and with a position of leader that was never discussed, Jake has to give his speech under different circumstances. As mentioned previously, he does not give his speech in the Na'vi language.

Instead, he enlists Tsu'tey's help as his interpreter, and gives his speech in English while Tsu'tey translates his words.
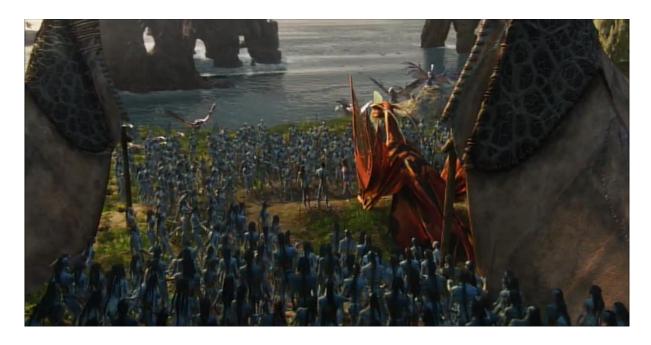

Image 16. Jake rallying Na'vi clans to his and the Omatikaya's cause. He is standing next to the Toruk and accompanied by Neytiri and Tsu'tey, who act as his seconds and interpreters.

(Avatar 2:18:44)

This shot captures the means that Jake uses to convince other clans to help the Omatikaya appropriately. Jake stands in the middle of a plain, surrounded by the members of a foreign clan. Two Omatikaya stand next to him, whom the viewer recognises as Neytiri and Tsu'tey. The Toruk, creature of legend, towers over the Na'vi, waiting for its rider to finish his speech. While Jake's position as leader of the Omatikaya could be perceived as weak, as he is not a native Na'vi nor fluent in the Na'vi language, it is this entourage that makes his speeches to the other clans so convincing. He makes use of Neytiri, the next *tsahik* in line, and Tsu'tey, who is respected as a warrior and should have taken up the role of *olo'eyktan* to translate his words from English to Na'vi, thus making them come out of the mouth of people who are used to leading, and who have suffered the colonisers' violence for years. They are thus able to convince the other clans more easily than Jake could have on his own, and in a language that he is not yet confident in speaking. The Toruk's presence is also a very powerful argument. As James and Ue argue, Jake's choice to involve the Toruk in the fight is strategical: he is playing on their beliefs and traditions to make himself look like the Na'vi's image of a legendary, heroic warrior (193). As he is asking that the

other clans get involved in a fight that mainly affects the Omatikaya, it is necessary that their leader pass as someone who is capable and recognised as a great warrior – and there is no better way to do this than to become the first person in several generations to succeed in taming a beast known as Pandora's apex predator.

All of these factors contribute to constructing the opinion that the other Na'vi clans will have of Jake after meeting him and whether they will decide to follow his lead, despite the fact that he is not biologically one of their own. In fact, James and Ue believe that Jake "obeys the [Omatikaya] clan's traditions only when it benefits him, ignoring the customs that fail to satisfy his own objectives" (192). This is especially reflected in the way that he treats Tsu'tey in relation to the clan's hierarchy, as well as the Toruk, which is to Jake only a means to be reintegrated in the clan that he has betrayed. While Tsu'tey and the Toruk are, regardless of Jake's own desires to be accepted by the Omatikaya once again, of use to rally the rest of the Na'vi, Jake mainly uses them to improve his image. As James and Ue write, "Jake [may value] the Na'vi customs much less than his individual desires" (192). If it truly is the case, his acceptance among the Omatikaya – and especially his leadership – ought to be questioned, yet because he is protected by the status of legendary warrior that accompanies the title of Toruk Makto, his actions are regarded as suitable. It can therefore be deduced that Jake has succeeded in carving himself an important place among the Omatikaya without giving the clan members and their traditions the respect they truly deserve. He may view the Omatikaya as his equals, his use of the English language and traditions to unite the clans is typical of a human rather than a Na'vi leader. He cannot be considered as a human, and he has been accepted by the Omatikaya enough that he later transitions into becoming a full Na'vi. However, his language and inability to respect Na'vi traditions properly argue against the completion of this transition – yet the Omatikaya accept him as their leader. This proves that they are able, as a clan, to disregard the differences that exist between Jake and them, and that they are willing to follow an individual that they once disdained if he proves to be qualified enough and to have their best interests at heart.

4.3. Conclusion

Language is an important part of *Avatar*'s narrative, especially as it can be qualified as a bilingual film due to the presence of Na'vi, a constructed language created specifically for Cameron's film. In *Avatar*, the human colonisers speak English, whereas the Na'vi, and subsequently the

Omatikaya, speak the Na'vi language. As Jake, the protagonist, does not know the Na'vi language upon arrival on Pandora and is almost immediately involved with the Omatikaya, he is given the opportunity to evolve by being taught how to "speak and walk like [the Omatikaya]" directly by natives (*Avatar* 00:52:41). As he interacts with both the humans and the Omatikaya regularly, Jake can, to a certain extent, experience linguistic relativity, since he is able to be part of both civilisations yet must act differently in each of them. As he has no formal education, this allows Jake to absorb the knowledge more naturally than the scholars who have studied the Na'vi and Pandora for years yet have never had genuine interactions with the indigenous people or wildlife. This also allows Jake to distinguish himself from characters such as Grace, who used language in order to preserve the colonised state of Pandora by creating a school and educating the young Omatikaya according to human standards – and especially teaching them the English language.

Moreover, language in *Avatar* can also be used as a means to otherize. Jake's process to become an Omatikaya includes that he must understand the true meaning that the Na'vi give to the act of seeing, which is that they see, accept, and understand the other. Once he understands these words and is able to repossess his own otherness with regard to the Na'vi, Jake starts another process: the otherization of humans. He is able to separate himself entirely from the rest of the humans, and goes so far as to use the word "aliens" to describe those who once were his people. However, language is also what separates him from the Na'vi, even at the end of the narrative when the Omatikaya accept him as one of them. He is not yet fluent in the Na'vi language: he must therefore resort to using his allies as interpreters, and believes that he must act as someone that the Na'vi would instantly perceive as one of them, and as their saviour. Jake's relationship to language is thus a complicated one: while he has othered the rest of the humans from himself, he is still somewhat othered from the Omatikaya by his own lack of fluency in the Na'vi language.

V. RACE, COLONISATION, AND LANGUAGE IN *AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER*

Avatar: The Way of Water functions as a sequel to the first film released in 2009. However, due to the time gap between the two releases and narratives, as well as the introduction of new factors in *The Way of* Water, the analysis of the racial, colonialist, and linguistic elements as they are presented in the first opus may not be adapted to the narrative of the second film. This analysis of *The Way of Water* will therefore be based on the arguments used to analyse *Avatar* in order to nuance them according to the new factors introduced in its sequel. This chapter will be divided in three sections, and will analyse each of the overarching elements discussed in the previous chapters on *Avatar*: race, colonisation, and language. The first section will explore the representation of race in *The Way of Water*: the introduction of a new Na'vi clan and how it affects the way that race is viewed both on screen and behind the scenes as well as the appearance of Jake's children and therefore of a biological hybrid that is seen as having mixed background, and of the recombinant, which replaces the avatar as the technological hybrid. The second section will discuss the nuances in the models of colonisation: the reappearance of an old antagonist under a new form and the consequences of this new identity given to him as well as how humans are represented in this new narrative; the replacement of feminised elements associated to Jake with his old masculine traits; and the role of Kiri as a new Messiah to replace Jake. As for the third section, on language, the points of discussion will be the following: *The Way of Water* as a bilingual or multilingual film, introducing a new language but partly dubbing Na'vi; the reinstatement of a linguistic divide between coloniser and colonised, forcing third parties to act as translators to benefit colonialism; and new perspectives of the Other within Spider, who mirrors Jake's process of transition in the first film.

5.1. Nuancing the representation of race

5.1.1. Trading humans for Na'vi

Unlike the first opus, *The Way of Water* does not have an important ensemble of human characters. While the human colonisers do return to Pandora, they are not as present on screen as in the first film, and instead, the main antagonists exist as "recombinants" – "a fully sentient human/Na'vi hybrid […] that has been embedded with the recorded memories of a human, and thus does not need to be remotely driven […] like an avatar" ("Recombinant"). The lack of human characters, however, leads to a different representation of race. Instead of being opposed to humans, there is

an opposition between two different Na'vi clans: the Omatikaya, represented by Jake's family and their fellow clan members at the beginning of the narrative, and the Metkayina, who are introduced when Jake's family seeks refuge among them. As the Omatikaya are strangers to the Metkayina and seek to integrate their clan, the Omatikaya are otherized by certain members of the Metkayina clan. This is demonstrated when Jake's family first reach the islands in which the Metkayina live and the remarks that some Metkayina make about the Omatikaya, both during this scene and in other scenes of the film, and is mostly due to the physical differences between the two clans.

*Image 17. Tonowari, the Metkayina clan leader, two of his children, Aonung and Tsireya, and other Metkayina clan members during the arrival of Jake and his family. (*Avatar: The Way of Water *55:58)*

The scene of arrival of Jake's family among the Metkayina allows the viewer to notice many of these differences, as the Metkayina are represented in number and point out traits that they find unusual in the Omatikaya. The build of the Metkayina is tailored to their environment: whereas the Omatikaya need to be discreet and adapt to the forest they live in, the Metkayina are swimmers by nature. Their thorax is larger to allow for bigger lung capacity, their arms and tails are larger and flatter, similarly to fins, and their skin colour is a much lighter blue than the Omatikaya, most likely to enable them to use water as a means to camouflage, just like the Omatikaya do within the forest. The Metkayina mock the Omatikaya's inability to swim as fast and as long as them, as

well as the thinness of their tails – scorns that could be considered as racism or xenophobia towards the Omatikaya, as these remarks are based on their differences and ostracise them.

Additionally, the issue that Russell raises in relation to *Avatar*, that is to say the roles of Na'vi only being given to Black actors, is nuanced by the attribution of other Na'vi roles in *The Way of Water* (Russell 211-212). Indeed, Jake and Neytiri's children are played by white actors, whereas most of the Metkayina roles are attributed to non-white actors with ties to indigenous civilisations – the only exception in Tonowari's (Cliff Curtis) family being Ronal, who is played by white actress Kate Winslet (*Avatar: The Way of Water*). As the debate on the ethnicity of the actors with Na'vi roles in *Avatar* was primarily based on the dissemblance between the actors and the civilisations that inspired their roles, *The Way of Water* opens a different debate. Indeed, Cameron explains in an interview that the Metkayina were inspired by "real Indigenous cultures that are very tightly associated with the ocean," mainly the Polynesian and Sama-Bajau cultures (Cameron). Since some of the actors, such as Cliff Curtis or Duane Evans Jr., are non-white actors with ties to the Māori, a Polynesian civilisation, the representation of the civilisations that have inspired their characters is not as much of an issue. However, certain Native Americans have called for a boycott of *The Way of Water*, as the issues of Cameron's perception of Native American tribes and of their representation in the first film still stand (Jackson). Indeed, Cameron has made several comments about Indigenous civilisations that can be perceived as racist. For example, in 2010, Cameron compared the Xingu, an Indigenous Brazilian tribe, to the Lakota Sioux, which he describes as a "dead-end society" (Cameron, quoted in Phillips). Thus, while the involvement of Indigenous actors is an improvement from the representation of race in *Avatar*, it does not erase the sentiment of the Omatikaya being a "racist caricature" of Native Americans that is felt by the latter (Jackson).

5.1.2. From technological to biological hybrid

Rather than representing it through an opposition of two biologically different species as is done in *Avatar*, *The Way of Water* introduces a different Na'vi civilisation, the Metkayina (Young-Roberts 61). Instead of the human/Na'vi opposition, *The Way of Water* shows a different conflictual situation that not only displays race issues between different Na'vi clans, but also the perception of mixed-race (hybrid) characters. The hybrid, in this second film, exists in two different ways: biological and technological. Jake's children, as the children of a full-blooded

Omatikaya and of an avatar (as Jake transferred his soul from his human body to his avatar in the first opus), can be considered as of mixed racial heritage. They were raised among the Omatikaya and according to the Omatikaya culture, while still maintaining some contact with the few humans that stayed on Pandora – their Omatikaya heritage is therefore stronger than their human heritage. However, this does not mean that other Na'vi, especially those who did not see them grow up, perceive them in the same way that they would a full-blooded Omatikaya. Indeed, the physical differences that the hybrids possess – such as the number of fingers (five for a hybrid/avatar, four for a full-blooded Na'vi), or the presence of eyebrows which other Na'vi do not possess – makes them targets of choice for mockeries and insults, as can be noticed once they live among the Metkayina. Most of the time, it is Kiri (Sigourney Weaver) who suffers these insults, and while they also attack her personality and call her a "freak," it is usually accompanied by remarks about her heritage. A prime example of this is when she plays with fish in the water and when she surfaces, two of Tonowari's children tell her "[you are] not even real Na'vi. Look at these hands" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:12:00). Thus, while the threat of human colonisation is, at this point in the narrative, not much of an issue to the Metkayina, the simple fact that Jake and his children have biological ties to humanity, the Na'vi's Other, is enough to ostracise them. Additionally, it is also possible to perceive Spider (Jack Champion), Quaritch's human son, as a mixed-race character. While he is, biologically, entirely human, he was raised along with Jake's children, and has always been in contact with the Omatikaya, so much so that he has adopted some of their behaviours. As for his appearance, like the Na'vi, Spider only wears a loincloth, and he is shown with blue stripes resembling the Omatikaya's painted on his body. He is also fluent in the Na'vi language, and uses the same defence tactics as the Omatikaya. He can therefore be viewed as having a dual background despite being purely human biologically.

Just as *The Way of Water* nuances the meaning of hybridity from a biological standpoint, it also rethinks the relationship between humanity and technology, and the resulting hybrids. Whereas the first film regards the avatar as a hybrid between the Human and Technology poles and a tool to reconnect humanity with Nature, the introduction of the recombinant in *The Way of Water* shows the technological hybrid under a very different light (Potter 9-10). Unlike the avatar, the recombinant does not need to be controlled by a human – it is, in fact, a being in and of itself, one that possesses its own consciousness but is based on the memories of a human ("Recombinant"). The recombinant that is given Quaritch's memories believes that he and his

human predecessor are not the same person, yet thinks and acts just like the human Quaritch would have (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 00:47:16). This conflictual identity does not exist within the avatar, as the avatar functions as a "Human-Technology interface" that "makes the two constituent parts indiscernible from each other" (Potter 9), while the recombinant almost creates a new person in a Na'vi body – one that will never truly be Na'vi, as recombinants' only objective is to continue the colonisation of Pandora and they have no genuine contact with Na'vi cultures. The recombinant can therefore be viewed as a technological hybrid solely used as a tool for colonisation, while the avatar is designed as a means to communicate with the natives, allowing for a cultural exchange between both civilisations.

Furthermore, as Potter explains, the avatar as used in the first film is a technological means to reconnect the Human with Nature (9). As the Na'vi have a very tight relationship with Nature and their environment and that the avatar is a perfect alliance of human and Na'vi, it is only logical that avatar drivers, as humans, would have the opportunity to be close to Nature once again (Potter 9). Contrastingly, due to the domination of humanity within a recombinant and to its non-existent relationship with its Na'vi component, the recombinant is much closer to humanity and Technology than to Nature or spirituality. However, the introduction of Jake's children, who are born as Na'vi but are inherently related to humanity and technology because of their father, suggests that it is possible to blur the lines between technology and nature. While Jake, in *Avatar*, fully transitions from being human to being Na'vi, the children do not have this opportunity. Rather, as their upbringing involved the rare humans who stayed on Pandora, they grow up in an environment that allows them to embrace both the technology of humans and the spirituality of the Na'vi. As the descendants of humanity, they are acquainted with technology and know how to make use of it. As Na'vi, they are part of the ecosystem of Pandora, and believe in Eywa. This last part is especially well demonstrated in the relationship that Kiri has with both her mother, Grace, who was an avatar driver, and with Eywa, whom she claims to feel (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:25:31). Kiri is different from other Na'vi, both because of her unusual birth and because of her much stronger relationship with the Na'vi's deity. Nevertheless, it is the differences that set Jake's children apart from the rest of the Na'vi that make them the perfect heirs of an avatar. They bypass the avatar's technological essence and create a balance between Technology and Nature simply because of their biological nature and dual upbringing.

5.2. Differences in the colonisation of Pandora

5.2.1. A new yet old antagonist

Avatar ends on a hopeful note for the Na'vi. As they are able to push the colonisers to leave Pandora, they believe that it is the end of their troubles – yet *The Way of Water* proves just the opposite. The narrative opens with the return of humans on Pandora, only this time they are not just seeking exploit the planet's resources. As General Ardmore (Edie Falco), the "On-World Commander" who supposedly replaces Quaritch on this new mission, "Earth is dying. [The humans'] task is to tame this frontier. Nothing less than to make Pandora the new home for humanity" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 00:24:10). Therefore, they intend to settle on Pandora for the long-term and to bring in more humans, taking over the planet and the Na'vi's home. This new mission starts with the creation of industrial buildings, as can be seen when Ardmore explains that "[they] have done more [on Pandora] in a year than in the previous thirty years" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 00:23:54). The colonisation of Pandora is thus much more fast-paced due to the improvement of the colonisers' technology, and the Na'vi, this time with some knowledge of human technology thanks to Jake and the humans who have stayed on Pandora as allies, are able to fight back, although with some difficulty. As a result, the colonising threat in this new opus is much more technological than in *Avatar*.

This is also demonstrated when the new antagonist, who is no one else than Quaritch – with enhanced senses due to his recombinant body, and the desire to kill Jake and Neytiri in retaliation for the loss of his own life – is introduced in the narrative. He is no longer human, but rather a version of the person he once was with the technological advantages of a new and improved avatar-like body which does not need remote control. The recombinants are essentially technological hybrids with a Na'vi component that is not truly Na'vi, as they do not know nor experience life as Na'vi. In fact, the closest they come to experience things as Na'vi rather than humans stuck in alien bodies is when Quaritch decides that they must learn to ride *ikran* in order to pursue Jake.

Image 18. Quaritch trying and failing to tame an ikran. *(*Avatar: The Way of Water *1:08:15)*

Because of the little knowledge that Quaritch has about the Na'vi and their ways, he tries to force the *ikran* to let him ride it through force, with the use of punches and other aggressive actions. He is not aware either that in order to fly on and share their directions with the *ikran*, the Na'vi bond with them through the *tsaheylu*. As can be noted on the shot provided above, Quaritch's braid is loose, and he does not try to use it to connect with the animal at all. He wishes to adapt to his environment in order to pursue his objective and Jake, yet is unable to do so because he refuses to acknowledge that the Na'vi are people with their own customs and culture. In doing so, he denies that his new body is in part Na'vi, and that he should therefore act as such. Instead, Quaritch believes that he is only borrowing this body. He is a cyborg, "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism," but one that does not offer the possibility of reconnecting with Nature as the avatars did (Haraway 9, quoted in Potter 9). Subsequently, Quaritch as a recombinant is the perfect representative for the new threat that befalls Pandora: a mix of Human and Technology, undoing the progress that Jake has made for the reconnection of Human and Nature in *Avatar* (Potter 9).

5.2.2. Erasing femininity

The development that Jake's character goes through in *Avatar* can be associated with stereotypical gender roles. He begins his journey as an example of masculinity, associated with war and

violence, although "rendered useless to the colonial cause in his human body because he is unable to assert militarised masculine dominance as he uses a wheelchair" (O'Connor 63). However, it is this inability to perpetuate colonialism in the stereotypical masculine and violent way that allows him to grow as a character and detach himself from stereotypes associated with masculinity. In turn, Jake becomes more feminised as the narrative unfolds. While his avatar allows him to "[regain] his utility for the colonial cause in a colonised body," he becomes acquainted with the Na'vi and their ways, and is in parallel mentored by Grace (O'Connor 64). Both Grace and the Na'vi have a peculiar relationship nature and spirituality, as well as science for Grace, which are all elements that are deemed as feminine (O'Connor 63). Because he is affiliated with both of these parties, and especially because he transitions from human to Na'vi, Jake becomes less of a stereotypical masculine coloniser, and more of a feminised one. However, the events of *The Way of Water* seem to undo some of this development. As soon as the colonisers return on Pandora, Jake is shown to act once again as the Omatikaya's war leader, to the point that he makes his own sons speak to him as soldiers would, calling him "sir" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 00:15:41). While this would make sense in scenes such as when the Omatikaya destroy a train bearing supplies for the colonisers, it becomes less understandable as the narrative develops (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 00:15:41). Indeed, there are instances when Jake, in order to scold his sons, talks to them not as a father but as a superior. For example, when Lo'ak (Britain Dalton) is duped by Metkayina boys and goes to hunt in an area that is forbidden to him because of its danger, Jake tells him "You brought shame on this family. […] Any more trouble, I jerk a knot in your tail. You read me?" and to appease his father, Lo'ak answers "Yes, sir. Lima Charlie" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:28:28). Thus, Jake's role as a military leader almost takes over his role of father, and subsequently, the femininity that is usually associated with familial values. Furthermore, as a leader, Jake once again mirrors in part Quaritch's role, as he coordinates the Omatikaya's efforts against the human colonisers. Even so, there is still a difference between these two characters. Whereas Quaritch, even as a recombinant, uses violence to pursue Jake and maintain the domination of humanity over Pandora and its inhabitants, Jake is able to detach himself from war, even if he is not entirely able to let go of the behaviours associated with it. Indeed, he knows that his family and himself are the prime targets of Quaritch's squadron, and decides that instead of fighting the colonisers head on and risking Neytiri and their children's lives, they must flee to a safer location. He becomes a refugee rather than a fighter, and goes as

far as to promise the Metkayina that the war will not reach them – which ultimately fails, and forces him to become a warrior and leader once again. This is a reminder of what Jake states in the first film: "[There is] no such thing as an ex-Marine. You may be out, but you never lose the attitude" (*Avatar* 00:09:13).

Additionally, whereas he once was associated with spirituality and seen as a White Messiah to the Na'vi, Jake gives up the role of saviour and instead gives passes it on to Kiri, his adoptive daughter (Brooks 2010, quoted in Mitchell 13). In fact, Kiri suits the role of Messiah much more than Jake did, as she seems to have a personal bond with Eywa. As explained during the introduction of Jake's children, while she is considered as part of his family, she is technically "born of Grace's avatar, a daughter whose conception was a total mystery" (*The Way of Water* 00:02:26). Her birth can therefore be described as an immaculate conception, a reminder of the birth of the Christ in the Bible. She could in fact be seen as a possible reincarnation of Grace herself, as she is as fascinated with the wildlife of Pandora as was her biological mother. As a matter of fact, the choice of the actress who plays Kiri leads to this same conclusion, since Sigourney Weaver is the one who plays the role of Grace in both the first and second opus of the franchise (*Avatar: The Way of Water*). Kiri's relationship with Eywa is also much different than the other Na'vi's. As mentioned previously, Kiri is able to "feel Eywa, [...] hear her breathing [and] her heartbeat" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:25:31). This relationship even enables Kiri to communicate with the animals of Pandora without a *tsaheylu*, as is demonstrated multiple times – but especially at the end of the fight against Quaritch and the *tulkun* hunters. As her parents and Tuk (Trinity Bliss), her little sister, are stuck underwater on the sinking boat, Kiri saves them by sending banks of small luminous fish to them, lighting their way to an exit. However, when she attempts to communicate with her mother by bonding with a branch of the Metkayina clan's Tree of Souls, Kiri suffers what is later diagnosed as an epilepsy seizure – but what visually almost resembles a trance.

*Image 19. Kiri's underwater seizure/trance. (*Avatar: The Way of Water 1:34:55*)*

This shot depicts Kiri still connected to the tree by the *tsaheylu*, her full body trembling and glowing – as if it were night, which is natural for the Omatikaya – in patterns. The glow almost makes her look as if she were part of the tree, as it glows purple and a shade of blue very similar to Kiri's. Her friends and siblings seem worried, showing how unusual the situation is. She is unconscious and trying to breathe, which proves to be impossible as she is underwater. Adding to the fact that in the few instants before the seizure, Kiri was asking Grace's spirit what Eywa wanted from her, this inability to control her body while simultaneously showing signs of association to the spiritual element she is bonding with are what makes Kiri's seizure seem spiritual rather than medical (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:34:31). Her entire existence is tied to spirituality, and her relationship with Eywa make Kiri seem like she may grow into acting as a priestess or a prophetess of the Na'vi's deity. Her role is therefore not as simple as Jake's, who was a Messiah figure colonising the Na'vi from the inside. Instead, she may turn into a much more complex and hybrid Messiah, as opposed to her father.

5.3. The use of languages in The Way of Water

5.3.1. From bilingualism to multilingualism

Whereas Atay describes *Avatar* as a bilingual movie for its use of English and Na'vi, *The Way of Water* could truly inscribe itself in the multilingual movie genre (156). Indeed, this second opus

expands the means of communication with a third language, this time unspoken. As sign languages are considered languages in the same way as verbal languages, *The Way of Water* introduces a third language, used by the Metkayina to communicate underwater, between them as well as with certain animals, such as the *tulkun*. In fact, the Metkayina's link to the *tulkun* and the communication that takes place between both species is fairly interesting, and gives meaning to the use of this sign language. The *tulkun* are marine creatures that strongly resemble whales, and that are used by the narrative to convey a message about both whaling practices and the endangerment of marine biodiversity on Earth. Similar to whales, they are shown to be a very intelligent species, and this intelligence is displayed in their bond with the Metkayina. As explained in the film, each Na'vi – as the Omatikaya are also capable of this – is able to bond with a *tulkun*, and this *tulkun* is then viewed as the Na'vi's "Spirit Brother/Sister" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:41:25). Because the Na'vi use their sign language to communicate with the *tulkun* and do not need to bond with them through a *tsaheylu* for this, the Metkayina's sign language can be regarded as reinforcing the idea that nonverbal communication as introduced in *Avatar* can be used as a means to be closer to other creatures, and to nature as a whole.

Moreover, as of the end of *Avatar*, Jake is almost fluent in the Na'vi language – yet not enough to confidently hold speeches in Na'vi. Since the events of *The Way of Water* unfold years later and that Jake was able to progress immensely in the learning of the Na'vi language within the course of a few months in *Avatar*, the viewer expects Jake to be entirely fluent in the second film. It is the case: in the first few scenes, there are conversations held in the Na'vi language between Neytiri, Jake, and their children, subtitled in English for the viewer's comprehension. In this still shot, Jake and Neytiri tell their children how they first met. They are both speaking in Na'vi, and Jake's fluency is shown to have improved. As he says in another scene, "[it] took a few years to get the language into [his] thick skull, but now when [he hears] it, it might as well be English" (*Avatar: The Way of Water*: 00:04:26).

Image 20. A conversation in Na'vi between Neytiri, Jake and their children, subtitled in English.
(Avatar: The Way of Water 00:03:23)

However, the movie does not make use of the Na'vi language for long, quickly replacing it with English. As Jake's family and the Omatikaya who are acquainted with humans seem to be fluent in both languages, it is most likely not the case for the Metkayina. Due to the geographic isolation of their clan, the Metkayina do not have much contact with humans, and are unlikely to be educated in the English language like the Omatikaya were. The dialogues of the film mostly being in English is thus a choice, as the film must be easily understandable for the viewer and an important part of the film is set in a non-English speaking environment. It is therefore possible to consider the film as translating the dialogue from Na'vi to English for convenience, almost as if the dialogue were dubbed in its original version, or, as the narration is provided by Jake, the translation represents Jake's newer understanding of the Na'vi language. Nevertheless, Atay seems to believe that "dubbing is against the nature of multilingual film" (142). The idea that *The Way of Water* is a film that does not make use of the Na'vi language in all situations that call for it is thus an argument against the consideration of the film as part of the multilingual genre. Still, due to the introduction of the Metkayina's sign language, it can be regarded as a film that at least inscribes itself in the tradition of the bilingual film genre (Atay 141).

5.3.2. Reinstating the linguistic divide

In *Avatar*, most of the scholars participating to the Avatar Project – especially those who will work as avatar drivers – have spent years receiving formal education about the Na'vi, their customs, and their language. As their role is designed for communication with the Na'vi, it is necessary for avatar drivers to speak the natives' language. Humans working on Pandora as part of the military troops, however, do not seem to require the same education. Thus, in *The Way of Water*, the return of human colonisers on Pandora without the inclusion of a scientific team focusing on studying Pandora and communicating with the Na'vi, as scholars like Grace did, generates a linguistic divide that did not exist in the narrative of *Avatar*. Indeed, the only character who seemed to encounter a language barrier in the events of the first film is Jake, as he is the only avatar driver that has not received a full formal education. Even so, Jake's development and transition from human to Na'vi includes the acquisition of the Na'vi language, and although he is not entirely fluent yet by the end of the narrative, he is still able to speak it.

In contrast, the linguistic divide that exists in *The Way of Water* creates a much clearer separation between coloniser and colonised. Whereas the colonisers in *Avatar* could speak the same language as the colonised, the colonisers of the second film cannot. The lack of scholars and linguists such as Grace collaborating with the colonisers means that the colonisers are now almost entirely associated with the military or with the RDA, and do not speak the Na'vi language at all. In fact, the communication between humans and Na'vi becomes so difficult that Quaritch, in order to carry out his mission and find Jake, must rely on Spider, one of the rare humans that are fluent in the Na'vi language, to translate his words when his squadron encounters Na'vi. Moreover, whereas Jake uses Tsu'tey as his translator in *Avatar* to include himself back in a clan that had just rejected him and give his words more weight among other clans, Quaritch does the opposite (James and Ue 192). He forces Spider to contribute to the violence that he and his squadron use against the Na'vi as they look for Jake, demanding that Spider translate what they are saying to the Na'vi, including threats (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:44:51). As Quaritch does not have an extensive knowledge of the Na'vi language, he cannot understand the Na'vi's answers to his questions and threats – and if he does, he chooses not to believe them (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 1:44:55). Moreover, in asking Spider to translate words that only carry aggressiveness and that promise violence, Quaritch is forcing him to participate to the colonisation of a world that has

been welcoming to him, and to betray the civilisation he believes to be a part of as well as hunt down the people he considers to be family. Thus, while Jake made use of Tsu'tey to rally the help of the Na'vi, Quaritch only uses Spider as a translator to perpetuate violence and assert the dominance of the human colonisers in places that they had not reached in the first opus. There is no intent to educate the Na'vi with the help of missionaries, nor is there any will to communicate and understand their culture; instead, the colonisers force a kidnapped child to do their bidding, and to some extent, perpetuate the violence that has always been associated with his humanity and, most of all, with his father.

5.3.3. New perspectives of the Other

Due to his fluency in the Na'vi language and his status as leader of a Na'vi clan, the events of *The Way of Water* no longer place Jake in the position of the Other. Instead, the second film introduces new perspectives of the Other, and as Jake is no longer the sole protagonist of the narrative, it is natural that the way to define the Other should change as well. By the end of *Avatar*'s narrative, Jake is well on the way to repossess his otherness, and that this, as Basu Thakur explains, may be the true objective of the film (11). As is demonstrated in *The Way of Water*, Jake's development is complete: he no longer considers himself human, and any obstacles to his repossession of otherness, such as fluency in the Na'vi language, is now obsolete.

Rather, the second film makes use of characters that are already fluent in both English and Na'vi to represent the Other. While *Avatar* had a clear opposition between human and Na'vi, it is not the case in this second narrative. Most of the protagonists, that is to say Jake's family, are Other in their own way: Jake's children are considered as of mixed heritage, and therefore Othered by those who do not view them as real Na'vi, whereas Spider could be described as a parallel to Jake. He is a child that was raised along with Jake's Na'vi children, making him part of the Omatikaya in a way – he is also fluent in their language, although he is a native English speaker. Yet, he is not directly considered as part of their family, as is demonstrated especially by Neytiri through her actions, but also by Jake's words as he introduces him through voiceover: "He [was not] part of our family. He was like a stray cat, just always around, inseparable from our kids. To Neytiri, he would always be *alien* – one of them" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 00:03:59, emphasis added). She does not view him as one of her own, and in fact, she even expresses dislike towards him in several scenes. She does not shun him, yet does not accept him as more than her children's

friend due to his humanity, as she does consider Kiri, who is not her biological daughter, as one of her own children.

However, the events at the end of the narrative change the way that both Jake and Neytiri view Spider. Since Spider helped them in their time of need, he is no longer seen as the Other in Jake's family, but as a new addition. As Jake says through voiceover, it is "a son for a son" (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 2:58:25). As Neteyam (Jamie Flatters), Jake and Neytiri's eldest son, dies and Spider is accepted in the family, Spider mirrors the process that Jake went through to be recognised as the leader of the Omatikaya. At first Othered by both human and Na'vi, he is made to take part in the colonisation of Pandora, and is only accepted because a Na'vi was sacrificed (Jalilvand 100). While Jake needed the sacrifice of two people who were considered to be leaders by the Omatikaya, Spider needs the sacrifice of a son, Neteyam. The very use of the word *son* as Jake embraces Spider and Lo'ak is thus calculated. While it can be seen as the loss of Neteyam can be seen as equal to Quaritch losing Spider, the embrace shows that it is not about loss, but about inclusion. Spider is no longer Othered by Jake, and instead has proved to be worth protecting. When Spider reappears, Jake searches his body for any injuries, while Neytiri is crying over Neteyam's body. Because she is too upset to care about anything else than the death of her son, it is unsure whether Neytiri has accepted Spider as family, or if she still resents him. Nonetheless, as Jake says, "a father protects" – and his actions demonstrate what he does not say out loud (*Avatar: The Way of Water* 2:59:13). Jake has thus traded a son for a son, while Spider has traded a father for a father, as well as repossessed the Otherness that he is associated with.

5.4. Conclusion

As the sequel of *Avatar* uses a similar intrigue as the first film, it is possible to analyse through the same angles of study: race, colonisation, and language. All three of these factors are once again of much importance for the narrative, and allow for both a deeper understanding of the *Avatar* universe, as well as the nuancing of some of the ideas that were discussed in relation to the first film. On the matter of race, the main difference is in the civilisations that are represented in the narrative. Humans are almost never included in the narrative, and instead, there are two new actors: the Metkayina and the recombinants – a new Na'vi clan, and a new coloniser. Additionally, the Other is now hybrid, and has developed a new dimension: it is both biological and technological, and considered in a different way in each case. In turn, the parallels that were

made between humanity and technology, as well as the Na'vi with nature and spirituality, are altered: the technological hybrid is now detached from nature, whereas the biological hybrid is capable of uniting human and Na'vi; technology and nature/spirituality.

In relation to colonisation, it is possible to draw a comparison between the use that is made of the avatar to perpetuate the colonisation of Pandora as opposed to the recombinant. The avatar is a being primarily made for communication and cultural exchange, whereas the recombinant gives up on its Na'vi component entirely. As for Jake, he erases in part the feminisation that his character went through in the first film in order to take part once again in a war against the colonisers, and is no longer viewed as the main link to Eywa. Instead, it is Kiri, Grace's child and maybe reincarnation, who becomes associated with spirituality and nature, as she is connected to Eywa in a way that other Na'vi are not.

As for the use of language, it may be possible to describe *The Way of Water* as a multilingual film due to the addition of a sign language that was not present in *Avatar*. The film also seems to be dubbed in English in situations that make use of the Na'vi language, and this may be explained by Jake's newfound fluency in Na'vi. Furthermore, whereas *Avatar* made use of translation as a means for Jake to be heard and accepted by as many Na'vi as possible, *The Way of Water* utilises translation as a tool to further the colonisation of Pandora, and forces unwilling parties to perpetuate colonisation in lieu of the original colonisers. This is mainly shown with Spider, whom Quaritch uses as his personal translator. Moreover, Spider is also Othered through language: the only use of the word "alien" in this new opus is to describe him, yet this changes when he is instead referred to as a son after going through a process of replacement similar to the one Jake had to experience in order to be seen as an Omatikaya.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to analyse textually and visually two films, James Cameron's *Avatar*, and *Avatar: The Way of Water*. Through a study of the representation of race, of the models of colonisation, and of the use of languages in these two films, it is possible to conclude that each of these elements interacts with the others in ways that are similar to real-world colonialism, but also in ways that are specific to the fictional world of Pandora.

Regarding *Avatar*, while Cameron wants the film to be considered as an ally and defender of the colonised natives, there are several issues in the way that the alien colonised is represented, and whereas one would expect a narrative in favour of the Na'vi to wholly vilify the coloniser, the presence of a third being, the avatar, creates different results. Indeed, whereas those who are purely seen as human symbolise the capitalistic and violent sides of colonisation, humans that interact with the Na'vi as avatars and colonise the Na'vi through more intellectual means are considered positively. Jake and Grace's positions are especially worth studying, as they are part of the few colonisers that belong in this second category. Whereas Grace is a feminised figure associated with science and spirituality, Jake's role as a liminal figure allows him to transition entirely from the status of a human to that of a Na'vi leader. Thus, although Grace did not succeed in establishing a positive exchange between both species, Jake is capable to overcome his former affiliation to violence, which grants him the possibility to accomplish what Grace, his mentor, failed to do due to her continuous participation in the colonisation of Pandora as a scientist and missionary. Additionally, Grace uses language to perpetuate colonisation, while Jake's acquisition of the Na'vi language happens in purely social situations. Therefore, the use of language presents another duality: some colonisers, such as Grace, make use of their linguistic skills to ascertain the domination of the colonised, and others, like Jake, may not use language as a tool of colonisation, yet still maintain the power imbalance between the two civilisations in many other ways.

As for the second film, *The Way of Water*, the narrative and characters both create an opportunity to nuance the results obtained in the analysis of *Avatar*. As opposed to a clear-cut context in which humans and Na'vi are enemies, and the avatar is stuck in between, this second film makes use of a different hybrid, the recombinant, as the antagonist. Due to the appearance of a second hybrid, biological this time, the lines between human and Na'vi are blurred, and the

Other is no longer the other species, but people who are considered as part of the Na'vi – and sometimes, pure-blooded Na'vi as well. Since the coloniser was human in *Avatar*, the models of colonisation represented are also altered, and so are the identities of certain characters. In this new narrative, language is also given many uses: the appearance of a third, silent language makes *The Way of Water* a multilingual narrative, whereas *Avatar* was a bilingual film, and the role of translator is this time used by the colonisers in order to perpetuate colonisation, this time without any intentions of education or cultural exchange.

While *Avatar* could be regarded as a standalone film due to the long period of time between its release and the release of *The Way of Water*, the nuances that *The Way of Water* bring to the world invented by Cameron allow the viewer to watch and understand *Avatar* differently. While this research mainly focused on the first opus, *The Way of Water* is a very recent film, and offers a great deal of possibilities for research on the franchise, on narratives pertaining to colonialism, or on the science fiction genre. As for the elements analysed in this dissertation, it may also be interesting to study their development as the franchise expands, and to reflect on the analyses that were made in earlier works.

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