

ANIMISM PRACTICES IN APOCALYPTO MOVIE

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
for S- 1 Degree in American Studies
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Submitted by:

Dewintha Primadinda 13020112140059

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY
SEMARANG

PRONOUNCEMENT

I states truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I do not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, November 2016

Dewintha Primadinda

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

- "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."
- --- Proverbs 17:22
- "I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength."
- **--- Philippians 4:13**
- "Kill them with your success, then bury them with a smile"
- --- NN

This project is dedicated to

My incredible family and friends

To everybody who helped me complete this project

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Written by:

Dewintha Primadinda

NIM 13020112140059

is approved by project advisor,

On October 4, 2016

Project Advisor,

Retno Wulandari, S.S., M.A

NIP. 19750525 200501 2 002

The Head of the English Department,

Dr. Agus Subiyanto, M. A

VALIDATION

Approved by

Strata 1 Final Project Examination Committee

Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University

On 23 November 2016

Chair Person First Member

Sukarni Suryaningsih, S.S, M.Hum

NIP 19721223 1998022 001

Prof. Dr. Nurdien H. Kistanto, M.A

NIP 19521103 198012 1 001

Second Member Third Member

Dra. Christina Resnitriwati, M. Hum

NIP 19560216 198303 2 001

Dr. J. Herudjati Purwoko, M.Sc

NIP 19530327 198103 1 006

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7

TABLE OF CONTENT

TITLE	i
PRONO	UNCEMENT ii
MOTTO	AND DEDICATIONiii
APPROV	/ALiv
VALIDA	ATIONv
ACKNO	WLEDGEMENTvi
TABLE	OF CONTENTS viii
ABSTRA	AKix
I.	INTRODUCTION
II.	LITERARY REVIEW
	II.1 Narrative Theory
	II.1.1 Theme
	II.1.2 Setting
	II.1.3 Characters
	II.2 Cinematic Theory
	II.3 Animism based on E.B Taylor Theory
III.	RESEARCH METHOD7
IV.	ANIMISM PRACTICES IN APOCALYPTO MOVIE
	IV.1 Intrinsic Theory9
	IV.1.1 Theme
	IV.1.2 Setting
	IV.1.2.1 Setting of Place
	IV.1.2.2 Setting of Time
	IV.1.3 Characters
	IV.2 Extrinsic Theory: Animism Practices; Human Sacrifices 11
V.	CONCLUSION
RIRI	JOGRAPHY 17

ABSTRAK

Projek ini membahas tentang cerita dan praktek animisme yang terjadi didalam film Apocalypto, arahan sutradara Mel Gibson. Projek ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan praktek animisme yang dipercayai oleh penduduk asli Amerika. Animisme dikenal sebagai suatu kepercayaan manusia primitif, dimana mereka mempercayai hal hal yang tidak masuk di akal oleh kebanyakan manusia modern pada zaman ini. Salah satu praktek animisme yaitu persembahan manusia termasuk praktek kekerasan dianggap kegiatan suci yang untuk mempersembahkan untuk dewa mereka demi memperoleh berkat dan kesejahteraan bagi penyembahnya.

Kata kunci: animisme, primitif, indian, sejarah amerika

I. INTRODUCTION

American history is inseparable from the history of civilization of ancient peoples who inhabited America before European or Columbus arrived. Indian tribe is the first ethnic group that inhabits the America region. In the article of "Native America-North America: Historical Background" (An Interactive Textbook, 1995. Web. 12 Dec. 2012), Charlotte Jirousek said that Native American came to the land bridge to Asia at the end of the last ice age over 10.000 years ago. These first immigrants arrived eventually inhabiting all of North and South America as quote from Jirousek's article. After centuries of growing, they built a civilization there. It is in the 16th century that Europeans enter, colonize then inhabit the Native American territory. The term of Indian is made by Colombus when he arrived on their land. He mistakenly believed that he landed in the Indies because he was welcomed by the people that have brown complexion. From this historical background, Native American is called Indian. Indian tribes have three civilizations, namely the Aztecs, Maya and Incas as written in American Passage (Edward L. Ayers, Lewis L. Gould, David M. Oshinsky, and Jean R. Soderlund, 2011:7)

Animism and dynamism is closely related to primitive lifestyle. In this final project, the writer analyzes Mayan's life in which one of the civilizations of Indian tribe is based on their belief. Maya tribe is very religious by worshiping various gods related to nature. They have been in touch with the gods and followed the hereditary succession. They are the mediator between the gods and humans on earth and they did religious ceremonies as their rituals. They believe in animistic and dinamistic aspects in their culture. They have beliefs about trusting the power behind the greatness of the world.

These actions appear in the Apocalypto movie. Apocalypto is historical movie which has a strong theme related to animism and dynamism aspects. Apocalypto has some genres which are action, drama, adventure and thriller. This movie is released in 2006, directed by Mel Gibson and it is set in the Yucatan peninsula, Mexico. The entire dialogue is in Yucatec Mayan language accompanied by English subtitle in the movie. Apocalypto is one of the Disney films that has been the number one of weekend movie in US according to estimation of entertaiment written industry as it was in http://www.today.com/id/16144000/ns/todaytoday_entertainment/t/gibso n-rules-box-office-apocalypto-debut/. Therefore, the writer is intended to analyze the movie.

To analyze this movie, the writer uses anthropological approach. The writer also focuses on cultural anthropology which discusses the culture of the particular society that every separate society has its distinctive culture. The purpose of this research project is to identify the custom of Maya Indian based on their culture and belief by worshipping God of the Sun in the *Apocalypto* movie.

II. LITERARY REVIEW

II.1 Narrative Theory

Narrative elements are tool to help the viewers to understand well about the movie. Narrative elements of the movie consist of theme, characters, setting, etc. Narrative is historically and culturally positioned to turn information and events into structures that already meaningful to their audiences as stated in *Narrative and Media* by Fulton (2005: 1).

II.1.1 Theme

Theme is basically a main idea explaining the whole story of the movie. Kennedy said in his book *The Introduction of Fiction*, he said that "theme of a story is whatever general idea or insight the entire story reveals" (1991:144).

II.1.2 Setting

Based on *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* book, Michael Meyer said that "setting is the context in which the action of the story occurs" (1990:107). There are two settings in narrative elements: setting of time and setting of place. Setting of time is setting when the event happens includes date, month, year, century and also natural condition such as morning, afternoon, or night. Meanwhile, setting of place is where the story happens such as nation, city, village, etc.

II.1.3 Characters

Character defines the figure playing some roles in the movie where each of them related to one another to create the story in the movie. Main characters dominate the whole story compared to other characters. Character is the mental, emotional and social equalities to distinguish one entity from another as quote in Hallet's journal *Elements of Fiction*.

II.2 Cinematic Theory

Cinematic theory is important thing in film maker. The cinematic elements has some technical aspects in a film production. There is also the term *Mise-en-scene* which means what is put into scene as written by Danshi Cliffs in his article. *Mise-en-scene* has some elements, they are; cinematography, editing, and sound.

Cinematography is a writing activities by using the moving image wherein the image pieces can be assembled and can convey messages, information or communicate a particular idea (Nugroho, 2014: 11).

Regarding to the camera distance, Jill Nelmes explains that "it refers to the range of shots which suggest the apparent distance of an object from the camera; it is conventionally defined according to the framing of the human form" (Nelmes, 2012:p. 93). Long shot is used when the human body or main object looks far and the background look balanced. Medium shot is used when the human body looks from the waist up. Close up is generally a small object in detail. This technique is able to show facial expressions and gestures clearly detailed (Nugroho, 2014: 23).

Camera angle is the angle of view of the camera to the objects that are in the frame. In general it is divided into three angles, namely: First,

straight angle, it happens when camera position is directly proportional to the object that to be taken. Second, high angle/ tilt down, this angle is able to create an object which seems small, weak or intimidated to give dramatic effect. Third, low angle/ tilt up, this angle is seen from low angle. It makes an object seems large, dominant, confident and strong (Nugroho, 2014: 117-118).

Sound is also one of the aspects of cinematic elements to depict the atmosphere of the scene. Jill Nelmes said that sound of the movie is divided into three; they are dialogue or speech, music and sound effect (Nelmes, 2012: 100)

II.3 Animism based on E.B Taylor's Theory

Animism is the most marked characteristic of Indian religious life. Many concepts of the supernatural are in their daily life. All tribes believe in existence after death. After death, the soul goes to the land of the dead at the end of the Milky Way, or stays on earth and roamed about intransformed nature of soul-ghost (Seaman, 1967: 32).

Animism is derived from the Latin word 'anima' that means 'spirit'. Animism is a belief that everything that exists on earth either live or die has a spirit. For this animism theory, the writer uses E.B. Taylor (1871) theory, who is the great nineteenth-century English anthropologist. He is famous for his writing on animism. He said in his book titled *Primitive Culture*, animism is the belief in the spirit beings, including monotheistic God beliefs. It is shown that E.B.Taylor's theory is the

foundation of animism theory. Taylor's theory has already been applied to a certain limited class of occult beliefs and practices. Meanwhile, believe in unseen or we called souls, ghost, goblins, poltergeists, genii, trolls, sprites, elves, pixies, leprechauns, fairies, witches, demons, devils, angels, and god are the animism as written in *Man in the Primitive World* by E. Adamson Hoebel (1958: 528).

Religion has beliefs about trusting the power behind the greatness of the world. People who believe in the absence of the world tend to follow the flow of animism. According to Tylor, the core of all religions is believing to spirit beings. However, Taylor do not claim that primitive cultures take the soul to be anything supernatural, but if it takes in the modern sense, it is a transcending the natural world. In *Primitive World*, Taylor states

The modern theory of the mind considers it capable of performing even exalted and unusual functions without the intervension of prompting or exciting demons; yet the old recognition of such being corps up here and there in phrases which adapt animistic ideas to commonplaces of human disposition, as when a man is still said to be animated by a patriotic spirit, or possessed by a spirit of disobedience. (Taylor; 1871: 166)

According to the quote above, Taylor's assumptions about animism is not much different from primitive thought. Religion comes from the old cultural ideas that brought up now. Although many modern thought is more reasonable, this primitive belief defeats the ability to think that can be said is illogical.

Mayan has been known as a tribe that uses primitive astronomical method for their traditions. Although they do not use modern technologies that support their estimates, they believe a sign of anything related to nature. It is used as their religious beliefs and to survive. Prediction of natural phenomena as well as the timing that is known as an astronomical term for the present, they believe to be the sign of bad or goodnews. Like the Gods they worship warn against anything that will happen. Through worship to God or deities, they give reciprocal to the gods by giving sacrifices.

To support more about theory animism, the writer adds dynamism which related to animism. Dynamism comes from the Greek 'dunamos' that means strength or power. Dynamism is the belief that believe all objects in the world is either alive or dead have power and supernatural powers.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In this paper, the writer uses library research as the method of study and objective approach as the method of approach. The library research is obtained from articles, journals and books. The writer combines books with other sources to be relevant information.

The writer uses objective approach to analyze the movie. The objective which becomes approach for literary work the basic information and proceeds to more complex information. In this case, the intrinsic of elements of the literary work is theme, setting,

plot, characters, point of view, and etc. The writer gives a little intrinsic aspect in the analysis of the movie to be the basic of analysis.

For further method of the analysis, the writer uses anthropological approach. This study emphasizes more on prehistoric culture which focuses on the social process at that time compared to the classical civilizations (Keesing and Gunawan, 1989: 2)

One of the actions of social process which refers to the prehistoric life is the belief in religion. Rituals performed at that time are more extreme and unacceptable by the logic for the contemporary man. In primitive era, they have ritual practices such as prayer, singing, offerings and sacrifices and trust in beings with supernatural powers. Creatures and supernatural powers can be the ancestral spirits or deities (Roger M. Keesing and Gunawan, 1989: 193). This ritual is used as a means of worship to the gods or ancestors as gratitude or offerings for a particular purpose. Gods are considered controlling man and the universe. Therefore, this ritual aims to make a request to the Gods in various ways such as human sacrifices others with prayer.

IV. ANIMISM PRACTICES IN APOCALYPTO MOVIE

In this paper, the writer intended to use Animism as basic theory in *Apocalypto* movie. *Apocalypto* related tightly to the belief in spirits or every object on the Earth like worship to god of the Sun. The best-known religious

practice of ancient Mesoamerica is human sacrifice (Miller and Taube, 1993; 30). This practice can be described as a way to worship god. Inside the *Apocalypto* movie clearly visible some practices of sacrifice that is illustrated in some scenes.

IV.1 Intrinsic Aspects

The writer uses intrinsic aspect to reveals the situation, environment, society and other aspects which build from the inside of the story. It aims that the viewers can understand the basic aspect in a movie.

IV.1.1 Theme

The theme of the movie is about survival. We can see from the main character fights to survive and saves his family from slaughter. At the end, the main character is still alive with his family though had been through some bad treatments from other Mayan tribe which has more power. Almost all the scenes are action. Many fighting scenes made the viewer breathe taking. In addition, this action movie combines with thriller which so many scenes show killing and slaughtering action.

IV.1.2 Setting

IV.1.2.1 Setting of Time

The setting time of the story in *Apocalypto* movie is 1490s. The writer finds that European came and found America on 12 October 1492.

This can be a proof because at the end of the movie, it shows that there are ships where the European coming to Jaguar Paw and two killers. Physical appeareance shows that a group of white people comes.







Picture 1 (02:07:05)

Ships come to the seashore

ships approach to Jaguar Paw

Picture 2 (02:07:20)

Picture 3 (02:07:37)
White people come to
Jaguar Paw

IV.1.2.2 Setting of Place

Kukulkan is the center of spiritual and political activities of the Maya, a human community that is depicted in *Apocalypto* as bloodthirsty. El Castilo is the name for Kukulkan Pyramid, the symbol of the glories of the Mayan civilization, a civilization of the largest in South America at the time. Kukulkan pyramid is crammed with hundreds of steps on all four sides as an intermediary to the summit. Kukulkan pyramid is taken with low angle. On each side of the rectangular pyramid are stairs to the top.

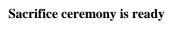


Picture 4 (01:10:10)

El Castilo surrounded by society



Picture 5 (01:10:15)





Picture 6 (01:10:20)

Victim is on the table of sacrificying

IV.1.3 Characters

There are some characters in the movie, but the writer focuses on the main charactersthat plays the important role. Jaguar Paw is the protagonist. He has strong feeling about what will happen with his village after met with other clan who run away to other place. He is strong, he has power like Jaguar. He is brave and smart. He still survives when the Zero Wolf's follower will kill him. But, because his cleverness, he can kill all the killers one by one include Zero Wolf.

Another main character is Zero Wolf the antagonist. He is the chief of the slaughter who victimizes people in Jaguar Paw's village. He is cruel and hard-hearted. He does not care about anyone, including his followers if anyone denies. In addition, he is very vengeful. His son has been killed by a Jaguar paw and wants to revenge to kill Jaguar Paw.

IV.2 Extrinsic Aspect: Animism Practices (Human Sacrifice Process)

According to the theory stated in previous chapter, animism is the basic discussion of *Apocalypto* movie. One of the animism practices is human sacrifice process. The involuntarily victims are considered as sacred or holy offering. They are relieved because by giving the sacrifice, god of the Sun stopped wrath. In the movie we can see that hundreds of Mayan shouts from below to worship god of the Sun (01:14:49-01:15:01). This scene is taken from straight angle and medium close up.



Picture 7 (01:14:49)

The leader of ritual leads the ceremony



Picture 8 (01:14:58)



Picture 9 (01:15:01)

The society shout from below The society praise their god of the sun

This sacrificial rituals is done by Mayan from their own calculations or estimates on the incidence of natural phenomena. That is the reason why they idolize inanimate objects as their god. In *Apocalypto*, sun is their god. Along with the right time of the sacrifice of Jaguar Paw, suddenly the scorching sun become dark and total solar eclipse happens. They all cheered rejoice (01:19:23-01:22:03).



Picture10 (01:19:23)

Moon appears start to cover the sun



Moon almost covers the sun

Picture 11 (01:20:45)



Picture 12 (01:22:03) total solar eclipse happens

Then, the head of the ceremony stops the ritual. They assume it is a reply from the god of the sun to discontinue the victim. In the movie at 01:21:40, the head of the ritual shouts, "Show us if you are happy, open the light for us again!". After that the solar eclipse shine back for a few seconds. They believe that the god of the Sun have been satisfied after

drunk the blood of the victims, god will give them all the goodness and blessing.

The belief of human sacrifice in this natural phenomena serve as ritual worship, thanksgiving and prosperity for the citizens pleading. But for Mesoamericans human sacrifice is a fundamental means to maintain world harmony and balance (Miller and Taube, 1997; p.30). Starting from the victim stretched on the table of offerings, then being stabbed brutally and taken heart. After the victim has died, the leader of the ritual is beheading the victim (01:15:27-01:16:40). The process of the leader is piercing the victim's heart uses medium close up with sraight angle to show the process clearly.

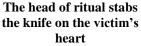


Picture 13 (01:15:11)

The victim is took on the table of sacrifice



Picture 14 (01:16:03)





Picture 15 (01:16:40)

The head of ritual takes the victim's

In the movie, the problem coincides with an outbreak of disease that causes the death of its citizens. The interest of human sacrifice is one way request to god of the sun to stop the deadly disease. Mayan believe that the outbreak of disease and drought in their region is the curse of the god of the Sun, so they continue to behead men from other tribes in village in order to remove the curse of their god of the Sun.

After the leader of the ritual slaughters the victim's head, it rolled from the top of the Kukulkan to below then the mother who just give birth to take the victim's blood to give to new born baby. The blood of the victim is regarded as sacred blood that can protect and be a blessing to the children of their descendants (01:11:32 - 01:11:35).







Picture 16 (01:11:32)

Picture 17 (01:11:33)

Picture 18 (01:11:35)

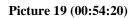
Society belive in victim's blood is sacred blood

The sacred blood is given for new born baby

The sacred blood is spread on baby's forehead

The dynamism aspect in this movie is not as much as animism aspect, but the writer still adds it which is also part of animism. Dynamism theory is belief on certain both dead and alive object seven creates things has supernatural powers and is considered to be sacred. In this movie, the writer finds the thing has a spiritual power.





Zero Wolf gives his superpower knife to his son



Picture 20 (00:54:25)

Zero Wolf gives his throne to his son



Picture 21 (00:54:28)

Zero Wolf's son takes the knife and to be his heirs

At 00:54:20 - 00:54:28 picture above shows that Zero Wolf give the knife as a symbol of his appropriateness to his son to continue his leadership. Inside the movie, with an implied illustrated that object by hereditary, has great magical value and has great power. This is believed from the number of victims who had been stabbed by this knife. The stronger the power of the knife, the user is given more strength.

V. CONCLUSION

The story of the Mayan culture by adherents of animism and stories about the arrival of European is documented in *Apocalypto* movie. It can be concluded that *Apocalypto* is included in American history that is formed in a movie. One of the processes of animism in primitive ceremony is human sacrifice. In *Apocalypto* movie, they have a ceremony to sacrifice many victims to god of the Sun to protect them from the treat of disease. Mayan believe if they present the victims, they will be safe, abundant and prosper.

Animism belief still exists until now. But, animism in modern and primitive era is different. In primitive era, the practices of their rituals or ceremonies are more unlogical and cruel. While in the modern era, the practice of their rituals is more logic eventually. In Maya tribe era before European come, they use their prediction and estimation of natural phenomena to be their guidance of life.

Based on the analysis previously in the movie, human sacrifice is part of the appearement of the violence of the creation itself. Generally the important thing of forms of sacrifice are human flesh and blood, whether drawn from their own body or from a sacrificial victim. Once gods create humans who praise them, these people are given their own god the abundant bless. The practice of human sacrifice is to worship them and their way of giving thanks before their gods.

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