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FILM ANALYSIS 3

*Avatar and Like Water for Chocolate*

Anti-colonialism and postcolonialism are two words closely related but different in meaning. Anti-colonialism is the act of trying to drive out the colonizer from the native homeland. In films, anti-colonialism is an apology for colonialism in that the colonizers are portrayed as wrongdoers. Postcolonialism, however, is not an apology because at this point it’s too late to apologize. Postcolonialism is defined as the period of time after the colonizers have left and control of the native lands has returned to the indigenous peoples. Postcolonialism deals with the cultural legacy of colonialism and is in the context of our world today. *Avatar* is an anti-colonial film because colonization is taking place in the film while *Like Water for Chocolate* is a postcolonial film because it is in the context of the period after colonialism, although colonialism is still alluded to.

*Avatar’s* plot is built upon the concept of borders between dual worlds. People are able to go between these worlds through the use of artificial avatar bodies. A secondary character, Grace, is one of these hybrid characters. Grace is a scientist who arrived on Pandora far before the avatar team and is a prime example of a hybrid character. Grace uses her avatar body to interact with and teach the Na’vi children English and her culture. Grace’s avatar has more human like qualities compared to the other avatars, like her facial structure and her nose. This is another example of her hybridity. Grace taught the Na’vi children until the school was shut
down, but she has always held a great love and respect for the Na’vi culture. The Na’vi culture itself is a huge melting pot of many different cultures. This concept of hybridity is applied to not only the Na’vi people, but also all living organisms on Pandora. The plants and animals in the film all seem to be a mixture of animals known to be on the American frontier. The Na’vi represent a hybrid of what is refereed to as “native” or “other” in history. This mixing is also relevant in terms of race. Miscegenation is clearly evident in the physical appearance of the Na’vi, who are said to have a mixture of Native American, Vietnamese, and Arabic features.

Like Water for Chocolate is a film that exhibits magical realism. One element of magical realism is hybridity—meaning that there could be mixing identities and races. Similarly to Avatar in terms of dual worlds and cultures, in Like Water for Chocolate the miscegenation and hybridity are shown with reference to the US and Mexico border. The film is set on a ranch in Mexico close to the US border. The ranch itself is a place between two cultures and races. The white people in the film, specifically Dr. Brown, are hybrid in that they constantly travel between the two countries and interact with the other race. Dr. Brown is an important secondary character due to the fact that he is hybrid and he helps the main characters in many scenarios. He uses medical remedies he learned from a previous Mexican doctor making him hybrid in his treatments. His treatments are parallel to Tita’s recipes—and life—in terms of the process and mixing of ingredients. Dr. Brown clearly loves the Mexican culture and adapts parts of it into his life. He is similar to Grace in Avatar because he is understanding and accepting of the other culture even though he is the white outsider. Dr. Brown played a major role in liberating Tita just as Grace played a role in the creation of good relations between Na’vi and the humans.
Miscegenation is clearly portrayed in the film through the success of multiracial couples, such as Gertrudis and her husband and Alex and Esperanza.

The final scenes of Avatar culminate to Sully abandoning his old life and fully converting to the Na’vi culture and body. Sully completely choosing the Na’vi culture over his own is one aspect that supports the anti-colonial message this film has. One of the final scenes of the film, an image of Sully and Neytiri flying into the sunset, is similar to the typical ending of anti-colonial love films except Sully does not return home. Unlike anti-colonial love films, he makes Pandora his home and stays with the Na’vi. Like Water for Chocolate concludes with almost all of the main character's’ deaths and the destruction of the ranch, the place of hybridity. Esperanza, Tita’s niece, goes back to where the ranch once stood and builds herself a small apartment, which evokes a feeling of nostalgia. This rebirth is a facet that supports the postcolonial message in this film that even though colonialism is in the past, life today is still impacted by colonialism.

Avatar is very successful in delivering its multicultural message. While Like Water for Chocolate is also successful, Avatar more roundly shows the acceptance of another’s culture and race. The film is said to be a glimpse of the future and leaves the audience with the devastating image that greed bears--destruction and loss of humanity. It encourages social change amongst people through characters like Grace and Sully who embrace the Na’vi culture. Like Water for Chocolate is also successful in delivering the multicultural message through the relationships the characters have, be it friendships or marriages. The relationships that work out by the end of the film are the multiracial and multicultural relationships. The film inspires the acceptance and
combining of cultures without changing them. Overall, both films inspire social change amongst people through the acceptance and understanding of other cultures and races.