

MIMICRY AND HYBRIDITY THROUGH JAPANESE SOCIETY IN THE LAST SAMURAI MOVIE

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Abstrak: This research aims to examine the mimicry and hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Last Samurai* movie. This research is also conducted to discuss more broadly how the characters develop themselves with western culture and create a new way of life. The forms of mimicry and hybridity represented by the Japanese characters in *The Last Samurai* movie are based on their practices in applying American culture where these practices are based on the desire to be more modern like the western countries. This research used a descriptive qualitative method to examine cultural adaptation by analyzing the context of the events in the story as well as how the characters deal with each event around them. The researcher revealed that the process of cultural adaptation could be seen through the way every individual responded toward west cultures in the environment. In *The Last Samurai* movie, the researcher found forms of mimicry and hybridity that the Japanese did for the sake of modernity focused on property, cloth, and language.

Keywords: mimicry and hybridity, colonial discourse, post-colonialism

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji mimikri dan hibriditas Homi K. Bhabha dalam film *The Last Samurai*. Penelitian ini juga dilakukan untuk membahas lebih luas tentang bagaimana karakter mengembangkan diri dengan budaya barat dan menciptakan cara hidup yang baru. Bentuk-bentuk mimikri dan hibriditas yang direpresentasikan oleh tokoh-tokoh Jepang dalam film *The Last Samurai* didasarkan pada praktik mereka dalam menerapkan budaya Amerika dimana praktik tersebut didasari oleh keinginan untuk menjadi lebih modern seperti negara-negara barat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengkaji adaptasi budaya dengan menganalisis konteks peristiwa dalam cerita serta bagaimana karakter menghadapi setiap peristiwa di sekitarnya. Peneliti mengungkapkan bahwa proses adaptasi budaya dapat dilihat melalui cara setiap individu merespon budaya barat di lingkungannya. Dalam film *The Last Samurai*, peneliti menemukan bentuk-bentuk mimikri dan hibriditas yang dilakukan orang Jepang demi modernitas yang terfokus pada properti, pakaian, dan bahasa.

Kata kunci: mimikri dan hibriditas, wacana kolonial, pasca kolonialisme

A. INTRODUCTION

As the main foundation in this study, the researcher uses theory or opinion from Griffith who explains that literature is a representation of social reality that exists over time. According to Griffith (2011) "Even though works of literature are "fictional", they have the capability for being "true" "(23). Although literature appears to feature fictional settings and characters, the things presented have the potency for being true as in the reality of life. The author's goal is to create an imaginary world for the readers which is based on the author's perception of the complexity of social reality.

Westernization is part of a reality that still happens in current society. In this term, westernization is explained as a new cultural effect on eastern people who adapt and adopt west cultures in their life. However, those who apply westernization in their lifestyle or needs are considered as an inferior group if it is compared to the west. For a detailed example, Japan is one of the representatives. According to Reischauer and Albert (1989) the Japanese are considered inferior beings by the west people who call them "Borrowers" and "Imitators" because their cultures are influenced by other countries, especially Europe (6-8, 41). The Japanese's strong consciousness brings up their history to see themselves through historical perspective to understand what happens in the present day. The experienced civilization that had been undergone by Japan has made the countless progression of the country.

Due to the illustration above, Homi K Bhabha as a postcolonial thinker discusses this kind of situation through his theory called colonial discourse. Colonial discourse is a term to bind a cultural form and legitimate colonialism. Bhabha presents mimicry and hybridity as the points of colonial discourse to deal with the effects of colonization in cultures and societies. According to Bertens (2001), this theory studies "the effects of cultural displacement" (200). It analyses the relationship between colonizer and colonized from a non-Eurocentric perspective where it takes focus on how society was affected by colonization and on the resistance towards the colonial power.

Related to the discussion above, the researcher is interested to analyze *The Last Samurai* Movie, the movie which is directed by Edward Zwick and released in 2003. In this movie, the main character Captain Nathan Algren's war journey in Japan during the colonial period shows how society at that time was formed by a meeting between western and eastern countries. These two relationships were formed by Japan's government. The emperor of Japan wants to prepare to be a more westernized country and eradicate the imperial of Japanese old warriors which then hire Captain Nathan Algren to train the country's army about the modern art of warfare to destroy Samurai adherents of ancient cultures. From the illustration above, there are two reasons for the researcher to take the movie as a research object in this study. First, the researcher beholds that there is a westernization process in Japan's society. Second, the movie also presents cultural displacement practices by Japanese toward western cultures as to how Bhabha explains above which will enable the researcher to give resistance analysis against colonial discourse through a non-Eurocentric perspective.

Based on the background above, the aims of this study (1) is to identify mimicry and hybridity through Japanese characters and (2) is to describe how

mimicry and hybridity are portrayed through Japanese characters in *The Last Samurai* Movie.

B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1. Movie

In modern times, many literary works adept with photographic depiction then change to a form named movie to surpass the means of realistic portrayal. According to Hornby (2010) "movie means a series of moving picture recorded with a sound that tells a story, shown at cinema/movie" (950). By this term, the connection of movie with other literary works can be explained through its similarity in presenting story which movie close with drama in terms of presenting the story. Therefore, as popular culture, these days movies cannot be taken as a semi-textual genre because it is exerting influence by literary works which enable to analyze literary criticism as the approach.

2. Post-Colonialism

As part of reality, colonialism not just reminds us of our history but indirectly continues at this moment. According to Dobie (2012) "colonialism is, simply, the subjection of one population to another. It is most clearly seen in physical conquest, but in its more subtle forms, it involves political, economic, and cultural domination" (205). In this case, Post-colonialism takes place in explaining the legacy of what colonialism gives and creates to society, including its future. Over the years, the study of post-colonialism has attracted the interest of literary scholars and critics. From the beginning of colonization to the present this theory gives its concern to the form of culture also even making inroads in fields of political science, sociology, and psychology.

3. Colonial Discourse

Colonial discourse is colonialism in the form of thought which is expressed through discourse. According to Bhabha (1994) "colonial discourse is a crucial discourse that binds or demands differences and discrimination by cultural hierarchies"(67). Cultural practices that we often encounter every day such as cultural forms adapted from foreign cultures are the main points of Bhabha's understanding of colonial discourse. The aim of the colonial discourse itself is to interpret those adapted forms as evidence of being left behind as colonized groups(70). The interweaving of history makes adapted cultural forms mentioned as a colonial discourse because each of the components relates with the colonizer where it leads to stereotyping or discrimination by authorities toward colonized to a split between different cultures (Bhabha 111). However, Bhabha with his colonial discourse theory tries to give resistance forms against colonial thoughts whose analysis reveals certain crippling contradictions in colonial relations. Therefore, there are two important theories in colonial discourse to explain the resistance forms, namely mimicry, and hybridity.

4. Mimicry

In simple terms, mimicry is imitation but in Bhabha's theory mimicry is cultural imitation. Bhabha (1994) says "Mimicry is camouflage. Imitation is the desire for another who is reformed and recognized as the subject of a difference" (85-86). The

imitation of this character certainly leads to the behavior of the inferior group. Bhabha explained that being in the midst of a dominant group as a group that is dominated forces them to demand a decent life so their behavior creates the true nature of the culture itself, changes depend on conditions. The behavior of imitation of culture is described by Bhabha as an independent character because the true nature of culture is constantly changing according to or depending on the conditions.

5. Hybridity

Hybridity is a genuine cultural feature, always changing. In this term, Bhabha (1994) tries to explain the cultural stipulation created by the society that the nature of culture does not change. He said, "Culture has no unity and Fixity" (37). Here, Bhabha tries to explain the concept of hybridity by bringing the reader to understand the ambiguity of cultural constitution and into his new term, "the space in-between". Then, this position is called the "third space" in which he explains that culture does not have unity and fixity because culture can be appropriated, translated, historicized, and read anew (Bhabha 36-37). This concept is closely related to the present because the modern era continues to create new cultural forms as a result of people who continue to adapt to foreign cultures, especially across countries.

C. METHOD

The researcher uses qualitative research methodology to conduct this research because one of the concerns of this method is a phenomenon. According to Goddard and Melville (2004), "Qualitative research is important in the behavioral sciences where the aim is to discover the underlying motives of human behavior" (3). Based on this statement, this research uses a qualitative research methodology. In this research, the researcher tries to present the representation of colonial discourse in *The Last Samurai* Movie which is going to explain in detail occurred colonial situation toward the group. Therefore, this research is fit to give a scientific explanation in qualitative and descriptive because the main discussion itself is about social events. And, the result of the data would be presented in the form of words or images.

1. Data and Data Sources

The source of data in this research is *The Last Samurai* Movie (2003). Meanwhile, the data are presented through related narration, dialogue, and action of the characters, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, throughout the movie.

2. Data Collection

The researcher began this step through preparatory work in movie analysis by Mikos (2014). The steps are developing general cognitive purpose, watch the visual material, read books, articles and journals that relate with the theory, developing a concrete cognitive purpose of the study, collects needed data that relate to research questions and theories through narration, dialogue, and action (420-421).

3. Data Analysis

Data reduction is the first step of analyzing data in this research. This step refers to selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data in a written-up field note. The researcher categorized the data into colonial discourse aims and write how it is represented in The Last Samurai Movie. The second step is data display. This focuses will be put on enriching the analysis data with theoretical insight. To analyze the data of mimicry and hybridity in the movie, the researcher related it to Bhabha's colonial discourse and other related experts' explanations toward other postcolonial works. After identifying the explanation of theoretical focus, the researcher related it with the dialogue and action of a Japanese character in the movie. The last step to analyze the data in this research is concluding. In this step, the researcher concluded the result of the research based on the research problem and colonial discourse theory that are used (Lothar Mikos, 2014, p. 420-421).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this point, the researcher aims to identify colonial discourse theory by Homi K Bhabha namely mimicry and hybridity forms that are presented through characters in the movie. The researcher will observe the characters through cultural aspects because mimicry and hybridity explain human behavior in changing their culture.

1. Result

1. Mimicry

Data 1

In findings, the researcher finds two applied mimicry forms like appearance and thoughts by Japanese characters. The first data of mimicry culture is presented through a character named Omura, minister of Japan. During the process of gathering data, the researcher found the forms of mimicry that were applied by Omura through his biggest struggle in doing the adaption process with foreigners.



Fig.1. Omura uses a black shirt and has dinner with Americans 00:07:50, Mimicry (The Last Samurai, Edward Zwick).

“Omura wears black shirt or western outfit for a formal look at dinner with Americans” (Data 1)

In this scene, Omura is attending a dinner meeting with a white man from America. As a minister and a Japanese person, at this banquet, both Omura and its members who are presented as representatives of his country do not look at all like Japanese in appearance. Omura and his members wear black suits in a westernized style similar to the American next to him to look formal and even he also has good conversations using the English language as the media.

From the description of the scene above, the attitude taken by Omura himself is a form of Mimicry which is meant by Bhabha, namely carrying out cultural imitation practices. First, in terms of dress, instead of using the original Japanese style of dress, Omura wears a black coat that is similar to his interlocutors at that place. Then, Omura also uses English as a medium to communicate with western people at the meeting, which the English language is certainly not the original Japanese language. Therefore, it can be concluded that Omura has carried out one of the mimicry practices as a form of formality by the Japanese towards the west.

Data 2

Language is another part of culture because in way of life of communities they have their language which is used as a carrier to deliver feeling, thought, and ideas. In this movie, the researcher observes that to communicate with foreigners Japanese characters are using English and not their national language.



Fig.4. Katsumoto uses the English language to talk with an American called Algren 02:35:11, Mimicry (The Last Samurai, Edward Zwick.)

- “Katsumoto : **My name is Katsumoto. What is your name? Are my words not correct? I will practice my English with you if you would honor me.**
- Algren : **You kept me alive just to speak English? What do you want?**
- Katsumoto : **To know my enemy”** (Data 2)

After losing in war, Algren was captured alive by the rebel army and brought to their village. In there, Algren Katsumoto or known as the leader of the Japanese rebel army and he asked about the purposes of being kept alive in the

enemy base. In the interest of communicating with American soldiers, Katsumoto uses the English language to introduce himself and ask Algren to be his partner to learn English.

Based on the illustration above, the researcher views that Katsumoto presents mimicry because practically he uses the cultural identity of another community by applying their language. In this term, the researcher indicates that Katsumoto applied mimicry because two reasons. First, Katsumoto wants to deliver feeling, thought, and ideas as to how the functions of language are. Second, he prefers to stand equal with Algren even though they are enemies. The will to be equal by Katsumoto presented through his politeness in the way of using the language. Also, his utterances toward Algren that tell to know his enemy can be understood as intentional to override their position to avoid the negative hierarchy between native and colonizer so they can respect each other without exception.

Data 3

Another data of mimicry is also represented through a character called Emperor. In this movie, the researcher beholds that Emperor also participates in modern things he got from another country which this action is taken because of his obligations as the leader of the country.



Fig.2 Emperor and his ministers wear a black shirt from the west 02:34:11, Mimicry (The Last Samurai, Edward Zwick.)

“When holding a meeting with representatives of western countries, the Emperor and his ministers wore the appearance of the new government by wearing black suits from the west.” (Data 3)

In the picture above, the ambassador of Swanbeck and Emperor conducted a meeting as a representative of each government to sign a contract of partnership between countries. To look formal and polite, Emperor wore a black shirt of western-style cloth and not Kimono as his national culture even they are conducting the meeting in Japanese Palace. Then, another data in the picture above is also shown by the ministers where they also wear the same costume as the Emperor.

From the illustration above, mimicry is represented through the compatibility of character between the Japanese: Emperor, ministers, and the western: ambassador of Swanbeck in terms of appearance. In the data, the Japanese group naturally being Anglicized because through the way they repeat western culture by appearance to respect their guest make them forced to be in English-manners or make themselves look decent by following western standards. Instead of wearing Kimono as their national costume, the action was taken by Emperor and his ministers contradict with their presence as hosts or stakeholders in the country. The modernism applied by the Japanese group makes them replace the national identity which this decision can refer to deletion of the identity itself.

2. Hybridity

Data 4

Hybridity is the mixing of a different culture (Bhabha 37). At the beginning of the introduction to the advancement of the modern world, the Emperor partially implemented his ancestral cultures with other cultures. The foreign cultures and ancestors can be seen through the Japanese army from the picture below.



Fig.10. Japanese soldiers are applying two different cultures. They are using rifles but still use kimono as the uniform 00:06:34, Hybridity (The Last Samurai, Edward Zwick).

“Soldiers are adapting and training with a rifle, a new culture in term of war.” (Data 4)

The data here is a form of the decisions made by the emperor as the leader of the country. When the war against the rebel army was about to begin, these soldiers received training from Algren (American) and a new form of war weapon. The weapon's name is Rifle and it is made in western countries. However, the policy by the Emperor does not make his people completely change their property into western stuff but only the weapon which is why the soldiers still apply the original uniform like kimono.

Here, instead of applying a war strategy by adjusting traditional properties in the form of a bow, katana (long sword), or even spear, Emperor replaced it with a modern one, namely the application of a firearm containing gunpowder to launch

iron bullets. However, from the picture above, there is something unique that the adoption of modernity is not one hundred percent because the soldiers still use kimonos and harps as uniforms. From the description above, it can be concluded that the position of the soldier is hybrid or standing in the third room as a character who applies a new culture of mixed results. This data supports the explanation about the Emperor's will in becoming an independent presence as the actor of mixed cultures. In hybridity theory, this practice is interpreted as a detailed explanation of the substance in Japanese cultural values. Bhabha sees the act in this data as a phenomenon of political practice by the inferior group to be independent in confirming themselves as the subject of difference that has belonged to the class culturally.

In conclusion, the presentation of the merging of the two cultures above describes a desire that longs for the progress of life with modern standards as western humans experience and enjoys it. The atmosphere above shows the soldiers who dress in western clothes which can be understood that the government system is an aspect that is also affected. This behavior is a form of freedom amid a variety of modernity in the ongoing Japanese period. Freedom is the position of the hybrid subject placed by Bhabha in the 'in between-space or not taking sides with any side because the cultural form created from the combination is new and belongs to the actor. Here, the policy of the Japanese government that makes its soldiers apply modernism to their life is the group that wants to have patriotic life with the mixed cult in-between the modern world. However, even so, the government and its people have no desire to erase the local culture inherited from their ancestors so that their position continues to be categorized as being in the 'in between space'.

2. Discussion

In this part, the researcher presents the discussion based on the findings of the study. In accordance with colonial discourse theory by Homi K Bhabha, the findings in this study implicate the representation of mimicry and hybridity in *The Last Samurai* Movie by Edward Zwick. Moreover, the researcher will then continue with a comparison to the previous study to determine the accurate results of the discussion.

The presentation of the mimicry forms of imitation of western culture that have been taken by Omura and the Emperor is a desire for a form of self-reform with the aim of self-satisfaction. This is following what is shown by Bhabha through his explanation as follows "Imitation is the desire for reformed, recognizable other as a subject of a difference" (Bhabha 86). Behind the cultural imitation by these two characters, it can be concluded that they are satisfied. Here, as a good adherent of indigenous culture, the establishment of relations between countries has presented new modern knowledge, which from here has also created a desire for the Japanese themselves, namely demanding new things to look the same as foreigners. The desires of the perpetrators describe mimicry as a will for post-colonial people who want to enjoy the progress of life. As an articulation that contains two meanings, mimicry gives rise to cultural appropriation and is inappropriate within the dominant group's area. These conditions can be taken advantage of by taking modern education from an early age or getting used to a modern lifestyle.

The next is hybridity. The hybrid process carried out by Omura and Emperor is a separate form of a new culture. Bhabha explains "the person placed "in-between

space" or "The Third Space" stands between two cultures. The concept of hybridity is created to give an understanding that culture has no unity or fixity because in the third space cultures already translated, historicized, and read anew" (37). The policy created by Emperor who make his soldier applied two culture at the same time make the position of soldiers who mix their war property are described by Bhabha as an independent form of a new culture which created by a combination of two or more groups. In other words, the existence and multiplicity of culture in the findings above is a dynamic process of the 'space in-between in which some cultures from the past are still present in modern life today to produce unique/complex subjects of cultural differences. Therefore, their long encounter with western culture since the colonial era has led to the presence of new values and practices that they currently believe in and live by.

In conclusion, the forms of hybridity and mimicry through properties, clothes, and language that the researcher found in *The Last Samurai* Movie are a description of how our social life works as time goes by. Changes in the identity of a group occur by things that support the interests of the individual itself, such as adjustments to work, community development, and so on. However, all of that does not mean a completely good thing because it contains the desire to colonize the mind which is called a colonial discourse. In addition, we also need and are obliged to present a cultural awareness that believes in and practices part of the mother's culture to dispel bad things that threaten our original identity or the colonization of the mind from modernism itself. Therefore, the importance of studying western culture can enable us to understand how to make progress in life, so that we can be on par with people from developed countries.

D. CONCLUSION

After the researcher presents findings and discussion on the previous chapter, in this chapter, the researcher draws the conclusion according to the research questions and the objective of the study. The objective is to examine the cultural adaptation represented by the Japanese characters in *The Last Samurai* movie using the colonial discourse theories from Homi K Bhabha namely mimicry and hybridity.

Based on the finding and discussion, there are four characters who apply mimicry and hybridity practice. These four characters apply new culture into their life in order to adapt to modern times. In this case, the social issue is westernized. Westernized does not only bring modernism to support the daily life of its performer but it also contains colonial discourse. It is a colonization of the mind that aims to categorize who is superior and inferior. The aims are presented through American and Japanese characters. By making western cultures look superior, the modernism brought by Europe has made the Japanese characters lose their traditional perception to live with western thoughts. However, the behavior of imitating modern changes or western cultures does not mean that the performer has been completely colonized because there is a potential for resistance behind these behaviors according to Bhabha. By mimicking or hybrid other cultures, these have explained two important points. The first is that groups with inferior positions can have the same position as superior because the copied modern cultures themselves prove that they already

reformed and are recognized as the subject of a difference. The second is that culture has no fixity because it is always hybrid (mix) as time went.

In conclusion, modernism through westernization in current society can be a support to have productivity, yet it also can be colonization for original identity in the same time which is why people needs to be a balance in adapting culture in today's modern era.

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