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Judul : The American hero and the American Ideology of survivalism in Steven Spielberg's War of the worlds

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The horrible tragedy of 9/11, the demolishing of the twin towers, the World Trade Center, causes America to become more protective towards its country. By using the reason for banishing terrorism and maintaining the Human Right, America begins to attack those which are thought as the terrorist nests like Iraq and Afghanistan. Because America has an advance and sophisticated skills and technology, it is easy for America to decide attacking a country which is against America.

Besides, deep inside of Americans heart, actually, they are afraid of and feel threatened by strangers. For a long time, Americans tend to think that they cannot be touched and bothered by others. However, the terrorist attack toward the World Trade Center and some part of the Pentagon on 11th September 2001 had changed their perspectives. America is now like a wounded nation where its people no longer feel secure and safe in wherever their place. Americans are now

having an anxiety dealing with their future. Are they safe when they sleep at night? Are they sure that no one will disturb and bother them? Are they sure that there is no threat in their comfortable life? Such wondering questions are still hanging there in Americans' mind. The psychological effect of that tragedy is still felt by Americans. The fear of threat from everything forces America to be over protective to its national security. America often feels afraid when other nation tries to develop their military forces. By many ways, America finds the reason to stop those nations so that America still becomes the most superior nations in the world.

In the mean time, there are many ways to reveal the feeling of threat felt by Americans. The easiest way is by making the movie, especially war movies. Undoubtedly, making this kind of movie is one of the easiest ways to spread and implant American ideology and its myth. It is because movies usually are made to reflect the condition of a society in a period of time. Therefore, by movies, the audiences unconsciously are given and implanted hidden message that is put by the director in his movies.

However, studying America is not for judging it. It is all about how learners can understand and know American movies which represent the social condition in America. This experience can be reflected in the form of culture, history, lifestyle, government, movies, music, etc. Its rapid progress of movies industries, for instance, leads many people to follow the figures and characters depicted in the movies. Therefore, it is not a surprising thing when movie has become the most powerful and influential device to convey its message. Movie

becomes propaganda equipment for delivering either entertainment or hidden message to its movie goers. As Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kavin state in *A Short History of the Movies* (1996), “The new films self-consciously defined movies as both the repository for cultural myths and the contemporary medium for their dissemination. Critics saw movies as myth machines” (p. 547).

Many directors know this pattern perfectly and most of Hollywood movies are using this pattern to enter audiences’ mind unconsciously and to implant America’s myth and ideology. Especially in the war movie, where a battle between America (and American) and its opponents which can be formed as other countries, robots, aliens, criminals, terrorist, etc. War movies, usually, strengthen America’s superiority towards others and this kind of genre is the ultimate form of cinema as stated by John Belton (1994),

If film is like a battleground, then the war movie is potentially the ultimate form of the cinema, creating conditions in which extreme expressions of love, hate, action, violence, and death could find representation. (Belton, 1994: 164)

That kind of movie reflects a good vs. evil in which the good side (mostly are acted by American hero) will always beat the evil side. According to John Belton in *American Cinema/American Culture* (1994),

Hollywood’s job has been to make sure not that we always win but that we are always right—that our victories are informed by an inherent pacifism and distaste for war that redeems us from the sins of our conscienceless enemies and that our single defeat (in Vietnam) is the product not of our consciencelessness but of our heightened conscienceness, which sets us against ourselves and provides the basis for the recasting of our defeat as a victory in Hollywood’s various epilogues to the war. Whether we win or lose the battle, the movies are there to enable us to win the war. (p. 182)

This is a pattern made by movie maker to emphasize the American myth that has been rooted thousand years of age. Moreover, movies also can reveal what certain phenomenon happens in American society. Movies are the simplest medium to reflect certain circumstance in the society.

Nowadays, large amount of people watch movie every single day therefore movie is a beneficial and powerful device to spread its hidden message. From so many entertainments seen by people, Hollywood is still the leading international producer of the most attractions (Wilson Dizard, Jr, 1997:157). That is why lots of Hollywood movies succeed in attracting audiences. To give the real imagination of the real threat, the director usually creates war movies especially the movies about the unknown object, the Alien. This kind of movie remains successful since it arouses audiences' curiosity about the unidentified object. The movie of Alien ran its first appearance in 1979 entitled "*Alien*" by Ridley Scott. Then it continued with other movies of similar major theme, the Alien. Meanwhile, the idea of Alien attack can be seen previously in the movie of *Independence Day* (1996) by Roland Emmerich. The latest movie talks about the alien attack can be found in Steven Spielberg's movie, *War of The Worlds* (2005).

Movies such as *War of The Worlds* (2005) and *Independence Day* (1996) contain a hero fighting against both fears and threats, and reflecting American society's belief and values. Directed by Steven Spielberg, the *War of The Worlds* is starred by Tom Cruise as Ray Ferrier, Dakota Fanning as Rachel Ferrier and Justin Chatwin as Robbie Ferrier. It tells about the coming of unknown object handles a tripod-shaped objects and starting to attack everything appears in its

sight. By a deadly light, this tripod attacks and ruins many buildings, people, cars, bridges, houses and streets. Tom Cruise, plays as a father of two children, has to run away and avoid this object by driving car, running and walking as fast as possible before they are attacked by its light. However, in one time, Ray must face the deadly tripod because his daughter has been captured. Then he tries to attract its attention so that the machine will capture him as well. Running away to avoid its tentacle, he fortunately finds a belt of grenades in an abandoned Humvee. There are so many people have been captured by this machine and put in a basket cage in its body. Captured and placed to the cage, Ray protects his daughter by sacrificing himself. He covers his daughter so that the tripod's mouth sucks him to its body. This is the time when he grabs a belt of grenades he finds. As he is being sucked into the machine through an orifice-like opening, Ray manages to pull the pins on the grenades, and then is pulled out by others in the basket just before the grenades explode and bring down the tripod.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_The_Worlds_%282005_film%29, cited in December 12th, 2005) This was the beginning when other tripods suddenly freeze over and loose their shields. In the end, a narrator reveals that the aliens were defeated by exposure to Earth's native bacteria and other microorganism, to which they were not immune.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_The_Worlds_%282005_film%29)

Meanwhile, in the *Independence Day* (1996) directed by Roland Emmerich, the alien came to the Earth precisely in July 2nd by a gigantic spacecraft. In the next day, it attacked New York, Washington and Los Angeles.

In this day, humankind made a plan to fight against the aliens back. In July 4th was the time for humankind to fight for their freedom because it was the Independence Day. These two films talk about the survival of human and also the heroes who save the world from the wicked creature threaten the Earth's existence. The movie of *War of The Worlds* and *Independence Day* are science fiction and action genre which emphasize on the extraordinary battle for the future of humankind through the eyes of one American family fighting to survive it. (www.movieweb.com/movies/synopsis.php, cited in December 12th, 2005) and man's best weapon is the will to survive. (www.imdb.com/title/tt0116629/, cited in December 12th, 2005)

Paying attention closely to the movie of *War of The Worlds*, it can be seen that this movie mostly talks about the efforts to survive from anything (the terror and attack from alien, the insecure feelings, other individuals and also within its character itself) through the eyes of its characters, both main character and supporting characters. This movie shows not only the fear of threat but also the hope of survivalism.

Related to the stranger's sudden attack, this movie is similar to the attack of the Twin Towers. It presents the sudden attack done by the aliens as the strangers. This attack also causes a massive damage to the community and threatens the existence of the human race. People are no longer having security feeling. They face insecurity and uncertainty feeling about the future after the alien attacks and tries to colonize the Earth. However, in the end, this film also embodies the myth of America as a Special Nation because, once again, this

movie shows the victory of humankind by believing the hope of survivalism as its idea which is affirmed by its main character, Ray Ferrier. Moreover, the idea of Natural Selection exists in this film because natural force plays important role in choosing an organism. This is a tool to determine whether a new and born organism can survive and settle in a new atmosphere and new environment or not. This movie shows that scientifically and naturally, America is depicted as a superior nation and its people, the Whites, are considered as the best race of the nation.

The researcher is attracted to analyze *War of The Worlds* since there are many characters' facial expression, characters' behavior, the dialogues and photography including the camera shots, lighting and color lighting and the camera angles that represent the effort employed by its characters in facing insecurity and to survive from the dangerous circumstances in the movie. The character of Ray Ferrier plays the most significant role in reflecting the survivals of the hectic situation in dealing with the insecurity and fright. As its hero, he is a common man who rises to great heights of achievement-from ordinary man to hero- and thus demonstrates to us both his own special ability and characteristics and he continues ties to the masses (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 315).

B. Scope of the Study

In order to give a limitation so that it will not be ambiguous, the researcher will focus on the analysis about *War of The Worlds* and its reflection towards American image of Hero and the American ideology of survivalism.

C. Research Questions

1. How does this movie present the American Hero?
2. How does the American Hero in *War of The Worlds* affirm American Ideology of Survivalism?

D. Objectives of the Study

American studies is an interdisciplinary studies which gives a possibility to the researcher to relate this research to everything necessary to get the deeper understanding about American society. The aims of this research are:

1. To explain how *War of The Worlds* presents the American Hero.
2. To describe how the American Hero in *War of The Worlds* affirms American Survivalism.

E. Benefits of the Study

1. The readers will understand American society, its culture and its supporting aspects that shape America today.
2. This thesis can be a contribution to other researchers who analyze the same theme in their researches.

F. Research Methodology

1. Type of the Research

This research uses the technique of library research method and its form is descriptive qualitative that is to describe everything related to the movie.

Penelitian deskriptif mempelajari masalah-masalah dalam masyarakat, serta tatacara yang berlaku dalam masyarakat serta situasi-situasi tertentu, termasuk tentang hubungan, kegiatan-kegiatan, sikap-sikap, pandangan-pandangan, serta proses-proses yang sedang berlangsung dan pengaruh-pengaruh dari suatu fenomena. (Nazir, 1988:63-64)

This research uses related information from books, magazines, movie reviews, and articles to support the subject matter of this research.

2. Theoretical Approach

a. Semiotic film theory

It is the theory of signs, meaning that in analyzing the subject matter, the researcher uses some signs that reflect the American image of Hero and the affirmation of American survivalism's in the movie *War of The Worlds*. Therefore, the problem statements of this research can be fulfilled.

In the field of arts, the language as a sign system, especially in the movie, will refer more in the second order of Semiotic rather than the first order one, as Culler said in Nurgiantoro (2005),

“Bahasa sebagai system tanda dalam teks kesusastraan, tidak hanya menyoran pada system (tataran) makna tingkat pertama (first-order semiotic system), melainkan terlebih pada system makna tingkat kedua (second-order semiotic system)” (p.39)

b. Popular Culture Theory (The Myth Theory)

The researcher needs to use this reflective theory in order to support the description and explanation about the myth and American belief

and values of the image of Hero reflected in the movie of *War of The Worlds*. Besides, since movie is a product of popular culture, it is understood that the popular culture theory should be used in this research. As Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause state in *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text* (1992), “Popular culture can provide the reflection necessary to expose and highlight our (Americans) cultural beliefs and values” (p.9).

c. Sociological Approach

Sociology involves the study of the social lives of people, groups and societies, sometimes defined as the study of social interaction (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology>, cited in October, 10th 2006).

Using this approach the researcher will know the social life and also the causes and consequences of human social behavior. It involves the study of the social lives of people, groups and societies, sometimes identified as the study of social interaction. This research uses this approach because the making of *War of The Worlds* is closely related to the social condition in the American society, especially after the tragic incident, the devastation of the twin towers, World Trade Center, in September 11th, 2001.

3. The Data and Source of Data

For the source of data, the researcher uses the original VCD of *War of The Worlds* directed by Steven Spielberg, written by David Koepp

and Josh Friedman, and produced by Paramount Pictures and DreamWorks in 2005. It is distributed in Indonesia by Media Line Entertainment. This movie is starred by Tom Cruise as Ray Ferrier, Dakota Fanning as Rachel Ferrier and Justin Chatwin as Robbie Ferrier. It is a science fiction and action film based on H. G. Well's original novel of the same title. The main data of this research are the dialogues, characters' facial expressions, characters' behavior and photography including the camera shots, lighting, sound, and color which are connected to the problem statements of this research.

Meanwhile, the supporting data that researcher uses are the movie articles, movie reviews, writings about American popular culture, articles about understanding movies and other articles taken from books, magazines and on-line services.

In analyzing this research, the researcher uses a research procedure. The first step is watching *War of The Worlds* over and over again so that the researcher can understand the theme built by the director. The second step is to look for the related information from articles and materials about American myth, belief and values and American image of Hero to get the correlation between this myth, the affirmation of survivalism and the movie in general. The third is to read and to make a note of the correlation between the hero character in this movie and the American image of Hero. The last is analyzing the American image

of Hero and the affirmation of American survivalism in the movie of *War of The Worlds*.

G. Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of four chapters and each of them is subdivided into subsequent divisions. The thesis is arranged as follows:

The first chapter includes the background, the scope of the study, the research questions, objectives of the study, benefits of the study, research methodology which subdivides into the type of research, theoretical approach and the data and source of data. The last part of chapter I is thesis organization.

The second chapter is Literature Review. This chapter consists of: Popular Culture, Hero in American Popular Culture, Survival of the Fittest as American Ideology, The “Alien” in American Movie, and the last, Semiotic Film Theory.

The next chapter is chapter III which presents the analysis of this research. This chapter contains the presentation of American hero in the movie of *War of The Worlds* and the affirmation of American ideology of survivalism.

The last chapter is conclusion and recommendation. It includes the conclusion of the analysis and gives the recommendation for other researchers who are interested in analyzing the similar research. Meanwhile, the end of this research is the appendix and bibliography.

