



Critical Discourse Analysis of “The Last Airbender”: A Portrayal of Cultural Genocide in Avatar

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the textual and linguistic features used in the portrayal of genocide in the television series “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” which was released in 2005. It also analyzes the power structures present in the language of the characters. The analysis is based on the concepts of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis as he asserts that language is a form of social practice, and these discursive practices are ideologically motivated which legitimizes the production and reproduction of unequal power relations. The results of the study indicate the asymmetrical power relations and the narrative of cultural genocide in the discourse of the characters.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter acts as a prelude to the current study and provides an overview of it. It offers the significance of the study, an account of questions and objectives of the study. The study focuses on the syntactic and textual structures of the dialogues of the series Avatar: The Last Airbender in order to explore the themes and tactics of genocide employed in the dialogues. The series is about a young boy from the Air Nation who is awakened in a war-torn world to achieve his destiny and bring balance to the world by ending the 100-year war. This analysis is done with the employment of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as he takes an interest between language and power and how social and cultural dimensions are significant in the creation of power relations. The aim of the research is to create awareness of cultural genocide and generate a discussion of importance of representation of such issues through the domain of cinema.

Avatar: The Last Airbender is an animated television series that was aired on American channel Nickelodeon in 2005. It was created and produced by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. The series revolves around a young boy with the ability to manipulate natural elements, who wakes up from a 100-year long hibernation. He is sent off to the world to save it from destruction and bring balance to it using his spiritual powers. Serious themes of war,

genocide, abuse, and matters of life and death are baked into the series from the beginning (DiMartino & Konietzko, 2005-2008). Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough examines social and cultural structures, power and ideological stances present in language. The aim of this study is to critically analyze the dialogues of this series in the cultural context of genocide and how language incorporates multiple techniques to perpetuate power structures in the series.

The credit of conception of genocide encompassing its cultural element goes to Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew, who recognized the need of an international jurisdiction to hold individuals and institutions accountable for the atrocities against oppressed groups in late 1920s. His definition of vandalism is similar to the attacks on world’s cultural heritage in modern times. In 1933, he explained vandalism as an

attack targeting a collectivity can also take the form of systematic and organized destruction of the art and cultural heritage in which the unique genius and achievement of a collectivity are revealed in fields of science, arts, and literature. The contribution of any particular collectivity to world culture as a whole form the wealth of all humanity, even while exhibiting unique characteristics (Frieze & Lemkin, 2013, p. 241).

The lack of discussion on cultural genocide poses a great threat to world’s Indigenous minorities. In current times, people are uninformed about the concept of genocide and cultural cleansing and the menacing effects they leave on world’s cultural heritage which precipitates an environment in which the perpetrators of the crime are not held accountable due to asymmetrical power structures. This study addresses this problem which contributes to the persistent issue of cultural heritage agenda in the series, Avatar, the Last Airbender. The study seeks to generate a serious discussion of cultural right violations and the strategies it employs through language and highlight this type of genocide depicted in cinema as it as a dominant medium of representation of social and political issues.

The study is based in the context of cultural genocide; the concept of cultural genocide has roots in historical atrocities where dominant powers systematically sought to erase the cultural, linguistic, and religious identities of minority or indigenous groups. Although the study deals with a fictional world, it is important to note that it has been derived from real-world instances and similarly has implications on the world we are living in. Cultural genocide results in cultural disconnection and intergenerational trauma, for instance as a result of forced assimilation policies Indigenous groups across North America were forbidden from speaking their languages or practicing their traditions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) declared these practices as cultural genocide due to their intentional eradication of Indigenous identity through education and systemic cultural suppression.

Likewise, beyond the physical extermination of six million Jews, the Nazi regime sought to erase Jewish culture and history. Libraries were looted, synagogues burned, and cultural artifacts destroyed. Heinrich Heine’s statement, “*Where they burn books, they will eventually burn people*” reflects the Nazis’ systematic attack on Jewish cultural heritage (Heine, 1821). Similarly, between 1910 and 1970, Australian policies removed Aboriginal children from their families to assimilate them into white society, removing their connection to Indigenous

languages and traditions. This practice was part of a broader effort to suppress Aboriginal culture and integrate Indigenous populations into dominant narratives (Bringing them Home, 1997).

The practice of cultural genocide is still prevalent in the modern world; one of such instances is the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region. Reports by organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International highlight the destruction of mosques and religious sites, the suppression of Uyghur language, and the prohibition of Islamic practices. As reported by Amnesty, “They are targeted for being Muslim, as the government attempts to erase their beliefs & practices and indoctrinate them with state-sanctioned propaganda about China” (China's Uighur Muslims: the truth behind the headlines, 2024).

Similarly, the Rohingya people, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, have faced both physical violence and cultural suppression, the United Nations has classified the persecution as both genocide and cultural erasure (Report of the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar - A/HRC/39/64, 2018). Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran are also facing systemic efforts to suppress their culture and language. In Turkey, bans on Kurdish language and names persisted into the late 20th century, and even today, policies discourage the promotion of Kurdish cultural expression.

As compared to the genocidal instances, there is limited discourse analysis focused on the treatment of genocide and cultural erasure within children's media. This study fills a critical gap by analyzing how this series uses language to explore those themes for younger audiences, challenging traditional expectations of children's media. This paper aims to provide insights into how animated series can communicate profound socio-political issues through discourse and character interactions.

The study of the portrayal of cultural genocide is significant in a way that it creates a room for the people to become aware about the crime of genocide and its effects. The technological global mecca, that our world has become, triggers a need for representation and cultural preservation of nations. This study proves to be helpful for the readers as it creates awareness of the importance of media in the representation of important aspects of life and how language is used to portray social and cultural issues in media.

Language is an essential part of human social structure. Through our social interaction we create and shape this world, so we perceive our world in terms of our language. Therefore, linguistic analysis of a certain text is significant to understand how the lexical items and linguistic techniques are employed in the text to convey a certain message to the readers. This study provides a critical analysis of the narrative of cultural genocide presented in the series through the application of various linguistic techniques.

1.1. Research Objectives

2. To find the portrayed image of cultural genocide in the series through critical discourse analysis.
3. To analyze the stylistic features used in the portrayal of genocide in the series to identify relationships of power.
4. To explore the power structures that are maintained through cultural violations in the series.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How do the textual strategies reflect the narrative of cultural genocide in the series?
2. Which language features result from the critical discourse analysis that is used to depict cultural right violations in the series?
3. How does cultural genocide establish and reiterate systematic repression in the series?

1.3. Delimitations

For this research, data is gathered from the animated series Avatar: The Last Airbender, and only 6 episodes are analyzed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section encapsulates the past work and studies that are used to guide the process of this research. It boils down to the origination of the concept of cultural genocide in the history of international jurisdiction and the enumeration of techniques of genocide given by Lemkin. This review also mentions the analysis of Lemkin’s concept of Genocide with the use of three theoretical approaches by Samuel Totten and Paul Bartrop, Johan Gultang and Gregory Stanton. The understanding of cultural exhaustion of Indigenous peoples as a deliberate effort and the consequences of the destruction of culture through different strategies can be seen in the article put forward by Gerard Maguire.

The critical discourse analysis of film dialogues to examine the power relations, manipulation of language and their relationship with social and political issues represented through film is also incorporated in this literature review. Culture has always been a significant aspect of every human and a number of studies have been done to produce well-grounded and cogent explanation of the terminology and the aspects of cultural violence keeping in view different cases of cultural genocide. Moreover, Cinema i.e., films, television series and motion pictures show and inform about such facets of life through its images, characters, and dialogues. Films and television series have been analyzed semantically, pragmatically, and lexically.

Luck (2018) gives an account of the conception of genocide together with its cultural conception, which is attributed to one man, Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin was a Pole, a Jew, and a lawyer who felt the need for an International legal system for holding governments and individuals accountable for crimes against hegemonized groups with the foregoing occupation of his native country Poland by Germany. His personal experience enriched his understanding of a strong link between cultural and physical destruction. He derived the term genocide from the Greek word *genos* (tribe, race) and *cide* (the act of killing) (Luck, 2018).

In Lemkin's view, genocide has two phases and uses multiple techniques in different fields. In the cultural field, he mentioned the forbidding of use of a group's language, substituting education, control over banning cultural activities and destruction of significant buildings. Luck concluded that a deeper need for considering cultural genocide is faced today for the protection of cultural heritage agenda (Luck, 2018).

Hobson (2019) examined the three integral parts of Lemkin's concept of genocide by using three theoretical tools. First, he employed typologies by Samuel Totten and Paul Bartrop in order to create a causal connection between justification of genocide and different combinations of institutional, ideological drivers and monopolistic practices. Second, he used Johan Gultang's triangle of direct, cultural, and structural violence to set up genocide as a deep-rooted, conscious, and multifaceted procedure of social exploitation. In the final part of the article, Hobson applied Gregory Stanton's ten stages of genocide to declare genocide as a chain of techniques providing a further understanding of genocide as a distinctive crime (Hobson, 2019).

Maguire (2018) discussed the cultural survival of Indigenous people and argued that cultural genocide is the deliberate exhaustion and destruction of cultural practices of Indigenous minorities. For many Aboriginal groups, culture includes territory, systems of governance, and the relationship with the natural world. Maguire connected the lack of political resolution to employ an established definition of genocide with the persistent exploitation of natural resources of Indigenous groups by the colonizing powers, especially in case of Canada's Indigenous people (Maguire, 2018).

Maguire also described the system of forced assimilation as an aspect of cultural genocide in case of Canada's Indigenous people. The residential school system functioned as a smoke screen for the eradication of Indian heritage, culture, and lineage. The article provided a lens through which the consequences of cultural genocide can be seen with Indigenous people's perspective in the foreground (Maguire, 2018).

Tommy Gustafsson (2017), in his article *A Fight over Souls*, probed Christian themed documentaries about 1994 Rwandan genocide and analyzed them as a subgenre of films about genocide. The 1994 Rwandan genocide against Tutsis is the second most documented genocide after Holocaust and the religious, historical elements of these documentaries and films are of note. Gustafsson concluded that the documentaries having religious grounds tend to provide a black and white world view and they become exploitative as the genocide is used as a backdrop for the dissemination of Christian values which affects the truths of the actual crime. Such documentaries were used to attract people to the right faith instead of highlighting the issues related to genocide (Gustafsson, 2017).

Donohue (2012) created a framework called "The Identity Trap" by using two broadcasts from the 1994 Rwandan genocide to reveal how language themes are employed to construct a social context of classification, symbolization and dehumanization that contrives speaker's social identity and disparages the enemy's social identity which further operates as grounds for inciting conflict against that enemy. He identified eight stages of social changes

which can function as early warning systems for the prevention of conflict. Understanding the identity trap framework means understanding linguistic tropes (the use of metaphors, irony, and metonymy) that are often developed in classification language to build identities and identity traps (Donohue, 2012).

Khalil (2016) examined the persuasive schemes hidden in the conversation of the character Loki from the movie Thor (2011). She used Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis to study the implementation and ramifications of compelling linguistic strategies. The paper provides us with the outcomes of using political, persuasive, and manipulative language through the dialogues of Loki (Khalil, 2016).

For the selection of the sample of data, Khalil employed a non-probability sampling technique due to time constraint and to analyze the specific scene that fits the most. The manipulative and abusive aspects of the dialogues were analyzed according to the ideas and method given by Fairclough. The analysis of the paper concluded that the conversation of Loki is packed with ideological stances which help us to understand the link between power, dominance and manipulation based on the ideas of Fairclough (Khalil, 2016).

Tobing (2013) analyzed the cultural aspects contained in the dialogues from the movie 8 Mile and studied how power influenced the interlocutors using Critical Discourse Analysis. Many other researchers have studied the discursive practices of movies which contribute to the discourse of race, identity, and language. He used CDA as his method of research, as it focuses on the language and its relationship with power and is concerned with social and political issues. Tobing concluded that the utterances carrying power and racial stereotypes present in American culture are reversed in the movie yet it makes the result of the analysis an interesting reference to study cultures, stereotypes and how they are produced through language (Tobing, 2013).

Sipra (2013) analyzed the first part of Martin Luther King’s speech ‘I Have a Dream’ using Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. It was explicated in the article how King used certain devices of speech to identify the relationship between the powerful and the oppressed and emphasized on the socio-cultural rights and racial discrimination with the help of various syntactic and textual devices (Sipra, 2013).

The aforementioned literature focuses on the concept of genocide, its conception, and strategies as the subjects of their study. It also pivots around the Critical Discourse Analysis of dialogues of movies to examine their role in the representation of social and cultural issues and their relationship with language and power. The lack of study on the representation of issue of cultural genocide in the world of cinema gave rise to the need of doing my research.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section provides the theoretical framework on the basis of which the study is done, research design and method and the sampling technique for the collection of the data.

3.1.Theoretical Framework

The Critical Discourse Analysis Model of Fairclough is used as a theoretical framework for this study. Critical Discourse Analysis was developed from critical theory of language which focuses on the use of language as a form of social practice and how this use plays a significant role in social change and maintenance. He enforced that language, being a part of the society, is 'a social process' as well as 'a socially conditioned process' He asserted that social practice produces social identities and relations which contributes to the system of knowledge and beliefs. He insisted that the focus of critical analysis should include relationship among texts, the process of production and interpretation and their social context.

According to Fairclough's socio-cultural approach, certain selections of discourse have some principal assumptions which are ideologically driven and stimulated and therefore discursive practices may be premised on certain ideologies since they participate in the production and reproduction of unequal power relations between cultural and ethnic majorities and minorities. He reasons that language connects with the social world through ideology and establishes a system which is based on the relationship between language and ideology. His particular interest is the analysis of ideology and power relations in discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis analyses the discourse and discloses the social practices like dominance, exploitative social relations, hegemonic attitudes, and victimization of the oppressed ones from linguistic perspectives by applying certain techniques such as textual and stylistics features. The topic of the research holds variables like cultural, social, and political inequality in context with genocide which are discussed by Critical Discourse Analysis. Thus, this theoretical framework affords a complete foundation and stature for the analysis of the mentioned variables in the series Avatar.

3.2. Research Design

In the present study, the research design is qualitative.

3.3.Sampling Technique

A non- probability sampling technique is adopted and a decided number of episodes of the series Avatar: The Last Airbender are selected for the purpose of analysis. This is a technique in which the sample is selected on the basis of the subjective judgement of the researcher. The researcher chooses only those pieces of data which they deem fit for the research study. The reason for selecting the purposive sampling is the time or cost considerations that the researcher faces in random sampling. For the current study, the reason for selecting this technique is to take specific scenes from certain episodes which fit the most to the concept of genocide to get a better view and analysis of the language used.

3.4.Research Method

Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis is used as the research method for this study. Fairclough observed the links between the change in language use and social and cultural elements and developed a theoretical framework for the language analysis. His model consists

of three interrelated processes of analysis which are tied to three interrelated dimensions of discourse. The three dimensions of discourse are:

1. The object of analysis.
2. The process through which the object is produced or received.
3. The socio-historical conditions that govern the analysis.

These dimensions require distinct types of analysis:

1. Text analysis (description)
2. Processing analysis (interpretation)
3. Social analysis (explanation) (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 187-188).

At the text level, the description involves the labeling of the linguistic feature present in the text. These linguistic features such as vocabulary and grammar and paralinguistic features such as intonation, gestures are considered social as they are used in social settings. In this way, they are socially shaped and socially shaped. At the level of social interaction, the interpretation involves the understanding of the participants’ meanings which are apparent in their linguistic choices present in their interactions. These choices function as responses to the constraints prevalent in the social setting of the particular interaction. This generates a link between text and discourse processes (Fairclough, 2003).

The last level of analysis is the explanation which involves the description of the text with the social context. This provides an understanding of the production and interpretation of text based on social and institutional structures that contextualize a situation. It includes the analysis of the relationship between participants’ preconceived notions about culture, social identities, and relationships and how they work ideologically to either construct, maintain, legitimize, or challenge existing power relations.

The subject of the research is the script or the dialogues of the series Avatar: The Last Airbender which is taken as text. Following the procedure of the method, first the text analysis is done then processing analysis and social analysis of the dialogues.

4. DISCUSSION

The data for this study is taken from an American animated series Avatar: The Last Airbender. The dialogues present in this series are numbered as macro units (see Appendix) which are analyzed with the help Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis.

Avatar: The Last Airbender takes place in a world which has four nations: Fire Nations, Water Tribes, Earth Kingdom, and Air Nomads. These nations are based on the four natural elements: fire, water, earth, and air respectively and selected individuals possess the ability to control and manipulate the elements by learning cultural practices. Only one person is able to

master all the elements of nature and that is the Avatar. An avatar is a physical incarnation of a higher spiritual being and exists in a cycle of reincarnation. He or She is the link between the physical world and the spiritual world and has the responsibility to maintain harmony and balance in both worlds.

The current Avatar, a twelve-year-old boy named Aang, is awoken from a hundred years of coma by two water tribe people, Katara and Sokka. Aang wakes up to the continuation of the colonial conquests and the aftermath of the hundred years' war raged by the Fire Nation to rule the world. He finds out that his nation was the first one to be destroyed in this power struggle. Aang and his friends embark on a journey to learn the bending of all the elements and to defeat the fire lord Ozai and end the atrocities of the Fire Nation. This show introduces the audience to the concepts of Colonization, Biopolitics and Necro politics and helps them examine the repercussions of these impingements in their own realities. (DiMartino & Konietzko, 2005-2008)

1. Katara and Sokka decide to help Aang in his conquest to learn all the forms of bending and start their journey. The siblings contemplate telling Aang about the destruction. Their first stop in their journey is the place where Aang grew up with other air nomads but upon reaching he finds the temple void of any life and Aang comes to the realization of the massacre of the entire temple and sees the skeleton of his dear friend and a mentor named Gyatso.

The scene starts with Aang finding out about Fire Nation army attacking the Southern Air Temple and murdering the entire nation of Air nomads. Aang comes to the realization that the rest of the Air temples would have been attacked too. The textual analysis displays the use of singular pronoun 'I really am' and 'the Last' emphasize on the remainder of his existence. He is the only one left from Air Nation, making him the Last Airbender. This phrase 'The Last Airbender' is emphasized repetitively in the series to focus on the genocidal nature of the crimes committed by the Fire Nation. The participants included in the above conversation both have been victims to genocide one way or the other thus they share the background knowledge and emotions. 'You were right' implicates there have been other conversations about the war and the genocide of Air Nation among the same people. The word 'really' also implicates the existence of denial of the 100 years' war in Aang's mind.

This is the beginning of the revelation of the disparity present in the powerful and the powerless nations. Fairclough, in his socio-cultural approach towards discourse, brings the use of language which reveals the imbalance under the critical lens of discourse analysis to open the floodgate of prevalent power imbalances. In the mentioned conversation, the language reveals the power structures present in the series. Aang, being from Air Nation, acts as the sole survivor of the rampant killing done by Fire Nation in order to gain power.

2. Aang, Katara, and Sokka camp near a small Earth Kingdom town where they meet a young earthbender named Haru. They find out that the Fire Nation has taken control of the village and has forbidden the bending. Haru is caught secretly earth bending by the Avatar team and they talk about it with Haru and his mother.

The textual analysis shows Haru’s mother implying the repercussions of doing earthbending. The pronoun ‘they’ in macro unit 2 in the appendix refers to an absent entity having control on their actions of earthbending. The next dialogue shows the appearance of a new character having power over the group. The Fire Nation soldier not only has economic power over the villagers, but he also yields elemental power of fire bending. He also holds institutional power as he is being backed by the Fire Nation. This institutional power manifests in the form of his use of vocabulary and tone. His language is assertive and demanding whereas the language of the earth benders is timid, controlled and collected. The personification of ‘fire’ having control of its own points out to two things: the lack of power of the villagers/earthbenders and the shift of power to a non-living entity from living human beings. Haru’s mother mentions the mining of Earth Kingdom for Fire Nation ships which suggests the imperialistic nature of the Fire Nation’s control of the Earth Kingdom village.

The word ‘steal’ is an overloaded term used for the imperialistic forces of the Fire Nation. It reveals the true nature of the people who are power hungry, and ‘coward’ is used for the Earth Kingdom people who do not stand up and fight for their land and their freedom. This tactic is used by the people of who have power to generate discourses. In several scenes, Earth Kingdom people are called cowards by the Fire Nation who have broken the spirits of the people and this way the internalization of this idea by the earth benders is inevitable.

The character Katara calls the bending as ‘a part of who we are.’ The bending of a nation is a major part of the culture and identity of the people of that nation so taking their bending away means taking their culture away. It disrupts the sacred, cultural ways of a group. The asymmetrical power structures in genocidal crimes go beyond the killing of a nation. It includes the control over their cultural, personal, and religious identities. So, by forbidding earthbending, the Fire Nation is taking part in the cultural genocide of the Earth Kingdom. This forbidding is a deliberate exhaustion and destruction of the cultural practices of the nation and misbalances the power structures present in the society keeping in view the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The enforcement of strict laws against bending and the economic hold on the Earth Kingdom are the result of the use of repressive state apparatus introduced by Louis Althusser. He proposed the concepts of repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) which are employed by the state or a powerful institution in order to exercise control over a group of people. The use of violence whether in the form of physical violence or administrative repression to maintain power is reflected in this scene where the Fire Nation is exercising economic and institutional power over the Earth Kingdom Village (Althusser, 1970).

According to Critical Discourse Analysis, the discursive practice of one group based on a certain ideology becomes their identity as well. The exploitation of the natural resources of the nation and the victimization of the people by a cultural or ethnic majority is a way of exerting their dominance on the minority group. The language present in the scene shows the Fire Nation exercising their power on the Earth Kingdom through economic and cultural means.

3. In the Earth Kingdom town, Katara persuades Haru to save an old man by earth bending but that old man turns him in to the Fire Nation. This makes Katara determined to save Haru by getting herself arrested. She devises a plan with Aang and Sokka and fakes earth bending and gets arrested. When she arrives at the Fire Nation prison, she gets to know that the ship is a metal sea fortress immune to earth bending. The textual analysis of the macro unit 3 from the appendix reveals that the ship warden of the Fire Nation calls earth bending ‘brutish savagery’ and earthbenders ‘you people’. The language of ‘othering’ is employed to construct a social identity of one group. The discourse of Fire Nation constructs the identity of the other nations as somewhat inferior and lesser than them. This discursive practice contains ideology of the Fire Nation which is legitimized and maintained through everyday action and is entrenched in the language of every person belonging to the Fire Nation. This selection of discourse by the Ship Warden discloses certain assumptions about the Earth Kingdom which are ideologically rooted and engages in the production of unequal power relations between the two nations which is the basis of critical theory of language.

The dehumanization of earthbenders to savages classifies and symbolizes one group as the enemy and a subhuman. This classification is then used as grounds for raging violence against them. The practice of taking away earthly elements out of reach of the earth benders and to call them distinguishing names to maintain a dominance over them comes under the techniques of genocide. This Identity Trap framework was put forward by a researcher William A Donohue who stated that a certain language themes and vocabulary are used to generate discourses against the classified ‘enemy’ to integrate in the audience the ideology of the speaker who is the colonizer or the nation in power. This use of language establishes a system of power and injustice (Donohue, 2012).

Fairclough’s CDA focuses on the role of language and discourse in maintaining and legitimizing ideological hierarchies and how these ideological hierarchies tip the power balances to stand on the top. He also enforces language to be a socially conditioned process which contains some explicit and implicit ideologies of the speaker. The fire soldier exerts his ideology of superiority over the earthbenders through his language of discrimination. He is employing his prejudices against the earthbender through the use of his language which establishes asymmetrical power structures present between both nations.

4. The Northern Water Tribe is under attack by the Fire Nation under the command of general Zhao just before the full moon. The full moon makes the waterbenders more powerful and weakens the bending of firebenders. So General Zhao, in the search of a solution, figures out the secret of the Water Tribe and he plans to eradicate the waterbending once and for all.

The Textual analysis of this macro unit shows that Aang is looking for moon and ocean spirits and says that if he does not find them ‘an entire culture’ could be destroyed. This implicates a direct relation between the waterbenders and the moon and ocean spirits. The imagery of life and death is drawn to create a link between their lives and existence with the life and survival of the water benders. The two koi fish which are the physical incarnation of the moon and ocean spirits are under grave threat. And when Koh says ‘it’s quite the other way

round’ refers to Aang being responsible for harmony and a connection between the human world and the spirit world.

The next scene begins with the monologue of general Zhao calling himself words like ‘Zhao the Conqueror’ and ‘Zhao the moon slayer’. The moon is a metaphor for the life of the Water Tribe and water bending. Without the moon, there will be no more waterbending. He calls it his ‘destiny’ to destroy ‘the moon’ and ‘the water tribe’. He aims to destroy the water tribe just by killing the fish which is the moon spirit. The koi fish are a cultural and religious artifact of the Water Tribe and the killing of one is equivalent of committing an act of violence against the entire nation.

The language of Zhao bears the ideology of power where he calls the destruction of an entire nation his destiny. He puts the onus of his atrocities on an abstract thing which has no physical entity to absolve himself of the blame for the act. This hegemonic attitude and exhibition of power relations through language are analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis. Fairclough focuses on the relationship between language and power and how power is exerted through the means of language. Zhao puts his power in show through the names he thinks people will give him after he destroys the moon and the water tribe.

5. Team Avatar is travelling through the Fire Nation, so they steal some clothes to disguise themselves during the day, but Aang snaps a Fire Nation school uniform and runs into a local officer who takes him back to the class. He decides to enroll himself in the school to learn the history through the Fire Nation point of view.

The textual analysis of the macro unit presents Aang asking a question regarding the ‘knowledge’ about the battle between the Fire Nation and Air nation present in the ‘national textbook’ of the Fire Nation. The textbooks portray Air Nation having an army who attacked the Fire Nation first. But the reality is different. Aang says that the Air Nomads lacked a formal military and were defeated by the Fire Lord in Ambush. This sheds light on the eradication of the Air Nomads history and culture and the hold of control and power of the colonizer and imperialist Fire Nation over the truths and reality of the tribe. The control over history textbooks through language constructs the intended identity of the enemy or the victim of the power-hungry state or nation in order to maintain the asymmetrical power relation present between the majority and the minority. This preservation of unequal power structure through discourse is focused by Fairclough.

The use of language present in the textbooks for the propagation of their ideological and political agenda reveals the relation between knowledge and power given by the French Philosopher Michel Foucault. He is of the opinion that power is rooted in knowledge and the usage of that knowledge for ulterior motives. On the other hand, power molds the existing knowledge in the desired form and promotes it. Whoever yields the power, has the knowledge and vice versa (Aberra, 2012).

Critical theory of Language centralizes the use of language as a form of social practice which in turn produces social identities through the system of knowledge and beliefs. The scene shows the alteration in the history books claiming the knowledge about the Air Nation when it is the

opposite of their reality. This portrays the hold of Fire nation over the history and reality of the Air Nation and the use of that power to manipulate the opinions of its people through the modification of the historical facts. The use of education to construct fallacious opinions about a nation exhibits the abuse of power in the series.

6. Zuko joins the team Avatar to help defeat his father. In order to gain Katara's trust, he decides to help her find the group of soldiers responsible of her mother's death. They come to know that the soldier named Yon Rha who is responsible for the death has retired and lives with his mother. Eventually, they find him out and he reveals that Katara's mother Kya named herself as the last remaining waterbender to protect Katara. The Fire Nation took all the waterbenders 'a long time ago' conveys the ceaseless and perpetual series of violence committed by the Fire Nation on the other tribes. The 'one waterbender left' refers to the wiping out of the waterbenders by the Fire Nation in order to take control of the water tribe and weaken their ground. The language of the second character displays the theme of begging for the life of others and the sacrifice of one life for the survival of another. The theme of sacrifice is dominant throughout the text to show the unity and empathy the colonized people have for each other.

The removal of humanity from the existence of waterbenders and the search and the killing of the last waterbender as if they are not a human being refer to the construction of the victim as the other by removing the human agency. This suggests the ideology of superiority that prevails in the discourse and practices of the Fire Nation. Fairclough focuses on these ideological assumptions enmeshed in the language practices in his socio-cultural approach of Critical Discourse Analysis. This reduction or removal of human agency of the sufferer to establish the grounds for exercising coercive power on them is given by Lilia Chouliaraki. The waterbenders are not considered human in the eyes of the Fire Nation Soldier, therefore, he lacks the empathy and mercy because they are just an object to kill or prison (Chouliaraki, 2008).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper examines the relationships of power, and the cultural violations present in the series of Avatar: The Last Airbender. It also analyzes the language features which are used to depict the power structures and systematic repression. It focuses on the ideas of Fairclough. Fairclough stated that certain discourses have certain ideologies which produce and reproduce unequal power relations. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis analyzes the social practices of domination, exploitative attitudes, and hegemonic instabilities from a linguistic perspective. The explanation of data analysis has shown the use of language of power and the presence of ideological stances in the language.

We have inferred from the textual analysis and discussion that the people in the series, who hold power over other nations, use their ideologically stimulated language to produce identities of other nations in order to maintain their power over them. The practice of using the language of othering pertains to the starting point of the social change which results in conflict of power.

The explanation has also revealed the exertion of economic and institutional power by the Fire Nation over Earth Kingdom which suggests the extent of the systematic oppression they have inflicted. The dichotomy of power and powerlessness is present in the series via the portrayal of Fire Nation on one side and the other side the three nations. The ideology of superiority is recurrent in the language of the Fire Nation people which then gives rise to certain social practices that involve the cultural and physical violations of the minority nations.

The issue of cultural violations that is unveiled through the Critical Discourse Analysis of the text shows the need for discussion on such atrocities to create an awareness about it. The series through its linguistic as well as semiotic elements has put forward the agenda of destruction and preservation of culture and cultural artifacts. The control over cultural, social, and religious identities in the series depicts the drastic effects and results of cultural genocide which is an apparatus to maintain the power hierarchies.

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Appendix

1. Season 1 Episode 3: The Southern Air Temple

Aang: I’m sorry.

Katara: It’s okay. It wasn’t your fault.

Aang: But you were right and if fire benders found this temple that means they found the other ones too. I really am the Last Airbender.

2. Season 1 Episode 6: Imprisoned

Haru: Uh, you must have me confused with some other kid.

Aang: No, she doesn't, we saw you earthbending.

Haru and his mother gasp

Haru's mother: They saw you doing what?

Haru: they're crazy, mom, I mean, look at how they're dressed!

Haru's mother: you know how dangerous that is! You know what would happen if they caught you earthbending!

Unknown voice: Open up!

Sokka: Fire nation soldier! Act natural!

Haru's mother: What do you want? I've already paid you this week.

Fire nation soldier: The tax just doubled. Wouldn't want an accident, would we? Fire is sometimes so hard to control.

(Haru's mother gives him the money)

Soldier: You can keep the copper ones.

Sokka: Nice guy. How long has the Fire Nation been here?

Haru's mother: Five years. Fire Lord Ozai uses our town's coal mines to fuel his ships.

Haru: They're thugs, they steal from us and everyone here is too much of a coward to do anything about it.

Katara: But Haru's an earthbender, he can help.

Haru's mother: Earthbending is forbidden. It's caused nothing but misery for this village. He must never use his abilities.

Katara: How can you say that? Haru has a gift. Asking him not to bend is like asking me not to waterbend. It's a part of who we are.

3. SCENE 2

Fire Nation Prison Ship

Ship Warden: You will notice, earthbenders, that this rig is made entirely of metal. You are miles away from any rock or earth, so if you have any illusions about employing that brutish savagery that passes for bending among you people, forget them. It is impossible.

4. Episode 20

Aang: I need to find the moon and the ocean.

Koh: Their spirit names are Tui and La, push and pull. And that has been the nature of their relationship all the time.

Aang: Please. Help me find them. An entire culture could be destroyed if I don't get their help.

Koh: Oh, you think you need their help. [Koh looks to the side.] Actually, it's quite the other way round. Someone's going to kill them!

Aang: What do you mean? How can I find them and protect them?

Koh: You've already met them, actually. Tui and La, your moon and ocean, have always circled each other in an eternal dance. They balance each other, push, and pull, life and death, good and evil, yin and yang.

Aang's eyes open wide as he experiences a flashback of the white and black fish circling each other in the pond and the vision he had of them as they turned into the yin and yang symbol just before he entered the Spirit World. Back to Aang.

Aang: The koi fish! I must be going now.

Cut to Tui and La in the oasis lake. Zhao grabs Tui from the water, placing it in a sack. The moon goes red, followed by everything else. Cut to close-up of the now red moon. Cut to a view of the entire city turning red. Cut to Pakku who loses his waterbending and falls to the ground. Cut to a waterbender attempting to waterbend but loses his bending. Cut three more waterbenders, bending water, but they too lose their bending. Cut to Fire Navy soldier's firebending. Cut to Appa flying with the red moon behind him. Appa groans as it cuts to the saddle.

Zhao: [Cut to Zhao at the oasis.] I am ... a legend, now! [Cut to panning shot from Zhao's hand, grasping the bag with Tui in it, down to his head.] The Fire Nation will, for generations, tell stories about the great Zhao, who darkened the moon. They will call me Zhao the Conqueror, Zhao the Moon Slayer, Zhao the Invincible.

Cut to wide view of oasis as Momo flies away toward the camera. A planned view of Momo landing on Aang's arm and running to his shoulder, with Katara and Sokka behind him. Cut to Zhao and his soldiers, readying themselves for battle. Cut to Aang, Sokka and Katara readying themselves. Panning shot of the oasis.

Zhao: Don't bother. [Close-up of Zhao as he lifts the sack up threatening to kill Tui.]

Aang: Zhao, don't!

Zhao: It's my destiny to destroy the moon and the Water Tribe.

Zhao releases the koi fish into the oasis. Cut to close-up of Zhao as he hesitates before striking the koi fish with a fire slice out of anger. Cut to wide view of the oasis. Cut to Iroh recoiling from the flames. Cut to Aang looking on and up at the moon. Cut to a view from the oasis to the sky as the moon fades out and the world goes gray.

5. Season 3 Episode 2

Kwan: Since it's obviously hilarious to mock our national oath, we'll begin with a pop quiz on our great March of Civilization. [The class groans and picks up their pens.] Question one: What year did Fire Lord Sozin battle the Air Nation army? [Aang raises his hand.] Kuzon?

Aang: Is that a trick question? The Air Nomads didn't have a formal military. Sozin defeated them by ambush. [The entire class stares at him, dumbfounded.]

Kwan: Well, I don't know how you could possibly know more than our national history book. Unless you were there a hundred years ago.

Aang: I'll just write down my best guess.

6. Season 3 Episode 16

Yon Rha: Now tell me, who is it? Who's the waterbender?

Kya: There are no waterbenders here. The Fire Nation took them all away a long time ago.

Yon Rha: You're lying. My source says there's one waterbender left in the Southern Water Tribe. We're not leaving until we find the waterbender!

Kya: If I tell you, do you promise [She lowers her head and closes her eyes to make a decision.] to leave the rest of the village alone? [Cut to a side view of Yon Rha who nods] It's me. [Cut to Kya who looks up] Take me as your prisoner.

Yon Rha: [Cut to a close-up of Yon Rha who smiles evilly.] I'm afraid I'm not taking prisoners today.

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