

**"Power Dynamics and Colonial Exploitation:
Unveiling Predatory Forces in
'Rise of the Planet of the Apes'"**

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*"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."*

- Isaiah 1:17 (NIV)

ABSTRACT

This abstract explores the dynamics of power, oppression, and resistance within the context of colonialism and postcolonialism, drawing on Robert J.C. Young's theoretical framework (2005). Analyzing the movie's portrayal of humans' control over apes, the hierarchical relationship between colonizers and colonized becomes evident. The belief in human supremacy over apes is contextualized within discussions of colonial ideologies and racial hierarchies, reflecting a colonial mindset rooted in notions of superiority. The apes' revolt against human captors mirrors historical resistance movements against exploitation and mistreatment. As a result: **1)** The apes have been the subjects of experiments and exploited by the men; men keep forcing the apes to cooperate in experiments (*Exploitation and Resistance*). **2)** The apes often get extreme abuse for the sake of the human race (*Power Dynamics and Oppression*). **3)** The men's superiority towards the apes creates resistance to fight back humans (*Colonial Supremacy and Racial Hierarchies*). It highlights the apes' vulnerability to human dominance, their determination to resist, and the potential for collective strength. The contrasting loyalty of apes and humans is underscored, shedding light on the dynamics of power and unity in the face of oppression. As Young's definition of colonialism comes to life, the complex interplay between dominance, resistance, and shared fears emerges, providing a thought-provoking perspective on the movie's themes.

INTRODUCTION

"Rise of the Planet of the Apes," a 2011 American sci-fi action film directed by Rupert Wyatt, draws its inspiration from Pierre Boulle's 1936 novel *"Planet of the Apes."* The movie, produced by 20th Century Fox Studios, features actors like Andy Serkis, James Franco, and Terry Notary. Its success spawned sequels in 2014 (*"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes"*) and later (*"War for the Planet of the Apes"*), with an upcoming 2024 release titled *"Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes."* Made on a budget of approximately 90 million USD, the film grossed around 481.8 million USD at the box office. Noteworthy awards include The Annie Award for Character Animation, *Critics' Choice Movie Award* for Best Visual Effects, *Genesis Award* for Best Feature Film, *IGN Best Sci-Fi Movie* of 2011, and *Saturn Award* for Best Special Effects.

In short, this film highlights the injustice behavior by humans towards primates; with the beginning of the film showing human violence in catching the apes to be used as "*guinea pigs*" in producing drugs that can improve human systems. And knowing the attitude of humans, they have actually never been concerned about human health, but the effectiveness of the drug so that there are more and more consumers. The injustice stopped when a chimpanzee named Caesar was adopted by a scientist named Will. This chimpanzee has a high level of intelligence and continues to increase. Until one day, he felt the injustice himself; how humans demean primates and other wild animals for their own benefit. Sensing the existence of a very inhuman caste system, and even driving their species to extinction, Caesar leads their revolt. The apes destroy the laboratory containing the experimented apes, and even attack the city. They rebel, and show those who treat them as they please, that they too have feelings, and should not be considered the same as a tool that can be played at will. At the end of the film, the apes take over the entire city. When Will invites Caesar to come home, Caesar says directly, "*Caesar is home*". Now, they have lived in a place where no one will ever look down on them, a place that no one will use them selfishly, a place where they can finally be free.

Binary Opposition (Stereotypes)	
Men Supremacy	Apes Race
The majority and the superior.	The minority/double minority due to nature and characteristics; therefore they are called the inferior.
Smarter, active, good-looking, more modern, more well-liked, more acknowledged, have more recognition, etc.	Not smart, passive, fair (dark hairy), primitive, less liked, less acknowledged, have less recognition, etc.
Indigenous, land owners, full-right citizens, strong (super power).	Ex-immigrants (non-indigenous), nomads, less recognized citizens, weak (minor power).
Well socialized, well-civilized, well-mannered.	Not well socialized, less civilized, lack of manners.
Called Humans, rulers, authority	Called Animals, slaves, objects of exploitation

METHOD

This analysis was conducted using a qualitative method in which the data were explained to criticize the human ego towards animals to the point of degrading and treating them arbitrarily, thus leading to the evolution of apes who felt they were being treated unfairly. In order to digest and analyze this problem, *Colonialism & Postcolonialism* theory by Young, R. J. (2005) was used to criticize the issue of the movie. Analyzing the theme of colonialism in "*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*" requires delving into the dynamics between humans and apes portrayed in the film. This interaction reflects broader historical and social implications. Young, R. J. (2005), highlights this aspect in his work: "*Postcolonial theory is not simply a form of cultural criticism; it is also a political intervention that aims to challenge, resist, and*

subvert the power structures that sustain colonial domination and exploitation.” (p. 11). Colonialism is evident through the portrayal of the apes' subjugation and exploitation by human characters, drawing parallels to real-world historical, cultural and political contexts. The apes' struggle for autonomy parallels the resistance often observed in colonial territories. The film underscores the ethical dilemmas surrounding power dynamics, *"The film forces us to question the morality of imposing our superiority onto other species, mirroring the historical colonial mindset that perpetuated inequalities and injustices."* (Brown, 2016, p. 75). Furthermore, the movie's portrayal of technological and scientific advancement as tools of control and manipulation draws parallels to the historical exploitation of colonized regions for resources and labor. The tension between the human desire for dominance and the apes' pursuit of freedom encapsulates the core theme of colonialism.

DISCUSSION

The movie begins with the scene of catching wild apes to be used as experimental material. The camera takes a *mise-en-scene* to show the audience the series of actions chronologically. Meanwhile the music makes it more intense, the company cages these animals and is in the process of developing a drug that will enhance the human brain system, maybe even expand it. Will, a scientist there, makes a drug called 112 and gives it to a



chimpanzee. Apparently, the intelligence of the ape has increased so that its IQ is almost the same as the human brain. But suddenly the chimpanzee became so aggressive that they shot her dead. Will thinks something is wrong with the drug, but when he checks the chimpanzee area, he finds a baby chimpanzee. So, this aggressive attitude indicates a mother's protective attitude towards her child. Feeling guilty, Will takes the baby home and names him Caesar.

In the next scene, the camera turns into a close-up shot, focusing on the characters' faces, while the background is blurred. This is to show the facial expressions and the emotions of them.. Caesar grows



up to be a little chimpanzee. One day, Caroline, Will's partner, visits Will's house and meets Caesar. Will is surprised to see Caroline playing casually with little Caesar and seems unafraid of the primate. Caroline answered, *"I love chimpanzees. Most are afraid of them, and it's appropriate to be afraid of them"*. This suggests that the character's society tends to be afraid

of aggressive animals – thinking they are a threat and can hurt people. The humans consider the apes to be living creatures that are difficult to control. Young's examination of power conflicts (2005) and the establishment of authority in colonial environments could apply to how humans exercise control over the apes in the movie. This representation reflects the hierarchical relationship seen between colonizers and the colonized, where the dominant group wields power and subdues the subordinate group. This is evidenced, regardless, the love of the men to the apes but domesticating them is controversial or subject to debate because wild animals have roamed and co-existed with humans. From Caroline's statement, it suggests that in her society, the fear of being predated emerges and becomes the basic survival skill over time, causing them to be afraid of wild animals today. *"...emotions, cognitive processes, and social behaviors, are shaped by the process of natural selection over generations."* (Lisa Fritscher, *verywell mind*, 2020). It proposes that numerous psychological characteristics and behaviors have evolved over generations and provided advantages in supporting the survival and reproduction of our forebears. These traits have endured and still exert an impact on their present-day conduct.

At this point, the men in the movie feel intimidated; but at the same time, they have control over the apes that can attack and act aggressively at any time to eventually cause a major injury. In this scene, the camera shifts to medium shot, focusing the interaction among the characters in a distance. Here, it can be seen when a neighbor questions Andy, *"It's not a chimpanzee?"* It signifies that it is the nature of men that seems to be ingrained in their heads, considering the apes a threat and a danger. That is why the apes are in the cage for purposes like poaching, inhumane experiments. They do not hesitate to shoot the chimpanzees if they act; exactly the reason why Caesar's mother is killed and is also the reason behind the massive reduction in the numbers of wild animals and their habitats.



Several years later, Caesar grows up and his intelligence far exceeds that of other primates due to the effects of drugs he has inherited from his mother. One day, when Caesar is out walking with Will and



Caroline in the park, Caesar passes a dog that is also being walked with its two owners. Caesar sees that the dog is wearing a leash and is very surprised to realize that he is wearing one too. He starts to think whether animals that should live happily with humans, are all this time considered pet-like accessories? In the previous sequel, Caesar is taken care of by human

caregivers that makes him really like to be stroked and given affection. "...As attachment is a form of love, animals are indeed capable of loving their caregivers," said Berit Brogaard D.M.Sci., Ph.D (*Psychology Today*, 2014). The case of animal abuse can be seen when the ape race is under experimental conduct by doing gene modification to enhance their intelligence and human-like emotion.

The case is increasing over time. In this scene, the camera takes a close-up shot to emphasize the facial expressions and emotions of both men and the apes, while the blurred background splits in seconds and takes turns. In this situation, the keeper of the laboratory cynically says, "Check out this guy. He thinks he's special or something. Stupid monkey," and tapping an electric



rod against the cage, creating bursts of illumination. There are many factors that cause it, but the thing that stands out the most is that humans tend to ignore the physical, emotional, psychological and emotional states of the ape race; this kind of abuse is completely damaging. In the movie "*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*," the issue of oral, physical, and mental abuses are closely connected to the unfair treatment that marginalized groups went through during *colonial* and *postcolonial* times. The fact that the apes cannot speak like humans reminds us of how oppressed people's voices were ignored in history, showing that they were not given a say.

The apes being hurt physically is like what happened to groups of people who were mistreated in the past, reminding us how they were treated as if they weren't even human. Also, the emotional pain that the apes experience because of their captivity and use for experiments is similar to the psychological suffering that people endured during *colonial* and *postcolonial* periods. The movie shows that mistreating others has a lasting impact and as a reminder to treat all living beings, whether humans or animals, with fairness and kindness. It is a contemplation about the consequences of our actions and to treat others ethically and humanely. Young, R. J. (2005) argued, "*Colonial and postcolonial history is full of examples of human beings being used as experimental subjects without their consent or knowledge, often with devastating consequences.*" In the movie where apes are subjected to scientific experimentation without their consent or awareness. The apes become unwitting subjects in an attempt to develop the cure of Alzheimer, ultimately leading to unintended and dire outcomes. The parallel to *colonial* and *postcolonial* history is evident as the apes' plight mirrors historical instances where marginalized groups were exploited for experimentation, resulting in profound suffering. The movie serves as a reflection, highlighting the ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding scientific advancement and the potential devastating consequences of treating sentient beings as mere tools for progress. This often happens to the

ape race that should be set free in nature, but men think of them as experimental subject companions and a companion is tantamount to being a servant who only constantly has to listen to the words of his master. This gives men a feeling of superiority, that even if they hurt animals, it would not be a problem because as a master, they have the right to do so. In addition, the scientists in the movie are seen to believe that the apes are only less intelligent than men and weak creatures, and they love developing the experiment until it succeeds when possible. This causes them to feel superior, to treat animals arbitrarily, and by forcing them to obey, expecting them to do anything they order willingly without resistance.

Upon the men's experiment, the scientists in the movie catch animals, especially the apes, which have a brain system similar to humans, to then be used as 'guinea pigs' in the laboratory. The same thing happens to Caesar's mother, who eventually dies from a strong drug as an experiment to advance human knowledge. In the next scene, the camera starts with a medium shot and slowly turns to a long shot,



emphasizing what is going on around the lab. Will shows the lab where it is happening to Caesar and says, "She took a medicine, like the medicine I gave to Charles (Will's father)..." They do this indeed to advance scientific knowledge, but the ones who are affected, even lose their lives, are the apes. Not only in primates, but other animals such as dogs, cats, rats, rabbits and many more.

"Colonialism creates a hierarchy of values, norms, and knowledge that privileges the colonizer and devalues the colonized. This can lead to feelings of inferiority, shame, and alienation among the colonized." (Smith, 2015, p. 27). The reason is simply for the sake of the men's pride of nobel prize awards. The study lasts for many years until the rise of the resistance of the apes occurs and they fight for their rights and equality. A large number of these apes are sacrificed for experimental purposes. But unfortunately, even if the experiment is successful, it creates the power of resistance of the apes to fight back for what men have done to the apes' relatives. .

This injustice causes Caesar to dislike humans even more (except for Will and his family, of course) so that one day he becomes aggressive and has to be put in an animal control center – separated from Will. There, he first experiences living together with other chimpanzees but then he wanted to be friends with them, a chimp immediately tore Caesar's man-made clothes, and attacked Caesar. If one looks closely, this clearly shows the feelings of a chimp filled with anger and fear of humans. Young's (2005) argued, *"understanding of opposing exploitation and mistreatment aligns with the apes' rebellion against their human captors, drawing a parallel to historical instances of resistance by colonized communities who resisted the injustices and maltreatment imposed by colonial authorities."* In the

beginning of the movie, the apes often feel terrified and intimidated. In this scene, it is shown in a close-up shot but focuses on the two facial expressions and emotions of the characters that are opposing each other. However, the plot changes, portraying men feeling the other way around. In this case, the image of the movie creates the feel of the men's insecurities. *"Propaganda was a potent tool in the colonial arsenal, shaping perceptions, justifying domination, and perpetuating the narrative of superiority."* - (Smith, 2010, p. 45). In this scene, the situation changes when an animal that is expected to be afraid, actually shows resistance. When the cage keeper is with some of his friends, one of them annoys Caesar because he gets too close. Caesar immediately grabs him by his collar and stares at him angrily. Caesar's action is actually caused by fear and panic. The apes in the movie are put in the metal cage that signifies the danger of the apes, but being caged, tied up, or 'lowered' are abusive forms. Men in this lab will eventually feel even more superior – succeeding in winning against something that is frightening to them. That is why they will not even sympathize, but the other way around; relief and safety.

This superior attitude of men in the movie leads to egoism and arrogant conduct operated by the company; it shows in the film how men capture primates for drug testing, and the one that causes an increase in IQ and the death of Caesar's mother, is called 112. Upon learning that Will's father Charles' illness has not only been cured but his brain has developed, the company's leaders, who initially accuse Will of the side effects of the drug, now instead push the production of the drug until it is revised into drug 113. And of course to test this new drug, more and more chimpanzees become victims. Will even scolds the head company, saying that he as a scientist has not approved of this production of 113. But this leader instead replies, *"You make history, I make money"*. This statement depicts how capitalists work as the legacy of colonialism; the mentality of Colonizers who often exploit the labor and resources of colonized regions to fuel their capitalist economies. Natural resources, agricultural products, and cheap labor are extracted and utilized to generate profits for them.

"Money acts as an incentive: if people can perceive or understand that a particular action is likely to lead to them obtaining money, they are more likely to perform that action."

(Lea, S. E., & Webley, P. (2006))

This statement highlights the role of money in influencing human behavior. It suggests that when individuals can recognize that a specific action will result in them earning money, they are more inclined to engage in that activity. In essence, the prospect of financial gain serves as a driving force, encouraging people to take actions they believe will lead to monetary rewards. Moreover, the actions that are taken do no harm to humans but threaten the lives of the chimpanzees. From the head of the company's utterance, gives the idea that the lucrative offer like this makes men weak. The money desires of these men carries

out greediness, while conscience stops, that for the sake of money, it is easy to forget that the apes have feelings, and emotions.

In this scene, the camera works in a wide medium shot to show the interaction of the apes as well as the intimate relationships among the apes. The apes represent the resistance in the movie that ends up rebelling against the humans who humiliate them, making them inhumane test subjects. The apes are becoming more and more intelligent that enables them to devise strategies



of rebellion; it can be seen from the way Caesar led the siege of the bridge; furthermore, he also seduces the others with similar drugs to gain more resistance/soldiers. *"Resistance is not always a conclusive event; rather, it is often a process of negotiation and endurance that challenges the colonizers' assumptions of control."* (Smith, 2007, p. 124). In the scene, they would not leave their friends even though they are injured; they fully believe in Caesar and his plans. They all have the same goal and mindset and never stray from that goal one bit; forming an unbreakable union as their physique is much stronger than humans. The men in the movie do not seem ready for the battle as the apes are gaining their power and it seems to be nothing wrong until the war occurs between the men and the apes.

CONCLUSION

Power dynamics and oppression within colonial contexts could be related to the humans' control over the apes in the movie. This control mirrors the hierarchical relationship between colonizers (humans) and colonized (apes), where the dominant group exerts authority and subjugates the subordinate group. The belief in human supremacy over the apes can be linked to Young's discussions of colonial ideologies and racial hierarchies. The humans' attitude reflects a form of colonial mindset where one group asserts its superiority over another based on perceived racial or species differences. The exploitation and abuse resonates in the apes' revolt against their human captors. This mirrors the resistance movements seen in colonial history, where colonized populations fought back against the exploitation and mistreatment by colonial powers, seeking self-determination. Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that: The apes have been the subjects of experiments and exploited by the men; men keep forcing the apes to cooperate in experiments (*Exploitation and Resistance*). The apes often get extreme abuse for the sake of the human race (*Power Dynamics and Oppression*). The men's superiority towards the apes creates resistance to fight back humans (*Colonial Supremacy and Racial Hierarchies*). In conclusion, as Robert J.

Young wrote, “*Colonialism, the rule by force of a people by an external power.*” The superiority of men (colonizers) due to their knowledge, or technology advancement make them feel stronger and smarter, exploiting often by force for their own. In the lack of self-defense and knowledge, the apes become vulnerable to potential threats from others. Even so, the physical appearance of humans mirrors that of robust apes, apprehension exists on both sides, as humans share fears with these creatures. However, considering the situation where apes, possessing comparable intelligence, opt to challenge the status quo, their success becomes plausible. This is attributed to their cohesive nature, wherein unity of sentiment, cognition, and purpose prevails. Unlike humans, the apes demonstrate unwavering loyalty to their peers, thereby minimizing the likelihood of betrayal.

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