

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. Rationale

In every election season, politics proves an important factor when determining a national's leaders. This shows that politics has a strong influence on the opinions of a country's citizens, including with regard to long-term issues and current affairs.

Politics is defined as “the activities of the government, members of law-making organizations or people who influence the way a country is governed,” and “the study of the ways in which a country is governed” ("Politics"). Moreover, politics includes the activities related to dealing with power, power abuse, domination and the consequences of social and political inequality or hegemony (Van Dijk 11).

The concept of hegemony was identified and developed by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. To Gramsci, “hegemony” stands for the domination of one social class over any/all others. The dominant groups exert their power over the subordinate groups by force, consent or both. The former uses mass media- such as propaganda, books, news, TV programs and movies, as tools to influence the latter toward achieving their objectives (cited in Goldberg par.5). Aidan Bryant also suggests that hegemony is often used in media studies to describe how the media presents the audience with selective information. Thus, the audience may not realize that they are being framed and even manipulated by the media and rather believe that they are actually in control of their consumptive practices. Besides, media companies today have

the power to turn grounded institutions such as, notions of cultural heritage and religion, into forms of pop culture without changing their structures. The media thus create a new understanding of what is perceived by the masses and what is accepted as “reality” (3).

According to Tony Kashani in “Hollywood an Agent of Hegemony: The War Film”, Hollywood has always been aware of the fact that film is a powerful medium, so it has used war films as a tool to promote and declare American dominance and superiority over other countries. This American film giant aims to frame the audience’s perception into glorifying the power of America. As a consequence, the war films usually portray the good guys (Americans) fighting against the perceived bad guys, who are often Germans, Japanese, Russians and Muslim terrorists, and almost always win. Kashani also states that war films work on many levels. They arouse the audience with battle scenes, invoke emotions, brainwash them into believing that what appears before their eyes is a representation of reality, and sometimes these film-makers even rewrite history. The professional film-makers know how to rearrange events and instill a definitive patriotic awareness in the viewers and make them feel that it is justifiable to kill the bad guys (Germans, Japanese, Iraqis, etc.) in order to safeguard the concepts of freedom and democracy in the world, and that this will be made possible only with America as the leader. In addition, Hollywood has constantly been producing war movies since World War II to serve the specific purposes of each period of time. For example, in the World War II era, classic war films rationalized the necessity of war, while in the Vietnam and the postmodern eras, films questioned war, while lastly, in the 21st century, war films seem to be raising a sense of patriotism (par.2-3).

Film is a vivid medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and

shame....[S]uch affective experiences directly and urgently involve politics. Power works in the depths and on the surface of the body, and not just in the disembodied realm of 'representation' or of 'discourse.' (Shaviro 7)

Chilton and Schäffner suggest in "Translation of Political Speeches: A Skopos Theoretical Analysis" that politics has been subtly involved in people's lives since the ancient times of Aristotle and Plato. Each human being gathers in groups for a reason. They unite with people who have the same or similar perceptions of values for their certain purposes. This makes them "social animals." In order to socialize in groups, people have to communicate. Thus, language has become a major tool in creating understanding, framing people's perceptions and/or twisting meaning for one's own purposes (cited in Hansen 18).

The English language has been used as a primary mode of communication within the entertainment business, particularly in movies in different contexts, including those about international relationships and wars. Many film-makers tend to insert hidden messages into their movies, enough to hint at the intended information, but not to make it too obvious to spoil the audience's pleasure. The essence of the movies observed and appreciated by the audiences will certainly result in widespread popularity of the movies, fame for the individuals involved and profits for the studios. It is not only through wars or the international relationships in these movies that hidden agendas appear, but they also occur in animated and/or fantasy movies for children, as they are also flooded with suggestive images and propaganda. An example is *The Incredibles* which portrays the value of the traditional family and warnings about the dangers of political correctness (Webber 7-8.). One of the war movie based on a true story, *Black Hawk Down* has been used in the educational curriculum of high schools and universities in the United States, such as in North Collins Junior-Senior High School,

McCallie School, Campbell University and Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute. This is because the movie depicts the roles of the American military in wars against their power invaders, in this case a Somali warlord and the troops of his advocates.

Black Hawk Down is about elite groups of American Rangers and Delta Force soldiers who were sent to accomplish a mission in Mogadishu, Somalia— to capture the top lieutenant of a Somali warlord whose corrupt government has led to the Somalis' starvation. During their operation, the language the soldiers and their commanders used reflects their sense of superiority over the Somalis. The biased perceptions of “the others” and the sense of dominance are embedded in their language, beliefs and relations to the Somalis.

The term “the others” is used in the binary opposition system which is based on Eurocentric knowledge, as a way of referring to other countries, such as those situated in the East, and marginalizes those countries to secondary world status. This term is used to explain the opposite status of two related categories (Akteer 3). Sarah Smith, Kym Murphy, and Tucker Hottes have noted the biases that are portrayed throughout the movie *Black Hawk Down* in their research. The movie presents the notions of “heroes” through the American soldiers' performances and most of the audience members perceive what they have done without realizing what the “real” event was like. Furthermore, *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* as mainstream media sources supported the biased ideology induced by the U.S. government to limit the boundaries upon ideological discourse regarding U.S. intervention in Somalia and potentially after the Battle of Mogadishu. The article “5 G.I.'s are Killed as Somalis Down 2 U.S. Helicopters” in the October 4th edition of *The New York Times* informed the readers that the Americans were brutally assaulted by the Somalis for no reason, evoking national

sympathy for the American soldiers. Since Aidid's comrades were captured on that mission, the American soldiers could be applauded for their successful mission (18-19). Thus, as the movie itself is political, verbal and non-verbal political discourse analysis will certainly lead to a definitive perception among the readers of how social and political inequalities, as well as relevant power relations, are implied in the movie. Political discourse analysis (PDA), which is one of the approaches of critical discourse analysis (CDA), will be used as a tool to study this movie.

Tuen A. Van Dijk, in *Critical Discourse Analysis*, explains that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach used to study the discourse of the relationships between the power imbalance, power abuse, inequity and the dominance which are reproduced by the language used in social practice and political context in both text and talk. It particularly differentiates the perspectives in diverse areas, such as pragmatics, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, rhetoric and media analysis. In addition, he suggests that CDA is not a specific direction of research because there are many aspects of CDA studies, for instance, gender inequality, media discourse, political discourse, ethnocentrism, nationalism and racism (352-53). Hence, in studying the power of written and spoken discourse, CDA can be used to describe, analyze and interpret the relationships between the actors and the participants in the studies, both in its text and context.

For PDA, Van Dijk states that PDA is both about political discourse and critical discourse, but it deals particularly with power, power abuse, domination and the consequences of social and political inequality that result from domination. He also defines political discourse as the study of actors or authors, namely, politicians. This means political discourse as the study of the text and talk of politicians or political

institutions, at the local, national and international levels. Although the actors and authors of political practices are crucial, politicians are not the only participants in politics. The public, citizens and the masses are definitely recipients in political activities. As a result, an analysis applying political discourse needs to pay particular attention to all the relevant participants and parties involved (11-13). Moreover, studying political discourse is not only realized in the actors' or authors' text and talk, but what should also be taken into consideration is the whole context between the participants and the actions of the political and communicative events within their settings (time, place, circumstances), intentions, goals or political implications (14). Therefore, political discourse analysis aims to seek the way to define "politics" through the political participants' language used in political activities.

To achieve a clear picture of the political exploitation and dominance of the US over Somalia in the movie *Black Hawk Down*, political discourse analysis (PDA) will be used as the main framework to analyze the conversations, actions and value systems of the actors, as American soldiers, on how they behave among Americans themselves and how they treat the inferior Somalis. Since the movie has reached a wide audience, it can be considered an appropriate source of study regarding the intended message of the film.

Consequently, this study will focus on the political language, political ideology and power relations which reflect the binary relations in the movie *Black Hawk Down* employing political discourse analysis (PDA). Even though there are two versions of this story, a movie directed by Ridley Scott and a book written by Mark Bowden who had interviewed many of the men who fought in the battle, the movie version will be chosen as the movie has been able to reach a wider audience whose attention was

focused within a limited period of time while watching the film, and for which the acts of political relations could be more deeply and widely perceived.

1.2 Purposes of Study

1.2.1 To investigate how the political language and the language ideology of binary relations are used by the American soldiers to suppress and marginalize the Somalis and how these affect the Somalis.

1.2.2 To raise awareness among the audiences of the film on the use of language techniques of politicians and the filmmakers to frame people's perceptions toward their particular circumstances and purposes.

1.3 Educational Advantages

The audience will become more aware of the political hidden agenda found in the language the actors, as well as the recipients (the public, citizens and masses), use so that they could see a clearer picture of what lies beneath the dialogue in other movies that involve similar content.

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