

A Study on *The Blind Side* from the Perspective of Postcolonialism

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Published: 30 August 2020

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Sponsoring information: Sponsored by the Seed Foundation of Innovation and Creation for Graduate Students in the Northwestern Polytechnical University (CX2020279)

Abstract:

"The Blind Side", which was nominated for Best Picture at the 2010 Academy Awards, is adapted from Michael Lewis' novel, *The Blind Side: The Evolution of the Game*. It tells the story of a poor African American boy, Michael Oher, who changed his fate and became NFL player with the help of a white family, Tuohy's family. This article intends to conduct a study on this movie from the perspective of postcolonialism under the guidance of post-colonial theory. In the Western perspective, Africans are marginalized and the other, while Western whites are civilized and saviors. The film also promotes Western-centrism in a subtle way, influencing non-Western people, allowing them to form the self-identity and worship for Western myths and American dreams.

Keywords: *Blind Side*, postcolonialism, the other, savior, exile, hegemony

"The Blind Side" was adapted from Michael Lewis' novel, *The Blind Side: The Evolution of the Game*. It was released in the United States in November 2009 and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2010. It tells the story of a poor African American boy, Michael Oher, who was helped by a white family, Tuohy's family, changed his destiny and eventually grew into a National Football League (NFL) player. After the film was released, it received extensive attention and discussion. The movie box office exceeded \$309 million.

Post-colonialism is the use of post-colonial criticism to study the traces of the colonial era left by post-colonial countries in cultural values and other areas of society after they have completed their political independence. The representative scholar of postcolonialism is Edward W. Said, who proposed postcolonialism on the basis of Gramsci's hegemony and Foucault's theory of discourse and power. "Hegemony" refers to the invisible colonization of non-Western groups by the West through cultural and ideological control, thereby realizing "discourse power". Said criticized the illusion of colonists who regarded themselves as truth and heroes in *Orientalism*.

1. "The Other": The Image of Black African Americans in the Western Perspective

"The Other" is an important concept in post-colonial theory. In postcolonial theories, Westerners are often referred to as "the self", while the non-Western world is often called "the other." In cultural colonization, the West often represents the "self", the "superior" culture, and the narrator; while the East often represents the "other", the "weak" culture, and the object of narrating. In Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, "the other" is used to refer to the cultural projection of a certain idea, which constructs the identity of the cultural subject through a certain power relationship and discourse power (Said, 1999).

In the movie "The Blind Side", the black group is a lazy, aggressive, selfish, and weak image. The black staff in charge of handling documents are arrogant, lazy, and procrastinating; the black youths in Hurt Village are idle, like fighting, and speak rudely; Michael's biological mother is an addict who has never assumed the responsibility of a mother; The black family where Michael is boarding dislikes him and considers him a burden. As for the male protagonist, the black boy Michael, as if he had no athletic ability at first, because his eyes were dull and that his actions were slow. In contrast, the heroine, Mrs. Tuohy, a white woman, has a rich, friendly, no quarrel, and loving family. Parents love their children and actively participate in their study and life. Mrs. Tuohy was able to remain calm even when her youngest son almost suffered misfortune because of Michael's carelessness. Other white characters, such as the tutor Miss Susie and the white teachers in the school work hard and perform their duties. It can be said that the white people in the film are all attractive, sympathetic, and kind. It was with the help of such a group of white men that Michael achieved his success.

However, Michael Oher stated in interviews and autobiography that *The Blind Side* has shaped him unfairly. In the movie, he was sloppy, and only started his football career after meeting Mrs. Tuohy. In fact, he is a person who pays great attention to appearance. He would iron out "every last wrinkle" (p. 134) on all of his clothes, including his practice clothes. He has been passionate about

sports from a very young age and understood the rules well. When he met Mrs Tuohy, he was already an accomplished, highly skilled and competitive athlete

Edward W. Said pointed out in "Orientalism" that dividing the boundary between East and West is entirely imaginary, and once this imaginary East becomes a fixed concept, then there will be a corresponding series of behavioral patterns and conceptual patterns. These imaginative-based behavior patterns and conceptual patterns unify the diverse and varied cultural patterns into a fixed pattern(Said,1999).

Whether it's the movie deliberately ignoring Michael's previous efforts and athletic talent to create a mediocre image to be saved, or the Tuohy couple's first discussion of Michael, worrying that he would steal something or frighten her "If you hear the scream, call the insurance adjustor"; or Mrs. Tuohy and her white friends talked about Hurt Village with some unkind words. Before accepting Michael, Mrs. Tuohy, like her white friends, focused on "self". In their opinion, the black community was imagined as violent, rude, and savage, and were the "other" that should be marginalized.

2. Heroes: the image of the western savior

The images of white people in "The Blind Side" are mostly positive, which conveys the idea of Western white society that white people are the incarnations of kindness and justice, heroes and saviors, and can help people in the world escape from suffering, including the black teenager from the bottom of society who has no birth certificate, no identity certificate, and lack of file records.

Coach Kirton rejected the consensus and accepted Michael into the school; Mrs. Boswell never gave up Michael and tried to discover his advantages; the principal was euphemistic and reserved when relaying the news of his father's death to Michael; the couple of Tuohy took care of Michael materially and spiritually; sister Collins defended Michael in front of her classmates; little Sean gave Michael professional help about football and actively protected his rights; Miss Susie did her best to improve Michael's academic performance and make him able to successfully enter the university and get a scholarship. They are all righteous, rational Western whites full of mission and responsibility. In contrast, another black teenager mentioned at the end of the film who was not rescued by the whites, although excellent in motor skills, dropped out of school due to poor school studies and died in a gang fight. It can be said that in the movie, the problems of accommodation, admissions, identity authentication, football training and other issues encountered by the male protagonist were successfully solved with the help of Mrs. Tuohy 's family and other white people. The audiences will involuntarily think that white people are angels and saviors. This is exactly the values conveyed by such Hollywood movies. Although in his autobiography, Oher stated that his school experience was not pleasant.

To understand Westerners from the Western world depicted in the film, you will see that non-Westerners can only survive with the giving and salvation of Westerners. The image of Westerners' saviors is unbreakable and gradually accepted. Hollywood superhero movies are popular all over the world, and people's recognition of Western superheroes also reflects this view.

3. Exile: a mix of cultural identities

In the post-colonial context, "exile" refers to exile in the geographical sense (referring to the change of the country of life) and exile in the sense of race (or blood), that is, the parents are from different races, and it also refers to cultural and psychological exile (Ren Yiming, 2008). A person in a state of exile has left his/her homeland, left the cultural context to which he belongs, and is exiled into an unfamiliar environment. Therefore, his/her original "self" cannot continue and has to adjust himself to adapt to the new environment, when the new environment is difficult to integrate, and the old "self" cannot continue, they become rootless wanderers.

Although Michael in the movie "The Blind Side" was born in the United States, his ancestral home was in Africa. He was separated from his parents since he was a child, and he is always in the cycle of being adopted-running away-changing adoptive family-running away. He did not have the opportunity to learn and accept any kind of culture. It can also be said that Michael has always moved outside of any single culture and suffered a dual exile by region and culture. Soon after Michael entered Chingate Christian School, Mrs. Boswell picked up a piece of paper that was discarded by Michael. He wrote: I looked around and saw white walls, white ground and many white people. He realized that he was incompatible with the surrounding environment. The new environment was not easy for him to integrate into, and he was working hard to adjust himself. Later, during Thanksgiving at Mrs. Tuohy's house, Michael did not hesitate to learn from other people's prayers, but in fact Michael's biological mother was not a Christian. For Michael, his identity is already mixed, and "exile" is a characteristic of his state of existence.

4. Cultural hegemony: a deep metaphor of discourse hegemony in Western countries

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak believes that Western feminist discourse itself contains discourse hegemony or colonial hegemony. It does not realize the elimination of hegemony, but is part of the mainstream discourse. The "female" in Western feminist discourse refers to white, middle-class and heterosexual women. Spivak proposed that the subaltern has no listeners and cannot speak, and should be wary of mainstream replacing the subaltern to speak. The term "subaltern" first appeared in Gramsci's *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, referring to those social groups that are subordinate and excluded from mainstream society, mainly referring to the proletariat. In addition, Gramsci also proposed the concept of hegemony. In Gramsci's view, cultural hegemony relies on identification rather than domination to strengthen the dominant ideology of political society. Western countries have gained political and cultural hegemony by virtue of their strong economic power, and exported cultural hegemonism with the help of movies. In movies, Western countries use their words and behaviors to influence non-Western groups and make them form identification and worship about the Western myths and American dreams.

In the movie "The Blind Side", the male protagonist Michael is homeless and often spends the night in the laundry room or gymnasium. All supplies are packed in a plastic bag. He is a completely proletarian, that is, a subaltern. When he was young, he did not want to be separated from his mother, but was forcibly taken away from his mother by the relevant departments and

handed over to the adoptive family. His voice of wanting to be with his mother was never heard and valued by any department. His speech was not heard by the audience. The heroine of the film, Mrs. Tuohy, has her own business and 85 restaurants, and is a standard middle-class white woman. In family life, Mrs. Tuohy's words are beyond doubt; on the training ground, her words can also profoundly affect Michael. In addition, the film was originally about the growth story of NFL player Michael Oher, but the first and last voices of the film were all made by Mrs. Tuohy, a white woman. The voice of a black proletarian boy was ignored, even if he is the first protagonist. Mrs. Tuohy spoke in place of Michael, the mainstream discourse was vocalizing, the subaltern had no voice, and the discourse hegemony was not eliminated. This reveals a deep metaphor of the discourse hegemony in Western countries.

5. Conclusion

"The Blind Side" is a film adapted from the experience of NFL player Michael Oher. While the audience understands the success story of this black athlete through the film, they are also subtly instilled with Western-centrism, and thus form the Identity and worship to the Western world. Said pointed out in "Orientalism" that the East is the Orientalized East, the East oppressed by the West with the help of discourse authority, and Orientalism is a manifestation of the cultural hegemony dominated by the West. In today's world, the competition of comprehensive national power is not only reflected in the political, economic, and military aspects. Cultural competition also plays an important role. The United States uses movies and other cultural products to export Western centralism and cultural hegemony in order to seek global cultural hegemony, and even world hegemony. Therefore, when we accept films and other foreign cultural products, we must take a critical attitude, take the essence and discard the dross.

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