
The Dynamics of Counterculture in Boulle's Planet of The Apes: A Study of Alterity in Postcolonial Context

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Abstract

This research offers a postcolonial analysis of Pierre Boulle's science fiction novel Planet of the Apes (1964). The novel explores complex themes, using apes as an allegory to depict an inversion of power dynamics in which apes become the center of power and humans are relegated to the position of the "other." This study is grounded in the conceptual frameworks of Michel Foucault's notion of power and Edward Said's theory of othering, supported by Aldo Leopold's concept of eco-grief. The originality of this work lies in examining how counterculture emerges when "center" and "other" reverse their roles in the power hierarchy, leading to environmental degradation and ecological grief. The objectives of this research are to analyze the role of eco-grief in the inversion of power dynamics and to explore how the concepts of othering and its reversal operate within this science fiction narrative. This qualitative research employs close textual analysis to deepen the interpretation of the novel. The study highlights how knowledge functions as a source of power and how its absence can result in ecological grief and social disintegration.

Keywords: Power Dynamics, Othering, Center, Counterculture, Eco-Grief.

Introduction

This research critically examines Pierre Boulle's *La Planète des Singes* (Planet of the Apes, 1964) through the lens of postcolonial theory. The novel presents an inversion of traditional power dynamics by portraying a civilization in which apes, rather than humans, occupy the position of dominance. This inversion parallels the notion of counterculture, wherein established power structures are challenged and redefined. Counterculture in this context reflects the political, social, and intellectual upheaval of the modern individual and underscores how shifts in power hierarchies redefine cultural norms. The dynamics of power in Boulle's narrative are closely linked to the concept of eco-grief, a term describing the emotional and psychological response

to environmental destruction. The novel suggests that humanity's status as the "other" is a consequence of its own actions—particularly its exploitation of the environment and ecosystem. This shift in power underscores how ecological destruction and sociopolitical structures intersect.

The study investigates how counterculture emerges as a consequence of colonial structures being challenged and reversed. The theoretical framework draws on Michel Foucault's (1995) concept of power, Edward Said's (1979) theory of othering, and Aldo Leopold's (1949) concept of eco-grief. Together, these theories offer a multidimensional approach to understanding power, alterity, and ecological consciousness in *Planet of the Apes*.

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This research emphasizes the significance of knowledge as a form of power capable of resisting cultural domination. It demonstrates that an informed and knowledgeable society is better equipped to counter hegemonic forces that threaten cultural and ecological stability. The study further explores how scientific and technological advancements influence power structures and contribute to the inversion of traditional hierarchies. Additionally, it highlights how both the ape and human worlds are complicit in ecological degradation, underscoring the urgent need for environmental harmony. By re-examining Boulle's novel through this critical framework, the research contributes to postcolonial and eco-critical literary discourse by revealing new dimensions of power, othering, and environmental ethics.

Literature Review

In order to situate the present research within the broader scholarly discourse and highlight its significance, it is essential to review existing literature that addresses the intersections of power dynamics, othering, alterity, and ecological grief in Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes* (1964). Previous scholars on Boulle's work have predominantly focused on the cinematic adaptations rather than the original novel, leaving substantial gaps in the critical engagement with the text itself. Furthermore, while studies have examined aspects of colonial discourse, inversion of power, and interspecies relationships, few have explored these concepts in conjunction with ecological consequences and the emergence of counterculture. This review surveys the most relevant contributions and identifies how the present research departs from previous investigations.

Blai Guarné's (2008) work, *On Monkeys and Japanese: Mimicry and Anastrophe in Orientalist Representation*, investigates the effects of Orientalism by examining paradoxical and inverted civilizations and the animalization strategies used to represent the Other. Through the analysis of Pierre Loti's writings and Boulle's fiction, Guarné highlights how apes, as a natural Other, adapt human

technology to surpass humans and subjugate them, thereby exposing the fragility of human dominance. The study underscores the Western tradition of portraying Japan and other non-Western entities as inverted or paradoxical civilizations, challenging notions of what is considered "Western" or "human." While Guarné's research provides valuable insight into inversion and mimicry, it does not address the ecological implications of these shifts in power. The present study diverges by examining how the imbalance of power between humans and apes extends beyond social and cultural domains, contributing to ecological disruption and the emergence of counterculture.

A similar focus on inversion is seen in the work of Junga Shin and Yong Ho Choi (2016), who interpret *Planet of the Apes* as a reversed world where apes are more powerful and intelligent than humans. Drawing on Juri Lotman's concept of "enantiomorphic pairings," they argue that cross-cultural communication arises from understanding the limitations of one's own language, leading to "commonality without common points." Through the interaction between Ulysse, a human, and Zira, a chimpanzee, the authors demonstrate how language exchange reshapes their senses communis. Although this study effectively illuminates the dynamics of cultural exchange and communication, its primary focus is on linguistic and semiotic processes. The current research departs from this by foregrounding the production of counterculture as a direct outcome of colonial power structures being questioned and inverted.

Christina Haupt's (2019) study, *Touching upon Boundaries: An Analysis of Interspecies Relationships in The Planet of the Apes Novel, Its Cinematic Adaptations and Remake*, explores the ape-human relationship in terms of the establishment and transgression of boundaries. By situating the texts within their historical and cultural contexts, Haupt examines how primatology and socio-political upheaval influence species representation. Her work analyzes intra- and interspecies hierarchies and the role of language in

perpetuating speciesism, before exploring how these boundaries are challenged, particularly through the relationship between Ulysse and Zira. While Haupt's research provides a comprehensive account of interspecies dynamics and boundary negotiation, it primarily emphasizes kinship and social structures. In contrast, the present study examines how Boulle's depiction of inverted hierarchies reveals deeper insights into power as a mechanism of control and its ecological ramifications.

Watson's (2021) analysis, *The Beast Within: Racial Representation and Reversals in the Planet of the Apes Reboot* (1968), focuses on the racial and political dimensions of the film adaptations of Boulle's novel. The study discusses how the franchise engages with themes of racial degradation, white supremacy, and Black radical resistance, interpreting the films through both political and theological lenses. While Watson's research is valuable in demonstrating how Boulle's allegory has been reinterpreted in cinematic contexts, it remains centered on the film versions and their racial subtexts. The present research distinguishes itself by concentrating exclusively on the original novel and investigating how its narrative interrogates alterity, power, and ecological imbalance.

Existing studies have also explored the broader theoretical concepts relevant to this research, including biopolitics, othering, and ecological grief. Godamunne (2011), in her study on biopolitics in science fiction films, examines how power over biological life is normalized and perpetuated through popular culture. By analyzing how resistance in such narratives is often limited to overthrowing oppressive regimes rather than challenging the biologization of politics itself, Godamunne reveals the subtle ways in which power operates. While her work provides a useful theoretical lens, it focuses on cinematic texts and the representation of power in film. The present study builds on this foundation by applying similar concerns to a literary text, investigating how power is exercised, inverted, and resisted within the world of Boulle's novel.

Postcolonial studies have extensively addressed the concept of "otherness." Jankulovska and Denkovska (2023) describe how subordinated groups are represented as inferior and in need of leadership from those deemed more civilized, thereby legitimizing hierarchical power structures. Said's (1978) notion of the Orient as the colonized "other" illuminates how colonial discourse constructs binaries such as Occident and Orient, with terms like hybridity, imitation, and ambivalence destabilizing colonial classifications. These insights are crucial for understanding how *Planet of the Apes* destabilizes similar binaries, portraying apes as the new "center" and humans as the "other." Parashar and Schutz (2021) further emphasize the lasting impact of colonial legacies on postcolonial states, tracing contemporary inequalities and conflicts to colonial power structures. Such analyses inform the current research's focus on how Boulle's narrative mirrors these dynamics in a fictional context, exploring how inversion perpetuates or transforms systems of domination.

The emotional and psychological consequences of environmental degradation have also gained attention in current research. Panu Pihkala (2020) discusses the concept of climate grief, or ecological grief, as a response to the profound losses caused by environmental change. People grieve not only the disappearance of species and ecosystems but also the erosion of identities, values, and ways of life. Pihkala identifies transitional grief, anticipatory grief, and eco-anxiety as key components of this phenomenon. Such insights expand the scope of this study by situating Boulle's narrative within an ecological framework, highlighting how shifts in power and exploitation of the environment provoke collective emotional responses and underscore the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems.

Although a range of studies address aspects of inversion, power, othering, and ecological change, most of them examine these themes in isolation or focus on cinematic interpretations rather than Boulle's original text. Furthermore, existing

scholarship rarely considers how these elements intersect within the same analytical framework or how they contribute to the emergence of counterculture and ecological grief. The present research aims to address these gaps by offering an integrated reading of *Planet of the Apes* (1964) that combines postcolonial theory, notions of otherness, the power-knowledge nexus, and ecological perspectives. By doing so, it not only enriches the understanding of Boulle's novel but also contributes to broader discussions on the dynamics of power, identity, and environmental change in postcolonial contexts.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in postcolonial theory. It relies on close reading and critical analysis of Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes* (1964) to uncover deeper thematic and ideological layers within the text. Through textual analysis, the study explores how power relations and alterity are constructed and inverted, and how these inversions contribute to ecological grief. The methodology also examines how knowledge functions as a tool of power and how its absence leads to oppression and environmental degradation.

The research engages with Michel Foucault's (1995) theory of power and knowledge, which posits that power is not a possession but a relational force that operates through accepted forms of knowledge, truth, and discourse. The apes in the novel embody this principle as they exercise power through scientific advancement and intellectual dominance, while humans—lacking knowledge—become objects of subjugation. The analysis investigates how these power dynamics between the “center” and the “other” contribute to the emergence of counterculture and ecological grief, disrupting social and environmental harmony.

The study offers interpretive insights into the ideological meanings embedded within Boulle's narrative, illustrating how the reversal of traditional power relations aligns with postcolonial discourse.

This approach supports the research questions and hypotheses, which aim to explore how power, knowledge, and othering intersect in the creation of counterculture and how these forces shape ecological outcomes.

1. Type of the Research

The present study adopts a qualitative research design and is conducted through the lens of postcolonial theory, using a close reading of Pierre Boulle's *The Planet of the Apes* (1964), supported by critical intuitions to uncover the deeper underpinnings of the text. It examines the novel's overtones and undertones while considering the author's perspective, focusing on how Boulle develops counterculture and inverts power dynamics in favor of ‘the other.’ Applying Foucault's framework of power/knowledge, the study highlights how the apes' technological and scientific knowledge grants them dominance, while humans, as the object, are subjugated. This research emphasizes the reversal of power relations between the center and the marginalized, exploring the emergence of counterculture, eco-grief, and the neglect of harmony. Through descriptive, analytical, and interpretative analysis, the study maps ideological meanings embedded in the narrative, providing insights into power, alterity, and postcolonial discourse.

2. Source of Data

The primary text for this research is Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes*, originally published in 1963 and translated into English by Xan Fielding in 1964. The first English translation serves as the textual sample for analysis. The novel's depiction of power, knowledge, and othering provides the foundation for exploring postcolonial concepts within a science fiction context.

A qualitative research design underpins the study, focusing on close textual reading to examine how power operates between the “center” and the “other.” The analysis foregrounds how alterity is

constructed and how power is exerted over groups deemed different from or outside the dominant order.

Data Analysis

The theoretical foundation of this study is Michel Foucault's power/knowledge nexus as articulated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995). Foucault argues that power is not simply possessed by dominant groups but is enacted through strategies, institutions, and discourses that discipline and regulate society. As he states,

"Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege,' acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated" (Foucault, 1995, p. 26).

Power thus produces, shapes, and limits knowledge, while knowledge simultaneously legitimizes and extends power. This Foucauldian perspective is complemented by Edward Said's (1979) seminal work *Orientalism*, which illustrates how colonial power relies on knowledge production to construct and dominate the "other." Said contends that the Orient was portrayed as backward and uncivilized to justify Western domination and to reinforce the West as the "center." He notes, "The 'other' is everything that lies outside the domain of the Occident's self" (Said, 1979, p. 1). This imbalance of power has profound ecological consequences, as exploitation of both people and the environment often accompanies imperial dominance.

Aldo Leopold's (1949) concept of eco-grief, introduced in *A Sand County Almanac*, extends this analysis to environmental ethics. Leopold laments the consequences of ecological destruction, writing, "For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun" (p. 110). The degradation of ecosystems—whether through colonial exploitation or environmental neglect—produces

grief that reflects the breakdown of harmony between humans and the natural world.

In *Planet of the Apes*, these theoretical perspectives converge. Humans, once colonizers, find themselves colonized by a more powerful species, the apes. This inversion challenges the notion that othering always arises from foreign dominance; rather, it can occur under reversed circumstances. Knowledge and authority elevate the apes, enabling them to exploit humans just as humans once exploited others. This exploitation contributes to environmental collapse and ecological grief, demonstrating how power relations shape both social hierarchies and ecological outcomes. The novel ultimately critiques the cyclical nature of power and exploitation, revealing how both humans and apes perpetuate systems of dominance that devastate the environment.

The central objectives of this research are thus twofold: to examine the role of eco-grief in the inversion of power dynamics and to explore how alterity and its reversal function within Boulle's science fiction discourse. These questions guide the study's exploration of counterculture and its broader implications for postcolonial and environmental thought.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies Michel Foucault's (1995) concept of power as its primary theoretical framework, supplemented by Edward Said's (1979) theory of othering and Aldo Leopold's (1949) concept of eco-grief. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional perspective for examining how power, knowledge, and alterity function within Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes* (1964), and how their interaction leads to the formation of counterculture and the emergence of ecological grief.

Foucault's conception of power departs from traditional notions that view power as something possessed by specific groups or institutions. Instead, he argues that power is relational, strategic, and exercised rather than owned. It is dispersed

throughout society and is closely intertwined with knowledge. As Foucault (1995) states,

“Power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27).

This reciprocal relationship means that knowledge both enables and is shaped by power, creating systems of truth that sustain social hierarchies. Building on this Foucauldian foundation, Edward Said’s (1979) *Orientalism* demonstrates how power operates through knowledge production to construct and control the “other.” Colonial discourse, according to Said, portrayed the Orient as inferior, static, and uncivilized to legitimize Western dominance. “The ‘other’ is everything that lies outside the domain of the Occident’s self” (Said, 1979, p. 1). The concept of alterity is therefore central to colonial power structures, reinforcing hierarchies that privilege the colonizer and marginalize the colonized. This framework is essential for understanding how power and identity are constructed and contested in *Planet of the Apes*, where humans—once the dominant species—become the subjugated “other.”

Aldo Leopold’s (1949) notion of eco-grief extends these postcolonial insights into the environmental realm. Eco-grief refers to the emotional and psychological suffering caused by environmental degradation and the disruption of natural systems. Leopold emphasizes the ethical responsibility of humans toward the land, arguing, “For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun” (p. 110). Environmental destruction is thus both a consequence and a reflection of imbalanced power relations.

The convergence of these theories provides a powerful lens for analyzing Boulle’s novel. In *Planet of the Apes*, the apes rise to power through superior knowledge and technological advancement, reversing the traditional hierarchy and relegating humans to the status of the “other.” This inversion challenges colonial binaries of center and periphery,

demonstrating how power and othering are not static but mutable and context-dependent. Moreover, the ecological devastation and grief that accompany this reversal highlight how systems of domination extend beyond human relationships to encompass the natural world itself.

By integrating Foucault’s power/knowledge nexus, Said’s concept of alterity, and Leopold’s eco-critical perspective, this study examines how power structures evolve, how identities are constructed and reversed, and how ecological consequences emerge from these dynamics. This interdisciplinary framework illuminates the complex interplay between colonialism, knowledge, identity, and the environment in Boulle’s narrative.

Discussion

This study offers an analysis of postcolonial theory through the framework of power and alterity, examining Pierre Boulle’s *Planet of the Apes* (1964) while also exploring how the inversion of human-ape hierarchies contributes to ecological grief and the disruption of environmental and social harmony.

Knowledge as the Source of Power and the Creation of Counterculture

The inversion of power dynamics depicted in Pierre Boulle’s *Planet of the Apes* (1964) closely aligns with the concept of counterculture, where established power structures are overturned, and new cultural orders emerge. Roszak (1969) defines counterculture as the set of values and practices of groups that stand in opposition to dominant culture. Similarly, Collins *COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (1987) describes it as “a group in society whose values, ideas, and ways of behaving are completely different from those of the rest of society.” This reversal of cultural and power hierarchies occurs when historically marginalized groups gain the knowledge and agency necessary to challenge dominant power systems.

In *Planet of the Apes*, the apes establish their own structured and intellectual civilization, supplanting the humans who once held power. The

planet Soror mirrors Earth in many ways, but with a significant reversal: humans are treated as subhuman animals, while apes—orangutans, gorillas, and chimpanzees—occupy positions of intelligence, governance, and cultural authority. According to Ulysse, one of the main characters, the apes have developed a cultured and most civilized society:

“The unification of the planet, the absence of war and military expenditures—there is no army, only a police force—factors that would foster rapid progress in every realm of the simian world” (Boulle, 1964, p. 98).

This new order reflects Michel Foucault’s (1995) assertion that knowledge is inseparable from power. He writes, “Power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge” (p. 27). The apes’ dominance is not rooted merely in physical strength but in their superior control of knowledge, science, and technology. Their intellectual authority legitimizes their rule and repositions them as the “center,” relegating humans to the status of the “other.” According to the colonial perspective, apes have ruled over humans through power by acquiring knowledge and technology because these are the two prerequisites that are needed to rule over and then to exploit others. Historically, the invaders of a land usually became successful in the establishment of colonies, and thus, they started to rule. However, in the present case, the invaders get caught, and instead of establishing their colonies, they end up in prison, which is an unprecedented turn of events. Due to this inversion of power relations between the ape and human world, a clash is built.

Foucault (1980) further emphasizes that “Power is firmly indicated in knowledge as a collection of relationships; knowledge and power are mutually exclusive.” In this light, the apes’ systematic acquisition and application of knowledge—manifested through social

organization, scientific progress, and political structure—constitute the foundation of their power. Said (1979) similarly argues that knowledge production was central to the West’s colonial project, as Orientalist discourse framed the East as inferior to justify domination. “Knowledge of the Orient,” he writes, “was not innocent or objective; it was deeply implicated in the power structures that created and maintained colonial authority” (Said, 1979, p. 32). The apes’ portrayal of humans as primitive and irrational echoes this colonial practice of constructing the “other” to validate one’s own superiority. The reversal of traditional hierarchies is underscored by Boulle’s choice of apes as the dominant species.

One may question why Pierre Boulle (1964) picked up the ape kingdom instead of any other animal kingdom. So, if we concentrate, we are reminded of what Darwin has said in his book *The Descent of Man* (1871) that “As man possesses the same senses as the lower animals, his fundamental intuitions must be the same.” (p.36) According to his theory, all complex living forms originated from simpler ones i.e. all life is related through a variety of genetic mutations. As Darwin (1871) argued, humans share fundamental instincts and evolutionary origins with other primates. By positioning apes as the intellectual and cultural center, Boulle destabilizes anthropocentric assumptions and exposes the contingency of human dominance. The character Zira reinforces this point: “Almost all the great discoveries... have been made by chimpanzees” (Boulle, 1964, p. 80). This inversion highlights how knowledge—not inherent superiority—determines power relations. Foucault (1995) further notes that power is meaningful only when exercised:

“Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions - an effect that is manifested and sometimes

extended by the position of those who are dominated.” (p. 26)

The strategic impact of power is exercised and at times extended beyond the apparent boundaries of one's position. The apes exemplify this principle by exercising power through experimentation, surveillance, and control over humans. Ulysse laments, “I was caught between the beaters and the guns” (Boulle, 1964, p. 37), illustrating how humans—once dominant—are now subjected to dehumanizing practices reminiscent of colonial exploitation. The apes conduct experiments on humans, mirroring the ways humans historically exploited animals and colonized peoples in the name of science and progress. A large part of the simian community was involved in biological research. “I believe this is a prosperous business, for man fetches a high price” (Boulle, 1964, p.96). This inversion of roles reveals what Foucault (1995) describes as the relational nature of power:

“Power-knowledge relations are to be analyzed... not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but... on the modalities of knowledge” (p. 28).

Knowledge allows those in power to define, categorize, and control the “other,” while simultaneously shaping the conditions of their subjugation. The apes' knowledge enables them to dominate humans biologically, socially, and intellectually, thereby reversing historical hierarchies and creating a new countercultural order.

This new order is not free of violence or oppression. Humans are treated as specimens and commodities, stripped of agency and identity. Ulysse observes humans “twisted in ridiculous postures, lay bleeding on the ground” (Boulle, 1964, p. 38), and describes their capture by “merciless stalkers” (p. 80). These scenes parallel historical colonial violence, where the colonized were objectified and exploited for scientific, economic, and political

purposes. In Boulle's narrative, the apes fail to recognize this limit, repeating the very systems of domination once imposed upon them.

The result is a profound shift in cultural identity and social order. The “self,” once associated with humans, is now embodied by the apes, while humans become the alien “other.” This reflects Roberts' (2007) definition of alterity as “the consciousness of self as unique from others” (p.5). The arbitrary boundaries between “civilized” and “savage,” “rational” and “irrational,” once drawn by humans, are now redrawn by the apes. Said (1979) argues that such binaries are foundational to colonial discourse, as they justify domination by portraying the colonized as inherently inferior. In Planet of the Apes, this binary is reversed, revealing the instability of such constructs and exposing the mechanisms by which power sustains itself.

The ‘Self’ as Familiar and the ‘Other’ as Strange

One of the core concerns of postcolonial theory is the dynamic between the “self” and the “other,” which Edward Said's landmark book Orientalism (1979) identifies as central to colonial discourse. The prominence given to the ‘self’ and the violent, totalizing stance adopted towards the ‘other’ were typical of the alteric interaction between the self and the other. “Alterity is simply the consciousness of self as unique from others” (Roberts, 2007, 5). The “self,” representing the Occident, defines itself in opposition to the “other,” often portraying the latter as inferior, uncivilized, and static. Said (1979) argues that “the ‘other’ is everything that lies outside the domain of the Occident's self” (p. 1), emphasizing that such binaries are constructed to justify domination and control. This process of othering is not neutral but deeply embedded in systems of power, as it legitimizes the colonial project and sustains hierarchies.

In Said's analysis, the West reduces these eastern societies to being unchanging and underdeveloped, creating a false impression of Oriental culture that can be researched, portrayed, and replicated for the sake of imperial authority. The

notion that Western society is superior, advanced, logical, and flexible is implicit in this deception. This enables the imagination of the West to perceive Eastern societies and individuals as a danger to Western civilization. The core theme of post-colonialism is an examination of the relationship between the self and the other. The portrayal of the self, or the Occident, and the other, or the Orient, in which the self or the center is privileged and has the upper hand to define and reconstruct the weak other, is associated with Orientalism.

In *Planet of the Apes* (1964), Boulle dramatizes this colonial dynamic through a striking inversion: apes become the colonial masters — the “self” — while humans are reduced to the exploited “other.” In the traditional anthropocentric worldview, humans occupy the center of power, ruling over the natural world. Boulle subverts this hierarchy by depicting humans as “inhabitants resembling us in every way from the physical point of view but who appeared to be completely devoid of the power of reason” (p. 27). These humans are stripped of language, reason, and social order — traits once considered markers of superiority — and are instead treated as primitive and subhuman.

The hostility between the two species further reinforces this constructed binary. When Nova, one of the human-like creatures, kills a chimpanzee pet, the act symbolizes the entrenched mistrust and antagonism between colonizer and colonized. The humans live in “nest-like” structures (p. 31), demonstrating their regression to a pre-civilized state. This dehumanization mirrors colonial narratives that depicted colonized peoples as barbaric, irrational, and childlike — a portrayal designed to justify their subjugation.

Said (2004) emphasizes that “humanism is the only — I would go so far as saying the final — resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history” (p. 11). In the novel, however, humans are denied this humanism, subjected to violence and ridicule by their simian oppressors. Ulysse recounts how “men, men like me, men and women whose naked,

punctured bodies, twisted in ridiculous postures, lay bleeding on the ground” (Boulle, 1964, p. 38). The gorillas, described as “meat eaters” (p. 80), embody colonial brutality, hunting humans for sport and experimentation.

Said (1997) warns, “You cannot continue to victimize someone else just because you yourself were a victim once; there has to be a limit.” The apes, once subjugated by humans, now replicate the same systems of domination and exploitation. “Taking a little pair of scissors out of her bag, leaned over her body, cut off a lick of brown hair, curled it around her finger” (Boulle, 1964, p.44). The gorillas have demonstrated their joy and passed “sarcastic remarks” over impoverished humans. (p.43) In order to honor future simian historians, these bloodthirsty colonial masters captured the grisly deaths of humans. Such acts recall colonial spectacles where the suffering of the colonized was documented as proof of imperial superiority.

This relationship between colonizer and colonized is fundamentally a relationship of power. Said (1979) notes that it is “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (p. 5). Michel Foucault (1978) expands on the idea that ‘othering’ has a close relationship between knowledge and power. When we compare ourselves to another group, we make ourselves appear stronger or superior by highlighting our perceptions of their perceived flaws. It suggests a hierarchy and keeps the balance of power in place. As it is stated that:

“Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... Power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (p. 93).

In Boulle’s world, power pervades every level of simian society — from scientific research to political governance — shaping not only social hierarchies but also the very definitions of humanity

and animality. The idea of the simians as masters developing a master/slave relationship with the humans is in close proximity with what Darwin once speculated: “man is descended from some ape-like creatures” (1871, p. 129). The apes perceive themselves as “rational creatures” (Boulle, 1964, p. 65) and label humans as bestial and inferior. They claim evolutionary superiority, mocking humans’ “short, clumsy fingers” (p. 81) and celebrating their own “broad visualization” and capacity for wisdom. “Achievement followed, and it is thus we have raised ourselves to the level of wisdom” (p. 82). This discourse of superiority legitimizes their dominance and parallels colonial ideologies that cast the colonized as biologically and intellectually deficient.

The novel also explores the erasure of identity — a hallmark of colonial domination. Professor Antelle, once a wealthy and knowledgeable leader of the expedition, becomes a “luckless scientist” (Boulle, 1964, p. 45) living like a captive, stripped of individuality and purpose. “Civilized man fallen again in a state of savage” (Said, 1979, 171). All of them look alike with no sense of individuality, wearing “the mask of madness” (p.135). In contrast, in the fictional world, ape scientists were referred to as “learned scientists” (p.105). Ulysse, too, experiences a crisis of identity, forced to conform to the apes’ cultural norms and denigrating his own humanity by referring to the apes as “Noble Gorillas,” “Learned Orangutans,” and “Wise Chimpanzees” (p. 109). Such erasure reflects what Said (1979) describes as the colonizer’s ability to “dehumanize and label [the colonized] as others, barbarians, or savages” (p. 207).

Ultimately, the binary opposition of “us” versus “them” underpins the dynamics of power and othering. The dominant group — here, the apes — imposes its categories and values on the subordinate group, redefining humanity itself. This inversion demonstrates that the constructs of “self” and “other” are not fixed but contingent, shaped by whoever wields power.

Emotional Pain and Ecological Grief Caused by Environmental Loss

Aldo Leopold (1949) coined the term eco-grief to describe the emotional suffering caused by ecological degradation. He asserts that “conservation is a state of harmony between men and land” (p. 207) and warns that environmental destruction disrupts this balance, leading to profound psychological and cultural consequences. Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) further define ecological grief as “the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change” (p. 275). This grief is both an emotional and ethical response to the disruption of the natural world.

Planet of The Apes (1964) illustrates the culmination of counterculture due to the flip in dynamics of power between humans and apes which results in the exploitation of, the other, humans existing on the Soror planet: “A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for health of the land” (Leopold, 1949, 221). The humans’ fall from dominance is linked to their prior exploitation of nature, which degraded ecosystems and destabilized the planet’s balance. Their subsequent status as the “other” symbolizes the repercussions of this exploitation. Frequent hunting scenes, with “bleeding bodies scattered all over the forest ground” (Boulle, 1964, p. 44), evoke a landscape transformed into a “death bed,” illustrating the ecological and emotional costs of violence and domination.

The novel presents the inverted form of the idea that men in the human world are the center of the universe, and everything else is the subjugated other. This lack of empathy for other species and ecosystems, as well as a feeling of alienation from the natural world, describes the emotional and psychological pain brought on by environmental deterioration, biodiversity loss, or existential danger. To this lack of empathy posed by catastrophic environmental events, Leopold suggests: “We can be

ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love or otherwise have faith in” (Leopold, 1949, 214). Humanities play a crucial role in understanding and offering a solution to environmental issues if they offer constructive knowledge and healthy criticism. (Paraphrased from Emmett & Nye, 2017)

Leopold (1949) notes, “We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect” (p. viii). This shift in perspective is absent in both the human and ape societies depicted in the novel. Both groups exploit their environment and subjugate the “other,” demonstrating how power — when divorced from ethical responsibility — leads to ecological devastation. Said (2003) similarly critiques imperial powers for cloaking exploitation in noble rhetoric: “Every empire... tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate” (p. xii). Even in the discourse when the roles are reversed, the goal is not achieved. Since everyone has rights, the more powerful group should be in charge of all the other groups in a functioning society.

Knowledge of science and technology is the two basic tools of power. Foucault reminds us that power is not inherently negative; it also has the potential to be positive.

“We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.” (Foucault, 1995, 194).

In an ethical framework, power should protect both human and environmental rights. Foucault is one of the few authors to acknowledge that power

may also have some constructive, useful, and positive character rather than being the instrument of oppression and coercion, forcing people to submit to the will of the powerful. (Paraphrased from Gaventa, 2003) However, in Boulle’s narrative, power is repeatedly misused — by humans in the historical past and by apes in the present — to dominate rather than to nurture. As a result, ecosystems suffer, and ecological grief becomes pervasive.

The novel discusses actual ecological losses that cause species, ecosystems, and landscapes to physically vanish, degrade, or perish, loss of environmental expertise causing destruction of identity, communities, and cultures that are directly reliant on the environment, and anticipated future losses. As mentioned by Ulysse, the condition of the forest after the attack of gorillas, “cleared space in the forest was littered with human bodies” (Boulle, 1964, p.38). The apes’ fear of human resurgence underscores the cyclical nature of power and its ecological consequences. “They are frightened you might find a new race on this planet. Unusual nervousness has been reported among the ones with whom you are dealing” (Boulle, 1964, p. 159). Their attempts to suppress human individuality — even as humans begin to produce “monosyllabic sounds” (p. 120) — reveal an anxiety about losing dominance. This fear perpetuates cycles of exploitation and ecological destruction, demonstrating that power alone, without ethical direction, cannot create balance.

Boulle concludes that power is cyclical and transient. Ulysse observes that “a human era had preceded the simian age on the planet Soror” (Boulle, 1964, p. 135), suggesting that no hierarchy is permanent. As power shifts, so too does the capacity for domination and ecological harm. The novel warns that unless power is reimagined as a tool for harmony rather than control, future societies — whether human, simian, or otherwise — will repeat the same destructive patterns. Thus, the turn of events is unpredictable. However, this change is not irreversible. Massive shifts can be triggered by

natural revolutions. The future of possibilities remains intact.

Conclusion

The aim of this research is to analyze the concepts of power dynamics and alterity within a postcolonial framework in Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes* (1964) and to examine how the reversal of power relations between the "center" and the "other" leads to the emergence of counterculture and ecological disruption. The study focuses exclusively on this novel and integrates two key concepts — power structures and othering — explored through the postcolonial philosophies of Michel Foucault and Edward Said. Additionally, Aldo Leopold's (1949) notion of eco-grief provides an essential ecological dimension to the analysis.

This qualitative study explores the text for its depiction of role reversal between humans and apes and investigates the broader repercussions of shifting power dynamics and the interplay between power and knowledge. It concludes that power and knowledge are deeply interconnected phenomena, often utilized by totalitarian regimes to maintain political and social control. While Pierre Boulle uses the language of "control" and "dominance," Foucault argues that terms such as "discipline" and "surveillance" more accurately capture the mechanisms through which power operates. Such regimes may construct outwardly stable societies that are hollow within, where echoes of grief and resistance persist beneath the surface.

The study demonstrates that neither the humans' nor the apes' world can satisfy the primary motives of power. In this perspective, one may conclude that ecological grief is an important emergent area for psychological and geographical inquiry that has the potential to shed light on personal and collective responses to ecological systems. Here, the question "What if" (Bradbury, 2013) appears. What would happen if a greater force is able to oust the apes and begins to exploit them for their own ends? Therefore, inversion of power dynamics has greater consequences. Approaching Boulle's work, it

is pretty apparent that it highlights how power can be a lethal weapon in the hands of a minority group, forcing the majority into outright subjugation. Thus, inequality in the distribution of rights emerges as a fundamental cause of societal collapse. Ultimately, the most enduring species is not the one that imposes hegemony but the one that wields power responsibly to advance collective well-being.

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