

MaryEllen Higgins (ed.) (2012), *Hollywood's Africa after 1994*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, ISBN 9780821420157, 288 pp.

Since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, human-rights violations in Africa have become part of public consciousness. Human rights activists soon discovered an opportunity to use film as a medium to disseminate the violations globally. A few years later, Hollywood celebrities such as Angelina Jolie contributed to human rights questions and the first Hollywood films about the topic were released. It is these latter films that the 15 essays in the present volume primarily deal with. The most important issue for all of these essays is formulated in MaryEllen Higgins' introduction: "how recent cinematic depictions of Africa adapt colonial fictions in order to subvert them, or whether they serve, ultimately, to reproduce colonial ideologies" (2-3).

The first essay, by Harry Garuba and Natasha Himmelman, proposes an interesting approach to the reading of representations of Africa, which is based on opposition of the cited and the uncited. The cited relates to the popular "archive" (16) of worldwide circulating images about Africa. The uncited is the "blank, uninscribed space that is still outside of discursive representation" (17). How these elements come into play is exemplified in Kevin MacDonald's film *The Last King of Scotland* (2006). An example of a blank space can be seen in the fact that Idi Amin, played by Forest Whitaker, does no harm to his European personal physician, Nicholas Garrigan, played by James McAvoy, although Amin knows that the young Scotsman slept with one of his wives. Only when Amin is informed that Garrigan wants to poison him does he order Garrigan's torture. In this case, the uncited is an element of characterization, and we could ask whether it is possible to interpret this via the use of character analysis. *The Last King of Scotland* makes use of an archive of images of Africa; however, it also makes use of an archive of narrations. It is most important for *The Last King of Scotland* that Uganda and its political protagonist are shown from an Englishman's perspective. This perspective is also central to Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, to which many essays in this volume refer. In their article "The Troubled Terrain of Human Rights Films", Margaret R. Higonnet and Ethel R. Higonnet emphasize that "different films rely on white Western men as the protagonists who mediate the viewers' experiences of events" (42). Even documentary films such as *The Devil Came on Horseback* (2007) make use of this narrative strategy. By analysing feature films, as well as documentaries, in terms of aesthetic and narrative devices, Higonnet and

Higonnet's article achieves one of the most important perspectives on the topic in the present volume.

One of the few films that feature an African hero is *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). The protagonist, Paul, played by the Afro-American actor Don Cheadle, is a Hutu who becomes involved in the conflict between the ethnic group he belongs to and the Tutsis in a complex way. However, with a plot reminiscent of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, the film uses history for the purpose of emotionalizing the viewer as intensely as possible. Based on real events, Paul helps more than 1,200 refugees, Tutsis and others, by hiding them in the Hôtel des Mille Collines, of which he is the manager. In her article about the film, Joyce B. Ashuntantang comes to the conclusion that *Hotel Rwanda* "manipulates the cinema medium to transform the image of the genocide [in] to a Hollywood product that creates the illusion that this medium can successfully interpret the genocide to the world" (66).

To speak of a manipulation of the cinema medium means to forget that, from its beginning, cinema has manipulated reality to entertain; indeed, Hollywood simply became the most powerful industry through which to achieve this goal. *Hotel Rwanda* is highly entertaining and suspenseful. Seen in this light, the film follows certain genre rules (the political thriller), which is a crucial point for many of the articles in the volume. In her essay about *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Tears of the Sun* (2003), MaryEllen Higgins highlights how Ridley Scott's Somalian drama *Black Hawk Down* makes use of elements of the western. She is absolutely right; however, *Black Hawk Down* is an example of an American form of the war film, or combat film, which is strongly connected to the western. Seen in this light, the important point is not only that "one fruitful interpretation of Hollywood's cowboy military humanitarians would recognize the tension between fantasy and authenticity, between myth-making à la Hollywood westerns and the insistence that the myth is authentic history" (81) – we also have to look at the concrete relations between the western, the modern wars in the twentieth century, and the new wars (Herfried Münkler) under which the African civil wars are subsumed.

Another example in relation to the importance of the genre context is Kimberly Nichele Brown's article about *District 9*. This highly acclaimed independent science fiction film "employs aliens as allegorical referents in order to flesh out contemporary problems of race and globalization in South Africa" (197). One of the many stimulating arguments in the text that make the critical success of the movie dubious is the representation of the other: Brown Wikus' (the protagonist's) "transformation follows the themes of malaise and cultural dissonance present in

the film. Becoming the other is a process of disorientation rather than enlightenment” (202). Again, we have a white protagonist who, in this case, becomes the other through a transformation. In addition, we once more see a genre trope, as the transformation into an other is crucial for the science fiction and fantasy genre.

Overall, Higgins’ book highlights a wide range of approaches to an interesting field of research. The often-mentioned influence of *Heart of Darkness* as an explicit reference for the films, and as a context for interpretation, is challenging, but could be complemented by further contexts. If we read *Heart of Darkness* as a journey, in light of what it is, we can consider what the hero’s journey means in Hollywood storytelling. In this respect, many objects of investigation can be further explored by using additional approaches and knowledge from narratology, film studies, and genre studies.

■ Thomas Klein