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My war, your war: understanding conflict in Africa and the Middle East through fiction film: Hotel Rwanda and The Kingdom

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FINAL THOUGHTS

> Violence in drama and news demonstrates power. It portrays victims as well as victimisers. It intimidates more than it incites. It paralyses more than it incites. It defines majority might and minority risk. It shows one's place in the 'pecking order' that runs society. Media violence is but the tip of the iceberg of a massive underlying connection to media's role as universal storyteller and an industry dependent on global markets[1].
>
> Nancy Snow

Through this research, it is evident that the way communities and people are presented within the mass media (from strictly factual to fiction) definitely impacts the general social perception. Firstly, with reference to Snow's comment above, all representations of violence or conflict reveal hierarchical powers of victims as opposed to victimisers, oppressors in contrast to the oppressed. This type of story-telling has prevailed from Aristotle and Shakespeare's tragedies right through to the modern day. It is a simple formula which allows the reader to understand better the complex social and political points of view expressed especially when the work does not relate to the reader's own culture or society.

Unfortunately this stance limits one's perception of events that happen in other cultures and leads to stereotypes, especially when they refer to conflict. One has to agree with Snow because through the discussion of this thesis, it becomes evident that when the media represents violence/conflict, it simplifies the events in order for an audience to understand it more easily. As a result, the simplified narrative "paralyses" the actual

[1] Snow, N. 2001. "Social Implications of Media Globalisation" in Kamalipour, Y, R & Rampal, K, R (eds.) *Media, Sex, Violence, and Drugs in the Global Village*. USA: Rowman and Littlefield, pg 24.

events whilst re-instating the "majority might" of the Developed states as opposed to "minority risk" of the Developing states. The fiction film that is based on actual events claims a certain validity, but in actual fact, it is a very subjective interpretation which reinforces culturally specific readings and interpretations.

This chapter seeks to outline the central premise of the overall argument and draw on final comments of the ideas expressed. In order to recognise how we understand conflict through the fiction film, it was necessary to examine the global environment in terms of economic structure and political agendas. This was achieved by examining firstly, the concept of globalisation and its relevance to film.

GLOBALISATION

Whether the notion of 'globalisation' started in the 15th Century as according to Robertson when nation states began to establish themselves in Europe whilst Vasco Da Gama, Christopher Columbus, Barthalamew Diaz were travelling to new undiscovered continents or whether it is a Modernist (Giddens)[2] or postmodernist (Harvey)[3] phenomena, the fact remains, globalisation has had a huge impact on our lives. In some cases this impact has been very positive, in others it has steered more towards the negative.

One feels the effects of globalisation on numerous levels, for example, one of the more positive outcomes involves the world becoming a smaller place because one has greater

[2] Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Polity.
[3] Harvey, D. 1989. *The Condition of Post-Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford Blackwell.

access to information of events happening in remote areas. The other, more negative extreme of the equation shows globalisation actually dividing societies on an economic level whilst still dominating the Emerging or Periphery states. This has had a negative impact not only in terms of profit, but more importantly, globalisation has effected the representation of communities from the Emerging or Periphery states.

The mass media's representation of Africa or Asia is quite different to Europe or the USA. The message endorses a clear distinction between the Developed as opposed to the Developing States. This is evident across different media, including news and film. As the number of news channels has increased, so has the need to cover the 24 hour time slots. Networks have achieved this by increasing their entertainment and fiction elements. The result is the constant merging of fact with fiction which encourages the audience to associate the two as complements rather than two complete different entities. This merging of fact and fiction is a common element in both *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom*.

Both case studies relate to events that have occurred in the 'real' historical world. *Hotel Rwanda* focuses on the Rwandan genocide whereas *The Kingdom* indirectly relates to terrorist attacks against American citizens but more importantly through this referent, the film comments on the Middle East crisis. One is therefore, forced to examine these events in terms of how news culture has broadcast these events, because the general political perspectives that were initially broadcast through the mass media emulates through the two films.

One can understand how the media (including film) portrays events through the five filters that form part of the Propaganda Model as introduced by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman[4]. Although their argument relates specifically to news media, the filters are relevant to film study because they demonstrate to what extent information remains superficial because it has passed through a filtration system. In addition, the information remains a commodity because it is clearly packaged and styled for its audience. Both of these positions relate to Baudrillard's[5] concept of mass communication. He writes

> With everyone glued at home, Television plays out fully its role of social control by collective stupefication … it affixes populations all the better for deceiving them, as with a bad detective novel which we cannot believe could be so pointless.

Baudrillard's comment refers specifically to television, but film that is based on real events works along the same parameters, spawning the same readings. The filters demonstrate to what degree ownership, advertising, source material, ideological assumptions and negative responses influence the way the two films in particular depict certain groups. The representation of Africans and Arabs in both *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* clearly play into ideological assumptions regarding the Periphery. In order for both films to be accepted ideologically and 'believed' by their audience, both films depict the central protagonists, two black men Paul Rusesabagina and Agent Fleury, as having very Western characteristics through their clothing, speech and general attitude. This allows the audience to align themselves with the central characters despite their demographic falling out of the usual 'white male type' hero that usually emerges out of

[4] Chomsky, N & Herman, E, S. 1994. *Manufacturing Consent*. London: Vintage.
[5] Poster, M (ed.) 2001. *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*. UK: Stanford University Press, pg 249.

the Hollywood system. Within each narrative, both characters are determined and emotionally invested in resolving the problems in their lives. These problems bear such a strong resemblance to the 'real' world that the viewer assumes the message of the film to be considerably accurate. The fiction narrative becomes a very complex 'referent' when it assumes the reading that the events portrayed within its framework mimic the actual, historical events.

FICTION NARRATIVE

Since early cinema, films that followed a specific formula seemed to perform better at the box office. The initial "Institutional modes of representation" as developed by Noël Burch[6] evolved into the Classical Hollywood formula/narrative. The narrative which is linear in construction and evolves around the principle of cause-effect, allows for simple characterisation that borders on stereotypes. The heroes are magnificently brave and the villains torturously wicked with each development in the film moving towards closure or resolution. The protagonist and villain in each film exude the necessary qualities which are stereotypical of each character type. The two central protagonists, Paul Rusesabagina and Agent Fleury are witty and skilful whereas the two villains, George Rutaganda and Abu Hamza are devious and cunning. Good overcomes evil and a new equilibrium is restored in the world. The Hutus from the *Milles Collines* find safe passage out of Rwanda in *Hotel Rwanda* and the terrorists who attacked the American compound are brought to justice in *The Kingdom*. For the moment, the world is 'safe' again.

[6] Burch, N. 1990. *Life to those Shadows (translation by Ben Brewster)*. USA: California Press.

Each film communicates through the principles outlined by the Hollywood formula and are structured around the codes and conventions which characterise their genres, namely, the War Drama, which exposes the horror of armed conflict and the Detective, Action Drama, which stems from the characteristics of the Classical Western. Chapter 1 highlighted to what extent ideologies and economic factors influence messages so that their audience will acknowledge them and be absorbed into the readings of the text. This argument is also true for genre theory. Graeme Turner[7] defines 'genre' as "a system", within which an audience can establish what type of narrative they are viewing and what kind of resolutions they can expect. According to this description, one can argue that the genre dictates the narrative and the outcomes thereof to some extent. Questions arise as to the authenticity of fiction representations that base themselves on actual events because the fiction narrative itself is so bound by the codes and conventions dictated by its genre. An audience will watch a specific type of film, with a clear expectation of the type of narrative they can expect. The 'real' events have to fit within this expected narrative framework and once this occurs, one is forced to question the degree of accuracy.

Narrative theory itself has undergone intense debate starting with the Structuralists, lead by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure[8]. In his writings, de Saussure[9] identifies that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, and that one understands and associates the correct signified to a specific signifier through the cultural convention

[7] Turner, G. 1998. *Film as Social Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, pg 37.
[8] Hayward, S. 1996. *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, pg 308.
[9] Ibid

of language. Roland Barthes[10] re-visits the Structuralist study of the sign in the late 1950s and relates it to popular culture. Here one sees how texts produce meaning through procedures that are historically and culturally specific, and secondly, that these procedures and structures are ideologically structured to promote myths[11]. Each film communicates a mythical message as highlighted by Barthes' second order of signification. When a narrative (x-axis) presents these myths, they play into the general understanding and perception of each conflict and move away from the historical (y-axis) and magnify towards myth (z-axis). *Hotel Rwanda* draws on the myths of Africa as the corrupt and primitive continent, and *The Kingdom* represents Saudi Arabia as a place, riddled with underground terrorist cells. Therefore, the image and the dialogue work in relation to one another in order to produce meaning.

Christian Metz[12] examined the relationship of the cinematic sign (image) to the linguistic sign (language). Metz also utilizes de Saussure's linguistic concepts of diegesis, paradigm and syntagm, and relates them to film narrative where the arbitrary units (paradigms), such as genre, credits, scenes and acts fit into a cohesive, syntagmatic narrative (syntagm). For example, the codes and conventions of the genre and the characteristic of the Hollywood formula are part of the paradigmatic, y-axis. When these are combined to form a story, one understands or interprets them along the syntagmatic, x-axis. An audience will not analyse the film according to genre or narrative principles but in terms of how the genre or narrative principles fit within the actual narrative or

[10] Lapsley, R & Westlake, M. 1988. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pg 130.
[11] Ibid
[12] Dudley Andrew, J. 1976. *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*. Oxford, London, Glasgow: Oxford University Press, pg 170-172.

story. The Structuralists sought the meaning of a text primarily through the relationship of codes within the text itself. Meaning is thus created where the conventions of the paradigms (categories) intersects with its position within the syntagm (narrative). One would then analyse the images and dialogue (syntagmatic, narrative axis) of *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* in relation to their function within the narrative and not according to the greater social and political influences. This type of confined analysis that falls under Structuralism does not cater for the greater political and social ideologies which emerge with globalisation and the transnational influences of the current social and political environment. One can only perceive a true interpretation of both films by analysing them according to their political and social ideologies, a position that Structuralism does not accommodate.

Post-Structuralists confronted the fissures of Structuralism and introduced the concept that meaning is created through the relationship between the text, author and spectator and not only sourced through the text on its own. This perspective becomes very relevant when analysing *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* because they both promote particular readings to the groups they represent. This Post-Structuralist position also allows for greater communication regarding marginalised groups and how they are represented within the greater global environment. The position communicates much about the film text and how viewers interpret its readings, especially when the film draws on the memory of an historic event.

MEMORY

Within the current global environment, the memory of a conflict is not confined to the historical facts of news reports or articles but it remains an accumulation of the historical fact combined with the memory of the witnesses and the cultural artefacts which emerge during and after a conflict. When one looks back on conflict, one remembers through an accumulation of the historical fact together with memory and culture. The three elements function together within society and have a pivotal role in one's perception of conflict.

Hotel Rwanda and *The Kingdom* both offer an eclectic interpretation of the events by each making reference to eye-witness testimony, news reports and historical fact. Both films support and mimic the way one views and interprets conflict today. One does not only understand conflict through factual material but rather once an audience can associate events with fictional characters who are based on 'real' people, only then does the audience start to understand the build up and sequence of events, of the actual, historic incident. This becomes particularly relevant when the events occur in remote and faraway places which, the audience is not necessarily familiar with. *The Kingdom* is quite particular in providing the historical and social background of Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the film. This factual material becomes crucial when the audience views and interprets the film. The historical background, for example, explains cultural differences such as the Arabic attitude towards women, the stronghold of the Saudi Royal family and its affiliation with the USA as well as Al Qaeda's role in the whole scenario. This reference to the 'real' does not only provide a platform in creating meaning, but it

also establishes the positions from which the audience should read the text, thereby, formulating social and political messages on a greater level.

This research has proposed that 'meaning' starts at the point of intersection when the historical fact converges with the concept of memory within a cultural medium, such as film. The fiction film that is based on fact not only attempts to present the ideas, but also keeps the memory of an event alive. Politicians have used memory as a political platform since the Ottoman Empire, Napoleon's loss at Waterloo, the First and Second World Wars and Vietnam. More recently, politicians have used the memory of the attacks on the World Trade Centre to support and promote the necessity for the War in Iraq and the War on Terror. It therefore becomes a very important concept to examine when analysing conflict. *The Kingdom* uses the memory of 9-11 to authenticate the fiction resemblance to actual events as well as to set the tone of the film. By identifying with the 9-11 experience, the film draws on similar emotions from the audience, thereby, justifying that the events in the film speak about the 'real' world. In contrast, *Hotel Rwanda* uses the concept of memory as a tribute to the victims of the Rwandan genocide so as to generate awareness to these kinds of events in hope of avoiding these atrocities in the future.

One can divide the concept of memory into two basic groups. The first, cultural memory refers to the ways specific societies understand memory according to the social and political positioning of that culture. This implies that a culture will remember according to the ideological perceptions of the society. For example, with reference to

Baudrillard[13], Gramsci[14] and Chomsky and Herman[15], one can deduce that the ideology of a society will promote a particular perception regarding a conflict. This position can further develop into the argument that specific perceptions/ideologies will be reiterated throughout that society's culture, namely the news, exhibitions, cultural artefacts and films. This research proposes that the actual process involved in creating cultural memory may resemble the memory of an individual but ultimately it is entangled in a complex network of political stakes and interpretations[16]. This emerges when a conflict uses the memory of another conflict as a point of reference.

The memory of the Vietnam War is a point of reference to the Gulf War. If one remembers the images of Vietnam, one remembers a collage of a confused American army, tortured civilians and innocent children caught in the crossfire. These memories create a very negative image of the American soldier and America. This fragmented imagery was used as a reference for the imagery that emerged out of the Gulf War. In order to forget the incoherence that emerged after Vietnam, the representation of the Gulf War offered a narrative which contradicted the memory of Vietnam in every way. In the early 1990s, the Americans focused on their strength and sophistication through their weapons during the Gulf War. The media broadcast this might in an attempt to eradicate the disjointed imagery that emerged out of Vietnam. Here, memory functions as an antidote to the painful memories of the past as well as sets a new tone for the American

[13] Poster, M (ed.) 2001. *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*. UK: Stanford University Press, pg 249.
[14] King, A, D (ed.) 1991. *Culture Globalisation and The-World-System*. London: Macmillan.
[15] Chomsky, N & Herman, E, S. 1994. *Manufacturing Consent*. London: Vintage.
[16] Sturken, M. 1997. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, pg 124.

image internationally. The image of the Twin Towers coming down subsequently eradicated this image and the USA has been trying to re-establish their strength through the images emerging from the War on Terror and the War in Iraq, although this has not always worked in their favour. *The Kingdom* symbolically draws on the memory of 9-11 through the attack on the housing compound. These historic 'referents' have a great historicity which claim to explain actual events through the fiction medium. The four FBI Agents represent the strength that America wants the world to see.

The second function of memory refers to how "signal crimes" as identified by Martin Innes, contribute to cultural memory[17]. He states that the media functions as a device that focuses on certain crimes which represent the state of a society or social order[18]. The single crimes act as signals of violence and function as a representation of the whole. Both films thus emerge as representations of the violence of each conflict and function as memories of the events. *Hotel Rwanda* acts as the signal crime of the genocide that happened in Rwanda, particularly in memory of the forty thousand victims who were slaughtered in four days at Murambi. The film acts as a representation of the fear and horror of the events that occurred during the Rwandan genocide. *The Kingdom* also acts as a signal crime of all suicide bombers and terrorist acts involving Americans. The film relies on memory, particularly the terror of 9-11 and the effects thereof. Both case studies, therefore, contribute to one's understanding of the current social and political environment, through their representation that one symbolises all. The events within the fiction film then become the representation of the actual historical events. The audience

[17] Innes, M. 2004. "Crime as a Signal, Crime as a Memory" in *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media,* Vol 1 (2):15-22.
[18] Ibid

assumes that he/she understands the historical through fiction that is based on fact. What the audience is actually watching is a very subjective interpretation of the events which is not produced to inform, but it is rather a product which is manufactured as a commodity to generate profit.

A society will only remember an event according to how the media (through culture) presents these events and an audience will keep re-visiting the event until one achieves closure. A society can only achieve closure of a traumatic event once it addresses the issue of pain and comes to terms with it. One element that remains inherent, is that memory can shift according to how culture perpetuates an event until it reaches the desired closure. All forms of media, including film, become essential components in terms of how a society will find closure. Both *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* contribute to the process of closure. Cultural artefacts, such as the two films, are essential products which perpetuate the actual events, and thereby contribute to achieving closure. People are likely to remember according to what extent the culture of a society will keep the memory of an event 'alive'. Sometimes memory works ideologically to re-instate one's position in society or create perceptions about one's own society as well as others. In order to achieve this, the memory becomes selective which implies that culture very often uses the concept of forgetting which is the adverse of memory. Here, the concept of forgetting becomes just as selective as remembering. *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* remember the events very specifically in order to assert the readings of their messages. Any event that contradicts this message is simply forgotten. Memory is

therefore, a fluid concept and can shift according to political objectives. Alongside memory is history, this refers to the actual events that are recorded as 'fact'.

Memory is often linked to the eye-witness accounts that give testimony of events. This forms part of the factual component of remembering and is often associated with news culture. With the rapid advancement of technology, viewers are able to witness events in real-time, in other words, as they are happening on the 24 hour news channels. What this concept has resulted in is a complete turn around in terms of news information. The news is no longer a pre-packaged verified report of events that have happened over the last 12-24 hours. The viewer now expects to watch a fragmented narrative of sometimes unverified information and events with the updates unfolding as the networks receive the information. The news broadcast has now become a disjointed narrative that replays stories a number of times during the day and only provides updates when they occur. This feeds into a number of areas which affect our daily lives. This starts with the speed at which we can obtain information, but also in terms of promoting quite specific ideologies and constructing social consciousness as highlighted by Larrain[19] or in terms of stupefying its audience as presented by Baudrillard[20]. Both argue that the media can use the speed of information to influence audience perceptions.

The Kingdom mimics this perception through its fast paced editing, not only with reference to the initial historical timeline presented at the beginning of the film, but also with reference to the speed of the narrative. Although this characteristic fits within the

[19] Hunt, A & Purvis, T. 1993. "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology …" in *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 44 (3): 477.
[20] Baudrillard, J. 2006. "War Porn" in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol 5 (1): 86-88.

genre of the film, it also imitates the 'real' world by presenting the climate of the way one receives information in today's modern day culture.

Both case studies present the notion of how one receives information. *The Kingdom* takes on the postmodern concept of receiving information as an eclectic mix of codes and styles whereas *Hotel Rwanda* questions Africa's position in relation to the West and how the West perceives the African continent. Each film is very specific in its encoded message but ultimately 'meaning' happens once an audience decodes the message and constructs a reading according to the Post-Structuralist and postmodernist perspective. This according to Hall[21] is an encoding/decoding process which acknowledges that a viewer may disagree with a text but because of the way the messages within the text are encoded/edited/positioned[22], a film may 'negotiate' a viewer into accepting the reading of the text. *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* focus on the journey of each central protagonist. By personalising their journeys, the story invests its audience from an emotional point of view. This association allows the audience to empathise with the protagonist's quest on an emotional level and draws the audience into the reading of the text, and thereby promotes a very specific understanding of the events. The audience then understands the historical event through the emotional fiction. This process reflects Hall's position, particularly with reference to how texts naturalise messages and 'preferred' readings, a concept which is the central focus of Chapter 4, specifically with reference to how texts create stereotypes and reaffirm certain groups of people as 'other'.

[21] Hall, S. 1980. "Encoding/Decoding" in Hall, S (ed.) *Culture, Media and Language*. London: Hutchinson in association with CCCS, University of Birmingham, pg 128-138.
[22] Ibid

THE 'OTHER'

Both films choose what to represent or 'remember' and by doing so; select which facts maintain a platform. This thesis has focused on how the mass media initially presents minority groups and how this representation infiltrates into the cultural. This position starts with Chomsky and Herman's[23] Propaganda Model which emphasizes the filtration process that may influence the perception of any story (as has already been highlighted). The Model is also relevant because it presents to what extent negative responses will be incorporated through hegemony ensuring that the Capitalist system will continue to thrive[24]. The epitome of this position is the structure of the Hollywood system which continues to present narratives that idealise the American Dream and all ideas relating to its political and economic authority. *Hotel Rwanda* perpetuates this position through its idealisation of the West in relation to the Emerging and Periphery states. The implied reading is that the West is the only one who can resolve the crisis. *The Kingdom* disseminates this message in its reinforcement of the 'American Might'. The film implies that America's knowledge and expertise is the only answer to solving the crime. Both films function on the same level ideologically but what they also promote is that the way the films depict the events, duplicate the way they actually occurred. This position endorses the audience to believe that what they are watching resembles the actual events as they originally enfolded.

Each film maintains this perception by maintaining a particular position towards cultural identity, specifically pertaining to how cultural identity shifts according to political

[23] Chomsky, N & Herman, E, S. 1994. *Manufacturing Consent*. London: Vintage.
[24] Ibid

agendas. As dominant societies come to terms with traumatic events such as the 9-11 attacks, cultural artefacts such as fiction film based on fact ensures polarities. The fiction film ensures the political agenda by drawing on differences amongst cultures and producing consent of the hierarchy in terms of dominance and subordination. What this implies is that the messages of mainstream films consider certain groups superior to those groups from the Emerging or Periphery states. *Hotel Rwanda* communicates this through the determination and ability of Madam Archer and Colonel Oliver, *The Kingdom* emphasizes this through the efficiency of the four FBI Agents. The result is the emergence of the 'other', a relatively simple term, but when it is used to identify a group of people, it marginalises minority cultures whilst certifying the superiority and dominance of others.

There are numerous positions and arguments around the concept of the 'other'. Edward Saïd[25] sees the construction of the 'other' as a Western concept where the West imagines the Orient as a contrasting image, idea or experience to itself. Both films draw on this image through the cinematography of the landscapes. *The Kingdom* presents the contrasting image of the colours of the desert and *Hotel Rwanda* draws on the redness of the African soil in comparison to the scenic landscape. These types of images romanticise the landscapes of both the Middle East as well as Africa and represent them as clearly foreign and 'other' to the West.

[25] Saïd, E, W. 1979. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage Books, pg 1-2.

Renata Salecl[26] poses a psychoanalytic interpretation where one bases one's revulsion of the other according to the extreme elements of the 'other', whether this relates to enjoyment or merely with reference to the excessiveness of that culture. *The Kingdom* emphasizes this position with reference to the difference in American and Arab culture, such as the way each culture perceives women, language, general customs and the violent tendencies' of fundamentalist groups. *Hotel Rwanda* draws on the perceptions of Africa as the 'dark continent', where the enemy butchers innocent men, women and children.

Roland Barthes[27] describes the 'other' as a linguistic concept that occurs in the second order of signification. One can link Barthes concept of myth to Nichols' position on myth, specifically with reference to how cultural identify shifts according to ideological perceptions. This argument becomes relevant in the central message or "voice" of each film, namely, the Middle East is perforated with extremism and fundamentalism and Africa remains primitive and reliant on the West. The representation of the 'other' becomes a mythical interpretation of an identity which magnifies the z-axis and fabricates the true identity of a culture. This perception is problematic when a fiction audience reads a text from the position that what they are watching resembles the historical events.

Slavoj Žižek[28] claims that one will always present the 'other' according to the negative elements which involve fundamentalism, violence and chauvinism. Fundamentalism emerges through the memory of 9-11 and violence emerges through the referent of the

[26] Laclau, E (ed.) 1994. *The Making of Political Identities*. London and New York:Verso.
[27] Barthes, R. 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, translated by : Lavers, A. 1989. London: Paladin, pg 125.
[28] Žižek, S. 1997. "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" in *New Left Review*, Vol 225 (September/October): 28-51.

actual Rwandan genocide. Both events have received much attention since their occurrence, which ensures that their subject matter for film is bound to be of interest to the Western viewer. The way the narratives function, however, promotes the idea that they offer a realistic perception of the events, but what they are actually offering are a commodity which promotes a very specific reading of history and function within the greater global social and political environment. A closer reading of *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* clearly shows how they function ideologically and marginalise cultures from the Middle East as well as Africa and present them as being different to a typically Western identity.

Robert Kaplan[29] takes for granted that there definitely is an 'other' but he argues that the West can never really understand the complexity of different ethnic groups because the hatred amongst different groups is deeply embedded in cultural history. *Hotel Rwanda* takes on this position with reference to the roots of the genocide and *The Kingdom* attempts to understand this position by trying to explain the history of Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the film.

What becomes evident through each of these theoretical perspectives is that when one engages in a discussion involving different cultures, one may fall victim to categorising individuals as 'other'. This position, particularly from a Western perspective, may have emerged as a result of Colonialism which gave rise to notions of Cultural Imperialism - a

[29] Kaplan, R. 2000. *The Coming of Anarchy*. New York: Random House, pg 26.

philosophy that ensured the "domination of one people, nation or country by another"[30]. What remains clear throughout is that when one views conflict, specifically in remote areas, the West has a tendency to simplify the events and work around an 'us-them, hero-villain, enigma-resolution' formula.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hotel Rwanda and *The Kingdom* are not factual but they are based on 'real' events whilst at the same time being governed by all the principles and conditions which affect the fiction filmmaking process. The initial events or core of the story may have originally germinated from the 'real' world, but when one examines the complexities which govern narrative film, one can see to what extent the narrative technique manipulates original events for the sake of sustaining audience attention. The actual event is merely a point of reference, and in agreement with the Semioticians, there is no necessary connection between the image evoked by the signifier and the signified (combined to create the sign) and the actual concept (referent)[31].

This research has questioned how we understand 'real' events through fiction film. It has also examined the influences of the filmmaking process starting from the concept of globalisation. Through the discussion, it becomes clear that although the concept attempts to integrate the weak and the poor into a global community, this is virtually impossible in a system that serves the interests of the rich and powerful[32]. The powerful

[30] Becker, D, G, Frieden, J, Schatz, S, P & Sklar, R, L. 1987. *Post Imperialism: International Capitalism and Development in the Late Twentieth Century*. Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pg 1.
[31] Macey, D. 2001. *Dictionary of Critical Theory*. England: Penguin Reference, pg 352.
[32] Hamelink, C. 1983. *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications*. New York: Longman, pg xiii.

have the finances to produce and distribute cultural artefacts which may represent the marginalised, but financial interests, ideological positions and cultural perspectives usually affect this representation. When a 'real' event is placed into the temporal and probable world of fiction, the event is manipulated by the codes that govern its narrative structure. This includes a hero, a villain and a believable world that follows a cause-effect rhythm. These characteristics become the defining features of the film that draws audiences and become the controlling factors of the story. Through the production process, the 'real' event or historical fact is merely a shadow to the striking visuals which accompanies the emotional conflict of the central protagonist. The historical becomes a vague memory that is engulfed by a cultural medium whose primary goal is to generate profit.

The processes of history, memory and culture have in turn influenced cultural perceptions, producing notions of the 'other' and fuelling notions of superiority for the economically strong. In addition, the media and popular culture have eclectically constructed the narratives which emerge, initiating a debate concerning the perspective from which one is looking and whose ideology one is serving.

This research has investigated how fiction films inform and instruct our representations of conflict, demonstrating through the analysis of *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* that each narrative constructs rhetoric around global issues. The boundaries between fact and fiction are not as clear cut as one would initially anticipate. The two blur and lean towards a degree of magnification of the factual, fictional or mythical. By promoting that

a film is 'based on fact' acquires legitimacy but when one examines the rules that govern the fiction narrative, it becomes evident that the actual events are manipulated in order to fit within the codes, conventions and principles that govern the fiction world. By examining their narrative structure, it becomes evident that each representation is centred on a discourse which at different points magnifies the codes of narrative, myth and the historical. The degree of magnification provides one with an indication as to whether the narrative leans towards the factual or fiction.

Through their intended messages, both *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Kingdom* advocate an authenticity because of their reference to actual events, but when one interrogates each text more closely it becomes evident that each is riddled with ideological perspectives whilst assuming a truthful depiction of its referents.

In his Oscar winning speech, Michael Moore[33] commented that we lived in a "fictitious society". Although, arguably, it is not fictitious in the sense that atrocities towards other human beings are most definitely real. However, what is 'fictitious' is the way in which we receive the information. The dynamics that characterise our global society are riddled with instant images that have influenced the way we view the world. Information is brought to us with an enigma that moves towards some sense of closure or resolution. Our understanding of the 'real' is immersed in the formula of fiction film where the binary opposites intertwine creating a matrix where fact and fiction define the one in relation to the other.

[33] Moore, M. 2004. *Will they ever Trust us Again: Letters from the War Zone to Michael Moore*. USA: Simon and Schuster, pg 8.