

Cinematic Representation of Development and Commodification of the ‘Other’

A Narrative Analysis of Two Popular Films

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Abstract

As a growing number of popular films continue to document development issues related to international development, it became ever more crucial to move beyond treating these films as mere sort of entertainment and start questioning how these popular commercial films are representing the developing world as well as the messages embedded in them. Some critics have pointed out that these Hollywood-produced films are made to entertain and to earn profits, and they represent what is actually a complex issue with their own biases and assumptions. This study aims to see how these popular films are representing developing world and the issues related by analyzing two popular films that fall into ‘development film’ category: *Blood Diamond* (2006) and *Avatar* (2009). Through the lens of Orientalism and Lauren Berlant’s notion of the ‘intimate public’, this research analyse the narrative of these two films. The study concludes that the two films are reproducing the ancient stereotypes of the developing world, as well as the hegemonic ideas of the West. In addition, the research finds that the popular films examined are commodifying the ‘other’ subjects represented, through fantasies of achieving wealth and romance created in their narratives.

Key words: Film, Narratives, Orientalism, Commodification, the ‘Other’

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1. Introduction

1.1 Film as a Popular Representation of Development

Stuart Hall (1992, p. 14) asserts, “*what is ‘out there’ is, in part, constituted by how it is represented*”. Non-governmental organizations (NGO), corporates, as well as other development institutions, nowadays, focus heavily on the representation part of their development works. These organizations altogether, agree on the importance of communicating with the general public of the global North who are distant from the traditional development issues, and since the 1980s, there has been an extensive proliferation of visual representations of development issues in, for example, charity advertisements, public campaigns, and fair trade marketing promotions (Kothari 2014, p. 43). As a study by the Department for International Development (DFID, 2000) indicates that 80% of the general British public receives information about the development issues and the developing world by television, it is these public representations of charity adverts, campaigns, marketing promotions and other visual representations of development that constitute a large part of the information that the global North public receives and shape global development discourse.

Although development is in the broadest sense a technical and specialized activity exercised by certain development experts and institutions, it is argued that at the same time, it also “faces outwards to a range of non-specialized publics” (Smith and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 657). The growth of organizations and individuals concerned in development, together with changing development ideas and new communication possibilities, shows complex ‘public faces’ of development to the greater extent (Smith and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 657). Lewis et al (2014, p. 113) asserts that more broader and popular understandings of development is critical, in order to improve “the way development policies are conceived, debated, and assessed”. This public awareness and understandings of the developing world in the global North and their attitudes regarding certain development issues are largely influenced by the ways in which the developing world is represented in the Northern popular culture (Cameron and Haanstra 2008, pp. 1476-1477).

Film, as one of the preeminent visual manifestations, is also an effective method to represent international development issues in the Northern popular culture and in terms of the impact on popular understandings of development, Cameron and Haanstra (2008, p. 1477) claim that representations of the global South in feature film industry may have more impact than NGOs and other development institutions’ works. Recent feature films, such as *The Constant Gardener* (2005), and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) have told stories that attempt both to entertain and to engage Western audience to international development issues. Both films have succeeded in making commercial success and receiving critical acclaim. One of the key reasons for the popularity of feature film as a sort of entertainment is in its visual form, the power of motion pictures to sway audiences and in virtue of this power, films have capacity to represent certain issues regarding development more empathetically (Lewis et al 2014, p. 117).

However, film as a development representation is without a doubt, a double-edged sword. Most of the films that fall into ‘development film’ category engage with diverse and more general development issues such as poverty, human rights, conflict, and often, cinematic representations of situations and issues (regarding development) are not challenged, especially when films are popularly acclaimed (Lewis et al 2013, p. 12). In these ‘development films’, it is not rare that details of a certain event or situation that they depict, are modified to strengthen the narrative arc of the story. So while the original focus of a film may be about violent conflict in a developing country, the main drama that the film deals is about the central figures of narrative and their moral ambiguities, personal misgivings and about finding themselves navigating (Lewis et al 2014, p. 115). Thus, during the process of ‘tightening’ the storyline, significant simplifications, dramatization, and/or distortions of cinematic representations on what is actually a complex development issue happen more casually than it should. Furthermore, when watching these development films, one can easily notice that the protagonists in these films are often (but not always) White individuals, or more precisely, ‘White male’, which indicates that most of these development films narrate their stories from a ‘Western’ point of view, and this is one of the main concerns of these development films (Lewis et al 2014, p. 114).

Film as popular representation of development has both strengths and limitations to the ways that it conveys complex issues. In terms of raising public awareness, and framing social issues, Hammer (2009, p. 204) states that film is an effective vehicle. However, precisely because of this power of film as a representational medium, it is important to be aware of how films can also neglect important subject in what is actually a complex and sensitive issue, and could deliver false information to the audience. The importance of studying and paying attention to cinematic representation of development is well represented in what Brown (2006, cited in Dawson 2007, p. 5) has states that “cinema creates ‘official versions’ for mass consumption to a greater extent than any official text or academic history”.

1. 2 Research Aim and Significance

The initial idea of this research derived from questioning how the international development issues are depicted in the global North and how the general Northern public encounter these development issues in their everyday lives. Existing researches on visual representations of development is concentrated heavily on examining posters, videos and other images from NGO fundraising, charity advertisements and marketing promotions. However, feature film, with its power and effectiveness as a representational medium as mentioned above, also appears as an important subject to study.

The main aim of this research is to examine and analyse these so-called ‘development films’ on their representation of development and the developing world in their narratives. Through this, the study aims to find out whether these development films

reproduce the West's stereotypes of the developing world. As Swimelar (2009) states, feature film as a form of art has the power to challenge conventional views, to call for social action and enhance public understanding, but also to reinforce entrenched assumptions. Furthermore, this research aims to point out that popular film is one of mediums through which development and the developing world are commodified, and as Lacroix (2009, p. 214) pointed out, it is necessary to move beyond treating these popular films as transparent entertainment and to question diverse representations of the messages constituted in.

Recently, there have been a growing number of (though very modest amount) studies on pedagogical use of popular development films in classrooms and studies that emphasize the effective role of the films in development representation. This study also recognises the potential of popular films as development medium. However, before acknowledging cinematic representation as a source of development knowledge and its 'positive' facet, it is vital to critically examine films' representations of developing world and the subjects. Through critical analysis, this research aims to encourage academic study on the relation between films and development.

1.3 Research Questions

Question 1: How do popular films depict development? In their representations, do they reinforce the Western stereotypes of the developing world?

Question 2: Do these Western produced popular films commodify development and developing world in their narratives?

The first question is the overarching question that this research wishes to examine through post-colonial lens. However, the later is the core question that the research aims to answer through analyzing the first question.

1.4 Delimitations

As the nature of the subject is broad, this research has made some limitations in order to conduct more focused research. This study on cinematic representation of development does not consider the film industry, production, or technologies and does not engage any film theories.

This study does not invite any theoretical works of Frankfurt School to study the commodification of development since the study does not wishes to look at the production nor distribution of commodified development issues in entertainment industry with economist point of view. Rather, the study relies on Lauren

Berlant's notion of 'intimate public' in order to analyse how developing world and the development subjects are commodified in the selected popular films.

In examining 'popular films', the research does not include any films of documentary form. Rather, the principle focus of this research is on dramatic narrative films that are purely fictional or based on real event. Naturally, it is quite impossible to look at every popular film that deals development issues in its storyline. Thus, this research will present two personally selected feature films that engage development in their narratives. However, more explanations on the selection of films will be presented later in the methodology section.

1.5 Disposition

So far, this research has presented the introduction, which includes the purpose of this research, its aim, significance, research questions, as well as the study's delimitations. In the following section the theoretical framework of this study will be presented. Here, an in-depth discussion on Orientalism and Lauren Berlant's notion of the intimate public will be made in order to provide sufficient theoretical ground for the analysis. The subsequent section will be on methodology, which are narrative analysis and case study that this research will employ in order to analyse the selected films. Following the methodology section, the narratives of the selected cases will be analysed through employing the established theoretical framework on Orientalism and *intimate public*. The final section of this research will be the conclusion part where it summarize the findings of the study, present answers to the research questions, as well as the suggestions for the future research.

2. Methodology

This section wishes to present the research design and the methods of analysis that will be employed in analysing the selected materials. The explanations on the reason why the study has formed itself as a qualitative research, examining two different cases, and using narrative analysis will be presented. It also wishes to introduce and discuss on the empirical materials that will be analysed as well as the applied methods' strengths and limitations.

2.1 Research Design

In any type of research, it is important to choose the most efficient method in collecting and analyzing data. According to Bryman (2012, p.36), qualitative research is a strategy that “usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data”. On the other hand, it is difficult to control research settings and rarely possible to pre-design research conditions in qualitative study (Holliday 2007, p. 22). However, given the nature of this research that wishes to examine the representation of development in narratives of the selected films, and in doing so, how such narratives commodify the subjects, together with in awareness of its benefits and limitations, it would be suitable that this research to be carried out in qualitative research design and methods.

The study intends to apply a multiple-case study by examining two different popular films. Bryman (2012, p. 74) points out that by comparing two or more cases, “the researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold”. The multiple-case study will allow a great opportunity to examine the operation of generative causal mechanisms in contrasting or similar contexts (in the case of this research, similar contexts) and the factors lied behind the operation (Bryman 2012, p. 74).

2.2 Narrative Analysis

This research intends to employ a narrative analysis in examining the empirical materials, which are personally selected popular narrative films and the study does not intend to analyse narratives in a decontextualized style. The definition of narratives, as Smith (2000, p. 328) notes, is an oral, written, or filmed account of events told to others or oneself. Bryman (2012, p. 582) notes that narrative analysis is “an approach to the elicitation and analysis of data that is sensitive to the sense of temporal sequence that people, as providers of accounts (often in the form of stories) about themselves or events by which they are affected detect in their lives and

surrounding episodes and inject into their accounts” and that with narrative analysis, the focus of attention shift from ‘what happened?’ to how do people make sense of what happened. Punch (2005, p. 218) notes that how people convey their meanings through language can be looked at from diverse contemporary perspectives.

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996 cited in Bryman 2012, p. 584), a narrative should be viewed in terms of the “functions that the narrative serves for the teller” and that a narrative analysis entails “a seeking-out of the forms and functions of narrative”. The functions of narratives, according to Smith (2000, p. 329), are that for listeners and audiences, narrative “can ‘raise consciousness’, create a shared history and a shared group identity, and preserve and transmit culture”. This highlights the reason why this research should take a narrative approach on examining the selected popular films, as it wishes to analyse the films in their representations of the experience of violence, inequality, conflicts and the creation of ‘intimate publics’, which in turn, commodify the represented subjects.

Riessman (2008) has differentiated four different forms of analysis in narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic-performative, and visual narrative analysis. “The thematic form interrogates what a story or group of stories is about”, but all analytic approaches focus on examining how speakers or a writer assemble and sequences events and use language and visual images to make certain points to audiences (Riessman 2008).

2.3 Empirical Materials

Given my limited focus on cinematic depictions of fictional or historical development issues I have decided to look at popular dramatic films that portray certain development issue/event and set their background in developing parts of the world. In the choice of empirical materials, it seems necessary to explain why this research decided to examine popular feature films instead of, or also including documentary films. First, it is the distinctions between documentary and dramatic films that should be noted. There are basic differences between the two genres. Documentary films are produced to present information and/or to educate about social, political or historical world in the style of representing reality, while dramatic feature films are concerned more with storytelling either of fictional nature or based on real events (Swimelar 2013, p. 20).

The study has made a conscious decision to examine primarily dramatic narrative films over documentaries for few reasons. First, for a popular film, its primary goals are not to educate or on imposing political messages (Swimelar 2013, p. 21). Second, most of the audience would see popular film as entertainment and thus narrative feature film as a genre has a great potential to speak to the audience and connect them to particular characters and stories (Swimelar 2013, p. 21). Such nature of popular films, together with the power of cinema as a representational medium, which was discussed in the introduction chapter, set out some interesting reasons behind for a close examination.

The two films that will be employed as the empirical materials in this study are *Blood Diamond* (2006) and *Avatar* (2009). Both of the films are produced in Hollywood, commercial and popular films that came out within the last decade and available as DVDs. The two films all accomplished big commercial success, critically acclaimed, set their narrative backgrounds in non-Western locations, fictional (although *Blood Diamond* being based-on a real event) and depict issues related to development: in *Avatar*, the issue of giant corporate exploitation of indigenous people in the developing part of the world for natural resource; *Blood Diamond*, violence and corruptions led by diamond industry and the issue of child-soldiers are presented. It is this study's intention to see how the two films represent particular development subjects in their narratives and in doing so, how such narratives commodify the depicted subjects.

2. 4 Strengths and Limitations

In terms of limitation of doing a qualitative study, Bryman (2012, p. 405) notes that it can be too impressionistic and subjective. However, this study is aware that analytic findings from the two films cannot be generalised and perceived as typical as Bryman (2012, p.553) points out. On the method of analysis, which is a narrative approach, Bryman (2012, p. 585) also asserts that narrative researchers treat the stories they are told uncritically. Though, it is difficult for any research to be completely neutral, as this study embarked through critically questioning the narratives of the films from the very beginning, the analysis will remain treating the narratives of the films with a critical perspective.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section of the research aims to present and discuss the two theories applied in this study. The first part of the theoretical framework discusses Orientalism and creation of the ‘other’ developed by Edward Said and other postcolonial scholars, which is also the dominant theoretical orientation among studies on representation of development. The in-depth discussion on Orientalism and the representation of the ‘other’ aims to give a strong theoretical ground for the later analysis part on the representation of development in the popular films. The second theory that will be applied is the notion of *intimate public* by Lauren Berlant, which in some way interlinked to Orientalism. This theory was employed as a theoretical ‘tool’ for the analysis of commodification of development in the two popular films.

3.1 Orientalism and Representation of the ‘Other’

“They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”
- Karl Marx (cited in Said 2003)

Orientalism, which is the idea presented by Said, has brought to the surface the significance of representations and constructions of the ‘other’ in the reproduction of colonial power (Wilson 2011, p. 319). Orientalism elaborated on the tendency of the Western cultures to “discuss an abstract ‘Orient’ as fundamentally different from an imaginary uniform ‘Occidental’ culture” (Tzanelli 2003, p. 221). Further, Said (2003, p.12) asserts that Orientalism is an elaboration not just of geographical distinction (Orient and Occident), but also of certain intention to understand, control, and perhaps even to incorporate what is evidently a different world; but above all, a discourse that is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power. According to Smith and Yanapoculos (2004, p. 659), the idea of how the construction of colonial ‘other’ is more closely tied to “how the ‘self’ wishes to view the ‘self’” and Lewis et al (2013, p.13) assert that this idea continues to resonate with those wishing understand how Westerners encounter and view the rest of the world.

The creation of the symbolic boundaries between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ goes way back to historical account of colonialism. In order to create and maintain this symbolic boundary, colonialism efficiently utilised tactics of producing stereotypes and categorisations of colonies in particular ways to show and emphasise the difference between ‘us’ (the West), and ‘them’ or the ‘others’ (colonies) (Dogra 2012, p. 13). From the eighteenth century and onwards, the colonial discourse of the ‘difference’, reflected especially in Europe’s textual and visual representations of the ‘others’, became common and institutionalized and Orientalism works through this widespread network of institutions (Dogra 2012, p.12; p. 15). This construction and the maintenance of difference and reproduction of stereotypes is what Dogra (2012, p. 12) described as ‘Othering’, which has undergone a transformation in contemporary the development representations.

The diverse and complex ways of Orientalism produced a broadened sense of difference and presented through binary oppositions, such as, if the West is superior, the Orient is inferior; if the formal is 'normal' then the later is deviant; what 'belongs' and what does not or is the 'other' (Dogra 2012, p. 15; Tzanelli 2003, p. 221). Such stereotyping is, in fact, still a part of maintenance of social and symbolic order and it tends to occur where there are large inequalities of power, which is often directed against the weak and excluded groups in society (Hall 2013, p. 248). According to Hall (2013, p. 249), stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence.

Said drew upon Foucault's work on discourse as a power and knowledge, that a discourse produces through different practices of representation (academic, literature, art, etc), "a form of racialised knowledge of the 'other' deeply implicated in the operations of power" (Hall 2013, p. 250). Orientalism, as a discourse, assumes and promotes a sense of underlying differences between the Western 'us' and the Oriental 'them' and by enhancing these 'differences', representations in diverse spectrum also stretch the distance between 'us' and 'them' (Dogra 2012, p. 15). The reproduction of such discourse allows the production and maintenance of representations of the 'other' as different and distant subject. Representation of Oriental discourse and stereotypes can also be found in contemporary popular culture of animations and films, for example, in *Pocahontas* (1995), and *City of Joy* (1992).

In his work, Said places representation at the center of the ways, in which the hegemony of European ideas of the Orient is central to understand the practices of Western power in relation to the non-West (Smith and Yanacopulos 2004, p.660). Such discursive impact of power has affected later theories on development. Escobar (1995), asserts that the global North has constructed hegemonic form of representation by 'discursive homogenization' that erases historicity and diversity of the 'other' as well as the historical and economical factors of colonialism that have served to create the Third World that is subject to representation (Dogra 2012, p. 16; Mudambi 2013, p. 279).

Singh (2013, p. 6) states that a common problem appeared in discussing development and developing world is, in fact, of managing the stereotypes and understandings in our heads and that in reproducing stereotypes, we are usually editing and repeating "a narrative or discourses that we have heard, read and watched elsewhere". Film, as popular representation of development also could be a mechanism that reproduces such stereotypes as Dogra (2012, p. 12) argues that the discourses of 'difference' and 'otherness' still linger and inform the ways of seeing and representing the 'other' in contemporary cultures. Thus, this research wishes to examine contemporary popular films on their representations of development and whether the stereotypes discussed above are being reproduced in them, using the theoretical discussion that has been made here.

3. 2 The Intimate Public

In her work *The Female Complaints* (2008), Lauren Berlant presents the rise and conventions of the first mass cultural intimate public in the United States, the 'women's culture'. She notes that the women's culture is recognized as a way of seeing that the people marked by femininity "already share something in common and are in need of a conversation that feels intimate, revelatory, and a relief even when it is mediated by commodities" even its particular stories are greatly different from each reader/viewer (Berlant 2008, p. ix).

Berlant focuses on examining novels and their melodramatic film adaptations that their sentimental narratives create an intimate public sphere in women's culture. Through presenting what seems to be commonly shared belief among women, that love and family overpower their emotional and social sufferings, and 'tomorrow is another day', a certain intimate public, which is "a collective humanity of womankind that supersedes racial and class differences" gets constructed (Mudambi 2013, p. 280; Berlant 2008, p.2). What make a public sphere intimate, according to Berlant (2008, p. viii), is an expectation that the intended consumers already share,

...a world view and emotional knowledge that have derived from a broadly common historical experience. A certain circularity structures an intimate public; therefore: its consumer are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history; its narrative and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world.

An 'intimate public' operates when intended consumer's "core interests and desires" are expressed in texts (Mudambi 2013, p. 280). Participants (consumers) of intimate public, according to Berlant (2008, p.5), "*feel* as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions". Thus, the intended consumers' participation seems to assure that there are people who share their emotions in each other's experience of power, desire, intimacy, disappointment, diverse suffering and fantasies of transcendence, together with the will to survive their everyday lives (Berlant 2008, p. 5).

Berlant's study on intimate public, according to Mudambi (2013, p. 280) stresses two closely related factors, fantasy and commodification. Berlant (2008, p. 8) states that intimate publics elaborate themselves through a commodity culture; are organized by fantasies of transcending; and "refunctioning the obstacles that shape their historical conditions". The represented subjects in nobles and films are commodified by text as a mere sort of entertainment, which allows the intended consumers to feel "sympathetic towards the simplified subject, locating histories of oppression squarely in the past" (Mudambi 2013, p.280).

Intimate public also promises to provide better experiences of social belonging. Berlant (2008, p. viii) asserts that an intimate public is an achievement, where it overcomes historical differences to construct “affective sense of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline and discussion about how to live as an *x*”. Mass-mediated popular culture, in its particular role, generates more opportunities for provoking a sense of certain belonging to a changing world and belonging to an intimate public is a condition of feeling general “within a set of porous constraints, and of feeling held or sustained by an evolving sense of experience that confirms some homogeneity and elaborates social distinctions” (Berlant 2008, p. 13).

When applied to Orientalism, according to Mudambi (2013, p.280), the notion of ‘intimate public’ helps to understand how the circulation of the texts and conventional narratives “may complicate the relationship between the Oriental and the Occidental to overcome the differences and construct identification”. Mudambi (2013, p.280) describes this as an intimate public that “commodifies the Oriental subject, suppressing the racialized differences and colonial relationships created in and justified through Orientalist representations by encompassing him/her with normative fantasies”. Such process of constructing an intimate public shifts the focus from the representation of ‘the other’ to “an Oriental object of sameness and difference that functions for the benefit of the Western audience” (Mudambi 2013, p. 281).

This study wishes to analyze the narratives of the selected films through the lens of Orientalism and by using Berlant’s theory of *intimate public*. It wishes to point out that through mobilizing sentimental desire for a better life and fantasy of romance, an intimate public is constructed and allow the audience to identify oneself and also feeling a part of great whole. This intimate public enables the audiences of the global North to feel comfortable on watching ‘the other’ and their sufferings without any responsibilities of colonial legacies, thus commodifies the represented Oriental subjects and the development issues that the films depict marked with adventure and romance.

4. Analysis

In this section, the study wishes to present the analysis of the two popular films and their narratives. The analysis is divided into three parts. First part of the analysis wishes to analyse each films' narratives individually. The second part of the analysis wishes to present the common findings of Orientalism in the films narratives and the third part is to discuss how their narratives are commodifying the development subjects that they are representing through Berlant's notion of the 'intimate public'.

4. 1 Fantasy, Love, Heroism, and the 'Other'

In this first section of analysis, the two films' narratives will be studied individually. The research wishes to see how the representation of the 'others' is being made and how the discourse of non-Western 'others' are rendered in the films' narratives, as well as, how fantasy, love, and heroism is created and represented in their narratives.

4. 1. 1 *Blood Diamond* (2006)

Directed by Edward Zwick, *Blood Diamond* (2006), which highlights the corruption in diamond industry and its responsibility for diamond conflicts in Africa, made a big commercial success and led much debate on both the film and the issue addressed. The film takes place in Sierra Leon during the brutal time of the country's Civil War in 1999 between the government and the rebel force Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The story of the film starts out in a small village where Solomon Vandy, a fisherman, and his family undergo an attack of RUF. Solomon gets separated from his wife and children, and sent to a diamond mine where he finds a rare 'pink diamond' and hides it, which becomes the center of the story.

The film's underlying message is intended at raising awareness on how the Western consumerism is being involved in the violent diamond conflicts, causing millions of death, homeless, and ultimately generating problems like child-soldiers. However, the film's narrative is riddled with the notion of Orientalism and the reoccurring theme that 'the West must save Africa'. When Solomon meets, Danny Archer, a white African and a diamond smuggler who wants to leave the continent, Danny finds out that Solomon has found a rare pink diamond. He instinctually realises that the diamond is the ticket to get him out of Africa and offers Solomon a help to find his family in return for the location of the diamond. In the scene where Danny tries to convince Solomon to accept his offer, Danny says:

Danny: Look at me. I know people. White people.
 Without me, you are just another black man in Africa.

This scene draws the line between Danny and Solomon, which signifies their racial differences. The film also shows many occasions where Solomon has to identify himself. In the scene where he gets on a bus full of western journalists with Danny and Maddy, an American journalist, Solomon seats down and a Western journalist next to him stares at him. Solomon then has to identify himself as a ‘cameraman’. Later when the bus gets under an attack, the journalist refuses Solomon to get back on the bus, signifying his ‘otherness’.

In addition, the film’s narratives constantly present the RUF rebels as the ‘bad guys’, who are irrational, mindless, bloodthirsty savages, can only be stopped by the Western intervention. On the contrary, the government troops, which were under the influence of the European colonization, are represented as the rational ‘good guys’. In the scene where Danny says to Maddy, “Will God ever forgive us for what we have done to each other? Then I look around and realize God left this place a long time ago” the narrative of Danny symbolises that after the West colonisers leaving Africa, the continent is abandoned with full of disasters and no social orders. However, the notion of Orientalism in this film ultimately shines through the Heroism of the West. Throughout the story, it is no other but the Western characters, Danny and Maddy, who help Solomon to find his family. Danny is an ultimate hero in saving Solomon’s life and in finding the lost son.

Solomon: I understand White people want our diamonds, yes?
But how can my own people do this to each other...
I know good people who say there is something wrong with
us inside of our black skin. That we were better off when
the White men ruled. But my son is good...

Danny: We will get your son back.

The narratives in this scene bring up the history of the Western colonisation of Africa with nostalgic sense and emphasize Danny’s role in this film as a hero as well as clear distinction between the West and the ‘other’. Danny’s story goes through certain transformation on its own. In the beginning, Danny is portrayed as a diamond smuggler who is only interested in using Solomon to find the location where the diamond is buried. However, Danny slowly finds his moral compass and makes a last-minute conversion. Towards the end of the story, though fatally wounded, Danny gives back the diamond to Solomon, saves Solomon from tragedy at the expense of his own life by sending Solomon to London, which is the Hollywood’s old-fashioned formula. However, it is not just one particular White character that tells heroism of the West, but even the ones that bring up the concerns over the diamond conflicts in Africa and insist on stopping it, are the Western people. At the end of the movie, in the UN subcommittee on International Trade, an ambassador speaks before introducing Solomon and states, “The Third World is not a world apart. And the witness you will hear today speaks on its behalf. Let us hear the voice of that world.” Thus the stereotypical theme of the West saving Africa, and the distinction between the ‘us’ and ‘them’, are being reproduced once again in *Blood Diamond*.

The film creates fantasy and sentimental appeal for a better life through the story of

Solomon. In the film, Solomon is characterised as an Oriental man, who loves his wife and children, brave and willing to sacrifice himself to save his family. At the same time, he is a victim, unwillingly separated from his family, as well as naïve, lack of any agency and incapable of understanding the complexity of the diamond industry without the white people's help. This creation of aesthetic structure is crucial to emphasize "the destined resolution of the harsh conditions" (Mudambi 2013, p. 283).

Throughout the movie, Solomon's great love for his family and guilt towards himself for losing them, and determined will to reunite them are frequently shown, and especially in the scene where he finds out that his son has become a child soldier for RUF, and Danny tries to stop him, but insists on going down to RUF camp to get his son out, and risk his life:

Danny: Your son is gone!
Solomon: He's alive! He is there with those crazy people! I am his father, his father should have protected him! I must go find him, I cannot live without knowing. Shoot me if you want. Why should it matter? I am dead already.

Such scene creates a sentimental appeal to the audiences and enables them to create emotional attachments to Solomon and also as Berlant (2008, p. 12) notes:

...negotiates constantly the significant difference between fantasizing fulfillment, witnessing disappointment, and engendering transformative events. Tears and the varieties of mourning, melancholia, satire, and bargaining that respond to disappointment are gestures that define living as responsiveness to the urgencies of the ongoing moment, as a scene of heroism, and pragmatism authorized fantasy.

At the same time, this particular scene shows Danny as a rational person, opposed to Solomon, which also acts as drawing a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. Lacroix (2009, p. 218), notes that the West construct themselves as civilized, rational, and objective, by "distancing and exoticising" the non-European other.

Eventually Solomon finds his brainwashed son from the rebels as well as his wife and children and reunites them. Throughout the Solomon's story, his possession of the pink diamond also rescues him from numerous crises where his life gets in danger in the process of finding his family. Mudambi (2013, p. 283) notes that such rescue is crucial in constructing intimate publics as they "emphasize the sentimental over the structural, bolstering fantasy while de-emphasizing social change". Solomon, arrived in London, meets Simmons from a diamond company, and he not only asks money for the expense of the diamond, but also demands to find and bring his family to London:

Solomon: I want what was promised by Mr. Archer.
Simmons: What was promised to you?

Solomon: My family. When they are here you will get the stone.
I will have the money, too.

Later, Solomon is seen in a nice suit at a conference where he is to reveal the evil story of diamonds. He not only achieves what he wants, but also exposes diamond companies' dirty secrets with a help of Maddy, which in the end, results in the creation of the Kimberly Process that will 'save' Africa from diamond conflicts. This allows him to be recognised in the Western society. The diamond as a commodity of capitalism transforms him from the 'other', an Orient man who lost everything in his life and incapable of restore it back, to a member of the global community both with money and respect. It also transfers him from harsh and backward Africa to the modern and civilised Western society, where normative fantasy of a better life can be realised. His tragedy was due to the violent conflicts for diamonds, but ironically, it is the diamond as a commodity that 'rescues' him. Solomon achieves both material prosperity and his family, and finally a fantasy of good life gets to be realised.

4. 1. 2 *Avatar* (2009)

Unlike the movie *Blood Diamond*, which is a fictional narrative based on a real event, *Avatar*'s narrative set its place in completely fictionalised background. Directed by James Cameron, the film has achieved an unprecedented commercial success, as well as critical acclaim. Set in 2154, the film takes place in a fictional planet called 'Pandora' where the human invasion for mining precious mineral resource is expanding. The tension of the storyline begins as this expansion of mineral mining colony starts threatening the indigenous 'Na'vi' tribes and their territories, and the film's narrative is about its protagonists trying to resolve the conflict.

Although one of the film's primary messages is on anti-imperialism, the subject of the 'otherness' is constantly appearing throughout the movie and reproducing the stereotypes of the 'other' through its narratives. Pandora's exotic geographic sceneries can be seen as the construction of the idea of Orientalism, as Said (2003, p.1) has stated that "the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic being, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" that helped to defined the West with its opposing and contrasting images and ideas. However, it is not only the exotic landscapes and images of the indigenous Na'vi that emphasise 'the otherness' in this film.

In the film's narratives, the 'Sky people' (humans) are divided into two teams. One is ex-military that are hired to use forces in extracting the resources. The other is the team of scientists who are hired to collect the 'native' knowledge so they can facilitate the mission of creating mineral mining colony. Both of the groups' narratives show their work of 'othering' the Na'vi. The corporate associates and the soldiers call the Na'vi as "savages" and "blue monkeys", describing them as irrational, barbaric creatures, emphasizing the 'differences' and 'otherness' of them. The team of researchers and their mission of collecting the native knowledge also work as

establishing ‘the other’ (the Orient). Dr. Grace, the leader of the research team says, “If you want to share this world with them, you need to understand them”. This clearly emphasise the distinction and the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or the ‘others’.

Further, the film only shows Na’vi and their harmonious life with the nature only through the avatars (hybrid of human and Na’vi), and especially through the avatar of Jake Sulley, the white male protagonist’s eyes. Such representation of Na’vi, according to Riazuddin (2010), creates a sense of nostalgia that “simultaneously homogenizes them whilst depriving them of their ability to tell their own story” and “constructing the understanding of natives as romantic and ahistorical”. Their ways of living and belief only become legitimized through Jake’s perspective. Thus, the ‘Orient’ must be represented by the ‘Occident’.

As a true Hollywood produced film, *Avatar*, contains both the story of overcoming the obstacles, as well as the romance. Hall (2006, p. 155) notes “the classic film has at least two lines of actions, both casually linking the same group of characters - and, almost invariably, one of these lines of actions involves heterosexual romantic love”. Through the narratives of romance, in *Avatar*, a sentimental fantasy of ‘true love’ is constructed. The films’ female protagonist, Neytiri, is a Na’vi princess. When she first meets Jake, she is hostile to him, but quickly falls in love with him, which seems deliberate. Lacroix (2009, p. 223) states that, despite the portrayal of Oriental women as strong-willed and independent, they are continuously positioned as characters that ultimately defined by male standards and goals, and find fulfillments through their romantic relationship with prince Charmings. In a scene where Neytiri tells Jake to choose a woman, Jake refuses:

Jake: I have already chosen. But this woman must also choose me.
Neytiri: (smiling brightly) She already has.

In the following scene, they seal their true eternal love as Neytiri says; “I am with you now, Jake. We are mated for life”. However, throughout the film, Neytiri and Jake repeatedly get separated from each other. Their love is constantly interrupted and rejected by Jake’s role as an avatar that belongs both with the humans and Na’vi, by conflicts between humans and Na’vi and as well as their racial differences. Such aesthetic conventional structure is created so that Jake and Neytiri arrive at true love as Berlant (2008, p. 13) state that “where love is concerned, disappointment is a partner of fulfillment, not an opposite”. Crème (1998, cited in Smith 2009, p. 226) also states that cinematic love has power to repair emotional pain in both the film’s characters and its audiences.

Throughout the film, Jake is a true romantic hero with “no fear”. Jake uses multiple means to fight against the humans and protect Neytiri and Na’vi clans. In the beginning, he is involved with the ‘Sky people’ and their project to remove Na’vi from their habitat, but later, he betrays the humans and risks his life several times to fight against the humans and rescue his love and Na’vi clans. Even in the scene where he is being accused as a betrayer and Neytiri being disappointed at him, Jake tries to convince her to save her and Na’vi clansmen:

Jake: At first it was just orders, and then everything changed.
I fell in love. I fell in love with the forest and with the
Omaticaya people, and with you.
Neytiri: You will never be one of the people!
Get away from here and never comeback!

Neytiri does not believe Jake's love for her anymore and refuses him from saving her and her people. However, as Spivak (1988, cited in Mudambi 2013, p. 287) says that "Western epistemologies do not let her speak; her words must be interpreted through a lens of privilege", within the discourse of romance, Neytiri's subjectivity is meaningless. When Jake still comes back to rescue her, he is ignoring her request, which signifies his heroism (Mudambi 2013, p. 287). Berlant (2008, p. 14; p.15) notes that love is a formal promise and an aspiration to try and try again to intend to be faithful, and the intention to repeat is what gets expressed in wanting to "have a future together" or to be someone's "intended". Neytiri admits that Jake was right in the scene where she sees that he has returned to her:

Jake: I see you.
Neytiri: I was afraid, Jake. For my people.
But I am not anymore.

Jake and the audiences are aware that their love is destined, except Neytiri herself. Her subjectivity is ignored by the romance and according to Mudambi (2013, p.287), her subjectivity "must indeed be overridden to complete the sentimental aspirations of fantasy". Although it seems that a white male hero is rescuing Neytiri, it is indeed not a man, but the fantasy of heterosexual romance that saves her in the end (Mudambi 2013, p. 285).

Jake and Neytiri's romance not only creates fantasy of true love and enables the audiences' emotional attachments, but also works as humanizing Na'vi through their love (Riazuddin 2010). Love as an emotion is endemic in humans, which differentiate humans from objects or animals. Thus, it is only when Jake falls in love with Neytiri, that her and the other Na'vi subjects transform to humans who also "have feelings, emotions, and lifestyle that are both authentic and legitimate" (Riazuddin 2010).

4. 2 Reproduction of stereotypes

On the surface, it seems that the line between the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is blurred in both films. However, in their narratives, these two films are continuously reproducing the West’s stereotypes of the developing world and the hegemonic viewpoint of the ‘others’. *Blood Diamond* represents Sierra Leon as a place full of conflicts, violence, and absence of social justice and order, ‘incapable of taking care of themselves’, which construct Orient familiar stereotypes to the viewers and performing relentless narratives of helplessness of the ‘third world’ (Jefferess 2002, p. 3; p.9). The Orient characters represented are constantly ‘otherised’ through the film’s narrative, and the story that a white man rescues an African man from his tragedies, together with the film’s underlying message that the Western diamond consumers should be aware of Africa’s tragedy and stop the conflicts driven by diamonds, simultaneously reinforces the hegemonic notion that ‘the West must save Africa’.

In *Avatar*, the native Na’vi and their lives, in other word the ‘Oriental’, is represented as romantic and ahistorical that creates a sense of nostalgia (Riazuddin 2010). Such representation of Na’vi and Pandora as ‘exotic’ and ‘different’ explains the West’s hegemonic viewpoint of what Jefferess (2002, p. 11) has said, “‘they’ live in ‘our’ past”. Hammond and Jablow (1977, cited in Jefferess 2002, p. 8) have stated that the colonizer perceives the colonized other through the lens of “a European system of values and belief”. Thus, the narrative of the film, which tells the story from the West’s point of view, continues to resonate the symbolic boundaries between ‘us’ and the ‘other’ created in history of colonialism. This also applies to *Blood Diamond* where the film was produced in Hollywood, and according to Lewis et al (2014, p. 115), it is the key concern in most of the ‘development films’.

In both films, ancient stereotypes of the Orient and the notion of ‘otherness’ are muddled in their narratives. This can be criticised as Jefferess (2002, p.2) notes, that the difference or distance between the knower and the known is a product of the representation and that “the other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but made”. Therefore, these popular narrative films’ representations of the development subjects and the developing world are reproducing the work of Orientalism where the developing world and development subjects remain ‘othered’.

4. 3 Intimate public and commodification of the ‘other’

Whilst reinforcing the stereotypes and the notion of ‘otherness’ of the developing world, both films also construct certain ‘intimate publics’ through the narratives of their characters. In *Blood Diamond*, an intimate public emerge through the story of Solomon and the sentimental fantasy of a better life (Berlant 2008, p.2). Solomon’s story tells overcoming of obstacles around him and achieving material prosperity through commodity, as well as fulfilling the fantasy of a good life by saving his family. From the total tragedy of losing everything he owned to in the end, attaining

both material prosperity and a loving family ultimately shows the desires and interests as familiar in the Western ideologies, which creates certain identification with the audiences in the global North (Mudambi 2013, p. 288). In *Avatar*, the story of Neytiri and the narrative of a romantic male hero sacrificing everything of him to rescue her from her sufferings and arriving at ‘happily ever after’ ending, build a sense of intimacy with the Western female audiences, as mentioned above, that love overcomes emotional suffering seems to be a commonly shared belief among women.

Mudambi (2013, p. 288) notes that such developed gender roles of Oriental man and woman and the intimate publics that have been created between them and the Western audience lead to construct an intimate public of “global community”, which enables Western viewers to identify the ‘subject likeness’, regardless of fundamental differences between the ‘other’ or the ‘Orient’ and themselves. This creation of overlapping intimate publics, as explained by Mudambi (2013, p. 287), transforms the stereotyped and distanced the ‘other’ to ‘one of us’ with same characteristics. Thus, Solomon and Neytiri are no longer regarded as the ‘others’ with the characteristic of differences, but they transform to ‘one of us’ characterized by sameness with the Western audiences.

Such intimate publics, according to Berlant (2008, p. xi) emerge from the shared space of the reproduction of life and it “thrives, because of the extreme amount of contradictions they absolve about the range of the possible and plausible conditions of unfairness”. This explains that it is the great contradictions between the Oriental characters in the films and the Western audiences, that increase the possibilities for intimate public, as well as enabling sentimental attachments to the characters (Mudambi 2013, p. 288). This suggests that a part of reason why both movies gain much popularity is because of the extreme contradictions between the lives in the films and of the Western audiences. Although Solomon and Neytiri come from the ‘Orient’ settings and environments, they are seen as ‘us’ instead of the ‘other’ because they arrive at achieving the ‘desires and interests’ that are identical as of the audiences in the West.

Belonging to an intimate public, according to Berlant (2008, p. 13) is “feeling held or sustained by an evolving sense of experience that confirms some homogeneity and elaborates social distinctions”, and this homogeneity created between the Oriental subjects and Western audiences enables the experience of watching the ‘other’ more comfortable (Mudambi 2013, p. 288). Both *Blood Diamond* and *Avatar* arrive at the endings that meet the expectations of the Western audiences by fulfilling the fantasies. Though the films are muddled with stereotypes of developing part of the world and of the ‘others’, by placing the ‘other’ subjects into Western familiar Western ideologies with same desires and interests of the audiences, Solomon and Neytiri, remain entirely ‘knowable’ to the Western audience (Mudambi 2013, p. 288).

Like that of Solomon and Neytiri, the process of transforming the ‘other’ into one of ‘us’ itself is a commodification, as this homogeneity created in intimate publics, according to Mudambi (2013, p. 288) also enables the Western viewers to watch the represented subjects free from any responsibilities of the colonial legacies represented in the films. These sentimental films according to Berlant (2008, p. 58) use suffering “vampirically to simplify the subject, thereby making the injunctions to compassion

safe for the consumer of the suffering spectacles”. Hence, sufferings from the vicious colonial legacies that the Oriental subjects go through in the films only simplify the characters, thus making it okay for the Western audiences to feel sympathetic towards them. Further, fantasies of romantic fulfillment according to Berlant (2008, p. 75) turns suffering into “something vague one had to go through on the way”, and the fact that narrative of the ‘other’ can be read as romance, “gives evidence that the system isn’t all that rigid, and that we are all humans, facing same obstacles with the same desires” (Berlant 2008, p. 99; Mudambi 2013, p. 289). Thus, the sufferings of the ‘other’ from the legacies of colonialism are represented as universal representation of ‘suffering’ and as universal stories of ‘survival’, that allow the audiences of the global North to watch the representation of the ‘other’ with no guilt involved (Mudambi 2013, p. 289).

Each of the two films embeds certain messages that are related to development. In *Blood Diamond*, as the director Edward Zwick said in an interview that, “the film is really about the responsibilities of a consumer society and the fact that the purchase of something in one place has implications somewhere else” (Rapaport 2007), it addresses the issue of violent conflicts in Africa driven by diamond industry, which leads to taking away a number of people’s lives, making thousand of refugees, as well as the issue of child soldiers. The film intends to raise awareness on how Western consumerism on diamonds is involved with causing such conflicts in Africa. *Avatar* on the other hand, addresses a number of messages that are social, political, and religious. However, the main message of the film that this study wishes to draw on is that the film is referring to the history of European invasion of developing world to present how giant corporates nowadays are threatening indigenous people’s lives and marginalize them in order to exploit resources in the global South.

Although these two popular films attempt to bring attention to the development issues mentioned above, by resolving what seems to be rather complex issues presented with simplistic solutions (such as by rescuing the Oriental subjects) and through the narratives of fantasy and romance, they construct the global ‘intimate public’ that perceive the ‘othered’ subjects as one of ‘us’ with Western ideologies, and their sufferings as universal representations of suffering. Thus, the focus of the films’ narratives is shifted from the need of social awareness and actions to sentimental fantasies. The sufferings that Solomon (*Blood Diamond*) and Neytiri (*Avatar*) are no longer due to colonialism or the West, but they are stories of sufferings that anyone can go through in their lives. The narratives of Solomon and Neytiri’s suffering and survival are thus exploited and commodified as adventurous, entertaining, and romantic stories so that the audience of the global North can enjoy watching with sentimental feelings.

5. Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the representations of development and the development subjects through analyzing the narratives of two popular films that fall into ‘development film’ category: *Blood Diamond* and *Avatar* that are both produced targeting the Western audience. Revisiting the first research question presented that how these popular films are representing development, the study found that the both films are reproducing the discourse of Orientalism in their narratives. The subjects in the developing nations are constantly emphasized as the ‘other’ with stereotypes of ‘differences’. Through repeating use of the notion of ‘otherness’, the narratives of the films create the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or the West and the Rest. In their narratives, the West’ hegemonic view that the West must save the Orient is also reinforced. In both films, it is the white characters that rescue the Orient characters from their tragedies and their problems are resolved by heroism of the West. Thus, both popular films are reinforcing the global North’s predetermined images of the developing world.

Answering the second question of this research, which asked how the films’ narratives commodify the development, this study found that in each film, intimate publics constructed through fantasies of transcending, true love, success, and fantasies for a better life. This intimate public creates certain homogeneity between the ‘others’ represented in the films and themselves and such homogeneity allows the Western audience to watch the representation of the ‘other’ and their sufferings more comfortably without feeling guilty of vicious colonial legacies. Thus, the films and their narratives are commodifying the people in developing countries and their sufferings by transforming them from the ‘other’ to ‘one of us’ with same desires and interests as of Western ideologies, and by telling their stories of survival as something of adventurous and romantic.

In a lecture at TED Global (2009), Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichi reminded us about the ‘danger of single story’ of narrowly limiting our understanding of inherently complex phenomena in a single account. Through repeating same representation of a concept, it becomes a definite story, which marginalizes other perspectives and frameworks of understanding. These popular narrative films and their repeating representation of the developing world as the ‘other’ might turn into a definite story, as according to Lacroix (2009, p. 226) that “the critics and scholars recognize the power of these cultural products and the narratives they tell”. Narrative popular film as a genre clearly has a greater ability to speak to the audience and connect them to certain characters and stories (Swimelar 2013, p. 21). However, as a growing number of Hollywood-made popular cinema continues to document and restage development subjects, it is ever more crucial to move beyond treating these films as mere entertainments and start questioning their representations of the developing world as well as the messages constituted in them.

5. 1 Suggestions for Further Research

Concerning the further research area, suggestions can be made on studying the public 'reception' part of popular representations of development. Majority of studies on popular representation of development are currently made on the 'production' of development representations. Smith and Yanacopulos (2004, p. 660) argue that the public understanding of development is a difficult area to study, precisely because development itself is a contested subject and "the fact that there are multiple public faces of development reflects a complex situation about which we have relatively little understanding of". Nevertheless, there has been a growing number of studies on using popular film as a teaching tool and as the study by DFID (2002) reveals that the most British public receive information on development issues through popular, visualised development representations, it is equally necessary to study how the general global North audience of these representations perceive and interpret the matter.

There is also a lack of studies that examine popular narrative films in general. Occasionally, studies on popular films can be found in political science where it examine films in relation to war, terror, trauma, as well as how women are framed and represented in cinema. However, Lewis et al (2013, p.21) argue that films can be a legitimate and potentially important medium for representation, both intrinsically and instrumentally, and the commercial and technical imperatives governing the production of popular films create highly variable capacity to accurately render key issues in development, thereby elevated their potential to both illuminate and obscure those issues. This research also would like to encourage further discussion on the intimate linkage between international development and popular films. The subject of popular representations and development is a potentially fruitful area for further research and more studies on popular representations such as cinema and television programmes dealing with development issues will enhance our understanding of the subject.

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