

District 9 : Science Fiction as Social Critique

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❖ ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways *District 9*, a film released in 2009, reworks the sci-fi genre to explore the human encounter with “other” alien populations. Like *Avatar*, released in the same year, *District 9* addresses the tropes of conflict over land and human-alien hybridity and introduces non-humans and aliens, not as invaders, but as objects of human oppression and cruelty. Unlike many other science fiction films where the encounter between humans and non-humans occurs in an unidentifiable future time and location, *District 9* crosses genre barriers to engage with urban realism, producing a social critique of contemporary urban population problems. The arrival of aliens in *District 9* occurs as part of the recorded human past and the film’s action is carried out in the present time in the specifically identified city of Johannesburg. A distinctly anti-Hollywood film that locates the action at the street level, *District 9* plays out human anxieties about contact with others by referencing the divisions and conflicts historically attached to South Africa’s sprawling metropolis and its current problems of urban poverty and illegal immigrants. Focusing on how this particular urban setting frames the film, the study investigates the ways Blomkamp’s sci-fi film about extra-terrestrials presents a curious postcolonial mix of aliens and immigrants surviving in abject conditions in an urban slum and forces a realistic examination of the contemporary social problems faced by South Africa’s largest city and by extension other major global

cities. The paper also examines the film's representation of the human-alien hybrid and its potential as a force to resist human exploitation of the other. It also claims that though the setting is highly local, *District 9* speaks to a wider global audience by making obvious the exploitative practices of profit-seeking multinationals. A sci-fi film that is keen on making a social commentary on urban population conflicts, *District 9* resonates with the wider sense of insecurity and fear of others that form the horizon of the uncertain and potentially violent contemporary human world.

Key Words

District 9, sci-fi film, South Africa, urban realism, social commentary, aliens, illegal immigrants

District 9 was released in 2009 to great success, praised by one reviewer as “the most exciting science fiction movie to come along in ages” (Vilkomerson). Produced by the famous *Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson and directed by Neill Blomkamp, it has often been compared with the film *Avatar*, not least because they were both released in the same year. In both films, the nonhuman alien beings are portrayed as the victims, not the threatening invaders of typical alien Sci-Fi movies. Both films hint at cultural and political overtones, pointing to the human as ultimate source and executor of violence. The two male protagonists in the films also enter or assume the body of the nonhumans and ultimately take sides with the cause of the oppressed. While more similarities abound and comparison is inevitable, *District 9* is vastly different from *Avatar* where humans purposefully visit the paradise-like otherworld of the proud Na'vi tribe. The “prawn” aliens in *District 9* originate from another world but there is no glimpse of their homeland. Jake, the male protagonist in *Avatar*, willingly assumes the body of the

native Na'vi tribe but Wikus, the male protagonist in *District 9*, is horrified at his transformation into the body of a prawn alien. A comparative study would produce a long list of similarities and differences between the two films and while this study will mention them intermittently, it focuses on *District 9* as an imaginative reworking of the Sci-Fi genre that brings the action “down to earth,” so to speak, interrogating the persistent problems of human populations through the trope of alien arrival.

Although undeniably Sci-Fi, Blomkamp's *District 9* intentionally breaks with the conventions of what viewers have come to expect of alien invasion movies. A distinctly “anti-Hollywood” film, *District 9* works closer with a street-level realism than it does with the spectacle of the fantasy sci-fi. Based on a short six-minute clip called *Alive in Joburg*, a documentary shot in 2005 about the struggles between the inhabitants of Johannesburg (“Joburg”) and non-South African immigrants, the full length feature film of *District 9* is the result of writer and director Neill Blomkamp's desire to extend the earlier short and shoot a science fiction film located in the city of Johannesburg. Situating *District 9* away from the major cities of the United States not only challenges the formulaic Hollywood set-up but makes the reimagining of otherness inseparable from the social and cultural context of its locale. Produced partly in a faux documentary form which provides background and commentary on the unfolding action, the gritty ground-level angle of the scenes also clearly emphasizes the fact that this is a film intent not only on exploring the possibility of producing a sci-fi film on the African continent but also on exposing the ills of contemporary urban ghettos, on their realities of poverty, homelessness, and oppression. At the same time that the film comments on present realities, *District 9* also relies on viewer knowledge of South Africa's apartheid past even as it projects an “apocalyptic“

perspective on “how the future, a human future, an urban future, will evolve” (Gaylard 169). The following sections examine the ways *District 9* reworks the alien encounter film and the human-alien hybrid trope by relying on a kind of urban realism to interrogate contemporary conflicts and insecurities among competing population groups in crowded global cities. The essay also considers the film’s depiction of corruption and cruelty of the prevalent power motive in multinational corporate players and how it also compels us to ponder the idea of intercultural co-existence in the global present.

Johannesburg as Signifier

District 9 opens with the commentary that aliens have appeared not in a famous American city but in Johannesburg: “To everyone’s surprise, the ship didn’t come to a stop over Manhattan or Washington or Chicago but instead coasted to a halt directly over the city of Johannesburg”. As South Africa’s largest city, Johannesburg is often referred to as the “premier African metropolis” (Nuttall and Mbembe 1) but also described as “an instant city of strangers, aliens and foreigners” (17). Remembered to this day for its black townships and squatter camps of the apartheid years, it continues to be emblematic of the extremity of social conditions that can exist in large urban centers. As such, Blomkamp explains, Johannesburg was the only possible choice for the film as it represents not only the present time but the future of the world: “In my opinion, the film doesn’t exist without Jo’burg. It’s not like I had a story, and then I was trying to pick a city. It’s totally the other way around. I actually think Johannesburg represents the future. What I think the world is going to become looks like Johannesburg” (in D. Smith 20).

Blomkamp’s choice of city is indeed most fitting for the film

considering that Johannesburg's inter-city slums have historically been characterized by an atmosphere of lawlessness, violence, and poverty. Known once as "apartheid city," Johannesburg was a city predicated on difference, its spatial order determined by segregation of populations based on race and ethnicity. Even after the end of apartheid, "political geography. . . followed apartheid delineations, its economy was based on apartheid divisions of labour and its citizens' lives were determined by the significations of race" (Bremner 457). Johannesburg's past history reveals a city tainted by racial segregation, brutal use of police force used to suppress riots, forced removals of populations, and destruction of whole districts of its inter-city slums. Its contemporary history also reveals continuing conflicts between the city's many populations vying to survive on its limited resources. And while progress is being made in postapartheid South Africa according to "political discourse whose objective is the construction of an egalitarian, integrated, non-racial future. . . its social and physical environments are being shaped by a new politics of closure, by new divisions and separations, new cleavages and fault lines" (457). Large influxes of foreigners in the years following the dismantling of apartheid worked to intensify these cleavages and fears and insecurities toward foreigners and strangers. Indeed, the urban politics of separation played out in Blomkamp's film aptly captures the xenophobic riots and clashes that broke out in the townships in and around Johannesburg a year before the film's release. It is into this particular historical and contemporary set of circumstances that the prawn aliens make their arrival on earth. Utilizing the city's potential to signify violent urban realities, Blomkamp makes the point that as unwelcome foreigners, the extra-terrestrials are going to be treated like any other group of illegal human aliens who need to be regulated, evicted, relocated, removed, or eradicated. In fact, the movie's action

takes place as they are being evicted out of one slum district to another, from District 9 to District 10, a camp supposedly more rigidly controlled and maintained in worse living conditions. In this environment of oppressive control and desperate survival, Johannesburg's economic and ethnic dimensions create a space that "defines the motivations and behaviours of the characters that live there" (Nel 554).

Aliens in the Urban Ghetto

The film's commentary explains that the prawn aliens arrived in 1982 and have since remained in the same city, their numbers reaching 1.8 million by the time the movie begins. It is not explained what exactly occurred in the almost thirty years since their arrival, but the aliens have obviously lived through not only the apartheid years but survived through the transition to democracy. And for a movie that largely reflects the reality of a growing urban problem and plays out the anxieties and fears about "alien" populations, the depiction of the arrival of aliens and their survival among the humans is curiously unafraid. *The aliens in District 9* arrive in the human world through mechanical failure of their mother ship, not as a result of an invasion plan. While the Na'vi tribe in *Avatar* proudly possess their own land and culture desired by humans, the aliens in Blomkamp's film arrive on earth as homeless refugees of a sort and find themselves at the mercy of the host state. When the armed police first enter the space ship, the aliens are found huddling in the dark corners of their broken ship, unsightly and smelly, and near starvation. The beginning scenes of the movie confirm their refugee status where aid workers have set up tents and are shown delivering emergency kits and boxes to the multitudes of starving aliens. These aliens have weapons but they do not use them to threaten the humans. And though

the aliens are later shown capable of violent behavior, they are on the whole occupied with getting over their hunger. In fact, what distinguishes Blomkamp's extra-terrestrials from those featured in other films is that they have become used to the filth and squalor of human ghettos during their protracted stay on earth.

Throughout the movie, the aliens on the whole are represented as filthy, unkempt, unintelligent, and potentially violent. Despite positive portraits of Christopher Johnson and his son, almost all depictions of other aliens involve disgusting images and practices. In helicopter captures of their slum life, the aliens are shown vomiting, stealing, urinating, chopping up cow heads and even devouring human body parts, conveying a strong sense of "repulsive vulgarity" (van Veuren 574). Furthermore, they seem to have learned to communicate and have shady dealings with the Nigerian gangsters operating criminal activities, suggesting that these extra-terrestrial aliens are not much different from the other illegal immigrants who have made their home in the ghettos of Johannesburg. In this peri-slum world of District 9, the aliens and the Nigerian gangsters together form a kind of African underworld. The Nigerians are described as dealing in illegal arms trade and even interspecies prostitution with the prawn aliens. They profit from various scams including the "cat food scam" where they sell tins of cat food to the aliens at exorbitant prices. The prawn aliens seem to have no other way of obtaining their daily nourishments other than depending on the Nigerians or scavenging in the refuse piled up in the District 9 slum.

The portrayal of Nigerians in the film references recent mass migrations of foreigners from countries like Zimbabwe in the decades following the end of apartheid. These migrants, mostly illegal, have often been the object of discrimination as they are often blamed for the increase in criminal activities in the inter-city slums of Johannesburg and

other cities in South Africa. Many critics have pointed out the film's racist undertones in portraying them as mainly involved in criminal activities. Indeed, these Nigerian gangsters are portrayed as not only criminal in their daily activities but primitive in their belief in the healing power of potions made with animal body parts. The Nigerian gang leader Obesandjo is obsessed with obtaining Wikus's arm, believing it will cure the disease that has forced him into a wheelchair. This suggestion of primitive reliance on traditional African myths adds to the "troubling note of racism" (Moses 158) in *District 9*, a criticism that protests the placing of aliens and Nigerians together as unwanted, criminal others, as objects of discrimination and cruel treatment by authorities. While the stereotyping is quite obvious, it may be possible to see the negative portrayals as providing a "representation of an underworld of the urban African reality" (Nel 550). Symbolically at least, both the prawn aliens and the Nigerian gangsters make up the urban poor, suggesting also an inescapable hierarchy resulting from survival mechanisms among the ghetto poor.

It must be noted here, however, that though the aliens and the Nigerians have somehow created their own survival economy, their coexistence is based on abuses of power and threats of violence. The ruthless Nigerian gangsters may be looked upon as members of the poor and marginalized in Johannesburg's slum district, but in their aggressive activities and criminal transactions, they convey a deeply corrupt and masculine pursuit of dominance that adds to the ugliness and vulgarity of the District 9 ghettos. And though they are at odds with one another in important ways, the Nigerian gangsters are also similarly corrupt and power-driven as Multi-National United (MNU), the corporation dealing in arms and commissioned to relocate the aliens from District 9 to District 10. In their abuse of the aliens and merciless pursuit of power,

the Nigerians function as “MNU’s structural counterpart” (E. Smith 154), with both groups underscoring the profit motive so prevalent and powerful in the contemporary global world.

Corporate Exploitation

A film made and released two decades after the end of apartheid, *District 9* sidesteps direct allusions to apartheid first “by using science fiction as a medium” (Weaver-Hightower 253) and second by placing MNU, not the state, as the oppressor. Introduced in the film as the “second-largest weapons manufacturer in the world,” MNU serves as a symbol for corporations taking over governance in the contemporary globalizing world. In their secret underground biotech facility, the MNU scientists have been experimenting on aliens for the purpose of developing new weaponry. They also attempt to experiment surgically on Wikus in their pursuit to discover the interface between alien DNA and the alien weapon’s trigger mechanism. The film’s documentary portions inform us that these experiments are illegal, uncommissioned “research” conducted to develop weapons for MNU’s weapons trade. The extent to which MNU is willing to go to gain weapons technology is exposed in the dead alien bodies found in the lab. Their attempted experiment on Wikus would have likely led to his death, indicating that MNU will go to any lengths to achieve their desired aim. Even more than the Nigerian gangsters’ attempts at taking Wikus captive, MNU’s experiments reveal a shocking cruelty and disregard for life. Helgesson claims that this “conjunction of corporate interest and the biopolitical reduction of the aliens to ‘bare life’... is the most chilling and potentially radical aspect of *District 9*. It is by mining this dark seam that the film speaks to our conflicted age” (173). Indeed, the film’s reference to MNU’s unscrupulous, neoliberal

practices intent on profit-making points to the extreme anomalies of the technologically developed world. Both the MNU and the Nigerians flout the law, conducting illegal activities to profit in any way they can. In their different ways, they also frame a “specific African reality” (Nel 550) which involves issues of citizenship, population movements, ethnicity, violence and power, as well as poverty and capitalism. In this perspective, the film can also be read as a “sci-fi allegory of a number of quasi-military African situations” (550) where police or paramilitary forces and multinationals intervene in the policies and practices of states.

Director Blomkamp’s focus on the ugly side of Johannesburg’s ghettos—the filth and poverty of the alien squatters, the ruthless masculine power machine of the MNU, and the unscrupulous criminal activities of the Nigerian gangsters—all serve what may be the “purposes of his apocalyptic vision” (Gaylard 168). Furthermore, the emphasis on the ugliness and repulsiveness of the slums, its occupants and their dealings, convey what Brott calls a “violent urbanism” (32), with the spread of violence and crime resembling the kind of “perpetual war” (32) that was waged during the apartheid era. In fact, *District 9* is teeming with unscrupulous characters who fight to the death to maintain their stake in the reigning social order of the ghetto. The two main antagonists of *District 9*, the Nigerian leader Obesandjo and MNU’s agent Koobus Venter, mercilessly pursue money and power, taking no cognizance of lives lost in their pursuit. If the violence between the multiple factions, the dirty poor inhabitants of the uninhabitable ghetto of District 9 and the power-driven MNU soldiers, defines the city of Johannesburg, as Blomkamp’s film suggests, then the future of the world is indeed one of a constant state of war waged in the segregated zones of mega urban centers.

The Abjected Human

The focal point of the movie is undoubtedly the human-alien transformation of Wikus van der Merwe. Thrown unwittingly into the violence of life in the district slums, the character of Wikus is subjected to a painful and hideous transformation that no other human has ever experienced. Both *District 9* and *Avatar* comment on hybridity by placing the human protagonists in a “liminal state,” where they retain human memories and consciousness (Weaver-Highwater 249). However, the fantasies and fears attending partial human transformation are complicated to a greater extent in *District 9*, to a greater “lingering ambivalence about assimilation and racial blending” (250). Unlike Jake who experiences a physical and mental freedom and even acquires a more complete sense of identity in his Na’vi form and has the option to return to his human state, Wikus has no control at all over the process of his transformation. In fact, the stages of his bodily change are horrifying to experience and disgusting to witness. The gruesome details of Wikus’s contaminated body, marked by disgusting eruptions and excretions, emphasize the transformation as a dehumanizing experience. Once contaminated by alien DNA fluid, the signs of change are immediate. he starts vomiting black fluid and dripping black blood. He becomes covered with scaly crustaceous skin and grows a shocking alien claw. Meaning to cut his arm off with an ax, he manages only to cut a part of his finger off. He starts to lose his teeth and fingernails and to his disgust, has to resort to eating canned cat food like the aliens. His hybrid alien-human body nowhere suggests a harmonious merging of two bodies. Rather, Wikus’s transformation is closer to the excruciating and frightening experience of the scientist in the American science-fiction horror film *The Fly*.

The movie clearly depicts the process of Wikus’s mutation as one of

abjection, one that completely reconfigures his subjective identity. As his limbs start to mutate one by one, Wikus's body literally embodies the zone between being and non-being, to use Kristeva's terms, signifying the relationship between abjection and boundaries of experience, through the physical rupture of his body. The various excretions of his body suggest a complete disturbance and reordering of identity systems. This is the kind of disturbance that "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). As human-alien, he hovers on the boundary of two abjected forms of being and though still recognizable as Wikus in his liminal state, his transformation means not only that he is becoming something grotesque to behold but that he is losing both his human form and his identity. He can no longer live among other humans so he is no longer part of human community but in effect becomes an abject body denied subject status. His abjection puts him among those, in Butler's words, "whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (3).

Abandoned by family and friends and pursued ruthlessly by the Nigerians and MNU, Wikus ends up in the "unlivable" space of the district camp among the other abjected prawn aliens and socially marginal human beings. Desperate to regain his former self, Wikus's only hope is to form an alliance with Christopher, the prawn alien who has been collecting the DNA fluid to restart his spaceship, which is also the remedy Wikus is desperately seeking. In a moment's decision, however, Wikus gives up the DNA fluid and fights against the profit-seeking MNU operatives. Using his hybrid condition to operate alien weaponry against the MNU soldiers, Wikus buys enough time for Christopher and his son to escape to the spacecraft. Giving up on his only chance to become human again, this self-sacrificing act can be viewed as liberatory and redemptive and suggests that the experience of

embodying an ugly repulsive body of a prawn alien allows Wikus to stand on the side of the aliens, against brutality and oppression and for the possibility of human dignity and justice. It must be said, however, that though he was mercilessly exploited by the MNU, it is still surprising that Wikus abandons the DNA fluid when there is no guarantee that Christopher would return to help him regain his human form and when the only place he can survive is in the district camps among the scavenging aliens and violent Nigerian gangsters.

Wikus's decision to give up the alien DNA fluid means giving up his only chance to become human but it allows Christopher to escape the oppressive existence of District 9. The only alien to have a name, he stands out among the millions of other prawn aliens living in the district zones. As far as the viewer can see, Christopher is the only alien who appears to have intelligence, a superior knowledge of technology, and even a set of manners and morals. We see him operating alien computing machines and secretly collecting the fluid that will power the spacecraft into flight. We also see him indignant when he finds aliens strapped and dissected by MNU scientists. Christopher also exhibits fatherly love, caring greatly about his son, playing with him and keeping him safe. He even forms a kind of social bond with Wikus, communicating to him that he will return to earth with a "cure" to reverse his contamination. As Marx points out, the movie "anthropomorphizes him into the stereotypes of the good father, leader, and buddy" (166). This father-son relationship contrasts obviously with the underhanded exploitation of Wikus by his father-in-law. This positive characterization of Christopher clearly works to highlight the cruelty of humans. However, it remains unexplained why only one alien possesses such superior intelligence and morals and if there are others like him who can reverse the prevailing image of the vulgar and repulsive prawn alien.

The significance of Wikus's sacrifice is a lingering point of contention. It is impossible to know if Christopher will keep his promise or how much time has passed when the last scene of the movie shows Wikus completely transformed into a prawn alien. He is no longer distinguishable from the other aliens and everyone including his family and the authorities has given up on locating him. If there is a benefit to his complete change, it is that the likes of MNU security forces and the Nigerian gangsters can no longer abuse him. Except for the flower he is folding out of scraps in the trash dump, it is as if Wikus the human has disappeared altogether. The ending forces questions about the significance of Wikus's contamination and his embodiment of the alien other. Is it possible that Wikus has become a "good hybrid" who can put aside his human desires to give alien beings a chance to return to their life? Does his "heroic" act imply that humans should strive to help illegal and unwanted aliens in their society? Is global corporate power the root of urban problems? Will the problems of urban ghettos continue into the future unresolved or even exacerbated? These are questions that the film raises but leave largely unanswered, despite Wikus's courageous change of mind.

Compared to *Avatar*'s fairy-tale ending where the Na'vi tribe triumphs in defeating the human invaders with the help of sympathetic humans, *District 9* persists in presenting a vision of unending conflict among the various contending groups of humans and aliens. *District 9* ends ambiguously and without suggesting a different future. It is possible that Christopher may one day return to save Wikus but this seems highly unlikely. The plight of the remaining aliens and, for that matter, that of the Nigerians, also remains unchanged. It is obvious the aliens are continued to be treated harshly and subjected to state control even after the exposure of MNU's illegal corporate activities. Furthermore, as

conveyed through the film's documentary footage, the people living outside the militarized districts have not been affected directly by the events they have been witnessing and have little interest in the plight of the aliens or other immigrants or refugees in their midst. They show concern for the unfortunate contamination and horrific transformation of Wikus but increasingly with less sympathy and concern. Indeed, toward the end of the film, Wikus is remembered less as one of their own but as someone who associated with a disfavored group of strangers from outer space. In addition, interviews with family members show that after his full transformation, he is largely forgotten and has been written off as dead and gone. And though Christopher and his son have managed to escape on their space ship, the other prawn aliens not only remain in the city but live in the same manner as before the battle between Wikus and the MNU. To a large extent, then, the overall feeling delivered in the movie is that social problems such as exploding populations of uninvited immigrants in large cities and their slum areas do not have a solution. Blomkamp's film seems also to be suggesting that while the state may be the one making policy decisions, they remain unwilling to take responsibility for them. As Marx puts it, the "South African state in *District 9* appears to have yielded control to a corporation" (165), but shifting control over to a private corporation is shown to be a risky undertaking. The film clearly indicates that a global multinational corporation will exploit its advantageous position and conduct activities outside state knowledge solely for its own profit-making machinery. And although the South African society depicted in the film is presumed to be contemporary and post-apartheid, the response to the refugee aliens, both extra-terrestrial and human, clearly recalls contempt for the racial other that characterized apartheid-era policies. As a signifier, then, Wikus's physical

transformation and survival among the aliens can provide multiple interpretations, suggesting both discomfort and hope. As Helgesson points out, these contradictory views can exist because Wikus “effectively embodies the intolerable contradictions of the society he inhabits” (174).

While the postapartheid vision of a culturally blended South Africa is obliterated in the violent urban reality depicted in the film, however, *District 9* manages to avoid being a completely dark sci-fi film. Though *District 9* deals with a heavy subject, its treatment is often light-hearted and experimental. The character of Wikus is played in a farcical, clumsy manner that solicits sympathy for the agony he physically endures. The film also pokes fun not only at the foreigners who dwell in the slums but at white South Africans and their culture. Documentary footage inserted into the film also has the effect of partially mitigating the negativity of the violent scenes. And despite some of its pitfalls in ethnic stereotyping, the achievements of *District 9* as a contemporary science fiction film are numerous, one of which is that it boldly does away with the expectations of sci-fi by imaginatively incorporating realism with science fiction. As many reviewers and critics have commented, the film offers a gritty, street-level perspective of a modern society in flux, setting “a new standard for dirty realism in science fiction” (Helgesson 172). Additionally, the success of Blomkamp’s *District 9* lies in taking full advantage of Johannesburg’s capacity to signify a national narrative. By interrogating the ugly side of the city’s reliance on segregationist policies in controlling slum populations, the film makes a scathing commentary on the material circumstances arising out of the fragmented postmodern urban space of the post-millennial megapolis that is Johannesburg today. More generally, in addition to locating the encounter with aliens in a historically divided city and a nation historically known for its execution

of forced removals and relocations of population groups, Blomkamp's film also makes a cogent case for considering the "alien" issue as a globally occurring phenomenon. By pitting the arrival of aliens as a here-and-now, socio-political issue that can be both local and global, *District 9* becomes an exploration of the possible futures of culturally or racially other population groups sharing the same spaces of this present world.

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❖ 국문초록

〈디스트릭트 9〉 사회비평으로서의 공상과학

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이 연구는 2009년에 개봉한 영화 *District 9*이 인간과 외계인의 접촉을 주제로 삼는 SF 장르를 재작업하는 방식을 살펴본다. 같은 해에 개봉한 영화 *Avatar*처럼 *District 9*은 인간과 외계인 간의 갈등과 혼종성의 문제를 재고하고 인간과 대비되는 비인간들을 침략자가 아닌, 인간들의 억압과 잔인함의 대상으로 소개한다. 많은 공상과학 영화가 불분명한 미래의 시점에서 발생하는 반면, *District 9* 영화는 SF 장르의 경계를 넘어 도시 리얼리즘을 가까이 하며 현재의 도시 인구 문제들에 대한 비평을 제공한다. 외계 생명체는 인간의 기록된 과거의 한 부분으로 등장하게 되며 이 영화의 사건은 명확하게 확인되는 현재 시점과 요하네스버그라는 잘 알려진 도시에서 발생된다. 명백한 반-할리우드 영화인 *District 9*은 남아프리카의 대도시와 역사적으로 연관되어 있는 분열과 갈등, 그리고 도시 빈곤과 불법 이민의 문제점들을 다루면서 타자와의 접촉에 대한 인간의 불안감을 탐구한다. 이 논문은 이 특정 배경이 어떻게 이 영화를 구성하는지 그리고 외계인들이 도시 슬럼가의 비참한 환경에서 인간 이주민들과 혼합체를 이루며 도시 인구 정책아래에 생존하는 과정을 그려내면서 남아프리카의 가장 큰 도시와 오늘날의 대도시들이 직면한 현대의 사회 문제점들의 현실적인 검토를 어떻게 유도하는지를 들여다본다. 또한 이 논문은 이 영화에서 나타난 인간과 외계생물체 간 이루어진 하이브리드를 통해 타자에 대한 인간의 착취에 저항하는 힘으로써의 잠재력에 대해 살펴본다. 비록 이 영화의 배경은 매우 지역적이지만, *District 9*은 영리를 추구하는 다국적기업의 명백한 착취의 관습을 그려냄으로써 보다 더 넓은 범위의 세계 관객에게 일침을 가하기도 한다. SF 영화이면서 도시 인구 충돌에 대해 사회 비평을 시도하는 영화 *District 9*은 불안정감과 타자에 대한 공포감이 가득한 불확실하고 잠재적 폭력성을 가진 현대 인간 세계를 그리고 있다.

주제어 : 디스트릭트 9, 공상과학 영화, 도시 리얼리즘, 남아프리카, 사회 비평, 외계인, 불법 이민자

524 비교문화연구 제42집 (2016.3.)

논문접수일: 2016년 02월 09일

심사완료일: 2016년 03월 07일

게재확정일: 2016년 03월 10일