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# Who are the Pirates? Somali Piracy and Environmental Justice in *Alakrana*, *Stolen Seas* and *Captain Phillips*<sup>1</sup>

*Can anyone ever really be for piracy? Outside of sea bandits and young girls fantasizing of Johnny Depp, would anyone with an honest regard for good human conduct really say that they are in support of sea robbery? Well, in Somalia, the answer is: it's complicated. . . . It seems to me that this new modern crisis is truly a question of justice, but also a question of whose justice.*

–K'naan,<sup>2</sup> quoted in *Vazquez*

## 1. Introduction

This article seeks to analyze three interrelated texts, specifically the Spanish miniseries *Alakrana* (2011), the independent US documentary film *Stolen Seas*, and the Hollywood big-budget production *Captain Phillips* (2013), which, though produced in very different contexts, dealt with comparable transnational issues. All three of them were based on real events, namely the hijacking of a merchant boat or fishing trawler by Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean. This analysis will be primarily carried out from an ecocritical perspective but will also take into account the ways in which different generic parameters, in

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particular those of historical fiction, the post-9/11 terrorist film and the documentary film are developed in the different narratives under scrutiny. In the case of *Captain Phillips*, this investigation will also incorporate a brief consideration of the ways in which popular star discourses may encourage a Manichean reading of events, which more often than not relegates considerations of the economic and social effects of globalization to the background. Bearing this important fact in mind, this article will specifically consider the different narratives from the perspective of environmental justice, or environmental racism, in order to, precisely, bring those possibly marginalized voices to the fore. In doing so, some of the questions which T. V. Reed considers it pressing for contemporary ecocriticism to answer will be addressed:

How can . . . criticism further efforts of the environmental justice movement to bring attention to the ways in which environmental degradation and hazards unequally affect poor people and people of color? How has racism domestically and internationally enabled greater environmental irresponsibility? . . . How can issues like toxic waste . . . be brought forth more fully in criticism? . . . How can ecocriticism encourage justice and sustainable development in the so-called Third World? . . . (149)

Pietari Kääpä for his part argues that a particular strand of transnational cinema studies places a strong focus on cross-border texts that draw attention to global discontent and inequality, environmental issues representing “one very visible instance of the type of inequality globalization sows” (26). This article will therefore attempt to provide an analysis of the transnational environmental discourses present in *Alakrana*, *Stolen Seas* and *Captain Phillips* and will focus on the extent to which they reveal the mechanics of global inequality (a mainstay of transnational ecocinema) from their own local perspectives. As Kääpä contends in his assessment of contemporary ecocinematic practices,

transnational ecocinemas must engage with such concerns in a global framework, providing sustained interrogation of the ways that concerns arising from transnational cinema studies (e.g. . . . , postcolonialism, . . . , the geopolitics and economics of a global inequality) feature in the ecocinemas of the world . . . . This type of ecocinema engages with issues of uneven global development and sustainability by providing alternative challenges to the . . . narrative conventions dominating mainstream Hollywood cinema. . . . (26)

In one of the DVD extras for the independent award-winning US documentary *Stolen Seas*, director and producer Thymaya Payne remarks precisely on the fact that the film is about neo-colonialism, environmental racism and the empowerment of disenfranchised people, in this case the inhabitants of famine-ravaged and war-torn Somalia, against economic and environmental injustice. Recalling his first impressions after watching the material that he had collected about the pirate networks, Payne is particularly keen to highlight the pirates' business savviness and remarkable negotiating skills: "It was very, very sophisticated and tuned into the global economy and how things work and that scared everybody, because God forbid the world's poorest figure out the game and they figure out how to hustle, because then they're dangerous."

This is a controversial comment which raises the perennial ethical question of whether it is right for the disadvantaged to empower themselves against poverty and dispossession by resorting to violence, in this case the hijacking of merchant ships and fishing trawlers with innocent crews on board. As Boggs and Pollard remind us in their analysis of post 9-11 Hollywood films dealing with the threat of terrorism, "discourses on violence reflect a double standard . . . Violence is sanctioned, even celebrated in the service of . . . power and wealth, but it is treated as a violation of civilized values when used by others" (349). This is an argument which, as I will try to demonstrate, may easily be extrapolated to the onscreen and media representations of Somali piracy in the West.

But what exactly gave rise to this violence? Piracy in Somalia became a brutal means to a specific end which initially and, in the opinion of many a Somali, legitimately responded to particular social, economic and environmental problems, which, as a whole, remained unreported in the West in order to safeguard "our" neo-colonial economic and geopolitical interests. Somali commentators from the world of journalism and academia have repeatedly voiced these concerns. Journalist Mohamed Abshir Waldo, for instance, condemned the broad international community for their excessively one-sided approach to the crisis and suggested UN officials may be keeping a hidden economic agenda. Academics Samatar, Lindberg and Mahayni for their part stressed the lack of in-depth analysis which has typically characterized most reporting on the issue as well as the fact that no real effort has been made on the part of Western nations "to appreciate why many Somalis are indifferent to the world's concerns about piracy" (1387).

The virtual absence of explanatory backgrounds in Western accounts of the crisis led to stereotypical media constructions of

Somalis as criminal supporters of sea robbery at best and terrorists at worst. According to Pollock, this resonates with centuries-long imperialistic constructions of Somalia as a territory “comprised of second-class citizens living in a third-world country . . . plagued with corruption, anarchy and violence” (46). The ultimate goal of this broad communication strategy appears to be to delegitimize or silence the Somali point of view altogether since the people of Somalia, despite lacking so much, still have something Western nations desperately need: “a geographical stronghold in a resource-rich region of the world” (48). Hence, as many Somalis complain, the (neo-)colonial discourses on piracy circulating in the West provide clear evidence of the international community’s double standards. Ultimately, Somalis have come to consider Western nations “a major factor in the making of the Somali disaster” (Samatar et al. 1389; 1391).

In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein put forward a persuasive argument regarding the forceful tactics employed by capitalistic regimes in moments of crisis (whether political, economic, or environmental) in order to push or strengthen neoliberal economic agendas. Indeed, much of the media reporting and fictional representation of the Somali piracy crisis, including some of the texts analysed here, may be read against this very same background. The multinational UN-backed military operations and the one-sided approach that generally characterized the film and media representations of the Somali piracy crisis seemed to serve the very same purpose: safeguarding the interests of Western nations in the Indian Ocean, no matter what the social, economic, health and environmental consequences for the local population.<sup>3</sup>

Although the problem of modern piracy is not new (the Asian South Seas had been ravaged by acts of piracy for years before Somalia hit the news), this issue had gone largely unreported until it put international commerce, large-scale fishing operations and oil transportation around the Gulf of Aden, that is, the vital route to Europe along the Suez Canal, at serious risk. In Somalia, piracy peaked between 2005 and 2012. After dozens of incidents and millions paid in ransom, international maritime law was modified in order to allow merchant and fishing companies to hire heavily-armed security staff to protect both crews and cargo. In addition, major UN-sanctioned military operations, including the EU’s *Atalanta* or NATO’s *Ocean Shield*, the former still in operation, were put in place in order to safeguard the economic and geostrategic interests of Western nations. According to UN resolutions 1816 and 1838, which were passed in 2008 despite Somali civil society objections (Waldo), these forces were authorized, in cooperation with the Transitional Federal Government, to operate within Somali

waters and had a very clear mandate: stop, by any means necessary, any act of piracy threatening the interests of the larger international community, arrest those responsible and put them on trial.

This article will consequently focus on the way the corpus I have selected dealt with this crisis. By critically considering these matters, I will not be trying to justify, let alone condone, the use of violence, as in fact most of the hijackings constituted rather violent physical and psychological attacks on the innocent crews. However, since the narratives and the filmmakers themselves explicitly raised these issues, I became interested in dissecting their views on the problem of modern piracy in the Indian Ocean. In order to achieve my goal, I will be referring to some of the economic, social and environmental effects of globalization.

It is widely believed that social inequality and economic deprivation breed crime in modern societies, and indeed globalization has been put to blame for the emergence or reinforcement of multiple transnational criminal activities, from international terrorism, to cyber-crime, to human and organ trafficking. The consumerist urge that drives global capitalism has also had terrible effects on the environment. This latest issue will also connect with the central concern of this article, that is environmental injustice and racism, which many claim is at the root of modern piracy in Somalia.

## 2. The Cinema of Globalization and Environmental (In)justice

In her consideration of modern transnational cinematic practices, Deborah Shaw has attempted to organize the different strands that have been identified as part of the same phenomenon. Although transnational cinema may be analyzed from different perspectives, for the particular purposes of this article I will be focusing on Shaw's third category, that is the cinema of globalization, or "film texts that explicitly address questions of globalisation within their narratives, central to which are the ways in which relations of power between nations and peoples are played out on screen" (54). Shaw is here drawing on Zaniello's work on films about the power of transnational organizations. He refers to "containerized shipping" as the "key logistics tool for globalisation" (12) and believes that this new form of transportation, in which, crucially, he also includes fish factory ships, is one of the key features of globalization, together with the leadership of transnational institutions such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund), digitalization, offshoring, and deregulation.

Though belonging to different genres and arising from different contexts, the three productions under analysis here form an integral part of the cinema of globalization. *Alakrana* deals with the hijacking of the Spanish-owned and flagged fishing trawler of the same name; *Stolen Seas* deals with the hijacking of the cargo ship CEC Future, which is Danish-owned but Bahamas-flagged. These same real-life events inspired another film, Danish production *Kapringen/A Hijacking* (2012),<sup>4</sup> although in this fictional film the ship is given the name of the Rozen, which, incidentally, is the name of a real St-Vincent and the Grenadines-owned and flagged ship which was also hijacked in Somalia. Finally, *Captain Phillips* deals with the hijacking of the US-flagged but Danish-owned merchant ship MAERSK Alabama and the spectacular liberation of its captain.

This discussion about vessel ownership and flags may seem inconsequential but it is in fact indicative of one of the main issues these texts deal with, and that is the economic, social and environmental effects of globalization. Ships may belong to a company in a given country but carry a “flag of convenience” belonging to a different one. This practice allows shipping companies to circumvent their own national legislation, as the countries that provide these flags have minimal regulation regarding environmental laws and treaties or the working rights of those on board. Frequently, rogue ship owners force their often exploited crews to carry out illegal fishing activities in order to maximize catches. This kind of activity has been carried out in Somalia for decades. In 2005, the Environmental Justice Foundation reported that,

Today, it is estimated that some 700 foreign-owned vessels are fully engaged in unlicensed fishing in Somali waters. . . . The foreign vessels compete with artisanal fishermen: by coming close inshore they destroy stationary fishing nets and traps and this has resulted in confrontations and loss of life. . . . Somalia is clearly in desperate need of international assistance to monitor and protect its coastal resources. The food security and livelihoods of coastal communities is being seriously compromised, and a valuable resource—which in the future could aid the recovery of the Somali economy—is being recklessly plundered . . . (Trent et al. 7)

When the Environmental Justice Foundation refers in its report to “food security” it is also referring to further unreported illegal practices along the Somali coastline, namely toxic and radioactive waste dumping from rich nations in exchange for cash and weapons for local warring factions, as depicted in the film *Gomorrah* (2008). This



environmental crime, a clear example of “toxic colonialism” (Pellow 11), became evident in the aftermath of the tsunami which ravaged the Indian Ocean in 2004, when hundreds of barrels of toxic waste were washed upon the Somali coastline. Public health started to become seriously affected but this appalling issue received minimal media coverage in the West. As K’naan denounces, European disposal firms were paying warlords about \$3 a ton, whereas in Europe, where environmental laws are much more stringent, they would have had to pay \$1000 a ton (quoted in Vazquez). Therefore, as Sumaila and Bawumia assert, “there was a *different kind of piracy* and criminal activity taking place in Somali waters by foreign vessels in the form of robbing the Somali people of their livelihoods, marine resources, ecosystem and health. There was injustice from an ecosystem perspective” (160, emphasis added).

The proliferation of criminal acts related to illegal overfishing and toxic waste dumping, which had been repeatedly but unsuccessfully reported to the international community by local and international environmental justice organizations,<sup>5</sup> spurred the emergence of what became later known as “piracy” along the coast of Somalia, as “fishers formed themselves into bands of local coast guards . . . They would board foreign vessels and demand compensation for the fish caught” (160). This suggests that the origin of the problem, which certainly later turned into a global-scale criminal activity with stakeholders disseminated around the world,<sup>6</sup> lay in the issues that advocates of environmental justice and critics of environmental racism have traditionally exposed, namely the close connexion between neo-colonialism, environmental degradation, whether in the form of pollution or resource depletion, and social injustice.

The scale and implications of the crime of piracy may have eventually turned global, but the origins were local. However, instead of addressing the root causes of a localized problem, the international community resorted to military solutions often grounded on the unconfirmed premise that Somali piracy was providing a safe haven for Al-Qaeda terrorists and funding their international criminal activities (Martin et al. 7). Indeed pirates were once referred to by Western superpowers as “one of the great menaces of our times” (Hari).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. *Alakrana*

The issue of illegal fishing leads me to the consideration of the first case study, *Alakrana*. This ambitious production was backed by the Spanish subsidiary of Lars Von Trier’s producing company Zentropa, together with the highly successful cinema-producing branch of

Spanish TV conglomerate Telecinco, and was meant to be exhibited in cinemas. It therefore displayed high production values and aimed to capitalize on the tremendous popularity of its star, Miguel Ángel Silvestre, who played the role of the inexperienced captain. The skipper's role, meanwhile, was to be played by prestigious stage actor Francesc Orella. Furthermore, it was scripted by Jorge Guerricaechevarría, who had just won a Goya Award (the Spanish Oscars) for his *Celda 211* (2009) script. However, despite its evident credentials and possibly due to a perceived lack of interest in current-affairs dramas on the part of the Spanish cinema-going audience, the production was "demoted" to miniseries status in 2011, one year after shooting was completed. Docudramas and historical fiction films<sup>8</sup> are well-established, popular TV genres in Spain (Duff Burnay and Rueda Laffond), which may have persuaded the producers to take this step in order to maximize their profits at a time when the economic crisis in Spain had led to a sharp decline in the number of cinemagoers (García de Castro and Caffarel Serra 179).

In general terms, *Alakrana*, like most contemporary Spanish docudramas and other historical TV productions destined to the mass audience, is informative but simplistic and excessively Manichean in tone (Duff Burnay and Rueda Laffond 86; García de Castro and Caffarel Serra 185). For a product coming from the *auteur*-led and inspired Zentropa factory, this is uncharacteristic (Ostrowska). Indeed, Zentropa Spain's main producer, David Matamoros, considers the audience, not individual artistic visions, to be the key factor in his decisions to back new film projects (quoted in Mollá Furió 1199). His perspective, predictably, mirrors Telecinco's general approach to film production (Triana-Toribio 424) and explains *Alakrana*'s heavy investment in the politics of stardom as well as its one-dimensional, selective approach to the events portrayed.

The *Alakrana* fishing trawler was hijacked in 2009 with a multinational crew of 36, including 16 Spaniards.<sup>9</sup> In the miniseries' press dossier, Telecinco vowed to provide the spectator with "a new perspective on the incident, with two opposing points of view, that of the crew and the pirates" ("Telecinco Estrena") (my translation). However, upon close examination of the narrative, it is difficult to find clear evidence of this assertion. In fact, the pirates' comments are only sometimes translated, normally when they talk to the crew in English. They shout, rather than talk, and are in general portrayed as violent gun-toting criminals with no background stories and no names. This characterization is therefore more akin to that of the irrational, (Muslim) terrorist stereotype that pervades much contemporary film production in the West than to that of the romanticized pirates that Brian Taves deals



with in *The Romance of Adventure*. Whereas the classical freedom-seeking pirate is defined “less by specific acts than by an individualistic rebelliousness and refusal to submit to any outside domination” (26), Muslims and Arabs<sup>10</sup> are stereotypically portrayed as the “brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural “others” bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners” (Shaheen 172).

The pirate leader is thus credited as “*el hijoputa*”<sup>11</sup> (the son of a bitch, literally) and his subaltern “*el barbas*” (the bearded one). However, the narrative makes an exception with the two young pirates that were arrested by Spanish Navy officers. These two pirates, who, in real life, were later on sent to Spain to stand trial, are exceptionally allowed the privilege of a short flashback portraying the harsh living conditions in war-torn Somalia. However, this is as far as *Alakrana* will go in its actual depiction of life in the country. *Alakrana*’s tagline was indicative in this respect: “The Devil is on dry land; Hell is at Sea,” which unfairly demonises all Somalis and clearly deflects attention from the hell of permanent civil war in Somalia, unanimously considered, since the fall of the dictatorial Barre regime in 1991, the prototype of a failed state, together with South Sudan.

Still, by highlighting the fact that the *Alakrana* had intentionally veered 800 miles away from the nearest protective frigate at the skipper’s request, the narrative highlights the pressures that fishing crews are under as a result of the current overexploitation of marine resources. Fishing trawlers have to follow fish shoals, despite the potential risks. When the interpreter for the pirates arrives, he explains that their justification for the hijacking is “inflicting a punishment for illegal (over)fishing” (my translation). As already explained, this practice, also known as IUU, or illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing, has been going on off the coast of Somalia for a long time. The interpreter’s version of the “*hijoputa*’s” words goes as follows:

In Spain they want to judge two Somali children, as if they were pirates, or thieves. But *you* are the thieves, coming all the way here to our homeland to steal everything we’ve got. First, you killed off all the fish in your sea, then you went further until there was no fish left to catch and now you come here and you want to swop all we’ve got for your factory junk? (my translation)

While it is true that the *Alakrana* was not dumping toxic waste in Somali waters, there are grounds to believe that it was poaching on them. However, the Manichean presentation of events, as well as the sustained narrative focus that is placed on the suffering of the crew and their families, conveniently invalidates the pirate’s point of view and

justification for the hijack, which is presented as a mere irrational rant coming from a vicious criminal. As a work of mass entertainment, *Alakrana* therefore refuses to delve into these crucial matters. However, there is a disturbing dialog between the hostage captain and skipper at the end of the miniseries that threatens to dig further:

Captain: Maybe it's true and we have come to their homeland to steal the only thing they've got.

Skipper: Look, I don't know anything about homelands. Everyone has got one and loves it in a different way. But the sea belongs to all of us. Well, those of us that are poor, because if you are not you don't look forward to getting on a boat and lurching in the middle of a storm. But if that's your only option and you have to go to the end of the world then you do it, and get fucked in the rain and the wind, or whatever comes your way and you rip the sea off everything it's got, even the stones. But I have never stolen anything from anybody, never done that in my life, much less from those jerks, fucking one another all the time . . . (my translation)

The skipper's words make it clear that legal sustainable fishing is not precisely a concern he seems to take seriously and therefore the pirates' accusation of illegal over-fishing is not too far off the mark. Besides, the skipper considers his own status as a poor person to be equivalent to that of the Somali population at large, whom he blames for their own misfortune. This is far from being a fair comparison, as the resources and opportunities at the skipper's disposal, however limited, are far greater than those available to the average Somali person. And yet, having been witness to the brutality of "*el hijoputa*," coupled with the fact that the real reasons behind piracy are left largely unexplored, the skipper's outlook on "our" fishing rights may be supported by the viewer. Therefore, despite the publicity's claims to the contrary, *Alakrana* clearly privileges only one point of view in a multifaceted problem with no easy solutions.

#### 4. *Stolen Seas*

The independent documentary *Stolen Seas*, in contrast, prides itself on allowing all participants in the story to voice their opinions on the matter, suggesting that lawlessness applies to practically all sides. As an effective instance of the documentary genre, *Stolen Seas* strives to present both its subject matter and the stakeholders' different arguments and points of view accurately, while also "accumulating

authentic source materials (witness testimony, direct capture of people, events through the camera)" (Parram 193). Nerve-racking telephone conversations and the opinions of various experts on the social, environmental, geopolitical and economic issues underlying the crisis may also be added to the list in this particular case. While dealing with the same issues as *Alakrana*, this documentary's scope was clearly much broader. As one reviewer put it, *Stolen Seas* "is a documentary of such ambitious scope that you might need a remote control and a notebook to keep up with it" (Mozaffar). The complexity and density that characterizes this narrative responds to the documentary genre's strong claim to truthfulness and factual accuracy, which certainly contrasts with the lack of narrative sophistication which tends to characterize productions like *Alakrana*.

*Stolen Seas* was directed by Thymaya Payne and written by Mark Monroe, who also wrote such well-known environmental documentaries as *The Cove* (2009) and *Before the Flood* (2016). Though extremely well researched over a period of several years and very positively reviewed as being "bold . . . incisive" (Linden), "riveting" (Debruge) and "magnificent in its thoroughness and nuance" (Catsoulis), this award-winning documentary achieved only a limited theatrical release after featuring in various festivals. It is nonetheless widely available on various streaming platforms and in DVD format.

In an attempt to avoid bias,<sup>12</sup> the director provided the real-life pirates with digital cameras so that they would film themselves and also interviewed the Somali interpreter/negotiator, the CEO of a Danish company whose ship was hijacked, as well as several hostages of various nationalities. The documentary clearly attempts to paint a more nuanced picture and provides a much-needed background to the story, concentrating on such aspects as illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping, which explains, rather than condones, the origins of the once-flourishing business of piracy. In many ways, Payne's documentary exemplifies Delman's account of effective documentary making:

Like narrative films, documentaries can entertain . . . and leave audiences wanting more. They can change the way we look at a particular topic . . . Documentaries shine a light on issues that need illumination. They meld journalism with visual artistry and illustrate people or problems that are important in our society but may have been neglected or misunderstood. (129)

*Stolen Seas* skilfully illuminates the obscure issue of piracy in Somalia while also excelling at portraying the pirates as savvy business negotiators, aware that merchant companies, often sailing under flags

of convenience and therefore with no guaranteed or effective governmental support, would rather pay ransom, financed in part by insurance companies, than take those responsible to court, a much costlier solution. Deregulation and *laissez faire* economics actually made piracy stronger. As a result, piracy is presented as *the* perfect crime, as it is very difficult to punish those responsible. Payne demonstrates that piracy became a very profitable business for all parties involved, both in Somalia and in many other parts of the world. What started as a local initiative subsequently became an international venture as the pirates forged very complex multinational networks involving unscrupulous capital investors and law firms as far as London and New York, which evinces how attuned these grids were to the workings of the deregulated global economy.

In their analysis of filmic representations of Islamic terrorism, Boggs and Pollard conclude that international terrorist networks have managed to flourish thanks to the same neoliberal conditions that help transnational organizations to prosper, from free digital communication channels to geographical mobility and the blurring of frontiers, therefore representing “the darkest side of neo-liberal globalization” (351). *Stolen Seas* reaches virtually the same conclusion, that is to say, global business practices have affected poor territories like Somalia rather negatively, but Somali pirates have successfully used the instruments set in motion by globalization to their own (criminal) advantage.

This documentary therefore delves into the environmental, economic and social origins of piracy further than *Alakrana* and dares to ask questions about the pernicious effects of global capitalism and deregulation, in particular the use of convenience flags, the overexploitation of marine resources and toxic waste dumping off the coast of Somalia. It also deals with the effects of the long-lasting war on the civilian population, a large percentage of whom have become displaced or long-term refugees, which leads the director to suggest that the massive international investment on military operations in the Indian Ocean should instead be invested on securing peace, security and stability in the region so that living conditions on land can subsequently improve. For example, the EU *Atalanta* Operation cost the Spanish tax payer alone around €250 m at the peak of its operations, between 2009 and 2011 (Martin at al. 43). This operation authorizes military patrols to protect vessels and arrest pirates, but there is no explicit mention of dealing with “the other pirates” on the *Atalanta* operation website (“Countering Piracy”). As already referred to, closely monitoring and stopping toxic waste dumping and IUU fishing does not seem to be a clear priority for the participating European nations.

### 5. *Captain Phillips*

This analysis will conclude with an examination of *Captain Phillips*, by British director Paul Greengrass, starring Tom Hanks. This film deals with the hijacking of a cargo ship which, ironically, was carrying UN food aid and water for Africans, including Somalis, along with other commercial goods. Greengrass has become an action *auteur* of sorts, with a very personal, gritty filmmaking style, which he developed during his years of TV documentary making in the UK. He has also become known for his predilection for controversial political subject matters, as evidenced in *Bloody Sunday* (2002), *United 93* (2006), and *Green Zone* (2010). Greengrass's fame has therefore been built on a strong corpus of docudramas, *Captain Phillips* providing the latest addition to his successful portfolio.

The docudrama, as a form of realism in fiction film, is a hybrid genre which typically deals with historical events, especially of a recent and controversial nature, more or less freely. This necessarily implies a certain degree of diversion from historical factuality, especially through the use of actors and artificial sets (Duvall 13). At the same time, the docudrama employs conventions which are typical of the documentary genre, such as certain sound and visual effects, the use of hand-held cameras, actors' improvisations, the insertion of actual footage or an emphasis on the accurate representation of historical facts and events (Raventós Mercadé et al. 130).<sup>13</sup> Thus, Greengrass was widely criticized for attempting to humanize the terrorists in *United 93*, although this was the direct result of his endeavor to present events realistically and even-handedly. In *Captain Phillips*, the director also strives to provide a background for the actions of the pirates, though this becomes perhaps more evident in the promotional interviews and in the extras for the DVD than in the film itself. Certainly, the presence of a Hollywood heavyweight like Hanks makes it rather difficult for the narrative to maintain a balanced perspective.

The film is also unapologetic about its focus on globalization, and the first minutes are dedicated to contextualizing the film in this respect, from the starting dialog between Phillips and his wife (Catherine Keener), revolving around harsh competition in the global job market, where "you gotta be strong to survive . . . Big wheels are turning," to the impressive aerial shots of the shipping port in Oman, which film critic Chris Norris described as "a breathtaking array of multicolored rectangles, a Mondrian canvas of globalization whose scale is hard to fully assimilate" (48). In monochrome Somalia, as represented at the beginning of the film, you gotta be *even stronger* to survive, which is

what draws desperate young men, no older than twenty, to the brutal pirate networks.

Despite reports at the time of the hijacking regarding the supposed links to terrorist networks (Syal and Townsend), the film strives to make it patent that the pirates' motives are purely economic. When they board the ship, Muse (Barkhad Abdi), their leader, declares "Relax Captain, no Al-Qaeda here, just business." In fact, the narrative stresses this point far more frequently than the problem of IUU fishing, with one important exception.

Muse: Irish, it's taxes. This money, taking you. That's all it is. You come to our waters, you've got to pay.

Phillips: We were in international waters. Not your waters, international waters. We were carrying food for starving people in Africa, even Somalis.

Muse: Yes, sure. Rich countries like to help Somalis. Big ships come to our waters, take all the fish out. What's left for us to fish?

Phillips: So you're fishermen?

Muse: Yes, we are all fishermen.

Here Muse is clearly criticizing the international community's charity approach to the problem of hunger and economic underdevelopment in Africa. A well-known proverb goes "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Muse does not need to be taught how to fish, as he already is a fisherman, he needs the same social and economic opportunities the citizens in Western nations enjoy and take for granted but are permanently out of reach for Somalis. The cargo and the crews on the ships the pirates seize therefore become the metaphorical embodiments of such denied opportunities. During a tense scene in which Muse threatens to execute Phillips, the latter says, "there's got to be other things apart from being a fisherman and kidnapping people," to which Muse responds "Maybe in America, Irish, maybe in America." At moments like these, it is difficult not to feel sympathy for the devil. As Hall concludes, this comment is "all the more tragic because it offers a clear opportunity for the film to explore the politics that the producers are so knowingly sidestepping."

Indeed, the opportunity is missed and it is in fact after this incident that the Navy Seals arrive. The tone of the film then changes radically as they mount their spectacular rescue operation, which ended "successfully" with the hostage freed, three pirates summarily executed by Navy snipers and the pirate leader captured and currently serving a 33-year prison sentence in the United States. The fact that the



US government deployed a whole team of 60 to 80 Navy seals belonging to the glorified but lately questioned antiterrorist Team 6 (Mazzetti et al.), the same team that located and executed Osama Bin Laden, is a clear indication of the links that were said to exist between piracy and terrorism. There is no other explanation for the disproportionate use of force employed to liberate one hostage, however American (and however Tom Hanks).<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, from the moment Seal Team 6 arrives, the so-far character-driven docudrama turns into a tense but conventional thriller involving a white hat-black hat conflict between “them,” the “terrorists”/pirates, and “us,” the Navy Seals and the innocent victims, as represented by the contemporary Everyman of the movies, Tom Hanks, with whom the audience easily identifies (Hammond). As one reviewer put it “it is as if Ken Loach had been sacked when shooting a film about piracy in the high seas and Tony Scott [of *Top Gun* fame] had been hired to complete it” (Piñón 43) (my translation).

In one of the extras for the DVD version of the film, this radical turn in focus is amusingly referred to by Greengrass. He describes how he discussed with Hanks his interest in reflecting the effects of globalization and economic injustice in the narrative. The star politely thanked him for his input but preferred to discuss the film as being simply about “this ordinary guy at peril at sea,” in a clear attempt to foreground, in true US docudrama style, his iconic star persona<sup>15</sup> and depoliticize the events in the narrative, thereby condemning the pirates to guaranteed obliteration by concealing their motives. As Nelson contends, the melodramatic thriller format has recurrently been used by Hollywood in order to depict the threat of terrorism, as this genre usually provides viewers with unqualified heroes and villains:

To emplot terrorism in thrillers is to endow its politics with clear heroes and monstrous villains, both acting for motives more personal than ideological. . . . In thrillers this puts terrorists unarguably in the wrong: thrillers seldom explore the complications in how one cause’s terrorist can be another’s freedom fighter . . . (187–88)<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, despite his purported intentions, Greengrass could do nothing but accept the ideological restrictions that the making of a standard star-focused Hollywood feature entails.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the issue of environmental justice. The Environmental Justice Foundation’s website declares “we

believe that environmental security is not just about quality of life, it is a basic human right . . . Environmental degradation . . . has disproportionate impacts on the world's poorest . . . communities, that [sic] lack a voice for their concerns" ("About EJF"). All three texts analyzed here purported to give a voice to the pirates, the undeclared "representatives" of one of these communities, which was no doubt a controversial endeavor. However, with the notable exception of *Stolen Seas*, their ecocritical potential, in the sense proposed by Kääpä above, becomes nullified as these voices remain largely silenced for the sake of melodramatic entertainment. As a result, the injustices that engendered piracy in Somalia in the first place are inevitably relegated to the background. Hardly surprising, given the international community's lack of initiative to put an end to "the other form of piracy."

Despite *Stolen Seas*' endeavor to incorporate the Somali point of view into the narrative, an "accented" (Naficy) take on piracy that originates from Somalia or from the Somali filmmaking diaspora remains to be produced, which points to the historical powerlessness of marginalized groups to take control of their own representation. Meanwhile, the recently released film *The Pirates of Somalia* (2017), its nuanced portrayal of Somalia notwithstanding, continues to present events from a "dominant" point of view through the eyes of its Western protagonist and narrator, based on Canadian journalist Jay Bahadur.<sup>17</sup> The voice-over narrative strategy adopted by this latest Western rendition of the piracy issue speaks volumes and ultimately confirms the dominant film industry's lack of interest to empower Somalis or any other disenfranchised group for that matter to control the means of their own representation lest, to quote Thymaya Payne again, "they figure out the game, . . . because then they're dangerous."

## NOTES

1. The research for this article was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (project reference number FFI2013-40769) and the Innovation, Research and University department of the Government of Aragon (project reference number H-12).

2. K'naan is a popular Somali Canadian poet, rap singer and activist whose music, and views, feature in the documentary *Stolen Seas* (2012), which this article discusses.

3. As Klein suggests, myriad economic opportunities presented themselves (or became consolidated) for Western companies as a result of the crisis. Factory fishing firms, insurance companies, security firms and the arms industry were some of the obvious beneficiaries. As Pollock states, "the message . . . in the West is that private ships . . . must now be protected from

piracy, offering the pirates of Somalia as a global scapegoat while simultaneously erasing their initial grievances" (52).

4. Though dealing with identical subject matter, this film will not be analyzed here because its focus is almost exclusively on the hostages and the negotiation process, which leaves little room for a consideration of the narrative from the perspective of environmental justice.

5. In 2011, United Nations' resolution 2020 was passed. It significantly incorporated article 24, whereby the Security Council urged "States individually or within the framework of competent international organizations to positively consider investigating allegations of illegal fishing and illegal dumping, including of toxic substances, with a view to prosecuting such offenses when committed by persons under their jurisdiction; and takes note of the Secretary-General's intention to include updates on these issues in his future reports relating to piracy off the Coast of Somalia." In effect, this meant that the international maritime forces were given no additional mandate over illegal fishing or waste dumping activities, leaving individual nations to monitor and stop such practices. Many of these individual nations are providers of flags of convenience, which are expected to do little regarding this matter. On the other hand, no further reports relating to Somali piracy have been published by the Secretary General. Hence, in 2015, former Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud appealed yet again to the international community to help his government to put an end to IUU [illegal, unreported, unregulated] fishing in Somali waters. His appeal has so far failed to achieve an expansion of the UN forces' mandate. The resurgence of pirate attacks in the area, five in 2017, has been blamed on these circumstances (Macleod).

6. This development has led Samater et al. to differentiate between different types of pirates, crucially what they call "resource pirates," "defensive pirates," and "ransom pirates." "Resource pirates" practice IUU fishing and traffic in toxic waste in Somali waters. The aim of "defensive pirates," meanwhile, is to protect Somali marine resources. "Ransom pirates," who attracted the most global interest, "mimicked the defensive pirates" though their true interest was collecting ransom (1385–1386). The Somali population at large supports the activities of defensive pirates (Waldo). K'naan, for instance, declared his support thus: "if getting rid of the pirates only means the continuous rape of our coast by unmonitored Western vessels and the producing of a new cancerous generation, we would all fly our pirate flags high."

7. Shortland and Vothknecht (S149–S150) report that the links between Somali piracy and Islamic terrorism have remained unconfirmed, mainly because piracy is considered by religious leaders to be un-Islamic, or *haram*, a point which Bahadur confirms (52–53).

8. Docudramas and historical fiction films or series are sometimes confused, as they both restage historical events in a condensed way with a greater or lesser degree of dramatic license. Docudramas tend to concentrate on events of the more recent past and feature the "real" protagonists of the story, even if played by actors, while historical fiction tends to feature fictional characters against the backdrop of historical settings or events.

The docudrama also differs from the related genre of the biopic in the sense that it tends to focus on ordinary members of the public, rather than historically significant ones (Raventós Mercadé et al. 124).

9. Although there are conflicting versions as to the exact location of the trawler, the Spanish court that dealt with the Alakrana hijacking ruled that it had been hijacked at a distance of 120 nautical miles from the Somali coastline (Murillo et al. 8), that is to say, well within Somalia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). According to Article 56 of the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, foreign fishing trawlers can operate in a given country's EEZ as long as they have the required licenses from the coastal state affected. Due to the permanent state of war and institutional crisis in Somalia, the legality of any fishing permits, if ever issued, should be considered as highly dubious. In any case, there was never any evidence that the Alakrana had any kind of fishing license and therefore it may be assumed that it was operating illegally.

10. Somalia is one of the twenty-two Arab states, which also include, among others, Iraq and Syria, home of ISIS.

11. The aforementioned court ruling, however, mentions the actual name of the pirates' leader, which reinforces the narrative's stereotypical construction of the pirates, who are emphatically denied any form of individuality.

12. Clearly, all texts, including documentaries, are biased to a greater or lesser extent and cannot claim to be fully objective. What I am referring to here is the director's wish to give voice to all stakeholders in a multifaceted situation, including the pirates. In the era of post-truth, *Stolen Seas* proves to be more nuanced and hence more authentic or 'truer' to reality than factual news, which is culturally understood to be always subject to objectivity and balance (Parram 193). Payne's partly observational, partly participatory (Nichols 34) yet unobtrusive directorial style confers an even higher degree of verisimilitude to the film.

13. These authors have usefully differentiated between the UK and US docudrama traditions. The former tends to deal with social and political issues in much more depth than the latter, which generally focuses on the lives of ordinary individuals involved in extraordinary circumstances. Greengrass's bridging of both traditions is a paradigmatic example of successful transnational creativity and would deserve deeper consideration, which is outside the scope of this article.

14. Cettl argues that it is a mainstay of the Hollywood terrorist film to equate the fate of the hostages with the fate of the nation (8). When the nation, the United States in this case, happens to be represented by Tom Hanks, consistently voted US favorite film star, such a massive display of prowess may be understood to make sense.

15. Thymaya Payne criticized Greengrass on this point: "[Somali piracy is] not about an American being held for three days and then rescued by US Navy Seals. It's . . . about poor people being held by other poor people for more than a year while . . . others decide what to do" (quoted in Howden).

16. Or as K'naan observes, "one man's pirate is another man's coast guard" (quoted in Vazquez).

17. Bryan Buckley's earlier Oscar-nominated Somalia-set short film *Asad* (2012), for its part, featured an all-Somali refugee cast, all speaking their native language.

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