

Review

Blood Diamond

Directed by Edward Zwick

Reviewed by Dinga Sikwebu

Since its opening in movie houses around the country, the movie *Blood Diamond* has generated enormous debate. Firstly, there has been the debate on the role of strategic resources such as diamonds in fuelling armed conflicts around the globe. Secondly, there is the question of how accurately Hollywood tells African stories.

The heat is not surprising. Edward Zwick's *Blood Diamond* is a story of a Sierra Leone fisherman Solomon Vandy who is separated from his family during the civil war that engulfed his country in the 1990s. In his search for his family Vandy, played by Hollywood-star Djimon Hounsou, meets in prison Danny Archer a former South African soldier who is now involved in diamond smuggling. Skillfully portrayed by another Hollywood-hero Leonardo DiCaprio, Archer's burning desire is to set his hands on a pink diamond that Vandy buried on the river banks while performing forced labour in a rebel-controlled territory.

Through Vandy's longing for his family and Archer's dogged search for his alluvial lotto, the destructive nature of the civil war to the country and to children whose youth is cut short as they become shock troops of rebel groups is revealed. Pictorially, geographies of today's wars are laid bare. Visuals of displaced people and refugee camps are a testimony to large-scale internal displacement that occurs

during civil wars. Also revealed through dialogue in *Blood Diamond* is the web that exists between countries where extraction takes place, diamond cartels, middlemen, countries where polishing takes place and markets in the North.

With *Blood Diamond* telling it all, about how natural resources such as diamonds have not only been a mainspring of wars but have prolonged some of the most intractable conflicts, the jittery about the film that existed amongst companies such as De Beers is understandable. Through gripping personal accounts, the film shows that diamonds are not only about love but involve greed and violence.

While *Blood Diamond* is successful in raising the role of strategic resources in wars, the movie has all the formulaic hallmarks of Hollywood. Like the bodies that are blown apart by rival armies, the civil war shatters Vandy's dreams of raising his family under tranquil conditions. The estrangement of Vandy's son with his father after the former's indoctrination by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels is not different from the generational conflicts that characterises many Hollywood movies. Similar to its stablemates' plots; courage, optimism and perseverance is what lead to the movie's denouement. But it is in this Hollywood staple diet that the film's weaknesses lie. In the scriptwriters' rush to have



good triumphing over evil, key features of the conflict in Sierra Leone are lost.

The first thing that does not come out clearly in *Blood Diamond* is what the conflict was all about. Equally not revealed are the warring parties' claims. The RUF which is a rebel movement fighting against the government in Freetown is introduced when its soldiers descend like vultures on Vandy's village and begin to chop hands and limbs. This portrayal of the conflict can unfortunately feed into widely-held stereotypes of how in the continent, widespread idiotic mayhem is in competition for rulership with psychopaths.

From recent accounts, disgruntlement with the Freetown government is what triggered the war in Sierra Leone. Corruption characterised post-independent Sierra Leone as foreign companies showered local politicians with bribes in exchange for rights to