

THE NATURALIZATION OF "GOOD" VIOLENCE IN RECENT FILMS

ABOUT THE WAR ON TERROR

by

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To my sons Martin, Simon and my beloved wife Carolina

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ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes a narrative analysis of three recent films about the war on terror: *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016) to study how these movies produce meaning with regard to the worldwide fight against terrorism and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Drawing on Barthes' theory of semiotics and Foucault's notion of Subjectification and Knowledge/power, this research explores the construction of the terrorist character and the Arab enemy in fictional narratives and how those meanings produce a body of knowledge which defines the imaginary space to think and talk about such phenomena. This thesis also addresses the discursive practices used to legitimize and naturalize procedures such as the torture of terrorists and the killing of children and women at the hands of U.S. soldiers or American secret agents. Finally, this thesis explores the ways in which these filmic productions have begun to implicate audience members in the perpetration of symbolic violence by constructing specific locations for the viewer, through which the message makes more sense.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as well as the hijacking and crash of Flight 93 on September 11, 2001 arguably constitute the most significant events in the 21st century so far. The terrorist plot represents not only the most destructive outside aggression on American soil since Pearl Harbor, but also the benchmark from which U.S. foreign policy and ongoing international affairs have been shaped in the first two decades of the 3rd millennium. As an aftermath of the attack, two large-scale wars began in Afghanistan and Iraq, one of which has become the most protracted war in American history; moreover, a third conflict is being waged around the world against terrorism and almost three million Americans have served tours of duty in those countries (2015), where more than 500,000 people have died so far (Plos, 2015).

The 9/11 attacks have not only defined American action in terms of diplomatic priorities, security concerns and warlike action, but have carved the present and future of a generation of men and women who are now veterans and know the rigor of the battlefields. Above all, the events of the World Trade Center, Pentagon and Flight 93 constitute a historic juncture which has shaken the consciousness of a whole nation. People are still dealing with the pain of tragedy, simultaneously facing the outgrowth of multiple wars and trying to face their consequences. One of the most important arenas of this struggle has been the mass media, a privileged territory where “central myths,” “consensus narratives” and “shared cultural experiences” are constantly built in an accessible language

(Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2016). The collective memory about the attacks, the subsequent wars, and their aftermath, has largely been shaped by media representation, understood as the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language (Hall S. , 1997). The events of September 11, according to Shopp and Hill (2009), not only altered America's inner life, but also generated a "knotted relationship between popular culture, political discourse and terrorism" (p. 12). No single medium has escaped the side effects of the tragedy and the trails of 9/11 can be found, sixteen years later, throughout all the mass media system and its products, especially those dealing with inspiration, creativity, entertainment and dramatization of reality, such as books, songs, television and films.

Focusing on this last medium, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze the way in which recent movies about the war on terror produce meaning with regard to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the worldwide fight against terrorism. How are those conflagrations depicted? What kinds of conflicts are shown? How is the audience placed to understand the plots? In which way is the war waged? What methods are implemented? What behaviors are justified? What does all this mean? In addressing these questions, this thesis attempts to explore the signification of war produced by movies, to analyze the extent to which those representations have created a new ethics of war and to shed light in regard with the emergence of new forms of violence and the ways in which they are naturalized.

Before going further, it is necessary to address some of the consequences of 9/11 in media overall. It is important to better understand how specific events and

historical disjuncture can produce immediate and long-standing effects on the production of meaning and the making of sense while societies try to face reality, heal the wounds and outstrip the pain.

News Coverage, Truth and Patriotism

Just minutes after the first impact against the World Trade Center the main TV Networks interrupted their regular programming (Chermak, Bailey, & Brown, 2003) to report the incidents and begin sharing images about the crisis (p. 52). Without time to verify all the breaking news, eighty four unconfirmed reports were aired during the first five hours of coverage (Reynolds & Barnett, 2003), and at least twelve different rumors – including an explosion at the U.S. Capitol Building – resulted false (p. 695). Programming schedules were cancelled, and a commercial-free coverage continued on the major networks for four days (Chermak, Bailey, & Brown, p. 53). According to an analysis of CNN's coverage (Reynolds & Burnett, 2003), the theme of the American unity immediately emerged as a result of the 9/11 attacks and the early framing of the events “created the impression that war was inevitable and necessary to combat the horror and devastation that Americans had just witnessed” (p. 87).

The web was still relatively new and, as a result, many pages, overwhelmed by the high demand of news, collapsed that day (Brown, Fuzesi, Kitch, & Spivey, 2003). Many newspapers produced special late editions (Chermak, Bailey, & Brown, 2003) and *The New York Times* established an advertising-free daily section titled “A Nation Challenged,” which endured for fifteen weeks and earned the daily six

Pulitzer Prizes the next year. Listenership to radio rose exponentially (Carey, 2003) and calls to talk shows increased by 50 percent or more, providing another way to discuss peoples' reactions to the events (Chermak, Bailey, & Brown, 2003, p. 58).

According to Schopp and Hill (2009), immediately after the terrorist attacks the U.S. Government and the mainstream media set up two dominant streams of public discourse: an increasingly sharp definition of concepts like "good" and "evil" in absolute terms, and the construction of "the enemy" as the antithesis of all that America stands for (p. 16). Editorial pages started equating the war on terror with the "savage wars" waged against Native Americans, and the "taming" of "the frontier" (Faludi, 2007, p. 5), or portraying it as the comeback of the "alpha-male" (p.9). Soon after the collapse of the Twin Towers, the search for heroes began: The Flight 93 passengers (p.56); the firefighters attending the WTC (p.70); President George Bush, dubbed by *Time* as the "Lone Ranger" and "America's 'dragon slayer'" by *Newsweek* (p.47), or New York mayor, Rudolf Giuliani, named by *Time* magazine as its 2001 "Person of the Year" (p. 49).

In April 2003, two weeks after the beginning of the Iraq War, the capture and liberation of Private Jessica Lynch enthralled national attention. The rescue of the first woman soldier ever – conducted and live-recorded by the U.S Army – raised Lynch to the status of hero (Scott, 2004). Citing U.S. officials, *The Washington Post* reported on April 3 that Lynch had "fought fiercely and shot several enemy soldiers" until "she run out ammunition" (Schmidt & Loeb, 2003). Then, several media started speculating about mistreatment to Lynch. On April 5 *Daily News* stated "it's likely

she was tortured," *Newsweek* alluded to "unsettling questions" and "unpleasant implications," and *People* talked about "extensive torture" at hands of "barbaric" people (Faludi, 2007, p. 189). While American journalism closed ranks around Washington and the media privileged the official accounts about the war, doctors in Iraq debunked U.S. press reports about abuses against the private or the presence of Iraqi soldiers in the hospital where she was rescued (Scott, 2004). In the end, Lynch told ABC journalist Diane Sawyer on Nov. 6 that she had not been shot in the ambush, and that she was never mistreated at the hospital (ABC News, 2003). Her case made it evident the dilemmas posed onto the media after 9/11 in terms of patriotism and objective news coverage.

As a consequence of that struggle, even terminology was modified in the press. Since the Presidential authorization to use "enhanced interrogation" techniques and the Abu Ghraib scandal of 2004, journalists also changed their use of the word "torture" according to a study by Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy (2010). The researchers found a significant and sudden shift in the characterization of waterboarding after 9/11 in four main U.S. newspapers: *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*. Before the beginning of the War on Terror, these media characterized waterboarding as torture or implied it was in eight of every ten cases, on average. By contrast, from 2002 to 2008, these newspapers almost stopped referring to waterboarding as torture, doing so in less than five percent of their articles (Desai, Pineda, Runquist, & Fusunyan, 2010). The emergence of these new discursive

practices included the coining of novel words. In 2003, Princeton University entered the term “militainment” in its online dictionary WordNet, to refer to “entertainment with military themes in which the Department of Defense is celebrated” (Stahl, 2010). Both cases put in evidence how the War on Terror was also waged in the media and the field of knowledge.

The Impact of 9/11 on the Book Industry

The publishing sector was one of the first culture industries focused on making sense of the world post 9/11. Within two weeks after the tragedy, readers flocked to bookstores searching for works about terrorism. Due to people’s interest in understanding reality, publishing houses ran to reprint previous editions and hasten the release of new materials dealing with the Middle East, Osama bin Laden, fundamentalism and Islam, while prophetic works about disasters and books on grieving, spirituality and mourning reached a similar success (Abbott, 2001). A sudden sprout of spirituality also gave rise to an exponential increase in the demand of religious books. By September 21, Bible publisher Zondervan had doubled its normal volume of shipments to \$1 million worth per day and Chicago’s Koran publisher, Kazi, sold in just two weeks after the attacks as many copies as it usually did in one full year (Ford, 2001).

On September 25, fourteen days after the World Trade Centers fell, the first book about the terrorist attacks was published under the title of *09/11 8:48 am: Documenting America’s Greatest Tragedy* (Manus, 2001). The work, a compilation of 25 accounts by survivors, witnesses and mourners, written by students, alumnae

and faculty at New York University Department of Journalism, represented the starting point of a wave of memoirs, plays, comics, graphic novels, and academic texts that flooded the market in the next months (Damico & Quay, 2010). In December, Marvel published *Heroes*, a sixty-four-page all color poster book featuring firemen and rescuers in an inspiring example of what the comics industry can do when called to duty. One year later, more than 150 books inspired in the events of 9/11 had been published, and eleven of them were best sellers.

In the next years, new titles would added to the list, including narratives about Flight 93: *Among the Heroes* (Longman, 2003), *Heroes: 50 Stories of the American Spirit* (Skomal, 2002); the passengers: *Let's Roll* (Beamer, 2003), *Your Father's Voice* (Glick & Zegart, 2004); the Zero Zone: *Between Heaven and Ground Zero* (Haskin, 2006), *Report from Ground Zero* (Smith, 2003); the firemen and police officers: *Last Man Down* (Picciotto & Paisner, 2002), *First In, Last Out* (Salka, 2005), *So Others Might Live* (Golway, 2003); the people inside the Twin Towers: *102 Minutes* (Dwyer & Flynn, 2005); the soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq: *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (Bragg, 2003); or analysis about America after 9/11, such as *The Terror Dream* (Faludi, 2007). Even children's books like *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey* (Kalman, 2002), and *September Roses* (Winter, 2004) were published to encourage children to adopt a nationalistic ideology in relation to September 11 (Sciurba, 2009).

By December 2016, Goodreads, Amazon's social cataloging website, listed 987 titles related with the day America changed. From accounts documenting the

attack and aftermath, to works addressing or challenging the official account, and later fictional stories, all this vast production represents a “cultural response to national wounds that are sustained intimately, by ordinary people” (Keniston & Quinn, 2008).

The Sounds of Tragedy and Patriotism through Songs

In regard with popular music, Damico and Quay (2010) documented distinctive patterns emerging in the record industry after 9/11, some of them “immediately evident, whereas others took time to emerge” (p. 213). Among these trends, the authors identified a deliberate contention of the industry about disruptive words and images in the days after the attacks, the release of spiritual and patriotic songs, as well as the emergence of productions explicitly supporting military action and retaliation by the U.S. government. In regard to the first point, some album covers, songs titles and even musical group names were changed to avoid inappropriate connections. Those are the cases of the band Bush, which changed the title of its single *Speed Kills* to *The People That We Love* (2001) or the techno pop music duo “I Am World Trade Center” that briefly shortened its name to “*I am the World*,” so as to avoid allegations of exploiting the tragedy (p. 214).

The music community also engaged in the organization of benefit concerts to honor and raise funds for the victims. In addition, it responded to the collective anxiety and the national mourning with lyrics. As early as October 23, singer Celine Dion released the album *God Bless America*, a collection of emotional anthems and songs of hope, freedom and inspiration, which debuted at number 1 on Billboard's

top 200 album charts and sold 180,984 copies in its first week of release (Moody, 2001). Other compilations, such as Frank Sinatra's *America the Beautiful* (released in December), Pete Seeger's *This Land Your Land* or the re-release of Whitney Houston's single, *The Star-Spangled Banner* and Lee Greenwood's *American Patriot*, nurtured this surge in patriotic music popularity. Contemplative and inspirational tunes also found receptivity and the album *Day without Rain* by New Age singer Enya, which was No. 20 in the Billboard before September 11, suddenly became the nation's No. 2 album (Moody, 2001). Meanwhile, ex Beatle's singer Paul McCartney released on November 13 *Freedom*, one of the first songs specifically inspired by the 9/11 events, which depicted the terrorist attacks as an assault on freedom (Damico & Quay, 2010). Singer Neil Young also released in November his single *Let's Roll*, about Flight 93 and whose title refers to the last words attributed to Todd Beamer, one of the passengers of the hijacked plane.

In time, 9/11 terrorist attacks inspired entire musical collections, such as the album *The Rising* (2002) by singer Bruce Springsteen, focused on individual perspectives of the tragedy in New York or Dolly Parton's *Halos and Horns* (2002), an introspective examination of the aftermath. Other productions, like *Courtesy of the Red White and Blue* (2002) by Toby Keith and *Have you Forgotten* by Darryl Worley (2003), started a new trend of explicit support for retaliation and military action in response to the attacks. Simultaneously, hip-hop singers critiqued the Bush administration, his "efforts to suspend civil liberties," his "lackluster response to Hurricane Katrina" and "the morality of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq" (Shopp &

Hill, 2009, p. 32). In his single *The 4th Branch* (2003), rapper Immortal Technique questions the sacrifice of nonwhite Americans during the War on Terror. That same year, rapper Paris releases his album *Sonic Jihad*, whose cover features a hijacked commercial airliner heading towards the White House (Williams, 2009). In 2004, Eminem's song *Mosh* (2004) repudiated President Bush for the war and urges him to bring the U.S. troops back. Since then, the music related to 9/11 has addressed almost all genres (including heavy metal songs like *So Others May Live*), through which the industry, as a whole, has made evident the connections between music and the political world (Damico & Quay, 2010).

Video Games: Virtual Soldiers Playing the War

If the Gulf War turned the presentation of war into a mass spectacle (Stahl, 2010), the emergence of combat video games in the 1990's invited the citizen to "play the war" (p.4). Before 9/11, titles such as *Doom* (1993), *Desert Tank* (1994), *Apache Longbow* (1996), and *Joint Force Employment* (1997) found success and provided players with the experience of a first-person shooter (FPS) and the shooting, stabbing, and chainsawing of enemies; the post-9/11 world furnished a new dimension for the flourishing of war games. Originally scheduled for September 11, but pulled because of the terrorist attacks, *Real War*, a computer-based simulator featuring real-time strategy (RTS) released on September 24 immediately became a success because people "get to blow the terrorist up" (p. 94). Before the end of 2001, Microsoft released *Halo*, a military science fiction first-person shooter

video game where players take control of a super-soldier living in the 26th century who fights aliens.

The following year, 2002, the U.S. Army released *America's Army*, a tactical shooter game in which players act as an American soldier. The game, designed to allow young Americans to virtually explore the Army, represented the first use of game technology in support of U.S. Army recruiting. The Windows version was released on July 4. In August Sony launched *Socom, Navy Seals* a computer game about counter terrorist missions accomplished in Thailand, Congo, and Turkmenistan. In December, Trauma Studios launched *Desert Combat*, a war game set in Iraq during the first Gulf War, which added many new weapons, vehicles, and maps. In 2003, Nintendo launched *Advance Wars 2*, a battle strategy game that involves playing against computer-controlled units to achieve territorial military goals (Crogan, 2011).

Upon commission by the Pentagon, one year after the Iraq invasion (in 2004) Pandemic Studios released *Full Spectrum Warrior*, a war simulator originally designed to train foot soldiers. The game's storyline involves the overthrow of Mohammad Jabbour Al-Afad, a fictitious ex Mujahideen and current dictator of Zekistan, a fictional Middle-Eastern nation (Stahl, 2010, p. 96). Likewise, the Marines developed *Closed Combat: First to Fight*, a Beirut-based ground training game, in which players have to fight local militias as well as Syrian and Iranian forces, trying to overthrow the Lebanese Prime Minister (Rogers, 2005). *Desert Strike (Return to the Gulf)* was also developed in 2004 and, in 2007, appeared *Armed*

Assault, a war game placed on a fictional Atlantic two-nation island. In the plot, one of them invades the other and U.S. soldiers have to restore order and freedom. That same year Microsoft released *Modern Warfare*, a (FPS) located in Russia, Ukraine and the Middle East.

According to Stahl (2010), “the attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ushered in a boom in sales of war-themed video games for the commercial market” (p.98). Titles such as *Prisoner of War*, and its sequel, *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (both featured in WWII), *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, inspired by the Gerry Bruckheimer film, *Conflict: Desert Storm* (reenacting Gulf War), and others in the combat genre encompassed seven best-selling games among all the top ten video games (Boggs & Pollard, 2007). By 2007, the military had become the main designer of war games developed in partnership with the entertainment industry (p. 229) The Army allocated \$100 million to the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT in 2004 to manufacture sophisticated cycles of war games (p.230).

The war genre not only includes special operations and insurgent hunting games like *Splinter Cell*, *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Recon*, and *Raven Shield*; it also encompasses mercenary plots such as *Army of Two*, in which “two soldiers-for-hire wander the earth doing odd jobs in the war on terror” (Stahl, 2010, p. 98), or recreations of real-world conflicts in video game format just weeks after they play on TV news, using information culled from news accounts (*Kuma/War*, 2004). According to Stahl, the new generation of war-themed games conspires to erase

common boundaries with real war (p.92), avoids all narratives interfering with the consumption of the pure experience of battle (p. 98) and conditions its understanding through an aesthetic of “gametime” (p. 100).

Terrorism on the Small Screen

In regard to television, Prince (2009) identified two kinds of productions developed after 9/11. One, called “Terrorism on the Screen” (p. 234), which encompasses dramatic series dealing with terrorism, such as *24* (2001-2010), the story of a secret agent performing real time counter-terrorist field operations to subvert plots and save the world from disaster; *The Agency* (2001-2003), focused on ethical conflicts inherent to intelligence work into the CIA; or *The Threat Matrix* (2003), centered in the tasks of a security anti-terrorism unit, whose mission is to eliminate terrorists and other threats against the USA.

A second category (Prince, 2009) includes made-for-television movies “more celebratory of the Bush administration and the Iraq War” (p. 9). This label includes productions such as *DC 9/11: Time of Crisis* (2003), which re-enacts the events of the September 11, 2001 attacks as seen from the point of view of the President of the United States and his staff, or *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003), about the capture and rescue of the famous woman soldier. Another relevant sample of this trend is *Path to 9/11* (2006), which dramatizes the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York City and the subsequent chain of events leading up to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

One trait of 24 highlighted by Prince (2009) is the explicit depiction of violence perpetrated by the star actor. The main character, Jack Bauer, is portrayed as “a seasoned pro at torture” (p. 234) who feels comfortable inflicting pain to others, and whose professional repertoire includes stabbing, electrocuting, shooting and beheading suspected terrorists and even innocent people if necessary to get crucial information. For Flynn and Salek (2012), many contemporary American films and TV shows depict torturers as messianic figures whose administration of pain is “righteous and even necessary” (p.10), under the premise that this kind of behavior can be absorbed by civil society in the name of superior and collective interests.

Some examples of this turn are TV series like *The Wire* (2002-2008), about the complexities of Baltimore’s institutions and the struggles of public servants who sometimes do bad things to enforce the law; *The Shield* (2002-2008), focused on a group of corrupt police officers willing to break the rules and work against their comrades to keep the streets safe, who end up betraying and killing each other; *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), about a high school chemistry teacher diagnosed with cancer who begins manufacturing methamphetamines and ends up dissolving people in nitric acid, or *Dexter* (2006-2013), which tells the story of a forensic technician who secretly hunts and kills criminals.

Hollywood’s Response

After 9/11, terrorist attack films have also played a vital role in the construction of meaning and the creation of a visual notion about the tragedy and its

aftermath. Cinema has become a space where myths about history and "commonsense" ideas in regard with politics (Lacy, 2003) are constantly produced, reproduced and where stories about what is acceptable behavior from states and individuals are naturalized and legitimized (p.614). According to Paul Virilio (1989), films are more effective than newspapers at creating identity based on common experience, thanks to their capacity "to shape society by putting order into visual chaos" (p.39). In the words of Lacy (2003) "cinema is now a place involved in the process of actively forgetting and actively producing history" (p. 614). That makes movies particularly worthy of examination in studies such as this. Since the attacks on 9/11, more than 30 films and documentaries have been produced in Hollywood that deal with the tragedy, its aftermath, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, or the global war on terror among, at least, eight categories identified in this research:

- Movies dealing with the 9/11 tragedy: this category includes films like *The Guys* (2002), *Flight 93* (2006) and *World Trade Center* (2006), which address the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the heroic ways in which ordinary people faced the facts.
- Documentaries about the Iraq War and the lives of soldiers and veterans, such as *Control Room* and *Gunner Palace* (2004), *When I Came Home* (2006), or *Warrior Champions* (2009), focused on the news gathering in war times, the complex realities of the invasion, the lives of homeless veterans who served in Iraq, or individual stories of soldiers who lost limbs or suffered paralysis in this war.

- Critical documentaries about the excesses of the War on Terror like *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007); *Ghost of Abu Ghraib* (2007); *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008); or *Torturing Democracy* (2008), focused on the extra-judicial detention and killing of civilians, the use of enhanced interrogation techniques, torture, and the abuse on prisoners.
- Critical movies about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars like *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), *Redemption* (2007), *Redacted* (2007), *Lions of Lambs* (2007), or *Battle for Haditha* (2007), which explicitly address excesses of the American troops deployed in the Middle East, the use of torture and redemption, and cases of political deception.
- Films about the coming back of veterans, which explore the psychological effects of war on veterans, inner search trips or love stories. This category includes movies such as *The Jacket* (2005), *The Lucky Ones* (2008), *Conspiracy* (2008) or *Stop Loss* (2008), *Brothers* (2009), *Hell and Back Again* (2011) or *The Lucky One* (2012).
- Movies focused on the theme of terrorism: this label includes productions such as *The Sum of all Fears* (2002), *Collateral Damage* (2002); *The Terminal* (2004); *Syriana* (2005), *the Kingdom* (2007), *Body of Lies* (2008), *The Traitor* or *Vantage Point* (2008), and *Unthinkable* (2010), focused on Arabs and Muslims as preferred terrorists, in which thug criminals can only be removed by maximum force.

- Documentary films directly related with the Afghanistan War, such as *Restrepo* (2010), *The Tillman Story* (2010), *The Hornet's Nest* (2014) or *Korengal* (2014), dealing with the inner experience of the soldiers and the sacrifice of their lives.
- Fictional and dramatic films centered on the battleground, like *Home of the Brave* (2006), *The Hurt Locker* (2009), *Green Zone* (2010), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) or the most recent *American Sniper* (2014), more focused on exploring the realities of warlike action. These movies feature the idea of the soldier as a lone man of conscience, full of “self-reliance and inner resolve” (Coyne, 2008) which metonymically evokes the “Wild-West” genre.

Research Goals

Building on research by previous scholars, this thesis examines three recent movies about the war on terror: *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016). This research specifically analyses the representations through which actors, facts and circumstances are given significance. It also deals with the portrayals of the Americans, the enemy, the others, as well as the symbolic construction of the terrorist as a negative persona in films. Likewise, this thesis focuses on the trend observed in recent releases through which a new kind of violence exerted by anti-terrorism agents (ranging from torture to assassination) is justified and legitimized in these stories. All these productions include scenes of explicit and naturalized violence committed by American soldiers or U.S. governmental agents: the killing of an Iraqi child and his mother by an

American soldier and the torture and killing of a terrorist at the hands of a secret agent. These plots, I argue, openly contradict the schemes of terror and war movies previous to 9/11, such as *The Siege* (1998) in which a sense of morality and righteousness governed the actions and behaviors of the American war on terror. In such productions there is a moral barrier preventing the cold-blooded killing of unarmed enemies and torture was unimaginable. Any attempt to transgress the rules and undertake extralegal procedures is severely condemned and punished. Understanding how this change happened in the film industry is the goal of this thesis.

Drawing on critical-cultural theories of semiology by Roland Barthes and construction of the Subject by Michel Foucault, this thesis will analyze the selected movies to unravel their meanings, motivations and purposes. Barthes' theory is helpful to understand how the movies constitute semiotic systems, a second-level chain of meaning whose elements are charged with deliberated symbolism. According to the mythology theory, there is always some form of motivation in this second semiological order, a kind of purpose or rationale underlying the use of certain signifiers to generate specific connotations (Barthes R. , 1983). This thesis analyzes how myths "make "innocent" motivated discourses transmitting cultural and historical constructions by transforming and materializing them as something natural, trans-historical, innocent and factual. So, the purpose of this analysis is to show the way in which reality is deformed and deprived of its own signification.

Also, Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, as a practice of power/knowledge in which reality is constructed "in specific contexts according to particular relations of power" (Foucault M. , 1982) will be addressed in this thesis. In particular, his concept of the "Subject" as an entity produced within the discourse will be useful to explore how all individuals in different periods are the subjects of a particular regime of truth, become subjected to its meanings and thus, the bearers of its power/knowledge. Through the use of Barthes' semiotics and Foucault's theories of discourse and the construction of the Subject, the goal of this thesis is to explain how the selected movies make sense of the war on terror, in what terms they define and depict its characters, in which way these films present their actions and procedures and ultimately how become naturalized new forms of violence.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed for this thesis includes the war film, the terror on the big screen, the War on Terror filmography, the torture tipping point and general trends. These topics were chosen to provide an overview in regard to the main traits of the war genre, from World War I to Vietnam War; the academic research about the movies dealing with the wars post 9/11; the recent changes in the way cinematography addresses torture as a theme; and the different perspectives outlined by scholars to analyze the features, motivations, patterns and implications of this growing universe of filmic productions.

The War Film

Films about war have given rise to an extensive academic literature regarding depictions of action in the battlefields, verisimilitude of plots, the portrayals of soldiers, the construction of the enemies, and the impact of such productions on audiences, which cannot be circumscribed to one single category. Theorists like Jeanine Basinger (2003) pose that war movies do not exist in a coherent generic form, because “different wars inspire very different genres” (p.10).

This is arguably particularly true in war films. Butler (1974) argued that at the dawn of the film industry, Hollywood addressed World War I from different perspectives. In the early years of the conflict, cinema replicated the pacifist mood prevailing in the United States through movies like *Be Neutral*, (1914), *The White Sister* (1915), *War Brides* or *Civilization* (1916), whose mere titles and plots suggested an open critic to war. The isolationist and pacifist cycle began to turn

after the release of *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), a film calling for preparedness to war by telling the story of a supposed enemy attack and the takeover of the country. Released shortly after the sinking of the ship *Lusitania*, in 1915, this movie set the stage for productions like *The Fall of a Nation* (1916), *Perkin's Peace Party* (1916), and *Bullets and Brown Eyes* (1916) – which showed Germans bayoneting children and raping women – and *In Again, Out Again* (1917), a movie depicting pacifists and isolationists foolish, misguided by enemy agents, where the specter of war loomed (Weestwell, 2006). After America entered the war, pacifist films were immediately displaced. The government created a Division of Films as a part of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and moviegoers started being taxed with a special admission fee, while being bombarded with movies that supported the war (p. 14). Except for comedies like *Shoulder Arms* (1918), starring Charles Chaplin or romances such as *The Service Star* (1918), the filmography during this period entails openly propagandistic films like *The Little American* (1917), *Hearts of the World*, *The Heart of Humanity*, *Kaiser*, and *The Beast of Berlin* (1918) and *The Lost Battalion* (1919), produced in an effort to change the American public's neutral stance regarding the war (Keil & Singer, 2009).

After the conflagration, a heroic vision about the unpopular war emerged through movies like *The Big Parade* (1925), *What Price Glory* (1927), and *Wings* (1927), which became the first financially successful postwar films about the conflict. However, a further trend gave rise to critical views like the screen adaptation of *All Quiet in the Western Front* (1930), according to which the Great

War had been a needless sacrifice of a young generation. Towards the end of the decade and throughout the 1940's the heroic version of the war returned, just before the World War II broke out (Rollins & O'Connor, 1997).

World War II, by contrast, was portrayed – even before the American involvement in the conflict, during the conflagration, and after the Nazis' defeat – through an extensive filmography which reinforced the idea of a “just war.” During the years of the conflict (1941-1945), more than 250 films were released (Koppes & Black, 1987) and Washington, convinced about the power of movies to mobilize public opinion for war, “carried out an intensive unprecedented effort to mold the content of Hollywood feature films” (p. 7). According to Basinger (2005), films like *Bataan* (1943), delineated the basic traits of the war film genre, in which: a group of men shows extreme courage; a hero is granted with leadership forced upon him; a military mission has to be accomplished; a commentator or observer (a journalist, somebody keeping a diary, thinking or talking out loud) narrates the war; the group undergoes internal conflicts; there are no women; a faceless and evil enemy has to be defeated; rituals are enacted (Christmas, burials, mails read, weapons are cleaned); propaganda is stated (through discussions about why the war is waged and how it is justified; and audience is taught what attitude take to the war through the plot (pp. 39 and 47).

After *Bataan*, further movies ratified the efficiency and adaptability of the genre to different war environments such as the desert (*Sahara*, 1943), battleships (*Guadalcanal Diary*, 1943), submarines (*Destination Tokio*, 1943), the aircrafts

(*Captains of the Clouds*, 1943). Since then, the Good War (the popular notion of World War II as a great and selfless crusade through which the United States saved the world from tyranny), remained as a permanent genre and a recurrent source of inspiration for new films for the next four decades. Until 1986, at least one production was released every year in the United States (Basinger, 2003). The Korean War, for its part, gave rise to action movies which underscored the heroism of American soldiers in the battleground, and conveyed the idea of leadership in a chaotic, brutal world (Kagan, 1974). According to Butler (1974), Korea's War films, taken as a whole, make a dismal viewing through a "gruesome procession of screaming, hatred glorified violence and dim mediocrity" (p. 87).

Hollywood's reaction to the Vietnam War, however, was far more delayed. Except for the case of *The Green Berets* (1968), the first movies addressing the conflict were released five years after the end of the conflagration: *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Earlier analysis about Vietnam War movies like "How the War was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam," by Albert Auster and Leonard Quart (1988), concluded that initial portrayals in the 1970's of the veterans as dangerous and destructive individuals were replaced in the 1980's for a smoother vision of them as survivors "in need of compassion and empathy" (p. 130).

Scholars like Robert Griffin and Sen Shaikat (1995) argued that mass media, including the film industry, might have played a role in the social definition of the meaning of the Vietnam War. In their view, the exposure to situational film

depictions of Vietnam veterans were associated with external attributions for problems some of those veterans faced, and positively related to attitudes toward them. In “War Hurts: Vietnam Movies and the Memory of a Lost War,” Benjamin de Carvalho (2006) explored how Vietnam War movies had a tremendous effect on reshaping the collective memory of the war. In his view, those movies allowed the soldier veteran to re-enter the stage, “this time no longer as a pariah, a ‘baby killer,’ but as the hero of a war that had been lost” (p. 952).

According to Carvalho, the intention behind *Coming Home* (1978) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) was not to debate the moral rightness of Vietnam, but to depoliticize the conflict and reduce the experience of war to the individual level, one in which people confronted with larger events whose purpose they could not always grasp, reacted with courage and their own blend of patriotism. “The war was thus – Carvalho explains – removed from the framework of its political debate and instead framed in emotional terms” (p. 956). Finally, his analysis suggests that through these two movies, Hollywood created an image of Vietnam as a war whose political and moral meaning cannot be grasped, “except for the fact that ‘it was all a mess’ in which ordinary men as soldiers had to cope in the best way they could” (p. 958).

Other scholars like David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith (2016) have identified a second generation of Vietnam movies like Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), which explores the warrior ethic, the relationship between individual character and collective purpose, and ultimately “reinforced notions of

militarization or the U.S. myth of the crusader nation” (p.7). An additional category of Vietnam War movies has been proposed by Michael Coyne (2008). According to him, the conservative Reagan era brought themes of nostalgia and elicited a tide of proud and patriotism through movie sages like *Rambo* (1982, 1985, 1988) and *Missing in Action* (1984, 1985, 1988), in which imaginary and personal victories in Vietnam occurred on the big screen. Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard (2008) consider that the Rambo-inspired films are designed to evoke pride and identification with the U.S. military, whose “valiant armed intervention against evil Communists was simply robbed of victory that Americans had every right to win” (p. 568). Likewise, scholars like Susan Jeffords (1989) refer to this trend as the “remasculinization of America,” a gender structure of representations of the Vietnam War through which veterans and soldiers achieved a renewed status by opposition to characters and institutions defined as feminine, the shift in focus from ends to means, the technologization of the male body (p. xiii).

Terror on the Big Screen

In regard to terrorism movies, the death throes of the Cold War and the sudden emergence of Arabic attacks against American targets in the Middle East, triggered a switch in a genre popularized in the 1960’s and basically circumscribed, so then, to spy films in which the villains were communists or sinister characters (Prince, 2009). Terrorism was not then defined as politically motivated acts targeted against innocents people, but as the threat from totalitarian enemies (basically the Soviets) to infiltrate and destroy America through espionage (Cettl,

2009). In the late 1950's and 1960's, however, fights against colonialism, the growing Marxist influence in Latin America, and the Arab resentment over the creation of Israel gave rise to a new terrorist persona, now political, and revolutionary, driven both by national and religious impetus, while terrorism as a practice became legitimated as "a means of guerrilla warfare in the movement towards national liberation and independence" (p.5).

This new reality was mirrored in the 1970's through films like *Rosebud* (1975), about a covered CIA agent who works to release five wealthy girls kidnapped by an anti-Israel terrorist Palestinian group; or *Black Sunday* (1977), about a deranged Vietnam veteran who joins an Arab terrorist group attempting to blow up a Goodyear blimp hovering over the Super Bowl stadium with 80,000 people, including the President of the United States. "Terrorism as a precursor to radical change –Cettl (2009) argues—became a provocative theme, and the figure of the terrorist became an awe-inspiring and captivately enigmatic danger" (p. 7). Thus, the mentality of the terrorist was placed on the center stage. That resulted in such character portraits as *Hennessy* (1975), about a peaceful Irishman whose family is killed and, in revenge, set out to assassinate Queen Elizabeth II, or *The Little Drummer Girl* (1984), about an American actress with a penchant for lying who is forcibly recruited by Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, to trap a Palestinian bomber, by pretending to be the girlfriend of his dead brother. In this last movie, according to Prince (2009), the leader of the terror cell is not portrayed

as a fanatic Islamist or religious fundamentalist, but as a “quiet and reflexive guerilla commander who has a sense of irony and humor” (p. 28).

The proliferation of left-wing terrorists that dominated world attention though the 1970's was reflected in the movie *Nighthawks* (1981), about a European terrorist fighting against British colonialism, who moves to New York in pursuit of worldwide coverage. However, as Prince argues, this film was mainly intended as a cop action production. Hollywood's treatment of terrorism changed in the 1980's when American interests and citizens started being targeted. After the bombing attacks against a U.S. military facility and Washington's embassy in Beirut in 1983, the hijacked of the Flight 847 in 1985 (when a U.S. diver was killed aboard), the bombing of a discotheque in Berlin, where two U.S. soldiers died in 1986, and the bombing of the Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in which 270 passenger died in 1988, a new generation of movies emerged, depicting terrorism as a Muslim threat. This stream included films like *Terminal Entry* (1987), about an Arab terrorists cell which plot to kill U.S. politicians, *Wanted Dead or Alive* (1987) about a Muslim group threatening to release a poison gas, and *Terror Squad* (1987), about a cell of Libyan terrorists that infiltrates the city of Kokomo, Indiana, and takes over a nuclear power plant.

This turn to the Middle East also included films like the *Delta Force* series (1986, 1990, and 1991), *Death before Dishonor* (1987), *Iron Eagle II* (1988), and *Navy Seals* (1990); in which the threat is not posed in American soil but U.S. forces project their muscle overseas to defeat the terror in the Middle East. In those

productions, according to Boggs and Pollard (2006) the terrorist enemy was seen “as semi-civilized, violent, shady, beyond redemption, capable of horrendous crimes—traits making them suitable for extermination” (p. 338). The first attack against the World Trade Center in 1993 accelerated the production of films about terrorism: *Chain of Command* (1993), *True Lies* (1994); *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), *The Rock* (1995), *Executive Decision* (1996), *G.I. Jane* (1997), *Air Force One* (1997), *The Peacemaker* (1997), and *The Siege* (1998). According to Boggs and Pollard (2006), many earlier films depicted villains as cold, calculating international masterminds capable of heinous criminal deeds. In the later cycle, however, they had been replaced by “fanatical Arabs and/or Muslims shown praying as they plotted terrorist carnage” (p. 343).

Arabs and Cinema

This trend regarding terror films added, according to Shaheen (2001), a new trait to the longstanding portrait misrepresenting the Arabs, furnished by the film industry. In his view, for more than a century Hollywood has constantly conveyed negative images of the Arabs and Muslims and shaped, by means of constant repetition, the common understanding of people about that culture. From the early Méliès’ productions in France around the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the 3rd millennium, Shaheen says, filmmakers have indicted Arabs as “brutal, heartless, uncivilized, religious fanatics, and money-mad cultural ‘others’ bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners” (p. 2).

In his analysis about more than 900 films featuring Arabs on the screen, Shaheen describes the emergence of a mythology about an exotic Middle East encompassing alternatively: pyramids, pharaohs, and mummies; quaint camels, savage Bedouins and threatening scimitars; harems, belly-dancers and black-beard potentates living in luxurious palaces; and most recently, billionaires, religious fanatics and terrorists. According to the author, in most of these movies Western protagonists refers to Arabs with epithets such as “‘assholes,’ ‘bastards,’ ‘cameldicks,’ ‘pigs,’ ‘devil-worshippers,’ ‘jackals,’ ‘rats,’ ‘rag-heads,’ ‘towel-heads,’ ‘scum-buckets,’ ‘sons-of-dogs,’ ‘buzzards of the jungle,’ ‘sons-of-whores,’ ‘sons-of-unnamed goats,’ and ‘sons-of-she-camels,’” (p. 11) or “‘monkeys” (p.13).

As earlier as 1912, films like *Captured by Bedouins* started the trend of lascivious Arabs trying to rape and abduct Western heroines. In 1936, *The Black Coin* portrayed for the first time an Arab skyjacker threatening to blow up a plane (p. 10), while *Sirocco* (1951) was the first Hollywood production explicitly featuring Arabs as terrorist (Shaheen, 2001, p. 16). All these narratives, according to Semmerling (2006), entail an “Orientalist fantasy” in which “the Western hero uses his phallic powers” to penetrate “into the feminized body of the Oriental land” (p. 34). All he cannot control with his powers, knowledge, moral and physical superiority, constitute an “Orientalist Hell” (p. 35).

In a further analysis of more than 100 films post 9/11 Shaheen (2008) found, among other traits, that 22 movies contained “gratuitous slurs and scenes that demean Arabs” (although their narratives did not deal with Arabs and the Middle

East), and 37 films featured Arab villains performing despicable actions (p. XIV). According to the author, the filmography after the terrorist attacks in Manhattan and the Pentagon has tightened the misrepresentations against Arabs, typecasting them as preferred terrorists. As a result, Shaheen concludes, unlike other minorities (Jews, Latinos, Black Americans, etc.) whose negative stereotypes have positively changed over time, Arabs remain as “the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood” (p. XI).

The War on Terror Filmography

Over the last 15 years, a wide spectrum of research – Lacy (2003), Lisle and Pepper (2005), Boggs and Pollard (2006), Coyne (2008), Prince (2009), Barker (2011), Jones and Smith (2016), among others – has focused its attention on the film and TV productions related directly and indirectly with the war on terror. Those scholars have addressed such an issue from a wide array of perspectives encompassing the initial mourning and national duel; the fears and anxieties which sprouted after the attacks; the reemergence of the war film; the pleasure for the combat and technology deployment; the Westernization of the genre so as to present soldiers as cowboys on horseback dealing with a hostile environment; the myth of the U.S. as the crusader nation with the manifest destiny and civilizing mission of “bringing freedom and modernity to the rest of the world, via force if necessary” (Jones & Smith, 2016, p.7); or the use of the film industry to enhance America’s foreign policy, among other elements.

Hollywood's initial reaction to 9/11, according to film historian Wheeler Winston Dixon (2011), was a general silence which could be seen as a "patriotically supportive response" evincing an unwillingness either to acknowledge or mythologize the attack (p.3). From 2005 onwards, the film industry engaged in a new cycle of movies dealing first with terrorism and then with war, fueled in a feeling of fear, paranoia, and patriotism (Boggs and Pollard, 2006). Those discourses are today conveyed through a media system in which technology—according to the theorist Jean Baudrillard (1994) – distances people from reality and the circulation of images and information led to indifference. Now, audiences find pleasure in the narrative and in the simulation of contemporary violence while spectators "remain passive agents of active forgetting" (p. 78) through films that alter human experiences and perceptions about the real meanings of conflagrations. According to scholars like Smith and Jones (2016) representations and mediations replace reality and the very definition of war becomes destabilized as the capacity to comprehend violence and conflict is constructed and altered by mediation (p. 6).

After 9/11, a new generation of movies about terrorism emerged with productions such as *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), regarding a plan to detonate a nuclear weapon at a football game in Baltimore and the efforts of a CIA agent to thwart the plan and avoid a conflict between the United States and Russia; *Collateral Damage* (2002), whose plot deals with a firefighter seeking to avenge the killing of his family at the hands of a Colombian guerrilla commando; *Syriana* (2005), about the CIA's plans to assassinate an Arab prince identified as being the financier behind

an Egyptian terrorist group; *Munich* (2006), which tells the story of the operation designed by Tel Aviv to retaliate the Munich massacre at the 1972 Olympic Games; *The Kingdom* (2007), about a team of U.S. government agents sent to investigate the bombing of an American facility in the Middle East; or *Body of Lies* (2008) about the attempts of the CIA and Jordanian Intelligence to catch a dangerous terrorist in the Middle East.

All these films, according to Boggs and Pollard (2006), not only mirror recent shifts in world politics. They also reproduce key elements of domestic ideological hegemony, such as “patriotism, the cult of guns and violence, glorification of technology, the hyper-masculine hero, obsession with ‘alien’ threats” (p. 347). For Boggs and Pollard, “in a universe where ‘terrorism’ is depicted as an omnipresent scourge to be extirpated by maximum armed force, further expansion of US global military power ends up as a logical corollary” (p. 348).

In *The Rise of Dark Americana: Depicting the “War on Terror” On-Screen*, Jones and Smith suggest that after the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, it is possible to identify a new kind of filmography dealing with the domestic impact of 9/11 and the strategic decision after 9/11 “to fight them over there” (p.16). They also propose three distinct genre conventions: 1) the espionage, crime procedural thriller (*Rendition, Zero Dark Thirty, Homeland*); 2) the war as a version of the Western, with the “man of conscience in a Humvee rather than on a horse, taking the fight to savages in a savage land” (*American Sniper, The Hurt*

Locker); and (3) the pseudo-documentary style favored by those like Paul Greengrass and Brian De Palma (*United 93*, *Green Zone*, *Redacted*).

Black Hawk Down (2001), one of the first movies released after 9/11, is depicted by Lacy (2003) as an apology of technology in the service of war, in which professional, well-trained and disciplined soldiers confront a temporary breakdown in their mission to bring order to a wild and irrational land. Other scholars like Lisle and Pepper (2005) suggest that the film assumes an aura of realism to conceal its ideological purpose: sustain a pro-war ideology, glorify American soldiers, legitimize their use of force everywhere, and reduce war to the status of police action.

In 2002, six months after 9/11, *We Were Soldiers*, a film about the Battle of Ia Drang (the first major clash among U.S. troops and the People's Army of Vietnam during the Vietnam War) was released. The movie, which depicts the American perspective of the showdown, was qualified by *The Rolling Stone* magazine, as “an unabashedly pro-military look at the first major battle of the Vietnam era” (Boggs & Pollard, 2008, p. 576). With the exception of *The Guys* (2002), the story of a fire captain who lost eight men in the collapse of the World Trade Center and the editor who helped him prepare the eulogies he had to deliver, the first movies dealing with events on 9/11 were released five years after the attacks. In 2006, Paul Greengrass produced *United 93* (2006), a supposed real-time account of the events on one of the planes hijacked on September 11th, and Oliver Stone directed *World Trade Center*

(2006), the story about two Port Authority police officers trapped under the rubble of the Twin Towers.

According to Carter and Dodds (2011), the movie did little more than recount the events of that day. For Boggs and Pollard (2006), *United 93* reinforces American patriotism, glorifies mythical citizen's heroism and legitimizes U.S. military action by conveying a polarized world where "cruel, sadistic terrorists" attack innocent Americans, who "exhibit tremendous courage" (p. 346). Jones and Smith (2016), however, counter-argue that *United 93* avoided treating the hijackers as psychopaths, and presented them as prayers "reciting the Koran, and carrying out what they believe to be a divine mission" (p.8). According to both authors, as the war went on, Hollywood's liberal conscience started examining the excesses of war (the use of redemption and torture, cases of military misconduct or political deception), throughout films like: *Rendition* (2007), which tells the story of the CIA's abduction and "enhanced" interrogation of an American citizen mistakenly identified as a terrorist suspect; *Redacted* (2007), about the real rape and murder of a 15-year-old Iraqi girl by American soldiers in Samarra in 2006; *Battle for Haditha* (2007), about the real massacre of 24 men, women and children allegedly shot by four U.S. Marines in retaliation for the death of a U.S. Marine killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq; and *Lions of Lambs* (2007), about the announcement of a new war strategy in Afghanistan made up by a republican senator and the fears of a journalist of becoming an instrument of government propaganda.

In his analysis of twenty-three Iraq war films Martin Barker (2011) identifies a category of movies dealing with the psychological effect of war on veterans back home, like *The Jacket* (2005) about a Gulf War veteran wrongly sent to a mental institution for insane criminals; *Conspiracy* (2008), an action film which tells the story of a veteran trying to find a disappeared friend; and *Stop Loss* (2008), about young soldiers whose experience in the Iraq War leaves them psychologically shattered and are arbitrarily ordered to return to field duty. Another kind of productions was focused on the lives of mourners in the US. Such label includes films as *The Situation* (2006), about an American journalist working in Iraq to collect material for a story who fall in love with a CIA agent and an Iraqi photographer, and *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), about a father trying to find his disappeared son, recently returned from Iraq, who eventually finds out that the young was killed by his mates because of his involvement in the torture of prisoners. This list also includes movies like *Grace is Gone* (2007), which tells the story of a father who takes his two daughters on a road trip after knowing that their mother, an American soldier, has just been killed on a tour of duty in Iraq.

In the light of these productions, Hollywood cinema, according to Douglas Kellner (2009), can be read as “a contest of representations and contested terrain that reproduces existing social struggles and transcodes the political discourses of the era” (p. 2). Carter and Dodds (2011) analyzed how most of these films failed to find a significant audience or to strike a chord with the American public at large (in some cases not even covering the production costs). Both of them concluded that

box office figures suggest little appetite among American audiences to see dramatizations of the war on terror on screen.

The 9/11 attacks also gave way to a wide array of documentaries which have been analyzed by scholars like Prince (2009). The list includes productions such as *Occupation: Dreamland* (2005), *Gunner Palace* (2005), *Combat Diary* (2006) and *The War Tapes* (2006) focused on the soldier's-eye perspective of ground operations; others, like *WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2004), *Why We Fight* (2005), *No End in Sight* (2006), and *Buying the War* (2007), assume a more critical point of view of the war, while a third category including productions such as *Soldiers Pay* (2004) and *The Ground Truth* (2006), examine the physical and psychological injuries on veterans. Unlike most popular movies, documentaries are considered truthful narratives about real facts, and are used for journalistic inquiry, public exposition, or even radical testimonies, aiming to provide an alternative perspective on events. However, likewise movies, documentaries involve the creative treatment of actuality and entail negotiations between filmmakers and reality (Bonner, 2013).

A second cycle of critical documentaries about the excesses of the War on Terror includes: *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007) focuses on the killing of an Afghan taxi driver extra-judicially detained and beaten to death by American soldiers; *Ghost of Abu Ghraib* (2007), a critical examination of the prisoner abuse scandal involving U.S. soldiers and detainees at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison in the fall of 2003; *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), focused on the psyche of the torturers at the Abu Ghraib prison; and *Torturing Democracy* (2008), about the use of "enhanced

interrogation techniques," including waterboarding, by the Bush administration in the War on Terror.

Boggs and Pollard (2008) underscore, however, how the "Hollywood war machine" moved into full gear to capitalize the post 9/11 American sense of "wounded, vengeful, but still very imperialistic nation" prepared to set the world straight (p.571). Both authors highlight the emergence of movies promoting an altruistic and heroic vision of American soldiers in Iraq through productions like *Home of the Brave* (2006), in which four men at the end of their tour of duty are sent on one final humanitarian mission to a remote village, in which all of them are ambushed. Part of the narrative, they argue, shows how well-intentioned US troops are suddenly torn from good deeds by a scheming, ruthless enemy" (p.566).

This trend also includes the comeback of Vietnam War movies like *Rescue Dawn* (2007), released as a cinematic tribute to US fighter pilots shot down on a mission over Laos during the conflict against the Vietcong, and the return, 20 years later, of *Rambo* (2008). This movie, according to Boggs and Pollard, epitomizes the "virtues of American military action," evokes "pride and identification," and represents "one of the great movie celebrations of militarized violence" (p.570). The film shows the killing of more than 230 people by beating, beheading, blasting, blowing up of grenades, bombing, incineration, shooting, stabbing, or tossing human beings out of aircrafts, at an astonishing rate of 2.59 deaths per minute of footage. Both authors conclude that such representations of war have transformed "orgies of media violence" into another American pastime, like baseball and hunting (p. 573).

Lacy (2003) arrived at a similar conclusion and states that people not only find pleasure in the simulation of contemporary violence but also develop a sense of indifference: “we consume real wars in the same way that we consume spectacles of destruction in the cinema” (p.614). For Carter and Dodds (2011), the glorification of the warlike action in these movies bolster the Jacksonian tradition on American politics, which basically states that the first priority of Washington must be the physical security and economic well-being of the country, as well as the defense of US interest anywhere by any means necessary. “The violence used by the hero – they argued – is imagined to be not only justifiable but also a necessary restorative” (p. 110).

Later movies started exploring the battlefield. Drawing on the notions of “just and dirty war,” as well as “the crusader nation image” (Jones & Smith, 2016), such productions attempted to address the political dimensions of U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the aftermath of this engagement (p.9). This trend includes movies like *The Hurt Locker* (2008), about the routine of an Anti-explosives team in Iraq, and the psychological reactions of their members to the stress; *Green Zone* (2010), about the efforts of a U.S. military to find evidence of the weapon of mass destruction in Iraq, who finally realizes that there are no such kind of devises; *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), a chronicle of the decade-long hunt for al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden after the September 2001 attacks, and his death at the hands of the Navy S.E.A.L.s Team 6 in May 2011; and *American Sniper* (2014), about the life and war action of Chris Kyle, a former soldier and marksman credited

with more than 150 kills in Iraq (Ferran, 2013), and author of the namesake book *American Sniper, the Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (Kyle, McEwen, & DeFelice, 2012).

The war on terror has also served as the backdrop for the staging of science fiction movies such as *The Objective* (2008), a horror film about a Special Missions Team sent to Afghanistan to find an important cleric, which ended up facing a close encounter with paranormal phenomena.

Torture Tipping Point

Prince (2009) also links the coincidences between the scandal about the torture practices inflicted by American forces on Iraqi prisoners in 2004 and the emergence of a new cycle of successful of “torture-porn” films such as *Saw* (2004), an American horror movie about a killer who traps his victims in truculent games to test their will to live through physical and psychological torture, with its sequels (2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008); or *Hostel* (2005), about a mysterious group that kidnaps tourists and sells the victims to clients anxious to torture them to death (with its subsequent sequels in 2007 and 2011). These movies, in his view, instead of naturalizing torture as a rightful resource in pursuit of a higher interest, accomplish this goal by transforming such a practice in a lurid spectacle, offered as a commodity for entertainment. Tortures are done by pleasure or money to elicit morbid enjoyment.

For Prince, the imprint of 9/11 is even visible in superhero movies such as *Batman*, which ultimately becomes war on-terror films. *In the Dark Knight* (2008),

the Joker is depicted as an anarchic terrorist bombing Gotham City and authorities, as well as Batman, have to “resort to harsh interrogation methods and other extrajudicial means to stop him” (Prince, 2009, p. 284). In a world where secret agents behead suspects, chemistry teachers dissolve people in nitric acid; corrupt police officers kill each other with grenades; psychopaths kidnapped innocent people and make them suffer for pleasure (and audiences enjoy such depictions), the torture of war prisoners in a far country is not as abnormal.

However, torture is not a new motif in movies. Productions such as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Midnight Express* (1978), *Man on Fire* (1988), and *Mississippi Burning* (1988), include the theme of mistreatment. In most of these films –as is the case of *Marathon Man* (1976) about a Nazi doctor who kidnaps and brutalizes a Columbia graduate student in the middle of a conspiracy plot— torture is not presented as a spectacle, the torturer is depicted as a depraved individual, and the viewer is more likely to identify with the victim than with the torturer (Flynn & Salek, 2012). This pattern, however, started changing after 9/11. In *Man on Fire* (2004), a remake of the original 1987 French-Italian production, a former CIA agent, also called John Creasy, is hired as bodyguard to protect a nine-year old girl, who is later kidnapped. But unlike the first version, in this new one the main character tortures all the involved in the plot. In the first torture scene, which lasts more than six minutes, the victim –a crooked cop— literally swims in his own blood, and, according to Chaudhuri (2014), the audiences

“feel much more empathy for the torturer, because his acts trigger a sensed of expiation” (p. 2).

This new trend includes the film *Unthinkable* (2010), a psychological thriller starred Samuel Jackson, centered on a black-ops interrogator and an FBI agent H, who systematically tortures a suspect terrorist into divulging the location of three nuclear weapons set to detonate in the U.S. The agent starts by chopping off one of the suspect’s fingers before escalating his methods, with the acquiescence of his superiors, who authorize the use of extreme measures to counter potential damages. Even *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), the dramatized story about the tracking and killing of Bin Laden, presents torture as a reliable technique which did help the United States to find the al Qaeda leader.

According to Chaudhuri (2014), over the last decade the torturers have changed from devil criminals “to counterterrorism agents, CIA or former CIA agents, U.S. soldiers and even Batman is one” (p.12). In his view, torture is depicted now, as necessary for the restoration of social and the saving of “innocent” lives, while the torturer is transformed into a benevolent “outlaw” willing to transcend the law to save civilization (p.11).

General Trends

All this body of literature has addressed the study of films dealing with the war on terror, from a wide array of angles, and has identified specific issues which could be summarized as follows:

- The theme of patriotism (Boggs & Pollard, 2006) dealing with the representation in movies of common citizens undertaking extreme tokens of courage and virtuous soldiers acting with exceptional courage and heroism to defend the country and the world.
- The naturalization of war as a common order of things (Lacy, 2003), which focuses in the depiction of a world where the terrorist threat requires perennial military action, and war is reduced to the status of police action performed by efficient soldiers assigned to protect civilization.
- The pleasure of violence (Boggs & Pollard, 2006), (Stahl, 2010), centered in the consumption of spectacles of mass destruction, in which relentless violence, graphic depictions of killings, celebrations of murder and social chaos, are constantly depicted, sanctioned, and even celebrated (Boggs & Pollard, 2006, p. 349), while social experience of war is transformed into participatory entertainment.
- The aestheticization of war (Lisle & Pepper, 2005) (Holloway, 2008) (Carter & Dodds, 2011), which analyzes the use of disjointed fragments organized into meaningful rhythmical sequence, sound effects, dialogues, camera movements, and edition procedures, to create spectacular amalgamations of gunfire, running soldiers and evocative music, and ultimately, pieces of art based on war.

- The moral indifference (Lacy, 2003), (Slocum, 2005), which – based on the ideas of philosophers Zygmunt Bauman and James Der Derian – explores the way in which cinema allows to distance both the citizenry back home from the suffering that is carried out under the banner of virtuous wars, and the soldiers from the face of the victims, through the use of technologies designed to suppress moral anxiety and distance humans from the consequences of their actions.
- The Westernization of war: (Coyne, 2008), which explores how movies about war on terror evoke the American “Wild West” genre of brave, and troubled but determined men dealing with hostile environments and moral challenges, who do the necessary things in difficult circumstances.
- The myth of the crusader nation: (Jones & Smith, 2016), which deals with the recurrent theme of the American manifest destiny that links the country with a civilizing mission to bring freedom and modernity to the rest of the world.
- The American hero (Jones & Smith, 2016) about working class citizens called for military duty, who do the right things in difficult circumstances to accomplish their missions, and take care of their comrades without examining the motives of war.
- The libidinization of gadgets (Lacy 2003), (Stahl, 2010), which deals with the trend of war on terror movies to provide a space where

common men can enjoy the military gadgets and the latest technologies of surveillance, evoking feelings of omnipotence and a celebration of the war machine.

- The moral ambiguity: (Boggs & Pollard, 2008), in which all the horrors of techno-war are permissible and some wrong things have to be done for the sake of humanity because and terrorism can only be removed by maximum force. Jones and Smith (2016) also underscore the switch of the dominant cinematic portrayal from a positive American self-imagery of virtuous warriors imposing good over evil, towards a “Dark America” which “recognizes a world of moral ambiguity” (p.3).
- The political agenda (Carter & Dodds, 2011), which analyses the ideological support that war films provide to American foreign policy so as to justify the involvement of the country in Middle East affairs.

Recent movies such as *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016), have followed this trend of depicting a kind of “good violence” like the killing of children or women at hands of American soldiers, or the torturing and murdering of surrendered terrorists by secret agents. Yet, given the lack of available literature dealing with these productions, more work is needed. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze such films, using the theories of semiology, by Roland Barthes, and construction of the Subject by Michel Foucault, to better

understand, how, such movies legitimize specific forms of violence through entertainment.

Building on this body of literature, this thesis focuses on these three movies to expose how the American film industry – through these recent productions about the war on terror – has given a step forward from the naturalization of war, the commodification, aestheticization and Westernization of violence, and the development of moral indifference and ethical ambiguity, to a new stage in which behaviors of unjustified violence against women and children are naturalized, as well as illegal practices of torture, perpetrated against terrorists at hands of U.S. agents. Specifically, this thesis attempts to unveil the symbolism used to propel certain signifiers and generate specific connotations, so as to naturalize and make innocent motivated discourses transmitting cultural constructions about righteousness and deviance. Likewise, by analyzing how the discourse produces a place for the subject, we can explore the positions from which the discourse makes most sense and unraveling its underlying meanings.

CHAPTER III: THEORY

Drawing on critical-cultural theories of semiology by Roland Barthes and Subjectification by Michel Foucault, this thesis analyzes the images of the films *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016) to explore how the use of symbols and the construction of the subject into the discourse reveal underlying, motivations, purposes and meanings.

According to the Swiss linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure, the production of meaning depends on language, a system of signs that allows people to communicate with each other, express ideas and give significance to the world. More than a naming-process through which words are assigned to the things they name, language constitutes a complex structure of symbolic units linking, not things and names, but concepts and sound-images (Saussure, 2011). From the relationship between two elements, a physical form (the word, the sound-image, called the signifier) and the physical or abstract thing referred by it (called the signified) a third element emerges: the concept or the idea that such a form elicits in mind. That is what Saussure termed the linguistic sign, a two-sided psychological entity encompassing a thing, a symbolic representation and a concept.

Such a notion is the foundation of semiotics, the science devoted to the study of signs as part of the social life, proposed by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) to better understand the laws governing them. The Swiss linguist based his model on one fundamental premise: the allocation process between signifiers and signifieds is always arbitrary and consequently, casuistic, not

scientific, historical, and subject to constant changes (Hall, 2013, p. 16). From this starting point, further thinkers like the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss expanded the scope of semiotic from its original linguistic focus in order to study cultural phenomena, such as the customs, rituals, myths and folk-tales of aboriginal communities. In his *Structural Anthropology* (2008) Levi-Strauss envisioned a new path for semiotics to enhance the study of kinship problems in the same way that structural linguistics dealt with phonemes (the smallest phonetic unit in a language that is capable of conveying a distinction in meaning). In his view, kinship phenomena, like linguistic units, are elements of meaning; both acquire significance “only if they are integrated into systems and are built in the mind on the level of unconscious thought” (p. 34).

Likewise, the focus posed by the French theorist Roland Barthes on the analysis of popular culture as activities and objects as signs gave rise to a new stage of semiotics. Barthes suggested that all cultural practices and products can function (in a similar way as words do) as conveyers in the production of meaning. By working as signs, cultural phenomena perform the same function of language and can be analyzed using linguistic concepts. But unlike the latter, the former can fulfil not only a descriptive function linking a sign with a concept, but also connect things to broader themes and meanings. Barthes (1983) called the first level denotation and termed the second one “connotation” or additional meaning (p. 89).

According to Barthes’ Mythology theory, there is always some form of motivation in this second semiological order, a kind of purpose or rationale

underlying the use of certain signifiers to generate specific connotations. One example of this is the American flag, whose sound-visual representation (in a first level) is the signified which refers to a piece of cloth with stars and stripes that constitutes the national banner of a country called the United States (signified). In a second-level semiologic system, however, the flag can mean many other things: pumpkin pie, rock and roll, or American-ness. One can even use the flag as a symbol of freedom. In Barthes' famous example about the 1955 cover of *Paris Match* magazine in which a young black soldier is giving the French flag a salute, the elements of the image (the black soldier, the beret, the French military custom) represent the form of a signifier which has been deliberately chosen to convey a literal, simple but motivated signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness). That is the denotation level (Barthes, 1972).

At the second stage, this completed message (or sign) is linked to an additional set of signifieds. There is a presence of an additional signified through the signifier (the connotation), and this is what Barthes called the myth or signification: in this case, "that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors" (Barthes, p. 115). Barthes called this second level of signification the level of myth. In his work *Representation* (2013), the theorist Stuart Hall (2013) explains the case of clothes, which can both, construct a meaning and carry a message. A coat, a suit, a jean or a pair of shoes can be more than garments

or pieces of fabric used to cover the body (denotation). They can also represent abstract concepts such as “elegance,” “formality,” or “casualness.” Those abstract notions are the signifieds (connotation), obtained as a result of a process which converts clothes into signs (p. 23).

Barthes, however, recognized the limitations of semiology and urged further study of connotations. This task was addressed in the following decades through the works of Birdwhistell (1952) about kinetics, the science about the body movements and gestures as a form of communication; Ekman and Friesen (1975) regarding the signification of facial expressions; Edward Hall (1966) on proxemics, the study of human use of space and its meanings; or Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Turner (1996), Fauconnier (1997), and Grady (1997), among others, in cognitive linguistics and the metaphorical and connotative nature of human conceptual systems.

Focusing specifically on film, the French film theorist Christian Metz (1974) investigated whether films could be treated as a language in its own right and tried to identify those concrete units of discourse which express structures of signification. He concluded that a semiotics of the cinema might be conceived as a semiotics of denotation or a semiotics of connotation (p. 22) and proposed, in a first stage, a cinematic grammar based on the analysis of aesthetic arrangements, figures of speech, camera movements, lighting effects, among other elements. On a second stage (Baseheart, 1979), Metz contrasted the processes of denotation and connotation with regard to motivation and concluded that denotative meanings (given that there is no equivalent in cinema for the arbitrary relation between

signifier and signified) are motivated by analogy, while connotative meanings are also motivated by symbolism (p. 23).

Both Barthes and Metz, underscored the relationship between films and symbolic levels of signification. According to Barthes (1977), all the elements of photographic image, and consequently of cinema (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed), “effectively belong to the plane of connotation” (p. 44). Metz, on his part, stated that “the study of connotation brings us closer to the notion of the cinema as an art (the ‘seventh art’)” (p. 97). However, neither of them deepened in this inquiry. The analysis of the metaphoric dimensions of films was fulfilled by theorists like Shobchack and Sobchack (1980), Giannetti (1993), Carrol (1996), who expanded the knowledge of connotations linked to the use of angles, shots, and the translation of proxemics and kinetics to filmic language.

The semiotic perspective has given rise to a broad literature regarding film analysis in areas such as the appeal of gambling and images of agency and self-control in fiction movies (Egerer & Rantala, 2015); the representations of addictions in films (Sulkunen, 2007); the semiotics of unreal landscapes (Goh, 2014); the symbolism of depicting record studios on films (Doyle, 2013); or the sexualization of technology and the emergence of “techno-scopophilia” on sci-fi movies (Soukup, 2009). Another relevant research by Tseng (2013) explores the features of characters’ interactions in recent war films, so as to understand how spectators’ inferences of narrative structures are substantially mediated by characters, whose

actions and interactions are systematically constructed based on systems of symbols.

Following the classic period of semiotic analysis (Easthope, 1993), other relevant theories arose to study films, including the Psychoanalytical approach (based on the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan), the Ideological approach (rooted in the works of Louis Althusser) and Subjectivity theory (grounded in the ideas of Emile Benveniste, Colin MacCabe, Laura Mulvey and Stephen Heath). One relevant path for the broadening of the Subjectivity theories can be found in the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose works about knowledge, power, discourse, and the subject deal with the production of meaning through language.

According to Foucault, knowledge is created through discursive practices in order to regulate the conduct of others, to constrain and discipline all kind of behaviors (Hall S. , 2013). Such process gives rise to regimes of truth, in which some types of discourses prevail, are accepted and function as true in every society. One relevant aspect in the creation of knowledge is the construction of the subject within discourse. In *the Subject and Power* (1982), Foucault stated that in our culture, human beings are made subjects, explored two modes of objectification. First, he suggested that the production of figures within the discourse (by dividing people inside themselves or from others) personifies particular forms of knowledge: “the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys,’ which are attached to specific discursive regimes and historical periods” (p. 778).

The second form of subjectification occurs within the discourse through the allocation of a place for the subject. According to Foucault, to become the subjects of a particular discourse and thus, the bearers of its power/knowledge (Hall S. , Representation, 2013, p. 40), individuals must locate themselves in the position from which the discourse makes most sense, becomes meaningful and has effects. So, discourses construct subject-positions and by doing it, subject people to their meanings, power and regulation. In *The Order of Things* (1970) Foucault analyzed the painting *Las Meninas* (1656) by the Spaniard artist Diego Velasquez. For the French philosopher, the work of art does have a completed significance, except in relation to the spectator who looks at the canvas and must complete the meaning of the picture by constructing himself/herself as the subject of its discourse. In *Las Meninas*, viewers can be different subjects at the same time. First, they can take the position of the spectator-subject, when looking at the picture. Spectators can also take the position of the painter-subject. When standing in front of the canvas, people are also in the position of the artist after finishing the work.

Just in this moment people realize that “we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at us” (Foucault, p. 5). Spectators realize that they are even part of the picture, that they are being watched by it and finally, that they are who is being painted (the object-subject). Foucault’s notions about discourse, power and the construction of the subject have been used in analysis of films like *The Elephant Man* (Darke, 1994) to explore how specific movies dehumanize and objectify subjects rather than represent abnormality and disability as human or

valid in itself, or the Brazilian production *Filhas do Vento* “*Wind Daughters*” (De Oliveira, 2013) to study – based on his categories of subject and ideology – the propagation and proliferation of a racist ideology of color.

Drawing on Barthes and Foucault, this thesis explores the meanings of the films *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016) in order to unveil their latent meanings. Barthes is helpful to understand how the movies constitute semiotic systems, second-level chains of meaning, whose elements are charged with powerful and deliberated symbolisms. That is what the French thinker (Barthes R. , 1991) calls the myth. Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message. For him, as he states in *Mythologies* “it is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth” (p. 117).

This thesis will analyze how the selection of images, objects and subjects in the movies are not arbitrary or unmotivated, but by contrast, how elements were intentionally chosen to produce a deliberated effect. This thesis will also try to show the way in which reality was deformed and deprived of its own signification to set the stage for the emerging of the myth. By analyzing how the discourse produces a place for the subject, we can explore the different locations constructed for him/her in the movies, find the position from which the discourse makes most sense and unravel its underlying meanings.

By taking the movies as a kind of “motivated speech,” a “significant unit,” this thesis will explain how the myth naturalizes its discourse, transmuting what is essentially a cultural construction into something innocent and factual. Foucault’s theory is also useful to understand how the discourses conveyed through the movies, as a practice of power/knowledge, do not truly reflect reality nor innocently designate objects. By contrast – in the words of the French thinker – discourses constitute the reality “in specific contexts according to particular relations of power” (Hall S. , 2013, p. 34).

Research Questions

If cinema, as Lacy argues, has become a space where myths about history and politics are constantly produced and acceptable behaviors from states and individuals are legitimated (2003), the analysis of recent movies about the war on terror – including scenes of explicit violence committed by American soldiers or U.S. governmental agents – constitutes a necessary task for cultural studies.

To explore how the use of violence is presented and justified in *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016), this thesis analyzes how reality is constructed and deprived of its own signification. Specifically, it will try to answer three basic questions: What kind of film techniques and semiotic resources are used to create a discourse validating specific forms of violence such as the killing of children and women in the war and the stabbing and murdering of suspected in the war on terror? Are those movies producing a discourse to legitimate new relations of domination? Are we facing the emergence of a new kind of filmography? This thesis will also analyze how the camera is used to create the distance and proximity, intimacy and detachment, among characters and objects, how the mixture of light and darkness is used as a resource to convey symbols and values, and how the plot is unfolded to promote certain readings of the situations. Finally, this thesis seek to discover how the personality of the good ones (the American side) and the bad ones (the enemy, the others) is created through all these devices, and how is the audience constructed as a subject to receive the meanings of the discourses.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

To study the movies *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016), and explore the way in which these productions naturalize violent behaviors, this thesis will undertake a textual analysis, a methodology of examination which, according to McKee (2003), helps researchers to “understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live” (p. 1). To McKee, people interpret the reality that they live in through their cultures, and textual analysis allows the study of such an understanding of the world. This technique also allows viewers to grasp how meanings are generated through cultural practices in which, in the words of Hall (1997) “we give things a meaning by how we represent them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them” (p. 145).

In the task of undertaking textual analysis, the concept of text is essential. Pauly (1991) argues that mass media artifacts such as news stories, television shows, records, films, or magazine advertisements, when analyzed, must be treated as products, independent cultural units of significance conveying meaning. McKee calls such products the “text,” and argues that “whenever we produce an interpretation of something's meaning — a book, television program, film, magazine, T-shirt or kilt, piece of furniture or ornament— we treat it as a text” (p. 4). From the interplay between the text, the producer and the audience, the task of

the qualitative researcher is “to decipher the symbolic forms by which they render experience” (Pauly, p.10).

To undertake this research, three movies – *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014) and *London Has Fallen* (2016) – were selected due to three rationales: First, they constitute most recent releases about the war on terror and the conflict in Iraq. Second, they have not been extensively studied by the academy. Although Jones and Smith (2016) examined *American Sniper* through the lens of heroism and the vision of a “Dark America,” scholars have not compared these three movies and there is no literature available about all the three of them, taken as a whole. Therefore, this research represents a contribution to expand the knowledge about the filmography post 9/11. Third, all the movies were chosen because they include scenes of explicit and naturalized violence committed by American soldiers or U.S. governmental agents, such like the killing of an Iraqi child and his mother by an American soldier and the torture and killing of unarmed terrorists at hands of a secret service agent.

The first movie, *Olympus Has Fallen*, tells the story of a Secret Service agent (and former presidential guard), who finds himself trapped inside the White House in the wake of a terrorist attack, and, using his knowledge, works with national security services to rescue the President from his kidnappers. The second film, *American Sniper*, is about the life of Chris Kyle, “the most lethal sniper in U.S. history,” and his tours of duty in Iraq, where he backs up military operations and became a hero and a legend. Finally, *London Has Fallen* (the sequel of *Olympus Has*

Fallen), tells the story of the secret agent Mike Banning, who discovers a plot to assassinate all the world leaders in a summit held in London but eventually succeeded in thwarting the plot.

Drawing on critical-cultural theories of semiology, by Roland Barthes, and construction of the Subject by Michel Foucault, this thesis will analyze the selected films to better understand the semiotic codes through which certain representations of violence are naturalized and their motivated discourses become innocent. Foucault's theory of Discourse will be used to explore how the notion of reality is constructed, how the "subject" is produced within the discourse and how the discourse produces a place for the subject, from which the discourse makes most sense and unraveling its underlying meanings.

Focusing on the films, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze the way in which recent movies about the war on terror have produced meaning with regard to the conflagration (what its meaning is, how is it depicted), and the trend observed in these releases through which a new kind of violence exerted by U.S military and anti-terrorism agents (ranging from torture to assassination) is justified and naturalized. To undertake such analysis, this thesis will focus in the specific scenes within each movie, in which those explicit behaviors are depicted. Specifically, I will focus on those behaviors perpetrated by American characters to analyze the context and legitimacy of their performance. Drawing on Bordwell and Thompson (2008), the concepts of motivation, similarity, difference and variation, and development, will be used to analyze why elements are placed in scene; how their continuous use-

from objects, colors, or places, to persons, sounds, camera positions, lights or even a character traits –help audience to understand the discourse; in which way the use of contrast shapes the meanings, and how the progression of the plot entail specific interpretations.

This research will focus on how the position and the movement of the camera work to create proximity and distance based on proxemics clues; how the interplay of light and darkness conveys meanings, the way in which facial expressions act as a language to connote and produce discourses, and how the plot assures people’s identification, conformity and compliance of the actions depicted on the screen. This thesis will also analyze how the selection of images, objects and subjects in the movie are not arbitrary or unmotivated, but by contrary, how elements were intentionally chosen to produce a deliberated effect. Finally, by taking the movie as a text, a “significant unit,” and a kind of “motivated speech,” this thesis will try to explain how reality is deformed and deprived of its own signification to set the stage for the emerging of myths.

Chapters Outline

Findings section will be divided into four chapters encompassing the construction of the terrorist persona and the Arab enemy as the subjects of a new discourse, as well as the use of semiotic resources to naturalize new forms of violence, and finally, the analysis of the audience as subject and the places from which the discourses conveyed through the films make most sense. These chapters are:

The Terrorist Persona: This chapter will address the formulation of the terrorist character in *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* in terms of distance and detachment, as a foreign menace, coming from an exotic place, entailing a different culture, language and ethnicity. This chapters will also analyze the motivations attributed to the terrorist (hate, revenge, greed, treachery), as well as his physical appearance, facial expression and moral traits. The resulting portrait of a debased human being, intrinsically malign, will set the stage for the appearance of a discourse naturalizing any kind of punishment.

The Arab Enemy: This chapter analyzes the use of cinema resources (light, camera movement, shots, proxemics, focus, the plot, among others), as well as binary oppositions to distance the Iraqis and portray them as potential threats, treacherous aliens, underdeveloped, butchers and “savages” in need of being rescued from themselves. In the achievement of this goal, the theories of “Otherness”, by Hall (1997), which deals with the practices of representations of the difference (racial, ethnic, and sexual) and Orientalism, by Said (1979)the patronizing representation of the East by the West, will complement this inquiry.

Legitimation of “Good” Violence: This chapter will explore how fictional narratives construct rhetoric to legitimize violence. In the analysis, Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1917) will be useful to understand how discursive practices justify the mistreatment of helpless, to what extent those discourses naturalize the use of torture and killing of surrendered terrorists as a legitimate resource to

extract information and restore justice, and how semiotic constructions can make innocent the killing of children and women in war.

The Audience as Subject: This last chapter will analyze how the spectator is transformed into subject of a knowledge conveying a specific historic notion about what a terrorist is, and what an Iraqi stands for. It will also tackle the different positions in which the audience is placed as subject of a knowledge-power dynamic. By analyzing how the discourse produces a place for the subject, we can explore the different locations constructed for him/her in the movie; find the position from which the discourse makes most sense and unraveling its underlying meanings.

CHAPTER V: THE TERRORIST PERSONA

This chapter deals with the construction of the terrorist persona in *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* by means of semiotic clues and practices of deformation and oversimplification. Drawing on Barthes, the analysis of the motivated visual speech conveyed through the movies brings to the forefront intentional traits chosen to categorize the villain as a foreigner threat, and a different other in terms of race, language and culture; they show a fanatic driven by selfish motivations, intrinsically bad, seeking hateful ends. Thus, the terrorist emerges as a malign entity as a result of a process of stereotyping, a cognitive consolidation which, according to Dyer (2012), refers to things outside people's social world. What Dyer calls stereotyping can be understood – according to Barthes terminology – as a significant chain based in processes of connotation through which deliberate social constructions applied to human groups are naturalized.

In terms of Foucault, stereotypes can also be considered as a knowledge-power practice through which dominant groups generate discourses to categorize the subordinate ones and determine how they have to be thought about and talked about. In this sense, the *Has Fallen* franchise movies not only feature recognizable character types in terms of Hollywood's protagonist-antagonist pattern (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2016, p. 243), but also build a discourse which debases people and naturalizes any kind of punishment.

Film Summaries

Olympus Has Fallen (2013) is an action film directed by Antoine Fuqua, which depicts the assault on the White House and the kidnapping of the U.S president, Benjamin Asher (Aaron Eckhart), at the hands of a North Korean guerilla group. Pretending to be part of the South Korean Secret Service, the terrorists enter the White House camouflaged as security agents of Prime Minister Lee Tae-Woo (Keong Sim), who arrived in Washington for a bilateral talk. During the meeting, other cells mount an air and ground assault and both leaders are led to an underground bunker for protection. However, as a result of the aid provided by a treacherous former U.S. Secret Service agent, the seat of the Executive branch is ultimately captured and both leaders are taken hostage. Then, the terrorists request the withdrawal of American forces from the Korean Peninsula under the threat of killing both dignitaries if their requirements are not satisfied.

Led by Kang Yeonsak (Rick Yune), a North Korean raised in the South whose parents were killed when crossing the border decades ago, the group seeks to ease the conquest of South Korea by the North and the implementation of Communism in the whole peninsula. Eventually, the South Korean Prime Minister and U.S. vice-president are shot dead, and Kang reveals his ultimate goal of avenging the death of his family by destroying America's weapon of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal in their respective launching locations. To turn the U.S. into a nuclear graveyard, Kang requires the three codes of a secret system controlling the remote destruction of nuclear missiles. Those passwords are held by three top government officials (the

Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the President), all of whom are in the bunker. After the killing of several officers, Asher orders his aides to reveal their codes to preserve their lives and avoid being assassinated, convinced that he himself would not give the information up.

Meanwhile, secret agent Mike Banning (Gerard Butler), who successfully gained access to the White House during the attack, finds Asher's satellite cellphone and comes into contact with authorities outside. Afterwards, Banning rescues the President's son and leads him out of the building, disables Kang's communications and starts killing the terrorists one after another. As a part of his plan, Kang fakes his and Asher's deaths by sacrificing several of his men as well as the remaining hostages and, in the end, he accesses the last code after brutalizing the President and activates Cerberus (the system which controls missiles' self-destruction). Banning, however, reaches the bunker, rescues Asher and kills the remaining terrorists, including Kang in a final one-on-one hand-to-hand fight, after which he stops the countdown three seconds before the fatal explosion.

London Has Fallen (2013), is the sequel to *Olympus Has Fallen*. The American action thriller film directed by Babak Najafi depicts the plot by Aamir Barkawi (Alon Moni Aboutboul), a Pakistani arms dealer and terrorist leader who plans the assassination of the world's leading leaders, including the U.S. President, while attending the funeral of the UK Prime Minister James Wilson in London. As a revenge for the killing of his daughter and other relatives during a drone attack against him two years earlier, Barkawi sets up a coordinated operation all around

the British capital and succeeds in killing the leaders of Canada, Japan, Italy, Germany and France. The U.S. dignitary is also targeted but succeeds in running away and gets on a helicopter to leave London. While in the air, however, they are attacked again and, after the destruction of two other air escorts, the helicopter is finally shot down.

President Asher (Aaron Eckhart) and agent Banning (Gerard Butler), the only survivors of the crash, start to run for their lives through London's streets in pursuit of the U.S. Embassy. Meanwhile, Barkawi contacts US Vice President, Allan Trumbull (Morgan Freeman), and admits to be the mastermind behind the attacks. Barkawi threatens to kill more innocent people if Asher is not handed to him. Authorities also discover that the British Prime Minister was killed with poison and conclude that the terrorist leader planned Wilson's assassination as a bait to attract the world's leaders. Moving from one place to another, Asher and Banning are later ambushed when leaving an underground shelter and the U.S. President is finally abducted. However, Manning succeeds in disarming a lagging terrorist and stabs him several times to force a confession about Asher's whereabouts.

Simultaneously, American Intelligence officers identify a building in London they consider to be Barkawi's hideout and British special-forces set up an operation to rescue the U.S. President. Banning joins the squad and eventually infiltrates the facility, where he starts to kill terrorists. Meanwhile, Kamran (Waleed Zuaiter), one of Barkawi's sons, beats up the President when waiting for digital connectivity to transmit Asher's beheading on line in real time. Banning comes into the room while

the saber is handled towards Asher's neck, neutralizes the executioner and rescues the dignitary. Both of them begin running away through the corridors and Banning requests the Special Forces to blow up the structure. After the explosion, the flames expand everywhere and all the terrorists are wiped out; meanwhile, Asher and the Secret Service officer save their lives by jumping into an elevator shaft. In the end, Asher and Banning are extracted and Barkawi is killed by a second drone strike after receiving a call from the U.S Vice-president to inform him about the failure of his plot.

The Foreign Menace

One of the main traits of the terrorist persona constructed through the *Has Fallen* franchise is the distancing it is subjected to. In these movies, the terrorist is always an alien who, according to Barthes (1983), denotes in a first level of signification its literal image: the foreignness. In a plane of connotation (p. 91), however, the stranger stands for the different and the unknown. As the French semiotician states in *Mythologies* (1972) symbolic constructions, when dealing with deviance, resort to naturalness ("that's how men are") or exoticism, so as to explain the difference, and relegate "the Other" to a state of "pure object, a spectacle, a clown", and relegate him/her to the confines of humanity (p. 153).

Boggs and Pollard (2006, p. 347) highlight this point by stating that home-made terrorism, such as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 or the two decade nationwide bombing campaign undertaken by Theodor Kaczynski (the "Unabomber") before his arrest in 1996, rarely have found way into mainstream U.S.

movies. Even the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which authors such as Law (2015) consider a terrorist organization because of its use of indiscriminate violence to generate fear among Black people, has not been portrayed in this way in American filmography. Likewise, the anarchist bombing campaigns in the late 1910's and 1920's, particularly the second most devastating pre-9/11 terrorist attack in US history, which occurred on Wall Street on September 16, 1920 (Jones T. , 2015), have never caught Hollywood's eye.

After 9/11, Hollywood has focused on foreign countries and exotic villains more likely to match the stereotype of the World Trade Center attackers. Terrorism in these narratives, far from being a home-made product, is a foreign menace. In *Olympus Has Fallen*, the terrorists are basically North Koreans, and in *London Has Fallen*, Pakistanis. As a result, the terrorist emerges as an "Other" whose estrangement is not restricted to nationality. It encompasses additional dimensions of race, language and culture, all of which structure a chain of signification connoting exoticism, uncertainty and the fear arising from the unknown. In spite of the flourishing of terrorism during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's in countries such as Germany, Italy, France, Spain or Ireland, where terror was driven by local groups (Hanhimäki & Blumenau, 2013), the terrorist depicted in the movies about the War on Terror and specifically in those of the *Has Fallen* franchise is not a white, Caucasian or Anglo-Saxon man, but a slanted-eye Asian or a dark-skin Punjabi (the main Pakistani ethnicity).

London Has Fallen starts with the wedding of Barkawi's daughter in Pakistan. The scene transports the audience to a portentous ceremony in a far place where attendants wear uncommon garments: the bride is dressed with a patiala salwar (a local type of female trousers), a kameez (a kind of shirt of varying length which is left open below the waist-line) and a colorful shawl around the neck. The groom wears a glittering kurta, (a long-sleeved shirt which falls around the knees), and a sehra (a ceremonial hat with garlands hanging that covers the face). Such a narrative, built on cultural signifiers (the clothes, the language, the ethnicity) connoting remoteness, constitutes what Barthes (1972) calls a motivated speech, a message defined by its intention (p. 122), in this case: promote a notion of otherness and distance the villain from the audience. Thus, the terrorist has not only to come from a far place, be racially distinct, and look different; he also has to sound strange and is featured not speaking English or another European language but uttering unintelligible words in Korean or Urdu (one of the official languages of Pakistan), respectively.

This construction of the terrorist persona places the otherness of the character in the field of Orientalism, a place which, according to Said (1997) represents for the right "barbarism," for the left "medieval theocracy" and for the center a "kind of distasteful exoticism" (p. IV). In the cases of *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen*, significant chains are deployed to promote a perceptual and psychological distance between the villain and the audience. This trait could be considered to constitute the first statement of an emergent discourse providing new

language and boundaries to think and talk about terrorism. This knowledge leaves no room for ambivalence or the least possibility of cultural identification with the terrorist.

Intrinsic Malignity

Once the terrorist is culturally distanced, the construction of his persona is completed through semiotic clues conveyed in the performance. The embodiment of the villain character enhances and overstates his intrinsic malignity according to the rules of kinetics, the area of semiotics formulated by Birdwhistell (1952), which studies the body movements and gestures as a form of human communication. Of the seven facial expressions identified by Ekman and Friesen (1975) as universal and innate emotions in all human beings – surprise, fear, disgust, contempt, anger, happiness and sadness – the construction of the terrorist persona constrains the psychological universe of the antagonist character to the most negative ones: anger and contempt.

According to Barthes (1972), in a second level semiological system any signifier (in this case the facial expression) can be looked at from two points of view: as the final term of the denotative plane (what he calls the *meaning*), or as the first term of the connotative plane, or the *form* (p. 115). The relation which unites the *signifieds* in both planes (that is, the *meaning* and the *concept*) is essentially one of deformation (p. 121). A face deprived of innate emotions and constrained to the more debauched feelings is not entirely human and is, to some extent, subtracted

from the mankind. Thus, the form loses all its richness while, in the words of Barthes, “a newly acquired penury calls for a signification to fill it” (p.116).

Kang and Barkawi express on the screen all the wide range of feelings anger entails according to Ekman (2003) classification: from slight annoyance to rage, including indignation, exasperation, revenge, and resentment (p. 109). In most of their appearances on camera both draw their eyebrows down and together and press their lips tightly. Sometimes, their mouths remain opened, but teeth are clenched and the jaw is kept tight. In other cases, the chin is lowered as if protecting the neck for a fight and the eyelids are tensed while narrowing the upper part of the eyes, which are expanded to make the expression of rage more intense. In this sense, the denoted image (the anger of the terrorists) naturalizes the symbolic message the movies try to convey (that those men are bad).

This naturalization, however, requires more than weak signifiers (*forms*). In the words of Barthes (1977), all images are polysemous, so, have multiple readings and imply floating chains, among which viewers can choose certain significations and ignore others (pp. 35-36). This uncertainty concerning the meanings of cinematographic objects or attitudes requires a “rhetoric of the image” (p. 49) to make possible the artifice of connotation; Among the inventory of all potential connotators Barthes suggested some of the ancient rhetoric figures of the Classics, such as the metonymy (a figure of speech that consist of the use of the name of one object or concept for that of another to which it is related, or which it is part) or the metaphor (a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to

which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance). In the case of *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen*, the instrument of connotation is the hyperbole (a figure which stands for the deliberate exaggeration of a concept). In their Facial Action Coding System (FACS), Ekman and Frasier (1975) identified three facial areas of distinctive movement during anger (the brow, the eyes and the mouth) and stated that unless perceptible changes are registered in all of them, messages become ambiguous. So in real life, these gestures can be ambivalent when not combined all together at the same time. In the selected movies, the acting overemphasizes those expressions and the actor performs all of them simultaneously so as to make the message unequivocal and effective.

Something similar happens in regard with contempt, an emotion that, unlike anger, is only experienced about people and entails “an emotional reaction to a target individual or group who is perceived to be either morally or socially inferior to oneself” (Hadnagy, Paul, & Ekman, 2014, p. 121). In *Olympus Has Fallen*, when Kang talks to the captive President Asher, he raises in one side of his face, both his cheek –as if he were pushing up to squint – and the lip, which is tighten in the corner and slightly part on that side. Sometimes this action is followed by a loud snort and a back-forward movement of the head. In both cases the performance conveys the sensation of deep disdain. In *London Has Fallen*, when talking on the phone to the U.S. Vice President about his plans to kill President Asher, Barkawi combines an expression of enjoyment and disdain by tightening one lips corner and rising a bit of a smile on the other side, producing a smug contemptuous look. A similar

expression is delivered by Kang in *Olympus Has Fallen*. When talking to Banning, the leader terrorist usually raises one side of the mouth and cheek for contempt, creating a sort of smirk and sometimes nods so as to indicate his feelings of arrogance. To avoid the uncertainty about the meaning of the gesture, the films resort to exaggeration to fix the concept (*signified*) and naturalize the symbolic message. In a first level of signification, the literal image denotes itself. In the second level, as a result of a rhetorical process of deformation and overstatement, anger and contempt symbolize malignity.

Deprived of any other human emotion, the terrorist character is damned to inhabit a world of perpetual hate and fury. The face is used as a text and the facial expression as a language to undertake a nonverbal communication whose function is to emphasize and complement the verbal messages. This intrinsic malignity of the terrorist is also conveyed through the facial expressions accompanying action. In one scene of *Olympus Has Fallen*, Kang orders the killing of a hostage as a reprisal for the insubordination of President Asher and the henchman in charge of the task accomplishes the job while smiling sardonically. The smile works in two different semiological levels. As the final term or *meaning* of the denotative plane, the laugh stands for joy, happiness, and cheerfulness. As first term of a second level chain of signification, the smile of the villain represents the *form* of a new and opposite *concept*. In this case, the resource to produce the deformation of the meaning of laugh and connote a new one is the antiphrasis (a rhetoric figure consisting in the

use of words in senses opposite to the generally accepted meanings). Thus, the smile does not represent happiness any longer, but ruthlessness and malignity.

Even the look of the terrorists is featured at times to evoke repulsion. In the starting scenes of *Olympus Has Fallen*, before it becomes evident that the supposed South Korean security agents are actually terrorists, some of them are portrayed with long hair and unshaven, in clear contraposition to the dress codes of the Secret Services and in violation of what Barthes (1977) called Cultural Codes. In this case, the appearance of characters works as the *form* of a significant chain in which the signifier (it is, the security agent) denotes integrity, respect and righteousness, but connotes the opposite: dirtiness, impurity, and disreputability. This deformation is orchestrated by means of antithesis, a rhetorical figure used to contrast ideas through the use of parallel arrangements or the opposition between things or concepts. This connotation also operates as a result of conceptual metaphors of valuation, intrinsic and universal cognitions which, according to Grady (1997) make people automatically link the morally good with cleanness (p. 292) and, by opposition, the morally bad with dirtiness.

Also kinetics (the study of body movements) is used to generate anxiety and aversion. In *Olympus Has Fallen*, Kang is depicted inside the bunker mostly walking from right to left, a movement that produces tension and discomfort in Western cultures because of the natural tendency to read pictures from left to right and the psychological state of calm that such a trait generates (Giannetti, 1993). Likewise, when the terrorist leading the attack to the White House talks to the U.S. Vice-

President through video-call, he is always shown walking toward the camera, a movement that, performed by a villain, can seem “aggressive, hostile and threatening” due to the invasion of the personal space of the spectator (p. 82). In these scenes, Kang’s rush and frenetic movements are used not only to denote a man in action but also to connote rashness, fury, and potential damage. This portrait of intrinsic malignity can be considered to constitute the second feature of what Foucault call the Subject, in this case the terrorist persona, as well as another statement of the emergent discourse providing the vocabulary, ideas, and limits to think and talk about terrorism. Now that the villain has been distanced, and condemned to stand for evil, the stage is ready to deprive him of ideology and morally debase him.

Despicable Motivations

Through narrative, *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* also furnish a portrait of the terrorist based on his/her actions, goals and motivations. By doing it, the films undertake a deliberate effort to conceptualize a historically elusive term which remains without a consensual and definitive meaning until today. According to Foucault (1982), people need an awareness of their historical circumstances, to know and understand the conditioning factors which motivate their conceptualizations (p. 778). The word terrorism was used for the first time in England by political theorist Edmund Burke (1727-1797) to describe the excesses of the Jacobin Government during the French Revolution (Law, 2015). In its first meaning, terrorism referred to the State’s violence against its own citizens rather

than a private and radical use of terror against third persons. In the late 1800s the concept resurfaced linked to the wave of anarchist assassinations targeting high-profile individuals which struck Europe and America at that time and charged, among its victims, Russian Czar Alexander II in 1881, French President Marie-Francois Sady Carnot in 1894, Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Canovas in 1897, Austrian empress Elizabeth I in 1898, Italian King Umberto I in 1900, and U.S. President William McKinley in 1901 (Laqueur, 2002).

After World War II, decolonizing and liberation movements spread all around the world, (Hanhimäki & Blumenau, 2013, p. 9), including revolutionary guerillas in Latin America and liberation movements such as the Irish Revolutionary Army (IRA) in Ireland, which adopted terroristic tactics to face a more powerful enemy (Law, p. 4). In the 1970s a new wave of terrorism emerged through leftwing movements like the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany, the Red Brigades (RB) in Italy (responsible for the kidnapping and killing of former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978), or the Japanese Red Army (JRA). This trend also included emancipatory movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the Middle East, and the separatist group Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country and Freedom) in Spain, all of which used terrorism to pursue their political goals (Rapoport, 2013). The last and current wave of terrorism is linked with religious elements encompassing everything from the ultraorthodox Jewish who killed the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, to the fundamentalist Muslims of Al-Qaeda who planned the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Given the different forms through which terrorism has appeared over time the international community has not succeeded in laying down a straightforward definition about its meaning. Among academics, however, several definitions of terrorism have emerged, all of them concurring around a cluster of traits: 1) the use or threat of violence; 2) the random choice of victims to cause impact; 3) the intention to create psychological effects beyond the immediate targets, and 4) the pursuit of political change (Hanhimäki & Blumenau, p. 4). From all these characteristics, *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* obliterate the last trait – the pursuit of political goals – as a motivation to use terror. Such a construction of the terrorist persona, not only contradicts the real evidence but also constitutes what Foucault (1982) calls "dividing practices", a process through which Subjects are either divided inside themselves or "divided from others" (p. 777). Such a process, the French philosopher adds, objectivizes individuals in this case, by putting a new brick in the wall of the terrorist identity: now he is depicted not only as a distant menace, intrinsically bad and bloodthirsty, but also as a violence spreader without political motivations.

In *Olympus Has Fallen*, the antagonist character (Kang) states the reunification of the Korean Peninsula under a Communist government as the objective of the attack on the White House. In the end, however, the terrorist leader reveals his ultimate motif: to take revenge for the death of his family at hands of U.S. soldiers decades ago. In *London Has Fallen*, there is no façade of justification. Barkawi plans the assassination of the world's leaders, including the beheading of

the U.S. President merely as a way to avenge for the killing of his daughter two years earlier. Such a narrative constitutes what Foucault (1982) calls “power relations” (p. 780), struggles which question the status of the individual, “break his links with others... force the individual back on himself, and tie him to his own identity in a constraining way” (p. 781).

Thus, *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* oversimplify the nature of terrorism and subtract the use of violence from the field of its arguable legitimacy as a resource for political action to place it in the terrain of derangement and meanness. The terrorist persona is deprived of any ideology, tenets or values. He is neither driven by patriotism nor looking for freedom, redemption or social justice. He is just the debased performer of an unrestrained fury and a pathological criminal constrained to represent hate and revenge. As a result, terrorism is denied any glimpse of rationality or justification, and condemned to stand for irrationality and turpitude. Even trapped in the rationale of their violence spirals, the driving force of Kang and Barkawi’s actions is neither a national cause, nor a collective vindication, but the unrestrained relief of a personal resentment. As Foucault states, this form of power-knowledge imposes a law of truth on the terrorist which “he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (p.781). The narrative also adds a new feature to the portrait of the terrorist and defines a new pattern to the emergent discourse about how to think about him: he is a selfish being without tenets.

In addition, the quantification of the terrorist’s expected redress proves to be disproportionate. To avenge the deaths of their relatives, Kang intends to transform

the United States into a nuclear cemetery, while Barkawi succeeds in killing five Presidents and Prime Ministers, and almost achieve his goal of – literally – beheading the U.S. Executive branch. In the construction of the terrorist persona emerges a myth which – according to Barthes (1972) – is essentially based on “a relation of deformation” (p. 121). Thus, all actions are exaggerated, magnified, and the terrorist is depicted as an insane criminal willing to wreak havoc for futile motivations, and to kill thousands and millions of innocent people in compensation for the loss of the few.

Depictions of terrorism in the *Has Fallen* franchise also keep aside a relevant trait of this phenomenon: the pursuit of an ulterior goal beyond the chosen target. In the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda’s final objective was to damage the U.S. economy as much as possible so as to force Washington to the sidelines in the Middle East and Central Asia, and allow the toppling of the regimes of the region and the setting up of a theocratic rule (Garteinstein-Ross, 2015, p. 340). In *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen*, the terrorist actions led by Kang and Barkawi are not a stage within a chain of events leading to a higher goal. They constitute the end in themselves. Once the revenge is accomplished the terrorist’s enterprise is done because there is neither an ideology nor a political cause motivating the exercise of violence. Building on Barthes (1972), it can be argued that the *meaning* of the terrorist in the real life is transformed into the *form* through which a new *concept* is tailored to naturalize and “gloss over” an intentional construction (p. 128).

One last feature in the terrorist debasement is his moral annihilation. The terrorist not only has to seem egoistic, irrational and vengeful, but also abject. In one of the final segments on *Olympus Has Fallen* Kang pretends to leave the White House and fakes his and Asher's death by remote-controlling the crash of the helicopter in which some of his men and the remaining hostage leave the White House. By sacrificing his own henchmen, Kang reveals his total selfishness, disloyalty and despicable nature. On his part, *London Has Fallen* features Barkawi as a terrorist and arms dealer. The resulting narrative constructs the antagonist as a death businessman who makes money at expense of others' lives and for whom terrorism is just kind of a hobby or at best, a part time job, whose hierarchy is not clarified. In the end, the filmic discourse expands the range of malignity attributed to the terrorist persona by adding two additional features driving his behavior: treachery and greed.

The Construction of the Terrorist Persona

The terrorist subject is not only built in terms of Otherness or semiotic clues like physical appearance, movement and behavior, but also through discursive practices geared to impose definitions in regard to what terrorism means. In the last scene of *Olympus Has Fallen*, after the ultimate defeat of Kang and his henchmen, President Asher delivers a speech during a press conference in which he states:

“Our foes did not come only to destroy our things, or our people. They came to desecrate a way of life, to foul our beliefs, trample our freedom, and in this, not only did they fail, they granted us the greatest gift: a chance at our rebirth. We will

rise, renewed, stronger and united. This is our chance to get back to the best of who we are”.

From the heights of power emerge a discourse, according to which the terrorist is an enemy, who hates “us”, is driven by ignoble goals, and the ultimate desire of destroying America. This set of propositions, in the words of Hall (2013) “provides a language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (p. 44) and lays the foundations for a body of knowledge to govern the way in which such a topic can be meaningfully understood.

If the meaning of terrorism is coined by the U.S. President (even a fictional one), so, it is discourse (what is said about the terrorist) – instead of the thing in itself (the terrorist subject) – which produces knowledge. Consequently, the effects of power linked with knowledge and qualification – according to Foucault (1982)—entail processes of “deformation and mystifying representations imposed on people” (p. 781). In this way *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* construct an ideological message, because the production and circulation of elements of meaning –in the words of Foucault— have “consequence in the realm of power” in as much as “communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons” (p.786). This form of power, Foucault adds, categorizes the individual, and attaches him to a specific identity (p. 781). Both movies seek – as Suleiman states in her work *Authoritarian Fictions* (1983) – to persuade the audience through the vehicle of fiction, about the correctness of a particular way of interpreting the world.

CHAPTER VI: THE ARAB ENEMY

This chapter is devoted to exploring the construction of the Arabs as enemies in *American Sniper*. Through the use of semiotic resources applied to the cinema language, such as lighting, camera movements, shots, focuses, and plots, among others, the goal of this section is to identify the structures of denotation and connotation deployed in the film, as well as the patterns of similarity, contrast and repetition deliberately applied as part of the narrative strategy. By unveiling the chains of signification through which intentional symbolic meanings are created and naturalized it is possible to explain how the use of filmic techniques give rise to a discursive practice to categorize the Iraqis. Likewise it is also possible to explain the emergence of a new kind of knowledge about the Arabs, which portrays them as potential threats, treacherous, butchers and uncivilized “savages”.

Film Review

American Sniper is a 2014 U.S. war drama film directed by Clint Eastwood. It tells the story of Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper), the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history, who served four tours of duty in Iraq and was credited with 160 kills, before his assassination in 2013 at hand of another Iraq veteran. The movie starts with the scene of a U.S. raid somewhere in Iraq, in which Kyle is about to shoot an Iraqi child who intends to throw a grenade towards the U.S. soldiers. Just before pulling the trigger, the scene is interrupted and the plot goes back to the sniper’s childhood and pre-Army adulthood. The first image of this twenty-minute flashback features a ten-year old Kyle, shooting a deer beside his father in the forest, and successively,

attending church, holding a Bible, and protecting his younger brother in a school fight. As an adult he is then shown working as a cowboy in a rodeo, joining the Army after a terrorist attack against U.S. embassies in Africa, training to become a Navy SEAL, meeting, dating and wedding Taya Studebaker (Sienna Miller), and leaving home bound for Iraq in his first tour of duty. So, the plot returns to the first scene of the movie and Kyle shoots dead the young Iraqi boy and his mother who, after witnessing the death of her son, picks up the piece of artillery to attack the U.S. troops. The sniper, in spite of hitting the mark, experiences a visible upset because of the killing of a child and a woman, his first two casualties in Iraq.

Kyle's unit is assigned to hunt for the al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Soldiers undertake a door-to-door raid in which they meet an Iraqi man who offers information to find al-Zarqawi's second-in-command, alias the "The Butcher." The militant, however, captures the informant as well as his young son, and both are killed while U.S. troops try to reach the place and a rebel sniper nicknamed Mustafa succeeds in killing several SEALs. Kyle returns home for the birth of his first son but his wife complains about his progressive detachment, and the sniper leaves for a second tour of duty in which he takes part in an operation leading to the Butcher's death. After that, Kyle returns home again for the birth of his second child, but becomes increasingly distant from his family. So, he goes back for two more tours of duty in which Mustafa kills some of his mates, and he is assigned to kill the enemy sniper.

Eventually Kyle succeeds in killing the marksman during an operation where he meets his target with a long distance shot at 2000 meters, after which he decides to return home. Once there, he finds it difficult to adjust to civilian life until a psychiatrist encourages him to become a volunteer to help returning soldiers diagnosed with stress disorder. Around four years later, Kyle leaves home to spend time at a shooting range where he is killed by a veteran he was trying to help. The movie ends with archive footage of crowds standing along the highway for his funeral procession.

The Distant Other

As Barthes stated in *Image, Music, Text* (1977), “all man's interventions in the photograph – and consequently, in cinema – (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed), effectively belong to the plane of connotation” (p. 44). As a result, any film is inherently a motivated message, a type of speech defined by its intention in which every element has been deliberately chosen to convey symbolic constructions. Unlike war, which requires at least two sides to be waged, filmic narratives about it necessarily have just one. Every story needs a vantage point, a place from which to tell the plot, and once a side is chosen cinematographic language works to highlight the main characters, and undermine the antagonist ones.

Looking at the opening scene of *American Sniper*, there is a raid somewhere in Iraq. On one side are the US troops; on the other, civilian Arabs popping up among half-destroyed buildings. The camera shows both camps while unfolding a story about the war, but such a story is told from one single side. It has been displayed not

in the middle of the ground but close to the U.S. Army, and throughout the whole movie the camera will remain near the U.S. characters and far from the Arab ones. The purpose of this arrangement is neither to provide an impartial account of the war nor simply to set the stage for the American version of it. The very position of the camera constitutes a semiotic resource to produce meaning and construct the Iraqi enemy, by promoting both identification and detachment.

Every element of the filmic language in *American Sniper*, from camera movement to angles and shots, constitutes a tool to produce chains of signification and transform literal meanings into symbolic ones. Among all the available resources, the use of proxemics, the area of semiotics formulated by Edward Hall (1966) which studies the human use of space and its effects on behavior, communication, and social interaction, represents the master key through which the movie succeeds in creating nearness and distancing. The position of the camera and the space between the lens and the characters work to connote the degree of affinity. Of the four interaction distance zones described by Hall (intimate, personal, social and public) the U.S soldiers are featured through the first two areas, while Arabs are mostly shown using the last two. Each one of these proximity levels promotes a learned situational personality, a cluster of cultural clues about appropriate behaviors and unwilling attitudes (Hall E. , p. 109) which, based on use of space, generate unaware psychological effects.

Intimate area (Gamble & Gamble, 2014) is the kind of distance people use to share closeness with those they trust and with whom they share an emotional bond

(p.168). This proxemics degree, which ranges from skin contact to eighteen inches away from another person, finds its appropriate camera equivalent in the extreme close shot (Giannetti, 1993, p. 66), mostly used to feature Kyle, especially when handling his rifle. In this sense, the extreme close shot stands for the semiotic resource to connote and promote emotional intimacy. Personal distance, that “small protective sphere or bubble an organism maintains between itself and others” (Hall E. , p. 112), is the area from eighteen inches to four feet that is reserved to friends and acquaintances while preserving individuals’ privacy. Personal distance finds its cinematographic counterpart in the medium close shot (Giannetti, 1993, pp. 64-66), used in *American Sniper* to show friendly interactions among U.S. characters. Thus, the medium close shot connotes friendship.

When interactions involve Arabs, the scenes are performed through social distance, the proximity level ranging from four to twelve feet, usually reserved to conduct impersonal business or discuss issues that are neither private nor of a personal nature (Gamble & Gamble, 2014, p. 169). The reproduction of this proxemics pattern is accomplished through medium and full shot ranges, used to generate impersonal atmospheres. In these cases, the medium and full shots are used to connote the lack of emotional involvement. Finally, when the screen features just Arabs, they are shown in extreme long shots, the cinematographic equivalent to public distance, the range of formal and detached proximity (Giannetti, 1993, p. 64) which extends from 12 feet and beyond and is used to remove people from physical interaction, communicate with strangers, or address large groups (Gamble &

Gamble, p. 169). Here, the extreme long shot is the semiotic resource to connote absolute detachment.

According to Barthes (1977), the denoted image plays a special role in the general structure of the iconic message by naturalizing the symbolic meaning and making innocent “the semantic artifice of connotation” (p. 45). From the viewers’ perspective, it becomes unconsciously natural to see American characters closer than Arabs, and in this way the deliberated purpose of distancing the Iraqis is inoculated and made innocent. Thus, visual narrative constitutes a suitable system to gloss over an intentional concept. To say openly that Arabs cannot be friends but perpetual strangers with whom there are no chances for interaction except in the most impersonal form, would not be as effective as with the use of images, shots and frames. As Barthes stated in *Mythologies* (1972), connotation processes (or myths, as he also called them) encounter nothing but betrayal in language, “for language can only obliterate the concept if it hides it, or unmask it if it formulates it” (p.128).

The opening scene of *American Sniper* starts with a close shot of a U.S. military tank rolling on a dirty road in a devastated neighborhood somewhere in Iraq, followed by medium shots of the troops moving forward. The camera opens to a general outlook from a rooftop featuring Kyle in the foreground at the bottom part of the screen and the battlefield in the distant up background. Then, a close shot (personal distance) shows the sniper looking at a faraway scene through the telescopic sight of his gun. In an extreme long shot (public distance) a suspicious man dressed in black appears on a rooftop talking by cell phone but shortly after

steps off. Suddenly, a young Iraqi boy and a woman go out from a ramshackle building in another extreme long shot (public distance). The woman gives the child a grenade and he starts running towards the U.S. soldiers, while the sniper follows them through the sight of his rifle in another extreme long shot. This kind of visual narrative promotes identification. Just a few images are necessary to make it clear the deliberate purpose of promoting a symbolic proximity with the American side. By providing a close-up of them, the image builds a sensation of closeness that is not only physical, but also psychological. Iraqis, on the contrary, are kept aside, shown from afar. Their existence is a looming presence. People can barely see their bodies and never hear their voices. Their faces are diffuse silhouettes, always frowning, permanently suspicious and perennially silent. For them, the distance is both physical and psychological.

Another semiotic resource to achieve the alienation of the Iraqis is also the framing. Of the five basic positions identified by Giannetti (1993) to convey psychological undertones – full front (facing the camera); quarter turn; profile (looking off frame left or right); the three quarter turn and, back to the camera (p. 60) – characters in *American Sniper* are filmed in opposite ways according to who they are. American roles are depicted in full front and quarter turn positions, the most intimate perspectives connoting complicity and emotional involvement. Iraqis, on the contrary, are mostly shown from three quarter turn and back to the camera perspectives, which connote aloofness, anonymity, and alienation. In the first scene when the woman gives the child the grenade, they are shown in the foreground,

facing the U.S. soldiers, and back to the camera, a cinematographic resource used to convey a sense of concealment and mystery (Giannetti, p. 61) In regard to the snipers, Kyle is always featured in a quarter turn position, facing the camera, which provides a higher degree of intimacy, while his Iraqi nemesis, Mustafa, is mostly shown from profile and three-quarter turn perspectives, which are used to express remoteness, unfriendly and antisocial feelings, respectively (Giannetti, p. 61).

Both shots and frames can be considered as visual techniques to translate into cinematic language semiotic structures, bearers of meaning. Sound and light are two additional resources to create detachment. In the two-and-a-half-hour movie, the voices of the Iraqis are heard holding a meaningful conversation in just one scene of around four minutes, which involves Kyle's talk with Sheikh Al-Obodi (Navid Negahban), an Iraqi civilian who offers information to capture al-Qaeda's number two man in Iraq. The sequence, however, was filmed using the technique of "separation" (Sharff, 1982), a kind of montage in which shots are arranged to feature the characters one at a time (p. 59). Thus, Kyle and Al-Obodi are shown talking each other in separate frames, and sometimes showing the face of one and the back of the other, a filmic technique used to connote the emotional distance and natural tension between Americans and Arabs. When Kyle chats with other U.S. soldiers, in contrast, characters are filmed in medium shots and unified frames, side by side or facing each other, a cinematographic technique which serves to symbolize the friendship and camaraderie.

In just one fleeting shot Kyle and Al-Obodi are featured in the same frame, talking in a background room. However, an inner column closer to the camera but visually between them, split the space into two environments. So, even though the characters are sitting opposite each other, the framing places them in different spaces, metaphorizing the impossibility of any relationship between U.S. soldiers and Iraqis, and reinforcing thus the distance between Americans and Arabs. The rest of the time, the Iraqi voices are unintelligible or remain mute. Every time Mustafa is called to take action, nobody talks, and both the caller and the receiver, silently looks off the frame, surrounded by shadows and dark atmospheres which evoke fear, evil and the unknown (Giannetti, p. 17).

The Iraqi Enemy

Unlike World War I and World War II films, or Korean War movies, *American Sniper* is not a traditional war production in which two regular armies face each other in fierce combat amidst a major conflagration. Given the early defeat of the Iraqi armed forces in the first months of after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, the movie basically gravitates around the clashes between the occupation army and the local resistance groups. However, it still remains a war according to Clausewitz's (2007) description of its three main objectives: The destruction or weakening of the fighting forces so as to prevent them from carrying on the fight longer; the occupation of the country to avoid the rearmament or deployment of adverse forces, and the total defeat of the enemies' will to fight both by forcing them to ask for peace, or completely submitting the population (p. 32).

Thus, *American Sniper* depicts an asymmetric conflict, in which insurgents use guerrilla tactics ranging from mortars, missiles, or car bombs, to snipers, sabotage operations and suicide attacks to face a technologically superior and numerically higher adversary. In this sense, the enemy shown in the movie is not a regular soldier, dressing in uniform and handling an official gun amidst a chain of command, but everybody on the streets. The filmic narrative creates the enemy persona and produces a specific knowledge in regard to it as a result of what Foucault (1982) calls “conceptual needs”, that is, discursive practices which found the construction of meanings not in the object of knowledge but in the historical conditions motivating them (p. 778). In this case, the enemy has to be anyone.

In the first scene of the movie, Kyle aims at a suspicious man dressed in black who appears on a rooftop talking by cell phone during a U.S. raid. In the end, however, he shoots the young Iraqi boy and his mother, who try to attack an oncoming U.S military convoy. The next battlefield scenes depict Kyle’s killing of a marksman hidden on a roof and then, of a suicide attacker handling a grenade while fast driving an old car towards U.S. soldiers. After that, he will aim at young men burying bombs on the street, children raising rocket-launchers, motorcyclists or gunmen. To fight the resistance movement and root out his leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the American troops undertake a door-to-door raid in an urban war zone where people are supposed to be evacuated and every remaining resident is considered a suspect. In one of the houses, Kyle’s military unit finds a man, Sheikh Al-Obodi, who offers information to capture Amir Khalaf Fanus –the bloodthirsty al-

Zarkawi's lieutenant- in exchange for \$100,000. Later, Kyle and his comrades raid the house of an Iraqi family whose head of household offers hospitality to the U.S. soldiers and invites them to dinner. While eating, the sniper realizes a weird redness on the host's elbow, and suspects about his real identity, then, he inspects the house and finds a hidden weapons depot. As a result, no matter what his age (children or elder), gender (male or female), or condition (friendly or fractious), every single Iraqi is a potential menace. The enemy is not a member of an official armed institution, or the embodiment of a specific part of society entitled to handled arms. The enemy is the society as a whole.

The construction of the Iraqi enemy is also accomplished through what Foucault calls "a system of differentiations" a play of oppositions deployed by the superordinates over the subordinates, which are, ultimately, the conditions and the effects of relations of power (p. 792). Unlike the American sniper, who is presented as a good son, a responsible spouse and father, a faithful Christian, and a patriotic citizen willing to serve his country and give his life for his comrades, the Iraqi enemy is deprived of both nationality and tenets. Al-Zarkawi, the resistance "leader" is depicted not as an Iraqi fighter but as a Jordanian fanatic militant, "funded," "trained" and "loyal to bin Laden," who leads a "mercenary army" of at least 5000 "well trained and well paid" warriors (Eastwood, 2014). Likewise, the enigmatic Mustafa, the expert enemy sniper responsible for the deaths of dozens of American soldiers, is described as a foreign Syrian Olympic medalist, who is fighting an alien war.

In the makeup of the enemy, what is said about him is as important as what is not. Words such as “patriotism”, “honor” or, “virtue,” are never mentioned in regard to Iraqis. Likewise, the adversary presence is neither referred to as an “occupation” or “invasion”. As a result the Iraqi is denied a driving force for his actions and a moral reason to rise up arms. He doesn’t fight for freedom. He doesn’t try to restore national pride. He is just a treacherous settler (like the woman hiding grenades in her clothes, or the man offering food while concealing guns in his apartment) triggered by money (such as Sheikh Al-Obodi), fanaticism or resentment. Thus – in the words of Foucault (1995) – it is not the activity of the subject that produces knowledge “but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge (p. 28).

Iraqis as Savages

Once the enemy has been identified and distanced, the stage is set up to vilify and abase him. Besides the use of cinematographic techniques to promote psychological reactions toward the characters in terms of identification and empathy vs. alienation and apathy, *American Sniper* builds a narrative in which Arabs are shown as exotic underdeveloped inhabitants, treacherous, greedy, but first and foremost, as savages. So, the Iraqi as enemy persona emerges as a form of knowledge power which, according to Foucault (1982) categorizes the individual, attaches him to an assigned identity and “imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (p. 781). In this sense,

the movie reproduces the patterns of a new wave of films whose main purpose is, according to Said (1997), to “demonize and dehumanized Muslims” by uniformly representing them “as evil, violent, and above all, eminently killable” (p. xxvii).

In at least two scenes, Iraqis are explicitly labeled as savages, from the mouth of the American sniper. In the first one, after returning home from his first tour of duty, Kyle is watching a video of an Iraqi marksman targeting U.S. soldiers. His wife suddenly comes into the room and he stops the film. Taya urges her husband to talk about his war experience, but he refuses by arguing his intention of protecting her from the cruelties of conflagration. Then, when she says that her imagination can be so much worse, he replies: “Oh, no it’s not. They’re savages. They are fucking savages.”

These words seem to refer to Amir Khalaf Fanus, “The Butcher,” who had previously killed the ten-year old son of Sheikh Al-Obodi, the Iraqi who offered information to capture Fanus in exchange for money. In that scene, al-Qaeda’s second man in Iraq is featured pushing up a drill against the right leg and the head of the child in the middle of the street, before his men shoot dead the father. Then, The Butcher says loudly: “you talk to them, you die with them.”

Such a narrative also connotes the idea of Iraqis’ irrational behavior. Apart from being depicted as inherent enemies, Iraqis are also shown as violent, bloodthirsty killers which, unlike enemies (who always target the opposite side) are able to attack their own people in the most shocking ways. In the scene previous to Fanus’ killing, while chasing the Al-Qaeda’s lieutenant, Kyle enters into a freeze

depot where a dead man is hanging on a hook and several human heads and other body parts are piled on a shelf.

In another scene, during his third tour of duty, Kyle is talking to Private Ryan "Biggles" Job (Jake McDorman), when driving a military vehicle on the streets of an Iraqi city. Biggles tells Kyle he has just bought a wedding ring for his fiancée. The sniper asks the soldier where he has bought the jewel, trying to find out if the piece was acquired in Iraq. Then, his brother-in-arms answers:

Biggles: Yeah, man, fuck, yeah. It's so much cheaper here.

Kyle: Did you buy it (the wedding ring) from savages? How do you know it's not a blood diamond?

Biggles: What the fuck do you care, man? You have spilled so much blood over here. You are a legend.

In these cases, the dialogue fulfills the two basic functions of the linguistic message identified by Barthes (1977) with regard to the iconic message: anchorage and relay. In the cinema, according to the French semiotician, images entail an uncertainty concerning the meaning about what is shown on the screen. Likewise, the word helps to identify the elements and to anchor all the possible denotative meanings (p. 36). At the symbolic level, the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting "a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating, whether towards excessively individual regions" (p. 39). Thus, the word constitutes the artifice by means of which the

source domain (the savagery) is mapped over the target domain (the Iraqis) and the connotation succeeds in naturalizing a deliberated construction: an Iraqi is a savage.

Other references to the Iraqis' supposed savageness or insignificance are spilled all around the movie through dialogues among U.S. soldiers. In one of them, Private Marc Lee (Luke Grimes), talks to Kyle about his apprehensions in regard to the Iraqi conflict. For him, war puts lightning in his bones and makes it hard to hold onto anything else. Then, Kyle asks him if he needs to vent the issue and the talk follows like this:

Lee: I just want to believe in what we're doing here.

Kyle: oh, there's evil here. We've seen it.

Lee: Yeah, there's evil everywhere.

Kyle: We're protecting more than just this dirt. Or, do you want these motherfuckers to come to San Diego or New York?

As Barthes (1977) states dialogue functions not simply as elucidation. It does advance the action "by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself" (p. 41). In this sense, a new connotation regarding Iraqis as terrorists is tailored by means of a process of deformation and what Barthes (1972) calls "the privation of history" (p. 152). According to Kyle the war in Iraq is waged not as a result of the search for supposed weapons of mass destruction but to fight terrorists and avoid attacks on American soil. Such construction makes evident the connections between Barthes' semiotics – which deals with the production of meaning – and Foucault's discursive practices – more

concerned with the effects and consequences of representation (Hall, 1997, p. 6): If American soldiers are fighting terrorists in Iraq, every Iraqi who faces them is a terrorist and every casualty at the hands of U.S. soldiers is justified because it is a terrorist.

Fusing together widely disparate realities under the label of “evil,” this kind of narrative simplifies – according to Bernstein (2005) – complex phenomena and distort their moral dimensions, but above all, “‘justify’ deeply problematic and questionable courses of action” (p. 58). In another scene, when Kyle is returning to Iraq for his second tour of duty, he runs into his young brother Jeff (Keir O'Donnell), who is also serving as U.S. soldier in Iraq and is then leaving the country to come back to the United States. The youngest Kyle looks upset and trembling while walking towards the transport airplane. Then his oldest brother approaches him asks:

Chris: What happen? (Are) you all right?

Jeff: I'm just tired man, I'm going home.

Chris: I'm proud of you. Dad is too. Dad's proud of you.

Jeff: fuck this place.

Chris: Huh? What did you say?

Jeff: fuck this place.

Immediately after the encounter with his brother, Kyle gets on a helicopter where he meets with Lt. Col. Jones (Chance Kelly). His superior informs him about his promotion as Chief Officer and commissions the sniper to lead a squad to hunt

The Butcher. Then the Col. emphasizes his orders with these words: “I want you to put the fear of God into these savages...”

The idea of fighting savages in a dirty land evokes –according to Jones and Smith (2016) – the Western genre of cowboys on horseback dealing with hostile environments and fulfills “the nation’s foundation mission of bringing civilization to a wilderness” (p. 7). This narrative, likewise, enhances the notion of Orientalism, that body of knowledge about the East described by Said (1979) produced in the West, for the West, and without participation of the East, which deterministically reduces the Orient to an inferior other, exotic “singularly backward, degenerate, uncivilized and morally corrupt” (Appelrouth & Desfor, 2016, p. 703).

By means of all the semiotic resources cinema provides as well as the linguistic messages conveyed through dialogues and the plot, *American Sniper* produces symbolic meanings in regard with the Iraqis. Through processes of denotation and the building of significant chains, the movie succeeds in distancing the Iraqis and depicting them as a foreign menace coming from the Orient, driven by hate and revenge. All these deliberated significations construct a Subject, the Arab enemy, and a body of knowledge about what he stands for: a despicable persona, violent, terrorist, greedy, treacherous, with neither tenets nor feelings, and intrinsically bad. This knowledge not only furnishes a language to talk about the Iraqis, but also defines the limits of the appropriate discursive practices to think about enemies facing U.S. soldiers abroad and the Iraq War as a whole.

CHAPTER VII: THE LEGITIMIZATION OF “GOOD” VIOLENCE

This chapter deals with the production of meanings and the construction of discursive practices through which the understanding of humans’ behaviors is modified and subverted in *Olympus Has Fallen*, *American Sniper* and *London Has Fallen*. Drawing on Barthes’s semiotics, it is possible to trace the chains of signification by means of which symbolic language creates imaginary territories. In this context this applies for the war on terror, the way of fighting evil and the appropriate punishment for terrorists and enemies. Building on Foucault’s theory of Knowledge/Power, the next pages are also devoted to the analysis of reprehensive actions – such as killing an unarmed person or torturing her – and how they cease to be condemned and become normal after the 9/11 attacks, especially through the selected movies. The goal of this section is to explain the emergence of a new regime of truth, the type of rationale which defines the limits of all that can be considered true and acceptable and transforms despicable crimes into exemplary feats.

Discursive Practices

Killing or torturing a human being is a form of exercising power over people, understood in the Weber’s (2016: 1925) view, as “the chance of a man or a number of them to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others” (p. 176). Thus, the stabbing to death of surrendered terrorists portrayed in the *Has Fallen* franchise or the shooting of children and women featured in *American Sniper* entail an exercise of violence, whose perpetration –even in fictional narratives – requires a rationale, a moral legitimation. In Homer’s *Iliad*,

Agamemnon declares war against Troy to avenge the rape of Helen. The classic Greek epic poem, however, restricts the violence to the clashes between two armies waging war against each other on an equal footing. Recent movies about the war on terror, by contrast, feature powerful perpetrators targeting disarmed or weak people and exercising an extreme violence in need of justification.

This dilemma of exercising violence on helpless people is not new in fictional narratives and has found resolution as back as Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1917). When explaining to detective Porfiry Petrovich his theory about humankind, Raskolnikov poses that all men are divided into "'ordinary' and 'extraordinary.'" The former, according to him, are those who live in submission, and have no right to transgress the law. The latter, by contrast, possess "an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep . . . certain obstacles, and only in case it is essential for the practical fulfillment of his idea (sometimes, perhaps, of benefit to the whole of humanity)" (p. 263). For the killer of Ivanovna sisters, if a positive end cannot be achieved "except by sacrificing the lives of one, a dozen, a hundred, or more men," the extraordinary ones "would have had the right, would indeed have been in duty bound . . . to /eliminate/ the dozen or the hundred men for the sake to the whole of humanity" (p.263).

With less literary quality but similar effectiveness, the analyzed movies also provide rationales to justify violence. During the twenty minutes flashback between the killing of the Iraqi boy and his mother featured in *American Sniper*, Kyle's father, Wayne (Ben Reed), explains to young Chris and his little brother his theory about

humankind. According to him, there are three types of people in the world: Sheep, wolves and sheepdogs. The first ones are those who don't know how to protect themselves. The second are predators who "use violence to prey on the weak." Finally, he concludes, "there are those who have been blessed with the gift of aggression and the overpowering need to protect the flock. Those men are a rare breed that lives to confront the wolf. They are the sheepdog" (Eastwood, 2014). In *London Has Fallen*, after the ultimate defeat of the terrorists who tried to kill the U.S. President, Vice-President Allan Trumbull (Morgan Freeman) addresses the nation and delivers a broadcast speech in which he states: "Far too many people died for no good reason. There are those who say that would never have happen if we just would mind our own business. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Frankly, we live in a dangerous world and we have few good options, but the worst option is to do nothing. And finally, we owe it to our children and to their children to engage in the world." (Najafi, 2016)

In *Olympus Has Fallen* there are two explicit scenes in which unarmed people are tortured and killed. In the first one, Agent Banning disarms and knocks two Korean terrorists in The White House's hallways. Then he ties both men with the purpose of interrogating them about the nature, size, and distribution of cell. Before starting the questions Banning says them: "I've been trained to extract information from people like you." When one of the terrorists laughs at his questions, he sticks a dagger in his throat, killing him instantly. Immediately, Banning turns to the other terrified man who, before being given a chance to speak, is stabbed in his leg, so as

to ensure his submission and cooperation. In the next image, the man is featured motionless and apparently dead. In a second scene a treasonous former Secret Service agent, Dave Forbes (Dylan McDermott), is sent by Kang, the Korean terrorist leader, to kill an unaware Banning, who ignores his betrayal. After a gaffe, Forbes' plot is discovered and then he faces melee with Banning, who eventually defeats him. Then Banning makes the traitor call Kang and falsely inform him of the fulfillment of the mission, before stabbing him to death.

This kind of narrative, according to Barthes (1972), constitutes a political act inasmuch as it is meant to make people accept the profound alienation of a message unveiled under the appearance of innocent forms (p. 157). Torturing a terrorist stands for what the French semiotician calls the "inoculation" principle, a practice through which the contents of the collective imagination are immunized by means of "a small inoculation of acknowledged evil." Its purpose is to protect the system "against the risk of a generalized subversion" (pp. 152-153). Thus, evil has to be fought with a dose of evil, good characters perpetrate bad actions because they are necessary, and terrorist deserve to be tortured, so, the bad actions of the good characters cease to be reprehensible.

London Has Fallen also features two explicit scenes of unjustified violence. In the first one, Banning disables a group of terrorists that have followed him and the U.S. President to the Subway. After shooting to death three of them, the Secret Service Agent approaches a wounded one who happens to be Raza Barkawi (Adel Bencherif), one of Barkawi's sons, and beats and stabs him in the back. In that

moment, his brother Kamran (Waleed Zuaiter), who coordinates the multiple attacks in the British capital, calls Raza through the radio, trying to contact his men. Banning answers the call and says to Kamran that Raza “is not feeling too well” at that moment because “he’s a little bit fucked up.” Kamran promises to broadcast the execution of the U.S. President across the Internet once he is captured, but Banning says to Kamran that there is something he wants him to hear first. Then Raza starts yelling while the Agent stabs him repeatedly and says through the radio: “That’s the sound of your brother dying.” All of this happens in front of the U.S. President, who asks Banning, “Was this really necessary?” and he answers, “No.”

The second scene occurs after evacuating a safehouse, when a truck side-swipes the car transporting Asher and Banning, and the President is finally captured by the terrorists, who drag him off to an unknown location. Trapped in his seat, Banning manages to reach his gun when a terrorist approaches and succeeds in shooting him on time. Then, he crawls towards the wounded man with a knife in his hands and starts stabbing him several times while demanding the President’s whereabouts.

In the words of Foucault (1995), the circulation of fictions about crimes and its punishment is allowed because they are expected to have “the effect of an ideological control” (pp. 67-68). From a Knowledge-Power perspective these narratives entail a discursive practice according to which the terrorist deserves torment, and any kind of punishment applied to him is admissible. This discourse also suggests that torturing is an efficient way to extract information and that the

appropriate penalty for traitors is death. Thus, the recurrent performance of tortures and killings upon terrorists, naturalizes their exercise, incorporates their usage into the repertoire of possible punishments and desensitizes the viewer to the suffering of the condemned.

These narratives also reproduce Dostoevsky's rationale about the extraordinary man who doesn't stop short at bloodshed if that course of action is of use to his cause. In the words of the Russian writer, "if such a one is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he can (...) find within himself, in his conscience, a sanction for wading through blood" (p. 264). But unlike Raskolnikov, the killings at the hands of Kyle and Banning, far from constituting crimes or receiving any punishment, are by contrast sanctioned as normal practices and celebrated as exemplary deeds. Such plots constitute a 180-degree turn with regard to the fictional treatment of the war on terror before 9/11, featured in films like *The Siege* (1998). In this example, the torture and killing of a terrorist suspect, Tariq Hussein, at the hands of U.S. soldiers in the middle of a massive attack on New York, is morally condemned and the main perpetrator, major general William Deveraux (Bruce Willis), is arrested for his betrayal of civil liberties and human rights. The way leading from rejection to tolerance of similar practices, and turning bad violence into good violence is the result of legitimation, the process stated by Weber (2016), through which a state of affairs is validated by compliance. In the case of the *Has Fallen* franchise, however, such a metamorphosis is partially external to the film, while in *American Sniper*, it is mostly intrinsic to it.

Legitimization of Torture

Soon after 9/11, different people started advocating in favor of more radical measures against terrorism. As soon as November 4, *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter wrote an article titled “*Time to Think about Torture*” in which he argued that “Some torture clearly works,” and stated the necessity to “keep an open mind about certain measures to fight terrorism” (Adler, 2001). On November 8, 2001, CBS Television program *60 Minutes* broadcasted an interview with Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz, who said, “If you’re got the ticking bomb case, the case of a terrorist who knew precisely where and when the bomb would go off, and it was the only way of saving 500 or 1,000 lives, every democratic society would, have, and will torture” (McCoy, 2006, p. 111). One hundred and forty years earlier Dostoevsky posed the same dilemma in these words: “Would not one tiny crime be wiped out by thousands of good deeds? For one life thousands would be saved (...). One death, and a hundred lives in exchange” (Dostoevsky, 1917, p. 57).

On January 8, 2002 President George W. Bush suspended the Geneva Conventions regarding treatment of war prisoners (McCoy, 2006) on the basis of considering Afghanistan a failed state and the coining of a new category, the “illegal enemy combatants,” different from either soldiers or civilians, and beyond the scope of the International Treaty (p. 113). The CIA implemented interrogation methods such as “open-handed slapping, the threat of live burial and ‘waterboarding’ ” to extract information (p. 121), and the Justice Department posited in a memorandum that “torturing suspected al Qaeda members abroad ‘may be justified’” (Allen &

Priest, 2004). Interrogators in Guantanamo started using gender coercion, sexual humiliation, and barking dogs to induce fear (McCoy, 2006, p. 130), and after the invasion of 2003, the procedures developed to interrogate Taliban illegal combatants in Afghanistan started being implemented in Iraq.

Among the victims of such procedures was Major General Abed Hamed Mowhoush (Otterman, 2007), former Iraqi air defense chief, who, on November 26, 2003 was slapped, gagged, forced into a sleeping bag, and subjected to chest compression (p.178). According to the autopsy, Mowhoush died from suffocation and "blunt force trauma" (McCoy, 2006, p. 144). In 2004, the Supreme Court recognized in *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* and *Rasul v. Bush*, the rights of due process for enemy combatants. However, on December 30, 2004, the Justice Department issued a second memorandum arguing that a broad range of interrogation techniques, "might be inhumane but did not constitute torture unless they resulted in 'prolonged mental harm' " (Bakalar, *The Line Between Torture And Cruelty*, 2007).

One year later, on 30 December 2005 the U.S. Congress passed the Detainee Treatment Act (DTA), prohibiting the "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment" of detainees and providing "uniform standards" for interrogation. Then on June 29, 2006 the Supreme Court stated, in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (2006), that military commissions set up to try detainees at Guantanamo Bay violated the Geneva Conventions. In response, President Bush signed on October 17 the Military Commissions Act, to provide legal support for the existence of such structures and suspended the right of detainees to justice. This restriction was ultimately overruled

in *Boumediene v. Bush* (2008), a Supreme Court decision reaffirming prisoners' rights to the writ of habeas corpus under the United States Constitution. As a result, Congress amended the law in 2009, under President's Barack Obama administration, whose second executive order forbade the use of torture in interrogations (Burkeman & Pilkington, 2009). Eight years later his successor, Donald Trump, claimed in an interview with ABC News that the U.S. must "fight fire with fire" and argued that torture "absolutely works" (Masters, 2017).

Thus, the legitimization of torture in the *Has Fallen* franchise is not only intrinsic to the films, such a legitimization comes from a set of discursive practices originated in the media and the academy, and then transformed and spread through legal dispositions, governmental practices, and executive orders. These developments, according to Bernstein (2005), corrupted American politics through the overuse of a simplistic rhetoric that splits the world between evil v. good, and obscures complex issues. The scene in *London Has Fallen* in which Banning stabs an unarmed terrorist in front of President Asher unveils the connections between the discourse naturalizing the torture and killing of suspects in the war on terror and power. It is the very President, the highest national authority, who endorses such a practice not with words but with silence. By neither requiring a specific command to be carried out nor being condemned as a reprehensible action, the torment of the terrorist, in addition, proves to be fair. Drawing on Barthes, Asher's mutism denotes acquiescence, as if following the rule of thumb: "silence lends assent." Likewise, as

Foucault stated in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), if the “patient” is guilty, pains imposed on him are not unjust (p. 41).

Another scene in *Olympus Has Fallen*, in which Banning stabs and kills two terrorists after interrogation, conveys a message that torture is an appropriate medium to get information, whose intrinsic function is, in the words of Foucault (1995), to reveal the truth (p. 44). This process, according to Bernstein (2005), parallels to some extent the disenfranchisement of Jews within Nazi Germany, a process that killed all that made them subjects of rights, and now makes terrorists superfluous as human beings (p. 5). So, the torture of an evil terrorist in *Olympus Has Fallen* or *London Has Fallen* is anything but fiction. It is not the movies which legitimates torture, but its real exercise which legitimates its performance in the cinema, in the form of entertainment.

By means of repetition, the torment of the terrorist becomes predictable. Viewers come to know that every time the secret agent has a chance, he will mistreat a helpless suspect. Such predictability emerges as a power-relation which manifests itself in two ways: First, as a perennial reaffirmation about the insignificance of the terrorist, who is intrinsically killable. Second, as the institutionalization of an avenging delight derived from the pleasurable contemplation of the torment. In *London Has Fallen*, the camera shows in close shots the stabbing of the terrorists, the efficiency of its repetition, and even the rotary movements in Banning’s hand by means of which the greatest possible harm is inflicted. As Foucault (1995) states, a successful torment justified justice, “in that it

published the truth of the crime in the very body of the man to be executed” (p. 44). In this sense, the films of the *Has Fallen* franchise bolster a new regime of truth, according to which terrorists deserve any kind of mistreatment and the spectacle of its carrying out deserves to be seen.

The Myth of the Hero

Producing symbolic meanings, according to Barthes (1972), is the same as creating myths or connotations. Every piece of culture has an underlying intentionality and a deliberate signification, which emerges from the work as a motivated speech. The product of such a speech is the result of a system encompassing a *signifier* (the thing or things referred) and a *signified* (the concept or mental representation of the things) which forge them to produce a significant *sign* (Barthes R. , 1983, pp. 42-47). In a second stage, that *signification* is the base for a new semiological chain that surpasses the denotative level (of direct relationship between signifier and signified) to reach a space of additional connections or “connotation” (p. 90). What people grasp is not the sum of the components, but the correlation between them. Into this unit there is a presence of an intention through a form, trying to naturalize artificial constructions and make them appear factual, innocent and de-politicized (Barthes R. , 1991, p. 113). The success of this adventure announces the birth of the myth.

From a literary perspective, Slotkin (1973) defines mythology as “a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world visions and historical sense of a people or culture”, and reduce “centuries of experience to a constellation of compelling

metaphors” (p. 6). In his view, American mythogenesis was founded on the shoulders of the colonists, adventurers, traders, explorers, and hunters who killed and were killed to tear a continent from the wilderness; then, the settlers who came after, and the cowboys who went further, all of them generation after generation, through an ongoing process of bloodshed shaped in such a way that “the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience” (p. 5). According to Faludi (2007, p. 13), the terrorist attacks on 9/11 engaged America in a symbolic war at home to repair the wounded honor, and restore a national myth in need of a new hero.

In analyzing the violence performed in *American Sniper*, the killing of an Iraqi boy and his mother constitutes at the same time its most extreme expression and the starting point for the construction of a myth. When watching the almost four-minute scene –split by a twenty-four minutes flashback about the early life of Chris Kyle– we are facing a second-level semiotic system. There is a *signifier* (an Iraqi child about to throw a grenade and a U.S. soldier who finally shot him and his mother) and there is also a *signified* (it is here a purposeful mixture of the harshness of war and the righteousness of American warlike action). Finally, there is a third term, which is nothing but the association of the first two. This is what Barthes calls the *signification*.

This scene resembles his famous example about the front page of the magazine *Paris-Match* N. 326 of July 1955, in which the photo of a black soldier appears giving the French salute (the signifier). The image was deliberately chosen

as the form of a motivated signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness). According to the French thinker, there was also a presence of the signified through the signifier: this is the myth or signification, “that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors” (p. 115). Thus, by analyzing the scenes of violence in *American Sniper* it is possible to unveil its underlying signification.

The choice of an Iraqi boy and his mother to be killed and an American hero to perpetrate the shooting are not arbitrary, but deliberated to expand the signification of the action. All of them constitute, in Barthes terminology, the “*form*” through which the myth is uttered. In visual myths, the elements of the form are related as to place and proximity, and the mode of presence of the form is spatial (p. 120): some things are shown from close, other from afar; some of them are lighted while others remain dark, in such a way that the relation uniting the concept of the myth to its meaning “is essentially a relation of deformation” (p.121). The “*mise en scene*” was conceived to create identification with the U.S. side through the use of the lens, perspectives and lights. The use of this last resource can, according to Sobchack (1980), affect the emotional and psychological responses to the image (p. 31). Darkness is used when featuring Iraqis to suggest fear, evil and the unknown, while light (use with Americans) evokes security, virtue and truth (Giannetti, p. 17).

The scene takes place in a battlefield somewhere in Iraq during a U.S. raid, when a suspicious man dressed in black appears (through an extreme long shot) talking by cell phone from a rooftop. Suddenly, a young Iraqi boy and a woman who seems to be his mother (also shown using an extreme long shot) go out from a building. The sniper (shown in close-up) follows them through the sight of his rifle. The woman (featured in another extreme long shot) gives the child a grenade. Through the shadows projected by the building, he starts running towards the U.S. soldiers. With the finger on the trigger (shown in a bright extreme close shot), the sniper looks at the boy approaching his comrades. The hero sweats (in a close shot), hesitates. Immersed into a deep conflict, he seems troubled in deciding whether or not to shoot the boy. He finally does but the child's mother picks up the grenade (in another extreme long shot) to attack the U.S. troops, forcing the soldier (in another close-up) to pull the trigger again.

In the words of Barthes (1972), "myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc." (p. 125). In this sense, a boy with a grenade is not anymore the image of innocence. A mother with a piece of artillery does not symbolize purity any longer. Both of them are now fighters, potential menaces, and enemies. Killing them has ceased to be a despicable crime to become an act of necessity. This deformation obliterates the independent existence of each element and merges them into new global signifiers: child, woman, grenade, threaten, attack, in one hand, and hero, comrades, U.S. lives, shoot, defense, on the

other, as the two sides of a same entity. To talk about one of these terms is to mention all of them: thinking on the boy is to think on the bomb, imagining the woman is to imagine the attack. That is what Barthes calls the *form* of the myth, which once it has been set up is ready to receive its signified: the harshness of war and the righteousness of American warlike action.

But this *concept* (the second term used by the French thinker to refer the signified) appears in global fashion, as a kind of nebula of a certain knowledge. The narrative provides a convincing sequence of events. It is obvious that the sniper did not want to kill neither the boy nor his mother. It is clear that he gave them all the possible time to change their minds. And it is also clear that he waited until the last moment to fire. It is impossible not to conclude that the killing of the child and the woman is the inevitable result of their own actions. It is their fault, not the fault of the sniper. The shots are the last resort of the hero to contain an attack and preserve the lives of his mates in arms (American lives). In the end, this is an act of justice in the midst of war. For Barthes, myth does not deny things. On the contrary, its function is to talk about them; it simplifies them, it purifies and makes them innocent. The child and the woman were chosen for the scene because killing the weakest has a symbolic power greater than any other death. If one accepts these deaths as unavoidable, all other killings are given a “natural and eternal justification” (p. 129).

Deprivation of history described by Barthes is also present. Myth has to obliterate all prints of past to emerge. Neither the scene nor the full movie tells the

circumstances of the war. The audience is not told that U.S Army invaded Iraq in 2003 based on the claim that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that Saddam Hussein's government posed an immediate threat to the United States and its coalition allies. On the contrary, reality is overly deformed and in one scene Kyle says to Private Lee: "We are fighting for most than this dirt. Or you want these savages in San Diego or New York?" Nobody tells viewers that at least 100.000 Iraqis have been killed during the conflict according to Associated Press reports in 2009. Also, Iraq Body Count, a non-governmental project has estimated more than 160.000 casualties before 2015 (Count, 2015). According to other sources like PLOS (Public Library of Science) a nonprofit publisher and advocate of Open Access research based in San Francisco, California, approximately half a million people died in Iraq as a result of the war and subsequent occupation from March 2003 to June 2011 (Plos, 2015). From this perspective, the Iraqi boy running with a grenade to attack the U.S. troops would be a patriot fighting an invader to liberate his country. This perspective is the reason why people must not know the history of the war. It is also why viewers are not allowed to hear the voice of the child, nor be aware of his feelings. Any possibility of identification has to be avoided. He must remain just as a menacing presence.

By focusing on the experience of soldiers in the battle rather than in the context of war this kind of movies – according to Stahl – bring the audience “into proximity to a vision of the soldier and the battlefield” while drawing the subject of war “further away from its point of deliberation” (2010, p. 43). These film

mediations work as spectacles that reinforce the idea of “amnesic representations” and have “the power to position viewers as citizens of a present rooted in particular understanding of the past” (Slocum, 2005, p. 28). In the view of Der Derian (2005), these mimetic wars constitute a battle of imitation and representation, “played out along a wide spectrum of familiarity and friendliness, indifference and tolerance, estrangement and hostility” (p. 328). As a result of all this, the myth abolishes the complexity of human acts, and reinforces their naturalness. The hero kills the Arabs because it must be done, because they do not leave him any other choice. People accept the impossibility of grasping the whole complexity of war. The concept becomes something ineffable, beyond criticism, and all discussion about it is reduced to numbers, casualties. That is what Barthes (1972) calls “the quantification of quality” (p. 154).

In addition, the exercise of legitimate violence is depicted as a component of an efficient device of checks and balances within the war machinery. Before shooting, Kyle asks for permission to fire while the soldier besides him warns: “They will fry you if you’re wrong. They will send your ass to Leavenworth.” Later, in another scene, the sniper is summoned to testify with regards to an inquiry about the killing of a further target. The widow assures the investigators that her husband had just a Koran in his hands, and the Hero answers that he doesn’t know how a Koran looks like, but he knows how an AK 47 does. “So, you tell me what he had in his hands,” he concludes. Through this narrative, the spectator is relieved to think about the legitimacy of the deaths and released from any moral concern. After all,

the war is waged by virtuous warriors, both patriotic and religious, who struggle before pulling the trigger, and there is also an impeccable bureaucracy managing and overseeing the use of violence against “the savages.”

Through all these devices the myth finally is unveiled and the underlying signification of the scene clearly emerges. The concept appears to people in all its appropriative nature: it comes and seeks the audience out in order to oblige them – paraphrasing Barthes – to acknowledge its body of intentions: what the killings of the Iraqi boy and her mother really mean is that every death caused by the USA is justified, and whoever faces its army, no matters his gender or age, deserves to be killed. To be successful the myth cannot be too obscure because it would lose efficacy, or too clear, which could affect its credibility. Announcing the use of the American hero as the symbol of the US righteousness destroys the myth by making its intention obvious. Proclaim the killing of the kid as the alibi to justify all other possible deaths, unmask its purpose. But once the myth has unveiled its real meaning people is ready to receive, as Barthes (1972) wrote, its imperative character in the form of a personal interpellation: “It is I whom it has come to seek. It is turned towards me, I am subjected to its intentional force; it summons me to receive its expansive ambiguity” (p. 123).

As a motivated speech, the movies of the *Has Fallen* franchise and *American Sniper* construct symbolic universe which, according to Barthes (1972), abolish the complexity of human acts, and gives them the “simplicity of essences” (p. 143). Thus, the films make innocent the torture of terrorist and justified the killing of children

and women. This body of significations constitutes the base for an emergent discourse which naturalizes the disenfranchisement of the terrorist, the extraction of confession, the exemplarity of the torment and the restorative value of torture as both, a form of punishment and a technique of investigation. But after all, these discursive practices transform the “good violence” into a spectacle worth been seen.

CHAPTER VIII: THE AUDIENCE AS SUBJECT

This last chapter analyzes the different positions in which the audience is constructed as subject of a knowledge-power dynamic. By considering how the discourse creates the subject and produces a place for him or her, it is possible to explore the different locations set up for the individual in the selected movies, find the position from which the discourse makes most sense and unravel its underlying meanings.

According to Foucault (1982) the human subject is placed in very complex relations of signification and power which determine not only the production and understanding of knowledge, but also the nature and identity of individuals. In his view, linguistics and semiotics offer instruments for the study of the former and its main output: the generation of meaning, while the latter, depends upon an historical awareness about the conditions and present circumstances motivating a given conceptualization (p. 778). As a result, power produces knowledge through discursive practices which govern the way a topic can be meaningfully reasoned and talked about. Discourse, the French philosopher added, produces the Subject through "dividing practices" which question the status of the individual and divide him/her from others. This process objectifies individuals and furnishes categories such as "the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the 'good boys'" (pp. 777-778). Among these categories fits Said's theory of Orientalism (1979), a body of discursive practices to define, describe, think, imagine and

dominate the Orient, which is entirely produced in the West and imposed over the East, reducing it to an exotic and uncivilized other (p. 3).

Olympus Has Fallen and *London Has Fallen* convey a discourse which produces its own Subject: the terrorist persona. This new individual emerges as a foreign menace coming from the Orient, despicable, driven by hate, revenge, and greed. The terrorist is also depicted as a treacherous persona, without tenets or feelings, intrinsically bad, bloodthirsty, ecstatic with the pleasure of violence, and seeking ignoble ends, whose actions make him deserve torture and death. *American Sniper* on its part creates another Subject: the Arab enemy, who is depicted as an exotic Oriental persona, underdeveloped, stuck in time, and potentially threatening. This portrait also encompasses the idea of a deceitful character, no matter his/her age, gender or condition, butcher and savage in need of being civilized and rescued. These subjects are produced within a discourse which subjects and transforms them into the bearers of a specific kind of knowledge. In the words of Foucault (1982), this form of power “categorizes the individual,” and imposes on him “a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (p.781).

But discourse, according to Foucault, not only produces subjects as beings endowed with identity and self-consciousness, who personify particular forms of knowledge. More importantly, discourse also produces subjects in terms of control and dependence regarding someone else, and constructs places for the individuals in such a way that everybody becomes, in specific periods its subject and “the bearer

of its power/knowledge” (Hall, 2013, p. 40). Thus the selected films transcend the individual spectator persona and construct a new collective Subject: “the audience,” by transforming the viewer into the repository of a particular regime of truth about the war on terror. In the words of the French philosopher (Foucault M. , 1982), communicating is always a way of acting upon others, in as much as the production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the behavior of people and thus, in the realm of power (p. 786).

The discursive practices conveyed through these movies also produce a new kind of knowledge which, in words of Hall (2013), determines what is “sayable” or “thinkable” about it (p. 29). As previously stated in chapters VII and VIII, *Olympus Has Fallen*, *American Sniper* and *London Has Fallen* build a body of meanings about the Iraqis, the terrorist, and the enemy, which defines the language to talk about this subjects, the possible discourses to refer to them, and the borders of any kind of reasoning in regard to them. First of all, this discourse presents the war on terror, either on the battlefields or everywhere else on the form of anti-terrorist operations, as a mass spectacle in which, according to Stahl (2010), a “state of violence is translated into an object of consumption” (p. 3). These movies reframe the spectators as an audience of war consumers which operates in two ways. First, as deactivated political subjects, distracted and entertained through a discursive practice that 1) disciplines them into the rationality of the real war; 2) provides ideological legitimation to the way in which war is waged, and 3) assures obedience

to the prevailing social, political and military order. The tortures and killings of terrorists and Iraqis enemies depicted in *Olympus Has Fallen*, *American Sniper* and *London Has Fallen* neither disturb the viewer, nor produce moral anxiety. By contrast, all of them seem necessary, just, restorative, and justified, under the premise that evil has to be fought with evil.

According to Stahl (2010), this kind of narratives not only favors an order of constant action and the suppression of ethical reflection (p.100), but also tends to function to control public opinion by distancing and disengaging the citizen from the realities of war (p3). The audience subject does not think about the reasons of war, the fairness of warlike action or the number of casualties. The discourse of war on terror as a spectacle entails a social process that positions viewers and so, the audience subject, for the everyday consumption of what Slocum calls “amnesic representations” (Slocum, 2005), film mediations that position viewers in a present rooted in particular understandings of the past (p. 28). The scene of *American Sniper* in which Kyle says to Private Lee that they are waging war in Iraq to avoid terrorist to attack U.S. soil, deliberately obliterates the original reason of the conflict: the supposed search of never found Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Thus, the film disciplines the audience into the rationale of the U.S. warlike action and reinforces the myth of the crusade nation which only fights evil in the name of freedom.

A second way in which spectators are reframed as an audience of war consumers entails what Stahl (2010) calls the “virtual recruit.” Such a discourse,

especially in *American Sniper*, encourages collective military fantasies of battlefield action, celebrates the efficient performance of the war machine and promotes a symbolic participation. Under this narrative, the audience is interpellated to contemplate the deployment of technology, and to witness the depiction of the military machine in action. *American Sniper* features since its first scene, the diversity of weaponry: Tanks, Helicopters, bombers, cargo planes, sophisticated rifles, laser sights, night vision systems, and so on, in such a way that viewers can enjoy what Lacy (2003) calls the libidinization of gadgets (p.615).

As discourse, Stahl (2010) says, “this virtual recruit is a product of the demilitarization of the citizen as subject of the military on the one hand, and the remilitarization of the citizen as the object of the military on the other” (p. 48). Thus, the audience as Subject is constructed as a depoliticized individual, distanced from the suffering perpetrated on others, relieved from any moral anxiety regarding the use of extreme violence, entertained with its reenactment and symbolically recruited to support its exercise on behalf of a superior goal and the collective well-being. Deprived of political and historical context, *American Sniper* reduces the Iraq War to the experiences of the U.S. soldiers who, as a band of brothers, fight not just against evil but to protect ones each other. In the scene where Kyle visits his comrade Biggles at hospital, after he has been shot in Iraq, the sniper promises to seek the responsible enemies and hunt them down. “They’re gonna pay for what they did to you”, he says, “because you’re my brother.”

Discursive practices in the *Has Fallen* franchise and *American Sniper* also desensitize the torturing of terrorists or the killing of men, of women and children, and transform the enactment of those practices into a pleasant or, at least, innocent and natural experience. As posed in chapter V, the scene in *Olympus Has Fallen* in which agent Banning tortures and kills two terrorists in the White House, conveys a message about the naturalness of such an action (which is carried out without remorse) and prepares the audience for the reenactment of the torment. Likewise, as explained in chapter VII, there is a scene in *London Has Fallen* in which President Asher remains mute while Banning stabs to death a terrorist in front of him. His silence furnishes acquiescence and explains the audience that the torture of terrorists has the highest executive approval, and consequently is necessary, fair, and is carried out in the best interest of America.

As the Subject of a specific discourse, the audience is the bearer of a kind of knowledge-power which legitimizes the use of violence. The *Has Fallen* films and *American Sniper* offer what Chaudhuri (2014) calls “cues for sympathy or allegiance” (p. 24), that is, narrative and aesthetic choices which invite viewers to respond in particular ways but specially to accept their moral universe. But as Foucault stated in *Discipline and Punish* (1995) our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance. In his view, under the surface of images occurs a “meticulous training of useful forces,” and the circuits of communication support an accumulation of knowledge in which the play of signs defines the anchorages of power (p. 217). Thus, when torture is inflicted in the movies against people declared

evil or children and women are killed after being labeled as a threat to U.S. lives, these acts cease to be perceived as horrific and “an altered moral universe is ready for its cinematic remediation” (Chaudhuri, 2014, p. 27). In the scene of *American Sniper* where Kyle talks to Biggles about the killing of the Iraqi boy and his mother, the sniper describes their intention of throwing a grenade as “evil like I never seen before.” Biggles comforts his comrade by saying him that the kid could have taken out ten Marines’ lives and adding: “you did your job. End of story”. If Iraqis try to hurt Americans it is fair to kill them.

Just as the spectator constitutes the Subject of a particular knowledge-power, the films represent his/her disciplinary space. As Foucault (1995) argues, discipline creates complex spaces that permit the circulation of discourses, indicates values and achieves the obedience of individuals, by producing subjected, practiced and docile bodies (p. 138). In this sense, the screen stands as the place for the permanent staging of discursive practices, whose continuous performance guarantees their ultimate naturalization and increases both “the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system” (p. 218). In this sense, the disciplinary space conveys a discourse which carves in subjects’ minds a particular knowledge about what an enemy stands for, what a terrorist is and, especially, what it is not, what are the appropriate punishments for their actions and what categories of human beings deserve torture and are killable. As Foucault states, the disciplinary space works as a kind of laboratory, which “can be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behavior, to train or correct individuals” (p. 203).

The Position of the Subject

As a laboratory for the reeducation and training of people, the *Has Fallen* franchise and *American Sniper* fulfill the three main criteria stated by Foucault as functions of discipline: to obtain the exercise of power at the lowest possible cost, to bring the effects of this social power to their maximum intensity and to extend them as far as possible, and to increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system (p. 218). But to be effective, discipline has to be efficient, and to be efficient, discourse has to be meaningful and produce effects on people. According to Foucault, discourses not only construct subjects but also construct positions for the subjects which people have to identify with, and from where they can be subjected to such a discourse to become “the subjects of its subject/power” (Hall, 1997, p. 56). Thus, by analyzing the places constructed in the discourse for the subject we can find out the position from which the message makes most sense.

Suffice it to recall how Foucault, in *The Order of Things* (1970) makes sense of *Las Meninas* by the Spaniard painter Diego Velazquez (1599-1660). The work displays a painter (who happens to be the same Velazquez), standing a little back from a great canvas, which is placed on the left end of the picture. The canvas has its back turned to that spectator, while the artist is glancing at his model, which is outside the space of the painting just in the same point where the viewer is standing. On the right side of the image, next to the painter, is the princess Margarita who has come there to watch, along with an entourage of maids of honor, courtiers, and dwarfs. All of them seem to look at the mysterious model and, at the same time,

towards the viewer. Opposite the spectators, on the ending wall of the room, there is a series of pictures all over the surface, except two points: On the right side, a doorway forming an opening shows far away, in profile and full-length, the silhouette of a man standing with his feet placed on different steps of a stair. On the center of the far wall, in the very middle of the painting, one of the hanging canvases shines with particular brightness. It is not a picture but a mirror which holds in its glow the far figures that the painter is looking at outside the work: the King and the Queen of Spain.

For Foucault, the work of art does have a completed meaning, except in relation to the spectator who looks at the canvas and must complete the meaning of the picture by constructing himself/herself as the subject of its discourse. In *Las Meninas* viewers can be different subjects at the same time. First, they can take the position of the spectator-subject, when looking at the picture, admiring all its beauty, the magnificence of the composition, the way in which Velazquez combined colors, or the interplay of light and shadows. Viewers can also take the position of the painter-subject. When standing in front of the canvas, people are also in the position of the artist after finishing the work in such a way that some part of his inspiration comes to them trying to tell everybody something else. Just in this moment spectators realize that “we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at us” (p. 5). Viewers realize that they are even part of the picture, that they are being watched by it and finally, that they are whom are being painted (the object-subject).

A similar analysis can be applied to *American Sniper*, especially to the scene about the killing of an Arab child and his mother. First of all, viewers are the spectator-subjects of the movie. Everyone watching the film enjoys the images, absorbs the deliberate interplay of angles and focuses, witnesses the plot and internalizes the staging. As former soldier Paul Rieckhoff, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) stated in 2015 “most of America is tired of hearing about Iraq. But now, they’re at least open to being entertained by it” (2015). And by doing it, the audience subject receives all the symbolic power-knowledge, the mythologies and discourses conveyed through the film about a particular understanding of history, and war.

Spectators can also be creator-subjects. Every second the plot goes on they are placed in the same position of the director when editing the movie at that point, and part of his inspiration comes to them. So, it can be said that, as the film progresses, both of them share the same experience. However, the position from which the message can make more sense for the audience is what could be called “the character-subject.” Throughout all the movie spectators witness the story from the standpoint of the camera. The lens puts the viewers in the place of a third-person, a kind of omnipresence, able to know, watch and hear everything: even the sniper’s pulsations and the silence of the Arabs. Spectators can see the soldiers going forward, the hero hesitating, the Arabs handling their cell phones, and plotting. They can see the child receiving the grenade and the marksman pointing his gun at him.

At the crucial moment, however, a subtle change happens. The spectator no longer is this third person. His ubiquitous presence in possession of the true and beyond the good and evil fades. Now the camera is not at one side of the action anymore. Now the lens is in front of the audience and people are now in the first person position: they are the main character of the plot. As a character-subject the spectator sees the events, out of the blue, through the eyes of the shooter. All of a sudden, the one who is pointing to the child is not the sniper, but the rather, it is the viewer. The one who follows the boy with the telescopic sight is not the soldier, but the spectator. And the one who is going to pull the trigger and kill the young Iraqi and his mother is not the character in the movie. It is you.

Finally, all the signification of the scene emerges from the position from which individuals are transformed into Subjects of its discourse and the plot makes more sense. Likewise, the Iraqi boy was chosen to die in a mediatized dramatization about the Iraq War spectators were chosen and disciplined to kill him in a symbolic way. By doing so, the film not only naturalizes the child's death, but also turns viewers into virtual executors of the shooting. To discipline the audience about the righteousness of the U.S. warlike action, the way in which war is waged and the moral performance of the killing-machinery, it is not only the hero (i.e. the sniper) who had to carry the burden of this crime. To purify all the evils of the war and naturalize all the deaths in Iraq, every American has to be a hero and perpetrate his own symbolic killing of an Arab boy.

Unlike *Las Meninas*, the position *American Sniper* and the *Has Fallen* franchise create for the Subject is not static place but a dynamic one. The spectator is not only the receiver of an action coming from the screen. He/she is also its executor, its perpetrator. Space and time dissolve, fade, and the viewer is simultaneously sitting and watching a movie at home or in a theater, while walking through Baghdad, London, or Washington, killing Arab enemies and Oriental terrorists. The new position for the Subject is not passive, it is participatory and, in this way, the Audience internalizes more deeply the prevailing regime of truth about the war on terror.

Thus, discourse not only produces the terrorist and the Iraqi enemy Subjects as well as the language and parameters to think and talk about them. It also puts the viewers in a position of control and dependence and transforms them into a new Subject and the bearers of a particular regime of truth about the war on terror. This body of knowledge, on its part, entails effects on people, their thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and thus, the audience as Subject emerges as a distanced individual, depoliticized, indifferent to the use of violence, entertained with its performance and symbolically recruited to support it.

In this way the symbolic knowledge conveyed through the films of the *Has Fallen* franchise and *American Sniper*, and built on chains of signification unveils its connections with power. As Foucault (1995) states, “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27). Thus,

the movies emerge as a disciplinary space in which audience Subjects are trained in the rationale of the system and induce to compliance in regard with the regime of truth and its practices. Finally, discourse also produces places for the Subject, locations from which the viewer can better grasp the meanings and the message makes most sense.

CHAPTER IX: CONCLUSION

The 9/11 terrorist attacks have had a deep impact all over the cultural circuit, from the information gathering and the setting of news agendas, the publishing of books, or the composition of songs, to the design of video games, and the production of TV series and movies. Among this last category, more than 30 films have been released regarding the tragedy on the World Trade Center and Flight 93, the aftermath of that day and the further War on Terror, shaping the public understanding about the meaning of those events.

However, there is no one single point of view in the 9/11 and post 9/11-filmography, but several trends form which the issue has been addressed by Hollywood. This research identified at least eight categories of productions: movies dealing with the 9/11 tragedy, documentaries about the Iraq War, critical documentaries about the excesses of the War on Terror, critical dramatic movies about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, films about the coming back of veterans, documentary films directly related with the Afghanistan War, movies focused on the theme of terrorism, and fictional films centered on the battleground.

London Has Fallen, *American Sniper* and *Olympus Has Fallen* belong to these two last categories, with a particular focus on the naturalization of “good” violence perpetrated at the hands of U.S. agents and soldiers. Drawing on Barthes’s notions of semiotics and Foucault’s theories of the Subject and Power/knowledge, this research identified specific filmic techniques used in these productions to generate symbolic meanings which categorize the terrorists and the Arabs, and how those

discursive practices both create them as Subjects and produce knowledge delineating the ways of thinking and talking about them.

The terrorist is depicted in *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* as a foreign menace coming from the Orient. These movies construct the character as an “Other” in terms of race, language and culture who is psychologically distanced from the audience by means of shots and the use of space. The terrorist is also portrayed as an intrinsically maligned persona through the use of his facial expressions, perennially showing rage and contempt. Deprived of any other human emotion, the terrorist character remains in a perpetual state of hate and fury and only smiles when killing. The plots also depict the terrorist as a fanatic who threatens the Western society moved by revenge and greed, whose actions unveil the bloodthirsty and treacherous personality of a man with neither principles nor feelings.

American Sniper, for its part, depicts the Iraqi as an exotic Oriental persona, half-clad and underdeveloped, stuck in time, and an omnipresent enemy, potentially threatening, despite age, gender or condition. Through the use of focus, camera movements, shots and lighting, among other cinematographic resources, Iraqis are also shown as a distant other and a perpetual stranger with whom there is no chance for interaction, even in the most impersonal forms. Through the plot, this portrait additionally encompasses a treacherous character, greedy, and violent, able to inflict damage even against his own people. Likewise, dialogues essentially underscore his condition as an uncivilized savage in need of being rescued from himself.

All the discursive practices used to portray the terrorists and the Iraqis as enemies construct not only cinematographic Subjects, but also an imaginary territory in regard to them and the War on Terror, the way of fighting evil and the appropriate punishment for terrorists and enemies. *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* convey a discourse about a fictional understanding of terrorism which contradicts the basic traits about this phenomenon identified by academics such as Hanhimäki & Blumenau (2013), who highlight the search for political goals and his ideological motivation as drivers for the use of violence. By contrast, the terrorist of the *Has Fallen* franchise is categorized as a selfish human being, deprived of political tenets and only moved by resentment or money. As a result, terrorism is denied any glimpse of rationality or justification and stands for evil.

In regard to the War on Terror, *American Sniper* and the *Has Fallen* franchise films reproduce the patterns described by Lacy (2003) about cinema as a space where myths and "commonsense" ideas about history and politics are constantly produced. *Olympus Has Fallen* and *London Has Fallen* reduce the War on Terror to a fight against pathological criminals willing to wreak havoc and to kill innocent people to avenge the loss of their relatives. Likewise, these movies restrict the terrorism as a phenomenon to a clash of civilizations driven by fanaticism and resentment, in which one side wants to desecrate the way of life, to foul the beliefs, and to trample the freedoms of the other.

American Sniper, for its part, deform history and obliterate the real motivations to invade Iraq (the supposed existence of Weapons of Mass

Destruction), by circumscribing the War in that country to a conflict initiated to fight terrorism and avoid attacks against America. The movie also reduces the war to the personal experience of the soldiers, who fight to protect each other, and avenge the hurt inflicted against anyone of their brother-in-arms. Those narratives not only deform and oversimplify complex geopolitical processes and provide a disservice to the public understanding of those phenomena but also fuel compliance around specific courses of action derived from those understandings.

The analyzed movies also convey discourses to legitimize the use of violence. *American Sniper* constructs the notion of the “sheepdogs,” those men “blessed with the gift of aggression” and driven by patriotism, proud and loyal towards his comrades, as well as the overpowering need to protect the flock. The construction of the Iraqi war as a conflict against terrorism also transforms the opposing combatant into a terrorist, whose annihilation becomes more permissible, while the narrative about a band-of-brothers, provides justification for the killing of any Iraqi who threatens an American soldier. In this sense, the death of any Iraqi is the inevitable result of his own actions. In this sense, *London Has Fallen*, *American Sniper* and *Olympus Has Fallen* work to naturalize and legitimate – as Lacy (2003) states – stories about what behaviors are acceptable from states and individuals (p.614).

Olympus Has Fallen and *London Has Fallen* on their part convey a discourse according to which evil has to be fought with evil, terrorists are not entitled with rights because they ceased to be part of humankind, deserve any kind of punishment. Torture is depicted as an effective technique to extract information from terrorists.

As Barthes (1977) states collective imagination are immunized by means of “a small inoculation of acknowledged evil.” The exercise of torture is legitimized through the dialogue, about the supposed training received by U.S. Secret Service agents to carry on it, or semiotic clues such as the silent acquiescence of the U.S. President while a surrendered terrorist is stabbed to death. Thus, the movies naturalize the exercise of torture by suggesting its institutionalization as a practice to deal with terrorist and the symbolism of a mute executive approval.

The analyzed movies also construct the audience as the Subject of the knowledge conveyed on the screen. This body of knowledge transforms the viewer into the bearer of a specific regime of truth that legitimizes the use of violence and according to which terrorists deserve any kind of mistreatment. As Stahl (2010) states, this kind of narratives favors an order of constant action and the suppression of ethical reflection (p.100). Likewise, this regime of truth transform the torture into a spectacle which carrying out deserves to be seen.

In this sense, the film emerges as a disciplinary space which allows the circulation of discourses that naturalize the continuous performance of torture against terrorists and achieves the compliance of individuals in regard to exercise of these practices. So, the movies discipline the viewers and function to control public opinion by distancing the citizen from the suffering of others. This productions also reproduce the patterns identified in previous films in regard with the description of enemies, terrorists and the use of torture, to the point where is possible to think about a new emergent cinematographic genre.

Finally, the films produce positions for the Subject, locations from which the message makes more sense. In the case of *London Has Fallen* the audience is put in the place of a jury witnessing the presidential acquiescence to the use of torture. People have to judge his behavior and produce a verdict: acquittal or condemn. In *American Sniper* audience is invited to participate in the shooting of an Iraqi boy and his mother and transformed into symbolic co-perpetrators of the crimes.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

As a narrative analysis, this research circumscribed its sphere of inquiry to the generation of meanings and discursive practices in regard to the main characters and the villains. Many other aspects such as the womanhood or the homeland, among others, have not been yet addressed as object of scrutiny. All those topics, however, furnish areas for further research and offer additional opportunities to study the production of signification about the war on terror and the emergence of specific knowledge about its significance.

Audience analysis could also improve the understanding about the way in which the messages conveyed through these movies are received and processed by the audience. Notwithstanding, the announcement about the forthcoming release of a new sequel of the *Has Fallen* franchise by 2018, promises a fertile ground to gauge the validity and continuity of the patterns identified in these research in regard with the construction of the Subjects, discursive practices to legitimate violence and the generation of new symbolic boundaries to understand terrorism or war.

Likewise, the intersections between video games and films furnish additional areas for research. In a world in which the new generations are growing up playing the war, enjoying the depiction of violence and symbolically participating of its perpetration, critical theorists have a great challenge ahead in the understanding of such phenomena. Further research could shed light on to what extent this emergent filmic genre transform complex processes into media spectacles, and how much those spectacles desensitize and distract the audience about the implications of these phenomena. Future studies could also analyze if the use of torture against dehumanized others in cinematographic productions induce support to U.S. military operations, and how much do those narratives succeed in altering the ethics of the viewers in regard with what behaviors and practices are admissible to fight terror and what kind of violence is legitimate and “good”.

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