

Hollywood Interventions into American Foreign Policy in the Films of Peter Berg, Kathryn Bigelow, Clint Eastwood and Paul Greengrass, 2007-2018

2007



The end of the film suggests the cycle of violence will only end when both sides take responsibility.

How does the representation of **the other**, **trauma** and **memory**, and **national identity** engage with US foreign policy and the war on terror?

2012



Dan tells Maya about torturing Ammar: "He has to learn how helpless he is." Is the point of the torture to show his helplessness in contrast to an American soldier who is likely to be rescued?

"[M]any only hear about Muslims and Islam from the news after an act of terrorism, or in distorted media portrayals in TV or film, all of which gives this hugely distorted perspective."
President Obama

2013



"Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters."
Judith Butler

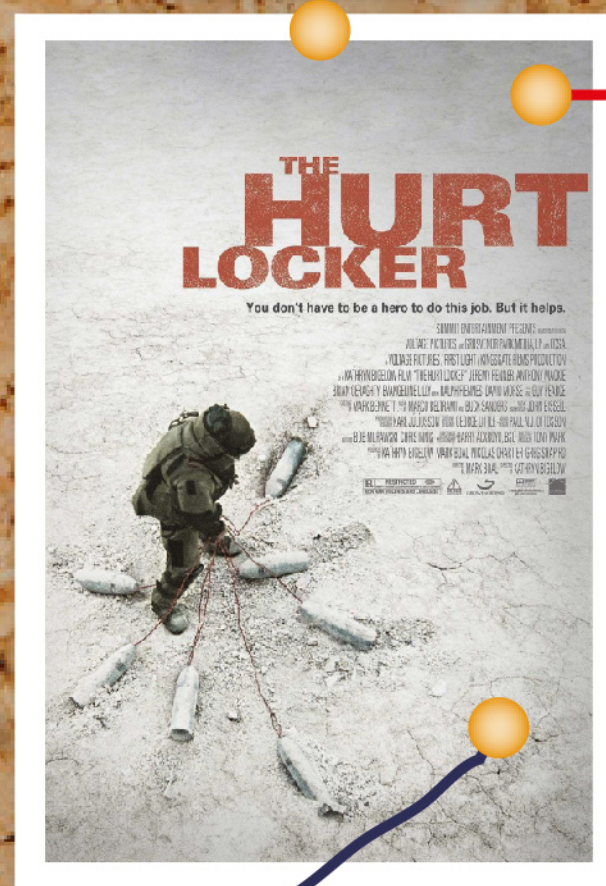
The Afghan villagers at the end of the film are shown to be compassionate, saving Luttrell's life and risking their own.

2016



"[T]he pro-war world view... found receptivity because of a pre-existing culture of exceptionalism that views America as morally superior - exempt from the rule that power corrupts."
Raymond Hinnebusch

2008



"The United States is now into the eighteenth year of a war that it will never win. Soldiers who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s are now seeing their children enlist."
Greg Grandin

To what extent do the films endorse the dominant ideology?

"[T]he war movie... [depends] on a prejudicial construction of a cultural otherness, in which an American identity is forged in relation to the threat of an enemy who is alien and dangerous."
Guy Westwell



Is the other grievable? To what extent does the audience's empathy lie with the traumatised soldier?

"Cathy Caruth claims that the soldier is 'the central and recurring image of trauma in [the twentieth century]'... Sarah Cole writes tellingly of a 'distracted fraternity', a band made brotherly through silence."
Kate McLoughlin

How has the cinematic portrayal of American foreign policy changed in the years following 9/11?

The endless war is emphasised when James returns for another 365 days.

"[A] cycle of Iraq War feature films entered production, appearing from late 2007 and into 2008... *The Hurt Locker* (on wide release in the US from mid-2009) and *Green Zone* originate in this period, but the releases of both were held back after the poor box-office performance of their predecessors."
Guy Westwell

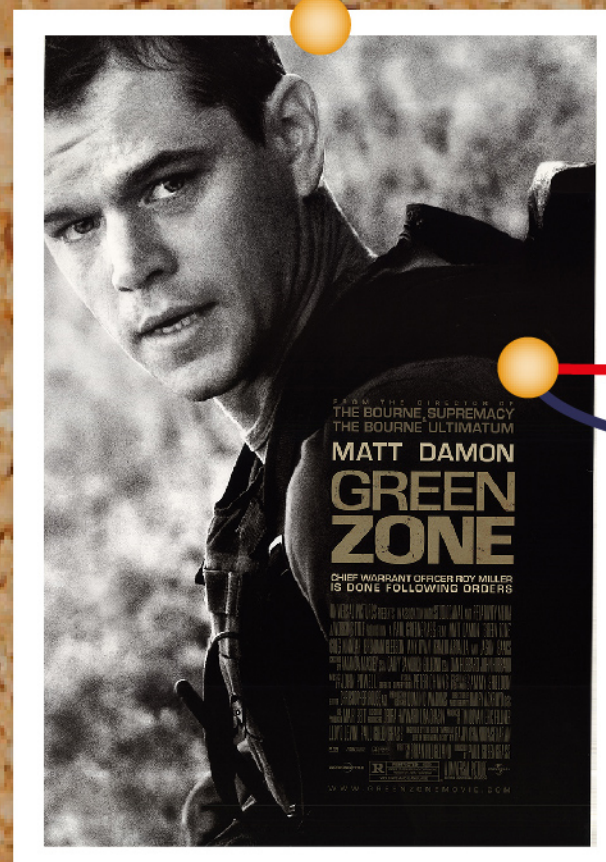
How is national identity affected by endless war and terrorism?

Does Hollywood, as a global industry, have a responsibility to portray a variety of voices and represent different sides of the same story?

"The critique of war [aims]... to consider what conditions might make violence less possible, lives more equally grievable, and, hence, more livable."
Judith Butler

Said identified how people of different backgrounds were being portrayed: "On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are... rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things."
Edward Said

2010



Chief Miller's search for WMD proves futile, challenging the US government's argument for invading Iraq.

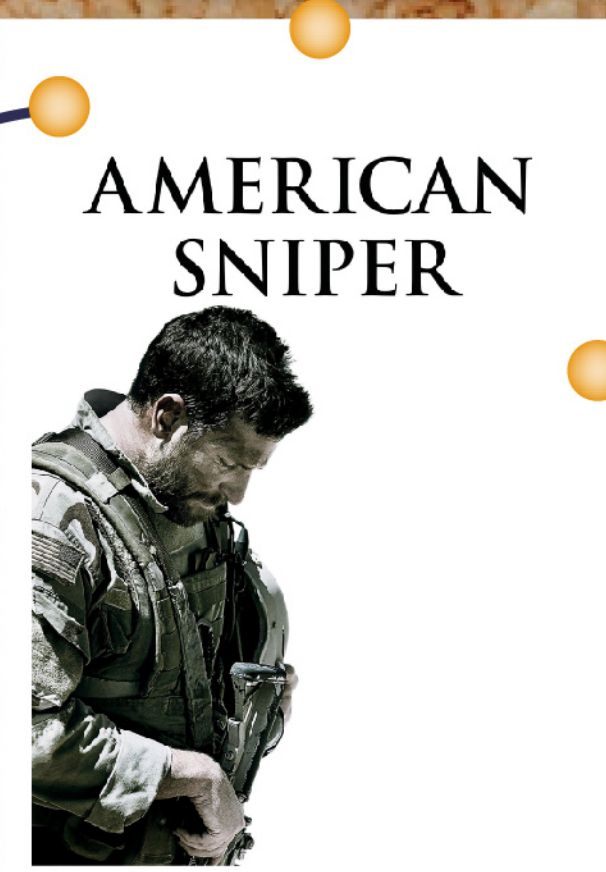
"[T]he veteran whose tales of war, if welcome at first, quickly become unwanted."
Kate McLoughlin

2013



Telling the story through the point of view of one character, based on a real person's memories, will inevitably lead to a distorted perspective on the other.

2014



The other is represented as a dangerous animal who needs to be captured.

2018



Olivia Flint
University of Southampton
o.m.flint@soton.ac.uk