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The Figure of the Soldier in *Green Zone* (2010) and *American Sniper* (2014)
Representation, Reflectionism and Politics



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Table of Content

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| I- Screening the Military..... | 12 |
| 1. Institutions..... | 12 |
| a. The Army, a Heterotopia..... | 12 |
| b. Deindividuation..... | 14 |
| c. Responsibilities..... | 20 |
| 2. War and Progress..... | 25 |
| a. Technology on screen | 25 |
| b. Gloryfing Ancient Warfare to Discredit the Iraq War | 27 |
| 3. War Imagery Debunking the War on Terror Rhetoric..... | 31 |
| a. Unveiling the War on Terror Rhetoric | 31 |
| b. Death, Destruction, Violence..... | 35 |
| II) The soldier's heroic image | 43 |
| 1. “Masculinity on the front”..... | 44 |
| a. Women as Background Characters | 44 |
| b. Masculine Codes..... | 47 |
| c. Gender and the Film Genre Theory | 52 |
| 2. Rethinking Heroism..... | 55 |
| a. Romantic Ideal and Heroic Values..... | 55 |
| b. The Hero’s Vulnerability | 59 |
| 3. Racism..... | 67 |
| a. The Enemy..... | 67 |
| b. Racism within the military | 70 |
| III) Ethics and Egopolitics..... | 73 |
| 1. The Soldier’s Duality..... | 73 |
| a. Private and Public Identity..... | 73 |
| b. Public Figure..... | 77 |
| 2. An Ethical Debate..... | 79 |
| a. The Soldier’s Dilemma..... | 79 |
| b. Good vs. Evil..... | 86 |
| 3. Religion and Morality | 95 |
| a. A Religious Conflict..... | 95 |
| b. Angels of Death | 95 |
| Conclusion..... | 106 |
| Works Cited..... | 109 |

Introduction

War film as a genre itself from the earliest years of film history. Indeed, the first war film to be documented, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* (1898), was produced in the year of the Spanish-American War¹. Yet “Hollywood producers did not recognize the box-office potential of propagandist war and anti-war films until the success of D. W. Griffith’s influential Civil War epic adapted from Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman, The Birth of a Nation* (1915)”². A “rather lengthy period of mostly patriotic war films” followed the success of Griffith’s film but

the aftermath of the very unpopular Vietnam War radically changed the war film genre in American cinema. Many films around that time communicated the American public’s disillusionment towards the war, which is a trend that has largely carried on into today, as the vast majority of war films since the Vietnam War have made it a point to more deeply address the horrors of war³.

Today, a meta sub-genre has risen from the recent geopolitical context: the Iraq War Film. In 2011, Martin Barker, a professor specialized in philosophy and cultural studies, observed in his book *A Toxic Genre: The Iraq War Films*, that “over the last five years, a cycle of films has emerged addressing the ongoing Iraq conflict”⁴. And, since 2011, the interest in the Iraqi conflict on screen has not dropped, as proven by the recent success of *American Sniper*. Like any American war film, this new sub-genre reveals much on America. Indeed, as Michael Hoffman suggested in an article on the *Cinemablography* website: “in the world of cinema, there is perhaps no other genre that is quite as effective at simultaneously addressing sociopolitical issues and assessing elements pertaining to human nature as the war film genre.”⁵ The numerous films made about the Iraq War can be used to understand today’s American identity. In addition they shed light on contemporary politics as “the worlds of film and politics are increasingly intertwined and even interdependent.”⁶ The Iraq War Films are even more politically permeated as the narrative is directly connected to geopolitical matters. Relying on films in order to understand socio-political subjects goes back to Fredric Jameson’s theory on mass culture. In his article “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture he suggests that “mass culture is popular and thus more authentic than high culture.”⁷ In other words, recent Hollywood war films can be approached as key elements to understand society. They are very much revealing of contemporary socio-politics and shed light on today’s military environment.

1 Tim Dirks. “War Films”, *Film Site*, visited 16.02.2016 <http://www.filmsite.org/warfilms.html>

2 Ibid.

3 Michael Hoffman. “The War Film Genre: Assessing Human Nature”, *Cinemablography*, May 2014. <http://www.cinemablography.org/blog/the-war-film-genre-assessing-human-nature>

4 Martin Barker. *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 2011)

5 Hoffman. op.cit.

6 Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas. *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films* (London: Routledge, 2005)

7 Fredric Jameson. “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture”, *Signature of the Visible*. (London: Psychology Press, 1992)

The latter holds a key place within American society. Indeed, “the United States has unquestionably been the most formidable military power in recent years,” “its spending levels [...] is the principle determinant of world military spending.”⁸ Generally, the US military spending has been on the rise and the US Department of Defense numbers indicate that “recent increases are attributed to the so-called War on Terror and the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions.”⁹ The importance of the military institution in America is also revealed through popular culture, as the U.S. produces many war films supporting the exemplary status of the soldier in the country. Indeed, the soldier has always inspired fascination and is an emblematic figure occupying a special place in the American collective imagination. He is often associated with patriotism and tends to be perceived as the protector of the nation. This famous figure is thus widely exploited in the artistic world. And, while the soldier has been at the heart of many art work, he also turned out to also produce art. The first and the second world war, in particular, gave birth to numerous soldier-artists such as poets Owen and Sassoon or painter Paul Nash. Through their work, they have illustrated the devastating nature of warfare and have pointed out the blurry lines between the fictional and the non-fictional worlds. The strong ties between these two worlds is still expressed today in contemporary work. For instance, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* are two Iraq War films based on real accounts and both have a soldier as main protagonist.

American Sniper, a biopic based on Navy SEAL Chris Kyle’s best-selling memoir, is one of the first war movies to attract a big audience in the years following the American invasion of Iraq. Directed by American director Clint Eastwood, the film focuses on Kyle, a Texan man who dreamed of becoming a cowboy but finally decides to join the military to help America fight its “war against terrorism.” After a harsh training period he becomes a talented sniper and goes on four successive missions in Iraq. The film offers an overview of Kyle's story by presenting his life in the military as well as his urban family life back in America. It has soon become the most successful war movie in history, surpassing Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).¹⁰ On the contrary, other films about the Iraq War have gone more unnoticed. This is the case of Paul Greengrass’ *Green Zone*, a film based on a 2006 non-fiction book *Imperial Life in Emerald City* (2006) by Rajiv Chandrasekaran, an Indian-American journalist specialised in political science. The film follows Roy Miller, a soldier part of a Mobile Exploitation Team searching for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Gradually, he discovers that the intelligence given to him is inaccurate and

8 Anup Shah. “World Military Spendings”, *Global Issues*, June 2013. <http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending#USMilitarySpending>

9 Ibid.

10 Pamela McClintock and Ryan Gajewski, “Box Office: American Sniper Quickly Becoming N°1 War Film of All Time”, *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 2015. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/box-office-american-sniper-quickly-765693>

starts questioning the war he is fighting. *Green Zone* received mixed critical reviews but was a box office flop: its production and marketing came up to \$140 million while the global theatrical runs only gave \$94,882,549 in gross revenue.¹¹ Despite their different reception, the two films both belong to the same sub-genre of the Iraq War films. Yet, they don't approach the subject the same way. Clint Eastwood described *American Sniper* as being apolitical. However, contrary to what he stated, "it is safe to say that *all* war films have political implications, even when they appear to avoid didacticism."¹² And indeed, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* both have political implications. According to authors Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas division of political films,¹³ *Green Zone* can be considered as a "pure political movie" combining a high political content with a high political intent. The film has a rather clear political agenda condemning the American invasion of Iraq. In *Seeing the Bigger Picture: American and International Politics in Film and Popular Culture*, Marc Sachleben and Kevan M. Yenerall present *Green Zone* by saying the film "is a sharp critique of the alleged miscalculation, mismanagement, and, most significant, faulty intelligence that many believe characterized this crucial invasion of Iraq."¹⁴

On the other hand, *American Sniper* is a "politically reflective movie" combining a high political content with a low political intent. While *American Sniper* does not present itself as a propagandist film, it still has a political subtext. Furthermore, the film appears to have sparked off a virulent political and public debate in the United-States, in which famous political figures such as Michael Moore and Sarah Palin have taken part. The film triggered a strong reaction in the country and is revealing of today's polarized politics. It divides public opinion between right wing and left wing thinking. John Powers, a film critic and former professor specialized in the study of American culture during George W. Bush's administration, summarizes the debate in an article published on the NPR website. He wrote:

its detractors argue that *American Sniper* is a right-wing movie that ducks essential questions like whether the Iraq war was a righteous one, and glorifies a remorseless sniper who killed somewhere between 160 to 250 people. Its defenders on the right accuse critics of hating America and our troops. The left frets that *American Sniper* is so popular because it lets viewers stay in denial about Iraq it doesn't say that the invasion was wrong, wrong, wrong. The right thinks it's so popular because it celebrates good old-fashioned patriotism.¹⁵

These violent and contrary reactions ensue from overly simplistic interpretations that cloud the

11 "Green Zone", *Box Office Mojo*, visited 20.02.2016 <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=greenzone.htm>

12 Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor. *America's War in Film and History, Why We Fought* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008) 28

13 Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas. *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films* (London: Routledge, 2005)

14 Mark Sachleben and Kevan M. Y. Yenerall. *Seeing the Bigger Picture: American and International Politics in Film and Popular Culture* (New-York: Peter Lang, 2012) 234

15 John Powers. "Full of Complexity and Ambivalence 'American Sniper' Shows the Cost of War", *NPR*, 2015. <https://www.google.fr/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=powers+john+NPR+american+sniper>

deeper ideas conveyed by the film. In order to have a more global understanding of the film, it is interesting to look into the opinion of its director. Clint Eastwood describes his own politics as a mixture of Milton Friedman and anti-war activist Noam Chomsky; he criticized the invasion of Iraq and stated that “contrary to public opinion (he) abhors violence.”¹⁶ All in all, it seems that *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* both reject the Iraq War. Each film by giving a subjective and different portrayal of the war shed light on the more or less current geopolitical context, but also reveals much of America’s internal socio-politics. In addition, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* are both war films and consequently approach and enlighten the world of the military and offer two different portrayals of the soldier.

The differences and similarities drawn from this comparative study can help delineate the characteristics of the figure of the soldier in Iraq War films. Socio-political assessments and general observations and reflection on warfare come out of this particularly interesting figure. Indeed,

the soldiers, constituting the army, are more than simple fighters: they have often been represented outside of the battlefield in order to evoke, in good or bad, a representative fragment of society. And “if the part of the soldier is to fight for his nation, the part of the cinematographic soldier is to support ideologies.”¹⁷

Looking into the representation of the soldier in war allows an interesting alternation of point of views, from the general to the particular, revealing socio-political information but also offering a deep outlook on human nature.

In order to carry out a conclusive analysis of the films and draw relevant conclusions I will rely on related theoretical work. The figure of the soldier in films has already been the object of study for some specialists and scholars. Indeed, specialists such as professor of International Relations Christopher Coker have looked into the evolution of the representation of the soldier in visual culture. Professor Gavin Davie wrote a graduate thesis on “The Hero Soldier: Portrayals of Soldiers in War Films.” While they don’t specifically dwell on the soldier in Iraq War films, these works are of paramount importance to understand the representation of the soldier and its evolution. A group of authors specialised in film studies, released a book analysing the representation of the army on screen: *L’armée à l’écran* illustrates the evolution of the figure of the soldier and offers global analysis of war films through time. These works explain the evolution of the soldier through time are necessary tools to understand the current representation of the soldier. The notable differences and similarities observed between the different soldiers are useful to portray the soldier of the Iraq War Films, and more specifically the representation of the soldier in the two films study. While it is

16 Steven Dicarlo. “Clint Eastwood argues that 'American Sniper' doesn't have a political agenda”, *Monitor*, January 2015. <http://natmonitor.com/2015/01/20/clint-eastwood-argues-that-american-sniper-doesnt-have-a-political-agenda/>

17 Sébastien Denis. “Avant propos: à vos rang... fixe!, *L’armée à l’écran* (Condé-sur-Noireau: CinémaAction-Corlet, 2004) 7 “et si le rôle du soldat est de se battre pour une nation, le rôle du soldat de cinéma est quant à lui le support de bien des idéologies”

important to look into the evolution of the soldier's representation, it is also necessary to situate the figure by looking into the war film genre in general. Many books and articles have been elaborated around the association of the worlds of cinema and geopolitics such as *Seeing the Bigger Picture: American and International Politics in Film and Popular Culture, Hollywood, le Pentagone et le monde* or *Guerre et Cinéma I, Logistique de la perception*. The connection between visual fiction and contemporary warfare as been detailed by Martin Baker in *A 'Toxic Genre'*. But more general cinematographic theoretical works by specialists such as Christian Metz, Michel Chion, Michel Cieutat and Jacques Rancière will frame the analysis of the two different films. The different critical writings selected approach the subject under study more or less evidently by bringing general comments on the cinematographic environment as well as more specific observations on the period or object under study. Nevertheless, in order to grasp a better understanding of political and social questions related to the movies as well as make comments on the nature of the soldier and the world of warfare and the military, it is fundamental to rely on works diverted from the fictional milieu. The world of cinema is of course closely connected to history and society and according to Jacques Rancière, the two representations of the world offered by history and by cinema are co-dependent, or – taking his own term – “s'entre-appartiennent.”¹⁸ The articulation of these two worlds has been the object of many studies, including a book called *L'histoire du cinéma*. The connection established between the two worlds requires an in-depth appreciation of contemporary and general American politics and a good look at the American military institution and its evolution. Great war theorists like Carl Clausewitz stand as crucial references to be linked with more recent works by contemporary war specialists such as David Fisher, Christopher Coker and Michael Walzer. All three have produced philosophical writings on warfare and their work tend to insist on the notion of morality in the battlefield. In addition to philosophical critical work on warfare, my research will rely on politically orientated writings on the subject like Whitman's article “Rehearsing the War Away: Perpetual Warrior Training in Contemporary US Army” or Bacevitch's book *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War?*. Moreover, it is relevant to compare American politics during and after Bush's presidency. First, by looking into his book *Decision Points* and James Mann's book on his government and administration: *Rise of the Vulcans: the History of Bush's War Cabinet*. These writings are useful to enlight the political context that surrounded and contributed to the American invasion of Iraq. This period is often referred to as the post-9/11 era and is to be contrasted with America “post post 9/11.” This term has not been yet popularised but is sometimes used by journalists or politicians to insist on the shift between the direct aftermaths of the 2001 attacks and the later following years. It has been used in particular by

18 Jacques Rancière, “L'historicité du cinéma”, *L'Histoire du cinéma* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1998)

Benjamin Schwartz, the deputy director for special operations in the office of the secretary of defence, who gave a talk in 2014 called “The Post Post-9/11 World: What We Have Learned and How Those Lessons Shape US Foreign Policy Today. The fact that there is no clear and official definition of the expression makes it hard to propose a date for this new period. However, it seems that the term started to be used a decade after the attack. The expression can point to the start of a new era starting around 2009-2010, with Obama’s first term of presidency. The contrast between these two periods is important to be taken into account in this study because *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* both discuss the Iraq War, a striking event of the post-9/11 period. Nevertheless, the films were produced and released during post post-9/11 America. In other words, they portray the Iraq War with hindsight. Moreover the political shift in the country, turning away from the Republican Party for the Democratic administration with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, is a strong contextual element impacting society thus the cultural environment. These contextual elements are key information for the films under study and press articles appear as a great theoretical source as they are revealing of the current political trend.

American Sniper and *Green Zone* both, more or less directly, reject the past Iraq War, following on the general tendency in America. Indeed, since the end of the war a majority of the American public condemns the invasion of Iraq. “In Pew’s latest national survey, conducted Feb. 20-24 (2008) among 1,508 adults, a 54% majority said the U.S. made the wrong decision in using military force in Iraq, while 38% said it was the right decision”. Furthermore, the numbers given by the American thinktank Pew Research also reveal that during the war “the decrease in support for the decision to go to war has occurred despite a dramatically improved perception of how the effort in Iraq is going.”¹⁹ The decreasing support of the war spread throughout the American intervention and according to a number of polls,²⁰ it seems that the initial popular support faded less than a year after America sent troops on ground. The answer to the question "Do you think going to war with Iraq in 2003 was the right thing for the United States to do or the wrong thing?" asked in a poll by Quinnipiac University, unveils much of the American popular opinion on the war. Since the election of Barack Obama, the numbers have mostly been higher than 60% for the answer “wrong thing,” showing that most of the American public condemns this war. Along with this assessment, journalists and analysts are today talking about a “Post-Iraq Syndrome”. Political scientist in the field of international relation John E. Mueller wrote in 2005 an article for the American journal *Foreign Affairs* entitled “The Iraq Syndrome”. In this article he discusses “how precipitously American public support dropped off” and connects it with the “Vietnam Syndrome.” The term was

19 “Public Attitudes Towards the War in Iraq: 2003-2008”, *Pew Research Center*, March 2008.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>

20 “Iraq”, *Polling Report*, visited 21.02.2016. <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm>

“coined by Henry Kissinger and popularized by Ronald Reagan to describe the U.S.’s reluctance to send troops into combat situations overseas”²¹ by the end of the 1970s. “After Gulf War 1991, President George H.W. Bush declared that Vietnam Syndrome was “kicked” after the relative successful end of this war and the US thought they had begun to recover from it”. However, today “there is considerable debate as to whether the War in Iraq is “another Vietnam” and the use of that phrase has caused many to believe that Vietnam Syndrome is alive and well.”²²

American Sniper and *Green Zone* could be symptoms testifying of the return of a post-war syndrome in America. Indeed, these movies fall in line with the post-Vietnam films as they tend to offer a critical vision of warfare and are marked by disillusionment. Through my work, I intend to show how the films under study support the theory of the presence of an “Iraq Syndrome” within the United-States: turning the population against warfare and towards an isolationist ideology. They support the basis of the general theory claiming that every military failure supports isolationist political thinking. But while these films shed light on contemporary politics by focusing on the Iraq War, they also paint the portrayal of the American military. And “to mention the army on screen, is to talk as much of warfare than of its human components – inherent to every built country.”²³ My thesis will focus on the figure of the soldier and its representation in these two Iraq War films and move from geopolitical to egopolitical conclusions. Furthermore, I will look into the articulations between, the particular with the figure of the soldier, and the general with the representation of the world of the military and of the war. By studying the figure of the soldier, my thesis should allow for a multidimensional approach to the world of warfare and opens up to various battlefields. First, it looks into the soldier's position within the military institution and intends to analyse the geopolitical role of the figure. It then focuses on the soldier's relation to heroism and explores how the figure can be used to unveil social and political realities. Finally, I will move from geopolitical to egopolitical comments and try to extract from the films elements building up the true identity of today's non-fictional soldier.

21 “The Vietnam Syndrome”, *The Vietnam War* website, June 2014. <http://thevietnamwar.info/vietnam-syndrome/>

22 Ibid.

23 Denis. *op.cit.* 7 “Evoquer l'armée à l'écran, c'est donc parler autant de la guerre que de la composante humaine des armées – inhérentes à tous pays constitué”

I- Screening the Military

1. Institutions

While America's first president George Washington had advocated "non-involvement in European and Asian conflicts and non-entanglement in international politics,"²⁴ the U.S soon abandoned its isolationist position to "established itself as the world superpower, possessing both, economic and military might."²⁵ Indeed, since the end of the Second World War and with the Cold War, "the U.S. was forced to alter drastically its thinking on international politics." Given the geopolitical context, "the military became a central concern" and "the United States became the global guardian of a vast alliance network which depended upon American power for its existence and prosperity."²⁶ Since then, the U.S. has kept its hegemonic power and has become the world's greatest military force. According to the website *Global Fire Power*, providing an analytical display of data concerning modern military powers, the United-States is ranked first over 125 powers considered in the ranking of military strengths.²⁷ The importance of the American military on the world stage explains the crucial place given to the institution within the American society. *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* reveal this importance by focusing on the military and especially on the soldier. The films offer a personal and human approach to warfare by illustrating the lives of soldiers in the relatively recent Iraq war. The soldiers place within the military, their relationship with others and the environment in which they evolves help giving a portrayal of the present American soldier. Its representation on screen also sheds light on a number of political realities regarding the war.

a. The Army, a Heterotopia

In his article published in the late 1960s, "Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," French philosopher Michel Foucault makes a distinction between utopias — which are "arrangements which have no real place" and "spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal" — and heterotopias. Heterotopias "constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the the real arrangements, all the other arrangements that can be found within society,

24 "American Isolationism in the 1930s", *US Department of State Office of the Historian*, visited 25.03.2016 <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/american-isolationism>

25 Definition of the term "superpower", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, visited 25.03.2016 <http://global.britannica.com/topic/superpower>

26 John J. Jr Tierney, "Samuel P. Huntington and The American Military Tradition", *Political Science Reviewer*, np. 206

27 "United States Military Strength", *Globe Fire*, 2016 http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=United-States-of-America

are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable.”²⁸ His description of heterotopias can very much be applied to the military. When joining the military, the soldiers enter a separate environment, which is at the heart of the American society while being paradoxically alienated from it. They have to adapt to this new environment by changing their usual habits and conduct to bend to the new social structure commanded by the military. The importance of values is, in a way, inspired from society but differs from it in some ways. That can particularly be seen in military customs, courtesies and traditions for instance. In both films, the main protagonists demonstrate their affiliation to the military through them. For example, they wear the uniform and address to their superiors in a particular way. In *American Sniper*, they are made particularly obvious through the training process as well as Kyle’s funeral.

The heterotopian quality of the military institution appears to be visually transposed in the two films under study in another way. *Green Zone* reveals the military space by only displaying scenes taking place in the war torn country of Iraq. In addition, the main character is only presented as a soldier and is devoid of any personal information. *American Sniper* relates quite clearly Chris Kyle’s entry into this heterotopian space. While mainly following Kyle’s four tours in Iraq, the film shows on screen his life from childhood to death. The viewer witnesses sequences of his childhood and his life before the military and gets a glimpse of his life as a war veteran at the end of the film. The early stages of the biopic display Kyle’s entering in the military world through his harsh training to become a NAVY Seal.

The different images illustrating the training period reveals how the soldiers are pushed to the limits and are trained to become efficient soldiers. This sequence is made of an alternance of scenes showing the men in the process of doing several demanding physical exercises. Every scene is accompanied by the voice of the instructors screaming mostly derogatory and humiliating remarks, adding a psychological struggle to the physical effort. The training sequence echoes the long first act of Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987): “a self-contained, fifty minute induction into Marine subculture.”²⁹ Some scenes parallel the recurrent motifs in the influential film 1987 like the numerous training exercises at boot camp and the final shot of the sequence showing the men running while singing the military cadence. The training sequence underlines the subordinate position of the men towards their superiors, the instructors. Their overall domination is illustrated throughout the sequence. First, they dominate the scene vocally: their voice cover the scenes nearly

28 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New-York: Routledge, 1997) 330

29 Thomas Doherty, “Full Metal Genre: Stanley Kubrick’s Vietnam Combat Movie” *Film Quarterly*, Vol.42 No.2 (Winter 1988–1989) 27.

without any interruption – off- and onscreen. They mostly talk to humiliate the men and give orders. The psychological ordeal they inflict to the men is tinged with humor recalling *Full Metal Jacket*'s instructor Sgt. Hartman, “ a poet laureate of verbal vulgarity” who “is such a virtuoso of vile invective that the main response to his torrent of abuse is delight in a master at work.”³⁰ The sequence shows that the men have only one thing to do: respect orders. Each time a man disobeys he is overwhelmed by a torrent of abuse. Their domination is emphasized by the low-angle shots of the instructors coupled with high-angle shots of the men. This effect is reinforced by the different postures of the characters: the instructors are almost constantly standing up while the men are often sitting or lying on the ground. All in all, the sequence insists on the excessively forceful methods used to turn the recruits into hardened combat-ready Navy SEALs. It also delineates the importance of the hierarchy structuring the army.

By illustrating the heterotopian quality of the military, *American Sniper* and *Green-Zone* unveil the particular position of the soldier who stands in and out of society. The films seem to show their paradoxically position: although they are part of society they become institutionalized by the military moulding which tends to strip them from their individuality.

b. Deindividuation

The comparison with *Full Metal Jacket*, is especially relevant as it depicts the army training as an indoctrinating and transfigurative process. In both films, the soldier's “identity is broken down with humiliating insults.”³¹ Through the training program, the military volunteers tend to be deprived of their personal identity in favour of their pure soldierly function. A phenomenon described by cultural theorist Paul Virilio as the “desintegration of the warrior's personality.”³²

American Sniper and *Green Zone* both exemplify and illustrate this theory of deindividuation. In *American Sniper*, the training sequence mentioned previously highlights the deprivation of men's identity and individuality. This sequence opens with a very long shot of the men lying on the ground doing physical exercises. This shot does not allow the viewer to distinguish the different characters suggesting the impersonality of every soldier. This idea is supported by the men's outfit: they are all dressed the same, with a white T-shirt and khaki shorts and black boots, as shown in the following shot.

30 Ibid.

31 Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, “Full-Metal-Jacketing or Masculinity in the Making”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol.33, No.2 (Winter 1994) 7

32 Paul Virilio, *Guerre et Cinéma I, Logistique de la perception* (Paris: Editions Cahiers du Cinéma, 1984) 141



American Sniper, 00:10:22.

Their identical outfits strip them of their individuality and foregrounds the same idea conveyed by the military uniforms throughout the two films under study. Indeed, the military uniforms tend to work as strong visual element supporting an identity erasure. Furthermore, the men are aligned on the ground, creating a different set of lines which are continued by the bars of the building. This composition reminds the bars of a jail and could be a way of illustrating Foucault's fifth principle of "heterotopology." According to his definition, "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time."³³ The soldiers assimilation to the jail suggests a form of imprisonment presenting the military as a closed milieu. In addition, different scenes point out that many men end up quitting before the end of the training showing the difficulty to adapt to this new environment. The sequences picturing the difficulty to become a Navy SEAL; may be suggesting that the army world is both isolated as well as penetrable. It is interesting to notice that, in *Green Zone*, chief Roy Miller does not constantly wear his uniform. His increasing distrust with regard to authorities his visually transposed and exposed by his clothing. Indeed, as the story unfolds and he loses faith in the Iraq war, the character does not appear on screen with his regular uniform anymore. Instead, he wears a darker outfit with a bulletproof vest which makes him very much alike another character played by the same actor in Greengrass' Bourne trilogy. This evolution as well as the similarity of Miller with Jason Bourne are illustrated by the following shots.

33 Foucault, *op.cit.*



Green-Zone, 00:05:01.



Green-Zone, 00:06:47.



Green-Zone, 01:15:50.



Matt Damon as Jason Bourne.

In the Jason Bourne trilogy, also starring Damon, the character personifies “the figure of the lone spy carrying dangerous work for his country.”³⁴ This description can also be applied to the character of Miller who attempts to accomplish a similar mission. The similarities between the two characters is also visual: they are both played by the same actor, who has not changed physically, and often appear on screen in dark outfits. The parallel drawn between the Bourne films and *Green Zone*, underlines Miller’s evolution as a character within the war film. As the film unfolds, he is presented more as a “lone spy” working for the CIA than that of a soldier. This shift suggests that the soldier and the “lone spy” have different roles and behave differently on the battlefield. By refusing to blindly follow the orders of his superiors and deciding to look into the mission he is given, Miller abandons his soldier identity to claim back his identity as a thinking man. In a way, Greengrass presents the soldier as a man who is not allowed to bring any critical thinking and should only follow the orders of his superiors. This way of presenting the soldier following the military hierarchy illustrates how it also deprives soldiers of their identity and individuality.

American Sniper and *Green Zone* tend to suggest that the soldier undergoes a process of deindividuation from the moment he steps into the military. This process is related to the traditional symbolic assimilation of the soldier with his weapon. Indeed, especially with the Vietnam war, many films, including *Full Metal Jacket*, have highlighted the indoctrinating methods of the military. These methods tend to strip the men from their personal identity in order to transform them into efficient warriors. This recalls the Foucaultian concept of heterotopia described previously: “to

³⁴ Vincent M. Gaine. Remember Everything, Absolve Nothing: Working through Trauma in the Bourne Trilogy, *Cinema Journals*, Vol.51, No.1 (Fall 2011) 160

turn soldiers into ‘warriors’, the Army has worked to overcode all vestiges of quotidian life with their martial equivalents, rewiring individuals from civilians into soldiers and constructing an other space a martial heterotopia that stands apart from civil society and in opposition to it, a space wherein these warriors can exist and perform without the limitations of societal norms and restrictions.”³⁵

The assimilation of the soldier with his weapon is clearly exposed in the Vietnam war film as the instructor bluntly tells them: “You will be a weapon.” The same idea permeates *American Sniper* in a more subtle and visual manner. As early as the training period, Chris Kyle reveals himself as a gifted sniper. Quite evidently, due to his sniper position, the film is composed of many shots of him with his weapon. Many of them are close ups of his profile or full face. These shots are a recurrent. Interestingly, the close-ups to his full face makes half of it disappear behind his weapon. These shots give Kyle a cyborg look framing him as a killing machine, as shown in the following shot.



American Sniper, 00:25:46.

According to Altman’s theory, these elements can be considered as syntactic elements as they stress the “structures into which [the building blocks] are arranged”³⁶ in a film. In that particular case they are used to suggest, once again, the dehumanizing process experienced by the soldiers who are shaped into efficient weapons.

Interestingly, the question of efficiency has been stressed in the military with the Iraq War. Indeed, according to the U.S Army Training and Doctrine Command, since 2003, “gone is the focus on tradition, honor, and comradeship (...) Professionalism in fighting and performance become the flash points of the new Army.”³⁷ This new way of approaching the army, by focusing on efficiency,

35 Zack Whitman Gill. “Rehearsing the War Away: Perpetual Warrior Training in Contemporary US Army”, *MIT Press*, Vol.53 No.3 (Fall, 2009) 141.

36 Rick Altman. “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Genre”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol.23 No.3 p.6-18 (Spring 1984) 7

37 Whitman, *op.cit.* 42

can be found in both films as they revolve around two characters who appear to be particularly valuable soldiers. Chris Kyle's skills are clearly evident; he is described as "America's most successful sniper"³⁸ due to his impressive number of kills: "the Pentagon has officially confirmed more than 150 of Kyle's kills (the previous American record was 109)."³⁹ His nickname "The Legend" is also revealing of his remarkable and distinctive reputation.

His efficiency is also highlighted by the military branch he chooses: the Navy SEALs. When Kyle visits the Armed Forces career center in the early stages of the film, the advisor he meets refers to the SEALs as the "warrior elite."

Furthermore, these elements are correlated with his relatively high-ranked position within the military. Kyle is a chief petty officer which grants him "vastly expanded powers and responsibilities over those below it."⁴⁰ Roy Miller has a similar position as he is a chief warrant officer, a position with "great responsibilities that includes training soldiers, organising and advancing on missions."⁴¹ Moreover, chief warrant officers are very few as they occupy "less than three percent of total army strength."⁴² In other words, both films focus on what makes the soldier specifically remarkable in both senses of the word. Their actions in particular seem to stand out. In *Green Zone*, Miller is the only soldier challenging the institution. The two films manage to portray the unusual characteristics of the two soldiers and bring out their individual uniqueness within the military moulding. This could suggest that the cinematographic medium has the potential to be transgressive. Through syntactic as well as semantic elements,⁴³ the films highlight the deindividuation methods of the military institution, but at the same time portray the soldiers individual identity. Both films focus on a single character, while some war films follow a set of different soldiers or a group of soldiers. Eastwood has already made war films in that vein: *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), for instance, follows the lives of three different soldiers during and after the 1945 Battle for Iwo Jima. Some other famous war films focus on numerous soldiers: like Spielberg's renowned *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and war drama miniseries *Band of Brothers* (2001). These diverse examples underline the diversity in the war movie genre. In *Green Zone* and *American Sniper*, the focus made on a single soldier, gives more importance to the main protagonist and might be a way of insisting, once again, on his individuality. The central character's individuality is supported, in both films, by

38 Anthony King, "Why American Sniper Is Not A Great War Film", *Art Of War*, 04.02.2015

<http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/why-american-sniper-isnt-a-great-war-film/>

39 Chris Kyle, Scott McEwen and Jim DeFelice, *American Sniper: the Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. History* (New-York: W.Morrow, 2012) cover page

40 "U.S. Military Ranks, Lowest to Highest", *Military Factory*, visited 01.04.2016

http://www.militaryfactory.com/ranks/navy_ranks.asp

41 "Army Warrant Officer", *U.S. Army*, visited 01.04.2016 <http://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/current-and-prior-service/advance-your-career/warrant-officer.html>

42 Ibid.

43 Altman, *op.cit.*

cinematographic elements. Chris Kyle and Roy Miller stand out in the different shots. They appear at the center of most of the shots and the films are composed of many close-ups of their faces. The stress on the central character appears quite evident, with the aesthetics employed in *Green Zone*: the handheld camera and the harsh zoom-ins on makes him stand out.

Both films aim attention at their central character but remain very different in their way of dealing with the latter. Because Eastwood loosely based his film on Chris Kyle's memoir it is bound to have a very personal and intimate approach. *Green Zone*, on the other hand, is based on a non-fiction book by an Indian journalist: Rajiv Chandrasekaran. This book, unlike Kyle's memoir, has a journalistic approach which is much more neutral and less personal. These different bases come to light in the two adaptations: *American Sniper* has a deep and well built character while *Green Zone* tends to portray a more superficial character.

The film focuses on Miller's identity as a soldier and only follows his life on tour, in Iraq. According to film studio executive Gavin Smith, Greengrass changed his style, resorting to "documentary-inflected aesthetic and, over the past decade, reinventing himself as a prime exponent of dynamic, visually intricate state-of-the-art action-thriller."⁴⁴ *Green Zone* is a great example of the director's new modus operandi which, unlike Eastwood, tends to give less depth to his main protagonist in order to favor the narrative. Indeed, Miller appears as a more superficial character devoid of any elements regarding his personal life. Greengrass justifies his choice in an interview: "most people's lives are mainly unreflective and about just doing what they have to do. I didn't want Miller [Damon] to seem specific or special because I wanted him to go on the journey that many people in Britain and America went on."⁴⁵

c. Responsibilities

Furthermore, the fact that the two main protagonists of the films are chiefs is a relevant detail as it makes them decision-makers. They occupy a transitional position within the complex military hierarchy as they give and receive orders. Miller and Kyle are part of the operational army while having a relatively close connection with the institutional army. This linking position is more evidently presented in *Green Zone*: Miller is clearly presented as a link between these two opposite ends of the military spectrum. Indeed, the film displays his actions on the battlefield as well as his interactions with high graded U.S. officials. Yet, his relationships with his superiors and members of the institutional army are contentious. This is exposed in an early scene of the film staging a meeting between high-ranked members of the military. Captain Jonathan Vaught explains what is going to be discussed in the meeting: "today we're going to be briefing you on WMD operations

44 Paul Greengrass and Gavin Smith, "Chaos Theory", *Film Comment*, Vol.46, No.2 (March-April 2010) 28

45 Ibid. 30.

due to take place in and around the Baghdad area over the next twenty-four hours.” Chief Miller stands out in the meeting by being the only one asking questions the Captains in charge of the briefing questions directly. The shots emphasizes his distinctive position. The scene alternates between shots of the officials in charge of the briefing and the audience. One of the first shots of the audience has an interesting composition: the foreground, middleground and background are clearly defined, as they are made up of three different rows of the audience. Yet, Miller still stands out: there is a focus on him, he is in the center of the shot and in the middle row. Moreover, the faces of the characters in the foreground are blurred and the characters in the background don’t appear entirely: their heads are cut out of the shot. As a result, despite the numerous characters present within the monochromatic shot, Miller is made conspicuous as can be seen in the following photogram.



Green-Zone, 00:13:40.

This visual distinctiveness is stressed by his challenging behaviour. He is also the only one questioning himself by looking into the file concerning the WMDs they have in hand. This scene marks Miller’s subversive and defiant position towards U.S. military authorities. It shows the hierarchal structure and organization of the military.

This is an issue thoroughly approached in both films, especially *Green Zone*, which is not surprising given the subject tackled. The Iraq War is a conflict that clearly stresses the responsibility of officials in warfare. In the post 9/11 era, the war in Iraq is framed as a major failure that tarnished the image of America and of the Bush administration on the international scene. As the film points out: no WMDs were found and the officials are charged of having launched a war that did not agreed with the criterias of the *jus ad bellum*. In 2011, the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal, a Malaysian organisation established in 2007 to investigate war crimes, even organized a symbolic trial which found former President Bush, Dick Cheney and Tony Blair “guilty of committing crimes

against humanity during the Iraq War (...) and also violated international law when they ordered the invasion.”⁴⁶ The responsibility of U.S. officials in this conflict has been recognised and largely discussed and is the crux of *Green Zone*. The negative portrayal of U.S. officials seems to be accentuated within the Green Zone. During the Iraq War, it was “the heavily guarded diplomatic/government area of closed-off streets in central Baghdad where US occupation authorities live and work.”⁴⁷ This “American bubble in Baghdad”⁴⁸ recalls once again the complex intertwining relations of spaces defined by Foucault: the Green Zone being a space within Baghdad but working with its own distinct rules. Furthermore, it is particularly interesting to look into the connection of the military and this Green Zone. William Langewiesche explains that “on the inside were the Americans (...) these were not soldiers primarily, but they answered to the Pentagon.” He adds that “the other soldiers in Iraq—most of the ones out in the fight—do not live in the Green Zone, or even stop by. The Green Zone is essentially therefore a civilian place, though militarized, and with enemies all around.” In fact, “the core of the Green Zone’s population are about 2,000 government officials.”⁴⁹ In *Seeing the Bigger Picture: American and International Politics in Film and Popular Culture*, Professor Mark Sachleben explains that Greengrass’s “film exposes the disconnect between the “Green Zone’s, safe haven, and the more chaotic reality raging outside.”⁵⁰ The discrepancy, between the government officials’ lifestyle, and the soldiers’, is illustrated and underlined in one specific scene of the film.

Roy Miller goes to the Green Zone in order to have a conversation about the intelligence concerning the WMDs with CIA agent Martin Brown. The first shot of the soldiers entering the Green Zone emphasizes the disconnect between the soldiers and this area. The shot displays the back of a soldier, who is sitting on a vehicle, on the left side of the screen. An arch occupies the center of the shot while the right side is composed of a line of palm trees and a sign on which can be read: “You are now entering the Green Zone,” as shown on the following shot.

46 Mahi Ramakrishnan, “War Crimes Tribunal Finds Bush and Blair Guilty”, *Global Research*, 08.02.2016 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/war-crimes-tribunal-finds-bush-and-blair-guilty/5478367>

47 “Green Zone”, *Global Security*, visited 04.04.2016 <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/baghdad-green-zone.htm>

48 Ibid.

49 William Langewiesche, “Welcome to the Green Zone”, *The Atlantic*, November 2004 <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/11/welcome-to-the-green-zone/303547/>

50 Mark Sachleben and Kevan M. Yenerall, *Seeing the Bigger Picture: American and International Politics in Film and Popular Culture* (New-York: Peter Lang, 2012) 234



Green-Zone, 00:42:52.

This composition is instrumental in conveying the disconnect between the soldier and the Green Zone as they appear at the opposite ends of the screen, thus visually disconnected. This shot conveys the main idea of the scene. It illustrates the oppositions of the Green Zone: a place of leisure and wealth within a war torn country. Miller meets Brown near a pool and is escorted by a few of his soldiers. Their arrival at the pool is accompanied by an diegetic anempathetic⁵¹ rap music by Snoop Dogg and Pharell that suggests a relaxed atmosphere at odds with military life. A very long shot, followed by a long shot presents the soldiers in this new environment. Their uniforms contrast with the outfits of the people around them: almost everyone is wearing casual clothes or bathing suits. The place is clearly presented as one of leisure and relaxation: people are sunbathing, playing pool, listening to music, doing exercise, drinking alcohol; as can be seen in the following photogram.



51 “anempathetic” is a term coined by film critic Michel Chion to describe a sound – usually diegetic music – that seems to exhibit conspicuous indifference to what is going on in the film’s plot <http://www.lampe-tempete.fr/ChionGlossaire.html>

Green-Zone, 00:43:50.

Without taking into account journalist Lawrie Dayne, it is also the only place in which women are allowed. Many elements frame the place as, in William Langewiesche's words: "a little America embedded in the heart of Baghdad."⁵² This is notably suggested by the diegetic American rap music and the small American flags decorating the walls. Indeed, according to French film specialist, they "are one of the most glorified representation of American patriotism."⁵³ The soldiers suggest the same idea when they comment on the presence of Western junk food and comfort: "these guys have Dominoe's pizzas and fucking beer." The clear cut between this "safe haven" and the rest of the city serves to point out how soldiers and high-ranked officials experience war in very contrasting ways. The officials are associated with this comfortable and secure place while the soldiers face the hardships of the battlefield. This idea recalls in a way the 2003 documentary film by Errol Morris: *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, in which the former U.S. Secretary of Defense illustrates his observations on the nature of modern warfare. The title of the documentary derives from the military concept of the "fog of war," introduced by Prussian military analyst Carl Von Clausewitz describing the difficulty of making decisions in the midst of conflict. McNamara partly explains how U.S. officials approach warfare with distance because they do not take part in the actual armed conflict. The Green Zone is a microcosm reflecting this distance: it is a comfortable place of leisure which is in sharp contrast with the battlefield. It is another way of drawing a negative portrayal of the U.S officials as Greengrass condemns the political manipulations of the American government.

The question of responsibility appears as a central issue in *Green Zone* and mainly focuses on the higher political spheres.

American Sniper tackles the same question from a different angle. One powerful scene at the beginning of the film illustrates the way Chris Kyle suffers from the harshness of his decisions. The scene is taken from his first tour in Iraq when the soldier has to kill his very first target. It stresses the weight of his dilemma as many lives are at stake, and it shows that he is the only one who can make crucial decision: the radio tells him that he is the only one who has eyes on the targets and tell him: "It's on you." This accentuates the weight of decision making on the battlefield as in both cases lives are at risk.

The films under study show how a soldier, regardless of his position, is bound to make critical decisions that have crucial consequences. *Green Zone*, with its geopolitical approach, tends to point to the high-ranked officials' responsibilities in the Iraq War. On the other hand, *American Sniper*,

52 William Langewiesche, *op.cit.*

53 Michel Cieutat, *Les grands thèmes du cinéma américain. Tome I* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988) 132 "le drapeau américain (...) l'une des représentation les plus magnifiée du patriotisme américain au cinéma"

with its egopolitical approach, underlines how every soldier faces crucial dilemmas. Yet the rank of the main protagonists of the film is meaningful and points out the weight of decision-making in warfare. The two characters are bound to make important decisions, yet they are supervised and restricted by higher authorities. Their transitional position sheds light on the internal organisation of the military institution. Responsibilities and decision-making appear as key issues in warfare and they are expressed in both films. All in all, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* seem to defend the soldier's position as the decisions they make part of their function. The soldier is thus presented as an untouchable figure, powerless facing decisions made by the government. The films approach warfare with a humanity which, in the real world, tend to be pushed into the background by geopolitical decisions.

2. War and Progress

a. Technology on screen

These two Iraq war movies offer a portrayal of this contemporary conflict and illustrate the evolution in terms of war methods and war technology. In both films, the soldier evolves in a highly technological environment.

The aerial shot is very much used and is a recurrent filmic device in the war film genre in general.⁵⁴ This type of shot has a long established relationship with warfare as the use of aerial photography started with the development of aviation in the 1900s and rapidly matured with the Great War.⁵⁵ While aerial shots helped picture the First World War battlefields, in the Iraq war films they give a vision of the new contemporary battlefield to the spectators. They are “typically used as establishing shots, zoom shots, or as transitions from one scene to another.”⁵⁶ They are repeatedly used in both *American Sniper* and *Green Zone*. In these films, they aim at localising the spectator in the conflict area: the Iraqi capital Baghdad. As described previously, one of the early shots in *Green Zone* is an aerial shot of the capital bombed at night-time. Like the different aerial shots of the city used in *American Sniper*, it is a way of showing the new faces of contemporary conflicts that some scholars refer to as the new “military urbanism.”⁵⁷ Indeed, the Iraq war mainly takes place in its capital Baghdad as sovereign conflicts take place in “cities, and capital cities in particular” as they “are

54 Dirks, *op.cit.*

55 Richard Cavendish, “The great military institution took flight on April 13th, 1912”, *History Today*, April 2012
<http://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/royal-flying-corps-founded>

56 “Aerial Shots”, *Film Studies at the University of West Georgia*, visited 25.05.2016
<http://www.uwgfilmstudies.com/aerial-shots/>

57 Chiara Bassetti, “Urban Conflicts”, 6th *Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference website*, September 2013
<http://www.etnografiaricercaqualitativa.it/?p=151>

seen as significant territory.”⁵⁸ The aerial shots offering a global vision of the city also show the devastating impact of war as illustrated by the shot in *Green Zone*: Baghdad is transformed into a battlefield jolt by mass bombing.

Furthermore, not only pointing out the urbanisation of conflicts, the aerial shots hint at the technological advances in warfare. Aerial views more or less directly suggest the presence of planes, helicopters or drones, illustrating the technological advancement in modern warfare. Military aircrafts are an important recurring motifs in these films. Helicopters are often shown on screen or suggested by the off-screen diegetic sound of the rotor blades, especially in *American Sniper*. While they are often presented as background elements regularly patrolling the sky, they also take an active part in combat. Chris Kyle asks for aerial support in the last battle scene in Eastwood’s film, showing the soldier’s dependance to modern technology.

Drones are also a strong motif highlighting the important place technological advancement occupies in modern conflicts. Also labeled UAV, “an acronym for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, which is an aircraft with no pilot (...) they are currently used for a number of missions, including reconnaissance and attack roles.”⁵⁹ “The military role of UAV is growing at unprecedented rates” and interestingly their use have been developed during the Iraq War.⁶⁰ *American Sniper* confirms the new extensive use of drones towards the end of the film. Before Kyle’s final battle, there is a low-angle shot of a drone at the center of the screen, the background being a clear blue sky. A slight right pan follows the movement of the drone. A low tilt then unveils the city from an aerial view indicating that camera might also be a drone’s POV shot. This scene indicates the importance of the drone that stands out in the shot and accentuates the importance of aerial military forces through the point of view shot. The presence of drones is also suggested when soldiers have access to images of the ongoing conflict on different screens. The drones and the screens are two key elements pointing to the digitalization of conflicts. In addition, drones have been subject to debate in the United-States and the rest of the world, opponents accusing them of violating international law. Exposing drones in the film underlines the importance they have acquired in the military field since Bush’s “War on Terror,” yet they might also be a way of alluding to ethical questions. *Green Zone* also tackles the issue of ethics and of warfare’s modernization and use of modern technology, the film being “Paul Greengrass’s dramatisation of the search for Weapons of Mass Destruction following the 2004 invasion of Iraq.”⁶¹ Indeed, “since the only use of nuclear weapons in 1945, the world has wrestled

58 Jo Beall, Tom Goodfellow and Dennis Rodgers, “Cities and Conflicts”, *Crisis States Research Centre*, June 2010 <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/crisisStates/download/Policy%20Directions/Cities%20and%20Conflict.pdf>

59 “The UAV”, *The UAV.com*, visited 05.05.2016 <http://www.theuav.com/>

60 Ibid.

61 Martin Barker, *A 'Toxic Genre', The Iraq War Films* (London: Pluto Press, 2011) 1

with the issue of how IHL applies to such weapons.⁶² The film's plot raises "a controversial and politically sensitive issue. The questions at the core of the legal debate are whether (and if so, under what circumstances) it is legal to use nuclear weapons, and, connected to this, whether it is legal to threaten the use of nuclear weapons and to engage in other activities involving nuclear weapons, such as the development, testing, manufacture, possession, emplacement, deployment and transfer of nuclear weapons."⁶³ Through the plot and the numerous shots, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* point out the use of new technologies by soldiers in modern warfare also suggesting the ethical debate concerning its evolution. While both films point out the overall presence of modern technology on the battlefield, *American Sniper* shows the soldier's reliance to his weapon, through the numerous shots of Kyle behind his sniper scope. Then there are POV shots showing the view through the scope. These shots are mainly close-ups and medium close-ups showing the limited vision of the sniper. They could be illustrating the soldier's particular perception of the battlefield and showing its paradoxically distant approach to the armed conflict. The weapon prevents a direct contact with the battlefield and participates in the "deregulation of the perception"⁶⁴ of the soldiers. This distance is also illustrated through the drone images on the different screens. The weapon and the modern technologies make the soldier tackle the conflict with some distance. Kyle's final battle might illustrate the confusion brought by technological advancement in the battlefield. In this scene, the soldiers are caught in a blinding sand storm causing disruption to the battle. The shots presenting indistinct forms in the sand blast, the rapid cuts and handheld camera, accentuate the confusion of the scene, which show how nature overrules technology.

b. Gloryfying Ancient Warfare to Discredit the Iraq War

While technology is very present, *Green Zone* also shows art on screen. Statues are a recurrent motif in the film: many shots show fragments of broken statues, but sculptures also appear as important elements in two different scenes. One scene illustrates a conversation between Roy Miller and Pentagon official Clark Pentagon, in the hall of a damage hotel. Shots reveal fragments of sculpture on the ground, but the main element in the scene is a big statue of dolphins standing at the center of the hall and of most of the shots. Another statue catches the spectator's attention: it appears on screen when Miller enters the Green Zone. This scene is composed of a long shot of vehicles driving into the zone. A tracking shot follows them before revealing an extreme long shot of the vehicles driving under a gigantic sculpture of two hands holding swords. This sculpture, like

62 "Nuclear Weapons", *International Committee of the Red Cross*, visited 05.05.2016 <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/weapons/nuclear-weapons>

63 "The Effects of Nuclear Weapons Under International Law", *Article36.org*, December 2014 <http://www.article36.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Nuclear-weapons-under-international-lawbb5.12.14.pdf>

64 Virilio, *op.cit.* 126

the similar one that can be distinguished in the background, forms a huge archway under which vehicles can drive, as can be seen in the shot below.



Green-Zone, 00:43:05.

This image is particularly interesting as it correlates art and warfare. Furthermore, both the art form and the weapon, immerse the spectator in the past. Indeed, the Western tradition of sculpture began in ancient Greece, and Greece is widely seen as producing great masterpieces in the classical period. The “supremacy of classical art and architecture as cultural models”⁶⁵ tends to mark sculpture as a an art recalling the past. The swords also refer in a more direct way to ancient warfare, when gunpowder and modern technology did not rule the battlefield. In the shot of the sculpture, three helicopters fly in the background. Helicopters, has explained previously, can be interpreted as symbols of technological advancement in the field of military. In a way, this shot draws a chronological overview of the history of warfare which is directly connected to the soldier’s evolution. Yet while this sculpture evokes the timelessness of warfare, sculptures also have an important significance in the Iraq War. During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, code named “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the American troops were filmed pulling down a 12-meter high statue of Saddam Hussein erected in honor of his 65th birthday in April of 2002.⁶⁶ The toppling of the statue “turned out to be emblematic of primarily one thing: the fact that American troops had taken the center of Baghdad.”⁶⁷

It appears that the first images of the film recreates the fall of the statue: the film opens on a close-up of a photo of Hussein in a frame falling down because of a blast in the building. The strong

65 Michael Gagarin, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University of Press, 2009) 192

66 Fall of Saddam Hussein's Statue, *Famous Pictures Collection*, visited 10.05.2016
<http://www.famouspictures.org/fall-of-saddam-husseins-statue/>

67 Peter Maass, “The Toppling”, *The New-Yorker*, January 2011 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/10/the-toppling>

symbolical impact of the toppling might explain the importance of sculptures in *Green Zone*. It seems that Greengrass suggests a rejection of the Iraq War by glorifying ancient warfare. Indeed, the shot of the swords sculpture is a low-angle shot magnifying the artistic arch.

Art is not the only way the director represents ancient warfare. While belonging to the war film genre, *Green Zone* barely features any battle scenes, unlike some war films that rely heavily on them. For instance, in Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, "the opening 27-minute sequence is unforgettable, depicting the Omaha Beach assault of June 6, 1944 in a way that is graphic as any war footage."⁶⁸ In the article "Translating the War: The Combat Genre Film and Saving Private Ryan," film historian Jeanine Basinger, explains that "the violence of (the) sequence is overwhelming. Spielberg's mastery of sound, editing, camera movement, visual storytelling, narrative flow, performance, and color combine to assault a viewer, to place each and every member of the audience directly into the combat experience."⁶⁹ Greengrass' approach to conflict is different. *Green-Zone* does not restrict itself to the war film genre and was "released under the 'thriller tagline 'Bourne goes epic', it's DVD proclaiming 'We wanted to make a popcorn movie' but set in Iraq'."⁷⁰ Thus, there are no tragic battle scenes between the Americans and the Iraqis. However, violence is still a key ingredient in the film. Miller's relation with the American military is very tense and results in violent confrontations. One scene clearly exemplifies this idea. Roy Miller is questioning Iraqi civilians in the streets of Baghdad when another group of American soldiers arrives and forcefully takes over the questioning. Miller quarrels with Lieutenant Briggs, the chief of the other group. The two stand face to face in a single shot accentuating their confrontation. Briggs asks Miller for a book containing key information and starts searching him. When Miller rejects him he pushes him to the ground and they start fighting. This fight is a clear illustration of the film's ideology: it reshapes the conflict. Instead of insisting on the conflict opposing the U.S. to Iraq, it opposes American forces. This reorganisation of the conflict is central to the ideology underlying the film. Miller, the main character, is portrayed "as a heroic military man who is willing to work entirely outside rules and discipline because of his commitment to truth."⁷¹ He confronts the American officials who are depicted as negative characters being either liars or violent. These portrayals serve to condemn the American officials and their wrongful "crusade." The scene of the hand fight between the two chiefs aims at illustrating this idea running throughout the film. Miller

68 Martin Chilton, "Saving Private Ryan Review, *The Telegraph*, December 2014

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/11162039/Saving-Private-Ryan-review.html>

69 Jeanine Basinger, "Translating War: The Combat Film Genre and Saving Private Ryan", *American Historical Association*, October 1998 <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-1998/translating-war-the-combat-film-genre-and-saving-private-ryan>

70 Barker, *op.cit.* 163

71 *Ibid.* 163

appears in a positive light: his relations with the Iraqis is non-violent, and he is the victim of Brigg's unjustified violence. Nevertheless, he is not presented as a helpless and weak victim, as he demonstrates strength during the fight. The film counts a few fistfight scenes and, while they are common motifs in the thriller genre, they also bear a particular symbolical significance in *Green-Zone*. Art seemed to be a way of representing the nobility of ancient warfare. The fistfights, devoid of any technological tools, might be another way of suggesting ancient warfare as opposed to modern warfare. The character of Miller is not actively pictured as a soldier using his weapons and killing the enemy. Instead, he fights in a traditional and noble way. His exemplary nature is the opposite of the Iraq War: a modern war described as being "morally, legally and strategically unjustified." Greengrass uses the figure of a noble and just soldier in order to criticize and condemn the Iraq War and the American government and institutions. Indeed, in an interview by film historian Nick Smedley, scriptwriter Tony Gilroy, who collaborated with Greengrass, explains that "Greengrass had already explored issues connected with the corruption of the CIA and other, sinister American secret organizations in his contributions to the Bourne series of films, particularly *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Greengrass, 2007)." Furthermore Tony Gilroy's anger about American participation in the Iraq War is chronicled.⁷² . But "Greengrass and Damon express this belief more explicitly in their subsequent collaboration, *Green Zone* (2010), which declares outright that the Bush administration blatantly lied about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to justify the US invasion."⁷³ In fact, Matt Damon's position with regards the Iraq War is quite clear. In 2012, the actor helped pay tribute to the late historian and author Howard Zinn. This rendition of a speech Zinn gave in 1970 on civil disobedience reveal Damon's thoughts on the matter:

"Above all, we must stop obeying the call of corrupt, lying leaders to go fight against innocent human beings in endless, bloody wars that simply make no sense, and don't benefit anyone except the arms leaders, the rebuilding contractor, and the oil corps. We must stop making war, we must stop believing that to honor the fallen we have to buy into the government and the mainstream media's glorification of war."⁷⁴

The anti-war beliefs of the cast and crew is reflected in *Green-Zone*. The film's plot clearly presents the American officials in a negative light and the film's main character, soldier Miller, is used as a voice against the war. Relics of ancient and noble warfare appear on screen and are used as another way of criticizing contemporary warfare. The soldier stands as a figure constructed around references from the past and the present. The elements of the past associated with the soldier are used to stress the glorious and romantic aura of the figure.

72 Nick Smedley, *The Roots of Modern Hollywood: The Persistence of Values in American Cinema, from the New Deal to the Present* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2014) 137

73 Vincent M. Gaine "Remember Everything, Absolve Nothing: Working Through Trauma in the Bourne Trilogy", *Cinema Journal*, Vol.51 No.1 (Fall 2011) 159-163

74 "Matt Damon from Howard Zinn's Speech: the Problem is Civil Disobedience", *YouTube*, November 2013 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2li9E_94MA

3. War Imagery Debunking the War on Terror Rhetoric

a. Unveiling the War on Terror Rhetoric

As explained in the introduction, *American Sniper* is a “politically reflective movie,”⁷⁵ thus the political ideas emerging from the film are expressed in a more subtle and debatable manner than Greengrass’ anti-war film.

In his article “Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the ‘War on Terror’”, media culture specialist Douglas Kellner explains how America and Western countries were permeated by “George W. Bush’s rhetorical framing of the ‘War on Terror’”⁷⁶ during the post-9/11 era:

The September 11, 2001, terror attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon were a great shock to the American people and a global media spectacle that captured the attention of the world. Osama bin Laden and various groups denominated as “Al Qaeda” have used spectacles of terror and a Manichean political rhetoric to promote their agenda in a media saturated era, and the Bush-Cheney administration fought back with its rhetoric of a “war on terror” and its media spectacles of war in Afghanistan and Iraq⁷⁷

This “carefully crafted rhetorical practice”⁷⁸ seems to show through *American Sniper*. Chris Kyle’s decision to join the NAVY Seals is directly connected to the ‘War on Terror.’ He decides to go the Army Recruiting Center after hearing a “special report” about terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi. He then explains his decision to join the Navy SEALs to his future wife Taya when he first meets her in a bar. He tells her that he would “lay down (his) life to save (his country).” When she asks her why he would take such a risk, he answers: “because it’s the greatest country on earth and I would do whatever I can to protect it.” His explanation, as well as being very patriotic, hints at the ‘War on Terror’ rhetoric suggesting that war is a necessary means to protect the American soil. On March 19, 2003 President Bush announces the start of the Iraq war. His address starts with this sentence: “My fellow citizens, at this hour American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.”⁷⁹ With these words, Bush insists on questions of security, defense and protection of innocents. He frames the Iraq war as a humanitarian war, a new concept attributed to modern warfare: “Western societies are trying to humanise war, and are likely to continue doing so for some time to come. It is the great project of the twenty-first century.”⁸⁰ In her book *War and*

75 Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas. *op.cit.*

76 Ryannon Macleod, "The Use of Dehumanizing Rhetoric in the War on Terror", *E-International Relations*, May 2010 <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/05/03/the-use-of-dehumanizing-rhetoric-in-the-war-on-terror/>

77 Douglas Kellner, “Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the ‘War on Terror’”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol.37 No.4 Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric, December 2007. 622

78 Macleod, *op.cit.*

79 "Bush Declares War", *CNN*, March 2003 <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/03/19/sprj.irq.int.bush.transcript/>

80 Christopher Coker. *Humane Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2001) 4

Delusion, philosopher and cultural critic Laurie Calhoun, has a darker outlook on this new concept. She asserts that “what has survived as just war theory is a powerful rhetorical tool, involving fallacious appeals to both authority and tradition, and playing upon human frailty, especially the desire to believe that we are good and our enemies are evil.”⁸¹ Thus, war is presented as a necessity to ensure peace and soldiers are portrayed as the protectors of the nation. Chris Kyle believes in this “romantic image of soldiers”⁸² and sees his enrollment as a way of becoming a protector of the American nation. His protective nature is pointed out on many instances. The scene where he actually leaves for Iraq shows him and Taya witnessing the attacks on the World Trade Center on TV. The scene is composed of a close-up of the television broadcasting the famous images of the towers collapsing, followed by a close-up of Taya in Kyle’s arms. While she snuggles against him he brings her closer to him and places his arm in a protective way. This scene reveals how Kyle feels the duty to take care and protect his family. This feeling is expressed later on in the film. When he is on leave before his fourth and final tour, his wife asks him why he insists on staying in the military. He replies: “I do it for you. I do it to protect you.” In addition, another scene triggered strong reaction and has been discussed in a few reviews. Reporter Ana Caklovic in her review of the film published on the online magazine *The Paly Voice* describes Chris Kyle as “a Texan cowboy who grew up with a father who taught him to classify people as wolves, sheep and sheedogs that protect the innocent.” This description refers to the flashback of Kyle’s childhood. In this scene, he is sitting around a table with his parents and his younger brother. His father explains: “There’s three types of people: sheep, wolves and sheepdogs.” He continues his explanation by telling him “We’re not raising any sheep in this family. I will whip your ass if you turn into a wolf.”⁸³ This metaphor explains Kyle’s career choice. He joined the military because partly due to what Jean-Pierre Zarader calls his “upbringing endorsing violence.”⁸⁴ Thus he believes that he is fighting to protect his family and his nation: being a soldier is a way of being a “sheepdog.”

Even his position in the military highlights the protective aspect of his work. During his first tour, a high-ranked soldier explains the importance of the sniper’s position: “You are snipers you are going to be paired with the marines to watch their back (...) your job is to protect the marines at all costs.” These elements show how Kyle perceives his military career and sees the soldier as a protector of the nation. In a way, it follows the positive image of the military conveyed by the government and the institution’s discourse.

81 Laurie Calhoun. *War and Delusion: a Critical Examination* (New-York: Palgrav MacMillan, 2013) 42

82 Ibid.

83 Ana Caklovic “Review: American Sniper – A personal outlook on war”, *The Paly Voice*, February 2015 <http://palyvoice.com/2015/02/22/review-american-sniper-a-personal-look-into-war/>

84 Jean Pierre Zarader, “American Sniper ou le refus de la répétition”, *Sens Public*, February 2015 <http://www.sens-public.org/article1146.html> “l’éducation à la violence”

Along with the positive image of the military, the main protagonist also absorbs the negative image of the enemy accentuated by the political discourse. The Iraq war is the perfect example of “modern conflict conform(ing) to the established political war time convention of constructing enemies as less than human.” The Manichean construction of this conflict shows through George W. Bush “carefully crafted rhetorical practice” hinted in *American Sniper*. Some words uttered in the film are more or less direct allusions to Bush’s discourse. The word “evil” is redundant while “George Bush’s immediate invocation of evil imagery is hardly unprecedented.” In “Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation,” R.C Ivie explains the “invocation of evil imagery” in the discourse:

Though not an inherently unique approach, the president’s rhetoric of evil was highly effective in that it immediately eradicated any space within the public perception for critical thought regarding terrorism, and those proposed “enemies” of the United States. From the very beginning of the War on Terror, absolutely every consideration “became a matter of national security as viewed through the lens of an evil threat.”⁸⁵

The film shows that Chris Kyle has been brought up to believe in a manichean conception of the world. In the scene depicting his childhood, his father tells him that “some people prefer to believe that evil doesn’t exist in the world,” implying that he believes that it does. Other scenes of his military life shows how the Manichean conception of the world is adopted by soldiers. In the scene staging Kyle’s first kill, the soldier standing next to him calls his first victim an “evil bitch.” This scene makes a direct reference of the rhetoric of evil through the vocabulary. Yet it also reveals how soldiers have a tendency to dehumanize their enemies: the soldier seems to be thrilled by the killing of a woman and does not show any signs of compassion. Another relevant scene illustrates a conversation between Chris Kyle and another soldier. The latter confesses his doubts regarding the war: “I just want to believe in what we’re doing here.” Kyle’s answer reveals, once again, the influence of the ‘War on Terror’ discourse: “Well, there’s evil here. I’ve seen it.” Furthermore, he uses other terms often employed in Bush’s rhetorical discourse. At one point he refers to the enemy as “savages.” The use of this term only reflects the “Manichean denunciation of the enemy”⁸⁶ which is carried through “military training programs through which soldiers are conditioned to kill.”⁸⁷ Contrary to what the public opinion believes, it does not mean that the film defends the Bush doctrine and the war in Iraq, it only underlines the power of his rhetorical discourse. This term supports the deshumanization of the “‘enemy’ cast as being savages or barbarians lacking in culture, cognitive and rational capacities, morality and self-restraint.”⁸⁸ This way of portraying the enemy is

85 Macleod, *op.cit.* Quoting Ivie, “Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation”, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*.

86 Calhoun. *op.cit.* 150

87 Ibid.

88 Macleod. *op.cit.*

part of the discourse. The most obvious reference to the ‘War on Terror’ rhetoric is made during the funeral of a soldier part of Chris’s team killed in battle, Mark. His wife reads out a letter written two weeks before the funeral in which the soldier describes the war he fought as a “wrongful crusade.” The term “crusade” has been carefully chosen as it echoes the notorious words employed by Bush in his rhetorical discourse. In the days following the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush gave a speech in which he declared: “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.”⁸⁹ This address became famous as the expression “war on terror” was used for the first time. Furthermore, Bush’s use of the term “crusade” “which passed almost unnoticed by Americans, rang alarm bells in Europe. It raised fears that the terrorist attacks could spark a ‘clash of civilizations’ between Christians and Muslims, sowing fresh winds of hatred and mistrust.”⁹⁰ These strong reactions put the spotlight on the term “crusade,” which has since been directly affiliated to the discourse.

American Sniper spreads subtle references to the ‘War on Terror’ discourse. Yet, contrary to what public opinion believes, it does not mean that the film defends the Bush doctrine and the war in Iraq; it only underlines the power of his rhetorical discourse. More than just suggesting Bush’s discourse taken on by soldiers, the film also has a critical eye on the matter. As early as the second tour, different soldiers cast doubt on the war they are fighting. Their doubts and disillusionment appear through short pieces of conversation like, for instance: “I just want to believe in what we’re doing” or “fuck this place.” In addition, in his letter, Mark bluntly criticizes the Iraq War by describing it as a “wrongful crusade.” His previous doubts are thus turned into a sharp rejection of the war. Moreover, the soldiers are portrayed as intruders through a recurrent motif. They are repeatedly violently opening doors and forcing themselves into houses. These scenes have a metaphorical quality, suggesting that the soldiers are forcing themselves in a place where they are unwelcomed. While the different soldiers in the film seem to condemn the Iraq War in different ways, main character Chris Kyle tends to illustrate the same idea. Contrary to the other soldiers mentioned, he does not expressly question the war. However, there is a clear evolution of the character throughout the film. He grows more and more tormented and changes from a joyful and funny man to a much darker character. Different scenes of him back home show that he suffers from PTSD: he shows sudden outbreaks of violence or withdraws into silence and sees a psychologist. In his review of the film on his online cinema magazine *Filmosphère*, french cinema journalist Nicolas Gilli describes this evolution as “a slow descent into hell.”⁹¹ This evolution along with his tragic

89 “Remarks by the President Upon Arrival”, *The White House*, September 2001 <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>

90 Peter Ford, “Europe cringes at Bush ‘crusade’ against terrorists”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 2001 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0919/p12s2-woeu.html>

91 Nicolas Gilli, “American Sniper”, *Filmosphère*, visited 15.05.2016 <http://www.filmosphere.com/movies/american-sniper-clint-eastwood-2014/>

death at the end of the movie stresses the wrongness of this war. At the very end of the film, when Kyle finally readapts to his civilian life, white words can be read on a black screen: “Chris Kyle was killed that day by a veteran he was trying to help.” With this ending full of irony, *American Sniper* implies that the threat does not come from Iraq, but comes from within the country – maybe suggesting that the Bush administration is the real threat for America. The ending of the film might be a response to Bush’s Manichean framing of the war. Eastwood discredits Bush’s rhetorical practice by showing that “evil” is not only to be associated with the “enemy” or, to use Mark’s statement during a conversation with Kyle: “There’s evil everywhere.”

At first sight, *American Sniper* might seem less political than Greengrass’s *Green-Zone*. Yet, the complexity of the subtext reveals how they both denounce the Iraq War in their own way. Eastwood’s film hints at Bush’s ‘War on Terror’ discourse which might lead the viewer to think that the film is pro-war. However, the director also counters Bush’s rhetorical practice. Furthermore, *American Sniper* and *Green-Zone* both rely on typical war imagery and aim to show the darker side of the conflict, another way of discrediting Bush, his government and his decision to launch the Iraq war.

b. Death, Destruction, Violence

Violence is a motif of crucial importance in any war film. In a previous subpart, this paper explained *Green-Zone*’s particular approach to violence. Indeed, the film does not show battle or armed combat scenes — recurrent motifs in traditional films. Yet while violence does not express itself through traditional war combat scenes, the motif is still of paramount importance in the film. The plot is constructed around major tensions between numerous groups. These tensions intensify to translate into physical violence. The fight scene between Miller and Lieutenant Briggs is a clear illustration of the importance given to violence. While this scene serves as an example illustrating the discord within American forces it also suggest violence against the Iraqi population. This sequence is particularly interesting as it sheds light on Miller’s diplomatic methods. In this excerpt showing the interrogation of Iraqi civilians, Miller manages to gather information by collaborating with those concerned and makes a deal with an Iraqi civilian: in exchange for information, he promises to protect his family. Miller’s pacifists methods are also underlined by his way of building conversation with the Iraqis: he kneels down to be on a par with the man he questions. The shot reverse shot between the two protagonists show that they are on the same level. Furthermore, other characters in the scene, such as Miller’s translator Freddie, are filmed in low-angle shots, as shown in the shot hereunder.



Green-Zone, 00:34:24.

This camera angle points out Miller's contrasting procedure: he treats the Iraqis as equals and favours a peaceful and non-violent approach. This approach is made clear to the spectator as it is contrasted with Lieutenant Briggs's methods, shown onscreen in the same scene. He uses unnecessary violence against the Iraqis: his soldiers violently drag the civilians into the helicopters and put black hoods on their heads. Miller's previous interrogation being successful, this violence seems particularly worthless. Through this sequence, Greengrass points out the worthlessness of violence praising the use of diplomacy. Another more illuminating scene takes place in a prison. Miller goes there in order to interrogate some prisoners and get some information. He goes in a first interrogation room where another soldier brings an Iraqi prisoner. When he ties the prisoner to the chair, Miller tells him "That ain't necessary," a way of rejecting the military "procedures." The prisoner gives him information redirecting him towards another prisoner that he visits in another room. This excessively dark scene shows the prisoner, who has been obviously severely beaten up by US forces, lying on the ground. The images contrast with the offscreen diegetic music: the soldiers are listening to a soothing American song. This anempathetic⁹² sound underlines the sharp contrast between the suffering Iraqi prisoners and the American military who set up a comfortable American bubble in Iraq. Paradoxically, the calm music tends to diabolize the Americans: it accentuates their inhumanity as they seem oblivious to the suffering of their captives. Miller, once again, distinguishes himself from the rest of the military. He is the only American who appears distressed and is the first one to call out for a doctor. The low angle shot and the many close-ups of his sweaty fixed face present him as a powerless spectator of violence. Furthermore, these scenes in prison bring a powerful re-assessment of the question of liberty within the conflict. When announcing the invasion of Iraq on the 20th of March 2003, president Bush declared: "My fellow

92 Chion, *Glossaire*, *op.cit.*

citizens, at this hour American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.”⁹³ *Green-Zone*’s prison scenes confront Bush’s humanitarian argumentation by showing Iraqis suffering in a what looks like an American environment. These scenes represent the American intervention in Iraq. In Greengrass’s film, the Americans are portrayed as occupiers imposing American ideology. The soldiers are used to pointing out the U.S. cultural hegemony: hinted with the diegetic music for instance. Reflecting the rest of the film, these scenes shed a negative light on Bush’s “agenda of cultural supremacy.”⁹⁴ The recurrent theme of violence is used to support the negative portrayal of the U.S forces. Nonetheless, Roy Miller distinguishes himself from the other soldiers: he is the only one avoiding and questioning the use of violence. Throughout the film he is presented as a righter of wrongs with human qualities. His relationship with the Iraqis also stresses his virtuous persona. He avoids the use of violence and positions them as his equals. His relationship with Freddie reflects his relationship with the Iraqi population in general. The two characters make a powerful duo in the film. Their efficient collaboration is a way of saying that the United-States and Iraq should have collaborated. In the *Green-Zone*, the director depicts a diversity among the military by framing an opposition between Miller and other soldiers. Chief Miller is presented as a character surrounded and victim of violence, but rejecting the use of violence when he believes it unjustified or unnecessary. His way of approaching physical violence echoes the use of violence on an international level: Greengrass condemning the Iraq War and framing the conflict as an unjustified military intervention.

Contrary to Miller, Kyle is a character deeply constructed by violence, a theme “associated with many of Eastwood’s films.”⁹⁵ While violence is part of the character’s story from its earliest stages, considering his education supporting violence, his military career confines him to a violent milieu. As an integral part of Kyle’s life, violence structures the biopic. While violence is part of the soldier’s life from the start, the spectator witnesses an escalation in terms of its representation on screen. First, the soldier’s childhood hints an underlying form of violence. Then his first tour in Iraq makes him face the harsh reality of warfare and finally the next three tours seem to depict an intensification of violence. In the last battle scene the depiction of violence reaches its climax. First, Kyle shoots his major target, his death is shown on screen and illustrated by a splash of blood. Then Kyle and his team are in a difficult position, outnumbered and surrounded by the enemy. The large number of combatants and the presence of important military apparatus, like a helicopter, highlight

93 “Remarks by the President Upon Arrival”, *op.cit.*

94 George Soros, “The Buble of American Supremacy”, *The Atlantic*, December 2003

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/12/the-bubble-of-american-supremacy/302851/>

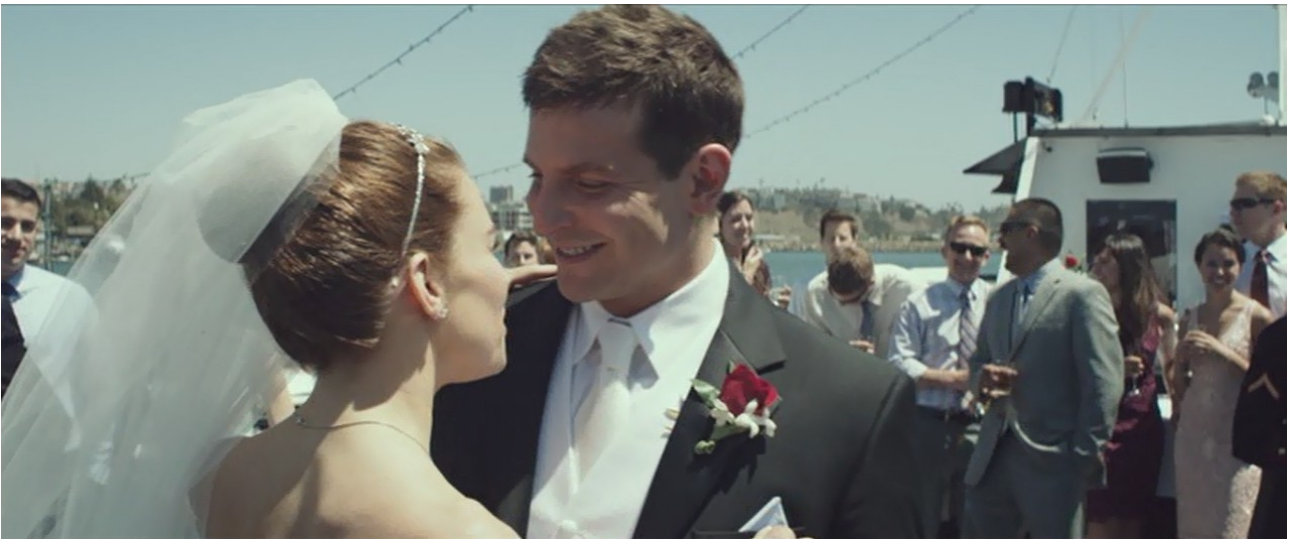
95 Ron Briley, *Wester Historical Quaterly*, Vol.40 No.2 (Summer 2009) 238

the gravity of the battle. Grenade explosions and gun shots give rhythm to the sequence. The spectator is thrown into the violence and confusion of the scene that is constructed by many successive shots coming one after another in a really fast cutting. The confusion is reinforced by the the sand storm increasingly filling the screen and blurring the shots. It is in this chaotic scene that Kyle finally decides to stop his military career: he calls Taya in the middle of the battle and tells her in a really moving tone: "I'm ready. I'm ready to come home." His decision emphasize the violence of the combat-scene, as Kyle finally reaches his breaking point.

As in *Green-Zone*, the environment in which the soldier evolves is deeply constructed around violence. The character's relation to violence is nevertheless ambiguous. Kyle asserts the necessity of violence, through his successive engagements and his reaction to Mark's letter. During his friend's funeral he tells his wife "that letter killed Mark. He let go and he payed the price of it," implying that violence is the only way to survive on the battlefield. Yet, his reliance on violence is equivocal and turns out to be destructive.

The character follows a clear evolution in *American Sniper*. The early stages of the film portray Kyle as a funny and joyful character and his relationship with Taya is probably the most obvious way to perceive his evolution. Two excerpts from the early stages of the film are particularly illustrative of his character before going to the front. To start, the sequence unveiling his encounter with Taya shows Chris playing games with his friends, and then flirting and drinking alcohol with Taya. Contrary to the rest of the film he appears to be the one leading the conversation and is really talkative. Furthermore, the character smiles and laughs in most of the shots. In the wedding sequence Kyle and Taya's happiness is shown through the numerous close-ups of their smiling faces. Their first dance is filmed with a handheld camera and a panning is used to follow their steps. Their whirling in front of the camera underlines the importance of their smile which appears even more evidently on screen as it they come closer to the camera. Furthermore, it might be a way of illustrating how the two characters are caught in a spiral of happiness.

His physical appearance is also interesting to describe: in these two sequences he has a clean-cut look: his hair is quite short and his beard is completely shaved off. From the moment he starts his military missions, he drops this look and appears on screen with a beard and often wears a cap. These two elements tend to harden his features and make him look older and less open, as illustrated by the two photograms below.



American Sniper, 00:23:04.



American Sniper, 00:37:08.

These physical changes mirror his change in terms of behavior. He grows more and more tormented and goes from being a joyful and funny man to a much darker character. Different scenes of him back home show that he suffers from PTSD: he has sudden outbreaks of violence and withdraws into silence and sees a psychologist. His psychological struggle is suggested by Bradley Cooper's acting, which is also revealing of Eastwood's cinematographic imprint. As the story unfolds, "he favors silences and scarcity of movements,"⁹⁶ and his characters tend to have an "impenetrable look exploiting the idea that the mask is impressive by its consistency in the change of events."⁹⁷ Kyle's death at the end of the film is a way to complete the character's destruction. The story of Chris Kyle is that of the destruction of an individual. The soldier is presented as a victim of warfare.

Green Zone does not propose an egotistic approach to warfare. The theme of destruction is

96 Andrea Grunert. "Clint Eastwood: un héros viril à la rencontre de son ombre (des années soixante-dix et quatre-vingts)", *Masculinité à Hollywood: de Marlon Brando à Will Smith* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011) 90

97 Ibid. citant Peter R. Hofstädter. *Psychologie* (Francfort/Main: Fisher, 1977) 244

present, but is expressed in a more global form. In order to denounce the Iraq War, the film resorts to a metaphorical approach of the subject. Instead of displaying shocking images of death and physical suffering, the film rests upon the metaphor of the ruin. In her book *Images et Sociétés: le progrès, les médias, la guerre*, Canadian Professor Catherine Saouter, analyzes this powerful metaphor. She explains that “the ruin metaphor is the acceptable answer to self-censorship”⁹⁸ and it “announces a psychological mean to support the new extent of mass death.”⁹⁹ For her, “the profusion of ruin photos talks about the profusion of the dead.”¹⁰⁰ While in her book she looks at the media, photography and film, her analysis of the metaphor can be applied to *Green Zone*. The motif of ruins is indeed often found in the film and the soldier is very much represented surrounded by destruction. The smashed sculptures suggest the destructive nature of battle but the scenes showing Miller in his hotel room are also very illustrative. One shot is particularly relevant: it shows him sitting on the bed of his room conducting research on his computer. He is not presented as the central element of the shot. In this long shot he is sitting on the side, turning his back to the camera. In addition, his brown shirt is similar to the other colors in the environment which makes him camouflage in the shot. In other words, the shot does not point out the importance of the character but of the environment. Indeed, art and decor elements are numerous and comprise in this shot. For instance, a painting and a chandelier lie on the ground and the bed frame is particularly embellished. But it is the colors in the shot that are striking. The image is colored by different hues of brown and gold. The color gold is very much present as it appears on the left side on the bed frame and on the right side on the painting frame. Being on both sides of the image it seems to frame the shot. The color gold and the different elements in the shot point to the wealth of the place. However, the other important factor to take into account is the mess and the degradation of the environment. The objects suggesting wealth are on the ground, the bed is messy and the wall is damaged. This damaged room is a way of hinting at the negative effects of the American invasion in the country. Through these images, U.S. forces are portrayed as the wreckers of a glorious civilization, recalling the parallels between past and present discussed previously. Miller, standing in the midst of this environment is presented as a witness of the pangs of warfare.

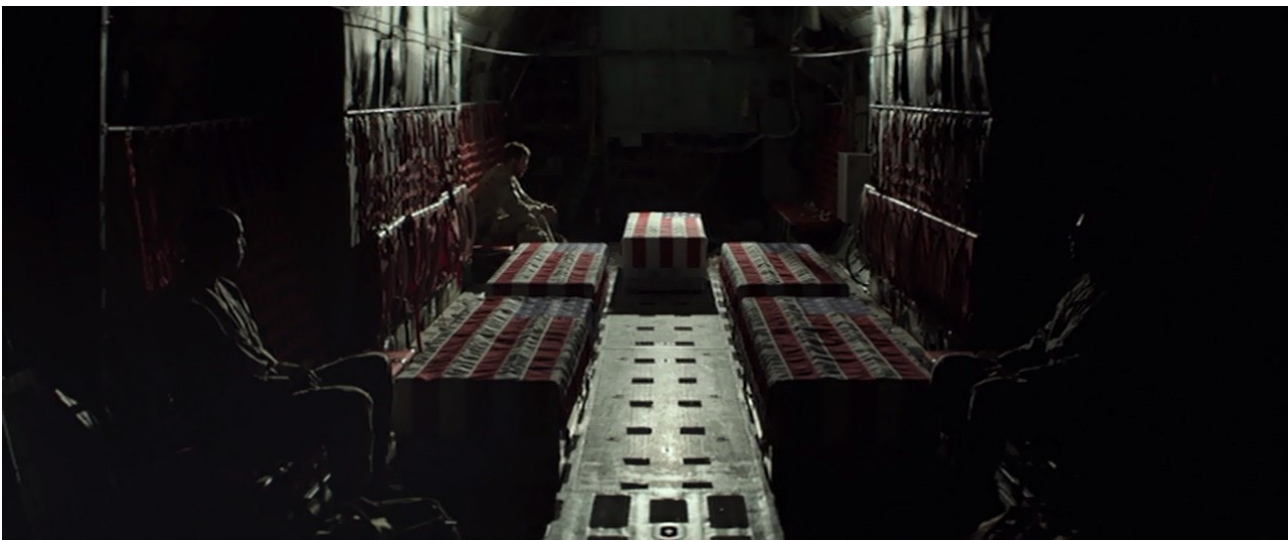
While Greengrass relies on the metaphor of the ruin to suggest the disastrous consequences of the conflict, Eastwood does not avoid the screening of death in his work. The escalation of violence resulting in the death of the main character is primal evidence. Furthermore it seems that, gradually, the combat scenes abandon their action-style embracing a more tragic mood and

98 Catherine Saouter, *Images et Sociétés: le progrès, les médias, la guerre* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003) 63 “la métaphore de la ruine est la réponse décente de l'autocensure”

99 Ibid. 67 “la métaphore de la ruine, très fréquente, signale un moyen psychologique de contenir l'ampleur nouvelle de la mort en masse”

100Ibid. 63 “l'abondance des photos de ruines parle de l'abondance des morts”

foregrounding the theme of death.. The thrill of the battle does not appear on screen anymore and Kyle's evolution supports this idea. In addition, some soldiers's deaths are shown on screen, like Mark's for instance. One particularly interesting shot shows Kyle on the plane flying him back home at the end of his third tour in Iraq. Death appears as the central theme constructing the shot. The image is striking because of its symmetrical composition: two coffins—prime symbols of death—are placed on either side of the shot and one is in the center background. The side coffins create a sense of perspective and pave the way to the one situated in the center of the shot. This composition, attracts the gaze of the spectator to the coffin in the background, making of it the key element of the shot. The idea of the path can evoke and redefine the common reference of the “light at the end of the tunnel.” But instead of depicting light the image is composed of a coffin, giving a much darker tone insisting on the theme of hopelessness. This shot also recalls near death experiences as many people have described that when they have had a near-death experience they have seen “darkness, tunnels, and light”¹⁰¹. The near death experience can be seen as a direct reference to the soldiers experience, as they confront death on the battlefield on a daily basis. The lighting only supports the importance given to the coffin. The shot is very dark and the light is only used to illuminate the central coffin. In addition, the darkness of the shot creates a really gloomy atmosphere which, combined with the prevailing grey color, might evoke a morgue to the spectator. The only colour standing out from the gray hues is the stripes of the American flags. Yet this colour can also be associated to death and blood. Furthermore, in the shot, the two human figures, meant to symbolize life, are sitting still in the dark, as can be seen in the following shot.

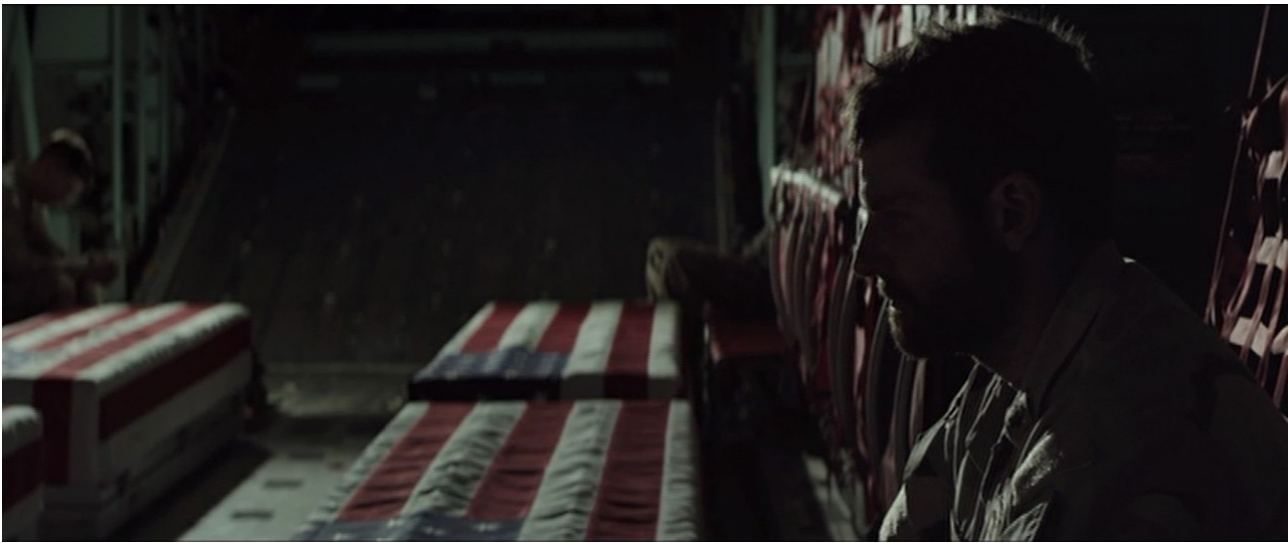


American Sniper, 00:23:20.

The soldiers look like invisible shadows: a illustrative way of erasing any trace of life in the image

101Linda J. Griffith, “Near-Death Experiences and Psychotherapy”, *U.S. National Library of Medicine*, October 2009. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790400/>

overwhelmed by the crushing weight of death. The weight of death is also shown in the next shot: a lengthy close-up of the face of Chris Kyle. He appears on the right side of the shot, the left displaying the numerous coffins covered by the American flag, as illustrated by the shot hereunder.



American Sniper, 00:23:24.

Once again, the color red of the stripes stands out in this shot evoking the trails of blood shed by his fellow soldiers. The offscreen acousmatic sound adds up to the tragic of the scene. The spectator can hear the voice of Mark's wife reading his letter during his funeral. The first word: "glory" is of paramount importance as it contrasts with the images shown on screen. This clash is a way of accentuating the disillusionment of the soldier who faces the harsh and tragic reality of warfare. Moreover, the end of Mark's letter sums up the idea illustrated in the shots, as he finishes it with this tragic statement: "I've seen war and I've seen death." All in all, this scene presents the soldiers, as well as the American nation, overwhelmed by the two intersecting themes of death and disillusionment.

The two films under study take different paths leading to the same conclusion: they both offer a critique of the Iraq war. *American Sniper* tends to spark public debate because of its dialectical construction. Indeed, the film presents two different argumentations mirroring one another. On the one hand, Eastwood unveils Bush's 'War on Terror' rhetorical practise. On the other, he has recourse to common war imagery debunking the discourse supporting the American intervention. This way of tackling the subject through extensive use of rhetoric and imagery recalls "ancient philosophers like Plato, Cicero and Aristotle (who) believed politicians deliberately made use of persuasive and manipulative rhetoric to deceive the public"¹⁰². In a way it reveals their political influence in the contemporary Western world. Their influence also permeates *Green Zone* which draws many parallels to the prestigious past but also by being a thrilling quest for truth

102 Macleod. *op.cit.* 62

Indeed the latter is another central goal of platonic political philosophy. In a way, the two films, intend to debunk Bush's framing of the war and re-establish the truth which is tinted by their personal ideology. In both works, the soldier is a key figure used to denounce the Iraq War. Despite the same objectives, the soldiers are not portrayed in the same manner. In *Green Zone*, chief Roy Miller is presented as a voice against the war. He clearly positions himself against the intervention and redirects his battle fighting for truth and justice. Chris Kyle, on the other hand, is a silent victim of the war. He suffers from the physical and psychological violence of the conflict and withdraws into silence: his speech is gradually replaced by the shortest sentences or even simple grunts. Chris Kyle does not openly denounce the war, but his suffering speaks for him.

II) The soldier's heroic image

The first part unveiled how the soldier is used off-screen by the political and military institutions and, on screen, by the directors. Eastwood and Greengrass both offer a visual critique of the American intervention in Iraq by using traditional war imagery and by relying on the powerful and essential figure of the soldier. It appears that, like the representation of warfare, the soldier's fictional identity relies on many typical characteristics present in most war films. The notion of heroism is of paramount importance and can not be overlooked. This ideal seems to be the foundation of the soldier's construction and representation. In his theses "The Hero Soldier: Portrayal of Soldiers in American Films," scholar Gavin Davie explains the importance of heroism in war films. In his introduction, he asserts that "the mythos of the hero has existed within the stories of humanity for as long as we can remember. Within the last hundred years, film has become one of the dominant storytelling media of our culture and numerous films, especially war films, about heroes and their inspirational actions have been made."¹⁰³ The heroic stature of the soldier in popular culture seems to echo the political discourse, strongly marked by patriotism, which give a very positive portrayal of the armed forces necessary for recruiting campaigns and military interventions. *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* seem to illustrate that idea by relying on the soldier's heroism. Indeed, the characters of Kyle and Miller seem to be partly constructed by heroic features. However, they also paradoxically subvert these usual codes. The two films, especially *American Sniper*, seem to offer more complex representations of the soldier, who is not only constructed around pure heroism. The growing complexity of the figure, illustrated in these two

¹⁰³Gavin Davie, "The Hero Soldier: Portrayals of Soldiers in War Films", *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*, supervised by Scott Liu, Columbia, University of South Carolina, 2011. 41

films, might shed light on the ambiguous relationship between the American population and the military in contemporary times.

1. “Masculinity on the front”¹⁰⁴

Like almost any war film, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* follow the “popular American compunction to equate manhood with soldierly function.”¹⁰⁵ The films depict a really deeply gendered division presenting the military as an exclusively masculine milieu. This division is to be associated with the heroic features assigned to the two main characters as, “the construction and deconstruction of masculinity are part of the discourse on American values and the hero.”¹⁰⁶ This deep gendered division seems to follow popular and political beliefs associating masculinity with power. It also might be a way of supporting the transcendental portrayal of the soldier visible in both films.

a. Women as Background Characters

Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, an American journalist and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote an article for *The Atlantic* called “Missing in Action,” in which she discusses the place of women in war films. She opens the article with a blunt and true statement:

“Over the past decade, a string of war movies emerged in the wake of 9/11: *The Hurt Locker*, *Syriana*, *The Messenger*, *Green Zone*, *Lone Survivor*, and *American Sniper*, to name just a few. Some have performed better than others at the box office, and many have received critical acclaim. Almost none has included portrayals of women in combat.”¹⁰⁷

Lemmon adds that, “among the recent spate of war films, hardly any women are seen as service members central to the action.”¹⁰⁸ She then insists on the fact that these on-screen representations do not reflect the contemporary importance of women in war and combat: “while women have been going to war in greater numbers than ever before in the decades since 9/11, their stories have yet to catch up with their service.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, “as of 2015, women make up about 15% of the U.S. military. More than 165,000 women are enlisted and active in the armed services with over 35,000 additional women serving as officers,”¹¹⁰ but this evolution is hardly shown in American films. More than just denouncing this absence, she frames their cinematographic invisibility as a lack of realism and

104Guerric DeBona, “Masculinity on the Front: John Huston's “The Red Badge of Courage” (1951) Revisited”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol.42, No.2, Winter 2003. 57

105Jon Robert Adams, *Male Armor: the Soldier-Hero in Contemporary American Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008)

106Grunert, *op.cit.* “la construction et la déconstruction de la virilité font parti d'un discours sur le héros et les valeurs américaines” 91

107Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, “Missing in Action”, *The Atlantic*, August 2015

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/missing-in-action/400235/>

108Ibid.

109Ibid.

110Jennie Wood, “A History of Women in the U.S. Military”, *Infoplease website*, visited 25.06.2016

<http://www.infoplease.com/us/military/women-history.html>

recognition: “watch a war movie and the roughly 300,000 women who have deployed in America’s post-9/11 wars are largely missing in action.”¹¹¹ Phil Carter, an Iraq war veteran and the director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at the Center for a New American Security agrees with Lemmon, asserting: “there haven’t been that many post-9/11 war movies, let alone good ones, and most of those have focused on parts of the military that are almost exclusively male.”¹¹²

Lemmon uses *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* as examples supporting her theory of the cinematographic erasure of the women in the military space. Indeed, the two main characters of the two films under study are men, and the female characters are very subdued and not associated with the military institution.

Green Zone features just one female character: Lawrie Dayne, a foreign correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*. The only time other American women appear on screen has been described in the first part of this paper, when Miller and a few of his men go into the Green Zone. The soldiers find themselves near a swimming-pool, surrounded by many civilians, including many women in bikinis. These shots, that show both soldiers in their uniforms and women sunbathing in bikinis, is a clear way of illustrating Laura Mulvey’s theory of to-be-looked-at-ness. In her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, the British feminist film theorist explains that, “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”¹¹³ Here, the central elements in the shots are the soldiers, who attract the eye of the spectator because they clash with their surroundings and are presented in the center of the shot. Reflecting the global ideology of the film, men are portrayed as central and vital elements while women are only part of the scenery. These men are defined by their uniforms. Their identity is shaped by their work and their action: they are soldiers above all else. In this scene, the women can also be defined by their clothing: bikinis, that are associated not with action and work but leisure and holidays. The appearance of these female characters is thus, to use Mulvey’s own terms, “coded for strong visual and erotic impact.”¹¹⁴ This contrast in terms of representation, highlights the positive portrayal of the soldiers. As opposed to the “passive”¹¹⁵ women, they appear as hardworking, selfless men fighting for their country.

Lawrie Dayne, the reporter, seems to occupy a different function as she is more involved and more active in the narrative. She investigates the WMDs and her articles have long seconded the administration’s conviction about WMD due to intelligence provided by a confidential source

111Lemmon, *op.cit.*

112Ibid.

113Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (autumn 1975): 6–18. Reprinted in her *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

114Ibid.

115Ibid.

called “Magellan.” Nevertheless, her portrayal is rather negative as the film emphasizes her lack of professionalism: she fails to obtain correct information and relays unverified information concerning the WMDs. Miller looks for information concerning the WMDs on the Internet and finds out that she wrote many articles without verifying her sources. While she appears as an inefficient reporter, he seizes the job and comes to act as a journalist. The first part of this thesis explained how he, more or less, abandons his soldierly duties to devote himself to a thrilling quest of truth. When he stops wearing his military uniform, his clothes are similar to what a war zone reporter could wear: a bulletproof vest over more casual clothes. The many shots of him typing on his computer also makes him look like a journalist as can be seen on the following photogram.



Green-Zone, 00'46'50.

Finally, the very end of the film supports this idea as he sends an email to Lawrie Dayne in which he writes: “Let’s get the story right this time.” The report about the “Falsification of WMD Intel, the truth about Magellan” is enclosed in the email. An extreme close-up reveals the distribution list of the email and a tilt shows the name of many journalists attached to different American newspapers. These scenes show that the mission he has taken on drives him away from the military institution, yet he still assumes two different positions: he is at the same time a soldier and a journalist. His position is thus paradoxical: as a soldier he is part of a system that forbids questioning but as a journalist his job is to ask questions. Miller ends up doing the job Lawrie Dayne could not accomplish herself. In other words, the man occupies, once again, an active role, while the woman is presented as a worthless character. The inefficacy of the woman journalist, who appears as passive, acts as a foil for Miller’s qualities. Women are either “erotic objects” in the background or ineffective. By contrast, the men appear as empowered.

In *American Sniper*, like in *Green Zone*, the female characters perform in the background and “the male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he

articulates the look and create the action.”¹¹⁶ In the film, putting aside Iraqi women, they are no female characters shown in Iraq and even less so on the battlefield. The only female character holding quite important a place in *American Sniper* is Kyle’s wife Taya. The relationship the soldier has with his wife seems to convey similar ideas as in *Green Zone*. Taya plays different roles throughout the film. But from the start she is dependent on Kyle. Her first appearance on screen occurs when she meets the soldier. The following images present her as a girlfriend, then she becomes his wife, and finally the mother of his child. These different roles support society’s patriarchal structure: the woman is secluded in the private sphere while the man occupies an important role in the public sphere. This patriarchal pattern is confirmed by Chris Kyle’s affiliation to the military institution. Kyle is also presented as an absent father. The film portrays Kyle as a man completely devoted to the army and who neglects his family life, as his wife tells him (“Your children have no father.”). This portrayal underlines the clear division between the private and public spheres and supports the deep patriarchal organisation of his family. In addition, as explained in the first part, Kyle believes he has the duty to protect his family. This belief fits in the patriarchal structure: the head of the household has authority over women and children, but also has the duty to protect them. Kyle wants to protect his family as a father, but also protect the nation as a soldier. His character reveals the patriarchal structure underlying both: his household and the system of government which is organised and protected by men and tend to popularize “the conception of the nation as a family in need of masculine providence and protection.”¹¹⁷ Kyle unveils this conception typical of right-wing discourse which aligns family and nation.

The soldier’s relationships to women in both films stress the important place men hold within society. Moreover, the women’s weakness, vulnerability, inefficiency or even invisibility in the public sphere is a way of highlighting the men’s strength and power. They are presented as vital elements controlling society. The deep gendered division along with the subsidiary role of women helps to underline the soldier’s masculinity.

b. Masculine Codes

In an article called “News from the Front: Contemporary American Soldiers in the Culture Wars,” Lieutenant Colonel Reed Bonadonna discusses “some representative depictions of soldiers and military forces in contemporary American culture” and aims at identifying “certain points about the perception of the soldier which [he] believes military people need to understand.” He asserts that “the military is being pictured as a dark, misogynistic place.”¹¹⁸ This statement can be linked to

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Stacy Takacs, *America's War in Film and History, Why We Fought* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008) 504

¹¹⁸Reed Bonadonna, “News from the Front: Contemporary American Soldiers in the Culture Wars”, n.p.

the institutional erasure of women. Indeed, the military is very much perceived through a gendered scope and the institution is grounded in masculinity.

In *Soldier-Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and Imagining of Masculinities*, professor of Historical Cultural Studies Graham Dawson explores the making of the soldier hero in the western imagination drawing upon the work of 19th century stories. In this book, he also discusses the connection between masculinity and the figure of the soldier. In particular, he notes that at the height of British imperialism in the 19th century, the dominant masculinity was found in the stable image of the soldier hero figure. He explains that for the Victorian, a “real man” would be “defined and recognized as one who was prepared to fight (and, if necessary, to sacrifice his life) for Queen, Country and Empire.”¹¹⁹ In other words, the Victorian completely assimilated the concept of masculinity with the soldierly function; thus making of the soldier “a quintessential figure of masculinity.”¹²⁰ In “The Soldier’s Life : Early Byzantine Masculinity and the Manliness of War,” cultural historian Michael Stewart, points to similar equations made in earlier times: “as one recent study on Roman masculinity asserts, serving the state as a soldier ‘was the only way many Roman males could lay claim to being a man.’”¹²¹ These different studies reveal the clear link established between the soldier and masculinity. Fighting is seen as a way to claim one’s masculinity and, reciprocally, masculinity is perceived as an essential feature to be a good soldier.

In his article “Masculinity as Spectacle,” Steve Neale discusses this image of “emotional reticence” which he relates in particular to Clint Eastwood’s acting. He connects “emotional reticence” with silence: “a reticence of language.” He writes: “theoretically, this silence, this absence of language can further be linked to narcissism and to the construction of an ideal ego. The acquisition of language is a process profoundly challenging to the narcissism of early childhood. It is productive of what has been called ‘symbolic castration.’”¹²² This can be related to Kyle’s gradual withdrawal into silence throughout the film. The main characters in *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* are constructed around features fitting within the stereotypical frame of the masculine gender. In *American Sniper*, the connection between the military and masculinity is established from the moment Kyle steps foot in the military. Indeed, his training highlights the gendered stereotypes attached to the military world. The instructors aim at turning the recruits into hardened combat-

<http://isme.tamu.edu/JSCOPE01/Bonadonna01.html>

119Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994) 1

120Ibid.

121Michael Stewart. “The Soldier’s Life : Early Bizantine Masculinity and the Manliness of War”, *Queensland University Press*, 2016.

http://www.academia.edu/2776322/The_Soldier_s_Life_Early_Byzantine_Masculinity_and_the_Manliness_of_War_BYZANTINA_SYMMEIKTA_26_2016_11-44

122Steve Neale. “Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema” *Screen* Vol.24, No.6 (1983): 9-19. 13

ready Navy SEALs. Most of the derogatory and humiliating remarks, mentioned in the previous part, are in fact based on gendered stereotypes. The quitters are stigmatized and the instructors ridicule signs of physical or psychological weakness. This weakness is associated with the feminine. The instructors turn the word “girl” into a derogatory term when shouting to the men: “take it girls, take it.” The training sequence shows how soldiers are prepared to have a gendered worldview. Their masculinity is marked as an essential quality to be a good soldier and a compulsory characteristic to survive on the battlefield. In 2009 Dr. Cem Kiliçarslan, a specialist in American history and popular culture, published an article called “The Masculinist Ideology and War-Combat Films: Reassertion of Masculinity in Hollywood,” in which he analyses the strong ties between the war film genre and masculinity. A passage of his work clearly explains the importance of manliness in the military:

the military functions as the medium where transformations of young men into warriors take place. In the army, and especially during basic military training, young men are taught to be real men by fighting and killing. To make warriors out of young men, the officers in the military employ techniques such as absolute submission and physical endurance. Those who cannot fulfil the expected tasks are humiliated and are called names associated with women or homosexuals, such as “faggot,” “pussy,” or “girl,” a practice which makes it clear that “not becoming a soldier mean[s] not being a man” (Cock, 1991, p. 59-60). In other words, a young man is instructed, by theory and action, “to deny all that is ‘feminine’ and ‘soft’ in himself” (1991, p. 60). Most importantly, military training equates masculinity with violence and killing (Goldstein, 2001, p. 264),¹²³

Kiliçarslan points out how the gender divide permeates the institution which relies on deeply masculine values. The figure of the soldier, by representing the institution, advocates the military values.

In the two films under study, the soldier’s masculinity is illustrated in many different ways, and Kyle and Miller are both constructed upon the stereotypical codes of masculinity and manliness. “Gender Stereotypes: Masculinity and Femininity” discusses the stereotypical construction of both men and women. The article explains that “the stereotype for men seems to be more stable, and men may be the victims of more stringent stereotyping than women. College students who described their views of women and men applied more stereotypical terms to men than to women (Hort, Fagot, & Leinbach, 1990).”¹²⁴ The article then exposes the result of the 1968 investigation by Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee and Broverman of gender stereotypes among college students, based on the social perceptions of the two genders. The stereotypical traits of men seem to be consistent with their on-screen representations in *American Sniper* and *Green Zone*. First, the study reveals that “aggressive” and “adventurous” are two stereotypical traits of men. Given their soldierly function, Kyle and Miller are bound to be relatively “aggressive” and “adventurous.” Act

123Cem Kiliçarsla, “The Masculinist Ideology and War Combat Films: Reassertion of Masculinity in Hollywood”, *Journal of Faculty of Letters*, Vol.26 No.1 (June 2009) 105

124Veysel Bozkurta, and Safak Tartanoglu and Glenn Dawesc, “Masculinity and Violence: Sex Roles and Violence Endorsement among University Students”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, (2015): 254
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815050909>

“as a leader” is another stereotyped masculine feature. The films emphasize the natural leadership of the characters by granting them a superior position. The position also stresses the soldiers’ strength and power. Miller is portrayed as an efficient lone spy successfully accomplishing his mission. He is also presented as a good fighter, as demonstrated in the fighting scene with Briggs described earlier. These qualities are even more visible in Kyle. The film presents him as a very gifted sniper. He is even nicknamed “The Legend” because of his impressive number of kills on the battlefield. The strength and power of the two characters are reflected in their physical appearances. In both films, the two actors playing Miller and Kyle have imposing builds. The 40-year-old actor Bradley Cooper even went through some important physical changes to impersonate the American Navy-SEAL; while his normal weight is around 185 pounds, Cooper bulked up and put on forty pounds to play the role.¹²⁵ These drastic physical changes underline the strength and power of the character. The choice of the actors is thus a way of stressing the masculinity of the soldier figure. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Mulvey notes that men’s physical appearance does not have the same impact on screen as women’s physical appearance: “a male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are [...] not those of erotic object of his gaze, but those of more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror”¹²⁶. Mulvey implies that the very presence of a male figure on screen is a way of asserting masculine power.

Other stereotypical traits are also used in the soldier’s characterization, the fact that he appears as: “self-confident” and “not dependent.”¹²⁷ Kyle boasts another kind of autonomy by being quite detached from his family life. But the most flagrant representation of masculine stereotypical traits is the characters way of dealing with emotions. According to the research on gender stereotypes, the male gender appears as very “unemotional.” The study lists a number of characteristics associated with men among which: “hides emotions,” “not emotional in a minor crisis” and “never cries.” Indeed, the two protagonists appear quite “unemotional.” *Green Zone*, by having more of a geopolitical approach to warfare does not focus on the soldier’s feelings and emotions. In addition to this lack of emotional display, the chief manages to keep his calm in troublesome situations. This is foregrounded during his very first appearance on screen. In this sequence, he arrives with his team to a presumed WMD site that is supposed to be secured. Yet the off-screen sound of gun shots and the Iraqi civilians running away in the background indicate that the place is not. Despite the global agitation and the close threat, Miller, like many of the soldiers present, keeps his calm. They

125Aly Weisman, “Here’s The Intense Training Bradley Cooper Went Through To Gain 40 Pounds Of Muscle For American Sniper”, *Business Insider*, January 2015 <http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-bradley-cooper-gained-weight-for-american-sniper-2015-1?r=US&IR=T>

126Mulvey, *op.cit.*

127Bozkurta, *op.cit.*

gather to exchange information and make decisions. Their attitude is in sharp contrast with the civilians. The different long shots of the sequence show numerous civilians running everywhere and the hand-held camera reinforces the confusion of the scene. In addition, many shots follow one another assembled by rapid cuts, adding a sense of dizziness to the scene. There is a medium shot of Miller walking straight towards the camera through the agitated crowd. He is almost hit by a chair carried by an Iraqi man but does not flinch and makes his way to a group of soldiers. The next shots are medium close-ups of the soldiers discussing the situation and wondering what to do. These medium close ups contrast with the long shots of the agitated crowd. The soldiers are very static as opposed to the Iraqis. The background of these shots often emphasizes the contrast as they show the agitation of the civilians in the background. Miller, like all the soldiers in this sequence, masters his emotions and stays calm and professional despite the overwhelming agitation. The discrepancy between the soldiers and the civilians is also illustrated in the relationship between Miller and his Iraqi translator Freddie. The latter is very often appears as overwhelmed by his emotions. He is portrayed as an agitated man: he moves and screams a lot. His behaviour contrasts with Miller's and insists on his calm nature. Through these different scenes, the soldiers seem to master their feelings and are not overwhelmed by their emotions.

Chris Kyle appears as a much more complex and ambiguous character than Miller. Yet he also appears unemotional on the surface. Indeed, throughout the film the character fights to hide his emotions. Despite his obvious gradual decay, Kyle endlessly repeats that he is doing fine. When he comes home after his first tour, Kyle goes with Taya to see a doctor for her pregnancy. The doctor asks Kyle how he is doing. Kyle says that he is doing great but the information given by his wife seems to contradict his statement. Taya tells the doctor it is the first time he leaves the house and after taking a test it appears that he has an abnormally high blood pressure. In the following scene, his wife states the obvious and tells him: "You're not talking, you act as if it is all okay." These scenes show that once he returns home from his first tour, Kyle puts on a mask and hides his true feelings.

Moreover, the way he copes with particularly traumatic events also reveals his desire to keep his emotions to himself. One scene illustrates this particularly well: it shows the moment the sniper has to kill his very first target, a child. The way Kyle deals with this tragic event is revealing of the way he copes with his emotions. Indeed, the soldier is very silent when he takes aim at the child, but the loud diegetic sound of his breathing creates a sense of tension that is reinforced by a non-diegetic low-pitched empathetic music. The rapid beat of the music reminds us of a heartbeat and is a way of suggesting the overwhelming pressure endured by the sniper. The close-ups, the slight zoom-in, and the slow motion convey the same idea. Yet, Kyle's face is impassive and shows how Cooper's

acting is similar to Eastwood's in most of his movies: "he favours silences and scarcity of movements"¹²⁸ and his characters tend to have an "impenetrable look exploiting the idea that the mask is impressive by its consistency in the change of events."¹²⁹ This "mask" put on by the actor is a way of expressing the soldier's psychological struggle.



American Sniper, 00'27'17.

It also reveals Kyle's desire to conceal his emotions and his weaknesses and present himself as a truly masculine soldier.

c. Gender and the Film Genre Theory

The soldier's portrayal in both films draws attention to the connection between the war movie genre and masculinity. In *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush*, Professor in English studies David Greven, looks into the intersection of masculinity and cinema. The book explores the struggle between narcissistic and masochistic modes of manhood that defined Hollywood masculinity from the late 1980s to the first decade of the twenty-first century. His work explains that Hollywood films are beset by strong remasculinization¹³⁰. In other words, they expose masculinity on screen through "set of values, interests, and activities held important to a successful achievement of male adulthood in American cultures."¹³¹ With the Vietnam War, the "remasculinization process was evident in several U.S. programs and movies."¹³² According to Greven's research, the remasculinization process also accompanies the Iraq War and *Green Zone* and *American Sniper* are two relatively recent films that seem to follow this general trend of remasculinization. The masculine codes permeating the two films can also be accounted for because

128Grunert, *op.cit.* 90

129Ibid. citant Peter R. Hofstädter. *Psychologie* (Frankfort/Main: Fisher, 1977) 244

130David Greven, *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009)

131Robert T. Eberwein, *The War Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004) 10

132Bret Carroll, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (London: SAGE Publications, 2003) 476

of the film genre. A number of studies seem to indicate that war films tend to promote masculine values. In 2009 Dr Cem Kiliçarslan published an article entitled “The Masculinist Ideology and War-Combat Films: Reassertion of Masculinity in Hollywood” in which he analyses the strong ties between the war film genre and masculinity. He states that “Hollywood films, and especially war and combat films depict a masculinist framework”¹³³. In other words, he asserts that Hollywood films support a form of masculine superiority. He further argues that “masculinity in particular and patriarchy in general are represented in manifold ways. Since masculinity is best observable in male dominated environments, i.e. military environments and war films, such narratives offer better opportunities to analyse an ideological masculinist discourse.”¹³⁴ In other words, the genre of the films and the environment in which the character evolves enhances the masculinist construct.

While belonging to the war film genre, *American Sniper* also seems to make indirect intertextual references to other films from the same genre. The first part focused on some strong similarities with *Full Metal Jacket*, yet the early stages of the film also recall another famous war film: *The Deer Hunter* (1978), written by Deric Washburn and directed by Michael Cimino. A flashback of Chris Kyle’s childhood shows him hunting a deer with his dad in the forest. The references to films belonging to the same war film genre stresses the deep masculine construction of the films. For instance, these two war films bring forward other activities that are typically associated with the masculine world. In his article, Kiliçarslan mentions *The Deer Hunter* and discusses the act of hunting in films. He explains that “hunting is a kind of metaphor which aims at establishing a commentary on the act of killing [...] the metaphor of hunting and the moment of killing the deer, are intentional representation of masculinity. Thus, the film uses hunting and other similar masculine rituals to create a covert layer of meaning which suggests that being able to kill is the measure of being a man.” Kyle takes on the image of the hunter, which is implicitly compared to his soldierly functions and is once again a way of extolling the character’s manliness. In *American Sniper*, the figure of the soldier is associated with other strong figures part of American history and culture. While the figure of the hunter is mentioned, the figure of the cowboy is more developed. The early stages of the film show Kyle’s passion for rodeo, a competitive sport based on the skills required to be a cowboy. The connection with the figure of the cowboy is clearly expressed by Kyle’s first girlfriend who says to him: “You think you’re a cowboy because you rodeo. You’re not a cowboy. You’re just a lousy ranch hand.” Soon after this remark Kyle understands that he might not become a successful professional rodeo and decides to join the Navy SEALs. The sniper’s first passion and professional orientation is a way of exploiting the famous

133Kiliçarsla, *op.cit.* 106

134Ibid. 102

figure of the cowboy. This veiled reference to the Western genre reveals Eastwood's cinematographic imprint. Indeed, as an actor and a director, Eastwood's career is associated with the Western and the character of the cowboy that he incarnated several times: "his physical appearance seemed to predestine him to the role of the solitary Western hero." And while Eastwood as an actor establishes himself as the "manly ideal of his generation,"¹³⁵ as a director he offers a visual "construction and deconstruction of manliness."¹³⁶ Following the same idea, Butters asserts: "Clint Eastwood has been one of the most iconic male figures on the American screen for the past fifty years. In his dual roles of actor and director, Eastwood has perhaps done more to shape the iconography of American cinematic masculinity than just about any other figure."¹³⁷ Along with Eastwood's personal appeal to the western genre, Peter Rollins and John O'Connor in their edited volume of *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television and History* explain that there is an "ongoing political appeal of the Western genre."¹³⁸ In their book, they add that "Westerns continue to define gender roles."¹³⁹ Professor of history Gerald Butters Jr. supports this idea, in his article "Masculinity in Film: The Emergence of a New Literature," where he writes: "perhaps one of the most overanalyzed cinematic genres in relationship to masculinity is the Western."¹⁴⁰ In *American Sniper*, Eastwood offers an interesting parallel between the figure of the cowboy and the figure of the soldier. Both figures mirror one another as masculinist constructs. Kyle leaves behind the cowboy image to become a soldier: a modern and achievable version of the mythical and heroic American figure of the cowboy. The cowboy western image provides a familiar icon of masculinity reinforcing the main character's manliness. This war film, by relying on masculinist codes from the western genre, reinforces the masculinity of the soldier figure mainly embodied by Kyle.

The figure of the cowboy and the soldier both evolve in a violent environment. While warfare is the ultimate violent milieu, Kyle also takes part in violent activities independently from his soldierly functions. For instance, there is a scene during his training period showing Kyle and his friends in a bar. The SEALs are all playing a violent game: a game of darts where the target is drawn on the back of one of the soldiers. This example stresses the on-screen assimilation of men and violence. In the article "Masculinity and Violence: Sex Roles and Violence Endorsement among University Students,"¹⁴¹ scientists Veysel Bozkurta, Safak Tartanoglu and Glenn Dawesc examine

135Ibid. 87 "Eastwood s'impose (...) comme l'idéal viril de sa génération"

136Ibid. 91 "la construction et la déconstruction de la masculinité (...) que ses films proposent"

137Gerald Butters Jr, "Masculinity in Film: The Emergence of a New Literature", *Choice*, February 2014. 4

138Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor, *Hollywood's West: the American Frontier in Film, Television, and History* (Limestone: University Press of Kentucky, 2005) 11

139Ibid.

140Butters, *op.cit.* 3

141Veysel Bozkurta, Safak Tartanoglu and Glenn Dawesc, "Masculinity and Violence: Sex Roles and Violence

the relationship between masculinity and violence. Their research have shown that most of the characteristics of masculinity are often associated with a culture of violence that is male-dominated. Weapons appear as key symbols of violence in Westerns and in war movies. In the two films, the protagonists rely on their weapons. Yet the importance of the weapon might be highlighted in *American Sniper* as suggested by the countless shots of Kyle behind the scope of his weapon. The assimilation of the soldier with his weapon points to the strong ties between the soldier and violence. But these weapon are also prime “symbols of masculinity.”¹⁴² The phallic possibilities brought up by this prop frames, once again, warfare as a no-woman’s land where masculine values are taken to the extreme. The soldier’s identity thus relies on his hypermasculinization: an exaggeration of traditionally masculine traits and behavior.

2. Rethinking Heroism

a. Romantic Ideal and Heroic Values

The hypermasculinization of the characters is a way to build up their heroism. Indeed, militarism, masculinity and heroism are three tightly connected concepts . Political discourses frame soldiers as heroes, an image reproduced in popular culture. In his book *Male: Armor: the Soldier-Hero in Contemporary American Culture*, Jon Robert Adams discusses the “popular American compunction to equate manhood with soldierly function”¹⁴³ and asserts that the heroization of the soldier is mainly constructed around his hypermasculinization. He mentions the “brand of male function associated with heroism – courage, suppressed emotions, strength and clear-headed decisiveness” and explains that “men who exhibit these behaviours are soldier-heroes. Men who do not seem as men.”¹⁴⁴ Scholar Patricia Fong White follows the same idea and looks into the ties between the hero image and masculinity in her thesis “The Unmaking of Heroes: A Study of Masculinity in Contemporary Fiction.” She explains that our socio-cultural system is one “that endorses the image of the hero as the ultimate form of masculinity and stresses a man’s need to live up to a certain type of manliness;” her main point is that “the hero image effectively embodies the abstract concept of masculinity.”¹⁴⁵

As explained previously, the cowboy imagery associated with Kyle participates in his

Endorsement among University Students”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2015)

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815050909>

142 Carla J. McDonough, *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary in American Drama* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 1997) 120

143Jon Robert Adams, *Male Armor: the Soldier-Hero in Contemporary American Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008)

144Ibid.

145Patricia So Fong White, “The Unmaking of Heroes: A Study of Masculinity in Contemporary Fiction”, Graduate Theses and Dissertations. Hong-Kong: University of Hong-Kong, September 2007.

<http://hub.hku.hk/bitstream/10722/51564/5/Abstract.pdf?accept=1>

hypermasculinization and can be linked to the heroic stature of the soldier. The codes of the Western also concern the film's narrative. Indeed, the plot of the films belonging to the Western are "normally rooted in archetypal conflict;"¹⁴⁶ like for instance good vs. bad, or virtue vs. evil. A similar opposition is used in the films under study as they are based on the Iraq War. The first part of this paper explored the political framing of this war and the Bush rhetoric and pointed out how it heavily relied on a good vs. evil construction. This opposition is used as a way to build up the American soldier's heroism. First, the character of Kyle corresponds to the "white male figure of the hero" in westerns who are often "local law men or enforcement officers, ranchers, army officers, cowboys, territorial marshals, or a skilled, fast-draw gunfighter."¹⁴⁷ His sniper position in the military reinforces his similarities with the traditional Western hero. In the first minutes of the film, Kyle clearly stands as a cowboy figure. He appears standing straight in a long shot dressed in jeans and wearing a white cowboy hat, traditional cowboy attributes. The character is in the center of the shot, standing outside a barn, in the light, his back to the camera. The two sections of the barns wall frames the character giving a photo-like quality to the shot, recalling the mythological aura surrounding the figure. In addition, this shot is an explicit intertextual reference to John Ford's classic Western film *The Searchers* (1956). The closing scene of the film presents main protagonist Ethan Edwards, played by John Wayne, in the same way: the cowboy wears similar clothes and hat and he is in the center of the shot, framed by the wall of the house. In these two shots, the framing, the composition and the lighting aim at presenting the cowboy as a central and imposing figure as can be seen on the following photograms.



American Sniper, 00'06'07.

146"Western Films, *Filmsite*, visited 28.06.2016. <http://www.filmsite.org/westernfilms.html>

147"Western Films", *Filmsite*, visited 28.06.2016. <http://www.filmsite.org/westernfilms.html>



The Searchers, closing scene.

In addition *American Sniper* follows the hero and villain binary typical of the Western. Kyle confronts Mustafa, his “opposite double, a mirror of his evil side that he has to destroy.”¹⁴⁸ Syrian Olympian fighting against the American Mustafa is presented as a very talented sniper like Kyle. The shots of Mustafa mirror the ones of Kyle behind his weapon. He is always portrayed in close-ups, his face often hidden behind the scope of his weapon. The colours associated with the two characters also recall Western archetypes. Many Westerns materialize the forces of good by white cowboy hats and the forces of evil with black hats.¹⁴⁹ In *American Sniper*, the colour divide is not as clear but follows the same idea. First, in America, when he is dressed as a cowboy he wears a white hat. As a soldier, he wears a light brown and green army uniform, and the many close-ups of him with his weapon are in light colours. The background is often a grey and bright sky. On the other hand, Mustafa is clearly associated with dark colors. He wears a black headband and is dressed in black. The background is often much darked than the shots showing Kyle, as shown in the following photograms.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Jeremy Agnew, *The Old West in Fact and Film: History Versus Hollywood* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012) 131



American Sniper, 00'46'52.



American Sniper, 00'38'07.

These differences classify the two men: Mustafa represents the forces of evil while Kyle stands for the forces of good. Furthermore “unlike Kyle, Mustafa is given no back story, family, or surname and remains more or less anonymous—we see his face but only in combat.”¹⁵⁰ This lack of information and his association to evil does not present the character as heroic, despite his battle skills. The confrontation between the two characters reaches its climax when Kyle finally shoots Mustafa, who killed his friend Biggles in an previous scene. This confrontation underlines Kyle’s heroism: he wins the battle with his nemesis and truly becomes a victorious hero.

This good/evil opposition brings out the heroic quality of the American soldier. The film relies on a traditional form of heroism by using classical codes taken from a “major defining genre of the American film industry.”¹⁵¹ By associating the soldier with the mythical figure of the cowboy,

¹⁵⁰ Courtney Duckworth, “How Accurate is American Sniper?”, *Slate*, January 2015.

http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/01/23/american_sniper_fact_vs_fiction_how_accurate_is_the_chris_kyle_movie.html

¹⁵¹ “Western Films”, *op.cit*

the cinematographic medium offers a romanticized portrayal of the soldier. The portrayals of the soldier in the film supports an idea brought out in *The New American Militarism*, a book by Andrew Bacevich, an American historian specializing in American foreign policy and military history. He asserts that “Americans in our own time have fallen prey to militarism, manifesting itself in a romanticized view of the soldier.”¹⁵² The heroic construct of the soldier figure in the two film could reveal society’s strong reliance on the military which is delineated in a positive light. In his thesis *The Hero Soldier: Portrayal of Soldiers in War Films*, scholar Gavin Davie explores the concept of heroism of paramount importance in war films. First, he explains that “the mythos of the hero has existed within the stories of humanity for as long as we can remember. Within the last hundred years, films has become one of the dominant storytelling media of our culture and numerous films, especially war films, about heroes and their inspirational actions have been made.”¹⁵³ Davie quotes Henderson, a student of psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, and writes that the “myth of the hero is the most common and well know myth in the world.”¹⁵⁴ He then writes that “the hero archetype is, at its most rudimentary level, the framework of an individual who combats the forces of evil” and adds that heroism “often involves personal sacrifice.”¹⁵⁵ These characteristics perfectly fit the soldier represented in *American Sniper* or *Green Zone*, who is ready to sacrifice his life to fight against the forces of evil.

b. The Hero’s Vulnerability

However, in his thesis Davie insists on the fact that the representation of the soldier and his relation to heroism have evolved. He asserts that “the hero soldier has become more flawed over time descending from invincible demi-god to a fallible human. This change is due to the merger between the hero and the non-hero characters, and the incorporation of their traits into one another.”¹⁵⁶ *American Sniper* seems to illustrate Davie’s remarks, Kyle is presented and perceived as a hero, even nicknamed “the Legend” because of his efficiency on the battlefield. At the beginning of the second tour, he bumps into his brother who joined the army who tells him: “You’re my hero. You always have been [...] The Legend.” In another scene, back on the American soil, Kyle is in town with his son when he comes across a soldier he saved in Fallujah. The latter kneels in front of Kyle’s son and tells him: “Hey buddy. Can I tell you something? Your dad: he’s a hero.” The soldier’s declaration is followed by a tilt moving from the child face to Kyle’s. Then another shot

152Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism : How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

153Davie, *op.cit.*

154Ibid.

155Ibid.

156Davie, *op.cit.*

shows the soldier kneeling on the ground and looking up at Kyle. These different shots and camera movement highlight the sniper's heroic stature. However the admiration surrounding the soldier contrasts with the evolution of the character described in the first part of this thesis. Indeed, while the manliness is integral part of the soldier's identity, the spectator also witnesses Kyle's deep suffering. Signs of his PTSD are the most direct marks of his psychological suffering. The scene preceding the one just mentioned, in which Kyle and his son meet another soldier, shows that the spectators feels Kyle's suffering through an internal focalisation. According to cultural theorist Mieke Bal:

The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character, or outside it. If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character.¹⁵⁷

In this scene, the viewer perceives the action through Kyle's point of view thus making him more understanding of Kyle's suffering. The scene takes place in a garage and Kyle is with his son in the waiting room. The scene is particularly silent contrasting with the previous noisy one taking place in Iraq. There is no off-screen sound or music. At first, the spectator only hears Kyle talking to his son. The silence of the scene accentuates the sudden off-screen diegetic sound of a drill. Once this sound starts, there is a close-up of Kyle's face, followed by a close-up of a drill. A shot/reverse shot draws a clear connection between Kyle and the drill. The scene is linked to an earlier particularly violent and traumatic scene in Iraq. In this scene, witnessed by Kyle, an al Qaeda operative nicknamed the Butcher attacks and kills a child with a power drill. The close-up of Kyle's face in the garage is emphasized by a slow zoom, which is a way of suggesting his thought process. The film suggests on many instances how Kyle is affected by traumatic memories of the battlefield. Towards the end, there is a sequence aiming at unveiling his psychological struggles. Kyle's family has organised a barbecue at their place. First, the sequence shows the soldier in a medium long shot, sitting the sofa in front of the TV. The spectator does not have access to the screen but once again, sound is of paramount importance. There are off-screen sounds of gun shots and helicopters mixing and contrasting with the on-screen sound of children laughing. As the camera comes towards Kyle's face, the sounds intensifies. Finally, the camera goes behind Kyle showing the TV screen turned off implying that all these sounds come from Kyle's head. A shot/reverse shot between Kyle and the black screen suggests that all the images of the conflict are in the soldier's head. Once again, there is a close-up of his face, which is intensified by a slow zoom-in. This shot along with the camera movement are running motifs in the film. They allow the spectator to imagine what is going on in the soldier's mind. It stages the discrepancy between the image of the hypermasculine tough soldier

157Mieke Bal, *Narratolo: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 104

and his hidden weaknesses.

The soldier's suffering and sensitivity are also revealed in a more direct manner in the film. Kyle's emotions are only displayed towards the very end of the film and often away from prying eyes. Indeed, the spectator sees the character cry on two instances: in and out of the battlefield. During the final battle scene of his last tour, he calls his wife in the midst of the fight to tell her that he is ready to come home and struggles to hold back his tears, as revealed in the following shot.



American Sniper, 01'44'29.

The first scene showing him back on U.S. soil after his last tour takes place in a bar: the shots are all very dark. He is sitting on his own at the counter when he receives a call from Taya. When he answers his voice is very shaky and the close-up of his face shows his teary eyes, as shown in the following photograph.



American Sniper, 01'49'12.

During the conversation, he looks down and hides his eyes behind his cap, showing his reluctance to reveal his tears. The scene ends on a long take of his face, encouraging the spectator to imagine

his disturbing thoughts. In these two scenes that reveal Kyle's emotions, the spectator is the only direct witness of the soldier's weakness. Indeed, nobody is around when he demonstrates his emotions which he only does on the phone. These circumstances point out the difficulty for the soldier to display his emotions because of the masculinist image stuck to the soldier figure. The sniper's rare emotional display challenges his hypermasculinity and is a way of recalling the soldier's humanity. However the humanity showing through the soldier's frailty should not be opposed to the notion of heroism. Davie explains that, in his research, he found out that "the hero soldier has become more human and fallible over time." He adds that "while possessing many of the heroic qualities, they have an added dimension, one of human fallibility and doubt."¹⁵⁸ Kyle is the perfect example of the modern day soldier hero combining the traditional features of hypermasculinity and "more human characteristics than its predecessors."¹⁵⁹ *American Sniper* illustrates Davie's analysis of the figure of the soldier: "where sixty years ago the hero was flawless and good, now the hero is tired and tortured."¹⁶⁰

The soldier in *Green Zone* is not a tortured hero as in *American Sniper*. Miller's character is constructed upon traditional codes of manliness but contrary to Kyle, he does not display any weakness. In *Music in American Combat-film: a Critical Study*, associate professor of media studies Wesley J. O'Brien, discusses *Green Zone's* approach to heroism. He writes:

while the protagonist of *Green Zone* does indeed embody such classically heroic elements as loyalty, valour, and integrity; ironically these characteristics drive him to work against his country's policies, which are in direct opposition to characteristics that define his heroic status. Because *Green Zone* depicts US policy as intent upon misleading the American people to precipitate their acceptance of an unjust war waged by an unprincipled administration, traditional notions of military heroism aligning the hero with the country he represents are subverted¹⁶¹

In *Green Zone*, Miller is the only soldier who appears as a soldier-hero. Indeed, the others are either unnoticeable or depicted in a negative light, like Lieutenant Briggs for instance. In his book, O'Brien explores many combat films and argues that, in a lot of Iraq War films, the "protagonists who are cast in the most sympathetic light are those who, one way or another, disavow either the conflict with which they are engaged or the military that is pursuing it."¹⁶² In Greengrass's film, Miller is presented as the only soldier with heroic qualities, the rest of the military being more or less associated with an unjust conflict. In a way, the film shows how the nature of the conflict impacts the definition of the soldier-hero. Contrary to some previous wars, the Iraq conflict has been vastly criticized in America and is considered with hindsight as one of the first major failures of the American military. The notion of morality being at the core of this conflict, it also impacts the

158 Davie *op.cit.*

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

161 Wesley J. O'Brien, *Music in War-Combat Films: A Critical Study* (London: McFarland, 2012) 135

162 Ibid.

image of the soldier in the Iraq War films. Indeed, the soldier's heroism in *Green Zone* is strongly connected to a deep reliance on justice and morality. Miller is presented as a soldier-hero because of all the traditional masculine codes but also because of his profound ethical commitment. Yet his opposition to the rest of the military might also reveal a crack in the image of the soldier-hero. While Miller gradually affirms himself as a hero, he also gradually abandons his identity as a soldier, as explained in the first chapter. The subtle evolution of the character could underscore the frailty of the positive image of the soldier-hero. The ambiguity is also analysed by O'Brien who declares: "it would seem that while the support for 'our troops' enjoys some popular consensus, popular culture is at a loss as to how parse that support while representing conflicts upon which the same public looks askance."¹⁶³ Miller's ambiguous position and his tense relationship with the other soldiers are directly connected to the context. In the book *L'Armée à l'écran*, professor in film studies Laurent Véray discusses the soldier's heroism in relation with the context. He explains that analysing the nature of mythological heroism in combat films requires to take into consideration the context in which the films are produced and the preoccupation of the time.¹⁶⁴ The debate around the Iraq War has impacted the image of the soldier who appears as a less glorious and more ambiguous figure through Greengrass's lens.

Though *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* offer a opposing portrayals of the soldier figure, they both seem to indicate an evolution of the on-screen representation of the soldier and its relation to heroism. In both cases, the soldier is connected to a certain form of fragility. Eastwood sheds light on Kyle's frailty to reinforce the soldier's heroism. In Greengrass's film, the figure of the soldier itself is vulnerable and loses of its heroism. The figure of the soldier is based on the same hypermasculine features. However, the nature of the Iraq conflict has affected the soldier's connection to heroism. In both films, the directors aim at unveiling the darker side of conflicts and thus of the soldier's position. But while they seem to approach heroism differently and take on an anti-war position the two film still honour the soldiers. The end of each film seems to suggest this idea. In *American Sniper*, Kyle's death appears as particularly tragic: he dies at the hands of a veteran he was trying to help. It stresses the fact that the soldier was still trying to help people after his service. This ending seems to insist on the soldier's self-sacrifice, a way of underlining his heroism. Indeed, "soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the well-being of their battalion and country would be fêted as heroes for precisely this reason."¹⁶⁵ Yet the film also depicts the sniper's funeral in a strikingly patriotic manner. The end credit sequence is constructed from actual footage used by

¹⁶³Ibid. 136

¹⁶⁴Laurent Véray "Les héros sont fatigués: le soldat de la Grande Guerre dans le cinéma français de 1960 à nos jours", *L'armée à l'écran* (Paris: CinémAction-Corlet, 2004) 185

¹⁶⁵Eranda Jayawickreme and Paul Di Stefano. "How Can We Study Heroism? Integrating Persons, Situations and Communities," *Political Psychology*, Vol.33 No.1 (2012): 172

TV news stations of the soldier's funeral procession, during which crowds of mourners lined the streets. By using archival footage, the film reminds the viewer that the fiction film is based on a true story and appears more touching. The story of Kyle is a way of reminding the viewer of the sacrifice made by the American troops. The emotional impact created by the footage is a way of insisting on the patriotic claim of the scene. There are many long and extreme long shots revealing the huge number of Americans paying their respect to the fallen soldier. The images are dominated by greyish colours giving a dark atmosphere to the sequence and contrasting with the colours of the American flags, an extremely patriotic symbol. Indeed, there are many flags along the road and a lot of people holding some. The soldier's procession counts many police cars, that have their red and blue lights flashing, another way of recalling the American colors, as shown in the following shot.



American Sniper, 02'00'16.

The images are accompanied by non-diegetic music (“The Funeral”), composed for the film by Ennio Morricone. The music is highly inspired by the military taps: a bugle call played at dusk, during flag ceremonies and military funerals by the U.S. armed forces. It is another way of insisting on the patriotism of the sequence and it also completes the tragic atmosphere. This scene presents Kyle's death as a true tragedy, propelling the character as a self-sacrificial victim and fallen hero. Indeed, the end of the narrative shows Kyle's gradual recovery after his “slow descent to hell”¹⁶⁶. His death seems particularly tragic because it occurs out of the battlefield, and after winning his personal psychological battle. The patriotism overwhelming the scene also presents the soldier as a direct patriotic symbol. In *Green Zone*, the ending of the film does not indulge in patriotism and is not steep in pathos, but it still presents the soldier in a positive light. In one of the final scenes, there is a tracking shot following Miller walking in a building towards the outside. There is a chiaroscuro effect between the inside of the building and Kyle's shape, which are both very dark, and the

¹⁶⁶Gilli, *op.cit.*

outside, which is very bright, as pointed out in the following shot. These images illustrate the end of Miller's involvement in the Iraqi conflict and thus suggest the start of a new brighter mission.



Green-Zone, 01'44'29.

There is an abrupt cut, followed by a long shot of vehicles driving towards a same direction. A close-up of Miller reveals that he is back in his complete traditional army uniform, as shown on the following photograph.



Green-Zone, 01'44'42.

Finally, the last image is an aerial shot of the vehicles, a slight tilt-up revealing the road. Once again, these images seem to announce the end of one mission and the start of another, which is associated with bright colours, and thus brighter objectives. In a way, it condemns the Iraqi conflict, but not the role of the military. In the film, soldiers are framed as heroes only when they fight for a noble cause. *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* suggest that the soldier is still considered to be an important heroic figure within American society. The last images of both films confirm their general

ideology: while they condemn warfare and the war in Iraq, they still honour the bravery of the soldiers who sacrifice themselves for their country. Reworked and redefined, the figure of the soldier is not stripped of its heroism and remains a central, untouchable figure in American society. Because the figure of the soldier is put on a pedestal, the other characters of the films can not get such a positive portrayal.

3. Racism

a. The Enemy

The first chapter explained at length how *American Sniper* plays on Bush's rhetorical discourse that demonized the enemy. But some elements reveal that the film itself, while denouncing the war and political manipulation, is permeated by the same idea. Journalist Noura Mansour condemns Hollywood's representation of Arabs and Muslims in recent films in an article for the press monitoring organisation the Middle East Monitor. Among other films, she accuses *American Sniper* to be anti-Arab and -Muslim propaganda. To prove her point, she analyses the different representation of the soldiers and the Arabs. Her general remark is that

American soldiers are presented as heroes, protectors and even at times victims in Iraq, whereas the Arabs are all presented as militants, including women and children, who are also engaged in fighting. There are no civilian Iraqis in this movie, except for one family, whose members are killed by Iraqi militants, of course, and not American soldiers.

She adds:

there is a clear objectification of Iraqi militants versus the humanisation of American militants. When an American soldier is killed, we get to see a close up of his face so that we can absorb his feelings and his wounds. However, when an Iraqi militant is killed, we only see his body falling down from afar; there's no blood, no facial expressions and thus no feelings. In addition, American soldiers are more than just soldiers; they are husbands, fathers, sons and daughters, whereas Iraqi militants are one-dimensional.¹⁶⁷

Mansour's analysis seems to be to the point and can be supported by the portrayals of Kyle and his Iraqi double Mustafa. The film offers a deep access to Kyle's personal story but gives very few information on Mustafa. For instance, the viewer sees Kyle's relationship with his wife and children throughout the film, whereas there is a single very rapid scene revealing that Mustafa also has a wife and child just before he gets killed by Kyle. The objectification of the Iraqis goes hand in hand with their on-screen demonization. One of the most notable characters on the Iraqi side is the Al Qaeda operative nicknamed "The Butcher." He is remembered particularly because he takes part in the most harrowing scene of the film. During his first tour, Kyle witnesses the Butcher torturing and executing an Iraqi child by taking a power drill to his skull. This particularly violent scene echoes the earlier one showing Kyle's first kill. Indeed, in both scenes, an important character kills a child,

167Noura Mansour, "Hollywood's Anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim Propaganda", *Middle-East Monitor*, January 2015.
<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150129-hollywoods-anti-arab-and-anti-muslim-propaganda/>

the ultimate symbol of innocence. Yet the two characters commit the deed in diametrically opposed ways. My previous analysis explained how Kyle is affected and suffers from his action. The Butcher, on the other hand, is not moved by the situation and the scene pushes the atrocity of his action to the extreme. First, his weapon is a drill, a particularly barbaric tool. Moreover, he does not kill the child straight away, but tortures him in front of his family first. A medium long shot shows the Butcher threatening the child with the drill, with the boy's family in the background. The family's distress is thus made visible, the distance of the shot suggesting their helplessness. The scene also emphasizes the horror through a close-up of the hand of the child being drilled, as shown on the following shot.



American Sniper, 00'47'05.

The off-screen sound of the child crying and screaming also stresses the horror. The Al Qaeda operative appears to be intimidating and dreadful, especially in a medium close-up in which he brandishes his drill covered with the child's blood at the camera. The Butcher then moves the drill to the child's head, shown in another close-up, as shown in the following shot.



American Sniper, 00'47'38.

When the Butcher starts drilling the child's head, his father runs towards him to help, but he is shot down by the Butcher's men. The last shot of the Butcher in this scene is a close-up of his face looking down at the body of the father. He then lifts his head and threatens the rest of the family: "You speak to them. You die with them." The sun is shining behind his head and he is filmed in a slight low angle shot which gives him a very impressive stature. This shot, shown below, points out his powerful position and present him as an intimidating and terrifying character.



American Sniper, 00'48'11.

The parallel drawn between this scene and Kyle's first kill is a way of insisting on the enemy's inhumanity bringing out the soldier's humanity: Kyle only kills the child to protect people.

Green Zone does not demonize the Iraqi population, but their representation is not particularly positive either. The soldier's masculinity, explored previously, revealed how the soldiers and the Iraqi population coped differently with their emotions, presenting the Iraqi as restless and nervous people. The difference in terms of representation is particularly evident when comparing the characters of Miller and of his translator Freddie. The two men cooperate and while Miller represents the strong figure of the soldier, Freddie stands for the Iraqi population. The character is constantly agitated, he almost constantly shouts and his foreign accent sounds exaggerated and false. While the film does not present him as a bad person, his stereotyped representation still reveals a form of underlying racism. This representation clashes with the powerful figure of the soldier and accentuates his heroic stature.

b. Racism within the military

Both films depict the Arab population on screen in a more or less negative light. Racism seems to take part in the representation of the enemy and the "other," but the military institution

itself is affected. First, in both films the main character is a white American man. In *Green Zone*, there is not a single coloured soldier: the only persons of color appearing on-screen are not American and are associated with Iraq. *American Sniper* seems to offer a more multicultural portrayal of the military. Some colored people belonging to the military are shown on screen. For instance, Kyle's friend and fellow Navy SEAL, Deryck Dandridge is an African American and play a minor role in the film. The training sequence also shows the presence of black people in the institution: one of the main instructors is also an African American. In this scene the black instructor dominates all the white soldiers. His superior position is stressed by the low angle shots of his face, and the high angle shots of the soldiers.



American Sniper, 00'10'57.

In addition, while the instructors mostly rely on a misogynistic discourse to humiliate the men, they also say racist remarks. When talking to an African American man, an instructor points out his skin color: “What are you still doing in my line trying to make this team? Everybody knows black guys don’t swim.” The soldier answers: “It’s all right sir I’m not black. I am the new black. We run slow, we jump low, we swim good, and we shop at the Gap. And I make the white folk proud, and I hose down their ladies. I dick ’em down.” Through this exchange the spectator witnesses the racism permeating the military world: while becoming “white” the black man is still marked by racist fears. Yet the scene is also a way of challenging racial prejudice: the soldier asserts and promotes his identity and the black instructor present black men as a powerful and dominating figure. While the film shows how black men are integrated within the institution, men with Arab origins are completely erased from the military space. This is also true in *Green Zone*. However, the United States government-funded multimedia news source Voice of America asserts that:

at least 15,000 Muslims, including about 3,500 Arab-Americans, are already in uniform. In fact, Arab-Americans have been fighting, and dying, for this country since 1776. The Pentagon regards Arab-Americans as especially valued members of the U.S. military because of their important language skills and their

understanding of the cultures of the Middle East.¹⁶⁸

The erasure of the Arab-Americans in the films, insists on the clear divide between America and the Middle East countries. By deepening the divide between the Americans and the Arabs, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* frame the Iraq war as a partly racial conflict.

While racism reveals itself under different forms and in a more or less strong manner in the two films, it is an integral part of the soldier's construction. The patriarchal and racist organisation of the army and of society frames the soldier's identity. In the films, the white American male stands as the figure of the soldier. Furthermore, the underlying racism with regards to the Arab population reinforces the positive image given to the figure.

Green Zone and *American Sniper* seem to show that the figure of the soldier is, still today, grounded in racial and gendered codes. While heroism is still at the core of the soldier's identity, the contemporary figure seems to be associated with a certain form of fragility and humanity. Today's soldier-hero takes the shape of a white American male whose sense of justice and morality is of paramount importance. In addition, the heroism of the main characters of the films under study is attached to their hybrid identity. Kyle has deep connections to the cowboy figures and Miller draws away from his soldierly function looking like a spy and a journalist. The multidimensional identity of both characters underlines their heroism but also pulls them away from their pure soldier function. This might suggest that the spectator does not admire the pure soldier figure as he used to, mainly because of ethical concerns.

War film specialist Christopher Coker points out the popular disavowal with regards to the figure of the soldier in his article "The Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror." He states that, "unwealthy or not, we display an equal interest in warriors – the men who were once admired as role models in our society. We admire them less than we did, which is a mark, perhaps of our ambivalence towards war itself."¹⁶⁹ With his ambiguous and complex construction the contemporary figure of the soldier is the bearer of a more human and humanistic vision of warfare.

168 "Arab-American Soldiers Stress Loyalty, Patriotism", *Voices of America*, October 2009.

<http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2007-02-15-voa46-66704312/559426.html>

169 Christopher Coker, *The Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror* (London: Routledge, 2007) 5

III) Ethics and Egopolitics

The previous parts of this thesis partly analysed how contemporary wars are strongly connected to notions of humanity and morality in the films. The figure of the soldier is not only used to tackle a number of ethical and moral concerns surrounding the Iraq conflict itself, but also those personally related to the soldier. The two films under study can be connected to theories discussing the realities of being a soldier. Political specialist Nicolas Tavaglione and cultural theorist Laurie Calhoun, look into the duality and the complexity of the soldier by exploring its paradoxical nature and the ethical dilemma attached to its function. *American Sniper* delves deeper into the soldier's identity and explores these egopolitical questions attached to the figure through the complexity of its main protagonist. In *Green Zone*, the approach is different. The portrayal of the soldier is not as elaborate but similar ideas seem to emerge from the film.

1. The Soldier's Duality

a. Private and Public Identity

The soldier's duality is at the basis of his identity. Indeed, the soldier is split between his soldierly function and his life as a civilian: he is constructed upon his public and his private identities. Yet, *American Sniper* and *Green Zone* illustrate his relation to the public and the private spheres in a very contrasting way.

The soldier's duality is at the core of Eastwood's film, which is built on sequences of his life as a soldier in Iraq and of his civilian life back in the U.S. The film alternates between these two locations, which tend to be more or less connected to the two sides of his identity. On the one hand, the American soil is connected to his private identity: when he returns from his tours Kyle takes on his role of father and husband. Most of the scenes are focused on his family life, like his wedding or the birth of his first child for instance. In Iraq, on the other hand, the character puts on his uniform and takes on his sniper position, most of the scenes being battle scenes. Yet, the two sides of his life are not indivisible and *American Sniper* sheds light on the difficulty to articulate these two different aspects. Kyle's childhood and relationship with his father already reveal the connection between the private life and the military world. This is patent in the flashback showing the father and son hunting. First, the scene recalls the military through the act of shooting, but Chris Kyle's way of speaking to his father recalls even more evidently the institution. In this scene, the child does not call him dad, but tells him "Yes, sir." This very short nominal sentence underlines the

authoritarian education of the child and also echoes the military form of speech as military courtesy commands that the words “Yes” and “No” should always be accompanied with “Sir/Ma’am.”¹⁷⁰

This scene shows how Kyle’s life is constantly permeated by the military world even before he enlisted. For that matter this form of speech comes up again when he is a soldier. Indeed, when he talks to a doctor during his leave, he keeps answering all her questions with: “Yes, Madam” or “No, Madam.” This way of expressing himself even in his private life is symptomatic of his double identity.

It is also unveiled in the wedding scene in the early stages of the film. In this sequence, Kyle gets married and learns that war has been declared and that he is going to be sent to Iraq. The combination of these two events sums up his double identity, which is also visually transposed on his body. Indeed, his wife Taya notices that he has green paint on his skin from his stag party. The color green recalls the military uniform and is a way emphasizing his identity as a soldier. In addition, Kyle tells his wife: “It’s a package deal,” a direct way of mentioning the two sides of his life and identity. Likewise, when he is on the battlefield his private identity is brought out through his relationship with his wife. On many occasions, Kyle phones Taya while he is on tour. The sequences showing the phone calls are interesting as they reveal the deep contrast between the battlefield and the life in America. The sequences alternate between shots of Taya in America and shots of Kyle in Iraq. Each time Kyle is in Iraq on the phone with his wife, he appears to be caught in a violent battle. There is a sequence in which Taya calls him after a medical appointment to tell him the baby is a boy. The sniper is in the back of a vehicle patrolling the streets and looks very excited by the news. But seconds after the announcement, Kyle and his fellow soldiers are attacked. The different shots and camera movements highlight the violence of the scene. First, there is a close-up of the back head of the soldier driving the vehicle. The close-up reveals a splash of blood covering the window between the soldier and the back of the vehicle, which accentuates the gore of the scene. This is followed by a car crash. From then on, the scene is filmed with a handheld camera enhancing the turmoil of the fight. Machine gun fire can be heard. Because these sounds are offscreen, the battle appears all the more so dizzy and messy.

The images of the battle are intercut with shots of Taya in front of the hospital while she is still on the phone. These shots contrast with the Iraq scenes: they are not filmed with a handheld camera and are very silent. The alternation of the shots representing Taya with the action scene underlines the difference in terms of lifestyle between the civilian environment and the battlefield. It also reveals a contrast in terms of film genre. The scenes representing Kyle focus on the fight and the

¹⁷⁰“Military: Custom, Courtesies, and Traditions”, *Global Security*, visited 02.08.2016.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/7-21-13/chap4.htm>

action, recalling the action film genre, whereas the scenes representing Taya seem to be inspired by the woman's film genre. Indeed, film theorist Mary Ann Doane, describes the woman's film as a genre portraying "women's concerns" such as problems revolving around domestic life, the family, motherhood, self sacrifice and romance.¹⁷¹ These main defining features correspond to the scenes showing Taya, which focus on the domestic family life. The alternation of scenes belonging to two different genres, underlines the two very contrasting sides of the soldier's life. In addition, in the shots representing Taya, trees and flowers can be seen in the background. The vegetation present in the shot is a way of illustrating life, as trees are often considered as symbols of life.¹⁷² These elements along with the conversation about the baby, associate the private sphere with life, as opposed to the public sphere which is associated with death.

The final battle scene is quite similar as Kyle calls his wife in the midst of a battle. However, this time there are only the shots of the soldier on the phone and not any shots of his wife. Kyle tells her that he is ready to put an end to his military career and come home. The fact that there are not any shots of Taya in America might suggest that the communication between the two lives is getting difficult, even impossible. Kyle can't assume both his roles as a soldier and father anymore. With this final scene the soldier finally chooses to devote himself to his private life.

The phone creates a link between the two sides of his identity by establishing the connection between Kyle's private and public lives. But it also insists on the difficulty to articulate these two spheres, the phone only allowing a partial and difficult connection. Interestingly, the motif of the phone call is also used towards the very end of the film when Kyle is back in America after his final tour. In this scene, analyzed in the second part of this thesis, the soldier is sitting in a bar and receives a call from his wife. Over the conversation, Taya discovers that Kyle has returned to the U.S., but went in a bar instead of coming home to see his family. This final phone call sheds light on the difficulty for Kyle to get back to his normal civilian life after his successive military missions.

With *American Sniper*, Eastwood illustrates the overwhelming weight of a military career on a man's life. The film also insists on Kyle's successful career. Indeed, the previous part of this thesis showed how he was presented and perceived as an efficient soldier hero. Yet the analysis also pointed out how the soldier suffers from his repeated military missions. His private life is clearly affected by his public role.

The soldier's hypermasculinity partly explains Kyle's detachment from his private life, the private

171 Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 152

172 "Trees in Mythology", *Myths Encyclopedia*, visited 25.08.2016 <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Tr-Wa/Trees-in-Mythology.html>

sphere being associated to women. But the character's evolution throughout the film insists on his impossibility to maintain a normal life independently of his military career. Each time the soldier comes back home after his tours, his wife draws attention to his invisibility as a husband and father. After his first tour she tells him: "It's not about them, it's about us. You have to make it back to us," while putting his newly born baby in his arms. After his second tour, they are both sitting in the baby's room when Taya expresses her feelings: "I'm making memories by myself. I have no one to share them with [...] Even when you're here you're not here. I see you, I feel you, but you're not here. I hate the Teams for it. You're my husband. You're the father of my children. But they are the ones who pull you back." In this scene, Kyle takes the baby in his arms during the conversation before putting him back in the cot and leaving the room without looking at his wife and daughter, a reaction underlining his growing detachment from his family life. Through his wife's remarks, the soldier comes through as a ghostly figure who gradually distance himself from his personal life. The contact with his child in these scene seems to support the same idea. While in the first scene his wife intends to create a bond between father and child by putting the baby in his arms, the second scene tends to point out Kyle's difficulty to maintain a connection with his family as he is not able to look at his family when leaving.

Finally, after the third tour the couple has a similar conversation when Taya asks him:

"Do you wanna die? Is that what it is?"

"No"

"So tell me. Tell me why you do that. I want to understand"

"I do it for you I do it to protect you"

"I'm here, your family is here, your children have no father"

"I love to serve my country."

"Fucking bullshit! You don't know when to quit. You did your part, you sacrificed enough, you let somebody else go"

"Let somebody else go? I could not live with myself" (...)

"I need you to be human again. I need you here. If you leave again I don't think we'll be here when you get back."

This conversation underlines Kyle's dependence on his function as a soldier. The scene insists on the sacrifices made by the soldiers, who are willing to die for their country as well as sacrificing their personal lives. By suggesting Kyle's dehumanization with the sentence "I need you to be human again", Taya suggests the weight of his public role as taken over and has reduced him to this mere function. In addition, Kyle justifies his decision through a positive set of arguments. His altruistic motivations along with the idea of sacrifice, shed a positive light on the soldier who appears as a brave and self-sacrificing individual.

The three scenes echo one another and unveil the evolving relationship between Kyle and his family. They explore the same idea: the soldier's family life is crumbling following his successive military missions. Kyle is portrayed as an absent father and husband. His absence is both physical

and psychological: the soldier is either on the battlefield or prisoner of his own thoughts on warfare.

Contrary to *American Sniper*, *Green Zone* does not offer a deep reflection on identity and geopolitical matters: the soldier's private life is completely erased and Miller is only presented as a public and political figure. The film does not reveal any aspect of Miller's personal life and only focuses on his career. By comparison, while *American Sniper* lengthily explores Kyle's relationship with his wife, Miller's only contact with a woman is with journalist Lawrie Dayne, and remains strictly professional. In Greengrass's film, the soldier's private identity does not reveal itself through his domestic life but through his rebellious behaviour with regards to the military institution and the government which has been discussed previously. Indeed, by distancing himself from the institution, Miller brings out his civilian identity. His similarity with the figure of the lone spy and of the journalist, as well as the fact that he stops wearing the uniform, are elements pointing to his private identity.

b. Public Figure

American Sniper shows the difficulty for the soldier to cope with his private life while being a member of the armed forces. In a way, the film insists on the weight of public life, which does not allow an equal balance of the two sides of his identity. *Green Zone* also suggests this idea only by revealing Miller's life as a soldier on the battlefield: the character is a public figure with a strong political role. While Greengrass' work focuses on the geopolitical conflict, *American Sniper* lets the spectator peer into the battle fought on an individual level by the soldier himself. Kyle's home in America becomes another battlefield in which he fights against his psychological struggles. The scenes of PTSD discussed earlier are illustrations of his personal fight. The scene showing Kyle in his living room staring at the black screen of the TV has been discussed previously to illustrate the soldier's masculinity. But it also transforms the soldier's house into a battlefield. Indeed, the different sounds alluding to an armed conflict are connected to images of Kyle in his living room. The film is thus constructed around a battle on a two-fold level: a physical and a psychological one. The scenes of Kyle in Iraq are numerous and aim at showing the violence and the difficulties of an armed conflict. This alternation of scenes of his life on the actual battlefield and in America points out how his private life and identity are affected by his duties as a soldier. *American Sniper* shows the soldier's impossibility to detach himself from his public identity. Once he steps foot in the military the soldier is doomed to fight a permanent battle: in and out of the battlefield. And indeed, while Kyle's life before service is already marked by the military world, his life after is also clearly dependent on the military environment: the war veteran joins an organisation to help wounded veterans. The murder of the soldier by a troubled veteran he was trying to help is another way of

unveiling the impact of the military on his life and death. The film thus illustrates Plato's famous adage "It is only the dead who have seen the end of war." This saying has been at the heart of many war films discussing the effects of war on the individual. Tanovic's drama war film *Triage* (2009) explores the psychological effects of war on a photo journalist. The film finishes on Plato's sentence written in white on a black screen. This shot echoes the shot following Kyle's death in *American Sniper* as it is presented in the exact same manner. The similarity between the two shots suggests their resemblance in terms of meaning. In Eastwood's film, the viewer can read the white words on a black screen: "Chris Kyle was killed that day by a veteran he was trying to help." Through the similarity of these two shots, the American director draws a parallel with Tanovic's work. The irony of Kyle's death, who is not killed on the battlefield but at home by a troubled veteran, recalls the traumatic impact of warfare on soldiers. Because they appear at the end of the films, these sentences look like maxims summarizing the films's ideology. The shot is striking by its simplicity: it is in black and white and there is only one sentence presented at the center of the shot. This simplicity is a way of highlighting the importance of the words appearing on screen. Moreover, in *American Sniper* it is a long take, allowing the viewer to ponder on the meaning of the sentence and the film in general. The long take can also be seen as a chance for the viewers to pay their respects to the fallen soldiers. The two films condemn warfare by demonstrating its lifelong impact on men. It also underlines the strength of the soldier's identity on the individual. Indeed, while Kyle's life is marked by his role as a soldier, so is his death. His funeral also insists on the public side of his identity: he is erected as a heroic symbol of patriotism. The images depicting the grandeur of the funeral, with the long shots and very long shots revealing the crowds gathered around the roads, recall the heroic stature of the soldier and show that Kyle dies as a soldier and not just as a civilian. Kyle's death and funeral suggest the crushing identity of the soldier who can't be separated from his public role and assumes his soldier status indefinitely. *Green Zone* suggests the same idea with the ending of the film. Unlike *American Sniper*, the soldier does not die, but Miller does not withdraw from the military. Indeed, the last shot showing Miller in his uniform in a humvee driving towards an unknown destination, implies that the soldier is going to start another mission. The two films show, in a different way, the crushing identity of the soldier who can't be separated from his public role and assumes his soldier status indefinitely. The films show that soldiers are bound to constantly live behind their public identity. They also reveal how the soldier reaches a certain form of immortality through his transformation into a strong symbolic figure by society.

2. An Ethical Debate

a. The Soldier's Dilemma

The soldier's divide between his private and public identities, is also the basis of an ethical debate attached to the figure. Political specialist Nicolas Tavaglione explains that the soldier faces a twofold moral dilemma falling within the *just in bello* ("right conduct in war"). The first dilemma is "indirect" and raises the question: is it morally justifiable to enlist? The second is "direct": is it morally right to kill in combat?¹⁷³ *American Sniper* deals with this egopolitical matter through the main protagonist Kyle. One scene from his first tour in Iraq is particularly illustrative of this damaging moral dilemma. It shows the moment the sniper has to kill his very first target. This scene shows Kyle on top of a roof with another soldier: the two have to cover and oversee an area. Kyle has his eye on a child and a woman and discovers, through his sniper scope, that the child is carrying an AKG Russian grenade. The situation is illustrated through numerous shots, many of them POV shots, presenting the scene through Kyle's gun sight.



American Sniper, 00'27'09.

These shots align the spectator's view with the soldier's. At the beginning of the scene, there is a tilt supporting this idea: it shows that the camera movement follows the presumed movement of the weapon. By aligning the spectator with the sniper, the scene dramatizes the soldier's inner struggle. The latter is expressed through the dilemma he faces. On the one hand, as a soldier, he has to accomplish his duty and kill the target because it is a threat. On the other hand, as a civilian, it is against his moral belief to kill a child. In other words, the soldiers's duty, which is to respect the orders and kill the enemy, goes against his ethics, "the basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct."¹⁷⁴ Nicolas Tavaglione discusses this idea by explaining that the soldier is a

¹⁷³Nicolas Tavaglione. *Dilemme du soldat, Guerre juste et prohibition du meurtre* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2005) 21

¹⁷⁴"Ethics", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, visited 26.08.2016 <https://global.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy>

dual figure who has to juggle between his collectivist view, which pushes him to protect people through the act of killing, and his individualistic point of view, which condemns the act of killing.¹⁷⁵ In this scene, the dilemma is pushed to its breaking point: because the child is a symbol of innocence, it makes Kyle's decision even more difficult. It is interesting to point out that, in Chris Kyle's, memoirs the victim is not a child but a man and "there was no doubt that (he) was an enemy."¹⁷⁶ Eastwood's version of the event underlines the cruelty of the action by using the pure figure of the child. He manages to point out the discrepancy between military efficiency and the question of morality. The focus made on Kyle is used to show the difficulties faced by a soldier in a situation involving a moral dilemma. The scene gains in intensity from the moment he understands that he is the only one capable of making a decision concerning the child. The sound of his heavy breathing can be heard, along with an extra-diegetic low-pitched music that contributes to the suspense. In this sense, the music can be described as empathetic as its "mood or rhythm matches with the mood or rhythm of the action on screen."¹⁷⁷ The rapid rhythm of the music reminds us of a heartbeat and is a way of suggesting the overwhelming pressure endured by the sniper. The close-ups, the slight zoom-in, and the slow motion support the same idea.

The soldiers' different reactions after the double killing could be a way of revealing the opposition between the "collectivist" performance and the "individualistic" morality. The soldier next to Kyle looks really excited by what has happened he even comments on the scene by saying: "Fuckin' evil bitch." Kyle has a completely different attitude. First, he violently rejects his comrades' reaction. The rejection is preceded then followed by a silent long take. A POV shot through the sniper scope shows the dead body of the child lying on the ground. And, finally, the last shot is another silent lengthy take, in which Kyle lowers his eyes before looking back into his scope.

175Ibid.

176Chris Kyle. *American Sniper, The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (New-York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012) 163

177Michel Chion. *Audio-Vision, Sound on Screen* (New-York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 222



American Sniper, 00'27,11.



American Sniper, 00'27'15.

These long takes are revealing of his pensive mood and underline how the character suffers from the harshness of his decision. The fact that the POV shot of the dead child lying on the ground is preceded and followed by the long takes on Kyle's face, is a visual way of relating the soldiers's thoughts with the killing of the child. This scene illustrates the battle, fought by the soldier on an individual level, between duty and ethics.

A scene towards the end of the film recalls this scene. Kyle's target is, once again, a child carrying a weapon. However, the latter drops it and the sniper does not have to shoot. In this scene, Kyle looks physically and psychologically worn out, stressing the destructive potential of his work. These scenes reflect the entire film as they reveal how Eastwood intends to bring back the essential question of ethics in the battlefield. The excerpt shows the idea discussed by philosopher and cultural critic Laurie Calhoun that "paradoxically, modern soldiers are expected to forsake their own humanity by suppressing their own rational and emotional faculties during wars said to be fought in

the name of humanity.”¹⁷⁸ Calhoun justly asserts the ambiguous position of the soldier who is condemned to act in an unethical manner for supposed ethical reasons. The Iraq war has been framed by the Bush administration as a “humanitarian war,”¹⁷⁹ a war fought in the name of human rights. In *American Sniper*, Kyle also insists on the positive reasons to fight by saying that he takes part in the war to protect people. However, the scene analyzed previously reminds the darker aspect of war and shows how the soldier is bound to be inhuman when taking part in a conflict. This paradox is at the heart of the soldier’s identity and is illustrated through the main protagonist.

On this view, the film stages a psychological battle taking place within a larger physical battle: the war in Iraq. By tackling these two battles, *American Sniper* dramatizes the geopolitical as well as the geopolitical matters.

Ethics is also at the heart of Greengrass’s work but the film approaches the notion from a strictly geopolitical angle. Miller has set himself the objective of uncovering the truth about the WMDs and insists on the reasons to go to war. On two instances he speaks up on that matter and he clearly takes a stand. In the early stages of the film, when the soldiers can’t find the WMDs one soldier tells Miller: “Chief we’re here to do our job and come back home. The reasons don’t matter.” A statement to which Miller replies: “They matter to me.” Towards the end of the film Miller has a similar conversation with Poundstone who implies that the WMDs were an excuse to go to war and that the reasons of a military intervention are meaningless. Miller’s reaction is very brutal: he violently grabs Poundstone before telling him: “Of course it matters! The reasons we go to war always matter! All those lies. . . it fucking matters!” When Miller first grabs Poundstone, the men are filmed in a long shot which does not allow the viewer to clearly distinguish the soldiers’s violent reaction. This way of showing the violence highlights Miller’s anger without framing him as a particularly brutal character. The following shot is a close-up on Miller’s angry face, before the two men are separated. Because the altercation focuses on Miller, as pointed out by the close-up on his face, the viewer is more inclined to be on his side. This scene underlining Miller’s rage summarizes the film’s general discourse, as *Green Zone* condemns the government in a fierce way.

The soldiers in each one of the films approach ethics on the battlefield differently. Yet they point out the key place ethics holds in contemporary wars as well as in the soldier’s figure.

b. Good vs. Evil

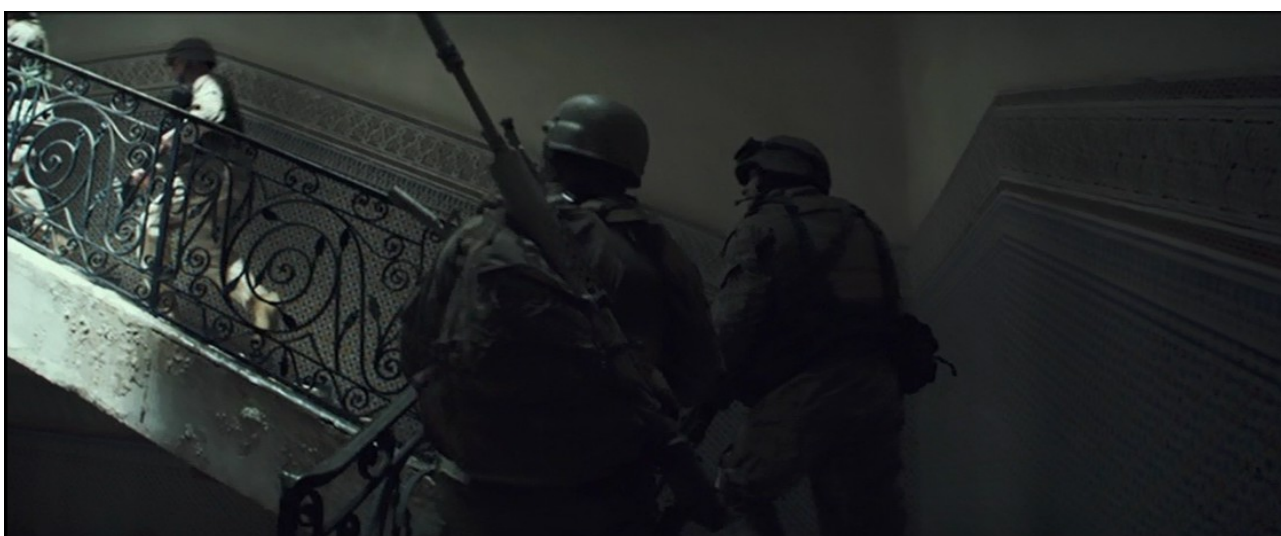
The first part of this thesis analysed the Manichean construction of the Iraqi conflict. This division between good and evil, while used on a geopolitical level, is also visible on an individual level. Indeed, the soldier’s duality explores the same divide by being also constructed on the good

178Laurie Calhoun. *War and Delusion, A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrav MacMillan, 2013) 150

179Christopher Coker, *Humane Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2001) 12

and evil dichotomy.

Due to its public and private identity the figure is caught between right and wrong. This paradox is visually transposed in both films, mainly through lighting. Indeed, the contrast of black and white, and light and darkness, has a long tradition of metaphorical usage. In Western culture, the contrast symbolizes the moral dichotomy between good and evil.¹⁸⁰ This metaphorical divide has already been mentioned in the previous part discussing the film's genre. *American Sniper* refers to the Western genre renowned for the use of black and white colours as symbols representing good and evil. But the film also associates the contrast with the figure of the soldier and not only of the cowboy. On many instances the soldiers are pictured in shots particularly interesting because of their lighting effects. In the first images of Kyle's first tour, the sniper and a couple of other soldiers are going up the staircase of a house in Baghdad. The different shots appear quite dull as they are only composed around a range of grayish colours resembling black and white shots. In addition, while climbing the stairs the soldiers advance in and out of darkness. The first shot is clearly divided in two: the left side is bright, illuminated by the outside light, the right side is plunged into darkness. As they climb, the lighting on and around the soldiers changes. First, they appear as dark figures in a bright illuminated environment. Then, on the contrary, they are illuminated by the sunlight while the background is completely dark.



American Sniper, 00'25'13.

¹⁸⁰Jonathan Reeves, "Detecting Literary Chiaroscuro in Eliot, Dickens, and Other Victorian Novelists", *Wordnet*, March 2015. <http://jonreeve.com/2015/03/detecting-literary-chiaroscuro/>



American Sniper, 00'25'17.

This contrast is also used more specifically throughout the film to frame Kyle. This is illustrated during the first tour for instance. Kyle kills a man from above to protect a group of American soldiers. Just after showing a man falling down dead, there is close-up of Kyle's face behind his sniper scope. The lighting divides the shot in two: the top of the sniper's head is in the dark while the bottom of his face is illuminated. Shortly after, another scene shows Kyle surveying an area with another soldier. One of the shots is quite similar: Kyle's face appears half in the dark half in the light.



American Sniper, 00'30'46.

The soldier with him is also framed in a chiaroscuro. A medium close-up only reveals one side of his face as the other is hidden in the dark. The shot is once again constructed around darkness and light: the right side is dark while the left is slightly illuminated.



American Sniper, 00'29'34.

These chiaroscuro effects can also be found in Greengrass' film. In some instances, the soldiers are moving around in between darkness and light. For example, one of the film's early scenes shows Miller and his men in a presumed WMD site, what looks like a big warehouse. In the process of looking for the WMDs, the soldiers gear up and shut down the warehouse to plunge it into darkness. The following shots are almost entirely dark, only a few lights from the soldiers' lamps can be seen. At some point, these lamps illuminate the soldiers before they disappear again in the darkness.



Green Zone, 00'08'09.

The use of darkness in *Green Zone* can easily be connected to the plot: the soldiers are unable to find what they are looking for and appear lost in the darkness. The presence of WMDs in Iraq is the official reason why the U.S. went to war. Thus, the absence of these WMDs on the site casts doubt on the war itself. Because light symbolizes knowledge, the fact that the soldiers are plunged into darkness is a visual way of showing that they do not have access to the truth about the war.

Once they realise there are no WMDs on the site, the soldiers open the big gate of the warehouse. The long shot shows the gate opening, letting in the bright light from outside, the soldiers silhouetted in the back light. Because of its link with knowledge, the light coming in the warehouse,

suggests that the soldiers have access to truth: there are no WMDs which makes the war unjustified. But the fact that they appear as dark figures against the light is a way of revealing that they are not yet aware of the truth.



Green Zone, 00'08'30.

Then, there is medium close-up of Miller shows his head half concealed in the dark.



Green Zone, 00'08'54.



Green Zone, 00'09'01.

Later on in the film, Miller's face is again represented in an interesting play of light. There is a medium close-up of his face while he is driving a vehicle in the night. The shot is almost entirely black, but his face filmed in three-quarter the side is illuminated, as can be seen in the following shot.



Green Zone, 01'04'37.

The lighting effect on Miller's face are to be connected to his quest of knowledge. The fact that his face is half in the dark is a way of showing that he does not have all the information about the war he is fighting. This idea is confirmed in the last images of Miller the film. Indeed, once he manages to find and reveal the truth about the lies of the U.S. government, his face appears completely illuminated. The play of light on the different soldiers in the film highlights the lies of the U.S. government underlining its negative portrayal. It also presents the soldiers as victims of the government as they appear to be lost in the midst of its lies. But the contrast in terms of lighting can also be connected to the same idea explored in *American Sniper*: the soldier's duality is visually represented by light and darkness. Indeed, this opposition represents the good/bad dichotomy lying at the heart of the soldier's identity, as explained by Tavaglione and Calhoun.

While the chiaroscuro effect is used with the different soldiers, including Miller, throughout *Green Zone*, the lighting effect is even more present towards the end of the film. Indeed, the previous parts explained the influence of the thriller genre on *Green Zone*, but towards the end the film also resembles film noir. Indeed, at that point Miller is tracking down a man in the streets of Baghdad during the night. The shots are thus really dark, recalling black and white filming which is one of the main characteristics of this genre. According to American film critic Roger Ebert, the locations of the film noir can be considered as a defining characteristic. On his website he posted a guide to

the film noir genre in which he writes that “locations that reek of the night, of shadows, of alleys” are typical features of the genre.¹⁸¹ Miller’s manhunt in the streets of Baghdad recalls the gloomy setting of the film noir genre.



Green Zone, 01'12'39.



Green Zone, 01'14'20.

This cinematographic style can be connected to the notion of masculinity, which has been explored previously as it is “a genre much discussed in relationship to masculinity.”¹⁸² However, it is also a genre heavily relying on stark lighting effects highlighting the contrasts between black and white and light and darkness.¹⁸³ The influence of the film noir genre is another way of illustrating the contrast between darkness and brightness in the film.

The chiaroscuro effect is a recurring effect used in both films. In *Green Zone* the contrast is used to

181 Roger Ebert, “A Guide to Film Noir Genre”, *Roger Ebert Website*, January 2015.

<http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/a-guide-to-film-noir-genre>

182 Butters, *op.cit.*

183 Rose Lincoln, “Chiaroscuro: Exploring the dark and the light”, *Harvard Gazette*, April 2016.

<http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2016/04/chiaroscuro/>

present the Iraq War in a negative light, as darkness is associated to the government's lies and untold truths about the war. But *American Sniper* also uses this lighting effect to recall the government's Manichean construct of the Iraq war. But the films do not only suggest geopolitical issues. The chiaroscuro can be understood as the representation of the soldiers's experience. Indeed, because of the paradoxical nature of his work, he is bound move in between good and evil, light and darkness.

3. Religion and Morality

The soldier's dilemma, as well as the war in Iraq are constructed around the good/evil dichotomy. This Manichean vision is also at the core of religion, a theme lengthily approached in *American Sniper*. Contrary to *Green Zone*, Eastwood's film makes quite obvious links between religion and warfare, and the soldier himself appears as a figure strongly marked by religion.

a. A Religious Conflict

Religion occupies an important place in *American Sniper* from the very start of the film. Indeed, while the screen is still black, the spectator can hear the acousmatic sound of an Arabic prayer. The fact that there is no image accompanying the sound gives more importance to the prayer, thus suggesting the importance of religion. The rest of the film supports this idea. First, the main character is immersed in a religious environment from his childhood. This is revealed through the various flashbacks illustrating Kyle's family life as a child in the first minutes of the film. After the hunting scene of Kyle and his father, there is an establishing shot of a church accompanied by the off-screen voice of a priest giving a sermon. The following shots represent the inside of the church in which we can see Kyle as a child with his family sitting on a bench listening to the sermon. In almost every shot, the spectator can distinguish at least one cross. For instance, in the medium close-up framing Kyle and his family, the edge of the bench is represented in the foreground of the shot and is decorated with a cross. A long shot showing the priest talking in the center of the church shows a cross in the background. Then there is a medium shot of the priest who is framed between two different crosses: one in the foreground and one in the background.



American Sniper, 00'04'49.

The cross is an obvious symbol of Christianity. Its presence in most of the shots illustrates the overwhelming presence of religion in Kyle's early life. In addition, in this scene there is a close-up of the Bible in Kyle's hand. These shots, presenting Kyle in a deeply religious environment from childhood, could suggest that he has been brainwashed by the discourse of the religious right. In an article called "The Religious Right: Rights and Rights Discourses in Religious Scripture" Lua Kamal Yuille, a professor of Law, asserts that: "the followers of many religions see themselves as human rights activists, promoting tolerance and freedom around the world."¹⁸⁴ This religious belief is at the heart of George W. Bush's "War on Terror" discourse as he declared that the military intervention was "to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger."¹⁸⁵ The similarity between these two discourses show how political insitutions rely on religious ideology.

The Bible is another component of Christianity, which appears in an interesting shot immediately following the church scene. A high angle shot presents the Bible on a table. Next to the Bible stand a few other objects and in particular a few small soldier figurines, as can be seen in the following shot.

¹⁸⁴Lua K. Yuille, "The Religious Right: Rights and Rights Discourses in Religious Scripture", *Social Science Research Network*, August 2012. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2126061

¹⁸⁵ "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival", *op.cit.*



American Sniper, 00'04'40.

The camera then slightly zooms in till the bible appears at the center of the shot. The presence of the soldier figurines and the slight camera movement placing the bible at the center of the shot, illustrates the fundamental tensions between warfare and religion. Through this metaphorical shot, the director suggests that religion is at the heart of the war in Iraq; and thus soldiers are to be associated with religion. The film also shows how religion has been instrumentalized to promote warfare in the context of the “War on Terror.” Kyle’s deeply religious childhood is a way of illustrating the power of the religious and political discourse on the soldier.

The Bible metaphor is also represented when Kyle is on tour. There is a scene showing a suicide car attack. A man drives a car and intends to make it explode in a group of soldiers before he is shot down by the sniper. Just after the man is shot down, there is a close-up of his hand holding the detonator. The close-up also shows that his hand is holding prayer beads.



American Sniper, 00'29'15.

One of the following shots show Kyle behind his sniper rifle, followed by a close up of his Bible

next to him.



American Sniper, 00'29'38.

These two close ups, appearing a few seconds apart, clearly echo one another and once again present the war as a religious conflict. These two shots suggest that the two sides of the conflict are prompted by religious discourses. Furthermore, the many references to Christianity are to be contrasted with the opening of the film displaying an Arabic prayer as a sharp symbol of the Muslim religion. However, there is an interesting difference between the images shown on screen and the protagonists discourses. Indeed, while the images illustrate the overwhelming presence of religion within the conflict, the protagonists seem to have a rather ambiguous relationship with religion. As suggested by the different shots, Kyle seems to be a deeply religious character. But one of Kyle's fellow soldiers tells him that he never saw him open his Bible. Moreover, in the scene showing him in the church as a child, he also seems distracted and doesn't really pay attention to the sermon. In addition, the character doesn't seem to know much about Islam either, as he declares "I don't know what the Coran looks like." These different elements reveal Kyle's ambiguous relation with religion: while he is strongly marked by religion he does not seem to truly understand it. It can be a way of echoing and criticizing the government's discourse. Indeed, the rhetorical framing of the war only foreground its positive aspects by heavily relying on religious and moral concerns.

The first six minutes put emphasis on religion by presenting both: the Christian and the Muslim faiths. The scenes of Kyle's religious childhood are mixed with the scene of his first kill in Iraq: a child and a woman. Making such a clear connection between his childhood and the killing is a way of expressing the strong ties between religion and warfare. In a way, the beginning of the film tends to present the Iraq war as a religious conflict opposing Christianity and Islam. Religion seems to frame the conflict, as well as the soldiers who have strong ties with the Christian faith. Kyle's

childhood is clearly marked by a Christian education, but he is not the only soldier attached to religion. Mark, a secondary character, also has an interesting link with religion. In the film, he is presented as the most religious soldier who also has a good understanding of religion because of his personal history. Indeed, in one scene of the film, he explains to Kyle that he went to seminary school and almost became a priest but decided to join the military instead. The film also shows his growing rejection of the Iraq war which is clearly expressed in a letter read out after his death. The letter his read by his wife during his funeral and resembles a sermon denouncing America's "wrongful crusade."¹⁸⁶ It seems that, once more, religion is presented as the driving force of the conflict. Furthermore, Mark's rejection of the war is another way of denouncing the political use of religious discourse. Indeed, by turning against this supposed religious war, and calling the war a "wrongful crusade", the soldier openly criticizes Bush's discourse. The character of Mark shows that *American Sniper* does not offer a simplistic framing of the war. The strong presence of religion in the film does not present the war as a religious conflict but illustrates the impact of the "War on Terror" rhetorical discourse on the American population and the soldiers. Mark shows how, paradoxically, modern soldiers are permeated by polical and religious beliefs and are turned into ancient fighting figures: crusaders.

b. Angels of Death

The connection of the soldier figure with religion is also visible through Kyle's similarities with a religious figure. As explained in the first part, in the military, one of the main objectives of the snipers is "to protect the Marines at all costs." This duty is similar to the beliefs surrounding the guardian angel figure. Indeed, according to religious beliefs a guardian angel is an angel assigned to protect and guide a particular person, group, kingdom, or country.¹⁸⁷ Reverend Lawrence Lovasik explains that it is a belief that can be "traced throughout all antiquity" and "was extensively developed in Christianity in the 5th century."¹⁸⁸

Other elements seem to support this comparison. Kyle is always filmed protecting his fellow soldiers from above. He often appears on rooftops or on the high floors of houses. In addition, there is a scene highlighting his superior position. Mark is walking in the street with a group of soldiers when Kyle shoots a target threatening them. He then tells a soldier: "That was your overwatch Einstein. You can thank him later." When saying this, Mark is filmed looking up, suggesting the presence of the soldier somewhere above them.

186 "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival", *op.cit.*

187Linwood Fredericksen, "Angel and Demon", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, visited 29.07.2016.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/angel-religion>

188Lawrence Lovasik, "Guardian Angel", *Omic International Research Group*, visited 29.07.2016.
http://research.omicsgroup.org/index.php/Guardian_angel



American Sniper, 00'28'40.

The following shot is a medium close up of Kyle. The fact that the sniper's position is not revealed by a long shot after this shot gives him a mystical quality. Being a protector, at the same time up above and invisible, Kyle looks similar to the figure of the guardian angel mentioned in religious texts.

Nevertheless, the film highlights the soldier's dilemma and the necessity for the sniper to kill. In that sense, he can be compared to another more specific angel mentioned in Christian texts: the archangel Michael. "In Roman Catholicism, the archangel Michael is viewed as the good Angel of death" and is opposed to another archangel: "Samael, the controversial Angel of Death."¹⁸⁹ These two religious figures recall Kyle and his opposite double Mustafa: their mission is to kill people, hence the comparison with the figure of an Angel of death. The similarities between these figures highlights the ambiguity of the soldier who kills to protect people. The relation between Mustafa and Kyle was analysed in the second part of this thesis, which described Mustafa as a mirror of Kyle's evil side. The two characters are similar: they both are snipers killing their enemies but belonging to opposite factions. One particular shot suggests the religious aura of the Iraqi sniper. He is filmed in a low angle shot presenting him as a powerful figure. There is strongly backlit, endowing him with a mystic quality and an angel appearance, as it resembles a halo.

¹⁸⁹Fredericksen, *op.cit.*



American Sniper, 00'47'21.

This ring of light surrounding a person has been used in the iconography of many religions to indicate holy or sacred figures.¹⁹⁰ The connection of the snipers with the sacred angel figure is also a way of transcending the soldier figure. Through this comparison, the soldier is presented as a powerful and sacred figure.

The relation of the soldier with death is also maintained and emphasized through a recurring motif, which develops as the film unfolds: a painted white skull. This painting is represented many times on military vehicles as well as the uniforms of the soldiers of Kyle's team and on Kyle himself.



American Sniper, 01'17'11.

A few vehicles are represented driving in the Iraqi streets when they are attacked by their enemies. The soldiers start shooting from their vehicles. One soldier uses a sub-machine gun placed on top of one of them. On the ride side of the armour plate protecting the soldier is painted a skull standing out because of the colours. Indeed, the vehicle is sand coloured and almost appears white on screen

¹⁹⁰“Halo”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, visited 19.07.2016. <https://www.britannica.com/art/halo-art>

while the outline of the painting is black. The emphasis on the skull is maintained in the next shot in which the vehicle drives towards the camera and shows the skull in a medium shot. A few seconds later there is a close up of the skull filmed with a handheld camera, which crosses the screen in a pan.



American Sniper, 01'21'11.



American Sniper, 01'21'17.

These camera movements make the motif fill the screen on multiple instances, stressing its importance. Through these shots, the soldiers are portrayed in a more threatening way. The focus made on the skull symbol make the soldier appear as an epitome of death.

The skull is an obvious symbol of death but in that case, because of its particular shape, it also makes a reference to a controversial character drawn from popular culture: Franck Castle, the Punisher. The Punisher is a character created in 1974 by Gerry Conway, Ross Andru and John Romita. His main distinguishing feature is a white skull drawn on the chest. This feature has become a true symbol representing the character. Another feature of the character makes a

comparison with Kyle possible: the story of Castle says that he is a war veteran who fought four years in Vietnam. Interestingly, The Punisher is “especially well-known for being a true anti-hero who does not hesitate to kill, mutilate, wound, and torture criminals to maintain peace and justice.” And “contrary to traditional heroes, Franck Castle kills and makes the criminal suffer (...) he is the symbol of revenge but also of summary and personal justice.”¹⁹¹ The link with the Punisher is a way of explaining the war in Iraq which is perceived today by many as a “summary and personal justice.” It also frames the soldier as a dual character who acts for justice by using force, thus becoming a true angel of death.

While *Green Zone* doesn't explore the egopolitical issues as explicitly as *American Sniper*, both films draw a similar portrayal of the soldier's complex position. The soldier, torn between political and moral claims, is presented as an ambiguous figure who suffers from the paradoxical nature of his duty. He appears to be a victim of political discourses which are permeated by religious ideas. The theme of religion, very much present in *American Sniper*, also transcends the soldier into a sacred figure. He appears at the same time as a victim and as a powerful figure, which is another way of underlining his duality.

¹⁹¹“Punisher”, *MDCU Comics*, visited 01.08.2016. <http://www.mdcu-comics.fr/encyclo/personnage/punisher-le/167/>

Conclusion

The overriding purpose of this study was to look into the figure of the soldier and its representation in *Green Zone* and *American Sniper* in order to draw social, political, and egopolitical conclusions. This research aimed at shedding light on the true identity of the soldier, and see how its on-screen representation is revealing of the U.S. society's relation to warfare. It also intended to demonstrate in what way the figure has a political and ideological function, which seems to point to a rejection of the armed intervention in Iraq and of the Bush administration.

Through their representation of the soldier, *Green Zone* and *American Sniper* offer a view on warfare which constrasts with the institutional approach of the subject. Indeed, while the government and the military favours a pragmatic approach to conflicts, these two films rely on the figure of the soldier to give a more human and complex outlook on warfare. Morality is thrown back in the heart of the figure and of the films. They manage to rebuild the soldier's personal identity, which has been dismantled by institutional discourses. Thus, the soldier has an ideological function aiming at recalling the importance of the notion of morality. In these films, and more particularly in *American Sniper*, the soldier is also used to condemn warfare. The characters evolve in the midst of violence, destruction and death, which are presented as the direct effects of conflicts. Kyle reveals the huge negative impact of war on the individual. In these two films, the character's suffering is used as another way to condemn warfare, which is presented as a destructive force. Partly through their representation of the soldiers, the films reject warfare, and thus American militarism.

While the films show the dark aspect of warfare in general, they also target more specifically the Iraq War. *Green Zone* is an open critique of the American intervention in Iraq, and the soldier explicitly speaks out against this war, that is presented as a unjust and immoral conflict. *American Sniper* also condemns the American intervention and uses the soldier to shed light on the rhetorical discourse established by the Bush administration, as well as the Manichean construction of the conflict. Eastwood opposes this view, in particular through the complexity of its main protagonist, and presents the war in "shades of gray."¹⁹² To condemn warfare and the Iraq War, the films present the soldier as a victim of the government's manipulative discourse. *American Sniper* does so by highlighting the indoctrinating processes of the military institution and the power of rhetorical discourse. The film shows how Kyle adopts the discourse but also stages the character's tragic evolution and points out all the devastating effect of war on his person. Kyle's personal history is a

¹⁹²Scott Foudas, "Clint Eastwood's Walking Wounded: From Dirty Harry to American Sniper", Variety, January 2015. <https://variety.com/2015/film/columns/clint-eastwoods-walking-wounded-from-dirty-harry-to-american-sniper-1201392603/>

way of countering the “War on Terror” rhetorical practise. In *Green Zone*, the soldier clearly speaks up against the government. The film redirects the conflict by opposing Miller to the institutions. Throughout the film, he evolves in a battlefield which is presented as a mysterious place ruled by lies and manipulations.

Paradoxically, while the soldier is presented as a victim of warfare and of the decisions made by his superiors, he still comes through as a powerful heroic figure. The heroism of the soldier is constructed on his skills and his efficiency on the battlefield, but also by a masculinist ideology. Indeed, the films reveal the common soldier as being a strong white male. Through this portrayal, they also hint at the underlying sexism and racism permeating the military as well as society. Indeed, the films are constructed around a deep gendered division and the soldier’s characterization relies on a set of masculine codes, such as violence, leadership and emotional reticence. The representation of the soldier connects the notions of masculinity and power and echoes the patriarchal structure of society. The hypermasculinist discourse also echoes the politics during the Bush presidency as “militarism, masculinity, and national security have become conflated in post-9/11 public discourse and [...] this fusion has helped legitimate the Bush administration’s foreign policy.”¹⁹³ Yet the films also connects the figure to a certain form of fragility, revealing how the Iraq conflict has affected the soldier’s connection to heroism. The soldier’s vulnerability also reveals the evolution in terms of politics in the American society, as the representation of the figure contrasts with Bush’s discourse.

Exploring the heroic characterization of the soldier also underlines the egopolitical matters showcased in the films, and particularly in *American Sniper*. The film highlights the damaging ethical dilemma at the heart of the soldier’s identity. Indeed, it points out the paradoxical nature of the soldier’s duty, who has to kill and act against his moral beliefs for supposed ethical reasons. The soldier is thus presented as a dual and ambiguous figure, connected to the two notions of good and evil. However, the films do not cast a dark light on the figure. On the contrary, the ethical dilemma adds to its suffering and is used to portray the soldier as a heroic-victim. His heroism is also enhanced by his connection to various important figures from the cultural and religious environment of the Western world, like the cowboy and the angel for instance. Besides, the various links made with religion support the positive portrayal of the soldier and even transcends him into a sacred figure. Moreover, the films also insist on his self-sacrificial nature. *American Sniper* reveals the impact of war on the individual and highlights the sacrifices of the soldiers for their nation. The film explores his vulnerability but transcends him into a positive untouchable figure shielded from criticism.

¹⁹³Takacs, *op.cit.* 489

American Sniper and *Green Zone*, while having different approaches, both honour the soldier by portraying him in a positive light. By relying on this sacred figure, the films' ideology appears all the more convincing. But the cinematographic medium is also used, in the same way as war memorials, to remind, honour and commemorate American soldiers.

This thesis demonstrates how two Iraq War films draw a similar portrayal of the soldier who, contrary to warfare and the Iraq war, appears in a very positive light. Yet, warfare constantly evolves, or in David Fisher's words "war is a protean monster that regularly changes its nature."¹⁹⁴ With the rise of terrorism, the world is confronting a new type of asymmetrical conflict, which could impact the soldier and its on screen representation, and change society's relation to warfare. The recent and coming representations of the figure of the soldier, could be revealing of U.S. position with regards to this new threat.

¹⁹⁴David Fisher. *Morality and War, Can War be Just in the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 6

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