

Between *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray*: The War on Terror and the Change in Gender Dynamics of American War Film

Ali Yasar Tuzcu

ABSTRACT: War films play a substantial role in American society by cultivating an understanding of military politics. I argue that the use of different narrative strategies encouraging spectator identification within the US American war films establishes the political backbone of the genre. This paper concentrates on the transformation of the genre's conventional gender representation in connection with American military politics. After providing a brief history of female integration into the US military, it offers a comparative analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Camp X-Ray* (2014).

KEYWORDS: 2nd Wave Feminism; Identity Politics; Militarism; Neoliberalism; Politics; Spectatorship; War Film

Introduction

Since 9/11, the gender policies of US military institutions have significantly changed. President George W. Bush signed the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act on December 12, 2001 ("President Signs Afghan Women and Children Relief Act"). During the signing ceremony, President Bush explicitly addressed the emancipation of Afghan women as one of the motivations behind waging war on the Taliban (Ibid.), increasing public support for the military intervention, as Jennifer L. Fluri has claimed (143). Furthermore, Female Engagement Teams (FET) were established by the US Marine Corps "to develop trust-based and enduring relationships with the Afghan women [...] encounter[ed] on patrols" (McCullough). Since 2016, all combat positions of the US military have been available for women (Howell). Among others, former president Barack Obama has been a strong proponent of this idea (Tilghman). These developments suggest a new understanding of gender with regards to US military policy. As Caroline Kennedy-Pipe asserts, the idea of rescuing Afghan women intensified the relevance of female presence in the US military (31). In the context of the War on Terror, increasing the number of women in the US military helped to create a more progressive image of the institution (Douglas Vavrus 111). The image of female soldiers rescuing Afghan women therefore implicitly helped to justify the invasion of Afghanistan.

During Barack Obama's presidency, visual media representations of women in military institutions also began to change. Films like *Home of the Brave* (2006), *The Kingdom* (2007), *Return* (2011), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Camp X-Ray* (2014), *Fort Bliss* (2014), and *Megan Leavey* (2017); TV series such as *Homeland* (2011-); and documentaries like *Lioness* (2008) and *The Invisible War* (2012) contributed to a discourse to examine, encourage, and criticize

female presence in military structures. The close relationship between the American entertainment industry and the United States Department of Defense, to be discussed later in the context of “militainment” (Stahl 6), and all of these gradual developments indicate the increasing presence and relevance of women in the US military. I propose that this development plays a significant part in the neoliberalization of US military institutions. Furthermore, it contributes to the foreign policy established during the War on Terror, which post-9/11 war films portraying female protagonists endorsed.

From a historical perspective, female participation in the US military gradually increased with the end of conscription in the 1970s. In her article titled “Fighting for ‘Freedom’: The End of Conscription in the United States and the Neoliberal Project of Citizenship,” Deborah E. Cowen claims that “the very economists who are commemorated as the pioneers of American neoliberalism [...] were members of key government commissions that recommended the termination of conscription” (169). Concerning conscription, Cowen detects a paradoxical feature of neoliberal thought. Due to its strong emphasis on individual choice, neoliberal criticism of conscription is logical. However, a system of national defense is also needed for the regulation of “the global ‘free’ trade upon which neoliberal capitalism relies” (Cowen 171). Trying to solve this paradox, Milton Friedman, one of the most prominent theorists of American neoliberal thought, played a key role in convincing President Richard Nixon to establish the All-Volunteer Force through the Gates Commission in the 1970s (Cowen 173).

As the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) took the place of conscription, “the military became an employer of last resort for the middle classes, although it continued to be a great source of upward mobility for working class Americans” (Cowen 176). Transforming military service from a national duty to a job through the AVF not only allowed American neoliberalism to manage to sustain national defense, but also extended its reach by making military institutions subscribe to free market logic. Although the transition from conscription to the AVF does not seem to collide with the freedom of choice, Cowen demonstrates how voluntary enlistment was structured in relation to class, gender, and ethnicity:

With the AVF, the numbers of women, people of color, and working class people in the military skyrocketed [...] and the economic recession of the 1970s [...] made more people more desperate for any source of stable employment, particularly people of color and youth. The neoliberalization of the economy was thus promising to dovetail quite nicely with the AVF. (176)

The demographic make-up of the target group recruited for military service changed with the AVF, resulting in a diverse military structure in regard to class, gender, and ethnicity. Even though it is possible to claim that this change resulted in a more positive image of the military as an institution comprised of members of differing social, gender, and ethnic groups, it must also be taken into consideration that several disadvantaged groups in American society were all but forced to enlist and risk their lives out of financial necessity.

Parallel to this shift from conscription to the AVF in the military, Nancy Fraser identifies another transition in second wave feminism from economic redistribution to social recognition. She claims that the former, taking place “in the context of state-organized capitalism” (212), “espoused a transformative political project, premised on an expanded understanding of injustice and a systemic critique of capitalist society [and] aimed [...] against economic exploitation, status hierarchy, and political subjection” (217). Fraser notes further that the transition from redistribution to recognition overlapped with the historical shift from state-organized capitalism to neoliberalism (218) and suggests a symbiotic relationship between the second step and rising neoliberalism (220). She asserts that “the tendency [in the second step] was to subordinate social-economic struggles to struggles for recognition, while in the academy, feminist cultural theory began to eclipse feminist social theory” (219). According to Fraser, feminism’s shift in focus from redistribution of capital to recognition made it compatible with neoliberal capitalism because it built “a new regime of accumulation on the cornerstone of women’s waged labor and [sought] to disembed markets from democratic political regulation to operate all the more freely on a global scale” (223). This historical transition in second wave feminism suggests a strong parallel with the neoliberal transformation of the military.

With the introduction of the AVF, the male-dominated structure of the military gradually changed, initiating a recognition process of women. Simultaneously, the shifting focus in second wave feminism, from the inequalities and injustice of the capitalist system to the struggle for recognition within the very system, complemented the gendered transition within the military. In this light, the transition from conscription to the AVF can be interpreted either as the creation of a more diverse American military or a neoliberal employment option for people with disadvantaged positions in society. Regarding these two potential interpretations, the US Department of Defense (DoD), rather unsurprisingly, pushed the former as the dominant narrative and strongly collaborated with the media and different entertainment industries. Consequently, the joining of military interests with the entertainment industry’s mode of production led to the emergence of what has come to be known as “militainment” (Stahl 6).

Spectacles of War: “Militainment” and Identification

In his book *Militainment, Inc.*, Roger Stahl defines “militainment” as “state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption” (6) and traces its historical development. Stahl attributes great significance to the end of conscription as the separation of the citizen from the soldier and claims that conscription “functioned to safeguard future wars from mass public protest” (13). Using the example of the 1991 US military intervention in the Persian Gulf, also known as Operation Desert Storm, Stahl demonstrates how this separation engendered the detachment of society from American military warfare (Ibid.). With the end of conscription, “militainment,” the collaboration between American media

and the DoD, acquired a stronger position because it began to be used as a tool to influence public perception of American military politics. Stahl asserts further that “[t]he presentation of war took the form of mass spectacle—from sports to cinema—while at the same time reframing the citizenry as an audience of war consumers” (14). This shift gained more momentum during the 2003 invasion of Iraq with the integration of reality shows, video games, and other forms of entertainment (Ibid.).

Filmmakers can work with the Pentagon for military equipment support under the condition that the latter edits the film script in accordance with the standards of the DoD (Capozzi 113). Through this collaboration, the DoD functions as a controlling mechanism of American war films, though this does not directly suggest censorship, as this is an optional *service* offered to filmmakers. On the other hand, filmmakers are implicitly compelled to ask for the Pentagon’s support since the equipment requirements of the genre are costly. This paradox obstructs the possibility of making war films explicitly critical of American military policies. Instead, this relationship seems to oblige filmmakers to comply with the requirements of the DoD. Due to this close relationship, I propose that the interdependency between the Pentagon and American war cinema, developed within the framework of “militainment,” actually renders it possible to track the transformation of military policies in American war film. In this regard, the emergence of female protagonists in American war films, starting in the 1990s, coincides with the transformation of the American military profile.

Early examples from the 1990s that portray female characters in the US Army, such as *Courage Under Fire* (1996) by Edward Zwick and *G.I. Jane* (1997) by Ridley Scott are pioneering in terms of their gender representation; however, as Anna Froula argues, they portray their female characters as “gendered anomalies” (xiv). Froula notes further that this particular depiction of female characters started to change with the War on Terror (Ibid.). Unlike *Courage Under Fire* (1996) and *G.I. Jane* (1997), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Camp X-Ray* (2014) neither approach their female characters as an anomaly nor test their capacity by masculinizing them in order to prove their success within military structures. Instead, the female characters in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* question, challenge, and transform the military structures in which they function with their determination, ambition, engagement, and competence, which I define as the traits of neoliberal *womanhood* in conjunction with Christina Scharff’s article titled “Gender and Neoliberalism: Young Women as Ideal Neoliberal Subjects” (218) and Teresa de Lauretis’ theory of *woman* and *women*.

In her book *Alice Doesn’t*, feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis makes a distinction between the categories of *woman* and *women*. By the former, she means “a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures (critical and scientific, literary or juridical discourses)” (5). The latter, according to de Lauretis, refers to “the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain” (Ibid.). Her theoretical approach not only acknowledges the fact that each woman has her own way of experiencing

her gender identity, but also underlines that there is a representational concept of what it means to be a woman which is dictated and transformed throughout history. De Lauretis' conceptualization of *woman* and *women* offers a useful way to approach the central characters of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* at the intersection between feminism and neoliberalism. Despite the fact that the main characters of both films are very different from one another as *women*, they have one point in common; they can both be read as examples of neoliberal *womanhood*, in reference to de Lauretis' concept, manifesting itself in different ways. In this paper, I develop a theory of identification to expound the political mechanism of war films through close readings of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray*, illustrating the different strategies of neoliberal *womanhood*.

Women in the War on Terror: Neoliberal *Womanhood* in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray*

In *War on the Silver Screen*, Glen Jeansonne and David Luhrssen contend that “[o]ur feelings about wars are often generated less by what we read or hear in lectures than by visual images, complemented by powerful dialogue, that make them unforgettable” (xi). This statement illustrates the power of spectacle in war films but does not mention the reason behind it. I propose that what engenders the power of spectacle is precisely the spectator's emotional engagement with characters triggered by the visual and auditory elements within film's narrative. Film narrative, as Murray Smith reminds us, is only accessible to the spectator through characters (18).

Extending Smith's statement, I argue that it is through the mediation of the characters that film narrative conveys its set of values to the spectator. Identifying with characters on screen, spectators follow and make sense of the narrative from characters' point of view. I want to examine the position allocated to the spectator in the narrative structure of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* in order to analyze their identification strategies and political agendas. Through the use of identification as a theoretical framework, I illustrate how the *women* in these films manifest differing dynamics of neoliberal *womanhood*. Even though each character's struggle to gain recognition in the patriarchal structure of different military institutions is a connecting pattern, different identification strategies employed in each film suggest the diversity of neoliberal *womanhood*.

Zero Dark Thirty, directed by Kathryn Bigelow, dramatizes the search for and capture of Osama bin Laden. In contrast to *Camp X-Ray*, *Zero Dark Thirty* acquires a specific position in its dramatization of an actual operation organized by the CIA. The central character of the film is Maya, a fictional CIA intelligence analyst based on the real-life officer who managed to locate Osama bin Laden and organized the capturing operation. The film starts with the interrogation of Ammar al-Baluchi, who is suspected to have connections with the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. During this interrogation, Maya joins Dan, another officer,

to observe what is happening. In this first interrogation scene, which introduces Dan and Maya, she is positioned alongside the spectator, in the role of an observer. Both witness this type of interrogation for the first time. The torture used seems to intrigue her, encouraging the spectator to feel the same.

The film portrays Maya as a self-confident, determined, intelligent, and ambitious character. Her assignment to the US Embassy in Pakistan introduces her to a new sphere of the CIA where she needs to learn how to gain recognition in a male-dominated environment. As the film narrative unfolds, Maya as a determined intelligence analyst becomes increasingly obsessed with the operation when she starts to believe that she is destined to find Osama bin Laden. I consider *Zero Dark Thirty's* portrayal of this process to be an example of mono-identification. I define mono-identification as a means through which the film narrative encourages the spectator to identify with one character and experience the film from his/her perspective. Maya's initial distance during the first interrogation and her struggle to gain recognition encourage the spectator to identify with her. Her gradual transformation into an analyst lacking moral boundaries in acquiring the necessary information to locate bin Laden becomes a part of this mono-identification process and encourages the spectator to acknowledge her transformation.

Zero Dark Thirty renders mono-identification possible because it does not provide the spectator with any emotional access to the detainees. The detainees are mainly shown during interrogations and perceived as the tools used to reach the climactic moment of the film, the capturing of Osama bin Laden. Contrary to the strategy employed in *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Camp X-Ray*, directed by Peter Sattler, constructs its narrative based on the tension between a detainee and a female military guard with the use of duo-identification. I propose the notion of duo-identification to denote to an identification model which encourages the spectator to shift between sympathies felt for two characters. *Camp X-Ray* starts with the kidnapping of Ali Amir from his house in Bremen, Germany. After a flashforward of eight years, Amy Cole, who is assigned to be a guard at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, is introduced. Much the same way as *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Camp X-Ray* also starts with the introduction of a woman into a military unit. Both women try to gain recognition within the male-dominated atmosphere of a military structure. Unlike Maya, however, Amy does not have a strict stance on her position in the War on Terror. This is the way the film renders duo-identification between Ali and Amy possible.

As the guard at Ali's unit, Amy gradually starts bonding with him thanks to his efforts. In the beginning, the spectator is encouraged to identify with Amy because of her struggle to gain recognition in the US Army. As the story unfolds, Ali starts to talk about his background, enabling the spectator to sympathize with him. From this point on, the narrative initiates the use of duo-identification which transforms the film into a symbolic microcosm of the War on Terror. The narrative clarifies neither Amy's exact motivation for joining the US Army nor whether Ali is a terrorist. This ambiguity makes it impossible to establish a sharp distinction

between “good” and “evil”. I propose that it is precisely this ambiguity that constitutes an important pattern of duo-identification. Unlike *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Camp X-Ray* portrays the Other (non-American) as a subject. In Ali and Amy’s struggle to understand one another, the use of duo-identification not only creates tension between the characters but also resolves it. The main difference between these two films lies in their attitude towards the War on Terror, illustrated through their respective representation of detainees. In the following section, I will illustrate this difference further with the use of Agamben’s concept of bare life.

The Bare Life of Detainees: The War on Terror as a State of Emergency in *Camp X-Ray*

In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, philosopher Giorgio Agamben defines two types of life: bare and political lives (1). While political life is “a qualified life, a particular way of life,” bare life is “the simple fact of living” (Ibid.). Agamben’s division is useful to understand the discourse surrounding the treatment of detainees as shaped by the War on Terror. Agamben defines bare life as the life which “may be killed but not sacrificed” (83). From an Agambenian perspective, Andrés Perezalonso defines the War on Terror as a state of exception and claims further that it enables the United States, as a sovereign state, to render detainees’ lives as bare lives. In both films, this claim can be observed due to the portrayal of human rights violations that the detainees suffer. However, *Zero Dark Thirty* depicts these violations as a necessary part of the War on Terror in order to acquire the necessary information from the detainees, while *Camp X-Ray* takes a more skeptical stance on them.

In one of the early scenes of *Camp X-Ray*, Corporal Ransdell gives a briefing to the soldiers about the camp:

And make no mistake about it. This is a war zone. Now, they ain't [sic] using roadside bombs, and we're not using F-16s. This is still a war zone. Now, some of you might think you're here to prevent them from leaving. You're not. The walls do that for us. You are here to prevent them from dying. (00:05:06-00:05:37)

Ransdell’s briefing illustrates two significant aspects of the War on Terror: the expansion of the war zone to the detention camps and the rendering of detainee life as bare life. Writing about Nazi concentration camps, Agamben claims that the “[t]he camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule” (168-69). Considered as a war zone by Ransdell, *Camp X-Ray* as a detention facility at the Guantanamo Bay becomes a space where the juridical order is suspended to perceive detainees solely in the context of being alive or dead: their bare lives. In response to a soldier, Ransdell emphasizes that the inmates of the camp should not be called prisoners but detainees. Explaining the reason for this warning to one of her colleagues, Amy says that “[p]risoners are subject to the Geneva convention [and d]etainees are not” (*Camp X-Ray* 00:06:00-00:06:03). This statement illustrates the way detainees are excluded from the juridical order.

When Amy walks around Ali's unit with a book cart to ask the detainees whether they would like to read anything, Ali asks her for the seventh book of the *Harry Potter* series after giving back a copy of the collected works of Emily Dickinson. After a brief discussion, Amy tells him that the book is not on the cart. Afterwards, Ali asks for "Azkaban," and Amy asks him whether that is one of his "Arab books" (00:21:15). When Ali explains to her that he means the third book of the *Harry Potter* series, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, this scene acquires a comedic undertone due to the global popularity of the *Harry Potter* franchise. The miscommunication between the two is intended to trigger sympathy for Ali and suggest his interest in literature. As he explains more about himself, this sympathy develops further.

In another critical scene, Ali offers Amy one of the sudokus he prepared with ornamental drawings around it. She rejects it due to the regulations and in response, Ali sarcastically tells her that this was his secret plan to escape from the camp with the support of his "Al-Qaeda [sic] friends in New York" (00:54:06-00:54:08) and throws it in the toilet. Getting increasingly frustrated with the situation, he says: "You locked up us [sic] here for years. For what? To show the world that you are good guy and we are bad guy. [...] You and America are the bad guy" (00:54:38-00:54:54). This tension between Amy and Ali is significant concerning Amy's perception of her own role and tasks as a soldier. As she gets to know Ali and comprehends the structure of the camp, she starts questioning her commitment to her position. Amy's gradual acknowledgment of Ali as a person makes it difficult for her to function further within the borders of her role.

After this scene, the film shows Muslim detainees praying and American soldiers carrying out their daily tasks at the camp with the use of cross-cutting. This scene is significant as it sharpens once more the political stance of the film towards the War on Terror. With this sequence, *Camp X-Ray* not only depicts the imprisonment of the detainees but also that of the soldiers. With the suspension of the juridical order and the transformation of the camp into a war zone, the soldiers are also expected to obey the regulations without questioning them. In one of the early sequences of the film, Ali reminds Amy that they are not going anywhere. This sense of confinement becomes more solidified for Amy when Corporal Ransdell notices the friendship developing between Ali and her. As the embodiment of the state of exception, Corporal Ransdell uses his position for Amy's assignment to night shifts as a punishment. Amy's realization of her own confinement through the night shifts triggers her further detachment from her role at the camp.

Through Amy's recognition of Ali by his name rather than as detainee 471, *Camp X-Ray* illustrates Amy's change regarding her perception of the US Army and the War on Terror. Ali's fictional voice enables the film to disclose the exceptional power structure of the camp and the rendering of detainee life as bare life. Amy's fictional voice, on the other hand, reveals how military officers are not allowed to question the inner dynamics of the camp, which is the embodiment of the state of exception created by the sovereign power of the United States. To sum up, *Camp X-Ray* starts with the portrayal of the systemic and

persistent violence used on the detainees at the camp and the moral detachment of these practices justified through the state of exception. With the introduction of Ali's voice, however, the film manages to question the lack of moral responsibility of these practices. While *Camp X-Ray* gives a fictional voice to one of the detainees and uses his perspective as an alternative interpretation of the War on Terror, *Zero Dark Thirty* avoids this and renders detainees voiceless using cinematic realism as a significant narrative tool to justify this choice.

The (Ir)responsibility of Showing: *Zero Dark Thirty* and “Enhanced Interrogation Techniques”

Zero Dark Thirty starts with these words on a black screen: “The following motion picture is based on first hand accounts of actual events” (00:00:38-00:00:42). This claim plays a significant role when analyzing the film, particularly if we consider that it includes reenactment sequences of terrorist attacks, portrayals of “enhanced interrogation techniques” used on detainees, and references to black sites of the CIA such as one in Gdansk, Poland. In an interview, Kathryn Bigelow, the director of *Zero Dark Thirty*, makes a significant statement about the film concerning its purpose:

It was a very riveting, galvanizing story that gave us a *real* glimpse into the intelligence hunt on the ground through the eyes of the characters [...] I think it was very important to us, and certainly from the script, to really give the audience a sort of “you are there” feel to this piece. [...] But again, the desire was to make it feel like you are there. I don't mean a lot of subjective camera, but nonetheless a kind of sense that it feels *real* and that it's unfolding around you in *real* time. (Roberts; emphasis added)

Bigelow repeatedly uses the word *real* when describing the film. The urge to achieve the effect of realness is one of the most striking aspects and claims the film makes. Moreover, the collaboration between the screenwriter, Mark Boal, and Leon Panetta, director of the CIA under President Obama, has already triggered a considerable amount of discussion (Henderson, and Leopold; Shamsian). In light of these details, examination of the political significance of cinematic realness is crucial to an analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty*.

In her book on feminist film theorists, Shohini Chaudhuri outlines a fundamental aspect of filmic realness: “A realist film leads its audiences to believe that its meanings are transparent, requiring no work of interpretation, but all the while the audience is involved in constructing its meanings through the codes they have learned to internalize” (23). It is precisely this aspect that enables Bigelow to transform *Zero Dark Thirty* into a narrative which claims to show the War on Terror as it is instead of representing it in a specific way. Also, when Bigelow asserts that “depiction is not endorsement” (Bigelow) against the accusation of *Zero Dark Thirty* advocating the use of torture (Bromwich; Mayer; Wolf), she also implies a division between presenting and representing torture. Considering that the presentation of torture on screen is indispensably a form of representation due to its specific

articulation within the film narrative, Bigelow's claim functions as her justification to avoid the ethical responsibility of portraying torture. Even though Bigelow claims to depict torture as it happened, this does not mean that she, as the filmmaker, is exempt from the moral responsibility of showing torture. In this regard, it is important to examine the representational choices made for the portrayal of torture in *Zero Dark Thirty*.

The discussion of *Zero Dark Thirty* endorsing or *solely* portraying torture should be approached in connection with its representation of the CIA officers and detainees. In this context, Ignatij Vishnevetsky's article offers an insightful interpretation of the film. Vishnevetsky claims that "[t]orture, surveillance, and enemy action are all treated as data, which is then used to calculate probabilities [in *Zero Dark Thirty*]" (Vishnevetsky). Vishnevetsky's perspective on torture in *Zero Dark Thirty* is helpful to understand the problematic effects that acts of *showing* generate within the film. In spite of showing the graphic details of torture, which could potentially be transformed into a critique of it, *Zero Dark Thirty* prefers to position these practices as a necessity for the data gathering process of the War on Terror. In this constellation, the CIA officers gather and analyze the data received from detainees, who are deemed to be the data *containers* to proceed further with the operation to locate Osama bin Laden.

In this technocratic warfare, "monitors and live video feeds become interchangeable with their real-world subjects" (Vishnevetsky). This technocratic universe of the film also explains Maya's swift acknowledgement of torture. Initially, Maya witnesses "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as waterboarding and sleep deprivation practiced on Ammar, giving her a disorienting feeling. Afterwards, she starts watching the video records of other interrogations using these techniques to acquire further information about Osama bin Laden's location. The video records make it possible for Maya to reorient herself to see these practices as a part of the procedure. The line between witnessing torture and watching the video records becomes blurred and the digital image of detainees on screen enables Maya to neglect the moral aspect of these practices.

Zero Dark Thirty's problematic attitude towards the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" lies in Maya's transformation. Returning to Agamben's theory of bare life, *Zero Dark Thirty* also shows how detainees are rendered as bare life. However, the technocratic universe created in the film justifies this process as a necessary part of the procedure. As data *containers*, detainees must be interrogated to acquire the necessary information. Therefore, detainees are never shown talking unless they share information. In contrast to *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Camp X-Ray* offers emotional access to Ali through his communication with Amy as the backbone of the film. In order to illustrate the political differences between these two films, I will compare two sequences from *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* portraying the connection the female characters develop with their co-workers and detainees.

In *Camp X-Ray*, Corporal Ransdell orders Amy to help him in the showers, after noticing a friendship developing between Ali and her. In spite of her hesitation, Amy is put in a position where she has to watch Ali taking a shower. Using this as a punishment, Corporal Ransdell intends to humiliate Ali and forces him to get completely naked. He also forces Amy to stare directly at Ali, when he sees that she tries to turn her eyes away. After noticing Amy's further hesitation, he directs a question at her: "Are you a soldier, or are you a female soldier? [...] I don't have these kind of problems with soldiers" (*Camp X-Ray* 01:09:58-01:10:04). This statement is emblematic of how Amy is also discriminated against and victimized.

In *Zero Dark Thirty*, Dan exposes Ammar's genitals to Maya during the interrogation and asks Ammar: "You don't mind if my female colleague there checks out your junk, do you?" (00:19:17-00:19:19) As he leaves the room, Dan asks Maya to stay in the room and she hesitantly does so. In that moment, Ammar asks Maya to help him. The sequence shows striking similarities with the one in *Camp X-Ray*. The difference, however, is in Maya's answer: "You can help yourself by being truthful" (00:19:59-00:20:02). Despite her discomfort with the situation, Maya does not object to the role Dan gives her during this interrogation. As a part of the procedure, Maya feels obliged to keep her position to make Ammar share the desired information about Osama bin Laden's location.

These sequences illustrate how both films construct their different political stances on the War on Terror through the development of their female characters. Maya's determination about the War on Terror developed through her strong urge to find the location of Osama bin Laden is the driving force both for the overall film and Maya's transformation. In this light, her gradual adaptation into the technocratic universe of the CIA distances her from the possibility of questioning the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques". Moreover, through the use of mono-identification, the film avoids any potential critique of these procedures and encourages the gradual acknowledgement of them as a necessity without any moral constraint. *Camp X-Ray*, on the other hand, initially portrays Amy as a determined and engaged soldier without clarifying her motivation to enlist. Through the gradual connection she develops with Ali and her alienation to her fellow soldiers, she starts to question her position at the camp. In this regard, duo-identification, rendered possible through Ali's development as a character, makes it possible for the film to offer a more multi-faceted take on the War on Terror.

Concerning "militainment" and the strong relationship between the US military and filmmakers, the box office results solidify the financial outcome of the political differences between these two films. *Zero Dark Thirty* with its 52,500,000 Dollars production budget made 95,720,716 Dollars at the domestic box office ("*Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) - Financial Information"), while *Camp X-Ray* with its 1,000,000 Dollars production budget making 9,837 Dollars ("*Camp X-Ray* (2014) - Financial Information"). Even though these results do not directly translate into a clear correlation between political complicity and financial success of

a film in the context of “militainment,” it implies the difficulty of producing a war film with a critical agenda towards American military policies.

Conclusion

Both *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* are significant films as they challenge the traditional gender conventions of war film. This paper analyzes them in close conjunction with the increasing relevance of women in US military structures that started with the War on Terror. Even though Maya and Amy are different characters, their struggle as *women* to gain recognition in male-dominated spheres of the US military is a common point uniting them. In terms of Nancy Fraser’s division between redistribution and recognition in different phases of second wave feminism, both films succeed in portraying women’s struggle for recognition within the patriarchal world of military institutions. The portrayal of this recognition process conceals the problematic aspects of the War on Terror such as the practice of torture, killing of civilians, and the detention of suspects at different camps. Both films dwell on these issues, but they do not offer an explicit and systemic critique of the War on Terror. Instead, they put emphasis on Amy and Maya’s different yet somehow similar struggle to gain recognition and imply their critique via their character development. *Camp X-Ray* attempts to illustrate the mutual victimization of detainees and soldiers not complying with the regulations of the War on Terror. However, it offers a final sequence in which Ali receives the seventh book of the *Harry Potter* series with a note from Amy, who is, afterwards, shown on a plane in her military uniform. Despite addressing the problem, *Camp X-Ray* chooses to resolve the tension between Ali and Amy in the context of the War on Terror without further examination of the disputable aspects of detention camps.

The neoliberalization of the US military that started with the end of conscription initiated a gradual integration of women into military structures and subsequently triggered a shift in gender representation. The portrayal of characters like Maya and Amy can be read as exemplary of the changing gender conventions of the genre. Taking into consideration the symbiotic relationship between the recognition phase of second wave feminism and neoliberalism, feminist struggles for equality are successfully incorporated into representations of the US military to give it a more progressive make-up. Concerning this progressive image, Megan Mackenzie asserts that the decision made in January 2013 about the removal of combat exclusion was not motivated by a wish for gender equality but used as a means to recover the damaged image of the US military (196). Maya in *Zero Dark Thirty* and Amy in *Camp X-Ray* articulate this progressive image in a cinematic context with substantially different political stances regarding the War on Terror. Identification theory is helpful to demonstrate the differences between these two films because it enables a multi-faceted examination of both their technical and political aspects. In interpreting this representational shift in American war films as a symptom of changing military policies, it is

crucial to develop a critical lens which does not celebrate “diversity” without questioning its potential to conceal the systemic human rights violations justified through it.

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