FROM GLORIFICATION TO JUSTIFICATION OF "JUST WAR": AN ANALYSIS OF POST 9/11 AMERICAN VISUAL NARRATIVES ON AFGHAN WAR

BY

SANA AZAM

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

ISLAMABAD

March, 2024

From Glorification to Justification of "Just War": An Analysis of Post 9/11 American Visual Narratives on Afghan War

By

SANA AZAM

BS English, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, 2019

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

In **English**

To

FACULTY OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES, ISLAMABAD

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES   **FACULTY OF ARTS & HUMANITIES**

THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defense, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommend the thesis to the Faculty of Arts & Humanities for acceptance.

Thesis Title: From Glorification to Justification of "Just War": An Analysis of Post 9/11 American Visual Narratives on Afghan War

Submitted by: Sana Azam   **Registration #:** 78-MPhil/Eng.Lit/-F20

Master of Philosophy

Degree name in full

English Literature

Name of discipline

Dr. Shazia Rose   _____

Name of Research Supervisor   Signature of Research Supervisor

Dr. Muhammad Safeer Awan   _____

Name of Dean (FAH)   Signature of Dean (FAH)

_____

Date

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I Sana Azam

Daughter of Muhammad Azam

Registration # 78-MPhil/Eng.Lit/-F20

Discipline English Literature

Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **From Glorification to Justification of "Just War": An Analysis of Post 9/11 American Visual Narratives on Afghan War** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

_____

Signature of Candidate

_____

Name of Candidate

_____

Date

ABSTRACT

Title: From Glorification to Justification of "Just War": An Analysis of Post 9/11 American Visual Narratives on Afghan War

This study focuses on four post 9/11 American war films on the war in Afghanistan including *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *The Kill Team* (2019), and *The Outpost* (2020) to explore the way they present American political narrative of Just War and how the portrayal evolves over time with changing sociopolitical environment. I argue that the visual narratives move from glorification of the war in the first half of the war to providing justifications for it towards the end of the war. This is a qualitative research that undertakes a textual analysis of the films under analysis using theoretical underpinnings of Michael Walzer's Just War Theory, Robert Entman's Framing Theory, and Sara Ahmed's concept of Affective Economies. A comprehensive analysis of the films in light of tenets of Walzer's theory reveals that they popularize the American political narrative of 'Just War' by framing the War on Terror as a 'Just War'. The narratives of glorification approach the subject matter with self-righteous, confident, and glamorous narratives of victory that do not take into account any criticism or controversies. The narratives of justification on the other hand approach the subject with more humility showing the darker side of war, with its complications and human cost. These visual narratives influence the subjectivities of the audience while also affecting the American culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EITs   Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

IED   Improvised Explosive Device

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What I am not thankful to but definitely need to acknowledge is my anxiety and executive dysfunction without which I would have completed this a year ago.

Grateful to Allah Almighty who paved the way for me, gave me courage to avail this opportunity, and helped me get through ups and downs along the way. Without His divine intervention I would not have been able to successfully achieve this milestone in life.

I am utterly grateful to my supervisor Dr. Shazia Rose for her love, kindness, support, and guidance throughout this process. I thank her for her patience with my missed deadlines and for providing a nurturing and positive environment to work in.

I am ever so indebted to my parents for believing in me and supporting me. I laud my father for allowing me the freedom and liberty that no other female in our family ever had. I laud my mother for being my biggest cheerer, for being my friend, and for exempting me from any and all chores so I could focus on my studies. I thank my siblings (Mehreen, Hina, Abdullah, Atiqa, and Saifullah) for putting up with my temper in stressful times during this research work and for bringing me stuff. Special thanks to Saifullah (who's just starting secondary school) for being the biggest critic of my work.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to my friends who were a part of my support system throughout the course of this work. I thank my friend and senior Faiqa for always being there to help, guide, and encourage me. I am also thankful to my very dear friends Faiza, Huma, Iqra, Sibgha, and Summaia; they helped me with their therapeutic presence and cheered me on. Finally, a shout-out to Mehreen who was my companion/partner and a source of moral support throughout this process.

DEDICATION

For My Support System

MY PARENTS

Who Stood Against All Odds for My Education

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

War is an inevitable reality of human condition. States, empires, countries, and nations go to war against each other for a variety of reasons. War and violence come out as a tool for changing balance of power, for expanding empire, for elimination of threats to state, nation, religion, or ideology, and even for achieving peace and security. In each case the perpetrators provide justifications that make the war appear unavoidable and logical. The offences are normalised and perpetuated effectively by policy makers and implementers to the masses through mass media. Media representations include news reporting, social media posts, documentaries, films and other entertainment media. Ideas and ideologies of nationhood and cultural difference are also most effectively promoted through these media and fictional narratives. Framing, portrayal, or representation of the self and the other aims to promote political ideologies and agendas. The viewers internalise these images and gradually develop a collective consciousness and subjectivities having a shared sense of self and the other. The purpose of this study is to analyse the evolution of narrative in American war films on Afghan war from glorification of the war to providing justifications for it, corresponding to the political developments in the real world. The analysis focuses on the framing of war in the selected films and provides an insight into the use of visual narratives for furthering political agendas and their power in shaping the public opinion. It also explores how the narratives have become embedded in American culture and impacted it.

Afghanistan was USA's battle ground for two major adventures; the Soviet War, fought against Russia and the post 9/11 War on Terror against al-Qaeda and Taliban. Both of these conflicts or interventions were politically motivated and succeeded in getting popular support of American citizens. In the backdrop of 9/11 attacks, before waging the war on Afghanistan, the situation was built up through political debates and media portrayal especially through news channels initially and later through the entertainment media including films. The imminent danger and the fear of a far-off enemy was implanted in the already grieving public's mind. Creating an atmosphere of fear and urgency gave the

US government popular support of its people for another military mission at the cost of national economy. The military adventures were glorified and popularised through sensational media portrayal and heroic war narratives the same way as was done for the World War II and the Vietnam War. At the same time, images of enemy or the 'other' were created through the same outlets to visualise the threats that the heroes were fighting for their nation.

The cycle of portrayal of the present danger, the future threats, need for future course of action etc. kept the war going for two decades. In the process, US government made alliances and kept them intact with strategies of power politics. Pakistan, being one of the central players in the war, was not spared from its direct effects. While in political sphere US forwarded its policies and interests through use of political power, in the public domain media politics and soft power remain as most effective tools. Among the American war efforts off the battlefield, visual narratives in general, and war films specifically play a significant role in gaining popular support and sympathies. Trence McSweeney in her book *'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames per Second* argues that "there is no more potent cultural artefact than popular film" (9). The immersive and short sensory experience that films provide can leave a deep and lasting impact which might influence the audience perceptions, views, understanding, and opinion about a particular subject. The American popular understanding of 9/11 attacks is of an act of pre-emptive war with no geopolitical or historical background that led to the attacks (McSweeney 11). This narrative of victimization was created through political discourse and popularised and normalised through repeated portrayal in media including films. It is therefore pertinent to analyse these films for their portrayal of the war and the affect they create.

This study looks into the gradual evolution of American narrative on the war in Afghanistan, starting from the confident intervention to the predictions of exit in disgrace depicted in the selected films. By exploring the evolving portrayal and themes in the selected visual narratives produced during the course of the Afghan war this research provides an insight into the use of visual media for furthering political agendas and their power in shaping the public opinion. This evolution in narrative through the course of the war has been traced in the present study. Hollywood films including *Zero Dark Thirty*

(2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *The Kill Team* (2019), and *The Outpost* (2020) are analysed in detail for their framing of America's 'Just War' in Afghanistan.

The terms 'glorification' and 'justification' of Just War need to be specified for what they encompass in this study. Glorification of war refers to an unapologetic attitude towards war including controversial policies and actions. It also encompasses the portrayal of war as a grand endeavour with inevitable victory for the US forces. Justification of war involves approaching the subject with more humility, highlighting the challenges and sacrifices, complexity of war, its human cost, psychological implications, and criticizing certain policies and decisions.

Cultural studies approach from film theory was used to explore and analyse the visual narratives. Three main concepts have been used as theoretical underpinnings for the study. First is Framing Theory by Robert Entman from the field of media and communication. The theory gives insights about the process of framing in media and is used to explore the process and role of framing of various groups and characters in the visual narratives. Second is the concept of 'Just War' with specific reference to Michael Walzer's work. The concept of 'Just Wars' is central to this study as American narrative on its wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan stands on this claim. Neta C. Crawford in her article "Just War Theory and the US Counterterror War" argues that "George W. Bush administration claims that its cause and conduct in counterterror war are just… which invites moral assessment" (5).

Translated from Latin term "bellum justum", Just War refers to a war "that is justified by a moral or legal tradition" (Just War). The concept of Just Wars is rooted in Christian tradition and propagated by religious figures like St. Augustine (354-430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). It corresponds to the concept of Holy Wars in Judaism and the concept of Jihad in Islam. However, Walzer's conception of the Just War Theory is secular and political rather than theological. Third is the concept of Affective Economies by Sara Ahmed that helped in understanding the role of the visual narratives in inducing affect and changing the attitude and views of the audience. This concept foregrounds that "a political community negotiates its terms of agreement and its conventions through

mediatized processes of affecting and being affected, regarded as a form of exchange or circulation" (Affective Economy 12). In this study war films are the mediums or sources of popularizing political discourse that generate affect which in turn impacts the views, perceptions, and understanding of the war and related issues in the American society.

The films that are analysed in this research dramatize different operations, battles, or incidents from the post 9/11 War on Terror in Afghanistan. *Zero Dark Thirty* is a 2012 film directed Kathryn Bigelow and written by Mark Boal that dramatizes the decade long mission of finding and killing al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The primary settings of the film are Pakistan and Afghanistan where CIA operatives work to break al Qaeda network and to find bin Laden. Jessica Chastain as CIA operative Maya is the protagonist whose work leads the mission to success with the killing of bin Laden in his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. *Zero Dark Thirty*'s shooting script was published in form of book in 2012 by Mark Boal.

Lone Survivor, the 2013 feature film by Peter Berg is based on a nonfiction book of same name by ex US Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell who was the only survivor of Operation Redwing. A team of four Navy SEALs, including Marcus Luttrel is sent to locate and kill a Taliban leader named Ahmad Shah where they get ambushed by a much larger Taliban force. Marcus survives the battle with the help of an Afghan villager and is later rescued by the US forces.

The Kill Team (2019) is a feature film based on a 2014 documentary of the same name by Dan Krauss. It dramatizes the 2010 Maywand District murders, where several US soldiers deliberately murdered three Afghan civilians. The story is told from the perspective of Andrew Briggman, a young recruit whose character is based on Adam Winfield the actual soldier who tried to report the problematic behaviour of his Staff Sergeant. The narrative highlights the ethical and psychological struggle of Briggman as he tries to survive in the war zone while facing hostility within the camp as well.

The Outpost (2020) directed by Rod Lurie is based on a 2012 nonfiction book *The Outpost*: An Untold Story of American Valour by Jake Tapper. The film dramatizes 2009 Battle of Kamdesh where US soldiers fought and won against a much larger Taliban force

while defending their highly vulnerable outpost. The narrative focuses on bravery, comradeship as well as fears and traumas of American soldiers while also highlighting the complexity of war in Afghanistan.

1.1. Thesis Statement

The American film industry plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and thus is effectively used as a tool for promoting the American stance on various issues of import globally. American films on Afghan war propagating the narrative of America's 'Just war' appear to have slightly different approaches towards the war ranging from its glorification to justification over the course of two decades. As the narrative of just war evolved with changing political circumstances it became visible in the filmic representations which correspond to changing political ideology towards the war.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the framing of post 9/11 American war in Afghanistan in selected Hollywood war films
2. To trace the evolution of narrative in the films from glorification to justification of the war
3. To examine the political and social implications of framing and changing portrayal of the Just War in Hollywood war films

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the political and cultural significance of American war films on post 9/11 war in Afghanistan and how do they deal with American narrative of 'Just War'?

2. How do framing techniques and narrative structures portray the shift in discourse from glorification to justification of post 9/11 war in Afghanistan?

3. How does the American political narrative on the Afghan war popularised through war films affect the general public?

1.4 Research Methodology

Qualitative design can be used for research on any document, text, picture, or video/audio files. Since my research is on visual narratives therefore I have used qualitative design for analysis because it relies "on text and image data, and [has] unique steps in data analysis, and draw[s] on diverse designs" (Creswell 232). Cultural studies approach to film analysis has been employed in this research. There are a number of research methods that can be used to carry out a qualitative analysis such as; textual analysis, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis among many others. For the purpose of this study I have employed textual analysis method as explained by Alan Mckee who describes the application of this method in visual and print media.

American films produced in the post 9/11 scenario are the focus of this study. Four films released between 2012 and 2020 have been selected for an in-depth analysis to see the change in American narrative on the Just war in Afghanistan from glorification to justification of the war.

The analysis is divided into three parts according to Entman's four locations of frames in the communication process. In the first part first location of frames i.e. the communicator is briefly analysed. In the second and the comprehensive part of analysis, films (standing in for 'text') were analyzed as the second location of frames. Textual analysis of various significant instances and elements of each film was done to highlight the portrayal and framing of events and characters in the narrative. Third part of analysis deals with the last two locations of frames that are the receiver and culture. The audience are at the receiving end of communication process and their interpretations of and judgment on any representation comes from their culture and experience. The impact of war films on opinion and perceptions is explored through secondary sources that mainly included survey results.

Analysis of the selected narratives to answer the research questions requires theoretical backing of three main concepts. Major tenets of the Just War Theory have been used to critically examine portrayal of America's just war in the films under analysis. The impact of these films or visual narratives on the audience has been explained through Sara Ahmed's thesis in the essay Affective Economies. Furthermore, to analyse the

representation and portrayal in the visual narratives, Robert Entman's Framing Theory from the field of Film Studies is used.

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it explores the evolution of American narrative on post 9/11 Afghan war in film representations, while also looking into the political discourse that influences the narrative of films and the public or audience whom the discourse targets.

Moreover, American war on terror in Afghanistan is a conflict that has directly impacted Pakistan, while also affecting many other countries therefore, this research is relevant to the Pakistani context. Analysing the selected film narratives, their discourse, and its political implication throughout the Afghan war is important in understanding the relation between political reality, media representation, and public opinion or subjectivity about this region.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

Due to limited time and scope for the study it has been delimited to the study of four feature films created in the backdrop of the post 9/11 US-Afghan war and does not include documentaries or other forms of visual narratives. From the large body of literature available on post 9/11 war, the four films selected for in-depth analysis in this study include *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *The Kill Team* (2019), *The Outpost* (2020).

1.7 Organization of Study

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives an introduction and background to the research along with stating the research questions, objectives, and significance. It also details the research methodology employed in the analysis. Chapter two constitutes a review of existing literature that helps in highlighting the gap in existing literature and placing the present research in the research paradigm. Chapter three includes a brief introduction of the theories and their specific tenets that have been used to support the analysis of selected literature. It also includes research method and methodology followed to carry out the analysis. Chapter four is the analysis of the films under study. It

has been divided into three parts for purpose of clarity. Chapter five concludes the research by stating the findings of the study. It also includes social implications of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will review the existing literature to place my research within the relevant field and find the gap in existing literature on the subject.

2.1 Post 9/11 American Wars

September 11 2001 attacks in the USA are considered one of the single most significant events in the recent history of the country. Two hijacked airplanes crashed into the twin towers of The World Trade Center, one fell on the pentagon, and another crashed into fields in Pennsylvania. Following the attacks, round the clock news coverage continued for more than 90 hours on leading television networks. Sitcoms, prime time dramatic programs, and other entertainment related activities were suspended to broadcast live coverage of attack sites, rescue activities, personal narratives of survivors, and friends and families of victims. These news reports included disturbing images and live videos of emergency works at twin towers site. Suspension of routine programs to broadcast images, videos, and stories surrounding or related to the attacks further created a sense of emergency in American public's mind. This repeated and uninterrupted projection of images related to attacks instilled more fear in the already grieving public. The news reporting alone framed the event as the most important happening, giving a catastrophic and even apocalyptic tone to the situation. This dispersion of political discourse in public arena led to creation of what Trence McSweeney calls a 'master narrative' on the attacks that is the American understanding of the attacks and following events. It is a narrative of American 'victimization' whereby representatives of 'radical evil' launched an 'unprovoked' and 'unanticipated' attack on US, a 'virtuous' and 'blameless' nation therefore "America's responses to 9/11, whatever they may be, were legitimized" (McSweeney 10).

A total of 2,977 people died in the attacks of September 11, and on September 12 the then American President George W Bush vowed to retaliate with all resources needed

and on September 20 he announced the 'War on Terror' in his address to congress and the nation (history.com). In their research titled "Framing the War on Terror: The internalization of policy in the US press" Reese and Lewis argue that the labelling of post 9/11 military action as the 'War on Terror' by Bush administration helped in Framing the political decision as a national policy and gain popular support for the war in political and public domains. Wide use of this terminology in media, particularly print media worked "to 'reify' the policy as uncontested, and 'naturalize' it as a taken-for-granted commonsense notion" (777).

Bush predicted the war to be long and was proved right as it lasted for 20 years, becoming the longest war in US history. Starting with military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, the US force expanded the war by invading Iraq in March 2003. According to an estimate the US has spent eight trillion dollars in relation to the post 9/11 wars up till the fiscal year 2022 (Watson Institute). Statistical analysis of human cost of war shows that civilian casualties in the wars was much higher than the number of opposition fighters killed by the US forces and their allies. Moreover, death toll of American armed forces is a very small proportion of the Afghan, Iraqi, Pakistani and other military and police personnel killed in line of duty during the War on Terror (Watson Institute). Total human cost of war as a result of direct war related violence is around 9, 40,000. In the end such high stakes war did not conclude in a definitive victory for the US as Taliban took over Afghanistan a few months after the US forces left the country for good in 2021.

The war which Bush started so confidently with popular public support, increasingly became harder for the consequent US governments to manage and defend on political front. During the first decade of the war, controversies like inhumane treatment of detainees in detention centres, and very high rate of civilian casualties as collateral damage put to question the US narrative of 'Just War'.

2.2 A Just War

War, an armed conflict of a certain magnitude, is mostly justified through appeal to logic and reasoning. War has been a part of human history since long, and so are the

philosophical debates about it. "The principles of a Just War originated with classical Greek and Roman philosophers like Plato and Cicero and were added to by Christian theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas" (just war). It is a concept comparable to the concept of Jihad in Islam, and the comparison of the two can give a better understanding of the non-American side of the conflict (Kelsay). According to the basic principles of classic Just war theory, war is waged/fought as a last resort when all other options fail. Only the legitimate authority i.e., the government can sanction a war, hence individual decisions do not hold any value. There should be a just cause and right intention for waging a war. Probability of success needs to be taken into account, as it is not justified to start a war when chances of winning are not good. Furthermore, in a just war violence and causalities caused should be proportional, or in other words, a balanced/proportional use of force is expected from both sides. Lastly, soldiers should not use violence against civilians, however, accidental or collateral damage to civilian lives is not condemned. (Moseley)

Bush Administration framed the post 9/11 War on Terror as a Just War wherein Bush in one of his September 2001 addresses went as far as to call the War on Terror a 'Crusade'. However the main aspects of political narrative that framed the war as Just include the portrayal of 9/11 attacks as unprovoked or pre-emptive act of war which allowed the US administration to present or sell its War on Terror as an act of self-defence (McSweeney). The political narrative through framing of the event deemed the prerequisites for waging a Just War fulfilled. To get a more relevant understanding of the conflict as a Just War in the contemporary world, a more recent perspective on Just Wars is needed. I therefore make use of Michael Walzer's concept of Just war theory which has a more political and ethical take on the issue and also Walzer provides his own views on the conflict which supplements the theoretical works presented in his book *Just and Unjust Wars*. The tenets of Walzer's Just War Theory used in this research are discussed in the next chapter. The political narrative of Just war created by Bush administration was popularised through news and entertainment media including films.

2.3 Reviews of Films under Study

From the body of literature produced in the backdrop of 9/11 attacks and the ensuing War on Terror, I have selected the following four Hollywood films for in-depth analysis.

2.3.1 *Zero Dark Thirty*

Zero Dark Thirty (2012), written by Mark Boal and directed by Kathryn Bigelow is an American action thriller film. The film was critically acclaimed for its acting, direction, editing, and screenplay, and performed well on the box office. It was nominated for five Oscar award categories but failed to achieve any prominent win. Film critic Kenneth Turan held the criticism of the film on political front responsible for its failure to win an Oscar (Reid and Sergeant). The Guardian magazine also argued that *Zero Dark Thirty* was a popular film among the film critics, however its take on use of torture made it controversial which cost it numerous awards including the award for best director (Greenwald). Three US Senators criticized the film as "grossly inaccurate and misleading" for implying that use of torture helped in tracking down Osama bin Laden (Reid and Sergeant). Furthermore, CIA and American government's cooperation/collaboration with the filmmakers in providing them confidential information instigated political debates around the film (Collins). This led to the creation of the view that *Zero Dark Thirty* was a government's project that aimed to present CIA and its use of torture in a positive light. Naomi Wolf, an American Author and Journalist criticized Bigelow's film as propaganda, and called it an "ad for keeping agents who committed crimes against Guantanamo prisoners out of jail" as it presents "people who committed violent crimes against other people based on their race" as heroes (Collins).

2.3.2 *Lone Survivor*

Written and directed by Peter Berg, the film *Lone Survivor* (2013) is based on the first-hand account of the "Operation Red Wings" by ex-Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell. The film was a critical and commercial success as it earned more than $150 million on the box office and won multiple awards in addition to being nominated for two Oscar categories.

Lone Survivor won the 2014 Critics' Choice Awards for best action film, and best actor in an action film i.e. Mark Wahlberg (IMDb). Berg's commitment to "properly honor the lives of real men of Red Wings" could be "felt in every frame" of the film as it pays close attention to details including production and costume design, cinematography, and makeup including depiction of wounds (Sharky). The filmmakers focused on making it a "raw and guerrilla style" film (Wahlberg), that presents "one of the worst disasters in special-forces history as a mournful tribute to Luttrell's fallen comrades" (Chang). As a result of this focus the film is detached from the history of the conflict, and does not answer critical questions on America's war on terror in Afghanistan (Chang). Some critics see the film's action sequence and overall imagery as problematic because it is something that "the American war machine can easily fashion into a recruitment commercial (Boone).

2.3.3 *The Kill Team*

The Kill Team (2019), written and directed by Dan Krauss, is based on a 2013 documentary of the same name about a group of American soldiers who deliberately killed three innocent Afghan civilians. Showing the dark reality of war in a grim tone, the film failed to make a big impression on the box office like *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lone Survivor*. While the film focuses on a sensitive topic of war crimes, critics argue that it does so in a submissive and passive manner rather than providing a strong, neutral criticism. Matt Zoler Seitz, a film reviewer and critic, states that the film sees Afghan individuals merely as "victims or pawns", and "it seems unwilling to question the idea that a war can have rules… and it doesn't delve too deeply into the idea that what the soldiers did was an atrocity measurably worse than the occupation itself" (Seitz). In the end the film turns out as an American centric retelling of events where somehow Americans are victimized. In majority of American films "war is always a thing that happens to Us, even if we are doing it to Them" (Seitz). Most of the critics drew comparisons between the documentary and the film, *The Kill Team*, while reviewing the film. New York Times reviewer believes that the film "adds a sheen of macho familiarity to a narrative that was eerily matter-of-fact in doc[umentary] form" and the dramatization of these events "makes them seem isolated – a bad-apples incident" (Keningsberg). The documentary, on the other hand, hauntingly implied that "if you train soldiers for Hollywood-ready combat, violence on peacekeeping

missions becomes inevitable" (Keningsberg). The 'Hollywood Reporter' cited that the performances of actors in the film were spot on, especially "Skarsgaard who anchors the film with his galvanizing performance as the sociopathic Deeks" (Scheck). However, some reviews criticized the film for taking too much inspiration from other films for its style and form, which combined with mediocre performances by lead characters dulled the impression of the film (Seitz). Los Angeles Times also viewed that the film failed to match the intensity of the documentary (Walsh), owing largely to the fact that Krauss has more experience in journalism than filmmaking.

2.3.4 *The Outpost*

Rod Lurie's 2020 film *The Outpost* is based on Jake Tapper's 2012 non-fiction book *The Outpost: An Untold Story of American Valor.* The film was included in National Board of Review, USA's top ten independent films in 2021, and was nominated for several other awards. Critic Brian Tallerico considers the film one of Lurie's best work as he manages to tell the story of Battle of Kamdesh along with a back-story of *The Outpost*. He is impressed by all aspects of the film, including the acting, cinematography, action sequence, episodic style, and the overall balance of all elements (Tallerico). Tallerico views the style of the film's action sequence as better than Berg's *Lone Survivor* as Lurie "never gets lost in the action… [and] manages to convey the insanity without resorting to cheap filmmaking tricks or manipulative storytelling". New York Times review of the film lauds it as a "well-crafted, fact-based tragedy of errors" that features impressive performances by the cast (Kenny). The characters in the film are "overwhelmed and confused, frustrated by orders that put them directly at risk" and the film "thrusts the audiences into their shoes" as they connect with the characters through the course of the film (Debruge). Furthermore, the camera work and cinematography of *The Outpost* "isn't glamorous, but respectful of the sacrifice and the split-second decision-making" of the soldiers (Debruge). Washington Post lauds Lurie's skill in "honor[ing] service and sacrifice, without lapsing into empty triumphalism" as his film "balances those competing impulses, with a canny combination of unadorned bluntness and technical finesse" (Hornaday).

2.4 Hollywood and US Administration

Films, like written literature are cultural products that "reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of societies" (Bond). Propaganda refers to "any sort of art, media, or literature that promotes a political viewpoint, especially through deception or cheap appeals to emotion" (literaryterms.net). Propaganda films on American wars are usually made through collaboration between filmmakers and government or military. Lindsay Varzarevsky, while working on the impact of cooperation between Hollywood and US department of defence states that this cooperation started off around World War I as an alliance between Hollywood and the government because "Hollywood needed military equipment and technical advice to artistically enact realism, while the government needed a mass medium to circulate information/propaganda about its war efforts" (12). The impact of this cooperation was strong during the Second World War as Eugenia Logie quotes that

> During the Second World War, all forms of entertainment were affected by the conflict, and the Office of War Information (OWI) was established to use mass communication to sell the war to the American people. OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures liaised with Hollywood to produce short propaganda films for several years… Rather than being shunned as propaganda, these films were well-received; Capra's Prelude to War (1942) won an Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1943. (23)

Contributing to this trend of propaganda films, private studios also played their part in 'selling the war' as "between 1942 and 1945, 93% of The Walt Disney Studio's output focused on war-related short movies, civilian propaganda films, and military design work" (Logie 23). Hollywood needs to sell films, and films uncritical of military often receive help in form of uniforms, equipment etc. that reduces the production costs and increases the profit margin (Valantin 6). Whereas, films that are critical towards the military are deprived of the assistance and hence are expensive to make and less profitable (Boggs and Pollard 4-5).

An online exhibit titled 'Powers of Persuasion' on National Archives' website features posters that were used during the Second World War to enlist new recruits in the

military. Hence they worked as a more "subtle form of warfare" going on besides the armed war with tanks, bombs, and gun (National Archives). Introduction to the exhibit states that

> Persuading the American public became a wartime industry, almost as important as the manufacturing of bullets and planes. The government launched an aggressive propaganda campaign with clearly articulated goals and strategies to galvanize public support, and it recruited some of the nation's foremost intellectuals, artists, and filmmakers to wage the war on that front. (National Archives)

The cooperation between Hollywood and Department of Defence or US military was very much relevant in the backdrop of 9/11 attacks as just two months after the attacks government representatives met with the most prominent personalities from entertainment industry. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss 'the war on terrorism' and educate the entertainment executives on administration's "communications strategy" (King). The white house representative Ari Fleischer compared this "Hollywood outreach program" to meetings conducted with other communities to "shore up support for US actions in Afghanistan" (King). The Hollywood did provide support in the form of heroic war narratives that kept coming out through the two decades of the war. The reason behind such focus of government and military on the filmic representations is that they have the power to affect the public opinion.

2.5 War Films and Affect

Films have the power to emotionally invest and impact the audience and thereby affect their opinions on and understanding of various subjects. While discussing "The Affective Power of Movies" Carl Plantinga argues that "film is a particularly sensual medium with the capacity to affect spectators in direct ways through the perceptual qualities of images and sounds. Moods, emotions, and various automatic body responses make up the affective dimension of film" (94).

The American public has not witnessed or experienced any war on their soil since long although the country stays engaged in one conflict or another since last hundred years. Films along with other media forms and literature bring the war closer to the public and act

as prosthetic memories of the wars for them. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, author of Ashley's War (2016) observes that movies are the reality for Americans who do not go to war. Similarly, Pautz argues that "war films contribute strongly to Americans' understanding of conflict, creating a 'pseudo-experience' that can capture the senses of sight and sound" (121).

As a result of emotional involvement, the public is likely to get affected by the films in some way. US war films present the events from an American perspective, i.e. state approved narrative which works to alter the subjectivities of the audience. Evren Eken asserts the same in her study, "How geopolitical becomes personal: Method acting, war films and affect" where she identifies war films as a source of affect and visceral experience of geopolitics. She argues that American war films "diffuse emotional narratives of the state to the population and affectively enables people to experience the international from the perspective of the United States" (210). Moreover, audience emotionally connects with the actors/characters which enables them to "personally feel like a state/warrior" and develop emotional commitment to the war (210).

Media productions and framing works to further political agendas and to influence subjective opinions of the audience accordingly. Studies have proved the power of media to create affect and alter the audience's perceptions. For instance, Michelle Pautz in a 2015 study "Argo and *Zero Dark Thirty*: Film, Government, and Audiences" analysed the impact of two films: *Argo* (2012) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) on political views of moviegoers. The films change their perceptions on a range of subjects. Pautz argues that "although the scope and magnitude of [film's] influence is debatable, [its] presence… is not" (120-121). The results of the study proved that 20% to 25% of the viewers changed their opinion on a number of questions about government after watching the films, for instance, the viewers of *Zero Dark Thirty* created a more positive attitude towards CIA. The percentage of people having change opinions is quite significant as it was a result of watching single movie once.

Along with affecting the opinions and perceptions of the audience, propaganda films can motivate audience to action as well. This has been proved in a 2022 study by Lindsay Varzarevsky, which examined "the impact of cooperation between the [US]

Department of Defense and movie producers on military application rates" (Varzarevsky 2). The research data proves that the number of military applicants increases in the years when movies produced with cooperation of the Department of Defense are released, hence establishing that government institutions have an effect on media, which influences perceptions and application rates of potential enlistees" (Varzarevsky). The findings of the studies cited here prove that influence of US military and government has a considerable impact in affecting the public and winning its support for the war.

2.6 Post 9/11 American Cinema

USA has established its military interventions in the Middle East and in Afghanistan as Just Wars. American mass media and cinema played a substantial role in promoting the American stance on these wars and establishing them as "Just Wars". This has been done through media framing of the stakeholders and the events according to the popular political agenda. It is argued in academia that film as a medium of narrative portrayal is capable of 'framing' issues, constructing realities and setting expectations. Alex Wagner (2016) writes that one of the most valuable American exports is the American cinema that continues to shape how Americans think about themselves and the world. This argument hold true for post 9/11 war narratives as they reflect the political narrative of American victimization and heroism.

Researchers have taken interest in analysing the American war films and their evolution over the time. James Bowen in his research titled "Six Post-9/11 American War Films: Towards an Evolution of Non-traditional Masculine Constructs" (2019) explores the evolution of the construction of masculinity in the post 9/11 American war films including *Megan Leavey* (2017), *Stop-Loss* (2008), *American Sniper* (2014), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Green Zone* (2010), *Lions for Lambs* (2007). According to the findings of the study, women are portrayed in combat roles, but a strong masculine image is always dominating the screen. Traditional masculine constructs in cinema are still more common than the non-traditional ones.

Similarly, the evolution in portrayal of females in American war films, and their actual participation in wars is a contemporary debate. Eugenia Logie adds to this debate

through her 2016 research; "From Screen to Battlefield: The Evolution of the Female Role in Hollywood War Films and the U.S. Military". After an extensive analysis of 85 war films, the study concluded that women are underrepresented in American war cinema as compared to their actual participation and role in the US military.

American war cinema is a diverse genre that includes reality based, fictional, fantastical, historical, and even superhero films. These films as cultural products work to create and alter subjectivities of the viewers. Debates on terrorism and the war on terror is not only widely discussed in war/propaganda films but have also made way into fantasy and super-hero genres. The aspect that is common and recurring in post 9/11 war films as well as superhero films is that they portray a one sided view of the conflict. As a result Americans are always portrayed as heroes whereas the political others, including Afghan and Iraqi civilians and the terrorists are misrepresented and underrepresented.

Raghed Majed in his 2016 research *Hollywood War Films Propaganda: Framing Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* studies Hollywood war films on Iraq and Afghanistan as propaganda films. While analysing *American Sniper, The Hurt Locker* and *Lone Survivor* using framing theory, Majed argues that the films were used as propaganda by the US government "to justify its unsuccessful encroachment of Iraq and Afghanistan… [by] fram[ing] the images of US soldiers and represent[ing] them as patriotic and sacrificial, while distorting the image of both Iraqis and Afghanis" (6). A quantitative analysis of text and image data from the films prove that Americans are framed as sacrificial, humanitarian heroes, while Iraqis and Afghanis are framed as terrorists and villains (96).

There are some films that depict the 'others' of American master narrative in a positive light. Ouidyane Elouardaoui's study "Arabs in Post-9/11 Hollywood Films: a Move towards a More Realistic Depiction?" finds that while Hollywood largely misrepresents the Arabs and other ethnicities associated with terrorists, some films are trying to portray the Arabs in a more realistic manner which according to surveys is welcomed by the Arabs (11). Cultural sensitivity and realistic representation is very important in the contemporary world to avoid biases, mistrust, and hate crimes against the groups impacted due to popular discourse created after 9/11 attacks.

However, most of the films keep Afghans and Arabs on the peripheries and silence them. The American narrative not only places and normalises America as the victim of 9/11 attacks and hero of the post 9/11 world, it also erases the historical and geopolitical developments behind the attacks from national memory through exclusion. Similarly, the Taliban and other terrorists are framed as notorious evil people rather than political or ideological groups with motives, agendas, and belief systems. The image of terrorist and the communities and ethnicities they come from is distorted in war films as well as superhero films a genre that grew rapidly in the post 9/11 world Jason Dittmer in "American exceptionalism, visual effects, and the post-9/11 cinematic superhero boom" argues that a reason for boom in superhero films in post 9/11 context is the "capacity for superheroes to articulate a particularly American geopolitical vision and sense of self" also known as "American exceptionalism". This concept in the real geopolitical scenario is responsible for bold decisions of US government like military and political intervention in other countries. It also results in distortion of the understanding of real geopolitical landscape.

Jerrod S. MacFarlane in the study titled "Desperate times and desperate measures: false-representation and distortion of terrorism in post-9/11 superhero films" highlights the ideological overlap between terrorist and superhero narratives. She finds that the depiction of terrorists in Superhero films are based on simplistic binaries of good versus evil, hence denying the terrorists any rationality or political consciousness. This oversimplification of terrorism can then lead to undermining of counterterrorism efforts and effect the popular understanding of terrorism.

This brief review of the literature on American war films, their production, and reception highlights that US administration makes sure that public understanding and national narrative on the country's wars aligns with the state narrative on the conflicts. Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, a geopolitical analyst criticizes the US governments for their use of "Hollywood as a tool of cultural imperialism and perception management". He argues that

[US] used movies like the Green Berets to distort the role of US in wars and movies like Argo, which the CIA is reported to have fact checked, to distort the perception of history. Hollywood movies like Iron Man and *Lone Survivor* never explain the circumstances behind the US military presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia. They merely present the US presence there as an invited one and even the US contingents there as simply peacekeepers. (3)

The political narratives popularised through Hollywood portray America at the centre of the world and its ideologies, perceptions, and treatment of others as righteous. The American centred approach makes the people and cultures at the peripheries susceptible to bias and mistreatment by Americans (Nazemroaya).

People on the peripheries of the US narrative do not have any power over their (mis)representation. The case of representation of Afghanistan in literature produced about Afghanistan has been explored in depth by Alla Ivanchikova and Nivi Manchanda in their respective books. Alla Ivanchikova, in her 2019 publication *Imagining Afghanistan: Global Fiction and Film of the 9/11 wars* explores a corpus of literature, including visuals and written texts as the object of study. Ivanchikova uses the term "global Afghanistan cultural production" for these works as "these texts were not written or produced by Afghans for the Afghan public but were created by foreigners for a global audience" (4). The main focus of discussion in this book is "how Afghanistan has been imagined, and reimagined, over the span of the two decades since the fall of the Twin Towers" (Ivanchikova 15) in both high and low culture.

Nivi Manchanda, in 2020 publication *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge* explores the subject of representation of Afghanistan in detail. The western canon of literature and research produced around Afghanistan has created an image of the country that is accepted as true and sufficient. The book highlights the issue of selective portrayal and partial truths. For instance, an Afghan school book illustrating firearms alongside pencils and fruits as numerical aids is displayed in a London museum but "the exhibition and its curators fail to mention is how these textbooks came into being" (Manchanda 2). Imagining Afghanistan essentially asks two main questions:

'[H]ow is Afghanistan thought about in a way such that it is possible to invade and bomb it?' and 'what are the sources of authority that sanction the discourses that make that act of invasion permissible and possible in the first place?' (Manchanda)

American films analysed in the present study are a part of the imperial knowledge produced on Afghanistan. Moving on from the questions posed and explored in Imagining Afghanistan, I examined through the selected films the American perspective on invasion/intervention in Afghanistan and how it evolved and changed over the course of the war.

In the more recent developments leading up to the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, film representations changed accordingly. The strong and confident American hero now appears sceptical of his role in the war. The failing war efforts are framed to shape popular opinion in favour of government policies. From the review of existing literature, I have determined that these films have not yet been analysed for their evolving narrative patterns from the glorification of the Just War to providing justification for the Just War. American films on Afghan war, specifically the latest productions need to be explored for their narrative, portrayal, and political discourse. To the best of my knowledge this is a gap in research paradigm I explore in this study. This research focuses on American war films from 2012 to 2020 to trace the evolution of American stance on Just War in Afghanistan, the political discourse channelled through these narratives, and the consequent affect achieved. The changing mood of films, from glorification to justification of and scepticism towards the war efforts is central to the study.

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I have discussed the theoretical framework and research methodology for the analysis of selected films on post 9/11 Afghan war. I have built my theoretical framework using the theoretical concepts of Just War Theory by Michael Walzer, Framing theory by Robert Entman, and the concept of Affective Economies by Sara Ahmed. The present study explores thematic and ideological evolution of American films based around post 9/11 Afghan war. I have used Cultural studies approach for analysing the selected films.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Analysis of the selected narratives to answer the research questions requires theoretical backing of three main concepts. Major tenets of the Just War Theory have been used to critically examine portrayal of America's just war in the films under analysis. The impact of these films or visual narratives on the audience has been explained through Sara Ahmed's thesis in the essay Affective Economies. Furthermore, to analyse the representation and portrayal in the visual narratives, Robert Entman's Framing Theory from the field of Film Studies is used.

3.1.1 Just War Theory

The classic Just War theory originating from Christian traditions sets certain prerequisites or premises for a war to be Just. A just war is waged as last resort, sanctioned by legitimate authority, a just cause, probability of success, right intention, proportionality, and rules about civilian casualties. Among the more recent developments in the theory, Michael Walzer's work is considered the most significant. Walzer's argument acknowledges states as sovereign bodies possessing political sovereignty and territorial integrity. Thus, any attack in form of pre-emptive war, is an act of aggression that the state has a right to resist. In the modern world order humanitarian intervention, aimed at preventing mass human rights violations is justified, and a right of the outsiders who want

to help. Combatants are representatives of political systems and therefore liable to kill or be killed in a confrontation. Non-combatants on the other hand should not be intentional targets, however, under a "supreme emergency" they can be targeted to avoid a greater disaster (Walzer 34-47). He also expresses his views on supreme emergency in his essay "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands". Walzer maintains that in certain situations morally wrong actions can be considered as the right thing to do. For him, the extreme torture employed in post 9/11 War on Terror is one of these supreme emergency situations where dubious tactics employed by US forces become right, otherwise considered illegitimate. While commenting on the issue of dirty hands in the aforementioned context Walzer stated that:

> I don't want to rewrite the rule against torture to incorporate this exception… I want political leaders to accept the rule, to understand its reasons, even to internalize it… to know when to break it…[and] to feel guilty about breaking it – which is the only guarantee they can offer us that they won't break it too often. (209)

Similarly, Walzer also accepts the necessity of nuclear deterrence in state of supreme emergency while pressing on the need to find morally acceptable alternatives. Furthering the argument on the morality and role of state Walzer argues that:

> The moral standing of any particular state depends on the reality of the common life it protects and the extent to which the sacrifices required by that protection are willingly accepted and thought worthwhile. If no common life exists, or if the state doesn't defend the common life that does exist, its own defence may have no moral justification. (54)

Walzer as a theorist maintains his position against intervention, yet he justifies post 9/11 US intervention in Afghanistan as an act of self-defence. He states that he is against any military intervention in Syria against ISIS giving the reason that "there is no reasonable prospect of success" (qtd in Brown 213).

These tenets of Walzer's Just War Theory along with his recent commentary on the post 9/11 American war in Afghanistan were used to analyse the American Just war narrative as presented in the films under study.

3.1.2 Framing Theory

Media's role in influencing people's attitudes, perception, and actions has been acknowledged in different fields of study. According to the proponents of framing theory, the information proliferated through media to the audience is sometimes framed to meet the goals of the providing source or the governments. In the context of filmmaking, video production and related fields, a frame is defined as "one of the many still images that compose the complete moving picture" (Film Frame). Framing refers to "the presentation of visual elements in an image, especially the placement of subject in relation to other objects" (framing (visual arts)). Framing is the way in which media encases and presents information to the people. Entman defines framing as a process by which media

> [S]elects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text in a way that can promote a certain definition, interpretation, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation. (52)

Framing is employed not only in news reporting but also in films and other visual narrative forms. Framing used in the war films based on the World Wars where certain scenes, dialogues, and characters are given more importance than others and visual effects among other things affect the communicated message and its interpretation. The theory makes a distinction between agenda and framing. Agenda setting refers to the placement of an issue in order of importance, whereas framing refers to the way these issues are portrayed and then relayed to the audience.

Entman points out four main functions of frames used in media productions. First function of framing is problem definition, whereby frames "determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values" (Entman 52). The second function of frames is to diagnose causes i.e., identification of the forces creating the problem. Making moral judgements by evaluating

the causal agents and their effects and suggesting remedies by offering and justifying treatments for the problems and predicting their possible effects are the third and fourth functions respectively (Entman 52). Furthermore, using the example of cold war, he identifies four different locations of frames in the communication process: "the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture" (52). Entman is of the view that

> Communicators make … framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames that organize their belief systems. The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information… that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments. The frames that guide the receiver's thinking and conclusion may or may not reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the communicator. The culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames… (52,53)

The function of framing in all four locations is similar: "selection and highlighting and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman 53).

According to the theoretical notion of framing, the effect of a frame is same on majority of the receiving audience, though it cannot have a uniform, universal effect. The selection of and attention to particular aspects of the reality described in a frame implies that frames simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects (Entman 54). The narratives framed this way directly affect the responses of the receivers, thus making the exclusion of interpretations as significant to outcomes as inclusion. This is the reason that framing of news in particular way and focusing on or obscuring certain aspects of reality is important to political bodies. The same can be applied to how events are presented in films. Entman therefore states that framing "plays a major role in the exertion of political power" (55). The impacts or significance of framing has been explained with the examples of post 9/11 media coverage and political statements in the USA, which forms the basis or starting point of analysis for the present study.

Framing of the Just War at each location of frames in the communication process is analysed using Entman's conception. These locations also form the basis for organising the analysis into different parts

3.1.3 Affective Economies

Another theoretical concept used in this study is the working of affect in human society. Sara Ahmed in "Affective Economies" argues that emotions are not just individual attributes but a social or communal product that grow and develop outside the individual subjects and work through them. She is of the view that human emotions, views, and loyalties are formed by political discourse and outside elements, they are not products of any individual's personal choices. She builds her argument around the feelings of hate and fear as affective economies. For instance, the ideas of nationhood develop on the exclusion of political other, who is then liable to be hated and marked as enemy. Films, through realistic representations of events induce certain emotions in the audience.

Ahmed further states that "the passion of these negative attachments to others is redefined simultaneously as a positive attachment to the imagined subjects brought together through repetition" of certain signifiers (118). She uses the example of white supremacy where hatred towards non-whites or people of colour brings the white community together. In this setting white people are the normative subjects that would be the ones hurt or threatened by the 'other' who signifies danger and threat of loss. Working of emotions is compared to and explained through example of economy. "Emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (Ahmed 120). In other words, "affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value over time)" (Ahmed 120). She creates an analogy between feelings and commodity fetishism, as feelings take a life of their own by concealment of how they are shaped by histories. As a result, the impossibility to reduce feelings like hatred to a particular body allows them (the feelings) to circulate in an economic sense.

According to this concept of affective economies, "words generate effects: they create impressions of others as those who have invaded the space of the nation, threatening its existence" (Ahmed 122). The post 9/11 political discourse in the USA created an environment of fear, an emotion that was created, associated with images and left to live and grow in the people. This creation of fear and hatred towards an unseen enemy helped the Bush government to pave way and gain popular support for the war in Afghanistan. Similarly, film representations and narratives became a significant tool for popularising the political discourse on the war. The effects of affective economies in context of the war continued to work till the very end and has been explored in the present study through the analysis of the selected films.

3.2 Research Design

For research on any document, text, picture, or video/audio files the qualitative design can be used. Since my research is on visual narratives therefore I have used qualitative design for analysis because it relies "on text and image data, and [has] unique steps in data analysis, and draw[s] on diverse designs" (Creswell 232). Cultural studies approach to film analysis has been employed in this research.

Oxford's *A Dictionary of Film Studies* defines 'culture' in cultural studies "to include all cultural forms that can be said to shape values, beliefs, habit, taste, and behaviour" particularly "those associated with the mass media, including print journalism, radio, film, and television" ('cultural studies and films' n.p). It further elaborates that "[c]ultural studies engages directly with how cultural values, meanings, and identities are established through cultural representations and institutions, especially in relation to social class, gender, race/ethnicity (and colonialism)" (n.p). David Forgacs argues that cultural studies approach to cinema "is concerned with the ideological meanings of film texts" and it deals "with the way films 'encode' ideological or covertly political messages and with how audiences may actively decode and respond to these (4). Cultural studies film theory as an analytical approach provides space to take into account context, politics, as well as spectatorship and subject-positions. It is an essential addition to the theoretical underpinnings in this research.

3.3 Research Method

There are a number of research methods that can be used to carry out a qualitative analysis such as; content analysis, thematic analysis, textual analysis, and discourse analysis among many others. For the purpose of this study I have employed textual analysis method as explained by Alan Mckee who describes the application of this method in visual and print media.

Textual analysis entails making educated guesses and possible interpretations of a text. However, "there is no such thing as a single, 'correct' interpretation of any text" neither is there a "simple, single representation of reality against which you could measure the newspaper story, or the film,… to judge how 'accurate' a representation is" (McKee 4,5). Textual analysis of any given text cannot be done without taking into account the context. McKee regards 'context' "that is a series of intertexts – related texts" as one of the most essential parts of textual analysis for "it ties down the interpretations of a text" (11). Context here refers to "other texts that surround a text, which provide useful information for making sense of it, which teach us how to interpret texts" and it includes "genre" and "the wider public context in which a text is circulated" (McKee 13). As textual analysis takes into account all aspects of a text, when reading films as text it takes into consideration cinematography, choreography, mise en scene, framing, sounds, lighting etc. in addition to dialogue, plot, and storyline of the film.

3.4 Research Methodology

American films produced in the post 9/11 scenario are the focus of this study. Four films released between 2012 and 2020 have been selected for an in-depth analysis to see the change in American narrative on the Just war in Afghanistan from glorification to justification of the war. As the main aim of this study is to trace the evolution of American narrative on the post 9/11 war in Afghanistan, the criteria for selection of films is that all films are about the same war, but some of them glorify the war efforts of the Americans in Afghanistan and others attempt to justify their war efforts. The difference in their approach towards war gives space for tracing the evolution from glorification to justification of the post 9/11 Just War in Afghanistan.

The analysis is divided into three parts according to Entman's four locations of frames in the communication process. In the first part first location of frames i.e. the communicator is briefly analysed. It includes an overview of the political and media discourse around 9/11 attacks that provided the Americans with a 'natural' or 'common sense' understanding of the event. The primary focus at this stage is on the analysis of the process of framing of 9/11 attacks as a landmark national tragedy that paved way for the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan.

In the second and the comprehensive part of analysis, films (standing in for 'text') were analyzed as the second location of frames. Textual analysis of various significant instances and elements of each film was done to highlight the portrayal and framing of events and characters in the narrative. To examine American narrative on just war and shift in the narrative the films were analyzed for use of language, presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, and stereotype images. Difference in portrayal and characterization of the US soldiers, Afghans fighters and citizens, and the treatment of war in general helped in identifying the shift in narrative. American stance on the necessity of war as presented and developed in the narrative of the films is read and analyzed in light of Just War Theory. This has helped in highlighting that the war in Afghanistan has been established (through these narratives) as a Just War. American intervention in Afghanistan, use of force, moral justifications and human rights abuses in the post 9/11Afghan war, as presented in the films have been analysed against the tenets of Walzer's Just War theory. In the second part of the analysis the focus is on identification of such instances; scenes, dialogues, or plot lines in the films that explicitly or implicitly present a view on Just War. Presence of such content in the films and its treatment in the narrative helped in analyzing American stance on the war. The films are analyzed for use of language, type of shots, visuals screen time given to different characters, lighting, and other similar elements to explain the process of framing. This analysis helped in developing the argument on use of framing to "create desired image of reality" (Entman 54).

Third part of analysis deals with the last two locations of frames that are the receiver and culture. The audience are at the receiving end of communication process and their interpretations of and judgment on any representation comes from their culture and experience. The impact of war films on opinion and perceptions is explored through

secondary sources that mainly included survey results. To supplement the aspect of affect/impact of framing in the films in creating or shaping public opinion, the concept of affective economies is used. It helped in understanding the phenomenon of creation of public consent towards war through media portrayal and discourse.

Visual signs are dealt with using the framing theory as it provides outlines for analyzing various elements of film representation. The films as narratives have been analyzed with focus on cinematographic elements including point of view, use of CGIs, screen-time, frames, lighting and mise-en-scene among others. Screenshots of significant moments from the films are attached in the research as appendix A.

To sum up, the present study is a qualitative research that employs cultural studies approach to analyse the visual narratives i.e. films under study. Cultural studies film theory as an analytical approach provides space to take into account context, politics, as well as spectatorship and subject-positions. The theoretical framework used for analyzing the selected films includes three different concepts; Just War Theory by Michael Walzer, Framing Theory by Robert Entman, and Affective Economies by Sara Ahmad. Tenets of Walzer's theory used in this research include rules of Just War, status of states as sovereign bodies with political sovereignty and cultural integrity that have the right to resist pre-emptive acts of war. His take on humanitarian intervention in the modern world order, state of 'supreme emergency', and the issue of dirty hands has been instrumental in analyzing the selected films. Entman's definition of framing, and his explanation of functions and locations of frames in communication process has been applied on the films. The location of frames help in organizing the analysis chapter as well. Lastly, Ahmad's concept of Affective Economies is used to analyse how the narratives on war presented in the films impact the audience/viewers. Her explanation of emotions as social or communal products that grow and develop outside the individual subjects through repetition and circulation of signs and signifiers is used to understand the significance of framing in selected war films. By using these three theories together, question posed in this research have been answered.

CHAPTER 4

Framing a 'Just War'

Production and dispersion of literary narratives can be treated as a communication process. The writers, storytellers, or filmmakers are the communicators who create texts and the readers/ viewers are the receivers of the communicated content. The process of framing in creation of post 9/11 visual narratives is multilayered. To analyze the framing in these narratives, it is important to examine the process and context of their creation and their reception. Entman pointed out four locations of frames in the communication process. In case of these visual narratives, the filmmakers are the communicators and therefore the first location of frames. Entman's framing theory points out that communicators make "framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames that organize their belief system" (52).

Earliest media coverage, news stories, and political statements/speeches by public representatives after the 9/11 attacks collectively created frames through which Americans viewed and interpreted the event. After the attacks, in his first address to the nation, President Bush clearly hinted at his intent of going to war. The attacks were presented as unprovoked acts of pre-emptive war against "the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world", i.e. America (Bush). The real geopolitical developments behind America becoming a target for these attacks were not discussed on media (McSweeney 10). Reporting instead was focused on presenting personal narratives of survivors, rescue workers, and families of victims. Personal accounts were presented as tales of loss, fear, and heroism. The contextualization of 9/11 attacks through political and media (mediated by the administration) content placed America in a victim frame. All these developments led to the creation of "a collective understanding of the incident", a highly politicized "master narrative" which on surface level appeared to be 'ideologically neutral' (McSweeney 10).Atmosphere of fear and emergency that was created framed it as one of the most significant incidents in American history. Consequently, American intervention in Afghanistan for 'War on Terror' was framed as an inevitable and just decision that placed the country in 'hero' and 'savior' frames (McSweeney 10).

Swift and significant decisions in response to the attacks made it a very sensitive topic and for this the country reviewed its foreign policy, security protocols, and immigration laws etc. (Council on Foreign Relations). USA started its longest ever war as a counteraction to these attacks. On the political front, active campaigning to bring public onboard the administration's decision of going to war was widely promoted. All this development led to formation of new cultural sensitivities in the US. Entertainment media, including visual narratives, largely depends on sociopolitical and cultural context for content and inspiration. The content creators or communicators take into account all these factors to be able to produce content that sells.

Communicators, that are filmmakers in this case, created content that best fit the nation's and more importantly administration's belief system. In the environment that was prevalent in the first decade after 9/11 films with themes of heroism, sacrifice, victory, patriotism etc. were expected to be welcomed by the public. *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Lone Survivor* (2013) are among the films that portray these themes. Later on with changing sociopolitical environment other themes including survival, threats, human cost of war, moral complexities, war ethics, fear, confusion, and even defeat were addressed in war narratives including *The Kill Team* (2019) and *The Outpost* (2020) among others. Hence, filmmakers made creative choices on framing of issues presented in the war films according to the sociopolitical context.

This brings the discussion to second location of frames that is the text itself. In this case the visual narratives, present in form of war films are the text produced by the communicators.

4.1 Narratives of Glorification

USA's 'master narrative' of 9/11 attacks frames the event as "a heinous and unprovoked attack on a virtuous and blameless nation", an unanticipated pre-emptive act of war that brought about the "end of innocence" for the country (McSweeney 10). This narrative of victimization hence legitimized any measures what so ever taken by the USA. American films have played a central role in popularizing this narrative. The films produced roughly during the first half of the war are more inclined to "reproduce an

uncritical and unreflective narrative of American victimization" while completely ignoring historical context, geopolitics, and causality (McSweeney 11). Films like *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Lone Survivor* (2013) present personnel involved in the War on Terror as national heroes, while glorifying their efforts and victories and debunking any criticism of their actions. These visual narratives endorse the War on Terror as a 'Just War' by providing justifications for 'military intervention' and even attempt to normalize use of torture by framing the situation as a 'supreme emergency' (Walzer). Following analysis of the aforementioned visual narratives explores how they glorify the post 9/11 American war in Afghanistan. The keynote for 'glorification' of just war narrative in these films is their unapologetic attitude towards controversial subject matter, and depiction of intervention and counterinsurgency as successful feats.

4.1.1 Catching Big Fish: *Zero Dark Thirty*

Before starting the analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty*, I will give a brief introduction to the film. The 2012 movie *Zero Dark Thirty* recounts the intelligence operation that led to finding and killing of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The movie is loosely based on true events surrounding the hunt for Osama bin Laden. After his survival and escape from military operation against him at Tora Bora in December 2001, he went under cover. CIA, therefore, led the operation to locate him. The film features a female lead, a CIA analyst named Maya who joins the operation in 2002 and is eventually successful in locating the Al Qaida leader in 2011. Navy SEALs conduct an operation and kill Osama bin Laden based on this intelligence in May 2011. Maya faces and overcomes a number of challenges along the way. The film pays tribute to CIA agents whose work is considered the backbone of all military operations. It lauds the consistency, resilience, bravery, and efficiency of American Intelligence agents. This visual narrative also sheds light on working conditions of these agents. They are shown working despite lack of resources, long working hours, and looming security threats. The Pakistani counterparts of CIA are framed as unreliable and unsupportive.

According to the concept of Affective Economies, Affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an effect of circulation between objects and signs, and the imagined

subject is brought together through this circulation of certain signifiers (Ahmed). Frequent allusion to 9/11 attacks has become a symbol of American nationalism, reference to which brings the American subjects together against a mutual enemy, raising fear, hatred and other negative emotions against the 'others'. This can be seen in the opening sequence of *Zero Dark Thirty.* The film opens with a disclaimer stating: "The following motion picture is based on firsthand accounts of actual events" (*Zero Dark Thirty* 0:00:39). It is followed by the opening sequence featuring audio clips of the exchange between hijacked airplanes and control tower just before they crash, and telephone conversations of victims with their families and rescue workers. These audio clips are played for One minute and twenty-three seconds against a black screen. The date 'September 11, 2001' appears at the center of the screen (Figure 1.1). This then merges into the first scene of the film where a CIA agent, Dan is torturing a detainee for information. Choosing this specific point as the opening of the film places Americans in the Victim/Innocent frame, while the hijackers and attackers are placed in villain/antagonist frame. Playing the original audio clips from the attack sites works to set the tone for a documentary style factual narrative. Furthermore, this particular choice aims at gaining the audience's attention and sympathy for the desired group. The opening sequence hence puts into perspective the use of violence against the detainees in the first scene. In this way, from the very beginning the film starts to justify American stance on the use of torture by framing the situation as one where "morally wrong actions can be considered as the right thing to do" (Walzer 209) .

However, that is not the only role it plays. The narrative contextualizes use of torture and inhumane treatment of suspects by the intelligence agencies. The practice became widespread after these attacks with establishment of detention centers like AbuGhraib and Guantanamo Bay (Amnesty International USA). People started questioning and criticizing this practice of arbitrary arrests, detentions, and torture, where the detainees did not have the right to defend themselves through legal procedures. Working with the production frames, that depicted Americans as victims and attackers as villains, the filmmakers and policymakers brought forward a narrative of victory out of it. The most important part about the on screen portrayal of 'Enhanced Interrogation' sessions is the way they are treated in the narrative. The film links the inhumane practice of extracting information to extermination of terrorist leaders including the Al Qaeda leader Osama bin

Laden. Former deputy director of CIA, Michael Morell criticized the film for making this link and falsifies the claim (qtd in, Greer 6). According to Entman in the process of framing, what is left unsaid is as important as what is said (54). The narrative only talks about detention of people having direct links with high profile terrorists and problems caused by inaccurate information provided by them. It keeps complete silence on the issue of detainment of hundreds of innocent citizens in Abu-Ghraib (Iraq), and in other detention centers (Swain). In the initial spree of war on terror, Muslim, Arab, and South Asian immigrants in the west became terror suspects and many suffered in detention centers despite being innocent (Sherer 1) There is a conflict of opinion on whether *Zero Dark Thirty* glamorizes use of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques (EITs) by CIA or criticizes the practice. The film depicts the morally complex nature of CIAs work. However, from what is left unsaid and how the efforts result in victory, it is clear that the narrative of the film places CIA in hero frame and glorifies America's role in The War on Terror.

Documentary films command authenticity as they visually narrate the facts on any given topic. *Zero Dark Thirty*, to an extent follows the cinematic style of a documentary about investigation of a crime. The locations including American military bases, interrogation rooms, and CIA offices are all realistically recreated. Name of each location along with the particular dates on which the event took place is shown in the establishing shot of each setting. (Figure 1.2 and 1.3)

Zero Dark Thirty includes actual news footage for instance, at [34:50] reporting the July 7, 2005 London bombings, at [47:00] reporting the September 20, 2007 Marriot Hotel Islamabad bombing, and at [1:18:10] reporting the May 1, 2010 Times Square, New York blast, and etc. This gives credibility to the film's narrative of The War on Terror. As the 'villains' attack different sovereign states in acts of pre-emptive aggression, rules of Just War give the victims, including USA and UK "a right to resist" these acts of aggression (Walzer 34-47). By grounding the narrative in real events, the film justifies the government's decisions and actions including human rights violations in detention centers as important part of a larger humanitarian mission.

Furthermore, the film makes minimal use of non-diegetic sounds and background music. The lack of background music as filler makes each scene more intense, and the silences more noticeable and significant. At the same time ambient sounds including noise of machinery, background chatter, chirping of birds etc. make the settings more authentic and immersive for the audience. A cinematographic choice that adds to the documentary style of this visual narrative is the use of hand-held camera technique. The camera is not stabilized and moves and shakes as the videographer moves. Hand-held camera technique gives a sense of immediacy and adds to the realistic, non-fiction, and objective mood of the film (Greer 6). By adopting this style, the director Kathryn Bigelow frames the narrative of this film as true and accurate. *Zero Dark Thirty* is a work of fiction inspired from real events but not entirely or accurately depicting the real events. It is a procedural drama in essence, starting with the 9/11 attacks and ending in killing of bin Laden, the mastermind behind the attacks. Presenting it in a documentary style is a politically significant decision as the film glorifies American efforts in war on terror in Afghanistan. Thematically problematic subject matter i.e. CIAs detention centers and Enhanced Interrogation techniques is presented in relation to manhunt for bin Laden that becomes a tale of glorious victory. The film was released around the time period when Obama administration was trying to shut down the detention centers set up after 9/11 attacks (Kyriakidis). The film features president Obama's statement given on a television program: "I've said repeatedly that America doesn't torture. I am gonna make sure that we don't torture. Those are part and parcel of an effort to regain America's moral stature in the world" (*Zero Dark Thirty* 52:14-52:27).

While human rights organizations as well as American public criticized torture of detainees in Abu Ghraib, the film regards provision of right to defense to those detainees as a major setback. Dan, the experienced CIA agent and interrogator featured in various scenes torturing a detainee (Figure 1.4), decides to leave for America when the program gets under scrutiny. He advises Maya to be "real careful with the detainees… the politics are changing and you don't want to be the last one holding a dog collar when the oversight committee comes" (*Zero Dark Thirty* 45:53-46:01). The scene has a grim and hopeless mood, implying that this change is a very bad news, a hurdle in the way of finding Osama bin Laden. Inhumane treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo bay detention

centers got public and media attention at global level. As a result American political leaders moved to address the issue. Hence, when Dan asks The Wolf (head of counter terrorism center in the US) for some funds he voices his aggression saying:

> As you know Abu Ghraib and Gitmo fucked us. The detainee program is now a flypaper. We got senators jumping out of our asses. And the director is very concerned. They will not stop until they have a body. (*Zero Dark Thirty* 1:10:44-1:10:55)

Similarly, later on in a meeting with National Security Advisor the resentment about loss of detainee program is brought up by CIA officials. When the advisor asks George to provide evidence of Osama bin Laden's presence in the compound, he retorts:

> You know we lost the ability to prove that when we lost the detainee program… who the hell am I supposed to ask? Some guy in Gitmo who is all lawyered up? He'll just tell his lawyer to warn bin Laden. (*Zero Dark Thirty* 1:44:00-1:44:10)

While the CIA representatives in the narrative complain about loss of detainee program, they still continue to employ Enhanced Interrogation Techniques on the detainees. This contradiction raises the question of whether the political narrative about detention centers was a practical step or just a part of Obama's election campaign. Provision of right to fair trial to detainees is not welcomed by the intelligence agency and is regarded as a hindrance in their line of work. The discontent on loss of detainee program is used to imply that it was a key element in hunt for bin Laden and campaigning against it is not in interest of national security. This assertion on importance of detention centers and use of EITs works to alter the public's opinion on the matter and win their support.

As a tribute to the Intelligence forces of the United States, the film lauds persistence, resilience, bravery, commitment, and resolve of intelligence analysts and agents. The most prominent framing choice in this direction is creation of the character of Maya. This character is based on a real life CIA analyst Alfreda Bikowsky who played key role in the hunt for Osama bin Laden (Roston). Bikowsky was recruited in 1988 and was working on Al Qaeda and bin Laden since 1996 (Roston). A human rights group in Germany filed a

criminal complaint against her for allowing the torture of "suspected Al-Qaida militants in the unit she headed and participat[ing] in the torture herself (RTnews). One of the prominent cases include torture and extradition of El Masri, an innocent German citizen, without any evidence or criminal charges (Roston). While this particular CIA agent came into public/media attention, larger majority of them stay anonymous, as do their just and unjust acts. The filmmakers made a creative decision of merging all those people into one character, i.e. Maya. They took inspiration from a person with bloody track record and made the character a hero. This choice gave the narrative its 'lead' protagonist. This lead character then stands for the heroic attributes; persistence, commitment, resolve, and work ethic of CIA agents and analysts.

The whole film plays out from the point of view of the characters working for the CIA as every scene includes one or more representatives of the intelligence agency. Screen time allocation to particular storyline, characters, and incidents is an important aspect of framing in any film. In *Zero Dark Thirty* most of the screen-time is dedicated to the meticulous process of intelligence gathering and processing. The operatives go through previous file records, interrogation tapes of detainees, and telephone intercepts, engage in discussion and arguments on related issues, tracking down the leads and following the suspects. As a result, intense scenes in the film are not only the ones with physical/outdoor action but also those within the CIA offices. Inclusion of minor details of the procedural aspects of the operation in this way emphasizes and glorifies the amount of work and effort that goes into intelligence operations. Large portion of screen time given to this aspect frames the manhunt for Osama bin Laden as an exhaustive process made successful through sheer dedication and commitment of all who were involved. Furthermore, the amount of screen-time dedicated to the CIA reinforces their framing as the heroes in the narrative. By focusing on positive attributes of CIA officials, the narrative glorifies their work and frames it as instrumental in the War on Terror.

Maya, the lead character in the narrative, personifies the agency's diligence, consistency, and resilience in the face of any hurdles that it faces. The narrative develops Maya as a highly motivated and committed professional who is hyper-focused on her work. Close-up shots of her when she is thinking, focused on work, or engaged in a conversation

or argument; reveal the intensity of her emotions. For instance; when she tirelessly goes through detainee tapes to trace Abu Ahmed, when she receives the news of her colleague,

Jessica's death in terrorist attack, and in the last scene when she finally boards the plane to go home (Figure 1.5 and 1.6). The narrative reveals these aspects of her character, as she remains steadfast in her pursuit of Osama bin Laden through the lead she finds. Her confidence is unwavering as she argues, sometimes aggressively with her co-workers and seniors. For instance, when the station chief tells her to focus on other targets right after the May 1, 2010 attack on Times Square in New York, she fiercely argues to get assistance for her plan. She warns him saying,

> … give me the team I need to follow this lead, or the other thing you are gonna have on your resume is being the first station chief to be called before a congressional committee for subverting the efforts to capture or kill bin Laden. (*Zero Dark Thirty* 1:19:41-1:19:54)

While the film takes care of minute details to present CIA officials commitment to fighting and winning the War on Terror, it paints the agency's Pakistani counterparts in a negative light and doesn't represent them on screen. Entman states that "identification of forces creating the problem" and "making moral judgments by evaluating the causal agents" are two of the functions of frames (52). Hence, ISI is framed as an untrustworthy collaborator on whom CIA can blame any of their own delays or failures. The ISI is portrayed as deceptive and uncooperative towards CIA in its efforts to curb terrorism. For instance, before Bradley's meeting with ISI, Dan suggests an agenda for the meeting saying "they are slow rolling us in Lahore, you might want to bitch about that" (*Zero Dark Thirty* 12:40-12:43). Later on, Bradely is publically named in a lawsuit for civilian casualties from drone attacks in Pakistan and a group of people gather to protest outside American embassy in Islamabad. Instead of addressing the issue of drone attacks or collateral damage, Maya consoles Bradley saying, "ISI fucked you" (*Zero Dark Thirty* 1:26:40).

In the self-righteous confidence, CIA turns a blind eye to civilian casualties caused by its faulty intelligence, and instead disparage the allies for allegedly making the information public. Framing ISI as inefficient and uncooperative gives the US forces an

excuse for armed intervention in Pakistani territory i.e. the operation on bin Laden's compound, without taking Pakistan's armed forces or intelligence agencies into confidence. The compound was basically unguarded and a team of US or Pakistani armed forces could successfully carry out the operation. US instead went behind its strategic ally's back to take full credit for killing of Osama bin Laden. The Narrative therefore frames ISI as deceptive body, to justify the breach of Pakistan's national security and sovereignty.

In conclusion, *Zero Dark Thirty* is a pro-war narrative that pays tribute to the CIA for its role in the War on Terror. It frames the agents as heroes while defending their use of the controversial EITs. Bigelow and her team shows complete disregard towards the worldwide criticism of detainee program and use of EITs and instead link them to finding and killing of Osama bin Laden. The film rejects issue of dirty hands and any ensuing moral questions by presenting the controversial subject matter as part and parcel of victory against 'evil'.

4.1.2 Close-up in the Action: *Lone Survivor*

Lone Survivor (2013) is based on ex-Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell's autobiography *Lone Survivor*: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Red Wings and the Lost Heroes of Seal Team 10 (2007). It is a dramatized adaptation of Luttrell's firsthand account of operation Red Wings, of which he is the only survivor. The story of the film revolves around a team of Navy SEALs who is sent to capture or kill a Taliban leader Ahmad Shah. The team's initial plan of action fails as it is ambushed by hundreds of Taliban fighters. Three of the SEALs die in action while one survives and is rescued by Afghan villagers. Their backup team of eight Navy SEALs and eight Army Night Stalkers is also killed as the Taliban shoot down the helicopter carrying them. With its extended action sequence, and firefight scenes, this film promotes narrative of American bravery, heroism, and sacrifice.

Taking inspiration from Marcus Luttrell's autobiographical account of Operation Red Wings, *Lone Survivor*, the visual narrative retells the story in a semi-documentary style film. The film features a prologue and an epilogue that includes images of the real life counterparts of characters in the film. The prologue details intensive training of Navy

SEALs through video clips from the actual training sites. This opening sequence attempts to ground the narrative as based on reality. Playing real life video clips of SEALs training instead of recreating the content in fictional filmic form is significant because if the prologue was recorded as a part of the film, it would not command the authenticity as it does with real clips. Moreover, the filmmakers worked to develop the fictional parts of the film in a journalistic style. As the director of photography Tobias Schliessler states that the film was "basically documenting [the events] with the camera" without "trying to hide anything" as their aim was to be "as truthful as possible" (Gettel). Schliessler and Peter Berg developed a "naturalistic [and] un-stylized aesthetic" for the film, similar to their previous projects together (Gettel). The naturalistic cinematography visually created the film as realistic, thus *providing* a sense of authenticity to the visual narrative.

Lone Survivor is largely an action based film that focuses on bravery, resilience, and proficiency of US Navy Seals in battlefield. It frames the US forces as willing and excited to participate in armed conflict. For instance, the scene with the seal team checking its gear for the operation before setting out (19:23-19:40) is supplemented with Shane's rap about navy SEALs playing in the background. This creates a sense of adventure, making war appear as an exciting and heroic endeavor. Moreover, action sequence where the SEAL team engages in firefight with a much larger Taliban force takes up almost forty minutes of screen-time in the film. Extended scenes shot with multiple cameras running at the same time are made more dramatic with further editing. Stunts such as the team falling off the cliffs are played in slow motion with dramatic background music. Use of editing, sound effects, and music make the firefight more intense and help in having strong impact on the audience. The last scene where quick response force finally comes to save Marcus is choreographed as a decisive fight that ends in victory, rather than mere salvaging of a botched-up mission. The video game like action sequence concludes in favor of the American forces and the villagers. Here the heroes not only win over evil forces but also win the hearts of local population who is framed as dependent on American forces for safety and security. Hence, the action film-like portrayal of battlefield, supplemented with narrative of camaraderie and brotherhood, and eventual victory glorify the efforts of American soldiers.

Frames "determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits" (Entman 52). *Lone Survivor* reveals the 'cost' of the 'causal agent's' actions at the start and then goes back tell the whole story. The film grabs audience attention by showing the severe consequence of the fight at the beginning and then telling the story as a flashback. It comes a full circle as it ends at the same point where it starts. The use of this technique gives the story a sense of completion and the viewers some sort of closure. After the prologue, first scene of the film shows critically injured Marcus being airlifted and rushed for medical assistance at a military base. This scene is shot with handheld camera, with almost all the sounds muted that supplements the subject matter to create a sense of urgency. While in the background Marcus narrates "there's a storm inside of us. I've heard many team guys speak of this… an unrelenting desire to push yourself harder and further than anyone could think possible…" (*Lone Survivor* 5:00-5:38). The last scene of the film again features Marcus being rescued from the Afghan village and airlifted to the US airbase. Although the story is at the same point as in the first scene, camera shots are from different angles and background narration is different. Paying tribute to the fellows who died in the battle and to the armed personnel in general, Marcus narrates,

> [B]rave men have fought and died building the proud tradition and fear of reputation that I am bound to uphold… I died up on that mountain… And I can never forget that. No matter how much it hurts, how dark it gets, or how far you fall; you are never out of the fight. (*Lone Survivor* 1:50:58-1:52:00)

The narration reflects preparedness and even eagerness of the American troops to engage in tough fights. Participation in action is momentous in their career and like *Red Badge of Courage*, wounds and injuries reflect bravery and resilience in face of adversity. The desire to push themselves to their limits comes from a sense of competition and need to keep up with the traditional definitions of bravery, patriotism and sacrifice. Hence, *Lone Survivor* is a narrative that justifies the war on terror as a good versus evil campaign. American fighters get framed as heroes as their mission was to save Afghan villagers from a notorious Taliban leader. Walzer argues that "moral standing of any particular state depends on the reality of the common life it protects and… if the state does not defend the common life that exists, its own defense may have no moral justification" (54). The narrative implies

that Afghan government itself was unable to protect its people from extremists and therefore US forces needed to intervene on moral and humanitarian grounds.

According to Walzer's Just War theory 'humanitarian intervention' aimed at preventing human rights violations is justified (Just and Unjust Wars). *Lone Survivor* underlines the humanitarian aspects of war and hence works to establish the intervention as a just act. Through effective use of mise-en-scene the filmmakers make distinction between Taliban and Afghan villagers. The traditional contrast of light and dark colors for good and evil respectively is used. Afghan villagers wear white or other light colored clothes, whereas Taliban fighters wear black or other darker colors. The village is in the open, looks vulnerable, and has abundant light (Figure 1.7), similar to the US airbase (Figure 1.8). Taliban on the other hand, hide out in the dark woods. The US forces strive to protect the innocents who are weak and exposed to the evil forces. When the SEAL team is getting briefed about the operation red wings, scene cuts between Taliban harassing the villagers and the briefing room. This establishes the operation as an act of "humanitarian intervention" according to Walzer's interpretation. Failure of the operation is largely attributed to the mishap where the team was spotted by three locals, who allegedly informed the Taliban about its location. The discussion about the fate of these locals (running from 41:44 to 44:30) is the most dense and thematically significant part of the otherwise action oriented film.

Just war theory emphasizes on protection of civilians in any armed conflict and not making them intentional targets of violence (Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars). In 2002, a number of US military personnel faced investigation and criminal trial for bringing in 'trophy guns' (Deseret News). Marcus mentions the imprisonment of soldiers for this crime when arguing with his fellows. Another thing he mentions is the 'rules of engagement'. Safeguarding civilians, and not making them intentional targets of violence in a war is one of the basic tenets of Just War Theory (Walzer). However America's war in Afghanistan and Iraq caused a large number of civilian casualties in form of 'collateral damage'. To address this issue, General Stanley McChrystal, who had the command of military operations in the region set strict rules of engagement. In mid-2009 General McChrystal ordered "an overhaul of U.S. air strike procedures" while stating that civilian casualties and

excessive damage alienates people and would lead to strategic defeats (cfr.org). Although this particular development in rules of engagement took place four years after the events showcased in the film had passed, such restrictions are condemned in the narrative of *Lone Survivor*.

While the team members discuss about the fate of three goat-herders they came across, the arguments against killing them do not come from humanitarian sentiments but fear of loss of reputation, as Marcus says

> Marcus: What are we gonna do? We gonna kill them? … What then what?
> Fucking bury 'em? They get found, then what?
> Axelson: Then what?
> Marcus: What do you think? This shit's gonna be private? It's gonna be out there for the whole fucking world. CNN, okay? SEALs kill kids. That's the fucking story forever. (41:45-42:06)

Fear of accountability and reputation is what Marcus is most concerned about as he strives to keep his hands clean. However it is not a welcome idea and more sentimental members do not want to follow these illogical rules that are creating obstacles in their mission. Danny and Axelson's criticism of the 'Rules of Engagement'

> Danny: it's nobody's fucking business what we do up here. We do what we do. What we have to do.
> Axelson: Shah killed 20 marines last week. If we let them go, we let him go… our job is to stop shah. Why do these men have the right to dictate how we do our job?
> Marcus: Rules of Engagement says we cannot touch them… got guys in Leavenworth for taking home trophy guns. What do you think they're gonna do for two fucking kids and an old fucking man?
> Axelson: look at him. That's not a kid. That's a soldier. That's death. Look at death.
> Marcus: we can't do it. They are unarmed prisoners.
> Axelson: and the second they run down there we've got 200 hajis on our backs. (*Lone Survivor* 42:07-43:39)

This whole argument summarizes the sentiments within the armed forces about rules of engagement and the extent of decision making power that troops have in the field. While higher authorities strive to keep 'clean hands' in front of the world, the ground troops feel powerless as their hands are tied by so many rules and regulations. Following the rules of engagement and tenants of the Just war theory, the seal team lets the goat herders go. Axelson calls them a "soft compromise". As the camera follows one of the boys sprinting down the ravine, it makes apparent to the viewers that letting them go was a mistake. The narrative implies that these locals informed Taliban of the seal team's location who then attacked the team. Hence, the failure of mission is directly linked to the policy of ethical warfare, and rules on civilians' safety and not to the seal team's error of judgment and lack of planning. It also implies that professional attitude and humanitarian considerations of the soldiers led them to make a wrong decision, whereas following their gut instincts about the three locals could have saved their lives.

Similar to *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Lone Survivor* allocates very little screen time to the locals and the Taliban. The narrative primarily focuses on the action of navy SEALs and also tries to give the audience glimpses into their personal; specifically love lives. For instances; after the "3 DAYS EARLIER" strip at 6:43, the scene shifts from one team member to the other as they sleep in their bunkers. In each room, through several cuts the camera shows surroundings of the navy SEALs including pictures on their walls and bedsides (Figure 1.9 and 1.10). These cuts give an introduction to each team member while giving insights about their personalities and personal lives. This introduction extends further as the narrative shows them playfully interacting with each other and other team members. Such introductions to primary characters in the narrative act as ice breaking and bonding experience. Seeing them casually interacting and dealing with minor daily life problems, makes the audience empathize with these characters.

Through brief introduction to the families or personal lives of the primary characters the film humanises the soldiers more than the Taliban as they appear to have no families, personal lives, or a soft, human side. Hence, family works frequently repeated "sign or signifier" as Ahmed puts it in 'Affective Economies' that attaches positive feelings for the soldiers, and the absence of which demonises the enemy. As audience finds these

characters relatable, they defend their actions and choices, and are inclined to agree with their points of view. This particular framing is used in combination with subject matter where primary characters get in trouble and even die for following certain rules. As apparent from this development, the stakeholders whose perspective the film voices, want to portray their war as a just war. But they do not want to or do not like playing by the rules of just war.

Issue of translation and the language barrier is a complication that arises at various points in the film. For most part where villagers are shown to speak in Pashtu, it is incomprehensible for the characters (mostly Marcus) and the viewers who do not know or understand the language. The director does not choose to add subtitles translating these dialogs into English except for a few cuts in two scenes. First, between 13:17 and 15:10 Taraq, Ahmad Shah's right-hand assailant, brutally beheads a villager for 'helping the Americans'(Figure 1.11) This allegation is translated through subtitles to let the viewers know about the reason behind this brutal act of violence. Second, At 1:38:00 the villagers stand up against Taliban in respect of their tradition of Pashtun-wali and save Marcus from being beheaded. The same people who couldn't save their fellow villager from Taliban stand up for Marcus, their guest.

> M. Gulab: This is my guest. Leave our village.
> Taraq: For an American you will die? Do you understand? You will all be slaughtered. (*Lone Survivor* 1:38:14-1:38:33)

The filmmakers tactically choose to only translate the dialogs that link slaughtering of villagers by Taliban to helping the Americans. Marcus being helped by the villagers points at the strategic victory of US forces as they have the support of local population. It also implies that Afghan people need and welcome American intervention against 'insurgents'.

Post 9/11 American narratives of the Just 'War on Terror' treat 9/11 attacks as the starting point, an isolated event with no historical background or causality. Therefore, McSweeney calls the American post 9/11 films on 'War on Terror' "uncritical and unreflective narratives of American Victimisation" (11). In *Lone Survivor*, the Chinook helicopter carrying backup team to the active firefight site is shot down with a rocket

propelled grenade. Ironically, the weapon, along with other hi-tech weaponry was provided to Afghans by the US to use against Russian air-force during the cold war as a part of a covert CIA program called 'Operation Cyclone' (Pear). The film Charlie Wilson's Wars also details how US spent large sums of money to arm Afghans who in turn fought America's proxy war. The narrative of *Lone Survivor* however does not make any allusions or connections to this historical aspect as it would challenge the framing of US as victim in the post 9/11 world.

The characters in hero frame get killed because they tried to follow the rules in battlefield. This framing makes *Lone Survivor* a pro war film that speaks out against strict rules of engagement in Afghanistan. The narrative also establishes US military intervention in Afghanistan as an act of Just War by portraying the US forces as 'saviors' for Afghan civilians. It shows that without US help Afghan people would not be able to defend themselves against evil Taliban forces, and therefore look forward to and welcome US help. Furthermore, by defending the Afghan village from Taliban attack at the end, the narrative glorifies US forces as heroes and saviors.

4.2 Narratives of Justification

Films like *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lone Survivor* attempted to frame and popularize American War on Terror as a 'Just' and grand endeavor. In doing so they did not properly address the psychological, moral, and ethical effect of the war on soldiers, the point of view of the other side, and the controversies and criticism regarding the conduct of US forces in Afghanistan. Issues like the inhumane treatment of detainees in detention centers and civilian casualties as collateral damage, were center of attention worldwide and were putting to question the whole idea of the War on Terror. In such a situation, public opinion could not be ignored for a very long time as American government needed popular support of its public to continue military missions abroad. Michael Walzer asserts the same while commenting on modern warfare in an interview. He regards wars as "political military engagements" where "public opinion, local public opinion, hearts and minds, domestic public opinion, and global public opinion is very important. And it affects whether you win or lose these wars" (Military Techniques, Strategies, Conflicts: Iran, Afghanistan, Vietnam

War). While the mega-projects focused on glorifying the military engagement abroad, others tried to approach the subject from various different angles. Films like *The Kill Team* (2019) and *The Outpost* (2020) take a relatively deeper look into the war in Afghanistan and focus on themes like moral and ethical dilemmas, fear, war crimes, existentialism, trauma, and psychological implications of first hand interaction with the dark realities of war. By presenting a darker side of the war, and its emotional and psychological implications on soldiers, these narratives work to justify and defend American stance on War on Terror. Instead of glorifying the war through narratives of victory these narratives present tales of survival in dark and scary environments. The visual narratives coming out towards the end of the war are more critical of the war although, they also tell the stories from American perspective and do not allude to historical context of the war. These narratives of justification through portrayal of continued violence against US forces in Afghanistan and their efforts to counter and survive it try to justify military presence and combat role in Afghanistan. The depiction of enemy as aggressive and largely outnumbering the American forces despite continued counterinsurgency efforts asserts that the war was necessary to protect America from further attacks like 9/11. The narratives of these films revolve around soldiers as they navigate their way in warzones. Nazemroaya argues that the use of this technique "collapses the event and the soldiers into one, which means that criticizing a US war will equate to attacking the soldiers and their convictions" (3). It allows the US administration to hide behind the soldiers and detract from "the real issue of an illegal occupation" (3).

4.2.1 War Crimes: *The Kill Team*

The Kill Team, a feature film released in 2019 is based on a 2013 documentary film of the same name by the director Dan Krauss. *The Kill Team* documentary and the film are based on 'Maywand District murders' committed by American soldiers in Southern Afghanistan during the first half of 2010 (Center for Army Leadership). The feature film develops the narrative from the perspective of a young recruit named Andrew Briggman. Briggman stands out among his fellows as he is a sensitive, reflective, and observant guy who is not attracted to violence, and sees Afghan villagers as victims rather than villains. Upon the death of their Sergeant in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) explosion at

the start of the film, the squad goes under the leadership of a charismatic yet manipulative and sadistic sergeant named Deeks. He promises to make the young recruits war heroes if they gave him their loyalty. He fulfils this promise by encouraging the squad to frame innocent civilians as enemies and kill them. While some of his fellow soldiers are completely onboard with Deeks' strategy and appreciate his machoism, Briggman looks at the killings as unjust and goes through moral and psychological dilemma throughout the film. He tries to report the criminal activities of his unit through his father, but has to stay silent as he finds his own life threatened. In the end he succumbs to pressure and unwillingly participates in shooting an innocent villager.

Krauss chose to retell the story of the 'Kill Team' in the form of a feature film that he had already told in his 2013 documentary film. He explains his decision stating that the documentary was "a retrospective account of the case" whereas the narrative film gave the prospect "to tell the story in a more immediate, thorough way" and would affect the audience more profoundly as it would allow them "to experience fist-hand" what the protagonist went through (Krauss 2). The film raises a politically sensitive issue of American war crimes in Afghanistan but it doesn't problematize the issue by not holding the military leadership or the administration accountable. Instead, the subject matter is approached as an isolated event where the primary victim is an American soldier for whom the killings are an 'end of innocence' traumatic experience, and the antagonist or primary culprit is an individual soldier rather than the whole system or chain of command. Additionally, the feature film was released in 2019, a time when the popular public opinion was largely against the war that had extended too long, and administration was planning exit strategy. When placed against the socio-political climate the film can be seen as a narrative that advocates for an end of the war because of the ethical crisis and trauma it can inflict upon young American soldiers. It cannot be clearly categorised as pro-war or antiwar but it certainly highlights a darker reality of war that soldiers are exposed to in the war.

By taking a stance about dangers that the soldiers face in Afghanistan in-spite of their counter terrorism and peacekeeping efforts the narrative justifies American military intervention in Afghanistan. Right in the opening sequence the film introduces the protagonist, a young army recruit who sees his deployment in Afghanistan as his 'chance'

[1:08-1:13], probably to become a war hero. At his home in America his father tells him that he is proud of him for "being a part of something like this" (*The Kill Team* 1:56-2:03). He is then willingly uprooted from the warm surroundings of his home to a grim looking Forward Operating Base in Afghanistan. As his perspective aligns with moral and humanitarian considerations, it is easier to understand him and support his choices. This introduction to the central and point of view of the narrative appeals to the audience to empathize with him as he faces challenges from outside and within his ranks while trying to do something significant for his country. The film depicts the relevance and significance of presence of American forces in Afghanistan from the first scene set in Afghanistan. Sergeant Wallace is killed when he steps on a hidden IED in a village that he and his squad were conducting a routine search operation in. Sergeant Wallace is friendly towards Afghan villagers and doesn't see them as insurgents but dies from an IED hidden within the village that the villagers plausibly knew about. It shows that it is impossible for the American forces to clearly differentiate Taliban and their conspirators from innocent villagers. Furthermore, as American soldiers suffer losses at hands of the insurgents while trying to bring peace to the country, their presence as combatants in Afghanistan is justified in the narrative. Walzer's take on complexity of modern warfare and the necessity to "differentiate between combatants and non-combatants" becomes relevant here. As the narrative instils that it is not possible for the soldiers to completely abide by this rule and distinguish between the Taliban fighters and civilians.

Within the first twenty-five minutes of the film another soldier named Sergeant Bruer gets severely injured (and later dies) in another IED explosion. Camera focuses on his severed body (Figure 1.12) as medics unsuccessfully try to save him. The narrative shows impact of this violence perpetrated against American soldiers through Briggman's reaction to Sergeant Bruer's death. Upon hearing the news he is unable to hold his emotions and says:

> Fuck those people, man. Fuck those motherfuckers. I'd like to see their whole country burn, man. Every village. Every goddamn house. Every bush, every tree. I just want to see this whole fucking country burn to the ground. (*The Kill Team* 24:52-25:53)

The visual depiction of Sergeant Bruer's severed body followed by Briggman's emotional outpour dramatizes the impact of exposure to violence on the minds of young soldiers. It also sets precedent for the soldiers' inclination to perpetrate violence against Afghans that in the narrative of this film crosses the boundary into war crimes. By placing the attacks on soldiers before the killings of the villagers by the squad, the narrative establishes Afghan/Taliban hostility as an action whereas the war crimes of American soldiers as a reaction to that.

Framing is a process used to present reality in such manner that it gives a desired "interpretation and moral evaluation" (52). As the narrative attempts to justify the War on Terror in Afghanistan, it does not overlook or in any way defend the war crimes committed by some US soldiers during the course of the war. Instead it takes Briggman as a representative 'good soldier' who on the behalf of the director, the audience, and American military condemns the unlawful actions of his fellows. Krauss makes Briggman the subjective point of view character and through him judges the actions of Sergeant Deeks and others as wrong while portraying Afghan civilians as victims of misplaced aggression. For instance, the scene with Afghan suspect in the camp, silently portrays the suspect as innocent through close up shots of him and Briggman. As the camera cuts between the two it shows the Afghan as a helpless victim through Briggman's eyes. Similarly, when his fellows kill an Afghan villager, the camera shows accusing, helpless, and traumatized gaze of his wailing son through Briggman's point of view whose full focus is on the wife and son of the victim as they mourn the unjust and unforeseen death of the head of their house (Figure 1.13 and 1.14). Although the narrative takes up an unpopular theme of war crimes, the perspective remains American as the narrative's victim is its protagonist who in turn sees the Afghans as victims. Moreover it does not give any deeper insight into the lives, perspectives, hardships, and traumas of the Afghan villagers subjected to unjust violence, thus keeping them on the peripheries. This narrative is then another case of American centric retellings of War on Terror where the experiences of Americans and Westerns "are prioritized as of greater worth than the experiences of non-Westerns" (McSweeney 14). However, the significant difference is that the issue is approached with humility and the toll of war effort is highlighted instead of glorifying it.

Just War Theory, including Walzer's interpretation, not only assert the need for a just cause to wage a war but also insist on use of just means to go through with it (Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars). While the IED attack in *The Kill Team* try to establish the cause as just, Sergeant Deek's character and morality highlight the unjust means. With his manipulative mind, and self-righteous and macho demeanor; Sergeant Deeks stands in complete contrast to Briggman. On a moral spectrum he is on the opposite end from Briggman. Deeks' characterisation and visual representation in the film resembles that of a typical hero in war films. But with his act of murdering the civilians he breaks the rules of Just War and becomes a villain who does not consider his actions wrong. His flawed sense of morality makes him consider and treat all Afghans as enemies. He challenges the rules of engagement as he instils the idea in the minds of young soldiers that "you don't win wars zip-tying people" (17:47-17:49). This line is a catch phrase used at different occasions in the film by different soldiers including Briggman but it is clear that it came from Deeks. In this narrative, the institution of military is not directly attacked as Deeks is framed as the main perpetrator of the crimes who preaches others to follow his lead. He is portrayed as a rouge individual who notoriously breaks the rules. As the film does not feature any officers or military command sanctioning the killings or defending (or condemning) the perpetrators, it doesn't harm the institution's general image. Deeks instead stands as the source of evil and unjust behaviour in the Just War.

While Navy SEALs in films like *Lone Survivor* and 12 Strong go to war zones with a grand sense of purpose, the soldiers in *The Kill Team* are bored and unsatisfied with their role during deployment in the war zone. These young soldiers went to war with a traditional concept of war in minds whereby they expected their mission to be all about combat and killing enemies. For instance, bored from routine search operations in Afghan villages Briggman's fellow soldier, Rayburn says "we can't arrest nobody, we can't fuckin' shoot nobody" (*The Kill Team* 3:48-3:54). This reflects the soldiers' lack of awareness about the context and nature of the War on Terror, and its complexities. They appear not to be properly educated about the war they were deployed in and their roles as peacekeepers instead of active combat soldiers. These young soldiers had dreams of becoming war heroes and therefore fall right into Deeks trap/hands when he promises to give each of them "a chance to be a warrior, to actually do something out [t]here, [and] to be a part of history"

(9:20-9:28). They already expressed their hatred and disregard towards Afghans villagers by using words like 'goatfuckers' and 'fucking animals' for them. Therefore when their leader, an experienced soldier with "three combat tours under [his] belt" gives a guilty verdict about those people and presents it as a chance to do something great, the young soldiers do not question his judgment and start killing them. This 'action' and 'fun' in warzone fills in for firefights and active engagements in wars that they had seen in films or read about in books. Killing people who look like the enemy i.e. Taliban, gives them a sense of fulfillment and they wildly celebrate each kill [30:11-30:45]. Presenting this subject matter in film works at two levels; first it gives an excuse for such instances where military personnel might actually confuse an aggressive civilian for an enemy as they look alike and live in close proximity, thus giving justification for any violence against the civilians. Second, on a deeper and more critical interpretation, it can be taken as a result of America's master narrative on 9/11 attacks that made almost all Muslim Asians and Arabs terror suspects and hence possible targets of aggression. Walzer however rejects any excuses for immoral behavior on battlefield as he expresses in an interview:

> I find people who apologize or defend terrorism to be morally reprehensible, because the condemnation of terrorism is part of the fight against it. And I find people who apologize for reckless or immoral conduct on the battlefield also to be wrong. (Walzer, Military Techniques, Strategies, Conflicts: Iran, Afghanistan, Vietnam War)

The dark subject of film is reflected in the mise en scene and cinematography choices. The Afghan terrain is rough, barren, and dusty. The villages appear as dead or haunted places as they appear colorless and lifeless. The helplessness and innocence of Briggman and the Afghan villagers is conveyed through slow rolling shots and silence; on the contrary evil acts and intentions are conveyed through dialogue and action. While commenting on the film's visual choreography, Krauss said that to create "a sense of intimacy and a sense of subjectivity", they made use of close shots and wide camera lenses instead of long lenses that are usually employed in shooting war films (Krauss). Thus, cinematography of the film works to strengthen the impact of subject matter and themes of the film and add to the dramatic aspect of the narrative.

The Kill Team retells a case of war crimes i.e. pre-mediated murders of three Afghan Civilians by members of a US army platoon. In doing so the narrative highlights the emotional and psychological toll that involvement in war has on young military recruits. It links the violent behavior of young soldiers to their young and impressionable age and the need for approval of the superior they looked up to. It also implies the lack of cultural sensitivity training, lack of empathy and critical thinking skills in the soldiers who fail to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. Furthermore, through exclusion the narrative points at absence of military leadership and its hold on bases in remote areas. While in *Lone Survivor* rules of engagement are criticized, in *The Kill Team* they are actually broken by soldiers who consider their actions justified. In its treatment of the Maywand district murders as an isolated case, the narrative saves the military as an institution from larger responsibility. Instead, despite claiming that he doesn't believe in the 'bad apples' argument, Krauss introduces Deeks as a bad apple who gathers around him a group of impressionable youths. In short, the narrative defends American intervention in Afghanistan by highlighting the violence against American forces in the form of IED attacks and its impact on young Americans who lose their innocence by being exposed to war and violence. The timing of the release of film makes it open to be interpreted as a call to end the war that is a challenging endeavor and is doing more harm than good to the Americans.

4.2.2 Eviction Notice: *The Outpost*

The Outpost is a 2020 war film directed by Rod Lurie, and is based on Jake Tapper's non-fiction book of the same name. The film is based on true account of American soldiers stationed at a perilous and isolated outpost, Combat Outpost Keating in Northern Afghanistan. *The Outpost* is vulnerable to attacks by Taliban insurgents because of the surrounding mountains and its strategically weak position in the bowl of the valley. Despite their unfavourable position and frequent attacks from Taliban, the soldiers maintain their position and try to build a relationship of mutual trust with the local population. Through the interactions between the soldiers and the local elders, the narrative highlights the complexities of modern warfare and the professionalism with which US forces are dealing with them. While the first half of the film showcases day to day activities, interactions, and

counterinsurgency efforts at the camp, the second half features fast paced action sequence detailing the battle of Kamdesh, the final and decisive fight at *The Outpost*. The film lauds bravery and camaraderie of soldiers as they work together to defend and indefensible station.

The Outpost is an action oriented film about the bravery and resilience of soldiers but unlike other action oriented narratives it presents the war in Afghanistan as a high stakes endeavour the complexity of which might render the efforts of American forces futile. Although American forces in general were armed with the latest technology, weapons, and backup supplies, compared to Taliban with much scarce resources in comparison. *The Outpost* attempts to establish it otherwise, pertaining to the clauses on "probability of success" and "proportional use of force" in a just war (Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars). Unlike the soldiers in *The Kill Team*, military leadership and soldiers at Camp Keating have a strong bond of mutual trust and camaraderie, sergeants patronize their men and help them through crisis and trauma. The men stationed at the camp have a good understanding of the nature of war they are fighting, their role and limits, and are culturally sensitive and respectful in their interactions with the Afghan villagers. The narrative while lauding the efforts of soldiers, criticizes the administration and higher military leadership for making strategically wrong decisions and putting the soldiers in danger. The soldiers are also disillusioned about the war effort for being placed in a tactically indefensible outpost. They ask existential questions and show their awareness of war as a futile effort rather than a noble mission towards some grand end. Through these themes and the subject matter, the narrative works as a microcosm for the whole post 9/11 war in Afghanistan and establishes it as a high stakes conflict that is doing more harm than good to Americans. Although it keeps up the American Just War narrative with arguments about rules of engagement and safeguard of civilians, it does not glorify the war but rather justifies American efforts in Afghanistan and ultimate exit with the awareness that Taliban will take over the country.

The Outpost starts in a documentary style with an introduction about the US outposts in textual form. Along with giving a background about *The Outpost*s, it creates suspense with its last sentence that states: "Everyone at *The Outpost* was going to die" (1:24). It is followed by a "based on a true story" script, thus establishing the narrative of

the film as true and accurate. In the film all the primary characters are introduced by name on their first appearance on camera as a name script appears on the screen. Each location within the camp is also introduced in the same manner. All these features reflect a reporting style that give the war narrative a sense of historical accuracy and truth. The film's narrative is divided into several portions and the arrival of each new commander of the camp marks the start of each portion that is named after the respective commander. For example, Keating for captain Benjamin Keating, Yllescas for Captain Robert Yllescas, Broward for Captain Sylvanius Broward, and Bundermann for first Lieutenant Andrew Bundermann (Figure 1.15).

Opening scenes of the film visually establish how small and vulnerable *The Outpost* is against its surrounding mountains and the dangers they can hide (Figure 1.16). Instead of showing macho 'can do' and 'fear nothing' attitude, the soldiers are realistic about their circumstances and openly express their concerns about the position of the camp. On first seeing the camp in daylight Sergeant Scusa wonders, "Aren't we supposed to be on top of the mountain to win this thing?" and one of his fellows tells him not be logical (*The Outpost* 5:08-5:11). Similarly, others who were seeing it for the first time call the camp's location 'a joke', and 'a black comedy' and ask questions like "how [and why] do we protect this piece of shit?" (*The Outpost* 5:17-5:32). The response to these questions is a sarcastic remark about the popular political phrase about the war efforts "freedom isn't free". Through this discussion the narrative criticizes administration's policy and military leadership for not properly analysing the on ground realities and putting the soldiers through unnecessary danger. The vulnerable position of *The Outpost* can be read as an analogy for America's vulnerable position in the war against insurgents that failed to bring a definitive outcome even after twenty years. The 'why' question about protecting *The Outpost* is something that gradually grew among the critics of war and was very relevant in public arena in 2020 when the film was released. By making the soldiers ask the same question, the narrative creates a soft image of US forces and allows the audience to connect with the soldiers and thus support them.

Two points from Walzer's theory become relevant and overlap in this film; "moral standing of the state depends on reality of common life it protects" and the rule of Just War

that states "non-combatants should not be intentional targets, however, under a 'supreme emergency' they can be targeted to avoid greater disaster". The villagers seem to exist on the borderline between combatants and non-combatants, they become a liability for the soldiers. Despite being placed in a hard and vulnerable station, the soldiers at *The Outpost* show cultural sensitivity in their dealings with the locals. The film gives some screen-time and voice to the locals as they interact with the American soldiers in their 'shura' meetings (Figure 1.17-1.19). These interactions show professionalism of different commanders of the camp as they try to win the trust of local Afghan villagers. During the first half of the film three meetings with the village elders take place, each under the leadership of a different commander. The Afghans are shown getting increasingly aggressive and skeptical with each passing meeting. For instance, in the first shura Capt. Keating puts away his safety gear and weapons before entering the shura building as a symbol of trust. Before putting forward the issue of attacks on *The Outpost*, he asserts their commitment to safety and welfare of locals stating "[o]ur job is to separate the Taliban and the ordinary people. We do that, the ordinary people won't get caught in the crossfire. I can give you money, contracts, projects, if you help" (*The Outpost* 15:54-16: 16). He goes on to offer incentives if the locals put down their weapons and do not attack the US outpost. The meeting ends with a positive response from the villagers who lay down their weapons and call Capt. Keating "Amat; highly praised one" (18:12-18:17). In the second Shura under leadership of Capt. Yllescas, the elders show interest only in the monetary incentives while failing to fulfil their part of the agreement and the younger men of fighting age do not attend the meeting. The third interaction of the local elders is with Capt. Broward where they bring along a rotting dead body of a girl saying that she died in mortar attack by the soldiers. The same elder who hugged and praised Capt. Keating at the end of first meeting says "this is what Americans bring. This is the death you bring… Everybody knows you are leaving soon. If we don't get paid now, we will never get paid" (*The Outpost* 1:00:55-1:01:12). These interactions and their increasingly grimmer nature highlight the complicated relationship that American forces have with the locals.

As the narrative is told from a western point of view, the locals are framed as untrusting, deceptive, and intrinsically hostile towards the Americans with their interest invested in monetary gains. Meanwhile, American soldiers try to work through these

complications as they continue their mission to fight the Taliban and avoid civilian casualties. According to Entman such framing through certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images… thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements" (52) are formed that in this case place the locals and the American soldiers on opposite ends of moral spectrum. Through these meetings the narrative establishes American War on Terror as a mission towards peace and stability in Afghanistan that faced many complications along the way and eventually fell apart because of lack of commitment and support from the locals. Additionally, as the locals refuse to help the American forces and keep leaning towards the Taliban, they get framed as conspirators instead of being completely innocent or victims. This proves that the situation in Afghanistan was very complicated due to which civilian casualties or collateral damage could not always be avoided.

While the world outside the camp got increasingly hostile, within the camp the soldiers showed incredible camaraderie and helped each other through their moments of doubt. As the soldiers try to defend their indefensible and highly vulnerable outpost, they do not shy away from expressing their reservations, concerns, and fears to each other. The narrative presents the soldiers in a survival mode, where they are not attempting to win glory or heroic titles for war efforts but are simply trying to protect themselves and get back home safely. This point is repeated by soldiers on different occasions in the narrative. For instance, when the high command sets a date for closing down *The Outpost*, Lt.

Bundermann says "guys our mission from now on is what it's always been", Sergeant Romesha completes the sentence saying "to survive" (1:03:44-1:03:48). Similarly, Romehsa equates victory in the war to staying alive when he says "Doesn't matter what kind of soldier you are. Good or bad. As far as I'm concerned, we all stay alive out here, we win" (11:11- 11:21). This take on war in the film challenges the notion of heroism and sacrifice whereby victory is associated with defeat/subjugation of enemy, and the concept of personal sacrifice and death in line of work is highly revered. The narrative attempts to justify American presence in Afghanistan for so long as it depicts the soldiers trying to fight insurgents while trying to protect their vulnerable outpost with limited resources. In depicting the challenges that soldiers face in strategically vulnerable outpost and criticising the authorities for putting them there, the narrative highlights the emotional

and psychological trauma that the soldiers go through. The senior members try their best to help the soldiers through hard times. For instance, Private Faulkner smokes hashish excessively to cope with the violence around him. Captain Keating, the commanding officer is concerned about his situation and instead of punishing him for misconduct he asserts how his presence in the camp matters; "smoking hash isn't the answer. There's only fifty-four of us. That's it. We all count on each other" (*The Outpost* 11:48-11:55). Staff sergeants show similar patronizing conduct towards their soldiers by taking care of their mental health and keeping up their morale. For example, when the situation starts getting more violent, one of the soldiers on guard duty is feeling scared and nostalgic for home.

His Sergeant consoles him saying "we're gonna get out of here and see our friends, our families, our loved ones, Sophie. We're gonna have a chance to make things right" (54:5455:06). Similarly, after surviving the attack that killed Capt. Yllescas, Private Yunger is deeply traumatized and is contemplating suicide with loaded rifle held close to his mouth and repeatedly saying "they just blew him up, man… I think I had like, a piece of his brain in my mouth" (45:25-46:55). Sergeant Romesha tries to calm him down and help him recover the shock, while also taking care to unload the rifle. Through handheld camera and close-up shots of Yunger's face, this scene expresses the intensity of his emotions and shock that he is in. Specialist Carter gets similarly affected by death of a fellow soldier who he tried his best to save. His trauma is also portrayed in an extended scene as he is unable to produce coherent sentences and express himself to the psychiatrist.

The narrative through visuals and dialogue portrays the trauma inflicted by war on the soldiers. In doing so it again breaks the stereotype of macho heroes who do not appear to be affected by violence they face or inflict. The depiction of negative impacts of war on soldiers and their struggle to help each other out through it works to create a soft image, showing soldiers as normal human beings. In presenting a defence to war in Afghanistan and reiterating its necessity, the film focuses on the sacrifices and human cost that US forces had to pay in order to protect their own country from the terrorists. Highlighting the human cost of the conflict gains more sympathy from the audience, and works to reduce criticism of the war as well.

Like many other films on Afghan war, *The Outpost* presents a point of view on the Rules of Engagement in war. Capt. Broward represents the military leadership's excessive caution in launching armed attacks, even if they are defensive and in response to insurgent attacks. The scene detailing this subject matter is choreographed to show how higher command and soldiers get differently affected by these rules and why they have varying opinions about them. When Taliban shooters open fire at the camp, the soldiers are in vulnerable position as they engage with them while the commanding officer monitors the situation from safety of his office. Capt. Broward personifies the authorities who preach excessive caution while engaging with the insurgents to minimize collateral damage. The narrative voices the two sides of argument on Rules of Engagement through Capt. Broward and Sergeant Romesha in the following exchange:

> Broward: Rules of Engagement are different here. You cannot shoot someone for acting suspicious.
>
> Romesha: Suspicious…? So where were the bullets coming from, sir?
>
> Broward: You must PID a weapon or a radio in an enemy's hand. That comes straight from McChrystal. You want your next tour to be in Leavenworth?
>
> Romehsa: Well someone should tell McChrystal then. We are not out here selling popsicles, sir. (*The Outpost* 52:37-53:03)

Broward's caution and strict adherence to the SOPs laid out by General McChrystal increases response time and puts the lives of soldiers in danger. The narrative therefore criticizes Broward for being too compliant to the 'rule' and endangering the lives of soldiers actively engaging with the insurgents. Sergeant Romesha's argument reflects Michael Walzers views on insurgents using civilian cover. Wlazer argues that

> [T]he insurgents are not blamed for shooting and deliberately killing civilians, and they're not blamed for using civilian cover systematically, for using civilian cover not only for the protection it affords them, but deliberately to provoke attacks that will kill civilians. And I think getting the judgments right is now really very, very important. (Walzer, Military Techniques, Strategies, Conflicts: Iran, Afghanistan, Vietnam War)

This argument asserts that insurgents do not follow any rules in the war, whereas American forces keep struggling with ethical concerns about protection of civilians and following the rules of engagement. As a result war effort becomes more complicated, challenging, and time consuming for the US forces. This point again justifies American war as an indispensable decision.

The film also provides an opinion on the use of EITs when Lt. Bundermann takes a waterboarding challenge at [1:02:15-1:02:25] to see how long he can endure it. Overwhelmed with the experience he remarks "I don't care what anyone fucking says man, that shit's torture" (1:02:22-1:02:25). This is a comment on CIA's defense of waterboarding as an effective interrogation technique, when it was called as torture by various groups. Thus the narrative reasserts commitment to ethical and 'Just' war.

In *The Outpost* the filmmakers attempt to incorporate a large number of themes and topics regarding war. Existential crisis is associated with hopelessness and can be defined as "a period of anxiety and conflict" about the meaning and purpose of life (Akre). The soldiers start to question God and His plans as they attempt to survive in their vulnerable outpost. This theme is apparent in this exchange between carter and a sergeant;

> Sergeant: If God was real, then these guys wouldn't be trying to kill us every goddamned day, and Keating would still be around.
> Carter: God works in mysterious ways sergeant.
> Sergeant: Yeah? So I guess God's plan is our chaos then, huh. (33:02-33:25)

Carter, with his religious and philosophical outlook starts seeing the chaos around him as a result of his disobedience of God, and says "you know Jesus was a pacifist, sergeant. I joined… volunteered for a war. You understand? … I think that tells you where God and I stand" (58:23-58:32). The apparent futility of the situation they find themselves in forces some of them to question everything and reconsider their whole belief systems. Whereas, others ponder upon the significance of their sacrifices and if they are considered heroes back home. When Keating dies in an accident Mace wonders if "what happened to Captain Keating made it back to the news in States" to which his fellow responds "the only news people give a shit about back in the States is who's fucking Paris Hilton" (35:08-35:15).

Through these exchanges in the first half of the film, the narrative tries to earn sympathy for Soldiers who have their lives at stakes and believe that they have been forsaken by their own people and even God. Soldiers, their experiences, traumas, and bravery are the primary factors that the narrative uses to justify and gain support for American actions in the war.

While the first half of the two hour long film highlights all the themes and issues discussed above through interactions of soldiers with each other and with the natives, the second half is more action oriented as it details the final battle i.e. Battle of Kamdesh at Combat Outpost Keating. The filmmakers carry the realism in the first half of the film to the portrayal of battle in fast paced action sequence in the second half. This focus on realism and authenticity works to create an immersive experience that gets the audience emotionally invested in the narrative. Audience connect with the soldiers through their universal human emotions and fears, and then root for them as they fight for their survival. All the fire fights including the last battle were proactive attacks by the enemies and US soldiers acted only in retaliation. Hence by giving them defensive roles, the narrative provides justifications for the Just War in Afghanistan that took a toll on emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing of American soldiers. It also reasserts the discourse of American victimization and the narrative of War on Terror as an act of self-defence in response to the pre-emptive attacks on 9/11.

The choreography of the action sequence attempts to realistically portray the chaos, tension, and stakes of war. It also incorporates use of strategy, tactics, and different forms of combat to make the sequence versatile and engaging. Mise en scene is effectively used to bring authenticity and urgency to the action scenes. For instance, as the battle started very early in the morning, most of the soldiers were not in their uniforms and combat gear, so to add to realism and dramatic effect, some of the soldiers are half dressed throughout the battle. The chaos and urgency is effectively depicted as guns run out of ammunition, some men running to get more ammunition while trying to avoid being shot by Taliban, and the hustle and confusion inside the ammo depot. The stakes get higher as some men of the already small force get injured, and the Taliban start to fire mortar bombs; a weapon the soldiers didn't know Taliban possessed. Furthermore, the soldiers are shown trying to counter the assault from different locations in the camp, while the enemy closes in from all

sides. This comparison highlights the high vulnerability of the camp and high possibility of defeat of the US soldiers.

Cinematography plays a significant role in making the choreography of action sequences effective and realistic. Use of handheld camera technique brings urgency to the action scenes and makes them more immersive and impactful for the audience. The chaos, urgency, and tension of the battle sequence is enhanced with fast paced editing as scenes frequently cut from one point of view to another. There are a number of long takes with tracking shots that follow the characters through the chaos as they try to move from one position to another. For instance, when Carter gets ammunition from ammo depot to the truck [1:16:30-1:18:00], as he brings injured Mace back to the truck [1:33:38-1:35:40], and when Larson and Carter lift Mace and run towards their medical facility [1:40:00-1:41:27] the long takes with tracking shots follow their actions while detailing the chaos and destruction around them.

The choreography, camera work, and editing of action sequence in *The Outpost* is markedly different from that of *Lone Survivor*. In *Lone Survivor*, action sequence was made more dramatic with slow paced editing and slow motion stunts. On the contrary, *The Outpost* aims for realism in visual depiction of war through a fast paced sequence that relies on natural lighting. However, due to the use of CGIs in some scenes, the action sequence resembles a clip from action oriented video games like Pubg. For example, as the camera follows soldiers rushing in chaos at the start of the battle [1:13:15-1:13:50], the handheld camera moves only in horizontal motion. The use of handheld camera to get wide angle shots during most of the battle sequence give it an animated quality. Similarly, in the scene where helicopters finally arrive and shoot down the Taliban forces [1:37:00-1:37:20], use of CGI is very apparent making it appear unrealistic. This gives the impression that either too much inspiration has been taken from the video games, or the video game action has been edited and incorporated into the film through CGI techniques. As a result, the overall quality of cinematography in *The Outpost* is not good as compared to *Lone Survivor* or *Zero Dark Thirty*. It can be deduced that narratives like *The Outpost* that do not glorify the war, do not put that much work in its visual portrayal and graphic details.

To conclude, *The Outpost* is a war drama film that puts a lot work into highlighting the human cost of war from American perspective. The complicated relationship with the Afghan civilians frame them as unreliable allies. It criticizes the administration and military leadership for putting the soldiers in danger with factors like General McChrystal's Rules of Engagement and overlooking on ground realities and safety of the soldiers before sending them to hard stations. On the hand, the narrative lauds the bravery, resilience, and camaraderie of the soldiers while depicting the physical, psychological, and emotional challenges they face. By focusing on the fears and vulnerability of soldiers and partly introducing their life stories through the narrative, the film raises sympathy for them and their cause. This framing makes them the victims of administrative policies as well as the violence inflicted by the insurgents. Furthermore, as the hands of American forces are clean of any war crimes, and any violation of the rules of Just War, their war effort is framed as justified and a need of that time.

4.3 Public Arena, Reception Frames, and Culture

Entman identifies four locations of frames in the communication process. The first two locations of frames i.e. the communicator and the text in the creation of America's Just War narrative in war films have been analyzed in this chapter so far. Filmmakers, and administrative bodies that affect their decisions have been identified as the communicators in the framing of war films. Texts, in this case the war films under study are the second location of frames and have been analyzed in detail for their framing of post 9/11 American war in Afghanistan. The receivers are the third location of frames, who in this case are the people who watch these films. Entman states that "the frames that guide the receiver's thinking and conclusion may or may not reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the communicator" (53). As the selected film narratives were produced in the USA by American filmmakers, the majority of American audience might receive and read the 'text' in the same frames as the communicators intended. The process of reception of frames by the audience and their integration into the culture can be understood through Sara Ahmad's concept of Affective Economies.

American visual narratives on war present American perspective on the post 9/11 War on Terror. Some films glorify the war efforts through narratives of glorious victories and American heroism. Whereas others simply justify the war efforts by exploring the complexity of the war, the bravery and resilience of American soldiers, their traumas, and the dangers they get exposed to. While both types of films frame America and Americans as victims/heroes, the former advocates for war to continue, the latter calls for an end to it because of its high stakes. The narrative of victimization was embedded into American cultural discourse through frequent framing and repeated assertions in political narrative. The political commentary on 9/11 attacks worked to create a master narrative on the attacks that treats 9/11 as "a heinous and unprovoked attack on a virtuous and blameless nation, an attack that was impossible to anticipate and that brought about a reluctant 'end of innocence' for the United States" (McSweeney 10). This master narrative portrays the perpetrators as 'radical evil' rather than enemy soldiers or criminals. This led to enculturation of the idea of American victimization that is reflected in the media portrayals, especially Hollywood films on the resulting 'War on Terror'.

Ahmed argues that the political discourse around 9/11 attacks created an atmosphere of fear and anger that led to popular public support of administration's decision to go on war against terrorists. The images of death and destruction from the attacks combined with political/state narrative circulated widely through media outlets in the days and months following the attacks and deeply impacted the American public. Various survey results of 2001 after the 9/11 attacks reveal that 87% of the Americans "felt angry about the attacks", 60% of adult population voiced "trust in the federal government", and a whopping 86% "approved of the way Bush was handling his job as president" (Pew Research Center). Moreover, 77% of Americans supported military intervention against terrorists even at cost of thousands of casualties in US armed forces. This support remained strong even in 2006 where 69% saw military intervention as a right decision (Pew Research Center). As the time went by stories from the war in the form of feature films were made to supplement, support, and promote the political narrative on the war effort.

Due to insufficient audience research on the impact of the selected films on audience, I analysed reviews on the films from IMDb website. An overview of these reviews gives an insight into the attitude of public towards these films.

Reviews by the audience show that *Lone Survivor* is largely lauded as a good action film with strong acting and cinematography. The story is viewed as a formulaic war film where protagonists embark on a mission and things do not work out the way they expected. Some viewers praised the filmmakers for accurately depicting the bravery and camaraderie of 'national heroes' as they selflessly put their lives on the line. While most reviewers found the film heart touching, some criticized it for insensitivity towards Afghan context and point of view. They see *Lone Survivor* as a propaganda film that works to garner support for US military and Afghan mission from the target audience i.e. the American public. Viewers were critical of the film narrative for presenting the story as a heroic tale of courage rather than using the same story to give an anti-war message.

Majority of the reviewers of *Zero Dark Thirty* focus on and appreciate the last part of the film that involves the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The reviews reveal that American audience primarily looks for action packed scenes that show heroism, bravery, and courage of soldiers in war films. The movie provided a well-directed and executed action sequence but only towards the end of the film. On screen portrayal of torture doesn't get much criticism. Although many reviewers were of the opinion that film's neutral or objective take on the use of torture make it look pro-torture and controversial. The audience do not voice the need for a more two sided narrative except a very small minority. Majority of the audience/reviewers class the film as a thriller or a boring experience based of their style preferences, however, they do not see the need for a more critical point of view on the events depicted.

A US army veteran expressed his displeasure with the film for defaming the US military by presenting an isolated case of war crime. He viewed it as an attempt to tarnish reputation of US forces in Afghanistan as well as the military leadership because public will view the incident as something common and recurring (IMDb). This reaction represents a deeply patriotic position whereby Americans consider their country the flag bearer of humanity and freedom.

Majority of the audience appreciate the film for highlighting the war crimes and show support and sympathy for Briggman's character. They talk about how war puts young men in difficult positions causing them trauma, and are thankful that they were not in Briggman's shoes. No one even imagines being in place of the Afghan villager. They do not feel the lack of voice of other side or in-depth view on the context. However, the change in point of view of public is visible as they see the war crimes presented as a reality of war and the majority of reviewers do not criticise the subject matter of the film. Although the reviewers missed action in the film but they praised it for portraying psychological drama around the situation.

On IMDb website, several US Army veterans rated this film as the most accurate and well researched depiction of the on ground situation in Afghanistan. It has been widely lauded for the realistic and thrilling action sequence by viewers who are interested in the genre of war films and action films. The film succeeds in wining audience sympathy for the soldiers as they face hardships in the missions abroad. However, a general overview of audience opinions shows that they are more interested in the action rather than the politics of war.

Hollywood war films reflect the American frames which means they tell the narratives from an American perspective. The reception of these films is different in the US and Western countries as compared to the rest of the world that does not share the same reception and cultural frames about America's role in Afghanistan and Middle-East at large. American films present American soldiers and citizens as 'normative subjects' whereas Arab and Asian, particularly Muslims as the 'other' that signifies danger and threat of loss as per Ahmed's terminology. As the normative subjects try to survive and overcome dangers, threats, and violence perpetrated against them in foreign land, the audience forms a positive attachment towards them while at the same time developing negative attachments towards the others. Ahmed argues that "the passion of these negative attachments to others is redefined simultaneously as a positive attachment to the imagined subjects brought together through repetition" of certain signifiers (118). One of the most prominent signifiers is the images of bearded Afghan/Arab/Asian men holding rifles or rocket launchers and/or having hatred in their eyes for the (American) normative subjects.

Resultantly, the audience sharing similar reception frames approve of the actions of US forces and accept the narratives presented as true and accurate depictions of the events. However, audiences from different cultures that do not share or agree with the American perspective on Afghan war, notice and criticize the absence of historical context and equal representation of Afghan perspective on the war.

American narrative on the war against terrorists dehumanizes the people associated with terrorist organisations to such an extent that the public refuses provision of equal human rights to the terror 'suspects'. The effect of American war films on the public can be seen in their opinion about use of torture on terrorism suspects. According to a 2015 survey that was conducted across 40 countries, "the US was one of the only 12 where a majority of the public said the use of torture against terrorists could be justified to gain information about a possible attack" (Pew Research Center). This public sentiment can be connected to two 2012 films; Argo and *Zero Dark Thirty* that present CIA's use of torture in a positive light by linking it to victory for USA. Ahmed's argument resonates the same as she states, "words generate effects: they create impressions of others as those who have invaded the space of the nation, threatening its existence" (Ahmed 122). The repeated portrayal of terror suspects as evil, and the use of torture as useful, leads the public to demand or atleast accept the inhumane treatment of the 'other' that's threatening the nation's freedom and existence. Hence, it can be said that if words generate effects, visual narratives can produce even stronger and lasting effect as they allow for a more immersive sensory experience.

Pentagon and Hollywood are said to have close ties since World War I and it continues to this day (Varzarevsky). Films presenting the administration, military, and war efforts in a positive light receive support from the US Department of Defense. As the films impact the audience on emotional level, they can inspire action in addition to influencing their perceptions and views. For instance, heroic deeds of soldiers in fight against the brutal Taliban leaders in *Lone Survivor* may motivate youngsters to join armed forces and fight those evil men. Data from earlier studies prove that "the number of military applicants increases in the years when movies produced with cooperation of Department of Defense are released" (Varzarevsky 2). Narratives presented in these war films raise the patriotic

spirit in Americans as they see their compatriots working hard to make the world a better place. The action sequences in *Lone Survivor* and *The Outpost* portray a small number of American soldiers fighting and incapacitating a much larger enemy force thanks to their better training, hi-tech equipment, and bravery. Such depictions motivate the American audience to be a part of that force to rid the world of evil and become national heroes as they are repeated "stereotyped images" of American bravery that generate desired "affect" (Ahmed).

Visual media tend to be effective in their ability to persuade public and gain popular support for desired subjects or issues. The visual mediums of soft power, particularly films work through generation of affect as they present the subject matter through often fictionalized and dramatic narratives that trigger/impact the audience on an emotional level. As America fights its wars in foreign lands, films become more relevant and significant in bringing the war experience closer to American public. Eken therefore argues that American war films "diffuse emotional narratives of the state to the population and affectively enables people to experience the international from the perspective of the United States" (Eken). Moreover, audience emotionally connects with the actors/characters which enables them to "personally feel like a state/warrior" and develop emotional commitment to the war (Eken).

The framing of 'self' and 'other' has been encultured so deeply in the US that Americans do not see any point of reconciliation. The Taliban and other terrorist groups were framed as forces of evil without providing any geopolitical background for their acts of violence. As a result, when American government wanted to have peace talks with the group, it faced unanimous opposition from the public irrespective of political affiliation. This has been proved in a Gallup survey on a peace summit scheduled with the Taliban in September 2020. 82% of the respondents criticised the summit for "either hosting the Taliban on US soil, signing an agreement with the group in general, or hosting the summit so close to anniversary of the 9/11 attacks" (Newport).

The analysis of films in the previous part of this chapter reveals that irrespective of the subject matter of the narrative, Americans are framed as victims and heroes. Whereas,

the representation of the political other varies slightly. For instance, in *Lone Survivor* Afghan villagers are framed as victims of Taliban hostility and friendly/sympathetic towards US forces whereas, in *The Outpost* a complicated situation is shown as the Afghan villagers conspire with Taliban despite the incentives offered by the US forces to do otherwise. *The Kill Team*, telling a controversial story portray some Afghan villagers as victims of a few US individuals' war crimes. How each of these portrayal will affect the audience depends on the narrative, subject matter, as well as the political atmosphere at the time the films was released. A common underline in all these films is the upholding of and defense of America's 'Just War' narrative. Framing the war as righteous, just, and justified allows American public to defend policies and actions of the state while believing in its moral superiority.

Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lone Survivor* were released during President Obama's tenure who during his 2008 presidential campaign vowed to get the country out of Iraq and to make the 'good war' against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan a top priority and win it (Miller). In order to cover the country's follies and crimes in Iraq, the administration showed an increased interest in winning the war in Afghanistan and rebuilding the country. This foreign policy take reflected in the government backed Hollywood projects like *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lone Survivor*, that glorified the war in Afghanistan with narratives of victory against enemy and triumph over the hearts of Afghan people. The visual narratives generally depict American forces fighting for a humanitarian cause having best interests of Afghans at heart. This repeated savior image resulted in a cultural norm whereby Americans feel responsible for Afghans and Afghanistan. Therefore, after the final exit of American forces from Afghanistan in 2021, 44% of Americans (despite believing that the war was a mistake) felt that their country had "an obligation towards the Afghan government and segments of Afghan society affected by the war" (Newport).

Death of bin Laden marked an end of an era whereby American public started looking forward to an end to the war in Afghanistan. A Pew research survey conducted one month after bin Laden's death revealed that 56% of Americans wanted the US forces to brought back at the earliest, whereas 39% wanted to wait for the situation in Afghanistan to stabilize first (Pew Research Center). *Zero Dark Thirty* celebrated this breakthrough in

the war, however a year later the film *Lone Survivor* was released to portray the intensity of situation in Afghanistan and the vital role that US forces were playing there. The narrative's depiction of large and overpowering Taliban force that nearly took over the US soldiers as well as Afghan population worked to raise fear as well as heroic sentiments in the audience. This asserted that American forces were on a great and noble mission in Afghanistan and their active presence was indispensable for subjugating the evil forces.

Similarly, *The Outpost* released in 2020 visualizes the American forces largely outnumbered by Taliban forces. It was a time when the administration was facing criticism about the war at both national and international level. Furthermore, the public consensus about terrorism being a big national problem decreased from 53% in 2016 to 25% in 2020 (Pew Research Center). *The Outpost*, by highlighting the dark realities of war and complexity of situation in Afghanistan, in combination with bravery and resilience of US soldiers tries to justify the American presence in the country. These images and visuals of the 'other' that is framed as a representative of 'radical evil' overpowering the American soldiers in magnitude brings the public together in support of those who are vulnerable to harm by it. As a result public develops feelings of respect and gratitude towards armed forces and do not direct much criticism towards their actions even when they do something wrong. For instance, the allegations of war crimes would result in criticism towards specific individuals rather than the whole institution.

The function of framing in all four locations of communication process is similar: "selection and highlighting and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman 53). The political discourse about terrorism, military intervention in Afghanistan, and the role of American forces in the war framed the intervention as a 'Just War'. This narrative was further popularized through war films about the issue. These war films, often based on real events told the stories of war zone from an American perspective. Hollywood films promoting the 'Just War' narrative select and highlight favorable content and present it in a way that aligns with and resonates the US state narrative on the war. The argument that US politicians, state institutions, media, and by extension filmmakers built around the causation of War on Terror is one completely detached from history. American framing of

the war at all four locations of frames places 9/11 attacks as an isolated event with no geopolitical and historical context. Most of the post 9/11 war films including the four analyzed in this research do not look back into history or even sideways on the non-American perspectives or understanding of the conflict. This is politically significant for the US as it relieves the administration of any blame from the public for making the country a target of attacks due to earlier foreign policy decisions. Additionally, erasing the historical developments behind the attacks from these visual narratives and entertainment industry at large, let the country sell the war as a 'Just' act of self-defense. As the time passed these films served to gain public sympathies and support for state institutions including armed forces and intelligence agencies while directing the public debates/attention away from faulty policies at political front.

Ahmed argues that "affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (120). The images of American heroes and Asian or Muslim antagonists have been an essential part of visual media during the course of this war. The biggest cultural implication that post 9/11 war films have on American culture is the historical understanding of the longest war in American history for the coming generations who will use these narrative as sources of information (Hall and Ross). These films are a cultural asset for the country as they reinforce the ideas of national identity, patriotism, and sacrifice. They also work as memoirs recording the nation's collective memory of a tragic event and its consequences. The hegemony of framing of post 9/11 world through entertainment media has not only impacted the contemporary culture but will work as prosthetic memory and cultural memoirs in the years to come.

The war on terror and resulting debate on it including the war films developed a new discourse in popular culture. The 9/11 attacks and the following US military missions abroad became internalized in American culture and made way into popular cultural artefacts like video games, comics, superhero films etc. For instance, the American army released a free computer game 'America's Army: Operations' in 2002 to motivate maximum number of young people to enlist in the army (Berkowitz). Similarly, collaboration between government and Hollywood resulted in entertainment programs about counterterrorism, like CIA agents carrying out successful missions in Iraq. Alteration

in storylines of Marvel Cinematic Universe after 9/11 attacks is a significant move in popular culture. Marvel superhero 'Iron Man' was originally set to fight against communism, but after 9/11 attacks, the writer Warren Ellis rewrote the character's origin story for the 2008 film where Tony Stark was "captured and tortured by some Afghan terrorists who had been purchasing [his] weapons" without his knowledge (Berkowitz). These allusions to the post 9/11 American wars in pop culture keep different sections of public aware of what latest threats the country is facing and how significant they are.

In conclusion, the post 9/11 American war films shape public opinion and perception of the war and the stakeholders. As audience emotionally connect with the characters in these narratives they develop certain feelings towards particular symbols. These feelings then reflect in their real life interactions and attitudes towards different groups like soldiers, Afghans, and Muslims etc. The films also work as outlets of political ideology and state narrative on issues of importance, hence popularizing the American perspective at national and international level.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This is the concluding chapter of this research in which I will discuss my findings corresponding to my research questions and will also discuss future scope of research in this area.

War films are a significant part of war literature as they bring war experience closer to the audience through dramatic audio-visual narratives. For people in countries like the USA, who have not actually witnessed or experienced any recent war on their homeland, these films act as prosthetic experiences and memories. All the US war adventures since the Second World War up-to the post 9/11 war in Afghanistan were fought on foreign lands. American public experienced these wars through media reporting, veteran accounts, books, and visual entertainment media including films. The point that problematizes the use of films as source of information and history is the involvement of US government in the production process of Hollywood films. Since the First World War, US government and military try to influence or work in cooperation with Hollywood in the making of war films. It is therefore very likely that political agendas, ideology, and state narrative on the issues are channeled through the narrative of such films. US government creates and disperses politically motivated desired perspective of reality through these films.

This qualitative research has explored the American war films on post 9/11 Afghan war, commonly referred to as War on Terror, for their portrayal of the war and its expected impact on the American audience and by extension the American culture. These films, as a tool of country's soft power, tell stories of the war from an American perspective popularizing and normalizing the political narrative.

Over the course of two decades American narrative of 'Just War' evolved with changing political circumstances and was reflected in the films as well. The assumption that narratives produced after the first decade of war glorified the war effort whereas narratives produced towards the end of the war provided justifications for the longest war in US history was the basis of analysis in this study. My research objectives in this study

were to analyze the framing of post 9/11 American war in Afghanistan in Hollywood war films on the issue, to trace the evolution of narrative from glorification to justification of war in these films, and to examine the political and social implications of this framing of 'Just War' in the USA. I posed three questions to analyze the selected visual narratives and to meet the research objectives.

The first question was on political and cultural significance of American war films on post 9/11 war and the way these films deal with American narrative of 'Just War'. To answer this question, rather than directly approaching the films, I followed the 'locations of frames' in communication process as explained by Robert Entman and started at the first location i.e. the communicators. The significance of 'Just War' narrative is reflected in the political discourse created right after the 9/11 attacks and the way it was propagated and popularized through news media. Framing theory and the concept of affective economies collectively helped in developing an understanding of the process through which American government created the master narrative on 9/11 attacks and the resulting War on Terror.

The analysis finds that political discourse on the 9/11 attacks framed the attacks as an act of pre-emptive war. It deliberately excluded the pre 9/11 role of American government and military in the Middle East, thus erasing the geopolitical and historical developments from the national memory. US government has a long history of influencing Hollywood war films and did the same in the post 9/11 scenario. The films produced on the War on Terror do not allude to historical aspect of the war, rather they portray individual events from the war in isolation, from an American perspective. By presenting narratives of American victimization and resilience; either by making 9/11 attacks as the starting point as in *Zero Dark Thirty*, or by focusing on efforts of soldiers in warzone, these films establish and assert the political narrative of the War on Terror as a Just War.

Walzer's concept of Just War was used to analyze the portrayal of war as a Just War in the detailed analysis of each film. I found that in narratives of glorification as well as justification American war was presented as a Just War and consistent with Walzer's rules of Just War, however, narratives of glorification (particularly *Zero Dark Thirty*) showed an attitude of righteousness towards the 'issue of dirty hands' i.e. the use of torture,

rather than being apologetic about it as Walzer suggests the governments should do. These films are politically and culturally significant as they are a source of history and cultural memory of the war. Hence, these films not only influence the present sociopolitical environment but will go down in history as factual memoirs.

The second question focused on the role of framing and narrative structures in portraying the shift in discourse from glorification to justification of war. To answer this question films as the second location of frames were analyzed in detail. Analysis of narrative style, story, dialogues, characterization, cinematography, screen-time and other related aspects of film helped in pointing out the shift in discourse of the films. Films produced towards the end of first decade of the war including *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lone Survivor* glorified the American war by presenting narratives of American victory over terrorists. These films frame the American armed forces and CIA personnel as brave national heroes. Their perspective on the war aligns with the popular political narrative and they win over the enemy forces through sheer dedication, bravery, and a can-do attitude. On the other hand, films produced towards the end of second decade of war, including *The Kill Team* and *The Outpost* attempt to provide justifications for the war by focusing on the continued violence by terrorists against the US forces, the bravery, sacrifices, and even fears of the soldiers, and by criticizing the authorities for faulty decisions. These films highlight the human cost of war and the psychological trauma that is caused by the war on the US soldiers in an attempt to defend the US stance on the war and to change public's criticism of war into sympathy for soldiers

Both types of films give very little screen-time and hence representation to the other side; including Afghan civilians and the Taliban. This underrepresentation makes the American visual narratives highly one-sided accounts of the events portrayed. Afghan civilians are either depicted as dependent on and thankful to the US forces for their security and protection from Taliban, or they are portrayed as unreliable and conspiring allies who are playing on both sides of the fence. Moreover, criticism of Rules of Engagement is common in both types of narratives as they put the soldiers in greater danger during combat.

The shift in the narrative over the time is a result of changing political landscape and public awareness. With the changing political landscape and public consensus the narratives framed and told the war stories differently to have maximum impact on the audience. First by glamorizing the war and then by showing its high stakes and dark realities, the Hollywood war films keep promoting American narrative of Just War in Afghanistan.

The third research question I posed was on the impact of political narrative popularised through war films on general public. I answered this question by focusing on the third and fourth location of frames in communication process i.e. the receivers and culture. The impact of films on general public was analysed through Sara Ahmed's concept of Affective Economies and elaborated through examples and survey results from secondary sources. The analysis proves that these war films affect the audience by influencing their opinions about and understanding of the issues presented. As a result of positive portrayal of CIA in *Zero Dark Thirty*, audience developed a positive attitude towards CIA and even the use of torture as a method to extract information from terror suspects. Similarly, the silencing, under-representation, and misrepresentation of the political 'other', in this case the Afghans, in the films as well as in political discourse result in development of negative attachment towards the 'other' in American public.

Consequently, the 'normative subjects' i.e. American public is more likely to direct their aggression in form of hate crimes, racism, mistrust etc. towards the marginalised political 'other'. As the characters in the films stand for whole communities, the whole Muslim and Asian communities have become vulnerable to harm in the US and global West at large. The war films also work to raise patriotic spirit in the public which helps in gathering popular support for government decisions. Furthermore, the narratives of heroism, bravery, and sacrifice motivate young people to enlist in the military and become national heroes.

To conclude, through this study I found that political discourse and film narratives are directly affected by each other. The political discourse framed 9/11 attacks as an unprovoked act of war and the resulting war as a Just War waged in self-defense. The

filmmakers presented the narratives of war working within these frames as they had become a part of American national and cultural understanding of the war. These narratives of American heroes fighting against insurgents are devoid of historical and geopolitical background of American involvement in Afghanistan and Middle East at large. While American public receives these narratives as depictions of reality, others might criticize and reject them for their exclusions and deliberate deformation of reality and history. These films, as a tool of soft power, not only make the US a hero and savior of the post 9/11 world but also attempt to normalize the US perspective on the War on Terror as a Just War outside the country. The impact of these films on American culture will be long lasting as they will continue to exist and be consumed as sources of history for being 'based on real events'.

5.1 Social Implications

The literature on any issue of importance works to develop popular narrative on the issue. A more active campaigning helps create and popularize a certain narrative which overshadows any alternate or parallel versions of reality. For instance, in case of post 9/11 American wars the American or the Western narrative on the issue dominates all other narratives or perspectives on the issue including the Afghan, Arab, Pakistani, or on a collective level voices and experiences of the East. It therefore is of great significance for us to use any available platform or position to present the voice of the other side. Media outlets can create content that voices the Afghan narrative. Similarly, people in academia can critically evaluate and deconstruct the western narratives through the lenses of the marginalized. This study, while answering the research questions, has also highlighted the narratives produced by Americans, largely for Americans, for their distortion of or complete disregard towards history and reality. It also discusses the socio-cultural and political implications of such distortion of history. Hence, it is an addition to the existing literature that is critical of the American war on terror and its popularization as a 'Just War'. Such discussions and debates are essential in the contemporary world to raise awareness about impact of media portrayals, to create a counter-narrative to that of the western narrative, and to counter social vices like Islamophobia.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the research that I have conducted I have some recommendations for future researches in this field. This research was very limited in scope as it focused on only four films. A more comprehensive research focusing on a larger body of literature produced on post 9/11 wars will be able to trace the 'evolution' of narrative in a better way. Similarly, comparative analysis of feature films and documentary films can give some interesting insights into the role of visual narratives and their ability to influence the public in subtle ways. Analysis of films on the same issue from different perspectives will help in understanding the perception of American war outside of the US.

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22.2 (2004): 117-139. Web.

Akre, Karin. *Existential Crisis*. 27 October 2022. web.
        <https://www.britannica.com/topic/existential-crisis>.

Amnesty International USA. "Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility." *Strengthening Human Rights For All in 2021- In the U.S. and Around the World* (2021): 60-61.
        Web. 12 August 2023. <https://bidenhumanrightspriorities.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Strengthening-Human-Rights-For-All-in-2021_110620.pdf>.

Berkowitz, Joe. *7 Ways 9/11 Influenced Pop Culture that you may have Forgotten or Never Known About*. 9 November 2021. Web.
        <https://www.fastcompany.com/90674387/7-ways-9-11-influenced-pop-culture-that-you-may-have-forgotten-or-never-known-about>.

Boggs, Carl and Tom Pollard. *The Hollywood War Machine: US Militarism and Popular Culture* . Boulder: Paradigm, 2007. Web.

Bond, Ricky. *The Role of Cinema in Shaping Culture*. 07 March 2023. Web. 06 May
        2023. <https://www.filmink.com.au/the-role-of-cinema-in-shaping-culture/>.

Boone, Steven. *Lone Survivor*. 25 12 2013. web. 22 12 2023.
        <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/lone-survivor-2013>.

Carnegie Council. *Just War*. 2023. Web. <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/explore-engage/key-terms/just-war#:~:text=Definition%20%26%20Introduction,on%20the%20waging%20of%20war.>.

Center for Army Leadership. *Maywand District Murders*. 07 April 2023. Web. 20 August
        2023. <https://cal.army.mil/case-studies/wcs-single.php?id=77&title=maywand-district-murders>.

Chang, Justin. *Film Review: 'Lone Survivor'*. 11 11 2013. web. 21 12 2023.
        <https://variety.com/2013/film/markets-festivals/lone-survivor-review-1200820276/>.

Collins, K. Austin. *Reexamining the 'Zero Dark Thirty' Backlash Cycle, Five Years Later*. 26 02 2018. web. 20 12 2023.
        <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2018/2/26/17055154/zero-dark-thirty-backlash-kathyrn-bigelow-2013-oscars>.

Council on Foreign Relations. *How 9/11 Reshaped Foreign Policy*. n.d. Web. 25 July 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/how-911-reshaped-foreign-policy>.

Crawford, Neta C. "Just War Theory and the US Counterterror War." *Perspectives on Politics* 1.1 (2003): 5-25. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3687810>.

Debruge, Peter. *'The Outpost': Film Review*. 29 06 2020. web. 24 12 2023. <https://variety.com/2020/film/reviews/the-outpost-review-1234690122/>.

Eken, M Evren. "How geopolitical becomes personal: Method acting, war films and affect." *Journal of International Political Theory* 15.2 (2019): 210-228. Web.

Elouardaoui, Ouidyane. "Arabs in Post-9/11 Hollywood Films: a Move towards a More Realistic Depiction?" n.d. Web.

Entman, Robert. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* (1993): 51-58. web. <https://fbaum.unc.edu/articles>.

Forgacs, David. "Cinema and Cultural Studies." *Introduzione ai Film Studies* (2013): 1-6. web.

Gettel, Oliver. *'Lone Survivor' cinematographer Tobias Schliessler aims for truth*. 14 January 2014. Web. 2 August 2023.

Greenwald, Glenn. *Zero Dark Thirty, CIA, Oscars*. 25 02 2013. web. 22 12 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/25/zero-dark-thirty-cia-oscars>.

Greer, Amanda. "Towards an (Aesth)etiquette of Torture: Polite Form in Zero Dark Thirty and Standard Operating Procedure." *Film Criticism* 41.1 (2017). Web. 12 08 2023. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/f/fc/13761232.0041.110/--towards-an-aesthetiquette-of-torture-polite-form-in-zero?rgn=main;view=fulltext#top>.

Hall, Todd H and Andrew A. G. Ross. "Affective Politics after 9/11." *International Organisation* 69.4 (2015): 847 - 879. Web.

history.com. *A Timeline of the US-Led War on Terror*. Ed. history.com. 5 May 2020. Web. <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/war-on-terror-timeline>.

Hornaday, Ann. *The Outpost Movie Review*. 01 07 2020. web. 21 12 20231. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/the-outpost-movie-review/2020/07/01/c53a969e-b713-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff_story.html>.

IMDb. *Lone Survivor Awards*. n.d. web. 20 12 2023. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1091191/awards/>.

—. *The Kill Team: User Reviews*. 2019. web. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6196936/reviews>.

Ivanchikova, Alla. *Imagining Afghanistan: Global Fiction and Film of the 9/11 Wars*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2019. Web.

Kelsay, John. "Just War, Jihad, and the Study of Comparative Ethics." *Ethics & International Affairs* 24 (2010): 227-238. Web. < https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.2010.00265.x.>.

Keningsberg, Ben. *'The Kill Team' Review: Bullying on the Battlefield*. 24 10 2019. web. 21 12 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/movies/the-kill-team-review.html>.

Kenny, Glenn. *'The Outpost' Review: At War, in a Worst-Case Scenario*. 02 07 2020. web. 24 12 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/movies/the-outpost-review.html>.

King, John. *White House sees Hollywood role in war on terrorism*. 1 November 2001. CNN. Web. 12 July 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/08/rec.bush.hollywood/>.

Krauss, Dan. *The Kill Team* Mongrel Media Inc. n.d. Web.

Kyriakidis, Kleanthis. *Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib Revisited*. 30 March 2012. Web. 09 August 2023. < https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/guantanamo-and-abu-ghraib-revisited/>.

Lehmann, Hauke, Hans Roth and Kerstin Schankweiler. "Affective Economy." *Affective Society*. Ed. Jan Slaby and Christian Von Scheve. 1. London: Routledge, 2019. 12. Web. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781351039260-12/affective-economy-hauke-lehmann-hans-roth-kerstin-schankweiler>.

literaryterms.net. "Propaganda." n.d. Web. <https://literaryterms.net/propaganda/>.

Logie, Eugenia. *From Screen to Battlefield: The Evolution of the Female Role in Hollywood War Films and the U.S. Military*. King's College London, 2016. Web.

Majed, Raghed. *Hollywood War Films Propaganda: Framing Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. Notre Dame University-Loueize , 2016. Web.

Manchanda, Nivi. *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Web.

McKee, Alan. "Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide." Researchgate, January 2003. web.

McSweeney, Trence. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. Web.

Miller, Paul D. *Shadow Government: Setting the Record Straight on Obama's Afghanistan Promises*. 29 March 2016. Web. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/29/setting-the-record-straight-on-obamas-

afghanistan-
promises/#:~:text=He%20said%20on%20the%20campaign,in%20civilian%20assi
stance%20every%20year.>.

Moseley, Alexander. *Just War Theory*. n.d. Web. 7 February 2023.
    <https://iep.utm.edu/justwar/>.

National Archives. *Powers of Persuasion*. 06 June 2019. Web.
    <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers-of-persuasion>.

Nazemroaya, Mahdi Darius. "Cultural Imperialism and Perception Management: How
    Hollywood Hides US War Crimes." (2015). Web.

Newport, Frank. *American Public Opinion and the Afghanistan Situation*. 27 August
    2021. Web. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/354182/american-
    public-opinion-afghanistan-situation.aspx>.

Pautz, Michelle C. "Argo and Zero Dark Thirty: Film, Government, and Audiences."
    political sience and politics 48 (2015): 120-128. Web.

Pear, Robert. *Arming Afghan Guerrillas: A Huge Effort Led by U.S.* 18 April 1988. Web.
    18 August 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/18/world/arming-afghan-
    guerrillas-a-huge-effort-led-by-us.html>.

Pew Research Center. *Two Decades Later, the Enduring Legacy of 9/11*. 02 September
    2021. Web. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/09/02/two-decades-later-
    the-enduring-legacy-of-9-11/>.

Plantinga, Carl. "The Affective Power of Movies." *Psychocinematics: Exploring
    Cognition at the Movies*. Ed. Arthur P. Shimamura. New York: Oxford Academic,
    2013. 94-112. Web.
    <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199862139.003.0005>.

Reese, Stephen D. and Seth C. Lewis. "Framing the War on Terror: The internalisation of
    policy in the US press." *Jounalism* 10.6 (2009): 777-797. Web.

Reid, Tim and Jill Sergeant. *"Zero Dark Thirty" fails at Oscars amid political fallout*. 25
    02 2013. web. 24 12 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oscars-zero/zero-
    dark-thirty-fails-at-oscars-amid-political-fallout-idUKBRE91O07S20130225/>.

Roston, Aram. *Exclusive: Ex-CIA analyst says she 'got bloodied' in tangled U.S. war on
    Al Qaeda*. 20 April 2022. Web. 24 July 2023.
    <https://www.reuters.com/world/exclusive-ex-cia-analyst-says-she-got-bloodied-
    tangled-us-war-al-qaeda-2022-04-20/>.

RTnews. "CIA 'Queen of Torture' could face trial in Germany." *rt.com*. Moscow:
    RTnews, 2015. Web. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3akvic>.

Scheck, Frank. *'The Kill Team': Film Review*. 24 10 2019. web. 20 12 2023.
 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/kill-team-
 1249585/>.

Seitz, Matt Zoler. *The Kill Team*. 31 10 2019. web. 20 12 2023.
 <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-kill-team-movie-review-2019>.

Sharky, Betsy. *Lone Survivor Review*. 24 12 2013. web. 23 12 2023.
 <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-lone-
 survivor-review-20131225-story.html>.

Sherer, Paul M. "Targets of Suspicion: The Impact of Post-9/11 Policies on Muslims,
 Arabs and South Asians in the United States." 2004. Web. 10 August 2023.
 <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/Targets
 %20of%20Suspicion.pdf?__cf_chl_tk=xmsnSKKmwmWpmbAY0RITObCr7kn8
 BZgUtEZminSckJk-1691655146-0-gaNycGzNC9A>.

Swain, Elise. *Iraq War Torture: Abu Ghraib*. 17 March 2023. Web. 9 August 2023.
 <https://theintercept.com/2023/03/17/iraq-war-torture-abu-ghraib/>.

Tallerico, Brian. *Reviews: The Outpost*. 03 07 2020. web. 24 12 2023.
 <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-outpost-movie-review-2020>.

Valantin, Jean-Michel. *Hollywood, the Pentagon, and Washington*. London: Anthem
 Press, 2005. Web.

Varzarevsky, Lindsay. "A Study of the Impact of US Department of Defense and Movie
 Industry Cooperation on Military Application Rates." Pace University, 3 May
 2022. Web.

videocide.com. *Film Frame*. 14 05 2019. 3 10 2022.
 <https://videocide.com/glossary/film-frame/>.

Walsh, Katie. *Movies: Review*. 24 10 2019. web. 20 12 2023.
 <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2019-10-24/kill-team-
 review-nat-wolff-alexander-skarsgard>.

Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*.
 Fourth. New York: Basic Books, 2006. Web.

Walzer, Michael. *Military Techniques, Strategies, Conflicts: Iran, Afghanistan, Vietnam
 War* Lt Col Peter Kilner. 27 March 2015. Web.
 <https://www.westpointcoh.org/interviews/when-to-fight-and-how-to-fight-just-
 war-in-theory-and-in-practice>.

—. "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2.2
 (Winter, 1973): 160-180. Web. < http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265139>.

Watson Institute. *Costs of War*. September 2021. Web.
        <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/economic>.

—. *Costs of War*. August 2023. Web.
        <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/WarDeathToll>.

wikipedia. *framing (visual arts)*. n.d. 3 10 2022.
        <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_(visual_arts)>.

APPENDIX A

Figure 1.1 Opening of *Zero Dark Thirty* with background audio from the 9/11 attack sites

Figure 1.2 Documentary style labelling of locations in *Zero Dark Thirty*
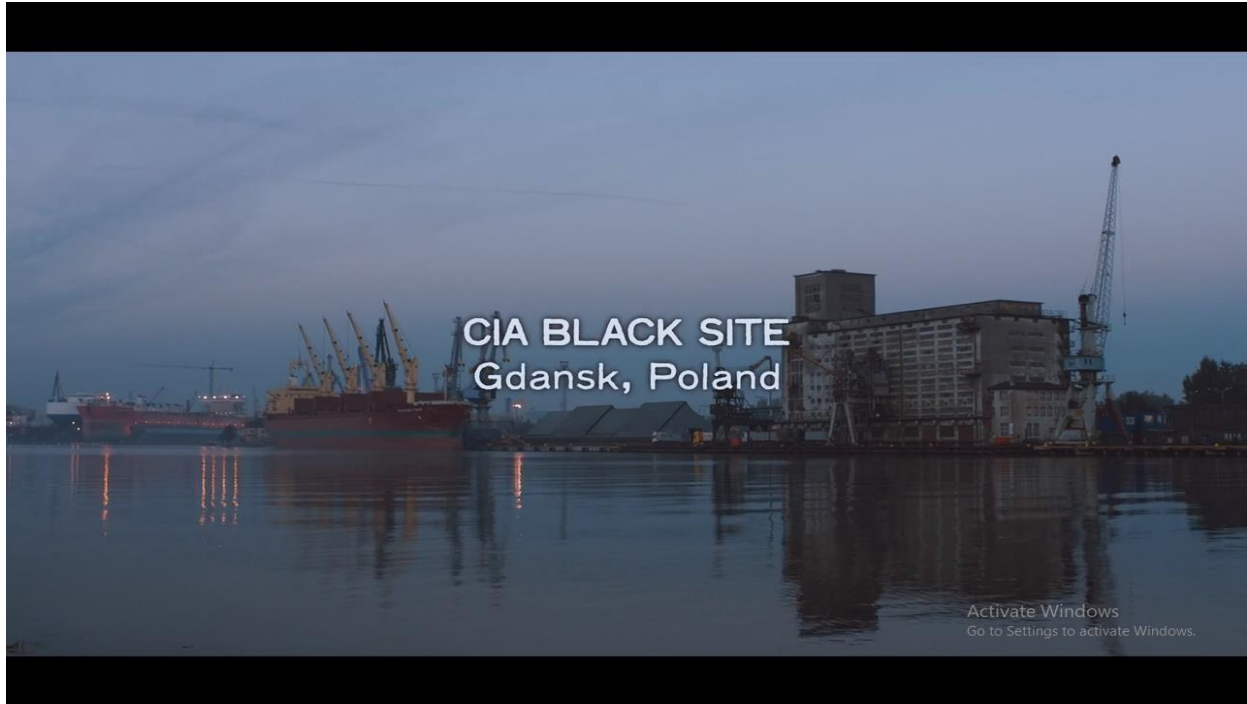
Figure 1.3 Documentary style labelling of locations in *Zero Dark Thirty*

Figure 1.4 CIA Interrogator Waterboarding a detainee, a torture technique widely used in CIA detention centers

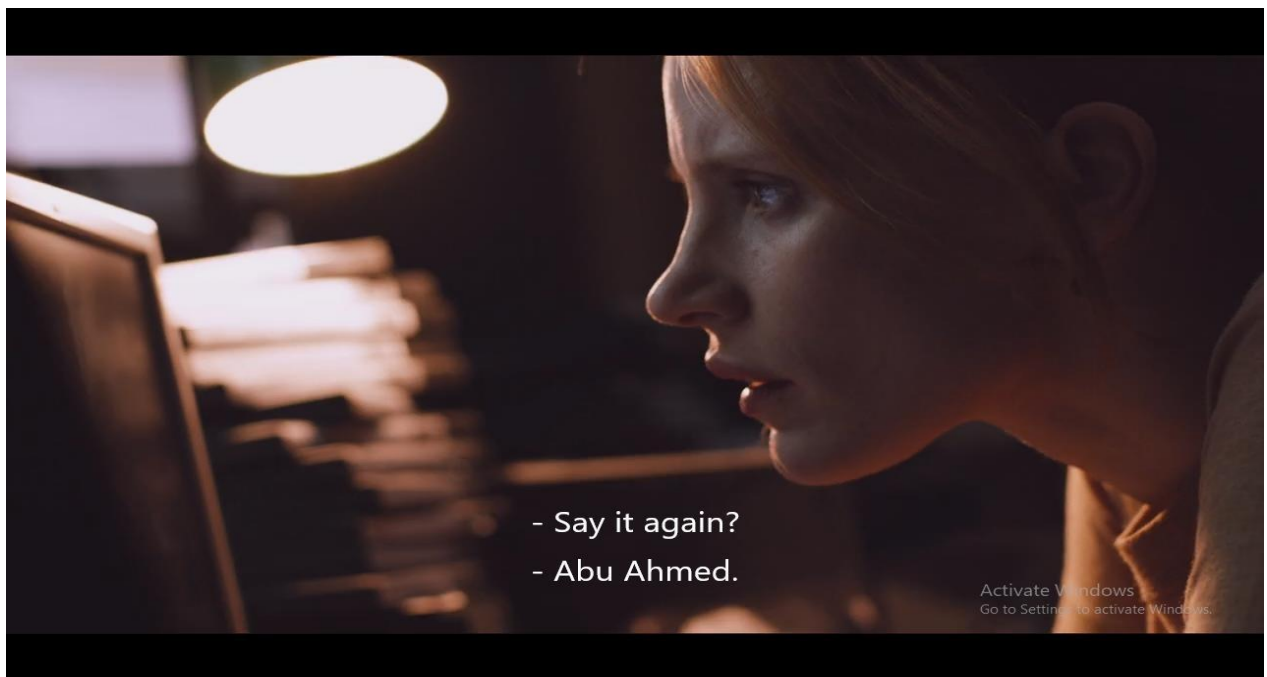Figure 1.5 Close-up shot of Maya after she hears new of her colleague's death

Figure 1.6 Close-up shot of Maya immersed in watching detainee interrogation tapes

Figure 1.7 An aerial shot of Afghan Village looking small and vulnerable in *Lone Survivor*

Figure 1.8 An aerial shot of Bagram Airbase in *Lone Survivor*

Figure 1.9 A shot of artwork around SEAL team member's bedside giving an insight to their interests

Figure 1.10 A shot of artwork around SEAL team member's bedside giving an insight to their personal lives

Figure 1.11 Taliban leader beheading an Afghan villager for 'helping the Americans'

Figure 1.12 A shot of Sergeant Bruer's severed body from an IED explosion in *The Kill Team*

Figure 1.13 Close-up shot of Briggman's face as he looks at Afghan mother and son crying when the team kills an innocent civilian
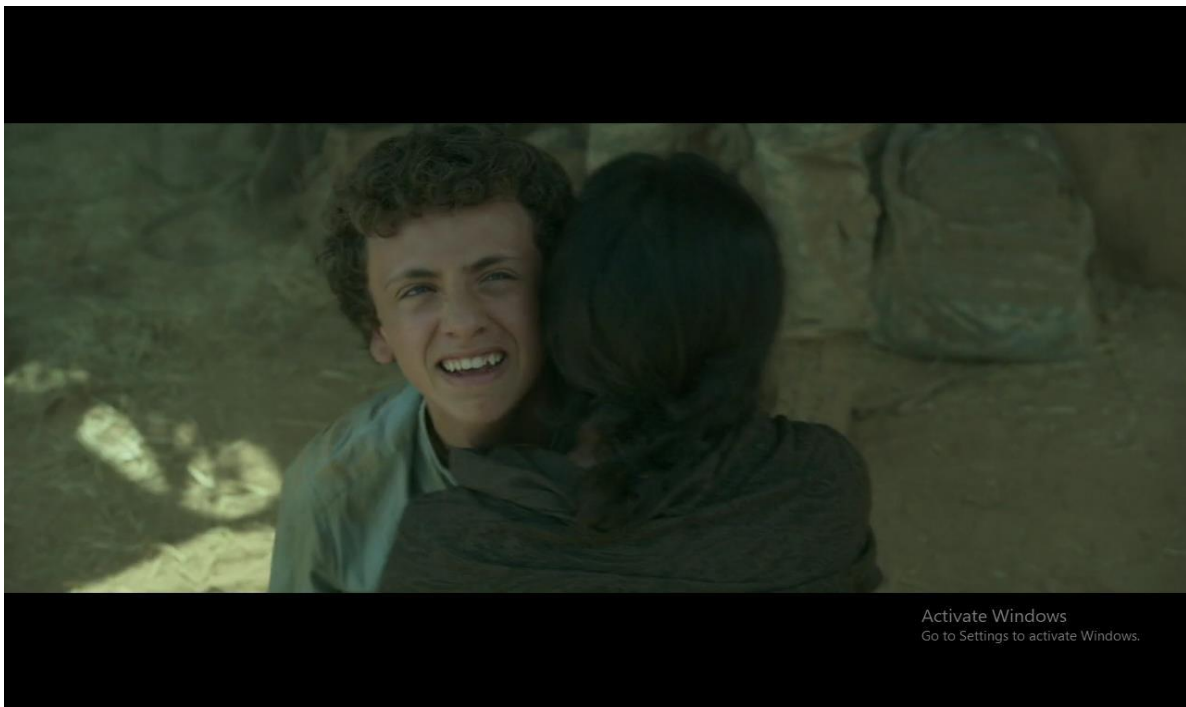

Figure 1.14 Afghan boy shot through subjective point of view of Briggman

Figure 1.15 A name-script shown at the beginning of each part of the film, named after the respective Commanding Officers of *The Outpost*

Figure 1.16 An aerial shot of *The Outpost* showing its strategically weak and vulnerable position

Figure 1.17 US soldiers greeting the Afghan villagers as they come to attend a Shura meeting

Figure 1.18 A view of Captain Keating's Shura with local elders

Figure 1.19 Village elder showing friendly attitude towards Captain Keating