



All in the name of security

A qualitative content analysis regarding the concept of security in the movie Zero Dark Thirty

Author: Emelie Andreasson

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Advisor: Arita Holmberg

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Abstract

This study explores how the concept of security is presented in current American action movies.

This study will use the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* as an illustrative example to examine the concept of security during the 'War on Terror'-era. The study will use qualitative content analysis in order to examine the concept of security.

Key Words: Security, Qualitative Content Analysis, Movie, Identity, Ontological Security

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1. Introduction

The concept of security has become increasingly relevant in today's globalized world. The traditional concept of security is challenged by new types of threats. Undoubtedly this is reflected in the popular culture we consume today. The dangers we are presented with can be exaggerated immensely we are presented with, as a source of danger, can be exaggerated immensely without the audience questioning them, because it is only a movie. Nevertheless it reflects our current understanding of our reality. Security can mean many different things depending upon the different circumstances. Furthermore what should be considered dangerous is something constructed and reconstructed over time (Campbell 1998:81). Additionally security can be achieved for the state, the individual, or for values and ideas etcetera. Indeed the concept of security is not an easy notion to dissect since it has the potential to mean different things. What can be perceived as security related may be dictated through the use of 'soft power'.

The spreading of ideas and values should be considered an act of power. From a traditional realist perspective, power comes in the form of military advantages and economic superiority. All the same, this definition gives a rather narrow view of what can be considered power. In 2004, Joseph Nye presented the idea of 'soft power' as a complement to 'hard power'. The idea behind 'soft power' is that America's hegemony is the power of attraction, rather than the use of 'hard power' (e.g. the use of military might and economic sanctions). Power of attraction is exporting the idea of what a good life can be, the idea of the 'the American dream'. Following that logic 'soft power' can thus dictate who and whom can be considered the enemy and how the hero should act. Values, culture and policies are what Nye labels 'soft power' (Nye 2002:8). In this case, the 'culture' aspect of soft power is interesting. Hollywood continues to play a significant role in the consolidation and strengthening of soft power. Fundamentally, this is due to Hollywood's ability to export ideas regarding what is valuable, and therefore, what should be protected. America is also interested in maintaining a degree of world order (Nye 2004:61). In fact rising powers such as China have started to invest in the movie industry in order to become more approachable (Vlassis 2015:490-491) The power of attraction, or 'soft power' is easily expressed in movies. In conclusion, one can argue that the movie industry has influence over how the audience perceives the world and what can be considered security.

Media has the ability to influence the way we perceive the world. Indeed, popular culture is in many ways political. On a regular basis we consume a plethora of media, such as newspapers, news, TV-

shows and movies. All these forms of media affect the way we understand the world around us, as well as our own identity as a nation. Media has the ability to create and reinforce symbols of national identity (Orgad 2012:81).

One can make the argument that popular culture is a reflection of the current political times (Smith & Jones 2015, Dodds 2008, Reigert 2007). As such, those responsible for the creation of popular culture wield enormous political power. A great deal of popular culture such as movies and TV-series are produced in Hollywood; the center of American filmmaking. Hollywood is amongst the biggest producers of popular culture in the western society. Because of this influence, Hollywood has the ability to shape how the audience perceives the world. For example action movies have been produced for years and have evolved together with politics, as is reflected in the evolution of who the predominantly portrayed antagonist is, as well as their motives. There is a strong connection with the political atmosphere and movies produced. There is also a working relationship between production companies and the US department of defense (Löffmann 2013). These themes will be discussed further in the chapter; previous research, but sufficed to say, there is a strong argument for the presence of political influence in the movie industry and vice versa.

Movies take liberties with the truth when stories are brought to the silver screen. There is little doubt that the audience is aware of the fact that what happens on the movie or TV screen is fictional. Nevertheless, imagery and story-lines are reflections of our current reality (Dodds 2008, Reigert 2007). TV-series such as *The West Wing* had story-lines which coincided with actual real-life events on numerous occasions (Reigert 2007:213). While the audience is aware of the fact that the storyline is a dramatization, it still reinforces the current political discussion. The depiction of 'reality' on the screen, plays into our understanding of the world reinforces stereotypes, and generate new ones. Furthermore, there also exists movies which claim to portray a realistic take on events. Indeed, movies which claim to be biographical or 'inspired by actual events' are commonplace in Hollywood. They are marketed as telling the story as truthfully as possible. In fact, Hoskins and O'Loughlin discuss the possibility of films providing a better representation about an event than a news report. This is ascribed to the ability of film to re-create the experiences of those involved in the story, whilst also providing context and a backstory (Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2010:65-66). In contrast, news reports typically focus upon what is going on exactly here and now, often at the cost of the (sometimes) complex context.

1.2 Research problem

Movies from Hollywood guide the audience to a particular understanding of the world. It can be regarding our society, norms, or even potential enemies. Thus, they have the potential of guiding an audience to a particular understanding of concepts, such as identity and security. For example, in constructing an enemy in a particular way, it shapes the way the 'us' understand the shared collective (Campbell 1999:73-74). Security and national identity are closely related (Hansen 2006:1, Campbell 1998:9-10). In order to have a consistent 'us' there must be some form of threat to the security of the nation, in this case American national security (Campbell 1998:30-33). The message of security and identity can be spread through popular culture. Movies are forced to simplify complex relationships between different countries and groups of people. Yet it will provide the audience with a interpretation of the situation and the context. Today movies are accessible for a global audience because of the cost of producing them. Movies with a high production cost must be promoted on a worldwide basis in order to make a profit (Dodds 2008:227). Successful movies must by necessity be shown on a global scale even though the themes of the movie will be 'American'. Considering the widespread release of such movies the values present will be shared on a global scale. This suggest that the ideas regarding security are open to interpretation and portrayals of these themes by Hollywood are exported on a global scale. That these movies are so widespread and the themes and subsequent discussions associated with them are so important, provides considerable incentive to study them.

The events of 9/11 changed the way much of the world perceivers threats and what it means to be secure (Croft 2006:37-38). The current paper has opted to focus on this time period because of the 'new' form of threats that have come from globalization, and the effects this has had upon American interests and the subsequent manner in which the Western world perceives security. Considering the idea that movies are a reflection of the current political climate, this grants the opportunity to understand the political climate through film. When it comes to the concept of security, this is something which always has a high priority on the political agenda. Through the use of key words such as 'security threat', politicians have the opportunity to legitimize extraordinary measures which might otherwise not have been possible, had the framing been different. Movies have the ability to both question a certain war and glorify the individuals who are apart of them (Der Derian 2009:166). This suggests that there can be several competing ideas present in the same film.

Previous studies have focused on the creation of the 'other' in these types of films (Dodds 2008, Jones & Smith 2015, Guterman 2013). That is, an alternative to how the American self-image is

reflected in popular culture (Dittmer 2005, Van Veeren 2009). However, how do movies treat the concept of security and what needs to be done in order to achieve security? Perhaps even more fundamentally, what constitutes security, and for whom does it exist?

Thus, this study aspires to bring to the field a deeper understanding of the concept of security and how its being portrayed in popular culture in the modern globalized world affects our understanding of identity. Previous research has focused on examining the representation of the enemy in Hollywood productions. This study attempts to shift the focus to study security as a whole concept.

1.3 Aim & Research question

The aim of this study is to bring about a deeper understanding of how security is being portrayed in Hollywood movies. As previously mentioned, the study attempts to understand how the concept of security is presented in popular culture. In order to illuminate the concept of security in the 'war on terror'-era, the study will conduct a qualitative content analysis of the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*. The movie claims to be an accurate account of the hunt for Usama Bin-Ladin. The research problem and aim lead to the proposal of the following research question:

What does it mean to be secure in the 'war on terror'-era, as portrayed in the film *Zero Dark Thirty*?

In order to answer the main question the study will also make use of two minor questions:

- How does the movie portray the so-called 'War on Terror' in terms of identity and security?
- How is the concept of security articulated in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*?

The reason for the focus on films produced post 2001 is because they have the ability to showcase the current understanding of what security can be considered to be, as well as identity. The movies produced in this era potentially offer an explanation towards the new kind of threat to the world order today, according to Hollywood. The choice of film will be explained further in the method chapter.

In the next chapter previous research will be presented which this study relies upon.

1.4 Previous research:

In this chapter intends to provide an overview of what has previously been done on the topic of security-identity media. The relationship between politics and popular culture has become a vast research field. Several different studies have been undertaken on TV-series and movies suggest, which have suggested that there is a link between the current political climate and the messages projected in popular culture. From the department of defense supporting movies with a pro-american military stance to the representation of the enemy. This is something which will be developed further in this chapter.

1.4.1 Department of defense and Hollywood

The relationship between the entertainment industry and the military will first be explored. In the book *Virtuous war*, Der Derian maps out what he calls the military-industrial media-entertainment network. He suggests that there is a close relationship between the military industry and entertainment industry. This in turn has changed the way the audience perceives war, to wit; it sanitizes the acts of war (Der Derian 2009:xxxix). This is done is through military exercises, as well as virtual simulations such as video games and movies. Der Derian also points out how the industries influence each other. For example, it is not unheard of that former technical specialists become consultants for production companies (Der Derian 2009:161).

The relationship between Hollywood and the department of defense is an interesting one. Löffmann claims in his study that certain themes when depicted in film tend to result in the producers receiving support from the department of defense. That is, films which portray the armed forces in a positive light receive support. Movies such as *Transformers: Revenge of the fallen* and *Battleship* received support (Löffmann 2013:290). These movies have a positive perspective towards the armed forces and suggests an American geopolitical role as the world protector. Officially, the pentagon has a set of criteria; that the film needs to portray a realistic image of American armed forces and the role of American national security (Löffmann 2013:283). Films that did not receive support from the Department of defense include amongst others; *The Hurt Locker*. This is perhaps due to the film's challenging of US involvement in the Middle East (Löffmann 2013:286). *The Hurt Locker* has been praised for its realistic portrayal of war and the soldiers who participate in them. Nonetheless, it questions the role of America as the 'world police', which arguably runs contrary to the motives of the pentagon. Instead, movies which suggest a heroic

America that protects the rest of the world from an evil 'other' (whether it be aliens, monsters, machines, or otherwise) gets support from the department of defense (Löffmann 2013:286).

1.4.2 Us and them

Far from all movies portray the American armed forces in a purely positive light. It seems to be have become more common after the events of 9/11. Jones and Smith mapped out the production of movies on the topic of the 'War on Terror'. They call the films produced after 9/11 for 'Dark Americana'. According to Jones and Smith there was an initial reaction from Hollywood after 9/11 in terms of what kind of movies they produced. Many projects were either shelved or delayed and more family friendly movies were produced and presented to the audience. Violence on screen became less prominent in movies produced immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center (Jones & Smith 2015:2). Jones and Smith found that there was a shift in the way Hollywood projected America's perceived role in the world after 9/11. These films depicted a less positive view of the 'American hero'. The concept of 'Dark Americana' can be described as a natural follower to the 'film noir'-genre (Jones & Smith 2015:3). Traditionally the image of 'Americana' has been consisted of the heroic and virtuous man who has conquered the evil seeking to destroy the concept of 'America'. 'Dark Americana' however, questions the American image and explores topics such as moral ambiguity and emotional complexity. The heroes become more complex and do not always appear likable or are portrayed as idealists trapped in a convoluted and flawed system. Examples of these 'Dark Americana' movies include *Body of Lies*, *Syriana* and the TV-series *Homeland* (Jones & Smith 2015:2,9). There has been a change in the way the American sees their place and role in the international community which is echoed in the movie industry.

The portrayal of the 'other', in particular people of islamic faith in big budget productions has been a topic of study for a long time. From the Smith and Jones (2015) study we understand that movies have started to question the concept of the hero, yet the idea how of the villain has remained static over the past 40 years. This is especially true if the villain has Middle Eastern ties and/ or of islamic faith (Guterman 2013:642-643). During the early days of terror on film there has been a wide variety of nationality amongst villains, such as Nazi's, Serbians and Communists. Using people from the Middle East as villains started in the 70's and has become increasingly more common. According to Guterman these villains are usually extremely stereotyped with little regard to the cultural complexity of the Middle East (Guterman 2013:642). Although there has been some attempts to give these men (as they are predominantly males) some context. For example, the TV-series 'Sleeper-cell' where the members of the cells motives are explored, as well as their back-

stories (Guterman 2013:645-650). Despite the series attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the people in the terrorist-cell, it still uses the stereotyped dichotomy of good and evil. It portrays the Islamic and the western cultures as polar opposites while at the same time problematizing both, the the way of that they might be opposite but they are connected nonetheless (Guterman 2013:649). Fundamentally, Gutermans demonstrates that whilst there has been some change in the way the popular culture portrays the islamic faith, it still remains overly simplistic and stereotyped.

A field within popular culture which has an interesting take on counterterrorism is the video game industry. Video games reach a wide audience and have been understudied, especially within the field of security studies. This is surprising considering the popularity of counterterrorism games. Games such as *Modern Warfare* and *Call Of Duty* are amongst of the most popular franchises with a counterterrorism narrative (Schulzke 2013:588). Many of the games lack a clear political goal given the fact that the main objective is to stop the terrorists without the player having any contextualization. Schulzke maintains that these games have a strong Pro-America bias in the 'war on terror' narrative (Schulzke 2013:591-592). Where films and TV-series have the possibility of showing various points of view, the games only gives the points of view from the player perspective. These games strive for realism when it comes to visuals, but lack realism in the narratives. The representation of actual events which in turn leads the player to a misrepresentation of the reality of counterterrorism (Schulzke 2013:587). It also gives little in regards of motive from the terrorists. The terrorists are represented purely as something that needs to be defeated by the hero who happens to a white male who saves the day (Schulzke 2013:595-599).

1.4.3 The protagonist

There has been an abundance of white males who saves the day in popular culture. This is exemplified in the TV-series '24'. Before the success of *Homeland* there was the TV-series *24* wherein Kiefer Sutherland's character, Jack Bauer, chases terrorists in downtown Los Angeles. Van Veeren discusses the line between reality and fiction in the post 9/11 world and the TV-show. The series has an action-heavy storyline which fits into the political discourse of the Bush administration after 9/11 (Van Veeren 2009:362). The show also relies heavily on the use of 'us' and 'them' in the manner in which it constructs the threat to national security. This narrative reinforces the 'war on terror' discourse, which created an enemy who is vastly different from the idea of us (Van Veeren 2009:376). Van Veeren discusses the close relationship between the TV-series *24* and the strategic narrative presented by the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11. Several of the plot-lines for the series were similar to actual events and/or statements made by the Bush administration. There is

always an exceptional threat to American security that needs extra ordinary efforts to stop it. The premise of the show was that the agency Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) and the agent Jack Bauer had 24 hours to stop a terrorist attack somewhere in the United States, usually in the convenient area of Los Angeles. The time constraint is something which is brought up on a frequent basis since it justifies some extra-ordinary measures from "the good guys" in order to procure some viable information from the suspects. On more than one occasion, this included the use of torture and/or deadly force (Van Veeren 2009:380).

These aforementioned studies have questioned the portrayal of the 'other' and the 'us'. The white male is often the hero to save the day against the terrorist. A character who can be described as the 'embodiment of the American hero' is Captain America. Dittmer conducted a study where he examined the role of Captain America in comic books. The character projects the American national identity that changes over time. Dittmer maintains that popular culture helps shape the perception of the world and our place in it. From this perspective the Captain America comics can be viewed as a political projection of American nationalism (Dittmer 2005:627). The character of Captain America was created in a world where America was perceived as peace loving and Europe was war-mongering. It was created to harness the patriotic feeling which is projected in times of crisis in order to unite a community. Steve Rogers became a symbol of America dressed in red, white and blue. The outfit and associated symbolism was frequently ridiculed by his enemies. He carried out his missions in the name of security, rather than building an empire (Dittmer 2005:629-630). Rogers is also a reluctant hero where he hates violence but he cannot stand on the sidelines and let other people die for him.

Symbolism is often used in these comic books, which guides the audience in terms of geopolitics. For example, America does not want to be the world protector, but they need to be. The narrative in the comic books has changed over time according to Dittmer. Not only the role of Captain America but also who the villains are represented to be. During World War II it was the Nazi Germans, and during the cold war it was the Communists. As the political situation in the world changes so does Captain America as well as his enemies. The character's role changes over time in order to reflect the current political discourse in the United States. The enemies change from the Nazis to communists to environmental pollution (Dittmer 2005:631-633). The authors are not afraid to criticize the government either, for example, Steve Rodgers adopts the alias 'Nomad' for a time, when he feels that he does not stand for the current political climate in the US. He only comes back to government service after the political leaders in the US apologizes (Dittmer 2005: 632-633). As

such, the character is always depicted as honest and true, a patriot who stands for American values, even when the ruling elite does not.

1.4.4 The reception

So far the discussion has been focused on the portrayal of different aspects of American security on film. An important question is, how are these messages being received by the audience? One study which seeks to answer this question is *Ask the audience: television, security and Homeland* (2016). Pears conducted a study wherein the author focused on the TV-series *Homeland*. She uses a critical narrative approach to study the message the audience receives from the TV-series. Pears used focus groups in order to answer how different people reacted to the content of the series. Pears maintains that consuming popular culture is a social experience which guides the understanding of the world. Pears admits that she had trouble finding people of islamic faith willing to participate in the study (Pears 2016:90). One of the central themes plots of *Homeland* is islamic radicalization and race. One of Pears' focus groups discusses the repercussion of stereotypical characterizations of people with islamic faith. Pears also found a difference in how different groups perceived the message of the series. The group of non-muslims focused on the message of failing on the CIA's part, how the characters who we are supposed to root for are presented as complex and human, and that the CIA makes mistakes but it is for the 'greater good'(Pears 2016:88-89). In contrast, the group of muslims focused on how the stereotypical portrayal of muslims affected their day to day lives (Pears 2016:92).

Dodds further examines the relationship between popular culture and popular geopolitics. His article *Screening Terror* discusses how Hollywood has approached the issue of terror on the silver screen. Like Smith and Jones, Dodds maintains that there has been a change towards how America has been represented in the cinematic world. This change coincides with the political changes in the United States, most notably the difference between the Clinton era and the 'War on Terror' era. Dodds declares that terrorism is a form of discourse and practice rather than an ideology (Dodds 2008:229). This concept is in keeping with his statements noting that the manner in which the concept/actions/ideology of terrorism mirrors the political climate in the United States. Another interesting example of this is the rarity of political extremists in American movies who hail from American allies or America itself. There are exceptions to this rule but then the villain will be given a reason for their actions or being exemplified as an exception to the rule (Dodds 2008:236). Thus there is a difference in the way terrorists are portrayed in American action movies.

In sum Dodds maintain there is a cultural significance in how terrorism is portrayed in American action movies. These differences are highlighted by the narrative and characterization of the individuals.

As is demonstrated by the aforementioned research, a great deal of attention has been focused on the concept of identity and the construction of danger and enemies. What is missing to the field is a problematization of the question: What does it mean to be secure? This study will follow in the footsteps of Klaus Dodds and examine the use of security in American action movies. In the next section, the theoretical aspects of this study will be presented.

2. Theory/ Concept formation

As mentioned previously, the study will focus on the concept of security present in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*. What can be considered security and how is it constructed? In order to make sense of the ideas projected in the movies, a frame of reference will necessarily need to be established, which is presented in this following chapter.

2.1 Ontological security

Ontological security discusses the idea of security, not only for the body but also for the self (Mitzen 2006:344). This theory makes a distinction between being physically safe and feeling secure on an individual level. Where the individual safety refers to the individuals perception of their own identity (Mitzen 2006:342). This type of security might be just as important for individuals as military security or a functioning government. There is an inherent importance of experiencing oneself as a whole individual. A foundation to rely on regarding who one are as an entity. The idea of what the self is, is created through relationships. Daily routines are important for the self-identity, and the disruption of routine is a great source of insecurity for individuals, as is exemplified in the event of an act of terror. This could be exemplified in the event of an act of terror. The threat comes down to the security for the individual as well, because it interrupts the routine of our lives. In certain cases respective needs for physical and ontological security may be in conflict with one another (Mitzen 2006:342). What is needed for the survival of the individual might clash with what is needed for the society as a whole. Additionally, the need for security for the self-identity is a direct violation for what is needed for physical security. Mitzen uses the example of a woman in an abusive marriage as an analogy. The woman is in physical danger everyday yet she

stays because the marriage gives her an identity as a wife (Mitzen 2006: 347). Ontological security focuses primarily on the individual. Giddens does; however, discuss the role of identity in a new globalized world. That is, the change in how a society perceive their own identity in relation to the rest of the world, mainly because it has widened our perceptions of belonging (Giddens 1991:32). Globalization has lessened the importance of nationalism but not the need for identity and security. It has affected the way we see what can be considered as security. However, the notion of ontological security can be applied on a state level as well.

Threat to what we see as our own identity is closely related to the perception of danger, which is something that will be discussed with the help of David Campbell.

2.2 National identity and National security

Where Mitzen and Giddens discuss security for the identity of individual, Campbell discusses the connection between national security and national identity. As an empirical example he uses American foreign policy and how the politics of national identity shapes the way American policymakers see security (Campbell 1998:31). In the introduction to his book *Writing security* Campbell writes "Danger is not an objective condition" (1998:1). This suggests that what is considered dangerous is something constructed. "Most important, just as the source of danger has never been fixed, neither has the identity that it was said to threaten" (Campbell 1998:31). After the end of the cold war and the fall of the Soviet union the United States were lacking a clear enemy who posed a great threat to American security (Campbell 1998:169). America, who had built much of their identity on the production and reproduction of an enemy, needed to have a new 'enemy'. When Campbell's book was written, the danger was created to be drugs. By having a clear enemy or danger it is simple to maintain an identity as something different as something safe. A similar process has occurred with the 'war on terror', where America once again has a clear enemy.

The discourse of danger shapes how policymakers create policies. This in turn shapes the way the public apprehend danger and security. In 1997, David Baldwin wrote an article regarding what the concept of security is accepted to be. It aims to broaden the understanding what security can be. From a classical realist perspective, threats come from other states with malicious intentions. The Copenhagen school later widened the concept of security to include other types of threats. Most notably, Buzan and Waever identified 5 sectors of security; military, environmental, economic, societal, and political (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde 1998:8). New forms of warfare and more

importantly new form of menace. The article also poses questions such as, security for whom, for what values, and security from what threats? (Baldwin 1997:12-17). The term security is incredibly value-ridden and according to Baldwin it lacks a cohesive use (Baldwin 1997:10). The lack of a common definition of what one calls security however, is not what scholars call a 'contested concept'. Meaning, there are not competing definitions of the concepts (Baldwin 1997:12). Thus, there is a need for each researcher to stipulate their own understanding of the concept of security.

The need for security becomes a policy objective on its own, without a clear vision of what security entails or from whom. The pursuit for security can be different for the state as for the individual, to the point where the two needs for security becomes contradictory (Baldwin 1997:12). This leads to the question; what is security, and at what cost? In order to achieve security there will have to be sacrifices, thereby begging the question; what are states and individuals prepared to sacrifice in order to feel secure? Another important point that Baldwin makes is the following: Security for whom? He identifies three levels of security; for the state, the individual, and the international system (Baldwin 1997:13). The concept of security has changed over time. In order to have a definition of what can be considered security we also need to have a concept of danger. This can often be connected with identity. This study will have a focus on security and what is needed to achieve it within the realm of popular culture. Which leads us to how national identity is constructed in media.

2.3 National identity and the media

As mentioned above, the idea of identity is closely related to security. National identity is something which is socially constructed and is present in the media. "Media construct, reconstruct and deconstruct the nation as a symbol of belonging, and the consequences of the ways in which the global media invite us to imagine ourselves as the nation" (Orgad 2012:81). Popular culture is part of the media which feeds the audience images of how we are supposed to think about the 'us' or the collective identity. The nation needs symbols of identity to rally around. These symbols could be events or characters that people of a nation can unite around (Orgad 2012:83). This phenomenon is something which helps with the building the nation. These images are picked up by the media and become embedded in the way we view the world. Eventually, they will become taken for granted or even as 'truths'. Media thus symbolically constructs and reinforces national identity. This process brings a sense of unity for the public. The symbolic 'building a nation' shapes a discourse in order to create an imagined community of people who might have nothing else in common except for belonging to the same nation.

In order to create a sense of security there is a need to have some construction of what danger is. This can be made through the creation of an enemy, it can be a real one as well as a constructed one. When there is a clear danger or enemy, there is a need for a clear idea of the 'us', the inclusive group that needs to be protected from the other or the danger. The spread of globalization has made the idea of the nation somewhat redundant since the evident threat was no longer necessarily in the form of another state (Orgad 2012:82). In order to maintain the idea of the nation, the media has become the new promotor of national identity. To clarify, national identity had spread in media before and during the cold war as well. "In times of crisis, 'banal' nationalism and flagging often give way to flag waving and overt patriotism, manifest in expression of nationalist fervour" (Orgad 2012:84). That is, the use of national identity as a way to motivate the use of force in terms of achieving national security. Wars and security crises are excellent examples of when national identity becomes apparent in media. National media companies make media for the domestic audience and are thus directing the images towards that end. However, Hollywood movies are produced to appeal to a larger audience in order to make a profit (Dodds 2008:227). This also implies that the idea regarding security and identity is spreading beyond the domestic market. As someone on the outside we have a stereotypical idea regarding American national identity which we in turn reproduce.

As such, it has been established that a link exists between the use of security and the construction of identity. A threat to security often includes a threat to one's identity, no matter if it's on an individual, state or international level, which in turn guides an understanding of security. This is something which is present in media and thus also in popular culture. This study will focus on how the concept of security is presented in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*.

3. Methodology

In this chapter aims to present the method used in the study. The epistemological standpoint will be accounted for and the research design will be presented. The limitations of the study will be discussed and the reasons for them. In order to examine the research question, a qualitative content analysis approach has been adopted for the analysis of the concept of security, as reflected in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*.

3.1 Epistemology

The main epistemological approach is constructivistic. The main purpose of this study is to understand how the concept of security is both described and presented. When studying politics we are contemplating our current reality as we understand it. There is an objective truth but as humans we cannot comprehend it (Della Porta & Keating 2008:24). Hence, we are studying how we construct knowledge around what we cannot know objectively. Thus, knowledge is socially conditioned, and can be challenged and should not be taken as a given (Della Porta & Keating 2008:24). The things we see are a product of our conceptualizations and will change with our experiences.

3.2 Research design

The paper will be conducted as a study with an illustrative example in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*. The focus will be on how the concept of security is being discussed in American action movies in particular, *Zero Dark Thirty*. This study attempts to understand how the concept of security is being constructed and reinforced in popular culture. In order to discover how the concept of security is being used, this study will make use of qualitative content analysis. The starting point will be the film examined, meaning that the study will have an inductive approach.

3.3 Qualitative content analysis

In order to answer the research question "What does it mean to be secure in the 'War on Terror'-era, as portrayed in the film *Zero Dark Thirty*?", this study will use qualitative content analysis. The choice fell on qualitative content analysis because it allows the researcher to explore not only the dialogue, but also themes and core ideas, as well as what is left out of the material (Drisko & Maschi 2015:82). This method also allows the researcher to analyze the visual and audial aspects of the movie. For example how the director has used imagery, dialog, musical cues etc (Drisko & Maschi 2015:84-85). In this case, the "text" which is analyzed is the movie *Zero Dark tThirty*.

There are several different version of the qualitative content analysis as presented by Drisko & Maschi; however, the main approach can be described as a systematic approach to the "systematic method for searching out and describing meanings within texts of many kinds" (Drisko & Maschi 2015:87). This allows the researcher to examine both manifested and latent content within the research object, in this case the movie. (Drisko & Maschi 2015:87-88). This study will focus on the

representation of security in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*. The study will discuss the concept of security and how it's presented in the film. For example, what is discussed, and what is not. Perhaps even more interesting, what is treated as a given. As Flinck writes "meaning can also be located beyond what the individual is aware of (which would refer to subject meaning)." (Flinck 2014:371). This is done through a categorization of the themes, latent content and manifested content into a summary of sorts (Drisko & Maschi 2015:90). In short, Qualitative content analysis is "systematic way to analyze the research question not only the text or language but also themes and core ideas as well as what is not addressed" (Drisko & Maschi 2015:82). The intention when using qualitative content analysis is to capture core ideas and themes in the object of analysis (Drisko & Maschi 2015:85).

In this study the researcher will be summarizing the narrative, and present the core, themes and describes the reasons for the presented labels. In this case the scholar will present the narrative of the movie and then move on to present the themes/categories. As described by Drisko and Maschi: "Researches uses coding to identify and describe key meaning within texts of many kinds. Coding is also used to reduce and summarize those meaning that are most relevant to answering the research question." (Drisko & Maschi 2015:102). In other words, it's up to the scholar to find categories and justify why certain aspects of the text can be categorized in that way. The categories are developed by the researcher who determines which are more overarching than others (Drisko & Maschi 2015:104-105). As mentioned before, this study makes use of an inductive approach, which means that the categories were not determined from a theoretical point of view but rather from the material itself. However, the study will also rely upon the theories which were presented in the previous chapter.

While qualitative content analysis share many traits with discourse analysis, the former places a greater emphasis on meaning (Drisko & Maschi 2015:82). Discourse analysis on the other hand focuses more on the power structure in a text. While it's perfectly acceptable to do a discourse analysis on this subject, it would not fulfill the aim of the study. Qualitative content analysis is similar to discourse analysis insofar as the use of themes and words are analysed; however, discourse analysis pays more attention towards power relations, especially those power relations which reinforces a certain discourse. In contrast, this study will focus on how security is being discussed and presented to an audience.

As such, the proposed methodology provides one with the opportunity to analyze not only what is present in the movie but also what is left out. In order to achieve this, the researcher has set up a

coding schema which will serve as a guide throughout the analysis. The analysis is conducted through a series of questions, which will be presented below. The first part of coding comprises of developing concepts which are central to the analysis (Flick 2014:373).

3.4 Coding scheme

In order to examine the assumptions underlying the portrayal of security in *Zero Dark Thirty*, and to answer the research question, the study will use the following coding scheme. Some of the questions are taken from Baldwins article '*the concept of security*' (1997). Other have been constructed by the researcher order to capture what it means to be secure in the 'war on terror'-era.

What can be considered security?
How is identity presented?
What do we accept as security related?
How can the 'us' be secure?
Security for whom?
Security for which values?
What is needed in order to achieve security?

3.5 Material

In the process of choosing the movie to be analyzed, there were several criteria were established in order to inform the final decision. To wit; the movie needed to be produced after the events of 9/11, The movie should be contemporary (in so far as the events portrayed should occur in the current historical period), and the movie should have some form of recognition (such as awards or critical acclaim). Furthermore, the movie should also have been released on a global scale, the cast be comprised of well-known actors (as their presence affects the dissemination of the film) and lastly, the box-office performance of the film was considered (although this factor was considered of secondary importance).

After some deliberation, *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), was selected, as it fulfilled all the aforementioned criteria. The film tells the story about the efforts in capturing Usama Bin Ladin, the man ostensibly responsible for orchestrating the 9/11 attack. *Zero Dark Thirty* is presented as a historical movie, set during the period after the events of 9/11. It does not follow a particular historical person's accounts of the events but rather the joint efforts to capture and kill Usama Bin-

Ladin. The movie was nominated for several academy awards, such as; best movie of the year, best actress and best original screen play, and received the award for best sound editing (IMDB). It was also nominated for other prestigious film awards and lead actor Jessica Chastain was awarded a golden globe for best actress. The films director, Kathryn Bigelow, had previously directed the academy award winning movie *The Hurt Locker*, which depicts soldiers in Afghanistan. In addition to Jessica Chastain the movie features other well-known actors such as; Mark Strong, Chris Pratt and James Gandolfini among others. The movie did fairly well from a financial standpoint, but was by no means a notable commercial success (IMDB). Despite this, the movie was the topic of considerable public discussion, and its reception of numerous awards and award nominations makes it intriguing enough to use as an object of analysis.

This movie was produced in 2012, more than 10 years after the attack on the World Trade Center. The movie has the capability of capturing the era in a different way than the movies produced closer in chronological proximity to the events of 9/11 and the advent of the 'War on Terror'. *Zero Dark Thirty* offers an interesting perspective on the so-called 'War on Terror'. Primarily, this is because the movie covers an intricate story that spans several years. Nevertheless, the movie has received significant criticism, in addition to praise. It is also a movie which has been criticized as well as praised for its portrayal of events. The movie *Zero Dark Thirty* makes a claim of historical accuracy. However, people who were involved in the manhunt for Usama Bin Ladin have openly critiqued how the events have been portrayed. In a piece written by Paul Kellerman in the UK paper *The Telegraph* the premise of the events in the movie has been questioned (Kellerman 2015). The movie strives for authenticity but given the span of time which the film aims to capture within a few hours, it is unsurprising some 'artistic' liberties were taken. Nevertheless, such a film still has the ability to provide a 'truer' account of events, through the depiction of backstory and context, as discussed by Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010:65-66).

3.6 Limitations

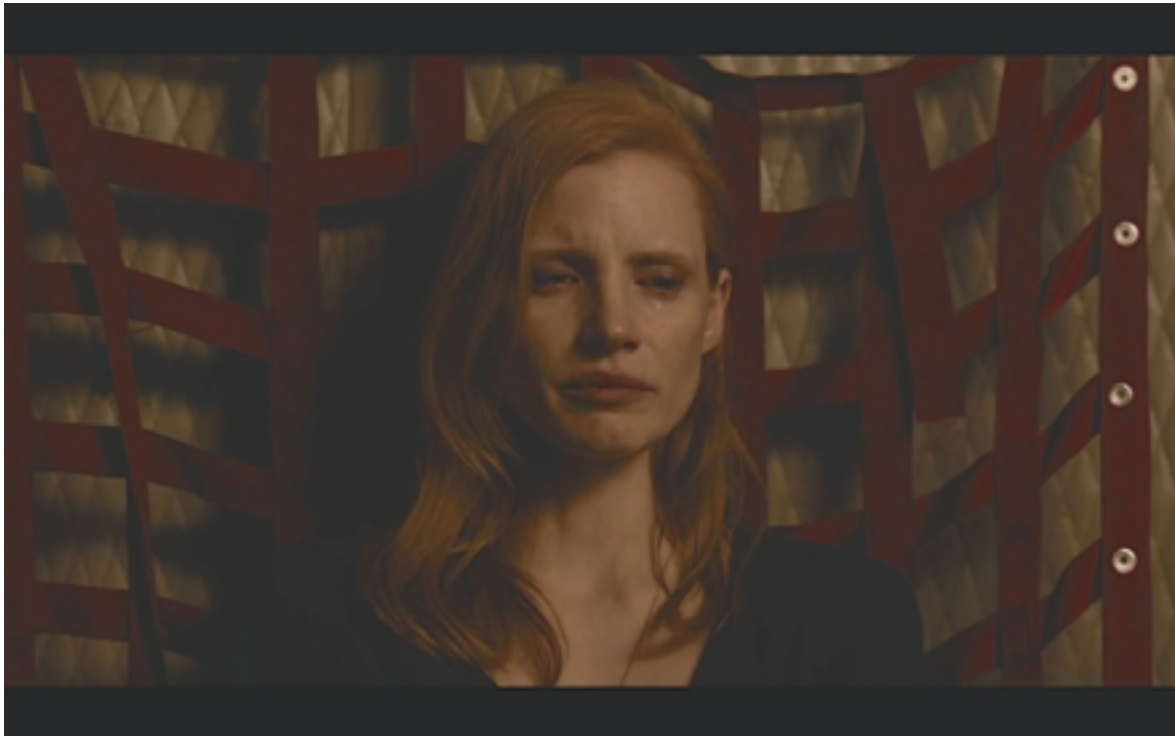
Initially, the current study aimed to apply a qualitative content analysis process to multiple films; however, upon gaining a greater appreciation for the scope of the study, this was revised to a single film. Nevertheless, this provides one with the opportunity to delve deeper into the framing and representations present in the movie.

In order to have a fresh perspective on the content of the movie and limit the influence of preconception regarding the content of the selected film, the research opted to analyze a film which had not previously been seen. In order to minimize prejudice the movie was watched twice, because it allows for the researcher to see different things. During the first viewing of the movie, notes were taken, with particular focus upon how the idea of security was portrayed and discussed in the film (with consideration to films more broadly in the wake of 9/11. This approach was elected, as previous researchers have noted a change in movies (Smith & Jones 2016). There are several advantages when conducting a study of this kind, chiefly, it allows for the manner in which the media presents and subsequently influences the way we as an audience are perceiving security and identity to be highlighted. The so-called 'War on Terror' was chosen as the subject of focus, as it changed the threat perception from an American perspective in the American movie industry (Smith & Jones 2016:1). There are obviously other forms of security threats, such as, domestic crime, natural disasters, and so forth, but these threats fell outside the scope of the current study.

Identities in general are something which are in constant flux; it is not in a fixed position in any place in time (Bergström & Boréus 2012:401). Going back to the previous statement regarding the constructivist epistemological standpoint of the current study, this suggests that we cannot observe the subject objectively. However, we are able to understand and analyze the content of the movie from our previous understanding of the concepts and theories used. Thus, this study will highlight what themes, images and assumptions which are projected in the movie and towards the audience. Therefore, it is anticipated that examining the messages projected towards the audience will help to illuminate the current idea of what security can be considered to be.

4. Analysis

4.1 Zero Dark Thirty, the plot



(Maya Crying 2:29:35)¹

The storyline for *Zero Dark Thirty* is as follows; The movie covers the CIA operation in the Middle East and South Asia spanning 10 years. More specifically, the hunt for Al Qaeda members and other people connected with the attacks on 9/11. The audience is initially presented with a black screen and the words "The following motion picture is based on the first hand accounts of actual events" (0:0:41). Afterwards we hear 911-calls after the attack on the world trade center. After the initial call we get to hear other types of phone calls such as people being trapped in the world trade center, saying things such as; "I'm gonna die, aren't I?" and "I love you" to loved ones. The central narrative begins approximately two years after the attacks. We are introduced to the main character, Maya, (Jessica Chastain) whilst she is participating in an interrogation. The prisoner in question is believed to have connections to Al Qaeda. During the interrogation the prisoner is tortured in order to extract information about the so-called Saudi-group. Afterwards, Maya is introduced to the rest of the group working on finding Usama Bin-Ladin at the American embassy in Islamabad. The movie then touches down at different points in time where significant events occurred, such as the London bombing on the 7th of July 2005, the bombing of the Marriot hotel in Islamabad in 2008 etcetera.

¹The reference is the time in the movie the scene takes place

The movie also depicts the manner in which Maya and her colleagues search for the so-called 'Saudi-group', which are deemed responsible for 9/11. In the last part of the movie, the audience gets to follow the navy seal team which apprehend and kill Usama Bin-Ladin. The movie ends with Maya confirming that the dead man is indeed Usama Bin-Ladin. The closing scene depicts Maya getting aboard an aircraft alone and the pilot asking if she is important, since she is the only listing on the manifest and he will take her anywhere she would like to go. The closing image is Maya crying on the aircraft. The hunt for Usama Bin-Ladin is over.

4.2 America as insecure

In order to create a sense of insecurity the director lets the audience hear various phone calls from 9/11. The events of that day sent shockwaves throughout the entire world. It sends the message that the western world/civilization is vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The phone-calls heard are private citizens who ended up being present at the wrong place at the wrong time. While the attacks themselves were on targets with symbolic values (such as the Pentagon and the World Trade Center), the people paying the price were ordinary. This showed America that they were not as safe as they thought in their own country. This feeling of insecurity is reinforced thorough the movie with the multiple depictions of various terror attacks.. It's a common theme where the attacks are portrayed as coming out of the blue which will be discussed in more detail below. The message projected is that the work these people are doing is the last line of defense in order to achieve security.

4.2.1 Identity of Maya

The protagonist in *Zero Dark Thirty* is Maya. When we are introduced to her, she has arrived in Pakistan to join the effort to find the Saudi-group. As an audience we don't get to know her as an individual. She is portrayed as goal-oriented and remarkably driven in the quest of finding Usama Bin-Ladin. According to her, she was recruited to the CIA directly out of high school. She is given little context over all. Consequently, the audience knows barely anything about her background or family ties. As an audience, we do not see her personal life or her having any free time. Her only reason for acting the way she does seems to be some sort of patriotic pride. The movie shows how Maya is result-oriented and gets annoyed when her superior does not follow her intelligence, and her subsequent frustrations, and feelings that she is not being heard. She works tirelessly in order to capture Usama Bin-Ladin. The movie presents Maya with a single goal, her *raison d'être* is to capture Bin-Ladin. She is presented as a pure driving force for the quest for security. She doesn't seem to have much personal attachment to anyone except her co-workers. She has no other identity

other than being in pursuit of Bin-Ladin. This is reinforced at the end of the movie when she is asked how long she's been with the agency, and her answer is that she was recruited right out of high school and her only focus in the CIA (and perhaps by extension, her life) has been Bin-Ladin (1:52:41-1:53:15).

In some cases she has tunnel vision on, with little regard to possible ramifications should the CIA act on her intelligence. The information she provides is acquired through, amongst other means torture. This is something which is discussed but is not entirely condemned since the information procured was accurate. She has little moral scruples over the use of torture. She might have some reservations about it, as she is shown feeling uncomfortable after various torturing sessions. For example, standing in a bathroom over a sink as if she would like to wash away what happened (0:41:38-0:44:34). Yet, she defends the practice of torture in order to retrieve information from the prisoners. Clearly she deems the practice necessary in order to capture Usama Bin-Ladin. In her characterization she is very similar to the role of Jack Bauer, where results matter more than the means. Maya has a clear goal and in her mind whatever needs to be done shall be done. She doesn't need to consider the political repercussions of acting on the intelligence. She is rather a "doer", and does what she deems necessary in order to achieve the mission. Her whole identity is constructed through her search for Bin-Ladin. Thus, her emotional response in the final scene is not surprising because it brings fourth the question; who is she now? Maya is painted very similarly to male protagonists, where they are prepared to risk all for the safety of the country. This notion is discussed in the chapter of previous studies. However, unlike Steve Rodgers (Captain America) she is not a symbol of "Americanness" but rather the unsung heroes in the CIA. She does what she deems necessary in order to keep America safe.

4.2.2 National Identity in Zero Dark Thirty

The movie is very patriotic in the way it portrays the events. This is not surprising, as the movie does tell the story from an American perspective and with that comes certain expectations. Without fail, every scene taking place in America or at an American embassy features an American flag present. Whether it be a small flag on a desk, or a large one mounted upon the wall. However, what should or could be considered an American identity is not really discussed. For example, it follows the American engagement in the middle east and we are following CIA agents in their work. The American identity is not challenged or articulated. It's not reinforced more than already discussed. There is no speech on how "America does not negotiate with terrorists". Instead, the national identity is treated as a given. Nonetheless, America should be protected. For example, on more than

one occasion the American flag or emblem is visible together with an armed guard. As an illustration:



(American Flag 1:53:41, Armed guard 0:54:44)

The events of 9/11 is an example of an event which the American people rally around. The events have been reconstructed numerous times in popular culture and the media. The concept of security becomes synonymous with the events of that day. As an audience we are familiar with what happened on that day, we probably also know that Al-Qaeda took responsibility for the attack. Thus, the creation of the enemy is also presented as a given. For example, the audience is not presented with a reason Al-Qaeda and Bin-Ladin is a danger to the Homeland. They are reduced to radicals who may not be persuaded to change allegiance because of money (0:30:34-0:31:10).

4.3 What can be considered security?

The movie does not discuss the concept of security head on. Nonetheless, it does give a pervasive sense of being insecure, and how the CIA tries to find the people responsible for 9/11. What the movie does is recreate an event in American history and reinforces the idea of insecurity. What the movie portrays is the struggle of trying to achieve security.

Approximately halfway through the film, the character George Wright (Mark Strong) delivers a big speech regarding the CIA's inability to locate Usama Bin-Ladin (1:04:17-1:06:15). He has gathered a large crowd of people who work on tracking down Bin-Ladin. He raises the fact that America has been attacked on numerous occasions, by air, by sea and by land. He is effectively reminding everybody that America is not safe; that there are forces out there that want to hurt America. After he tallies up the number of dead in the terror attacks in New York he says the number of dead deployed soldiers in the region. He also reminds the room that there is not a black ops division working alongside them. The people in the room is all they've got. It's their responsibility, more or less to keep America safe. The operation costs a lot of money and people are dying, but still they haven't achieved the results they need. This scene is particularly interesting, as it does not take into consideration the fact that the American invasion can be seen as an aggression in the region. The security of the region is not reflected in the movie at all. What matters is killing an ostensibly significant threat to American security. The character of George Wright is emphasizes the importance of the work they're doing with this line: "Do your fucking jobs, and bring me people to kill"(1:05:57-1:06:01). Usama Bin-Ladin becomes the mythical 'Boogeyman' who is a tremendous threat to American security, and perhaps the rest of the western world. There is an implied assumption that while Bin-Ladin is out there, they are not safe. The logical conclusion to which is that the CIA forces are charged with responsibility of keeping America safe and protected.

Another type of security which is discussed is Maya's personal security. During the progression of the story, Maya becomes more recognizable as a CIA operative in Pakistan. At this time, the American presence in Pakistan has upset a great deal of people, represented by the moderate numbers of protesters outside of the embassy (1:25:28-1:26:12). These protests escalate to target Maya personally. In one instance, she is leaving her home in a gated community and is besieged by gunfire (1:32:24-1:34:02). In this scene her personal security is jeopardized because of her job from being outside the standard military forces. The character of Daniel, who is one of Maya's closest co-workers at the beginning, is worried for her security when the 'black sites' program is being placed under scrutiny. He warns her of possible ramifications for her if she is "the last one holding the dog collar when the oversight committee comes" (0:44:41-0:46:15). Here there is a different kind of threat with different ramifications because the threat is internal and could also be construed as the judicial arm of their own government being the 'enemy'.

Closely connected to the events above, the nature of job security is discussed. Maya's supervisor, Bradley, residing in Islamabad, becomes a scapegoat for a drone strike gone wrong and was subsequently pulled out of the region. It's implied that Bradley might not be personally involved in the decision but is sold out by his superiors after he's been named in a lawsuit (1:25:46-1:27:14). He is pulled out officially for his own security's sake, but Maya is maintaining that ISAI² is using him as a scapegoat. Forasmuch as he did the job well, forces outside of his control cost him his job security and he was forced to go back to Washington. The danger is less profound to his physical safety, but there could still be consequences to the character's ontological security.

4.3.1 Political security vs the risk of doing nothing

Towards the end of the movie when Maya has more or less established that Bin-Ladin is hiding in a compound in Pakistan, she appears to be the only one certain of Bin-Ladin whereabouts; which frustrates her tremendously. Where her supervisors and others are more careful in their assessment of the possibility regarding Bin-Ladins whereabouts, she is adamant that she know where he is (1:50:15-1:52:07). This tension goes on for some time, something which Maya keeps reminding her boss; George Wright. She does this by writing the number of days they have not acted on the information on his window. For example:

² No explanation is given in the movie as to what the ISAI stands for



(Count 1:50:25)

While Maya is pushing her more careful supervisors, they in turn try to convince the political advisors to act on the intelligence. There is an exchange between George Wright and a political advisor to the president. The CIA agent is clearly frustrated with the political stand-point. That is, the oval office doesn't seem to want to act on the intelligence (1:41:8-1:54:55)³. The struggle between the CIA and the political advisors goes on for some time, but in the end they are permitted to act on the intelligence, and send a combat team to engage Bin-Ladin. This conflict was alluded by Campbell, where the risk of doing nothing would possibly harm the national security but acting without accurate information could damage the national identity. Bin-Ladin had been constructed as a huge threat to the American security but a poorly executed mission could damage the idea of America as a "world protector". Within the international community, America has been given a certain role to play which can be exemplified here. When two objectives become incompatible it creates an insecurity for the nation as to which objective they should reach for.

³ From when the first meeting between the CIA and the political advisors to the go ahead call

What is striking in these scenes is the juxtaposition between political security and the risk of doing nothing. This is an example of two different security needs in conflict with one another. One is the political security and public facade for the President. The other is letting a known terrorist slip through their fingers. Initially, the American identity of being righteous and polished is more important than capturing Bin-Ladin. The national identity as a go-getter, the ones that show strength in times of need. The political security refers to the presidency and legitimacy of the American president. This could be considered as an example of ontological security, where two different security needs become opposed towards each other. In the movie the political aides describe President Obama in the following way: "The president is a thoughtful, analytical guy, he needs proof" (1:45:04). The presidential offices has to consider a bigger picture than the CIA. While it would be an immense political gain if the intelligence should prove to be accurate and the mission would succeed; the political repercussions would be equally immense should the mission fail. Thus, the political aides keep asking for more in terms of confirmation in order to give the "go ahead" for an intervention. This proves to be something the CIA have trouble giving them, as they are not acting in the realms of absolutes and certainties. They cannot be certain that Bin-Ladin is in fact located in the designated house. What can be alluded to here is American forces intervening on foreign soil has consequences for the international system. This is something that the political leaders need to take into consideration before making a decision. These scenes demonstrate the complexity of security and which 'type' of security should be prioritized. Should it be the bigger picture which includes some sort of security for the international system, or for the individual country? This seems to aggravate Maya since she is certain that he is there. However, she would not need to face the consequences in an international context in the same way as the president would, should the intelligence prove inaccurate.

The movie does allude to a change in the political landscape, but only very subtly. Mostly in reference to the existence of the black sites and the use of torture. Such as when the character of Daniel warns Maya of the risks of being left responsible for the black sites (0:44:41-0:46:15). The political change in Washington thus affects the everyday lives for the personnel in the field and the risks.

4.4 How can the 'us' be secure?



(American embassy in Islamabad 0:10:33)

That the CIA is working for American interests is not really addressed in the movie. However, there are subtle indications throughout. The use of flags and emblems are signifiers to reinforce the national identity.

The character of Maya is insisting that she is right when she is articulating a need for more action. The CIA should do more and get more resources in order to follow the leads, as this is the biggest threat to American security. In a particularly emotionally loaded scene, Maya and her supervisor, Bradley, are standing in a hallway in the American embassy in Islamabad. Maya has received intelligence that a person of interest has been spotted in Rawalpindi but the resources to monitor the area have not been granted. Maya is visibly aggravated as she scolds her supervisor. "If you really want to protect the Homeland we need to get Bin-Ladin". She gives him two options, either he gets her what she wants or send her back to Washington and explain why she is there (1:18:32-1:20:26). Once again Bin-Ladin is projected as a mythical 'boogeyman' and the source of American insecurities. The use of extraordinary measures is thus legitimized in the hunt for him. In order to find, him torture is considered acceptable because it is justified by the end goal. In this context there is no other option for the 'us' to be secure, but to capture him.

4.5 Security for whom?

The terror attacks, which are fairly common in the movie, always seem to come out of the blue. To demonstrate; the first example depicts the London bombings in 2005. It appears to be a regular day in London and the viewer is shown a red double decker bus and some traffic. Suddenly a bomb explodes, and one is transported to a scene depicting an exploded bus. News reports with injured people telling their stories is on the news (0:34:19-0:35:24). The next terror attack shown is the Marriot hotel in Islamabad. Maya is late, meeting her colleague Jessica and they are waiting for a third person. Maya is complaining about the traffic/security checks. She brings up something work-related to which her colleague responds by saying that they are here for relaxation and not for job-talk. They begin to discuss Maya's lack of a personal life when the bomb goes off. The scene continues with people screaming and crying and Maya and her co-worker trying to get out of the restaurant (0:46:45-0:50:00). The terror attacks in the movie are dramatization of real events. However, not all terror attacks which happened during this time have been accounted for. The film chooses to focus on attacks with "western" targets and leaves others.

Both of the scenes described above are showing insecurity in the sense we can never avoid these types of incidents completely. They seem to occur out of the blue, because that's when they are the most effective. The different terror attacks in the film are either taking place in the western world or in places with western clientele. These attacks are disrupting the routine. It threatens individuals, in the sense it could happen to you. The movie does not explicitly discuss the terror attacks before 9/11 although they are briefly mentioned. The 9/11 attacks become mythical in this way. They become an event for a nation to rally around. The incident would be a symbolic attack on the nation rather than on the individual. Nonetheless it is the individuals who end up paying the ultimate price during these attacks. The discussion regarding security is limited towards the western world.

There is no discussion regarding whether the American presence in the Middle East and South Asia has had any effect on perceived security. There is also little regard towards the fact that America can be seen as a security threat to the Middle East and South Asia. Not even in the final scene when the navy seals are in the house is the insecurity of the 'other' addressed. During the raid in the house the focus is on capturing Bin-Ladin. However, there is a whole family living in the same house. They experience fear and danger but the point of view is from the American soldiers on a mission

(2:02:54-2:24:32). This subtly reinforces the idea that Al-Qaeda is only dangerous to western ideals and not discussing how these attacks affect the region as a whole. After the attacks we are seeing the agents involved being distraught and helpless yet resolved to apprehend the persons responsible.

The 'other', in this case Al-Qaeda, are portrayed as radicals and given no other possible motive besides that. They are given no context to explain their actions. For example, Maya is reminding Jennifer that the use of bribes may have worked during the cold war but now it's a new era of threats (0:30:34-0:31:10). This portrays the enemy as something different from the threat during the cold war. Perhaps also as something extremely foreign to an audience used to a capitalistic system. The perpetrators motives are not discussed at all. As an audience we are not given a reason for them to threaten 'us' which can make them even more terrifying.

4.6 Security for which values?

Unlike some other movies in this genre there is no great speech regarding so-called 'American values'. There is no big speech about how Al-Qaeda is a big menace towards democracy and freedom, etcetera. Instead, we are presented with an uncertainty about how to keep America safe. There are moments which can be considered patriotic but they are rather low-key. For example there are a lot of American flags in the movie.



(picture, Conference room Washington 1:37:08)

Flags are shown in offices both small and large, depending on whose office it is. Many of the male supervisors and political aides wear pins on their lapels. When a scene takes place on an American base there is one shot of the flag waving in the breeze accompanied with armored guards. This is interesting because of what the visual implies. By connecting the flags with armored guards it connects the flag or emblems as something that should be protected. By extension, the values that are usually associated with the US need to be protected.

However, the articulation of the word 'Homeland', used throughout the film, gives certain clues as to what values we as an audience should associate with America. The phrase 'Homeland' is only mentioned a few times, but typically in reference to something which is either in danger or needs to be protected. Homeland signifies something more than the country in of itself, but rather, the idea and values it contains. For example, in the scene where Maya scolds her supervisor, Bradley (1:18:32-1:20:26), she explicitly states that in order to protect the homeland they need to find Bin-Ladin. She is both articulating what should be protected and from what. At the same time, 'Homeland' can also be identified as a symbol where the audience can themselves define what the Homeland is. In this sense, it allows for the audience to attribute their desired values to the notion of the homeland, and by extension, what values should be protected in this scenario. It is doubtless anticipated, that the the (American) audience would probably project values that are typically connected with America, such as freedom and democracy. Nonetheless this is not something which is openly articulated. Thus reinforcing the idea of national identity as discussed by Orgad. The ideas of which values need protecting is thus reinforced by the film. The symbol of the homeland is open to interpretation for the audience. While it can signify different things for different people, it still has the ability to reinforce the idea of unity.

4.7 What is needed in order to achieve security?

The movie shows that the desired the information may comes naturally, by accident, bribery, or by hard and painstaking work. Sometimes you need to buy someone a Lamborghini in order to get the right connection (1:11:19-1:13:37). The movie also shows the sometimes unethical "reality" of the people trying to achieve security for America. The message articulated through that implies that in order to achieve security, one sometimes needs to do unethical things. This suggest that *Zero Dark Thirty* follows in the tradition of what Smith & Jones calls 'Dark Americana'.

One of the more controversial parts in this movie is undoubtedly the torture scenes. There is more than one torture scene. As mentioned before, the very first scene in which we meet Maya is during an interrogation/torture of a prisoner. The torture scenes are rather graphic. Mainly, they dehumanizes the prisoners. For example, the first torture scene depicts the prisoner left without pants in the dark after he has soiled himself (0:02:14-0:09:16, 0:15:48-0:23:33). There are different types of torture, including; humiliation, water boarding, force-feeding, assault, sleep deprivation, and blasting heavy-metal music among others. After the various torture scenes we are shown a Maya looking uncomfortable yet she keeps insisting that they should be pushing the prisoner harder. Further, in the next scene she is defending the use of torture since it provided tangible information (0:43:00-0:46:15). There is an underlying assumption that in order to achieve security one needs to figuratively get their hands dirty. The movie undoubtedly presents the fact that CIA used torture, however the use is not glorified nor questioned. Although one could suggest that the use of torture is accepted since the information provided was accurate. The characters present at the torture do not question the validity of the information. None of the intelligence acquired during these sessions (in the movie) proved to be false. The use of torture is somewhat questioned by a later stage in the movie by a political advisor. He challenges the accuracy of the information "... the only human reporting you have is six years old, from a detainees who are questioned during duress" (1:45:26-1:45:51). Perhaps this is more to challenge the accuracy of the information rather than a challenge to the use of torture.

In order to obtain intelligence on Al-Qaeda several persons are being tortured. This could imply that its a acceptable practice among the operatives on the black sites, and not a stand-alone occurrence. The movie gives some praise to the use of torture especially because the intelligence turned out to be true. It doesn't question the implications of the human rights violations. However, one could argue by showing the "true extent" of the torture it questions its right to exists. Yet it fails to acknowledge the violation of human rights for these prisoners no matter what crimes they might be responsible for. It does not question whether or not a person is telling the truth during torture. In this case the information turns out to be true. Yet a person might say anything in order to stop the pain including what they believe the torturer wants to hear. In the TV-series 24, the use of torture was justified because of the time constraint e.g they tortured the suspect in order to obtain information before the attack happened. In *Zero Dark Thirty* they don't discuss the time aspect as a reason for torture.

There a scene where Barack Obama is shown on TV claiming that the US does not torture prisoners, which is noted by the persons present (0:52:00-0:52:41). However, the fact that the political leader of the US denies the use of torture is not acknowledged by any character. Yet, the choice by the director of showing the segment of the interview is significant. The use of torture is somewhat questioned when the movie shows a statement by Barrack Obama where he claims that the US does not engage in torture. During the segment Obama can be heard referring to "America's moral statue", the characters are shown clearly watching the show but are discussing other matters. This could allude to a difference between the different areas of managing security. This segment can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. "America's moral statue" can be used both in order to justify an intervention as well as staying out of a conflict.

We are introduced to these characters as professionals without any personal ties or motivations. Only one character, Daniel, is discussing the personal sacrifice he has made when he decides to leave the CIA 'black sites' in Pakistan for a new life at Langley (0:44:41-0:46:15). This is the character who is seen performing torture on several prisoners. Daniel claims he has seen to many guys naked and that he needs to do something normal, at least for a while. He invites Maya to accompany him to DC. Her response is that "I'm not gonna find Usama in Washington". Daniel then proceeds to warn Maya about the environment because the politics are changing; he is referring to the American politics. He seems concerned for her personal security, not only from the political threat if she ends up being the one responsible for the torture, but also for being a recognizable CIA face in Pakistan. Once more we are reminded about the risk for the personal security of these individuals. It forces them to be stationed in South Asia far away from any family or friends. They are shown as disconnected from the rest of the world and are only engaged with either prisoners or colleagues. Their entire existence is within the context of making sure America is safe. As an audience we aren't given any reason as to why these people are acting in this way, or indeed, why they're so focused on keeping America safe. Their own security is connected with how good they are at their job.

In order to achieve security, sacrifices have to be made. The characters themselves have made personal sacrifices which are discussed above. Another example of sacrifice comes approximately one hour into the movie; the loss of the character of Jennifer, who is killed when she is interviewing a supposed mole in Al-Qaeda. For the meeting, she travels to a base in Afghanistan to meet with the

alleged mole. In order to assure the asset's willingness to co-operate she orders the first line of security to stand down. This is ultimately a fatal decision for the people at the base, since the person arriving is a suicide bomber (0:56:44-1:00:27). Here, the character Jennifer had to take a calculated risk of taking down the first line of security since the potential benefit of having "someone on the inside" was deemed greater. This decision unfortunately led to a disaster. What happened at Camp Chapman in Afghanistan did actually happen and the agent in charge was a mother of three (Kellerman 2015). However, that fact is not presented in the movie. We are only shown Jennifer's close colleagues mourning the loss, but also, perhaps, the loss of a possible mole into the Al-Qaeda organization. The essential point here being, that the viewer is only meeting these people in a professional capacity. As an audience, we know very little regarding these character's personal sacrifices, since which ever sacrifices they are making are for 'the bigger picture'.

5. Conclusions

This study focuses on a particular aspect of the concept of security in the 'War on Terror' era. The engagement in the so-called greater Middle East has become a subject of many movies since the invasion in 2001. In turn, the movies have been studied from the perspective of identity and 'othering'. What this study has attempted to accomplish, is to broaden the field of study to include what can be considered security and what it means to be safe.

The question this study attempted to answer was "What does it mean to be secure in the 'war on terror'-era, as portrayed in the film *Zero Dark Thirty*?"

While the movie never explicitly discusses the idea of what security should be considered to be, it does pose questions regarding the costs of security. The characters sacrifice a great deal in order to capture Usama Bin-Ladin. Is this something which was truly needed in order to achieve security for America as a nation? Should things like security for other nations, personal security, ontological security, and security for moral statue be less prominent in the quest for security? What is interesting in this movie is it discusses what is needed in order to be secure from a particular threat, but not what it means for the 'others'. The people working towards achieving security do so with little regard to their own security. *Zero Dark Thirty* does not give a glamorous portrayal of how the CIA handled the the eco called 'War on Terror'. It does not shy away from showing how CIA operatives violated human rights in the pursuit of Usama Bin-Ladin. In order to capture Usama Bin-

Ladin the CIA apparently needed to use bribes and torture. Consequently, the movie challenges the idea of the "good guys" are always doing the right thing. It does articulate a need for amorality in order to achieve security. The movie does not shy away from portraying the fact that torture did occur in this context and it's human cost. It *somewhat* questions the necessity of it. However because Usama Bin-Ladin subsequently is executed by the American forces the messages becomes that the use of torture etcetera becomes justified.

The role of identity, especially national identity, in *Zero Dark Thirty* is treated as a given. We as an audience can assume that it's American interests which are protected in the movie. This is not articulated, but it is constructed and reinforced subtly through the use of symbols such as flags. As Orgad suggested; the media constructs, reconstructs and finally deconstructs, the role of the nation. The security and identity of America becomes a rallying point. The notion that "we" aren't safe and because of this "we" need to rally around the symbols of the nation.

We don't know what the actual person behind Maya truly felt about the use of torture. We don't know what the detainees at the CIA black sites knew, or if they actually were the ones who gave up the information which ultimately led to the capture of Bin-Ladin. We don't know how close their understanding of their own identity was connected with capturing Bin-Ladin.

5.1 Discussion

The movie *Zero Dark Thirty* is interesting because it somewhat questions what level of security we can achieve. In order to achieve security in a classical realist sense people and moral values need to be sacrificed. The movie suggests that this should be done without questioning it. Sacrifices are deemed necessary for the greater good. The movie presents the events from an American point of view which will affect the framing. The enemy is not given a clear goal or even a motive. The movie does, however, challenge the methods used by the CIA in the hunt for Bin-Ladin. It shows clear violations to human rights in order to achieve security. It makes little moral judgements though, rather stating torture happens, and perhaps encourages the audience to ponder the need for it. In the movie, the torture does render accurate information. It does not however, discuss how people react during torture. People will tell whatever they deem necessary in order to get the agony to stop. This includes what they think the interrogator wants to hear, regardless of what the truth is.

The movie *Zero Dark Thirty* is based on actual events. The very first thing we as an audience see is a claim to truth, a claim of accuracy. This has been questioned by people who had first hand accounts of the events. However, in order to capture 10 years of events in three hours some simplifications clearly had to be made. The terror attacks depicted in the movie are actual events. However, it is unclear if the character of Maya is based on a singular person or a combination of several. According to the IMDB frequently asked questions (FAQ) page, the character of Maya is a composite of several persons (IMDB). It makes sense out of a storytelling point of view. The focus of the movie is less about the characters depicted, and more about the events. The representation of events becomes more important than the characters. By combining several characters or giving actual persons other names gives the storytellers some liberty with what can be considered the truth. It does capture a sense what one could consider security in the 'war on terror'-era.

One aspect of the security concept which was not observed in the film was "what do we accept as security related". Unfortunately, nothing was present in the film which pertained to that question. However, one could conceivably argue that the concepts of surveillance and the violation of human rights falls within the scope of the question. Furthermore, the argument could be mounted that the use of torture could be accepted as security related. When the question was posed, the inconveniences of security checks and global surveillance would feature more prominently in the film.

5.2 Further studies

While writing this thesis several ideas for further studies arose. From the outset, the possibility of performing a comparative discourse analysis over time was present. The concept of security will undoubtedly have changed over the different historical eras. This would also have been reflected in the action movies at the time. For example 'war on terror' compared with the cold war period. Or the period between the two (e.g. 1991-2001). The security discourse and the perception of what should be considered dangerous would likely changed over time. This would have been reflected in contemporary action movies during this time. The study could be conducted on one movie from each era to see a potential change. A study with a similar orientation as this one but from a different cultural context. Perhaps there is a movie from Europe which discloses the engagement in the Middle East/ South Asia and how the security discourse is present there. Even Bollywood productions could offer another take on what it means to be secure in another cultural context.

Alternatively, an examination of the role of female characters in security movies. The protagonist Maya is not the typical female lead which is interesting. Many of her qualities usually belongs to men in this particular genre. She is unapologetic in the way she is carrying herself, both towards her subjects, co-workers and superiors. She is portrayed as the driving force behind the hunt for Al-Qaeda members and the leader himself. The movie itself does not make any judgement on the fact that she is a woman and the character could just as easily have been male. This truly is a sidestep from the typical woman in distress in action movie which is refreshing. In *Zero Dark Thirty* the female protagonist has a somewhat different role. The fact that she is a woman is not discussed at all. Her behavior of being out-spoken, driven and goal oriented is usually assigned to male characters. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct a study of *Zero Dark Thirty* from a gender perspective, and further to connect that to the change in the security discourse.

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