

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

**“The construction of the white female war journalist in
Whiskey Tango Foxtrot (2016) and *A Private War*
(2018)”**

verfasst von / submitted by

Magdalena Berger, BEd

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (MEd)

Wien, 2022 / Vienna 2022

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 199 507 510 02

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Lehramt, UF Englisch,
UF Geographie und Wirtschaftskunde

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sarah Heinz

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the people who have supported me throughout my thesis and, more specifically, while I was writing this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sarah Heinz for being a supervisor who is not only very generous with her time, but also gives thorough and constructive feedback. I am very grateful for that.

Secondly, I would like to thank Univ.-Prof. Dr. Monika Seidl who accompanied me through my master program and introduced me to the beauty of cultural studies. Without her, I would have never started to dive into this field with such joy and excitement.

Thirdly, I cannot express the level of gratitude and love I have for my family. Without the financial support of my parents and the love for books my mother sparked within me at a very young age, I would have never been able to finish even a bachelor's degree. I owe special thanks to my sisters who remind me every day that I am an old Millennial who should really be done studying.

Lastly, this thesis is also dedicated to my friends and comrades. To Matej, because he always listens to me talking about my thesis despite really not being interested in the field. Nothing would be possible without you anyways. To Elli, because she encouraged me to continue working, while telling me that "it's normal to feel that way during writing". Nobody was as excited about this thing as you were. To Beate, my exploited proof-reader who is content with getting only a dinner invitation and a book token in return. To Nora, because she suggested exploiting Beate. To Kevin and Adam for having read everyone and everything and answering all my annoying questions without ever appearing bothered. To all the Marxists who forgive me for writing a not very Marxist thesis. And eventually, to everybody who has listened to my complaints for the last six months, especially the 25 people in my close friends section on Instagram – I owe you one.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1. WHITENESS	6
1.1 UNDERSTANDING WHITENESS	7
1.2 “THE BODY” - CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIFFERENT FEMININITIES AND MASCULINITIES	9
1.3 MUSLIM WOMEN AS ORIENTAL OTHER	13
1.3.1 EDWARD SAID AND THE ORIGINS OF ORIENTALISM	14
1.3.2 REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO 9/11	15
1.3.3 POST-9/11 REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLIMS IN THE WEST	18
1.4 WHITE SAVIORISM AND ITS FEMINIZATION	20
1.4.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHITE FEMINISM	20
1.4.2 WOMEN AS THE NEW WHITE SAVIORS	22
2. THE WAR MOVIE	23
2.1 A GENRE APPROACH – FEATURES OF THE US-AMERICAN WAR FILM	24
2.2 US-AMERICAN WAR MOVIES AS A TOOL OF IMPERIALISM	27
2.2.1 FROM WORLD WAR II TO VIETNAM	27
2.2.2 THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE SAD US-AMERICAN SOLDIER	30
2.2.3 THE WAR JOURNALIST – A NEW LIBERAL FEMINIST HEROINE	33
3. ANALYSIS	36
3.1 THE UNMARRIED AND INDEPENDENT WOMAN – ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS	37
3.1.1 KIM BAKER’S QUEST FOR LOVE?	37
3.1.2 SEX, DESPAIR, AND WEAPONS – MARIE COLVIN’S RELATIONSHIPS	40
3.2 DUSTY AND DRY LANDSCAPES – THE WESTERN IN THE EASTERN	43
3.2.1 KABUL CHAOS VS. THE DESERT	44
3.2.2 FROM THE JUNGLE TO THE EMPTY DESERT	47
3.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US MILITARY	52
3.3.1 THE STATE EMPOWERED SECURITY FEMINIST	53
3.3.2 INDEPENDENT, YET UNCRITICAL	56
3.4 “ALLAHU AKBAR” - DEPICTION OF MUSLIM MEN	58
3.4.1 TERRORIST AND DANGEROUS	59
3.4.2 DANGEROUS AND TERRORIST	61
3.5 DEPICTION OF MUSLIM WOMEN	64
3.5.1 ABSENT AND DEVALUED	65
3.5.2 ABSENT AND CRYING	69
4. CONCLUSION	73
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY	77
5.1 PRIMARY MATERIAL	77

5.2 SECONDARY SOURCES	77
5.3 MOVIES AND SERIES REFERENCED	82
<u>6. APPENDIX</u>	<u>83</u>
6.1 ABSTRACT ENGLISH	83
6.2 ABSTRACT GERMAN	83

TABLE OF FIGURES

PICTURE 1: CRYING IN THE NEWSROOM (2:37).....	38
PICTURE 2: IN BED WITH PATRICK (3:42)	40
PICTURE 3: NAKED IN FRONT OF MIRROR (60:11)	42
PICTURE 4: KABUL (7:32)	44
PICTURE 5: NYC OFFICE (2:18)	45
PICTURE 6: CAR IN AFGHANISTAN (52:43)	46
PICTURE 7: HELICOPTER IN AFGHANISTAN (14:16)	46
PICTURE 8: LONDON NEWSROOM (37:05).....	47
PICTURE 9: COLD LONDON (38:15).....	48
PICTURE 10: PSYCHIATRY (38:49)	48
PICTURE 11: SRI LANKA (5:35)	48
PICTURE 12: IRAQI BORDER, 2003 (18:00)	49
PICTURE 13: MARJAH, AFGHANISTAN 2009 (47:00).....	50
PICTURE 14: MISRATA, LIBYA 2011 (57:00)	51
PICTURE 15: HOMS, SYRIA 2012 (76:35).....	51
PICTURE 16: SHOT AFGHAN BOY AND SOLDIER (48:48)	57
PICTURE 17: KIM RUNS AWAY (55:00)	60
PICTURE 18: MEN WITH GUNS (18:50).....	61
PICTURE 19: MILITARY CHECKPOINT (23:34)	62
PICTURE 20: INTERROGATION IN LIBYA (57:05)	63
PICTURE 21: AFGHAN WOMEN IN HOUSE (43:12).....	63
PICTURE 22: KIM IN BURQA (51:48)	63
PICTURE 23: MUSLIM WOMEN IN CHADORS (27:12)	69
PICTURE 24: CRYING MUSLIM WOMEN (49:00)	70
PICTURE 25: CRYING WOMAN WITH BABY (83:20)	71
PICTURE 26: SHOT PALESTINIAN GIRL (35:41)	72

1. Introduction

Stories about war, as much as any other stories about history, have predominantly been told from a male perspective (von der Lippe and Ottosen 2016; Yuval-Davis 1997). Despite this historic male hegemony, there have, however, always been female war reporters. The outbreak of World War 2, for instance, was first covered by Claire Hollingworth in *The Daily Telegraph* (BBC 2017). Probably the most famous female war journalist of the 20th century is Martha Gellhorn, who covered almost every major war event from the Spanish Civil War as much as World War II to the Vietnam War (Gellhorn 2012).

With especially white women gradually entering an increasing number of positions of power in politics as much as journalism, female war reporters went from being a small fraction to a prominent group (von der Lippe and Ottosen 9). This has been reflected in movies, where women have been represented in traditional masculine roles, such as the war journalist (McNair 106). At the same time, a new wave of Hollywood movies about heroines is to be observed, depicting young women tougher, cleverer and more willing to also use physical violence in their fight against systems of power, revealing “a melding of class-based, anti-authoritarian resistance within a gendered context” (Brown 168). This new figure of the revolutionary young woman has not only appeared in science fiction or fantasy movies such as *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015) or *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) (ibid.), but also in movies about war. As Charania (2020) argues, Academy-Award-winning movies such as *Eye in the Sky* (2015), *The Honorable Woman* (2014) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) all feature Western white women in the context of war. While it might appear that those new female characters break traditional gender norms – and they do to some extent, as they “glorif[y] white female determination and persistence in a world dominated by men” (Charania 112) – they equally enforce other systems of oppression. Abu Lughud (2012) argues that especially Muslim women are discussed in a colonial and missionary framework and presented as waiting to be rescued. It is hence no coincidence that the non-white counterparts to the new female war heroine are presented as “objects to whom the world happens and never subjects *worlding the world*” (Charania 132).

In my master’s thesis, I will combine the recent increase in the representation of young heroines with the representation of female war journalists. Specifically, I will

compare the depiction of two US-American female war correspondents in two different movies: Kim Baker in Afghanistan (*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*) and Marie Colvin from Sri Lanka to Syria (*A Private War*). Initially, these movies appear different. On the one hand, there is *A Private War*, a war drama which follows the story of the award-winning journalist Marie Colvin throughout different wars over a period of 11 years. The movie confronts the spectator with a female journalist who is increasingly suffering from PTSD but continues to go back to zones of conflict. On the other hand, there is Tina Fey's war comedy *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, which follows the dissatisfied TV journalist Kim Baker, who leaves her boring New York job to go on a self-discovery adventure as a war journalist in Afghanistan.

The media reception of these movies reveals several similarities, frequently stressing the feminist and heroic storytelling of the movies. *The Washington Post*, for instance, titles: "*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* is Tina Fey's latest ode to unmarried women" (Rosenberg 2016). It includes "a nicely spun feminist awakening" according to *The Guardian* (Hoffman 2016), and *The New York Times* considers it a "feminist comedy" (Ryzik 2016). Attributing the word feminism to Tina Fey's 2016 movie *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* in big English-speaking media comes as no surprise, as Fey has been an outspoken feminist for years and her reputation as a feminist comedy screenwriter is undisputed. In 2015, she hosted the Oscars together with Amy Poehler, which *Guardian* columnist Hadley Freeman considered "the first feminist film awards ceremony". For the first time, jokes seriously critiqued contemporary Hollywood, as in the comment that "there are still great roles for women over 40, as long as you get hired when you're under 40" (2015).

The narrative in the assessment of *A Private War* does not predominantly stress a feminist, but a heroic motif, as demonstrated for instance by *The New York Times'* headline: "Hollywood's Forgotten Heroes: Female War Correspondents" (Ryzik 2018). In this review, Ryzik describes Colvin, despite having lived through so much trauma, as "witty, gregarious and stylish: a natural cinematic heroine" (2018). Especially Rosamund Pike's performance as Marie Colvin was assessed tremendously positively, as for instance in a *Washington Post* review: "Rosamund Pike delivers the performance of her career as war correspondent Marie Colvin" (Hornaday 2018). Ann Hornaday, *The Washington Post's* chief film critic, considers *A Private War* a movie "that examines its heroes not with a tone of vicarious swagger or abject worship, but one that emphasizes pain, sacrifice and often fatal stakes" (2018). On Rotten Tomatoes,

the movie obtains a score of 88 % and the critics' consensus is that "*A Private War* honors its real-life subject with a sober appraisal of the sacrifices required of journalists on the front lines - and career-best work by Rosamund Pike" (Rotten Tomatoes 2022b).

Tina Fey's work has been subject to much critical feminist analysis within academia and beyond (Oh 2020; Mizejewski 2012). Colpean and Tully argue that the huge success of Tina Fey's feminist comedy entails that her feminism must remain marketable; hence, sticking to a white mainstream. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* is a perfect example for this, as it "center[s] white feminist politics that feature weakly reflexive engagements with whiteness that allow for Fey's [...] continued success" (Colpean and Tully 162). *Bitch Media* published an article called "The Orientalist Narrative and Erasure in '*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*'", in which Abraham argues that the movie uses "Afghanistan, its problems and its women, as a backdrop for Kim's journey of self-discovery" (2016). However, such reviews were not published in prominent media outlets, such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, but only in a feminist online magazine. Aside from the above-mentioned positive mainstream feminist connotation, the overall response towards the movie remained rather negative. On the prominent movie rating website Rotten Tomatoes, the movies received 67 %, which equals 3.3 out of 5 stars. The critical consensus states that "[w]hile WTF is far from FUBAR, Tina Fey and Martin Freeman are just barely enough to overcome the picture's glib predictability and limited worldview" (Rotten Tomatoes 2022a).

As opposed to *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, there is no academic discussion of *A Private War* and there are no reviews to be found which illustrate the Orientalist notion of the movie. This absence of intersectional and postcolonial feminist criticism is one of the main reasons why I chose this movie to analyze the representation of the white female war journalist. While *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* obviously works with blunt racism, as for instance when Kim Barker considers the burka a "beautiful, mysterious IKEA bag" (19:50-19:55), *A Private War* is much more subtle in its Orientalism. I chose *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* to demonstrate how straight-forward white feminism can be and I chose to *A Private War* to demonstrate that a much more subtle depiction does not render a movie less problematic.

Despite apparent differences in terms of plot and genre, I argue that both movies have a similar underlying ideological structure, as they deal with issues concerning white neo-colonial violence, the disposability of people of color, and a political system

that allows an increasing number of white women to obtain positions of extraordinary power (Charania 2020). Hence, I claim that the journalists in the movies under analysis are presented as gender norm-breaking women in a liberal and Western feminist framework, but continue to uphold a neocolonial identity in relation to the people they are reporting about. I am therefore examining the construction of the white female Western war journalist in opposition to their Muslim-coded *Other*. My main argument is that the white female war journalists under analysis require the devaluation and passivity of their non-white counterparts to enable the construction of white femininity as empowered. To investigate this claim, I developed the following research questions: In what ways does the construction of the female war journalist in the movies under analysis entail a narrative of empowerment? What filmic and narrative means uphold neocolonial values in the representation of US-American female war journalists in the movies under analysis?

To answer these questions, I predominantly rely on intersectional feminist and postcolonial theory. The theoretical framework of my thesis consists of two parts, a first part about whiteness and a second part about the war film. In chapter 1, I first explain the concept and ambivalence of whiteness and in a follow-up chapter I focus on different types of (racialized) femininities and masculinities and their relations to white femininity. To do so, I mainly draw on the work of researchers such as Dyer (2017) or McIntosh (2019). This is followed by a concrete examination of how Muslim women function as *Oriental Other* to white femininity. Therefore, I am going back to Said's (1978) original notions of Orientalism, while equally discussing Western imaginations of Muslim women in historical (Kahf 2022) and contemporary feminist (Alsultany 2012) contexts. In the next chapter, I explore current notions of white saviorism and its feminization by investigating white feminism and exploring white women's role as new white saviors.

The second section of my theoretical framework deals with the issue of genre and the war film, specifically. In the first chapter, I explore the genre of US-American war movies by drawing on researchers such as Klein et al (2007). The second chapter provides an in-depth analysis on how Hollywood can be and has been used to preserve American imperialism throughout different wars, while especially focusing on World War 2, the Vietnam War, and the various wars in the Middle East (see. e.g., Boggs and Pollard 2016). In the last part of this chapter, I focus on contemporary liberal feminist heroines in movies and investigate in what ways female war journalists can be

considered as part of this notion of gender norm-breaking female characters. My arguments are supported by drawing on the work of Deylami (2019), Thobani (2019) and Charania (2020).

Regarding my analysis chapter, I investigate the representation of five different motifs. The first central motif is the romantic relationships of the main characters. Both women are presented as independent and career-driven, putting their professional success above romantic love. However, their relationship to men is still featured in vast parts of both movies to illustrate the cost of an independent life. It is, hence, no coincidence that especially *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* often resembles a romantic comedy. Secondly, I analyze the main character's relationship with the US military. While *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* constantly features the US military and there is a close positive relation between Kim Baker and the US forces, Marie Colvin in *A Private War* remains somewhat critical of Western military presence. However, even in *A Private War*, the enemy is rarely ever the imperial force of the West, but instead the killing is always conducted by local militia. The third motif under analysis is the filmic depiction of landscapes. I explicitly devote a chapter to this because the portrayal of dusty and dry yellow landscapes contributes to the Orientalization of the Middle East and functions as a further Other in the individualization of the female protagonists. The last aspect I focus on is an in-depth analysis of the character's relationship to the local population. While Muslim men are usually depicted as dangerous and distant in both movies, Muslim women are never individualized, but rather presented as nameless groups without agency. Thereby, an empowered version of white femininity is created.

It is important to mention that I examine the *representation* of Muslim women, and not their lived experience, as this has been done by various scholars before me (see e.g. Ahmed 1992, Jeffery and Qureshi 2022)). I investigate what purpose their oppressed depiction serves in the West and what consequences it entails on white femininity. Hence, I do not claim that Muslim women are not affected by patriarchy. Instead, I believe that patriarchy is a universal problem that affects all women and genderqueer people on this planet.

Lastly, there are several remarks to be made on the usage of capital letters and abbreviations in this thesis. I capitalize the words Orientalized and Other when used in a context in which they signify dialectical oppositions. Following Lori Tharps, the word Black will equally be written in capital letters throughout this thesis. "Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color," as

Tharps explains her case for the capital B (2014). As opposed to white people, Black people “have strong historical and cultural commonalities, even if they are from different parts of the world and even if they now live in different parts of the world” (Daniszewski 2020). White people do not have such commonalities and neither do they share common experiences regarding racism on the base of their skin color. As white is usually only capitalized by white supremacists (ibid.), I will refrain from capitalizing it in my thesis. Additionally, I am not going to use the full names of the movies after the introduction and instead refer to them as *Whiskey* and *Private* to improve readability.

1. Whiteness

The key idea of this thesis is that white women move into the position of white men and hence, move into privilege. Consequently, whiteness is the broadest analysis category of this thesis, which is why it is thoroughly analyzed first. However, whiteness alone is not enough to capture the broadness of my research question, which is why I need to add other analysis categories. First, I add gender, second, I add the racialization of religion. This is the base structure for the theoretical base of my master’s thesis, which I follow throughout this whole chapter.

I start with a detailed examination of “race” and whiteness. I debate the current state of research regarding whiteness and clarify how I understand and use the term. This is followed by a thorough examination of white femininity by contrasting it to other markers of race and gender. In the next step, I discuss the representation of Muslims and especially Muslim women as Other to whiteness and white women in particular. I investigate this narrative historically to realize how the understanding of Muslim women as oppressed and helpless figure has developed, while equally examining the contemporary relevance of this depiction. Eventually, I will combine my findings on white and Muslim femininity to analyze how white saviorism was femininized and why white women are often represented as the liberators of Black women or women of color. Here, I explain why the white middle-class heterosexual feminist subject has long been predominant in feminist discourses in the United States and draw on the most important criticism towards white feminism by Black and intersectional feminists. I do so to understand why the representation of Marie Colvin and Kim Baker was so easily understood as heroic and feminist.

1.1 Understanding Whiteness

Whiteness has been studied thoroughly, especially since the 1990s. To understand what whiteness is and what it entails, I work with the definitions of scholars such as Richard Dyer (2017), Dawn Marie McIntosh (2018) and Ruth Frankenberg (1993). However, before I discuss how whiteness is understood in this thesis, I need to clarify one important thing: my usage of the word *race*. I follow Gilroy, who argues that “‘race’ is best approached as an after-image – a lingering symptom of looking too casually into the damaging glare emanating from colonial conflicts at home and abroad” (185). Frantz Fanon says, “that race is a process in which the unity of the world becomes mediated by racialized objectification of the subject” (Unity and Struggle 15). This is why race functions as alienation. When using *race*, I am hence not referring to biological markers, but treat it as a social construct that is neither fixed nor essentialized. Race exists because Black people and people of color are *racialized* or, following Patrick Wolfe, produced as “racial subjects” (58).

In the first sentence of his groundbreaking study *White*, which deals with the representation of whiteness in visual media over the last 500 years, Richard Dyer argues that “racial imagery” is essential to the structure of our world (1). Racial imagery organizes the world through various ways, it controls who profits from goods, whose houses get bombed by whom, what professional opportunities a person has, what education they can get. While race is not the sole element that influences these things, it always remains a significant factor. But as “race in itself - insofar as it is anything in itself - refers to some intrinsically insignificant geographical/physical differences between people, it is the imagery of race that is in play” (1). Racial imagery has been studied for decades, for instance, there has been much analysis of the representation of Black Americans as much as native Americans or the construction of the racialized Other in the context of post-colonial studies. However, up until the 1990s, whiteness has often been absent from this type of analysis. Dealing with racial imageries was synonymous with dealing with the representation of non-white racialized Others. This lack of research illustrates how whiteness has functioned as a norm and white people were considered as un-raced (1).

Being un-raced or un-marked is a crucial marker of whiteness that has not solely been discussed by Richard Dyer. In her groundbreaking study on white womanhood, Frankenberg (1993) analyzes in what ways whiteness shapes women’s lives. She argues that: “[f]irst, whiteness is a location of structural advantage. Of race privilege.

Second, it is a 'standpoint', a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed." (1) What is understood by the *un-markedness* of whiteness is best illustrated by the following example: When discussing other people, whiteness is usually not a reference marker while the Blackness of a person is habitually mentioned. Indeed, understanding ourselves as merely people and not racially *marked* people is a key element of white culture (ibid. 2). In order to destabilize this narrative of white un-markedness, hooks (1992) analyzed how white people react to Black imaginations of whiteness which threaten this crucial understanding of un-markedness. Usually, they respond with anger. "Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think will make racism disappear" (ibid.). hooks demonstrates how the liberal understanding of racism and ideas of 'colorblindness' are linked to white privilege and the inability of white people across the political spectrum to 'see' their own racialization within a cultural imagery. 25 years after hook's claim, Reni Eddo-Lodge shows in her 2017 book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* how white liberals still have neither seriously advanced their understanding of racism, nor investigated their own whiteness.

The body and the embodiment of race is the second common denominator that occurs in various definitions of whiteness. Dyer, for instance, argues that being white is expressed in and through our bodies, "yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal" (45), it is "within but not of the body" (xxxiv). Whiteness is to be found in our souls, thoughts, in living and dying, all features of our social position as white people, it "is the sign that makes white people visible as white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people which is invisible" (ibid.). McIntosh (2018) works with a definition of "whiteness as an intersectional embodied performance" (94). She focuses on the body and examines thoroughly through what practices whiteness is expressed on a daily base. By doing so, she emphasizes intersectional aspects and their relation to whiteness. In essence, "[s]tanding at the performative matrix of whiteness, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, and class clarifies the social reality of whiteness" (ibid. 95). This understanding of whiteness is probably best explained by Shome, who argues that "whiteness is not just about bodies and skin color, but rather more about the *discursive practices* that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism

and privilege, sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews” (108).

A third marker of whiteness is its relationship to “the sexual reproductive economy of race” (Dyer 121). By using this phrase, Dyer investigates the relationship between whiteness and heterosexuality, which equally intimidates and conserves it. The white nuclear family is the essence of whiteness, and the heterosexual couple is conserving whiteness through having white children. Together, white men and women are reproducing their very own race which is why interracial marriages have been a taboo for such a long time (Frankenberg 55). “Women of color are not needed by white men to reproduce biologically pure offspring and therefore have been subordinated through *rejection*, whereas white women have been *seduced* into compliance because they are needed to reproduce biologically the next generation of power structure,” as Hurtado describes the white nuclear family and its effects on different femininities (viii). These “family ties” make it impossible for white men to suppress white women just as they suppress women of color. Instead, it positions white women in proximity to white male power and thereby makes them benefit from the existing power systems (ibid. ix). A similar understanding of the importance of the white nuclear family is to be found in McIntosh’s writing, who equally stresses the relationship between whiteness and heterosexuality, for instance by saying that “[t]he white female body must serve patriarchy by exemplifying the norms of heterosexuality” (97). To summarize, the white woman benefits from the nuclear family through her proximity to white male power; however, she is equally controlled by the white man.

1.2 “The body” - Constructions of Different Femininities and Masculinities

Whiteness alone is not a sufficient analysis category to answer my research question. Instead, another lens, namely gender, must be added. Following Frankenberg, “masculinity and femininity are divided in racial and cultural terms” (9). To understand white femininity hence requires understanding how other types of masculinity and femininity are constructed and how white femininity relates to them. Therefore, I first briefly describe the origins of the construction of Black and white masculinity, before discussing white femininity in detail. Most dominant understandings of Black masculinity and femininity emerged during slavery, which is why there is an emphasis on this time period.

This investigation is going to start with the examination of the most privileged version of masculinity, located at the top of the pyramid: white masculinity. As mentioned above, the *embodiment* of whiteness plays a crucial factor. A similar statement can be made about masculinity and white masculinity in particular. The most dominant marker of white masculinity is that instead of being the body, white men control the body. Instead of being sexualized, they sexualize. This claim is supported by Dyer (2017), who argues that white men were not depicted as sexualized or naked for a long period of time. Up until the 1980s, filmmakers hesitated to show the white male body on screen. The reason for this is simple: Nakedness is connected to vulnerability. Not wearing clothes entails not being shielded by something. At the same time, the white male body is used to demonstrate superiority. A flawless white male body signals bodily power. However, there is also the perception that non-white bodies are better and more trained, which is a problem for those white men who depend on their body. This is especially the case for white working class men, to whom their body matters even more (Dyer 146f.).

Black masculinity, as opposed to this, is frequently represented as furious, oversexualized and hostile (Frankenberg 68f). They do not control the body but are the body. The aggressive Black male rapist is probably the most telling stereotype about Black masculinity (Davis 174). Indeed, the connection between Black men and rape has a long history in the United States. As Gerda Lerner writes:

The myth of the black rapist of white women is the twin of the myth of the bad black woman – both designed to apologize for and facilitate the continued exploitation of black men and women. Black women perceived this connection very clearly and were early in the forefront of the fight against lynching. Their approach was to prove the falseness of the accusation, the disproportion between punishment and crime, the absence of legality, and lastly, to point to the different scales of justices meted out to the white and the black rapist. An often neglected aspect of this problem is judicial indifference to sexual crimes committed by black men upon black women. (193-194)

This quote perfectly illustrates that rape allegations have habitually functioned as a racist attack towards Black men, which did not only incarcerate them, but also hinder common anti-rape struggles between Black and white women. It also demonstrates how the stereotype of aggressive sexuality functions as a means to control the Black male body. Crucial to this understanding is that Black women were rarely seen as the victims of rape (Davis 188). Instead, the person that had to be protected from Black

male violence was the white woman. Through this unique position as a victim, she becomes an idealized ever-glowing character, a symbol of virtuousness (Dyer 122f). It also fosters the picture of white women as white Virgins, a pure God-given image, that positions them as the Virgin Mary next to Jesus Christ, the white man, to form the ideal heterosexual family (ibid. 16f). In essence, the stereotype of aggressive Black male sexuality further reinforces existing gendered and raced representations: It strengthens an angelic white femininity and positions the white man as the hero, who needs to protect the white woman and in doing so, protects his own race.

Black women have been equally represented as oversexualized, but in contrast to Black men, they are constructed as genderless at the same time. These constructions of Black femininity are linked to the demonization of Black masculinity via the institution of slavery and the function of racialized imageries of blackness for the white imagination. To understand Black femininity is thus to understand the Black woman's role as a worker, which is completely opposite to the bourgeois white woman of the 19th century, who was set in the domestic sphere (Davis 5f). In essence, the dominant role of Black women can be summarized as such: "When it was profitable to exploit them as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect, as genderless, but if they could be exploited, punished and repressed in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusively female roles" (ibid. 6). These exclusively female roles, e.g. the "jezebel", "hoochie" or simply the "whore", all "represent a deviant Black female sexuality" (Hill Collins 81). However, drawing on Dyer (2017), this equally reveals that Black women, as much as Black men, are not in charge of their bodies, but have their bodies controlled. The sexually aggressive jezebel figure for instance was used as an excuse for the common attacks by white men on Black women (Hill Collins 81). This demonstrates how the narrative of aggressive Black sexuality functions as a means to control the Black body.

The limitations of Black femininity as either genderless or hypersexualized are especially noticeable when compared to dominant performances of white femininity as defined by McIntosh (2018): The white virgin, the good white female employee, the white pinup, the white supermom, the white trash mama, and the white lady. These categories "demonstrate the roles white women are culturally expected to perform, can perform and continue to perform" (ibid. 96). That does, however, not entail that every white woman is necessarily part of one of these roles. Instead, it is

[m]ore likely [that], white women performatively fall into complex interstitials of them. This performative fluidity denotes how white women's bodies are afforded the racial privilege of more complexity and the power white women have to pull from these different performances depending on the contexts in which they find their bodies. (ibid. footnote)

I will not discuss every performance in detail, but instead draw on those roles that are most relevant to understand the essence of white femininity and for the argument of my thesis. Therefore, I will start with the white virgin. She is the aspirational example for white women, "a pure vessel for reproduction who is unsullied by the dark drives that reproduction entails" (Dyer 29). She is the exact opposite of what was described above as the angry Black sexually promiscuous jezebel woman (Hill Collins 81). One of her key performances is her enactment of helplessness and her severe dependence on white men, who are supposed to save her. Through her acts of helplessness, she demonstrates how much she depends on the white patriarchy (McIntosh 97). The perfect example of the white virgin is the media construction of Princess Diana. She was habitually depicted as a helpless mother whose death can be attributed to her vulnerability and inability to handle celebrity life. Princess Diana demonstrates in what ways the white virgin obtains protection from white masculinity, a form of safety that was never guaranteed to women of color (Shome 2014 qtd. in McIntosh 97). A virgin is the ideal white woman, because of her purity and the Virgin Mary is central to this, because she has already performed her reproductive duties without having sex (Dyer 74). As both Black femininity and masculinity are connected to aggressive sexuality, the white virgin's purity is the ideal counterpart to devalue Blackness.

The second category is the good white female employee, who is deeply related to the white virgin. Good white female employees "aspire to prestigious positions of employment by embodying intersectional performances of whiteness, patriarchy, and classism" (McIntosh 98). Hence, they are eager to obtain positions of power and to perform perfectionism and competitiveness. This type of femininity developed out of the bourgeois suffragette women movement and still entails various features of this movement of middle-class white women. One of these features is the belief that she, a well-read feminist, can never be racist, because racism is considered to be a problem of the lower classes. This belief leads to severe ignorance towards issues of race and other markers of oppression not affecting a good white female employee. To allow her to put her career first, she often remains unmarried or childless. In order to remain successful, she often exploits working-class women or women of color (ibid. 98-100).

In a contemporary context, I would call the good white female employee a typical “Girlboss” woman, as for instance expressed in the autobiographical book *Girlboss* by Sophia Amoruso (2015) or the Netflix series *Working Moms* (2017 – present). This performance is also found in the representation of Kim Baker and Marie Colvin, which I will discuss in more detail later.

1.3 Muslim Women as Oriental Other

Black femininity was not the only femininity actively or passively devalued by white femininity. Other women of color, especially Muslim women, faced and still face a similar problem. However, while Black women are often depicted as aggressive and strong (see above: Hill Collins 2000; Davis 1983), Muslim women are represented as weak and waiting to be saved (Abu-Lughod 2002; Kahf 2022). In this chapter, I will explore the origins of this Orientalized depiction of Muslim women and thereby contrast white femininity and Muslim femininity. However, what I understand as *Muslim* needs to be investigated first. Despite their heterogeneity Muslims emerged as “a new racialized group after 9/11” (Husain 589). They are predominantly “racialized as foreign and brown [...] and the implicit racial meaning in Muslimness is brownness” (ibid. 602). This is why I do not focus on the representation of different ethnicities, such as Afghans or Arabs, but instead examine the representation of Muslims as a whole group that is homogenized by the West. At the same time, I used the term Muslim in cultural and not religious terms. When using this term, I am hence not predominantly referring to practicing Muslims, but instead to people who are culturally part of a Muslim community (Ghabra 5). It does make sense to differentiate between different ethnic groups when examining lived experiences. However, the focus of this chapter resides in their Western representation (Kahf 4). This understanding as proposed by Kahf “makes it possible to analyze representations across racial, ethnic, and even religious lines” (4).

I use the term *the West* for the same reasons and again follow Kahf’s understanding of it. While it has not always been a geographical area in which people would understand each other as a community, a Western identity slowly emerged as Christianity became the dominant European religion. While of course there are various differences between Western cultures such as those of Great Britain or France, they are similar in their representation of Muslims (Kahf 2). In order to analyze this representation, I will first draw upon Edward Said’s influential work *Orientalism* to set the theoretical framework for my argument, and eventually discuss the representation

of Muslims, again with a special focus on Muslim women, in different media formats. This chapter contributes the third analysis category to my thesis: ethnicity as expressed in religion.

1.3.1 Edward Said and the Origins of Orientalism

Edward Said is considered one of the key thinkers of postcolonial criticism. In his book *Orientalism* (1978), he contests the European understanding of “the Orient”, as it presents the East as “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” and considers it “almost a European invention” instead of a cultural or geographical fact (1). Europeans needed the creation of the Orient to produce a sense of self which emerges from difference to the image of the Orient. However, the Orient is not only a place of imagination, indeed it is a discourse that manifests in organizations, language or imageries (Said 2). Said proposes several definitions for Orientalism and argues that it refers to numerous things which are all connected and depend on each other. The first definition deals with academia: Everybody who works in Oriental studies and publishes texts or discusses the Orient can be defined as an Orientalist who produces Orientalism. His second definition is broader, but closely related to his first argument: “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and most of the time ‘the Occident’” (Said 2). Hence, the vast majority of writers from scholars to poets did not question the basic assumption of Orient vs. Occident, East vs. West, and instead developed Orientalist theories as much as novels. As much literature and theory was written based on this binary framework, the epistemological part of this quote is logical. However, the ontological aspect of the Orient is less clear. Instead, by defining the Orient this way, Said contributes to an essentialization of the East and opens up a dichotomy he originally intended to overcome (Varisco 49). In his third definition Said argues that “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3).

Since the first publication of his book *Orientalism*, Said has been widely criticized and refined (Varisco 2017; Mani and Frankenberg 1985). One of the key feminist criticisms of his predominantly male colonial subject was developed by Lewis (1996), who analyzed the role of female Orientalists and their contributions to imperialism. She argues that throughout history, researchers predominantly focused on “Orientalist images of women rather than representations by women” (ibid. 3). In

doing so, the colonial legacy of female Orientalists, who equally produced imperialist images, is forgotten.

Following this feminist understanding of Orientalism and being well aware that this thesis would be considered as Orientalism by Said, I still argue that his concept provides a suitable base for this chapter. Said's key thesis, namely that the Western imagery creates the East as its Other is the base on which I form my argument for this thesis. In essence, the strength of postcolonial critique is that it "questions why situations are the way they are and formulates strategies to reverse and resist these situations" (Ghabra 31). This is the angle from which I explore the representation of Muslim femininity in relation to white femininity in the following chapters.

1.3.2 Representations of the Muslim Woman From the Middle Ages to 9/11¹

Since the Victorian era, Western societies have had one dominant understanding of Islam, namely that "[it] was innately immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of societies" (Ahmed 152). The key essence of this understanding is the image of the Muslim woman as entirely victimized. There are variations of this idea: some women are represented as eager to escape, others perfectly adjusted to their oppression. However, the main narrative strand, victimization, remains the same. Scholars have questioned this narrative mainly through the study of the lived experience of Muslim women, whereas its representation remained largely unexplored (Kahf 1). This is also why I focus on the representation of Muslim women as white women's Other in this thesis. There is a strong argument for shedding light on representation instead of only debating the lived experience of Muslim women, because the "narrative [of representation] has a genealogy and logic of its own, emerging from developments in Western representations of gender, of the self, and of the foreign or Other" (1).

One of these similar features concerns the changing depiction of Muslim women in Western representations. In Medieval texts, for instance, Muslim women do not occupy a central space. The medieval imagination of Islam is focused on "technological expertise, magical knowledge, and superhuman power" (1). This also accounts for the

¹ The following chapter draws heavily on the work of Mohja Kahf (2022). If not indicated otherwise, my quotations refer to her book *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Teragant to Odalisque*.

representation of Muslim women, as they are typically presented as empresses or aristocrats. They are imagined to “transgress the bounds of traditional femininity, reflecting the failure of their parent religion to inculcate proper gender roles” (1). The most central aspect of today’s discussion on Muslim women and submission, the hijab, is not debated, and instead of Othering Muslim women, Medieval texts endeavor to incorporate them into European society. During Medieval times, the Muslim woman in European literature is presented as equal, a notion that slowly changed with European colonization.

With the advent of colonialism, European discourse on Islam increases; however, Muslim women are still not central to it. The Renaissance era is the starting point of the mythical representation of Muslim women which is still familiar today. Regarding gender restrictions, Muslim and European women are represented quite similarly and they operate rather in terms of parallels and differences, instead of being Othered. At the same time, features such as the veil or harem slowly arrive in literature and the first representations of Muslim women as slaves or concubines are constructed. This classic Orientalist representation as odalisques in a harem becomes dominant in the 18th and 19th century (5f).

It is no coincidence that the representation of the Muslim woman as enslaved odalisques collides with French and British colonialism over various Muslim countries. These Empires were interested in presenting Muslim women as subordinate, despite being responsible for enforcing repressive politics on them. Presenting Muslim women as waiting to be saved serves as an excuse for their own colonial project. However, the representation of Muslim women as oppressed does not only collide with colonialism, but also “with the beginning of the whole question of liberty in Western political discourse” (7). The industrial revolution then shifts Western politics of gender and sexuality. With the middle class turning into the dominant social group, a new version of femininity emerges in which women are depicted as part of the domestic sphere and a severe collision with the realities of working-class women arises. The new representation of the Muslim woman fits into these changing realities as it functions as a version of negative femininity. It serves as a suitable opposite for European societies, an un-European Other or a “non-Oriental identity” (7). The central image of oppression is strengthened during the Romantic period in the 19th century, when the already enslaved odalisque is rescued by a white Romantic hero. She is portrayed with “irredeemable difference and exoticism; intense sexuality, excessive

ornamentation and association with fetish objects; and finally, powerlessness in the form of imprisonment, enslavement, seclusion, silence, or invisibility” (8). The veil and the harem are the classic symbols for this depiction. Here, the colonizer does not solely conquer the land, but also the Muslim woman’s body.

While the suppression of the Muslim woman was already represented in earlier periods, Romanticism is the time in which the predominant concept of oppressed Muslim women is strongly propagating. This image remains part of the Western imagery up until today. During the height of imperialist aggression at the beginning of the 20th century, this depiction is especially interesting because of the state of women’s rights in the Western world. There was neither universal women’s suffrage nor legal equality. While the French claimed to civilize Algeria and liberate Algerian women from the oppression of Muslim men, French women in France fought against their own oppression by the same men who colonized Algeria. At the same time, considering Arabs as uncivilized was France’s main excuse for their colonial presence in North Africa (179).

During the decolonial struggles amid the 20th century, the narrative around Muslim women suddenly changes. After Algerian independence in 1962, the creation of the PLO in 1967 and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the connection between the Muslim female body and terrorism is increasingly represented. However, this terrorist connotation is already partially absorbed by the dominant paradigm of oppression, despite not having the ability to fully process it (179). An example for this process is the meaning of the headscarf. In Western countries, it was a signifier of oppression for a long time, with the rise of so-called Muslim terrorism, it equally became a marker for terrorism and oppression (Aziz 192). It is likely that the terrorist narrative is eventually going to be fully integrated in the submission narrative, however, it is not clear yet what this process will look like. As Kahf (179) summarizes: “For all that Western culture retains today of its own ebullient parade of Muslim women is a supine odalisque, a shrinking-violet virgin, and a veiled victim-woman.”

The beginning of the 21st century and the attacks of 9/11 exacerbate already existing imaginations of Muslim women. As Kahf (2022) rightfully points out, colonial wars were often legitimized by a savior motif. A similar narrative is used to legitimize wars in the Middle East post-9/11. As outlined above, one of the main rhetorical strategies to justify the invasion of Afghanistan was the so-called liberation of Afghan women from their oppressive religion (Bahramitash 221). Again, this claim is ironic,

because conservatives like George Bush Jr. strictly followed their neo-conservative agenda in the US by encouraging young people to remain abstinent and stressing the importance of the traditional family and marriage (McRobbie 255–256). At the same time, these claims leave Middle Eastern feminists in a dilemma, which Ghabra (4) considers “Intersectional Dualism”. While patriarchy and the actual oppression of women are a big problem in communities in the Middle East, Middle Eastern feminists equally need to protect themselves from white patriarchy. “[W]e face double the work of critiquing our own patriarchal struggles and whiteness simultaneously”, as Ghabra (5) puts it.

1.3.3 Post-9/11 Representations of Muslims in the West

While post-9/11 US-America needed to paint Muslim women as oppressed figures to legitimize their wars, Islam in general was frequently connected to terrorism. This especially affects the representation of Muslim men. An example for this is James Bowman’s *Warlord Rules*, where he writes that “an awful lot of those who are letting off bombs in the world today, many of whom are blowing themselves up along with them, are doing so in the name of that same gentleman [Mohammed]” (56). Other depictions of Muslims are tied to “airplane hijackings, skyscraper terrorism, and suicide bombings” (el-Aswad 44). Muslim masculinity is thereby regarded as “lecherous, premodern, and uncivilized” and a threat to white women (Aguayo 53). “Their universally recognized prototypes are bearded, gun-toting, bandanna-wearing men, in long robes or military fatigues of some Islamist (read terrorist) organization or country”, as Gerami summarizes it (449). This reveals important connections to Black masculinity and demonstrates that non-white men are often depicted as dangerous. With regard to Muslim women, media mainly focuses on the veil or other contexts in which the oppression of Muslim women can be debated, such as so-called honor killings or Female Genital Mutilation (Alsultany 165f).

However, the post-9/11-era is equally categorized by an increase of positive representations of Arabs and Muslims. The vast majority of blockbusters featuring Muslim terrorists equally include positively connoted Muslim characters as well. This dichotomy is no surprise, as the separation between the good and the bad Muslim has often been conducted by George W. Bush and popular culture followed this approach (ibid. 161). For instance, on September 20, 2001, Bush gave a speech in which he argued: “The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab

friends. It's a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them" (68). Three months later, he again draws on that narrative by saying: "[The terrorists] hate progress, and freedom, and choice [...] and all Muslims who reject their distorted doctrines" (ibid. 93). Therefore, positive representations of Muslims simply mirror pre-existing dichotomies.

Even if pictured positively, such representations are not unproblematic. Alsultany considers them "simplified complex representations" (162). The term refers to the fact that TV producers believe they created a progressive and multifaceted depiction of the respective characters when it is in fact highly simplified. These new forms of representation can be attributed to the "post-race era, signifying a new standard of racial representations" (ibid.). While these new depictions might critically engage with basic clichéd depiction, the idea that they sincerely challenge stereotypes remains an illusion, because the characters still remain one-dimensional. A classic figure, for instance, who emerges in a post-9/11 film production is the Patriotic American Muslim who assists the US government's fight against terrorists (ibid. 162-163). Such figures demonstrate that the only opportunity for Muslim men to be represented positively is to reject every criticism of the West.

The TV representation of Muslim women after 9/11 follows similar dichotomies. Likewise to Arab men, they also tend to be represented as "patriots [...], and Arab/Muslim terrorists" (Alsultany 71). However, they are equally represented as victims of hate crimes. An example for this argument is the depiction of Muslim women in the famous American drama series *7th Heaven*, which deals with the life of an evangelical family of seven. The show includes two episodes with hijab-wearing women, both of whom are harassed after 9/11. A similar storyline is to be found in *The Education of Max Bickford*, where a Muslim college student receives death threats. Usually, such characters remain under-complex. The post-9/11 era might have produced more multilayered terrorist characters in TV, however, the storylines of the victims remained one-dimensional (ibid.).

To summarize, the representation of both Muslim men and women in the West pre- and post-9/11 is predominantly organized alongside a binary opposition between the dangerous Muslim man and the oppressed Muslim woman. That she must be liberated from him, typically by a white man, is central to Western imaginations of Muslims since Romanticism. It collides with the shifting Western politics regarding gender and sexuality during the industrial revolution and the colonialism of various countries in the

Middle East and North Africa. With the beginning of the decolonial struggle in these respective countries, Muslim women are equally represented in connection to terrorism. However, the main terrorist is still the Muslim man. 9/11 reinforces these already existing imaginations, where the saving of Muslim women is used to justify wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Muslim masculinity is even further connected to terrorism. Even positive representations remain one-dimensional and lack complexity. To overcome this narrow framework, especially with regard to Muslim woman, Abu-Lughod argues for “a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world – as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires” (783). Moreover, she stresses that it is important to not simply focus on *saving* women, as this word always entails a power imbalance, but instead attempting to work with them, while tackling personal accountabilities “to address the forms of global injustices that are powerful shapers of the world” (ibid.).

1.4 White Saviorism and Its Feminization

The previous chapters demonstrated how whiteness serves as a base for this thesis. I discussed how white femininity is constructed, how Muslims are depicted in the West and how Muslim woman are presented as eternal Other to white femininity. In this chapter, I will combine my previous findings and investigate the relationship between white women and Muslim women even further. I argue that this relationship is shaped through a savior-saved relationship, which is organized alongside the lines of a decades-old debate within the feminist movement: the question of white feminism. Hence, I first briefly explain what white feminism is to eventually discuss the relationship between white women and Muslim women in the context of white feminism.

1.4.1 A Brief History of White Feminism

“A white feminist is someone who refuses to consider the role that whiteness and the racial privilege attached to it have played and continue to play in universalizing white feminist concerns, agendas, and beliefs as being those of all of feminism and all of feminists,” Rafia Zakaria summarizes the core ideology of white feminism (ix). Indeed, the mainstream feminist movement has for decades been dominated by white

middle-class feminists who believed their own problems were universal to all women and thereby complicated the formation of alliances between women from different racial and class backgrounds. Thereby whiteness was not only dominant within feminism, but equally neutralized. It remained unmarked and enabled the allegedly 'neutral' white feminist subject to problematically lead the discourse (Rowe 64ff).

Criticism of this narrow feminist framework by Black women and women of color is as old as white feminism itself and was especially central during the second wave of feminism (Hurtado 1996; hooks 1992; Lorde 1984). During the 1960s and 1970s, various Black cooperatives formed to challenge the hegemony of white feminism. One of those is the Combahee River Collective, founded in 1974. The collective explicitly states that the fight against racism as much as (hetero-)sexism and class-based oppression is part of their feminist agenda. They argue for a Black feminism to combat all struggles that women of color face (Combahee River Collective 264). Their main criticism towards white feminism is the exclusion of various groups of women, such as working-class women, women of color and women in the Global South. These groups of women fought for inclusivity from the beginning of the feminist movement. However, the racism and elitism within the white-dominant mainstream feminist circles led to an exclusion of Black women, women of color and working class women, which necessitated the formation of their own organizations (ibid. 265). A similar critique of white feminism and its white feminist subject is found in the feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women*, where Black women equally argue for an antiracist feminist movement (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002). One of the key elements that has been revealed through this criticism is that white femininity entails a crucial contradiction: racial privilege and gender subordination (and potential class privilege), as discussed in previous chapters. This white privilege made it easier for white women to be visible and publicly lead feminist discourses (Rowe 64).

Following the criticism brought forward by Black women and women of color, white feminism entails the following characteristics: First and foremost, feminist concerns and campaigns favored issues that affect white (middle-class) women, while intersectional forms of discrimination remained unnamed. White feminists rarely ever acknowledged "the ways in which racist and (neo)colonial histories and contemporary cultural practices produce white privilege because they do not experience race-based subordination" (Rowe 69). While whiteness remains unmarked and white privilege habitually unidentified, white women use it to obtain positions of power and high-

ranking jobs. The possibility to succeed within a capitalist and racist system makes it more likely for white women to follow classic American myths, such as the American dream and American exceptionalism. According to Rowe, “[s]uch assumptions tame the political edge of feminism because subordination of women of color is too easily located within the individual and not the (neo)imperialist institution” (69).

1.4.2 Women as the New White Saviors

That colonial wars were often explicitly justified through a white feminist argument proves that white feminism does not only concern non-white women in the US, but also outside of the country. White women like Linda Bush or important US-American figures such as Elizabeth Cheney and Hillary Clinton played an important role in the construction of Muslim women as oppressed by giving speeches on Muslim women in which they “spread patriarchal notions of imperialism” (Ghabra 63). A common element of such speeches is that they create a binary world where feminism is achieved in the Western world, but not in the Global South (ibid. 57). It is important to stress again that I do not examine the lived experience of Muslim women, nor negate that they live under patriarchy or experience oppression. Instead, my focus resides in their Western representation and the purpose this representation has – namely, to create an empowered form of white femininity. In the post-feminist argument, where the patriarchy is located in the Orient, this empowered version of white femininity flourishes.

Considering the important role white women occupy in the Othering of Muslim women, I claim that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s famous sentence “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (269) must be adapted to incorporate white women as well. Spivak coined this sentence to analyze the relationship between colonizer and colonized (ibid.). A more modern paraphrase suggested by von der Lippe and Ottosen is “Western women protecting brown women from brown men” (11). Even if their intention is benign, white female war reporters easily fall into white savior roles. This is at least partly due to their position as “third gender” in areas of conflict in the Middle East (von der Lippe and Ottosen 11). White female war journalists have often argued that they are not considered as *women* in the same ways as the local female population is. Whereas Middle Eastern women are imagined as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.”, white Western journalists understand themselves as “educated, modern, as having

control over their own bodies and sexualities and the ‘freedom’ to make their own choices” (Mohanty 65). This colonial distinction makes it easy for white Western journalists to not identify with the women on the ground (von der Lippe and Ottosen 11).

However, the white savior woman is an important figure outside of journalism as well, as her main purpose is to “reinforce a white patriarchal nationalism” (Ghabra 150). Women like Princess Diana or Angelina Jolie are possible examples for this argument. They are often depicted as saving children from the Global South, despite actually “reinforc[ing] a white heterosexual patriarchal family [and] erasing the violence by Western colonialism that destroyed familial systems in many underprivileged nations” (ibid.). While white feminism has been criticized since the Suffragette movement (Mercadante et al. 1988), such examples demonstrate that its core ideology is still widespread among white women. Up until today, many white women still use a feminist framework that does not take other markers of marginalization into account.

2. The War Movie

Film theory is the second key framework for this thesis. So far, I have predominantly focused on a postcolonial and intersectional feminist framework to analyze the ideology of the movies. My main argument was that white women move into the position of white men and hence, move into privilege. To establish this empowered version of white femininity, other women must be constructed as a subordinated Other. This role is frequently assigned to Muslim women, because there is a long history of them being represented as oppressed figures in Western literature. In the following chapter, I now examine how this relationship of privilege and subordination consolidates within the US-American war film by exploring how the genre evolved over the course of the 20th century until today. At the same time, I investigate how the Hollywood war film is used as a means of imperialism to support the US-American storyline on its wars. In a third step, I combine my findings from both theory chapters to answer whether the white female war journalist can be considered a new liberal feminist heroine.

My approach of combining issues of genre with gender is motivated by a new movement within film and series production. In the last decade, many women were assigned traditionally masculine roles in movies. This is a broader cultural

phenomenon that is not limited to one movie genre, but ranges from science fiction movies such as *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) or *The Hunger Games* (2012 - 2015) (Brown 168) to war movies like *Eye in the Sky* (2015) or *The Honorable Woman* (2014) (Charania 112). The war journalist is one of these classic, formerly masculine-dominated characters, who is now also played by women (McNair 106). It is hence no coincidence that the first movies which feature female war correspondents as lead characters, *Whiskey* and *Private*, came out in the mid-2010s. The Norwegian-Irish movie *A Thousand Times Good Night* directed by Erik Poppe was also released in 2013 and tells the story of Rebecca, a photo war journalist. Poppe used his own experiences as a war photographer in the 1980s to create this movie, but used a female main character (Maddox 2014). While such movies might signal that women are now (finally) allowed to play lead roles in what might be one of the most violent and masculine film genres, it is crucial to observe that only one group of women is allowed to step into this position of the white male hero: the white woman. Hence, my main argument is that white women play a crucial role in fostering US-American war narratives as they function as “agents” of imperialism (Lewis 2). Analyzing genre and gender as key aspects of the cultural politics of movies like the ones selected for my thesis helps to establish this function and outlines that genres play a central role in perpetuating narratives of superiority.

2.1 A Genre Approach – Features of the US-American War Film

Stories of battle and slaughter have always been part of cinema, yet the genre of the war movie is difficult to define. Therefore it is best understood from a historical perspective, as a “cinematic reflection of mechanized modern wars since the First World War” (Klein et al. 14, my translation).² The First World War is often considered as a broad initial mark for the war film, because it is also the period where people first had the technical possibilities to create movies. As opposed to the Spanish-American war of 1898, which was the first war captured on film, early movies of the First World War already depict what can be considered as the core element of the war movie: combat. Combat is crucial to the war film and all its offshoots, even though those

² Original quote: „Der Kriegsfilm ist zu verstehen als filmische Reflexion technisierter moderner Kriege seit dem Ersten Weltkrieg.“ (Klein et al. 14)

subgenres significantly draw on other genres as well, very often as war dramas or war comedies (ibid. 15). This is also the case for *Whiskey* and *Private*, as both films can be considered mixed genre movies.

The typical hero of the war movie is the soldier, usually a white man. This white masculinity is expressed through idealized body constructions and the functioning and transformation of these bodies (see Krewani 101).³ The classic image of masculinity in the body of the soldier derives from the fascist literature of the interwar period. Here, soldiers are imagined as mere bodies of steel who suppress what they cannot control. Instead, they project the uncontrollable onto their antagonists: women and communism, which both had to be destroyed (Theweleit 2019). This is the base for what Susan Jeffords calls “hard bodies” in her research on the revival of aggressive masculinity as a symbol for the US foreign policy in the Reagan era (1994). One example for this representation is *Rambo – First Blood Part II* (1985). The *Rambo* series perfectly mirrors a revival of traditional masculine gender roles which were strongly advocated by Ronald Reagan and his successor George H. W. Bush. How masculinity is embodied is best observed during the torturing scenes of the movies. Rambo’s body, no matter how often he is hurt, always resembles unbreakable armor. Yet, the torture gives his body an uncontrollable element, which is almost resembling an orgasm. Hence, this character demonstrates that Rambo can solely unload with either a weapon in his hand or if an experience of release is forced on him (Krewani 102). A similar analysis of the representation of white masculinity in *Rambo* is also conducted by Richard Dyer who argues that it “show[s] us [an] ideal, hard, achieved, wealthy, hairless and tanned white male bod[y] set in a colonialist relation, of aid as much as antagonism, to lands and people that are Other to [him]” (161). The white soldier and his hard body are the fundament upon which all other white war heroes and heroines are built.

As opposed to this aggressive embodiment of masculinity, women played only minor roles in Western war films until recently. Usually, they were represented in relation to the classic male war hero, as for instance mothers or love interests. If the male main character is still waiting to go to war, women tend to be more visible, but as soon as he leaves his homeland, his relationships are situated in the far distance, and he remembers them only through pictures or memories. During the Cold War, this was

³ Original quote: „Meine vorläufige These lautet, dass spezifische Körperkonstruktionen über Funktionsweisen und Transformationsprozesse des Genres Auskunft geben.“ (Krewani 101)

specifically true for Western war films, while Eastern European movies, especially in Soviet National filmography, tended to be slightly more female-centered. One famous movie is Mikhail Kalatozov's *Letyat zhuravali* (*The Cranes Are Flying*) from 1957, which follows the story of a nurse. The nurse is one of the typical roles which women were allowed to play in war films (Klein et al. 18f). That women were more visible within the Soviet war film is no surprise as it parallels the economic conditions of the time. While the capitalist US-American model favored male breadwinners and stay-at-home housewives after World War II, women in the USSR already had opportunities to work outside of the domestic sphere (Ghodsee 22).

As war movies rarely ever featured female protagonists in the West, women remain absent during all four phases that Klein et al. identifies as the main episodes the war movie underwent (2007). The first phase starts with World War I and ends in the 1930s. Movies that belong to this era are the classics *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) or *The Grand Illusion* (1937), which are both influenced by World War I and provide many of the base structures that are still relevant today. This period is characterized by a development from a propagandist towards a pacifist narrative. In *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), a young man called Paul Bäumer becomes an increasingly disillusioned soldier watching his companions die until he is finally killed himself. This movie has often been considered as a prototype for anti-war movies because it depicts the horror and absurdity of war.

In the beginning of the second phase of the war film, during World War II, propaganda becomes essential again. However, only when the war was already over, the war film experienced a first real high in Hollywood with movies such as *They Were Expendable* or *A Walk in the Sun*, which were both first released in 1945. Until the end of the 1950s, this popularity remained relatively stable with classics such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). The third phase of the war film starts in the 1960s and is characterized by a decreasing demand for war films. Due to the Vietnam War and the socio-cultural conflict around the evaluation of the war, the classic war film got increasingly unpopular. The fourth stage, New Hollywood and blockbuster cinema, which starts at the end of the 1970s, managed to revive the genre of the war movie. With the US-American war on terror in the beginning of the 21st century, this movie period is increasingly characterized by propaganda movies (Klein et al. 20f). What all these movies have in common, regardless to which phase they belong, is the lack of female representation.

Klein et al.'s examination ends roughly in the mid 2000s with the claim that war movies increasingly use mixed genres to stay relevant (25). Following Charania (2020) and Brown (2015), I argue that we are currently experiencing a fifth phase of war movies which is characterized by an increasing number of female lead characters in war movies. This does not only include war journalists, but also the presence of woman as CIA agents or other affiliates of the state. As Deylami argues, "the popularization of heroines fighting to protect our country in television and films intimates both that the US is far ahead of its enemies in establishing gender equality and that women's participation in seeking out the enemies of the state has a transformative effect on the culture and violence of the state prerogative military apparatus" (774). However, productions like *Homeland* (2011-2020) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) demonstrate that this is not a progressive movement towards a new feminization of security politics and a 'softening' of state violence, but rather a fostering of already existing patriarchal power relations securing the US state power (ibid). Therefore, the ways in which war movies are gendered and re-gendered play an important role in their function as tools of imperialism as outlined in the next chapter.

2.2 US-American War Movies as a Tool of Imperialism

2.2.1 From World War II to Vietnam

Creating white emancipated female lead characters is a somewhat new imperialist approach, however, it can be regarded as a logical follow-up strategy to a much older movement within Hollywood. "[N]arratives of western innocence and benevolence rest on the production of the colonized world as a zone of death, wracked with violence, and that the western subject's journey through such a world of terror confirms its essential humanity," Thobani claims in her examination of Western representation of conflict in the Middle East (527). This quote illustrates perfectly how US-American movies work with one central dichotomy: the good and free Western world against the dangerous, uncivilized Global South. This narrative is especially connected to wars in the Middle East (Deylami 2019; Thobani 2019), but has a longer history that is particularly obvious in the filmic representation of the Vietnam War (Auster and Quart 1988). This chapter is hence dedicated to the imperialist strategy of US-American war movies, while examining the filmic adaptation of the US presence in World War II, the Vietnam War, and the various wars in the Middle East. Through these examples, I

argue that movies play an important role in the narrative production and past or current legitimization of wars.

One crucial element to win support for a war in the present is the remembrance of successful wars in the past. For Hollywood movies, the perfect link has been World War II. It “served as a suitable vehicle for patriotic revival in the post-Vietnam era because of the contrast between it and the Vietnam War” (Lipsitz 85). In the war against fascist Germany, the United States and its allies clearly considered themselves on the right side of history. The solidarity among US-Americans during the Second World War and the economic boom after the war were central to the creation of a patriotic understanding of nation and citizenship during the Cold War period. At the same time, the understanding of World War II as a ‘moral’ war can also be considered as an implicit nostalgic desire for a past in which the United States were segregated and the post-war prosperity predominantly benefitted white men (ibid.) A perfect example for such movies is Stephen Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), in which John H. Miller (Tom Hanks) and his squad save a lost member under great personal risk. The movie demonstrates an imagined ideal morality of US-American soldiers and brings those virtues back to the American consciousness (Krewani 106f). In the case of *Saving Private Ryan*, the choice of World War II is especially interesting, because the film came out in the middle of US military intervention in the Middle East and can thus be read as a legitimization of these new wars by remembering a glorious US past with a clear ‘good’ and ‘bad’ dichotomy.

As opposed to this, the reprocessing of the Vietnam War remains much more ambiguous. Similar to World War II, the Vietnam War is central to US-American memory and represented in various movies, however, it works with different narratives and operates within a clear Orientalist framework. While the general depiction of the war varied a lot over the decades, which will be elaborated in detail later, the depiction of the Vietnamese remained very similar during all those phases. Soldiers as much as noncombatants “are portrayed as cunning, cruel, even sadistic, ambivalent, and irresponsible” (Kleinen 433). The classic stereotype behind this representation is the “Yellow Peril” trope, which can be considered as an Orientalist framing of the Vietnamese as entirely “devious and unchanging” (ibid.). Consequently, “[t]hey are rarely presented [...] as sympathetic victims of a war they are fighting for their own independence and even more rarely as active subjects of their own history” (Boggs and Pollard 66). The Orientalist depiction of Vietnamese people and Vietnam in

general is equally mirrored in the typical Vietnam War setting: the jungle. It serves as mysterious terrain, which is confusing and appears foreign to the US militias. The Vietnamese soldiers are rarely visible in the jungle, often one can only hear them (Klein et al. 17). An example for this depiction is Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump* (1994). When Forrest and his squad are attacked in the jungle, the Vietnamese remain unseen, symbolized only through some minor noise and voices behind the big green trees, before they attack the US forces. Indeed, the complete visible absence of Vietnamese soldiers demonstrates that the war "is depicted as primarily an American experience" (Boggs and Pollard 65). This is equally expressed by the many movies that focus on "friendly fire" as the main narrative strand, such as in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), in which the story of American soldiers killing each other is foregrounded (Kinney 2000).

At the beginning of the Vietnam War, when the general sentiment was not as critical as during the later years of the war, there was a number of movies in which US involvement in the war was enthusiastically celebrated. One of these movies is John Wayne's *The Green Berets* (1968), which can be considered a war-propaganda movie. Wayne was the white male star of the Golden Age of Hollywood and predominantly starred in Westerns or war films. *The Green Berets* does not support the US invasion subtly, but instead fully glorifies the US-American army (Klein et al. 22). Because of this depiction, John Wayne has often been accused of making "nothing less than a cowboys-and-Indians [sic!] movie caught in a time warp" (Auster and Quart 34). The Western elements of *The Green Berets* are no coincidence, instead this structure is to be found in various Vietnam war movies. According to Boggs and Pollards, both genres "share a venerable cultural myth: courageous warriors fighting noble battles against demonic foreign savages, enemies lacking any shred of humanity" (41).

However, in the course of the Vietnam War, this narrative had to be adapted. This is due to fact that the Vietnam War was becoming highly unpopular and controversial within the American mainstream. This development started around 1967 with the protests against the draft lottery system, through which random young men were picked to go to war (Graham 16f). Therefore, the content of Vietnam movies transformed during the war. Indeed, "the best-received Vietnam films, released between the mid-1970s and the late 1980s, appeared to capture the intense antiwar feelings of a generation influenced by the lengthy military debacle, the radicalism of the new left, and the general experimental sensibilities of the counterculture" (Boggs and Pollard 65).

Yet, even within this broad corpus of anti-war movies, the depiction of combat often remains highly one-dimensional and in favor of US narratives. This includes for instance the depiction of the typical US soldier as a noble person, a young man simply trying to survive in a place where he is not welcomed. Such soldiers are predominantly depicted as unfortunate victims of the war rather than aggressors. A similar strategy is used when it comes to the depiction of war crimes such as My Lai, which are usually dealt with as isolated incidents that are merely part of the horrors of war. Therefore, US troops are regarded as an army simply fulfilling its duties. In essence, storylines in which US soldiers commit war crimes are usually only told if equally accompanied by another narrative in which American soldiers are presented as victims. By doing so, the movies contribute to the victimization of the aggressor and deflect from the issue of white guilt and aggressive masculinity. This had consequences on the outcome of the vast majority of 'antiwar' war movies as well. They never fully deal with the violence of US American troops but instead favor the narratives of heroic and lost soldiers (ibid.).

An understanding of the representation of the Vietnam War is crucial for this thesis, because many narratives which are found in the filmic adaption of the Middle East, in which both *Whiskey* and *Private* are set, date back to Vietnam. This includes the Orientalist construction of the landscape, the representation of the local population as dichotomous Other, the focus on a white hero conquering the unknown East, and, most importantly, the usage of movies as war propaganda tools.

2.2.2 The Middle East and the Sad US-American Soldier

There is no example which captures the principle of US-American war propaganda on Iraq better than Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* (2014). *American Sniper* tells the story of the deadliest shooter in US military history, Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper), throughout his four tours in Iraq. The film was widely successful, it won six Academy Award nominations and made more than \$500 million at the box office. However, since its release, there has been an equally intense debate on the ideology of the movie (Soberon 1). "Every movie rewrites history. What *American Sniper* did is much, much worse", *Vox* titles (Taub 2015), and *The Rolling Stone* considers it "a two-hour cinematic diversion about a killing machine with a heart of gold who slowly, very slowly, starts to feel bad after shooting enough women and children", which makes the movie "almost too dumb to criticize" (Taibbi 2015). Some criticism was even harsher, as the one by the famous US-Canadian Seth Rogen who satirically tweeted: "*American*

Sniper kind of reminds me of the movie that's showing in the third act of *Inglorious Basterds*." (2015). His tweet is in reference to the Nazi propaganda film *Stolz der Nation* (*Nation's Pride*) that is referred to in *Inglorious Basterds*.

The response to these claims was straightforward, yet not convincing for the critics. While Clint Eastwood's argued "American Sniper and I are anti-war" (Beaumont-Thomas) and the *American Sniper* crew was constantly stressing the apolitical background of the movie, various academics have foregrounded its political component (Hasian 2020; Soberon 2017). Soberon for instance argues that "*American Sniper* has an obvious political agenda in advocating a view of the 2003 Iraq invasion – and the subsequent military measures taken in that context – as just and necessary" (2).

To fulfill this agenda, akin to Vietnam, the typical war movie that is set in the Middle East draws on elements of the classic American Western. *American Sniper* mythically transforms the political context of war into a moral one that opens the dichotomy between "civilization and savagery" (ibid.). By doing so, the movie strengthens the US narrative on the war, it ensures that the stories about the war continue to be told from an American perspective and that their opponents remain nameless. It likewise guarantees that the US-American offensive wars and the executive soldiers appear humane, and each operation appears just. *American Sniper* (2014) is not the only post-9/11 war film which operates like a classic Western, but it is an example for a larger movement that took place in the years after the September 11 attacks. In series such as *Homeland* (2011-2020), audiences are presented with "a transnational cowboy fighting the war on terrorism across a new global frontier" (Kollin 5). Western motives, as for instance the vast, empty landscape, or having one single character bringing structure to an otherwise empty land do not only occur in movies but are also central to other forms of publications such as books. In Nathan Fick's book *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (2005), he writes that "Afghanistan's rugged, spare beauty reminded me of the deserts of Nevada or Arizona" (122). Susan Kollin summarizes these descriptions as such:

Encountering a threatening and dangerous terrain, the writer resorts to a domestic desert aesthetic, his sense of dislocation and displacement alleviated by a comparative landscape description that likens the incomprehensible and overwhelming war zones of Afghanistan to the familiar terrain of the U.S. South-West while offering a triumphalist narrative framework that seeks to ensure a successful ending for U.S. soldiers in the region. (8)

To understand the cultural significance of movies such as *American Sniper*, post-9/11 movie production needs to be investigated in detail. To begin with, the vast majority of movies that dealt with the war on terror in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 were not profitable (Boggs and Pollard 170). Content wise, movies such as Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), Jim Sheridan's *Brothers* (2009) or Kimberly Pierce's *Stop-Loss* (2008) follow a tradition that had already been dominant in the depiction of the Vietnam War. Instead of foregrounding the horrors the Iraqi or Afghan population went through, the dominant victim of the war on terror on screen is the US-American soldier. If US-American soldiers survive the wars oversea, they usually return home traumatized or wounded, unable to fit back in to US society (McSweeney 61f). This form of representation demonstrates that the basic structure organizing US-American narratives on their wars has been roughly the same since the Vietnam War. This includes the following aspects: Firstly, the core narrative which constructs who the viewers should have empathy with always works in favor of US-American soldiers instead of a local population. Secondly, US-American war movies borrow various elements from the classic American Western, especially with regard to landscape description and a clear dichotomy between colonizer and colonized. Eventually, all these movies are in need for a heroic main character who saves the country and thereby provokes American patriotism.

As the Iraq and Afghanistan war movies lacked financial success, the need for exceptional courage and bravery was met through another movie figure which boomed amid the 2000s: the superhero. This development can be explained through various reasons, among others through "a connection between the politics of superheroes and the politics of the [then] recently departed Bush Administration, which includes the use of military force, doctrines of preemption, and the valorization of militarism more generally," as Dittmer summarizes the research on this topic (114). At the same time, 9/11 was widely quoted as feeling "just like a movie" (King 47) to many US-Americans. A superhero movie resembles this understanding, as it typically operates with a clear good vs. bad-dichotomy and presents a supervillain who needs to be stopped in order to save a country. A substantial component to understanding this boom is "the capacity for superheroes to articulate a particularly American geopolitical vision and sense of self, which is often shorthand as American exceptionalism" (Dittmer 114). American exceptionalism refers to the idea that America is unique and fundamentally different to any other nation (Madsen 1998; Pease 2009). The superhero genre as much as the

Western are the most typical genres to transport this narrative (Dittmer 115). What this demonstrates is that the war film alone is not the only possibility to strengthen a narrative around a specific war, here the war on terror. Creating a clear dichotomy between the good US-Americans and the evil terrorists can not only be achieved through war movies alone, as other genre types, such as the superhero movie, fulfill the exact same purpose. The reason for this brief examination of the superhero films and their relation to the war movie is the following: Within this specific genre type, the new boom of female heroines started (Brown 2015).

2.2.3 The War Journalist – A New Liberal Feminist Heroine

The creation of superheroines, such as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* (2012 – present), provided the context through which white women like Kim Baker and Marie Colvin could thrive as heroines. The mirroring of this development in war movies is still a very recent phenomenon that started shortly after 2010. Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* from 2012 is the first movie that I would consider part of this new category of increasing white female representation within the war movie. The war thriller follows the story of Maya (Jessica Chastain), a CIA intelligence analyst, and her key role in the hunt of Osama bin Laden. In 2015, Gavin Hood's *Eye in the Sky* tells the story of Katherine (Helen Mirren), who is a British colonel in Kenya and responsible for drones. The movie features the ethical dilemma Katherine faces when a little girl enters the area where the Americans locate terrorists, and therefore want to conduct a drone strike. Similar tropes are also to be found in *Homeland* (2011-2020), where white women kill terrorists, or the BBC's *The Honourable Woman* (2014), where Nessa Stein (Maggie Gyllenhaal) attempts to create peace between Israelis and Palestinians (Charania 112).

With their release dates of 2016 (*Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*) and 2018 (*A Private War*), both movies examined in my thesis fall into this exact category and timeframe. A key storyline in these new movies is the struggle of women within patriarchal US-American institutions like the army or, in the case of the movies under analysis, the press. Such depictions make the audience fall for “a different kind of American hero [...] – one that is predicated on feminine intelligence and intuition rather than mere physical violence” (Deylami 757). This is one of the most crucial dichotomies that is central to various Western genres, e.g., detective fiction. Probably the most famous female detective, Miss Marple, equally worked with intuition and empathy rather than hard facts and

sciences (Köseoğlu 134ff).

Perhaps the most crucial point in the representation of these new white war heroines is that they do, in fact, express some features of feminist achievement. They represent what Angela McRobbie considers the “phallic girl”. A phallic girl becomes exactly like her male counterparts and thereby “gives the impression of having won equality with men” (McRobbie 83). Jessica Chastain in *Zero Dark Thirty* represents “the motherfucker” finding Bin Laden and Helen Mirren in *Eye in the Sky* is always ready to fire shots (Charania 126). These women do challenge stereotypical gender norms where shooting, bombing, and slurring is considered unfeminine and belonging to masculine codes of behavior. At the same time, “[w]ar correspondents must be able to mix and mingle freely with (largely male) soldiers, in a culture where women are, even in the twenty-first century, prevented by most armies from taking front-line roles” (McNair 95). However, they are doing it at the expense of others, operating as what Grewal calls security feminists, “a specifically feminist subject empowered by the state” (119) which is usually “liberal, white, and patriotic” (120). Security feminists are similar to the white middle class feminists that have been criticized in previous chapters, usually they “build on a long history of US women’s participation in imperial expansion, tying nationalist and military projects along with the state security, to women’s advancement and security in the home and nation” (ibid.).

Many security feminists, or the closely related “imperial feminists” (Amos and Parmar 2005), support the idea that the war on terror is conducted to protect Muslim women and women of color (Grewal 118). The main dichotomy re-emerging here is the classic understanding of Western enlightenment and civilization against the backwardness of the Muslim world (Bahramitash 2005; Charania 2020; Ghabra 2018). According to Iris Marion Young, the United States under George W. Bush organized around ideas of “masculinist protection”, where the US-American state claims to protect women and children (2003). Through such a logic, “the role of the masculine protector puts those protected, paradigmatically women and children, in a subordinate position of dependence and obedience” (ibid. 2). In short, the state acts as if the interests of women and children are central to its own agenda, turning itself into a paternal figure of authority. However, when it comes to the war on terror, the relationship between “protector/protected” is organized slightly differently as it “is not coordinated via biological difference but rather standing in the nation-state apparatus” (Deylami 759). This means that a person symbolizing the US state apparatus does not

necessarily have to be male to “participate in and represent the logic of masculinism endemic to state protection” (ibid.).

Certainly, journalists are not directly part of the US military security apparatus. However, “the mass media of the United States are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorships, and without significant overt coercion” (Herman and Chomsky 409). Following Herman and Chomsky in their influential book *Manufacturing Consent*, the media are often considered to be “independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth”, when in fact their reporting is often characterized by consenting to the hegemonic opinions of the governing classes (68). As outlined above, war movies fulfill similar purposes as they foster narratives of good US-American invasions. Therefore, I claim that that Herman and Chomsky’s assertions equally account for the representation of journalists in movies. Especially Kim Baker is a perfect example for this, which will be outlined in my analysis chapter.

I claim that war journalists function as new liberal feminist heroines for various reasons. First and foremost, their whiteness and perception as “third gender” puts them in a unique position of privilege over the people, especially women, they are reporting about (von der Lippe and Ottosen 11). Their proximity to white male power allows them to move much closer to jobs that were typically associated with men, such as war journalism.

Secondly, while they are not the typical protagonists of the US war film, the struggling US soldier, they still tell the story from a white Western perspective and not from the standpoint of someone who is affected by the war firsthand (Boggs and Pollard 65). Hence, the viewers are likewise most empathetic with the struggling white main heroine trying to process the war or make sense of everything she sees. At the same time, viewers get to admire the bravery of women who seemingly break patriarchal ideas. However, this understanding solely works in a liberal feminist understanding which stresses the specific achievement of individuals and “confuses feminism with the ascent of individual women” (Arruzza et al. 12).

In effect, it is her whiteness that allows the white female war journalist to move into privilege and thereby appear heroic to a white Western audience. All of this entails that the change from male to female war journalist does not mean that narrative formulae are changed. The Other to the white main character is still as nameless, faceless, and

backward as it has been in every cinematic representation of a US-American war on screen. In using Western and superhero formulae, the movies manage to present the US as both heroic and exceptional, while agents of its state apparatus (whether soldiers or not) are victimized or presented as struggling heroes or heroines.

3. Analysis

The theoretical constellations I utilize in this thesis have been thoroughly explored in the previous pages. They provide the foundation upon which my analysis is built. Theorists that I engage with provide me the language and discursive cues that solidify my thesis. To answer my research questions, I decided to investigate the following five motives of the movies: romantic love, depiction of the landscape, relationship to the US military, representation of Muslim men and eventually representation of Muslim women. These elements are analyzed with regard to both movies – either because they are similar or because they are diverging, and always because they foster my arguments. The chosen elements all derive from the literature above.

I start with a concrete investigation of the romantic relationships of the two main characters to analyze how whiteness and gender relations are embodied in their romances and to understand what role imaginations of the nuclear family play in both movies. Secondly, I investigate in what ways the Orientalist depictions of the landscapes of the East function as a canvas onto which both heroines can project their own struggles to make sense of themselves. Thirdly, I analyze their relationships with the US military to detect how much their reporting and representation is influenced by their proximity to the US marines and whether their reporting supports the dominant narratives of the good American troops. In a final step, I will look at their relation to the local population. This means that I first investigate the depiction of Muslim men and prove whether it follows classic binary representations of Muslim men as terrorists or ‘good’ Muslims which work alongside the US troops. Eventually, I concentrate thoroughly on the depiction of Muslim women and their relationship to an empowered version of white femininity.

I mainly focus on the narrative structures and filmic elements that support a specific ideology in which white women get to be created as heroic. Therefore, I close-read chosen scenes in which these elements are the most obvious. That being said and due to the limitations of a master thesis, I am not able to do these for all scenes but have

to thoroughly focus on those in which my claims become most obvious.

3.1 The Unmarried and Independent Woman – Romantic Relationships

As I will show in the following chapter, Kim and Marie's romantic relationships play an important role in their construction as independent career-oriented war journalists. Their lack of romantic attachments and focus on their profession demonstrates their willingness to overcome patriarchal expectations about reproduction. Thereby, being childfree and unmarried gives them the necessary independence to conduct a typically masculine job. However, both Marie and Kim cannot fully overcome patriarchal expectations and therefore also struggle with being single. Kim's time in Afghanistan often resembles a quest for love. While the movie attempts to overcome a heteronormative marriage plot, it strengthens it through a strong focus on romantic relationships that is especially expressed through the fact that she finds romance in Afghanistan. As opposed to this, Marie's romantic relations are less present and fulfill a different purpose. Her sexuality and love life are often connected to her PTSD. She is the most vulnerable when she is with men. This is why she is depicted as a woman who runs away from commitment, because it reminds her that she is not able to have children. Thereby it becomes clear that the ideology of the nuclear white family (Dyer 2017), is still persistent in both movies and neither Marie nor Kim is allowed to be independent without sacrifices.

3.1.1 Kim Baker's Quest for Love?

"We need people, any people to fill the void in Afghanistan. And you folks are all the unmarried childless personnel in this room" (2:26-2:34) is one of the first sentences to be said in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. In this introductory scene, Kim's boss Ed Faber assembles his employees around him and urges them to go to Afghanistan – not a prestigious job, because according to him all of the network's talent has been posted to Iraq, a much more extensively covered war. Afghanistan is hence not for the superstars, it is for those who are dispensable and above all, not missed by partners or children. It is in these first minutes of the movie that the heteronormative matrix in which the movie operates is set up. This is conducted through various strategies. First of all, being unmarried is equated with being single. Kim is asked "Are you going to be joining in?" (2:45-2:48), despite her having a boyfriend to whom she is simply not

married. Thereby, Kim's relationship is not taken seriously, and she counts as a single woman. In order to earn the term *being missed*, she would have to marry her partner or give birth to a child and hence demonstrate that she is part of the nuclear family that Dyer considered the essence of whiteness (121). Secondly, the newsroom room full of single people is not pictured as a happy room. The room is empty, the faces of the journalists appear sad. Especially for women, being single is equated with unhappiness, as illustrated by Kim's female colleague in picture 1. She is in the center of the picture and immediately starts to cry after she realized she too is "unmarried and childless" (2:33-2:34). The others do not attempt to comfort her, instead they look away.



Picture 1: Crying in the newsroom (2:37)

It is crucial to notice that Kim's colleague, the only one to start crying, is a woman, more precisely a white woman. As investigated above, Dyer argues that whiteness and heterosexuality are closely connected and that the white nuclear family is the center of whiteness, because it helps to perpetuate whiteness through reproduction (121). Therefore, not being able to reproduce and succeed within the heterosexual family can be considered a failure for white women. The tears of Kim's colleague illustrate that white women are aware of this. They know what is expected of them and they struggle with not being able to fulfill it. Kim is not the one who is crying, but the crying is substitutional for what she is supposed to feel. This is also illustrated by the punchline at the end of this scene. When Kim is asked whether she wants to join, she looks around and asks: "The travel or the crying?" (2:49-2:50).

Despite having a relationship, Kim's love life is not depicted as happy or fulfilling. If anything, it resembles an *Eat Pray Love* (2010) storyline, where the lead character perceives her life as boring and repetitive in the beginning (Voeltz 2018). She knows that she has to change something and therefore decides to take the spot in Kabul. She does not discuss her departure with her partner Chris, instead she simply tells him that she is about to go there ("When do you get back from Houston? [...] Because I am going to Afghanistan on Tuesday?" [3:25-3:35]). She does not include him in her plans, but instead presents him with a *fait accompli*. In this scene, it becomes even more obvious that *unmarried* is indeed an equivalent to being single and that her partner is only in her way when she is looking to do something greater. From the very first scene, it is clear that Kim and Chris are about to break up. He does not try to hold her back or tells her that he is about to miss her but supports her departure with the words "Go! Go! Go!" (4:10) when they meet one last time at the airport. It attempts to position Kim as the "good white female employee" (McIntosh 2018), a white woman who puts her career first and above all.

To some extent, this is true, Kim obtains many of those features. She is the typical middle-class feminist who ignores issues of race and even exploits other lower-class women for her own success, which will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on the representation of Muslim women. However, the airport scene and her unhappy relationship also clarifies that *Whiskey* is still not an "ode to unmarried women" (Rosenberg 2016). Instead, it is the story of a woman, who is trying to find herself – and above that, real love. Thereby the movie follows the heteronormative marriage plot it attempts to overcome.

This interpretation is strengthened as soon as Kim enters Afghanistan, and her boyfriend is immediately supplanted by another love interest: Iain. Iain is a Scottish journalist who also lives in Kabul, part of the so-called "Ka-bubble", which consists of foreigners and journalists there. Kim and Iain get closer to each other when he protects her from the advances of another expat, Nic, who is also Kim's security guard. To prove that he cares for Kim, Iain punches Nic in the face. By doing so, he demonstrates his masculinity through an act of violence and protects his love interest from other men. In this scene, Kim's and Iain's bond becomes stronger, she is the damsel in distress that is rescued by her white knight. Through this performance of strong white masculinity, Iain confirms that he is the one in control (Dyer 2017). In this situation it is obvious that Kim can still settle down with the heterosexual family she is supposed to have. Iain

demonstrates his affection through acts of care, he hugs Kim and brings her water. She is surely impressed by his fight for her, which is why the story line ends with them having sex upstairs. However, they do not immediately form a relationship, instead Kim attempts to remain distanced from Iain as she says: “Obviously, this was just a Kabubble thing, right? Just a fun mistake where one of us had an orgasm” (63:40-63:43). Iain, however, tells her right away that he is into her. Even further, when Kim says that having sex with random men is not who she is, he tells her how much Kabul has changed her. This scenes probably illustrates best “the well-worn literary and cinematic tropes of a white woman in an alien, usually masculine, realm who undertakes a voyage of self-discovery, and finds romance” (Voeltz 53).

3.1.2 Sex, Despair, and Weapons – Marie Colvin’s Relationships

Private’s first scene, after a short intro by the real Marie Colvin, begins with sex. Marie returns home at night openly kissing a man. The scene cuts and switches to her waking up in the morning, lighting a cigarette, while the man from last night types on his laptop. The man in question is her ex-husband Patrick, which is signaled by her saying: “We should get married again” (3:09-3:10). Patrick laughs and responds with “It didn’t work so well last time, did it?” (3:13-3:17). Marie does not drop the issue, but instead says: “I wanna try for a baby again” (3:26-3:28). Here, the mood shifts, especially when Patrick says: “We tried. You are not 35 anymore” (3:36-3:42). This scene is shown in picture 2. Patrick attempts to underline his point by looking straight into her eyes, but Marie is not able to face him directly. Instead, she looks away and her face is filled with sadness; it shows how painful the short discussion with Patrick feels for her.



Picture 2: In bed with Patrick (3:42)

This scene is crucial for the plot of the movie, because it provides one first narrative: That the famous and fearless Marie Colvin, who is not afraid of war and combat, cannot fulfill her duties as a white woman at home. She cannot reproduce, despite trying to do so. The positioning of this scene in the beginning of the movie is critical because it tells the audience what to expect of the character Marie Colvin that has been described as heroic in various reviews (e.g., Ryzik 2018, Hornaday 2018). Instead of presenting her as fearless and eager to take risks in the beginning, Marie appears fragile. Even though the first scene incorporates sex, it makes her appear innocent, unstable, and pure, foregrounding her sadness and most importantly: her dependency on the white man. She performs helplessness by almost begging Patrick to get her pregnant and thereby illustrates how much she depends on the white patriarchy (McIntosh 97).

As opposed to her public reputation as fearless independent heroine, Marie's private life demonstrates that when it comes to reproduction she is still as dependent as every other woman around her. Staying childfree is not her own choice, instead it is forced upon her. Like Kim, she is unhappy with life and this loss. This is also obvious through her physical appearance right from the beginning of the movie. She is very slim; her hair is typically messy, and her chain-smoking is already apparent right from the beginning. Her sadness and the deterioration of her mental health is expressed through the lack of effort she puts into her physical appearance. Patrick is the first person she discusses these problems with, namely when she asks him: "Do you ever have nightmares?" (15:22-15:24) and he affirms. What follows is not an open conversation about struggles and depression, because Marie is not actually ready to open up to him. Instead, they start to fight.

Patrick: You are constantly leaving me for some far-away place, despite that I have always been here for you.

Marie: I never asked you to.

Patrick: You shouldn't have gone to Sri Lanka. I told you to stop all of this so long ago. You are like a moth to a bloody flame. Look at you. You were so beautiful.

Marie: Fuck off, you know what. Fuck off back to your novels. (16:14-16:40)

This dialogue illustrates one core problem found within Marie's relationships: She puts her career and her job first, in a way that even alienates her partner. As opposed to Kim, however, Marie exemplifies less features of the "good white female employee" (McIntosh 98). While her work is the most important thing for her, she is not predominantly eager to acquire a higher position in her job and be successful for the

sake of being successful. Even further, she does not actively choose to remain unmarried and childfree to succeed in her job, but seeks refuge in it, because she is not able to reproduce. While Kim seeks fulfillment and love in war zones, Marie is crushed in the very same places. War is not a self-discovery journey for Marie, she does not meet a love interest abroad, instead she runs away from possible partners at home. Her job is her escape, but it leaves her damaged. When Patrick leaves after their fight, Marie is alone in her house. She turns on the light immediately, but the background noise signals that something is about to happen. Suddenly, she has flashbacks of war zones, there are dead soldiers around her. Straight from her own house, where the war haunts her, the scene cuts to her journey to Iraq in 2003. The jump cut visualizes central features of her PTSD, intrusions, and her fragmented experience of reality. This is the first scene in which a moment with a love interest is already linked to immediate violence afterwards.

This connection between romantic love and violence equally occurs in Marie's second relationship with the businessman Tony (Stanley Tucci). When they spend the night together for the first time, Tony makes her breakfast, and they discuss the last night and their relationship. This is one of the few moments in which Marie appears happy and unburdened. However, she is not allowed to stay happy for longer than a few moments. Suddenly, the camera focuses on the TV instead of the two talking, and quiet sad music starts to play. There are news reports of the war in Libya on screen, the scene cuts to the newsroom and only some seconds later, Marie is in Libya in a war zone again. Again, she prioritizes her job and leaves a partner for a story. Again, love is linked to immediate violence. The longer she remains in war zones, the more her sexuality is connected to her traumatic flashbacks.



Picture 3: Naked in front of mirror (60:11)

This connection is best illustrated after her return from Libya (picture 3). She stands in front of a mirror, naked, and touches her face. The music steadily switches from stressful to shouting people in the back. While being naked, Marie revisits the places of her trauma again. Especially the sound of weapons is very loud and there are soldiers in armed gear standing in front of a dead teenage girl that is a central element of her flashbacks. When the episode is over, Marie is still in front of her mirror, staring at both her face and her body in silence. The room around her is dark, only some lights are on. She is visibly naked from the front and from the back, she's not even wearing her eyepatch. This is her most vulnerable moment in the entire movie – and it is both connected to love through Stanley, who waits outside for her, and the PTSD she sustained through her reporting. Through this explicit connection sexuality and trauma, the movie makes a concrete statement about femininity, sexuality, and partnership. Throughout, the movie Marie demonstrates one thing: She is not the aspiring “Virgin Mary” (Dyer 2017) she is supposed to be. As a white woman, she was supposed to carry “the hopes, achievements and character of the race” (ibid. 29). She is responsible for its future existence. As she cannot not fulfill these duties, she has to suffer. Her very own trauma of not being able to reproduce is inherently linked to her war trauma. Thus, her episodes often occur when she is with a man – be it in a fight or in a moment of love.

3.2 Dusty and Dry Landscapes – The Western in the Eastern

As outlined above, the classic war film often resembles the Western with its typical feature of having one main character who brings structure to a land that is imagined as empty. In both movies, the depiction of the landscape plays an important role in the Orientalist construction of the East as dusty, dry, and almost unlivable. This hostility of the landscape dramatizes the heroic challenge put to the main protagonists who need to not only survive in such places, but who also bring order and meaning to an otherwise empty space. Landscape is inherently linked to personal struggle in both movies. The Eastern landscapes in the movies function as an empty canvas, onto which the heroine can project her inner struggle. Following Said, both women need the Orient to establish their own sense of self (1). Therefore, the movies are not about the Middle East, but about the inner journey of their heroines. The East functions as a means of self-construction for Western people and works with binary oppositions such

as cold vs. warm colors through which an epistemological distinction between “the Orient” and “the Occident” is created (Said 2).

3.2.1 Kabul Chaos vs. The Desert

Whiskey heavily draws on the Western genre in its depiction of the landscape, which is also illustrated by the fact the movie was predominantly filmed in New Mexico and Morocco, while the airport scenes were shot in India (IMDb 2022a). This demonstrates that the movies do not predominantly focus on the accurate representation of the landscape, but work with Western imaginations about the East. There are two main places through which the construction of Afghanistan as inherent chaotic Other that needs to be tamed by Kim Baker is predominantly organized. Firstly, through the representation of the city of Kabul as messy and chaotic, and secondly, through the representation of the Afghan countryside as an endless desert. As opposed to this, the West, as represented in New York, is pictured as a clean, yet cold place. Thereby, the movie classically follows a distinction between the West and the East alongside a binary opposition that has already been identified by Said (2).



Picture 4: *Kabul* (7:32)

Kabul is depicted as a disordered city. As soon as Kim leaves the airport in Kabul, the background music switches to Oriental sounds. She is surrounded by people and struggles to navigate the airport. Outside the airport, the music still plays, and wind blows down the hijab she put on for this occasion. Kim coughs at the dry air which is “quite polluted with pisses” (6:10-6:12) as Fahim, her Afghan assistant, says. The

dialogue of the two is almost difficult to understand sometimes, because the background noise, people talking and motor horns, is too loud. When Kim arrives in the car and watches the streets from within, she does it through a dirty and dusty window. The streets are roamed by many soldiers who seem to control the area. On some occasions, however, the car window is so dirty that it is difficult to fully see through it. For the duration of Kim's drive through Kabul, the Oriental music remains. Everything she sees from her place inside is covered in dirt and most houses are simple shanties as illustrated in picture 4. Here it is important to note that all Kabul scenes were filmed in India (IMDb 2022a). India here acts as a stand-in representation of the East, as it has visual features that satisfy a Western audience's preconceived notions of it. This equally includes the people in the back who, although Indian, are set up as Afghans because Western audiences do not distinguish between different brown people. The East as embodied in the city of Kabul is represented as a dirty, yet mythical place, which Kim has to navigate – predominantly in a car and never alone.



Picture 5: NYC office (2:18)

Kabul is also the perfect *uncivilized* opposite to Kim Baker's office in New York City.⁴ When Kim is still in New York, her office is the dominant signifier of the city. It is a clean place, yet it still stands for Kim's depressing life in New York. In her newsroom, every journalist has an identical, standardized office space (picture 5). The colors of

⁴ See e.g., Kahf's (2022) and Soberon's (2017) examination of the usage of *(un-)civilized* in the construction of the Orient as outline above.

New York are predominantly cold, everything is set in grey or blue, through which the Occident is color-wise separated from the Orient. However, the colors also function as a means to describe how much Kim struggles in New York. The *civilized* world is thus world that makes Kim unhappy and does not give her the opportunity to either fulfill her dreams or live the adventures she still wants to experience.

Kabul, or Afghanistan in general, is the perfect opposite to this dull and sad representation of New York. “The American man or woman wants to experience [...] exotic cultures because of the promise of a more exciting, happy, balanced, or meaningful life,” as Voeltz summarizes this classic American story line (54). That Afghanistan has the possibility to fulfill this notion for Kim is not only illustrated through the vibrant city of Kabul, but also through the landscape outside of the city. Here, the similarity between war movies in the Middle East and the classic American Western is again obvious (Kollin 2015). Like the classic cowboy in a Western, Kim needs to conquer the landscape. She is not a cowboy on a horse, instead she masters the landscape through vehicles like cars or sometimes even helicopters (see picture 5 and 6). The cars Kim uses on her missions are predominantly military jeeps which signal dominance over the landscape. In these scenes, the camera often operates in wide angle shots where the whole area is visible and the only thing the viewer can see is the moving vehicle which flies or drives through an empty landscape. Thereby Kim’s personal relationship to the land is established. In all of these scenes, she and her military entourage are the only people visible who tame the supposedly empty land. The extreme long shots underline Kim’s conquering mission, presenting her as the colonizer of seemingly undiscovered places. This is also underlined by the Oriental music in the background to not only visually, but also auditively stress that Kim is not operating in any desert, but a desert that is located in the very *East*.



Picture 6: Car in Afghanistan (52:43)



Picture 7: Helicopter in Afghanistan (14:16)

In essence, the landscape construction of Afghanistan clearly follows the classic Orientalist imaginations of the East that have already been outlined by Said. The East is separated from the West alongside binary oppositions. While Kabul is presented as a vibrant and chaotic city, New York is constructed as a clean yet unhappy place. The construction of the Afghan countryside follows the classic Western representation of an empty desert which has to be organized and conquered by Kim.

3.2.2 From the Jungle to the Empty Desert

The landscape depiction in *Private* is slightly more complex as Marie Colvin does not only cover one war like Kim Baker, but several wars. However, the predominant setting, the desert as an emblem for the Middle East from Kabul to Homs and a cold and clean depiction of the West, London, remain the same. The only big difference regarding landscape is to be found in Sri Lanka, where the East is also symbolized through the jungle.



Picture 8: London newsroom (37:05)

The representation of London is exceedingly similar to *Whiskey's* New York. Again, it serves as a signifier for the clean, yet cold atmosphere of the West, which is especially illustrated through the choice of cold colors. A central element of the representation of London is Kim's newsroom (picture 8). All the journalists in there wear formal clothes, everybody in the newsroom knows their job, Marie, however, does not appear to fit in. Instead, through her clothing she always sticks out. Very much like Kim after her return from Afghanistan, Marie is not presented as the typical journalist within the London newsroom: her clothing looks different, and she does not adhere to the London standards of workplace. Instead, she absorbed the landscapes of the East

and brought them back to London as expressed through her clothing. Even outside of the office, the UK is the perfect opposite to the dusty landscapes that characterize the Middle East. London and any other place in the UK is always rainy, foggy, and cold. Seemingly, Marie only stays in the UK in winter or when the temperatures outside are low. The sun never shines brightly in the UK, neither when Marie is on the boat with her friend Rita (picture 9) nor on her way to the psychiatry (picture 10). While there are



Picture 9: Cold London (38:15)



Picture 10: Psychiatry (38:49)

some party scenes in London, the place predominantly serves as a marker for Marie's inner unhappiness. Like Kim, she cannot stay in this cold and dark place. Instead, she needs to go and find herself somewhere East.



Picture 11: Sri Lanka (5:35)

Marie's self-discovery journey starts in Sri Lanka and likewise the civil war there is the first war Marie covers in the movie. In Sri Lanka, the movie makes various references to classic Vietnam war movie tropes, e.g. by showing the soldiers walk through the jungle unable to see their enemy, but only able to hear them (Klein et al. 17). Marie's walk through the jungle is frequently interrupted by bullet shots and she needs to lie down. The bullets are not visible, she only hears them in the distance. The audio is important in this situation, because as the enemy is not visible, Marie needs to carefully listen where he might hide. Apart from distant shots, the footsteps of Marie's group and the vibrant sounds of the jungle, there is no sound. Klein et al.'s arguments

regarding the jungle in Vietnam war movies are crucial for the interpretation of this scene. The jungle is the classic mythical terrain, the unknown place that appears foreign to people from the West (17).

In Sri Lanka, this mythical setting of the jungle as Oriental Other to Marie's base London is clear from the very beginning. The jungle there, however, is less green and the colors of the floor and the trees are much browner than in a typical Vietnam War jungle as depicted in picture 11. While everything is full of palm trees, the floor consists of dead wood which snaps loudly as soon as anybody steps on it. The visual setting looks much duskier than in a classic green jungle. This representation of Sri Lanka is also due to the filming locations of the movie which were only Jordan and London (IMDb 2022b). Again, a specific landscape type of the *East* functions as a representation means for the whole region. That India can easily pass as Afghanistan in *Whiskey* and Jordan can pass for Sri Lanka in *Private* demonstrates that the exact location of the respective places is subsidiary. The movie's main purpose is not to accurately represent a region, but instead to visually satisfy a Western audience's imaginations of the East. In this context, it also clarifies that the movie is not about Sri Lanka itself, but about what Marie makes of the place, how she experiences it and how it is part of her inner journey. In Said's terms, the movie creates the classic Orientalist notion of a "place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1).



Picture 12: Iraqi Border, 2003 (18:00)

As soon as Marie leaves Sri Lanka, there is only one type of landscape left: the desert. The fusion of the Middle East into one big desert is a central theme of the

movie. Each country she reports from is introduced through its name in white letters⁵ and a countdown until she arrives at her last stop in Homs, Syria (see pictures 12-15). Without this lettering, it is nearly impossible for the viewer to tell where Marie is currently located as the places are virtually identical. Picture 12 is the introduction to Marie's journey to Iraq. It shows a man sitting on a street full of rocks and staring into the distance. A similar scene is to be found as a signifier for Afghanistan (picture 13). The landscape in these two pictures looks almost as if it was shot from a different angle, but in the same place. The only difference is that there is no person visible in Afghanistan, instead, there is a car. Such wide-angle shots frequently recur in the movie. Like Kim, Marie conquers the landscape of the East through a vehicle and thereby evokes the typical Western allusions that are central to war movies based in the Middle East.



Picture 13: Marjah, Afghanistan 2009 (47:00)

The introduction to Marie's coverage of the war in Libya is again very similar to the one in Afghanistan (picture 14). While the sandy colors are the dominant links between Iraq and Afghanistan, the connection to Afghanistan and Libya is made through the driving car on an empty street. Misrata, Libya, hereby almost looks like the end of the road of Marjah, Afghanistan. The only crucial difference is the choice of lighting. In Afghanistan, it is in broad daylight, however, in Libya the coloring is much darker, the scene is probably shot in the very early morning, and everything located next to the street is already much more war-torn. Again, there are no trees and people remain absent. While the area appears slightly more livable, indicated through the houses in

⁵ While I watched the movie in English, the lettering remained in German. On legal German streaming services, there is unfortunately no other version available.

the very back of the picture, the main focus still lies on Marie's cars driving through a landscape that looks like the ones she conquered before, but increasingly more dangerous.



Picture 14: Misrata, Libya 2011 (57:00)

Eventually, there is Homs. Here, as illustrated in picture 15, it is clear the most that the places Marie visits not solely melt together into one big entity, but also mirror her mental state and the increasing darkness of the movie. While the light in Afghanistan and Iraq is still bright and it starts to get darker in Libya, Syria is fully dark. The only thing the viewers see is a little flashlight in the back, but the place itself is not even visible any longer, which serves as a reflection of Marie's mental state and demonstrates that the landscapes mirror her feelings. This is also indicated by the countdown of the images. Marie's journey through different countries is one whole for



Picture 15: Homs, Syria 2012 (76:35)

her because it is not the story of the Middle East and its residents, but the story of her personal development. The similarity of the landscape has one clear function: It is one long road towards a climactic moment, namely her death in Homs. In this sense, Marie resembles the classic American war hero of the post-9/11 war film. She is not a soldier, but still it is her trauma, her personal development that is foregrounded.

Like *Whiskey, Private* follows a classic Orientalist representation of the East as the West's "contrasting [...] experience" (Said 1). Both Marie and Kim need the Orient as a place of their personal journeys, an empty canvas, on which they can project her inner struggle. While this struggle manifests predominantly as a sense self-exploration for Kim, for Marie it is mainly her deteriorating mental state that is negotiated in her journeys to the East. As Edward Said has pointed out, the East was often used as a means of Western people's self-construction (2003). This is also how war journalism is used by Kim and Marie to make sense of themselves.

3.3 Relationship With the US Military

The presence of the US military plays a crucial role in *Whiskey* and a minor, yet still relevant role in *Private*. In order to analyze in what ways Marie and Kim use their whiteness to function as "agents" of imperialism (Lewis 2), their relationship to the US-American soldiers on the ground needs to be investigated in detail.

Through Kim's close relationship to the troops, she follows a tradition of white women standing in solidarity with white men rather than with Black or other feminists of color (Rowe 2000) and thereby legitimizes the masculinist institution that is the United States troops. Working side by side with marines, Kim "functions as a successful alibi for white supremacy in its most imperialist brutality" (Charania 128). Through her performance of white femininity, that is sometimes naïve and helpless, yet brave and inconsiderate at other time, she manages to create a specific type of relation to the marines. Despite the movie's clear framing of her as a "new American war hero – a complex, intelligent, witty and observant woman" (ibid. 127), she remains protected by the white patriarchy that is manifested in the troops, and thereby dependent on them. Because of this dependency, she never questions the idea of the noble American mission in Afghanistan. As opposed to this, Marie's relationship to the US military is much more ambiguous. She regularly perceives them as figures that at least partly hinder her reporting and refuses to be fully absorbed into the nation-state apparatus. However, just as Kim, she never challenges dominant US-American war

narratives in which their invasions or operations appear in a positive light. The direct representation of singular soldiers still remains overall positive, and their missions are not criticized. Thereby both women are the type of journalists that consent to the dominant opinions of the ruling classes (Herman and Chomsky 2022).

3.3.1 The State Empowered Security Feminist

The relationship between Kim and the marines is not subtle, instead she is clearly protected by the US soldiers, operates solely in their proximity and never questions their authority or the war in general. Ironically, it is General Hollanek (Billy Bob Thornton), an important Commander, who points out how close the relationship between Kim and the US military is. When Kim first enters the Bagram Air Base and is following the Colonel across the terrain, he wants to give her a little coin as a present.

Kim: I'm sorry, Colonel. I can't accept gifts as a journalist.
Hollanek: OK. So logging, transport, protection, that's all you can accept?
Kim: I'll do my best to stay objective. (12:30-12:42)

In this dialogue, it is clear that the marines realize something Kim either does not, or simply tries to avoid, namely that she is in Afghanistan not as an objective journalist, but as somebody who is closely affiliated with the US troops and hence operates on their behalf. It is not possible for her to go anywhere without the protection of the troops, and neither can she question their authority or legitimacy. Being white grants her protection from all sorts of attacks that Afghan people do not have. However, her immediate relationship with the marines also demonstrates that as a woman she needs to navigate a highly patriarchal institution where she is not taken seriously. In the same discussion with General Hollanek, this is made obvious through the following dialogue:

Hollanek: So, while you're outside the wire with my men, you will in no way distract them. Understood?
Kim: Are you asking me not to sleep with your soldiers? Because I-
Hollanek: No, not soldiers. Marines. You're not here to sleep with or perform jobs of any type on my marines. Clear copy, Miss Baker?
Kim: Copy that. (13:10-13:27)

Instead of asking the soldiers to control themselves, it is Kim who is made responsible for not seducing them. In this situation, Kim perfectly pictures the new white female US-American heroine who does not solely have to navigate through an

unknown dangerous war terrain, but also deal with the present sexism in US-American institutions, as Deylami pointed out (757). Thereby, the movie suggests that Kim's journey is the one of an empowered feminist who has to overcome patriarchal challenges, despite her never actually challenging such comments ("Copy that."). This is not to say that Kim does not experience sexism or that such comments are not rooted in deep misogyny, however, the challenges proposed by the movie remain on a superficial and often only verbal level, as illustrated by the last dialogue. The benefits of staying with the troops and enjoying their protection are simply more valuable than critically engaging with them – despite the sexist remarks.

Hence, Kim never questions her relationship to the troops, instead she profits from it and much of her reporting centers the experiences of US soldiers. She explores Afghanistan in helicopters surrounded by heavily armed marines or military cars and in return, she gets to interview the soldiers and ask them to discuss their experience of the war in Afghanistan. In her first interview with US marines is, she asks them questions about the local population, such as "Do you believe that the Afghani [sic!] people are happy about our presence here?" (14:52-14:55). Instead of asking Afghan people what they think of US-American presence, she asks the Americans themselves and thereby gives them the opportunity to control the narrative of the war. In her interviews with the marines, the movie often attempts to self-ironically joke about white reporters knowing their field, such as when Kim mixes up "Afghani" (the currency) with "Afghan" (the people). Such gags, however, do not work, because Kim frequently demonstrates that she never breaks the stereotype of the white reporter.

Instead, she continues to ask them questions such as "What do you believe your mission to be here?", "What inspired you to enlist originally?" or "Are you guys getting outside the wire much?" (15:05-15:37). By doing so, she gives US marines the possibility to talk about their very own dreams and aspirations within the military. They argue that they enlisted because they like Arnold Schwarzenegger or that they want to help with community services in the villages in Afghanistan. When Kim goes on TV after collecting her interviews, she says, "and even though we saw first-hand that attacks against coalition forces are up, Corporate Coughlin told me that he is still not planning to lock and load his weapon, when he is on a patrol" (23:47-23:55). Corporate Coughlin is not only the classic good guy in this situation, but later follows the representation of another famous trope: the sad and wounded soldier (McSweeney 61f). Coughlin gets hit by bomb and therefore has to leave Afghanistan. He, the good

soldier, who does not even load his gun when he goes out in Afghanistan is wounded and traumatized and left alone in his little farm in the United States. Thereby one thing is strengthened: US soldiers are never the aggressors, but always the victims.

Not only her reporting demonstrates her intense relationship with the marines, but also the missions on which she joins them. In her first trip to rural Afghanistan, the troops help the villagers by building a well. The representation of US marines is again highly positive in this situation, as they cannot only brand their mission as peacekeeping and developmental aid, but also because of the way they care for Kim in these situations. When she is in the car with the marines, they offer her water to ensure that she stays hydrated and frequently wish her a “good ride”. Through her identity as a white woman, she is still perceived as weaker and more fragile by the soldiers, which is why she does not only experience sexism from them, but they also protect her in the very sense of the word through such acts of care. However, the branding of the American soldier as good person also occurs in their encounters with the people in the Afghan villages. As soon as they arrive in the village, they give sweets to the Afghan children and try to find out why the well is broken again, as it was blown up in the air repeatedly. In a short dialogue with a villager, the American self-image of their war in Afghanistan becomes evident again.

[Afghan man talks in his language to Fahim]

Solider: What’s that mean?

Fahim: He wants to know if you are the Russians.

Soldier: The Russians? No! No, Sir. That was 20 years ago. And we are here to help. And I am Black! (19:10-19:20)

“Here to help” is the central narrative strand that accompanies the presence of the US military in Afghanistan in the movie. It is especially interesting that this expression is used in the respective scene when it is later revealed who blew up the well: the women of the village. They used old Soviet landmines to do it because they enjoyed going to the water together, as they used the time for gossiping and socializing. Despite this dubious depiction of unpaid labor, the US marines accidentally used a white savior trope to “help” Afghan women. Kim is tokenized in this situation, because through her close presence through the troops, she is, despite being a journalist, incorporated in the American state apparatus. As Deylami argues, however, this does not entail a “feminization of state prerogative power but [produce] a tension that reifies the masculinism of state security” (774). As Kim does not challenge the American state

apparatus, she eventually legitimizes it and thereby follows the long history of white women who – despite experiencing misogyny in these very places – rather stood in solidarity with the institutions of white supremacy, instead of dismantling them (Davis 1983).

3.3.2 Independent, Yet Uncritical

While Kim often resembles an army correspondent, Marie's relationship to the US troops is much more ambiguous. She is much less openly protected by them, but nevertheless, also does not critique their presence and, despite the movie's clear anti-war stance, the political reasons for war and questions of guilt remain undebated. From the beginning of the movie, it is clear that Marie mainly wants to talk to people on the ground and perceives the – predominantly US-American – soldiers as an obstacle that prevents her from doing her job. One of her first interactions with the US troops is at the UN base in Iraq. The situation there resembles a press meeting, an army soldier talks to foreign journalists and explains that they need to cooperate, or they might lose all their privileges. Reporters are even forced to stay with an assigned unit of soldiers. The implied privileges are exactly those Kim had in Afghanistan, which is why it is perfectly imaginable that she would sit there with the journalists listening to the talk and follow the advice given by the troops. Marie, however, does not want to obey ("It's like they are drugging the fucking journalists" (19:43-19:47) and is well aware that the troops do not facilitate her work but ensure that she only reports what they want her to see. While Kim is what Grewal called a "feminist subject empowered by the state" (119), Marie seeks independence from the state.

As opposed to Kim who frequently uses army vehicles, Marie usually drives her own cars or is accompanied by local journalistic fixers. Only in Afghanistan does Marie travel with the same army vehicles as Kim, but yet again, she does not feel comfortable being this close to the troops. While she clearly has a relationship to them, the restriction they put on her outweighs the benefits. After covering the horrors of a terrorist attack in Afghanistan while the US troops are present, she wants to go further into the country – without being accompanied. "Norm, hey Norm, if I ditch the babysitters [the troops], you got room for two?" (49:45-49:53), she asks her fellow colleague, and he agrees. This sentence perfectly mirrors, what Marie thinks of the US forces. They are "babysitters" to her, people who constantly watch her and ensure that she does not see anything she is not supposed to see. As opposed to Kim, Marie actually challenges

the rules of the military and does not simply obey. Thereby, she chooses to stop being protected by the white patriarchy that is expressed in the troops.



Picture 16: Shot Afghan boy and soldier (48:48)

This does, however, not entail that the movie critically engages with the purpose of the troops in the Middle East. They might be annoying for Marie, but they are never openly criticized and in direct interaction with the local population, they are still depicted as the classic moral US-American soldiers. After an attack in Afghanistan, they ensure that injured people receive medical attention and tell them “You’ll be okay, right” (48:44-48:46). As illustrated in picture 16, the soldiers even provide for the hurt civil society. Through these visible acts of kindness, the good-evil dichotomy in which the US troops are the guardians of the people, is strengthened. Throughout the whole movie, Marie never encounters corpses shot by Western soldiers, instead terror and war only comes from the local groups on the ground. The only exception to this rule is the recurring image of a shot Palestinian girl which haunts Marie during the movie. In the cinematic treatment of the war on terror, Israel typically serves as an US ally against Muslim terrorism⁶, which is why Marie’s recurring nightmare is the only exception in which a US-associated military is also responsible for terror and death.

Private takes a clear anti-war stance, however, in doing so often remains apolitical. This is most obvious in the many voice-overs of the movie. Voice-over scenes are typically used in situations of death and despair in the movie when the camera films dying and suffering people on the ground. In the background, there is Marie’s voice reading out her reporting on the respective situation. In the short bits audible of her reporting, war is typically condemned, but questions of responsibility are not dealt with.

⁶ See Thobani (2018) for a further analysis of this.

When Marie sees the many Afghan civilians lying on the ground after being hit by a bomb, the voice-over says: “War is the quiet bravery of civilians who’ll endure far more than I ever will. Of those asked to fight and those who are just trying to survive. Mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. Traumatized families bereaved and inconsolable” (48:50-49:15). Through statements like this, war as an entity is condemned, but the powers responsible for war remain unquestioned. War hence becomes an ambiguous condition which appears to simply happen to people without questioning the ideology and interests of states behind it.

In their relationship to the troops, especially to the US-Americans, Kim and Marie reveal the most differences. Marie challenges the patriarchal institution that is represented by the marines through refusing to be fully incorporated into the nation state apparatus as a reporter. Kim, however, adheres to the rules of the military and thereby becomes dependent on them, which is why she becomes closely affiliated with the US nation state and upgrades their image through a liberal feminist branding. When it comes to the direct representation of US soldiers, they appear slightly hindering yet unquestioned in *Private* and fully accepted in *Whiskey*. Both movies show soldiers in situations in which they provide the local population with care and never when they hurt them.

3.4 “Allahu Akbar” - Depiction of Muslim Men

A crucial element with regard to the construction of the Orient as the eternally dangerous and terrorist Other to the good United States or the West is the depiction of the local people on the ground. Muslim men play an important role in this construction as they are typically represented as either terrorists or good Muslim guys who assist the US in their operations (Alsultany 162f). At the same time, there is a long tradition of representing non-white, especially Muslim, masculinity as a dangerous threat – particularly to white women (Aguayo 2009). The vast majority of Muslim men in both movies are indeed represented as a threat both Kim and Marie need to be protected from. This representational strategy is especially strong in *Whiskey*, where the depiction also follows racist narratives. Those men who are not represented as dangerous, namely the two fixers, Fahim and Mourad, are assisting the women directly and thereby prove loyalty to the West. Thus, both movies picture a dichotomous form of Muslim masculinity that lacks complexity.

3.4.1 Terrorist and Dangerous

The depiction of Muslim men in *Whiskey* follows various obvious racist representational strategies throughout the whole movie. In essence, there are two central tropes to be found in the depiction of Muslim men: firstly, their representation as dangerous de-individualized terrorist masses, and secondly, as good Muslims who work together with the US.

The first trope is introduced in the very beginning of the movie, namely Kim's arrival in Kabul. She takes out her money and it gets blown away by the wind. The scene is very chaotic, there are car noises in the background and Muslim men in traditional clothes start to collect the money immediately. They even fight over who gets to keep the money and need to be kept apart by Nic. Nic here functions as the mediator who ensures that the men stay away from Kim, he protects her from being run over, and brings order to the chaotic situation. In this situation, Nic is not only Kim's savior who protects her from men, but he equally symbolizes the core imperialist narrative that white Westerners need to *civilize* brown Muslims (Soberon 2017). This form of representation is in line with current Hollywood depictions of Muslims and strengthens an "Us vs. Them" dichotomy in which the dangerous Muslim man needs to be enlightened by the West (Senanayake 64). This is the base for the relationship between Muslim men, white men, and white women throughout the movie. Muslim men are brutal, they need to be controlled and especially white women have to be shielded from them.

While there are some occasions on which Kim directly encounters Taliban fighters and thereby the classic depiction of the Muslim man as dangerous terrorist, the real problem resides in the representation of civilians. This is possibly best illustrated when Kim attends a men-only event with her camera in Kandahar (picture 17). In this scene, a Muslim man who resembles a preacher stands on stage and is talking to an audience of enraged men. It is not clarified what language is spoken on stage and the text also remains untranslated. Yet, the effect of the speech underlines the danger of the situation and the frequent shouting of "Allahu Akbar" is equally supposed to signify to a Western audience that Kim, who is in the center of this unpredictable mass, is at risk. Kim wears a burqa to remain anonymous for as long as possible, but as soon as the men realize she is filming them, they start shouting at her. Their faces look angry, and they are gesticulating wildly. The men in this situation are not individuals, instead they melt into one big shouting mass that signals danger to Kim. This time it is Fahim, the

good Muslim, who rescues her from what is depicted as the violent barbarism of Muslim men in the East. As demonstrated in picture 17, Kim has to run and hide in the car to escape this mob and it is only possible because Fahim protects her from behind.



Picture 17: Kim runs away (55:00)

Fahim is an important character because he serves as contrary to the otherwise barbaric masses of Muslim men. He is the good Muslim who is affiliated with the US, as pointed out by Alsultany (2013). Through his proximity to Kim and the US troops, he gets to rescue Kim from the danger of Muslim masculinity, like Nic in the beginning of the movie. Thereby he proves loyalty not only to Kim, but to the West in general. Fahim's concrete affiliations remain unclear, but he is the one who follows Kim everywhere and gets to protect her from dangerous situations as the one above. The main purpose of his character is to suggest that the movie provides a variety of representational strategies for Muslim men. However, the opposite is true: He is what Alsultany called a "simplified complex representation" (162). His character is not multilayered, instead it suggests that the only possibility for Muslim men to be represented in a positive *civilized* way is to fully corporate with the West. Above that, it is important to note that Fahim is played by the actor Christopher Abbott, hence, the only positively depicted character is played by a white US-American man.

This demonstrates that the representation of Muslim men is organized alongside a binary. They can either embrace their tradition and thereby be seen as backwards and dangerous, or they can fully embrace the presence of the US troops and be loyal to

them to be positively depicted. Kim's presence as a white woman is crucial in this dichotomy, because Muslim masculinity is always organized in relation to her. This means that Muslim men can either be the ones she needs to be protected from – or those who protect her like white men would.

3.4.2 Dangerous and Terrorist



Picture 18: Men with guns (18:50)

The depiction of Muslim men in *Private* reveals much less obvious racist elements than *Whiskey*, but similarly follows the classic representative structure of Muslim men in US-American movies along the binary of the good vs. the bad Muslim. Compared to *Whiskey*, Muslim men in *Private* obtain less speaking time on screen and are pushed even further to the side. While a character like Fahim is among the most present supporting roles in *Whiskey*, there is no Muslim male character that is present constantly throughout *Private*. Therefore, the whole story of Marie Colvin is told from the perspective of white people, while the people of color on the ground solely function as plot devices. They predominantly do not occur as active individuals but remain passive to illustrate the horrors of war.

There is only one speaking Muslim character who is present thorough a longer time span: Mourad, the equivalent to Kim's Fahim. As opposed to Fahim, whose concrete job remains unclear, Mourad clearly functions as Marie's fixer in Iraq. He is responsible for helping her on the ground, assists her, drives her, and provides her with information on local events. By doing so, he achieves the typical role of the good Western-affiliated Muslim Alsultany identified in her work (2013). Like Fahim, he cooperates with Western foreigners and assists and translates for them. Indeed, the similarities between Fahim

and Mourad are obvious on almost every level. He equally appears *civilized*, because of his close proximity to white Westerners. The only real difference between the two characters is that Fahim often saves Kim, while Mourad only assists. Mourad does not protect Marie from dangerous brown men, instead she protects him, as for instance when they are threatened on their way to Fallujah by Saddam Hussein's soldiers. It is Marie who tells Mourad what to say to them, it is Marie who shows them her gym card to prove she is a healthcare worker, while staying completely calm. Through this reversal of roles, Marie transgresses gendered expectations and emphasizes that she is always in the lead.

Apart from Mourad, there is no male Muslim character that occupies space individually. Instead, most of them are depicted as fighters in a group. While it remains unclear for whom or against what they are fighting, they are typically heavily armed and always watching out for possible threats (picture 18). Even further, often there are close-up scenes of their guns which is underlined by the frequent clicking of weapons via audio. Such scenes are typically accompanied by tense music, which illustrates that something dangerous might happen. As it remains unclear what is fought by the numerous visible soldiers, this representation contributes to the post-9/11 narrative in which the Muslim man is simply "terrorist and inhumane, one who [does] not value life" (Senanayake 67).



Picture 19: Military Checkpoint (23:34)

The framing of Muslim men as a terrorist and dangerous entity frequently repeats in the movie. As mentioned above, Marie goes to Fallujah with Paul and Mourad. On their way, they are stopped at a checkpoint by soldiers faithful to Saddam Hussein, which is indicated through the flag of Iraq under Saddam (picture 19). In this situation,

the clear dichotomy between Mourad, the good Muslim who works with the Western journalists, and the terrorist Muslims becomes the strongest. Mourad translates Marie's story to the Iraqi militia who are inspecting their car and shout at them in Arabic. Neither do they understand English, nor does Marie speak Arabic, despite covering wars in the region for years. The severe danger of the situation is stressed through tension in the music and an emphasis on the sounds of the military gear the men are wearing. Their steps are loud, their weapons click and there is a constant clank of chain audible. The language of the men is also made easily identifiable for the viewers as Arabic. The usage of common words such as "kahba" ("bitch/ whore"), "yallah" ("let's go", "come on") or "Khalas!" ("Stop it!") means it is likely viewers will be able to identify the language. As Arab was so closely linked to Muslim after 9/11 (Alsultany 2012) and Muslim equally symbolized terrorism, the words are used to signify danger in this situation.

However, even despite the threatening situation, Marie manages to stay calm and (with the help of Mourad) talk herself out of the situation. Stronger than ever before, she demonstrates that she does not need to be protected by men, that she is not afraid, that she is willing to take risks and thereby cannot be threatened by anything – not even by brown men in armed gear, the masculinity she is supposed to fear the most.



Picture 20: Interrogation in Libya (57:05)

The more violent the scenes become overall, the more the depiction of Muslim men is loaded with signifiers which signal Islam to a Western audience. The climax of this depiction, however, is not observable in Iraq, but in Libya. This is best observed when Marie interviews a Libyan soldier, faithful to Gaddafi, who confessed to raping a girl (picture 20). The composition of this interview reveals various interesting features.

Marie is, as usual, the only woman surrounded by Libyan men. The soldier who confessed to raping a girl is kneeling on a carpet and looking at the floor. At various points of the interview, it appears as if he was praying, despite him saying that “Gaddafi is Allah” and thereby signaling that he is not a religious person. The other big marker which links Islam and war to a Western audience is the frequent shouting of “Allahu Akbar” by Muslim men. “Allahu Akbar” thereby is not predominantly used in speech but incorporated into the auditive representation of war. As soon as machine gun shots or explosions are audible, “Allahu Akbar” is shouted and thereby merges with the normal sound of war.

To summarize, the representation of Muslim men follows a classic binary opposition in both movies. If they work together with Marie and Kim, such as Fahim and Mourad, they are represented as good Muslims who adhere to Western imaginations of *civility*. If they are not cooperating with the West, they are usually represented as terrorists in armed gear (*Private*) or simply de-individualized masses of shouting men (*Whiskey*). As non-white and especially Muslim masculinity is often regarded as a threat to white femininity, questions of race and gender are directly negotiated in their contact with the respective men. While Kim usually needs to be protected from them through men like Fahim, Marie is protecting herself. Thereby Marie symbolizes a fearless white heroine who is not even afraid of what she is supposed to fear the most.

3.5 Depiction of Muslim Women

The depiction of Muslim women and their relation to the white female main characters is the last big element that needs to be investigated to finalize this thesis. As opposed to Kim and Marie, Muslim women predominantly remain passive to ensure that the white Western heroine can shine. They need to be submissive to support the underlying ideology of the movies, namely that white women as war journalists are on a mission against patriarchy, challenging gender norms at the expense of other women on the ground. Thereby, the heroine figure they constitute is a neoliberal postfeminist construction that only works because of their position as white women from the West.

3.5.1 Absent and Devalued

When analyzing Kim's relationship to the Muslim women on the ground, the first realization is how rarely they are depicted at all. While her surroundings are filled with Muslim men or men from the United States, Kim and Tanya are often the only women present, which strengthens the idea that they have to succeed and survive in a highly male-dominated area. It also illustrates that women like Kim and Tanya are able and allowed to represent the whole of womanhood because their whiteness remains unmarked. As discussed in my chapter on white feminism, the experiences of white middle-class women often function as a stand-in for all women within and outside the feminist movement (Rowe 69f). Kim's standing up against patriarchy makes her take up the typical role of the feminist heroine who does not have to question her own privileges and complicity in the devaluation of other women.

Where Muslim women are visible in *Whiskey*, their representation follows a typical guideline, one of them is the figure of the conservative Muslim woman who upholds patriarchy – as opposed to the white woman Kim, who is supposedly threatening it. When she meets Fahim at the airport and her scarf is blown away, a hijab-wearing woman shouts at her in Farsi: "Cover your head, shameless whore!" (05:52-05:54). Kim does not understand her, but believes Fahim, who claims that the woman was just welcoming her in Kabul. Indeed, this remains the only encounter Kim has with an Afghan woman who is actively speaking. This juxtaposition strengthens the narrative that white women are more feminist or closer to an egalitarian society than others (Ghabra 57).

While Afghan women typically do not speak for themselves, they are often the center of discussions. If discussed by the Americans, they are characteristically referred to as submissive figures. This is best illustrated when Kim needs a toilet at the Afghan village, where Americans are rebuilding the well.

Fahim:	They said, the Taliban came at night.
Kim:	I don't care. I drank too much water and I have to pee.
Fahim:	Stop, stop. I am engaged to be married.
Kim:	Okay, Fahim. I know you like your women to be like beautiful mysterious IKEA bags, okay? But we urinate, doctor. Out our vaginas.
Fahim:	You think you urinate out of your v-
Kim:	No, no. I know it's a separate thing. God, help me. (19:40 – 20:00)

Despite Kim saying this to Fahim with rolling eyes, the camera pans from their discussion towards two women in burqas and one in a hijab to visually illustrate what Kim is talking about. During no other scene of the movie does Kim's understanding as superior, as a "third gender" (von der Lippe and Ottosen 11), become more obvious. While she is the emancipated woman from the West, the Afghan women themselves remain invisible and oppressed to her.



Picture 21: Afghan women in house (43:12)

The depiction of the women of the village who remain Kim's predominant encounter with the local female population are the most crucial marker to understand the Orientalist ideology the movie exemplifies. When she goes to an Afghan village for the second time, her interaction with the women is longer than before. First, the women sit on a house in row and with their blue burqas, they are the only thing in the landscape that is not held in sand-colors. When Kim goes around a house, she runs into a Muslim woman. The woman only says one word in Farsi and urges Kim to follow her into a house, where many women of the village are waiting for them (picture 21). The scene is again accompanied by Oriental-seeming music which makes the women, who are completely covered in their blue burqas, appear like mythical creatures. As soon as Kim is inside, the score slowly starts to change towards touching piano music. When Kim stands in front of the women, they take off their veils and show their faces. In this *un-veiling* situation that appears so moving to Kim, the veil, which is the most relevant contemporary marker to construct the oppression of Muslim women finally becomes

relevant (Kahf 4). During the whole procedure, the camera is not focused on the faces of the women, but on the way, Kim reacts to them; they are merely used as scenery for Kim's discovery. She is the only person with a face in this room, the other women are only filmed from the back. Even after they take off their burqas, they remain faceless and passive. It is Kim's reaction towards them that matters to the movie. Thereby, the covered and uncovered women remain mythical creatures, passive humans who are not allowed to talk and communicate only through expressions.

While passivity is their main characteristic when Muslim women are present, they are mainly devalued and de-feminized when they are absent. This is for instance expressed through the frequent reference to "Kabul-cute". "Kabul-cute" is a common marker to degrade Afghan women and position beauty only among white women. It refers to the idea that white women are more attractive in Afghanistan than in their home countries. Almost every Westerner Kim meets in Kabul refers to "Kabul-cute" in a different way. Sgt. Hurd introduces the concept by saying "Are you familiar with the concept four-ten-four, Miss Baker? [...] It refers to women, who are fours back home, become tens when they ship out and when they are back stateside, they become fours again" (12:45-12:58). In her first interaction with Iain, he also tells Kim that she is sitting "next to the only two women in a country the size of Texas that remind a man that you are the only okay looking" (26:37-26:42). The concept, however, is explained in most detail in Kim's first encounter with Tanya.

Tanya:	You could have Nic. In Afghanistan, you're a serious piece of ass.
Kim:	Thank you, that's nice.
Tanya:	Cause you what? Seven, six or seven in New York? Here, you're a nine, borderline ten. It's called Kabul-cute.
Kim:	What are you here? Like a 15?
Tanya:	Yeah. (11:15-11:30)

The focus here resides not only in the degrading practice of assigning numbers to women to rate their attractiveness, but more on what this entails for the construction of Muslim women. Attaching beauty to a respective location, and thereby implicitly to a certain group of women, racializes it. Through the invention of "Kabul-cute", white women are again separated from the women on the ground and thereby privileged. Muslim women in Afghanistan are hence not received as a threat, but rather as welcome surroundings in which Kim's or Tanya's white privilege shines. In this context, they are not only presented as oppressed figures, but equally de-feminized.



Picture 22: Kim in Burqa (51:48)

Aside from “Kabul-cute”, Muslim women are often depreciated by Kim herself. One of the key stances she takes is her explicit reference to their considered oppression signaled only through clothing. When Kim goes to Kandahar, she needs to change her clothes to wear a burqa. After having some troubles with putting it on, it finally fits and she says to herself “It’s so pretty, I don’t even want to vote” (51:45-51:48) (picture 22). Thereby, overcoming patriarchy is attributed to suffrage, and Kim perpetuates the idea that US-American women are free, while Muslim women are oppressed, and this oppression is predominantly based on religious principles and clothing.

However, the burqa is equally sexualized. As soon as Kim leaves the house in it, romantic music is played and every man who sees her turns around. She is presented as highly attractive in this situation and thereby draws on the classic Orientalized sexualization of the Muslim women which started in the Romantic period (Kahf 8). Her veiling is suddenly considered sexy, and while she walks through the group of men who are all staring at her, she does not talk and thereby perfectly mirrors the imagination of Muslim women as promiscuous exotic fantasy, who are still remaining quiet and waiting to be conquered.

The fact that Muslim women remain fully absent and passive in *Whiskey* and only white Western women such as Kim and Tanya are presented as having agency is equally stressed by one topic Kim likes to cover: women’s rights. She does not talk to Muslim women on the ground, yet still claims to cover their struggles. In one of her news segments on Afghanistan, she stands in front of a Muslim woman in a car. “Today

Kabul's first female licensed driver, Gulbahar Yousofy, hits the road" (49:01 – 49:06). When Yousofy accidentally goes into reverse and hits a little stall, she says: "That sucks, that sucks for women" (49:08-49:11). This is only one of the various situations in which Kim discusses the state of women's rights in Afghanistan and thereby creates a possibility for the movie to brand itself as feminist. While feminist topics are covered, they are dealt with without the influence of Afghan women who are actually affected by them. By never talking to them, yet constantly talking about them, Kim perfectly expresses a *white savior* motif.

In summary, the depiction of Muslim women in *Whiskey* follows four clear guidelines. Firstly, Muslim women usually do not speak and remain passive whereby the movie draws on the century-old narrative of the Muslim woman as entirely oppressed figure who needs to be liberated (Kahf 2022). Secondly, they are equally presented as upholders of the patriarchy which strengthens the Western narrative that white women are more emancipated than Muslim women (Ghabra 2018). Thirdly, they are considered as no competition to white women, because the movie heavily draws on white beauty standards. Lastly, the movie operates within a white feminist framework, because Kim admittedly covers topics that concern the emancipation of women in Afghanistan, yet she does so without ever talking to them. Kim's representation as a liberated and empowered woman only works through the devaluation and passivity of Muslim women as her Other.

3.5.2 Absent and Crying



Picture 23: Muslim women in chadors (27:12)

Similar to *Whiskey*, Muslim women are predominantly represented through absence from active roles in *Private*. If they are present, their main mode of representation is as helpless figures waiting to be rescued by Marie. To begin with,

there is no Muslim female character in *Private* who obtains a speaking role of more than a few sentences. While Kim is never in active contact with Muslim women, Marie regularly speaks to them and interviews them to hear their stories – the viewers, however, get to hear these stories through Marie’s words and almost never hear a woman talking herself. Her first interaction with a group of Muslim women is in Fallujah. During the excavation of the mass grave there, she is approached by a group of Muslim women in black chadors (picture 23). The women all have pictures of their lost relatives in their hands. One of the women approaches Marie herself and briefly tells the story of her father. Marie answers, “I want to hear the stories of individual people. I want to tell their stories. Can she tell me about her father?” (27:30 – 27:35). This might be the biggest differences in dealing with local populations between Kim and Marie. While Kim talks about them, Marie talks to them. However, this does not result in more screen time for the victims of the war, but simply highlights Marie’s self-understanding as a war journalist. Eventually, the women in this situation are not “individual stories”, they remain grouped in masses, nameless and speechless as picture 24 shows. To foreground their sadness, the movie frequently includes close-ups of crying women in a hijab (picture 24). Thereby, Muslim women remain even more passive in *Private* than in *Whiskey*.



Picture 24: Crying Muslim women (49:00)

This mode of representation climaxes in Homs. It’s only Marie’s second direct conversation with a Muslim woman, when she meets a woman more desperate than all the women before (picture 25). The woman tells her in Arabic that she is not even able to feed her own baby, because she is too stressed to produce milk and hence, has to give her baby water and sugar to survive. She cries during the interview, but

sometimes she appears even too weak to cry. Marie tells her the same thing she told the woman in Fallujah “I want people to know your story” (82:45). Again, she is presented as the voice of the people through her reporting. Yet, it is her sensitivity that matters most in this scene, not the woman’s. This scene demonstrates that the sadness of the woman in Homs is again a means to understand Marie’s very own feelings and her mental health. Her PTSD peaks in Homs, and as much as this is illustrated by the landscape, the characters visualize this as well. The camera does not stay on the crying woman, it frequently moves to Marie’s face, foregrounding her very own despair that is projected onto the woman she is talking to. Thereby it becomes clear that the women in the movie are like the landscapes of the East used as a canvas to make sense of Marie’s feelings.



Picture 25: Crying woman with baby (83:20)

This is best illustrated through the shot teenage girl that haunts her during several PTSD episodes. The girl, whose ethnicity or name remain unknown during the episodes, demonstrates the depiction of Muslim women and their relevance to understand Marie’s feeling better than anybody else in the movie. Through her looks, the loose hijab, and her clothing, she appears Middle Eastern. She is composed as the perfect victim in Marie’s flashbacks. She lies in her bed with closed eyes and almost looks as if she was sleeping. But at a closer look, it is suddenly visible that her left hand is injured and shredded (picture 26). It is clear that the nameless girl who innocently lies in her bed must be dead. However, while her death looks tragic and shocking, she is not main character of the scene. Her emotions don’t matter, she is not contextualized. Instead, she serves as a means to illustrate Marie’s PTSD. The girl on the bed is only pictured for two seconds, then the film immediately cuts back to Marie,

who is having a panic attack in her flat. She throws around things, spills alcohol and only manages to calm herself when she smokes a cigarette. Yet again, the center of the scene is not the death of a Muslim woman, but how Marie, the white woman, reacts to it.



Picture 26: Shot Palestinian girl (35:41).

The girl does not only play a role as a dead body, but also in a discussion with her boss Sean Ryan, when Marie returns from Afghanistan to London. In this situation, the girl suddenly gets a name and a background story, but only in relation to Marie. Her death is not tragic for the sake of its death, but because Marie had to see it. This underlines that Muslim women primarily function as a setting for Marie's emotions.

- Sean: Why am I always the fucking bad guy? I had to cover myself with Libya because you are totally unpredictable. God know, everybody loves you, but you are a pain in the fucking ass.
- [Marie names several war correspondents who died because of their jobs.]
- Marie: Safa Abu Seif.
- Sean: Who did he work for?
- Marie: She was a twelve-year-old Palestinian girl killed by a stray bullet that pierced her heart. I watched her parents hold her while she bled out. She was wearing pear earrings. She probably thought she looked pretty that day. I see it, so you don't have to. (74:57-75:48)

In essence, there are only two closely intertwined ways in which Muslim women are represented in the movie. Firstly, as helpless figures that need to be rescued by a white person, which follows the classic representation of Muslim women as submissive and passive (Kahf 2022). While they are central to Marie's reporting, they never appear as speaking people, but instead remain nameless victims. This is closely interwoven with

their second mode of representation, namely as illustrations of Marie's emotions. As much as the landscapes of the East function as a canvas for Marie, the tragedy and despair of Muslim women is used to understand her very own emotions and to make sense of herself. Their bravery, resilience or resistance is never foregrounded. Instead, the only woman throughout the movie who gets credit for her heroism is Marie.

4. Conclusion

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot and *A Private War* seemingly have very different main characters. Certainly, both of them are war journalists, but they appear to have little in common in the beginning. On the one hand there is the heroic Marie Colvin who, from the outside, seems to never be afraid of anything, while fighting her demons inside. On the other side, there is Kim Baker, a woman who chooses war journalism because she cannot bear her mundane everyday routine any longer. What I demonstrated in this thesis is that their representation is not as unlike as one would initially guess.

The aim of my thesis was to detect in what ways their construction as white female war journalists entails a narrative of empowerment and through what filmic and narrative means this representation still upholds neocolonial values. I claimed that the characters can only be considered heroic because of the devaluation of others in the movie – predominantly Muslim women. To thoroughly answer my research questions, I analyzed five different motifs: how the two women experience romantic love, how the landscapes are composed in both movies, what their relationship to the US military is, and finally, how the people on the ground, Muslim men and women are depicted.

Postcolonial, intersectional, and critical whiteness theory turned out to be most suitable to answer my research questions. In the first part of my theoretical examination I researched, whereby white women step in the position of white men and hence, move into privilege, while other, non-white women are devalued. This manifests in the history of the feminist movement as much as in different types of representational formats. That white women are suddenly depicted as more heroic than ever before in the movies can only be understood in this context. It proves that analyzing gender alone is never enough to assess how 'feminist' a movie is.

My second theoretical examination focused on the US-American war film. Possibly the most important insight is that this type of movie always works in favor of the US troops. In the wars in which the Americans could easily consider themselves as the good guys, such as World War II, glorious memories were evoked. In the less positively

remembered wars – e.g., Vietnam – the mere sadness of American soldiers was foregrounded. The Scottish Comedian Frankie Boyle probably provided the most suitable summary for this: “American foreign policy is horrendous ‘cause not only will America come to your country and kill all your people, but what’s worse, I think, is that they’ll come back 20 years later and make a movie about how killing your people made their soldiers feel sad” (Craig 2020). It is hence no coincidence that the US-American war film needed to appear more progressive, and the creation of female main characters perfectly fulfills this notion.

This has consequences on the representation of Marie Colvin and Kim Baker as well as topics which are dealt with in the movie. When it comes to the depiction of their romantic love life, both women cannot overcome their wish for reproduction. While they are presented as childfree and unmarried women who focus on their career in a typically masculine job, they still struggle with being single. Kim uses Afghanistan to find love and even as the movie claims to overcome a heteronormative marriage plot, eventually it is love that matters most to Kim – and she finds it in Iain. Marie’s love life is even more of a struggle, as her sexuality and relationships to men are deeply connected to her PTSD. She cannot have a child, which haunts her over the course of the movie and hence, she often runs away from men. Thereby both movies demonstrate that the ideology of the white nuclear family still persists, and women can seemingly never escape what is considered their real place in society.

When it comes to the depiction of the landscape, both movies operate exactly within the same binary of the cold and unhappy West vs. the sand-colored adventurous East. The East, as expressed in Afghanistan or Iraq and Syria, is a dusty and dry desert onto which both heroines can project their own struggles. It is organized alongside a classic colonial understanding where Westerners make use of the East to understand themselves. The movies are therefore not about the Middle East and its wars in general but focus on the inner struggles of the heroines.

That reporters and the press are not free, but still support the hegemonic narratives of the ruling classes, is best expressed in Kim’s and Marie’s relationship to the military. Especially Kim works closely together with the troops and thereby functions as an “agent” of imperialism (Lewis 2). She is mainly protected by the white patriarchy that is expressed in the troops, which is why she never questions it and instead fully complies. As opposed to this, Marie challenges the troops on various occasions and thereby demonstrates female agency. She senses that they might hinder her reporting, but

nevertheless, she does not question their presence and missions. Both movies heavily draw on tropes in which US soldiers are considered as the good guys. This demonstrates that both women predominantly cover for the white supremacy of the troops.

As opposed to the good US-American soldiers, Muslim men on the ground are depicted as violent colonial Others. Most of them are represented as dangerous terrorists and therefore as a threat to white femininity. Only one character in each movie, Fahim in *Whiskey* and Mourad in *Private* are represented positively. It is their proximity to the West that enables this depiction. Especially in *Whiskey* the depiction of Muslim men as *uncivilized* is very strong. While Kim constantly needs to be protected from the dangers of Muslim masculinity, Marie usually functions as the protector and thereby again appears empowered.

Lastly, the depiction of Muslim women is crucial to understand the ideology of the movies. As outline above, Kim rarely ever appears empowered. She is looking for love and has to be protected all the time. But in her relationship to Muslim women, she can finally appear as superior. During the whole course of the movie, she and her white colleague Tanya are depicted as the only active women, the only women who operate in these highly patriarchal surroundings. As opposed to this, the Muslim women on the ground are fully devalued. They almost never speak but appear completely without agency and as oppressed figures who need to be liberated. If they are talking, they uphold patriarchal values and thereby foster the idea that white women in the West are more liberated than Muslim women. Lastly, they are often de-feminized and thereby seen as non-threatening competition to white women. What this demonstrates is that empowerment only occurs through the depreciation of other women – which is actually not feminist at all.

While Marie also appears empowered in other situations, what is most dominant in her interactions with the military or other men on the ground, is that she is equally a woman surrounded by men and not-speaking women only. The Muslim women she wants to be at the center of her reporting are always passive, helpless and need to be saved by her, because they cannot speak for themselves. They are used as a canvas onto which Marie can project her emotions, which almost equals them to the landscapes of the East that are used for the very same reason. Marie uses them to make sense of her own struggles, which is why they can never appear brave or resilient

but have to remain silent and nameless. Again, this passivity is required for a white woman to appear more empowered, heroic, and eventually 'feminist'.

What my findings demonstrate is a clear case against white feminism in which white women's experiences function as a proxy for all women. The world we are living is not organized alongside gender alone but other markers of oppression – be it race or class have to be taken into account. As a white woman myself, this thesis helped me realize this even further. Lila Abu-Lughod argues for “a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world – as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structures desires” (783). Only if we do that, we can develop a kind of feminism that really works for all women.

5. Bibliography

5.1 Primary Material

- Ficarra, Glenn, and John Requa, directors. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. Little Strangers, Broadway Video, 2016.
- Heinemann, Matthew, director. *A Private War*. Acacia Filmed et al., 2018.

5.2 Secondary Sources

- Abraham, Stephanie. "The Orientalist Narrative and Erasure in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*." *Bitch Media*, 11 Mar. 2016, <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/wtf-tina-fey-orientalist-narrative-and-erasure-whiskey-tango-foxtrot>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783–90.
- Aguayo, Michelle. "Representations of Muslim Bodies in The Kingdom: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood." *Global Media Journal* 2.2 (2009): 41–56.
- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Alsultany, Evelyn. "Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a 'Postrace' Era." *American Quarterly* 65.1 (2013): 161–69.
- . *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.
- Amos, Valerie, and Pratibha Parmar. "Challenging Imperial Feminism." *Feminist Review* 80 (2005): 44–63.
- Arruzza, Cinzia, et al. *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*. London: Verso Books, 2019.
- Auster, Albert, and Leonard Quart. *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam*. Westport: Praeger, 1988.
- Aziz, Sahar. "From the Oppressed to the Terrorist: Muslim-American Women in the Crosshairs of Intersectionality." *Hastings Race & Poverty Law Journal* 9 (2012): 191–264.
- Bahramitash, Roksana. "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism: Case Studies of Two North American Bestsellers." *Critique* 14.2 (2005): 221–35.
- BBC. "Clare Hollingworth: British War Correspondent Dies Aged 105." *BBC News*, 17 Jan. 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-38573643>. Accessed 17 Aug 2022.
- Beaumont-Thomas, Ben. "Clint Eastwood: American Sniper and I Are Anti-War." *The Guardian*, 17 Mar. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/17/clint-eastwood-american-sniper-anti-war>. Accessed 25 Aug. 2022.
- Boggs, Carl, and Tom Pollard. *The Hollywood War Machine. U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Bowman, James. "Warlord Rules." *New Criterion* 24.7 (2006): 56–60.
- Brown, Jeffrey. *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

- Bush, George. *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush: 2001-2008*, [https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus\(bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus(bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf). Accessed 25 Aug. 2022.
- Charania, Moon. "Ethical Whiteness and the Death Drive: White Women as the New War Hero." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 35.1.103 (2020): 109-37.
- Colpean, Michelle, and Meg Tully. "Not Just a Joke: Tina Fey, Amy Schumer, and the Weak Reflexivity of White Feminist Comedy." *Women's Studies in Communication* 42.2 (2019): 161-80.
- Craig, Cameron. "There is no such thing as an anti-war film." *Medium*, 13 Aug. 2020, <https://medium.com/make-it-personal/theres-no-such-thing-as-an-anti-war-film-308307c37ec8>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Combahee River Collective. "The Combahee River Collective Statement." *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. Ed. Barbara Smith. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000. 264–74.
- Daniszewski, John. "Why We Will Lowercase White." *Associated Press Blog*, 20 July 2020, <https://blog.ap.org/announcements/why-we-will-lowercase-white>. Accessed 17. Aug. 2022.
- Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, & Class*. First Vintage Books Edition. New York: Random House, 1983.
- Deylami, Shirin. "Playing the Hero Card: Masculinism, State Power and Security Feminism in *Homeland* and *Zero Dark Thirty*." *Women's Studies* 48.7 (2019): 755-76.
- Dittmer, Jason. "American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29.1 (2011): 114-30.
- Dyer, Richard. *White: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2017.
- el-Aswad, el-Sayed. "Images of Muslims in Western Scholarship and Media after 9/11." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 22.1 (2013): 39-57.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Freeman, Hadley. "How Amy Poehler and Tina Fey Made the Golden Globes the First Feminist Film Awards Ceremony." *The Guardian*, 12 Jan. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2015/jan/12/amy-poehler-tina-fey-golden-globes>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Fick, Nathan. *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006.
- Gellhorn, Martha. *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Reportagen 1937 – 1987*. Zürich: Dörlemann Verlag, 2012.
- Gerami, Shahin. "Islamist Masculinity and Muslim Masculinities." *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*. Ed. Michael S. Kimmel et al. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005. 448–57.
- Ghabra, Haneen Shafeeq. *Muslim Women and White Femininity: Reenactment and Resistance*. New York: Peter Lang, 2018.
- Ghodsee, Kristen. *Why Women Have Better Sex under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence*. New York: Nation Books, 2018.
- Gilroy, Paul. "Scales and Eyes: 'Race' Making Difference." *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*. Ed. Sue Golding. London: Routledge, 1997.

- Graham, Herman. *The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.
- Grewal, Inderpal. *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First-Century America*. Duke: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Hasian, Marouf. "Visualizing Monsters and Just Wars in Legal and Public Analyses of Clint Eastwood's American Sniper." *Monsters, Law, Crime: Explorations in Gothic Criminology*. Ed. Caroline Joan "Kay" S. Picart. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.
- Herman, Edward, and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Hoffman, Jordan. "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot Review – Tina Fey Sees the Funny Side of War Reporting." *The Guardian*, 3 Mar. 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/03/whiskey-tango-foxtrot-review-tina-fey-afghanistan-war-reporting>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- hooks, bell. *Black looks: race and representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- Hornaday, Ann. "Review | Rosamund Pike Delivers the Performance of Her Career as War Correspondent Marie Colvin." *The Washington Post*, 7 Nov. 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/rosamund-pike-delivers-the-performance-of-her-career-as-war-correspondent-marie-colvin/2018/11/06/3280e940-dd51-11e8-85df-7a6b4d25cfbb_story.html. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Hurtado, Aida. *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- Husain, Atiya. "Moving beyond (and Back to) the Black–White Binary: A Study of Black and White Muslims' Racial Positioning in the United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42.4 (2019): 589-606.
- IMDb. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot (2016) - Filming & Production*. 2022a, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3553442/locations>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- . *A Private War (2018) - Filming and Production*. 2022b, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2368254/locations>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Jeffery, Patricia, and Kaveri Qureshi. "Muslim Woman/Muslim Women: Lived Experiences beyond Religion and Gender in South Asia and Its Diasporas." *Contemporary South Asia* 30.1 (2022): 1-15.
- Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- Kahf, Mohja. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022.
- Kinney, Katherine. *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Klein, Thomas, et al. "Motive und Genese des Kriegsfilms. Ein Versuch." *'All Quiet on the Genre Front?' Zur Praxis Und Theorie Des Kriegsfilms*. Ed. Heinz Heller et al. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2007. 14–25.
- Kleinen, John. "Framing 'The Other': A Critical Review of Vietnam War Movies and Their Representation of Asians and Vietnamese." *Asia Europe Journal* 1.3 (2003): 433-51.
- Kollin, Susan. *Captivating Westerns: The Middle East in the American West*. Lincoln: University Press of Nebraska, 2015.

- Köseoğlu, Berna. "Gender and Detective Literature: The Role of Miss Marple in Agatha Christie's *The Body in the Library*." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 4.3 (2015): 132–37.
- Krewani, Angela. "Der Männliche Körper und Sein Anderes." *'All Quiet on the Genre Front?' Zur Praxis und Theorie des Kriegsfilms*. Ed. Heinz Heller et al. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2007. 101–09.
- Lerner, Gerda. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*. New York: Random House, 1992.
- Lewis, Reina. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. 20th anniversary edition. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984.
- Maddox, Garry. "War Photographer Erik Poppe's *A Thousand Times Goodnight* Turns Camera on His Own Story." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Nov. 2014, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/war-photographer-erik-poppes-a-thousand-times-goodnight-turns-camera-on-his-own-story-20141125-11hyrz.html>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Madsen, Deborah. *American Exceptionalism*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.
- McIntosh, Dawn Marie. "From White Ladies to White Trash Mamas: (Re)Locating the Performances of White Femininity." *Interrogating the Communicative Power of Whiteness*. Ed. McIntosh et al. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- . *On Privilege, Fraudulence, and Teaching as Learning: Selected Essays 1981–2019*. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- McNair, Brian. *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- McRobbie, Angela. "Postfeminism and Popular Culture." *Feminist Media Studies* 4.3 (2004): 255–64.
- McSweeney, Terence. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames per Second*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- Mercadante, Linda, et al. "Roundtable Discussion: Racism in the Women's Movement." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4.1 (1988): 93–114.
- Mizejewski, Linda. "Feminism, Postfeminism, Liz Lemonism: Comedy and Gender Politics on *30 Rock*." *Genders* 55 (2012): 1–40.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30.1 (1988): 61–88.
- Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, editors. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Expanded and rev. 3rd ed. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002.
- Morris, Rosalind. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Oh, David Chison. "'Opting out of That': White Feminism's Policing and Disavowal of Anti-Racist Critique in *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 37.1 (2020): 58–70.
- Pease, Donald. *The New American Exceptionalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

- Rogen, Seth. "American Sniper kind of reminds me of the movie that's showing in the third act of Inglorious Basterds." *Twitter* 18 Jan. 2015. Web. 17 Aug. 2022. <<https://twitter.com/Sethrogen/status/556890149674434560>>.
- Rosenberg, Alyssa. "Opinion | 'Whiskey Tango Foxtrot' Is Tina Fey's Latest Ode to Unmarried Women." *The Washington Post*, 4 Mar. 2016, www.washingtonpost.com, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2016/03/04/whiskey-tango-foxtrot-is-tina-feys-latest-ode-to-unmarried-women/>. Accessed 25 Aug. 2022.
- Rotten Tomatoes. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. 2022a, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/whiskey_tango_foxtrot. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- . *A Private War*. 2022b, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/a_private_war. Accessed 17. Aug 2022.
- Rowe, Aimee M. Carrillo. "Locating Feminism's Subject: The Paradox of White Femininity and the Struggle to Forge Feminist Alliances." *Communication Theory* 10.1 (2000): 64–80.
- Ryzik, Melena. "Hollywood's Forgotten Heroes: Female War Correspondents." *The New York Times*, 25 Oct. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/movies/a-private-war-marie-colvin-rosamund-pike.html>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- . "Q. and A. With Tina Fey: Live from Kabul, It's a Feminist Comedy." *The New York Times*, 4 Mar. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/arts/television/q-and-a-with-tina-fey-live-from-kabul-its-a-feminist-comedy.html>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Senanayake, Harsha. "Hollywood and Wicked Other: The Identity Formation of 'Western Us' Versus 'Muslim Others.'" *Open Political Science* 4.1 (2021): 64–67.
- Shome, Raka. *Diana and Beyond*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- . "Whiteness and the Politics of Location: Postcolonial Reflections." *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*. Ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith Martin. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999. 107–28.
- Soberon, Lennart. "'The Old Wild West in the New Middle East': *American Sniper* (2014) and the Global Frontiers of the Western Genre." *European Journal of American Studies* 12.2 (2017): 1–19.
- Taibbi, Matt. "*American Sniper* Is Almost Too Dumb to Criticize." *Rolling Stone*, 21 Jan. 2015, <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/american-sniper-is-almost-too-dumb-to-criticize-240955/>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Taub, Amanda. "Every Movie Rewrites History. What *American Sniper* Did Is Much, Much Worse." *Vox*, 22 Jan. 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/1/22/7859791/american-sniper-iraq>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Tharps, Lori. "Opinion | The Case for Black with a Capital B." *The New York Times*, 19 Nov. 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-case-for-black-with-a-capital-b.html>. Accessed 17 Aug. 2022.
- Theweleit, Klaus. *Männerphantasien*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz Berlin Verlag, 2019.
- Thobani, Sunera. "The Visuality of Terror: Gender, Sex and Desire in War." *Social Identities* 25.4 (2019): 523–41.
- Unity and Struggle. "Fanon and the Theory of Race." *Unity and Struggle*, 13 Apr. 2015, <http://www.unityandstruggle.org/2015/04/fanon-and-the-theory-of-race/>. Accessed 17. Aug 2022.
- Varisco, Daniel Martin. *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. 2nd ed. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017.

- Voeltz, Richard. "Eat, Pray, Love—And War: The Search for Fulfillment in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *Eat Pray Love*." *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 37.2 (2018): 53–74.
- von der Lippe, Berit, and Rune Ottosen. *Gendering War and Peace Reporting: Some Insights – Some Missing Links*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2016.
- Wolfe, Patrick. "Race and Racialization: Some Thoughts." *Postcolonial Studies* 5.1 (2002): 51–62.
- Young, Iris Marion. "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29.1 (2003): 1–25.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Women, Citizenship and Difference." *Feminist Review* 57 (1997): 4–27.
- Zakaria, Rafia. *Against White Feminism. Notes on Disruption*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021.

5.3 Movies and Series Referenced

- Blick, Hugo, director. *The Honourable Woman*. BBC Worldwide et al., 2014.
- Bigelow, Kathryn, director. *Zero Dark Thirty*. Columbia Pictures, First Light Productions, Annapurna Pictures, 2012.
- Burton, Tim, director. *Alice in Wonderland*. Walt Disney Pictures et al., 2010.
- Cosmatos, George, director. *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. Carolco Pictures, Anabasis Investments, Estudios Churubusco, 1985.
- Eastwood, Clint, director. *American Sniper*. Village Roadshow Pictures et al., 2014.
- Gordon, Howard, and Alex Gansa, developers. *Homeland*. Teakwood Lane et al., 2011-2020.
- Ford, John, director. *They Were Expendable*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945.
- Haggins, Paul, director. *In the Valley of Elah*. NALA Films, Samuels Media, Blackfriars Bridge, 2007.
- Hood, Gavin, director. *Eye in the Sky*. Entertainment One, Raindog Films, 2015.
- Kalatozov, Mikhail, director. *The Cranes Are Flying*. Mosfilm, 1957.
- Lawrence, Francis, director. *The Hunger Games* (2-5). Color Force, Studio Babelsberg, Good Universe, 2012 – present.
- Lean, David, director. *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Horizon Pictures, 1947.
- Milestone, Lewis, director. *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Universal Studios, 1930.
- , director. *A Walk in the Sun*. Superior Productions, 1945.
- Peirce, Kimberly, director. *Stop-Loss*. MTV Films, 2008.
- Poppe, Eric, director. *A Thousand Times Good Night*. Paradox Production, 2013.
- Renoir, Jean, director. *The Grand Illusion*. Réalisations d'Art, Cinématographique (RAC), 1937.
- Ross, Gary, director. *The Hunger Games* (1). Lions Gate, Color Force, 2012.
- Sheridan, Jim, director. *Brothers*. Michael De Luca Productions, Relativity Media, Sighvatsson Films, 2009.
- Spielberg, Steven, director. *Saving Private Ryan*. Dreamworks Pictures et al., 1998.
- Stone, Oliver, director. *Platoon*. Hemdale Film Corporation, 1986.
- Tarantino, Quentin, director. *Inglorious Basterds*. A Band Apart, Studio Babelsberg, Visiona Romantica, 2009.
- Wayne, John, and Ray Kellogg, directors. *The Green Berets*. Batjac Productions, 1968.
- Zemeckis, Robert, director. *Forrest Gump*. The Tisch Company, 1994.

6. Appendix

6.1 Abstract English

The aim of this thesis is to detect in what ways the representation of the female war journalists Marie Colvin in *A Private War* (2018) and Kim Baker in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016) entails a narrative of empowerment, while simultaneously investigating through what filmic and narrative means the very same representation still upholds neocolonial values. These questions are examined through the lens of postcolonial, critical whiteness and intersectional theory, whereby five main motifs are identified in the movies: romantic relationships, landscape construction, the main character's relationship to the US military, and finally, the representation of Muslim men and Muslim women. While Marie Colvin appears as an active female character with agency in various situations, Kim Baker is rather presented as a naïve woman who has to be saved by the men around her and only challenges male supremacy through her presence in the patriarchal surrounding of war. However, both women appear empowered during their interaction with the Muslim women they are reporting on. The construction of Muslim women as helpless und oppressed figures creates a neocolonial dichotomy through which white femininity appears as heroic and empowered only through the devaluation of Muslim femininity.

6.2 Abstract German

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es herauszufinden, wodurch die Darstellung der Kriegsjournalistinnen Marie Colvin in *A Private War* (2018) und Kim Baker in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016) eine Erzählung der feministischen Ermächtigung beinhaltet. Gleichzeitig wird untersucht, inwiefern die filmische und erzählerische Darstellung der beiden immer noch neokoloniale Werte enthält. Diese Fragen werden unter Verwendung von kritischer Weißseinsforschung, postkolonialer und intersektionaler Theorie untersucht. Daraus folgt die Identifizierung von fünf Hauptmotiven, in denen diese Fragen am deutlichsten verhandelt werden: romantische Beziehungen, Landschaftsdarstellung, die Beziehung der Hauptfiguren zum US-Militär und schließlich die Repräsentation muslimischer Männer und muslimischer Frauen. Während Marie Colvin als aktive weibliche Figur mit Handlungsmacht in verschiedenen Situationen auftritt, wird Kim Baker eher als naive Frau dargestellt, die von den Männern um sie herum gerettet werden muss und rein durch ihre Präsenz im

patriarchalischen Umfeld des Krieges die männliche Vormachtstellung herausfordert. Beide Frauen wirken jedoch während ihrer Interaktion mit den muslimischen Frauen, über die sie berichten, ermächtigt. Durch deren Konstruktion als hilflose und unterdrückte Figuren wird eine neokoloniale Dichotomie geschaffen, durch die weiße Weiblichkeit nur durch die Abwertung muslimischer Weiblichkeit als heroisch und ermächtigt erscheint.