The Wild Man and the Shepherd. Hegemonic Masculinities and the Definitions of Trauma in *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and *American Sniper* (2014)

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Abstract

Although one could not escape the ubiquitous comparisons to Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* while reading reviews for Clint Eastwood's latest war movie (*American Sniper*), the impressions both films leave are quite different. Despite the apparent similarities regarding protagonists, settings and narrative structure (we follow a soldier of a special unit making tours in Iraq while coping with PTSD), the differences regarding box office results and the films' interpretations are undeniable. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the conception of trauma. While real-life Chris Kyle was a public, yet polarizing figure of war-related experiences and an example of how to deal with and conquer (!) one's own trauma to regain a "normal" life according to hegemonic ideals of US-masculinity, his counterpart in *The Hurt Locker* (William James) was not just perceived to be an adrenaline junkie, but was actually blamed to produce a disrespectful image of professional soldiers and their masculinities. In the few cases James' trauma is accepted, his PTSD is reduced to a small number of scenes (e.g. scenes at home and in the supermarket) while ignoring his traumatic disposition (death drive, latency, compulsive repetition) or interpreting it as mere thrill-seeking behaviour, thereby constructing a narrative of "cold" masculinity around

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him. In sharp contrast, Eastwood links Kyle's trauma to positive attributes (especially the (fatal) wish to protect his family (represented by his comrades)) and constructs his narrative in the vein of a (successful) revenge story, thereby establishing a legitimized form of trauma and a gender appropriate reaction to it. Considering both the nature of trauma as a highly biased and political construction favouring some experiences over others and the problematic nature of the traumatic male body in the context of hegemonic masculinity, the question of legitimized forms of trauma and one's reaction according to gender identities becomes quite relevant. Therefore, to address the complex relationship between gendered codes, the legitimate understanding and reading of trauma and its portrayal in trauma discourse, this paper attempts a culturally and historically contextualized reading of *The Hurt Locker* and *American Sniper* to analyze concepts of legitimate and illegitimate trauma in contemporary USA, their narrative constructions, and their interconnections with hegemonic masculinity.

Keywords: PTSD, trauma theory, hegemonic masculinities, Iraq War cinema, curative time

Vahşi Adam ve Çoban: *The Hurt Locker* (2008) ve *American Sniper* (2014) Filmlerinde Hegemonik Erkeklikler ve Travmanın Tanımları

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Özet

Her ne kadar Clint Eastwood'un son savaş filmi America Sniper'ı izleyenler film hakkındaki yorumları okurken Kathryn Bigelow'un The Hurt Locker'ı ile ilgili yapılan kıyaslamalardan kaçamasa da, her iki filmin de bıraktığı izlenimler birbirinden oldukça farklıdır. Kahramanlar, mekân/zaman ve anlatı yapısıyla ilgili belirgin benzerliklere rağmen (Irak'ta operasyon yapan özel bir birlikte görevli ve aynı zamanda TSSB ile başa çıkmaya çalışan bir askeri takip ediyoruz), gişe sonuçları ve film yorumları arasındaki farklar inkâr edilemez ölçüdedir, ve bahsi geçen farklılıklar en belirgin halleriyle travma olgusunda ortaya çıkmaktadır. Filme kaynaklık etmiş gerçek hayat hikayesindeki Chris Kyle, savaşla ilgili deneyimlere dair kamuya mal olmuş olsa da, kutuplaştırıcı bir figür haline gelmiş ve Amerikan erkekliğinin hegemonik ideallerine göre "normal" bir yaşamı yeniden elde etmek için kişinin kendi travmasını nasıl ele alacağına ve fethedeceğine (!) bir örnek iken, The Hurt Locker'daki meslektaşı (William James) sadece bir adrenalin bağımlısı olarak algılanmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda profesyonel askerlerin ve erkekliklerinin hoşgörüden yoksun bir imgesini üretmekle suçlanır. James'in travması yalnızca istisnai durumlarda kabul görür ve TSSB'si travmatik eğilimi (ölüm dürtüsü, edimsizliği , zoraki tekrarlar) göz ardı edilerek yahut sadece heyecan olarak yorumlanarak oldukça az sayıda

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sahneye (örneğin evde ve süpermarketteki sahnelere) indirgenir ve böylece etrafındaki "soğuk" erkekliğin bir anlatısını inşa eder. Tam aksine, Eastwood, Kyle'ın travmasını olumlu özelliklere bağlar [özellikle (silah arkadaşları tarafından temsil edilen) ailesini koruma isteği] ve anlatısını (başarılı) bir intikam hikayesi şeklinde inşa eder, böylece meşrulaştırılmış bir travma biçimi ve buna uygun bir toplumsal cinsiyet tepkisi oluşturur. Meşrulaştırılmış travma biçimleri ve kişilerin toplumsal cinsiyet kimliğine verdikleri tepki sorunsalı, hem travmanın doğası hem de diğer bireylerle paylaşılan deneyimleri destekleyen çok taraflı bir politik yapı olarak, travmatik erkek bedeninin hegemonik erkeklik bağlamında problemli doğasını düşünmek açısından oldukça anlamlı hale gelmektedir. Bu nedenle, cinsiyetlendirilmiş kodlar arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi ele almak, travmanın resmi algısını ve okumasını ve travma söylemi içerisindeki tasvirine dikkat çekmek adına, bu makale günümüz Amerikasında meşru ve meşru olmayan travma kavramlarını, anlatı yapılarını ve hegemonik erkeklik ile olan bağlantılarını analiz etmek amacı ile The Hurt Locker ve American Sniper'in kültürel ve tarihsel olarak bağlamsal bir okumasını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: TSSB, travma teorisi, hegemonik erkeklikler, Irak savaşı filmleri, iyileştirici zaman

Though one could not escape the ubiquitous comparisons to Kathryn Bigelow's The Hurt Locker (hereafter: HURT) while reading the reviews for Clint Eastwood's latest war movie (American Sniper (hereafter: AS)), the impressions both leave are quite different. Despite the conspicuous similarities regarding protagonist, setting and narrative (we follow a soldier of a special unit making tour(s) in Iraq while coping with PTSD and leaving one's family behind), the differences regarding box office results and their interpretations are undeniable. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the conception of trauma. While even real-life Chris Kyle, author of the autobiography AS is based on, was a public, though polarizing figure representing how to deal with and conquer (!) one's own trauma to regain a 'normal' heteronormative life according to hegemonic US-masculinity, his counterpart in HURT (William James) was not just perceived to be an adrenaline junkie, but was actually blamed to produce a disrespectful and distorting image of professional soldiers, especially members of EOD-units, and their masculinities (Hoit, 2010; Nochimson, 2010). In the few cases James' trauma is accepted, his PTSD is reduced to a small number of scenes at home while, at the same time, ignoring his traumatic disposition (death drive, latency, compulsive repetition) or interpreting it as thrill-seeking behaviour, thereby constructing a narrative of 'cold' masculinity (Barker, 2011b: 157). In sharp contrast, Eastwood links Kyle's trauma to positive attributes, especially the fatal wish to protect his extended family and constructs his narrative in the vein of a successful revenge story, thereby establishing a legitimized form of trauma and a gender appropriate reaction to it.

Considering the problematic nature of the traumatized male body in the context of hegemonic masculinity, the question of legitimized forms of trauma according to gender identities becomes even more relevant. For example, Tarja Väyrynen (2013) described the state's necessity to "prioritize[…] some male bodies and forms of hegemonic masculinity over others" during times of war. "The trained, powerful, and invulnerable male body invokes ideals of sacrifice," which

corresponds with clear hierarchies regarding gendered bodies: "heroic/abject, protector/protected, tough/soft". Therefore, Väyrynen recognizes the appearance of the traumatized male (militaristic) body as a moment of societal anxiety due to a momentary "access to a disruptive corporeality" (139-140) contrasting idealized masculinity. Similarly, Christopher Gilbert (2014) discusses discursive interferences produced by images of wounded and traumatized veterans due to their inability to remain and retain "proper [militaristic] bodies". "They are no longer images of self-control, obedience, or ferocity," i.e. figures of hegemonic militaristic masculinity. Due to the frequent effeminacy of "sick, weak, or wounded" male bodies, "injured returning soldiers are, in part, emasculated." (148-149) Thus, both raise an interesting question: How can a wounded body be accepted as traumatized while still embodying ideals of militaristic masculinity? Albeit photographer Michael Stokes (2015) recently staged the bodies of male veteran amputees in the vein of a hardened, sacrificing masculinity, the psychological repercussions of trauma seem to complicate the very notion of masculine efficiency fetishized by Stokes, thus, making it harder to visualize traumatized soldiers in the context of hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, trauma has been "used […] to substantiate heroic counternarratives that repudiate victory […] culture" (Farrell, 1998: 171) in US-discourse since the Vietnam War, which is quite apparent in the context of US-American wars in the early 21st century and their representations on screen: Aside from concentrating on humanitarian efforts (Krewani, 2011a: 172; Žižek, 2010), the inclusion of PTSD seems to be a major strategy to shift the focus away from a politically critical stance and towards personal tragedies experienced by US-American soldiers (Barker, 2011b: 32; Maseda & Dulin, 2012: 22; Westwell, 2011: 31).

So, in spite of the notion of trauma taking "place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality" (Laub, 1992: 69), trauma itself is neither an ahistorical nor a universal concept (Craps, 2014: 49) but a highly biased and political construction favouring some experiences over others (Barker, 2011b: 84). Though some authors have already commented on the gendered nature of trauma discourse (Goldman,

2009: 993; King, 2012: 10), there are very few texts focussing on the process of gendering traumatized reactions. For example, in his seminal study Post-Traumatic Culture, Kirby Farrell (1998) outlines three "principal modes of coping with traumatic stress: social adaptation and relearning, depressive withdrawal or numbing, and impulsive force (berserking)." (7) Interestingly, the first thing Farrell does to elaborate is to gender them: Female withdrawal and numbing, male berserking – no relearning. Though, several pages later, he describes the male protagonist in Leaving Las Vegas (1995) in the manner of his "personal numbness" (279), thereby alluding to a more complex relationship between gender and one's reaction to trauma, the author swiftly constructs the numbness as a façade "to contain his rage" (280). In contrast, Jonathan Shay (2003) locates a direct link between both states arguing that numbness is accompanied by the loss of fear leading sometimes to berserking (53).

Therefore, there is a complex relationship between gendered codes, the legitimate understanding and reading of trauma and its portrayal in trauma discourse. To shed some light on these issues, this paper attempts a culturally and historically contextualized reading of HURT and AS to analyze concepts of legitimate and illegitimate trauma in contemporary USA, their narrative constructions, and their interconnections with hegemonic masculinity.

Synopsis

Kathryn Bigelow's 2008 war movie, HURT, follows an EOD-unit consisting of Sanborn, Eldridge, who copes with the loss of the unit's former leader (Thompson), and said leader's replacement, William James, who seems to be traumatized by previous missions in Afghanistan. In the manner of a true (traumatic) backstory wound, neither James nor the movie (can) explicitly state what happened, but his behaviour and personality are shaped and informed by the events preceding HURT. Instead, the movie focuses on the tension-filled transition of leadership structured by several encounters with hostile

forces on the one hand, and his distant relationship with his family on the other, which ultimately culminates in him volunteering for another tour in the end.

Based on Chris Kyle's autobiography of the same name, Clint Eastwood's AS follows the so-called "deadliest sniper in US-history". After a major twenty-minute long flashback showing Kyle's childhood, training as a Navy SEAL, and the beginning of his marriage, the movie focuses on his several tours in Iraq contrasted with short stays at home to illustrate his estrangement and traumatized state of mind: On the battleground, Kyle functions somewhat like a machine; at home, he shows easily identifiable signs of trauma (e.g. anxiety, dissociation). After his fourth and last tour, he begins helping veterans coping with mental and physical illnesses until his sudden death. Though Kyle's murder at the hands of a veteran he tried to help is not actually shown, the movie climaxes in the footage of the real-life funeral service held for Kyle and ends in minutes of reverent silence while the end credits play.

Gazing at rooftops and bodies

From the very first scene (0:00-0:10), Bigelow showcases a typical approach to directing modern war zones by focussing on the overwhelming nature of the battle situation (Barker, 2011b: 32). Shot simultaneously with four camera-units, Bigelow explores her set by simulating the constant threat an EOD-unit faces. According to her, the Iraq War "[i]s not a ground war, it's not air-to-ground, it's basically a war of invisible, potentially catastrophic threats, 24/7. There is no place that is off-limits, there is no downtime for the soldiers […]. [T]he entire 360[-]degree environment […] [is] a potential threat" (Bigelow with Dawson, 2013: 143). Akin to Raya Morag's (2009) description of traumatization in Vietnam War cinema (155-156), Bigelow illuminates the stressful war experience by constructing it around bombs, IEDs, and other (deadly) fragments left by an otherwise invisible enemy. Today, cinematic soldiers are constantly struggling with their desperate desire to get an overview of the scene. This is especially true in the context of satellite

pictures used in films such as Black Hawk Down (2001), Body of Lies (2008), and Zero Dark Thirty (2012). Once representing the militaristic logic of territorial conquest (Krewani, 2011b: 326), they are now a painful reminder of the impossibility to gain that very position (Straw, 2011: 60). Accordingly, the very first image we see in HURT echoes this notion: While we are hearing Arabic voices, the screen shows the point-of-view shot of a bomb disposal robot for some time (0:00). Instead of an establishing shot (or any further information of our whereabouts), we constantly gaze at the sandy ground. Though we leave this position twenty-seconds later, the confusion does not end here. People are running in every direction, some are walking, some are arguing with soldiers, while the camera can neither stay steady nor focus on any part of the scene but is frenetically zooming in and out. Even the robot seems to change course more than once due to the scene repeatedly ignoring the 180-degree-rule of classic editing (0:00-0:02). Consequently, one cannot make any sense of the scene. Considering the importance Bigelow puts on cinematic geographies (Bigelow with Smith, 2013: 78), this approach to setting a scene is essential and symptomatic for the whole film. That is especially true for the soldiers' reaction to the situation: constantly and nervously watching the roof-tops, they are trying to find a safe spot for just one moment but cannot.

Therefore, any tangible and symbolic device utilized by the soldiers is constructed to distance them from the overwhelming and uncontrollable situation at hand. From the robot's remote control and its monitor to the sexualized translation of the technical act of defusing a bomb (calling it "momma" and describing the tools used as their own genitalia (0:02-0:03)) (Koch, 2012: 130-131) and the continuing verbalization of one's own position in regards to the IED (0:06-0:09), each action seems like a desperate attempt to gain an imagined control over the situation, while the constant gazes to the rooftops betray their performed confidence. Especially Thompson's, the group leader's own death (0:10), just moments after he claims that they "will be okay" (0:04) behind the Humvee, contradicts this self-assured attitude. Even the scene of him describing the outcome of the explosion shortly before his death

seems eerily off. Despite being the first long shots of soldiers and scenery after the fast-paced editing of the preceding minutes, there is no way to identify the bomb and its relation to the men. Nonetheless, Thompson claims to anticipate how the bomb will detonate, namely "in a beautiful umbrella pattern" (0:03), while he is gesturing as if to orchestrate the spectacle. His choice of words is especially interesting because of the similarities it shares with Judith Butler's observation (1992) regarding the shift in militaristic language in the 1990s: by "calling the sending of missiles 'the delivery of ordnance,'" the discourse "figures an act of violence as an act of law […] [to] wrap[.] the destruction in the appearance of orderliness" (11). In the same vein, by describing the explosion as "a beautiful umbrella pattern", the uncontrollable destruction is reconfigured in the "appearance of orderliness," which is immediately contradicted by Thompson's own death. Like the other acts, they are just coping mechanisms to gain an imagined control of the battleground.

And at this point, James and his traumatization come into play. In his study, Martin Barker (2011b) pointed to the chilling effect James' presence has on the frenetic camerawork. For Barker, his calming presence actually makes him a role model to illustrate how to "overcome" one's PTSD, that is "by having James absorb it into his personality" (163). To drive this point home, Barker insists that James "has just forgotten how to be its victim, and thus becomes a poster-boy of Iraq war generation." (157) By this curious choice of words, Barker does not just deny James his own vulnerability but defines a legitimized form of PTSD in the context of male militaristic behaviour corresponding to one's own effectiveness on the battleground. James "is what soldiers need to be, ought to try to be." (Barker, 2011a: 41) Similarly, Guy Westwell (2011) locates James' heroism as an antidote to media coverage of the Iraq War and compares HURT to World War Two propaganda (24). Again, it is his effective manoeuvring around the battlefield that seems to inform this kind of problematic heroism and masculinity. Referring to Slavoj Žižek's (2010) pivotal text about HURT's victory over James Cameron's Avatar (2009) at the 82nd Academy

Awards, Westwell (2011) points out that, by emphasizing rescue missions, the movie can bypass any questionable militaristic conduct (i.e. torture and other atrocities) "to reclaim […] a certain conventional model of male, soldierly behaviour." (24) In both cases, the authors concentrate on a hegemonic notion of militaristic masculinity effectively dealing with an extraordinary situation that is constructed by the usage of steady (extreme-)close-ups of James' face, eyes, and hands (especially his fingers) while defusing bombs. Though I partially agree with Barker's analysis that, in these instances, the camerawork keeps strangely calm, those moments are continuously intercut by stressful gazes from and at the unit from the outside (e.g. 0:34-0:43). There is an obvious disjunction between James' experience of the scene (unbroken focus on the target) and the one his comrades have, yet throughout the movie, the field of vision and, in extension, the unit's own safety are precarious. This is best understood by looking at the death scene of a military psychiatrist accompanying them. After successfully defusing one of the most complicated IEDs in the movie, the unit is waiting for the psychiatrist's return in the Humvee. Shot from its backseat, the camera focuses on the silhouetted soldiers looking at the approaching psychiatrist when he blows up right in front of their (and our) eyes (1:27). Though James may disregard safety protocols on many occasions, such as setting off a smoke grenade to obscure visibility (0:18), not reporting his position (0:19), and refusing to wear a protective suit (0:34), all these actions do neither enhance nor worsen the precarious situation they are in but only make its precarious nature more obvious, so that James can pursue his death drive.

James' carefree and self-destructive reaction is akin to many accounts by veterans who emphasize their short life expectancy while stressing that they are not suicidal. In his now-famous book Achilles in Vietnam, Shay (2003) is quoting a patient of his who circled the Boston red-light district in the hopes to confront a perpetrator, thereby channelling his own death drive in a somewhat legitimate fashion regarding his gender. Though him rescuing a sex worker from a rapist could be interpreted as a heroic expression of vigilante masculinity, he

knew that he only acted on his own desires (xvi). This is quite similar to the diegetic (a superior officer calls James respectfully a "wild man" (0:46)) and non-diegetic reading of James' behaviour. When Martha Nochimson (2010) criticizes leading actor Jeremy Renner's performance as John Wayne-ian because of its "reduced notion of masculinity", one wonders if we are supposed to celebrate this form of masculinity.

To that end, let us take a look at a pivotal moment in the relationship between James and his comrades. While celebrating a successful mission and the first time the unit clicked as a team, Sanborn demands to hit James once. James complies and takes off his shirt for Eldridge to draw a crosshair on his muscular body (1:14). At that moment, one can take a long look at his upper body and the wounds suffered on previous missions. Shot in a close-up, the right side of his torso is covered with dozens of little scars highlighted both by the direct light coming from the right and by the drawn crosshair. This is the literal translation of E. Ann Kaplan's and Ban Wang's (2004) trauma definition in another context. Namely, it is "engraved on the body, precisely because the original experience was too overwhelming to be processed by the mind." (5) Noticing the scars scattered all around his lower torso, Eldridge inquires about the incident, but instead of giving any straightforward answer, James jokingly accuses his mother of dropping him as a baby (1:14). The traumatic wound literally visualized on his skin is emphasized by the crosshair on his body but, at the same time, not addressed due to the incapability to translate the traumatic memory into a narrative one. After Sanborn's blow, James retaliates and begins riding Sanborn in an explicitly sexual manner while calling him his "bitch" (1:15). At first, the scene seems to be a stereotypical male bonding exercise often seen in war and comrade movies. Since homoerotic undertones are obscured by marking the eroticizing gaze "not by desire, but rather by […] aggression" (Neale, 1994: 18), as Steve Neale put it in his pivotal text "Masculinity as spectacle," the scene can be read in the context of warmth existing between soldiers in homosocial groups. But the scene takes a fast turn for the worse when Sanborn pulls a knife to hold it at his comrade's throat. Interestingly, instead of pulling

back, James gets cheerfully closer to Sanborn and his knife, as if to kiss at least one of them while breathing suggestively (1:15). With the lighting coming from the background, James' face is obscured by dark shadows and thereby somewhat othered, while Sanborn's confused reaction is highlighted. This clear shift of identification is quite important, since it deviates from the most typical racialized cinematic lighting favouring white skin as the "norm" (James) while obscuring faces of black actresses and actors (Sanborn) (Dyer, 2008: 99-101). At this very point, the normally accepted homoerotic tensions end and the scene shifts from eros (pleasure principle) to thanatos (death drive). Thus, both the problematic notion that James "has forgotten how to be […] [a traumatized] victim" and his status as a role model for this very reason must be seriously questioned. As I pointed out by referring to Shay's patient, James' actions may be read as heroic, but one cannot integrate it in a concept of hegemonic militaristic masculinity regarding modern US-cinema because he lacks both the compassion for his family and his comrades due to this very traumatic disposition and death drive, as I will try to elaborate by shifting my focus to AS.

In sharp contrast, every move cinematic Kyle does is somewhat informed by his love for family and comrades. Because of the ubiquitous nature of the trope of being attacked from all sides, as I have described above, I would like to point to two major strategies found in AS to cope with this specific situation. First, although there are similar suspicious and frightful looks at the rooftops of Baghdad (e.g. 0:01; 0:46; 1:23), Eastwood's direction diverges significantly from Bigelow's by locating Kyle in a superior, if not otherworldly position from which he has complete control and sight of the battleground. Similar to the staging of James, Eastwood uses tight, concise shots to emphasize Kyle's precise movements and effectiveness while mostly showing us the battleground mediated by his binoculars or rifle scope (e.g. 0:01-0:03; 0:29-0:31). Thereby, the cinematic experience is somewhat disjointed – but in a quite different manner than seen in HURT. For example, while we are looking at a man carrying a weapon, we hear the shot of Kyle's rifle moments before we actually witness its impact. The scope is a means to

elevate a person above the others and a means to produce truth, thereby dispersing any ambiguity that plagued the protagonists in HURT. If Kyle takes a shot, Eastwood stages it to convince us that it was a righteous call. When a widow claims that her deceased husband was carrying a Quran (0:32), we know he wasn't because we have seen the AK-47 he was handling (0:30). This otherworldly position is not the fatal imagination of control we have seen in HURT, but a panoptic one. Others may not act as if they are constantly being watched (Michel Foucault's definition of the panopticon to describe the workings of modern society), but Kyle gained a godly position that is more akin to Jeremy Bentham's original concept: A position from where everyone can be seen, or, in the case of the movie, from where Kyle can act out his fatal desire to protect everyone and judge those trying to kill his extended family.

Early in AS, a comrade calls Kyle the "overwatch" (0:28), an angelic figure protecting every single US-soldier mirroring the simplistic morale matrix Kyle's father preached at the dinner table: In one of the very first scenes, he tells his young son that there are only three types of people: Sheep, wolves, and sheep dogs. The first do not know how to protect themselves, while the wolves "use violence to prey on the weak. [...] And then there are those who are blessed with the gift of aggression and the overpowering need to protect the flock." (0:05) Despite the peculiar choice of words hinting at a criticism of this seemingly outdated notion of masculinity (McDonald, 2015: 100), the whole movie is framed by this very speech. Not only do we hear it just five minutes into the movie, making it an essential tool to understand AS as a whole, but the idea of an "overpowering need to protect" appears to be at the core of Kyle's trauma. Though, at first, he seems to be hesitant and slightly regretful of his actions (highly gendered by the only deaths of a woman and a child to illustrate this point (0:26-0:28)), cinematic Kyle is not traumatized because of the lives he takes but because of the ones he cannot save. And here, the second visualization strategy comes into play: As I have mentioned earlier, the ambiguity of the situation in Iraq is radically downplayed. To highlight this, nearly every death of an US-American soldier can be traced to one totally othered and muted sniper

called Mustafa, thereby somewhat structuring the narrative by Kyle's encounters with him, as I will elaborate in the following section.

Working through vengeance and acting out repetitions

Considering Robert Eaglestone's stance (2014) to put the "structure of experience" at the very heart of trauma theory (17), "the inherently narrative form of" texts dealing with traumatic experiences "must acknowledge this in different kinds of temporal disruption." (Luckhurst, 2008: 88) Therefore, according to Roger Luckhurst, traumatic texts can be considered "anti-narrative" by design while, at the same time, "generat[ing] the manic production of retrospective narratives" to react to the "challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge." (79) Thus, the manner how the narrative is structured is a major factor in the reaction to trauma and, as we will see, its gendering. Not only does the inclusion of the film-only sniper Mustafa "provide[…] a link between the different action scenes" and a "dramatically satisfying explanation of why Kyle keeps re-enlisting despite his wife and children" (McDonald, 2015: 100), but his presence also structures the experience of trauma, thereby tackling the loss of "all sense of meaningful personal narrative" (Shay, 2003: 180) that is so typical for PTSD.

Introduced by a comrade wondering about "this one sniper that's been hitting headshots from 500 yards out" (0:25), we see Mustafa constantly watching the troops, taking shots at them (0:31; 0:44-0:48), or in contact with enemy information networks (1:09). Every time someone jokes about his involvement in a situation, the camera makes sure to prove them right (1:16-1:17). One could argue that he is a figment of Kyle's imagination, the personification of the enemy to cope with trauma – especially considering that one superior officer told Kyle and his colleagues that the enemy sniper "can be whoever the fuck you need him to be" (1:33). Although this is somewhat contradicted by the presence of Mustafa on an Islamist television channel Kyle watches while being stateside (0:54), this image could be read as just another aspect of

this traumatic fixation due to Kyle staring at a switched off TV on another occasion (1:50). Either way, the structure of the narrative is mostly informed by the presence of Mustafa as the personification of danger lurking over his colleagues' heads – and this is especially true for Mustafa's death.

When two of his closest friends are killed by the sniper, Kyle decides to volunteer for a fourth and last tour (1:29). Because the only actual mission of this tour we experience is the one to kill Mustafa, the tour is directly linked to the compulsive need to avenge his fallen allies, thereby evoking associations to the "berserk state" defined by Shay (2003).

> During berserk rage, the [lost] friend is constantly alive; letting go of the rage lets him die. In addition to reviving the dead, revenge denies helplessness, keeps faith with the dead, and affirms that there is still justice in the world, even if this is manifested only in the survivor's random vengeance. (90)

Despite being a "militarily desirable consequence" (200) because the state often leads to volunteering and lowering one's threshold for violence, Shay calls it "ruinous" for the psyche, drastically changing it forever (98). Nevertheless, AS does not construct the killing of Mustafa as a "random [act of] vengeance", but as an important turning point of Kyle's trauma, putting it in a positive light. By staging it as an impossible shot while being cheered on by the last surviving member of Kyle's original unit, the film fetishizes the "hyperalert" nature of the "berserk state" that enables him "to see even the smallest novelty in the environment" (93). Though the audience cannot see the target that is "2.100 yards out" and even his comrades are questioning his sight ("[H]e can't even see that far out." (1:38)), the film makes sure to prove him right: A tiny glint can be glimpsed followed by a reverse shot of Mustafa to disperse any doubts. The scene even ends with a digital bullet traveling above the rooftops in slow-motion (1:39-1:40), hence visualising the death in a spectacularized manner not seen before.

Instead of merely imagining the inflicted justice, as Shay suggests, Mustafa's death is not just staged as a righteous kill, but as the suspenseful climax of the movie, so that Kyle can literally leave his rifle and his traumatic fixation (symbolized by Mustafa's corpse) behind in the devastating sandstorm following (1:47). By focussing on this highly gendered response to trauma and fetishizing it, the scene reminds one of Claire Sisco King's (2012) definition of trauma as "an experience that appears to belong only to men and to require the efforts of men to undo." (107) So, albeit Kyle will not be able to hang this specific "masculine rifle [...] on the wall above the feminine hearth", he works through his trauma in the vein of the Western narrative described by Richard Slotkin (1974). By gendering front(ier) and home, there is the necessity to engage in a dialectic relationship with the other, who the hunter / sniper will only come to know "in the act of destroying him. [...] With [his] vanishment, the dialectic of the hero's history ends" (563-564). Though, afterwards, Kyle still suffers from some symptoms (1:49-1:51), Mustafa's death is staged as an important turning point: Immediately after his kill and still on the battlefield, Kyle calls his wife (1:44), accepting his "voluntary exile" at "the feminine hearth" (Slotkin, 1974: 563-564). Just a few minutes later, for the first time, Kyle finds himself in a psychiatrist's office discussing his failure in rescuing everybody. As a solution, the psychiatrist suggests talking to other patients and, one moment later, we find him chatting with new-found friends who he "rescues" by serving as their role model (1:52-1:55). The trauma is overcome by reutilizing this fatal rescue wish he has been fixated on since the very beginning of the film at the home front.

Therefore, the movie and by extension the shown trauma are structured by a clear definition of beginning (his father's formulation of the "overpowering need to protect"), middle (being traumatized by the conjunction of this compulsive need and being unable to fulfill it) and ending (destroying the personification of danger and reutilizing this fixated idea in his transition into civilian life). That way, the movie is akin to representatives of traumatic cinema during the period of classical cinema as described by Anna Martinetz in her historiographical study on

cinematic representation of war trauma. According to her, the pictures of this period "are shaped by an excessively obvious narrative style" to stress the causality of trauma and the possibility of its cure (Martinetz, 2012: 59). By arranging its narration in a chronological order (except for Kyle's first shot which literally "triggers" the major flashback portion), the explicitly structured experience of trauma is further emphasized in order to favour the notion of working through trauma along the lines of "curative time", thereby reproducing compulsory able-mindedness (Kafer, 2013: 27, 34). After working through it, it is done. There is no traumatic part left. Before the movie ends with Kyle's abrupt death, the film states, loud and clear, that he is obviously healed by showcasing him being a supporting comrade, a loving father, and a sexually active husband. These are all signs of him retrieving the pleasure principle and thereby returning to hegemonic masculinity in the interdependency of heteronormativity and compulsory able-mindedness (16-17). But ultimately, his death seals the deal. Not only does it showcase "Hollywood's fixation on the traumatic suffering and ritualized destruction of (mostly) white male bodies" (King, 2012: 2), but it allows AS to clearly end the narrative and get rid of any ambiguity regarding his remaining trauma.

In contrast, HURT is more obviously related to the "structure of traumatic experience" as described by Cathy Caruth (1995). According to her, the traumatic "event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it." (4; my emphasis) While one might interpret HURT's narrative structure as "the aimlessness of the invasion and occupation, and the circular, endless, and ultimately impossible task of imposing order" (Westwell, 2011: 23), I would like to suggest an interpretation that links this structure more closely to James' traumatic experience. Though there is an obvious arc of suspense, the film itself is structured by the constant recurrence of IED defusing scenes. While at first, the film seems to be formally structured by the days left in Iraq (starting off at 38 (0:13)), thereby implying an upcoming ending of tour and movie, HURT ends with James going back to Iraq for another cycle and starting the

countdown over, thereby mimicking his compulsive repetition and the "timeless" experience of trauma. At the end, while James speaks to his infant son and tries to explain his own fixation by using a jack-in-the-box (2:00-2:01), the movie clearly references the Fort-Da-Spiel (Gone-There-Game), Sigmund Freud's (2000) prime example to define compulsive repetition in Jenseits des Lustprinzips (Beyond the Pleasure Principle): After witnessing a one-and-a-half-year-old-boy throwing a wooden reel away and reclaiming it coinciding with his joyful exclamation fort (gone) and da (there), respectively, Freud interprets the compulsive need to repeat a traumatic event (here, the process of individuation) as an opportunity to regain an active role in an event one, otherwise, only experienced in a passive manner (224-227). Similarly, James is obsessed with objects "that almost killed" him. He collects these in a box because he is fixated on the idea of "hold[ing] something in" one's "hand that could have killed anyone" (1:13), including himself, thereby mirroring the joyful play with the wooden reel to gain an active role in the traumatic event. This link becomes even stronger if one considers that the boy's reaction in Freud's example is not just directed at his individuation but also at his father leaving for war (226). To quote Dori Laub: "The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after." (Laub, 1992: 69) In this respect, James' (re)actions are more akin to acting out than working through, by definition, a cycle one cannot easily (if at all) escape.

At one point, HURT's narrative structure seems to shift focus away from the repetitive nature of IED disposals towards a more straightforward, gendered revenge plot akin to AS. After stumbling upon the corpse of an Iraqi boy he recognizes as the one he used to play soccer with (1:21), he tries to find the culprits. In this instance, James performs the script of hardened masculinity projected on him from the very beginning. At first, he forces a man to take him to the boy's parents at gunpoint, then he breaks into the home of the supposed parents (1:31-32), and, finally, he orders his unit into pitch-black darkness in the hopes of finding the perpetrators of a massive explosion he could not prevent (1:40-41). Nevertheless, in all cases, he fails to perform this particular

kind of masculinity. The innocent man takes him to a random house (1:32); there, he begins stuttering and bangs his head while escaping an Iraqi woman – aside from James' wife, the only other female speaking part in the film – who is rightfully furious with the intruder (1:33-1:34); and the search for perpetrators ends with Eldridge being shot in the leg (1:44). Although Barker describes the revenge scene(s) in a positive light (Barker, 2011a: 40), he misses the mix-up, that is at the core of this plot line: James mistakes the corpse for the Iraqi boy he knows. The revelation of him being alive (1:46) undercuts the importance of the cinematic trope of US-soldiers playing with Iraqi boys (Krewani, 2011a: 172) because, to James at least, they are interchangeable, making the vengeance during berserk rage truly random (Shay, 2003: 90). He can act as if he feels a deep connection to the boy and he can even try to avenge him, but this rings hollow because, as James states in his final conversation with his son, there is only one thing left he "really love[s]" (2:01). In contrast to AS, berserking does not lead James back to the pleasure principle but highlights his incapability to do so. In their account of cinematic portrayal of war trauma, Rebeca Maseda and Patrick Dulin (2012) praise the positive images of veterans' own "desire for reintegration into society." Most Iraq War movies "do not show veterans as outcasts [anymore] but as community members going back to their families" but, of course, "[w]ith the exception of The Hurt Locker" (21). By constructing the trauma in the vein of compulsive repetition, HURT cannot be included in today's trauma discourse due to its lack of a supposedly soft masculinity showing compassion for others, even though James' hardened masculinity is a blatant symptom of acting out trauma.

Conclusion

To address the complex relationship between gendered codes, the legitimate understanding of trauma and its portrayal, this paper analyzed how legitimized trauma representations are directly informed by hegemonic masculinity. Although both AS and HURT construct a traumatized masculinity that embodies the very self-

efficiency excluded from most other accounts of trauma, only Kyle is legitimized and widely accepted as a traumatized subject. By focussing on his love and compulsive need to rescue as the core of his traumatization, he shows a soft side that does not just allow him to occupy the position of traumatized but gives him the opportunity of a gender appropriate reaction to it (revenge), thereby overcoming his trauma ("curative time") and reinstating his hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, James is not recognized as traumatized and vulnerable subject because of the very reaction he has to trauma. By re-framing this behaviour in masculinizing narratives of hardened masculinity (stoicism, thrill-seeking, violent), such a reading easily obscures his self-destructive tendencies. Thus, the trauma definition shown in HURT is excluded from trauma discourse due to it not fitting its gendered dimension, banned to "the space of a wild exteriority", to refer to Foucault (1981: 61): a place where "truths" can be spoken, but do not have any impact on the discourse. In this way, James becomes the "wild man" he was never intended to be.

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