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Cinema and society interact. This given becomes fascinating when socio-politically sensitive issues are adapted in films that confront spectators with the frames of reference they use to make sense of society.

This thesis studies how North-American and European films depict political torture in the context of the 'War on Terror'. It starts from the debate that was held in the political and public domain concerning the 'actual' torture of suspects of terrorist activities, and analyses political torture in film as a fictionalised, stylised form of such violence. In this way, it shows how public debates, politics, and art convene in cinema to engage with contemporary realities we, as societies, find difficult to witness and process.

The analyses focus on War on Terror films made between 2004 and 2012. All of these films share a Western, heterogeneous, yet ethnocentric perspective on the War on Terror, including the role of torture and Muslim otherness. They incorporate ethical, political, and moral questions about the use of political torture, while addressing the West's share in the geopolitics of the War on Terror.

Ultimately, contributions are made to the fields of film narratology and cultural theory, as well as to current debates about the role of cinema in society: cinema as art object, as commercial artifice, and as commentary on socio-politically sensitive issues.

SCREENING THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

Odile Bodde

SCREENING THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

The Politics and Aesthetics of Torture
in American and European Cinema

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