- Chapter 3 -

The veteran as culprit, and PTSD in *The Mark of Cain* and *Brødre/Brothers*

Introduction

In *Zero Dark Thirty* and in *Unthinkable*, the protagonists were in some way complicit in interrogational torture as part of a ticking bomb situation. The interrogated and tortured victims were Muslim detainees, and the experience of torture was limited in that the role-play between torturer and tortured had to effectuate the latter's eventual breakdown. In the second chapter the *experience* of being tortured is investigated by analysing films in which the roles of CIA agent and Muslim are reversed; in *Syriana* and *Body of Lies*, the torture inflicted by Islamic fundamentalists occurred within a broader, geopolitical context in which torture is used as a punitive method for Western political and economic interventions.

The films in this chapter, the British production *The Mark of Cain* (Marc Munden, script Tony Marchant, 2008), the Danish film *Brødre* (*Brothers*, Susanne Bier, 2004)[102] and its American adaptation *Brothers* (Jim Sheridan, 2009), move away from the geopolitical stage to domestic spheres. In these films, the occurrence as well as the experience of being tortured is made secondary to torture's aftermath and to personal trauma. In these three narratives the protagonists are, to various degrees, forced to torture during warfare – which becomes a form of torture in its own right – and experience the consequences of their actions through post-traumatic stress as veterans.

In recent years, film and cultural studies have begun to research the representation of the war veteran in film and the consequences of the intervention in the Middle East for soldiers, as well as for Western and Middle-Eastern societies. The appearance of War on Terror veteran

[102] Since *Brødre* translates to 'brothers', the original title will be used when discussing the Danish version to avoid confusion with the American adaptation.

films roughly coincided with the withdrawal of troops from Iraq in 2007/2008. Unlike the considerable number of films about war veterans that came out soon after the end of the Vietnam War,[103] recent War on Terror war veteran films[104] are not nearly as popular as those made about Vietnam War veterans made at the time.[105]

The difference in how the two wars are represented can be explained by the long timespan of the Vietnam War, for which public support radically toppled after the My Lai Massacre in 1968, which officially ended only after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Shortly after, films began to critically evaluate the war and to illustrate the damaging effects for the soldiers' mental stability (Klein 26). The official integration of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a clinical pathological mental disorder into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1980 might have reinforced the realization of warfare's side effects (Lockhurst 59-76). The War on Terror has similarly led to films accentuating, as Robert Burgoyne argues, the eerie "haunting of the present by the past", in which veterans try to cope with the traumatic experience of the War on Terror (2010, 165). At the same time, the War on Terror signifies not only an actual or material war but also a rhetorical and conceptual one. The revolutionary movement that became known as the Arab Spring in late 2010 and early 2011, and its after effects that continue today, does not exclude possible interventions in the Middle East and has not entirely exorcized the 'War on Terror' spectre. Emmett Early argues that the audience does not seem "ready" for themes pertaining to the veteran that point out the negative long-term consequences of war, as the debate about military interventions is a continuous one (2014, 20, 24). At the same time, the unpopularity of most of these veteran films could also be due to the great number of War on Terror films released within

[103] Vietnam War films include *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978), *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1979), *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976).
[104] War on Terror veteran films include *Home of the Brave* (Irwin Winkler, 2006), *Badland* (Francesco Lucente, 2007), *In The Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007), *Stop-Loss* (Kimberly Peirce, 2008), *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008), and *The Veteran* (Matthew Hope, 2011).
[105] For the financial success of all films mentioned here, see Markert (212).

the last several years and their varying quality.[106] This, however, remains speculative.

Jeanie Elenor Gosline attributes another cause to the current unpopularity of War on Terror veteran films, which she relates to the parallel that lurks between War on Terror and Vietnam veterans. About the latter category, Gosline writes that the portrayal of veteran soldiers as vulnerable and traumatised was prominent after the Vietnam War and these films were infused with both hopelessness as well as anger towards the war and the military. Soldiers were presented as "liable to commit acts of horror and cowardliness and also acts of bravery and compassion. Sometimes the same character would act in both ways in the same movie" (94). An analogy with this negative image – the morally and emotionally unstable veteran and disillusioned patriots whose representations are "trapped in clichés" (95) – suggests that the particular unpopularity for similar Iraq veteran films could stem from public fear that the well-known trauma experienced by Vietnam veterans is currently being repeated in the current generation of soldiers (94-95).

Although many films have tackled the figure of the Iraq/Afghanistan war veteran and the consequences of active combat, few films have depicted the manifestation of PTSD in relation to torture.[107] What makes *The Mark of Cain* and *Brødre*/*Brothers* important for this study is that they also depict the consequences to bodies and minds after *having performed* torture. The films can be seen as a subcategory of War on Terror veteran cinema; their combination of the manifestation of

[106] In the 60s and 70s American Vietnam War films were released approximately once a year, increasing to several a year in the late 80s and early 90s. To compare, in 2007/2008 alone over a dozen War on Terror films were released, yet this number decreased in the years following. Moviegoers could be suffering from a "Iraq overdose" (Robert Greenwald quoted in Gosline 89), not only because of the number of feature films, but because of the unprecedented use of social, and other, media outlets.

[107] Notably two films, the small productions *The War Within* (Joseph Castelo, 2005) and *Five Years* (*Fünf Jahre Leben*, Stefan Schaller, 2013) depict the consequences of having *been* tortured during the War on Terror, which is a rare theme.

trauma and having tortured muddies the categories of perpetrator and victim.

With the analysis of *The Mark of Cain*, *Brødre¸* and *Brothers* a different focus comes into view; the films do not revolve around global or national political interests and terrorism, but around the personal costs and psychological consequences of warfare for veterans and their families. The ways in which the films tackle the relation of PTSD to torture reveals the complex political and individual implications of issues of culpability and responsibility during warfare, but also concerning post-service integration and social safety nets. In *The Mark of Cain*, which is based on real events, a British military unit tortures Iraqi detainees in Basra. The two youngest members of the unit, Mark and Shane, are scapegoated to save their superiors' skin. In *Brødre*/*Brothers*, a soldier is forced to beat his fellow soldier to death during his captivity by the Taliban. In all films, the protagonists suffer greatly from their actions after they have returned home.

This chapter investigates what this shift in focus means for the way in which torture is brought onto the screen and incorporated into the plot. In particular, it analyses the films' accent on the politically sensitive topics of social pressure and individual versus collective culpability for torture inflicted during active combat. By extension of this line of inquiry, the ways in which these films present a critique of the War on Terror through their depictions of warfare and the use of torture will be investigated. By accentuating the personal psychological turbulence, it is assumed, the films give shape to another form of political criticism.

Secondly, this chapter explores the extent to which the protagonists' actions and their trauma invite the spectator to identify with them, although they fuse the positions of culprit and victim. Further, I investigate whether identification with the protagonists facilitates an understanding of the moral decisions made and actions undertaken as a consequence of torture, and, in turn, whether the way in which moral decisions are presented allows identification with the protagonists. This line of investigation relates to the way in which PTSD is portrayed by the three narratives. Therefore, whether and how

trauma is presented differently in each film, how trauma is represented by narrative techniques and formal means, and thereby the un/representability of trauma, is examined.

Firstly, I explain how the protagonists in *The Mark of Cain* are brought to torture others, and how this torture scene is framed stylistically and narratively as part of the plot.

1. Peer-pressure and torture in *The Mark of Cain*

The plot of *The Mark of Cain* hinges on two protagonists, eighteen-year-olds Mark Tate and Shane Gulliver, who grew up in the same English village. They are stationed in Basra (Iraq) in 2003 as part of an operation during the War on Terror. The unit is stationed as a peacekeeping unit that has come, as one of their Colonels tells them, "with respect for the civilians. Anyone who needlessly kills or violates an Iraqi, will have the mark of Cain upon them". Despite the mission's peacekeeping nature, the men end up participating in the torture of Iraqi men suspected of carrying out a guerrilla attack on the soldiers' unit. While the detainees are held captive and tortured, several photographs are taken by Shane and later made public by his girlfriend. Mark and Shane are the only two who are tried, and are essentially sacrificed to save their superiors' job and rank. The course of events proves to be destructive to the young men's careers, and moreover, the guilt of being complicit in acts of torture causes Mark to commit suicide.

The depiction of torture is cut into two coherent fragments which take up less than ten minutes of the film's screen time, as well as through fragmented shots interspersed throughout the story. Unlike, for instance, *Zero Dark Thirty*'s torture of Ammar as a delineated plot segment, the scenes of torture in *The Mark of Cain* become a red thread and obtain a crucial position throughout the duration of the film's actual screen time as well as the film's semantic, narrative time. The first fragment takes place between Mark, Shane, a third unnamed soldier, and two detainees in a small prison cell. This scene ends abruptly and is unfinished until the final scenes of the film when Shane provides details of the torture episode as part of an official courtroom account and allows the spectator to reconstruct events. In order to

produce a chronologically-coherent reconstruction of the torture scenes and to locate their function in the plot I will first scrutinise them and explain how they are presented to the viewer.

Setting the stage

The first scene of abuse is simultaneous to the short opening scene of the film, which commences with a shot of a run-down, badly-lit prison cell with blue-grey concrete walls and floor. This light casts strong shadows in the room that foretell the troubling events to come. Five dark silhouettes walk into the frame from behind the camera and become the focus of attention. Three soldiers, Mark, Shane, and another unnamed soldier, drag two handcuffed detainees with bags over their heads into the room. The camera moves in a tracking shot as the soldiers position the detainees and themselves in the cell. The detainees are forced to sit on the floor, opposite each other, with their backs against the right and left walls. Only the accelerated and irregular breathing of the detainees and the shuffling of feet and bodies are heard. The next shot frames Mark in close-up profile as he catches the light from above. When the shot cuts to his front his face in close-up reveals anxiety or anticipation as he looks down at the detainees first, then up to his right, where Shane is positioned. In the background, the unnamed soldier grins and walks away. A re-establishing shot from the entrance of the cell frames the two soldiers from behind: they have sweaty bare arms and wear dark tank tops and look down at the detainees on the ground, who wear white tank tops and white plastic sandbags over their heads.

Shane then looks at Mark and asks him to, "Bring them on, right?" and in one movement pulls the two bags from the detainees' heads with both hands. He starts laughing at the detainees, who look around puzzled, and addresses Mark and the detainees by joking "Hey! It's Ant and Dec!"[108]. The camera frames the left detainee in close-up and pans to the right detainee, as they sit with their heads bowed behind the two soldiers. Within the same shot Shane quickly lowers

[108] Shane here refers to Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly, a British comedy and presenting duo known as Ant & Dec.

himself down to the detainee on the right and suddenly shouts in his face, "Cunts!" The camera cuts to a shot of the empty hall, where Shane's voice loudly echoes. In total, this scene is less than a minute long.

The way in which this scene is arranged implies an external narrator who frames the situation. However, the external narrator seems to adjust or conform him or herself to the view of the protagonists by giving a hectic, fragmented account while emphasizing Mark's inner turbulence. The alternation of a shot of the back of Mark's head with a close-up of his anxious facial expressions suggests that the external narrator expresses Mark's experience; although these shot are not Mark's subjective shots, they match his interpretation of the scene.[109]

The scene that follows the scene in the cell marks a jump in time and space. In the next shot Shane, flanked by two soldiers, approaches the camera while marching in a courtyard. These shots alternate with several shots in which a military official proclaims that "this was an appalling and revolting episode which completely contravenes the very high standards of the British army". This shot cuts back to the three marching men, which is now infused with former Prime Minister Tony Blair's off-screen voice, and then alternated with a shot of Blair on television stating the case will be investigated, that this was only a minority and that the overwhelming majority of British soldiers is doing an excellent job. The military official in another shot then continues, "I think and hope that the people of Iraq will appreciate that in bringing about this prosecution, that we will never tolerate this kind of action in any form or shape. But hopefully, lessons have been learned, the guilty have been punished, and a line can now be drawn". The parallel editing of these scenes suggests that the official statements relate to Shane, who is guarded by two soldiers. Since the shots of Shane marching follow the scene in the prison cell it is also suggested that Blair's statements provide a judgement of the previous scene.

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[109] See Verstraten on the discrepancy between external focalisation and internal focalisation, or external focalisation communicating a character's subjective perception or vision (2009, 109-111).

Moreover, by incorporating the footage in which Tony Blair appears on the news and makes a statement, the film suggests that the scene in the prison cell is based on real events. More importantly, showing Blair so early in the plot implies that it is *important* that the spectator realizes the film makes a reference to a real situation. Within the first five minutes, the film thus provides a frame for how to perceive the scenes in the cell (ostensibly 'through' Mark, and with the condemnation of the former prime minister), without providing contextual information about the situation.

Few cues concerning Mark and Shane's positions and states of mind during the opening scene are provided, but are sufficient enough to determine a sense of anxiety and anticipation in Mark. His glance towards Shane fixes Mark's participation in the events, and simultaneously suggests Mark's concern and uncertainty. Mark waits for Shane, who presents himself as more confident and dominant than Mark, to take the lead. Although the prison scene ends abruptly, the spectator is led to guess the nature of the "appalling and revolting episode" and to assume that it will feature prominently in the plot. The formation that is missing concerning this scene is only filled in near the end of the narrative in the form of Shane's official statement before the military tribunal. The story develops between these scenes, but before I return to the second part of this scene, it is necessary to touch upon these developments in order to grasp the significance of the final part of the scene.

Establishing the motivations for torture

During a regular patrol the unit is ambushed by civilian insurgents. While trying to save a private their captain is killed by a projectile. Upon receiving information about the insurgent's whereabouts shortly after, the men's new superior, Corporal Gant, gives the command to search a village and 'detain' potential suspects 'vigorously'. In a subsequent panning shot that frames several cells next to one another, six Iraqi men on their knees with bags over their heads are held prisoner. While waiting for further orders, the soldiers become vexed. In his anger over the death of their captain and his frustration of having

to wait, their colonel begins to wonder why Saddam Hussein assassinated 200 men within 15 hours in the Abu Ghraib prison, and why they are not allowed to question six men that are suspected for killing Americans. This line of reasoning, fuelled by anger and pent-up frustration, motivates him to 'question' the detainees while stimulating his soldiers to join.

Instead of following the men, Mark tells Shane that he does not see the point. Shane responds, "You can't just walk away from it. […] Walking away from those who did it is like… as if you don't care". When Mark answers, "This isn't compulsory", Shane replies by pressuring Mark into participating: "It's what's expected of you", and continues, "These are insurgents, terrorists. If you don't go back there, and put yourself in it, then no one's gonna trust you again. If you walk away from this, it will be the same as deserting". After weighing the consequences of his refusal, Mark reluctantly follows Shane inside. At the entrance of the building they ask their corporal if they "can have a go". He responds by sarcastically asking, "What am I, the Red Cross? Get in".

Instead of showing Mark and Shane going in, the next shot frames the empty, barely-lit hall, where off-screen shouts are faintly heard. The shot cuts to the following scene, in which Shane, Mark, and their corporal carry a beaten and unconscious man with a swollen and blood-stained face outside into the first light of day. As Mark and Shane entered the building in the dark, this cut suggests a jump in time. With stern faces, they put the detainee in the back of a truck, while their corporal pats them on the back and tells them they are "good lads".

This void in events is only temporarily, but before the spectator is provided with all cues to fill in the narrative gaps, the soldiers return home. Shane proudly shows some pictures taken in Iraq to his girlfriend Shelley, but they are not shown to the spectator. Shelly becomes increasingly ambivalent about what she sees, and the nature of the photos' content is suggested through Shelley's surprised comments, "Why does that one have a shoe in his mouth?". During one of the soldiers' welcome home parties shortly after, Shane and his girlfriend have a fight, after which Shane takes another girl home instead. When

Shelley finds out about this affair, she takes revenge by calling the police about the existence of Shane's photographs. When Mark and Shane appear to be the only ones identifiable on the photos (which the spectator has still not seen) they are court-martialled. The missing information concerning the nature of the events is then presented through Shane's account in court.

The court case: Filling in the gaps

The second part of the opening scene in the prison cell starts with a shot of the abandoned and badly-lit hall with which the first part of the scene ended. The dark blue-green colour filter used for the shots of the hall and cell provides a formal unity between the fragments of the prison cell and ratifies the disturbing atmosphere of the space. The colour pattern returns systematically in shots of the military and their base camp. The grimness established by the colours and the use of light in the torture scenes contrasts with the brighter colours used to shoot scenes in the UK and locations in Iraq outside the military camp.

Whereas the first part of the scene ended with Shane's shout ("Cunts!") resounding in the hall, this first shot of the second part of the scene is exactly the same but without the shout. This second part precedes the events in the cell, and the shot of the hall functions as an ellipsis by continuing the scene where the first part ended. The opening scene is reconstructed but with minor alterations, predominantly using different angles to frame Mark, Shane, and the detainees. A close-up of Mark presents him centrally and from behind, a repetition of the shot in the previous part of the scene. This time Mark folds his arms behind his head. The new part of the scene continues where the first part of the film ended – with Shane cursing in the detainees' faces ("Cunts!").

Shane then moves towards the right detainee on the floor, and unzips his pants. He looks to his right and in a point-of-view shot the third soldier on watch, who helped bring in the detainees, is seen laughing, averting his eyes and cursing. The next shot presents a close-up of the detainee, which is partly obstructed by Shane standing in front of him. Shane starts peeing on the detainee while repeatedly singing, "Who are you?", with all soldiers laughing. The frame tilts down to

display the detainee's lap and cuffed hands where Shane urinates. The next shots alternate between a cut in which Mark is shown copying Shane's action and similarly urinates on 'his' detainee on the left, and the laughing third soldier again.

The camera cuts and shows how Shane leans close to the detainees' faces, while he asks them, "Not so rebellious now?" and "Terror? I'll show you terror". He suddenly punches a detainee in the face off-screen. A close-up shows the third laughing soldier who further encourages Shane, and in the next shot Shane continues beating the detainee's off-screen face. In the following scenes the blows and punches are mostly implied through the sounds of beating rather than visually framed. Shane and the third soldier encourage Mark to 'do his' too and in a sequence of shots Mark is encouraged and starts hitting the detainee, who is similarly obscured from sight as he collects the punches. In these shots Mark is made central by alternatingly framing him from behind while punching, and in close-up when finished.

The next shot presents the back of Mark's head, and again, it is slightly different from the previous shots. Mark now folds his arms behind his head, which, when his facial expressions are revealed in a reverse shot, becomes a motion expressing anticipation and anxiety. Shane's off-screen voice, suddenly invading the frame, demands that the detainees "now kiss each other". The camera tilts down while Shane pulls the head coverings off the two detainees at the same time and forces them to "snog" each other. The camera cuts to the third soldier and back to a frontal close-up of Mark, both now laughing. Meanwhile, faint shouts in adjacent areas are perceptible. Shane stands up, laughs, looks around, approaches the two detainees, and in a re-establishing shot of the cell Shane pulls the left detainee towards the right detainee, who is made to stand up. His lip is slightly bloodied because of the beating. Shane pulls the detainee against the legs of the right detainee while demanding he reveal the other detainee's genitals. The camera cuts again to the laughing third soldier, then back to Shane pulling down the pants of the right detainee, thereby exposing the man's genitals. Mark, disturbed, shakes his head in disagreement. Shane does not understand Mark's hesitancy, and asks him, "Because it's against

their religion? That's why we should do it, man." In the background the right detainee is made to stand against the wall, looks up shaking, and softly mumbles what seems to be a prayer. Shane pulls the left detainee's head towards the other's exposed genitals to have them simulate sex acts. The cell's light source reflects on the right detainee and Mark's back and accentuates their presence in the room.

Shane urges Mark to hold the detainee's head, but Mark, framed frontally, is disgusted: he no longer wants to cooperate and states that they are going too far. The third soldier, in close-up, suggests that he will do it, if Mark is too much of a "pussy". In a reverse shot Shane says to Mark, "He's not too pussy, are you Mark?" Mark looks at both soldiers hesitantly, capitulates, and moves towards the detainees, saying "Let's go on with it". A re-establishing shot positions Mark on the right as he holds the left detainee's head down and pushes his face towards the other detainee's genitals. Mark looks right, towards Shane, and in the shots that quickly succeed each other, a point-of-view shot frames Shane taking a picture of Mark, the third soldier watching them, and Mark as he pushes the left detainee's face into the right detainee's genitals, which are now obscured by the right detainee's legs. This quick cutting sequence repeats itself, so that Mark, posing, Shane, taking pictures, and the laughing third soldier are presented as mutually complicit in the event. A close-up of the right detainee accentuates his blank eyes while in front Mark and Shane look at the pictures that were taken. Their heads are out of focus, which keeps the spectator's attention on the shocked detainee in the background. At this point, Shane's narrating voice returns, and in the next cut Shane stands in front of the military tribunal, in another time and space, as he describes the events in the cell. Although Shane's account does not finish here, I will use this cut to reflect on the scene just described before moving to the final episode and the implications of the soldiers' acts.

The nature of torture

Although the spectator now knows that the scene recounted by Shane is a continuation of the first scene of the film, his story has neither

accounted for the unconscious and blood-stained detainee who is carried outside and put into a truck, nor for the four remaining detainees with bags over their heads who were framed previously (together with the two abused by Mark and Shane this makes six detainees in total). What is presented in these brief scenes, however, is the motivation for the detainees' imprisonment and the nature of the torture inflicted on them. The discussion between Mark and Shane about Mark's reluctance to 'question' the detainees in the courtyard precedes the scene in the prison cell. Weighing the two options – deserting or abusing – Mark opts for the latter and goes inside, which accounts for the anxiety and aversion Mark seems to feel in the prison cells. Obviously, refusing is not the same as deserting, but Shane's pressure on Mark suggests Shane's dominance and upper hand in their friendship.

The spectator has come to realize that the detainees were not 'questioned' by Mark and Shane, but abused. Further, Mark and Shane's acts are spurred by their corporal's frustration and pressure into participating. Instead of handing them over to the Military Police, the unit's casualties become an excuse for torture, and vice versa, the torture becomes a justification for the unit's casualties.

As in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Unthinkable*, the prison blocks (although not necessarily designed as prisons), become an 'exceptional' and extra-legal space (Agamben 2005, 23), in which the detainees' legal rights are discarded. The space's 'exceptionality' is not fuelled by the emergency of a ticking bomb situation or by interrogations. By putting bags over their heads, the detainees are disoriented and not only treated like inferior humans, but also produced as inferior. Additionally, the prison cell becomes a stage for 'performing' a role-play that sets the soldiers and detainees in antagonistic positions (McKenzie 342-343). With less screen time than in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Unthinkable*, the soldiers' role-play – in terms of a development in 'plot' and 'character' – is confined to only a few minutes.

Mark and Shane's torture is not covered up by a covert motivation of retrieving information, but is carried out for sheer pleasure and opportunity. Instead of using and abusing the detainees'

emotions and rationality to break them, the soldiers do not dialogue with or interrogate the detainees. Shane becomes the instigator and 'director' of the role-play, in which he exploits the liberty to enhance his dominance by degrading the detainees. Not only do the soldiers not converse with the detainees, they remain blind to their facial expressions of shock and horror. By ignoring their faces, as Judith Butler contends, the detainees' precariousness and defencelessness is ignored as is the ethical demand made by and stemming from their faces. In their turn, the detainees do not actively appeal or talk to Mark and Shane or resist in any way.[110] Yet with this deliberate blindness, which ignores the detainees' expressiveness, the soldiers ignore the detainees' subjectivity. In this sense, the role-play consists of one-way communication, with Mark and Shane positioning the detainees like puppets.

Shane believes that the detainees are 'insurgents' and 'terrorists', thereby implying that the soldiers have the right to molest them. Mark, however, is not fully persuaded, not necessarily because he is not convinced of the detainees' status as terrorists, but because he is not convinced this gives the soldiers the right to molest them. Whereas Shane refuses to see these men as humans, Mark's initial refusal to participate implies that he thinks otherwise. By cooperating, Mark seems to temporarily dismiss their traces of humanity, but his hesitancy when asked to participate in sexual abuse indicates that Mark never ceases to see the detainees as human. This impossibility of reducing them to inferiors will be, as I will explain later, crucial for Mark's development of PTSD. In what is assumed to be one of Mark's involuntary flashbacks later in the film, a close-up of the face of the

[110] Butler appropriates Levinas' analysis of the face of the Other. Although the face cannot speak like the mouth, it nonetheless always formulates an address and 'we'/'I' are ethically required to respond. Butler views this ethical relationship in light of the unrepresentability (and consequently the dehumanization) of detainees and proclaimed terrorists in the media, such as the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. This notion relates to feature film too: in *Zero Dark Thirty* Osama bin Laden' face was only framed for Maya when she identifies him. Reducing some people as unable to be conceptualized (as humans as well as in terms of representations) facilitates committing crimes against them. In *Unthinkable*, Yusuf pointed to this conceptualization or (un)frameability of lives. (2002, 40, 55-56 and 2009, 1-32).

detainee who was beaten into a coma reappears. This flashback presents the shot the spectator saw during the sexual simulations but was previously ignored by Mark and Shane, which suggests that Mark did see the shock and horror on the faces of the detainees. This shot is, again, external narration translating Mark's subjective vision to the spectator; through editing we know Mark did not consciously 'see' these faces before, but this fragment asserts that he did in fact see them.

Although ignored by Shane, and to an extent, by Mark, the spectator cannot ignore the detainees' faces. By framing and accentuating the detainees' faces in close-up and by making Mark and Shane's positions secondary by blurring them, the viewer is forced to contemplate the detainees' horror and humanness. Apart from framing the detainees (in close-ups), like Ammar in *Zero Dark Thirty*, they stand out through the use of light that reflects on their faces and white tank tops. Like Ammar's accentuated and central position in the torture scenes in *Zero Dark Thirty*, the aesthetic highlighting of the Iraqi detainees' incarcerated position contests their position of assumed inferior human being. Unlike Ammar's detention, the detainees are not suspected of a specific crime, but their potential co-operation with Iraqi terrorists is an argument for their imprisonment. The uncertainty concerning their crimes makes their 'claim' for intelligibility in the eyes of the viewer a legitimate one and further enhances their humanness. The soldiers' actions, rather than emphasizing their superiority, stress their self-righteousness and immaturity.

Shaming through sexual simulations

The false intimacy between Dan and Ammar, established through the breaching of Ammar's bodily integrity, is an inherent component to bodily abuse, as Appadurai notes (1998, 917). This forced intimacy becomes explicit in *The Mark of Cain*. In *Zero Dark Thirty* it is significant that Dan 'only' forces Ammar to undress himself in front of his female colleague as a tool to break Ammar. He did not force him into (or into the simulation of) sex acts, as do the soldiers in *The Mark of Cain*. The bare and sweaty arms of the detainees and soldiers underscore their corporeality and their shared 'erotic' simulation. The motivation for the

abuse is, however, not sexual in nature, but is revealed in Shane's argument that "It is against their religion, which is precisely why we should do it". This statement suggests that Shane considers the simulation of sex acts between men to be *even more* embarrassing and abusive in Muslim culture, in which manifestations of homosexual desire are taboo (McKenzie 344-347).

Shane's comment stresses that the sexual abuse inflicted affirms the conceptual distance between the soldiers and the detainees in terms of ethnicity and beliefs. As in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Unthinkable*, the detainees are punished and embarrassed for their inferior ethnic background. Penalizing them for this very background is used as a justification for torture, while the violence in turn reaffirms the detainees' diverging ethnicity. In *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Unthinkable*, however, the infliction of pain is a component of retrieving intelligence, and in *Syriana* and *Body of Lies* pain is inflicted as a form of punishment (also for Bob and Roger's ethnicity), occurring in tandem with a political game between torturer and tortured. In *The Mark of* Cain, the abuse is inflicted to punish and shame the detainee's for their Iraqi background, rather than their terrorist activities, for which the infliction of pain is secondary. Additionally, the detainees are "made responsible" (Sussman 4, 7) for their own abuse by their involuntary cooperation.

Although the simulation is between the detainees, the soldiers set up the simulations and photograph the detainees, an act reminiscent of the Abu Ghraib torture and photographs. In the light of Abu Ghraib, Susan Sontag has argued that torture is especially attractive to inflict when there is a sexual component in which the detainees are embarrassed (2004, Part III). She accentuates that the confluence of torture and pornography often encourages the use of photography so the torturers can watch and re-watch the pornography – not for its erotica but for the shameful position in which the victims are placed (ibid.; Olson 2014, 136). Interestingly though, Mark and Shane do not use the camera to necessarily intensify the detainees' shame, but to increase a sense of pleasure they derive from the assault (at least on the part of Shane), in which the images function as trophies. In the previous

chapter it was argued that the use of a recording device in *Body of Lies* had a specific political component. Shane, however, records for personal use.

The sense of pleasure evoked by the torture and photographs is crucial. Chapter 2 explained that torture inflicted by CIA agents is often legitimized by a sense of 'urgency'; although the torturers might secretly enjoy inflicting torture, the violence is presented as necessary within a bureaucratic system: it 'has' to be executed (Žižek 2008a, 106). Although the Iraqis are detained for suspected complicity in the attack, Shane's pleasure, derived from the torture, enhances the "theatricality" (McKenzie 347, 352) of the soldiers' performance and overrules the political motivations underlying their detainment. To Mark and Shane, the abuse is a game in which sexual simulations are used to make fun of the detainees. The element of 'game' or 'play' is underscored by Shane's defence in court: when the judge remarks that Shane's confession is a rather "curious defence against the accusation of sexual assault", Shane seems genuinely appalled and replies that "it had nothing to do with sex", but that they were just "taking the piss". Shane's reply to the judge suggests that he is not primarily appalled by the claim of sexual assault, but by the insinuation of homosexuality, as if, Shane argues, he has done a "gay thing".[111] The theatricality of the simulations and of the photographs reveals both a mocking of Arab culture and of homosexuality.

Instead of pressing on and impressing their victims to make them talk, Mark and Shane use the detainees to impress each other. As such, the torture is not only a role-play between the two tortured and between torturer and tortured, but also between the two torturers. Strikingly, no female agents or soldiers are present in *The Mark of Cain*. Their absence seems to suggests that male soldiers experience a form of peer pressure to perform and cooperate, and that their behaviour – in particular Mark's – is influenced by the presence of solely men, who are

[111] In the response to the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, Judith Butler distinguishes between seeing the sexual abuse as homosexual acts and as physical and sexual torture. She notes that both were deemed equally "disgusting" by President Bush at the time (2007, 961).

older and of higher rank. The infliction of sexual assault in the prison cell seems to be inspired by a desire for recognition from their fellow soldiers, as well as from their superiors.[112]

Of the two soldiers, Shane takes the lead. The scene in the courtyard, preceding the soldiers' entrance into the cells, illustrates Shane's pressure on Mark and the latter's constant duality: the refusal to cooperate on the one hand and the desire for recognition on the other. Although Mark is clear about his unwillingness to cooperate, Shane, seemingly inspired to help Mark survive in the military, does not recognise this. At the same time, Mark's desire for recognition and belonging overrules his reluctance, and as such he cooperates nonetheless. When Mark refuses to participate in the sexual abuse, he is called a "pussy" by the third soldier on guard. Shane encourages Mark by disagreeing with this insult, thereby foreclosing the possibility for Mark to refuse once more. Again, Mark's facial expressions indicate unease, and his frequent glances towards Shane are an appeal towards his friend. Shane, however, ignores Mark's appeal and his unease and thereby not only ignores the detainees' faces, but also Mark's. In his turn, although ignored, Mark does not want to 'lose face'. For him, participating in the sexual abuse becomes an effort to uphold his status in front of Shane, and he uses the detainees to achieve this. Shane, in contrast with Mark, uses the photographs as material trophies to achieve a dominant position. Rather than having to convince Mark of his superiority, he uses the images as proof of his participation and uses them again later to acquire the respect of his superiors and his girlfriend. As such, these scenes are set up to stress the soldiers' problematic friendship, in which the torture becomes the stage for visualizing their internal tensions.

Mark deems the acts wrong from the start, while Shane is initially convinced of the innocence behind the sexual abuse, but later comes to realize the nature and implications of their deeds. I will argue that by first showing the torture episode and by then stressing its consequences for detainees as well as soldiers, the film presents a

[112] See again Butler's analysis of vulnerability and the desire for recognition as a basis for ethical responsibility as referred to in Chapter 2 (2002, 33-37).

critique of the effects of peer pressure in the military and 'rites of passage' the young men are pressured into.

Rites of passage

The internal tension and hierarchy is not only present between Mark and Shane, but also particularly strong between the young soldiers and their superiors. Influenced by the military's normative codes of masculinity and morality, Mark struggles to live up to the idea of what it means to personify a 'soldier'. As an 18-year old, the recognition Mark needs from his superiors is to be taken seriously, to be valued, heard, and seen. As the most insecure and vulnerable, however, Mark is continuously bullied. He is given the nickname 'Treacle' for buttering up and sticking to other people. When their lance corporal nearly chokes Mark with a T-shirt to make fun of him, their corporal watches, laughs, and does not intervene.

Prior to the torture scenes, Mark refuses to participate in the public beating of a Kuwaiti who tries to smuggle petrol from Basra to Kuwait. Civilian insurgents demand justice by having the man punished. Fearing riots, Corporal Gant decides to publically punish the Kuwaiti in the form of beating. The man is thrown into the back of a truck and the soldiers are allowed to 'do' the man one by one, to appease the agitated crowd. Mark is made fun of and called a "pussy" by his lance corporal when he and Shane object that "he didn't do anything wrong". Afterwards, Mark tells Shane he did not punch the man when it was his turn, but gave him some water instead. Prior to the torture of the Iraqi detainees, Mark already discovers the deadlock of the impossibility of refusal due to his lack of persuasive power and dominance, and of the social humiliation ("pussy") that accompanies this refusal.

Throughout *The Mark of Cain*, the soldiers perpetually and frequently stress their heterosexuality through various power games and normative codes of machismo, and suppress any manifestation of weakness. Shane's shocked response to the judge's remark about 'sexual assault' reveals his embeddedness in a "homophobic institution" that acts "against a population that is both constructed and targeted for its own shame about homosexuality" (Butler on Abu Ghraib, 2008, 17).

The homophobia paradoxically returns in the abusive simulation of sex acts, which reveals the military's obsession with the detainees' Islamic background as well as sexuality.

The pressure on young, vulnerable men in the army is further visualised through the rite of passage new recruits – "fresh blood" – must undergo. One young soldier is tied to a hook in the changing rooms with a piece of cloth in his mouth. When Mark and Shane see him hanging on the hook, they leave him there to test his perseverance. With the detainees' imprisonment, Mark and Shane's sudden possession of power over others can be located in the need to canalize their frustration of being underdogs in the military, and by turning the detainees into underdogs instead. Although Mark's superiors continuously pressure him, it is Shane who eventually pulls him over the threshold. Although the recognition Mark seeks should be obtained by mutual respect, it is now demanded by force and abuse (Arendt 45). Unlike Mussawi's demand for Bob's respect in *Syriana*, in this scene Mark does not require the detainees' respect necessarily, but Shane's. The scene in the prison cell gives Mark a chance to show Shane, and implicitly his superiors, that he is a worthy soldier who is seen and valued.

Instead, the scene shows the force of peer pressure, but also the young soldiers' ability to be influenced, and their desire to belong to the group. This desire inaugurates a traumatic backlash when firstly, the torture evolves into atrocious violence that exceeds anything they have participated in thus far, and secondly, when peer pressure takes on lethal proportions.

From pleasure to shock

After his interruption in court, Shane continues his report of the torture in the prison cell. While looking at the photographs together, Mark, Shane, and the third soldier are accompanied by a fourth soldier who enters the room and is curious to see what they are looking at. A re-establishing shot at the entrance of the cell frames Mark and Shane showing the new soldier a picture on the camera. In the middle, behind the soldiers, the right detainee still stands against the wall with blank

eyes. The soldiers do not pay attention to him but show the fourth soldier the pictures. The new soldier informs Mark and Shane about events in adjacent cells, from which noises and shouts are now clearly audible.

The soldiers take the detainees to the end of the corridor, into a big room. There, Shane recounts, "Lance Corporal Quealy and other soldiers are taking pictures, while holding four more detainees captive." The first shot of this large, ill-lit space is obstructed from sight by the dark shadows of Mark, Shane, and the two remaining soldiers pulling the handcuffed detainees in, who are again made to wear the sandbags over their heads. A close-up of Shane's face, and a subsequent close-up of Mark then displays their astonishment at what they see inside as they look around, while behind them one of the soldiers takes pictures. The camera turns and with three quick consecutive shots, in which a small group of tank-topped soldiers looks at the floor and take pictures of what is there, the situation in the room slowly starts to unravel, while still predominantly obscured from the spectator's sight. One of the soldiers picks up the limp arm, covered in blood, of someone on the floor. One of the others laughs and the arm is dropped again. The rest of this body is off-screen and remains invisible as the camera cuts back to the soldiers. Shouts and noise are heard from all around the room and soft extra-diegetic music accompanies the horror displayed by Mark and Shane.

The camera then moves back in a reverse shot to a close-up of Mark's face as he curses, and an eye-line match shows Shane looking back at Mark in equal amazement: "Mad". Shane's gaze attends to the cell again and the camera cuts to his point-of-view shot of several soldiers holding down a detainee while trying to shove a shoe into his mouth. In a reverse shot we see Shane taking a picture of this scene, the aluminium camera accentuated in the frame. During that time, one of the detainees is positioned on Shane's right. Due to overexposure, the detainee, although completely forgotten by Shane, is difficult to ignore for the viewer.

While Shane takes pictures, the camera repeats his point-of-view shot of the detainee with a shoe in his mouth with a concurring flash.

The camera cuts and several subsequent shots then show different soldiers in dark red t-shirts holding a detainee on the floor, where several soldiers in sequence jump on his stomach. The detainee's face and his expression are obscured from sight behind the hands of the soldier holding him down, yet his moans are heard. The camera then quickly cuts to another location within the room, showing a soldier holding a detainee down onto his knees while another soldier, by and large off-screen, forces several large scorpions towards him. In a close-up of the scorpions the off-screen voice of Lance Corporal Quealy is heard demanding that the detainee kiss them. A next reverse shot shows a close-up of Mark's face, as he looks around at the scene in utter astonishment, which indicates that Mark and Shane share the same points of view and facial expression.

In this same shot figuring Mark's astonished face, the camera suddenly pans to the left, revealing Lance Corporal Quealy's presence next to Mark, who urges Mark and Shane to remove the sandbags from the detainees' heads "so they can see". After the bags are removed, a close-up of one of the detainee's horrified face registers him adjusting to what he witnesses. Where the previous shots followed up on one another in rapid succession, the detainee's view gives a long point-of-view shot of the whole room, panning from left to right, where the different events now come together. In the forefront, Shane's shaded figure still avidly takes pictures, while the detainee's subjective shot moves through the room, and lingers on the blood-stained and naked body of a detainee who lies curled up on the floor. Several flashes illuminate the scene to indicate that pictures are now constantly and rapidly taken while another reverse shot shows the astonished face of the detainee.

Shane's omniscient narrating voice returns to the shot, then the camera cuts to the court room and a close-up of Shane's face as he recounts that there were ten more soldiers in the room, including Lance Corporal Quealy. The next shot goes back to the large cell where Mark is seen from the side looking into the room, while Shane stands next to him still taking pictures. A subsequent close-up of the two witnessing detainees behind the soldiers illustrates that the soldiers have forgotten

all about the detainees. One of them suddenly decides to escape through the hall. Mark and Shane immediately notice and run after him. The camera cuts to outside and shows the detainee, still handcuffed, heading towards the camera with Mark and Shane chasing him. The detainee soon falls down onto the sandy ground. Two lights at the entrance of the building illuminate the dark courtyard. From the left, Major Gilchrist walks into the frame, and from the right, Corporal Gant, who apparently ran after Mark and Shane. Closed in by their superiors, their Major asks, "Escaped detainee? Well, get him back in there then", and leaves. From their positions in the courtyard, the soldiers' shouts from inside the cells are clearly audible. This shot with the corporal and major, as part of Shane's account, reveals that all superiors were aware of the abuse in the prison cells.

Still within this shot Corporal Gant, angry for being reprimanded by the major for his lack of control, grabs the detainee by the neck and drags him away. Yet instead of taking him inside, he drops him and angrily starts pummelling the detainee in the stomach with his knee. Mark and Shane stand on both sides of Gant, with their backs towards the camera. The detainee moans and falls to the ground. In the close-up that follows, Gant, naked from the waist up, looks down to the detainee on the ground and says to him, "You make it look as if I can't command?", while a subsequent shot shows Mark and Shane exchanging glances and looking at Gant in anxious anticipation. He starts kicking the detainee as he lies on the ground, whose body is omitted from sight. Only the detainee's groans are heard each time he is kicked. Gant looks at Mark and Shane furiously and tells them, "I'm in command". The camera then uses alternating cuts between a close-up of Gant, and Mark and Shane looking back at him in a shot-reverse-shot. While Gant repeatedly shouts, increasingly louder, "I'm in command!", he kicks the detainee while Mark and Shane watch motionless.

Turning point: From perpetrator to witness

In the previous scene Mark and Shane were the perpetrators, but in this scene they view, like Maya in *Zero Dark Thirty*, the scene of torture as distant witnesses overlooking the prison cell. This scene, and Mark and

Shane's position in it, proves to be a turning point in the narrative for several reasons. Instead of deriving pleasure from the scene of abuse, this time Mark and Shane are appalled. The spectator focalises alternatingly from the soldiers' point of view (through their eyes and through Shane's camera), and from the detainees' point of view. In the previous torture scenes external narration focalised the abuse and translated some of Mark's perspective. In this scene internal focalisation – the soldiers' facial expressions and perspective – are strong indicators of the soldiers' interiority and provide an explicit interpretation of what is presented to them (Dyer 1994, 133-136; Verstraten 2009, 90-92). Although the spectator was inspired at first to deem Mark and Shane's torture and now this scene as equally horrific, the soldiers' internal focalisation, strong reactions, and peripheral position now steer the spectator towards taking their side.

Moreover, the detainees' internal focalisation positions the spectator on a par with the detainees, who are further 'humanized' in this scene. The previous scenes already communicated their horror to the viewer (yet not to Mark and Shane), and this scene translates their state of mind even more potently. What this scene establishes, by means of the alternation between Mark and Shane's internal focalisation and the detainees' focalisation, is the suggestion of Mark and Shane's relative innocence; the soldiers and detainees are equally appalled and positioned as witnesses to horrific torture.

Similar to the torture scene with Mark and Shane, the shots are edited in such a vein that, again, the atrocities are partially hidden from the viewer's sight. Although shocking because they suggest torture, the scenes are not graphic and, for that reason, not unwatchable (Grønstad 2011, 6). By presenting only fragments of objects and body parts, which functions as a synecdoche for the whole violated body that the spectator never or rarely sees, the soldiers' fierce violence is potently presented: the force with which the shoe is shoved into a man's throat, the soldiers jumping onto another man's stomach, and in particular the point-of-view shot of the blood-covered and curled up man on the floor. The only body visible is that of the curled-up man, which is presented to the viewer only briefly. Due to the briefness and uniqueness of this

shot, which functions as a rupture with the shots that only show parts, the sudden image of the bloodied and unmoving man, whose face remains hidden, becomes a powerful one.[113]

Although in the previous scene Mark and Shane, and their fellow soldiers in this scene, all inflict a form of punitive torture, the torture in this last part is presented as more brutal. *The Mark of Cain* – at least ostensibly – relies on the same assumption that the spectator might deem the necessary 'torture lite' of Ammar's interrogational torture as less atrocious than the bodily molestation and 'unfair' torture analysed in Chapter 2. Although sexual abuse is regarded as a form of torture (Wisnewski, 46, 14 72-73, 91), compared to Mark and Shane's torture in the previous scene, the torture in this cell and Corporal Gant's beating of the detainee outside is introduced as *more* atrocious, because there is more physical harm and more blood. In addition, the violence in this scene is presented as more dangerous: the shoe in the man's mouth nearly makes him choke, the large scorpions could lethally sting, and Gant nearly beats the Iraqi to death. Although Shane and Mark punch the detainees several times before inflicting sexual abuse, little blood is visible. This, together with their shocked responses and the element of 'play' in their own sexual simulations, presents Mark and Shane as less reprehensible and reinforces the image of two young and insecure men acting on the desire to be accepted. The implications of this difference – that Mark and Shane as less culpable – tie in with the second turning point in this scene, which resides in the consequences of the torture and the young men's unfair treatment.

2. Trauma and fate: "They will have the mark of Cain upon them"

After Mark and Shane return home, the film shifts from depicting cohesion (or forced cohesion) in the military unit in Iraq to a focus on the approaching court case and mounting tensions. Shane shows the photos taken of the detainees to his girlfriend Shelley. When she

[113] This is not a shocking, graphic, and unwatchable image, but a powerful image because it suddenly presents the whole body. As Grønstad would argue, it is not directed *at* the spectator in order to shock but *for* the spectator, and it is not an image that affectively disturbs the spectator but it is a disturbing image; the body parts now belong to a man, lying on the floor (2011, 2, 6.)

discovers Shane is cheating on her, she reports him to the police. Mark and Shane's loyalty to the collective of the military is put under pressure when their superiors learn that they are unidentifiable in the pictures. While trying to save their own skin by giving a different testimony about their whereabouts, they pressure Mark and Shane into silence about their involvement.

To this point, Mark's experience and understanding of the situation are constituted through the interaction he had with his superiors and with Shane. Initially, he experienced the torture of the detainees as a ghastly yet necessary initiation ritual into the military's moral codes and behaviour, and the torture as "taking the piss". When abandoned, Mark begins to realize that he is not taken seriously by anyone but Shane. His pursuit to be accepted has failed, which transforms his desire for recognition into an all-consuming sense of guilt and a comprehension of the wrongness and magnitude of the events.

Crucial to this transformation is the presence of the superiors in the second scene of torture yet their absence in terms of responsibility. Their presence should have relieved some of Mark and Shane's liability, but their refusal to accept blame puts all the responsibility for the torture on the young men's shoulders. Instead of protecting their privates when the situation turns bad, the superiors save their own skin by intimidating and humiliating, which reveals the limits of their sense of responsibility and concern.[114] The superiors neither feel responsible, nor guilty, nor even embarrassed, because they blame Shane for taking and showing the photos, which facilitates scapegoating him and Mark.

This opposition between Mark's growing personal responsibility and the lack of institutional culpability constitutes a paradox: the soldiers' pressure to be loyal demands Mark to behave morally (a

[114] From a psychoanalytical perspective, Kelly Oliver argues how contemporary, regulative, and disciplinary law such as that of the military no longer gives meaning to emotional life and moral sensibilities. The military prohibits but does not aid in shaping meaningful bodily experience and sensations, leading to excesses such as the Abu Ghraib episode (2010, 64-65). The military law in *The Mark of Cain* fails to provide possibilities for making sense of the soldiers' experiences, and instead uses abusive humiliation techniques against their own soldiers prior and after the torture of detainees.

demand Mark answers to because he desires recognition), but Mark's forced separation from the military body increases a personal freedom (to choose and take responsibility) he did not ask for, which establishes a moral imprisonment. Realising such paradoxical fidelity was expected of him, he tells his mother:

> You have to obey. I could have refused. But I did not have the moral courage. To have the moral courage, you have to be disloyal. […] In the army, in the regiment, it is better to be loyal than to have moral courage. That's how we work.

Trained as a collective, the "we" here indicates that Mark still thinks collectively, yet the moral courage he talks about is *his personal* moral imprisonment. On the one hand, individual moral courage to refuse is made difficult. On the other hand, he is forced to take personal responsibility when he decided to follow orders after all. While Shane becomes infuriated and rebels against his unfair treatment by fighting back, Mark moves towards an ethical act: he understands that the violence done to him does not justify the violence he has done in return, and that he should take full responsibility for his own deeds.[115] Yet the lack of responsibility in others weighs on him heavily, and torn between collective loyalty and personal moral courage, Mark feels he is now marked by "the mark of Cain".

During the first days in Iraq the unit was told they were on a peacekeeping mission, and that everyone who needlessly killed or violated an Iraqi would evoke the Biblical curse.[116] The Book of Genesis teaches that, after Cain killed his brother Abel, God cursed Cain and he became a condemned fugitive. Cain then expressed a profound fear of being killed and, taking pity, God put a mark on Cain, which made him

[115] Judith Butler argues that it is easy to find a justification for violence under the guise of self-defence or retaliation, but that self-defence or retaliation never justify more violence (2002, 58). Mark seems aware of such an ethical premise, which is why he has his doubts about violence as punishment in the case of the Kuwaiti man, as well as in the case of the detainees.

[116] For those unacquainted with the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, the film does not explain what this ambiguous mark of Cain signifies and what it means for those who violate others.

recognisable as a brother murderer (and outcast), but it also prevented anyone from killing Cain (which forced him to live with his sin) (Melinkoff xii, 1-2). In her extensive historical and exegetical study about the origins and many interpretations of the expression "the mark of Cain", Ruth Melinkoff explains that the Bible itself is ambiguous in the precise nature of this statement; the sign can be both a warning sign as well as a protective device (xii, 2).

Mark might not fully understand the profundity of this statement, but he does understand – or rather experiences – that he is 'marked' both in terms of being scapegoated and in terms of his own conscience manifesting itself (one can see Mark as carrying this first name in the film *because* he carries the mark of Cain). When he is publically forced to accept blame, Mark not only experiences guilt but also starts to believe he is cursed, as he tells Shane. The ambiguous Biblical sign put on Cain, as Larry Ray argues, functions as a warning for those who want to kill Cain, and also as a marker of more violence to come: the killer of Cain will in turn unleash retaliations (297). Whereas Shane believes in his essential moral innocence and thinks the situation will resolve well, Mark feels trapped. To the spectator, however, Mark is presented as both guilty and innocent: he could – and should – have declined Shane's appeal. As the victim of pressure and pranks, the viewer is ushered towards forgiveness of him, while Shane's position of naive initiator tips towards guilty.

Unreliability and post-traumatic stress disorder

Mark's tortured conscience manifests the morning after the abuse. His sense of confusion is stressed when he learns that his officials lied to the family of the detainee who was beaten into a coma about the cause, nature, and seriousness of their son's condition. Back in England, Mark becomes increasingly unstable and is haunted by memories that, as the spectator is led to assume, return as involuntary flashbacks; several almost identical shots return as motifs throughout *The Mark of Cain*, and seem to translate Mark's experience of the episode and his state of mind. One of these motifs is the recurring image of the hall and prison cell. Sometimes it recurs as a single shot, sometimes as a scene in which

the camera moves to a different cell, and sometimes as a shot in which the soldiers drag the detainees towards the cell. The recurring shots of the abandoned hall and those of the detainees waiting in the cell function as prefiguration of the torture that is to be revealed later.

It is suggested that these shots and scenes function as Mark's internal focalisation and occur in the shape of a retrospective, nightmares, or as involuntary flashbacks. Sometimes they seem to function as a presage for the unfolding torture incident. Presented even before the actual torture scene, the fragments – whether voluntary or involuntary – defy a forward-moving chronology and often work confusingly; in hindsight the spectator is led to assume the short presage shots from the opening scene are also Mark's flashbacks. Again, since Mark appears in some of these shots and scenes they could be presented by an external focaliser, although he could arguably appear in his own dreams, delusions, or memories, which would make the fragments unmistakable cases of internal focalisation. The possibility that they are narrated by another character, such as the third soldier or someone else all together, is unlikely: the strong focus on Mark in these segments implies that these segments are the content of Mark's mind. So again, either an external narrator seems to translate Mark's subjective perspective, or he stars in his own internally-narrated flashbacks.[117] Additionally, right before his suicide, a close-up of one of the detainees' faces is positioned between two shots of Mark as he prepares himself for suicide. This way of editing again suggests that this particular segment is his flashback.

As such, the 'single' event of torture as a stylistically varying yet pervasive episode is interspersed within the story. The precise status and origin (in terms of narration) of the fragments, however, remains opaque, which leads to a sense of confusion on the part of the spectator.

Apart from these incoherent shots, the previously discussed scenes of torture are cut into several fragments. Since the scenes' last parts are recounted by Shane in court, it is likely that these torture

[117] See Verstraten on external focalisation translating internal perspective, even when the protagonist whose perspective is visualised is present in the frame (2009, 105-111).

scenes represent Shane's memory. Although the act and nature of abuse remains the same, for Shane, these events manifest only on a rational and conscious level. The slight variation of the same event suggests their diverging impact on Mark and Shane respectively; Mark suffers greatly from the events and the motifs seem to be his flashbacks. Shane's chronological account is then interlaced with Mark's involuntary and atemporal flashbacks, with Shane eventually standing in for Mark in court and narrating the second part of the torture episode, which – we cannot be sure – might deviate from Mark's experience of the torture episode. Shane's account, however, reinforces the idea that Mark needs others to talk for him.

A third recurring motif is the shot of the back of Mark's head while present in the prison cell with Shane and the detainees. The strongest and most developed shot of his back is presented as a sequence of two shots in two different locations: in close-up, with the parents of the comatose Iraqi detainee blurry in the background. This shot of Mark cuts to the second one in which the camera again frames the back of Mark's head in the prison cell with the detainees. This time he figures centrally in the frame, while breathing heavily and folding his hands around his head in what appears to be despair. Again, an external narrator seems to mediate his subjective state of mind.

This shot in the cell is different from the first shot in the first scene, when Mark's head functions as object of focalisation while not revealing any cues for his state of mind. The anxiety and anticipation in the first scene is visualised when the camera cuts to a reverse shot of Mark's face, displaying distress. Mark's assumed flashbacks and the slight internal alterations connect the detainees' and Mark's situation: they suggest that Mark often thinks back to the detainees. Secondly, these shots of the detainees remind Mark, and subsequently the viewer, of the detainees' situation, thereby dovetailing Mark's position as 'victim' of peer pressure and the detainees' position as victims of abuse. This reinforces the impression created that Mark is the dupe of machismo rather than an immoral abuser.

The discrepancies between what is visualised and who visualises it is alienating, and plays with the spectator's desire for allocating the segments to a specific narrator.

The alienation created by the uncertainty about the nature, status, and origin (Mark or Shane or someone else entirely) of recurrent fragments is reinforced by the occurrence of delusions on the part of Mark. These delusions provide another reason to assume the motifs presented throughout the film are Mark's involuntary flashbacks. The delusions are translated by means of – yet another – motif that consists of the recurring shot of Mark persistently feeling the sand of Basra between his fingers, even after his return to England. *The Mark of Cain*'s opening credits and score are accompanied with a close-up of fingers with sand sliding through. The fingers are blurry and the image is distorted, and only later does the spectator recognise this as one of Mark's delusions.

Apart from creating the impression that the recurring fragments and shots are Mark's memories, the delusions also indicate that Mark suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although questioning the torture immediately, only belatedly does Mark experience the full force of the torture; he is haunted by involuntary memories, has intrusive delusions, and becomes emotionally inflexible and sensitive to loud noises and lights.[118] In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth stresses the haunting power of PTSD, a specific occurrence of the more general notion of 'trauma', and its disruptive quality based on a distortion of events. The event is not significantly experienced or assimilated fully at the time but only belatedly, when it comes to haunt the traumatised subject (1995, 4-5). Caruth stresses the literality of the event that returns; the haunting traumatic experience cannot be ontologically distinguished from the event in the past; there

[118] The most recent edition (Edition 5, 2013) of the DSM, or the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, gives these experiential criteria for suffering from PTSD: 'exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence' and requires the presence of symptoms from each of four symptom clusters: 'intrusion symptoms (previously known as re-experiencing), persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event, negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event, marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event, and impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.' Article 309.81 (F43.10).

is just one event that keeps on returning. The traumatic memories as such are not knowable in the sense that they can be grasped and processed, which is why they come to possess the subject. This explains the atemporal dimension of the traumatic event: the re-living of the past in the present, the haunting of the present by the past, and the impossibility of recognising one's own present in terms of present and past events. This is what makes the re-living so overwhelming and immediate (ibid.).

The involuntary memories and intrusive delusions depress and shame Mark rather than infuriate or make him aggressive. Many traumatised subjects experience an impossibility of expressing themselves (Caruth 1995, 17; Scarry 19), or experience language as a discursively insufficient means to do so (Van Alphen 2004, 109-110). Mark, who is technically not a victim but a perpetrator, is desperate to talk about the traumatic episode in the prison in Basra and to relieve himself of his guilty conscience. Frustrated when the military doctor he visits attributes Mark's visit as a way to potentially mitigate his sentence in court, Mark starts drinking heavily. When finally assigned sick leave, he attempts to tell his mother about what he went through. A close-up of the back of Mark's head with his mother blurry in the background strongly resembles the frame of Mark's head in the Basra prison cell. It seems to foretell Mark's confession to his mother about his cooperation in torture. He starts, however, with, "I cannot tell you what happened in the cells, Mum", and so the close-up from behind signifies his inability to narrate.

As such, *The Mark of Cain*'s atemporal and distorted narrative with aporia and "psycho-pathological [narrative] techniques" (White 82) resembles the distorted experience of suffering from PTSD. The recurring segments that infuse the plot from beginning to end resemble the haunting quality of post-traumatic stress. More importantly, the converging of form and content draws attention to the question of the (un)representability of trauma.

Many, amongst whom notably Caruth, have regarded trauma (in relation to the Holocaust) as the limit of representation, in which

language and images are regarded as aporetic and defy referentiality.[119] Although this is not the space to explore the modes and limits of representing trauma in cinema (as others, including Elsaesser and Kaplan and Wang, have already effectively done so) it is significant to note that *The Mark of Cain* plays with the very question of the (un)representability of trauma: its structure implies that in Mark's case, the episode was too traumatic to handle and narrate. As such, his perspective remains incoherent and muddled with blurry and distorted recurring shots that are, for the spectator, often difficult to make sense of. Although the film's structure collapses form and content and reveals how Mark might have experienced the episode, this structure simultaneously suggests that in order to represent his trauma, this representation can only be similarly fragmented and distorted.

In Shane's case, his ability to give an account in court suggests that the episode as such was not as traumatic for him, or not experienced as traumatic, and indirectly that he has less empathy than Mark. The episode's aftermath is more troubling for him personally. In addition, Shane's account implies that the film could be one big flashback (in which his rational and relatively coherent account takes over from or finishes Mark's incoherent fragments). This would explain the atemporal structure of the film.[120] However, the impossibility of

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[119] See Caruth (1995, 151-156 and 1996, 115). For Van Alphen, trauma is the result of the discursive nature of experiencing and the forms of representation available (2004, 109-110). Similarly, Kaplan and Wang, in the footsteps of Dominick LaCapra and Thomas Elsaesser, examine the representability of trauma and the forms such representations and narrating positions might take (4, 8-15). These theorists write about the Holocaust, however. Our current knowledge about 9/11 and the PTSD of contemporary War on Terror veterans is still developing, which is why I build on these theorists. Although I do not mean to argue that the trauma of 9/11 and PTSD of war veterans can be put on par with the trauma of the Holocaust, these theorists have conceptualized trauma in relation to representation in more general terms and their work on trauma provides a fruitful foundation.

[120] In addition to Caruth, Van Alphen argues that trauma is a "failed experience", which means that trauma arises as the result of unsuccessfully experiencing (and memorising) the event. This translates into symptoms (trauma) of the unsuccessfully assimilated experience. This reading would explain the fragments, which return as symptoms of an experience that has not come about and that returns as a failed attempt at discursively processing (2004, 108-110). This would also explain why for Shane, who either fully experienced the episode at the time, or who has found the discursive semiotic means to narrate, is not traumatised.

attributing the recurring motifs to a specific narrator, and additionally, this narrator's doubtful credibility, suggests general unreliability; we had assumed thus far that the motifs were Mark's subjective perspective translated by an external narrator, yet we only *assume* this is how it went. The details of the torture episode come to us through Shane's account. Shane's final testimony lays bare that everything the spectator has seen could be the fruit of his subjective yet distorted and perhaps untrue memory. The characters as such are not necessarily unreliable (Shane might believe it happened that way), yet the way in which the plot is presented to the viewer is.

The film's recurring segments and the fragmented torture scenes are pieces of a puzzle that are only put together in the final scenes of the plot, and even then pieces of meaning remain missing. This converging of content and form evokes the paradoxical response of wanting to infer meaning, yet not being able to satisfactorily do so, which (as when watching *Syriana*) evokes a critical evaluation of the themes presented, but not necessarily an affective engagement (Grønstad 2008, 6, 13).

The Mark of Cain's unconventional, distorted narrative structure creates a distance between spectator and character, but the spectator moves from distant witness of Mark and Shane's abuse in the early scenes of the film towards more sympathy for Mark's turbulence later on. The fragmented nature of the plot, however, prevents the spectator from fully understanding Mark's feelings and perspective and from identifying with him. As such, fragmented or distorted, moderately estranging narratives like that of *The Mark of Cain* can, while foreclosing affective engagement, provide insight into the traumatic experience of its characters (White 66-86) and can establish an ethical viewing position (McGowan 2011, 9, 10, 17; Wheatley 38-39, 54-55). Yet this affective engagement is not strictly necessary or required for upholding an ethical position or developing moral insights in relation to what is presented.[121]

[121] Todd McGowan connects atemporal narrative structures to traumatic events and to particular ethical positions. He argues that atemporal cinema is circular like the psychoanalytic 'drive'. The temporal confusion when watching atemporal films makes

Like the sand of Basra, the film's narrative structure slips through our fingers and the desire for linearity, causality, and certainty is constantly played with. The film ultimately steers towards an acceptance of this confusing condition, and suggests that this impasse is precisely what trauma looks like when one attempts to screen it.

Unreliability and a political critique

Although their corporal, who incited and enabled the torture of the detainees, is only fined, Mark and Shane are court-martialled. This indicates that, like the Muslim torturers in the previous chapter, the soldiers do not operate above the law, as the CIA agents *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Unthinkable* do, but are officially punished for their war crimes.

Instead of rectifying the unfair treatment by giving testimony in court, Mark takes responsibility – or, more precisely, escapes from having to take it – by committing suicide. This prevents him from experiencing shame and trauma, but also by betraying others by putting the blame them. He kills himself by putting a bag over his head, which becomes "a gruesome nod to the Iraqi captives" (Wollastan 2007). Shane is pressured to conceal from the court the exact nature of his superiors' participation in the beatings. After Mark's suicide, however, Shane takes responsibility for his own participation, as well as for Mark's death, by telling the court what has happened, revealing for the first time the nature of the abuse.

By testifying in court, Shane redeems himself and establishes three things: firstly, he becomes a 'moral character' who presents to the court and the spectator his subjective view on the episode of abuse. He makes explicit what the spectator has already seen: his own involvement, as well as the presence and complicity of their superiors in the prison cells and with the escaped detainee outside the prison

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the subject become aware of her subject position and induces another way of experiencing existence which moves beyond the desire for conclusiveness.

block. Shane realizes his statement jeopardizes his superiors' rank and functioning within the military, but also his own career.[122]

The second thing Shane establishes by testifying is the re-humanization of the detainees. Shane recounts that Mark, before his suicide, traced the identities of the two men held captive and abused in their cell. By subsequently providing their names in court – Said Ahmed and Abdullah Omah, or, "the people we did it to" – Shane, in the name of Mark, responds to the detainees' after all; he addresses them as humans and makes them intelligible for others by returning to them their identities (Butler 2009, 5-8).

Thirdly, his account indicates that the acts of abuse are not, as the UK government and the involved military seniors want to present it, the work of a few, but rather that the abuse seeps through all layers of the military unit. While evidence is gathered, it appears that Corporal Gant was recognisable in one of the pictures. Consequently, a group of military officials discuss whether they should have "a few rotten apples" take the blame, or whether they "cannot tolerate this type of barbarism" from the unit. This debate reveals the men's fear that torture is increasingly inflicted "by our own people", a fear discussed in Chapter 1. By having one of the characters explicitly point to the unit's "barbarism", the film problematizes the self-evident notion of 'barbarism' by showing that the barbarians are not 'them', or Iraqi insurgents, but 'us', the British military. The negative "semantic stagnation" that surrounds the term 'barbarian' (Boletsi 3) is first mobilized in *The Mark of Cain* and consequently debunked.

Initially, the film presents the soldiers' concerted behaviour and group pressure as a justification for inflicting abuse. Along the way, the film begins to problematize the cohesion of the soldiers as a collective

[122] Kelly Oliver argues how Lynndie England saw herself as being both guilty and innocent: she was just having fun, but soon realized that what she had done was wrong. Pleading guilty while harbouring a sense of moral innocence, the result of the breach between regulative law and meaningful experience problematizes, Oliver argues, the notions of guilt and innocence (2009, 64, 72-73). Shane seems to do something similar: he pleads guilty and understands the consequences of doing so, while retaining his own sense of moral innocence. He still feels on the one hand, that he was pressured into cooperating, while, on the other hand, what he did was just "taking the piss".

body operating against the same enemy. Although the soldiers are highly disciplined, the scenes of abuse suggest that regulative and disciplinary forces can paradoxically lead to individual excesses and a weakening of self-control against prohibited forms of behaviour, such as torture (Bourke). *The Mark of Cain* illustrates the steps taken prior to the final occurrence of individual excess (by Mark and Shane) and collective excess and as such formulates not only a critique of torture methods, but also of the strict military moral codes of honour, and of the mechanism of blaming 'rotten apples'. Although some superiors were identifiable on the photographs, the film accentuates the ease and convenience with which the 'rotten apples' can be pushed forward and blamed, while the military hides behind these scapegoats.

The film's mode of narration – its atemporal structure with fragmented motifs on the one hand, and Shane's quasi-coherent account on the other – works in tandem, I argue, with a direct political critique made by the film, in which the narrator's unreliability and the lack of conclusiveness become a strategy in itself. On the level of the characters, the film undermines the image of the military as rightful and moral. Where in the previous chapter the image of the antihero became a rhetorical strategy to question (*Body of Lies*) and criticize (*Syriana*) American foreign policies, *The Mark of Cain* intensifies the image of the post-heroic antihero and posits Mark as an unstable, vulnerable victim of the military institution who takes his own life because group pressure has become too strong. Secondly, on the level of the plot it posits narration in more general terms as unreliable: Shane's account, which suggests the plot as it is presented to the viewer, is one big flashback, and cannot be certified as truthful. In the end, the spectator is left to wonder what actually happened and how it happened. This sense of confusion forces a deadlock: the spectator favours conclusiveness and straightforward moral positions, yet this desire is neither granted nor rewarded. As such, atemporality and unreliability play with the spectator's desire for conventional, psychologically coherent Hollywood melodrama (Elsaesser, 153, 163, 172).

Additionally, the sense of confusion is reinforced by the film's powerful last scene, in which Shane, after having photographed the

detainees, is 'captured' in an image and becomes the object of focalisation himself. After his confession he is first severely beaten by their lance corporal and other soldiers and then imprisoned. When the steel door closes, the spectator sees Shane through the door's peephole, as he slowly undresses his beaten body. Suddenly, he looks straight into the camera and faces the spectator directly. This stylistic rupture assigns the viewer the position of a guard looking into his cell and imposes a sense of voyeurism. By looking straight into the camera, Shane could be admitting his guilt, yet he also seems to cast the intricate question of culpability back to the spectator. The deadlock of Mark and Shane's situation has turned Shane from a naive and immature perpetrator into the subject of his colleagues' bullying and beating shortly before and after the court case. This shot through the peephole, in which he has become a prisoner himself, again reminds the viewer of his previous inhuman treatment of the Iraqi's detainees. Nonetheless, the film constantly muddies the categories of perpetrator and victim, and although both viewing positions (that of voyeur and of guard) inspire a judgemental component, moral judgment is constantly postponed.

The Mark of Cain's realism and ideology: Camp Breadbasket

The film's atemporal narrative structure seems artificial, as it draws attention to its form. Like *Zero Dark Thirty*, however, *The Mark of Cain* is based on real events, and in particular, on a torture scandal in the British military which occurred at Camp Breadbasket in Basra, "the UK's Abu Ghraib" (Cobain).

Made by independent producer Red for television, *The Mark of Cain* was generally well-reviewed, and scriptwriter Tony Marchant's extensive research into the Breadbasket episode in order to portray it accurately was acclaimed (Thompson).

As in the case of *Zero Dark Thirty*, reviews made reference to the actual episode in Basra and the film's depiction of this episode; the army in particular attacked this, in their eyes, negative depiction (Wollaston). Some reviews explicitly considered the merging of fact and fiction – calling it a "factionalised" war (Flett) – and found this fusion

problematic (Conlan). While some found fault with the forced and constructed plot structure (Weissberg), others praised the film's authentic rendering of subjective experiences in the military, partially established by the fragmented narrative structure and the occasional use of a hand-held camera (Thompson).

Technically, *The Mark of Cain* does not hinge on any particular incident and the film does not refer directly to Camp Breadbasket, other than by means of the media footage of Tony Blair (the DVD does not have a disclaimer, but the television broadcast was apparently preceded with a disclaimer about the fusion of fact and fiction [Conlan]). As such, the film does not pretend to represent *the* reality (as did *Zero Dark Thirty*, see again Houwen 52), or to do otherwise than appropriate real events into a fictionalized account. In terms of narrative structure, *The Mark of Cain* resembles *Syriana*'s formal complexity that formulates a form of social verisimilitude, in which the content is only 'based on' real events. Due to its fragmented and atemporal structure, however, which suggests internal focalisation and personal turbulence, unlike *Syriana*, *The Mark of Cain* is not a "docudrama" (see again DeWaard and Tait 154), which aims for a seemingly impartial rendering of facts.

The issue behind the criticism directed towards the film's portrayal of the military and its fusion of fact and fiction pertains, I argue, to the film's uncovering of the ideology behind 'moral courage'. *The Mark of Cain* suggests that the double standard inherent to moral courage was the incentive of wide-scale abuse: on the one hand the impossibility of refusing, and on the other the taboo on "grassing" on, as Mark argues, the ranks above them. The film does not only show how one is forced into the deadlock of moral courage, but also reveals the mechanism behind moral courage, or the cover-up of institutional culpability and the blaming of 'rotten apples'. This mechanism includes the knowledge that since Abu Ghraib 'we' – government and military officials but also the public – know these violent excesses occur. This is not necessarily a political problem as long as these excesses are hidden from sight or remain undisclosed. When, conversely, photographs or other visual evidence is circulated, a dignitary is forced to confess these

secrets are true and the embarrassing secrets are then subjected to verification.

This explains why Mark and Shane are forced into precarious positions and greeted with hostility; although praised for their courage, Mark and Shane's characters *in* the film and *The Mark of Cain as* film reveal the mechanisms of ideology to which we have conformed. Like the photos taken at Abu Ghraib, Shane's photographs are seen to "tarnish the image" of the British military (Davis),[123] and so their publication is worse for the nation than for the actual victims of torture. Mark and Shane are not only punished for their involvement in torture, but also indirectly for tarnishing the image of the military as presented in the film. This is their true crime; the shock and disgust pertains to their taking of photographs and to their publication, not to what they depict.[124] Similarly to how *Zero Dark Thirty* reminded its audience of what institutional procedures have allowed, *The Mark of Cain* reminds the military of their image, tarnished by the torture episode in Basra,[125] and this message is more explicitly formulated than in *Zero Dark Thirty*.

3. Torture in *Brødre*/*Brothers* and the consequences of PTSD for relatives

In *The Mark of Cain* the focus rests on the military body's internal and forced coherence, but *Brothers* (Jim Sheridan, 2009) depicts the consequences of torture for veterans' relatives. During his captivity by the Taliban, Captain Sam Cahill is forced to torture and kill a subordinate. After his release, he begins expressing symptoms of PTSD. The film is an adaptation of the Danish film *Brødre* (Susanne Bier,

[123] The power of the photographs taken by Shane resides in their impact. See also Sontag (2008) about the ambiguities of photos as evidence, their affective power, their power to shock and reveal, and how they manipulate our understanding of reality.
[124] See Sontag (2004) for the ambivalent responses to the Abu Ghraib photographs, which reveal that people considered the existence of the photographs worse than what they depict.
[125] Ironically, *The Mark of Cain* was initially delayed just hours before its television broadcast on 5 April 2007 because of the on-going crisis over Iran's seizure of 15 British sailors and marines. Although it was not actually *believed* that broadcasting the film would cause considerable danger to the negotiations, due to its negative depiction of the army the film was screened at a later date as a precaution (BBC News, 3 April 2007).

2004), and is almost identical in structure: Officer Michael/Captain Sam is a successful military official, husband, and father of two little girls. Michael/Sam's brother Jannik/Tommy is released from jail after imprisonment for an armed bank robbery, shortly before Michael/Sam embarks on a tour of duty in Afghanistan. While searching for a missing soldier from a helicopter, the small unit is shot from the sky and Michael/Sam is imprisoned by the Taliban. His family, however, is told he is dead. The family's black sheep Jannik/Tommy feels the need to redeem himself for his criminal past and takes responsibility by caring for his brothers' family. Jannik/Tommy grows increasingly fond of his brother's wife Sarah/Grace, and in their mutual grief they share a passionate kiss. When Michael/Sam suddenly returns from Afghanistan all seems well again, until he begins to exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and becomes convinced his brother and wife are having an affair. Due to his violent temper, mental instability, and inability to explain what happened during his captivity, he soon becomes an unwanted guest in his own house.

The films' plot diverges with respect to Michael and Sam's captivity and the development of their trauma. Hollywood adaptation *Brothers* has appropriated *Brødre*'s themes for a more traditional American climate. In the remainder of this chapter I will position *Brothers* in relation to its Danish equivalent, then analyse both films in relation to *The Mark of Cain*, and subsequently locate and reflect on the films' overt and implicit political messages. I begin by scrutinising the nature of torture in *Brothers*/*Brødre* and the internal differences between the two versions, but refrain from describing the scenes of torture in as much detail as previously done for *The Mark of Cain*: in order to come to an analysis of the politically sensitive depiction of having tortured and posttraumatic stress, it will suffice to focus on and single out the differences between the 'Brothers' films and the implications of these differences.

Held captive and forced to kill

After the helicopter has been shot down in *Brødre*, Michael is found by the Taliban, barely alive, on an embankment and brought to a house where the missing soldier the unit was looking for, a young technician, is also imprisoned. Together, they are held captive in a small hut for what seems to be a long time, occasionally engaging in conversations about their families and current situation. One day, an interpreter for the Taliban leader asks the young technician to show them how to arm a missile. The young technician, frightened and with a gun against his head, admits he does not know how. Michael does know and shows them. He asks his captors to leave the young technician alone and to give them both some water. Back in the hut, they indulge in the sparse food and water provided to them and Michael assures the technician they will be fine. After Michael's demonstration of his skills with the missile however, the Taliban consider the young technician to be of no further use. Both soldiers are taken outside and thrown onto their knees on the sandy ground and told, "To live you must be of use. He is of no use", referring to the technician. A metal bar or pipe is thrown in front of Michael and he is told to kill the young man.

Michael, uncertain of what to do, stays on his knees, unmoving and staring into space. The technician meanwhile clasps his arm and begs him desperately – "Michael!"– to ignore this request. The technician is kicked back onto the ground, while two Taliban members grab Michael's head, drag him up and tell him, "Kill him or you will both die". The Taliban leader looks at him and asks, "Do you want to live?" Michael reluctantly nods. He is kicked in the back, dragged up again by his hair, and the metal bar is pushed into his hands. The technician is held down onto the ground and keeps calling Michael's name. Resisting, Michael lets the bar drop to the ground, but the leader puts a gun against his head. Realizing he has no choice, Michael starts howling and screaming in frustration, while encouraged by the Taliban to "do it!" The bar is shoved into his hands again, and in the next shot he turns to the technician, still howling and with his eyes wide open. He hesitates but when kicked again, driven by adrenaline and fear, Michael starts beating the technician's arm with the bar. The young man falls down

and starts moaning and wailing, but Michael reluctantly continues. Michael is framed beating the technician's body and face while the technician is largely off-screen, only his moans and the strikes are heard. Michael groans with every hit and he starts crying, but seems possessed and cannot stop hitting the young man, even after the technician has stopped moving. The Taliban force him to stop, and Michael is thrown into his prison again, where he breathes heavily, curls up in a corner, and vomits. He becomes quiet and looks out of the little window with a blank face. The scene ends with an extreme close-up of his blue, emotionless eyes.

In the American adaptation *Brothers* Captain Sam and a young private, saved by Sam when the helicopter was shot down, are taken captive by the Taliban. They are thrown into a hole in the ground and locked up, but are soon sold to other Taliban members. They are moved to a cave that functions as their prison but from which they witness the execution of an Afghan man. This man is a relative of the Taliban leader, but is killed for jeopardizing the Taliban's location. Sam and the private are ordered to recite the message that the "US has nothing to do in Afghanistan", while being video recorded. They refuse, and Sam is tied to a pole where he must stay overnight. Unlike the technician in *Brødre*, the Taliban tortures the private in *Brothers* by poking him with a hot metal stick in order to extract information about, apparently, the position and strategies of the US military. Sam has to watch from his prison, appalled and in shock, while he orders the private to stay strong and to not reveal any information. The torture is predominantly presented to the viewer through the private's off-screen screams of pain and panic and by means of Sam's appalled facial expression after which a reverse shot of the torture is withheld. In a subsequent scene, the private is filmed as he reads a message, stating that he realizes "Afghanistan belongs to its people and the Americans have no business being in Afghanistan". The video is later shown to Sam in his prison. Yet another scene indicates that the private is again tortured with the hot metal stick, screaming for his captain, while Sam must watch. This time, however, Sam seems to have grown used to it.

Some time after, Sam is taken outside. The private sits on the sandy ground, with wounds on his face, holding his left arm. He is shivering. Several men point their guns at them. The Taliban chief gives a metal bar to a young boy, and urges the boy to give the bar to Sam. Sam looks at the boy in horror, affected by the boy's young age and the understanding of what is asked of him. Sam is told by the interpreter that the private has no more value to them and that Sam must kill him. He throws the bar onto the ground while being video recorded by a Taliban fighter. The interpreter walks towards Sam and orders him to pick up the bar while pointing a gun at him. Sam picks it up and is told, "You or him, kill him or I will kill you", and "Kill him or I will cut his head off!" Sam remains on his spot, his eyes wide with terror, but he is urged, through shouting from all sides, to kill the private. He looks to his side, to the private, who first looks up at him in despair, but then covers his face with his hands and bends over on his knees. This seems to pull Sam over the threshold and he starts beating the young man, while howling and screaming like an animal with every stroke. The private remains largely off-screen, while video images of the scene indicate everything is recorded. Sam throws the bar down and screams, "There!" while he looks around him in anger and with large eyes. Back in the cave, he curls up in a corner and stares with blank eyes to a spot in front of him.

The interaction between the two imprisoned soldiers in the American adaptation is different from that in *Brødre*. Michael and the young technician engage in dialogue more than do Sam and the private. As his superior, Michael feels a responsibility towards the young technician, and continually tries to keep morale up. Sam, played by Tobey Maguire, is younger than the Danish Michael, played by Ulrich Thomsen, and closer in age to the young private than Michael is to the technician. Because of their ages, there is less hierarchy between Sam and the private, despite Sam's rank of captain. The interaction between Michael and the technician, however, becomes like a father-son relationship, in which Michael feels responsible for the young man's well-being. Although Sam first rescues the private from the water and is later forced to kill him, this deed of self-preservation is presented as

less grave than the elder Michael being forced to kill the much younger technician, whose was taken hostage by the Taliban before him. Further, the father-son relationship and the kindness of the young technician contrast with that of the young private, who scolds Sam for saving him from the helicopter crash and who wishes to be dead rather than held captive.

Apart from the age difference, the Taliban's use of the camera is a new trait in *Brothers*; the private's political video message is recorded and Sam is filmed when he is forced to kill the private. This is not done as part of the pleasure of watching and re-watching torture, which motivates Shane's photographs in *The Mark of Cain.* Like the recording of Roger in *Body of Lies*, the Taliban aims to distribute the anti-US message spoken by Sam to Western media and to show their own disciples a firm statement about the Western intervention in the Middle East. When US soldiers later raid the Taliban compound, the footage is lost and the private and Sam are saved from humiliation. As in *Body of Lies*, the element of recording in *Brothers* seems embedded in America's recent history with and Hollywood's subsequent representations of – and preoccupation with – film footage of kidnapped and beheaded journalists made by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Together with the execution of the Taliban leader's own relative, the appearance of the young Taliban boy, and the torture of the private with a hot metal stick, these recordings present the Taliban as more cruel than they are in *Brødre*. The threat of decapitation ("I will cut your head off") as a form of execution when Sam keeps refusing presents the Taliban as barbaric assassins who record their beheadings. This depiction of the Taliban in *Brothers* can be seen as a form of 'culture talk', as discussed in the previous chapter, in which the Taliban's culture and nature are deemed essentially backward and evil (Mamdani 766). This depiction suggests that in *Brothers* the political aspects pertaining to the presence, identity, and actions of the Taliban are more important than in *Brødre*.

Presenting the Taliban as such stresses the need for action against them, whereas in *Brødre* this urgency is not formulated. At the

same time, the Taliban's recording of soldiers in *Brothers* makes a statement about American operations in Afghanistan, and provides a critical note addressed to the American military. It also reveals the Taliban's explicit motivation for captivity and torture, which is 'Afghanistan is not US business'. As will be explained below, this message is more covert and ambivalent in *Brødre*. Before I move to the political implications of the differences between the two films, the nature of the torture inflicted on and by Michael/Sam is first analysed.

The nature of torture

About *Brothers* Emmett Early writes that "after enduring torture and the death of his fellow POW, Sam is rescued and returns home" (2014, 131). This is an ambiguous sentence and gives a somewhat distorted view of Sam's captivity. Sam and Michael not only endure torture, but are also forced to harm and kill, which converges their subjection to torture and infliction of torture. Additionally, in writing "torture in captivity has caused the veteran to inhibit his ability to relate to his family" (22) Early could again mean two things: having tortured or having been tortured. In *Brothers*, it is suggested that Sam is tied to a pole for the night after refusing to record an anti-American message. Although he is forced to watch the torture of the private from his cell, he is not himself tortured with a hot metal bar or poked to extract information from him. In *Brødre*, Michael is not abused to this degree, which reinforces the image that the Taliban is more cruel in *Brothers*. Both Michael and Sam are deprived of food and water and imprisoned, but Sam's captivity is presented as more 'torturous' than Michael's.

Early's quote could also indicate that Sam has endured *having* tortured in captivity. In my discussion of *The Mark of Cain* and of the previous films I asserted that torture is presented in film as a method to extract information or to punish; while in all cases the component of shaming and dehumanization is prominent or even sought, it is not always achieved. In the *Brothers* films, Michael/Sam is forced to assassinate a subordinate, which is presented as a form of punishment. In *Brothers* Sam is punished for his American background and for his refusal to cooperate and record an anti-US message. In *Brødre*,

however, the spectator can only guess at the Taliban's motivations and assume these relate to Michael's (Western-)European background and the presence of the Danish military in Afghanistan.

The forced execution proves to be torturous for both men: the impossibility of refusing forces Michael/Sam to collude against himself and to participate in a dehumanizing act not only directed towards his subordinate but also towards himself (Sussman 4). In *The Mark of Cain*, Mark was semi-pressured into torturing and could have refused. Although he became a victim of the military institution, in the torture scenes he was the perpetrator. In *Brødre/Brothers*, the element of pressure blurs the line between torturing and being tortured. Early is thus right to assert that Sam is being tortured, but he keeps the nature of torture opaque: Sam is forced to dehumanize himself (or torture himself) by brutally killing another human being as a form of punishment.

Here, another slight difference between the films presents itself; in *Brødre*, Michael's choice is between killing another or being killed himself, which is essentially a choice between refusing to act (which means both men die) or living and killing (which means life but life in shame). In *Brothers*, Sam too has the option of staying alive by killing his subordinate, yet the choice is between refusing to kill and dying by decapitation, being forced to watch the Taliban cut off your subordinate's head (and likely facing the same fate thereafter), or staying alive but living in shame. This alternative of decapitation (and having it recorded) is presented as more barbaric than the choice offered to Michael, in which both men will die but not necessarily through decapitation. Despite the method, however, in both films the urge for survival predominates, and choosing one's own life over another in an act of self-preservation is the cause of trauma in both cases. Although deprived of food and water, Michael and Sam stay optimistic when incarcerated. Only when they are forced to kill do they break and their faces become emotionless.

The consequences: PTSD and domestic violence

The last and major difference between the two films pertains to the way Sam and Michael's post-traumatic stress disorder consequently develops. When reunited with his family, Michael/Sam has difficulty adapting to his home situation, and becomes unable to express himself about his experiences. Growing confused about habitual, ordinary things, he loses his sense of humour, suffers from insomnia, and seems emotionally alienated. Seemingly repressing the violent episode to the far corners of his mind, Michael/Sam grows silent, tense, increasingly emotional instable, and develops paranoia, which are all traits of PTSD.[126]

Both films give no indication of intrusive memories, as in *The Mark of Cain*, but do depict the intrusion of hallucinations. Although not entirely unfounded, even before his wife tells him about the kiss which "meant nothing", Michael/Sam starts suspecting his wife and brother of adultery. In *Brødre*, the blossoming affection between his wife and brother establishes a tension between all parties involved, and the spectator is given reason to believe there are indeed more feelings between his brother and wife than they admit (or is screened). In *Brothers*, set in a conservative American climate, Sam's high school sweetheart Grace clearly (and visibly) does not allow such feelings to seep through. In both cases, Michael/Sam's incomprehension and exaggerated violent reaction towards his family illustrates his symptoms of post-traumatic stress. He starts suffering from insomnia, drinking heavily, and destroys the kitchen his brother helped build during his absence. While growing increasingly hostile, his daughters add fuel to the fire by disclosing their preference for their uncle. In the films' climactic finale, Michael/Sam's and his brother fight, while the latter, anticipating Michael/Sam's uncontrolled and unstable mind, has already called the police. Upon their arrival, Michael/Sam becomes homicidal and suicidal, first pointing a gun towards the police, and then

[126] We cannot be sure if in *Brothers* Sam's PTSD is not instead Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), which typically begins immediately after trauma and can gradually transform into PTSD (Caruth 4; DSM-5 online, article 309.81 (F43.10)). This is, however, inconsequential to the depiction of Michael/Sam's behaviour.

threatening to take his own life. He is overpowered and brought to a psychiatric hospital.

Although *Brothers* is faithful to *Brødre*, with almost identical scenes and dialogues, Michael's behaviour and attitude towards his family is decidedly more violent and menacing. Michael's mental and physical struggles draw a raw portrait of the traumatic effects of torture and warfare. In the domestic violence scenes some of the torture he experienced seeps through and is transferred into his relationship with his family. This constructs Michael's ambiguous status as victim: although affected by PTSD, *Brødre* accentuates the convergence of victim with perpetrator. Although a war victim, he now becomes an offender in his own home.

Like Grace's repression of her feelings for Tommy, Sam's repressed physical violence in *Brothers* is characteristic of a film that is polished and appropriated for an American audience.[127] Despite his outbursts of anger, Sam is only physically violent towards his brother and to the policemen. As such, his destructive behaviour, not directed towards women and children, is mitigated for the viewer and deemed less 'offensive'. This impression of Sam's upheld morality in times of crisis is reinforced when one of the policemen tells Sam, right before he is overpowered, that he is a "war hero, sir". Although voiced to calm Sam down when waving a gun, it is emphasized that Sam is a hero who survived Taliban captivity. Yet it also makes painfully explicit that which Sam himself does not want to hear: that he is a hero and not a killer.

Brødre's unpolished rawness is derived through form and plot: the frequent use of a hand-held camera creates an oppressive atmosphere in relation to domestic violence and the suggestion of adultery. The Hollywood adaptation looks for a similar edge with its

[127] *Brødre* has been seen in the light of Susanne Bier's earlier Dogme film *Elsker dig for evigt* (*Open Hearts*, 2002). In addition, Ulrich Thomsen's role as Michael has been linked to his role in Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (1998), made in a Dogme 95 style that uses naturalistic, intense emotions, and a hand-held camera. The American *Brothers* appropriates the themes presented in *Brødre* and polishes them into a Hollywood adaptation, which stresses conventional ideals regarding heroism, marriage, and adultery. See also Markert's emphasis on this difference between the two films (250-252).

depiction of "a US marine committing atrocities while imprisoned, even under torture and duress" (Bradshaw 2010). Furthermore, Sam's character, a traumatised war veteran going ballistic, is not "an obvious product of the Hollywood machine" (ibid.). However, the film's "glossy veneer, carefully composed shots and superstar cast" (Lawrence), in which the taboo of adultery remains nicely under the radar, detract from the film's potentially potent critique of the self-evident heroic status of American soldiers on the one hand, and on the thin line between victim and culprit in warfare on the other. As such, *Brothers* is not "post-heroic" (Burgoyne 2012a, 8) in the sense that *The Mark of Cain*, *Brødre*, and *Syriana* are. The latter three display a self-conscious reflection on patriotism and the use of torture (*The Mark of Cain),* and (domestic) violence and weaponry (*Brødre*), and explicitly present the side-effects of warfare. *Brothers*, like *Body of Lies*, seems less determined to let go of American heroism and patriotism and underlines the need for action against dangerous regimes.

Brødre/*Brothers* in relation to *The Mark of Cain*

Michael/Sam is taken to a psychiatric hospital where his wife visits him. After she pressures him into confessing what happened during his capture, indicating that she will leave him if he refuses to talk about his experiences, the films end with Michael/Sam uttering a sentence that points to a first attempt at verbalizing his traumatic experiences. In *The Mark of Cain*, Mark is willing to talk about the events, despite his guilt, yet when on sick leave he cannot verbalize to his mother what happened in the cells. In all films, having tortured seems to produce the effect of disintegration of the 'self' and of that which expresses the 'self' (Scarry 19): in both cases their trauma leads to unnarratability,[128] and suicide or suicidal tendencies. However, where *Brødre*/*Brothers* hints at a sign of recovery, in *The Mark of Cain*, no such optimism is possible as Mark commits suicide, Shane goes to prison, and the other involved soldiers remain unpunished.

[128] See again for trauma and narrating or representation: Scarry, Felman and Laub, Van Alphen (2004), and more recently on trauma in film, Kaplan and Wang.

In the *Brothers* films and in *The Mark of Cain*, the themes of torture and PTSD are intertwined and occupy a prominent part of the plot. The main question addressed in all three films is how loyal one stays to oneself after being involved in the torture of others, and how to subsequently deal with one's respective decisions afterwards. Greatly impairing their social lives, the PTSD that develops manifests differently in *The Mark of Cain* than in *Brødre/Brothers*, which results from the nature and circumstances surrounding the torture the protagonists are involved in. Mark was not forced to torture to the degree Michael and Sam were, and although seemingly unable to refuse participation, not Mark's life but rather his honour depends on the refusal to cooperate. Less aggressive than Michael/Sam, he is instead consumed by embarrassment at his institutional exclusion, by guilt over his own lack of backbone, and by anger over the military's lack of responsibility. In *Brothers*, Michael/Sam's life depends on the refusal, but not necessarily his honour. He could have been courageous by sacrificing his own life for that of his subordinate, but the technician/private would most likely have been killed nonetheless. Mark might initially *feel* he has no choice, but Michael and Sam really do not have one.

The Mark of Cain's power resides in its fragmented atemporal narrative structure, which translates some of Mark's gradual mental deterioration, while leaving the status of narration opaque and unreliable. Similarly, the *Brothers* films mould war trauma and torture into a private "micro-drama" (Burgoyne 2012b, 179), reflected by the films' titles, that particularly accentuate the impact of PTSD on families. Unlike the ticking bomb scenarios and geopolitical thrillers already described in this study, the *Brothers* films, like *Syriana*, are characterized by the consequences of torture and on the developmental nature of relationships and domestic life, rather than by action and suspense.

Brødre and *Brothers* invite the viewer to feel sympathy alternatingly for the traumatised Michael/Sam and for his wife and brother, but *Brødre* does this more convincingly than its adaptation. Due to the frequent use of a hand-held camera, *Brødre* attaches the

spectator to the characters' skin and absorbs the spectator into the family's household, in which the camera creates a sense of claustrophobia that adds to the mounting tensions. Whereas in *Brothers* emotions are expressed but violence is withheld, in *Brødre* the viewer is included in the characters' looming emotions as well as of Michael's violent outbursts. In addition, like *The Mark of Cain*, *Brødre*'s style of filming draws attention to the unrepresentability of trauma; the unsteady hand-held camera does not translate Michael's trauma as such, but evokes the working of Michael's unstable mind and simmering unexpressed feelings. In the film's formal style a parallel is thus drawn with the film's content to express Michael's mental instability. This again implies that trauma can only be suggested in a similarly fragmentary, distorted, and restrained manner.

These factors establish that *Brødre* manages to convey internal constraints, Michael's turbulence, and the troubled intimacy between characters more potently. The adaptation, on the contrary, schematically positions the characters and their intense, pent-up emotions elicited by *Brødre*'s naturalistic film style. Sam's overacted emotional outbursts seem to express the idea of PTSD rather than evoke its structure or 'psychology' (Scott 2009; Van der Burg). Additionally, whereas Michael and his brother Jannik are initially staged as the 'good' and 'bad' son, or the son who fights for his country and has a loving family and the son who has robbed a bank, this moral binary begins to dissolve when Michael becomes violent and threatens his family and Jannik starts looking after Michael's wife and children. This dissolving boundary provides an extra layer to Michael character that is not present in the 'war hero' Sam.

Both *The Mark of Cain* and *Brothers* fail to convey an attachment between spectator and protagonists due to the fragmented structure of the narrative and the confusion elicited concerning the status of focalisation and the reliability of narration. In *The Mark of Cain* the spectator knows less than the characters, which leaves her to grope in the dark until Shane's story unravels, and the plot remains confusing even then. In *Brødre* the spectator knows more than the characters. The film's cast is presented to the viewer differently, and together the

characters become constituents of a 'moral character' that presents their subjective view on the situation. As all characters are separately considered, this creates sympathy for their respective positions and aligns the spectator to the characters individually.

On the contrary, very little information about Shane's character and internal world is provided, which sustains a distance between the viewer and his character and the ambiguous nature of his testimony. The spectator is inclined to attach to Mark, as his internal world is presumably presented through external focalisation, and as he proves to greatly suffer first from the pressure to participate in torture, and later from being scapegoated for it.

The differences in how identification is elicited are neither good nor bad traits of the films (although *Brothers*' schematic approach comes across as a missed opportunity, but only in relation to the original version *Brødre*) but they do show how formal means invite the spectator to become either a more active or passive viewer.[129] *The Mark of Cain*'s fragmentary nature, ambiguous focalisation, and the presentation of the plot as a possibly true, yet unreliable, flashback hinder acceptance of what is presented, and instead incite a state of enduring confusion. The lack of affective engagement and the atemporal structure compel the spectator to take a self-reflexive, ethical position. *Brødre*'s narrative structure, the use of the hand-held camera, the spectator's omniscient knowledge, and the spectator's engagement with the various perspectives of Michael and his family, attach the spectator more potently to the characters in *Brødre* than in *The Mark of Cain*. *Brødre*, however, spells out the characters' various stakes and perspectives of the situation, which allows the spectator to more easily process the plot.

[129] This is the dilemma of using between different media formats, genre formats, and stylistic formats to represent traumatic events, in which the subsequent question of which is favourable becomes a moral and judgemental one. See also Elsaesser's work (1996).

Brothers and *Brødre* on the one hand, and *The Mark of Cain* on the other hand formulate different political critiques. *The Mark of Cain* does not necessarily raise the question of military intervention in the Middle East but does addresses military immorality and injustice. It is suggested that patriarchal oppression and bullying is transmitted from superior to subordinate and between privates: those who were bullied as new recruits will in turn bully or abuse others. This raises questions about the moral integrity of the military, rather than about political interventions.

Brothers/*Brødre* addresses the presence of the US/Danish military in Afghanistan, but *Brothers* does so more explicitly. The difference between engagement with Michael's disturbed mind and violent outbursts in *Brødre*, and *Brothers*' schematic depiction of PTSD can be explained by the remake's focus, not only on the development of PTSD, but also on the political implications of the intervention in Afghanistan, and the Taliban's response. Released in 2009, *Brothers* follows on the cluster of 'body genre' films produced and released around 2007/2008, as defined by Burgoyne (2012a, 12), in which the heroism and patriotism of the War on Terror are overshadowed by a delineation of the war's side effects on vulnerable and violated bodies. In *Brothers* the Taliban's motivation for captivity and torture is made explicit through the recordings, yet in *Brødre* the spectator can only guess the Taliban's motivations and is led to assume similar anti-Western sentiments. Although Michael's forced killing of his subordinate and his PTSD sound like a recipe for an anti-war film, the focus does not lie on the operations in the Middle East. Instead, the consequences of Michael's decision to act in self-preservation, as a form of primal instinct, is made tangible through PTSD. In this sense, the nature of the situation in which torture takes place is of secondary relevance in *Brødre*; the effect of torture, not the deed itself, proves pivotal, and the occurrence of torture is almost interchangeable with any other gruesome and traumatic event. In *Brothers*, however, the development of Sam's PTSD is staged in tandem with the ongoing intervention in Afghanistan and the Taliban's use of torture to make a

point about US foreign affairs. Therefore the action – torture in captivity – is as important as its effect on Sam. Despite the Taliban's anti-American messages, *Brothers* does not necessarily oppose intervening in the Middle East. Instead, it suggests that the operations are not damaging as such, but captivity and torture by the Taliban are. The fact that the Taliban threatens to decapitate the soldiers in the film only stresses the necessity of military interventions in such a 'barbaric' culture.

In *Brothers*, Sam is not the only one suffering from PTSD. It is suggested that his father, a Vietnam War veteran, suffers or has suffered from traumatic war experiences. Whereas in *Brødre* the difficult relationship between Michael's brother Jannik and their father is due to the latter's disappointment by Jannik's criminal record and unemployment, in *Brother*s the tension between Sam's brother Tommy and their father is due to the latter's latent aggression, depression, and alcoholism caused by untreated PTSD. The manifestation of PTSD in Sam and Tommy's father suggests that Sam might have been affected by their dad's oppressive behaviour before his mission in Afghanistan (Lawrence), whereas Michael is 'only' affected by his own trauma (Early 2014, 59).[130] The theme of undiagnosed and repressed PTSD in *Brothers* seems to formulate a more general critique of the business of war after all; it is not only damaging for those involved, but also for the next generation. The occurrence of PTSD however does not overrule the necessity of military interventions; the message is that it is *untreated* PTSD in particular that is damaging.

Brødre, released in 2004, provides a raw portrayal of war cruelties but neither shares *Brothers*' explicit political undercurrent nor frames an explicit critique on military functioning and the effects of peer pressure, as does *The Mark of Cain* (which, also based on real

[130] Early argues that intergenerational transmission of PTSD can occur through abuse or neglect of the child, or indirectly through the child's close association with the traumatised parent (2003: 59). Interestingly, early in *Brødre* it is suggested that Michael resembles his father in the latter's rigidness and in the detached manner in which he expresses his affection for his family. His PTSD, however, magnifies these character traits. While in *Brødre* Michael only resembles his dad's aloofness, it is suggested that in *Brothers* Sam is affected by his dad's undiagnosed PTSD.

events, formulates its political messages more explicitly than *Zero Dark Thirty*, which does not pose such a critique). Similar European films that explore the consequences of being exposed to the War on Terror's violence – such as killings in *Route Irish* (Ken Loach, 2010) and torture in *Five Years* (Stefan Schaller, *Fünf Jahre Leben*, 2013) – are also more political than *Brødre*, because they accentuate governmental corruption, misdeeds, or lawlessness. *Brødre* examines the personal cost of the traumatised war veteran through post-traumatic stress and domestic violence, *without* the explicit political message or critique of similar war veteran films.[131] This means that European film does not necessarily present the War on Terror in more critical terms than Hollywood cinema, but that the focus lies on the personal costs of warfare and violence, rather than on making political justifications for or critiques of the War on Terror.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by exploring three different yet interlaced features: whether the figure of the war veteran, his association with torture, a focus on personal and group responsibility, and resulting psychological turbulence shapes another form of political critique of War on Terror operations. Secondly, I investigated whether the identification created for the protagonists, both victims and culprits, facilitated an understanding of the moral decisions made and actions undertaken as a consequence of torture, and whether these moral decision helped in creating sympathy for the protagonists. This last aspect of inquiry is tied to the way in which PTSD is represented by the film's content and formal structure.

In *The Mark of Cain*, the occurrence of torture is the result of the military's machismo and oppressive nature, but is never justified on those terms. Rather, the torture of Iraqi detainees seems secondary to the alarming lack of responsibility taken by the military superiors and

[131] Such as *Home of the Brave* (Irwin Winkler, 2006), *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006), *Badland* (Francesco Lucente, 2007), *Stop-Loss* (Kimberly Peirce, 2008), *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008), and *The Veteran* (Matthew Hope, 2011).

to the consequences of Mark and Shane's subsequent exclusion from the military body.

By simultaneously depicting the 'barbarism' of the military, by maintaining the detainees' humanness for the spectator, and by re-humanizing them later through Mark and Shane's testimony, *The Mark of Cain* moves beyond the binary of civilization versus barbarism, and the 'with-us-or-against-us' rhetoric (Sontag 2004, Part IV; Boletsi 1) that began to be questioned after Abu Ghraib. More than *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Unthinkable*, the film explicitly critiques the use of torture, the peer pressure within the military that leads to torture, and the deadlock of moral courage. More importantly, the film unambiguously shows the ideology behind the mechanism of moral courage and culpability: the open secret of violent excesses, yet the desire to keep these behind closed doors and to conform to a false public ignorance.

Unlike Mark, Michael/Sam in the *Brothers* films are forced to kill as punishment for Western presence in Afghanistan and have no choice. The Taliban's political motivation and the intra-generational effects of PTSD are made explicit in *Brothers* but not in *Brødre*, which largely avoids contextual and political questions about military intervention in Afghanistan and about warfare in more general terms. This proves to be the most explicit difference between the two films.

In these three films, torture is depicted in less graphic terms than in *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Syriana*, and *Body of Lies*. This can, firstly, be explained by seeing the function of torture as secondary to the effects of torture on the protagonists. Only in *Brothers* is torture firmly tied to questions about the legitimacy of the War on Terror. In *The Mark of Cain* and *Brødre*, the torture episodes are gruesome occasions that set the stage for the consequences of participating in such violence for the film's protagonists.

The second explanation for the films' less overt way of framing torture is that torture here is not motivated by information gathering, but by the desire to humiliate: Mark and Shane's humiliation of the Iraqi detainees, and the Taliban's humiliation of Sam/Michael respectively. Furthermore, as the narratives concentrate on the situations leading up to torture and the consequences of the humiliating episodes, the

interaction or role-play between torturer and tortured is not expounded.

This focus on the humiliating nature of torture and its aftermath has formal consequences. In all cases, the torture episode proves devastating – to Sam/Michael in *Brothers/Brødre* and to the detainees as well as Mark in *The Mark of Cain*. In *The Mark of Cain*, Mark's trauma and disintegrating mind are suggested by the film's atemporal and distorted narrative structure, in which the 'single' event of torture is cut into fragments and shots that return as motifs and are as such interspersed with the story. At the same time, the precise status of the fragments and the identity of its narrator remain opaque. As such, the film's structure firstly plays with the (un)representability of trauma: the spectator's desire for conclusiveness is constantly thwarted, and aporia, confusion, and emotional distance with regards to the characters are instead established. The film intends that precisely this impasse confronts the spectator with the limits of representability. Secondly, the unreliable or ambiguous focalisation functions as a strategy to muddy the categories of perpetrator and victim, in which the spectator's moral judgment is constantly postponed. This strategy compels the spectator to take a self-reflexive, ethical position.

Brødre's naturalistic, raw style formally resembles *The Mark of Cain* more than *Brothers*; its use of the unsteady hand-held camera evokes the working of Michael's unstable mind and unexpressed trauma. While *The Mark of Cain*'s lack of engagement between spectator and character and its distorted narration compel the spectator into a self-reflexive, ethical position, *Brødre* spells out the characters' various stakes and perspectives on the situation and absorbs the spectator into the claustrophobic domestic atmosphere and personal relationships. In *Brothers*, the experience and development of PTSD as evoked by *The Mark of Cain* and *Brødre*'s formal structures is polished and schematically applied through more conventional camerawork.

The films' depictions of the war veteran prompts further contemplation; the protagonists' vulnerability and instability upon their return to normal society provokes a rethinking of the moral decisions these men were forced to make within the military apparatus or in

combat, and, more broadly, the social and political status of the war veteran in the context of the War on Terror.