

*Valley of the Wolves, Iraq and Green Zone:
Inventive Presumptions in the Iraq War, 2003*

**وادي الذئاب العراق والمنطقة الخضراء:
الافتراضات الابتكارية في حرب العراق، 2003**

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المخلص:

الهدف من هذه الدراسة النقدية هو فحص مدى صحة تصوير حرب العراق (2003) في إنتاجات السينما التركية والأمريكية بعد الحرب، وذلك باستخدام وجهتي نظر متميزتين. تكشف هذه الدراسة عن أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين الأجندات السياسية للولايات المتحدة وتركيا من خلال تحليل محتوى الفلمين: المنطقة الخضراء للأفلام الأمريكية (2010) ووادي الذئاب العراق (2006) للسينما التركية. لقد تم استخدام هذا المجال الخاص من صناعة السينما كوسيلة غير قسرية لتعزيز الأهداف السياسية ودفع الأجندة السياسية نحو الحرب. في الواقع، تُستخدم أفلام الحرب كقوة سياسية غير مرئية لإقناع الجمهور. ولذلك، لتنفيذ هذا البحث. سيتم استخدام منهج تحليل المحتوى الخاص بأوكونور للكشف عن الدوافع الضمنية المتجسدة في الأفلام المذكورة سابقاً وراء غزو العراق عام 2003. تظهر النتيجة أن الأفلام التاريخية لا يمكن أبداً أن تكون أصلية تماماً لأنها تعمل كمنصات للتعليق السياسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

حرب العراق؛ غير قسري؛ الضمنية؛ المتجسدة؛ السلطة.

Abstract:

The aim of this critical study is to examine the veracity of the depiction of the Iraq War (2003) in post-war Turkish and American cinema productions, using two distinct points of view. This study exposes the similarities and differences between the political agendas of the United States and Turkey by using content analysis to approach the American Film Green Zone (2010) and the Turkish Film Valley of the Wolves, Iraq (2006). This particular realm of the film industry has been used as a non-coercive means to further political goals and advance the political agenda toward war. In fact, war movies are used as an invisible political power to convince the public. Therefore, to carry out this research, John. E. O'Connor's Content Analysis approach will be used to reveal the implicit motives embedded in the two movies behind the Iraq invasion in 2003. The result shows that historical movies can never be completely authentic since they serve as platforms for political commentary.

Keywords:

Iraq War; none-coercive; implicit; embedded, power.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The film industry has a key role in every day's conflict, particularly in times of crisis. It shapes people's opinions in favor of the government's intentions. It is the most influential medium used for political ends. Therefore, in the realm of cinema, producers center their efforts on projecting on the screen an intentional angle of political issues that fits their agenda. The Iraq invasion in 2003, which is the main concern of this paper, came as a turning point in the history of the Middle East and the Arab world. The emergence of Iraq as a powerful country incited the Bush administration to launch a perilous alarm over President Saddam Hussein's considerable presence in the maelstrom international arena of Western political affairs.

The circumstances in which the United States and its allies declared war on Iraq were a major event represented in war movies. Later, the 'Hollywoodization' of the war's pretext has become problematic, for it shaped a different reality of the events. Consequently, as a counter narrative, the Turkish film industry responded to the events of the Iraq War (2003) with a striking anti-war movie entitled *Valley of the Wolves Iraq* (2006), offering a different insight into the invasion. Hence, this paper offers a thorough content analysis of the movies under study in order to reveal the political interests advanced within.

In the field of cinematic production, cinematic techniques are considered strategic, as they are used to influence and shape the individual's unconsciousness and his attitude towards universal events. According to Antonio Gramsci, the government exerts its power merely if it directs morals and values to the populace via civil institutions such as the media. In his theory of hegemony, as quoted in R. Bates, "public opinion is strictly linked to political hegemony" (Bates, 1975, p.336), This fact is also supported by Chomsky's theory "that propaganda in capitalist, democratic societies has an 'indoctrinating' effect on people" (Cathey, 2009, p.2).

Indeed, this paper is an attempt to analyze the exerted influence of the two post-war movies produced by the Turkish and American film industries, namely, *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq* (2006), and *Green Zone* (2010). In fact, both movies cover the same war yet have different political agendas. This paper is divided into three main sections. The first and second sections are devoted to a thorough analysis of selected scenes from the two movies, with the aim of verifying that they both have distinct interests and a political objective. To do so, O'Connor's approach to content analysis is a tool to unveil the implicit discourse behind the scenes. According to O'Connor, the historical analysis of films involves answering questions about content that involve close, repeated viewings of the film under study and the analysis of the techniques utilized in order to communicate the film's message (O'Connor, 1987, p.11). In the third section, the focus is set on the comparison of the movies under investigation to understand the affinities and differences that join the American and Turkish movies together.

2. Turkish Perception of Iraq War in *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq* (2006):

Valley of Wolves is a television serial of ninety-seven episodes that began on January 22, 2003. It is written by Bahadır Özdenir and Raci Şaşmaz, produced by Osman Sinay and Raci Sasmaz, and directed by Serdar Akar and Sadullah Sentürk. From the early days of its broadcast, the serial reached enormous success. The series cover the most recent and actual major political events of the time; they offer explanations for some concrete events that occur in Turkey.

After three successful seasons of the serial, a film by the same production team was produced under the name of *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, in 2006. The film has also gained popularity and became the subject of a public debate. It was released three years after the Turkish Parliament rejected a US request to use Turkish territory for its invasion of Iraq on March 1, 2003. This refusal created a tense diplomatic relationship between the US and Turkey. The climate of uncertainty that reigned during the Iraq War and the rapid political changes in Iraq made it difficult for Turkey to set a clear policy about Iraq. Thus, the Turkish government and army have increasingly supported cinema in order to assist Turkish interests (Ahmady, 2006), and this support gave birth to the movie *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*.

In this context, the Turkish film industry presented its opposition to the war against U.S. foreign policies towards Iraq via *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*. The film was driven by a nationalist perspective. Moreover, the producers and writers represented the Iraq War from a distinct perspective. The movie was based on real events that occurred during the Iraq War, namely the 'hood event' (Gozen, 2005, p.81), where a group of Turkish military personnel operating in northern Iraq, Sulaimaniya, on July 4, 2003, were captured, led away with hoods over their heads, and interrogated by the United States military. The soldiers were released sixty hours later, after Turkey protested against the United States. This event damaged diplomatic relations between Turkey and the United States. It was a direct humiliation for the Turkish state. Not long afterward, reports by the Turkish military academies declared that the U.S. was untrustworthy and predicted that it would become an enemy of Turkey (Arnett, 2008, p.6). *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, came as a nationalist reaction to the Sulaimaniya events.

Hence, the film offers a counter narrative, for it was released primarily to restore honor and pride for Turkey, as well as to promote Turkish nationalism and anti-Americanism on the screen through an explicit representation of the Iraq War. Another true incident that was animated in the movie was the Abu Ghraib scandal, which was a U.S. Army detention center for captured Iraqis who were dramatically tortured and abused. This event provoked rage around the world. The movie, thus, sheds light on the terrors of the American soldiers who were supposedly sent to restore humanity in Iraq, but they were themselves deprived of it. This same aspect

of anti-Americanism was also stressed via fictional events in the movie, such as American soldiers' random shootings into a shipping container carrying civilian prisoners to Abu Ghraib prison and also an American Jewish doctor who harvests organs from prisoners to be transferred to the United States, Israel, and Britain.

Conversely, the film appeased Turkish viewers by portraying the true drama of the conflict, which helped them comprehend the geopolitical events that occurred around Turkey. It also followed the protagonist's victorious quest to defeat American officers to restore the dignity and honor of the Turkish state. For instance, former Turkish parliamentary speaker Bulent Arinc describes the movie as "absolutely magnificent" and "an extraordinary film that will go into history." (Anaz & Purcell, 2010, p.40). Furthermore, the Minister of State, Kürşad Tüzmen, compared the film to Hollywood productions and argued that it was 'a source of pride' for Turkish cinema (Dilek, 2011). This declaration also indicates that the Turkish politicians support anti-Americanism in the movie.

In *the Valley of the Wolves*, Iraq Serdar Akar introduces the audience to the atrocities committed by American soldiers during the war. The film opens with a fictional portrayal of the real incident, the 'hood event'. The incident was narrated through flashbacks. Suleyman Aslan, a Turkish officer who was a member of the Turkish military involved in the humiliating event, writes a letter to his friend Polat Alemdar, reporting to him the worst humiliation that he had witnessed. Unable to bear the shame of what happened, he commits suicide after embracing the Turkish flag. The cinematic dramatization of this event, with the rise and fall of the music tone mixed with popular Turkish melody, exemplifies the love of the country and inspires the Turkish viewer to take on the role of the character and seek retribution to restore Turkish national pride and honor.

Polat Alemdar, the Turkish protagonist, is a former Turkish intelligence agent. With his small group, he travels to northern Iraq seeking vengeance over the American commander Sam Marshall, who is responsible for the hood event. Throughout the journey, the filmmaker builds on the concepts of anti-Americanism and anti-war. In fact, the cinematic representation focuses on the atrocity and cruelty of the war and the violent acts of American soldiers, who were represented as inhumane and harsh towards the natives. Thus, this violent vision of the American soldiers portrayed in the movie gives the audience a valid reason to establish a negative view of Americans and the war in general. The latter conception reflects the idea of Noam Chomsky's manufacturing consent, which is creating a negative image using all the possible techniques and methods to promote it in order to convince the audience of its credibility (Cathey, 2009).

For instance, in the midst of an Iraqi wedding, the American soldiers captured the Iraqis violently without any valid reason; they hit women and killed children. It was a massacre that drowned the whole village in blood. Another scene that depicts

Review <i>EL'BAHITH - ENS - Bouzareah - Algiers</i>				
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the inhuman act of the Americans is when Marshal utilized children to threaten Polat. The Marshal says, "I will kill all who would ruin the peace." (Serdar, 2006). This scene incites anti-Americanism, for it could be interpreted as saying that Americans are ready to use all means, even killing innocents, to reach their political ends.

During the course of the investigation, while Polat is determined to meet the American Marshal to make him experience the same humiliation as the Turks, the viewer is driven by another discourse that is anti-Kurdish. Polat declares clearly, in a scene, that he does not acknowledge the Kurdish state. Furthermore, the film explicitly describes the Kurds as gaining power in northern Iraq through their collaboration with American soldiers against the Iraqi people. It could be argued that the Americans used the Kurds to achieve their goals in Iraq. This is exemplified in a particular scene when the American army moves the Arabs away from the mentioned regions in the movie: Kirkuk and Mosul. In a scene, while an Iraqi chief is explaining the manipulations of Americans in Northern Iraq to Polat, he says, "They gave the Kurds the mountain, the Arabs the Sahara, and they took all lands of petrol." (Serdar, 2006). Thus, by giving leadership to the Kurds against the Arabs, the Americans exploited the oil and the richness of the land for their own.

Another aspect of anti-Americanism present in the movie is the American manipulation of the news. Serdar screens a happy audience of Iraqi Kurds at a fake event that was organized by Americans who brought journalists to broadcast it. In the same scene, the Kurds offer Marshal a piano that was taken from Saddam Hussein's palace as a gesture of gratitude in the name of the Iraqi people. Marshal whispers in the Iraqi speaker's ear and promises him something, and then he asks him to smile intentionally for the American photographer. The agenda here highlights the narrow-angled and collaged American news that does not represent the factual reality of the war. It also implies that the Kurds were not only collaborating with Americans, but they were also jubilant about the invasion.

The movie closes with the death of Marshal at the hand of the Turkish protagonist, Polat, using an Iraqi's dagger that is considered symbolic in the movie. The dagger is a representation of the unifying cooperation of Iraqis with the Turks against the American army in northern Iraq. It is a political message that points out that both the Iraqis and the Turks have a common enemy, namely, the American army in Iraq. Furthermore, what satisfied the Turkish audiences was the death of the Marshal, which represents the triumph and the restoration of Turkish national pride. The last scene of the movie ends with a bright sunrise that enlightens the village, along with a popular nationalist Turkish song.

Ultimately, *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, is a movie that propagates anti-Americanism, anti-Kurdish sentiment, and the anti-Iraq war. Through an explicit representation of the war on Iraq, the producer of the movie, Serdar Akar, settles the

focus on the atrocities of the American soldiers in the war. Hence, by creating fictional realities ornamented with cinematic techniques to affect the audience, the movie aims to shape people’s views of the whole event. The Turkish propaganda about the Iraq War in its most successful movie, *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq* (2006), was presented from a Turkish perspective. On the other hand, Hollywood presented the Iraq war from an American perspective in *Green Zone* (2010). The movie is considered controversial and holds distinct realities about the war.

3. American Perception of Iraq War in *Green Zone* (2010):

Green Zone is an American war movie written by Brian Helgeland, directed and produced by Paul Greengrass, who was himself a journalist discussing international conflicts for the Britannica ITV channel (Douin, 2014).

The story of the film is about Roy Miller, an American officer who has a mission to find weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that served George W. Bush as a pretext to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein’s regime. In the movie, a part of the American government fabricates evidence for the existence of a WMD program, confirmed by an Iraqi source, saying that Saddam has a biological-weapons program. The protagonist of the movie is, thus, perplexed by the rapid pace of the events.

Roy Miller investigates all the locations that were asked to be inspected, yet no trace was found for the appalling WMD. Miller's doubts over the reliability of the information source are refuted by Clark Poundstone, an agent of information for the American defense. So, with the help of a confused Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent, Miller begins a personal inquiry. This fictional quest demonstrates deft political maneuvering.

The film starts with the sound effects of war alarms, bombings, and women's cries. A horrifying and explicit image of the complete devastation of the capital is screened to transmit to the audience a hostile atmosphere of the invasion of March 19, 2003. Four weeks later, the investigation of the WMD by Roy Miller begins. After three consecutive quests, he finds the sites empty, which disseminates doubt about the credibility of the source of information. Yet, Miller, without solid conviction, executes his mission. Despite the fact that Martin Brown, the CIA agent, confirms to him that the site was already inspected in vain by the United Nations’ team, Miller goes to the fourth site, situated in Al Mansour, to circle Baghdad, the capital. Here, the scene indirectly absolves the American soldiers of guilt. The counter-discourse of this act is to indoctrinate the viewer with the idea that not all the soldiers were convinced by the war, and therefore, it liberates the soldiers from the accusations of the invasion.

On the Al Mansour site, Freedy, an Iraqi citizen, approaches Miller to provide him with important information about illegitimate events occurring in his town.

Freedy, with his patriotic and prideful attitude, makes Miller see the absurdity of what he is doing; digging in a popular location to look for WMD is something irrational. Hence, Miller decides to follow him to find out the truth. Here, the producer makes it clear that the American government oriented the attention of people to make them believe in the existence of the WMD. Thus, closely, people followed the information and the news to find their trace, ignoring all the misery of the Iraqis. The invasion was led under what is called "Operation Iraqi Freedom." The collaboration between the Iraqis and the American soldiers in the film incites the idea that the Iraqis were against Saddam and accepted the help of the Americans to settle peace in Iraq. For instance, in the scene when Freedy furiously rejects Miller's intention to reward him for the information he has provided, he says, "Whatever you want here, I want more than what you want; I want to help my country." (Greengrass, 2010). This scene exemplifies the producer's manipulation of ideas to project an innocent image of Americans who went there merely to liberate Iraqi people.

Another scene that reveals the veiled intentions of American intelligence is in a meeting where the members of American intelligence, in the presence of an agent of the CIA, were arguing about selecting Zubaidi as the new leader of Iraq. Nonetheless, in the course of the scene, CIA agent Martin Brown argues to collaborate with an officer from the Iraqi army who can really help the American agencies settle peace in Iraq instead of bringing an unreliable man who was exiled for thirty years. He added, "If you corrupt the army, you dismiss the country, and I assure you, you will get civil war in six months." (Greengrass, 2010). The discourse that is apparent in the latter scene is that the CIA agency was aware of and against the decisions of the corrupted part of the government and their misty manipulations. However, the agenda of it really is to convince the audience that the American government is not fully corrupt and that there are members within who fight the wrongdoers. Doing so, the producer aims to restore faith in the American government in particular and in the American people in general.

Green Zone also projects the way the American government confused the media and made it defuse fake realities on the front for a particular reason. In a scene, Miller was surfing the net, where he found an article written by Lawrie Dayne, entitled 'New source confirms Iraq WMP program,' February 22, 2003. The article covers all the declined areas that were identified to be investigated but in which the WMD were not found. When Miller addresses Lawrie Dayne to understand the disillusion of the information, she could merely say that she had the information from a reliable source from the government. Furthermore, in another scene at the airport, Poundstone is questioned by Wall Street Journal reporter Lawrie Dayne; she asks him to meet Magellan, who was identified as the source of information concerning the existence of WMD. Poundstone finds himself embarrassed and unable to guide her to the truth, for he knows that the WMD are not

yet found. The efforts of the American journalists searching for the truth in the movie demonstrate the credibility of the media. Nevertheless, the media defused fake realities purposely to persuade the public about the necessity of the war.

By the end of the movie, Roy Miller writes a verdict report that falsifies the existence of WMD in Iraq. He sends it to different international journals, including Lawrie Dayen. By doing so, Greengrass is portraying to the audience a good American soldier who has endured a long journey of investigation to discover the truth and uncover the responsible villain, American political leaders, for the distortion in Iraq. On the other hand, he is also highlighting the fact that the American media was misled. This depiction is used by the producer to affect the opinion of the viewer and to give a new positive image of the American soldiers, who were highly criticized.

Essentially, the above-discussed scenes in the movie support Gramsci's theory, who believed that in order for the government to exert its power, it had to first direct morals and values to the populace via the media. In his theory of hegemony, he states that public opinion is strictly linked to political hegemony. Hence, Greengrass is promoting the political agenda elaborated in *Green Zone* to persuade the audience that the Iraq invasion was led by some American political leaders who do not necessarily represent all the members of the American government in order to restore faith in the American government again.

4. Comparison between *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq (2006)*, and *Green Zone (2010)*:

Both *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, and *Green Zone* are anti-war movies. They were produced after years of the Iraqi invasion (2003), which is known to be unjustified by public opinion worldwide. Although both movies emphasize and shed light on the horror and atrocity of the war, the purpose of these films is to enhance the image of the American soldier in the *Green Zone* while focusing on the restoration of Turkish pride in the *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*.

In both movies, the protagonists carry out a mission. Polat in the *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, and Miller in the *Green Zone* seem to have a patriotic mission to accomplish. In the Turkish film, Polat travels to northern Iraq to seek vengeance for the Hood event incident and restore Turkish pride. Across his journey, the viewer experiences through Polat's eyes the atrocities of the war and the turmoil of the Iraqis. On the other hand, Miller, an American soldier, is missioned to find the Weapons of Mass Destruction, which is an act of bravery to secure the lives of Iraqis and to protect the world from the great danger of the WMD. Hence, *Green Zone* portrays the events of the war via Miller to show the audience the heroic attitude of the American soldiers. The portrayal of American soldiers in the *Green Zone* is unlike their depiction in the *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*. Therefore, the contrast in the American soldiers' representation is evident in the two movies.

Review <i>EL'BAHITH - ENS - Bouzareah - Algiers</i>				
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The concept of media being used as an influential medium of communication is tackled in both movies. Both producers seem to shed light on the possible manipulation of media to communicate false or intended information for a specific purpose. For instance, in *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, Polat orders Marshal to wear the hood and go out to the media reporters in order to satisfy the Turkish audience and restore their pride. On the other hand, in *Green Zone*, Miller has a private meeting with an American journalist where he blames her for publishing unreliable and false information about the existence of WMD. In addition, by the end of the movie, Miller is captured writing a detailed report about the misleading information and blurred sources given to the soldiers in Iraq to find the WMD that did not even exist; he, thus, sends it to the most known news channels to unveil the reality of the war and expose media news' manipulations.

In essence, this comparison is a guide to easily recognize that both movies are indeed a representation of the war; however, each film is modelling reality according to its own political agenda presented by the producers. Hence, cinema is indeed a strong and influential medium through which producers can possibly orient or direct the audience's vision.

5. Conclusion:

Movies that represent historical events cannot be completely authentic since they are used as vehicles to display political messages. The Iraq War was indeed an invasion based on manipulative assumptions. In the realm of the international film industry, Hollywood started a wave of post-war movies with the aim of creating sympathy and compassion for the American combatants who participated in the war. This strategy is in fact a tool meant to influence the audience and make them change the way they perceive the war. The Turkish film industry, on the other hand, has provided counter-narrative movies to offer a different insight into the war. Indeed, post-war movies like *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, and *Green Zone* are representations of one single historical event, but since the interest of the portrayal is different, this makes the war seen differently. In other words, *Valley of the Wolves, Iraq*, is a Turkish movie that communicates strong political messages like anti-Americanism and anti-Kurd sentiment that serve the country politically to gather domestic opinion against external enemies, that is, the Americans and the Kurds. On the other hand, the portrayal of the Iraqi war in the *Green Zone* is an attempt to restore faith in American soldiers and the American government. This helps in creating an idealist image of the American government to set them apart from the previous wars that turned the public against them, like the Vietnam War (1955) and the Iraq War (2003), and to cement the ground for new intended military interventions such as the war in Syria. Ultimately, it is clear that cinema is an institution used by the government to exert its hegemonic power indirectly and guide the viewers to adhere to its political agenda.

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