



# DROWNING THE BODY IN PAIN: TORTURE IN *THE RAILWAY MAN* AND *ZERO DARK THIRTY*

AFOGANDO O CORPO NA DOR: TORTURA EM *THE RAILWAY MAN* E  
*ZERO DARK THIRTY*

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**RESUMO:** O objetivo deste artigo é discutir as características e implicações das representações de tortura em filmes de guerra, mais especificamente, na análise cinematográfica das sequências de interrogação e tortura em *The Railway Man*, ambientado durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial, e *Zero Dark Thirty*, um filme que representa o clima de guerra após os ataques de 11 de setembro. A análise fílmica das cenas proporciona um entendimento sobre a performance e as ramificações da dor corpórea e emocional, assim como o debate sobre o retrato dos papéis de torturador e torturado. Tais representações demonstram o impacto dos eventos traumáticos de guerra no imaginário nacional ao mergulhar profundamente nas funções do corpo e da memória, à medida que o passado vem à tona como uma manifestação corpórea de sensações dolorosas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** cinema; guerra; tortura.

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to discuss the characteristics and implications of the depiction of torture in war films, more specifically, in the cinematic analysis of the interrogation and torture sequences in *The Railway Man*, which is set during the Second World War, and *Zero Dark Thirty*, a movie that represents the post-9/11 warfare climate. The filmic analysis of the scenes provides an understanding of the portrayal and ramifications of corporeal and emotional pain while also raising a debate on the depiction of the roles of torturer and tortured. Such representations demonstrate the impact of traumatic warfare events in the national imaginary, delving deep into the role of the body and memory as the past resurfaces in the corporealized manifestation of painful sensations.

**KEYWORDS:** cinema; war; torture.

The subject of torture and the act of inflicting pain upon a human being can be seen as complex elements that have been present in the war film genre, especially as the opposing military sides closely interact with each other. Whether in a film that deals with the Second World War, such as *The Railway Man* directed by Jonathan Teplitzky in 2013, or with the most recent post 9/11 conflicts, in this case Katherine Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* in 2012, the filmic representation of physical and emotional pain caused by torture remains a challenging feature, since the ability to intimately grasp someone else's pain still requires an intricate assembly of narrative and cinematic elements. Elaine Scarry comments on the difficulty and inexpressibility of physical pain when she points out that "when one hears about another person's physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person's body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact [that] has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth".<sup>1</sup> Cinematic portrayals of pain allow the unearthing of such complex phenomenon through the depiction of visual and narrative elements. The aim of this article is to cinematically analyze the interrogation and torture sequences of two war films, *The Railway Man* and *Zero Dark Thirty*, in order to better comprehend the portrayal and implications of corporeal and emotional pain and discuss the depiction of the roles of the torturer

and tortured. Such representations demonstrate the impact of traumatic warfare events in the national imaginary, delving deep into the role of the body and memory as the past resurfaces in the corporealized manifestation of painful sensations.

The act of torture has as a fundamental element the exposition of power to cause pain upon the tortured body. Scarry discusses the idea of torture as follows:

[Torture is] itself a demonstration and magnification of the felt-experience of pain. In the very processes it uses to produce pain within the body of the prisoner, it bestows visibility on the structure and enormity of what is usually private and incommunicable, contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body.<sup>2</sup>

The torturer assures that the spectacle of power over the prisoner's body is incontestable through the magnification of psychological and bodily threats, and their subsequent applications. Pain turns into power through an "obsessive, self-conscious display of agency" by the torturer.<sup>3</sup> Instances of agency occur in the exposition of the painful weapons that are being utilized to torture, and the hostile configuration of the interrogation or torture rooms and their furniture, or lack of them. The elements that are part of the world built for the visible process of torture signal "the

1. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 3.

2. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 27.

3. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 27.

conversion of every conceivable aspect of the event and the environment into an agent of pain”.<sup>4</sup> The presence or absence of objects have their own purposes in the fearmongering spectacle of torture.

The body and the voice become two components that are intimately connected to pain and interrogation. One of the objectives of torture, although not usually the main goal, is the gathering of information. Scarry points out that there are two acts linked to the mechanism of torture: the physical act and the verbal act. The physical act can be seen as the “infliction of pain” on the prisoner’s body by a variety of methods, and it is usually followed by the verbal act, or “the Question,” the so-called reason for staging the torture.<sup>5</sup> These questions are voiced in a manner of supreme importance even if the content of the answers turns out to be insignificant or incomplete. As Scarry claims, the interrogation process cannot be seen as the sole reason for torture due to the fact that the reasons for the arrests are in some cases fictional.<sup>6</sup> She explains that “for every instance in which someone with critical information is interrogated, there are hundreds interrogated who could know nothing of remote importance to the stability or self-image of the regime”.<sup>7</sup> In this case, information retrieval is secondary whereas the display of power over the destiny of the tortured person’s life can be demonstrated for society.

The relationship between the torturer and tortured is an interaction based on threats, pain, and power subjugation. The torturer controls the most basic needs of the tortured such as food intake and sleep regularity, among others. The former does not only dominate these elements but, most importantly, displays to the latter that he retains the power over these elementary choices that directly affect one’s wellbeing on a daily basis. Concerning the opposite positions that torturer and tortured have in relation to pain and interrogation, the physical and verbal acts, Scarry observes that:

For the torturers, the sheer and simple fact of human agony is made invisible, and the moral fact of inflicting that agony is made neutral by the feigned urgency and significance of the question. For the prisoner, the sheer, simple, overwhelming fact of his agony will make neutral and invisible the significance of any question as well as the significance of the world to which the question refers. Intense pain is world-destroying.<sup>8</sup>

In the process of inflicting severe pain on the tortured in order to obtain answers, the world that is created for the act of torture and the corporeal sensibility to the injuries become the only existing and palpable elements for the prisoner who experiences a rupture from the outside

4. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 27.

5. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 28.

6. As an example, Anne McClintock mentions that in Guantánamo Bay detention camp and Abu Ghraib prison “most of the men and, yes, the women and children imprisoned, and many of them tortured, [...] are likewise neither terrorists nor enemy combatants but innocent people, most often picked up in random sweeps [...], people who, by the government’s own admission, could not provide and have not provided ‘actionable intelligence’”. MCCLINTOCK. *Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib*, p. 50-51.

7. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 28.

8. SCARRY. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, p. 29.

world in geographical and mental terms. Questions and answers are not placed in the realm of a rational and logical exchange of information, they are instead related to a struggle for power assertion on the side of the torturer and respite from the pain from the position of the tortured.

One of the most ruthless methods of torture is called waterboarding, a practice represented in both films being analyzed in this article and that have relevant roles in the narratives. The basic principle of waterboarding is the use of water to asphyxiate the prisoner and lead to the feeling of drowning. Cristián Correa comments on the notion of waterboarding, as follows:

The effect results within a few seconds or minutes and leaves no external injuries, thereby eluding a definition of torture which requires proof of injury, bleeding, or other physical harm. Waterboarding has been designed to cause intense psychological pain while granting technical impunity to those administering the punishment.<sup>9</sup>

The gruesome method has also been called “‘water torture’, ‘water rag’, ‘wet bag’, ‘chiffon’, ‘submarino’, and the ‘water cure’”.<sup>10</sup> In an overwhelmingly clinical description of the method of waterboarding, the U.S. Department of Justice coldly delineates the steps to the act of this specific torture:

The individual is bound securely to an inclined bench, which is approximately four feet by seven feet. The individual’s feet are generally elevated. A cloth is placed over the forehead and eyes. Water is then applied to the cloth in a controlled manner...[T]he cloth is lowered until it covers both the nose and mouth. Once the cloth is saturated and completely covers the mouth and nose, air flow is slightly restricted for 20 to 40 seconds...This causes an increase in carbon dioxide level in the individual’s blood...[T]he cloth produces the perception of ‘suffocation and incipient panic,’ i.e., the perception of drowning...During those 20 to 40 seconds, water is continuously applied from the height of twelve to twenty-four inches. After this period, the cloth is lifted, and the individual is allowed to breath unimpeded for three or four breaths...The procedure may then be repeated.<sup>11</sup>

This disturbing detailed description, which resembles more like a manual to apply such practice as it even indicates the height from which water should be poured, denotes the level of thought put into devising more sophisticated and precise methods to cause temporary pain and panic on the prisoners without necessarily scarring them on a physical level. In the films that are analyzed in this article, waterboarding is featured as a key element to inflict physical agony on the body of the prisoners, turning

9. CORREA. *Waterboarding Prisoners and Justifying Torture: Lessons for the U.S. and Chilean Experience*, p. 21.

10. SOLIS. *The Law of Armed Conflict: International Humanitarian Law in War*, p. 462.

11. SOLIS. *The Law of Armed Conflict: International Humanitarian Law in War*, p. 462.

them into vulnerable preys to the torturers, but also as a way to emotionally distress them into giving up the desired information.

The first film to be analyzed, *The Railway Man*, is set during the Second World War and tells the story of a group of soldiers from the British Army who are prisoners of war (POW) in a Japanese labor camp. It goes back and forth in time, showing the characters during war times and also during the 1980s. The focus of the narrative is on Eric Lomax (Colin Firth) and his coming to terms with his own traumatic experiences in the POW camp and his torturer, Takeshi Nagase (Hiroyuki Sanada). Nagase is a translator who also takes part on the acts of torture of the Japanese Kempeitai. According to Mark Felton, “the Kempeitai was responsible for running Japan’s prisoner of war and civilian camp system, and under its control the camps were as harsh and depraved as Himmler’s concentration camps or Josef Stalin’s Gulag”.<sup>12</sup> It was well known for its cruelty and fearful tortures in relation to the captured soldiers and civilians. In the film, the characters are forced to work in the construction of the Thailand-Burma railway, also known as “The Death Railway” due to its horrific working conditions, which was, as Sears Eldredge points out, a “259-mile railway line that would connect Bangkok, Thailand, with Moulmein, Burma” built for the purpose of encountering

a distinct supply route for the military in Burma, and also as a way of taking advantage of the labor force supplied by the POWs under Japanese control.<sup>13</sup>

The major acts of torture in this film can be divided into two moments: the first one is the public torture which takes place outside with other people watching and features the use of explicit physical injuries, such as bruises and broken or fractured bones, through the use of canes. The second one is the private torture which happens in a closed space, indoors, generally watched only by a few military personnel who inflict physical pain with no external injuries along with emotional distress by the use of waterboarding. The scenes of torture are shown in flashbacks that start during Lomax’s honeymoon as he sees, as if in an apparition, the figure of his torturer in his room. The vision of the young Nagase (Tanroh Ishida) from the past signifies the haunting of the traumatic memories, a persistence in painfully remembering an unfinished narrative of loss and agony. The haunting of the past in Lomax’s life stands for the haunting of history not just on an individual level, but as a collective phenomenon in the national imaginary. Past events that are repressed or avoided due to their charged traumatic status force their presence in the film, causing the remembrance of war to be stripped of heroic overtones.

12. FELTON. *Japan’s Gestapo: Murder, Mayhem and Torture in Wartime Asia*, p. 3.

13. ELDREDGE. *The Thailand-Burma Railway: An Overview*, p. 45.

The acts of public torture are the ones that feature a greater level of explicit aggression to the soldiers' bodies, and the weapon featured in the film for this type of torture is the cane. In this specific sequence, the Japanese army discovers that the British engineers, including young Lieutenant Lomax (Jeremy Irvine), have built an improvised radio and are in possession of a hidden map of the railway they are building. The Japanese single out four of the British soldiers for a meeting with the Kempeitai officer (Masa Yamaguchi) and his translator, Nagase. The scene takes place outside, under the scorching sun, as the camera follows in a long shot the officer and Nagase getting out of the car and walking towards a table where the radio can be found. As the camera tracks positioned next to the ground, it is possible to see the Japanese soldiers in the foreground, the table in the middle ground and the four British soldiers in the background. There is no conversation, no questions, no interrogation, just a fluid movement without editing that continues as one Japanese soldier takes his place behind the British, and randomly hits Withins (Tom Stokes) in the back. It creates a tension that only elevates the level of threat faced by the British soldiers. That is when the aggressiveness reaches a high level as the Japanese soldier, still in a long shot, repeatedly hits Withins with the cane and kicks him despite the painful crushing thud and Withins' loud moaning.

The next shot is the reaction of the remaining British soldiers to the imminent atrocity. In a medium close-up that places Lomax on the left of the frame and in the foreground while the other two soldiers remain blurred, his facial reaction of fright but determination is the cue to his attitude (see fig. 1). He gives a step forward, as volunteering and accepting the guilt for the radio. The reaction of the others, both British and Japanese, is of incredulity. In a close-up, his shaking hands place his glasses on the table, next to the radio, in preparation for the upcoming violence. The diegetic sound of the cane hitting him and his vocal reaction to the pain are suppressed. Only the soundtrack, with its tense and contemplative mood, can be heard evoking a sense of pity and sadness.



FIGURE 1

FIGURE 1  
Lomax watches Withins' corporeal punishment.  
TEPLITZKY. *The Railway Man*, 2013.

The torturous sequence of Lomax's beating only shows Lomax himself in few shots of his twisting body on the ground in pain. The rest of the sequence features the reaction of the many other British soldiers and some Japanese soldiers as well. There is no access to the visual representation of the punishing act on Lomax's body, his pain is felt through the reaction of others, their indignant, compassionate, tired, and heartfelt eyes mediate his suffering, which in a way is a collective pain as well. Finlay (Sam Reid), Lomax's best friend, watches the violent display in an agonizing stare that includes the brutal movements of the Japanese aggressor in the blurred foreground. As if frozen in time, the battered soldiers helplessly look at the spectacle of violence with their exposed and malnourished bodies in a low angle shot in which the sun streams in from the right side of the frame (see fig. 2). Their motionlessness hints at the impotence of helping a fellow soldier based on the acknowledgment of the temporary authority and power of the Japanese. Lomax's beating is a punishment, but it is also a spectacle. The beating is meant to be watched because it is supposed to send a message of subjugation to him and to all the other British soldiers. It is a collective experience of witnessing, an assertion of power over the wellbeing and destiny of human life in the prisoner's camp. It can be seen as a moment of memory formation, one that will contribute

to the trauma experienced by the soldiers even years after the violent events.



FIGURE 2

During the moments of interrogation, the content of the questions addressed to Lomax are related to the construction of the radio and the railway map. The Japanese officer, aided by Nagase's translation into English, asks questions such as: "Why did you draw a map of the railway?", "Who's it for?", "Why did you build the radio?", "Who helped you to build the radio?", "Where did you get the components for the radio?". The Japanese assume the British are using the radio to communicate with their enemy and pass on information about the construction of the railway. The radio has only a receiving equipment, therefore it has no capability of sending out messages. Even though this detail is made clear to the Japanese soldiers, their insistence in discovering

FIGURE 2  
The reaction of British soldiers to the punishment.  
TEPLITZKY. *The Railway Man*, 2013.

any kind of new or decisive information leads to an ongoing and circular set of questions and rituals of inflicting pain on Lomax, since he has no palpable information that pleases their needs. This attitude can be linked to Scarry's aforementioned comments about the lack of information of the tortured and the insistence on pursuing the process of torture even though no solid intelligence can be extracted.

The private torture is depicted as a flashback when the older Lomax visits the torture room, now a museum, the site of one of the most haunting images during the narrative. The entrance to the torture room is shown three times throughout the film, each time closer as Lomax is more reluctant to talk about it, and the inside is only revealed later. This place can be associated with a ghost from the past, a traumatic space that torments him due to its barbaric nature. The older Lomax stands in the doorway of the badly lit torture room, the only source of light coming from his direction, as the place reveals itself to be small and with a bed-like structure in the middle with chains on its sides. As the camera softly approaches, his breathing becomes more erratic and his eyes fill with tears. The next shot reveals the remaining object in the room: the hose, which was previously on the bed, is now on the floor and water slowly comes out of it, as if the memories of the past are gradually creeping into his mind. The sound of water

becomes more prominent, but not a flowing type of sound, but a gurgling, dripping water sound. The construction of memory is emphasized in this passage as trauma overflows the senses and the traumatic remembrance of the events becomes the focal point.

The flashback takes over the film as the camera rises from the wet floor to the bed height to show the bare breasted young Lomax agonizing with a cloth over his mouth and nose, and water being poured on his face with the hose in the foreground, while his body convulses in the background (see fig. 3). The cloth is removed but soon the Japanese officer orders the procedure to be repeated. In a long shot that shows the silhouette of the Japanese soldiers, except for Nagase whose face is lit by the door, the hose is held over Lomax's mouth as he agonizes with gagging sounds and his body convulses in despair (see fig. 4). A medium close-up portrays Lomax upside down and depicts him loudly screaming, followed by a traveling shot from the right to the left which has no diegetic sound, but features Lomax still screaming accompanied by a muffled sound (see fig. 5). The process of this act of torture is seen in full detail as Lomax's face is sideways on the frame with the cloth on it and the hose inserted in his mouth (see fig. 6). His unrecognizable face covered by the fabric is emblematic to the pain and agony of many others whose stories may



have happened in similarly cramped torture rooms. The waterboarding procedure is done in the total of three times, leading Lomax to desperately call out his mother in a moment of agony. The embodied effects of pain are highlighted in this moment and unveil the source of his psychological struggle later in life. By depicting his body in pain in a very detailed manner, the visual proof of violence consolidates the haunting memories in the narrative.



FIGURE 3  
The first display of waterboarding.  
TEPLITZKY. *The Railway Man*, 2013.



FIGURE 4  
The silhouette of the Japanese soldiers.  
TEPLITZKY. *The Railway Man*, 2013.

FIGURE 3-4



FIGURE 5  
Lomax agonizes during torture.  
TEPLITZKY. *The Railway Man*, 2013.



FIGURE 6  
Sideways display of waterboarding.  
TEPLITZKY. *The Railway Man*, 2013.

FIGURE 5-6

The relationship Lomax has with his torturers, mainly with Nagase, with whom he communicates in English, is given a conclusion as both exchange positions. The torturer becomes the tortured and vice versa when Lomax visits the camp where Nagase works as a museum guide. Lomax's catharsis of releasing the bottled-up anger comes by threatening to hurt Nagase with the same instrument he was injured so many times, the cane, and putting the Japanese in a small bamboo cage, similarly to how it was

done to him. Lomax is able to re-enact the past in the way it apparently pleases him. However, the satisfaction he gets from using violence against Nagase is not enough to heal the wounds of the past. Nagase's confession of his wrong doings and heartfelt apology have a deeper effect on Lomax as both agree that they wish to let the ghosts of the past rest and agree not to relive that day anymore. By highlighting the gruesome reverberation of war crimes, *The Railway Man* does not offer a simple solution to the nightmarish haunting of torture, but portrays its complex and layered structure, one that seems to trouble crystallized discourses of warfare heroism and soldierly conduct.

In a different historical context, *Zero Dark Thirty* portrays the issue of torture as part of a program by the United States government that included apprehension and interrogation of possible suspects in connection to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The brutal modes and abuses related to this process have been widely discussed in the media, especially regarding the controversial behavior of the American military personnel in Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib prison facilities. The film focuses on intelligence gathering done by the CIA officer Maya (Jessica Chastain) in order to discover the precise location of Osama Bin Laden. She watches and eventually participates in the torture acts, piecing together

what seems to be an endless puzzle of fragmented and misleading information on the whereabouts of Bin Laden.

The contemporary context of torture in which the film is situated can be connected to the notion of embodying the faceless enemy after the 9/11 attacks. Anne McClintock claims that there is a necessity to “produce the ‘enemy’ as *bodies*, placing them under permanent US super-vision, and rendering them most dreadfully subject for retaliation and revenge in the labyrinths of torture”.<sup>14</sup> The mastery of the torture methods has produced what is called “touchless torture” that entails “the breaking down of the self through radical sensory deprivation, disorientation, and extreme stress” in which the prisoners “cannot see, touch, taste, move, or breathe properly”.<sup>15</sup> The very word detainee, used by the American government during this period, instead of prisoner of war, brings to mind the careful planning done to avoid responsibilities and give freedom to act outside the Geneva Conventions. McClintock summarizes what torture stands for in this context by saying that it is the “diabolical manifestation of paranoia, the determination to break down the tortured person’s being and force them to ‘confess’: not to crimes they have committed [but to] the godlike domination of the torturer”.<sup>16</sup> Torture is seen as a spectacle of sovereignty and control based on brutal force that entails political connotations.

14. MCCLINTOCK. *Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib*, p. 58.

15. MCCLINTOCK. *Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib*, p. 65.

16. MCCLINTOCK. *Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib*, p. 72.

*Zero Dark Thirty's* initial sequence is the first sign of the search for the palpable that has been lost in the 9/11 attacks. The film begins with a black screen accompanied by the sounds of the radio transmissions and desperate phone calls from the people trapped in the World Trade Center during the attack. The suppression of any visual footage of the Twin Towers and the permanence of the black screen evoke a sense of void and invisibility of the terrorist acts. As Robert Burgoyne mentions, the black screen suggests that “the bodies of the victims as well as the bodies of the perpetrators simply disappeared in the collapse of the towers. The mass destruction of 9/11, the most filmed and viewed event in history, was, disorientingly, a disembodied event”.<sup>17</sup> Burgoyne continues by highlighting that the film singles out two elusive figures that are persecuted throughout the narrative: Bin Laden and Abu Ahmed.<sup>18</sup> These two people are manifestations of the embodied enemy along with all the other prisoners that are tortured in the film.

The main torture scenes that are dealt in this article take place indoors, in special facilities prepared for this purpose. Nick Hopkins explains the characteristics of the Black Sites, as follows:

[They are] places that US government agencies used to transport, detain, and interrogate detainees. Their use was

authorised in the days after the 9/11 attacks as hubs for prisoners accused of terrorist involvement. [...] For years their existence was denied. President Bush was forced into admission in 2006.<sup>19</sup>

In the film, the first portrayal of the inside of the torture room is in a bright spotlight coming from the ceiling surrounded by darkness. In this ray of light, a great amount of dust particles can be seen flying around which hints at the possible poor hygienic conditions of the place. In another image, the room is more visible, as a long shot reveals the torturer, Dan (Jason Clarke), walking towards the tortured, Ammar (Reda Kateb). The room displays objects and furniture that are functional in the task of torturing, such as the mats on the floor, a small box used to put the tortured inside, a cooler with water and a jar for waterboarding, and ropes attached to the ceiling for tying the prisoner. It is indeed a minimal but sinisterly useful choice of props in this initial representation of the torture room.

The film portrays the torture acts more in relation to the point of view of the torturer than of the tortured, a distinct contrast to *The Railway Man*. The torturer, Dan, walks in and out of the torture room and the film accompanies him and his interactions with Maya, showing nuances of his personality. The figure of the torturer is much more explored in psychological and behavioral terms since there

19. HOPKINS. *Zero Dark Thirty: a beginner's guide*.

17. BURGOYNE. *The Violated Body: Affective Experience and Somatic Intensity in Zero Dark Thirty*, p. 248.

18. BURGOYNE. *The Violated Body: Affective Experience and Somatic Intensity in Zero Dark Thirty*, p. 248.

is a difference in attitude of two distinct Dans: on-duty and off-duty. On-duty Dan can be friendly and cooperative as he calls Ammar “bro” and gives him a juice bottle and food by saying “food in here sucks so I brought you some of this”. A split second later, if not given what he wants, on-duty Dan threatens Ammar’s life with the most hideous torture methods, and hostile comments such as “I own you, Ammar, you belong to me”, and “If you don’t look at me, I hurt you. If you step off this mat, I hurt you. If you lie to me, I hurt you”. His godlike attitude is based on the fact that he claims to have power over Ammar’s destiny. Off-duty Dan is capable of disconnecting himself from the torture environment the moment he steps out of the torture room. He displays a sense of humor seconds after he threatens Ammar’s life, in which he jokes with Maya by saying “just off the plane from Washington. Rocking your best suit for your first interrogation”. Daniel Goleman points out that “the torturer seems to cope with his cruelty by means of a psychological split in his personality” which he calls “doubling”.<sup>20</sup> He continues by explaining that “in doubling, a person develops a full repertory of feelings and habits that are quite specific to his evil role, and he is able to revert to his ordinary self while away from work”.<sup>21</sup>

The sequence that features waterboarding in the film initiates with an interrogation section. The relationship

between Dan and Ammar is quite different from Lomax and Nagase in the sense that Ammar is blatantly uncooperative and at times he fights back with words and physical struggle. The interrogation is shown by a series of shot/reverse-shots of Ammar standing up with his hands tied to the ceiling and Dan pacing around him (see fig. 7). Dan’s conversation is led by the accusations of Ammar’s terrorist involvement when he says “I have your name on a five-thousand-dollar transfer via Western Union to a 9/11 hijacker.” In Dan’s logic, after he establishes Ammar’s culpability, he proceeds to demand secretive information, in this case, the email of a Saudi contact.



FIGURE 7

20. GOLEMAN. *The torturer’s mind: complex view emerges.*

21. GOLEMAN. *The torturer’s mind: complex view emerges.*



FIGURE 7  
Shot/reverse shot of Ammar and Dan.  
BIGELOW. *Zero Dark Thirty*, 2012.

FIGURE 7

As Ammar denies giving the information, the waterboarding process starts. In a medium long shot, Ammar is framed in the foreground while the torturers prepare the mats (see fig. 8). Ammar struggles with the ropes, trying to free himself. Dan and the other torturer take Ammar down and proceed to immobilize him. The interrogation mixes itself with torture as Dan holds up the jar with water while asking questions. The handheld camera keeps the image in an unstable manner which creates more tension. In a close-up, the cloth is put over Ammar's head as he screams "I don't know". Dan proceeds to carefully, and almost clinically, pour water on his face (see fig. 9). A close-up shows the cloth getting soggy and Ammar's grunting and gagging are heard (see fig. 10). His bodily reaction of agony is

emphasized as the film depicts his kicking legs and hands desperately pulling the rope. While Dan pours the water, he asks questions such as "Who is in the Saudi Group?", "And what's the target?", "Where was the last time you saw Bin Laden?". The waterboarding reaches the end as Dan removes the cloth to show Ammar's face in complete helplessness and agony (see fig. 11). His pleading eyes reveal the pain of a person confined to the power obsessions of a torturing system that crosses the line of human rights in an attempt to gather information, whether the person has it or not.



FIGURE 8

FIGURE 8  
The preparation for torture.  
BIGELOW. *Zero Dark Thirty*, 2012.



FIGURE 9

FIGURE 9  
Dan pours water on Ammar's face.  
BIGELOW. *Zero Dark Thirty*, 2012.



FIGURE 11

FIGURE 11  
Ammar's facial expression of agony.  
BIGELOW. *Zero Dark Thirty*, 2012.



FIGURE 10

FIGURE 10  
Water being poured on the cloth and  
Ammar's bodily reaction.  
BIGELOW. *Zero Dark Thirty*, 2012.

Other types of torture take place in the film that avoid explicit physical injuries, therefore can be seen as part of the touchless torture system. Ammar suffers acoustic and stress position torture when the film shows him tied in an incredibly uncomfortable position in the dark torture room while music is played in an almost unbearable volume. Ammar also goes through sexual humiliation as Dan pulls his pants down and leaves him alone with Maya in the torture room. Later, Dan continues the humiliation process by walking Ammar with a dog collar, and finally puts him in a small box that barely fits his body in a fetal position. All these practices sustain the belief of psychological and corporeal break down in order to extract information by relying on dehumanization of the prisoner and gruesome rituals. *Zero*

*Dark Thirty* brings the practices of torture to the screen as a reminder of incontrollable power abuse during war, and an acknowledgment of the continuing reshaping of national memory related to the conflicts in the twenty-first century as classified information becomes accessible to the public.

In conclusion, the issue of torture can be seen as a display of human paranoia for power and subjugation. More than inflicting pain on the tortured, the torturer seeks the spectacle of agony which leads to the recognition of the godlike authority as a sign of superiority over the other part. *The Railway Man* and *Zero Dark Thirty* have different specific purposes when they represent instances of torture. The former deals with the viewpoint of the tortured by showing the repercussions of the trauma of torture, and the struggle to come to terms with the aggressor. It is a movie that depicts the emotional scars of life in a way that also encompasses and mirrors the collective suffering on a national level during the Second World War. *Zero Dark Thirty* emphasizes the actions of the system, the standard procedures of a gruesome practice that is depicted as having a governmental basis. The nature of violence in the twenty-first century is highlighted in the film as the torturer becomes the focus and raises the subject of contemporary desensitization to suffering. Both films attempt to portray pain through a collection of images and sounds that emphasize

an affective connection with the audience. The characters' corporeal reactions are depicted with categorical scrutiny, leading to the immersion in a world of senses and trauma. The display of such disquieting events constructs the filmic memory of warfare as complex and challenging moments in world history.

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