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Films as Carriers of Strategic Culture?

Analyzing Societal Beliefs on the Use of Military Means through Film

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of film analysis as an emerging field within international relations (IR), it is surprising that films have not yet been the subject of research on strategic cultures, which deals with societal beliefs regarding the use of military means. Additionally, cinematic IR literature has mainly focused on the analysis of single films. Missing, though, are studies that analyze films from different countries in a comparative perspective. The article therefore examines how the strategic cultures of Germany, the United Kingdom and France are represented in six films about military operations. It also compares the findings of the film analysis with traditional strategic culture research. The study shows that films represent crucial elements of the specific strategic culture of the country of origin, thus indeed functioning as carriers. The article thus contributes to the theoretical grounding of IR film analysis and gives an initial assessment of the theoretical framework proposed.

1. Introduction

Despite the fear that "[f]or mainstream Political Science, 'popular culture' is still not considered worthy of serious investigation" (Engert and Spencer 2009, 83), numerous publications of "cinematic IR" (Holden 2006) have treated films as a relevant area of international relations (IR) research (Weber 2006; Nexon and Neumann 2006; Shapiro 2009; Weldes 2014; Caso and Hamilton 2015; Heck 2017) as well as a promising tool for teaching about politics (Haney 2000; Kuzma and Haney 2001; Weber 2001; Webber 2005; Ruane and James 2008; Engert and Spencer 2009; Swimelar 2013; Clapton 2015; Holland 2016). Such a research agenda is based on the idea that films represent and even influence norms and practices of international politics (Neumann and Nexon 2006; Carter and Dodds 2014, 12). Analyses on representations of war and peace constitute an especially large part of cinematic IR literature: studies deal with docudramas constructing narratives on real events (Heck 2017), representations of identity conflicts in fictional TV films (Engelkamp and Offermann 2012), documentaries as mediums of representation (van Munster and Sylvest 2015a) or narrative strategies concerning warfare in films (Behnke 2006). Other research investigates how the collective memory of wars is shaped by films (Carvalho 2006), or how films can be treated as part of the discourse on geopolitical danger (Dalby 2008; see also Power and Crampton 2007; Carter and Dodds 2011). Nearly all of these empirical studies have in common that they examine one or two films from one country, which they discuss against the backdrop of the specific discourses within the film's country of origin. Missing though are broader empirical studies that analyze films from different countries in a comparative perspective.

This article therefore examines cinematic representations of societal beliefs on the use of military force in Germany, United Kingdom and France, addressing the following questions:

1) What societal beliefs regarding the use of military means are represented in films about military operations from Germany, the United Kingdom and France?
2) Do these representations match other data on these beliefs?

I chose to analyze these three cases, as these states are particularly relevant players in European politics, especially in security and defense matters. Moreover, these cases can be characterized as having particularly diverse security policies (see, for example Giegerich

2006, 67–81), making a comparison very promising (see also the chapter "Case Selection").

To grasp societal beliefs on war and peace theoretically, I will draw on the strategic culture approach, which is concerned with collective beliefs regarding the use of military force: fundamental norms, narratives, ideas and attitudes shaping the security policy of states (Gray 1999, 50–51; Longhurst 2004, 17; Meyer 2005, 528). Conceptualizing strategic culture for the analysis of film, this article aims at bringing strategic culture and cinematic IR together in a constructive manner. Surprisingly, neither strand of IR has been recognizing the other to date. Although literature on films and IR is strongly emerging, films have not yet been the subjects of research on strategic cultures. Neither theoretical groundworks (Snyder 1977; Gray 1999; Lantis 2002; Haglund 2004; Meyer 2005; Haglund 2011) nor empirical studies on the strategic culture of states (Buras and Longhurst 2004; Massie 2008; Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas 2013b; Rosa 2014; see, for the European Union: Rynning 2003; Cornish and Edwards 2005; Biava, Drent, and Herd 2011; P. Schmidt and Zyla 2013; Chappell and Petrov 2014) have regarded popular cultural artifacts as potential representations of strategic culture. Instead, previous research has used conventional data as basis for the investigation: speech acts and strategy documents of foreign policy elites (Hoffmann and Longhurst 1999; Buras and Longhurst 2004; Giegerich 2006; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2005; Norheim-Martinsen 2011), media coverage (Meyer 2006, 78–111), or survey data (Göler 2012; Irondelle, Mérand, and Foucault 2015). I therefore propose to broaden the scope of strategic culture research, perceiving popular culture as potential representation of strategic culture. In this regard, films as part of popular culture could also be conceptualized as carriers of strategic culture.

At the same time, it is striking that IR film analysis on war and peace has not yet considered the strategic culture approach as theoretical basis, despite the fact that the latter explicitly deals with social practices and discourses of warfare.

Hence, the empirical analysis in this article is meant to function as a showcase for bringing together strategic culture research and the current trend within IR of studying films and popular culture (see, for example Tanguay 2016; Heck 2017; Baker 2018). Following this enterprise, I seek to make both a theoretical and an empirical contribution to the ongoing debate: The paper has a share in the theoretical debate as it productively broadens the scope of strategic culture research by including film analysis in the theoretical framework. At the same time, it brings forward a promising theoretical approach for cinematic IR and assesses its applicability for the discipline for the first time. As I argue, both strands are useful to one another, so this paper's approach could also be applied to other cases in future IR studies which analyze films.

From an empirical perspective, this article also contributes to the debate as it seeks to enhance our understanding of the popular cultural discourse on military means in the analyzed countries. Highlighting differences and similarities during the comparison, it thereby not only joins the recurrent efforts to study cultural foundations of security policies from a comparative perspective (see, for example Meyer 2006; Giegerich 2006; Korteweg 2011; Mirow 2016), but also adds new perspectives by including the cinematic representations of these foundations, which has not been done yet. This article should therefore also be understood as an empirical contribution to understanding strategic culture in its various manifestations and as a call to further engage with films in IR.

The next section conceptualizes the strategic culture approach as theoretical basis for the analysis of cinematic representations, showing that strategic culture and cinematic IR can be combined. After outlining the methodology and the analytical framework, the article then conducts a film content analysis of two films per country based on four categories: objectives for the use of force, multilateral backing, rules of engagement and acceptance of

casualties. In the process, I contrast the three cases against each other to underline the argument that films can be used to work out characteristics of a specific strategic culture. In order to assess the utility of films as carriers of strategic culture, the article also compares the findings of the film analysis with traditional research on strategic cultures.

The study reveals that films depict crucial elements of the strategic culture of each country analyzed, leading to the conclusion that they should be regarded as carriers of strategic culture. Doing so, the article also points out that the strategic culture approach has the potential to contribute to a further development of cinematic IR.

2. Popular Culture as Strategic Culture: Theorizing the Nexus between Strategic Culture, Cinematic International Relations and Film Fiction

Before bringing forward the conceptual framework in detail, we should take a brief look at the question of how strategic culture could serve as a theoretical background for the analysis of films within cinematic IR. I argue that the strategic culture approach is able to include popular cultural artifacts as subject of analysis, perceiving films as representations of strategic culture.

First, what do I understand the term to mean? Strategic culture can basically be defined as "a distinctive and lasting body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force" (Longhurst 2004, 17). Although there are various understandings of the concept, the common denominator is that culturally rooted normative elements function as relevant factors influencing the foreign and security policy behaviors of states (Gray 1999, 50–51; Longhurst 2004, 17; Meyer 2005, 528). The term thus "refers to the use and threat of military force as a foreign policy instrument" (Giegerich 2006, 36). A fundamental debate within the strategic culture approach questions how strategic culture and behavior are related, dividing the literature into three strands or "generations" (Johnston 1995, 36–43; Gray 1999, 49). Whereas the majority of literature (the so called first generation) conceptualizes strategic culture the context within which security policy takes place (see, for example Gray 1981, 1999), the scholars of the third generation see a causal nexus between strategic culture and behavior (see, for example Johnston 1995).[1] In contrast, the rather marginalized second generation seeks to deconstruct discrepancies between strategic culture and actual motives of decision makers (Göler 2012, 5; Klein 1988; Lock 2010).

For the following analysis, I draw on the first generation, regarding foreign and security policy as part of culture, which are then both mutually constitutive. Conceptualized in this way, strategic culture makes it possible to embrace cinematic IR, as the latter broadly acknowledges the assumption that international politics and culture influence each other (Neumann and Nexon 2006, 14; Engert and Spencer 2009, 91; Dodds 2015, 53). In this regard, a basic connecting factor between both strands lies in the fact that culture participates in shaping and constructing politics. Similar to the strategic culture approach, cinematic IR highlights the fundamental cultural basis of international politics, stating that (popular) culture plays an important role in the production of meanings (Weldes 2014, 230; 2003, 7-8). Popular culture, in this regard, provides knowledge about political practices, offers narratives that politicians draw upon, or may have naturalizing and legitimizing effects (Neumann and Nexon 2006, 14-20). Although the first generation of strategic culture does not take up the post-structuralist or critical perspective shared by the majority of cinematic IR scholars, which dissolve a clear distinction between culture and politics

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[1] This debate on the epistemological foundations of strategic culture is also called the 'Johnston-Gray-debate' (for an overview, see Johnston 1995; Gray 1999; McDonough 2011).

(see, for example Weber 2014, 274), cultural factors are the keys to analyzing and understanding international politics in both strands.

How can we perceive popular cultural artifacts such as (fictional) films as representations of strategic culture? At first glance, this idea seems far-fetched, as a larger amount of literature considers foreign policy elites as main actors in strategic culture and thus focuses on speech acts or strategy documents of those elites (see, for example Hoffmann and Longhurst 1999; Buras and Longhurst 2004; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2005; Giegerich 2006; Norheim-Martinsen 2011).

However, the approach also acknowledges that strategic culture can manifest itself in various artifacts. The objects of analysis could not only "include the writings, debates, thoughts and words of 'culture-bearing units' such as strategists, military leaders and national security elites", but also "images of war and peace portrayed in various media; (…) *even war literature*" (Johnston 1995, 49, my emphasis).[2] Hence, the analysis of strategic culture is explicitly not restricted to material that originates from a political context in the narrower sense. Rather, the approach acknowledges the plurality of cultural representations. Like war literature, popular cultural artifacts such as fictional films can thus be considered as embodying strategic culture, playing a part in shaping the construction of security policy. In this sense, film fiction is also strategic culture – an assumption of which cinematic IR could also approve, as it places fiction explicitly inside the cultural, social and political domains (Engert and Spencer 2009, 91; see also Weldes 2003, 8-16).

At this point, cinematic IR makes an important argument for the use of films for strategic culture research, as it already conceptualizes popular cultural artifacts as representations of social orders, thereby contributing to our construction of reality (Neumann and Nexon 2006, 6). In this regard, popular culture represents, but more importantly also reproduces the foreign policy discourse (Weldes 1999, 119). The question of how the use of military means is socially legitimized is at the heart of strategic culture research, so films that take part in these debates should not be omitted. Consequently, cinematic IR scholars argue that "the articulation of official discourses on warfare and international politics cannot be properly understood without analysing their representations in popular culture" (Behnke and de Carvalho 2006, 935). In addition, what makes popular culture important for strategic culture comes not only from its role in the construction of reality, but especially from the notion that the former transports these discourses into our daily lives (Weldes and Rowley 2015, 19; see also Weber 2014, 9). In this view, films as part of the everyday are relevant to understanding strategic culture as a whole.

Besides these fundamental theoretical considerations, there is another argument in favor of treating fictional films as representations of strategic culture. The process of the actual filmmaking shows that a film is not only a cultural artifact that stands for itself. It is also the result of a filmmaker's work, of cinematic authorship (Watson 2007). Thus, "what filmmakers chose to make reveal[s] a great deal about the nature of contemporary life, prevailing social concerns, preconceptions, morals and manners" (Barber 2015, 1). From this perspective, we can argue that the filmmaker is rooted in and socialized by the strategic culture in which he or she grew up and lives, which influences his or her cinematic work. Assuming that making a film about war and peace requires deep contemplation about these topics and how to deal with them in a film, filmmakers can even be said to occupy a deeper sphere of strategic culture thinking. Because production

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[2] The possibility of examining diverse manifestations of strategic culture is also underlined by the fact that some literature also considers public opinion as a source (Irondelle, Mérand, and Foucault 2015; Göler 2012; Biehl et al. 2011), thereby already straying from the narrow path of analyzing strategic culture only through military and foreign policy elites.

dynamics require reaching as large an audience as possible, it is also generally the case that a filmmaker shapes the film in such a way as to find resonance within the societal background, anticipating the views of the future audience. In this regard, the fact that films follow national styles or tastes provides another argument that they can be used to compare cinematically depicted strategic cultures across countries. Of course, cinematic authorship is a contested concept, as the film making is not solely based on the work of a single creator (like the director), but also includes the collective action of numerous agents (Watson 2007, 92–93, see also Sellors 2007). However, no matter who or what we understand to be 'the filmmaker', be it a collective or a single creator, we can assume that the surrounding culture shapes her, his, its or their work. This assumption is not only compatible with the strategic culture approach, but also with cinematic IR, which acknowledges the influence of the cultural context on the work of the filmmaker (Engert and Spencer 2009, 91).

Overall, it is therefore not far-fetched to believe that the views, beliefs and attitudes concerning military means of the filmmaker as well as those of the anticipated audience exert an influence on the film, thus making it a relevant artifact for strategic culture research. In light of the large amount of cinematic IR literature that examines fictional films, suffice it to say that these films can indeed tell us something about international politics. Hence, this should not be the place for a further discussion about the validity of fictional films as a source.

This article's theoretical perspective does not contend that a single film can fully reflect the entire strategic culture of a society. Strategic culture research points out that a closed or solid strategic culture does not exist. Rather, there are different strategic cultures in most countries, as discrepancies between elites and the public (Göler 2010, 197) or the concept of "strategic subcultures" (Lee 2008, 269–71; Bloomfield 2012, 452) show. A fictional film can thus be understood at least as one representation of a strategic subculture.

As we have now seen, the strategic culture approach allows the inclusion of popular culture and fictional films into the analysis. However, the question remains what strategic culture has to offer for cinematic IR and the following film analysis. Strategic culture can offer three categories of insights in this context.

First of all, a particular advantage of the strategic culture approach is that it provides us with conceptual frameworks, which can be operationalized and used comparatively across countries (Meyer 2005, 526–31; Meyer 2006, 19–27; Giegerich 2006, 46–47; Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas 2013a, 14–16; Irondelle, Mérand, and Foucault 2015). A structured framework enables us to conduct a comparative analysis of a greater number of films and is helpful in grasping the inherently vague term "strategic culture". In light of the criticism of cinematic IR that films are just low data (arguing against this accusation: Weldes 2014), a structured theoretical basis and broader research design have the potential to make a point in favor of using films in IR research.

Secondly, strategic culture deals in particular with normative and cultural foundations of the use of military means. Therefore, it has the potential to further theorize cinematic representations of war and peace – a goal pursued by this article and also by a significant portion of cinematic IR literature (Behnke and Carvalho 2006; Carter and McCormack 2006; Shapiro 2007; Engelkamp and Offermann 2012; Dodds 2015).

Thirdly, previous strategic culture research offers us findings derived from non-cinematic manifestations of societal beliefs on military means, as there are numerous studies based on strategy documents, speeches or other data (see, for Germany: Buras and Longhurst 2004; Junk and Daase 2013; for France: Irondelle and Schmitt 2013; Hellman 2016; for United Kingdom: Cornish 2013; Britz 2016). Hence, we are able to compare cinematic and non-cinematic representations of these debates: "first-order" and "second-order"

representations (Neumann and Nexon 2006, 7). Pointing out similarities and differences between real and fictional events can thus underline the relevance of cinematic IR – an important task, given that publications frequently justify the relevance of popular culture for IR research (Dalby 2008, 440; Grayson, Davies, and Philpott 2009, 155–56; Weber 2014, 274; Weldes 2014; Kiersey and Neumann 2015, 75; van Munster and Sylvest 2015b, 5–7).

3. Methodology: Qualitative Content Analysis of the Film's Stories and Plots

Having established that the strategic culture approach allows analyzing films, this section outlines the analytical framework. The fundamental target of film analysis is to examine the meanings conveyed by films (Geiger and Rutsky 2005, 17–18). This is not an easy task because films are complex visual artifacts that generate meanings via multiple modalities such as images, music, effects and many others (Wildfeuer 2014, 1). Hence, the question "how films mean" (Bateman and K.-H. Schmidt 2012) is answered differently depending on the specific strand of film studies: some schools refer to the role of signs (Mitry 2000; Thwaites, Davis, and Mules 2002), others draw on discourses (Wildfeuer 2014), narratives (Bordwell 2008) or even concepts from neuroscience (Connolly 2002). These multi-faceted methodologies are also reflected within cinematic or visual IR, which can nowadays be described as a pluralist field. Despite the fact that IR has long ignored visuality (Weber 2008), existing works use, for example, narrative approaches (Engelkamp and Offermann 2012; Heck 2017), semiotics (Heinrich and Stahl 2017), iconology (Heck and Schlag 2013), to name only a few (for a systematic overview on the different strands of visual methodology, see Andersen, Vuori, and Mutlu 2015). Consequently, scholars argue for a pluralist and interdisciplinary methodological approach, even if methods from different schools are sometimes incompatible (Bleiker 2015).

As this article seeks to examine six films in a comparative perspective, I cannot draw on a very detailed mode of analysis for each individual film. Instead, the large amount of cinematic data requires simplifying the films in order to keep the material manageable. Therefore, I propose a methodological framework based on a qualitative content analysis, focusing on the fundamental characteristics of every film: story and plot. The term story depicts the events of the film, i.e. actions and responses of the characters involved, whereas plot "refers to the ways in which the story is presented to us in terms of its order, emphases and logic" (Speidel 2007, 62–63). More specifically, "plot is about causality – how one event or action leads to another" (Edgar, Marland, and Rawle 2015, 45). To classify and structure the plots, I will draw on techniques inspired by qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000; 2014; Schreier 2014). Qualitative content analysis is a systematic procedure to reduce the complexity of material, using a category system (Mayring 2014, 39–40). Originally designed to handle large amounts of textual material, content analysis has recently also been conceptualized as a methodology for visual data (Monk-Turner et al. 2004; Rose 2010, 81–104). I explicitly do not seek to count numbers. Based on Mayring's version of qualitative content analysis, I will assign eligible parts of the plots to deductive categories and analyze them using the techniques of summary, explication and structuring as basic forms of interpretation (Mayring 2014, 64).

A focus on the story and plot of the films is suitable for my analysis, as I seek to examine how and why military means are used in the diegetic world. Causalities and norms within the films are part of their story and plot, represented in the dialogues and actions of the characters as well as in the chain of events. I am aware that my focus leaves out other

important elements of a film. However, standard film studies literature points out that an analysis can be aimed at diverse aspects such as content, characters, aesthetics among many others (Mikos 2014, 413). In this regard, a film analysis does not necessarily require dealing with all of these elements, but rather allows a focus that depends on the purpose of the analysis – in my case the film content.

3.1   Defining the Categories

The categories for the following analysis have been created deductively on the basis of the diverse conceptual frameworks brought forward by strategic culture research (Meyer 2005, 526–31; Meyer 2006, 19–27; Giegerich 2006, 46–47; Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas 2013a, 14–16; Irondelle, Mérand, and Foucault 2015). To derive overarching categories, the questions these frameworks seek to answer have been narrowed down and regrouped to the following common denominator: All strategic culture approaches work out how the use of military means can be justified and legitimized within the society of a certain state, distinguishing between several aspects of legitimation. First, all frameworks ask for justifiable security policy objectives, for example power projection, humanitarian reasons or self-defense (1). It is also relevant to what extent multilateral integration of military operations is considered as crucial or if unilateral action is acceptable (2). The rules and instruments of the military operation itself also play a role for legitimation, such as aggressive or defensive behavior of the troops (3). In addition, some schemes also question the extent to which casualties are acceptable within the specific strategic culture (4). Differentiating between these major aspects of legitimation, four central questions serve as categories for the content analysis of the films:

1) What are justifiable objectives for the use of military means?
2) What role does multilateral integration play in legitimizing military actions?[3]
3) What rules of engagement and instruments do the armed forces apply during the operation?
4) How do the characters and stories of the film deal with casualties on their own side and on the side of the adversary?

3.2   Case Selection: The Civilian Power, the Military Power and the Loyal Ally[4]

For the case studies, I selected Germany, France and United Kingdom for the following reasons.
Firstly, critical comments on cinematic IR demand that the field take non-American films more strongly into account (Holden 2006, 818); and indeed, until today, cinematic IR has mainly analyzed films from the United States (see, for example Dalby 2008; Dodds 2008; Weber 2014). Although some contributions from non-American points of view have since been made (see, for example from a German perspective Engelkamp and Offermann 2012; Heck 2017; covering a Danish documentary film: van Munster 2015), this is one of the reasons why I chose European cases. Regarding the debate on popular culture within IR, the selected countries are also especially relevant here, as lately an increasing number of films from all three countries has been processing recent military operations such as

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[3] I draw on a very simple understanding of multilateralism as "the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions" (Keohane 1990, 731).

[4] The title of this section is inspired by Korteweg's study on NATO named "The Superpower, the Bridge-Builder and the Hesitant Ally" (Korteweg 2011).

Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo. Hence, we can assume that these military operations constitute a relevant topic within these countries' popular cultural domains. As a side effect, this has also led to a substantial basis of possible cinematic material from which to select films.

Secondly, taking a European perspective, these countries are particularly relevant players within the European Union's foreign and security policy. Germany and France have, not only during recent years, been acting as promoters of an enhanced cooperation in security and defense matters in Europe – an attitude which recently led to two papers sketching a joint vision for a European Security and Defense Union (Koenig and Walter-Franke 2017, 3). The United Kingdom has also had a strong voice, mostly as it was rather skeptical concerning a further development of the European defense policy (Whitman 2016, 3). Each of these three countries is therefore especially relevant in this policy.

Thirdly, against the backdrop of strategic culture, I selected these cases because the strategic cultures of the three countries have been described as particularly diverse: Germany has been characterized as "civilian power" (Maull 2000) associated with a special "culture of restraint" (Giegerich 2006, 67), whereas, in contrast, France is traditionally referred to as a strong military power (Hellman 2016, 24). The United Kingdom, unlike the other two cases, is said to have a special relationship with the United States (Giegerich 2006, 74–75; Cornish 2013, 377; Britz 2016, 152) – a point manifesting itself, for example, in the British support of the US-led Iraq operations in 2003, in which France and Germany rejected participation.

Hence, a comparison of these cases seems instrumental in the pursuit of this article's goal: If these diverse culturally based attitudes towards military means are also detectable in the cinematic material, then this is a strong argument in favor of using films as a source for strategic culture research. In this regard, the comparison of heterogeneous cases underlines my argument.

3.3   Film Selection

The films were selected based on temporal and content-related criteria. Since this article addresses current discourses on military means, possible films to be considered had to deal with recent military operations. I hence could narrow down the timeframe of the release dates to the years 2000 until the present time. These basic criteria resulted in a list of about 20 films from the three countries. As this article seeks to present a first application of the analytical framework, I decided to boil down the material to two films per country, keeping the option of extending the analysis to a greater number of films.

To do so, I reduced the material gradually, proceeding with the following steps:

Starting with a preview of all of the material, two strands to be distinguished manifested themselves: Firstly, films dealing with homecoming veterans, located at home; secondly, films whose story mainly takes place in the country of the military operation. Since films of the second type depict the foreign missions directly and at greater length, I ruled out the veteran films in a first step.

In a second step, I selected films dealing with the operations in Afghanistan, as Germany, France and United Kingdom were involved there. A point of controversy in all three countries, this topic can be regarded as particularly relevant. Additionally, especially in the case of France and Germany, among missions within the last 20 years, this one was among the most robust and cost some of the greatest numbers of casualties.

As the material was still too bulky, in a third step, the selection criteria had to be tightened further. In order to be able to sketch out cinematic representations of the debate on military means as well as the actual soldier's work, films under consideration should address both

"talking and fighting": depicting dialogues between soldiers about their operations as well as combat or action scenes. Additionally, the military operation should constitute a major part of the story, allowing me to analyze the Afghanistan mission extensively. I therefore excluded films whose story focuses on other aspects than the military mission as such.

Lastly, the films' stories and plots had to give answers to all four of the analytical questions mentioned above, a criterion which I checked in a prescreening of the Afghanistan films. This allows for conducting a complete analysis for each film, without the need to investigate different films for the different categories and justifies focusing on two films per country.

Proceeding with these steps and applying these criteria led, finally, to choosing to the following films for analysis:

Germany	United Kingdom	France
Auslandseinsatz (Foreign Mission), 2012 – AE *Set in Afghanistan* Zwischen Welten (Inbetween Worlds, 2014) – ZW *Set in Afghanistan*	The Patrol, 2013 – TP *Set in Afghanistan* Kajaki: The True Story (alternate title: Kilo Two Bravo), 2014 – KTTS *Set in Afghanistan*	Ni le ciel ni la terre (Neither Heaven Nor Earth), 2015 – NHNE[5] *Set in Afghanistan* Forces Speciales (Special Forces), 2011 – SF *Set in the border region of Afghanistan/Pakistan*

Table 1: Film selection with abbreviations of the films (with my translations of the titles or official English titles if available)

4. Elements of Strategic Culture Represented in Films or: Real vs. Reel Strategic Culture

4.1 Objectives for the Use of Force

All analyzed films deal – explicitly or implicitly – with the question of what objectives can justify the use of military force. To begin with, it is obvious that the plots in the German films depict humanitarian missions, rather than counterinsurgency operations. The official task for the soldiers in AE is to establish contact with the civil population of a small village (AE, 00:04:35). For this purpose, they have a budget at their disposal for reconstruction and development aid projects (AE, 00:15:56). Later, the soldiers actively help to rebuild a school (AE, 00:36:21). Likewise, the Bundeswehr team in ZW has orders to protect the population of a small village (ZW 00:11:09) and to help rebuild a road (ZW 00:05:08; 00:36:23). Hence, soldiers of the Bundeswehr act as development aid workers in uniform, not as fighters. These efforts are later depicted as reasonable within the diegesis: kids go to school laughing (AE, 00:50:05) and girls are able to study in a university (ZW, 00:11:50; 01:32:31).

However, the plots also show that the soldiers cannot maintain such a narrow focus on humanitarian objectives. Despite their good intentions and peaceful tasks, both German squads in Afghanistan are unintentionally drawn into fights with hostile Taliban units (AE, 00:25:45; ZW, 00:48:19). Fighting and killing, though, is an extraordinary task for the

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[5] Although NHNE is partly a mystery and partly a war film, it nevertheless depicts the Afghanistan mission and meets the selection criteria, so it can therefore be considered as relevant for my analysis.

Bundeswehr. In ZW, the Bundeswehr soldiers overwhelmed by the combat situation, as finally only the attack of an allied local militia ends the fight (ZW, 00:49:38). After a short battle in AE, the protagonists repeatedly talk about the fact that a Bundeswehr soldier has killed a single Taliban fighter (AE, 00:33:26; 00:37:27), thus also demonstrating the exceptionality of a combat situation.

Hence, fighting terrorism with military means is no commonly accepted goal within the diegesis. In what follows, the German soldiers again and again discuss their mission and whether soldiers can contribute to the political goals for Afghanistan at all (AE, 00:40:55; 01:03:50), questioning whether the military means can even make a difference in such complicated situations. However, there is a discussion in AE among the soldiers of whether a more robust approach would be necessary to achieve the humanitarian goals (AE, 00:21:39).

Overall, the German films display a constant debate about military means in general and the role of the Bundeswehr in foreign operations.

Comparing these findings with the literature on German strategic culture, we can see that both films represent fundamental elements. German strategic culture is characterized by the general reluctance to use military instruments (Junk and Daase 2013, 147; Bergstrand and Engelbrekt 2016, 51), also referred to as the "culture of restraint" (Giegerich 2006, 67) and associated with the notion of Germany as a "civilian power" (Maull 2000). Against this backdrop, the missions of the Bundeswehr have been justified either with humanitarian reasons such as preventing genocide and protecting civilians (Bergstrand and Engelbrekt 2016, 55) or stabilization and development tasks (see for example Afghanistan: Westerwelle 2010). Surveys investigating German strategic culture also show that development aid and reconstruction are broadly supported as tasks of the Bundeswehr, whereas a majority does not favor fighting terrorism (Biehl 2011a, 79; Biehl 2011b, 49–50; Biehl and Giegerich 2011, 67–68). This position is also taken up by the recent German White Paper on Security Policy, which highlights the nexus of development and security policy instruments as a core element of German security policy (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 41).

The British films deal with different objectives for the military. In TP, the overarching task is to conduct a counterterrorist operation against the Taliban (TP, 00:12:45; 00:56:05). The soldiers, for example, search houses (TP, 00:02:44) and repeatedly engage in combat with enemy forces (TP, 00:08:30; 00:14:53; 00:21:12). The task of the British troops in KTTS is the same, so they monitor the area (KTTS, 00:14:55; 00:19:19), order an air strike against insurgents (KTTS, 00:16:28), or leave the camp to fight insurgents who have established an illegal roadblock (KTTS, 00:23:07). Doing so, the films depict combat as a normal task for the soldiers. Both films further represent this idea. In TP, the soldiers return to their daily routine after the short fights (TP, 00:10:07; 00:15:14). Similarly, KTTS shows the daily life of the soldiers, who play pranks upon each other or play games (KTTS, 00:11:08; 00:21:32), but do not criticize ongoing operations.

Accordingly, the British soldiers' discussions about the mission differ strongly from those of the Germans. Of course, they talk about the sustainability of the missions, questioning whether their efforts have a long-lasting effect (TP, 01:07:15) or opining "God knows what we're going to leave behind" when talking about Afghanistan's history (KTTS, 00:19:08). However, they do not question the task of fighting itself, but – if they question anything at all – merely the specific mission in Afghanistan. Furthermore, these discussions are rare and do not constitute a major theme of the films. Hence, we can assume that the use of hard military means such as fighting insurgents is depicted as a normal goal for the military within the British cinematic worlds. Against this backdrop, none of the plots deal with development aid measures or reconstruction as tasks for the British soldiers. Instead,

fighting insurgents and securing peace within dangerous environments are accepted tasks for the military, leaving civil tasks to civil actors.

Regarding accepted objectives for the use of force, the films depict central characteristics of Britain's strategic culture. The general acceptance of military tasks within the cinematic worlds reflects the willingness to use military means actively (Giegerich 2006, 74; Cornish 2013, 379) as well as the fact that the British public and elites are, in principle, more comfortable with the use of force, compared to Germany (Britz 2016: 161). Accordingly, there are almost no taboos regarding the use of military means for the United Kingdom (Heiselberg 2003: 28, as cited in Giegerich 2006, 74). Similarly, strategic culture analyses based on survey data show that a majority of over 80% of the British population is in favor of fighting against terrorism as a task of the armed forces (Biehl and Giegerich 2011, 69). Not showing significant discussions on the task of fighting actively, the films depict this attitude towards military means. As the films pick up objectives for the use of force such as counterinsurgency and peacekeeping operations after a regime change, they refer to known justifications given for Britain's participation in international operations. During the latest few interventions (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya), Britain's elites have justified the use of force with reasons such as fighting terrorism, defending democracy or protecting civilians (Britz 2016, 169).

The French films analyzed provide the viewer with a broad range of objectives for the use of force. The main task for the soldiers in SF is to rescue a kidnapped journalist from the hands of Taliban fighters led by a well-known terrorist (SF, 00:15:15). This mission is marked as a positive goal, as the French president himself presents a rescue operation as France's duty, stating that "it is out of the question that a French citizen should be beheaded in front of the whole world" (SF, 00:25:35, my translation). Later on, the rescue operation is successful as the journalist can finally be brought into safety (SF, 01:38:50). However, the soldiers in SF also pursue additional goals during their deployment. After giving the French soldiers shelter, the inhabitants of a small village are attacked by Taliban fighters chasing the rescue team (SF, 01:05:10). Despite the fact that this is not their mission objective, the special forces return to the village and attack the Taliban fighters (SF, 01:06:30). Hence, the soldiers also act as guardian angels for the local civilian population and as counterinsurgency fighters.

Similarly, the two goals pursued by the French troops in NHNE are counterinsurgency and the protection of civilians living in the area. The unit in NHNE has the task of guarding the border to Pakistan and ensuring that their sector is clear of Taliban. The commanding French officer also points out that the soldiers try to keep a village in their sector safe (NHNE, 00:05:05). Although the French do not actively engage with hostile fighters, it is clear that fighting the Taliban is part of their mission, as the French forces fight with insurgents attacking a patrol (NHNE, 00:06:34). The short battle is carried out in an experienced way, as the soldiers remain relatively calm and professional. Unlike in the German films, it is therefore clear that this goal is not extraordinary within the diegesis.

What about the acceptance of the objectives? It is striking that neither the characters in the French films nor the plots express criticism of the missions. There is almost no discussion among the soldiers concerning their mission. In SF, the commander clearly states that politics is not the business of soldiers (SF, 00:43:58). The film thus presents the French army as an executing actor of the French political system, marking the military as an extended arm of the French president. The plot illustrates this aspect further when a high ranking officer reads about the critical discussions about the mission in the French press. Despite the negative press, he immediately justifies the operation, stating "if we would have done nothing, the critique would be the same" (SF, 00:56:32, my translation). In this manner, the film answers the question whether public opinion is important for military

means in the negative: it obviously is not relevant, leaving the decisions about military operations in the realm of the French president. In NHNE, the soldiers do not discuss the mission at all, leaving a similar impression. In sum, both French cinematic worlds show that a large variety of military objectives are accepted and that the characters take a relatively uncritical view on military action itself.

Looking at strategic culture research, this uncritical view can be considered as representing the French self-image as a strong military power (Hellman 2016, 24) and the long tradition of using military means to reach political objectives (Irondelle and Besancenot 2010, 22; Irondelle and Schmitt 2013, 135). As Hellman (2016, 40) puts it, "[i]t has always been part of the political culture in France to support foreign policy objectives with military means if need be". In addition, public opinion in France is, in principle, very supportive regarding military operations (Irondelle and Schmitt 2013, 133; Hellman 2016, 27). The legitimate use of force can thus be named as a crucial element of French strategic culture (Giegerich 2006, 79).

Leaving the decision to rescue the kidnapped journalist with military means within the president's authority, SF depicts that defense and security policy is part of the "domaine réservé", giving the French president great powers concerning the armed forces with no need to consult the parliament or government prior to deployment (Hellman 2016, 26).

The objectives of the missions depicted in the films match those present in French strategic culture, which is characterized by accepting a variety of objectives for the use of military means such as protection of civilians, fighting terrorism, dissemination of universal norms or defending collective security arrangements (Hellman 2016, 25-42).

4.2   Multilateral vs. Unilateral Action

The military actions depicted in the German films are clearly backed by a multilateral framework: The Bundeswehr in AE has a NATO liaison officer present (AE, 00:02:34) and gives shelter to American troops (AE, 00:04:04). In ZW, the Bundeswehr is deployed in an area from which American troops have withdrawn (ZW, 00:04:50). Hence, it is clear in both cinematic worlds that the Bundeswehr is part of NATO operations and does not act without allies.

Likewise, a strong commitment to multilateralism is a key element of German strategic culture (Giegerich 2006, 69; Junk and Daase 2013, 146). Accordingly, a majority of the German population rejects unilateralism and there is a consensus about the fact that multilateral integration of security policy is absolutely necessary (Biehl 2011b, 36). Multilateralism therefore plays an important role both in real and cinematic spheres. However, the plot of AE also presents the challenging issues that can accompany a strong multilateral integration when American Delta Forces operating in the region kill an innocent young boy (AE, 01:00:53). The protagonist in AE is not allowed to proceed with the investigation of the murder. His superior officer argues that "we are part of NATO" (AE, 01:01:50, my translation). The film thus puts unconditional support for allies in question as this could be accompanied by an indirect responsibility for such a collateral damage. This reflects a prevalent German debate: although the absence of a multilateral integration is repeatedly cited as an argument for not participating in military missions, an action based on multilateral solidarity is highly controversial in domestic policy (Göler 2012, 15).

A multilateral framework is also present in the British films. In TP, the British soldiers coordinate their actions throughout their mission with American troops and work together (TP, 00:09:08; 00:56:03; 01:03:00). During their operations in KTTS, the soldiers get close air support from the Dutch air force (KTTS, 00:16:36). This embeds their actions into the

NATO operations in Afghanistan and thus also establishes a clear multilateral backing. Against the background of the problems deriving from multilateral operations shown in the German films, it is important to notice that such aspects do not play any further role for the story in KTTS and TP, leading to the conclusion that this background for the operations is not contested within the diegesis.

The intradiegetic focus on the United States as an important ally can be regarded as representing the special relationship with the United States, which is a key feature of the British strategic culture (Giegerich 2006, 74–75; Cornish 2013, 377; Britz 2016, 152). Moreover, the general acceptance of multilateral operations within the NATO depicted in both films aligns with Britz's conclusion concerning British strategic culture that "[m]ultilateralism through NATO has been a traditional pillar of importance for the UK" (Britz 2016, 153).

The French films depict multilateralism in two different ways. In NHNE, there are two short references to a multilateral background: A TV showing news about the ISAF troops leaving Afghanistan (NHNE, 01:27:09), and the announcement for the viewer that the Captain will have to defend himself before an international military court of the coalition (NHNE, 01:37:36). The first reference remains just a hint, because during the operation itself the French soldiers do not cooperate with other ISAF troops or establish contact with them. In addition, no one discusses the fact that the subsequent trial is international. Hence, these references do not have any relevance for the story or lead to problems, so we can assume that multilateralism is broadly accepted within the NHNE's cinematic world.

In contrast, multilateralism plays no role at all in SF: the decision makers in SF never once mention the question of whether allies should be involved. This is of utter importance: not only do the actors make unilateral decisions, they also do not even think about any multilateral backing of their mission. As there is no further discussion during the film about this decision, unilateral action is completely acceptable within the diegesis of SF. SF making no reference to multilateralism can therefore be regarded as representing the fact that such a backing is not an absolute necessity for French military operations.

Considering a multilateral backing in two different ways, the films refer to the ambivalent French relationship to multilateralism. France deeply engages in multilateral operations and recognizes multilateralism as a fundamental principle, but is also willing to undertake missions unilaterally, stressing its independence (Irondelle and Schmitt 2013, 126–27; see also Irondelle and Besancenot 2010, 25–26). The reference to an international trial in NHNE mirrors the strong French commitment to international rights and institutions such as the UN Security Council (Hellman 2016, 24) and its willingness to enhance military cooperation within NATO, CSDP or in bilateral arrangements (Irondelle and Schmitt 2013, 131).

4.3 Rules of Engagement and Instruments

Against the backdrop of the humanitarian objectives, the rules of engagement of the Bundeswehr within the German films are very restrictive. The soldiers have strict orders not to get involved in the Afghan's domestic affairs (AE, 00:00:26; ZW, 00:47:22, 00:56:51) as well as not to engage with hostile combatants (AE, 00:23:58). Accordingly, the soldiers only shoot back in self-defense (AE, 00:25:44; ZW, 00:48:19). Using military force is therefore clearly restricted, although the Bundeswehr is confronted with an aggressive enemy, who threatens or even kills people (AE, 00:20:24, 01:18:50; ZW, 01:16:00). It is not surprising that these prohibitions lead to moral dilemmas for the individual soldier and cannot be sustained. The protagonists in all of the German films have to break the rules and refuse to obey orders in order to do good, i.e. to save innocent

civilians: women or girls who have fallen in the hands of the enemy (AE, 01:11:24) or have been seriously wounded and need medical care (ZW, 01:19:44). The plots of all of the films later justify the rule breaking, because the German soldiers are able to save the civilians (AE, 01:20:56; ZW, 01:26:13), thus marking their actions as successful. The strict official rules are hence contradictory to the reality of the mission, showing a problem inherent to military force itself and that an out-of-area mission is still an exceptional situation for the Bundeswehr. As both rule-breaking soldiers are punished in the end, the films further stress the contradiction of good intentions and restrictive rules. Discussing these issues resulting from prohibitions, the films refer to the debate on the Bundeswehr's restrictive rules of engagement (see, for example, Noetzel 2011, 406).

Depicting the soldiers as defensive and unwilling to fight actively, both films mirror the "deep-seated societal suspicion of (…) military activism" (Bergstrand and Engelbrekt 2016, 49) and the rejection of hard military action (Bergstrand and Engelbrekt 2016, 70) as crucial elements of German strategic culture. Moral dilemmas within the films are not only core elements of the plots, but can also be considered as mirrors of the domestic debate on moral issues regarding the use of military force, which has recently been taken up by the German White Book. It proposes to "take into account the changing character of ongoing and future missions and also consider the ethical challenges that arise through new forms of conflict" (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 114). In this regard, the films again confirm the strong German reservations against the use of military force that have been pointed out by strategic culture research (Biehl 2011a, 80; Junk and Daase 2013, 147; Bergstrand and Engelbrekt 2016, 51).

The rules of engagement in the diegesis of the British films differ from the situation described above. Hard military violence is not unusual within the norm structures of the films. When attacked by the enemy, the soldiers shoot back with guns blazing, even using heavy machine guns (TP, 00:01:30; 00:08:44; 00:14:45; 00:21:18) and air strikes (TP, 00:14:53; KTTS, 00:16:28). Besides, the unit in KTTS has mortars at its disposal (KTTS, 00:09:02), also implying that there are no limits regarding certain instruments. This behavior is not discussed any further and does not need to be justified by the soldiers or their superior officers. Hence, the actions of the soldiers have followed the intradiegetic rules of engagement.

Nevertheless, TP deals with conflicts with the rules and moral issues, as the subordinate soldiers in TP refuse to obey orders at the end of their mission (TP, 01:12:47). However, these issues are not the result of the overall situation within the country of the mission or a combat situation, but are rather an effect of personal failure of their superior officer and frustrated soldiers. Hence, there is a clear message that failing to follow the rules of engagement always equals bad behavior. Therefore, the film implies that rules of engagement as such should not be questioned. Accordingly, the plot does not justify breaking the rules with good intentions. At the end of the story, there is a lawsuit against the officer in TP (TP, 00:01:36), showing that the behavior did not adhere to the rules. Nevertheless, these events show that there is no clean or perfect war, illustrating at least to some extent an intradiegetic discussion on military means.

The fact that neither film depicts strict restraints concerning the instruments used during the operation strongly reflects British strategic culture. Since 1945, British forces have undertaken various kinds of military operations, such as counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, special forces commitments, full-scale armed conflicts and many more (Cornish 2013, 379). Against this backdrop, British strategic culture allows for engagement in different types of missions, demanding a broad variety of instruments – even hard military violence if necessary. Correspondingly, studies on British strategic culture state that counter-insurgency operations do not follow a fixed template, leaving each campaign

leeway to adjust to the situation at hand (Egnell and Ucko 2016, 31). Strategic culture studies based on surveys show that the acceptance of soldiers actively fighting insurgents is naturally high, as almost two thirds of the British population are in favor of such tasks (Biehl 2011a, 79–80). Although the rules of engagement in the films cover all kinds of instruments, one film also refers to the legal constraints that govern soldiers' actions. This can also be regarded as a reference to British strategic culture, as civilian and political control of the military has been increased during the last few years (Britz 2016, 159).

Similar to the British films, the rules of engagement of the French cinematic worlds are not very restrictive. Engaging aggressively and actively in fights with the Taliban, the soldiers in SF clearly behave as fighters with the task of killing hostile forces (SF, 00:33:21; 00:41:37; 00:53:15; 01:06:33), using heavy guns, explosives and snipers. The unit in NHNE also fights with the Taliban as a regular part of their mission (NHNE, 00:06:34). As the soldiers do not discuss this behavior at all in either film, we can assume that this is considered a normal and accepted behavior during the operations.

However, the soldiers do not always use hard military means. For example, a civilian approaching the camp in NHNE is driven away from the sector without fighting when the soldiers fire warning shots (NHNE, 00:02:40). Furthermore, the soldiers in both films establish contact with the local civilian population (NHNE, 00:04:40; SF, 00:57:44), or try to cooperate in order to gather information (NHNE, 00:29:24; SF, 00:58:00). As the French soldiers do not have strict rules of engagement during the operation, they follow a "whatever is necessary approach", using a broad range of military instruments: whatever is suitable to achieve the goals of the mission or to cope with the specific circumstances, even hard military violence.

Moral issues do not play a significant role in either of the French films. In NHNE, there are no discussions about rules of engagement or similar aspects during the plot. To give one example: Although the Captain mistreats a civilian because he insults him and does not give him information (NHNE, 00:47:42), he is not punished or sanctioned for his behavior. The single moral dilemma in SF occurs when the squad's sniper receives the order not to fire at Taliban threatening a girl, consequently letting them murder her (SF, 00:31:58). He later seems to regret not having helped the girl, asking "what have I done?" (SF, 00:49:45, my translation). However, he carries on dealing with his conscience, not affecting the success of the mission. The only discussion about moral issues takes place when the soldiers argue whether they should defend the friendly citizens of the small village against the Taliban chasing the soldiers (SF, 01:02:59). Although there seems to be a conflict between the missions' goals (to get away to rescue the journalist) and the humanitarian duty (to help the civilians), the decision is made immediately: return to the village and fight against the Taliban (SF, 01:03:25). As the soldiers kill numerous Taliban, in the end, this also suits the goals of the mission. Hence, I would argue that this situation did not lead to moral issues, so there is no actual debate concerning moral dilemmas within SF. Finally, there is another aspect that obviates the need to deal with moral issues in both films. Due to a clear distinction between insurgents and civilians (they are clearly marked with weapons and by their behavior), aggressively fighting against insurgents is perfectly justified within the diegesis, as the killing always hits the right target. Setting up such a clear-cut scenario, killing innocent civilians accidentally is unlikely, thus avoiding moral issues that come along with the use of military means.

Discussing these findings against the backdrop of previous research, we can see that the films again reflect certain characteristics of French strategic culture. Similar to the British case, France is a nation used to conducting military operations of all types, using different instruments and tactics (Irondelle and Besancenot 2010, 35–36). As Irondelle and Schmidt argue, French strategic culture is characterized by giving priority to military force instead

of non-military instruments in crisis management, considering the armed forces as a tool to achieve security objectives (Irondelle and Schmitt 2013, 133). Against this backdrop, it is not astonishing that nearly 90% of the French population considers fighting terrorism a legitimate task of armed forces, as strategic culture research based on survey data shows (Biehl and Giegerich 2011, 69). Depicting soldiers as fighters behaving aggressively if necessary, both films can be construed as manifestations of this aspect of French strategic culture.

4.4   Acceptance of Casualties

The last aspect to discuss is how the films deal with casualties. When it comes to casualties of the Bundeswehr, three aspects should be mentioned. Firstly, the German films depict casualties as tragedies resulting from extraordinary situations, rather than commonplace occurrences during a foreign operation. In AE, a soldier who previously had been kidnapped dies because he attacks Taliban unnecessarily after his rescue, seeking revenge for the death of a civilian friend (AE, 01:20:21). In ZW, a friend of the protagonist is killed while driving back to the camp after the protagonist has left his unit to rescue a wounded girl (ZW, 01:24:33; 01:30:19). Hence, he is blamed for the death of his comrade. His guilt is also depicted when he stands trial because of the death of his comrade (ZW, 01:30:05). In both cases, the death of Bundeswehr soldiers is not part of the routine operations covered by the goals of the missions, creating the impression that a soldier killed in action is an unusual incident during a German foreign mission.

Secondly, the films not only construct the death of soldiers as extraordinary, but also as personal tragedies for individuals, rather than soldiers. The films highlight the personal grief of the comrades, who are seen standing silently at the coffin (AE, 01:21:11) or crying in private (ZW, 01:25:20). Doing so, both films show that neither of the casualties is an abstract sacrifice, but a personal tragedy.

The third important fact is that neither of the German soldiers who have been killed can be considered a hero within the diegesis. The soldiers did not die sacrificing their life for the sake of a higher good or to rescue other people. Instead, their deaths did not make a difference or were unnecessary (as the girls in AE would have been rescued anyway without the sacrifice). This leads to the conclusion that the films question whether German soldiers may be war heroes at all.

However, not only casualties on the side of the Bundeswehr are rejected within the diegesis. After the death of a Taliban fighter at the hand of a German during a fight, the soldiers repeatedly talk about the situation throughout the film, trying to cope with the fact of having killed an enemy (AE, 00:33:26; 00:37:27). Additionally, the film presents the act of killing an enemy as not being heroic within the diegesis because a comrade immediately criticizes the shooter for bragging about his deed (AE, 00:37:35). This is even more surprising as the soldier had a greater good in mind while shooting – to protect his comrade from the aggressor. We can conclude here that there is little acceptance for casualties within the diegesis, even if these are enemies.

Compared to German strategic culture, the films refer to well-known characteristics. Since the first German soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan, the German political elite has tried to sidestep a discussion about dead soldiers, avoiding the term "Gefallene" (a meaningful German term solely used for soldiers killed in action) for a long time. German strategy documents also do not refer to goals that would justify sacrificing soldiers (Göler 2010, 193–94). A problematic attitude towards war heroes and sacrifices of the Bundeswehr has manifested itself as well in a critical discussion about a memorial dedicated to slain German soldiers, which was hotly discussed in the Bundestag and in

public discourse (Deixler 2012, 18–21). A critical attitude towards casualties on the side of the enemy represents the recent German debates about victims of military actions of the Bundeswehr. The broad debate concerning the Kunduz bombing (for a good overview on the events, see Noetzel 2011) shows that the German public finds large numbers of foreign victims highly unacceptable. This rejection of casualties, which is deeply rooted in Germany, is reflected in the cinematic world of the films.

In contrast to the German films, soldiers in TP are regularly killed during engagements with enemy forces, as a bullet from the distance hits the unit's machine gunner (TP, 00:21:54). In KTTS, soldiers are seriously wounded by land mines during an attempted counter insurgency operation (see, for example KTTS, 00:25:44; 00:48:25), which finally results in the death of one soldier (KTTS, 01:39:20). Additionally, two soldiers talk about a slain comrade (KTTS, 00:18:00), thus revealing that other casualties had to be mourned. Although these incidents are shocking moments for the soldiers, it is clear that this is somehow an inevitable part of a military operation within the diegesis. The squad in TP regroups and adapts positions, coping professionally with the loss of a soldier (TP, 00:29:34). Similarly, despite the gravity of the situation, the soldiers in KTTS immediately start the rescue operation, risking their own lives in the minefield (KTTS, 00:26:01; 00:30:20), and continue even after more men have been struck by mines (KTTS, 01:04:12). Nevertheless, the victims are personalized, as the dead or injured soldiers in both films are individuals involved in a social fabric and are mourned. In KTTS, the two soldiers who talk about their dead comrade call him by name and call him brave (KTTS, 00:18:00), showing that they are personally affected. The soldier who dies later in KTTS is also depicted as a well-integrated part of the group throughout the film. The remaining soldiers in TP constantly talk about their badly wounded and later deceased comrade (TP, 00:37:44; 00:46:10), which, in the end, is one of the reasons why they disobey their superior officer (TP, 01:12:47). Doing so, the film underlines that the situation affects the soldiers personally and at least partly questions a soldier's death to be meaningful.

The obvious difference compared to the German films is that the victims died or were wounded as soldiers, doing their job. When the unit's officer in TP delivers news of the machine gunner's death to the rest of the soldiers, he underlines that he died as a professional soldier (TP, 00:46:10). In KTTS, the two soldiers who are in a dialogue do not question the fact that a soldier died during battle in principle (KTTS, 00:18:00), which, similarly, implies that this is a sad, but at least not unusual part of the job. In the same sense, the dying man in KTTS wants his comrade to tell his uncle that he died being a good soldier (KTTS, 01:34:54), also stressing the motif of being killed in action. Although the rescue operation in KTTS in the minefield is a special situation, from a more general perspective, it hence comes as not unexpected that soldiers might get seriously injured during a mission. The film also underlines this as the minefield is presented as a military problem which needs to be solved by professional military means: soldiers with military medical training, who come to rescue their comrades and military equipment, such as choppers to bring everybody home alive.

Overall, despite the fact that casualties are not an ideal result, it becomes clear that being seriously wounded or losing their lives are part and parcel of a soldier's job and part of the reality of a foreign operation.

Regarding casualties on the side of the adversary, the soldiers in TP are happy about the deaths of hostile enemy combatants, as they react to the bombing of a village with cheering (TP, 00:15:16). Similarly, the soldiers in KTTS do not find the killing of enemy fighters at all problematic throughout the whole film. Unlike in the German case, casualties on the side of the opponent are therefore wholeheartedly accepted in the diegesis of both British films, representing the normality of a foreign mission.

Concerning their own casualties, the films reflect that the British public is unfortunately used to soldiers being killed in action. Since 1945, soldiers have been killed in operations almost every year (Cornish 2013, 379). Moreover, surveys show that there is public acceptance for military deaths to a certain extent if the mission is perceived to be successful (Gribble et al. 2015, 139). The UK government websites also illustrate the British attitude towards casualties. Each soldier killed is listed with full name, age, rank and hometown, commemorating each of them individually (see for example: Ministry of Defence 2017a; 2017b). This manifestation of strategic culture is in line with the cinematic worlds, in which the remaining soldiers commemorate the dead as individual casualties, doing their jobs. However, the British public has been less and less accepting of casualties during the deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, going hand in hand with force protection issues gaining political relevance (Clegg 2012, 23–26). In this regard, the personal mourning of the soldiers in TP and the cruel situation in the minefield depicted at length in KTTS reflect critical attitudes towards casualties, questioning at least partly the greater value of the loss of lives for the specific mission.

The general acceptance of foreign casualties in the films can be regarded as mirroring the fact that a robust use of force was not very controversial in the Afghanistan case (Mirow 2009, 65). Similarly, surveys analyzing strategic culture show that a vast majority of the British public approves fighting insurgents (Biehl 2011a, 80). As these actions inevitably come along with killing hostile fighters, this can be regarded as another parallel to the cinematic worlds.

Similar to their British counterparts, the French soldiers in SF die during the execution of their mission, not in extraordinary circumstances. During a rest in the village, a Taliban sniper kills a soldier, whereas other soldiers are shot during firefights (SF, 01:10:17; 01:26:45). Although the deaths are very dramatic and shocking for the remaining comrades, the situation is hence clear: they died doing their job. The soldiers in NHNE do not die during battle but disappear after falling asleep during watch (NHNE, 00:13:41; 00:33:57). These undoubtedly strange circumstances are rooted in the special character of NHNE as partly mystery thriller, partly war film. However, they disappear while on watch, exercising a common soldier's task. Additionally, we get the information that French soldiers have died earlier. Two soldiers chat over the radio, talking about having to recover a dead soldier who died from a booby-trap. Although their words describe the dead body in detail, it is in part normal for them to cope with comrades being killed, as they are not surprised about the situation (NHNE, 00:10:50).

As in the above-mentioned films, both French films depict the dead or missing soldiers as individual characters who are part of a social group. The wife of a missing soldier in NHNE leaves him a voicemail, stating that the family needs him at home (NHNE, 01:36:19). The remaining comrades in SF cry about the death of their friends (SF, 01:26:45), react with anger (SF, 00:59:13) and hold a quiet, private funeral (SF, 01:30:00). Therefore it is clear that their deaths were not abstract, but the sacrifice of individual persons.

At last, it is important to mention that the soldiers died as heroes, sacrificing their lives for others. The sniper in SF acts as bait, luring the Taliban away from the rest of the group (SF, 01:16:20). He pays with his life, but saves his comrades. As the last remaining soldiers in SF are seriously wounded and cannot walk any further, they force the journalist to walk on by herself, as they would endanger her rescue (SF, 01:33:28). Although a helicopter picks them up later, they would have sacrificed their lives. Likewise, the other soldiers dying throughout the mission sacrifice their lives to accomplish the mission – to save the journalist. Through their deaths they played their important role for the mission.

Because the journalist is rescued in the end, all of the soldier's sacrifices are depicted as successful within the diegesis of SF.

The most outstanding aspect in SF concerning casualties on the side of the enemy is that the soldiers repeatedly kill a very high number of hostile fighters throughout their mission without discussing the killings once. In contrast to the German films, killing enemies is totally accepted as part of a soldier's job. SF strengthens this basic motive strongly by drawing a distinctive picture of the Taliban: reckless and violent terrorists who kill innocent civilians to reach their goals (SF, 00:32:20; 01:04:06), acting based on archaic values such as false pride and religious fundamentalism. This leads to an overall situation where killing the enemy is not only necessary to reach the goals of a certain mission, but to achieve the greater good: making the world safer and more peaceful. Although such a strong commitment is not present in NHNE, the soldiers also kill attackers during a firefight (NHNE, 00:08:35) and do not discuss the act of killing throughout the film. Hence, this is also an accepted and normal situation during a foreign mission within NHNE's diegesis. Additionally, both cinematic worlds underline the basic motive that killing the enemy is justifiable by drawing a clear distinction between insurgents and civilians, pointing out clearly who "the enemy" is.

Reviewing strategic culture research, we can see that there is indeed an acceptance of sustaining casualties on one's own side rooted in French society, as public support of military missions is relatively high, even when losses had to be mourned (Hellman 2016, 28). In the same vein, the French White Paper points out that military personnel may be "called on to serve at any time or in any place and even to sacrifice their own lives" (French Ministry of Defence 2013, 108), underlining the relevance of the cinematic depiction of the sacrifices made by the soldiers. The acceptance of taking out hostile forces as part of French strategic culture also becomes obvious in the French White Paper, which states that the armed forces "must be able to engage in coercive actions" pursuing the goal of "neutralizing the adversary's political-military platform" (French Ministry of Defence 2013, 128). This attitude is also reflected by surveys concerning strategic culture, showing that almost 90 % of the French population approves of the fight against terrorism with armed forces (Biehl and Giegerich 2011, 69).

5. Conclusion

Analyzing six films from Germany, United Kingdom and France, this article pointed out that the films reflect different societal beliefs on the use of military means, depending on the country of origin. Overall, the German films revealed strong concerns regarding the use of military force, whereas the French and British cinematic worlds did not reject military means from the outset, representing them as regular instruments of foreign and security policy.

Concerning objectives of the military operations, the German films depict the missions as humanitarian and development aid, unwillingly degenerating into combat operations. In contrast, the British and French films constructed fighting as a regular part of a military intervention. A multilateral backing was present and generally accepted in all films, with the exception of France also being able to conduct operations unilaterally if necessary and a German film showing issues emerging from multilateral integration. Meshing with the objectives, the rules of engagement in the German films are very restrictive, leading to moral dilemmas for the individual soldiers. The British and French cinematic worlds do not reflect such a discussion and thus allow the soldiers to behave as aggressive fighters if necessary during the operations. Finally, all films expound the problems of soldiers killed

in action, but they differ in the depiction of the circumstances. The death of German soldiers in both films is rooted in special circumstances not being part of the regular mission, whereas French and British casualties occurred as part of a soldier's job. Regarding enemies, the analysis pointed out that dead adversaries are commonly accepted without comment in the French and British cinematic worlds but problematic and thoroughly discussed within a German film.

Discussing the results of the film analysis against the backdrop of strategic culture, the study revealed that the overarching topics discussed within the films match characteristics of German, British and French strategic culture. That the strategic cultures of the three states are particularly diverse is therefore not only pointed out by previous research, but also by films about military operations. To come to these insights, a comparative research design with three cases was suitable since it allows for a determination whether films represent these specific features of strategic culture across cases in a similar way, which they did.

However, films do not only bolster strategic culture. They also mirror controversies and recent debates concerning the use of military means, referring to recent public and political debates on the use of force. The main topics identified in the film analysis can therefore at least be understood as depictions of specific strategic subcultures, reflecting an ongoing debate within a society's strategic culture. This understanding is in line with cinematic IR, as films can be regarded "as visual representations of various 'selfs' [sic] rather than as searches for the one or the true story" (Engert and Spencer 2009, 91).

Through depicting, discussing and reinforcing crucial elements of strategic cultures, the films contribute to the (re-)construction and shaping of strategic cultures. Films can thus be conceptualized as carriers of strategic culture, offering an enormous potential concerning the analysis of norms, values and attitudes on military means within societies. I would therefore argue strongly not to exclude popular culture from the analysis of strategic culture and vice versa.

Combining the strategic culture approach and film analysis, this article also assessed the potential of the strategic culture approach for cinematic IR. As strategic culture research provides us with analytical frameworks and previous data with which to compare the films, the approach offers the opportunity to carve out systematically different cinematic depictions of societal beliefs across various cases. For that reason, strategic culture and cinematic IR should be fruitfully combined, constructively using the strengths of both. In addition, the relevance of film analysis for strategic culture research makes a good case for a strong presence of cinematic IR within political science as a whole. In this sense, this study should be conceived as a theoretical as well as an empirical contribution to the ongoing debate on how to deal with films in IR.

Overall, especially in light of the recent interest of IR in images and photography (Kennedy 2009; Johnson 2011; Heck and Schlag 2013), cartoons (Dodds 2007; Hansen 2011), or even video games (Power 2007; Salter 2011; Robinson 2015; Ciuta 2016; de Zamaróczy 2017), not only films, but also these popular cultural artifacts could be promising objects of analysis for a broadly based strategic culture research. As this article seeks to promote such a research agenda, I strongly encourage other scholars to analyze strategic culture through its various representations in popular culture. Popular cultural material that is both entertaining for the scholar and valuable for IR research is in ample supply.

Analyzed Films

Auslandseinsatz, directed by Till Endemann, written by Holger Karsten Schmidt, Germany 2012.

Forces Speciales, directed by Stéphane Rybojad, written by Stéphane Rybojad and Michael Cooper, France 2011.

Kajaki: The True Story, directed by Paul Katis, written by Tom Williams, United Kingdom 2014.

Ni le ciel ni la terre, directed by Clément Cogitore, written by Clément Cogitore and Thomas Bidegain, France 2015.

The Patrol, written and directed by Tom Petch, United Kingdom 2013.

Zwischen Welten, written and directed by Feo Aladag, Germany 2014.

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