



**Universidad**  
Zaragoza

# Undergraduate Dissertation

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Clint Eastwood:  
Looming over National Discourse.  
An Approach to the Diptych about the Battle for Iwo Jima.

Author

Sandra Valdovín Rubio

Supervisor

Prof. Luis Miguel García Mainar

Degree in English Studies  
FACULTY OF ARTS. UNIVERSITY OF ZARAGOZA  
2022

## RESUMEN

La batalla de Iwo Jima todavía mantiene una gran importancia hoy en día, debido al díptico de Clint Eastwood estrenado en 2006: *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*. El distinguido crítico de cine Richard Schickel reconoce a un autor infinitamente fascinante que ha sido un ícono, un actor y un cineasta atraído por temas que tienen que ver con cómo el pasado afecta al presente. De esta manera, la relevancia de su autoría se agudiza cuando intenta ilustrar la construcción social de una nación y, por tanto, de la identidad nacional. La fecha coincide con una nueva era de globalización que no solo ha traído inestabilidad social, sino que también ha despertado niveles de vigilantismo y nacionalismo, particularmente después de los ataques terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001. A pesar de que EE.UU. y Japón han sido enemigos desconocidos entre ellos, el autor construye su individualidad de una forma peculiar y única. Sin embargo, cuando analiza la formación de cada identidad nacional, retrata una construcción social. Por un lado, el autor refleja una sociedad ciega con el objetivo de dar a conocer cómo se fabricó la identidad nacional y cómo todavía la propia nación estadounidense se crea a través de la maquinaria propagandística del gobierno y la necesidad de tener modelos a imitar. Por otro lado, el autor reelabora la identidad nacional en la que la cultura occidental da forma e impone su comprensión sobre Oriente.

## ABSTRACT

The battle for Iwo Jima still maintains a great deal of significance today, owing to Clint Eastwood's diptych released in 2006: *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*. The distinguished film critic Richard Schickel recognises an endlessly fascinating *auteur* who has been an icon, an actor and a filmmaker drawn to issues that have to do with how the past impinges on the present. In this way, the relevance of authorship comes into sharper focus when he tries to illustrate the social construction of a nation and, therefore, national identity. The date coincides with a new wave of globalization that has not only brought social instability, but it has also awakened levels of vigilantism and nationalism, particularly after the aftermath of the 11th of September terrorist attacks in 2001. In spite of the fact that both U.S. and Japanese men have been faceless enemies to each other, the *auteur* constructs their individuality in a peculiar and distinctive manner. However, when he explores the formation of each national identity, he portrays a social construction. On the one hand, the *auteur* holds up a mirror to a blind society aiming to raise awareness of how national identity and the U.S. nation itself was fabricated and it is still pending between government propaganda machinery and the need to have role models to imitate. On the other hand, the *auteur* reworks the national identity in which Western culture shapes and imposes its understanding of the East.

## KEY WORDS

The auteur, national identity, social construction, cultural artifacts, vigilantism, status quo, collectivity, public image, oppression, cultural hegemony, orientalist objects.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: The Battle for Iwo Jima.	5-6
2. Contextualization: The “noughties” decade in the U.S.	7
3. Theoretical framework:	
a. Clint Eastwood: The relevance of authorship.	8-10
b. Nation as a social construction: Bhabha and Saidian “Orientalism”.	9-13
4. Corpus	
a. “Flags from Our Fathers”: from form to meaning.	14-19
b. “Letters from Iwo Jima”: the representation of otherness.	20-24
5. Conclusion	25
6. Works Cited	26-27

## 1. Introduction: The Battle for Iwo Jima

After three days of naval bombardment, U.S. troops landed on the beaches of Iwo Jima on the 19th of February 1945. This is one of the Japanese volcanic islands of the Ogasawara Archipelago whose highest point is Mount Suribachi. The assault on the island continued for weeks until the 26th of March 1945. Coarse volcanic sand hampered the movement of U.S. men and machines as they struggled to cross the beach. When they least expected, the Japanese began a heavy barrage of fire against the invading force. Hence, navy doctors and corpsmen were strictly necessary to the American victory at Iwo Jima. They ensured that the Marines remained well-supplied, administering first aid to casualties and giving two tank landing ships offering water, provisions, munition and fuel. However, the war effort meant a massive operation for casualties because only 24,000 U.S. airmen saved their lives out of approximately 70,000 Marines. The U.S. flag was officially raised over American Headquarters near Mount Suribachi on the 14th of March of 1945 after a proclamation from Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz:

*[...] By their victory they have made an accounting to their country which only history will be able to value fully. Among the Americans who served on Iwo Island, uncommon valor was a common virtue.*

At first glance, it seems similar to many other battles that happened late in the Pacific War. However, the Battle for Iwo Jima was different because taking the island meant more than a symbolic capture of the Japanese homeland. In 1954, the image taken by press photographer Joe Rosenthal of Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi became the symbol of the Marines, who gave their lives in service to the United States of America.

The Japanese, meanwhile, were also suffering major losses and were running low on supplies under General Tadamichi Kuribayashi's leadership. Even though The Imperial Japanese Army defended their positions tenaciously with vast bunkers, hidden artillery and 18 kilometers of tunnels, the final battle raged on the northern part of Iwo Jima. On the 26th of

March, 300 of Kuribayashi's men mounted a final banzai attack. In the end, over 19,000 were killed of the 21,000 soldiers present at the beginning of the Battle for Iwo Jima. Because of the brutality of the fighting and the fact that the battle has retained a great deal of significance even today, it was brought to cinema screens in 2006 by Clint Eastwood. His two-pronged cinematic treatment of the battle for Iwo Jima illustrates the social construction of the nation. In other words, Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) superseded a symmetric reversal and doubling of national perspectives deeply embedded in the formation of each national identity.

## 2. Contextualization: the “noughties” decade in the U.S.

The facts and circumstances of the 2000s rigorously changed the way people live and communicate all over the world. This period underwent a global cultural change mainly because of the growth of the Internet, the worldwide economic downturn and the war on terrorism that influenced the growth of the United States as a modern nation-state. It prompted a cluster of global attitudes in which national identity ran opposite to cosmopolitan and transnational citizenship. Until then, the sense of national belonging was based on mutual exchange between committed citizenry and the national state. However, the falling standards of living, high unemployment and since the government was not keeping its part of the social contract, the conception of national identity generated unprecedented changes among U.S. citizens. Not only did the awareness of human rights and tolerance of differences concerning minority groups become commonplace; but also the levels of vigilance increased regarding assorted threats to society, particularly terrorism in the aftermath of the 11th of September terrorist attacks in 2001. Ultimately, when revisionist critics, such as Sheila Croucher, look back, there is a popular choice for defining the decade in retrospect: a perpetual crisis of democracy and the economy; of international relations and national identity that are said to have awakened nationalistic sentiments and movements (p. 22). More quietly, people realized that culture is political in the sense that it co-existed with an intensifying individualism to promote greater equality in society as a whole. Therefore, the intention of this research paper is to examine the revisionist tendency of national identity in a decadent social context where nationalism has recently gained cultural and political significance.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Clint Eastwood: The relevance of authorship

The attention to the cultural construction of authors is certainly necessary for the study of cinema. In 1954, Truffaut set out a more comprehensive definition for *auteurs* in which those who wrote and directed their own films had a unique, personal vision. The process of filmmaking went beyond the surface level to explore deeper themes in a nuanced and skillful way. The cultural function of authorship shows the necessity to study closely the ideologies subtly disseminated in the construction of a star persona (Mainar, 2006 p. 62). For this reason, the figure of the star-author encapsulates a variety of fantasies that point to current concerns about identity. The relevance of authorship represents a specific identity associated with a concrete community and thus, in this particular analysis, becoming the spokesman for national identity. This capacity can reflect either commitment to and suspicion of the cult of the self, so that the tension found between individual and collective identity is approached as a social construction. In the decade in which human beings encompass personalities that are “all-about-me-species” (Thompson, 1978 p. 2), they encourage the conflict between strong personal identities and those created by social pressure in the discourses of U.S. cinema. In this way, much of Eastwood’s career may be analyzed in a balanced act between commercial films and prestige projects. The artistic responsibility for what occurs on the screen yields a discourse of specific themes and structures, notions of gender and sexuality, notions on modern culture, race relations and patriotism.

Some observers, such as liberal *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich, affirm his “free thinker” self-image by saying his ideas resist categorization. Clint has supported both Republicans and Democrats over the years, as Rich quotes the star saying: “I vote for what I like. I’m not a loyalist to any party. I’m only a loyalist to the country” (Sterrit, 2014 p. 219). Nevertheless, his Republican credentials were displayed when he started on his 1986 mayoral

campaign in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. However, Eastwood's best-known statement of his libertarian leanings appeared in a 2004 interview with *USA Weekend*: "live-and-let-live". More often than not, Eastwood has expanded on the problem of government power as a widespread phenomenon derived from human nature present in the country if we are not vigilant (Sterrit, 1997 p. 221). In fact, this characterisation of Clint's political attitude comes from a heady strain of anarchism in the Sergio Leone trilogy and the westerns Eastwood has directed. But also, he reaches a conservative image when, for instance, a bigoted retiree becomes a reluctant hero in *Gran Torino* (2008). Undoubtedly, Eastwood's image conditions every attempt to convey a historical movement or social values to the viewers (Mainar, 2006 p. 49). Without leaving a fixed legacy and reputation, Eastwood is exactly an icon between his self-declared identity and his star-powered ventures. Therefore, the relevance of authorship comes into sharper focus when managing his reputation and ideological discourse in the process of filmmaking.

Considering Eastwood's importance as a pop-cultural force, he is a master of telling, retelling, revising and recasting the grand narratives of the United States' distant and recent past (Sterrit, 2014 p. 4). The only time he has directed war films is in the case of the diptych showing the Battle for Iwo Jima. Considering his authorship in both films, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, he constantly constructs a heroic battle looking for tragedy by the combination of homage and critical nationalism. As Cristopher Orr states, "Eastwood is the rare artist who has gone from being condemned as a fascist propagandist by the left to being condemned as a fascist propagandist by the right" (Sterrit, p. 16). Taking into account that after the 9/11 events there was a difficult common ground between East and West, the author is suspicious of carrying ideological implications. Eastwood may choose these memory-making films to offer plural perspectives of the nation's ideals (i.e. USA and Japan) in order to explore the clash between personal and socially expected ideas beneath the

concept of national identity. The content of this dissertation supports the idea that the *auteur* conveys the significance of nation and national identity as a social construction.

### 2.3 Nation as a social construction: Bhabha and Saidian “Orientalism”.

Historically within the United States of America, national identity can be recognized as a fluid and changing phenomenon. When it comes to theorizing the nation, Homi Bhabha (1990) states: “a system of cultural significance unfolding time that it must be understood through its narrative address as a form of social and textual affiliation and as a narrative strategy” (p. 2.). Hence, Bhabha’s nation consists of unstable and competing temporalities including the colonial, postcolonial, native and modern states driven by the split between national official discourse and that which resists it. In this way, a nation is not a consolidated and homogeneous collective identity and therefore, Bhabha insists on describing the people: “historical objects of nationalist pedagogy” (p. 3). In other words, there is an emerging debate on the conditions of admission and exclusion within the prescribed boundaries of nationhood. This frequent dilemma is the cradle of national discourse because a culturally homogeneous population is more often than not considered as a more stable and viable nation. These “politics of performativity” (Larsen, 2001 p. 42) confirm the established authority over national identity. Bhabha thereby began by questioning central and prescribed ideas of the nation as a product of national ideology: a mental and a social construction deeply embedded in the population.

Anderson and Smith explored the issue of national identity in military studies as a moral force that demands extraordinary and massive sacrifices and commitments from its members, including dying for the nation (as cited in Ting, 2008 p. 455). By considering the cultural and social foundations of the nation, it coexists as a cultural community sharing myths, historical memories, values and symbols. Quite often and especially in this analysis, individuals internalize symbols as mediating devices to understand the premises of a particular nation and its institutions. These symbols become what are called cultural artifacts in the construction of a specific national identity. The idea of the sovereignty of the people,

equality of citizens in a nation as the modern political principles of nationhood, nationality and citizenship need to be understood with this realm of social construction. Therefore, if we simply take institutionalized nationhood as the reference for national identity, we are bound to explore the dialectical relationship between the dominant national form of identification and the repressed one, so often labeled as “the other”. Stuart Hall (1996) suggests that nationalistic discourses appropriate a process of self-identification in order to produce the meaning they are interested in (p. 344). As a result, the social construction of a nation is indeed linked to significant historical moments the people can identify with. Subsequently, these events become cultural artifacts in which beliefs are constructed to give the sense of collectiveness, safety and patriotism. Thus, national identity is socially and culturally constructed by people’s identification with a particular person, the significance assigned to certain acts and specific outcomes valued over others (Holland et al., p. 60).

Considering now *Flags of Our Fathers*, the film explores the concept of nation as a social construction as it is focused on the Battle for Iwo Jima; but more than anything else, it scrutinizes the signifier of the nation’s ideals by the flag raising theme. On the one hand, it revolves around myths of U.S. national characters such as Ira Hayes, John Bradley and René Gagnon, while anatomizing the blatant government propaganda machinery to instill new moral values in the nation’s population. On the other hand, the construction of the heroic mode is so evident and necessary throughout the film that it reflects on the determining facts of Western culture to overcome the effects of the 2000s. This anachronistic aura of revisionism imposed by the figure of Clint Eastwood as *auteur* becomes the pretext to construct the nation’s significance between the height of pretense and the idyllic triumphalism.

Given that Eastwood released *Letters from Iwo Jima* as a transnational film, it portrays a counterweight to recognise the humanity of Japanese soldiers in the battle for Iwo

Jima. The *auteur* constructs their individuality as a way to strengthen the identity of the West differentiating itself from the East. Since Edward Said's "Orientalism" was published in 1978, the concept has been used to better understand that the "the Orient" is a textual construction of the West and not an actual place. As Said (1978) states, orientalism is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). In other words, it is a way for the West to shape and impose their understanding of the East. Therefore, the representation of the Japanese is a product of national discourse. This form of ethnocentrism emphasizes Japanese strangeness and otherness: as fanatical, passive, eccentric, backwards and "with a tendency to despotism" (Said, 1993 p. 36). For the purpose of this analysis, Saidian "Orientalism" becomes quintessential for understanding the social construction of a nation. In fact, one of the central interests in *Letters from Iwo Jima* is to parallel the term "the Orient" to the Middle East. In a futile attempt, the film reconciles Japanese and the U.S. by questioning national convictions. However, Eastwood relies on national discourse by distancing U.S. identity from any kind of "Orientalism".

#### 4. Corpus

##### 4.1 “Flags of Our Fathers” (2006): from form to meaning.

Firstly, this film itself is complexly structured because on one level, the fighting places a primacy and an immediacy effect because the battle is still alive in the minds of the Marines in terms of memory, nightmare and post-traumatic stress disorder flashbacks. On a second level, Eastwood reconstructs the battle for Iwo Jima through a narrative voice: John “Doc” Bradley’s son (Thomas McCarthy) who portrays his father’s personal experience in the wartime past. This historical event underlies the public values and meanings that were assigned to the actions of Doc (Ryan Phillippe) and his fellow Marines. It contrasts with the human bonds forged by their friendship, their shared traumas and their sacrificial dedication. My analysis primarily focuses on how the *auteur* has introduced particular cinematic effects to represent each national character and to reclaim the values attached to national identity. In fact, Eastwood plays an impressive critical role by choosing Joe Rosenthal’s photograph and military victory in the U.S. flag above Mount Suribachi as cultural artifacts in order to dismantle heroic imagery and glorification. Thus, Eastwood focalizes The Marine Corps through three soldiers: John “Doc” Bradley, Ira Hayes (Adam Beach) and René Gagnon (Jesse Bradford) who survived the fighting and were recalled to participate in a bond tour to raise the money necessary to fund the war effort. Eastwood explores the clash between their public image and their personal perception towards the war experience. Clearly, Eastwood’s star persona has been created by the characters he has played, the films he has directed, and those in which he takes both roles, so that in *Flags of Our Fathers*, he also tries to get rid of the public assumptions and to veneer his strong personal identity.

From the very beginning, a voice-over starts defining how morality is beneficial both to society and the individual person, but following them without considering their origin or using your own judgment can cause controversy. Afterwards, it alludes to an

“easy-to-understand truth” to explain the power of mass media to hype victory in battle because immediately afterwards the camera focuses on Joe’s Rosenthal photograph, which is something that the photo itself did not imply at that time. From that moment, viewers understand that this statement belongs to Joe Rosenthal in an interview with Mr. Bradley’s son. People were tired of war, the general mood across the country was in decay and the only way out was to develop stories that built on collective identity in order to infuse national identity. From the very beginning, it is corroborated how politicians appropriated the photograph to produce the meaning they were interested in: safety and control. In addition to this, viewers can recognize the posttraumatic stress syndrome because the *auteur* is recurring in rapidly edited, completely layered imagery and quick flashbacks. The juxtaposition of the voice-over and the images of war parallels Mr. Bradley’s frantic worry, who starts suffering a heart attack. For a few seconds, the next scene places the Marines climbing a mountain that resembles Mount Suribachi at Iwo Jima, but when they reach the top, viewers realize that there is a reenactment of the flag raising in an overcrowded football stadium: the flares are fireworks, the cheering crowds are letting out a war cry and the orchestra is imitating the aircraft carriers. The position of the camera tilts up in order to spawn the false pretense of the flag raising and more importantly, to put forward the main theme of the movie: national identity as a social construction. The flag raising snapshot helped turn the mood of U.S. citizens and consequently, it confirms the objectification of the masses to advocate for patriotism and nationalism.

Before arriving at Iwo Jima, Eastwood presents the soldiers at camp Tarawa. The main component associated with the star persona within U.S. culture is the condition from which he represents the male role model (Mainar, 2006 p. 14). Following the crisis of masculinity throughout the 90s and how men have been depicted within feminized parameters, Eastwood’s representation of masculinity is the vehicle for disseminating the

intrinsic necessity in society to have social models to imitate. In this way, these characters encompass a thoroughgoing overhaul of Eastwood's identity as *auteur* since the culture of the image is enormously influenced by the strong presence of mass media. Therefore, the scene pays tribute to "real" male characters because it counteracts the cultural machinery that has prompted society to believe and idealize the common soldier. Few seconds later, the soldiers are immersed in the battlefield and we follow each Marine in the form of a hand-held camera that creates a sense of chaos and immediacy to the state of war, as well as producing jerky and bouncy shots. For the first time, spectators are shown the harsh reality when soldiers literally say: "Corpsman! Is this a bad battle or what?—It's a fucking slaughter!" after having witnessed how a soldier goes up in flames. The atrocity of the scene along with the brutal tone neutralize any form of nationalism but, even more remarkably, Eastwood displays a huge expressive strength determined by the contrast of lights and shadows (i.e. chiaroscuro effect). At first sight, it helps viewers understand the personal effort made to cope with the haunting inner images of war, but more precisely, Eastwood avoids any kind of glorification of the common soldier as well as the military victory itself. Therefore, the dark lighting, the rapidity of the action and the violent brutality deny any celebration of national pride. What's more, Eastwood subverts the conventional conception of national characters into the agreed form of an overwhelming public identity: "the Heroes of Iwo Jima".

The film's narrative reconstructs the story of Iwo Jima and the flag raisers by using a multilayered historical account. Eastwood transmits different angles of perceived truth so that individuals' lives are determined by these specific historical conditions. In this way, René, Ira and Doc became idealized national heroes and Eastwood comments on their individual experience to get to the truth about the central icon of the film: Joe's Rosenthal photograph of the flag-raising. On the one hand, their participation in the bond tour contributed to sustaining the fundamental values of the nation and on the other hand, each perspective offers an insight

into continual indignities and emotional pain when they endure the flag-raising reenactment. The characterization of René Gagnon —whose name already reminds us of his foreign nature— is delighted to turn into a public figure. Eastwood does not show any flashback to his experience as a soldier, but on the contrary, René forces Ira Hayes to serve as a political prop. In fact, the *auteur* introduces many political leaders and apparently eminent characters that are behind the interest of the nation in successful banquet halls, stages and saloons. The *mise-en-scène* is fundamental to convey how the cultural significance beneath the sense of collectiveness and safety is taking hold in society. Not only does Joe Rosenthal's picture appear explicitly in every setting, but also the word "victory" and campaign slogans such as "now all together", "the victory you can invest in" or the most striking one: "if you can sell bonds, you can sell homes". The increased frequency and severity of flashbacks when Doc and Ira deal with the status quo atmosphere in combination with the engine sounds from any kind of vehicle in the film (i.e. trains, taxis, cars) often serves as a crossover to the bombs, barrels, rifles and aircraft in the battle. Eastwood's unique style combines to create a mental rather than a physical space with the aim to render the characters and their actions on a human scale. Without question, the past and the present incessantly in contrast with each other reveal how people are still suffering the consequences of the war and how it has contributed to the fragmentation of collective memory to such an extent that it remains alive. However, by remarking this social commentary, the *auteur* attempts to detach himself from the ties to high echelons of economic and political power and all the ideological speculation built around his star persona. He constantly fosters the concatenation of lies and the height of pretense in the fight to the national identity fabricated by leaders who lack the moral code to appropriately defend the U.S. (Mainar, 2006 p. 118). In this way, the film brings to the surface the futility and manipulative nature of politics so as to distinguish the displayed information (i.e. pride, glory, safety, control, victory) from the country's historical reality.

Government propaganda machinery has lulled people into the condition of inertness, passivity, delusion and thus, forcing them to operate as their own interests. More often than not, these idealized convictions were introduced by the government who ignored the dark side of U.S. history.

By the end of the movie, the acuteness of the flashback mechanism has diminished until it unfolds and becomes an uncharted motion towards long swathes of an accumulated past. The loudly orchestrated narrative contributes to an emotion-laden denouement that indeed Eastwood introduces to evoke a melodramatic effect. As opposed to the conventional classical norm of melodramas that preserve unity of time and space, here Eastwood especially emphasizes a strong amount of pathos and action. The *auteur* accentuates his awareness of social problems and failures of justice to metaphorically feed on the problems of realities that could and should be changed. It reveals the beginning of a spatially located innocence inserted in a corrupt society (Mainar, 2006 p. 155). Instead of holding action to make the audience reflect upon the catastrophe of war, the melodramatic mechanism drives them to either recognise the moral legibility of praising the good or condemning an evil (Williams, p. 44). In this way, the “Heroes of Iwo Jima” who were acquainted with their virtuous quintessence at the time, are systematically placed as victims these days. The construction of the nation regarded these soldiers as “national heroes” and it became an unquestionable truth that people end up believing in favor of national discourse. However, the confrontation into an “essentialist” reading of nationality that attempts to define the whole nation by relying on the supposedly homogeneous, innate and historical tradition, it implies, defines and ensures the people’s subordinate status. In fact, the interests of these producers are embodied in the three main characters’ ending. René becomes a “yesterday’s hero” whose role of national figure made him live perfectly and successfully in the past, but he is left to fend for himself when the show is over. John “Doc” Bradley encapsulates the trauma account and the

consequences of self-esteem in the sense that the dedication, determination and sacrifice assigned to his persona in the war effort is no longer considered a pride. Ultimately, Ira Hayes is psychologically scarred by the inevitable slide from “a national Native-American hero” to zero. He finally dies of exposure, in solitude and faded into oblivion.

To conclude, *Flags of Our Fathers* holds up a mirror to a blind society because national identity was fabricated and it is still pending between government propaganda machinery and the increasing power of mass media. Therefore, the nation is portrayed as a social construction beneath the utopian concepts of collectivity, homogeneity, patriotism and safety. By revising the values attached to national identity in a war film, the *auteur's* cinematic effects also give meaning to the effort to cope with his star persona. The character's suffering symbolizes Eastwood himself as he is often considered representative of the perceived attitudes in the films he literally creates and performs. In this way, this particular memory-making film parallels the power of the image that forged the creation of fictional heroes. In the end, there is also a fresh attempt to fight against the focus on celebrities whose image is favored by mass media; rather, it represents how popularity does not entail a social model to be imitated which the entertainment industry or the status quo could have manipulated for their own aim.

#### 4.2 “Letters from Iwo Jima”: the concept of otherness.

To start with, Clint Eastwood, together with one of the best known cinema directors of all times, Steven Spielberg, decided that telling one side of the war story was not enough. The second film of the diptych follows an entirely Japanese perspective in a straightforward flashback narrative when a group of archaeologists discovers a cache of letters written by the Japanese soldiers defending Iwo Jima. From that moment, there is an analepsis to the digging trenches near the beach in preparation for the U.S. invasion. Eastwood makes clear that the central soldier of the film is very much aware that defending homeland on Iwo Jima is certainly a suicide mission: the island is flat, featureless, volcanic and they were running out of provisions. In all likelihood, they might die of starvation before the war started. Furthermore, the Japanese soldiers' disposition when confronting death in the battlefield reflects a variety of reactions to the status of “ultimate sacrifice”. Therefore, Eastwood portrays Japanese conceptions of national identity which basically concentrate on committing suicide rather than being captured by the enemy. By bringing into focus the enemy's guise, the *auteur* constructs his own vision on national identity on account of the ability to define and explore the cultural values and beliefs that he already understands. Thus, my analysis inquires as to how Eastwood, the *auteur*, is bound to describe the Japanese with his own cosmovision and cultural parameters. Since then, he justifies and contributes to the construction of otherness (i.e. Japanese stereotype) in the discourse of national identity.

From the very beginning, Eastwood focuses on Saigo's characterization (Kazunari Ninom) to pose questions about national convictions. He is a poor soldier mostly interested in keeping touch with his wife Hanako by sending letters. Eastwood depicts high officials opening and reading his letters until one of them erases a part of it. In this way, he already points to how the state is authoritarian and thus it supports censorship. The audience begins to know a specific type of character that implies hierarchy, subordination and submission to

very rigid cultural beliefs that have little room for human nature. Saigo is interested in surviving the battle for Iwo Jima, but more precisely, to escape from a totalitarian government that has already forced his army to become fanatical warriors until death. The possibility of surrender can only be conceived as a dishonor and they are only engaged in self-sacrifice for the glory of the Emperor. However, Saigo did not believe in the recurring motif of the suicide bomber. The *auteur* focuses on an obedient soldier whose dissenting silence hides feelings of confrontation and rebellion towards the overwhelmingly dominant footage of regimentation, fanaticism and brutality —upon all of which the U.S. Army also insisted. Therefore, Eastwood captures a clash between feelings of fascination and fears towards the presumptions that underlie the fanatical Japanese soldier. On this latter point, he only projects Saigo on the same wavelength as Baron Nishi (Tsuyashi Ihara) and General Kuribayashi (Ken Watanabe) who happen to be the only ones in close contact with Western culture. Their characterization towards East culture parallels the way that Eastwood often understands his own culture: a chronicle of destructive values, exploitative practices and self-gratification.

When General Kuribayashi arrives on Iwo Jima, he intends to create a strategic plan but he is constantly questioned for having an international experience. He has spent some years living in the U.S as a diplomatic military man and Eastwood provides a flashback to understand that in the hypothetical case that Japan and the U.S went to war, Kuribayashi's admiration towards the U.S country and its values would not change. Later on, he admits the absurdity of engaging in such a war by drinking a glass of Johnny Walker whiskey in conversation with Baron Nishi. Moreover, the constant presence of the Colt.45 gun which he was awarded by the U.S Army is a deliberate prop that Eastwood indeed introduces alluding to his movies featuring firearms. In particular, it is an affectionate nod to “High Plains Drifter” (1973) that drew heavily on the western genre that launched him into stardom, but

more precisely, the first western he directed. In fact, it parallels the diptych as both appear to be daringly original in which it is almost impossible not to scan Eastwood's politics: a revisionist aura of a country that has forgotten its values. More specifically in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, there is progressively a more insatiable desire to fight oppression; not only for his political affairs, but also creating a space for his self-directed war film among the cultural hegemony of this historic moment (i.e. World War II). In addition, Kuribayasi's plan is carried out with vast bunkers, hidden artillery and 18 kilometers of tunnels from Mount Suribachi to the north of Iwo Jima. By attacking from these caves, the *auteur* depicts Japanese soldiers living under a regime known as "vigilantism", one closely related to fascism. This U.S tendency to enforce the law casts doubts on the beliefs, attitudes and values associated with national identity (Mainar, 2006 p. 49). In this way, Eastwood focuses on Kuribayasi's plan because he's the one in power who apparently challenges the Japanese stereotype. In fact, he commands a high officer to tell Japanese soldiers to not commit suicide because that will literally be "a waste of honor". However, he is the one who witnesses how his soldiers have been arbitrarily massacred by U.S. soldiers. This result is precisely that the *auteur* is confronted with the concept of otherness, that is, the Japanese stereotype moral belief of self-sacrifice. Therefore, there is an attempt to impose the Western understanding of national convictions and he places these Japanese soldiers as orientalist objects in the discourse of national identity.

Regarding Baron Nishi, as being described by Saigo's words, he not only was a very well-known equestrian who won an Olympic medal in Los Angeles, but also handsome enough to attract women—a virtue often attributed to Eastwood star persona. It is certainly true that Nishi was extremely popular among the Hollywood crowd just before being assigned to the defense of Iwo Jima and his role within the movie is not a coincidence. The horse is a recurrent motif attached to Eastwood, so that the *auteur* has efficiently portrayed it

as a symbol of domination: to emphasize U.S. authority over Japan. Although the presence of Baron Nishi in the battlefield remains in the background, the *auteur* introduces him with the aim to make the audience take part in his horse's death. Possibly of greater significance, a reminder of "Pale Rider" (1985) —by and starring Eastwood— that conveys a clear stance on the fact that U.S. values and way of life are being annihilated in vain. The *auteur* proves once more a revisionist aura, invoking the sturdy self-control and confidence that he used to show in his previous cinema works. As in the case of this analysis, his national convictions can be recognised when he portrays the concept of otherness as being imprisoned in an ideological cage. By stigmatizing Baron Nishi and his horse in the ideals of their final death throes, Eastwood finds a motive to focus on the distinction between the U.S. and Japan national discourses.

Another important figure is Shimizu (Ryo Kase), a disgraced military police trainee who was sent to Iwo Jima because he could not manage to kill an innocent barking dog. Paradoxically, when Eastwood directed and played the title role of "Dirty" Harry Callahan in "Sudden Impact" (1983), he had a questionable use of force as a police officer. In any case, Saigo fears that Shimizu is there to report on his unpatriotic griping, but he makes him realize toward the end of the movie that they have been taught false beliefs. Both soldiers witness several Banzai charges, but their commitment to survival is never shown as cowardice. In fact, when they both reach the north caves escaping from the traditional status of "ultimate sacrifice", they are literally said: "You're both a disgrace". Suddenly, Kuribayashi appears onscreen and orders not to kill them; just as immediately there is a transition to an aerial shot of the north caves up to Mount Suribachi, where it is shown how the U.S. Army has already raised the flag. Therefore, the *auteur* speaks for the Japanese army rather than allowing it to have its own voice because he is constantly searching for outliers. This naturally provides admiration for the values and beliefs coming from the U.S. while perpetuating the portrayals

of Japanese culture as backward, violent and inhuman in the form of otherness. The perceived dichotomy only serves to identify and understand Japanese behavior by the use of binary oppositions: aggressive or nonaggressive, rigid or submissive, loyal or treacherous, brave or coward.

By the end of the film, emerging from the barren land, Saigo and Kuribayashi are the only survivors. The *auteur* has defined them in opposition to war, but after all the effort to defend their homeland, Kuribayashi commits suicide and Saigo is in charge to bury his body. Surrounded by U.S. soldiers, Saigo undergoes an outburst of rage because he has seen the Colt.45 gun in the belt of a Marine. Eastwood shows them trying to help Saigo amicably, until he is arranged with the rest of U.S. wounded soldiers by the seashore. Movingly, an orchestral triumphant soundtrack starts while Saigo fixes his eyes on the horizon; a new day dawns at Iwo Jima. As understood here, the *auteur* reworks the model through which the Western culture gazes at Japan: Saigo is left to the mercy of the U.S. Marine Corps. There is a conscious endeavor to depict the United States of America as a paternalistic nation that emphasizes the combination between individual liberties and authoritative social control. In fact, this “happy ever after ending” implies a set of male heroic values for (white) male U.S. identity as a whole, justified with the concept of otherness. After grappling with the past, the *auteur* returns to a sturdy patriotic mental space in which he feels safe and sound. The nation is perceived as a social construction that systematically implies subordination, patriotism, collectiveness, homogenization and, therefore, it remains beyond our control.

## 5. Conclusion

The relevance of authorship looms over the representation of national identity in Eastwood's two-pronged cinematic treatment of the Battle for Iwo Jima. He has both depreciated and paid tribute to what it means to be a U.S citizen. He has explored the dialectical relationship between the dominant national form of identification and the repressed one, in this particular case, the Japanese. Not only does the *auteur* introduce a plea for action due to the fact that every national identity is a social construction, but also speculates about the role of the status quo. In the end, the ideals that support the U.S nation have been fabricated and even today, national identity is still pending between government propaganda machinery and the increasing need to have social models to imitate. By reducing the Japanese into orientalist objects, there is also a conscious endeavor to depict the U.S as a paternalistic nation. In other words, these films that revolve around contemporary politics emphasize a combination between individual liberties and authoritative social control, which restricts the choices of any individual in the interest of the status quo and without consent. The *auteur* creates a sturdy patriotic mental space in which he feels safe and sound in an attempt to impose his understanding of national identity on the East.

## 6. Works Cited

- Bhabha K. H. (1990). *Nation and Narration*. (1st ed., pp.2-3). London: Routledge.
- Croucher, S. L. (2003). *Perpetual Imagining: Nationhood in a Global Era*. International Studies Review, 5(1), 1–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3186487>
- Eastwood, Clint, dir. (2006). *Flags of Our Fathers*. Malpaso. Warner Bros. Pictures and DreamWorks Pictures.
- Eastwood, Clint, dir. (2006). *Letters from Iwo Jima*. Malpaso. Warner Bros. Pictures and DreamWorks Pictures.
- Eley, G., & Suny, R. G. (Eds.). (1996). *Becoming National: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jones K. (2003). *The Eastwood Variations*. (Vol. 39 no. 5 pp. 44, 47–8, 51). Canada: Film Comment.
- Larsen N. (2001). *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative and Nation in the Americas*. Verso Books.
- Lave J. and Holland D. (2001). *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*. (Vol 1. pp. 60–61). Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press & James Currey.
- Mainar, L. M. G. (2006). *Clint Eastwood: de actor a autor*. (Vol. 22 pp. 14, 49, 118, 155). Barcelona: Paidós.
- Thompson R. and Hunter T. (1978). *Clint Eastwood, Auteur*. (Vol. 14 p. 2) Canada: Film Comment.
- Ting, H. (2008). *Social Construction of Nation—A Theoretical Exploration*. Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 14(3), 453–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110802301418>
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. (1st ed., p 3). London: Penguin Books.

- Sterritt, D. (2014). *The Cinema of Clint Eastwood: Chronicles of America*. (Vol 1. pp. 4, 16, 219, 221). Amsterdam: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/ster17200>
- Williams, L. (1998). "Melodrama revised." *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*. (Vol. 1 p. 44). Ed. Nick Browne. Berkeley: University of California Press.