
Research Article

Brotherhood and sacrifice in the face of war: a comparative study of Mosul (2019) and Saving Private Ryan (1998)

Mohammed Abdulbasit Ibrahim^{a*}

Department of English, College of Education

^aAlnoor University, Mosul, 41012, Iraq

mohammed.abdulbasit@alnoor.edu.iq

ORCID: 0009-0006-69655744

Received: 19/10/2024 Accepted: 20/11/2024 Published: 28/04/2025

Abstract:

This article compares two prominent war movies, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Mosul* (2019), by analyzing two main themes: brotherhood and sacrifice in war. The former, directed by Steven Spielberg, explores World War II through the story of American soldiers who embark on a mission to rescue a private Rayan after his three brothers are killed in combat.

© This Is an Open Access Article Under the CC by License.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



* Corresponding author
E-mail address: mohammed.abdulbasit@alnoor.edu.iq



Several soldiers are assigned to their commander Captain John H. Miller and through the journey to find Rayan in the middle of the chaos of war, a bond of brotherhood is formed that sacrifices itself to save one man. The second film, *Mosul* (2019), is based on true events: the battle to liberate the Iraqi city of Mosul from ISIS control, where an elite SWAT team comes together to rescue a woman named Hayat and her young daughter. The article highlights how the two films portray the bonds of brotherhood between soldiers and the sacrifices they make to save others and sacrifice for their countries. The focus of comparing these two works is that they convey the same message about the suffering caused by war, and how they become motivated to sacrifice.

Keywords: Mosul, war, brotherhood, sacrifice, soldiers, movie, message, Steven Spielberg, Saving Private Ryan

Introduction

Saving Private Ryan, directed by Steven Spielberg, is not merely a war film; it is a poignant exploration of the themes of brotherhood and sacrifice amidst the harrowing backdrop of World War II. The narrative follows a group of soldiers on a dangerous mission to rescue Private James Ryan, whose brothers have been killed in action. This quest raises profound questions about the value of a single life in the brutality of war. The film vividly depicts the deep bonds that form between soldiers, as they become a single force defending and dying for each other, their selflessness and willingness to risk everything for each other, even for a man they have never met, and come to believe that this man they will die and sacrifice for is their country. Many critics and writers admired the film and considered it one of the immortal films forever. John C McManus, professor of US military history at Missouri S&T states:



The movie is so powerful and so skilfully made that it has stayed with us perpetually as a kind of visual and emotional base point for what we imagine Omaha Beach and Normandy must have been like. It is accurate enough that it does enhance popular historical understanding. Some of the incidents that the film portrays are taken directly from survivor accounts (McManus, J. 2024).

As the soldiers navigate the treacherous battlefields, they embody the essence of brotherhood, demonstrating that their commitment extends beyond duty to a profound emotional connection. The sacrifices made by Captain Miller and his squad highlight the harsh realities of war, where the cost of saving one life can lead to the loss of many others. Through heart-wrenching moments and powerful dialogue, *Saving Private Ryan* captures the essence of camaraderie and the moral complexities faced by those in combat, the film serves as a tribute to the courage and sacrifice of the Allied forces, reminding us of the enduring spirit of humanity in the face of unimaginable adversity.

Mosul is a gripping portrayal of courage, sacrifice, and the unbreakable bonds of brotherhood amidst the chaos of war and the terrorist occupation of Mosul city. Set against the backdrop of the brutal fight to liberate the city from ISIS, the terrorists have turned the city into a slaughterhouse. The film follows a SWAT team in Nineveh as they clear the city and rescue a besieged family. In the heart of the city, a group of local fighters are united by a common mission and a deep sense of loyalty to one another. Roxana Hadadi is a film, television, and pop culture critic states:

Dabbach (Major Jassim) is the heart and soul of “Mosul,” making real the unbelievable loss Iraqis have suffered after decades



of war and destruction—and the sliver of hope they still hold onto for a better life (Hadadi, 2020).

As they navigate the grim realities of combat, the men of the SWAT team embody the essence of brotherhood, relying on mutual trust and unwavering support to survive the relentless dangers they face.

The story delves into the emotional and moral complexities of war. What the terrorists have done breaks all the rules of human rights and structure. The film's story highlights the individual and collective personal sacrifices made not only for the greater good of their city and the besieged families but also to protect their comrades. From here, initiatives of brotherhood and sacrifice are formed. Each character's journey reveals the profound impact of loss and trauma, as they grapple with the weight of their responsibilities while forming a family bond as if they were brothers, and their leader who leads the mission as if he were a father, transcending traditional relationships.

The film captures the sentiment that in the besieged and bitter city of Mosul, you can only survive with your brothers, and without the bonds of brotherhood there is no victory, highlighting the need for unity in the face of overwhelming adversity as unity is the only path to victory. Through its raw and authentic portrayal of the war against ISIS, Mosul serves as a powerful tribute to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring bonds forged in the crucible of war. It is a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by those who stand together in the pursuit of freedom, making it a compelling and thought-provoking cinematic experience. Here comes the comparison between the films *Saving Private Ryan* and *Mosul*.



The theme of brotherhood emerges as a strong, central, and essential element among the soldiers in both films. Perhaps the director of the film *Mosul* is trying to clarify the idea that this brotherhood bond was formed among the Iraqi SWAT forces because the American troops are the ones who trained and advised this force. In the film *Saving Private Ryan*, the brotherhood bond is embodied through the selfless actions of a group of American soldiers who risk their lives to save Private Ryan, a man they do not know, driven by an unwritten code of companionship and the desire to save his mother from losing all her all sons. *Saving Private Ryan* is not just a mission of the higher command, and the evidence for this is that all the soldiers in both films try to defend their colleagues, so why not try to save private Ryan, whom they considered their brother without even seeing him? This theme is further explored through the sacrifices made by each member of the squad, which shows their willingness to protect each other even in the most difficult circumstances.

Mosul depicts the deep bonds between a SWAT team in Nineveh as they fight against ISIS to liberate their city and free a woman named Hayat and her daughter. Hayat is a soldier's wife and a civilian, a persecuted resident of the city. Their brotherhood goes beyond friendship; it is rooted in mutual trust, loyalty, and shared trauma. The SWAT team is trying to free a woman they don't know, and they are motivated to fight and enter dangerous places. This is a common thread between *Saving Private Ryan* and *Mosul*. The film highlights how their bond is forged through the hardships of war, with each member relying on the other for survival. The sacrifices these fighters make are not just for their mission, which was later canceled by the higher command, but they decide to go ahead and free the family, demonstrating that their



fight is as much about personal dedication as it is about a collective cause. both films poignantly depict the sacrifices made in the name of brotherhood, illustrating how these bonds can provide strength and resilience amidst the chaos of battle. Through their narratives, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Mosul* offer a profound commentary on the human spirit, the costs of war, and the enduring power of camaraderie in the face of adversity.

1.1 The Brotherhood of War in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)

One of the most important symbols depicted in the film is the symbol of brotherhood. The sense of comradeship is evident on the battlefield, and it is formed as a result of suffering, as from the womb of suffering hope is born, and we see this clearly in the dialogues, especially towards the end of the film. Towards the end of the film, the soldiers locate Private Ryan, but he refuses to return with them to safety due to the bond of brotherhood that has developed between him and his battalion that has held out defending the bridge in the city of Rommel. Private Ryan asserts, “These people are the only brothers I have left.” (Spielberg, 1998, 1:34:56.). The brotherhood is on display on the battlefield; Ryan's three brothers have been killed in combat, and under the Army's sole survivor policy, he must be returned home. While searching for Ryan, the squad faces the threat of the German army, and some of them question why they should risk their lives to save one man. As they travel through cities, countryside, and forests, several members of the regiment are killed. Eventually, they find Ryan, who refuses to leave his unit because he must stay with the rest of his squad because of the bond of brotherhood he has woven within him.



The brotherhood in Saving Private Ryan is demonstrated through selflessness in the most trying of times. Each member of the squad, from Sergeant Horvath to sniper Private Jackson and medic Wade, demonstrates their willingness to sacrifice, not only for the greater cause of winning the war but for the men beside them. This is made clear when they go to great lengths to save Ryan, a man they don't even know and have never met, because of the unintended bond of brotherhood that binds the soldiers. Sergeant Horvath, he states on the bond between soldiers he says "Someday we might look back on this and decide that saving Private Ryan was the one decent thing we were able to pull out of this whole god-awful, shitty mess" (Spielberg, 1998, 1:41:00). He didn't want Ryan's mother to lose all four of her sons at once. At the time, the command didn't intend to sacrifice the eight rescuers. And the rescue team probably didn't think they would die either.

In Ramelle, they find Ryan, who refuses to abandon the bridge or his comrades. Miller decides that his unit of eight, which has only six men left, will remain with Ryan's unit to defend the bridge against the advancing Germans. Vastly outnumbered and outgunned, the American soldiers devise an ingenious defensive strategy that will allow them to hold out against the German attack until Allied reinforcements arrive, which may never arrive. Before reinforcements can arrive, Jackson, Horvath, and Mellish are killed in the battle, while Steamboat Willie reappears, allied with the Germans, and mortally wounds Miller. As he dies on the bridge, with the troops gathered around him, Miller orders Ryan to justify the sacrifice he and the other soldiers made to save him.

The remaining men of Miller's squad integrate with Ryan's unit and prepare for a German assault. Miller sustains severe



injuries during the combat and persists in discharging his weapon at an advancing German tank. As the tank detonates, an Allied bomber ascends overhead and departs beyond the horizon. The final words of a dying Miller are addressed to Ryan "Earn this... Earn it." (Spielberg, 1998, 2:37:00) As reinforcements arrive to secure the town, only Reiben and Upham from Miller's troops remain. The final scene shows Pvt. Ryan looks down at Capt. Miller as he fades away. The image crossfades to the current day as Ryan returns to France as a much older man, looking down at the grave of Capt. Miller at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer. With his family nearby, he kneels at the grave and states:

Every day I think of what you said to me that day on the bridge," Ryan tells Miller. "I've tried to live my life the best I could and I hope that was enough. I hope that at least in your eyes, I have earned what all of you have done for me (Spielberg, 1998, 2:42:00).

Though the main characters in Saving Private Ryan were fictional, the film accurately depicts the sacrifice and courage displayed by Allied forces during a crucial time in world history. Saving Private Ryan is not just an epic war film; it's a profound narrative that intertwines themes of sacrifice, duty, and brotherhood.

1.2 The Brotherhood of War in *Mosul* (2019)

In *Mosul* (2019), the movie Brotherhood is a central theme, portraying the deep bonds formed among the men of the Nineveh SWAT team as they fight to liberate their city from ISIS. The brotherhood they share transcends blood relations and is rooted in mutual trust, loyalty, and a sense of duty to one another. This bond



is forged through war and the suffering each member of the squad has experienced, each a victim of the terror, hardship, and dangers of war, each man dependent on his comrades for survival. This bond is forged not only through their shared mission to liberate Mosul, but also through the knowledge that in the chaos of battle, danger, and risk of death, they must stand together, or none of them will survive. This unity is summed up in the line, “In Mosul, you only survive with brothers,” (Basha, 2019, 00:21:00). Which encapsulates the team's reliance on one another.

Brothers protecting each other is a fundamental element of their bond. Men are willing to sacrifice their lives, band together, and defend each other, and this is evidence that their brotherhood is built on more than just a common cause - it is about brotherly devotion. As Major Jassim poignantly states, “We do this for each other, not just for the city,” (Basha, 2019, 00:57:00). Stressing that although their mission is difficult and dangerous, their real motivation and great incentive comes from the deep brotherly bond they feel towards each other. After the death of a fellow soldier, the line “He was my brother” (Basha, 2019, 1:28:00). It reveals the depth of loss and trauma experienced by the men, who see each fallen comrade not just as a fellow soldier but as a family member or a brother not born of their mother.

Another aspect of brotherhood in Mosul is the emotional support and mentoring within the team, a role that is the responsibility of the leaders but in this respect, each member of the force tries to play. When a young police officer named Kawa is recruited and rescued by SWAT, the experienced and knowledgeable SWAT team members immediately take him under their wing, teaching him how to survive the harsh conditions of war



and how to stand up unharmed. This mentoring reflects the care they have for each other, and their brotherhood extends to the recruits they bring with them. Their commitment to protecting one another is summed up in the simple yet powerful line, “We protect each other. Always.” (Basha, 2019, 1:00:00). This covenant of mutual protection, even in the face of sudden and imminent danger, defines the strength of their bond. For SWAT troops, their brotherhood is not just a means of survival, but a deep emotional bond forged through shared sacrifice and unwavering loyalty.

There are still good people in the city trying to defend it and liberate it from the terror that has taken over it, and the men of the SWAT team are bound together not only by their mission but also by the trauma of losing family members to ISIS. Each soldier has lost a family member to the terrorists, creating a brotherhood rooted in grief and revenge against their enemies. Kawa, who lost his uncle in combat, Major Jasem asks Kawa if he has lost a family member during the conflict. "Did you lose someone?" and Kawa answers "My uncle." (Basha, 2019, 00:15:00). And who was initially reluctant to join their mission, slowly finds himself drawn into this tight-knit group, where the lines between justice and vigilantism blur because he doesn't know them. Major Jassim, who saved Kawa's life, represents the ruthless leadership that binds the team together, while Kawa's gradual acceptance into the group reveals the evolving nature of the brotherhood, the strong bonds, the mission, and the vision amidst the chaos of war.

This portrayal of brotherhood is complicated by the moral and emotional contradictions that arise in the heat of battle, and the battle is not easy. The men are fighting not only for survival, but also for a cause and the memory of their loved ones, and this shared



pain creates a sense of comradeship that goes beyond the traditional bonds of friendship or duty. Kawa's journey, from resisting the group's methods to fully embracing them, illustrates how brotherhood in war can be as much about shared trauma as it is about shared purpose. However, Mosul also critiques this concept of brotherhood by highlighting its limits. While the SWAT team operates as a cohesive unit, the film's journalistic approach, inspired by Luke Mogelson's account of the real Nineveh SWAT team, leaves some of the individual stories on the sidelines, which viewers have criticized for a lack of deeper contextualization. The human stories at the fringes of the main plot suggest that even in the closest of brotherhoods, the full complexity of each member's experience cannot always be fully understood or expressed.

2.1 Sacrifice in the time of war in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)

On the battlefield, any military operation carries risks. Whether you are attacking, defending, or assisting, you might die. Even if you do nothing and just stand by, you could still be killed by enemy bombardment. In the movie, we can see that the deaths of the rescue squad were primarily due to additional combat missions, not from shielding Ryan from bullets. When they encountered a hidden German outpost, the captain chose to take it down instead of bypassing it, to prevent subsequent friendly forces from being ambushed. As a result, the medic was killed in action. When faced with danger, they chose to fight rather than avoid it. That's war, the brutal reality of war.

Captain John H. Miller American who served in the US. Army in World War Two, he isn't a superhuman. He is just as human as the next man, but he is motivated to protect everyone under his



care; he only desires to rescue the man and return him to his family. Captain Miller referred to Ryan by saying:

Sometimes I wonder if I've changed so much my wife is even going to recognize me whenever I get back to her. And how I'll ever be able to tell her about days like today. Ah, Ryan. I don't know anything about Ryan" (Spielberg, 1998, 01:40:49).

Miller's handshakes and his soldiers are observed throughout the film. However, rather than undermining his authority, it strengthens it. Miller is viewed by the group as "one of them," as a man who is subjected to the same kind of extreme pressure yet still manages to perform effectively. Miller refuses to join in on his men's complaints. Instead, he discusses the norms of griping in the US Army in a superb moment of communication. "I don't gripe to you Reiben. I'm a Captain," he says. "There's a chain of command. Gripes go up, not down. Always up. You gripe to me, I gripe to my superior officer, and so on, and so on". (Owen, 2002, p.249-282.).

2.2. Sacrifice in *Mosul* (2019)

A band of courageous local fighters unites against ISIS to reclaim Mosul city, Iraq's sprawling metropolis. Amidst chaos and sacrifice, their harrowing journey highlights resilience, camaraderie, and the indomitable spirit of a city fighting for freedom. Sacrifice is a central theme that underscores the personal and collective stakes of war. The film, which follows a rogue SWAT team in the city of Mosul during the fight against ISIS, portrays characters who are deeply committed to a cause greater than themselves. Each member of the unit understands that their mission to liberate their home and protect their loved ones could very well cost them their lives, but they continue forward with



resolute determination. Sacrifice in *Mosul* is depicted not just as a noble act but as a necessary and inevitable part of survival in a war-torn environment.

The characters endure immense personal losses and face grueling challenges, often foregoing their safety and well-being for the possibility of a better future for their families and their country. Major Jassim asserts "Every man who fights alongside me is my brother. I will die for him if I must." (Basha, 2019, 1:05:00). Kawa also has the same idea when he asserts "You can't be afraid to die. You have to be ready to do anything for your brothers." (Basha, 2019, 1:15:00). This sacrifice also extends to the emotional burden that soldiers bear in the line of duty, who bear the heavy burden of trauma, grief, and pain, yet continue to work in a spirit of duty and accomplish the mission. In *Mosul*, the idea of sacrifice is framed as the ultimate price of freedom, and the film highlights how the selflessness of a few can pave the way for the liberation of many.

The protagonists are compelled to make arduous decisions and withstand extraordinary adversities in their struggle for liberation. They forfeit their safety, their loved ones, and even their lives for the greater cause. Individual Sacrifice: Numerous characters are conflicted between their obligation to safeguard their family and their responsibility to their community. Some make the poignant decision to abandon their loved ones to engage in the struggle, aspiring that their sacrifice would finally yield a more favorable future. Some individuals are compelled to observe the demise of their relatives and companions, nevertheless they persist in their struggle. The city of Mosul collectively suffers because of ISIS's savagery. The inhabitants of Mosul experience extensive hardship, encompassing famine, displacement, and violence. They



collectively forfeit their ordinary lives and aspirations for a tranquil future to oppose the adversary. Abandonment of Hope: The protagonists in the film encounter persistent obstacles and failures. Despite frequently experiencing hopelessness and despair, they persist in their struggle, motivated by a conviction in a more promising future. Their sacrifice of hope exemplifies their perseverance and steadfast commitment to freeing their hometown. Sacrifice in *Mosul* is a poignant and impactful film that examines the human toll of warfare. This honors the bravery and sacrifice of the Mosul populace who resisted ISIS and regained their city. The film's depiction of sacrifice underscores the significance of human dignity and the resilience of the human spirit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both *Saving Private Ryan* and *Mosul* powerfully portray the theme of brotherhood and sacrifice in the context of war and hardship. In *Saving Private Ryan*, the bond between the soldiers is demonstrated and created through their willingness to risk their lives for each other and they develop compassion and fear for each other, which culminates in the poignant message of winning the sacrifices made by their comrades and conveys the message of the film beautifully. Highlighting the selflessness, courage, and morale of soldiers as they navigate the brutal realities of World War II, *Mosul* shows how brotherhood can emerge even in the most trying of circumstances. *Mosul* also highlights the deep bonds formed among the Nineveh Expeditionary Force as they fight ISIS and liberate the city. Their brotherhood is rooted in mutual trust and the shared trauma they have all experienced, with each member willing to sacrifice his or her life for their comrades and their city. The film portrays sacrifice



not only as a personal commitment to a greater cause but also as a collective struggle against oppression, emphasizing the emotional cost and resilience required in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Both films serve as a clear and moving reminder, warning, and message of the human spirit's capacity for loyalty, sacrifice, initiative, and the deep bonds that can form in the chaos of war. This keeps many people clinging to friendship for years after the war is over. Soldiers' bonds and unions developed after World War II, and survivors remained connected because of the bond of brotherhood that was built between them. This comparative study of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Mosul* shows that both brotherhood and sacrifice are central values in the war narratives presented by the two similar films, despite the differences in time, place, and combatants. *Saving Private Ryan* shows the brotherhood that develops between soldiers as a driving force behind courage and dedication in the context of World War II, which has ended, while *Mosul* embodies these deep human bonds in a modern, contemporary war environment that is still ongoing, where brotherhood and sacrifice are manifested in the face of a common enemy and the face of deadly and dangerous danger.

This study highlights the psychological and emotional significance of these values in both films, as brotherly bonds are strengthened in times of danger, and sacrifice emerges as a value inseparable from the experiences of war. It also shows that war, despite its cruelty and destruction, contributes to creating moments of deep humanity that bring soldiers together and motivate them to sacrifice themselves for others. Through this comparison, we can understand how wars, across their different eras, highlight the same human values that transcend the boundaries of cultures and



nationalities, making these films a powerful embodiment of the essence of brotherhood and sacrifice in the darkest moments.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Alnoor University for providing me with the opportunity and resources to conduct this research by supporting and funding this research under the code: (ANU/2024/HUM02). Special thanks go to my academic advisors, Asst. Dr. Prof. Ismail Abdullwahab Ismail, whose guidance and support have been invaluable throughout this journey. I am also immensely grateful to my family and friends for their constant encouragement and understanding during the completion of this work.

References:

1. Al Fawareh, A. J., Dakamsih, N. J., & Alkouri, A. M. (2023). Ecocriticism in modern English literature. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(3), 783–788.
2. Carnahan, M. (Director). (2019). *Mosul* [Film]. Netflix.
3. Grain, H. M. J. S., Al-gburi, G., Suleiman, O. W., Alghazali, T., Kadhim, A. J., Hassan, A. Y., & Dawood, I. I. (2022). Impact of English language proficiency, multilingualism and perceived language difficulties on international student's academic performance in Iraq. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 160–170. (Include DOI if available)
4. Hadadi, R. (2020). *Reviews Mosul movie*. RogerEbert.com. <https://www.rogerebert.com> (Accessed September 20, 2024)
5. Hasian, M. (2001). Nostalgic longings, memories of the “Good War,” and cinematic representations in *Saving Private Ryan*. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 18(3), 338–358.



6. Ismail, I. A. (2024). Exploring translation theories and literary criticism: Translating Al-Jawahiri's poem 'O Sir! Inspire me' (in praise of King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan) into English. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 16(1), 117–146.
7. McManus, J. C. (2024). *Saving Private Ryan is so powerful it forever changed how we look at D-Day*. HistoryNet. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20240605-how-saving-private-ryans-d-day-recreation-changed-the-way-we-see-war> (Accessed September 1, 2024)
8. Mogelson, L. (2017). *His desperate battle to destroy ISIS*. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com> (Accessed September 3, 2024)
9. Owen, A. S. (2002). Memory, war, and American identity: *Saving Private Ryan* as cinematic jeremiad. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19(3), 249–282.
10. Spielberg, S. (Director). (1998). *Saving Private Ryan* [Film]. DreamWorks Pictures.
11. Winter, C. (2020). Framing war: Visual propaganda, the Islamic State, and the battle for east Mosul. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(5), 667–689.