

# The Mass Media, Politics, and Warfare (Draft Version)

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## Abstract

A medium is an entity that helps organizing a relationship between two entities. In society we find technological, ecological, economic, political, and cultural structures that mediate the relationships of human beings and hence the reproduction of social systems. The mass media are a subsystem of modern society that embeds certain technologies into social institutions in order to distribute knowledge, news, ideologies and views. The mass media are closely connected to and influenced by economic and political institutions and interests.

The war coverage of eleven US mass media institutions was observed from March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003 until April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 in order to exemplify theoretical assumptions about the presentation of politics by the mass media. The qualitative study focused on reports on war protests and media coverage, and concludes that the mass media are prone to a type of political coverage that to certain extents distorts and misrepresents reality. War coverage frequently makes use of principles such as emotionalization, concentration on selective facts, limitation to the methodical, demonstrative harmlessness and inoffensiveness, classificatory thinking, decontextualization, emergent meaning, and recoding. The analyzed coverage on anti-war protests was frequently selective, emotional, unbalanced, misleading, deceptive, disorienting, and one-dimensional. Many of these articles were made up in such a way that they heavily recoded and connotated images of violence into descriptions of anti-war protests, hence they must be considered as having a strong ideological, manipulative propaganda character. The mass media are not a neutral, fully autonomous subsystem of society, they are closely linked to the political and economic system. They shape public opinion and are shaped by external social interests.

**Keywords:** mass media, politics, war coverage, Iraq war, war protests

## 1. Theoretical Background

A medium is an entity that helps organizing a relationship between two entities. Via a medium a relationship between parts of a system and/or system and environment is produced in order to enable the self-organization of the whole system. Etymologically the term medium stems from the Latin *medius* which means in the *middle*, the *middle one*. Media have to do with mediation. Social media mediate the social relationships of human being. They are employed in social relationships of living, social actors.

Social structures can be found in all societal areas: in technology, ecology, economy, polity and culture. *Tools* are means employed for reaching defined goals, *natural resources* organized by humans are necessary in order to reach these goals, *property* enables the production of use values and the satisfaction of needs. *Decision power* is necessary in order to orient processes and achieve decision-based results, *definitions* (norms, values, knowledge) serve as means of reflection and assessment of concrete human existence. I.e. in society we find technological, ecological, economic, political, and cultural structures that mediate the relationships of human beings and hence the reproduction of social systems. They are both medium and outcome of social actions, they constrain practice, but also enable practices that result in new structures and the differentiation of already existing ones (cf. Fuchs 2002a-e, 2003a-h; Fuchs/Hofkirchner/Klauninger 2002, Fuchs/Schlemm 2003, Fuchs/Stockinger 2003, Giddens 1984). Media can be found with different characteristics in all complex, self-organizing systems (cf. Fuchs/Hofkirchner 2003). The basic characteristics of social media are:

- Media store and fix social knowledge and simplify human action because due to their existence certain foundations of actions don't have to be permanently (re)produced, but can be accomplished by making use of media. Media reduce the complexity of society. They are carriers of knowledge and a foundation of the spatial and temporal extension of social systems.

- Media enable the continuity of social reproduction over space and time, they result in a spatial and temporal distancing of social relationships without loss of continuity. But media also produce special modes of proximity and hence sublimate distance by reembedding spatio-temporally disembedded relationships.
- Media are a foundation of practice and enable a certain degree of mobility.
- Media mediate, organize and co-ordinate social relationships, communication, knowledge management, production, co-operation, competition, domination, decision processes, the discursive establishment of norms and values, and the production and materialization of ideologies.
- Media connect actors, individuals and groups.
- Special skills, rules, organizational forms, and norms are necessary for using media (media literacy). Media put forward certain forms of usage and exclude others.
- Media mediate and change human perception.
- Media are symbolic systems and referential systems (e.g. technologies refer to purposes, property refers to material possibilities and positions, power to decisions, definitions to life-styles and taste).
- Media have material-substantial and ideational aspects. E.g. in computer mediated communication (CMC) the technological distribution as well as the produced content are important.
- Media make possible new experiences and ways of experience that transcend the immediate experience of corporeal presence.
- Media dissolve on the one hand temporalities and spaces, but on the other hand also produce new spaces and temporalities.
- Media don't come into existence by chance, but in certain historical situations and due to certain social and cultural needs and interests. Media have their own history.
- Media are referring to objective reality, but these references are not simply reflections and mappings of reality, but also contain new meanings and contents. Media unite different contexts, e.g. different subjective value schemes in face-to-face communication or different cultural contexts in virtual discussion boards. Mediation means frequently that realities are disembedded from their context of production and reembedded into new contexts. E.g. in the Internet and in a film-montage elements that stem from different contexts can be embedded into a new context that contains new, emergent meanings that can't be found in one of the single elements.
- Media employ principles of order. E.g. linearity is a principle of order of the book, networking and linking are order principles of hypertext, and precision is one of the medium money.
- Media contain certain meanings, ideologies, myths and world views.

In modern capitalistic society media play a particular role. The development of technological media has been advanced in order to organize economic production more efficiently. Capital accumulation is a driving power of the development of new technological media. Due to the enlargement of the scope of technological media (railway, telegraph, public transport, mass transport, telephone, radio, automobile, airplane, TV, fax, computer etc.) the flexibility of social relationship increases. Economic and military interests are present in the genesis of technology, the globalization of capitalism is medium and outcome of the development of new technological media. Anthony Giddens (1985) has shown that the emergence and expansion of capitalism is connected to the emergence and development of means of surveillance controlled by the nation state (cf. Fuchs 2002d, 2003b, 2003f). These are means of organization (census, statistics, public records etc.) and means of discipline that allow political control of citizens. The development of modern media is connected to political and

ideological interests. Military interests play an important role because the enforcement of certain political interests is based on efficient military technologies.

During the Fordist mode of development that was based on mass production and mass consumption the mass media have emerged as a relatively autonomous and functionally differentiated subsystem of society. The beginnings can be found earlier with the establishment of the press; radio, film and television have propelled the development of the system of the mass media. In this system, ideologies are produced and distributed, it is a diffusion channel of knowledge, news, ideologies and views. The mass media form an autopoietic or self-organizing system that is organized around the permanent production of topical news about the state of the world. The mass media don't map objective reality exactly, they construct social realities that distort objective reality due to the subjective views, interests, and complex relationships that are contained in this system. The system of the mass media produces imaginary representations of reality, it doesn't simply construct one of many legitimate realities as claimed e.g. by the constructivist sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1996), it rather produces and distributes various views of objective reality that are different from reality as such to certain degrees. This system can be considered as a subsystem of the cultural subsystem of society. Mass media are organized around certain technological media (printing press, radio technology, television, computer etc.) that are embedded into social institutions. Hence the term mass media doesn't simply denote certain technologies, but social relationships that make use of technological media in order to organize themselves and to reach certain goals. The mass media are closely structurally coupled with the economic, political and technological subsystems of society, they can achieve their goals only by making use of technological, economic, political and cultural media. Institutions of the mass media frequently (especially within deregulated social and institutional settings) also pursue economic interests and make use of technological media in order to achieve these aims, i.e. they sell knowledge and news as commodities. The commodification of symbolic forms aims at capital accumulation both in a direct and an indirect way. In a direct way information commodities are sold on the market, the indirect way is constituted by the sale of advertising space (advertisement in television, banner-commercials in the Internet). Due to the emergence of the new electronic media that are based on computer technology, new forms and ways of capital accumulation such as digital pay-per-view television and online shopping have emerged.

We should employ the term *mass* media because technologies are used in order to reach a large number of people. Audience ratings are an important economic aspect of the mass media. A central characteristic of the existing organization of the mass media is that the main contents are controlled and produced by a relatively small number of people and groups, whereas the number of recipients is much larger. It does no longer make sense to distinguish subsystems of the mass media such as printed media, film, radio, TV because the convergence of technologies and media institutions takes place. Due to digitization and technological networks it is possible to digitally unite several classical media. Such a combination of scripture, audio, images, video, music, communication and body enables a multimodal dimension of the mass media. The Internet as a new technological medium is a typical expression of the convergence of technological media. Media organizations make use of technological convergence in order to expand the scope and distribution of their contents. In institutional convergence one can find a convergence of different markets and institutions. Monopolization is an important aspect of the mass media. Media corporations engage in both horizontal and vertical integration, they try to monopolize existing areas of specialization, but they also try to settle down and expand their influence in other areas of mass media. They aim at both selling content (film, music, videos, books, TV programs etc.) and acting as providers

and distributors (media megastores, TV channels, cinemas etc.). The production and distribution of media contents is converging. The system of the mass media is technologically multidimensional (multimedia), but institutionally there is an increasing lack of plurality, it is controlled by a few large global players that engage in such different areas as software, Internet, film, broadcasting, music etc. at the same time. The mass media are dominated by a few, large transnational corporations (AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Bertelsmann, Murdoch, AT&T, Sony, Seagram, etc.), the largest one is Time Warner Inc. that has been a result of the fusion of Time and Warner in 1989 and of Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting in 1996. In 2000 AOL, the largest Internet provider, merged with Time Warner, the largest media and entertainment corporation, in order to create AOL Time Warner. The system of the mass media is coined by capitalist interests and to a certain extent pursues economic goals. Hence Dieter Prokop (2002) speaks of “media capitalism“, the media world-market would be an oligopoly.

The example of multimedia corporations shows that social media don't operate fully separated from each other. Human beings make permanently use of different media (also at the same time) in order to organize their daily life and to reach certain goals. Technologies, organized natural resources, property, decision power and definitions don't exist fully autonomous from each other, they rather as a totality constitute the structural characteristics of all social systems. In order to exist, the human being must make use of different media: technological ones (language, scripture, computer etc.), cultural ones (norms, values, knowledge), economic ones (goods, money, etc.) and political ones (laws, elections, rules etc.). The system of the mass media embeds technological media institutionally, but it is also based on economic, political, and cultural media. Its aim is the production and distribution of knowledge and topical news that frequently take on ideological and economic forms and are coined by economic, political and ideological interests.

## 2. Politics and the Mass Media

The borders between media, politics and economy are increasingly diffusing and becoming blurred today. Polity is increasingly organized around a logic that corresponds to the economy and the mass media. Modern democracies have emerged in co-evolution with the modern economy, the two systems have never been independent. Hence the principle of competition is not only an economic, but also a political principle. Decision processes have a competitive character in modern society, but the degree of competition has thus far been low concerning the mode of presentation of political issues. Due to the rising importance of the mass media, this area of polity is increasingly influenced by the economic logic of the media industry. This economization and mass-mediaticization of politics results in several tendencies (cf. Fuchs/Hofkirchner 2003):

- *Staging*: Politics is today frequently a staging without issues (issueless politics), concrete political actions and political programs have become rather unimportant issues. Politics is confronted with the exertion of pressure for staging and it answers with self-staging. Personal competence in staging and entertainment is today one of the most important qualities of a good politician. Politicians are associated with certain images, and these images are created by the media and marketing experts. Advertisement-, communication- and PR-experts – so-called “spin doctors“ – actively plan the appearance, strategies and images of politicians.
- *Personified politics instead of party politics*: We are witnessing a change of the role of political parties, which define and present themselves via leadership figures who are

staged in the mass media. Long-term strategies are no longer of much interest for the mass media and this results in a loss of importance of parties in politics.

- *Pressure exerted by topicality*: The political process time is much longer than the one of the media, news are of value only for a very short time in the media business. Political parties orient their policy on media time, hence they are oriented on short-term political strategies. The mass media present politics to the viewers as a fast moving flux that doesn't include more permanent processes, but constitutes itself as a fast juxtaposition of relatively independent singular events and topics that will be forgotten after a short time.
- *Political events*: Politics gains an event character, contacts between politicians and citizens are staged and organized as important mass events (e.g. party congresses). Political coverage in the mass media is organized around such events. Party congresses are used for the self-staging of political leaders and for attracting public attention.
- *Political coverage in the mass media*: Political coverage is increasingly based on the simplification of complex political processes, on visualization, personification, short reports, statements and articles; enlargement of the degree of entertainment by integrating "light", unambitious topics, dramatizing, scandalizing, intimization, problematization of the unproblematic, emotionalizing, concentration on single examples and private persons, conflicts, scandals, celebrities, and surprise effects. There is a tendency that pretentious, substantial contents are substituted by commerce, sex and scandals. The political is frequently marginalized and extremely simplified by the mass media. Visual images dominate over texts and words. Jean Baudrillard in this context speaks of simulation, the substitution of the real by the fictitious that results in self-referential sign systems that don't have fixed, but flexible contents and meanings. Images are made up of iconographic signs that directly resemble the represented object. This is not the case with symbolic signs which make up written and spoken language. Hence the video images presented by the mass media seem to be directly insightful although they frequently don't represent reality. A difference between essence and mediated appearance of reality shows up that can't be recognized easily. There is a false appearance of authenticity and immediacy. Politics is presented as a fast sequence of images, symbols and pseudo-events by the mass media. The concentration on fast sequences of images and statements results in a tendency of antiintellectualism. Bad journalism is based on a positivistic practice that discards critical thinking. Tactics employed include<sup>1</sup>: the *concentration on facts* (external contexts, backgrounds and larger coherence are ignored), *limitation to the methodical* (concentration on the search for evidence on certain assertions, the usefulness and meaningfulness of the employed strategies and the contents isn't reflected), *demonstrative harmlessness and inoffensiveness* (harmful and dangerous processes are presented as harmless, the meaning of the harmful is not questioned), *classificatory thinking* (certain social affairs are presented as self-evident although they are not, there is a lack of differentiation, existing orders are described and classified, but not questioned, existing phenomena are presented as being without alternatives, possible alternatives are discarded). Another methodological process one can find is *decontextualization*: images from certain contexts are embedded into other contexts without taking over the whole contextual information, a new mosaic that consists of different images and descriptions is created, it is characterized by a lack of contextual information. New meanings emerge from and are produced by this mosaic of decontextualized pieces of information. Due to the interlinked, decontextualized, fast flowing character of information that is transmitted by the mass media, it is sometimes hard to judge whether or not meanings correspond to factual reality. The principle of *emergent meaning* is very important in modern mass media: a media report is more than the sum of its elements, it has symbolic and emergent

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<sup>1</sup> The first four principles stem from Dieter Prokop (2002), I have added the latter three.

contents and puts forward certain implications indirectly. Frequently meanings are not articulated and coded directly in the media, but *recoded* into other symbols.

- *Politics and Entertainment*: Politicians make use of entertainment strategies in order to enlarge their electorate. Entertainment industry to some extent makes use of political topics and figures (in films, TV serials, etc.) in order to increase their attractiveness. Politics can be a topic on the level of the characters, the characters' practices or the employed topics.
- *Interactivity*: Political correspondence is increasingly employing interactive elements such as Internet discussion boards, live chats with politicians, etc.

### 3. Examples: Media Coverage of the Gulf War

War coverage in the mass media is especially interesting for exemplifying some of the tendencies mentioned above because these are situations where the media are especially important for the public and are getting very large attention from both the public and political actors. I want to point out some aspects of coverage of the Iraq war in US media in order to show that political interests and media coverage are interrelated. This coverage has as I will try to show sometimes been extremely one-sidedly, manipulative and unbalanced, however Americans don't seem to worry about media distortion and seem to be satisfied with the coverage. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> 87% of the interviewees in a CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll said the media are doing a good or excellent job.

The war coverage of eleven important US mass media institutions was observed from March 21<sup>st</sup> until April 3<sup>rd</sup>: CNN.com, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Post, New York Times, Newsweek Magazine, San Francisco Chronicle, Time Magazine, USA Today, Washington Post, Washington Times. The first two weeks of war seem to be of particular interest for observing new tendencies in war coverage. I concentrated on articles on war protests and the role of the media in order to find examples for the theoretical assumptions mentioned above.

One remembers that in 1991 the coverage of the attacks on Iraq was dominated by pictures broadcast by CNN that mainly showed Baghdad by night illuminated by flashes and radar images, as well as military analyses. Almost no dead bodies were shown, the media created the image that this was a clean, surgical war without civil casualties. For many observers these pictures seemed realistic because they were broadcast live, they took what they saw for representing the reality of war. But the decisive question in war correspondence is not what is shown, but what is not shown, and it seems strange when there are no reports on casualties and the horrors of warfare. This war was the first hyperreal war, the images broadcast consisted mainly of simulated, fictitious, virtual reality detached from the real world of war. Media coverage changed the public perception of war, war became a media event that entertains people and that one can watch live on TV 24 hours. "The Gulf spectacle was 'postmodern' in that, first, it was a media event that was experienced as a live occurrence for the whole global village. Second, it managed to blur the distinction between truth and reality in a triumph of the orchestrated image and spectacle. Third, the conflict exhibited a heightened merging of individuals and technology, previewing a new type of cyberwar that featured information technology and 'smart' weapons" (Best/Kellner 2001: 73).

The situation was a little bit different in 2003: The Internet as a new medium for alternative coverage was present, there were websites where independent journalists and alternative agencies report directly from Iraq. This can help in establishing a plurality of sources from which observers can choose and which they can compare in order to create their own

opinions. This time also many European countries along with large media institutions opposed the war and hence provided alternative sources of information. 600 reporters were “embedded” with British and US troops and reported directly from the front. All of these journalists had to sign an agreement that defines “ground rules” and set strict limits for coverage. The coverage directly from the front has further transformed the media coverage of warfare into a spectacle that excites and thrills the viewers, pictures of dead soldiers, i.e. the horrifying effects of horror, were not shown. One can question whether it makes sense to embed journalists and whether this results in a more balanced coverage. These journalists face all the dangers that the fighting soldiers are facing, and hence their reports might be distorted and might reflect their subjective fears and angers more than in traditional coverage. Can “embedded” journalists report independently and impartial on warfare they are involved in personally? Can they adequately maintain distance from their objects of coverage? Which stories are shown on TV, which ones are missing? Do 24-hour-live coverage and reports directly from the front democratize and pluralize media coverage, or do they create yet a new dimension of hyperreality, media spectacles and simulated, false, one-dimensional realities? The reality of death and destruction might get lost amid the high-tech imagery delivered by the mass media. Was the embedding experiment really “a demonstration of democratic values and freedom of speech in action” (Katovsky/Carlson 2003: XIX), or rather an integrative strategy of manipulation?

"When the American military goes to war, so does American journalism," said Marvin Kalb, fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard and former CBS and NBC correspondent. "The American soldier is trained to accomplish his mission, and it's a narrow mission. He has to take that hill, and so does journalism. It often has difficulty showing you the full terrain" (cited in With Media in Tow, Does Objectivity Go AWOL?, Los Angeles Times, March 22nd, 2003).

The Department of Defense Embedment Manual (in: Katovsky/Carlson 2003: 401-417) defined precise “ground rules” for embedded journalists and their coverage, it says e.g. that the media will be briefed in advance about what information is sensitive, “what the parameters are for covering this type of information”, after exposure to sensitive information the media should be briefed “on what information they should avoid covering”. In instances where a unit commander decides that coverage of a story will involve extremely sensitive information, “the commander may offer access if the reporter agrees to a security review of their coverage”. If in such a security review sensitive or classified information is found “the media will be asked to remove that information”. Another rule says that “embargoes [of certain media, CF] may be imposed to protect operational security“. Embedding is an integrative strategy of dealing with the mass media that allows influencing coverage by close contact and precisely defined rules. The ground rules enabled the filtering of coverage.

Due to Vietnam experiences, US governments in the subsequent decades tried to keep the mass media out of the war zones and the invaded countries. This was e.g. the case in Grenada and Panama. Since the 1990ies and starting with the Iraqi war in 1991 a different strategy was employed, one that focuses on integration instead of repression. This shift is an expression of a larger ideological shift in society from “disciplinary society” to the “society of controls”. The disciplinary regime that dominated during the area of Fordism operated with the help of disciplines and disciplinary milieus. Disciplines are methods that secure the submission to external forces by surveillance and punishment (Foucault 1977). They are inherent in modern institutions such as schools, prisons, families, universities, hospitals, corporations, etc. because these milieus try to enclose the individual. Disciplines were also incorporated into the Fordist apparatuses of mass production, especially into assembly lines. These aspects still

exist today to a certain extent, but concerning the disciplinary regime there is also a shift from the "disciplinary society" (Foucault) to what Gilles Deleuze (1992) calls the "society of control". Controls are internalized disciplines, forms of self-discipline that present themselves as liberating and operate in a more subtle manner: "Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point [...] The old monetary mole is the animal of the space of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control. We have passed from one animal to the other, from the mole to the serpent, in the system under which we live, but also in our manner of living and in our relations with others. The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network. [...] The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill" (Deleuze 1992).

The mole as a symbol of disciplinary society is faceless and dumb and monotonously digs his burrows; the snake is flexible and pluralistic. The repressive political strategy tried to discipline the mass media, the integrative strategy in addition tries to provide a certain degree of flexibility (such as embedding journalists) and freedom of movement that is kept within clearly defined limits. It tries to produce identity between the mass media and political strategies. This strategy is one of ideological integration. The ground rules were a discipline, but in many cases there was no need to apply them due to the ideological identity established by the practice of embedding that dissolves distance. This ideological shift can not only be observed in the mass media, but also in the area of production where strategies of participative management aim at the ideological integration of the work force into corporations. Bonus systems, team work, share options, corporate identity, attractive design of the work place, construction of a community between management and workers ("we"-identity), advancement of spirit of enterprise within the workforce etc. are part of this strategy that constitutes new qualities of the disciplinary regime.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism Research Center (2003) has conducted research on embedded journalism and concludes that "the overwhelming majority of the embedded stories studied, 94%, were primarily factual in nature". That the reports were to a large degree according to facts doesn't mean that they all told the truth about the war. Decisive question that one would also have to cover in such a study are: Which facts are shown, which ones are not shown or omitted? Which language and symbols are used for describing both US and Iraqi troops and people? Is the context of the shown pictures adequately presented? Which emergent meanings do the reports put forward? Are there indications that the reports can manipulate or influence public opinion into a certain direction? Do the embedded journalists have enough distance from pro-war arguments and are they able to keep such a distance from the action in their reporting? To which extents do the reports represent the subjective views and experiences of the embedded journalists? The PEJ study quantified a report as factual if it is not an analysis, opinion or commentary, but this means that the decisive question whether the reported "facts" represent or misrepresent reality wasn't researched. Facts were simply understood as that which is presented by the media as facts, not as coverage that corresponds to objective reality. The study doesn't take into account that one of the main aspects of information management in the media society is that facts and fiction, reality and simulation, essence and appearance are increasingly harder to distinguish. Another result of the PEJ study was that "while dramatic, the coverage is not graphic. Not a single story examined showed pictures of people being hit by fired weapons". What does this result tell us about the representation of the reality of war in the mass media? It shows that the selection of the pictures reports focus on is a decisive criteria for representing or misrepresenting reality and

that the question to which extent the media can report the truth about the war can't be answered easily by researching whether certain selected pictures represent certain aspects of reality. Reality is multidimensional and interlinked. Especially complex sections of reality like war zones have a high degree of networked, interlinked, multidimensional causality and events. Media coverage always and necessarily reduces this complexity because it can't show all dimensions at the same time. But in order to represent reality adequately it is necessary not to focus on single events, but to embed single reported events into larger contexts and dimensions. Hence coverage should not focus on single events, but try to represent as much of the complexity of reality as possible. This is especially a problem for war correspondence because there are multiple limits of coverage. In short, media studies on war coverage should take into account how the various complex variables, aspects and dimensions as well as their interlinking are represented reports.

In 2003 there was no longer a CNN-monopoly on war coverage, Murdoch's FOX TV heavily competed with CNN, there were alternative press institutions that mainly made use of the Internet in order to provide alternative sources of war information. The competition for topical news and ratings between large channels such as Fox, CNN, ABC, CBS, and MSNBC didn't automatically result in a more democratic and pluralistic type of coverage. Driven by the run for ratings, such competition can easily result in a media competition for who can present the war in the most sensationalistic and spectacular way. The result won't be the representation of alternative views, but mass one-dimensional coverage. The problem that alternative media are facing is that they are hardly recognized and hardly known and that the war-waging parties try to control and influence information and war coverage. A study on two weeks of US media pre-war coverage concluded that the networks are megaphones for official views. "Seventy-six percent of all sources were current or former officials, leaving little room for independent and grassroots views. Similarly, 75 percent of U.S. sources were current or former officials. At a time when 61 percent of U.S. respondents were telling pollsters that more time was needed for diplomacy and inspections, only 6 percent of U.S. sources on the four networks were skeptics regarding the need for war. Sources affiliated with anti-war activism were nearly non-existent. On the four networks combined, just three of 393 sources were identified as being affiliated with anti-war activism – less than 1 percent. Just one of 267 U.S. sources was affiliated with anti-war activism – less than half a percent" (FAIR 2003).

When comparing media coverage of the First Gulf War 1991 with the one of the second one in 2003, one sees that the sanitization of war has remained, but a new "human(e) touch" (cf. e.g. the pictures from Newsweek magazine in fig. 1) and emotionalization of coverage has entered. Embedded journalists show staged pictures of hard-working British and US soldiers who risk their lives for liberating the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein and helping them. Pictures of explosions are shown in order to present the alleged superiority of the allied forces and so-called "psy-ops" (psychological operations) against the enemy are waged by making use of the mass media (cf. e.g. the cover of Time magazine in fig. 2). War has become a spectacle and media event to a full extent, 24-hour-live-coverage is sold as a home entertainment-commodity (cf. fig. 3 from cnn.com).



Fig. 1: The new “human(e) touch” of war coverage (Source: Newsweek, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003)



Fig. 2: War as a spectacle (Source: Time Magazine, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003)

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Fig. 3.: War as home entertainment-commodity (Source: cnn.com)

TV networks like CNN have established special filtering systems. “A new CNN system of "script approval" – the iniquitous instruction to reporters that they have to send all their copy to anonymous officials in Atlanta to ensure it is suitably sanitised – suggests that the Pentagon and the Department of State have nothing to worry about” (Fisk 2003).

The mass media make use of the blurring of the boundaries between truth and fiction, this *derealization* makes it sometimes very hard to judge for the viewer what is right and what wrong, what corresponds to reality and what not. “On September 7, 2002, Bush cited a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency that he said proved that the Iraqis were on the brink of developing nuclear weapons. [...] Actually, no such report existed” (Rampton/Stauber 2003: 86). In autumn 2002, US media reported that Iraq bought special aluminium tubes for its nuclear weapons program. It took quite some time until former UN weapons inspector David Albright was able to report that these tubes were not intended for nuclear weapons and that the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) could confirm this. In January 2003 the IAEA reported that the size of the tubes shows that they are not suited for uranium enrichment. Meanwhile the speculations about the tubes had influenced the opinion of Congress-members on voting for an authorization of war. A few weeks before the start of the war, Colin Powell announced that Saddam Hussein tried to buy nuclear material in Africa, and he presented a letter as evidence. Many observers, among them IAEA head Mohammed El Bardei, questioned the authenticity of this letter. In February 2003 Powell presented material to the UN security rate that as he claimed showed that Iraq violates the UN sanctions and produces weapons of mass destruction. He presented radar pictures and images of vehicles, whether or not the facilities shown were used for producing such weapons was not clearly evident and was a mere affair of speculation and interpretation. It is e.g. unclear whether the bunker presented on one picture (fig. 4.) really was a chemical munitions bunker. That the bunker was sanitized one month later doesn't prove that chemical or nuclear ammunition was produced or warehoused there. As evidence that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction Powell also presented a report of the British MI6. However, this dossier

wasn't an authentic work, but a combination of cut and pasted elements from a few scientific articles (Rampton/Stauber 2003: 96f).

The main argument that was presented by the Bush administration for justifying the war on Iraq was that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. History has shown that after the defeat of Iraq no such weapons could be found. This fact sheds critical light on the presented arguments. In his speech on the Interim Progress Report on the Activities of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003, the head of the ISG David Kay had to admit e.g. that “despite evidence of Saddam's continued ambition to acquire nuclear weapons, to date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material“. Instead of objective facts that could prove the existence of mass weapons, Kay presented purely subjective intentions as solid results of the survey. E.g.: “Saddam, at least as judged by those scientists and other insiders who worked in his military-industrial programs, had not given up his aspirations and intentions to continue to acquire weapons of mass destruction“. After resigning as the Bush administration's top weapons inspector in Iraq in January 2004, David Kay said: "My summary view, based on what I've seen, is we're very unlikely to find large stockpiles of weapons. [...] I don't think they exist“ (Kay: No evidence Iraq stockpiled WMDs, CNN.com, January 26th, 2004). Being confronted with such hard facts, Colin Powell now argued that other reasons such as purely subjective intentions would have justified the war on Iraq: "Iraq had the intent to have weapons of mass destruction and they had previously used weapons of mass destruction. They had programs to develop such weapons [...] Military action was justified by Iraq's violation of 12 years of U.N. resolutions“ (ibid.).

These examples show that in the information and media society it is sometimes hard to judge whether an information corresponds to reality or not and that mere speculations can influence important decisions. When symbolic content plays an important role as is the case in media coverage, one is confronted with the fact that symbolic forms can be manipulated and fabricated in order to influence public opinion and to manufacture hegemony and consent. This is especially critical when such images play a decisive political role and can influence important political decisions and opinions. Critical examination of all alleged facts, critical awareness of the public and permanent reflection of the contents presented by the mass media and politics seem to be the only ways for managing these complex situations. A pluralistic media landscape that reflects alternative standpoints, methods, and approaches is needed, but especially in times of warfare this is hard to achieve.

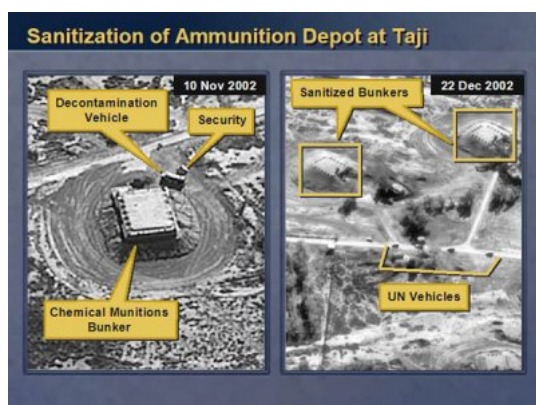


Fig. 4.: “Evidence“ for Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction presented by Colin Powell

A US media center was established in Katar, Western media coverage on the war in Iraq depended to a large extent on the information given from US officials to the few hundreds of journalists present in Katar. Three press conferences per day had been promised before the

war began, frequently none took place and gagging orders were issued. This shows that Western media coverage to a large degree depends on the information issued by US officials, censorship and disinformation are military tactics, war-waging parties try to influence the mass media in order to mobilize the global public opinion. Going to war also means staging propaganda warfare. The mass media line up frequently with their government on important issues because they are politically influenced and shaped and to a certain extent represent the same economic and political interests as dominating groups.

One can report on events in a manner that tries to invoke positive or negative feelings of the readers, differentiated coverage tries to avoid strong emotionally articles that could influence the reader in one or the other direction. Negative feelings can be invoked by associating events or persons with phenomena or terms that are considered as dangerous, threatening, extreme, and menacing. This is especially true when media connote coverage about certain events with images of violence. Many examples for such an unbalanced, emotional coverage could be found in the coverage of US media on the protests and demonstrations against the war in Iraq.

The protesters were described with terms such as anarchists, violent mob, vandals, rioters, mayhem, chaos, aggressive, etc. The problem is that even if it is true that some protesters behave violently, such coverage can create the image that anti-war protest is inherently violent and hence unjustified. The New York Times e.g. reported on the first day of the protests: "Marchers set fire to bales of hay in the shadow of the Transamerica Building, opened fire hydrants and smashed police car windows. They vomited on the pavement outside a federal building and linked themselves with metal chains, forcing firefighters to use circular saws to separate them. [...] By late in the day, Assistant Chief Alex Fagan said, the situation in San Francisco deteriorated into "absolute anarchy." Scattered vandalism and hundreds of arrests were reported elsewhere, as well, with large crowds gathering despite cold and heavy rain in some places" (Protesters Across the Nation Try to 'Stop Business as Usual', New York Times, March 21st, 2003). Here the protesters are associated with categories like fire, vomit, chains, anarchy, vandalism, and large crowds that will invoke negative feelings of many readers. There was a slideshow on the website of the NY Times accompanying these articles which showed protesters struggling with the police on 7 of 13 pictures (cf. fig. 5). Violence is overemphasized, the motives of the peaceful majority of marchers were disregarded, this is an emotional coverage that makes use of text and images for getting through certain messages. A headline of the Chicago Tribune was "Hundreds arrested in anti-war protests" (March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003), in the article the newspaper spoke of "mob-action" and reported on demonstrators who "blocked the intersection of Chicago and Michigan avenues". The protesters are described as fast-moving, growing "crowd" "that overtook the southbound lanes as well, with people weaving in and out of stopped traffic". Many people associate feelings of threat, density, and helplessness with large crowds, the description of the protesters as large crowd that blocks traffic and "overtakes" streets can invoke such negative associations. Another Tribune-headline was "More arrests in Federal Plaza"(March 25<sup>th</sup>).

The San Francisco Chronicle (March 21<sup>st</sup>) ran articles that titled "Street Mayhem" and "1.400 arrests in war protests in San Francisco". The protesters were described as pouring into the streets, seizing streets, "blocking traffic and failing to follow police orders", storming "the Bay Bridge, paralyzing traffic for blocks around", and spreading "anger and tension". They would have "clashed with police, accosted motorists and vandalized a wide swath of the Financial District". Police officers were cited who spoke of "16 hours of fighting communists and anarchists" and "a ratcheting-up from legal protest to absolute anarchy". No statements and views of protesters can be found in this article, their motives are only mentioned by the

way, one can get the impression from this article that protesting against the war inherently means violence and chaos. The 14 pictures accompanying this article on the website of the San Francisco Chronicle mainly showed disobedience, damage, arrests, fire, and blockages. Employing terms like mayhem, pouring, seizing, blocking, storming, paralyzing, vandalizing, anarchy, fighting, etc. for describing anti-war protests is problematic and violates acceptable standards of journalism. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Chronicle presented poll results in order to stress that people don't welcome "disruptive tactics" (fig. 7). However, the question posed is manipulating because it puts forward the assumption that all tactics employed by the anti-war protesters are disruptive.



Fig. 5.: Invoking strong negative feelings by associating protesters with violence. An example from a slideshow by the New York Times (March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003). The subtitle to one of the pictures read: "The clashes in San Francisco resulted in more than 1,000 arrests. Alex Fagan, the assistant chief of police, said the situation deteriorated into "absolute anarchy" by late afternoon".



Fig. 6.: A series of images that portrays anti-war protests in a strongly negative way (San Francisco Chronicle Website, March 21st, 2003)

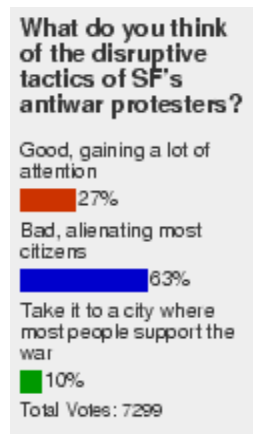


Fig. 7: Poll conducted by the San Francisco Chronicle (published March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003)

The Los Angeles Times reported on the anti-war protests by associating demonstrators with the “discovery of a dozen Molotov cocktails in a downtown alley“, “using hammers to break the windows of police cars“, “discovery of old liquor bottles, each filled with gasoline and a wick“. It cited mayor Willie Brown who spoke of a “riot“ and labeled the protesters “anarchists“ (San Francisco growing edgier from War Protests, Los Angeles Times, March 22nd, 2003). Another time it created an association between antiwar protests and criminality by reporting as a headline: “Antiwar Protests Bring More Than 100 Arrests“ (March 25<sup>th</sup>). The New York Post had an article that titled “Worldwide, Civil Disobedience“ (March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003) and mainly reported about arrests, protesters “harassing motorists“ and blocking traffic. Later it published an article that could create an association between violence and anti-war protests by reporting about a planned “bash“ of “peaceniks“ that forces “police to beef up already heightened security“ (Peaceniks planning media bash, March 27<sup>th</sup>).

Not many balanced and unemotional articles on the anti-war protests could be found in the US media during the first days of warfare. One of those few articles was on cnn.com and its title read “Protests swell in wake of war. Largest anti-war activity in San Francisco“ (cnn.com, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003). The article reported on single acts of violence, but also mentioned the motives of the protesters (“No blood for oil“ etc.) and let some of them explain why they attend the demonstrations and think that the war against Iraq is unjust. The article mainly listed anti- and pro-war-demonstrations in different US cities, how many attended them, and mentions single statements and slogans from protesters. However, there is also a certain imbalance in this rather journalistically serious article because pro-war protesters are cited 7 times, anti-war-protesters only five times, and the reporters felt it was necessary to mention in association with anti-war-protests blockages three times and acts of violence two times. The Chicago Sun Times too had a quite balanced and unemotional article that described the different groups participating in the Chicago protest movements, their differences and common goals, their motives, the refusing attitude towards violence of the vast majority of protesters, etc. (Anti-war protesters come in all stripes, Chicago Sun Times, March 23<sup>rd</sup>). The

New York Times ran a long, balanced article on March 29<sup>th</sup> reporting about the different groups involved in the anti-war protests and their motives and strategies (Antiwar Effort Emphasizes Civility Over Confrontation, NY Times, March 29th). It was one of the few articles that didn't focus on single events, but reported in a rather balanced way and tried to describe the background, context and motives of protests.

After more than 100,000 protested in New York City peacefully and a few protesters behaved disobedient, the NY Post titled an article "Violent End to NY Protests" and reported that "thousands of stragglers refused to leave Washington Square Park and some started pelting cops with rocks and spraying Mace" (March 23<sup>rd</sup>).

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the San Francisco Examiner ran an article titled "Anarchy': City's wave of protests" and worried that the protests could cost \$ 500.000 each day. It wasn't mentioned that the war against Iraq will probably cost up to 100 billion \$ and that the bombs thrown at the Iraqis each day are far more expensive than the damage all worldwide protesters could cause on one day. The San Francisco Guardian had an article titled "Anarchy in the USA" the same day. The Gotham Gazette spoke of an "aggressive antiwar coalition" (The Anti-War Protest And The Police, Gotham Gazette), the Washington Post of the "largest shows of civil disobedience since Vietnam War" (From Sea to Sea, Rallies For, Against the War, Washington Post, March 22nd, 2003). On March 30<sup>th</sup>, Washington Times columnist Tom Knott called the protesters "loony", they would have a "seemingly pathological need to be heard and acknowledged", would be "taking up lots of Washington's valuable law-enforcement time", "self-serving Americans" that have families and must pay bills would be "tied up in traffic because of the protesters taking a nap on the road" (Tormented protesters give us no moment of peace, Wash. Times, March 30th).

On March 28<sup>th</sup> most newspapers reported on "die-ins" in Manhattan, most of them mainly stressing arrests and traffic blockages (e.g.: "Rush-Hour Protest Clogs Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, a symbolic 'die-in' to support war's victims is among incidents leading to more than 200 arrests", LA Times; "War protesters crowd New York's Fifth Ave.", USA Today). The LA Times reported that "Los Angeles police officials said Wednesday they are investigating five incidents in which officers were accused of using excessive force or inappropriate behavior to control antiwar protests" (LAPD Probes Protest Claims. Official says incidents of alleged misconduct at antiwar rallies are under investigation, March 27th). Police officials who defend the LAPD's handling of demonstrations are cited, no protesters that made such accusations or could talk about the police's behavior are mentioned. This is a one-sided, unbalanced coverage. The investigations were ordered after KCAL-TV Channel 9 broadcast a video showing a police officer hitting a man from behind with his baton, and then repeatedly striking a woman as she attempts to take his picture. Like the video that influenced the Rodney King trial, this example shows that modern mass media not only help the powerful in maintaining their power, it also can be helpful to the less powerful. The media have an ambivalent, dialectical character, they can both advance repressive and liberating processes.

The New York Times reported that demonstrators waved banners that read "George W. Hitler" (Wave of Protests, from Europe to New York, New York Times, March 21st, 2003). The LA Times reported that Indonesian protesters "attacked President Bush personally, calling him a terrorist and war criminal and comparing him to Hitler, Satan, vampires and monkeys" (100,000 Indonesians March in Protest, March 31st). A comparison of Bush with Hitler is surely inadequate because it downplays the terrors of the Nazi regime. An undifferentiated coverage on the association of Bush with Hitler can create negative feelings

towards protesters. In another article the NY Times reported that protesters in Berlin compared the bombing of the Iraqi capital to the World War II firestorm in Dresden and that angry protesters hoisted a placard that read "Dresden 1945, Baghdad 2003: the same crime". Mentioning such comparisons in US media can create the feeling that protesters consider that the USA are like the Nazis. It is very likely that a lot of US citizens will indignantly condemn such comparisons, a certain percentage of them might even condemn anti-war protests due to the invoked feelings. Especially if such reports are made about German protesters this can invoke negative feelings towards protesters because the US liberated Germany from the Nazi regime.

These examples illustrate operating principles of the media such as the concentration on certain facts, the limitation to the methodical, classificatory thinking, decontextualization, emergent meanings, and recoding. Certain facts that have to do with violence are overemphasized, a simple picture of the protesters is put forward, there is a lack of differentiation, complexity and contextual information. There is a limitation to the method of reporting mainly on violence and arrests, the method concentrates on searching for evidence on such behavior, the method itself is not critically reflected, i.e. it is presented as self-evident. Certain pictures and images are presented as reality in a positivistic manner, they are offered as self-explaining reality that doesn't need to be questioned and checked. Different categories and images create a new whole that contains new meanings that can't be found in any single piece or element. The possible invocation of the impression that anti-war protest=violence is such an emergent meaning. Frequently certain acts of violence are presented as isolated facts, many such singular events are decontextualized and accumulated in one article and a new meaning emerges. Dislike and negative feelings towards protestors are not coded directly, but recoded into images and descriptions of violence.

Stuart Hall (1980) has pointed out that the coding and decoding of the meaning of messages are shaped and influenced by discourses, i.e. by knowledge from routines of technological infrastructure, relationships of knowledge production, and institutional frameworks. Coded messages would be significant, meaningful discourses. Subjective aspects that influence coding and decoding would be very important and hence one couldn't assume an automatic identity of encoded and decoded meaning. In the examples just mentioned there is information that contains meaning and gains significance by media discourses. There might be certain meanings that shall be decoded in certain intended ways, but there surely are different decoded meanings, i.e. there is no absolute identity between coding and decoding, e.g. some might see the media coverage as providing good information on the war, others might consider it as highly manipulative. However, Hall mentions that there are dominant/hegemonic codes that try to ensure that recipients decode message in a certain intended manner. Employing emotional images of violence, disruption, arrests, etc. is a form of dominant encoding that makes use of the recipients' fears and emotions in order to increase the possibility that the forms of decoding and reading/interpreting a text remain strictly limited.

The only positive war-related news one could find in US media during the first days of combat were that the oil price fell and the Dow Jones, S&P and Nasdaq indexes sharply increased (cf. e.g. the following articles : "Wall Street sees gains in brisk trade", Financial Times, March 21st; "Dow, S&P 500 rally on bombing", "Crude oil falls for seventh day", USA Today, March 22nd).

On March 26<sup>th</sup> many US newspapers expressed relief that the anti-war protesters seemed to shift their strategy from mass demonstrations to smaller events and raising awareness for the

relationship between economic interests and warfare. The San Francisco Chronicle reported “Protests shift to firms. Demonstrators scale back, focus on war’s supporters”. The Chicago Tribune had a headline saying “Protesters to cool down a bit, seek to widen support” and the Washington Times reported that “Anti-war groups redirect energies”. The New York Times reported on March 29<sup>th</sup> that the protesters have abandoned their plan to disrupt everyday life and “have shifted away from large-scale disruptive tactics and stepped up efforts to appeal to mainstream Americans“ (Antiwar Effort Emphasizes Civility Over Confrontation, NY Times, March 29<sup>th</sup>). In many newspapers, the focus of covering protests shifted from describing the protests as violent acts, or ignoring or downplaying them, to expressing that the demonstrations will exhaust themselves. The one or the other news agency might have hoped that this would become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Many articles created the impression that the protests are Anti-American, this is problematic because it influences the reader in an emotional way that increases the possibility that (s)he will oppose protests. E.g. the New York Times reported on the first day of protests that American flags were burnt in Athens and that anti-American slogans were shouted (Wave of Protests, from Europe to New York, New York Times, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003). USA Today listed international protests against the war and described the protesters mainly in negative terms: “Police clashed with 30,000 anti-war demonstrators Friday outside the U.S. Embassy in Yemen“, “10,000 people chanted anti-U.S. slogans“, “small groups of protesters hurling rocks and gasoline bombs at officers guarding the glass-and-marble U.S. Embassy“, “protesters on bicycles blocked Parliament Square“, etc. (Anti-war rallies march on, USA Today, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003). On March 31<sup>st</sup> USA Today reported about protests in Egypt and Marocco and concentrated on burnt US flags, stones and bottles that were thrown by some (Hundreds of thousands protest against Iraq war). Arab people and protesters were portrayed by some media as aggressive, violent rioters. A headline of the LA Times was “Arabs Temper Their Anger In Latest Demonstrations“ (March 23<sup>rd</sup>), later it reported that “marchers called Bush a "pig" and said British Prime Minister Tony Blair was Bush's "lackey and dog."” (Protesters Rally in Syria, Libya, Jordan, March 26<sup>th</sup>). The Chicago Tribune titled an article “In Islamic world, riots break out at marches“ (March 22<sup>nd</sup>) and reported: “In Cairo, the Arab world's largest city, as many as 50,000 people rioted throughout the day, burning American flags, throwing rocks and setting a firetruck ablaze“. In another article it spoke about growing crowds in Arab streets and “violent anti-American clashes involving tens of thousands“ in Jordan (Simmering rage threat to regimes, March 24<sup>th</sup>). The Washington Post reported that “anti-war protesters were out in force on the streets of cities across the Arab world again yesterday to vent their anger at the U.S.-led assault on Iraq“ (Marchers object to assault on Iraq, Washington Times, March 23<sup>rd</sup>). USA Today described foreign protesters as outrageous: “Arab demonstrators vent outrage over U.S. invasion Government leaders call for swift end to war” (March 25<sup>th</sup>). The LA Times reported that Arabs derived pleasure from watching US POWs on Iraqi TV and Al Jazeera: “From the Arab League to the Arab street, television images of Iraqi resistance and American prisoners of war have drawn cheers. Pictures of four dead U.S. soldiers are circulating on the Internet under the words "About Time." Said a Cairo cabby: "The Iraqis are wonderful. I never dreamed they could do this."” (Arabs take pride in Iraqi resistance, March 26<sup>th</sup>). Similarly the Chicago Tribune reported that the video images “often inspired pride and satisfaction around the Arab world Monday” (Images of Captive, Dead GIs Spur Glee”, March 26<sup>th</sup>). Such headlines and contents can put forward the association that all Arabs favor and welcome violence against Americans and hence can be considered as undifferentiated, emotional coverage and pro-war propaganda.

The Washington Times (March 26<sup>th</sup>) reported on international protests in a way that could invoke the association protest=violence: It said that “thousands of protesters pelted Sydney

police yesterday with bottles and chairs“, that protesters were arrested and burnt American flags, that in France “vandals attacked a copy of the Statue of Liberty“ and “cracked a plaque on the statue commemorating the victims of the September 11 attacks“, ”demonstrators in Spain attacked the offices of the ruling party, throwing excrement and scrawling graffiti to protest its support for the war“, etc. The paper drew a very grim picture of the protests and concentrated only on certain selected aspects. On March 29<sup>th</sup> it ran an article titled “Anti-Western rallies set Mideast on edge“ and reported about “Anti-Western anger“ in the Arab world.

Descriptions such as the ones listed here can distort public opinion and mobilize the public against anti-war protests, and they also have racist implications. There is a concentration on certain facts, others are left out, pieces of information are decontextualized and create new meanings for the reader. Many journals limit themselves to the method of finding evidence for violent behavior of protestors, this method is not questioned or reflected. Violent images are presented as self-evident. The decontextualized description of acts of violence in Arab countries joins with terms that describe the events in a drastic way, a new meaning can emerge in the readers’ mind, an emergent meaning that implies Arabs=bastards and hence has racist implications. John Fiske (1996) stresses that social struggles that are organized around the lines of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, etc. are reflected within and are part of the mass media. Social conflicts are slugged out in the media, conflicting discourses are represented by the media in certain ways. “Discourse [...] is always a terrain of struggle. [...] The dominant discourses, those that occupy the mainstream, serve dominant social interests, for they are products of the history that has secured their domination” (Fiske 1996: 5). In these examples racial meanings are not spoken out directly, but indirectly recoded into other discourses about warfare.

Some articles downplayed the demonstrations by reporting that they were rather small. E.g. on March 21<sup>st</sup> USA Today titled an article “Hundreds protest war with Iraq“ and reported that there were 200 protesters in Washington, 300 in New York, 30 in Atlanta and 50 in Raleigh, although on the same day at least 100.000 protested each in San Francisco and Chicago. This example shows that omitting information and overemphasizing certain other facts can create impressions that are quite different from reality. Also the Washington Times mainly concentrated on coverage of warfare and almost ignored the anti-war protests. It only mentioned rather shortly: “3 arrested in anti-war rallies in D.C. area” (Washington Times, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003). Some media reported that the number of protesters shrank although hundred thousands protested in large cities in the USA and Europe. On the third day of protests the Los Angeles Times titled an article “British Protests Shrink as Public Opinion Turns“ (LA Times, March 23rd, 2003). During the protests, US media frequently stressed that the anti-war protests haven’t resulted in a change of public opinion. E.g. the San Francisco Chronicle reported: “The demonstrators' views appear to be in the minority. In a recent Washington Post-ABC News poll, more than 7 in 10 people backed Bush on the war issue“ (PROTESTS: Tens of thousands demonstrate peacefully in S.F., 200,000 take to streets in N.Y; SF Chronicle, March 24th). One can debate whether such an information is appropriate in an article on anti-war protests or whether or not it serves the role of creating a negative public image of the protesters. There is a lack of differentiation, and a concentration on only certain limited facts.

Since the third day of anti-war demonstrations, the media increasingly stressed that most Americans support President Bush's decision to invade Iraq and that pro-war demonstrations took place. These pro-war events remained quite small, nonetheless they were vastly overrepresented in US media. Frequently the coverage created the impression that there is

more protest for than against the war. Such reports and misrepresentations can distort reality and can mobilize public opinion in favor of war. CNN.com reported in a headline that “Americans demonstrate for, against war“, but it didn’t mention that hundred thousands protested against the war and only some thousands for the war (March 23<sup>rd</sup>).

On March 24<sup>th</sup> the New York Times titled an article “Thousands Gather [in Richmond] to Back U.S. Troops and Policy“, although this event as well as the reported protests of the 1000 pro-war activists in New York were comparable small in comparison to the several hundred thousands of anti-war protesters one day earlier in New York who were not mentioned here. Overemphasis and selective coverage can create images that misrepresent reality. Another article titled “‘Support Our Troops’ Is This Rally’s Call“ in the same issue reported on thousand pro-war protesters in New York, very similarly the New York Post titled an article “Patriot Rallies Support Troops” (March 24<sup>th</sup>). Articles like these imply that the anti-war protesters are unpatriotic and don’t care about what happens to US troops. The Washington Times ran a headline “7,000 rally to show support for troops“ (March 24<sup>th</sup>), the LA Times reported “Rally, and Relief Valve, in Vegas. There’s a huge, pent-up desire’ for people to show support for U.S. troops, says the man who organized an event that attracted 2,000” (March 27<sup>th</sup>). The San Francisco Chronicle ran an article titled “S.F. rally backs U.S. troops in Iraq. Event organized by local GOP, support groups for military families“ (March 31<sup>st</sup>). In this article pro-war demonstrators called anti-war protesters terrorists, Anti-Americans, and subversives, the objects of these accusations were not interviewed. The NY Post had a rather emotional article reporting about Veterans and Sep. 11<sup>th</sup> victims’ families rallying for supporting US troops (Ground Zero Rally Boosts our Troops, March 31<sup>st</sup>).

USA Today didn’t report in a very balanced way on the pro- and anti-war demonstrations, on the one hand it emphasized that “Pro-war demonstrators show support for troops“, in the same issue it felt it was necessary to stress: “Anti-war forces not influencing polls“ (USA Today, March 24<sup>th</sup>). The latter article reported that ”Americans remain wary of protest. A USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll over the weekend found that a tiny percentage had attended a protest or made a public display of war opposition. Two-thirds were unsympathetic when protest disrupts“ and that the anti-war protests are “loosing steam“. Such articles can put forward positive feelings towards pro-war demonstrators and negative ones towards war protesters. CNN.com to a certain extent created the image that anti-war protests transformed into pro-war protests, reporting that “prayers for U.S. troops replace church leaders’ criticisms of war“ (cnn.com, March 24<sup>th</sup>). The LA Times reported that the conservative thinker William Bennett is conducting pro-war teach-in in universities “to win the hearts and minds of the nation’s college students“ (Bennett returns fire at pro-war teach in, April 3<sup>rd</sup>).

Many newspapers stressed in the same articles that there are pro-war rallies and that anti-war protesters behave violently and get arrested. These are ideological, manipulative tactics. The LA Times titled an article “Street Drama at the Oscars. Twelve antiwar protesters are arrested as some scuffling with police takes place. Backers of military action also rally“ (March 24<sup>th</sup>). The daily considers the important information about the anti-war protesters that some of them were arrested and scuffled with police, and that “an anarchists’ group had vowed to shut down the awards“, whereas it doesn’t use such negative imagery for describing the pro-war protesters. The Washington Post described the pro war protesters in very positive terms and in the same article spoke about “misdemeanor charges“, “vandalism“, broken windows, and arrests concerning anti war protesters (Along the Mall, a Chorus of Protests and Support, Washington Post, March 24<sup>th</sup>). The Chicago Tribune reported: “While about 500 people quietly rallied in support of U.S. troops Wednesday at Daley Plaza, anti-war demonstrations elsewhere in the country resulted in the arrests of a well-known activist, a Chicago bishop,

and two Nobel Peace Prize winners“ (both sides of issue rally to state case, March 27<sup>th</sup>). Such simplifying, undifferentiated coverage can create a paradoxical picture where pro-war demonstrators are associated with peace and anti-war protestors with violence. New emergent meanings are created by leaving out contextual information, limiting coverage to certain facts and methods, and overemphasizing certain facts.

On the websites of CNN and USA Today one could watch computer animations of war planes and cruise missiles. Such animations can create the impression that it's a high tech war with high precision that doesn't cause harm, misery and death. These animations only show technology, you don't see the impacts of its usage. On the website of CNN (March 23<sup>rd</sup>) there was a slideshow where one could choose pictures from four categories: warfare, damage, refugees, and reaction. There were no pictures of dead people, only material damage. This can create the impression that there are no human casualties.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, Iraqi TV and Al Jazeera aired videos showing dead US soldiers and prisoners of war (POWs) from the US who were questioned by reporters. Most US politicians and media commented that this was disgusting and humiliating. The pentagon asked news agencies not to broadcast pictures of the dead and captured US soldiers. Most US media didn't air the video or showed only still photos of it because they said respect for the families of the POWs would be necessary. Showing such pictures is indeed a violation of Article 13 of the 1949 Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war ("Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity"), and hence a condemnation of such media coverage is appropriate. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, many US and international newspapers ran headlines that reported that US officials said that the videos prove that Iraq had executed some POWs, and they cited officials speaking of disgusting war crimes (e.g. Top U.S. official: Iraq has executed some POWs, cnn.com, March 27<sup>th</sup>).

Most TV networks and US newspapers didn't mention that one year earlier the USA started imprisoning Al Qaeda and Taliban captives in Guantanamo Bay, refused to grant them the status of POWs arguing that they were "unlawful combatants", and that pictures and videos of these prisoners being transported to the detention camp were shown in the media. They were exposed to public curiosity, hence this also was a violation of the Geneva Convention. Over the weeks of warfare and also 12 years earlier during the first Gulf War, US media showed pictures and videos of surrendering Iraqi soldiers who held their hands in the air. A balanced coverage would have had to stress that both sides have violated international conventions. In those cases where this wasn't the case, media coverage on the media coverage of POWs acted one-sidedly and served as portraying Iraqis as inhumane foes. Such coverage has strong, problematic propaganda implications, it demonizes the foe. It has an ideological character. The San Francisco Chronicle and the Chicago Tribune both ran the same article that simply described the videos of the US soldiers in a very emotional way ("looked terrified", "shaky voice", "one of his arms wounded", "he seemed to sway slightly", "four bodies on the floor"; SF Chronicle: Iraqi Television Airs Footage of Captured American Troops, Chicago Tribune: Arab TV Shows Dead, Captured U.S. Troops, March 24<sup>th</sup>). A very problematic, one-sided, emotional and unbalanced coverage could be found in the New York Post that headlined "SAVAGES. Iraqi fiends execute American POWs" (cf. fig. 8) and "Ghouls Parade Our Prisoners". The article talks about terrified prisoners and disgusting, deplorable, and detestable pictures. Abusing Iraqis on the front page as savages and calling them ghouls is not only bad journalism, it is also manipulating propaganda that tries to create the image that Iraqis are lower-class beings that can't behave in a civilized way and hence deserve to be

killed and bombed. Some days later the NY Post's headline was similarly emotionally and ideologically loaded (cf. fig. 8).



Fig. 8.: Manufacturing negative images of the opponent. Covers of the New York Post, March 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>

The Washington Times titled an article quite emotionally “U.S. calls footage of POWs 'disgusting'” (March 24<sup>th</sup>). The Washington Post mentioned Guantanamo Bay, but stresses that the US doesn't show pictures of POWs by quoting Rumsfeld (Display of 5 POWs Draws Firm Rebuke, U.S. Warns Iraq on Televised Images, Washington Post, March 24th). USA Today besides the pictures of POWs on Arab TV also mentioned that the Bush administration had refused to classify the detainees at Guantanamo Bay as POWs, but didn't mention that there had been pictures and videos of the POWs in US media (Iraq puts captive troops on TV, USA Today, March 24th). The San Francisco Chronicle had a limited, emotional coverage that focused on citing commentators (“totally unacceptable“, “disgusting“, ”hostile media“, ”gruesome images“, ”horrible“; ”TOUGHEST DAY“: Iraqis interrogate captured Americans before television cameras -- U.S.-led forces treading warily after faked surrender and ambushes inflict losses. PRISONERS: 5 U.S. captives stoic on Iraqi broadcast, SF Chronicle, March 24th). The Washington Post (Perceptions: Where Al-Jazeera & Co. Are Coming From, March 30th) ran an article about Arab media arguing that AL Jazeera and others manipulate their audiences, are anti-American and don't care about ethical aspects of coverage: “But the messages are uniformly anti-American: Americans are barbaric, and here are the pictures to prove it. We Arabs are heroic, and here are images of us downing their planes. Shots of Iraqi civilian casualties are a highlight of the coverage, as are those that show the "invading" forces suffering routs and setbacks. With few exceptions, ethical constraints are rarely discussed in the Arab media, where the notion of editorial judgment sounds to many like censorship“. Time Magazine wrote that Al Jazeera broadcasts “grisly pictures and aggressive coverage of the coalition” (The War on TV from both Sides, April 7<sup>th</sup>). Newsweek reported that Al Jazeera treats the US “with a half-hearted effort at balance, followed by withering commentary” and that statements from Iraqi officials “are covered on Al-Jazeera as facts, comments from American officials are portrayed as “claims”” (The Other Air Battle, April 7<sup>th</sup>).

The Chicago Tribune reported that Chinese TV runs manipulative, ideologically distorted reports about the war because the “pictures show crying Iraqi women, angry Arab demonstrators, injured children and American troops – but no image that might explain whom U.S. forces are fighting or why“ (Media don't walk fine line; News, editorials slanted against U.S., April 3<sup>rd</sup>). The lack of contextual information and differentiation is a global problem in war coverage. Is it manipulative to show pictures of misery caused by warfare, or is not showing these pictures manipulative?

Only a few media mentioned in their articles on these pictures and videos that both sides have acted problematically (e.g. Images of POWs and the Dead Pose a Dilemma for the Media, LA Times, March 24<sup>th</sup>; Prisoner Images Are Tough Issue For Iraq and U.S., Both Sides Are Criticized on Treatment, Washington Post, March 25<sup>th</sup>). US officials and media have been keen on not showing pictures or videos of dead soldiers because this could create an alternative image of war to the one of the sanitized high-tech-war presented by most mainstream media. Media are involved in propaganda warfare themselves and have a hard time avoiding being used as channels for the manipulation and influence of public opinion during times of warfare. Pictures that show the violent side of war can influence public opinion in such a way that voices that oppose warfare increase. When the number of American casualties increased massively during the war against Vietnam and especially since the Tet offensive in 1968, pictures of the violent outcomes of warfare were quite present in US media. Many say that this contributed to the enlargement of the anti-war movement and put pressure on US politics. The most famous image from Vietnam that was published in the media was the one of the little girl Kim Phuc who was shown running screaming, her clothes seared from her body and her body burnt by an American Napalm bomb that was dropped on the village Trang Bang in June 1972. The photographer Nick Ut won a Pulitzer Prize for this picture which as is said by many became a symbol for the strengthened anti-war movement (cf. fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Above: An example of media coverage of the Vietnam war 1972, below: an example of media coverage of the Iraq war 2003 (Source: cnn.com)

In the Information Age fast streams of images are all-present, hence controlling and influencing what is being broadcast and printed has become a much harder task. Nonetheless US officials and most US media try to keep away such images from US TV screens and minds. Condemning the coverage of Iraqi TV and Al Jazeera seems not to have been primarily motivated by humane concerns, rather fears that a second Vietnam-like media influence seem to have resulted in the above documented reactions. The concerns were mainly about avoiding negative propaganda that could lower public support of warfare. US officials and media argued in favor of demonstrative harmlessness and inoffensiveness, they

seemed to aim at presenting the results of warfare as harmless by limiting coverage to showing soldiers and impressive technologies, but not talking about the destructive impacts warfare and these technologies have on human lives. War was presented as a humane, bloodless high-tech, 24-hour live, entertaining spectacle, such a mode of presentation has ideological implications. Due to the fact that the media in the world society are diversified and pluralistic and that it's not possible to exert influence upon all media, we were witnessing media-offensives and counter-offensives on both sides: the Arab media tried to influence opinions of the global audiences against the war, as a response US media tried to influence the worldwide public by describing such coverage as barbaric. This shows us that the media are highly politically influenceable and play a decisive role at the propaganda level of warfare. In the information age, the outcome of warfare is not only decided on the battlefield, much influence is exerted by the symbolic battlefield of the media. The media are a terrain of social struggle. In propaganda warfare each side is trying to portray the other as more reckless and brutal. Each media side is not questioning its methods, concentrates on certain facts, overemphasizes and misrepresents certain events and processes, creates emergent meanings, and presents the broadcast pictures as self-evident.

The journalist Peter Arnett was fired by NBC and National Geographic because he gave an interview to Iraqi TV and expressed his opinion about the war. One can only speculate whether they have feared that Arnett might report too critically about the war, Arnett was reprimanded by CNN in 1998 after reporting that American forces used sarin gas in Laos in 1970. Some observers argued that Arnett helped Iraqi propaganda, others argued that he was sacked because he might have questioned American propaganda. This case shows once more that the mass media are a terrain of propaganda struggle, are influenced by political interests and try to influence public opinion in certain ways. If the decisive point was indeed that he made critical comments or was expected to report critically, then this is a clear indication that the mass media don't have an objective character, but try to forestall criticism of certain interests and to boost certain political interests.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The examples gathered in the conducted qualitative media observation study indicate that the mass media are prone to a type of political coverage that to certain extents distorts and misrepresents reality. This is especially the case in tense political times. Making use of principles such as emotionalization, concentration on selective facts, limitation to the methodical, demonstrative harmlessness and inoffensiveness, classificatory thinking, decontextualization, emergent meaning, and recoding distinguishes manipulative coverage from high qualitative coverage. The analyzed coverage on anti-war protests was frequently selective, emotional, unbalanced, misleading, deceptive, disorienting, and one-dimensional. Singular events were frequently decontextualized, overemphasized and combined with other singular events, descriptions and images in such a way that emergent meanings were produced that could easily be decoded by readers in such a way that the coverage heavily influences their views. Many articles were made up in such a way that they heavily recoded and connotated images of violence into descriptions of anti-war protests, hence they must be considered as having a strong ideological, manipulative propaganda character. Certain facts were frequently overemphasized, other more decisive facts at the same time dropped or underrepresented. One can conclude that many of the analyzed products "indoctrinate and manipulate" (Marcuse<sup>2</sup> 1964: 12), and represent an "attack on transcendent, critical notions" (Marcuse 1964: 85) as well as a mainstream media universe of "one-dimensional thought and

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the topicality of selected aspects of Herbert Marcuse's works see Fuchs (2002e)

behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are [...] repelled” (Marcuse 1964: 12). The mass media are not a neutral, fully autonomous subsystem of society, they are closely linked to both the political and economic system. They shape public opinion and are shaped by external social interests. Mass media are a territory of propaganda warfare, they compete for steering public opinion into certain directions. The mass media encode certain meanings, views, and ideologies into symbolic content, they make use of hegemonic codes in order to increase the possibility that the recipients will decode the content in intended ways. In times of heavy social struggles hegemonic codes and strategies gain special importance. Due to the one-dimensional character of many war reports, alternative, independent media and information sources are very important for trying to compensate the imbalance of represented views and information.

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