New War Journalism
Trends and Challenges

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Abstract

How has war journalism changed since the end of the Cold War? After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was talk of a new world order. The Balkan Wars of the 1990s gave rise to the concept of "new wars". The 1990-91 Gulf War was the commercial breakthrough for the around-the-clock news channel CNN, and the war in Afghanistan in 2001 for its competitor al-Jazeera. The 2003 Iraq war saw Internet's great breakthrough in war journalism. A new world order, new wars, and new media – what impact is all this having on war journalism? This article outlines some important trends based on recent media research and discusses the new challenges as well as the consequences they entail for the conditions of war journalism, its professional reflexivity and democratic role.

Keywords: new media war; propaganda and war journalism; framing of war news; visual war reporting; media reflexivity.

Introduction

How has war journalism changed since the end of the Cold War? After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was talk of a new world order holding the promise of international justice and peace. However, the Balkan Wars of the 1990s gave rise to the concept of "new wars" that in the wake of the terror attacks of 9/11 have acquired an iconicity rivalling that of fiction films. The 1990-1991 Gulf War was the commercial breakthrough for the around-the-clock news channel CNN, and the war in Afghanistan in 2001 for its competitor al-Jazeera. The 2003 Iraq war saw Internet's great breakthrough in war journalism with the, at first anonymous, icon Salam Pax belonging to the first generation of war bloggers. A new world order (that did not turn out as hoped in 1989), new wars, and new media – what impact is all this having on war journalism? Can we see signs of a new war journalism, perhaps even the development of a peace journalism?

War Journalism as Mediated Banal Nationalism

Wars are not only fought by military means. Alongside the fighting on the ground, at sea, and in the air, a media war is fought over public opinion and the willingness to fight of populations and troops (Taylor 1997:119; cf. Thussu & Freedman 2003:7). The media become a battleground, and journalists are drawn into the conflict, either voluntarily

or under orders, or even unawares. Modern wars cannot be fought without public support, and great efforts are made to get the public to accept, and preferably support their own side's actions in the conflict. Media and journalists have gained an increasingly central position due to developments in media technology such as satellite TV channels broadcasting 24/7 news so rapidly that it is possible to report live from a combat zone. The visual media's unique power of influence increases the propaganda pressure on journalists, and makes them, from a military point of view, into either a fourth branch of service or a fifth column. Warring parties are making ever greater efforts to influence, steer, and control the reporting distributed via international media, and this is especially true in the case of visual materials such as photographs and videos.

War has always been highly newsworthy. Depictions of the course of wars, of victories and defeats, are very dramatic and affect the fates of many people – in some cases almost the entire world. War news attracts a large audience and often deeply engages people both emotionally and intellectually. Public opinion is mobilized to an extent that otherwise has no counterpart even in the established democracies (Gitlin & Hallin 1994). Stories about armed conflicts, feuds, campaigns, great battles, glorified victories and crushing defeats have for millennia made up a considerable portion of popular culture. It is part and parcel of our cultural inheritance, and from childhood we have become accustomed to sharing the hardships and successes of heroes in our imagination. These stories possess an almost irresistible allure, tempting us to side with the good heroes in their fight against evil. One can view war propaganda as a continuation of these stories, though by other means. By appealing to already well-known narratives about the struggle between good and evil, we are persuaded to take a stand in the conflict. The outcome of the struggle for our sympathies and antipathies depends on which of the antagonists' propaganda strategists best gains access to our attention and emotional engagement, i.e., how we as an audience identify with the different parties in the conflict. As in the banal nationalism described by Billig (1995), on the battlefield of war propaganda the contest is about identities, or, to put it differently, a discursive political process concerning which identity constructions will come to dominate the conflict at hand. With whom does the public feel sympathy and empathy? Which side does it trust and wish to support? Which leaders arouse public repudiation and contempt? Which victims awaken compassion, while the sufferings of others are passed over in silence? It is these aspects of identification that are being fought over in the propaganda war. But also what *We*, the collective community addressed by war journalists, stand for in the war. Who are *We*, and how is this *We* positioned within the conflict? With the help of concrete examples of media reporting from the wars after 1989, I will try to show how war journalism is engaged in a sort of identity politics, at the same time as it attempts to adopt a stance in relation to the involved parties' efforts to exploit journalists and media for the propaganda war. Special emphasis is placed on visual storytelling in news reporting, which has come to almost completely dominate war journalism, as well as many other forms of journalism, though with significantly more serious and controversial implications.

The 1990-1991 Gulf War – The "Clinical War"

The 1990-1991 Gulf War, or the Kuwait War as it is also sometimes called, since it began with Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, is, alongside the 2003 Iraq War, the largest armed conflict after 1989. It also gathered what up until then was the largest assembly of journalists, with approximately 1200-1300 correspondents on site in Saudi Arabia

(Nohrstedt 1992:208). Among the most spectacular features of the media reporting was CNN's breakthrough as a transnational news channel with around-the-clock broadcasts and access to leaders on both sides of the war. The satellite channel had unique opportunities to transmit live images from Baghdad where a team fronted by Peter Arnett was stationed during most of the war. CNN's footage of Coalition cruise missiles flying in over the Iraqi capital, tracer ammunition streaking against the night sky, wailing sirens, and air strikes from carriers in the Persian Gulf were aired on TV channels the world over. The visual material conveyed the image of a clinical war fought by the Coalition with so-called smart bombs claimed to have surgical precision and to be able to minimize civilian casualties. The image of the clinical war was largely the result of the coalition's propaganda. It was perfectly adapted to the goal of the PR strategy of portraying one's own side's war-fighting as "civilized", unlike that of the opposition. At the press conferences held at the Hyatt Regency Riyadh, where most of the war correspondents were staying, Commander Norman Schwarzkopf and his public affairs officers made a conscious effort to spread the image of a high-tech war without innocent victims. Time and again they screened video sequences that substantiated this image before the gathered world press (see, e.g., Gerbner 1992; Kellner 1992; Paletz 1994).

There was a striking contrast between how different Western media portrayed civilian victims in the news from the Gulf war. The "clinical war" image hid the casualties on the Iraqi side. But when Iraq attacked Israel with Scud missiles, the media reports closely followed the horror and suffering in highly exposed articles and newscasts, although in number of deaths and injuries the Israeli losses were far below those of Iraq. Thus, this was a clear act of distancing from the suffering in the first case, while in the second case, the victims' agony was depicted close-up, making it almost impossible for the audience to distance itself emotionally.

This pattern is well known within media research, and has been discussed by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in terms of a distinction between worthy and unworthy victims in media reporting (Herman & Chomsky 1988:37 ff.). The "worthy" victims of wars are those whose innocent sufferings journalists take great pains to portray, with personal portraits and individual life-stories. Close-ups of grieving relatives, wounded victims with faces twisted in agony, and massacred corpses make up the repertoire of war correspondents when they choose to portray what has been called "the true face of war".[1] In this way, the audience becomes psychologically and emotionally involved in the sufferings of the civilian victims. In the Gulf War, however, the media did not succeed in depicting "the true face of war", apart from the two exceptions above. The image of the clinical war was predominant, which has been substantiated in a number of academic studies (e.g., the contributions in Bennett & Paletz 1994; Mowlana, Gerbner & Schiller 1992, and Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2001; see also Kellner 1992). In retrospect, it has been shown in various ways – even to a certain degree in the media – that this image was completely misleading. USA, the leading superpower in the Coalition, has refused to provide any figures at all on the number of Iraqis killed or wounded during the Gulf War. Available estimates diverge greatly, but it is probably not too bold to assume that the civilian victims on the Iraqi side numbered in the tens of thousands during the period of the conflict itself. If one also includes victims of the destruction of infrastructure and economic sanctions, the number of dead civilians amounts to between 111,000 and 500,000 (The Human Costs of the Gulf War 2005).

To sum up, the media – either consciously or unconsciously – were completely deceived in their reporting on the Gulf War. In reality it never was a clinical war, but claimed

large numbers of civilian Iraqi victims. These Iraqis were the "unworthy victims" of the conflict, with whom audiences in our part of the world never had the chance to identify. Their fate remained mostly unknown in the Western world, and public opinion was never mobilized for their cause.[2]

The Kosovo Conflict 1999

Background

In the early 1990s, increasing tensions in the disintegrating Yugoslavian Federation resulted in several wars between various separatist groups and the central authorities in Belgrade under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević. Croatia and Slovenia declared independence in June 1991. While Slovenia managed to achieve autonomy without any major armed confrontations, war broke out in Croatia and then continued with the Bosnian War 1992-1995. In the province of Kosovo diverse interests intersected, with Kosovo Albanians demanding a union with a Great Albania, national sovereignty, or far-reaching autonomy within the Yugoslavian Federation. The Milošević regime responded with increasingly Serbian-nationalistic sentiments, and fighting subsequently broke out with both sides accusing the other of terrorism and ethnic persecution. The Kosovo Albanian side was relatively successful with its propaganda, accusing Belgrade of ethnic cleansing and planning genocide against the Kosovo Albanians. There is also no doubt that Serbian militias and military units, as well as paramilitary forces supported by Serbia, committed atrocities and massacres; in particular the 1995 murder of 8,000 men and boys in Srebenica has received widespread attention. At the same time, it must be said that the Kosovo Albanian UCK also committed acts of terror against Serbian civilians. At the end of the 1990s the conflict intensified. At the initiative of a contact group of major powers headed by the US, Great Britain, and France, a peace conference was arranged at Rambouillet Castle outside of Paris. However the talks finally broke down on 18 March 1999. Several analysts have concluded that the talks were never intended to bring peace, but rather to function as a trap to place all the blame on the Milošević regime (Stoltenberg 1999; Chomsky 1999). NATO decided to intervene militarily to halt alleged ethnic cleansing in Kosovo directed against the Kosovo Albanians. NATO's military measures consisted of air strikes lasting from 24 March to 10 June 1999.

Media Reporting in the Crossfire of the Propaganda War

The media war surrounding the Kosovo conflict was markedly different from that during the Gulf War, according to a study of press reports in Norway, Great Britain and Sweden (Nohrstedt, Höijer & Ottosen 2002). Admittedly, NATO did initially try to disseminate the image of a clinical war. However this was tarnished rather quickly when reports began streaming in of civilian facilities being targeted for air strikes, the result being that even hospitals, homes, and schools were hit. The depictions of "worthy victims" of this war were initially almost entirely about Kosovo Albanian refugees and their hardships. In a veritable media blitz, their victimhood was portrayed in feature stories from the borders of Albania and Macedonia. The experiences of terror and fright that lay behind their flight were exhaustively reported, to the accompaniment of full-page photos – especially of women and children.

The depiction of the Milošević regime as solely responsible for the war, and the Kosovo Albanians as the worthy victims strongly influenced media reporting. The hostile

image of the Yugoslavian president stood fast during and after the war with all the classic character traits of demonization – he was power-mad, ruthless, unreliable, evil, etc. – while the image of the war's worthy victims instead gradually became more balanced. After about two weeks of constant air strikes, reports of Serbian civilians' victimization and suffering received increased attention, and by mid-April, NATO was caught up in a PR crisis. This was directly triggered by reports that NATO had struck two convoys of Kosovo Albanian refugees killing around 70 of them. From this point on, media in both Sweden and Norway became distinctly more sceptical towards information from NATO and at the same time more occupied with covering the war's consequences for civilians, regardless of ethnicity and geographic location. Civilian Serbian victims became on the whole just as "worthy" as Kosovo Albanians. After the close of the war, several of the Norwegian and Swedish newspapers that were covered in this study even took up the "inverted ethnic cleansing" that resulted when large groups of Serbs left Kosovo out of fear of the returning Kosovo Albanians' revenge.

In summary, the media's image of the Kosovo conflict's "worthy victims" initially bore the stamp of the leading NATO countries' propaganda, which led to compassion primarily encompassing the Kosovo Albanian refugees. However, successively, and in pace with the questioning of NATO's propaganda, the picture became more balanced, and even Serbian civilian victims received attention. This shift was presumably facilitated by both geographic and cultural factors. The Kosovo War was the first war in Europe since the Second World War to militarily involve the great powers. Its close proximity, and professional contacts with media in the Balkans, counteracted the sort of one-sided propaganda picture that the media had relayed during the Gulf War. It was not possible to cover up or distance oneself from the "true face" of the war. Those afflicted were, after all, Europeans.

The War on Terror I: 11 September 2001 and the Afghanistan War

The New Type of War – Asymmetric Warfare – Comes Spectacularly to the Fore

Though the "new wars" thesis (Kaldor 1999) was formulated in connection with the wars in the Balkans during the 1990s, it acquired its full resonance after the terrorist attacks against the USA on 11 September 2001. It could hardly be more clearly demonstrated that armed conflicts in the new world order after 1989 are asymmetrical in nature, and are fought between loosely organized networks of paramilitary groups on the one side, and nation states' military units on the other. The attacks against three or four prominent symbols of the American superpower – the World Trade Center (WTC), New York; the Pentagon, Washington, D.C.; and presumably the White House or Capitol Building – claimed close to 3,000 civilian lives and, as is well known, received enormous media attention around the world.

The Media Picture – A Racifying and Inclusive Discourse?

In retrospect it may seem remarkable, but the Swedish Broadcasting Company's (Sveriges Radio) reporting of the terrorist attacks was accused of being anti-American. In substance, the complaint was about journalists' attempts to explain the terrorism with reference to US politics in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world. Subsequent studies proved that the accusation was taken out of the blue (Ghersetti 2004; Nord & Strömbäck 2002). On the other hand, the studies mentioned provide no clear-cut

answer to another question concerning the media's portrayal of other cultures, peoples, and social systems. This question, which has come to be an object of interest for media researchers ever since Edward Said's work on orientalism (Said 1993), concerns whether Western media are bearers of a racifying, ethno-centric, "white" discourse. Jan Guillou, then chairman of *Publicistklubben*, an organization of publishers and journalists for safeguarding freedom of the press, criticized the media because materials from Anglo-American media were used so uncritically, claiming that journalists no longer fight for the truth, but for "the Western cause" (Guillou 2002:70).

In the following, the discursive identity constructions in Swedish media will be compared with reference to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent Afghanistan war as well as the Iraq war. Like the Gulf War, the Afghanistan War took substantially more civilian lives than 9/11 – in the case of Afghanistan over 20,000 civilians (Small Arms Survey 2005:244). It is relevant to explore to what extent these victims were or were not included in a compassionate *We*.

It would appear impossible to deny that media often apply an Us-versus-Them principle in the distribution of compassion.. This can most clearly be seen in the headlines. Like European politicians and elite media, the tabloid *Expressen* chose a performative utterance as the title of its main editorial the day after the terrorist attacks: **Today we are all Americans.** A quote from the main body of the text is bolded: **"Not only as shocked TV viewers, but also as democrats"** (2001-09-12; Nordström 2002:18). The same day, *Aftonbladet* quotes President Bush in a full-page headline: **"God Bless America"** (2001-09-12; Nordström 2002:23). There are many expressions of sympathy in headlines and photos the day after 11 September. In *Aftonbladet*, for instance, in headlines such as: **The world held its breath** (first page), **The whole world has been raped** (pp. 38-39), **The whole world sends its support** (pp. 42-43), and **Now we must all keep together** (back page) (Nordström, 2002:18). *Expressen* follows up its main headline's declaration of empathy with other headlines such as: **Swedes fled the skyscraper** (p. 21), **Consolation sought in the churches** (pp. 34-35), **A candle for all the victims** (p. 36), and **Equipped to protect Arlanda** [Stockholm International Airport] (p. 38) (Nordström 2002:18-19).

While there is consequently little doubt that the media discourse on the whole, contrary to the accusations of anti-Americanism, instead included the American victims within a collective *We*, the question remains of the portrayal of *Them*, here specifically Muslims, as a collective. In this case the answer is ambiguous. In any event, Nord and Strömbäck are not inclined to make categorical judgements on the basis of their results. Apart from media reporting after the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, Nord and Strömbäck's report also treats the first five days of the Afghanistan War, i.e. 7-12 October 2001. As one of the differences between the reporting from the US and from Afghanistan, they point out that the latter events are relatively seldom covered by reporters "on site". Instead attention is given to scattered demonstrations in neighbouring Pakistan, which especially applies to television (Nord & Strömbäck 2002:119). In the newspapers, on the other hand, articles on how media function in war receive a relatively large amount of space (Nord & Strömbäck 2002;119). American elite sources dominate the reporting both after 9/11 and during the Afghanistan War (42 vs. 46 percent, respectively). In both cases, victims figure as sources relatively infrequently, and Afghani victims appear just as frequently in TV reports in the latter case as do American victims in the former. On the other hand, the newspaper materials differ in that American victims are cited as sources after 11 September four times more often than are Afghani victims during

the first days of the Afghanistan War (8 vs. 2 percent, respectively; Nord & Strömbäck 2002: 92,126). As in the media reporting after 9/11, Nord and Strömbäck conclude that the analysis of rhetorical figures connected with the Afghanistan War does not confirm any clear-cut "USA-friendliness or hostility towards Muslims" (p. 139). They do find, however, a difference between, on the one hand, selection criteria and contents of media reporting, which they find to be fairly balanced and free from either strongly anti-American or Anti-Muslim features, and on the other hand, TV reports and photographic images, which relatively often express stereotypical conceptions about Muslims and Westerners, respectively. With regard to visual presentation, they conclude that editorial consciousness seems to have been lost. They describe a black-and-white media coverage, with Muslims depicted as "desperate, aggressive, and irrational" while Westerners are "modern, humane and rational, and members of a high-technological society" (Nord & Strömbäck 2002:157-158). The authors are cautious about concluding that these stereotypes have influenced public opinion, but they assume that pre-existing prejudices have been reinforced (ibid. 159).

Summary

The 9/11 attacks demonstrated with blatant clarity that a new type of war had arisen. The events were shocking and incomprehensible, and politicians, journalists and the public found it difficult to understand what they meant. What about the underlying causes? Who were the guilty parties, and who were the victims? The media coverage was naturally enormous, and showed clear traces of how exceptional the news of the terrorist attacks against symbols of the US's superpower status was judged to be.

In terms of knowledge, news media are the connecting link between events at the global level and their national and local repercussions, particularly in the implicit appeal to relate to the casualties of the war, that is to say, whether the reporting encourages identification and engagement, or distanciation and disinterest, through the construction of "worthy" victims. In connection with 9/11, identification with the victims is extraordinarily strong and clear; the victims are "worthy" of Swedish sympathy and empathy to a degree seldom seen within journalism. Headlines such as "We are all Americans" are only the most striking examples of this. Empathic feature stories about relatives searching for their loved ones, how they alternate between hope and despair, plus horrifying full-page photos of victims leaping to their deaths from the WTC towers and close-ups of grieving faces – all this contributed to an emotional nearness to the terror victims.

In their texts, the media avoid polarizing the conception of the West as under attack from the Muslim world. They manage on the whole to avoid making all Muslims complicit in the acts of terror. But in the visual materials, in TV reports and press photos, Muslims as a collective are singled out as desperate, aggressive, and irrational. They are portrayed as full of hatred towards the US and the West in a fashion reminiscent of the colonial era's racism.

The War on Terror II: The 2003 Iraq War
Freelancers and Embedded Correspondents

The second Gulf War, or the 2003 Iraq War, was a very different media war than the first Gulf War of 1990-1991. It is admittedly difficult to find directly comparable research results; however, it is a relatively safe general assessment that the "true face of war"

came into focus in a completely new way in the most recent war. A long-term change in journalistic priorities and working methods can be discerned, leading to greater emphasis on the consequences for the civilian population, which also requires that reporters be on site with the affected population. War correspondents thereby take greater risks, and the casualty figures within the journalist corps have grown steadily during wars in the new world order. Freelance journalists are accounting for more and more of the reporting – a tendency that was conspicuous in Swedish media during the Iraq War with names like Åsne Seierstad, Urban Hamid, and the American stringer Bob Graham (Nordström 2003:16). Feature stories from homes and hospitals conveyed vivid and sympathetic portrayals of the civilian population's vulnerability and hardships, but also stories of courage and pride in the midst of the destruction. These features were probably one of the reasons why *Expressen*, clearly referring back to the reporting after 9/11, exclaimed **Today we are all Iraqis** on its editorial page when the bombs began falling over Iraq on 20 March 2003. Is this how one should view the coverage provided by freelancers and other correspondents – as an appeal for collective solidarity with the Iraqi people in their vulnerable situation? As an inclusion of suffering Iraqis within an almost global *We*, who together share the horrors of war? I will return to these questions shortly.

It was not only the freelancers, however, who brought immediacy into the media coverage of the war. The American military introduced a system for "embedding" reporters who were offered an opportunity to accompany troops in the field. This was not entirely new, either as an idea or praxis, but it was used to a greater extent than on earlier occasions such as the Falklands War 1982 (Morrison & Tumber 1988) or the Gulf War (Nohrstedt 1992). In an international project on media reporting from the Gulf War in seven countries, I had reason to conclude: "War news is a discourse embedded in propaganda" (Nohrstedt 2001:177). However, in that war the embedding was limited to a small number of journalists who were part of the pool system organized by the military (Nohrstedt 1992). Prior to the 2003 Iraq War, 600 journalists underwent a hostile-environment training programme and were taught how to conduct themselves among the soldiers (Tumber & Palmer 2004). The primary motive was, in all likelihood, not concern for the media's need for dramatic feature-stories and photos from the front, but rather an ambition to provide the media with potent material that also supported the war propaganda. Experiences from the Falklands War, for example, showed that correspondents who share the soldiers' daily hardships, and who also depend on them for their safety, are likely to also come to share the military's perspective on the events. Correspondents become part of the psychological warfare and propaganda. The Pentagon's strategy would appear to have been successful, even if not all the stories had the desired tendency. For instance, one embedded photographer filmed the wiping out of an entire Iraqi family. In any case, Fox News Channel in the US based much of its broadcasting on embedded reporting and achieved highly successful ratings with its patriotic message.

The Media Image of the Iraq War:
Civilian Victims and the Impact of Propaganda

The Swedish media reporting on the Iraq War were even more biased than in connection with the previous wars. It has been called "pseudo-journalism" owing to its heavy dependence on American elite sources (Nord, Shehata & Strömbäck 2003:117, 118). Furthermore, rhetorical figures benefiting the US are much more prevalent than those

that are damaging to that side in the conflict. The researchers explain the imbalance as being due to routine journalistic prioritization of events that are "concrete, close at hand, and relatively easy and inexpensive to cover" and to the superpower's superior "information and propaganda resources" (Nord, Shehata & Strömbäck 2003:113; cf. Andén-Papadopoulos 2005:145).

As mentioned above, there is a trend within Swedish war journalism towards an increasing focus on the suffering of civilian populations, particularly if you compare the 1990-91 Gulf War with the 2003 Iraq War. This trend is also evident for the shorter interval between the 2001 Afghanistan War and the Iraq War. According to Nord et al.'s results, the degree of attention devoted to the theme of civilian victims of war increases from being relatively insignificant during the first days of the Afghanistan War to being one of the most prominent themes during a comparable stage of the Iraq War (Nord & Strömbäck, 2002: 118 fig. 30; p. 120 31; and Nord, Shehata & Strömbäck 2003:56 fig. 5.1; 58 fig. 5.2). In quantitative terms the changes are not large, from a couple to five or six percent of the total number of articles/items, but they are still relevant. The results further show that Iraqi citizens, as eye-witnesses or victims, play a relatively subordinate role as sources in the media studied. While American sources figure in every fourth article or TV-item, only slightly less than one in ten uses Iraqi citizens as sources (Nord, Shehata & Strömbäck 2003: 65, 73). If one looks at the attention devoted to the civilian population's situation and victims of war in an international and comparative perspective, two things are clear. First, that there are relatively large differences, and second, that the amount of attention varies depending on the distance from and degree of involvement in the conflict. For instance, during the Gulf War, Swedish and Norwegian newspapers focused on the situation of civilians substantially more than did American newspapers (Nohrstedt 2001:196, 198). Second, a British study shows that, during the opening phase of the Iraq War, German television devoted significantly more space to Iraqi suffering than to victims on the coalition side, while the American TV channel ABC "massively favoured attention to coalition casualties", and the BBC devoted somewhat more attention to coalition losses than to Iraqi ones, though with a significantly smaller margin than ABC (Tumber & Palmer 2004:97). I shall return below to the question of how to interpret this pattern.

The wide reach of globalization processes, and not least the increasingly intensive international exchange of news and other media products, raises questions concerning the global media landscape's importance for how wars are reported on in various countries' media. What impact, for instance, does the dominant position of American media in the ever more globalized media market have on news distribution in different parts of the world? Does it also involve an ideological and political dominance, due to the power over opinion formation that this position could entail? The questions are controversial and tie into previous controversies about the New World Information and Communication Order within UNESCO and the theory of cultural imperialism (Carlsson 1998; 2005; McPhail 2002). The pro-Americanism of the Swedish media's reporting on the Iraq War is explained, as mentioned, by Nord et al. as being due to the PR resources that the US as a superpower can mobilize. What is the picture like for other countries' media? The lack of systematic comparative studies makes it difficult to give a definitive answer. However, the currently available research provides a splintered picture, in which the degree of influence of American sources and propaganda varies between different types of media and branches of journalism. For instance, African studies of Ugandan and South African media outlets' coverage of the Iraq War indicate that criticism of the

US and the Coalition was more prominent in editorials and opinion pieces, while news and photo materials were of a more pro-American character (Mucungunzi 2005; Kupe & Hyde-Clarke 2005). At the same time it is apparent that the presence of a pan-Arab press, for example the London-based *al-Hayat*, and the new Arabic satellite TV channels such as al-Arabiya, Abu Dhabi and al-Jazeera, has led both to US-critical coverage focusing on American hegemony in the Middle East and to television becoming less dependent on CNN and BBC-World in many Arab countries (El-Bendary 2005; El Gody 2005).

The Conditions of Media: Self-criticism and Reflexivity

In connection with the 1990-91 Gulf War, the conditions of war journalism received attention in the media due to the restrictions and manipulations that were imposed to control the reporting. It was claimed that this topic was accorded an exceptional amount of space in the media coverage (Eide 1992). In quantitative terms it was not, however, a question of a predominant position, and available data indicate that only a few percent of the reports were about the situation for media. Only the American media devoted any greater degree of attention, about five percent of the articles, to this topic (Nohrstedt 2001:196, fig. 4). While it is risky to compare different studies with varying methodologies, a comparison of the studies of the Afghanistan War and the Iraq War ought to provide some indications. The results suggest that the level of attention devoted to the conditions of the media coverage increased relatively strongly from the Gulf War to the Afghanistan War (from a couple of percent to nine percent in the press materials) only to shrink again from the Afghanistan War to The Iraq War (five percent in the press materials), though without sinking back to the low percentage level of the Gulf War (Nord & Strömbäck 2002:120, fig. 31; and Nord, Shehata & Strömbäck 2003:56, fig. 5.1). That the media inform the public about the conditions of war journalism is probably important in order to avoid overconfidence in the veracity and completeness of the reporting. It can contribute to a more critical attitude, and perhaps even an increased capacity to determine what information is missing in the media. However these sorts of self-critical accounts are also important to the media's professional consciousness. It is a matter of reflecting on the relationship between professional ideals and practical results, that is to say, on the extent to which one succeeds in living up to the professional standards expressed in ethical ideals and norms. By treating this topic in connection with daily news reporting, these important questions are prevented from being relegated to internal committee meetings and professional associations, and are instead kept constantly alive in the work. It ought to thereby also function as an indicator of the degree of readiness to change and of receptivity to media criticism within media corporations and the journalistic corps. Certain researchers have assumed on theoretical grounds that globalization more or less automatically leads to greater reflexivity in general (Hjarvard 2001:24-25).

Against this background, it may be of interest to consider whether this applies to war journalism, and in what forms self-criticism and reflexivity find expression in the media discourse. Even in this case, there is probably reason to distinguish between different types of media and genres, and between text and image. In opinion pieces and commentaries, the difficulties and dangers of war journalism are thematized from time to time. Nowadays the news pages as a rule also discuss propaganda and attempts to manipulate the media coverage, even if, as previously mentioned, this is not a question of an especially large amount of attention. In a close analysis of press materials from

the Iraq War, I have found that the Swedish papers studied – *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*, and *Dagens Nyheter* – in news stories about the US's and Great Britain's accusations against Iraq, suggesting that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction and had connections with the terror attacks of 9/11, treated these accusations in a remarkably critical fashion, contrasting them with different expert opinions that questioned the accusations. However, in the visual materials, the reporting presupposed to a striking extent that the accusations were substantiated. Graphic illustrations showed, for instance, maps of how Saddam Hussein could attack neighbouring countries with missiles equipped with chemical warheads, etc. The self-critical reflections found in the opinion pieces concerning weaknesses in the reporting do not concern these visual representations at all (Nohrstedt 2005).

Media's Visual Storytelling and Compassion

Visual materials have become increasingly influential in war journalism and are therefore also contested and subject to manipulation attempts. Philip Knightley claims that, during the Gulf War, the Pentagon induced Saudi Arabia to prioritize the accreditation of tabloid and TV correspondents over reporters from the quality press, because these outlets were more easily manipulated and receptive to the visual materials provided by the military (Knightley 1991). In connection with the Afghanistan War, photos of dead civilians, including children, and interviews with Osama bin Laden received wide exposure in international media, which caused the Bush administration to put pressure on the media. Condoleeza Rice urged American media not to broadcast the video interviews with bin Laden because they could allegedly contain secret messages for terrorist cells in the West (Magder 2003:37). And within CNN, for instance, a directive went out that images of civilian victims should be balanced by reminders of the victims of the 9/11 attacks (Ottosen 2002). In an investigation of Swedish media's reporting on three special events during the Iraq war, of which the first involved some American prisoners and dead coalition soldiers being shown in the media, the second the rescue of Jessica Lynch, and the third the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein, Kari Andén-Papado-poulos finds that the photos convey "a more clear-cut and pro-American message than the texts" (Andén-Papadopoulos 2005:144). The photos of American troops torturing Iraqi prisoners in Abu-Ghraib prison comprise a further example of the powerful impact of visual storytelling in war journalism. There is also no doubt that the visual form of representation has been especially important in efforts to document the "true face of war"; it is by means of photos of dead bodies and close-ups of suffering and grieving human beings that journalists depict how civilian populations are afflicted by the war (Höijer 2004). Such images bring about a call for compassion and strengthen anti-war opinion, which can be difficult to manage from a war-propaganda point of view.

Are We all Iraqis?

Whether it is the visual materials or other aspects of war reporting that generate compassion for the victims, it is typical of the popular press to resonate these emotions. When *Expressen*, in an extra edition of 20 March 2003 in connection with the invasion of Iraq, topped an editorial with the headline **Today we are all Iraqis,** it is a direct paraphrase of the same paper's headline after 11 September 2001. This underscores that Iraqis in general cannot be held responsible for the acts of terror committed eighteen months earlier. This is undoubtedly an unusual discursive inclusion of a distant

and suffering people within the imagined community. The question is only how much importance it had in practice. Does it suggest that non-discriminatory compassion has taken over? Unfortunately, this is hardly the case. *Expressen* may very well proclaim that we are all Iraqis on a day when they are subjected to massive bombing – "shock and awe" as Rumsfeld called it when he claimed that the attack would be so massive that any resistance would immediately be broken – but certainly not all Iraqis are *We* in war journalism. Numerous examples show that the media calculate losses by different standards, being led astray by the political logic that dictates that even moderate losses of American lives can swing public opinion in the US. Accordingly, almost every individual American soldier killed is reported, while Iraqi lives are measured by the tens, hundreds, or thousands. Relying on the Pentagon's information, Swedish media also keep careful accounts of American dead, although they are satisfied with rough estimates of the numbers of dead Iraqis. This selective maths is especially noticeable when the American forces, for obvious reasons, prefer that journalists look the other way, as in the case of the massacres in Fallujah. At an international tribunal in Istanbul in the summer of 2005, testimonies were heard about war crimes committed by the occupation troops, including the use of illegal weapons such as cluster bombs, napalm, and chemical weapons, and about American forces targeting hospitals, killing both doctors and civilians in connection with the Fallujah operations in November 2004. By all accounts the massacres were a horrible revenge for the desecration of the corpses of four Americans in April that same year, whose burnt and torn bodies were hung up for all to see on a bridge in Fallujah (Enders 2005; Medialen website). Like, for example, the BBC, Swedish media chose to ignore these testimonies, and lost the opportunity to make up for previous deficiencies in the reporting.

Summary

In what ways do the media position their home country's collective community vis-à-vis the parties involved in the conflict in Iraq? In the news media's cognitive mediation between international occurrences in distant places and the audience's local, everyday existence, not only knowledge of distant events is generated. In addition, the audience is also discursively invited to adopt an attitude towards the involved actors and peoples in certain specific ways. As readers, listeners, and viewers, we are invited to take specific positions in relation to the ongoing war, though without this being explicitly expressed. It is instead presupposed through the perspective of the reporting, and above all in the framing of the discursive construction of "worthy" versus "unworthy" victims.

The studies of Swedish media's reporting have found that the balance is tipped in favour of pro-American reporting. Through comparisons with previous investigations of the 9/11 and Afghanistan War coverage, it can be determined that both pro-American and anti-Muslim tendencies in Swedish media have increased between 2001 and 2003. These results should, of course, be interpreted with caution, since the sample is limited to the most intensive phases of immediate warfare, i.e., when media reporting, according to other research (Bennett & Paletz 1994; Nohrstedt 2001), is at its most receptive to war propaganda from the stronger party, that is to say, the US. In a mid-long time perspective on war journalism in Swedish media since 9/11, it is probably more likely that pro-Americanism has decreased rather than increased. There are several reasons for drawing such a conclusion. Generally speaking, media tend to follow along with their country's foreign policies. This suggests that Swedish media were less critical of the

US in connection with the Afghanistan War than the Iraq war, because the international community expressed support for the former, but not the latter.

Another important factor explaining the Swedish media's critical stance towards the war coalition's policies is a professional journalistic ambition to focus attention on the "true face" of war in order to avoid becoming a mouthpiece for war propaganda. As far as can be judged, journalism's concentration on civilian victims of war has increased since the 1990-91 Gulf War, Iraqi civilians being constructed as "worthy" victims in the Iraq War to an extent that never was the case in connection with the Gulf War. That a leading paper like *Expressen* chose a headline for its main editorial that urges readers to identify with the afflicted Iraqi population is unique within the Swedish press as a statement of active involvement for the sake of a suffering people in the third world. However, there is no doubt that there was great sympathy and compassion for the suffering Iraqi civilians in third-world countries. This was encouraged not least by the new Arabic satellite TV channels, of which al-Jazeera was the foremost competitor of CNN.

Visual storytelling has clearly achieved an ever-growing importance in today's media landscape, both internationally and nationally. Visual reporting has an especially potent emotional effect on audiences; images of war victims activate people and linger in their awareness, and are probably the most important cause of identification with the afflicted population. This makes visual storytelling about war into an influential and contested terrain within the propaganda war. This has serious consequences for the safety of war correspondents, a topic to which I shall return shortly.

Conclusion I: The Gradual Transformation of War Journalism

In this article I have presented some important trends within war journalism after the Cold War. The results concern Swedish media, but are presumably more widely applicable – at least hypothetically. First, media tend to give increasing attention to war's "true face", i.e., to the sufferings of civilian populations and civilian victims of warfare. Second, the conditions of war journalism are increasingly receiving attention and are the object of self-critical reflection. The involved parties' attempts to manipulate the reporting by more or less sophisticated means and propaganda strategies have to a certain degree become news material. This has caused various media to express reservations about the reliability of their reporting and to encourage the audience to be critical. Third, visual materials have been given an increasing amount of space, which however has not been accompanied by greater reflexivity; unlike the contents of texts, the contents of visual materials have not been subjected to the same critical scrutiny or led to warnings to the audience.

In discourse-analytic terms, these trends can be described as instances of change within a global discursive order. News reporting from international armed conflicts is characterized, like other foreign news, by a growing international exchange of material. The increasing availability of different transnational news channels enables a diversity that is not always utilized. In this connection, establishment of the satellite TV channel al-Jazeera is the foremost example of the importance new actors in the media market can have in this respect. Another component of the global discursive order is the development of discourses of compassion that – through live-broadcast charity concerts in which music and film celebrities participate – have directed media attention to human suffering in distant places. Compassion is becoming globalized, which for war journalism is an incitement to give prominence to "worthy victims", even those afflicted by

the US's and other Western democracies' military operations. In addition, globalization is generally considered to increase reflexivity (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994; Hjarvard 2001), which in this context is most closely represented by professional self-criticism and openness about the institutional conditions of war journalism.

These findings, however, should not be interpreted as indicating that the discursive order of war reporting has been completely revolutionized since the end of the Cold War. The institutional embedding of the media and reporters still means that military, political and economic power structures exert a great amount of influence on news reporting from armed conflicts. Nor do the processes of globalization appear to have caused the cultural mechanisms of discursive inclusion and exclusion to undergo any radical changes compared to the ethnocentrism that Edward Said and others have exposed in Western culture. At the time of writing, in January 2007, the general opinion about the US's role in the world is probably less positive than it has been at any time since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It can therefore appear odd to claim that pro-Americanism in, for instance, Swedish media's war reporting has increased since the Gulf War of 1990-91. Because this assertion is based on comparative studies of short periods in the opening phases of each war, the picture may well have changed since Spring 2003 as the consequences of the Iraq War have become increasingly obvious. However, there is reason to caution against drawing overly hasty conclusions about the global discursive order of war journalism.

At the same time, media discourses in general, and perhaps war journalism in particular, are embedded in a national foreign policy context. The effect of the warring parties' propaganda on media reporting depends to a large degree on this context. The polarized propaganda discourse that depicts the conflict in black-and-white has, not surprisingly, the greatest impact on the involved parties' media, and consequently a lesser impact on the media of uninvolved countries (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2001:255 ff.). This even has consequences for the depiction of the victims. The polarization into worthy and unworthy victims, respectively, most clearly influences the media of the countries directly involved. It was mentioned above that, during the Iraq war, German media devoted significantly more space to Iraqi victims than did American or British media. It is therefore clear that the degree of a country's involvement in a conflict is an important factor in explaining the influence of war propaganda on its media, and which victims that are accorded the status of being "worthy".

To this should be added the interesting example of the headline urging that **Today we are all Iraqis**. This headline is an unusually clear expression of inclusion of the other within our own collective community. *We* include the suffering civilian population of Iraq within *Our* community. *Our* sympathy and *Our* compassion go out to them. However not even for an instant is this a question of *Them* being allowed to encompass us. It is *We* who express and define – not *Them*. Nonetheless, this is an interesting example of how the discourse of compassion achieves a certain degree of independence in relation to the power relations and superpower domination of the propaganda war. Admittedly, it is hardly possible to imagine *Expressen*'s headline without the strong anti-war opinion in Europe and in the rest of the world. The fact that leading European politicians like Gerhard Schröder and Jacques Chirac had stood up and openly questioned the war coalition's mobilization for intervention in Iraq undoubtedly broadened the spectrum of legitimate standpoints for the European media. It was a rather opportune moment to express compassion for the Iraqi civilian population. But it still must be seen as a bit sensational that *Expressen* equated the 9/11 victims in the US with the coming victims

of the US's and Great Britain's military assault on Iraq in 2003. The example suggests that compassion for the innocent victims of war, who are sorted by war propaganda into worthy and unworthy victims, comprises an independent factor that can challenge the polarization of war propaganda. However, war journalism's place within the global discursive order means that it is still unable to escape the grip of the structures of power, and the threat is very immediate.

Conclusion II: The New Threat to War Journalism

The propaganda war's polarized depiction of victims requires that compassion and sympathy be controlled and steered in such a way that the distinction between worthy and unworthy victims is maintained. This is one of the central goals of the propaganda strategists. The US and its allies succeeded with this during the Gulf War and the later phase of the Afghanistan War, but were less successful during the Kosovo and Iraq wars. New media that compete with CNN and BBC World for international TV audiences, especially in the Arab world and the third world, such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, are a challenge to the superpower's attempt to control compassion. Images of dead and wounded civilians on the "other side" lead to humanitarian engagement and empathy being directed to people other than the American casualties and their relatives. The battle over compassion has intensified and in the new wars it is no longer possible to disregard the possibility that it has taken the step from propaganda war to war fought by military means. Signs of this development have been visible for some time and are becoming increasingly irrefutable. During the Kosovo War, NATO fired on the TV building in Belgrade, resulting in a dozen or so dead. NATO's press spokesman Jamie Shea initially explained that Serbian television was a legitimate target because it was spreading propaganda that incited hatred of Kosovo Albanians. Later, the justification was changed: suspicious military signals had been detected from the building. In the Afghanistan War, Western media faced competition from al-Jazeera. The Arabic TV station was the only one to report from Kabul under the Taliban regime, and it broadcast footage of war victims that had a great impact worldwide. When Kabul was taken, an American missile completely destroyed al-Jazeera's editorial office, though no one was harmed because the premises were empty at that time. The American military has not excused the incident as a mistake, but has claimed again that it detected electronic signals coming from the office. Nic Gowing, experienced foreign correspondent for the BBC, has tried to investigate the issue, which has only resulted in the remarkable conclusion that the Pentagon does not consider itself obligated to determine whether signals from a news office are a regular news broadcast or some form of espionage or the like (Gowing 2003:234). During the Iraq War, the American military attacked journalists on three separate occasions on the same day, 8 April 2003. Al-Jazeera, which after the events in Kabul did not wish to risk being fired upon again when they defied the US's call for journalists to leave Baghdad, had informed the Pentagon of the coordinates of its office in the Iraqi capital. Nevertheless, one of its photographers was killed and another journalist wounded on the roof of the clearly marked building when it was fired upon from the air. A Reuters photographer and another photographer from the Spanish TV channel Telecino were killed when an American tank opened fire on the Palestine Hotel, well known as the lodgings of the Western journalists. US forces also fired on the offices of Abu Dhabi TV despite the fact that the name of the station was written in large blue letters on the roof. Philip Knightly is convinced that there is an obvious purpose behind these attacks: "/T/he Pentagon is

determined that there will be no more reporting from the enemy side, and that a few deaths among correspondents who do so will deter others" (Knightly 2004:104; cf. Bodi 2004:249; Gowing 2003: 232-233). The suspicions have grown since the *Daily Mirror* in November 2005 published reports that in April 2004, in connection with the US siege of Fallujah, President Bush attempted to convince Prime Minister Blair to bomb al-Jazeera's headquarters in Qatar (*Dagens Nyheter* 05-11-27).

The idea that the discrimination of the victims of war is so fundamental to war propaganda that the superpower views journalists working against it as military targets is of course deeply disturbing. Just over two and a half years after the beginning of the Iraq War, 99 journalists and supporting staff had been killed in Iraq. This can be compared with 63 during the Vietnam War, which, after all, lasted for twenty years (Kianzad 2005). In 18 of these 99 cases, the US military was responsible (International Federation of Journalists website). It is also worrisome that this threat has not received more attention in, for example, Swedish media. If there is something that especially characterizes war journalism in the new wars, it would seem to be this deadly threat. If Knightly is correct in his conclusion, this threat is directed – in the name of democracy – both against the humanitarian idea of the equal value of all people, and against freedom of speech. The threat is also directed against any hope of a peace journalism (Lynch & McCormack 2005), which is primarily characterized by freeing oneself from the polarized and divided image of war propaganda, in which only the victims on one side are deserving of our compassion.

Notes

1. While I was conducting a study of Swedish correspondents' experiences in the Gulf War, I interviewed a number of foreign desk editors-in-chief of leading media outlets. In several cases they used this expression, or the closely similar "war's real face", in answering my question about whether there was anything especially important to cover in reporting from the war.
2. It can, however, be added that the situation for Kurds and Shiites in northern and southern Iraq, respectively, received attention after the war when they were threatened with repercussions after an attempted rebellion against Saddam Hussein. Above all, BBC's reporting from Kurdistan caused the British government to demand the imposition of no-fly zones on Iraq for these regions (Shaw 1996).

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