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Reflections on media war coverage: Dissonance, dilemmas, and the need for improvement

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Abstract: Media preference of war has been diagnosed as resulting from correlations of media psychology, culture, and interests with war. Such correlations encourage personal, professional and institutional dissonance, and provoke dilemmas of coverage adequacy; selectivity of narratives and contexts; manipulation, and narrow ranges of discourse and focus. Efforts to curb these difficulties might succeed, with research and applied efforts aimed at updating the media culture of war coverage; helping identify media controls; encouraging gradual and cumulative reporting; employing "thick coverage" and "thick training"; promoting the cooperation of established media with newer types of journalism; assisting journalists in resolving war coverage dilemmas; promoting ongoing field monitoring and empirical research; helping post-war establishment of appropriate media structures, regulatory frameworks, and program production.

1. The media like war

Research on conflict coverage reveals a long-standing preference for war in the printed press, radio and television (Shinar 2003; Wolfsfeld, 2004). As early as 1898, just before the Spanish-American War broke out, the New York Journal envoy to Cuba, photojournalist Frederic Remington spent a few days in lively Havana. Without sensing any signs of war, he cabled his boss saying, "there will be no war, request to be recalled". The boss, press tycoon William Randolph Hearst, cabled back: "Request denied. Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war". Regardless of the doubts over its accuracy, this episode illustrates the media preference of war and the pursuit of this interest. In line with Hearst's papers' sensationalist style, later baptized as "yellow journalism", his New York Journal carried out an aggressive campaign, blaming the Spanish for the mysterious sinking of the American battleship Maine in Havana harbor, in addition to allegations of torture and rape of Cubans by Spanish forces. At present, it is widely believed that the explosion on the Maine was due to a fire in one of its coalbunkers. Nevertheless, the coverage of the incident together with a daily torrent of horror stories, served to steer public opinion and to pressure Republican President McKinley into a war he had wished to avoid (Beede 1994; Corbett 2012a, b)

More recent literature displays a similar tendency, including coverage of the first and second World Wars; and conflicts in South East Asia; the Middle East; the Gulf; the Balkans; Chechnya; Afghanistan; Africa and Latin America (Corbett 2012a, b; Pilger 2010; Bläsi, 2004; 2009; Knightley, 2000).

Two examples are highly illustrative. Before, during, and after the April-July 1994 Rwandan genocide, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM)¹ became an iconic symbol of media promotion of hatred and violence in that country. Run by Hutu majority government agencies, that popular radio station openly called for the extermination of the Tutsis, enhancing a climate of hostility that encouraged genocidal mass killings. Yanagizawa-Drott (2012) concludes that access to such broadcasts served to increase organized and civilian violence; that they caused approximately 10% of the participation in genocidal violence; and that some 50,000 deaths can be attributed to the broadcasts. Tayeebwa (2012) corroborates this evidence and adds information on hate media in the 2009 Northern Ugandan crisis.

The ethnic and religious strife in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s provides further evidence of such preferences. Nationalist propaganda disseminated by major media channels sponsored by the Milošević regime in Serbia, has enhanced violent attitudes and behaviors on the part of civilians against rival minorities; and later recollections of such propaganda have served civilians to justify unacceptable behaviors (Shinar and Bratič, 2010, Volcic, 2006). Likewise, Croatian journalists used global discourses of violence to justify and legitimize war crimes in the coverage of the war in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia (Erjavic & Volcic 2007, Kurspahic 2003).

1. French for "One Thousand Hills Free Radio and Television", deriving from the description of Rwanda as "Land of a Thousand Hills".

2. Media attitudes and behaviors

Professional critique and academic research provide information on institutional, organizational, personal and professional aspects of the media preference for violence and war. Schechter (2006) offers a critical analysis of this preference by U.S. media organizations in the Iraq invasion.

Ottosen comments "that it is interesting to see how both the New York Times and the Washington Post one year after the War in Iraq started, apologized to the readers for misleading them and then taking responsibility for being a part of the war preparation" (Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 12). On a more general vein, Andersen (2006) argues that the history of the struggle between war and its representation has changed the way wars are fought, and the way stories of war are told: information management has developed together with new media technologies; computer-based technologies have transformed the weapons of war; and media images have turned war into entertainment.

The media tendency to incite and ignite rather than to appease is another dimension of this scene, as documented in research and professional writings. The former includes works by Kull et al., 2003-04; Shinar 2003; Wolfsfeld 2004; Volcic 2006, and others. The latter is illustrated by reports such as Pekusic's for the Belgrade Southeast European Times (January 10, 2012), entitled: "Media war crimes under investigation in Serbia: The Belgrade prosecutor's office says trials are forthcoming for the journalists who are responsible for inciting 1990s war crimes in the former Yugoslavia". SETimes' states at the same date that according to the prosecution, media propaganda in the former Yugoslavia was a prelude to the ensuing armed conflict. Bläsi (2006, 2009) analyses institutional and professional constraints that affect journalists in conflict coverage, such as media structures, conflict situations on-site, individual journalists' personal features, political climate, lobbies, and audiences in different stages of conflicts. Based on interviews with German journalists who covered conflicts in the Gulf War, the Balkans, Chechnya, Rwanda, Liberia, Indonesia, Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq, he argues that it might be easier to improve the coverage quality of the violent stage through investing efforts toward more accurate reporting of the "pre-violence phase". Further research is required to supply more evidence to support this proposition.

Finally, current research displays several types and degrees of media involvement in conflict:

1. *pro-active involvement*, such as Hearst's, and Radio Mille Collines';
2. *"passive compliance"* with governmental authorities, such as in the My Lai massacre in 1968, reported from Vietnam by freelance Seymour Hersh, but not by the mainstream media, even though some journalists and media executives knew about this and similar atrocities (Corbett 2012a, b; Pilger 2010);
3. *Cooperation* with government agencies, as revealed in the correlations found by Kull and his associates (2003-2004) between audiences' misperceptions about the war in Iraq support for the war, and individuals' primary source of news. Viewers of US government-supportive Fox News, for example, displayed more misperceptions and support for the war;
4. *embedding*, i.e. contractual relations of journalists and media outlets with governments and armed forces' agencies that provide journalists with access to and relative personal protection in war events, in return for their vaguely defined "fair" coverage (Ignatius 2010; Goodman & Cummings 2003).

3. Why is that so?

Professional environments, political contexts, and economic constraints provide some explanations of media attitudes and behaviors in conflict and war coverage.

3.1 Professional environments

Professionally, conflict coverage has been highly rated in the mainstream media culture because of its nature as a source of prestige and of its openness to discourse that enhances the news-value of war. Both factors encourage journalists to represent realities in vivid colors and clear-cut polarities, primordial sentiments and the thrill of the unexpected. They allow reporters and editors to prefer the emotional over the rational and to emphasize glory and heroism, thus satisfying classic "news value" requirements: "live" coverage immediacy, dramatic action, simplification of events, personal stories and "victory" or "defeat" results (Corbett 2012a, b; Shinar 2011; Nohrstedt 2009). Thus Wolfsfeld (2004, 15) states that conventional news values are so grounded in conflict to the extent that "when peace appears to be taking hold in a particular area, it is time for journalists to leave". Such conventional news values include a "sacrosanct" set of norms that dictates the use of frames such as immediacy, drama, simplicity and ethnocentrism. Since journalists cannot afford to be in the "business of waiting" (p. 16), the "immediacy" frame captures events and specific actions rather than processes and long-term policies. The "drama" frame demands violence, crisis, conflict, extremism, dangers, internal discord, major breakthroughs rather than "calm, lack of crisis, cooperation, moderation, opportunities, internal consensus and incremental progress". The "simplicity" frame favors "opinions, images, major personalities, two-sided conflicts; while ideology, texts, institutions,

multi-sided conflicts are less newsworthy Under "the "ethnocentrism" frame news is "our beliefs, our suffering, their brutality", and what is not news is "their beliefs, their suffering, our brutality" (ibid).

Such coverage has been criticized for de-sensitizing the audience to the gory details of war, for blending news with views, and for ignoring facts and contexts. This is how media war coverage becomes a form of entertainment rather than a quest for information (Buntig 2004; InfoRefuge 2003). One excellent illustration is the comment made by an American correspondent one night during a US air raid over Baghdad, about the thrill caused by the "fireworks" that lit up the sky¹. Moreover, the evolving public status of media organizations and journalists in war coverage has benefited from the fact that they have become direct actors in international relations: they exchange information with policymakers and field actors, they provide channels for dialogue between belligerent leaders; and they often ignore the distinction between the roles of reporter and actor. The resulting media culture has thus tended to emphasize fighting parties, manifest violence and sportslike "us versus them" attitudes; and visible events and results, winners and losers, rather than longer and complex processes. In addition, it has made it easier for governmental agencies, such as the military, to manipulate the media (Shinar 2011; Nohrstedt 2009).

However, cases of rebellion against manipulation, and of less biased reporting should not be ignored. Thus, frustrated by Pentagon manipulation of the media during the Gulf War, CBS's Bob Simon and his three-man crew began making unauthorized forays from the press center in Dhahran to the front. Regardless of the fact that in their last trip they were taken war prisoners by Iraqi troops, and spent forty days in a Baghdad jail (Simon 1992), this episode reflects professional attempts to resist pressures imposed on journalists. On another line, Rosen (2010) and Hammock (2010) recognize the merits of a "contextual journalism" new trend in some of the traditional and newer media, and quote illustrations for this trend. Another example is the worldwide award winning documentary "Precious Life", produced by Israeli TV correspondent Shlomi Eldar in 2010, in which he reports on the efforts to have a Palestinian baby taken out of Gaza during the Cast Lead operation in the Winter of 2008-9, in order to give him lifesaving treatment in an Israeli hospital. The film manages to escape the propaganda war, and to show dilemmas, radical positions, and a human approach that is often missing in war reporting (www.preciouslifemovie.com).

The question remains, however, whether such few instances are not the exception that proves the rule.

3.2 Political contexts and controls

Not surprisingly and not exclusively, media political contexts are active both in totalitarian regimes, and in democratic open societies. While it is true that the media are controlled by coercion and censorship in the former, less obvious manipulative practices have been making progress in the latter (Shah, 2005). Thus, in 2005, the White House admitted to producing videos designed to look like news reports from legitimate independent journalists, and then feeding those reports to media outlets ready to air on the evening news. In April 2008, the New York Times revealed a secret US Department of Defense program launched in 2002 that involved using retired military officers to implant Pentagon talking points in the media. They were presented as "independent analysts", while the fact that they were briefed beforehand by the Pentagon was concealed. Also, in line with developments in the media world, it was revealed early in 2012 that the US government had contracted with a private firm to develop software that create fake social media accounts so as to steer public opinion and promote propaganda on popular websites (Corbett 2012a, b). Pilger (2012) and Knightley (2000a) express similar criticism for the United Kingdom media political context.

3.3 Economic constraints

Insofar as media economy is concerned, radical and moderate critics perceive the media preference of violence and war as highly correlated with the influence of the profit-making, rating-hungry, scoop-hunting basic media structures, particularly but not exclusively the private ones (Mc Chesney 2000; Herman & Chomsky 1988). Nohrstedt (2009) points out the economic breakthrough given by wars to media organizations, such as the Gulf War to CNN and the Iraq War to Al-Jazeera. Such claims are illustrations of a "media economic imperative" that works together with the technological and the professional ones. A second important aspect is the increasing economic facet of war coverage as entertainment. Raymond Federman (1997) wrote a sarcastic "letter to a friend" about the Gulf War being the best TV show of the year, and Jean Baudrillard (2001) made an ironic claim that the war did not happen, but was just a media production. More specifically, Billig's (1995) notion of "banal nationalism" might have inspired Bunting (2004) to indirectly refer to the economic imperative in terms of the "barbarism" and "banality" involved in the interruption of news items that show images of death and suffering with tasteless out-of-context advertisements for consumer goods. On the other hand, a rather paradoxical result of the economic imperative appears in studies that link market pressures with the shrinking coverage of war (Ricchiardi 2008).

1. Shown in Schechter's video and script that accompanies his book (2006).

Such professional environments, political contexts and controls, and economic constraints together with the pressures and prejudices of journalists, editors, and producers on the ground provide the context for dissonance and dilemmas in war coverage. While war coverage is a classic case of convergence and coincidence of the institutional and personal normative levels, dissonance refers mostly (but not exclusively) to institutional and organizational issues, and dilemmas refer mostly (but not exclusively) to professional and individual aspects.

4. Dissonance

The preference of conflict is a central feature in the institutional DNA of the media. This implies high and multiple correlation levels of media psychology, culture, economy, and technology on one hand, with violence and war on the other. Such correlations can encourage the emergence of institutional and personal dissonance, such as:

a) Between *patriotic/ethnic and professional allegiances*: Evans (n.d.) and Zandberg & Neiger (2005) documented a preference of the former, mostly in the early stages of war¹. This confirms findings of other studies that in the coverage of conflict, particularly when referring to their own countries, journalists are caught between nation and profession, and their belonging to the national community overpowers their membership in the professional one. This leads journalists to relate to an institutionalized 'sphere of consensus' (Hallin 1986), in which they feel free to stop trying to be balanced in favor of a generalized 'we' and take for granted shared organizational values and assumptions (Schudson 2002).

b) Between the former *"agenda-setting monopoly"* held by the traditional media and the competition raised by the emergence of new media: the printed press, radio and particularly television have traditionally had exclusive control of setting the agenda in society, sometimes on behalf of governments and corporations, and particularly in war coverage. The emergence of new online and social media has reduced this monopoly considerably, as people are increasingly abandoning their former main source of news – newspapers, radio and television – in favor of online channels and as online journalists and bloggers are emerging as a threatening competition. This has been changing the ways in which the public agenda is being set. It is still unclear whether and how online channels affect the media preference for war and violence and to what extent governmental and opposition efforts to use the web will succeed. However, the flourishing decentralized and "de-institutionalized" new media and the decline of the traditional media monopoly have been worrying the traditional media system (Corbett 2012a, b; Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 30).

c) Between *technological advancement and ethical standards*: the emergence of newer technological developments in the media can pose serious challenges to journalistic ethical standards. Jean Paul Marthoz quotes: "The world is ... reduced to a village; all men are compelled to think ... on imperfect information and with too little time for reflection", and adds, "this sentence is not about the CNN effect but about the telegraph effect; it was pronounced in 1889" (Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 29). Based on data from their study of the Romanian revolution and the Gulf War coverage, Shinar and Stoiciu (1992, 253) reflect that "technological changes have been so rapid and overwhelming ... that journalists and researchers have been busy chasing them with little time left for understanding the demands they make on the profession". Indeed, the CNN-style "rolling news", immediate satellite links, and the on-the-spot 24/7 availability of broadcast materials have made it very tempting to use them before assessing their veracity, significance, and impact. The professional race with their peers in the field and with their own editors has often led journalists to file or broadcast their reports without cross checking the information, out of fear that they will lag behind. (Corbett 2012a, b; Nohrstedt 2009; Shinar & Stoiciu 1992). Terzis writes about this dilemma in the Greek and Turkish media: "When my competitor gets the story, how can I miss the story? I know it's one-sided and I know it might not be true and I don't have the time to check the sources" (Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 27). In this sense, it is important to recall the institutional facet of media ethics, presented in Tehranian's comment (2002, 58) that "the locus of most media ethics has hitherto been the individual journalist. But the individual journalist operates in the context of institutional, national, and international regimes ... media ethics must be negotiated not only professionally but also institutionally, nationally, and internationally ... ethics without commensurate institutional frameworks and sanctions often translate into pious wishes".

d) Between *longer and shorter spans of memory*: the media have little or no memory, argues Philip Knightley (2000a). This is plausible, at least based on his critique of the Kosovo NATO campaign coverage. In a rather unusual stance, he suggests that war reporters have short working lives and there is little tradition, motivation or means for passing on their knowledge and experience. The military, on the other hand, plan media strategy with as much attention as military strategy. The Pentagon and Ministries of Defense have manuals updated after every war, which serve to guide the way they will manage the media – as does every other major military power. These military manuals follow basic principles – appear open, transparent and eager to help; never go in for summary repression or direct control; nullify rather than conceal undesirable news;

1. But not only in the early stages of war, as shown by the firing of venerated professionals Peter Arnett and Phil Donahew by their US media employers during the Iraq campaign (see below in the section on *direct pressures and constraints*).

control emphasis rather than facts; balance bad news with good; and lie directly only when certain that the lie will not be found out during the course of the war. In this sense too, one can wonder what implications will be introduced in this area by the increased access to historical materials provided by newer technologies.

5. Dilemmas

A considerable number of professional and individual normative dilemmas surface, based on the earlier discussion. The following presentation of some such dilemmas aims at providing a basis for thought and research rather than being an exhaustive list of problems. Reactions, support, suggestions for improvements, criticism and disagreement are bound to enrich this basis. The dilemmas listed here refer to the adequacy of coverage techniques; to the selectivity of narratives and contexts; to self-manipulation; and to the narrowing of focus and discourse.

5.1 Adequacy of coverage techniques

Dilemmas in this context refer to how to maintain a reasonable "critical distance" necessary for adequate reporting vis-à-vis the dependence on official sources; the attraction to "negative coverage" and access and safety problems.

The *dependence of media organizations and journalists on official sources* is a recurring theme in the academic and professional literature on war coverage. The allegation that mainstream media treat information supplied by official sources as fact rather than as just one perspective provides one example. Such dependence leads the mainstream media to fail in presenting context and depth. In reporting the Iraq war, popular mainstream news channels, such as *The New York Times*, *CNN*, and *Associated Press* presented news stories that practically conveyed only the government's message, with little coverage of alternative views and sources that have often challenged official sources (Lancaster 2008). Likewise, Terzis reports on Greek and Turkish journalists' experience that "international affairs reporting depends heavily on the official sources ... dependency on the ministries of defense and foreign affairs is much greater than for example the environmental correspondent, because he can depend on personal experiences and eyewitnesses" (Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 27).

"*Negative coverage*", such as personalizing, "negative othering", demonizing or dehumanizing poses another professional dilemma vis-à-vis the professional normative demand for impartiality. Shinar and Stoiciu's accounts about such techniques in the Romanian revolution and the Gulf War (1992), and reports on the genocidal role of Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda illustrate this type of coverage (Yanagizawa-Drott 2012; Tayeebwa 2012). They are supported by more recent reports, such as the declaration of Serbian Chief War Crimes Prosecutor that "most local media during Milošević's regime were part of the war machine" whose propaganda goals were "completely to de-humanize opponents in the armed conflict, often threatening their right to life" (Pekusic 2012). And propaganda expert Nancy Snow explains why in the Gulf War, a majority of Americans linked Saddam Hussein to 9/11 because they "were repeatedly told by the President ... that Saddam's evil alone was enough to be linked to 9/11 and that given time, he would have used his weapons against us" (Gutierrez 2004).

Access to and safety in combat zones, are deadly characteristics of war coverage. About one hundred journalists and supporting staff died during two and a half years after the beginning of the Iraq invasion. A similar number of media workers and journalists died in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. These figures certainly outweigh the sixty-three journalists killed during the Vietnam War, which lasted for twenty years. They illustrate the dilemma in the definition of journalists as witnesses on behalf of the public or legitimate targets. (Andersen 2006). This dilemma has been frequently used and abused by official authorities to deny or curb access of journalists to combat areas (Schechter 2006) resources)

5.2 Selectivity of narratives and contexts

Like many types of journalism, war reporting cannot present every detail of events and processes, but purposeful or negligent deceptive coverage should certainly worry those concerned with the adequacy of war coverage. At times, such shortcomings blur the distance between journalism and propaganda, creating dilemmas of incompleteness; inaccuracy; surrender to the "seductions of convenience", and ethical shortcomings.

Incompleteness: The lack of access to events, and the consequent lack of full or at least reasonable witnessing explain obvious limits in the provision of details in war coverage. Safety demands are another explanation, based on the need to prevent supplying important information to the enemy. Thus the strict control imposed by US and South Korean authorities on visiting tourists and journalists to the DMZ; or the harsh limitations imposed by Israeli authorities on reporting landing sites of missiles and rockets in the Gulf War, the 2006 Lebanon War, the 2009 Cast Iron and the 2012 Pillar of Defense operations in Gaza¹. Additional sources of incompleteness include:

- massive information flows together with limited print space and airtime have made it more difficult for journalists to deal in detail with processes and complex topics, and for citizens to make sense of them;

- limited knowledge about the contexts and culture of conflicts and lack of motivation to learn about them has led reporting to reductionism and simplicity, and has emphasized what is close and what is believed to be known to media users;
- voluntary and forced cooperation of media institutions and journalists with political and military establishments has made independent journalism less and less feasible and less acceptable ... This ... is increased by ... the commercialization of news (that) leads to subservience to ... official communication policies" (Marthoz, in Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 30-31);
- the lower news value assigned to certain regions and topics have made it difficult for the media to cover complexity. The case of Darfur (and Africa in general) is an example of geography-based lower news value: the crisis started in March 2003, peaked between September and December 2003, and the first big broadcast came in March 2004 (Carpentier & Terzis 2005). Environmental damage caused by war is an example of thematic lower news value. The environment is a major victim of current war reporting. It is practically absent from the coverage, and in the few instances in which it is covered, it usually appears in less relevant pages and scheduling. This results from the traditional lower news value of environmental coverage in general, from the facts that the topic is complex, and that it demands previous knowledge by journalists and audiences of at least some historical, economic, and cultural backgrounds, and some perspective of its long-term consequences (Shinar 2008).

Inaccuracy: Some incompleteness might be acceptable, given the problems discussed above. Inaccuracy is less acceptable, for both practical and ethical reasons, referring to media organizations' and individual journalists' responses to direct pressures and constraints; "seductions of convenience"; and ethical shortcomings. The major dilemma in this case is how to provide appropriate coverage under such circumstances.

Depending on levels of democracy, *direct pressures and constraints* range from institutional and organizational directives and from professional and individual peer pressure. Terzis offers some evidence from Greek-Turkish crises reporting: "Greek and Turkish journalists ... feel like soldiers of the national army ... journalists would be fired in Greece and in Turkey ... if they go against the perceived national interest ... legislation exists in Turkey that if as a journalist you speak against the 'national interest', you can be imprisoned. In Greece, you will be fired ... and you will not be able to find a job afterwards ... journalist unions ... (to) protect journalists, are not there ... you want ... not be isolated from the main sources ... you socialize with them ... you don't want to be 'the bad guy' in the group' ... huge peer pressure especially in times of crises ... not to voice other opinions" (Carpentier & Terzis 2005, 25-28).

Greek and Turkish journalists are not alone in this matter. Questioning the US government and Pentagon agenda has resulted in an abrupt end to more than one media personality's career. In 2003, NBC fired Peter Arnett, after he criticized the US policy on the war in Iraq. MSNBC fired Phil Donahue in the months leading up to U.S. invasion of Iraq. Although his show was top-rated, he was fired in response to his anti-war opinions and guests. A leaked network report called him "a difficult public face for NBC in a time of war ... anti-war, anti-Bush and skeptical of the administration's motives ... (and providing) "a home for the liberal anti-war agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity" (Harris 2012). Dan Rather, the iconic CBS news anchor for 24 years, told interviewer John Pilger (2010) that in reporting the war in Iraq, "there was a fear in every newsroom in America ... of losing your job . . . of being stuck with some label, unpatriotic or otherwise ... that war has made 'stenographers out of us'" This is a view now shared by a number of senior journalists interviewed in the US.

Surrender to the "seductions of convenience" refers to the levels of inaccuracy accepted by media organizations and journalists to help cope with complexity and financial constraints. The former refers to difficulties imposed by complex items and contexts; the latter to benefits provided to media organizations and professionals. Barstow and Stein (2005) note that together with a continuous demand for news that usually increases in war times, news channels budgets and staff are shrinking. In the United States alone, some 90 percent of TV newsrooms rely on video news releases, and "ready-to-run segments", provided by official agencies and contracted PR firms. This allows many outlets to expand their news coverage without additional costs. It also allows for the dissemination of inaccurate news with less checks and harder traceability, as segments flow through a vast network of distributors and redistributors. Nohrstedt (2009) implies some similarities in the inaccuracy of reports on the Iraq invasion and the coverage of the NATO bombings in Kosovo.

Ethical shortcomings refer to direct breaches of ethical codes, in addition to the such aspects in incomplete and inaccurate reporting. It includes the inventing of stories; and techniques of media management, such as the aforementioned practice of releasing and using prepackaged and fake PR segments; paying journalists to promote certain issues or contracting PR firms to feed stories to the press. Inventing stories refer to strategies that increase the attractiveness of the news. Thus,

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1. This is the official title of the operation (in Hebrew it is called "Pillar of Cloud"), referring to the belief, recorded in the Bible, that during the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, God took the form of a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night, in order to light their way and to frighten the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:19-20; 14:24; 13:21-22; Numbers 14:14).

although war atrocities are not uncommon, Evans (n.d.) notes that "the Germans did not ... toss Belgian babies in the air and catch them on bayonets, nor boil down German corpses for glycerin for munitions... the French did not routinely ... gouge out the eyes of captured German soldiers, or chop off their fingers for the rings on them". These were stories invented by a British correspondent to satisfy his office for attractive news. Iraqi soldiers invading Kuwait in the Gulf War did not toss premature babies out of incubators, as *The Sunday Telegraph* in London, and then the *Los Angeles Times*, reported, quoting Reuters. The story was an invention of the Citizens for a Free Kuwait lobby in Washington (Knightley 2000a). In addition, news of the "massacre of 41 Serbian children" in an elementary school, near Vukovar, published in November 1991, proved very soon to be a fabrication (Pekusic 2012).

Paying journalists and experts to promote certain issues, without acknowledging this or without the media mentioning the sources, is an ethical issue dealt with caution, even in blogs and internet sites. Nevertheless, blogger Justin Raimondo (of www.antiwar.com) talks openly about "a cadre of bought-and-paid-for columnists, publicists, and perhaps even a few "bloggers". In a more personal vein, he attacks senior journalists Armstrong Williams and Maggie Gallagher¹ on grounds that these pundits' messages sound like Pentagon press releases. Harris (2012) reports that not long after the Iraq war began in 2003, CNN chief news executive Eason Jordan revealed that he had secured the Pentagon's approval for a list of military analysts, mostly retired generals, to provide on-air commentary. PR firms are contracted to "sell a war, and to maximize media coverage of particular issues through the careful use of media management techniques, such as "driving the agenda" and "milking the story". This includes, for example, leaking jigsaw pieces of information to different outlets, leading them to piece the story together and to drive it up the news agenda (Gutierrez, 2004). One such example is the Washington PR firm The Rendon Group (TRG), a public relations and propaganda firm that as its website states, (<http://www.rendon.com>) "for nearly three decades has been providing innovative global strategic communications solutions ... assisting leading commercial, government and military organizations ... active in 78 countries" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rendon_Group_-_cite_note-prwatch2001-1#cite_note-prwatch2001-1). Founder John Rendon described himself as "an information warrior, and a perception manager", which in the language of Pentagon planners means "actions to convey and (or) deny selected information and indicators ... to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning" (Rampton and Stauber 2003). Many media outlets are willing partners. Kull et al (2003-2004) found that the frequency of Americans' misperceptions on the war in Iraq varies significantly depending on their exposure to different news sources. Their analysis of polls conducted in the summer of 2003 found that 48% incorrectly believed that evidence of links between Iraq and al Qaeda have been found, 22% that weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq, and 25% that world public opinion favored the US going to war with Iraq. Overall 60% had at least one of these three misperceptions. The following table presents a breakdown of respondents' percentages that had one or more of the three misperceptions listed above, according to their major source of news.

Misperceptions	FOX	CBS	ABC	NBC	CNN	Print	NPR/PBS
None	20%	30%	39%	45%	45%	53%	77%
1 or more	80%	70%	61%	55%	55%	47%	23%

The table presents a clear connection between all commercial TV networks, notably Fox, CBS, and ABC, with misperceptions about the war.

5.3 Self-manipulation

Some academics and professionals hold on to Herman and Chomsky's (1988) media manipulation pioneering model, regardless of the changes taking place in reporting war and in other aspects of international relations. Harris (2012) accepts the model as is, including the filtering agents that determine the news people receive from the media: owners; sources; financial interests; ideology, and "flak", namely corporate or government front groups that spin on particular stories or advocate their own point of view or deceptively plant false stories through fake advocacy organizations. Likewise, Shah (2006) and Corbett (2012 a, b) believe that in war coverage the media are totally manipulated by official sources and public relations firms that disseminate propaganda as news. Even without pointing out the need to update some details Herman's and Chomsky's model to the post-Cold War era, one must accept the argument that governments and private interests always use one or more of such agents. One can also admit that the press, radio and TV do disseminate false and distorted information, probably consciously in some cases. However, media organizations and professionals are not 'babes in the woods'. It is difficult to believe that they are always innocent victims of one-sided manipulation by omnipotent conspiracies. In most cases, they play active and willing roles in the process. In other words, the discussion is not really about evil pres-

1. Armstrong Williams is an American conservative political commentator, and host of a daily radio show and a nationally syndicated TV program. Maggie Gallagher, writer, commentator, columnist for Universal Press Syndicate, and has published five books. Both are known as media pundits, i.e. independent experts.

sure working on innocent media, particularly in war reporting. The dilemma faced by the media is the extent to which they can afford to go along with well known external pressures, and to what extent they can afford to disregard ethical codes and the public interest (and thus lose at least some credibility) in return for economic and other benefits. This is the media self-manipulation dilemma. Tagged in the early 1990s in an analysis of the Romanian revolution and the Gulf War coverage, it showed how desk editors in America and Europe framed reports from the field to fit their own expectations, and their willing acceptance of governmental, military, political or corporate views as facts (Shinar & Stoiciu 1992). Following Hearst's heritage, and resembling some features of war coverage at present, this pattern finds expression not necessarily in factual materials but in the use of pre-conceived frames, such as:

- *The conspiracy frame* that ranges from Ceausescu and his Securitate's behavior against the Romanian people to similar framings of Saddam, Gadaffi, Mubarak, Assad and others in more recent years.
- *The monster frame* produced by the demonization of leaders, such as Ceasescu, Saddam Hussein, Iranian leaders, and personalities ousted in the Arab Spring. Satanic images promoted by the highest official sources and willfully accepted by the media, range from brutality and torture, to clumsiness and cowardly behavior. Images of crime and punishment, good and evil, freedom and oppression make up the backbone of the legitimacy sought for war.
- *The spontaneous reaction frame* refers to the alleged snowball nature of events, which fits the "breaking news" style. Again, such framing in the coverage of Romania and the Gulf War, parallels the framing of events in former Yugoslavia, Tahrir Square and in other Arab Spring symbolic sites;
- *The national unity frame* promoted in the Western media coverage of early crises, and often abandoned as the climate becomes chaotic and anarchic (as in Romania, Tunisia, Lybia, Egypt, Syria, etc.).
- *The international community frame*, cherished at the political, economic, and psychological levels by governments, and by the media. Sympathetic portrayals of US-led coalitions have detracted public attention from unpopular facts. Examples include war against former allies (Saddam Hussein; the Taliban; regimes ousted in the Arab Spring); links with and support of undemocratic and oppressive regimes (Kuwait, Syria, Saudi Arabia); poor training and inadequate command of military allies; and economic and political interests that motivated members of coalitions and media organizations to participate in US-led efforts.

Also this professional pattern implies, firstly, that in war coverage, particularly in areas far away from media centers, distinctions exist between field-reporters and headquarters' desk editors. With or without sufficient factual materials, Western desk editors very often prefer less reliable information that fits their pre-dispositions, psycho-symbolic expectations and external pressures rather than reports filed by their own field staff. Self-manipulation is evident in that they tend to construct realities that do not deviate from the hegemonic consensus.

Second, in war coverage perhaps more than in other areas, the very trademarks of prestigious media help to legitimize propaganda. Regardless of the message, the sheer prestige of organizations such as The New York Times, CNN, or BBC plays a legitimizing role for selective and segmented information, and this is increasingly effective for governmental media management.

Third, in war coverage, media users get some details rather than full pictures, and are told 'what they mean' rather than what they are. In many cases, this displays the media willing compliance with the official line that promotes rituals of heroism and patriotism, condemnation of 'disloyal' actions and legitimate criticism; reliance on authority; morality and rationality; stereotyping, and others.

Finally, research findings (Knightley 2000b), reveal that both official propaganda and the media prepare users for war in skilful ways, increasing the likelihood that they do not want the truthful and balanced reporting once expected from war correspondents. As a result, governments might find further justification for exerting open and covert tighter control of war correspondents and media organizations.

The dilemma is whether ethical considerations and service to the public interest can reduce the media tendency to accept such control in return for commercial and political benefits.

5.4 Focus and range of discourse

The dilemmas of coverage techniques, narratives and contexts, and self-manipulation display some built-in focus and discourse problems. The present section adds two dilemmas specifically related to the media openness to discursive patterns that enhance the news value of war. They include narrowing the focus and range of discourse, and wording.

Narrowing the focus and range of discourse refers to presenting and discussing issues within a limited range of ideas, opinions, and facts. This approach allows for making judgments on details of given events, processes or issues while curbing broader and deeper substantive frameworks and boundaries of discourse. Indeed, directing focus, deflecting the range of discourse into "permitted parameters of debate", and using preemptive assumptions¹, appear like democratic debate and

discussion, but do not allow for proper deliberation, and encourage the loss of focus (Shah, 2005, Eno, 2003, Parenti, 2001). Following the earlier discussion, media use of biased experts, helps to determine such parameters and assumptions, thus reinforcing the limits imposed by governmental and military authorities on the range of the debate. Such limits are often systemic, although they might also occur accidentally, and sometimes result from journalists' plain ignorance, lack of attention, or professional constraints, such as space and time limitations. The major dilemma in this sense has to do with the extent to which journalists and media organizations can accept such narrowing.

Wording: Classifications on this matter, such as Delwiche's (n.d.) and Parenti's 2001¹ clearly point out some of the important dilemmas referring to the use of language in war coverage. They include questions on the extent to which war coverage should use:

Word Games, such as name-calling and labeling people, groups, and institutions in positive or negative terms; glittering generalities; euphemisms, blander meanings, connotations and simple, repetitious and emotional words;

False Connections, such as symbols and imagery of institutions in order to strengthen or weaken acceptance; testimonials; citing individuals and sources not qualified to make the claims made;

Special Appeals, such as plain folks; leaders appealing to ordinary citizens by doing "ordinary" things; using band wagon effects and the "everyone else is doing it" argument; heightening, exploiting or arousing people's fears to get support for one side, and opposition and hatred for others; and

Logical fallacies, such as bad logic or unwarranted extrapolation.

These factors affect ethical standards and provoke dilemmas of coverage adequacy; framing selectivity of narratives and contexts; difficulty to detect fabrications/lies, manipulation and self-manipulation; and narrow ranges of discourse and focus.

6. Nine implications for the improvement of war coverage

This closing section offers implications from the preceding diagnostic sections on the media preference of war and violence, their attitudes and behaviors; their professional, political and economic contexts; and on media dissonant dimensions and dilemmas in war coverage.

The first implication calls for reconsidering and encouraging the updating the media war coverage both conceptually (regarding aspects such as news-value, objectivity, ethics, and the like), and professionally (regarding techniques, use of technology, discourse, legitimacy of varied views and narratives). This could be done in joint symposia, conferences, and training efforts (see below) with the participation of journalists, officials and researchers experienced in war coverage, such as gatherings sponsored by a variety of media-and-peace-related institutes and foundations, relevant NGOs, academic institutes, and professional associations. This might be a slow process, with unknown results. The chances of success might have increased since the social media have joined the traditional press, radio, and television. Such new media and networks, particularly facebook, you-tube, and twitter – seem to be better equipped for early warning, airing events in real time, revealing intentions, exposing, mobilizing, and compensating for the limitations of the traditional media. Their use during clashes and crises² could be encouraged.

In this context, questions on the extent to which this implication differs from peace journalism principles are natural. A concise response is that efforts to achieve this goal are increasingly becoming better equipped with evidence based on research and practice from the field, and with experimental applications, thus improving the arsenal of arguments offered by the rather ideological work conducted by Galtung and his disciples. Moreover, while the peace journalism guidelines advocated by Galtung and others can be accepted in principle, the methods offered by the original peace journalism model have not produced a significant genre in journalism since their advent some forty years ago. The low acceptance rates of these methods and their limited effectiveness have been recognized and criticized on the grounds of their radical ideology; their weak theoretical and empirical bases; their sectarian, "closed club" structure; and their "missionary" efforts at professional re-education (Shinar 2011, Hanitzsch 2004a, b).

An additional argument calls for challenging the increasing number of journalists and researchers critical of Galtung's model to suggest new experimental trends and adapt the model to the 21st century. Good leads in this direction include Julian

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1. Media acceptance as given of the very positions that need to be critically examined (Parenti, 2001).
 1. Parenti's classification (2001) includes suppression by omission, "attack and destroy the target", labeling, pre-emptive assumptions, face-value transmission, slighting of content, false balancing, follow-up avoidance, and framing. For detailed categories, see his www.propagandacritic.com website.
 2. See, for example John Pilger's (2010) combined use of text and video segments run in you-tube.

Assange's wikileaks and other models based on new technologies, the developing "contextual journalism" trend (Hammock, 2010), revealed shortcomings in current conflict, peacemaking and peacekeeping coverage.

The second implication calls for recognizing the shortcomings of local and international media, not only in totalitarian but also in democratic environments. In the former, the ability of traditional local media to influence, expose or mobilize is limited, although not entirely blocked, as documented in the historical Iranian revolution and Palestinian national awakening (Shinar 1983, 1987) and in the ongoing Arab Spring. This emphasizes the importance of international and social media. Also media control in totalitarian regimes is easy to identify, for its usually blatant and crude methods. In democratic societies, they are harder to grasp. Thus, it is important to identify media control practices in democratic societies, particularly in the coverage of more recent wars and conflicts. In addition, this implication is an opportunity for recognizing that the concept of media literacy needs to depart from its traditional focus on the traditional printed press, radio and TV, on quite older and to some degree irrelevant expectations from journalism, and on rigid Western-based definitions of democracy. An updates effort could be made to study and experiment with technological, economic and normative changes in the journalistic profession, with particular reference to war coverage.

The third implication calls for encouraging gradual and cumulative reporting rather than immediate and explosion-like coverage, emphasizing

- predictive and interpretive reporting based on unbiased expertise, experience, and openness to a wide range of official and critical assessments;
- constant attention to possible and emerging eruptions of war and violence;
- early warnings, accompanied by immediate reactions, and consistent follow-up;
- awareness of the advantages offered by the new media for such roles: while the traditional media instill a sense of "controlled, closed networks", the newer media enhance the activation of "networks open for all".

The fourth implication calls for adopting, developing, and demanding "thick coverage", in the spirit of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's "thick description", a tool to rescue thoughts, meanings, actions, feelings, deeper motives, and details about the surroundings of people or phenomena. Thick coverage is process-oriented rather than event-centered; demands context, background knowledge and understanding; resolves as much as possible professional contradictions and dilemmas that affect the coverage; and does not narrow focus and discourse. It stands in contrast with "parachute journalism" that refers to reporters who drop into a country for a relatively short period, file a story or handful of dispatches, and then leave. This is an unflattering term, based on the sense that an outside journalist, usually a well known media celebrity, who stays in a country or town for just a short time is unlikely to have a sufficient feel for the area's political and cultural landscape. Lack of knowledge and tight deadlines often result in inaccurate or distorted reports, especially during breaking news. Unlike reporting by expert foreign correspondents active in the locale for a longer time, critics contend that "parachute journalists" misrepresents facts, display ignorance of contextual issues, lack proper contacts; are not able to conduct independent investigation; and often use the only information immediately available from other news organizations or from "official" or bureaucratic sources, which might be propaganda agencies.

Even though this might be difficult to implement fully and immediately, one could recommend to start working this strategy in terms of developing and experimenting with working definitions (i.e. change news value concept, increase respect for audiences, experiment with new media), and introducing the concept in the professional agenda.

As mentioned above, providing "thick training" to media students and young journalists could be a positive step in this direction. It could be based on teachers imparting and students acquiring knowledge and skills on the roles, techniques, and organizations of traditional and new media, on their current shortcomings, and on ways to improve their performance in war coverage. Scholarly and professional works as well as projects run by international organizations, such as Search for Common Ground and other NGOs, UN agencies, universities, and relevant institutions could take part in such "active media literacy" efforts.

The fifth implication calls for the adoption, by established media, of constant and consistent "routinization", legitimization, and cooperation with "civic", "fringe", "blog", and even "outcast" journalism, such as represented by Michael Moore, Danny Schechter, Julian Assange, John Pilger and others.

The sixth implication calls for assisting journalists in Western and other countries to resolve dilemmas of media rhetoric, particularly those related to focus and range of discourse, and to wording. It also calls for efforts to develop a media peace discourse (Shinar 2004) as an improvement of classic peace journalism. Academic research and emphasis on training older and younger journalists in this respect could serve to update the marked focus on training by Galtung's disciples.

The seventh implication follows lessons from the reporting of 21st century conflicts and calls for redirecting Galtung's ideological concentration on professional reeducation to promoting ongoing field monitoring and empirical research that might help uncover incitement and hate-media as well as to document ethical infringements in Western and other countries. This

could serve to legitimize and encourage the remarkable ongoing progress of empirical research on war coverage and peace journalism in Third World countries, as showed by Lee and Maslog on Asian media (2005), Tayeebwa (2012) in Africa, and others.

The two final implications refer mostly but not exclusively to the post-war establishment of media structures, regulatory frameworks, and the production of adequate post-war contents. Accordingly, *the eighth implication* follows the premise that the use of media as weapons of war can lead to the development of new post-war media structures. Many NGOs and grassroots activist communities have become increasingly influential in both conflict and post-war times through creating their own coverage, as illustrated by their prominent presence on websites, by their use of professionally designed publications, and by the development of their own audio and video broadcasts. Examples from Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Israel-Palestine show the importance of such media structures. Following pressures of international powers, post war Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a laboratory of peace-oriented media regulation, resulting in an increased post-war ratio per capita of radio and television stations in Bosnia. Major media projects emerged, aiming to promote adequate media structures, such as new television and radio networks, and new frequencies and licenses that transformed the former ethnic broadcasters into a Public Broadcasting System. In Kosovo, the media responded to the conflict much in the same fashion, following the international community initiative to set up a national television and radio system, and strict regulation of hate broadcasting (Shinar & Bratič 2010). These examples might lead the way to additional initiatives.

Finally, *the ninth implication* calls for the production and dissemination of post-war adequate formats and contents. Examples include the Israeli-Palestinian jointly operated All for Peace Radio that has been successfully producing and broadcasting joint-produced news and programs in Arabic and Hebrew. In former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, the Common Ground News Service has been providing information produced by local and international experts, on and to conflicting parties, such as syndicated articles, analysis, and op-ed pieces. In order to counter the organization of the media along ethnic lines, Common Ground initiated joint reporting teams and ensured that each joint-written article be published identically in the different papers. The organization initiated the production and broadcasting of radio and television programs intended to build consensus on contentious issues, such as television series looking at the lives and concerns of ordinary people, with particular attention to successful efforts to rebuild post-war economy and society (Melone et al. 2002).

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