Media and War

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Introduction

When war reporting emerged as a specialisation in the period from 1865 to 1914 the expectations of journalists were quite simple. As Philip Knightley (1975:42-44) has pointed out in his seminal book on the history of war reporting, the huge popularity of war reporters at the time was dependent on their ability to write war reports as narratives of adventure without too much political comment or moralising.

A century on, the issue of the relationship between journalists, media and war has come to the fore again, but this time the expectations of journalists are far less clear cut. Since the end of the Cold War, the world has seen a number of horrific intra-state conflicts where episodes of severe human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing and genocide have prompted demands that the international community should intervene on humanitarian grounds and stop the violence. International journalists have found themselves to be key players in the public communication processes about this modern variation on the theme of war even if the exact dynamics of the process are currently very poorly understood. For many international journalists covering the intense violence in places like Rwanda, Iraq, Bosnia, Chechnya and Kosovo has led to personal soul searching and questioning of the appropriate roles of journalists in such conflicts – particularly as it has become clear how much the protagonists have used local media to build and sustain the very same conflicts.

Unfortunately, such journalists will find little help in the current academic scholarship on war and the media. As Susan L. Carruthers (2000: 11) has pointed out in her comprehensive book "The Media at war" research has tended to fall into a fairly limited number of categories: studies of the media performance in single, specific conflicts; participant accounts and memories by war correspondents; analyses of the military media activity in war time, such as propaganda, war photography or wartime cinema. Critique of journalistic performance in war is commonplace in such studies but bear a general condemnation of military and governments regulation of media

access to and reporting from theatres of war, curiously little has been said about from a normative point of view of how we would like the role of the media to be in war and that can be achieved. Academic research on news production has shown time and again that the media in general are highly dependent on information from societies institutions. It is a dependency born out of a desire and need to keep down the costs of newsgathering and it applies at times of international conflict too.

This essay is an attempt to show which has been the role of the Media in the lasts conflicts as Gulf War, Chechnya and Kosovo, how they influenced the public opinions and the Western States and which differences can we see among the cases studied.

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Historic Transition

Up to and during the Cold War, media appeared primarily national in form, and international communication across borders remained secondary. From the point of view of International Relations, media could be seen therefore as components of the 'domestic' order, relating to national politics and public opinion. Media were not seen as signficant components of the international order, except to the extent (generally considered limited) that the domestic affected the international. Increasingly, of course, international theory stressed 'interdependence' between national economies (Keohane and Nye, 1977), and the emergence of 'non-state' actors - such as multi-national corporations - in international relations. By the end of the Cold War period, such processes were seen as breaking down the divisions of 'domestic' and 'international' and leading to 'post-international' world politics (Rosenau, 1990).

Economic and cultural integration, moreover, was seen as taking the form of 'globalisation' in which borders were undermined. In radical versions of this argument, the proliferation of non-state actors included social movements - including, for example, women's, peace and environmental movements - and was leading towards the formation of a 'global civil society' (Falk, 1995). This was itself seen as part of a wider movement towards a 'global society'.

Curiously, media figured very little in these transformations of the International Relations debate. International media groups were of course recognised as one variety of the increasingly important multi-national corporation, and media were criticised in radical accounts as part of the dominant American hegemony (Chomsky and Herman, 1988). But the significance of media was

often restricted to the interface of 'foreign policy' with 'domestic' public opinion in conflicts, which themselves were often conservatively theorised since war remained mostly a topic in the 'realist' end of International Relations. Because domestic politics too was seen as only an inconsistent, intermittent influence on international relations, it also figured fairly marginally in the field.

Specific media phenomena (e.g. CNN, the Internet) have achieved totemic status - the former in discussions of foreign policy, the latter in globalisation debates. However it is fair to say that no systematic, general rethinking of media has appeared in any of the critical debates in International Relations. Media studies retain a cinderella status in all main theoretical schools.

The transformation of the state order has been very much a condition for the development of globalised communications and global civil society (and indeed 'globalisation' in general). The internationalised political order has been increasingly liberal in content, facilitating transnational, and increasingly globalised, communications and culture. It is in these circumstances that press and television have become more and more frameworks for transnationalised and globalised information and ideas. Although many have located the emergence of a global civil society in globalist social movements - environmental, feminist, human rights etc. - the common framework of this emerging form has been the transformed public sphere of mass media.

The development of transnational and global public spheres has coincided with the development of new media technologies, institutions and markets. Mass media have become less homogenous - technologies have multiplied, markets have fractured even as overall they have expanded, and interactivity has increased. However the transformation of the public sphere does not depend solely, or even mainly, on these developments, as the totemic importance of CNN and the Internet might suggest. It is important to emphasise the extent to which historic national media and institutions, such as radio, television and the BBC, have become primary vehicles for transnational and global trends. Just as state internationalisation has depended on the integration and harmonisation of nation-states' practices, so the transformation of media and civil society has involved interlinked national media. The hugely expanded and speeded-up flow of information and images between media institutions means that core content is increasingly harmonised, even while its framing in public broadcasting retains many distinctively national characteristics. The location of media in civil society is reinforced by the fundamental political transformations of our time. The movements towards democratisation in Latin America, east-central Europe and the former Soviet Union, and many parts of Asia, Africa and even the Middle East, in the last two

decades have had deep significance for the roles of media. Media and journalists are often in the forefront, and at the cutting edge, of transformative processes the diffusion of information through increasingly global media cannot be contained within bounds which even the most powerful state leaders would prefer.

I turn to an emblematic case of contemporary, post Cold War international relations: the Gulf War and its Kurdish aftermath.

Media as Sites and Actors in Global Politics: Conclusions from the Iraqi Wars

The Iraqi wars of 1990-91 present a considerable paradox in contemporary international relations. On the one hand, the (Persian) Gulf War appears as something of a limiting case, the first clearly interstate conflict after the Cold War to have involved the Western powers as direct protagonists rather than war-managers. It is therefore a standard against which other 'new wars' (as Kaldor, 1999, has called them) are measured, and only the Kosova war of 1999 has matched it. On the other hand, the Kurdish refugee crisis has been taken as a paradigm of a new form of 'humanitarian intervention' in which states use military power for ends distinct from the classic pursuit of strategic interest. Despite the obvious links of these two emblematic episodes, they have been studied for the most part separately. Moreover, despite the contrasting media roles which were central to the two cases, no attempt has been made to theorise the linkages between these experiences. In 1990-91, it involved four distinct phases of war: the Iraqi army's invasion of Kuwait; the UnitedStates-led coalition's campaign against the Iraqi state; the Shi'ite insurrection in the South of Iraq and its crushing by the Iraqi state; and the Kurdish insurrection in the North and its defeat. It was clear to all, of course, that the war was heavily mediated. The most important studies confirmed the success of the principal coalition states' governments and armed forces in managing media coverage, to reinforce the military campaign. (Taylor, 1992). There was little detailed attention to even this issue as it affected the Arab world. And almost all academic media studies ceased at the point at which George Bush attempted *but failed* to end the wars, with the coalition ceasefire of 28 February 1991.

There was therefore very little close attention to the role of the media in the insurrectionary wars and their aftermath, the huge and desparate exodus of refugees from the repression of the Saddam Hussein regime. This is extremely curious given that the totemic role of CNN, which arose first from its coverage of the coalition assault on Iraq, became identified in subsequent debates with the role of media in the Kurdish refugee crisis and the genesis of the Anglo-American-French intervention to create 'safe havens' in Kurdistan.

 The term 'CNN effect' - as emblematic of the media's role in international politics today as 'Vietnam syndrome' was in earlier days - means the ability of dramatic television pictures of suffering to force Western governments' hands in the way they are presumed to have done in the Kurdish case.

The Kurdish case became the paradigm for the debate about 'humanitarian intervention' which preoccupied many international scholars in the early and middle years of the decade and returned at its end with the Kosova war. International relations has mostly been happy to take the media's role for granted, in order to concentrate on the forms of intervention it was presumed to have induced.

First, we need to understand *the role of increasing inter-linkages of domestic and inter-state politics in global politics*. These are only partially and (compared to previous periods) less distinct fields within an increasingly common world political framework (Rosenau, 1997). The first mistake of Bush, John Major and other leaders, reproduced in many academic studies, was to believe that inter-state and domestic politics could be separated in the Iraqi situation. In effect, they mistook the convenient fiction of national sovereignty for a description of political reality. They intervened in the conflict of Iraq and Kuwait, apparently a straightforward inter-state conflict, only to find once they had succeeded in 'resolving' this issue that behind it lurked the complex social and political conflicts 'inside' Iraq. These 'internal' conflicts concerned, however, ethnic and religious groups which connected across the borders into neighbouring states (Iran, Turkey and Syria) and so involved international as well as domestic politics.

 Second, we need to start from the assumption that *global politics as a whole is constantly mediated in a more or less common framework*. States like other actors require sophisticated understandings of media if they are to complement their political and military with media strategies - and without successful integration of media with other strategies, the latter may also fail. So Iraqi military-political strategy failed because it was based on an out-dated version of the Vietnam syndrome - the belief that media would amplify US casualties to the point of withdrawal - which the US preempted. Coalition strategy was more successful in the short term, but the second mistake of Bush and Major was to believe that it was enough to successfully manage the media coverage of their planned military campaign. They failed to foresee how the constant mediation of political events would move beyond the situation beyond the results of their planned campaign, and would thus rebound

on the initial success. it is important to grasp *the dynamics of television, newspaper and other media coverage, especially the relations between film, commentary and text, in generating political impact*. Television news programmes, no more than newspapers, are simple purveyors of information and images. What is crucial is the narrative within which these two commodities are presented. Although predominantly visual media construct narratives in different ways from those of textual media, the narrative is still king. The ability of news presenters to frame visual images and representations of actors is crucial to their power. Only when governments can more or less define the narratives within which journalists operate can they hope to manage coverage.

The unexamined consensus about the 'power' of the media in the Kurdish crisis of 1991 is that television was able to show shocking visual images of refugees' suffering, the transmission of which aroused public opinion and forced the US and UK governments to change their policies.

Anyway these images did not work by themselves. Their impact depended on two additional factors. First, the presence on the ground of authoritative reporters, able to provide a first-hand gloss on the images which the cameras produced, was central. Secondly, the integration of both pictures and first-hand commentary into a general narrative - elaborated more or less consistently over a period of weeks by anchorpeople and through voiceovers as well as by the reporters on the ground - completed the process. In the final weeks before first the Major and then the Bush administrations made dramatic 'U-turns' towards intervention in northern Iraq. The power of this campaign made television the pivot of Western civil-society interventions in general, mobilising both general public opinion and the actions of other actors such as humanitarian organisations. However it also left the Kurds a walk-on role in their own salvation, as they were reduced to pidgin-English soundbites calling for help, their voices dwarfed by the journalists' own much more articulate and elaborated arguments.

Indeed, the Kurdish crisis was an almost unique conjuncture because of the investment of Western media as well as military resources in Iraq, the reaction of journalists against their subordinate role in the managed military campaign, and the very direct nexus of responsibility which television was able to exploit. These factors have not operated in the same ways even in Palestine, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti or Chechnya, in all of which large-scale global media coverage has occurred and played a political role - let alone in the dozens
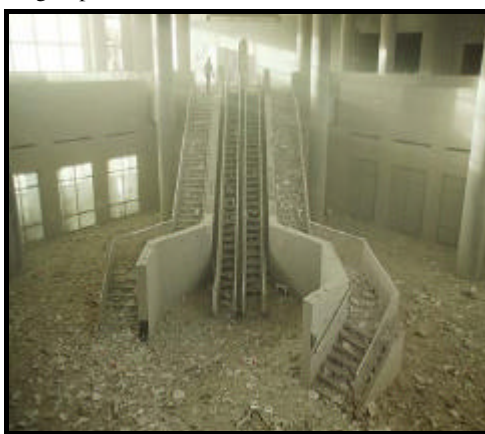
of wars around the world which have received minimal, episodic and generally unifluential coverage.

Chechnya

Not much can be said about media or public opinion and the ongoing crisis in the Russian province of Chechnya. The Russian government has been left to its own devices in dealing with the independence seeking rebels of Chechnya. They have succeded in many senses at framing the Chechens as terrorist and blaming them for several bombings that have taken places within Russian cities. Global Media has played a very limited role in even bringing the Chechen wars to the forefront discussion. Most striking are two front-page "Corriere della Sera" pictures which showed the Chechen capital Grozny before and after the massive Russian bombing campaign. The "after" picture showed the world a hollowed out version of the city, desolated and deserted. The led to some mild public opinion that Putin should be compelled to end his campaign in Chechnya. However, the West has seen some systemic interest in not crippling the viability of the Russian government and already-weakened economy by becoming directly involved.

Were one to compare to the situation in the former Yugoslavia without taking into account the historical power positions of the various nations, one would quickly assume that the Western powers would have intevened on behalf of the Chechens. The clear difference between the conflict in Chechnya and Recent U. S. and NATO intervention is the lingering respect for Russia, or more precisely a remembrance of a powerful Soviet empire based in Moscow, following the realist paradigm; or it can be seen also as an effect of the lack of interest played by the Western Media thus switching the discussion on the neo-realist theory. In my opinion both of them can be seen as consequences of the scarce interest from Westerns State's.

Indeed, the Kosovo war of 1999 was closer than any other conflict to the conditions of the Iraqi wars of 1991. It appeared, in its early stages at least, like a speeded-up, more concentrated version of the Gulf/Kurdistan crises. Here the interstate conflict, of NATO and Serbia, was inextricably linked from the start with the genocide of the Kosova Albanians (whereas in Iraq, the genocidal campaign against the Kurds had followed the interstate war which began over Kuwait). Here the nexus of responsibility implicating the West in the fate of Albanian civilians was present in the causes of intervention (rather than having to be established by media against the Western state as in Iraq). This connection of responsibility was deepened when Serbia responded to Western military action by intensifying its war against Kosovan civilians (similarly to how ferocious repression of Shi'ites and Kurds followed Western action against Iraq).

Media at War: The role played in the Kosovo crises

The Persian Gulf war had a specific narrative line, a precise schedule and an emphatic closure, leading some to suggest that the most appropriate metaphor for that war -- as experienced in the NATO Countries -- was "total television." Perhaps a comparable metaphor for the war in Yugoslavia is the World Wide Web. Not only was this the first war covered online, but this war and the web

completely the channels of information, no readily discernible borders, no real sense of history and no sense of closure, simply a chaotic, immanent, present.

I argue that complex issues of national identity affect the government and media narratives of war, which in turn affect its public reception I examine the role of global communication technologies as crucial vehicles for conveying the story of the war. The World Wide Web, in particular, is both symptom and agent of changes in notions of sovereignty, which underlie the apathetic reception of the war in Yugoslavia. The differences, however, between the two wars in terms of narrative structure and reception by the public reflect the changes in the Western Countries both economically and technologically in the past decade. Global communication technologies – the internet and particularly its graphical interface the World Wide Web -- made a crucial difference in the coverage and reception of the war in Yugoslavia. A spokesman for the Air Force Print Service, which hosted a web site for Air Force families put it this way, "Just as Desert Storm was the catalyst for CNN, the Kosovo crisis will be the stimulus for online news"(Verton:1999). In fact, because of the prominence of the Web during this time, this war has been called by some media sources the first Internet war and Web War I (Lynch: 1999). The sheer amount of information on the Web about the war in Yugoslavia was, in fact, overwhelming. A simple Boolean search with the key words "Kosovo And war" on the search engine Alta Vista found 3,831,464 Web pages. Monopolized by CNN and other major television news stations, the Gulf war was spun as a televised spectacle of U.S. technological might. The major networks constructed a tightly controlled media narrative, reflective of the limited freedom and information granted them by the U.S. government and military. Rather than being publicly critical of such limitations, however, the news media by and large chose instead to celebrate the war as a triumph of U.S. technologies – in particular, the "smart" weaponry. Because journalists were not allowed to enter the war zones and as little alternative information was available, the exaggerated claims about the efficiency of the weapon systems went unchallenged. General Schwarzkopf could claim that Patriot Missiles were "100 percent effective" without fear of repudiation. Later figures released would show the correct figure at less than six percent. Through reports from other media sources, the U.S. learned that such bombs went astray into neighboring countries, hit civilian neighborhoods, took out commuter trains and destroyed the Chinese embassy. Significantly, much of the information about possible targets and mishaps of the U.S. weapons systems were first posted on the Web, and then picked

up by news organizations. This critical information was available because, according to Web publishers and media analysts, the war in Yugoslavia was the first armed conflict in which all sides had an active presence on the internet(Lynch:1999). The presence on the Web of accessible information from all sides of the conflict contrasts sharply with the controlled coverage of Persian Gulf war. U.S. media coverage during the Gulf war was nearly mo-

nopolized by the major television networks. Through reports from other media sources, the U.S. learned that such bombs went astray into neighboring countries, hit civilian neighborhoods, took out commuter trains and destroyed the Chinese embassy. Significantly, much of the information about possible targets and mishaps of the U.S. weapons systems were first posted on the Web, and then picked up by news organizations. This critical information was available because, according to Web publishers and media analysts, the war in Yugoslavia was the first armed conflict in which all sides had an active presence on the internet.

The presence on the Web of accessible information from all sides of the conflict contrasts sharply with the controlled coverage of Persian Gulf war. U.S. media coverage during the Gulf war was nearly monopolized by the major television networks. Despite the access to multifaceted and multiple narratives of the war, and despite extensive amounts of alternative press, the U.S. public remained largely apathetic to the war in Yugoslavia. There was no call for public support by the media or politicians, as there was during the Persian Gulf war, and since no ground troops had been committed, and most of the U.S. citizens at risk were pilots high above the ground, the war remained a distant abstraction. Even before the ground troops had been sent in, the Persian Gulf war drew huge crowds of supporters and protesters alike to almost every major city in the U.S.; during the war in Yugoslavia such demonstrations were almost non-existent. Whereas thousands of protesters marched in Europe, protests in the U.S. generally had only a handful of participants.

Why this difference? American position, as e.g. with regard to the question of sending ground forces to Kosovo. Here a certain concept of 'Europe' emerged during the war, one defined by a partial opposition to the United States. The more general and essay-like articles on future visions of 'Europe' referred to a much wider concept, which is rather an idea than a concrete political or geographical space.

Although only examining a limited time period, the coverage of Kosovo highlighted the differences that exist between countries regarding the debate on the issue of common security policy in Europe, ranging from quite developed in France to barely existent in the UK. The differences between countries regarding his aspect of integration do of course reflect historical differences and traditions. It is also apparent that, in general, 'national security identity' and policy has not yet given way to any 'European' equivalent. It is not really surprising that this would be the case. Even where there was debate on European security policy, it tended to be from a 'national' perspective, an example being the case of Italy, with the focus on Italian solutions to European problems. There is a sense that media coverage, whether reflecting elite opinion or political statements, allows for differing definitions of what is 'European' and at what point it is appropriate to include the nation-state in this grouping.

Conclusion

The 1990s have therefore ended as they began, with highly mediated wars of the Western state against genocidal nation-states. If anything, the intensity of mediation increased, with the West in Kosovo c
In order to answer to that question we should analyse the role played by the Media in the European Countries.

Kosovo Crisis and Media in Europe

The Kosovo raised questions about peace and stability, expansion of the EU towards the East and the future role of NATO in Europe. All of these issues were important background debates in the media during the crisis but the nature and depth of discussion varied between countries influenced by past traditions and alliances and also by

age was given to coverage of the troops. Hence the CFSP and a European dimension constituted an important element in Italian coverage while the UK debates remained national or NATO-focussed. The reporting did not attempt to link explicitly the wider political and economic debates about European integration with events in the Balkans. The same failure to connect these events was true of both *The Times* and *The Guardian*. The Balkans conflict was neither discussed nor reported in the wider context of developments in the European Union, not least the implications of that conflict for common foreign and defence frameworks.

A particular aspect of the Spanish media during this time, which was more pronounced than in other countries was coverage of the Russian angle on the crisis due to Moscow visits of the Spanish President Aznar. On French television a series of thirty to ninety-second news reports on the TV primetime newscasts showed co-operation be-

current concerns and interests.
In Italy the conflict inspired debate about 'the concepts of 'Europe', 'European integration' and 'European identity' emerged in war news dealing with Europe's role in the crisis, with reference to the discussion of a 'European security identity' and foreign policies.' In both the Irish and Swedish media the Kosovo war revolved around questions of neutrality. In general debates on CFSP were apparent in all the quality press but severely lacking in Britain, the Scottish title, the *Herald*, being an exception. There was some focus on the national role being played in the conflict, which in Italy referred to the Italian government's peace proposals, while in Britain much cover-

tween, and possible divergences among, European leaders regarding Kosovo and examples of co-operation between European soldiers. There was concern that Europe
was playing second fiddle to the US within NATO, and that Kosovo illustrated the urgency of a common European defence and security policy.

The German media reflected internal debates including heavy critique within the Green Party of the government whose Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer is a member of the Green Party. Many opponents of the war left the Green Party, causing severe problems for the coalition.

The government had to steer between this critical position and the ommitted from the start to 'humanitarianism', and Serbia more astute than Iraq in utilising world and Western media to influence the struggle. These experiences underline the need, argued for in the first part of this essay, for an account of media in conflicts which is located in a larger understanding of the role of media more generally in global politics. This requires these issues to be taken out of the context of media studies and developed within international relations - but in an international theory which has been reconstructed so as to be able to encompass them.

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