The War against Iraq in Transnational Broadcasting

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Abstract: Looked at with the analytical tools of narrative text analysis, the coverage of the war against Iraq in transnational broadcasting appears to contain several conflicting accounts of what actually happened. For some, the BBC World and CNN International accounts of the war were mere Western propaganda. For others, on the other hand, they were objective and reliable narrations of the events. Our main point contends both of these beliefs. Available evidence suggests that transnational broadcasting is culture-specific and in many respects culturally biased. Far from being a point of view from nowhere, and providing culturally neutral accounts of the war, BBC World and CNN International reported the events using narrative patterns or models with strong cultural, ideological and political connotations. The "soccer" narrative model for BBC and the "crusade" one for CNN, although in practice supportive of Allied propaganda efforts, were not in principle forced upon journalists and reporters. Rather more interestingly, we believe that these models served as implicit and undisputed selective criteria affecting the reporting beyond even the reporters' awareness. This paper provides the conceptual tools to identify these narrative models, and ultimately, to oppose them in support of more responsible broadcasting and critical accounts of the constraints affecting transnational narrative communication.

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1. The Western Perspective: Crusade and Soccer

In this article, we present some reflections on how to make sense of CNN International and BBC World reports on Iraq in the late winter and early spring of 2003. These reflections are supported by empirical evidence obtained by applying a conceptual framework originally devised for the analysis of the communicative potential of transcultural broadcasting and for the implementation of critical monitoring of transnational broadcasting as suggested by Nordenstreng[1]. Within the scope of this short article, we cannot conduct a deep analysis of the concept of transnational broadcasting. Therefore, our operational definition is as follows: Any broadcasting – be it television or radio – is transnational if it is produced for a general, overseas audience from a general point of view. According to this definition, BBC World, Al Jazeera, and CNN International are transnational broadcasters. Their reports are produced in a certain country and in a certain language, but they are not primarily aimed at natives, nor do they primarily deal with domestic topics. The Swedish satellite channel SVT Europe as well as the Finnish short wave transmissions called Radio Finland are not transnational since they mainly serve audiences of expatriates or people that happen to have an interest in Sweden or Finland.

The Anglo-American war against Iraq was an uneasy challenge to the main transnational broadcasting actors. Unlike most news items, this one presumably divided the transnational news agencies into friends and foes from the point of view of the warring parties. There were mainly three transnational broadcasters covering the Iraq war from the beginning, i.e. CNN International, BBC World and Al Jazeera. In our study, we only consider the two Anglo-Saxon broadcasters, i.e. CNN International and BBC World. There are several reasons for this. A practical one is that our monitoring capacity during the war was very limited. However, there are more challenging reasons than this one.

Both empirically and theoretically, a comparative study of BBC World and CNN International provides an interesting approach to conventionally determined aspects of news reporting. The British and the Americans were allies, they both represent Western democratic values and they share a common language and faith. BBC and CNN share a relatively high public acceptance as reliable source. Nevertheless, our study shows that there are considerable differences between CNN International and BBC World even if these two broadcasters were attached to the same party of the conflict. While the Americans conceived the war as a crusade, the British looked upon it more like on a soccer game. We do not claim that either of the broadcasters would explicitly have claimed that the war was either a crusade or a soccer tournament. Our point is that we are able to identify conceptual patterns according to which scattered reports from the war were understood and presented by these agencies. We chose to call these two patterns "crusade" and "soccer game".

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[1] Kaarle Nordenstreng, 'Something to Be Done: Transnational Media Monitoring' in *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* No. 6 (Spring/Summer 2001), available from World Wide Web: <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring01/nordenstreng2/html> [24 July 2003]
See also Nordenstreng K. and Michael Griffin, Eds. (1999). *International Media Monitoring*, Cresskill, Hampton Press.

On a conceptual level, a crusade and a soccer tournament share several crucial features: Participants are divided into two competing factions. The reporter and the audience are supposed to have their sympathies with either of them, not both. There is a limited scope of possible outcomes, i.e. either "we" win or "they" win. The actions and tools available to the parties are limited in number and kind. Hence, the interesting part is how to use them, i.e. the strategic capability of the parties is highlighted. Psychological preparation is crucial. Nevertheless, unforeseen contingent circumstances can play a considerable part in the outcome. Crusades and soccer games, however, also present some important conceptual differences. Although both can trigger excessively nationalistic behaviour, the crusade concept tends to offer a more profound reference to the superiority of "our" culture as opposed to the inferiority of "their" culture. In a soccer game between national teams, from the "us" and "them" perspective one presupposes that "we" and "they" are morally on an equal basis, at least within the limited scope of this sport. A soccer game is about who wins, but winning a soccer game does not imply ideological or religious superiority.

In our study, we came to the conclusion that some of the most significant differences and similarities in CNN and BBC coverage systematically alluded to narrative models consistent with the crusade and soccer game metaphors respectively. More precisely, we have reason to believe that albeit not explicitly uttered, crusade and soccer games played a role as 'systematic metaphorical concepts' (Lakoff and Johnson 1981, 55) that structured news reports. This means, in practice, that *the communicative point of a significant part of the television news reports could be identified only within the logical framework of either of these metaphors*. The principal features of an action-logic ascribed to, or identified by, the crusade and soccer game metaphors can be summarised in terms of two sets of value judgments:

- *Moralization*: the attribution of moral connotation to the quest for victory, to the stand of players and the players themselves is a most significant element in crusade's narratives. A crusade is a cause with sacred element and success a sign of moral superiority while victory in a soccer match only proves better training and, to a certain extent, luck.
- *Polarization*: in a crusade-type narrative model the representation of third actors forces them into either friends' or foes' role, while in soccer-game type narratives support for third teams is clearly a more accepted possibility.

As we shall see later on this seems to hold true for the reports at some key stages of the crisis – e.g. the Powell's presentation, the breakdown of diplomacy and the beginning of war – and in relations to some key topics within the main story – e.g. the role of technology and the representation of the media.

In this article, we show that the discrepancies between CNN and BBC are not only relevant from a political point of view. We claim that these differences can be used in order to show in what ways broadcasting is nationally, culturally or ethnically founded even if it strives to be global and, thus, in some sense culturally neutral. Furthermore, we claim that an understanding of the role of such cultural foundations is necessary if one

wants to grasp the distinction between an unavoidable cultural bias and deliberate manipulation. From an analytical point of view, it does not matter whether a broadcaster is committed explicitly to a certain set of values and beliefs or not. If the output makes sense only from a certain epistemological or ethical point of view, then the broadcaster, at least implicitly, is committed to that worldview.

2. News Reports: Narrative Communication

Western transnational broadcasters were seduced into acceptance of the Pentagon epistemic model of the conflict. Part of the reason why this happened, we suspect, might have to do with the incapacity of BBC World and CNN International to formulate alternative narrative patterns for the description of the war against Iraq as a war against "evil" – a point irresistibly clear and simple. Before we turn to the analysis of the narrative effects of this "seduction" it might be useful to spend a few words on describing four distinctive traits that are common to all narrative models.

Firstly, narratives presuppose a temporal closure of the reported chain of events. Soccer matches, royal weddings and other such occasions can be shown live on television with great success. This is, however, only due to the fact that they are highly predictable processes. A soccer game cannot include helicopters flying in live elephants or sudden smart bombings of the goalkeeper. A narrative can be produced only when the author knows the total chain of events that should be covered, or at least the type of events that form this chain. During a soccer game, the producer of the television programme does not know which team will win. What s/he does know is that there are only three possible solutions. Furthermore, the types of events presented on television from a game are fairly limited in number. One can prepare for almost any possible combination of them so that the overall story makes sense to a viewer not present at the match. War reporting is much more unpredictable. It is not known when and where the most significant events will take place. It is not even known which events should be considered significant, because one does not know whether this is the story about Saddam's Waterloo or about Bush's Vietnam.

Secondly, narratives are structured in terms of chains of events that provide the explanation to the question "how did it happen?" when something significant has occurred and we want to know the reasons or the causal chain that lead to that situation. News reporting has been and will probably remain a problematic case of narration because news events rarely occur as nice and tidy packages of temporally closed processes. Instead, they are slices of long and not very well defined chains of events. Mostly, however, the news is told in a mode that presupposes a certain narrative model or structure: as a series of events belonging to a greater story.

Thirdly, narratives are construed according to models that are re-used over and over. The model most frequently used is probably that of David and Goliath. One of the involved parties is ascribed as the poorly equipped but morally superior David, while the other one

is given the function of Goliath, the representative of the foreign, the evil and brutal force. For instance, during the Gulf War of 1991, much effort was put into shaping the perception of the course of events in terms of a conflict between Kuwait (David) and Iraq (Goliath). In this somewhat non-canonical version of that biblical story, the US-led coalition was given the task of the celestial forces assisting David. The longer this conflict lasted, the more evident it became that the David and Goliath model did not suit. In the 2003 conflict it was self-evident that a David and Goliath model would be disastrous for the US case. The United States could not be given the role of David because evidently Saddam had not made a convincing appearance as Goliath in that comparison. On the other hand, the US would clearly have been unhappy starring as Goliath in domestic and Western media.

Finally, the narrative model is an abstraction. It is not necessary for the broadcaster or for the viewer to recognise it explicitly or to name it. Rather the narrative model is an unconscious epistemic device that serves as an unmarked reference for the correct understanding of similar stories. In "Tom & Jerry" cartoons even a small child understands who the bad guy is and who the good guy is. In journalistic reporting, most significantly in television news, one has to pick the correct single events out of a complex crowd of events in order to construe an intelligible story. Hesitations as to what narrative model should be adopted undermine the possibility of picking out the right events. In the war against Iraq, the news organisations had two main alternatives: either to stick with the Alliance, or to have no footage on any significant events.

3. Conceptual framework

Our analysis of the narrative patterns affecting the news reports from the war against Iraq is conducted along four dimensions. These dimensions[2] are listed here in order of decreasing communicative prominence:

- **the contextual or social dimension** hosts the communicative point of the act, i.e. what epistemic conclusions are made either about things within the story or about things outside the story,
- **the structural or textual dimension** consists of convention-governed, meaningful patterns of signs, e.g. to ascribe the function of "bad guy" or "good guy" to a specific person within the story, cf. *dramatis personae*,
- **the referential dimension** is ruled by semantic conventions of reference between a sign and the phenomenon to which it refers, e.g. images of red spots on a green surface denoting blood on grass,
- **the perceptual dimension** encompasses stimuli emitted by the television screen and loudspeakers, but also shifts in intensity and other physical features.

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[2] Our four-dimensional approach relies on similar principles presented by the aesthetician Roman Ingarden (1972 [1931]), his teacher Adolf Reinach (1989 [1911&1913]), and later by speech act theorists J.L. Austin (1986 [1960]) and J.R. Searle (1969, 1975).

One main task, if not *the* main task of any broadcaster with journalistic ambitions is to bring sense and order to seemingly chaotic chains of events. The communicative point of war reporting is to establish a certain set of judgments about war significance to the viewers, i.e. on the social dimension. Mainly, sense and order are mastered by means of meaningful patterns, such as the Crusade framework, i.e. the significance of singular events is established on the structural dimension. The semantics and the technical articulation of a report are less of a problem once the point and the epistemic structure have been established.

In practice, however, television reporting needs heavy preparations and detailed planning in order to achieve the aesthetic values that make the message acceptable to the audience, i.e. comprehensible and appealing. The possibility of knowing what is going to happen and what the significance of certain types of events is, make producers much more comfortable in the planning and execution of their reports. This is why every news organisation is tempted to rely on a pre-conceived idea about the nature of a certain chain of events. In the war against Iraq, the most likely party to provide correct – in practical terms – predictions about the future unfolding of events was the Pentagon. Even if the transnational broadcasters were to disagree with the US government on the justification of the war, it was in their interest to be able to cover it at their best.

We do not claim knowledge of any deliberate conspiracy on behalf of the Pentagon and the CNN in order to mislead the public. There might have been one, but our analytic tools do not deal with such matters. However, we claim that the nature of television reporting made it hard to avoid a seductive invitation by those who planned the war to accept their epistemic model, and, thus, to make the communicative point they strived for. CNN International's adherence to the Crusade structure provided by the Pentagon raises the question on the transnational feasibility of its reports. The validity of these deliberations is subordinated to the acceptance of the following assumptions, which are not defended or explained in any further detail in this article:

- **The principle of social convention:** A communicative expression, e.g. a news report, makes sense[3] only as far as there is a social convention to which it adheres.
- **The principle of social context:** A communicative expression, e.g. a news report, makes sense only in a specified social context.
- **The principle of consistency:** A communicative expression, e.g. a news report, can be judged in terms of consistency of its sense.

It follows from these principles that we are allowed to draw conclusions about the worldview of a communicator even if this person might deny our judgments. But, we are allowed to do this only with regard to sufficient knowledge of the social context and conventions underlying this message.

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[3] We like to use the phrase 'making sense' as opposed to 'mean' because the latter term is loaded with counterproductive connotations in logic, linguistics, and other disciplines dealing with symbols and communication.

CNN International took for granted that the war against Iraq was a genuine crusade and that the American concept of crusade is globally acknowledged. According to our three assumptions, this implies an attitude that makes serious transcultural or transnational broadcasting virtually impossible.

Either CNN International actually worked under the premise that nobody could ever doubt the American case, or then CNN tired to manipulate its audience into accepting the crusade premise. In either case, shortcomings of this kind revealed some weakness in the allegedly transnational approach by CNN International.

On the structural dimension, CNN made yet another fatally false judgment. Understanding the concept of crusade is strongly dependent on one's cultural heritage. In America, it seems, crusades are seen as limited and justified violent actions that aim at restoring or installing a justified state of affairs on foreign territory. In Western Europe, it seems, crusades are seen as malfunctioned efforts to achieve an idealistic but in practical terms hollow cause. In the Arab world, crusades are seen as unpredictable, unjustified aggression an intrusion by evil forces on holy land.

4. Making Sense: Ascribing Meaning to Events

In order to see how news reports make sense we need identify the tools we use on the four levels. Normally, discussions concerning media coverage focus merely on the second level, i.e. on the dimension of literal reference. Along this line, one may think that a report has been objective and serious if and when a corpse is shown when there is a corpse. More recently, however, there has been a move towards analysing features on the third level, i.e. on the structural dimension. One is supposed to pay attention to whether the Iraqis or the US marines are depicted as "good guys" or as "bad guys". Being a "good guy" or a "bad guy" in a story depends on what kinds of actions are shown. You identify the "bad guys" by the way they behave. And you identify the "good guys" by the fact that they oppose the bad ones. The reasons why certain *actant models* (cf. Genette 1983) or *narrative patterns* are imposed on certain reported events have been less frequently discussed.

Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), our claim is that certain narrative patterns reflect culture-specific understandings of the events narrated. In addition, our claim is that specific and identifiable narrative models restrict the range of understandings that uncritical viewers can sensibly achieve of reported events. On the fourth level, i.e. on the contextual dimension, the war reports rely on these socially construed schemata and in doing so enforce them. Reporting the war as a battle between good and evil, not only establishes Iraq as evil and the Allied as good but it also establishes implicit criteria concerning what actions are appropriate or not, what are the tolerable costs, what goals should be sought and what outcomes are expected, etc. In fact, the narrative models selected to narrate events do affect the nature of the expected ending of the story reported. Depending on the circumstances, however, not all narrative models are suitable for every type of event. From our point of view, the presumed end of the story, i.e. the

'liberation' of Iraq, offered to both BBC and CNN journalists the general framework or a sort of discursive "algorithm" according to which significant events during the conflict could be identified and reported in a meaningful way.

The "crusade" and "soccer game" narrative models set both the expected end of the war and the war itself as inevitable. In transnational communicative practice, the adoption of these models marginalised the relevance of diplomacy to that of a mere prelude to military actions rather than a credible alternative to it. This narrative choice was clearly germane to the stand that the US and British governments, in practice, if not in principle, had on the issue. Furthermore, it established selective albeit latent narrative criteria to distinguish what is salient, what is not, what type of events to include or to exclude in reports, and the style and substance of appropriate comments. In the myths, events unfold according to the path of necessity: whatever happens, it happens because it had to happen. And the triumph of the "good" is possible because it is inscribed in this trait of the myth narrative: its necessity. As in every myth, also the myth of American power against dictatorship is inscribed in the past and is run by necessity. BBC and CNN supported this myth, albeit in a very different way, by accepting to tell the story about the war against Iraq through the narrative of the eternal struggle between good and evil and, especially CNN, as another episode of a century-long clash between US democracy and foreign dictators.

5. The power of transnational broadcasting

Before we turn to a more direct analysis of the war against Iraq coverage in CNN International and BBC World, we should clarify the ground for the peculiar social saliency we attribute to narrative patterns in transnational broadcasting

If looked at in its social significance, the most distinctive feature of transnational broadcasting is its 'power': CNN and BBC (and Al Jazeera) can *do* things that other broadcasting agencies cannot. They can produce news stories whose quantity and quality have no rivals; they can pick and chose news stories from virtually every corner of the planet and show them worldwide. A subtler feature of transnational broadcasting power has to do with the relationship that, by virtue of its ubiquity and real-time broadcasting technology, transnational broadcasting can establish with the events it covers. In this respect, only transnational broadcasting can tell stories while they are happening and give them a meaning while their outcome is still uncertain. Only transnational broadcasting has the 'power' to collapse events and their narratives at a global level. Technology provides those broadcasting organisations with the material conditions to impose specific interpretations of events or explanatory frames, whose social intelligibility depends however on non-material conditions. These frames are not more accurate, objective or 'true' than those provided, e.g. by local broadcasting: they are just unchallenged because transnational broadcasting supremacy is based on technological but also financial and organisational factors unmatched by local competitors.

The special status and "power" of transnational broadcasting can be described in relation to at least three aspects (crucial in relation to the issues of power): 1) *Technological capacity*: access to satellite and to state-of-the-art information and communication technology that enable the production and distribution of unmatched quantitative and qualitative levels of information in support of socially influential narratives; 2) *Organisational capacity*: accountable for the extensive coverage from everywhere and distribution almost everywhere in the world; 3) *Transnational audience*: an audience not identified by national affiliation but rather by linguistic and socio-economic status.

At least three consequences follow from this. a) Transnational audiences create the illusion that transnational broadcasting is the "voice" of the international community – itself a notion historically rooted in the liberal idea that international affairs are managed by elites which, despite differences, share some very basic values, interests and goals. b) Transnational media mistakenly appear as the vectors for transnational narratives: accounts transcending the particularities of local perspectives on behalf of a "broader" and apparently more reliable view of local events. c) The material possibilities of transnational broadcasting imply more extensive and high-quality visual accounts of events supporting the illusion of a more trustful account of them – a belief based on the two misleading ideas: "that a picture is worth a thousand words" and that "images talk for themselves".

In the era of the "war on terror", transnational broadcasting is a crucial asset because it represents the "natural" voice of the world; the parameter of what is "good" and what is "evil", of what is true and what is false and of what is authoritative and what is preposterous. The relevance of the very special function these types of media perform in contemporary societies – coupled with an international situation which seems to promise more conflicts such as the last war against Iraq – provides indisputable ground in support of the calls for transnational media monitoring applied to war coverage broadcasting[4] and also, we believe, for a more informed and effective training in critical broadcasting.

In the following sections, we apply this type of narrative analysis to four themes which we believe particularly interesting in the overall coverage: 1) the case for war as presented by the US Secretary of State Colin Powell at the UN Security Council on February 5th; 2) the failed effort by the US and UK to gain UN support for military action against – the so-called "breakdown of diplomacy" – on March 17th, three days before the actual start of hostilities; 3) the way in which technology enters the coverage of the war and, last but not least, 4) the way in which the role of the media was depicted in the conflict. In each of these cases, the main differences can be easily interpreted in relation to different the narrative patterns adopted by CNN International and BBC World – "crusade" and "soccer" respectively. Finally, some reflections concerning the implications of this type of analysis for journalists are offered in the concluding section.

6. The case for war: Powell presentation at the UN Security Council

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[4] Nordenstreng, 2001 op. cit. Nordenstreng and Griffin, 1999, op. cit..

Looked at from the contextual or social dimension – the fourth dimension described above – the attitude of CNN International and BBC World towards the case for war – as presented by US Secretary of State Colin Powell at the UN Security Council on February 5th – shows a rather interesting set of differences and similarities. Polarization and moralization effects are rather evident in CNN coverage of the debate on the case for war and stand in marked contrast with BBC position on the issue. In CNN War is portrayed as preferred, simplest and somehow more natural outcome to the crisis, while the alleged causes and potential consequences of war itself are left unquestioned. In BBC the rationale for war appears more problematic, dissenting opinions and criticism receive far more attention. Despite this, however, in both accounts the issue is moralised in support of the US by associating Powell's presentation at the UN Security Council with the US stance against Soviet missiles in Cuba in the Sixties.

The narrative pattern followed by CNN seemed to imply that the political discussion and diplomatic negotiations were meaningful only as pre-war preparations: events were reported as parts of a story which had still to happen but whose overall unfolding was already known – and accepted – by the newsmakers. Albeit a negotiated solution was still technically possible, the reporting of the debate was framed in ways so to make the US and UK inclination to resort to war a more effective or "simple" solution to the Iraqi problems, as opposed to the extension and deepening of inspections sought by France, Germany, Russia, and China among others. CNN did not simply cover the Powell presentation at the UN but actually promoted the US Secretary of State's overall point. From the perspective of CNN journalists such as Jim Clancy and Zain Verjee, the focus seemed to be on establishing who the "friends" were and who the "foes" were much more than on the persuasiveness of the case for war. The two main arguments – the Saddam regime support for al-Qaida and the possession of operational weapons of mass destruction – were never really challenged and dissenting comments were overtly opposed. This is how, for example, CNN's Jim Clancy commented on the speech by the French Foreign Minister, broadcasted live from the UN Security Council, which followed Powell's presentation:

> (CNN) «Firmly on defence and not choosing side other than the France has already staked out, and that is calling for more inspections foreign Ministry Dominique de Villepin, they are complicating things if you will, calling for an enhanced regime of inspections that might require another UN Security Council resolution there and saying we shouldn't be in any rush to get to war..." (CNN 05 Feb. 2003 at 17.43 GMT).

Right after that CNN journalist Zain Verjee interviews the Editor of Al-quds Al Arabi, Abdel Bari Atwan. The idea of inviting comments from an Arab journalist was presumably inspired by the effort of voicing an alternative view from non-Western commentators. This plan however got rapidly sour once the guest started to express his perplexity and outright disappointment with the overall quality of "evidence" provided by Powell.

> (CNN) «The issue of al-Qaida link to Iraq: what did you make of that?»

Atwan «I believe this is the Secretary of State weakest point …» (CNN 23 Feb. 2003 at 17:43:36 HT).

CNN Verjee interrupts Atwan and, after having established that Powell evidence was compelling she asks Atwan a question whose value cannot be other than rhetorical:

(CNN) «We have seen a lot of visual evidence that most people, some at least would say was compelling … Are you convinced by those intercepts that Iraq is hiding weapons that Iraq is deliberately not cooperating? » (CNN 05 Feb. 2003 at 17:46 GMT)

In his answer, Atwan states that more time should be given to UN inspectors to actually control the information provided by Powell which, as it is, does not seem convincing enough to justify a war – a point also made by British arms control expert Trevor Findlay contemporarily on air on BBC World. Visibly annoyed by Atwan's response, CNN journalist Zain Verjee cut short concluding the interview:

(CNN) «Unconvincing to you Abdel Bari Atwan [turning away visibly annoyed]. We'll continue to check in with you as we dissect the body of what Colin Powell had to say this day at the UN Security Council». (CNN 05 Feb. 2003, 17:48 GMT).

While CNN International appears to endorse as stand of militant journalism in support of Powell's case for war, BBC World openly criticised many of the premises on which war was considered necessary. This is how BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner answers BBC Stephen Cole's question: 'what does Western intelligence really think about Iraq?' a few hours before Powell's presentation at the Security Council:

(BBC) «What it [Western intelligence] thinks about Iraq is really divided in two issues: is Iraq hiding weapons of mass destruction? Probably yes according to Western intelligence. Has Iraq or has Saddam Hussein's regime got institutional links with al-Qaida? Almost certainly no. Now what we are seeing here, Steve is a large degree of manipulation of this intelligence by politicians. It's clearly in President Bush's interest and in Prime Minister Tony Blair's interest to pump up the case against Saddam Hussein as much as possible» (BBC 05 Feb. 2003 at 11:06 GMT)

At about the same time when CNN journalist Zain Verjee was reprimanding her Arab colleague, BBC's Nik Gowing went so far into his critical attitude toward Powell's alleged "evidence" to ask Trevor Findlay, arms control expert and executive director of Vertic, the following question:

(BBC) (Gowing): «Should we have assumed, should we believe that this is genuine or in other words has not been put together in a lab by the CIA or the dirty tricks department somewhere in Washington? (…) The reason I've said that is that of course if we think back to the incubator story, of the babies, where the incubators were switched off in Kuwait, we now know that that was all fabricated, put together by the dirty tricks department back in 1990 – 1991»

(Findlay): «Indeed … so that is possible ..» (BBC, 05 Feb. 2003 at 17:45 GMT)

Despite an overall more critical stand on the specificities of Powell's case for war, however, BBC International as CNN World both established an important historical linkage which framed the symbolical meaning of that presentation in more positive terms for the US. The case for war against Iraq was associated to one of the most delicate moments in the history of the Cold War, when the world seemed on the brink of a direct military confrontation between the US and USSR: the address of US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson in the same forum forty years earlier, facing the Soviet Ambassador with the 'photographic evidence" of missiles in Cuba in 1963. First on BBC:

> (BBC) «…Another place, another time, but history is almost repeating itself. Just over four decades ago the US Ambassador to the UN, Adlei Stevenson, presented evidence to the Security Council that showed a nuclear missile build-up in Cuba. Now the Bush Administration is attempting to replicate that dramatic diplomatic feat …» (BBC 05 Feb. 2003 at 11:01 GMT)

And later on CNN:

> (CNN) «You can't help to draw comparison with a dramatic event at the United Nations four decades ago. That was when US Ambassador Adlei Stevenson confronted the Russian Ambassador with photographic evidence of Russian missiles in Cuba. Will Secretary Powell turn before the Security Council have the same impact?» (CNN 05 Feb. 2003 at 15:15 GMT)

Notwithstanding obvious inconsistencies, this analogy deserves attention for the linkage it establishes with the Cold War narrative. In this narrative, the US action was legitimised on the ground that the enemy was an agent of somebody else, as Western communist parties were in the USSR. By establishing a narrative linkage with the Cuban missile crises, CNN International and BBC World effectively recalled the political polarisation of international affairs in those years and the US supremacy as the leader of the 'free world"- an idea that appears much less convincing today. At the same time the linkage implicitly depicts Saddam's regime as a threat of comparable magnitude to that of Cuba equipped nuclear missiles and both as 'agents" of a bigger and more threatening power – Bin Laden and the Soviet Union respectively. Notwithstanding the British intelligence services report leaked to the BBC which explicitly denied effective linkages between Saddam regime and Al-Qaida, the narrative of the war against Iraq was presented as a legitimate initiative in the frame of the 'war on terror" from the beginning. CNN International and, surprisingly given its more critical attitude on the issue, BBC World did not hesitate to adopt a narrative pattern that supported, rather than challenged, the analogy with the US-Soviet confrontation at the UN Security Council on the Cuban missiles.

7. The breakdown of diplomacy and the start of the "real" action

The analysis of the contextual or social dimension seems particularly useful in assessing the way in which BBC World and CNN International made sense of another topical moment in the evolution of the crisis, namely the diplomatic "breakdown" at the UN Security Council on March 17th. The focus in BBC and CNN reports is on the failure of Allies' initiative and France opposition to their effort to have the approval of UN Security Council for their military action. In these accounts, polarization, moralization combine in conveying the idea that support for the Allies was the right choice while opposition to them a wrong cause. When war finally appeared inevitable, attention shifted to the battlefield. As in the minutes preceding important soccer events, BBC reports showed opposing team getting ready for the match to come while CNN coverage focuses mostly on US political and military preparations and comments.

With mounting opposition at home and the coalition building efforts substantially frustrated, US and British diplomacy aimed at obtaining a "second" UN resolution in support of their military action in Iraq – in practice a legalisation of the war *de jure*. Among the most prominent international opponents – France, Germany, Russia, and China – French President Jacques Chirac announced France would veto all initiatives which might lead to war. Allegedly because of this, on March 17th the UK Ambassador to the UN declared that he and his colleagues from US and Spain had decided not to submit the draft for the "second resolution" to the UN Security Council. On technical grounds the move simply signalled the end of the US and British efforts to look for the international blessing of their military actions, with no impairment to further diplomatic initiatives by the UN or other countries to avert war. In the narrative of Anglo-Saxon transnational broadcasting, however, that act meant the end of the diplomatic confrontation and the beginning of the "real" war. In sum, both the BBC and CNN adopted a narrative description of the event according to which war was going to happen because of, rather than despite, France.

The interesting aspect here is that both CNN and BBC journalists seemed to have interiorised an idea of diplomatic "success" closer to the plans of the Bush administration and Prime Minister Blair than to those who wanted to avoid war.

CNN Ralitza Vassileva introduces the issue as follows:
>«A critical day and British Prime Minister Tony Blair is holding an emergency cabinet meeting about an hour from now to discuss whether diplomatic efforts to avert war have been exhausted … Three permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia, France and China remain opposed to military action (CNN 17 March 2003 at 15:01 GMT)

Why not say: two permanent members, the US and UK, remain committed to military action? A plausible explanation is that the CNN anchorwoman had implicitly assumed the Anglo-American perspective on the issue. Moralization implicit in the crusade metaphor gave Allied so much higher ground that blame was put not on those who wanted war but rather on those who did not support it. The British interpretation was voiced shortly after by the British Ambassador to the UN, Sir Jeremy Greenstock:

«…As you know, we have worked very hard in the last few days in a final effort to seek consensus on Iraq in an effort to reunite the Council. The UK proposed last week an ultimatum which would challenge Iraq to take a strategic decision to disarm … Having held further discussions with the Council members over the weekend and in the last few hours, we have to conclude that Council consensus will not be possible in line with resolution 1441. One country in particular has underlined its intentions to veto any ultimatum, quote "no matter what the circumstances" unquote. That country rejected our proposed compromise before even the Iraqi government itself and just put forward suggestions that would row back on the unanimous agreement of the Council in resolution 1441, and those suggestions would amount to no ultimatum, no pressure, and no disarmament. Given this situation, the co-sponsors (US, UK and Spain) have agreed that we will not pursue a vote on the Draft UK, US, Spanish resolution in blue … The co-sponsors reserve their rights to take their own steps to secure the disarmament of Iraq» (CNN and BBC 17 March 2003 at 15:02 GMT)

In the CNN correspondent Michael Okwu's report, the theme of "simplicity" returns associated with drift toward war, when his colleague from the studio asked him if something could be done to prevent a war from happening

(CNN) «Well, I can tell you this much, Ralitza, as far as I can see right now …this is over. There is again a very eerie simplicity about this. After all the verbal jousting …it has essentially come down to this: the US, Spain and the UK had a resolution on the table that said March 17th was in fact the deadline, they are not waiting beyond the 17th to take action …Those three diplomats are not at all happy with the way the French played this out» (CNN 17 March 2003, 15:16 GMT).

In fact, in both the CNN and BBC accounts, it was the "breakdown of diplomacy" that made war inevitable and France, rather than merely frustrating the American and British efforts to legalise the war, was actually responsible for it.

(CNN) «…US Secretary of State once seen as a voice against war in Iraq then as a voice for international consensus on a war in Iraq, confirms there has been no consensus at the UN Security Council and blames France. War now looks imminent» (CNN 17 March 2003 16:08 GMT)

While virtually all those commenting the events of those hours showed a similar misperception, it was the BBC correspondent from the UN, Philippa Tomas who eventually fell victim to a slip of the tongue, reflecting the dominant narrative pattern. Describing the "breakdown" of diplomacy as virtually the beginning of war, she misled the audience into believing that the second resolution was aimed at averting the conflict rather than, as it was, legalising it. Asked by her colleague in the studio about the practical relevance of Blix's report on the precipitating events, Philippa Tomas answered as follows:

(BBC) «Hans Blix has been carrying on with his work…in a sense, he [Blix] has to continue even though a resolution to avert conflict has been withdrawn…» (BBC 17 March 2003 at 19:05:34 GMT)

In that narrative pattern, the resolution to legalise war was confused with one to actually avert it. And since France was a prominent actor in opposing the legalisation of Bush and Blair's invasion of Iraq, France's behaviour could appear responsible for the collapse of diplomacy and the imminent war[5]. As the BBC correspondent from Paris, Stephen Sackur answering the question from a colleague in studio 'is this what France wanted?' put it:

> «Well I wouldn't say the situation is what France wanted but in a set of bad options I think the French are at least pleased that they didn't in the end have to exercise their veto … Nobody I think in Paris would pretend that this is a good situation. What we will have though over the next few hours, quite clearly from the French, is a lot of justification for what they have done …But the British and the Americans are insisting that Chirac send a signal that there would not be a second resolution and that took the pressure off Saddam Hussein and that's why, according to Washington and London, we've now reached the point where war is inevitable and it's inevitable without the specific authorisation of the UN. This blame game, this recrimination atmosphere … it clearly does raise serious questions about the United Nations and certainly about the European Union and Nato as well where those three countries, Britain, United States and France are supposed to be allies and supposed to be working together » (BBC 17 March 2003 at 18:06 – 18:08 GMT)

In addition, albeit diplomatic activity involving France, Germany, Russia and China was actually still going on, the narrative patterns at the BBC left no opportunities for coverage, hence endorsing in practice, if not in principle, the US and British line on the matter. Symptomatically, in making the case that 'the time of diplomacy is over' earlier on, Philippa Tomas seems to endorse the US Ambassador's position on the issue:

> (BBC)« … And we know that still here the ambassadors from France, from Germany, from Russia believe that there could still be more talking to be done, there could be a possible way to avert war, somehow get a resolution together. However it's got to the point where the US, at least, isn't listening to that, it's moved on beyond that. We heard from the US Ambassador here, John Negroponte that the time for diplomacy is literally exhausted. So whatever some of the ambassadors here are saying, the majority feeling is it's over: the US is going to go ahead with military action» (BBC 17 March 2003 at 21:04: HT),

And as the US was not listening, the BBC and CNN were not even reporting. A reason for it is presumably that attention was already turned to the field where the battle was going to start. BBC World follows the script of a soccer event, and the live broadcasting of the actual match was preceded by reportages portraying the opposing teams. Albeit under some 'reporting restrictions' Rageh Omaar reports from Baghdad

> (BBC) «The Iraqi government has long promised a bitter battle for Baghdad. [images of heavy artillery moving on trucks] The movement of this military

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[5] It should be noted that France had already displeased Bush and Blair by vetoing the activation of Nato in support of Turkey, with a move that opened up the most serious split in the history of the Northern Alliance. (Quote)

equipment to the city is at the very least a clear sign that they are preparing for this». (BBC 17 March 2003 at 15:21 GMT)

Right after that, lights moved on to the Allied forces with Hilary Anderson's emphatic report from North Kuwait

(BBC) «[Image of British soldiers shooting with machine gun]. They're armed primed and ready. This live ammunition exercise, close enough to Iraq to be heard across the border. While the world agonises about all this, the focus here is utterly clear [anti-tank missile launched by British vehicle] This Milan anti-tank rocket system operated by the paratroopers is designed to move fast and take out Iraqi positions» (BBC 17 March 2003 at 15:22:43 HT)

At about the same time, CNN illustrates the preparation for war spicing it up a bit, as Barbara Starr reports from the Pentagon:

(CNN) «Pentagon officials are saying that there is some evidence, the new, fresh, recent evidence, that Iraq is making preparations to use chemical weapons possibly against US troops or their own citizens [images allegedly from Holliman Air Force Base in Texas: US soldier wearing special protection suites, practising in the use of equipment, and Stealth fighter plane flying] (CNN 17 March 2003 at 16:51 GMT)

As is now known, Iraq never used non-conventional weapons during the war and none of the chemical ammunitions mentioned in these reports has yet been found in its aftermath. Interestingly enough, however, these early reports anticipate a pattern that will be common during the war: the reliance on technology as a common feature of both the military and the media.

8. Technology and death

Framed within the crusade metaphor, Allied technological superiority is not associated to the idea of unequal confrontation but on the opposite, to the Allied moral and cultural superiority. The role of technology is moralized and polarised: Allied weaponry supports the just cause and it is hence "good" technology, as opposed to the technology supporting the construction of enemy's weapons – conventional or not. The precision of Allied weaponry is taken as a dogma and Allied military technology praised for its efficiency in producing allegedly selective death. This stand, endorsed by CNN more than BBC, practically implied that civilian casualties were either enemies or victim of the enemy's weaponry. Moralization and polarization also affect media technology, blurring the distinction between witness/reporters and participants but also that between fiction and reality. Expected and successful achievements are shown before they actually happen; computer generated representations supports accounts of ongoing events that anticipate the future and help bringing it about as self-fulfilling prophecy. The representation of technology played a distinctively relevant role in supporting the crusade metaphor narrative model. Computer-generated representations of high-tech warfare were abundantly used by both CNN and the BBC to provide their audience with graphic explanation of the unfolding campaign. A most remarkable achievement of the efforts to

control wartime broadcasting in the war against Iraq is the almost absolute removal of the wanted and unwanted effects of military action – namely death – from the iconic content supporting the news stories. In narrative terms, this removal reflected mainstream interpretations of the so-called 'revolution" in military affairs (RMA), which CNN and to a lesser degree also the BBC seemed to have taken at face value. Albeit early reports of Allied casualties produced by "friendly fire" leave room for reasonable suspicion, the claim of US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld (cf. Donald Rumsfeld on CNN 21 March 2003 at 20:50HT and broadcasted many times by both CNN and the BBC in the following days) about the 'undreamed" precision of the US arsenal went largely unchallenged.

Technology enters GW03 coverage in at least three basic ways: as a tool for war, for its coverage and for the representation of its features. During the entire campaign most of the reports from "embedded" reporters were rather indulging in the description of technical details of the weapons systems and, in some cases, quite overtly enthusiastic about allied and especially American superior military technology. CNN International used computer-generated animation showing technical details of US weapons systems in a way closely reminiscent of the tele-shopping kind of reporting already seen in the 2001 bombing campaign in Afghanistan (Thussu 2003, 125) (e.g. CNN 21 March 2003 at 06:16 GMT, and at 10:34 GMT), while the BBC advertised defence industry products in extended reports from the field, e.g. as in BBC Peter Dobby's report from the Royal Air Force base in Kuwait:

> (BBC) «…Take us through why the Tornado is such a particularly special plane as far as reconnaissance machines are concerned »
> (RAF Officer) «You are very right in pointing out that the Tornado is capable of a large spectrum of roles. The majority of the operations here have been using precision-guided weapons… which are very, very accurate, and very effective indeed. In addition to that, we have been doing reconnaissance missions using a reconnaissance pod called 'Raptor". But furthermore we're even able to use a missile called Alarm …and on the top of all we even used, operationally for the very first time, a standard cruise missile called Storm Shadow which turned out to be very, very effective» (BBC 03 April 2003 at 10:16 GMT).

Technological superiority has been an invariant feature of colonial wars and it might have been, as such, an aspect with detrimental effects on the overall image of the Iraq 'liberation" campaign. Interestingly enough, however, at least two aspects contributed to a different framing. In the first place, references to the use of high-tech weaponry, especially by the American army was invariantly coupled with their supposed precision, which gave the latter an alleged capacity of discerning 'bad" and 'good" Iraqis. Secondly, technological superiority translated into the moral supremacy of Allied military practices, *beside the actual effects of these practices*. All in all, the representation of war technology reinforced the narrative pattern of Iraq's 'liberation" beside the practical consequences of applied military technology on the Iraqi population.

A second avenue for technology in the coverage of the war against Iraq by transnational broadcasting has to do with broadcasting technology. The technical,

financial and organisational possibility of broadcasting live and almost simultaneously from every place in Iraq, every section of the battlefront, at every moment gave transnational broadcasting two distinct but equally important roles. On the one hand, the BBC and CNN were the absolute witnesses to the events, the ultimate points of reference for getting reliable information on the overall unfolding of events. At the same time, and by virtue of their technological capacity for extensive 'live" coverage, the importance of BBC and CNN broadcasting spilled over from the domain of the international media market into that of the Allied military campaign as part of the psychological warfare campaign. The point is even made explicitly clear:

> (CNN) «A military analyst tells CNN that a significant element early in this operation is the use of psychological warfare. An Iraqi deserter speaks of chaos within their ranks and the overwhelming force they face. [Indoor, an alleged Iraqi deserter at an unidentified location, dubbed]. 'What caused me to flee? The officers are fleeing. So when I had the chance I just fled. And we had to flee because it was chaos. This is a technology war, so, we don't have equipment to fight back". …»
> (CNN. 21 March 2003 at 07:14 GMT[6]).

Technology, it appears, was the conceptual domain where the military and transnational broadcasting actually joined forces. Both CNN and the BBC generously divulged deceptive information spread by the military sources at the beginning of the military campaign. The 'shock and awe" aerial bombardment campaign was designed, announced and reported as an act directed to undermine the control of the Iraqi regime over its own population by terrorising both and whose effectiveness depended greatly on its appropriate broadcasting. A CNN correspondent at the Pentagon explained the point as follows:

> (CNN) «There are indications that …when the shock and awe campaign begins it will be something like we have never seen before … what they [Pentagon officials] are trying to do is finish the psychological warfare phase of this campaign. A lot of what you are seeing here is an effort to tighten up the tension within the Iraqi military, within the Iraqi high command, make sure they think the American planes are coming after them each and every night until the full blown campaign starts. Another part of the psychological effort to make the Iraqi leadership realise that if it comes to a full blown war in the coming hours they have no hope of winning against the United States » (CNN on 20 March 2003 at 20:07-08 GMT).

Similarly, the graphic representations and live reports on the advance on Baghdad was admittedly described by a CNN military analyst, retired US General Dan Christman as information provided in the psychological frame and the information warfare campaign:

> (CNN) «General, if I can ask you, some people watching this may in fact be with the impression that this is vital intelligence, vital information which President

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[6] The same insert with identical introductory comment was shown again at 12:19, 13:16 GMT and several more times after that

Saddam Hussein could be using. Is that the case, or would he be aware of the positions of those two units?»

(Christman): « I am absolutely convinced, first of all, those are large goose eggs on the maps. Second, the coalition forces would not allow this kind of broadcasting were it not to be used for psychological influencing as well … I suppose that the coalition might desire that Saddam and his leaders would take a look at how far into their country these coalition units are advancing. This is once again an extraordinary armoured cavalry movement in open terrain closing in, very quickly on the final defences of Saddam Hussein» (CNN 21 March 2003 at 06:16 GMT)

The point is reiterated, in a more refined way, less than an hour later, after a similar barrage of computer-generated graphics:

(CNN) «General, just tell us, we were talking earlier about the psychological impact and quite deliberate void by US military and by military planners for the Iraqi leadership to see these pictures, see this advance on Baghdad».

(Christman). «Indeed the whole psychological operation component is part of a two almost three-month-old information warfare campaign that has been laid down by the coalition to simply influence the outcome, to get into the minds of the Iraqi leaders and convince them that the coalition is coming after them [images of US tanks], and it is time to say, it might be the opportunity to depart, to leave your soldiers and to defect. That, after all, is the all purpose of this psychological operation campaign and it seems to me, seeing these pictures, these vivid illustrations of how rapidly the coalition is closing in on Saddam indeed from all sides». (CNN 21 March 2003 at 07:08 GMT).

According to Taylor 'The Us defines PSYOPS as 'planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behaviour of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals' (Joint Pub 3-13, 1996 [quoted in Taylor 2003, 105]) [7]. Although there is no evidence that CNN was in fact broadcasting under the pressure of Allied military control, the functionality of this type of broadcasting for psychological operations and information warfare is quite plain. The polarization and moralization of war coverage implied by the uncritical adoption of the crusade metaphor puts military and reporters of the same side, making broadcasting technology an additional weapon for a common cause.

The third way technology entered war coverage was in support of functional interpretations of the ongoing events and the framing of coverage meaning in ways functional to the war effort. Computer-generated representations of the military campaign were used to provide the audience – including the "enemy" – with visual description and explanation of unfolding events. These representations were not only telling a *story* about unfolding events as if it was the *reality* itself unfolding in front of the viewer's eyes, but they were also telling the viewer what the *meaning* was of what was allegedly going on. They were *showing* the truth and *making sense* out of it. Examples are quite abundant. Retired US General Dan Christman, commenting on the invasion as CNN's military

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[7] See also Brown 2002, 40-50.

analyst, describes the US army advance in the desert showing a computer-generated animation and saying: « …you can see the refuelling tankers coming up here right away …» (CNN 21 march 2003, at 09:27 GMT).

Similarly, the BBC foreign affairs correspondent David Shuckman described the early stages of the military campaign on a computer-generated map crossed by moving allied planes and tanks

> (BBC) «We are seeing a massive escalation in the war and the pressure on Saddam Hussein's regime has never been so intense. Waves of air strikes are underway [a little bomber flies over a computer-generated map while a flash of light simulates an explosion of a dot with a caption 'Baghdad'] and they are meant to destroy any leave of power the Iraqi leader might have. So the focus is on Baghdad again [the map of Iraq dissolves into an aerial vision of Baghdad – as if the viewer was now in the bomber]. Targets tonight include presidential sites and government buildings [flashes marked Saddam's palace, Ba'ath party H.Q. and Government buildings] Washington claims that Saddam is starting to lose control. Now these images [images of night bombardment from Abu Dhabi TV] of the bombing show immense explosions, which does mean there is a risk of civilian casualties. Yet the Pentagon insists tonight that no war has ever been this precise [insert of Rumsfeld saying, "…the weapons which have been used today have a degree of precision that no one ever dreamed of in a prior conflict. They didn't exist. And it is not a handful of weapons. It is the overwhelming majority of the weapons that have that precision"] [back to Schukman] Well, we'll see. Now on the ground the focus is down south, the gateway to Iraq, the first real test of Iraqi resistance. …The first attack come by air [little transport helicopters flying over a map representing the Kuwait-Iraq border region] and by sea into the Faw peninsula where oil installations were seized. And another advance [little tanks appears moving north on the map] led by the Americans and headed to the major port of Umm Qasr, a vital objective. And a third went down the main road to Basra …So at the end of day two, the war is suddenly far more aggressive and far more widespread. It's a challenge to the Iraqi leader like never before»   (BBC 21 March 2003 at 23:14-17 GMT)

Translated into the narrative of transnational war coverage, military and broadcasting technologies were effectively used to undermine military resistance in Iraq and opposition to the war in Western society. In this sense, technology provided the ground for the needs of both the transnational broadcasting and the Allied military. The exhibition of war as 'action footage' or 'techno-warfare' was coherent with the values of military efficiency and effectiveness and with the aesthetics of the contemporary mainstream Western movie industry. Presented in its technological and technical aspects, war can appear easy to fight, easy to describe, easy to explain and easy to accept. It might be debated that technology is actually changing the way war is covered. Available evidence seems to suggest, however, that the narrative of war framed in technological terms assuredly preserves the opportunities to control the nature of broadcasting, its social impact and ultimately war itself as a social phenomenon.

9. Media on Media

The global mobilisation for the "war on terror" implies that neutrality is impossible and that, consequently, the media are supposed to contribute to the "war effort" – or else considered as "enemy". Having access to virtually every population of the world – including Iraqis – transnational broadcasting is a most useful tool for waging the war, rather than merely the reporting of it. Its "power" reflects in the fact that events can be commented on and given meaning while they unfold. It consists of producing self-fulfilling or self-defeating prophecies of unfolding events and, more generally, affecting attitude and emotions of public audiences of "friendly" and "hostile" governments alike. This role is particularly crucial in selected moments of hostilities, when uncertainty enhances the practical importance of information. While made it possible by mere technological development in information and communication technologies, this new role is not without danger. As Nick Gowing wrote explicitly puts it:

> «The new, insidious development is that because of the impact of our real-time capability, we are being actively targeted by warriors, warlords and forces of even the most highly developed governments who do not want us to see what they are doing» (Gowing 2003, 232)

In the two and half months of GW03 media community has suffered more casualties that in any previous war. This is probably one of the reasons why the actual coverage of GW03 was not only about the military and their vicissitudes. It was also, and in a certain sense, predominantly about media coverage itself. And this is where the differences between CNN International and BBC World coverage are more discernible in relation to two different issues: the relations with Arab media and the coverage of casualties among non-embedded media.

As for the former, BBC seemed to be rather aware of the complexity of intercultural communication and tried to tackle it as a diplomatic problem. This is how BBC's Carol Walker presented the Arab media in a critical report of Allied propaganda efforts:

> (BBC) «The Arab world is bombarded by news and images of the war [images from Aljazeera TV] Aljazeera is one of three Arab satellite channels broadcasting 24 hours a day. Tony Blair's assertions that Iraq will be administered by the Iraqis once Saddam has been removed made headlines news today. But often the message from London and Washington is lost amidst the pictures of death and destruction caused by their weapons. Many Arab people find it hard to believe this is supposed to be a war of liberation [images of wounded Iraqi children and women]. The British government is courting the Arab media as never before in its effort to counter hostility to the military action [insertion Al Arabya network with critical interview to foreign ministry Jack Straw] … [insert: critical comments by Arab journalists] …But any media campaign can be blown off course by the reality on the ground [American shooting] … and ultimately the Arab world will be convinced of the motives of Great Britain and the United States only if they leave a genuinely free and independent Iraq after the war is over ..» (BBC 3 April 2003 at 09:51-54 GMT)

In this and other reports, the foreign media were depicted as potentially influential actors in the struggle for the control of national and international public opinion and treated accordingly: not 'enemy' but rather 'competitors'. CNN instead had a more antagonistic view. The role of media was portrayed through narrative patterns at least compatible with – if not inspired by – the militant attitude of the crusade metaphor. In this perspective, the foreign media were rather 'allies' or 'enemies' depending on their stand toward the action of the US army in Iraq.

After Baghdad was being bombed for the second night in a row, Iraqi military official asked CNN staff to leave the city. Despite the fact that reporters and military analysts explicitly acknowledge the importance of CNN World coverage for the waging of the Allied information campaign and psychological warfare (see e.g. CNN 21 march 2003 at 07:14 and 07:08 GMT), CNN Jim Clancy showed genuine surprise and resentment. In his opinion CNN coverage was 'fair'. This is how he announced that piece of news:

> (CNN) «You know that we have tried to cover all the sides of the story and bring it to you fairly, showing you all sides of the story …We have been told now: Iraqi officials are ordering CNN to leave the Iraqi capital Baghdad… We regret to be telling you this because after all the efforts have been made to bring you their side of the story as you've seen here in the last months, weeks, years … now we've been told that CNN has been ordered to leave Baghdad …» [8]. (CNN 21 March 2003 at 16:39 GMT).

CNN felt unjustly punished by Iraqi authorities but showed no sympathy when only a few our later CNN correspondent at the Pentagon, Barbara Starr, reported live that the US were going to 'take over' Iraqi TV and radio. This is how she delivered this piece of news:

> (CNN) « …one official said …we would only strike what we would need to that would be supporting the Iraqi military, we don't want to do anything that is going to cause a humanitarian crisis. He [unnamed military official] forewarned that we might, in the next day or so, see some of Iraqi state-run television and other media being taken over …by the United States, we would like very much to command the airwaves but also concerned that that type of activity might provoke some sort of humanitarian disturbance or unrest …» (CNN 21 March 2003 at 20:34 GMT)

Under the polarization effects of the crusade metaphors the media were given only two possibilities: either allies or enemy. The institutional arrangement devised to achieve the control of the media by Allied military authorities was the so-called 'embedding system'. Its effectiveness rested on the fact that to offer controlled access to the battlefield is organisationally easier and politically more fruitful than just exercising censorship[9]. This

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[8] Iraqi decision came as no surprise given that CNN reporters in Baghdad had been commenting on the hits of US bombardment and on the direction of the anti-aircraft fire, more or less consciously providing Allied military authorities with precious information for damage assessment and countermeasures.

[9] This principle was already applied in 1991 and earlier on with the 'pool system' based on the British experience with the control of the press during the war for the Falkland/Malvinas (cf. A. T. Thrall, *War in the Media Age*, Cresskill, Hampton Press, 2000, 110-115)

system allowed the military to 'use' the press rather than 'fight' it; to 'feed' them with a flow of pre-recorded and carefully selected images rather than 'starve' them, forcing them out in search of material[10]. The effects of this organisational arrangement were presumably unclear to most at the onset of hostilities. As soon as the actual war began, however, it became quite obvious that the costs for critical broadcasting would have been higher than expected. In their own 'battle for control', as the BBC headlines put it, the BBC and less evidently CNN conducted a struggle in which the 'enemy' was not the Iraqi regime but rather the media control system put in place by Allied military to 'manage' the media. This particular struggle had its own casualties - to large extent independent or 'non-embedded' journalists – that, resulting from the non-compliance with the organisational arrangement established by the military authorities, should be considered *the human costs of independent coverage*. Unsurprisingly, BBC World and CNN international showed a rather different stance on this issue.

An interesting piece of broadcasting in this respect is the interview with Fabien Nerac, the wife of Fred Nerac, cameraman in the ITN team led by Terry Lloyd who was killed when his convoy came under attack near Basra on March 22nd. CNN's Richard Quest and the BBC's Stephen Cole interviewed Mrs Nerac on April 3 rd at 11:23 and 12:42 HT respectively. The story to cover was that Mrs Nerac was appealing to Colin Powell to have information on the fate of her husband (still missing to date). In practice, however, that interview touched an important aspect of war broadcasting: the meaning of a personal tragedy of public significance since it occurred partly as a result of the professional commitment to the independent reporting of war. The greater respect for the personal tragedy shown by BBC Stephen Cole enhanced the value of the public dimension of that tragedy, while CNN's Richard Quest overtly contrasted Mrs Nerac's need for information and her personal tragedy with the broader saliency of the ongoing battle for Basra.

The embedding system offered valuable protection to individual reporters in exchange for control. More subtly than traditional censorship – still applicable if necessary - it effectively performed as a socialisation process, which led reporters, presumably with some exceptions, to more or less unconsciously assume their mentors' point of view. As BBC reporter Clive Myrie confessed to BBC reporter John Kampfner:

> «As long as you are aware of that [that the military will try to look good in the
> eyes of the public] then you can begin to try and tell whatever story you're trying

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[10] The media centre at camp Doha was the technical facility in support of international media but it was also the place were the actual control on war coverage was taking place. It was the place were the potentialities for the media to practise critical coverage were nullified and where the production of information *about* the war was effectively transformed into a practice *for* the war. Camp Doha and the embedding system were two elements of an organisational arrangement designed to hamper the practical possibility for the media to perform a critical role.

> to tell in as objective way as you can, bearing in mind that the unity you are with is feeding you, dressing you, protecting you, whatever».[11].

Embedded reporters experienced and interpreted the war with the eyes of the soldiers doing the fighting – albeit only American and British soldiers. But in so doing the focus changed from war as a *drama* to be socially managed through war narratives to war as the *framework* of isolated events as seen from one of the conflicting parties. In the terms of our analysis, the opportunities for critical broadcasting reside in the nature of the narrative model adopted, rather than merely in the nature of the images per se. The belief that reports from embedded media allow to 'seeing' more of the war and hence to 'know' more about it is a false prejudice based on the false idea that TV broadcasting can perform as an extension of human capacity to "see things" happening in remote areas in about the same ways as cars allow humans to 'run' faster and aircrafts to 'fly'. TV does not 'show' as a telescope could do but rather 'represent' in a way closer to a piece of drama. What reporters could show were huge explosions blowing buildings to pieces, tanks rolling in a sandy desert, aircrafts puffing streams of sparks and foot-soldiers couching behind ruined walls. But the ideas that Baghdad was being bombed with 'undreamed' precision [12] to undermine Saddam regime, that the rush in the desert was an 'extraordinary cavalry moves'[13] to speed up the liberation of Iraq, that a British armoured column was being hit by 'friendly fire' despite the alleged precision of Allied weaponry, and that Iraqi soldiers offered unexpected resistance in Umm Qasr could be obtained by the viewer only from information contained – and sometimes hidden - in the war narratives. These types of narratives are obviously not intrinsic to the events but rather the product of actors that, in a variety of roles, participate to the process of sense making. While seductive in its promise of first-hand, real-time reporting and action footage, embedding also fostered the standpoint of the military fighting for their lives and for the victory of their governments' cause. It should be noted that institutional efforts along these lines were not left unchallenged. War coverage and the beyond-the-scene struggle between the media and the military pitted the organisational self-image of transnational broadcasting against the unpleasant reality of control in contemporary warfare; the ideal of independence and objectivity of individual journalists against the operational interests of the military authorities; the abstract possibility of critical broadcasting against the practical advantages and the safety of "embedded" coverage.

10. Ethics and ignorance

The narrative approach proposed in this article aimed at assessing the overall point of transnational broadcasting or its significance on the social dimension. At important

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[11]Cf. Clive Myrie to reporter John Kampfner in 'War Spin', *BBC Correspondent*, broadcasted on BBC 2, Sunday, 18 May 2003 at 1915 GMT. Transcripts available from World Wide Web: <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/ nol/shared/spl/hi/programmes/correspondent/transcripts/18.5.031.txt> 00.15.59 [24 July 2003])

[12] Cf. U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld on CNN International and BBC World, 21 march 2003 at 18:50, GMT.

[13]Cf. U.S. Army General (Ret.) Dan Christman as military analysist for CNN International, 21 march 2003 at 06:16 GMT.

points, BBC World and CNN International war coverage was indeed affected by the cultural and communicative influence of the "war on terror" rhetoric, and the "liberation of Iraq" propaganda – presumably even beyond individual journalists' awareness. This influence supported a narrative pattern, which we labelled "soccer game" and "crusade" for the BBC and CNN respectively. Despite important differences between these models, both organisations appeared incapable of giving meaning to events beyond pre-established narrative patterns with strong cultural and political connotations.

In the light of all this, the fact that transnational broadcasting organisations such as the BBC World and CNN International can address a world-wide audience only means that these organisations have the practical possibility of spreading their cultural, ideological and political biases world-wide. Overt pressures exerted by identifiable political actors are unnecessary for these biases to be in place. The share dependency by the military authorities for much wanted action footage, the pressing rhythm imposed by extended live broadcasting, and the intrinsic tendency to simplify complex events to make intelligible to an extremely wide and diverse audience, are just some of the aspects supporting the narrative model chosen by transnational broadcasting to cover the war against Iraq.

In a cultural atmosphere in which news reporting is more and more affected by security restrictions, commercial imperatives and time constraints it should come as no surprise that opportunities for critical broadcasting and, more broadly, critical thinking are increasingly rare and hence precious. In this situation one may wonder if ignorance about the origins, the nature and especially the consequences of the narrative models selected to report war and other dramatic events should not be considered as a capital sin – at least for those that make of this reporting their profession.

In the terms of our approach, the possibility for news story critical broadcasting depends on at least two preliminary conditions. The first of these is the journalists' awareness of the social implications of a given narrative model. The second is the capacity to identify and choose a narrative model which is appropriate and unambiguous in relation to the point s/he wants to make in covering a given event. Taken together, these two requirements seem to be the *conditio sine qua non* for the notions of professional ethics and accountability to be meaningfully applied to journalism. Awareness of the social implications associated with, and the intelligibility of, a particular way of making sense out of socially relevant events is a valuable asset. And it is even more so when opposite fundamentalisms foster more or less disguised propaganda while, at the same time, setting serious constraints to open and informative debates. Without this awareness, the claim to neutrality or impartiality appears as a reliable indicator of ignorance, which puts the claimant in a position indeed rather vulnerable on ethical grounds. Against this ignorance and for an ethic of critical broadcasting we hope this type of analysis might prove useful.

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