Media Representations of the Gulf War: What Transpired on the Battlefront?

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Media Representations of the Gulf War: What Transpired on the Battlefront?

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1. INTRODUCTION

I have recently come across an article in *The Guardian* titled “The first *TikTok* war: how are influencers in Russia and Ukraine responding?” (Stokel-Walker). A platform intended for viewing and sharing dance and funny videos has become a platform for showing the horrors of war in almost real time. This practice of engaging social media in war combat has peaked during the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, but is deeply rooted in the history of war correspondence and war journalism. The media are seen as people’s window to the world not directly accessible to them. This role is even more prominent during times of war when the media and war correspondents are our only source of information of the events taking place on the frontline. The informational role the media have is supposed to assist the public in forming informed opinions of the public affairs and not serve as entertainment for the masses. Sharma points out that “while the role of the media is vital in any democracy, it is during times of conflicts and wars that it becomes even more pronounced” (qtd. in Spitzer 6). It is because most of the citizens, other than those participating in the war have no way of knowing and understanding the goings on in the “theatre of war” (6). The “frontline journalists” are the only source of information to the public, “audience with little or no direct experience of war today” (6), and are thus expected to report as objective observers. This thesis focuses on the USA’s war correspondence and how the norms have changed through times.

The topic of this paper is media reporting of the Gulf war in 1991. That was a significant moment in history of war correspondence as the media not only failed to take a position of objective bystanders but became an additional frontline. Technological advancement brought forward television as the main informational medium. It is widely accepted, as Winzenburg points out, that "television not only covered the Persian Gulf War, it became an integral part of the conflict

– from the opening moments of the war, with live telephone coverage of the bombing of Baghdad, to the final liberation of Kuwait" (47). This was a heavily televised war that, for the first time in history, allowed people to watch military combat in real time. However, the Bush administration made a ground-breaking effort to control the news and a never before seen censorship has been imposed on journalists and media organizations by the government and the military. The result was the initial positive response to the war from the public as their perception was fundamentally guided by the distorted representation shown in the media. This paper will also provide a brief overview of significant moments in history of war correspondence that culminated in mass media reporting of the Gulf War.

The first chapter introduces a brief history of war correspondence based on research done by "White papers on Global journalism" and we try to uncover the underlying motivation for reporting from such dangerous conditions. The following chapter examines three war correspondents chosen on the basis of their contribution to the history of war reportage – Sir William Howard Russell, Ernest Hemingway and Michael Herr. More importantly, remnants of their work can been traced to the reporting of the Gulf War and more contemporary armed conflicts. In order to fully comprehend what led to the events that transpired in the Gulf War in respect to war correspondence, in the third chapter we take a look at some key developments in its history. To contextualize the job of war correspondents in the triangle of the government (the military), the public and the press, we first present the conditions during the American Civil War, which saw the event of organized journalism and censorship in reporting, and then the Vietnam War, which witnessed an unprecedented freedom of press that arguably influenced the outcome of the war. The ultimate section recognizes the changing nature of the relationship between the military and the media in that the lessons learned influenced what transpired on the 'journalistic

battlefront' during the Gulf War. The US developed a new strategy of 'pools' to avoid the 'Vietnam syndrome' and we will outline the influence that it had on news reporting and the issues it created. Moreover, this section mainly focuses on reporting conventions and technological advances that changed norms and values of journalistic practice and shaped the way war journalism is practiced and perceived today. Frequently drawn from are papers written by Douglas Kellner and Stig Nohrstedt; in addition, Phillip Knightley's "The First Casualty" has proven indispensable for writing this thesis as well. The methodology of this research was based on a qualitative approach with the goal of identifying strategies and techniques used in managing and utilizing the media in wartime. Secondly, as we are trying to outline the socio-cultural phenomenon of the influence war reporting has had, in accordance with the methodology of American Studies, it is examined how public policy and social norms impacted the war correspondence in respect to American media.

2. WAR CORRESPONDENTS

"Why did you go?", I asked my mother, who was a war correspondent for the Croatian National Television during the Croatian War for Independence. Her response: "People needed to see" did not satisfy my curiosity. Journalists have recorded and greatly influenced modern history. Their reports have the power to change our perception and engage the reader in critical examination of the event reported. Jon E. Lewis states that the *reportage* "as an eyewitness record is the first draft of history, but more prosaically the information it imparts is essential for the knowledge of the citizen" (210). Reporters, especially war correspondents, often have to take on the role of historians and report the truth about great events, but also bring them to life "as refracted

through language skills of the journalist" (Lewis 198). This chapter will provide an overview of the rise in the numbers of war correspondents throughout history as well as try to analyze the underlying motivation behind their work.

As Al Abri points out, "The significant role of journalists – whether you call them foreign reporters, war correspondents, war junkies, parachute journalists, local producers, stringers, citizen journalists, or bloggers – is at the heart of live broadcasting" (26). It cannot be contested that a number of war journalists don't consider their work a job, but rather a mission. Their efforts are defined by realistic risks of injury, death, imprisonment, kidnaping and other dangers that culminate at times of war. They are people whose desire to follow and report a (news) story prevails over reason and instinct. A report on global journalism provides compelling data on journalists killed every year. According to the source, in the period of 1990-2020 "we paid almost every week with the life of a reporter, a cameraman or support worker" (White paper on Global Journalism 3). The International Federation of Journalists has been publishing annual reports of killed journalists since the year 1990 and in the report it is stated that "at the time we started counting in 1990, we listed 40 journalists and media workers killed in that year" (3) and since then 2658 journalists have been killed (3) up to the year 2020. The reason also lies in the fact that the number of reporters covering wars grew with the advancement of modern technology. Spitzer clarifies that, "During the American Civil War, there were close to 600 war correspondents. In the Korean War, there were 1,600 correspondents and by the time of the Vietnam War, it is estimated that the number of accredited war correspondents was close to 5,000" (9). According to several sources (International press Institute, Committee to Protect Journalists, International Federation of Journalists) the deadliest country for journalists has been Iraq which is not surprising considering the fact that Iraq suffered two major wars since 1991 (McLaughlin 11).

Christiane Amanpour (CNN), one of the leading global reporters, recalled being "further motivated by a deep conviction that the stories covered are important and absolutely need to be told" (qtd. in McLaughlin 21). A war correspondent John Pilger explains his motivation as an attempt to "explain the war, to deconstruct it, to find out what the real agendas of the war are" (qtd. in McLaughlin 23). They witness history and aim to report it as objective observers which, as history shows, has often proved more difficult than putting on a helmet. Objectivity should be a key principle of journalism, but that does not mean that reporters are always neutral. Reporting in extreme situations such as war, would necessarily be influenced by the events experienced: "The media become a battleground, and journalists are drawn into the conflict, either voluntarily or under orders or even unawares" (Nohrstedt 95-96).

Moreover, technological advancement throughout history has influenced journalistic practices and gave way to new modalities in reporting wartime events. As Rafeeq contends: "The demand for news and information from the news media, economic and political institutions have increased the demand for international news, and provided opportunities for news agencies to become wholesalers of news to a diversified market – news media, business and political institutions" (141). Modern wars can no longer be fought without support from the media and journalists have thus become an integral part in mobilizing the public opinion (Nohrstedt 96). Nowadays, war journalism predominantly relies on visual portrayal in providing news and information from the battlefronts.

To further examine the impact war correspondents have had in the American context, we will take a closer look into the works of Ernest Hemingway and Michael Herr. They have done critical work during wartime and have left a lasting legacy in American culture both as writers and war correspondents. Following the work of Terry Mort in *Hemingway at War* and Michael Herr's

Dispatches the following chapter is going to examine how their work has left a mark in journalism. Although our main focus are works of Americans, the chapter is going to open with a brief introduction of the man considered to be the first modern war correspondent - Sir William Howard Russell (Knightley 8).

2.1. Sir William Howard Russel

The Crimean War attracted an unprecedented numbers of war reporters. British *The Times* had been covering the war through dispatches in forms of letters sent from the front by junior correspondents who were "highly selective in what they wrote" as well as unfamiliar "with the workings of the newspapers" (Knightley 8). Lewis observes that the dispatch often took weeks to arrive (222) and the demand for information grew in such a way that war coverage needed to be modernized. *The Times* decided to meet this demand and hired correspondents to report from the frontlines. Sir William Howard Russell spent a little short of two years in Crimea writing for *The Times* as a "special correspondent" and is often regarded as "the father of modern war reporting" (Roth 265). His writing has also had an impact on 19th century literature, with his reports being credited with influencing Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and Kipling's poem "Tommy" (Roth 266).

As stated by Knightley: "Russell's coverage of the Crimean War marked the beginning of an organized effort to report a war to the civilian population at home using the services of a civilian reporter" (8). His war reporting is of great value because his dispatches were met with high public response as it was the first time the public read about the awful reality of war (Spitzer 15). According to Roth, the British suffered more from shortages of weapons and basic necessities than

from their Russian opponents (266) and that was all reflected in Russell's dispatches. The Crimean War also marks the beginning of "prejudicial attitude among the high command toward war correspondents" (72) and a continuous conflict between the press and the military over access to battlefronts and information that would generate coverage and inform the public. This "battle for control of information" will later culminate in the Vietnam War.

Most importantly, the Crimean War shed light on "the fact that the public had something to say about the conduct of wars and that they are not the concern exclusively of sovereigns and statesmen" (Knightley 8). Russel's work showed that the opinions formed and expressed by informed readers can influence political change, a fact that can be traced in conflicts to come.

2.2. Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway, a 20th century American author who is best known for his novels and short stories, also showed enviable reportorial skills. His time as a war correspondent left a mark in journalism as a profession and influenced the way wars and combat are covered in the media. In 1899, Hemingway entered this world in Oak Park, Illinois (Mort 2). While in the military during World War I, he served as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross and pursued his early passion of writing. As a war correspondent, he covered conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the Korean War (Mort 4). Hemingway documented his time in the service and observations of the conflicts in numerous works published after his return home.

In the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, Hemingway initially worked as a war correspondent (Putnam 1). Thirty dispatches written by Hemingway during the Spanish Civil War

have been published in the *New York Times*[1]. After enlisting in April of 1937, he was in Spain for over a year. During this time, he contributed to other newspapers like the *Toronto Star* and the *North American Newspaper Alliance*. As a correspondent for the *North American Newspaper Alliance*, he covered the brutality of the conflict at length. In addition, he contributed to the publication *New Masses* (Putnam 1). As was expected, General Franco's Nationalists and the Spanish Republicans were the primary subjects of Hemingway's reporting: "Personally, I think Franco got himself into a fix when he advanced into Madrid and failed to take it, a situation from which he can never extricate himself" ("The Loyalists" 3610). He documented the destruction of cities and villages and the plight of civilians trapped in the crossfire. Similarly, he praised the bravery and courage of the Republican forces. Hemingway was commended for his reporting and ability to bring the conflict to life through his colorful and comprehensive descriptions. As he points out on one occasion: "When we got up with the Americans they were lying under some olive trees along a little stream. The yellow dust of Aragon was blowing over them, over their blanketed machine guns, over their automatic rifles and their anti-aircraft guns" ("Hemingway Reports Spain"). As a firsthand witness to the battles between the Republican and Nationalist armies, Hemingway chronicled their successes and setbacks in his writing. Many of his accounts were stunning and tragic since they detailed atrocities done by both sides.

Upon leaving Spain, he commented on his Spanish coverage saying: "It was the toughest and most dangerous assignment anyone has had since Matthews' Danakil trip. What the hell" (qtd. in Mitgang). Shortly after, Hemingway travelled to Europe to cover the Second World War for several publications. The liberation of Nazi-occupied Paris occurred while he was there in August

[1] These articles served as a source for quotations of Hemingway's reportorial work in this paper (see: https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/30/arts/hemingway-on-spain-unedited-reportage.html).

1944 (Mort 2). After that, he went to Italy's front lines and chronicled the Allies' progress on the Germans while documenting the courage of the soldiers and the horrors of battle. In addition, he detailed the plight of innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire: “'You may frighten a man by threatening to kill his brother or his wife and children. But if you do kill his brother or his wife and children you only make of him an implacable enemy. This is the lesson the fascists have not yet learned” (qtd. in Mitgang).

Many people read Hemingway's accounts of the war, and they praised him for the vivid detail with which he described the conflict. When Hemingway finally returned to the States in 1945, he chronicled his travels throughout Europe in a series of articles (Mort 7). Hemingway did not stop reporting on conflicts after WWII. Between 1950 and 1951, he covered the war in Korea and he also visited Cuba several times and wrote about the revolution led by Fidel Castro in the '50s and '60s. Additionally, Hemingway's job as a war correspondent took him back to the battlefield during the Korean War. He detailed the horrors of the trenches and the bravery of the American troops fighting the North Koreans.

It is no secret that Hemingway's reporting from World War II was criticized for its candid and sometimes unfavorable portrayal of the conflict. Hemingway's critique of the Allies' tactics and strategies during World War II earned him notoriety (Mort 8). Despite the backlash, Hemingway was held in high regard as a war journalist and was often quoted as a source of calm in an otherwise volatile atmosphere.

Hemingway was a keen observer of combat and one of a few war correspondents who successfully conveyed the battlefield's horror, anxiety, and exhilaration in their writing. In addition to the more significant events, he added a human dimension to his writing by describing the people he met on the battlefield. Hemingway was typically in the middle of the action, earning him a

reputation for bravery and boldness (Mort 10). Hemingway's voice was heard and respected in the journalistic world, not just as a war correspondent. A pioneer in war reporting, he was an example to other journalists and influenced how the conflict was covered. His writings about the bravery and valor of the men he saw amid war's horrors earned him a reputation for realism (Putnam 1). Likewise, Hemingway's ability to portray the humanity of the soldiers and the stories of their bravery and perseverance earned him widespread acclaim.

Hemingway was a skilled journalist who was able to incorporate a human element of combat in his essays, which served to motivate and encourage many readers. Hemingway's work, which clearly showed the devastation of battle, helped influence the public's perception of the war (Mort 11). Hemingway not only covered the war from a journalist's perspective, but he also wrote extensively about war in his novels, so, in his case, one kind of writing reinforced the other. He used the context of the war as a background for his novels and self-making as a writer. The horrors of war are depicted in his work *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in a strikingly realistic manner (Mort 12). The book follows the exploits of American Robert Jordan, who enlists to fight for the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway based the plot on his experience in Spain. Hemingway's writings frequently reflected his experiences as a war correspondent; therefore, it is safe to say that war and his time as a war correspondent profoundly influenced his work. Many of the topics and characters in his fiction and nonfiction works stem from his experiences during the conflict.

Hemingway's work as a war correspondent has left an enduring impression. He was one of the first war reporters to provide readers with a clear and compelling picture of the horrors of the Spanish Civil War and World War II. His articles helped shape the public's perception of the war by highlighting the courage and determination of the Allies.

2.3. Michael Herr

Michael Herr's 18 months of covering the Vietnam War resulted in arguably one of the best books to be written about the Vietnam war experience –*Dispatches* (Cobley, Spindler, New York Times qtd. in Herr). In a 1989 interview, Herr stated that his going to Vietnam was always motivated by the plan to write a book: "I went to write a book. Harold knew that. Whatever arrangement I had with him – whether it was pieces, or a columns [sic], or even regular feature – the idea was always to write a book" (qtd. in Schroeder 40). He refers here to Harold Hayes, editor of the *Esquire* Magazine Herr reported for before and during the time he spent in Vietnam. It is a lesser known fact that besides *Dispatches*, Herr was involved in screenwriting for the movies *Full Metal Jacket* and partly *Apocalypse Now*, which, according to Spindler "also extended his influence over popular perceptions of the [Vietnam] war" (25).

As argued by Hallin: "anyone who thinks the television camera necessarily shows war more graphically than print should look at (…) Michael Herr's *Dispatches*" (130). *Dispatches* is considered an intense and revolutionary experience, the very best of embedded war reporting. Embedded reporters gained access to the war front and stories they would unlikely be able to safely attain (Spitzer 7). Herr portrayed how this reporting style can capture the soldier's voice and experience while at the same time keeping the real focus on the writer, an approach that can be traced all the way back to Hemingway. This is also explicitly addressed in the book: "…you could also hear the other, some young soldier speaking in all bloody innocence, saying, 'All that's just a *load*, man. We're here to kill gooks. Period.' Which wasn't at all true of me**.** I was there to watch" (Herr 19).

In *Dispatches,* the narrator witness circulates knowledge, but it is often difficult for him to distinguish fact from fiction as fantasy and experience tend to influence each other (Cobley 97). This puts the narrator in a difficult position where he is expected to take a position of a reliable witness, but by being in the narrative could not refrain from subjective representations. In *Dispatches* he indirectly addresses the difficulty to detach oneself and provide conventional reportage: "'Must be pretty hard to stay detached,' a man on the plane to San Francisco said, and I said, 'Impossible'" (Herr 27). According to John Hellman, "Herr constructed the book not as a report on Vietnam at all 'but rather as an exploration of the memory of the war'" (qtd. in Spindler 26). As explained by Spindler this "shift in tone of voice from the cultivated, restrained, detached voice of conventional reportage to one that possessed urgency and immediacy" (26) fits into the frame of (at the time) developing sub-genre – the New Journalism. New Journalism is characterized with blending of generic genres in a way that reportage blends into autobiography or history is blurred with fictive narration (Spindler 26). Building on that, Colby remarks that "New journalism, the documentary approach of *Dispatches*, highlights the problematical status of facts for the production of meaning because it occupies an uneasy position between fact and fiction" (97). Herr, however, never claims that he is offering a comprehensive coverage of the war and while *Dispatches* is an example of New Journalism, the documentary elements of a reportage cannot be disregarded. Political element is omitted and Herr explained why: "Politics is language, and as such I find it completely worthless and useless. (…) In *Dispatches,* I had no political axe to grind" (qtd. in Schroeder 42). His first-hand accounts of combats and the horrors men had to endure are vividly depicted. Herr said that he believed the media coverage prolonged the war (Schroeder 43) but he must have been aware of the power art inspired by war can have on war itself. Not necessarily on the frontlines but it can influence the way people perceive it and their desire to

engage. Herr's influence as a writer is significant and "the combination of documentary and experimental techniques he used to narrate the facts of war" (Cobley 112) can be traced through sensationalist war reporting of the Gulf War to the reportage of the present-day conflicts.

3. WAR CORRESPONDENCE IN CONFLICTS

This overview provides a good starting point for examining the evolution of war correspondence throughout history. Shifting the focus from individuals the following chapters are going to chronologically reencounter the U.S. Civil War and the Vietnam War and address progression of norms and principles of journalism. The evolution of mass journalism and the use of press for propaganda in the American Civil War is going to be traced following the colossal works of Philip Knightley and Mitchel Roth. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the Vietnam War. Based on research done by Hallin and Mandelbaum respectively, a closer look will be taken into addressing why the Vietnam War is nicknamed "The Television War". As a result of lessons learnt from the Vietnam War, we saw a complete culmination of restrictions posed on journalists in the Gulf War which will be observed mostly through the work of Munro, Nohrstedt and Taylor.

These conflicts saw a radical change in the relationship between the media, military and the public. Altered standards of war journalism culminated in one of the most reported wars in the 20th century – The Gulf War in 1991.

3.1. The American Civil War (1861-1865)

The American Civil War helped reshape the US by ending slavery and had also highly influenced the US press. According to Knightley: “The war created a tremendous demand for news, and as newspaper circulations soared and incomes increased, proprietors ploughed back much of their new riches into sending more correspondents to provide a wider coverage of the conflict” (16). This was all due to the fact that nearly everyone was somehow connected to the war and the request for news was high.

The American Civil War is considered to be one the most thoroughly and timely documented wars of its era (Roth 4). Together with increasing literacy among Americans, technological advancements created a change in journalistic practice. One of the most significant technological advancement was the telegraph which “was available for large-scale use for the first time” (Knightley 8). The telegraph line covered the length of almost 50,000 miles and it provided high-speed connection which meant that “For the first time in American history, it was possible for the public to read what had happened yesterday, rather than someone’s opinion on what had happened last week” (8). The growing demand for news coverage consequently meant growing competition. The war was covered by European press as well as American with the estimation of over 300 correspondents covering the Union armies and around 100 Southern reporters at different times (Roth 5) making it the most comprehensive and timely coverage to date (Spitzer 18). Rising competition generated the demand for exclusivity and as Knightley observes that “accuracy became a minor consideration” (20) and continues to refer to the period of The American Civil War (1861-1865) as one of “the poorer periods in the progress of the war correspondent” (21). Untruthful and sensationalistic reports started to prevail as well as journalistic work overflowing with propaganda, due to which eventually government enforced censorship (Roth 7).

New technologies and new demands for information during the Civil War changed journalism in many ways. The Civil War introduced extensive mass media war coverage formed new principles in war journalism, one of them being the establishment of Associated Press. This system enabled newspapers to pool their resources to get more extensive battle coverage, a strategy that was extensively employed in The Gulf War.

3.2. The Vietnam War (1965-1975)

Former US president Lyndon Johnson wrote: "As I sat in my office last evening, waiting to speak, I thought of the many times each week when television brings the war into the American home. No one can say exactly what effect those vivid scenes have on American opinion" (qtd. in Mandelbaum 157). Johnson was referring to "vivid scenes" of the war fought in Vietnam and argued that the brutality of war that appeared regularly on television steered the public opinion and eventually "forced the withdrawal of American troops" (157).

This was the first televised war bringing the scenes from the battlefronts regularly into Americans' living rooms. The US fought in the Vietnam War between 1964 and 1975 on the ground of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. North Vietnam, The National Liberation Front and a communist-led Vietnamese movement under the direction of North Vietnam (The Viet Cong) fought against a coalition of The South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam), the United States, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand (Turner 22). Both sides aimed to unify Vietnam with the South Vietnam wanting to keep close ties to its principal ally, the US, and North Vietnam wanting a communist regime in the country (22) backed up by the USSR and China.

The Vietnam war differed from any other in the American history of warfare and both the United States' and the media involvement in the war grew gradually. The media were not prepared for the difficulties of reporting a war on unfamiliar ground and fought in an unconventional, guerrilla, manner. According to Rid, the crucial problem was the nature of the conflict (54). The fighting mostly took place in remote rural areas and in a jungle environment and it was difficult to distinguish combatants from civilians (54). He continues by stating that "war was utterly confusing and disorienting, for the soldiers who were fighting it, and even more so for the journalists who tried to cover it" (54). This meant that progress could not be followed or reported so the US military gave the reporters unprecedented access to frontlines, battle zones and information. The media had unprecedented freedom to report the war and were not subject to any censorship by the American government, or the military (Hallin 6) and they had not expected the backlash that followed. Television has just become the prominent news medium in the US and most Americans relied on this medium to get their information about the war and the world (Mandelbaum 158). However, Mandelbaum points out, that "television coverage of the war had very little overt editorial content. The networks simply presented a series of images, mainly of Americans fighting an unseen foe" (160). This resulted in Americans drawing their own conclusions about the war and ultimately "it was the public opinion that determined American policy in Vietnam" (Mandelbaum 158). Rid argues that the Vietnam War caused hostility between the military and the press (53).

In early stages of the war, the public view of the war was mostly favorable and news coverage quite supportive. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were usually able to 'handle' the news very efficiently (Hallin 126). The coverage was also divided among TV and liberal 'prestige press' which had different political functions. *The New York Times* and other liberal "prestige paper" like *The Chicago Tribune*, as well as small local papers which focused on the 'local boys' in action in

Vietnam (Hallin 11) provided a very different coverage from "mass-circulating tabloids" (11). A person who was informed about the war in *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* got a much more critical view than someone who followed it in *The Daily News* (Hallin 10-13).

As an example, the Tet Offensive was one of the most significant turning points in the Vietnam War (Spitzer 28). During a cease-fire in honor of the Vietnamese lunar New Year, the Tet, North Vietnam and allies staged an attack on key cities as well as American military bases throughout South Vietnam (Walton 45). This proved to be a massive success for the forces and "many historians consider the Tet Offensive a psychological victory for the Communist forces and a political defeat for the US" (Walton 45). Media coverage grew significantly after the Tet offensive and atrocity coverage grew in importance. The US media became more critical of the war, but, according to Turner (23), still not against it. A time of shifting the media perspective came after a famous, well trusted news anchor, Walter Cronkite concluded after the Tet offensive that it was time to take American troops out of Vietnam, calling the war a "bloody stalemate" (Rid 59). The significance of this moment and, vicariously, the importance of the media in this war was depicted in the words of president Lyndon B. Johnson, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost the country" (qtd. in Walton 46).

The US government and military blamed the media for their televised loss. "The lesson, translated into practical advice for future operations, was that the press needed to be treated like an adversary and that media access to the battlefield should be strictly denied" (Rid 63). Whether or not the media really did alter the course of this conflict can never be confirmed with certainty.

According to all sources cited in this section, the majority of reporting done from Vietnam was factual with correspondents honestly reporting what they experienced firsthand. All the horrors they witnessed was what influenced the American public, not the manner of their reporting.

The absence of censorship in Vietnam allowed journalists to move around freely and report what they pleased. As Hallin pointed out Vietnam was in this manner a truly 'uncensored war' and journalists today often portray that era as a time when the media "came of age" (Hallin 9).

3.3. The Gulf War (1990-1991)

The Persian Gulf War is one of the most reported wars in the 20th century. According to Winzenburg (47), two forms of war broke out in the Persian Gulf. The first was the war between American allies and Iraqi supporters and the second was between the US military and US mass media companies. "The media became a battleground and journalists were drawn into conflict either voluntarily or under orders, or even unawares" (Nohrstedt 95). To fully understand the media frenzy that surrounded the event, we need to examine the Gulf War as a critical incident in respect to history and journalism profession. Modern wars cannot be fought without the public support and media and journalists have a central position in informing the public and forming the general opinion. This chapter will follow how the mainstream media promoted the US military intervention on Iraq.

The war began when Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2nd August 1990. Iraqi leader at the time was Saddam Hussein, who decreed an attack and occupation of Kuwait with the overarching objective of taking over the rich oil reserves in the country (Rodriguez et al.). At the same time, the invasion was meant to nullify the large debt Saddam owed Kuwait and Saudi Arabia ($30 billion) and expand his authority beyond Iraq's border to this country (Rodriguez et al.). This expansion defined the first significant international crisis in the post-Cold War time.

In response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the US government and allies to this war immediately began promoting a military solution to the crisis, and the mainstream media were compliant in that endeavor (Kellner 136). This response was why the war was the most reported.

Even before the start of the war; tensions had been building up in the Persian Gulf in the summer of 1990. These tensions reflected the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war that ended in August 1988 (Munro 11). They were explicitly fueled by the continued subtle hostility between the two countries even after the official end of the war. Munro notes: "By the latter part of 1989 the Gulf states which had shown support for Iraq in the war with Iran were beginning to sense fresh danger. In particular, there were signs that Saddam had the intention of putting the screws on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia" (12-13).

He perpetuated political and economic issues so that the earlier tensions between Iran and Iraq were extended to Kuwait. Other accusations were that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were reducing their oil prices to please the western countries buying the product from the region. On the other hand, according to several scholars (Kellner, Zellizer, Rid), many false reports surrounded Hussein and Iraqi soldiers. Saddam Hussein was linked to Hitler, and Kellner even reports a column titled "The Beast of Baghdad," published by Mary McGrory (138). Furthermore, Kellner continues: "[The said column] which also assumed that Iraq was set to invade Saudi Arabia and which called upon Bush to bomb Baghdad! Precisely the same line appeared in an op-ed piece by the Post's associate editor and chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland who kicked in with a column: 'Force Hussein to Withdraw'" (138).

The sensationalist reports coming from the US government reinforced the opinions of the American public and moved the campaign to support the US military intervention. Interesting approach considering that had the Iraqi forces war responsible for so much cruelty, the truth would

have sufficed (Ottosen 75). Talks between Iraq and Kuwait were held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to solve the territorial and economic tensions between the two countries. These talks did not deter Saddam from attacking Kuwait as he invaded the country on 2nd August 1990 (Munro 27). The attack was despite his promise to the then-Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, that he would not use force against Kuwait (Rodriguez et al.). Hosni's intervention was encouraged by the fact that Saddam had brought his soldiers to the border with Kuwait in preparation for an invasion, even after the talks in Jeddah (Munro 32).

During this attack, the Kuwaiti military force presented an active resistance to the invasion for more than 14 hours, costing approximately 4,200 Kuwaitis' lives (Rodriguez et al.). The highest degree of resistance was noted in the Dasman Palace, which only yielded after hours of battle efforts. Despite opposition from Kuwait's army, Saddam quickly conquered the country's city (Rodriguez et al.). His success in taking Kuwait over created a new government dispensation with an Iraqi military leader being the head of state in the country. Again, the takeover led to the creation of a 19th Iraqi province in Kuwait- it became part of the Iraqi territory (Rodriguez et al.).

However, Saddam would not enjoy his conquest for long because the international community swiftly responded to his actions. For instance, the then US president (George H.W. Bush) condemned the attack, as was the case with the British governments and the Soviet Union. Consequently, on the 3rd of August 1990, the United Nations Security Council demanded that Iraq should withdraw its operations from Kuwait. However, since Saddam was adamant, the United Nations Council allowed using any necessary means to force Saddam out of Kuwait. According to Kellner: "when the Bush administration sent a massive troop deployment to the region, the mainstream media applauded these actions and became a conduit for mobilizing support for U.S. policy" (137). The council's declaration marked the beginning of the Gulf War on January 1991,

with one group supporting the ouster of Saddam Hussein (Egypt, Japan, Soviet Union, Germany, France, Saudi Arabia, and Britain, among others). A second group helped him remain in Kuwait (Algeria, Palestinian Liberation Organization, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen) ("Persian Gulf War"). Ottosen reports how Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney initially refused to allow reporters to accompany the US troops dispatched on August 8, but ultimately relented after intense media criticism (73).

The attack (called Operation Desert Storm) by the allied countries against Saddam was supported by the latest military technologies: "Smart Bombs, infrared night-bombing equipment, and Stealth bombers". These technologies facilitated the US-based air attacks on the Iraqi defense and such essential locations as oil refineries, armories, and communication networks. The public still had confidence in their leaders and their decisions at this point. Ottosen presents the results of a public poll conducted on 25 March 1991 which indicated "that 84% of the US public gave the press an 'excellent' or 'good' grade for Desert Storm coverage, and 83% said military restrictions on news reports during the conflict were a good thing" (79). The Iraqi forces would later retreat to reduce airborne attacks and minimize ground war. However, the US and its allies waged war against Saddam in a new operation called Operation Desert Sabre, marking the end of the Gulf war ("Persian Gulf War"). During this operation, the forces against Saddam surrounded the Iraqi troops and conquered them in four days.

President Bush announced a ceasefire on the 28th of February when the Iraqi resistance was defeated in Kuwait. The ceasefire marked a new beginning for Kuwait and Iraq, where the subsequent peace terms required that Saddam recognize that Kuwait was no longer his 19th province but a sovereign country. Saddam heeded these terms and agreed to eliminate his weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.

The Gulf War gathered (up to then) the largest number of correspondents with an estimated number of 1200-1300 being on site (Nohrstedt 96) and in addition, the author suggests that they, the media, were completely deceived in their reporting on the Gulf War – either consciously or unconsciously (97). This notion will be further examined in the following chapters.

4. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

The Persian Gulf was so significant that it caught the attention not only of the media in the United States but also internationally. The technological advancement – development of satellite technology and portable antennas enabled almost "real-time" reporting with only a one-and-one-half seconds' delay (Winzenburg 47). Media coverage was facilitated by two microwave relays and five satellites that revolved around half the globe for live streaming every aspect of the war. The coverage reflected the advancement of media technology in the US for people who had not experienced such incidences as the Persian Gulf war in the past.

The advent of portable satellite technology shifted the focus from print to television. Winzenburg states that "television not only covered the Gulf war, it became an integral part of the conflict – from the opening moments of the war, with live telephone coverage of the bombing of Baghdad, to the final liberation of Kuwait" (47). Indeed, Winzenburg continues that "the television coverage of this war not only projected the war live but became a core aspect of the war from the first invasion strikes of the US allies to the Kuwait emancipation" (47). This coverage meant that all the American citizens followed and learned different war tactics from live footage. Zelizer observes that "the emphasis on television news sometimes turned non-newsworthy events into news, largely because television technology was there to report them" (70). Television war

coverage somewhat resembled a TV show and as Zelizer reports: “the war’s onset seemed to have been timed to coincide with the networks’ evening news programs, and night after night Americans were treated to action that heated up as prime time neared” (70). Networks had recognizable titles for Gulf War segments such as “War in the Gulf” and “Showdown in the Gulf” with accompanying music (“Television – The Persian Gulf War”). Technological advancement enabled viewers to follow the events in Iraq via video from cameras attached to bombers, but it also meant that each media outlet tried to be the first to capture all the details of the war. A reporter from the Gulf War said that a breaking story would be “old by dinners time” (qtd. in Zelizer 70).

The US media houses collaborated when gathering information and interpreting the different events as they hit the viewers’ screens (Winzenburg 49). However, their collaboration was limited to the media coverage policies defined by the various coalition forces for which the correspondents were working (Winzenburg 47). These policies were informed by the fear that the successful inside coverage of every detail of the military preparation of the war coalitions would lead to failure for the yearned victory as far as troops from each alliance were concerned. These restraints were predominantly a response to the legacy of the Vietnam War. Ottosen reports how The Gannet Foundation Media Center investigated key words, phrases and names that appeared in news stories in 16 news outlets (77). According to him, “the most striking finding was the number of times the word 'Vietnam' appeared: 7,299 times” (Ottosen 77) and continues with contesting that “one explanation for this is of course that the phrase 'this is not going to be a new Vietnam' was consciously used by the Bush Administration in its rhetoric and was used over and over again” (Ottosen 77).

It left a powerful mark in American history and the “mistake” of granting reporters unrestricted access would not be followed by the Bush administration and “general Colin Powell,

the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed that Vietnam had shown that the American public simply would not tolerate a prolonged, televised war with heavy casualties" ("Television – The Persian Gulf War"). During the time of the war "the Bush administration controlled the media discourse in part through disinformation and propaganda, and in part by means of control of the press via the pool system" (Kellner 137). A press pool was a small group of reporters, consisting of representatives of different media such as the press, television, radio, photographers and magazine correspondents. Organized into pools and accompanied at all times by military personnel, they would be taken to a chosen sight (Kellner 137). Their movement and access to the action was restricted. The limitation on the media personnel placed by the different military forces involved in the war indicated that the media was not covering the war the same way it covered the daily news. Only the media houses that televised the war according to the preferences of the military alliances were qualified for coverage (Taylor 12). As a result, while the media houses reported using different styles and camera angles, they were guided by the propaganda preferred by the military coalitions on whose side they were covering the war (Taylor 12).

The media pools made it possible to control the news with the illusion of "independence". Ottosen observes how military censorship has traditionally been challenging for the US military since the First Amendment guarantees freedom of expression and only national emergencies can justify prior censorship (71). Another aspect of control that made the media coverage of the Persian Gulf war different from the routine press was that the American army forces wanted to present the country as a superpower compared to other countries in the world (Taylor 5). This superiority was exercised by televising the high-end war technology the US and its allies used during the war. However, in all this reporting about war, TV provided an extremely limited view of the fighting. In fact, it was a "bird-view" of the fighting as the Defense Department supplied most of the video

of the air war. Recorded at night and with night vision equipment, the images resembled a video game ("Television – The Persian Gulf War"), hence the war being nicknamed – The Video Game War.

American military forces could not allow the televising of its mistakes during the war. Indeed, when such failure was not publicized, the country reserved the ability to show its military power while communicating with the locals in Iraq to support the ouster of their president from Kuwait (Taylor 16). This communication was achieved by ensuring that the Iraqi could only access news from American networks (Taylor 10). The American forces enhanced the US communication supremacy by targeting and destroying Iraq's television and radio transmitters. Even then, this effort was only successful in the television transmission because the radio transmission continued turning the Iraqis against the US (Taylor 10). Thus, in the same way, the American military controlled what the media televised, the Iraqi military force ensured that their media never televised failures but focused on successful parts of the war and propaganda against the US (Taylor 11). The effort by the Iraqi press was a reiteration of similar media actions taken by the American military to ensure that the world was only informed about the positive side of the war scenes involving this coalition. Clearly "censorship was used to eliminate information which could create a negative picture of US soldiers" (Ottosen 74).

The efforts by either alliance to control the media were informed by the fact that the media presentation of war was as important as the operational logistics used in the war (Taylor 11). It urged journalists to refrain from reporting sensitive information as a condition of their accreditation ("Television – The Persian Gulf War"). A few would object to restrictions on reporting "sensitive military information", but the restrictions placed went way beyond this. Ottosen provides few examples: "For instance, it was permitted to interview or take photographs

of wounded US soldiers only in the presence of a military escort and only with the consent of patient, doctor and commander" (74).

For instance, all the US military flaws of the American military coalition were presented in a positive light, while Saddam and his allies were vilified through the media. As far as the American alliance was concerned, the press presented its military actions to inform the world that its attacks were precise to avoid the causalities of innocent people. According to Kellner, this propaganda was spread through the dictates of the American coalition and the efforts of George H.W Bush who was the US President then (149). From this coalition's standpoint, General Schwarzkopf stated that the American forces and allies were using technology to ensure minimal casualties as far as the civilians in Kuwait and Iraq were concerned (54). This statement was propaganda because claims made by the Pentagon in the wake of the war showed that the US forces and allies had missed 70% of their targets during the war (54). Thus, there was a 70% probability that the American troops decimated innocent people as they ousted Saddam from Kuwait. On that note, Ottosen observes that "during the first days of the war, TV screens were full of pictures of 'smart bombs' accurately hitting military headquarters in Baghdad" (76). Smart bombs that missed their targets or failed were shown far less.

The military control on the content presented by the media for the American and allied military forces and the Iraqi and allied military forces meant that the global presence and effectiveness of the media houses did not matter. Therefore, the media failed to educate citizens by presenting authentic news, as the televised war scenes were not genuine. Nohrstedt refers to the Gulf War as the "clinical war". "The image of the clinical war was largely the result of the coalition's propaganda. It was perfectly adapted to the goal of the PR strategy of portraying one's own side's war-fighting as "civilized", unlike that of the opposition" (Nohrstedt 27). Such

censorship helped the coalitions remain relevant and maintain their international position as far as global media houses were concerned.

Delivering staged news meant that the media houses were not as independent as expected in the regular reporting cases. The presentation of compromised war scenes according to the dictates of these briefers would later be discovered after the war ended. As noted earlier, the Pentagon declared that the missed targets among the American forces amounted to 70% of all the attacks in Kuwait and Iraq (Kellner 146). Similar evidence showing the hidden flaws in overrating US military prowess were images and videos that depicted the American coalition's attacks on non-military targets in Iraq, leading to the death of scores of innocent civilians. Besides the direct invasion of the US forces and allies on the civilians, they focused on destroying Iraq's economic resources, including electricity, which affected the innocent Iraqis and Kuwaitis during and after the war. These atrocities were only discovered after the war ended because the media coverage of the war was one-sided from the perspective of the two warring coalitions (Kellner 154). Ultimately, the media was mostly used to spread propaganda in favor of the American-and-allied or Iraqi-and-allied forces, as the case may be. Television journalism was a particularly fertile ground for war journalism with one media outlet specially standing out – the CNN.

5. PERSIAN GULF WAR CORRESPONDENCES

The Cable News Network (CNN) provided the most extraordinary coverage of the Gulf War. One of the most spectacular features of war reportage was CNN's breakthrough with 24 hour broadcasts and access to leaders on both sides of the war (Nohrstedt 97). The satellite channel enabled the transmission of live footage from Baghdad where a team of reporters was stationed

during most of the war (97). Nohrstedt continues: “CNN’s footage of Coalition cruise missiles flying in over the Iraqi capital, tracer ammunition streaking against the night sky, wailing sirens, and air strikes from carriers in the Persian Gulf were aired on TV channels the world over” (97).

It was the only media outlet that happened to broadcast from inside Iraq when the bombing began and “for the next two weeks, CNN was the only American television network broadcasting from Iraq” (Bahador 3). The author also reports that “at 2:38 am, on January 17, 1991, the residents of Baghdad were woken by the launch of the first Gulf War” (Bahador 3). CNN correspondents Peter Arnett, John Holliman, and Bernard Shaw were confined to a hotel in Baghdad when the bombing started. As seen and heard in CNN’s video “See how the Gulf War began: 'The skies over Baghdad have been illuminated’” the correspondents described what they were seeing from their hotel room on the 9th floor as the bombing affected video transmission: “‘And we just heard—whoa. Holy cow. That was a large air burst that we saw. It was filling the sky.’ ‘Go for it, guys," a CNN producer told the reporters. "The whole world's watching’” (“Television – The Persian Gulf War”).

While the media was not effective in covering the Gulf War in the style expected of typical journalists (it was not very objective) because of the imposed pool system that in theory ensured that the information from pool members would be available to all reporters. In the beginning, 192 journalists from various media outlets, TV stations, newspapers and agencies were divided into 24 pools and assigned to different units of the military (Ottosen 73). In reality, that system was imposed to safeguard the reporters and limit their access to information. Only a few, like Bob Simon from the CBS, went out into the Saudi desert without being accompanied by military personnel. Simon's first such feat was a report from Khafji where U.S. marines were under attack.

Another correspondent that had a great impact was Bernard Shaw (Bauder). This journalist was famous during this war for his involvement in the pioneer coverage as the war broke out between the American and the Saddam-led coalitions. Indeed, he covered the war in the background of missiles flowing around and past him in Iraq's capital (Bauder). Despite covering the Gulf War amidst airborne and ground attacks between the two warring coalitions, he remained calm and could work comfortably even under pressure and intense fear. His efforts were why CNN covered the war to the delight of the American government.

Peter Arnett and John Holliman worked with Shaw during the first few days in the wake of the eruption of the Persian Gulf war. Shaw and his colleagues would later be called the "Boys of Baghdad" for their bravery and commitment to journalism (Arnett, Peter). Their journalism skills were observable when CNN aired a thirty-minute coverage televised before the American military administration declared that the war had begun. However, one of these correspondents who got the most attention was Peter Arnett. Most of that attention was unwanted as it came after he would expose the media propaganda related to CNN and other media. Arnett repeatedly pushed against limiting his movement and censoring his reporting. Moreover, "his stories about civilian casualties during allied bombing raids stirred enormous controversy in the US" ("Television – The Persian Gulf War").

With the exception of Arnett's reporting, the Bush administration was overall pleased with television coverage of the Gulf War. The Pentagon's chief public affairs officer, Pete Williams, concluded that the news media had provided "the best war coverage we've ever had" ("Television – The Persian Gulf War"). It can be contested that reporting from Baghdad during those first hours after the bombing started was arguably the most wholesome because government restrictions were

not imposed yet. Those restrictions were posed within 24 hours from the start of war operations (Bahador 4).

There are important lessons the media can learn from the Gulf War. It was a turning point in the history of war correspondence. All experience from previous wars has contributed to how the events in respect to reporting unfolded in the Gulf War. Knightley observes that it was "a war in which the military succeeded in changing people's perceptions of what battle was really like" and "in which the way the war was communicated was as important as the conduct of the war itself" (222). Originated from the coverage at this time, the term "CNN effect" was coined to contend that television images can shape foreign policy (Spitzer 34). This chapter will conclude with words of Barry Zorthian, chief Pentagon public affairs spokesman during the Vietnam War, to a National Press Club forum on March 19, 1991: "The Gulf War is over and the press lost" (qtd. in Knightley 222).

6. CONCLUSION

Barbie Zelizer contends the generally accepted notion that "CNN's role in the war has generated suggestions that its mode of news gathering signals an end to recognized journalistic practice and the beginning of a new era of journalism" (78). While it has offered a faster and less edited journalism it might be a bit far-fetched to discuss CNN's reporting as the beginning of a new era of journalism (78). But in which ways has the Gulf War of 1991 impacted journalistic practice in times of war?

To fully comprehend war journalism, it is of course necessary to view it as a whole and follow its development through history. However, due to the focus of this thesis, I have presented the evolving relationship between the government, military and the media in the American context.

As is exemplified, standards that media were expected to meet had a decisive role in the evolution of war coverage. Issues of what should be reported and to what extent have been challenged through history. In some examples, as seen in the American Civil War, the limitations posed on journalist have been in the service of the authorities in order to utilize the media for their own goals. On the other hand, examples such as that of the Vietnam War saw reshaping of journalistic practices and a unique level of journalistic autonomy.

As do the American Civil War in the 19th century and the Vietnam War in the 1960s, The Gulf War in 1991 marks one of the turning points for the discussion about journalistic practice and how the correspondence was revaluated and reshaped. The Gulf War introduced a precedent of controlling journalistic freedom and presents a critical moment for American journalism. It is quite likely that it has established a model for managing the freedom of the press in times of conflict and crisis. The Gulf War can therefore also be a great incentive for discussions on lingering concerns about the acceptable limits of censorship and government control (if any), organized media pools and their viability and the degree of inclusion of modern technology in reporting conflicts and crisis. Technological advancement which followed the Gulf War shaped the journalistic practice and that impact can be seen today. The arrival of new satellite technology shifted the focus from print media to television. Even though TV coverage was prevalent, print media was adjusted to the new form of journalism. Zelizer's analysis concludes that "newspapers used eye-catching graphics, sidebars, boxes, maps and special pull-out sections—a response to the increasing centrality of the visual element in news" (qtd. in Zelizer 76). This leads us to possibly

the most important change that the Gulf War has brought upon – favoring the visual element. More visual packaging and informative graphics that many adopted during the war (Zelizer 76) still persist today in various modes of reporting – from printed newspapers to *TikTok*.

In this paper we have traced media coverage of war from correspondence via letters all the way to live-streaming war on television. In order to understand and assess how the norms and values in reporting have evolved into their contemporary form, it is useful to review the major developments in war reporting and trace the history of war correspondence with a particular focus on reporting norms and advances connected to technology.

We are currently witnessing a new internet dominating era where the public, that was previously a receiver of news, can now participate in distributing information and providing an alternative view and opinions on a/ the war. In a world where change and war are a constant presence, the responsibility of the media is extensive. If we follow the history of warfare reportage, we can trace a pattern of swapping between censorship and freedom of press and if a repetition of this exercise wants to be avoided, we need to look back at the lessons that decisive significant moments in history, like the Gulf War and its precedents, can teach us.

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8. ABSTRACT

The media are always expected to be the objective mediators between the events they are reporting and the public. This thesis explores situations when the media willingly or unwillingly discarded the role of critical and objective bystanders and became the extension of the conflict. The main focus of this thesis is The Gulf War (1990-1991), nicknamed the *Video Game War* due to daily broadcast of images from Iraq.

The paper presents work of Sir William Knightley, Ernest Hemingway and Michael Herr in respect to war correspondence. Building on that experience, the paper examines conflicts which brought forth new journalistic practices in war reportage. The American Civil War saw the event of organized journalism and censorship in reporting and the Vietnam War witnessed an unprecedented freedom of press that arguably influenced the outcome of the war. These events led to the changes imposed on media freedom in the Gulf War. The US developed a new strategy of 'pools' to avoid the 'Vietnam syndrome' and we outline the influence that it has had on news reporting and the issues it has created. In addition, this paper focuses on reporting conventions and technological advances in relation to war correspondence. Television not only covered the Gulf War, it became an integral part of the conflict – from the opening moments of the war, with live telephone coverage of the bombing of Baghdad, to the final liberation of Kuwait. These events also impacted the change of norms and values in journalistic practice and shaped the way war journalism is practiced and perceived today. Having all this in mind, the paper attempts to answer the question: In which way has the Gulf War of 1991 impacted journalistic practice in times of war?

9. KEYWORDS

war correspondence, war correspondent, The Gulf War, media pools, technology