

# Analysis of fairclough's critical discourse analysis, chomsky's media model, and ...

War



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## **Media and Conflict Assignment: Iraq 2003**

No conflict in modern times has polarised popular discourses to the extent that the 2003 invasion of Iraq achieved. This study will examine a specific selection of media texts to explore how western newspapers represented Iraqis, particularly following the capture of US private Jessica Lynch and the deaths of six British Royal Military Police. The focus will be on the conflation of military and paramilitary actions by Iraqi forces with notions of 'barbarity' and 'evil'.

In order to critically evaluate the texts under analysis, this essay will use elements of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, Noam Chomsky's media model and Frank Furedi's arguments put forward in his book 'The New Ideology of Imperialism.'

On March 24 2003, Columnist Melanie Phillips wrote for the Daily Mail newspaper an article that ran with the headline: 'This war is about good and evil,' (Melanie Phillips, [www. dailymail. co. uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), This war IS about good versus evil) By framing the debate in such terms the Mail, begins to mythologise the causes of the conflict, reducing the role of economic, diplomatic or political factors and replacing them with a seemingly more 'natural' or simplistic discussion. Phillips presents as evidence in the article the fact that Saddam Hussein presented on film evidence of his hostages, and filmed dead US servicemen, some purportedly 'shot between the eyes' (Melanie Phillips, [www. dailymail. co. uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), This war IS about good versus evil).

This last reference clearly implies execution, suggesting that the normal rules of war are being violated, and that the US soldiers may have been executed after having surrendered. Much of the wider context for the soldier's deaths, the reasons for the war and for their presence in Iraq goes unmentioned. Fairclough argues in 'Language and Power' that this use of rhetoric constitutes an 'ideological creativity', an attempt to present a pro western stance at a time when the legitimacy of the conflict was extremely weak in both Britain and America (Fairclough, 116). In the same article Phillips contrast Saddam's barbarity and the gratitude of ordinary Iraqis who appeared to have wept as allied troops liberated Basra, with the anti war protest movement in Britain (Melanie Phillips, [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), This war IS about good versus evil). By presenting the conflict as a simple struggle between good and evil, Phillips seeks to criticise the protesters as naive. This argument obviously serves the wider conservative news agenda of the Daily Mail, and is typical of Phillips' own stance on foreign policy, Israel and the Middle East.

Two days later on March 25th the Mail reported that guerilla style attacks on British troops were taking place ([www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), Guerrilla-style attacks on UK troops). Non uniformed fighters in cars were taking "potshots" [Mail's punctuation] at troops and a 'somber mood' had descended through the US army encampments following the capture of US prisoners. The report interviews Lt Col Alastair Deas, a British Officer, who said that British forces would continue to distribute humanitarian aid ([www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), Guerrilla-style attacks on UK troops). What is implied in this article, along with the Phillips column is that Iraqi forces are contravening the normal rules

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of conflict and that allied soldiers are facing the danger not so much of a military force they can fight head on, but of terrorism instead. The binary opposition to this terror are the humanitarian efforts of the British Army. A further article by the Mail on the 27th claimed that children had also been used to shoot at US soldiers, a contravention of the normal rules of warfare, and arguably further evidence of the ' uncivilised' nature of the enemy (Daily Mail, Children shoot at US marines). The connotation within the text is that not only are unsuspecting allied troops victims in Iraq, but also some of the nation's children, however the regime itself is not directly blamed for arming children. The actual culprit is unclear, and the fact that this is missing from the text could potentially lead readers to assume that in the absence of state coercion, that arming children is more of a cultural practice or a natural response to invasion. The reading of the article is therefore more anti Iraqi than anti Baathist in its emphasis, implying some level of barbarity and callousness on the part of Iraq's people, not simply the regime.

The article quoted WDTV journalist Keith Garvin: " Unfortunately some of the children have been firing at our marines and the marines have been forced to defend themselves." (Children shoot at US marines, Daily Mail) The Mail added that fortunately, no marines had been hurt. Garvin's quote is telling here, as part of the embedded press accompanying the US army his use of the word ' our' and his identification with US troops suggests he had previously consciously decided to abandon his status as a neutral observer and transmitter of empirical evidence and reportage. He describes the decision to return fire as unfortunate, but by implication beyond the control of the US marines.

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The Daily Mail's politics regarding the Iraq War were explicit from the start in its editorials, but under the guise of supposed unbiased reporting, the newspaper uses language in order to heavily imply certain key ideas about the supposed barbarism of the Baathist regime, relative to Allied forces. The most obvious example of this is in the case of a Jessica Lynch, a female US soldier captured by the Iraqis in the first week of the invasion. Lynch was subsequently rescued from an Iraqi hospital by US special forces, and the Mail reported the story of her convalescence. On April 3rd 2003 it reported that: " Rubenstein (the commander of the US military hospital in Germany that Lynch was sent to)...denied speculation that she had been shot or stabbed, but refused to comment on how she broke so many bones or at what point - in battle or captivity - she was injured." (G. I. Jessica a very important patient, Daily Mail).

At the same time that Rubenstein was denying speculation as to the origins of Lynch's injuries, the Mail introduces speculation directly into the story by presenting the reader with two (of many) potential explanations, that she was either wounded fighting or tortured. Up to this point there had been no previous discussion of torture in the US or UK media and the US government had not discussed Lynch's condition as the results of torture. The Mail skilfully introduces speculative thinking into the article, without identifying it directly as speculation.

John Kampfner, then editor of the left of centre New Statesman wrote about the rescue of Lynch, the tone of the article is fundamentally different, less focused on portraying the Iraqis in one light or another and more supported

by empirical evidence (John Kampfner, *The Truth About Jessica*, Guardian). The conclusion reached by Kampfner, that Lynch was not tortured and had no bullet holes in her before the special forces raid, is fundamentally at odds with the picture presented by the Daily Mail. Kampfner, a well known and outspoken critic of the war had previously written a book on the subject of Tony Blair's military adventurism in the Balkans, Africa and the Middle East, 'Blair's War' published in 2002, so his view of the Iraq War was hardly likely to be jingoistic. The Guardian was the only British broadsheet newspaper to be openly critical of the war, however the language of the article is far from being as verbose or as suggestive as the Daily Mail, and there is little argument that a constructed ideology is present. Instead, the article avoids the implied and the implicit and explicitly presents evidence that suggests that the reporting of Lynch's captivity was both inaccurate and manipulated.

Titled 'The Truth About Jessica' Kampfner reports that: "One story, two versions. The doctors in Nassiriya say they provided the best treatment they could for Lynch in the midst of war. She was assigned the only specialist bed in the hospital, and one of only two nurses on the floor. "I was like a mother to her and she was like a daughter," says Khalida Shinah. We gave her three bottles of blood, two of them from the medical staff because there was no blood at this time," said Dr Harith al-Houssona, who looked after her throughout her ordeal. "I examined her, I saw she had a broken arm, a broken thigh and a dislocated ankle. Then I did another examination. There was no [sign of] shooting, no bullet inside her body, no stab wound - only RTA, road traffic accident," he recalled. "They want to distort the picture. I

don't know why they think there is some benefit in saying she has a bullet injury."(John Kampfner, The Truth About Jessica, Guardian).

Whilst there may be some possibility that the account of the hospital staff might have been exaggerated or distorted, unlike the Mail reportage it actually includes the voice of an Iraqi. This adds a sense of legitimacy, authenticity and veracity to the account, and steers the reader away from the possibility that there might be a set of values, beliefs or an agenda that Kampfner is attempting to impart. Given his previous writings it is highly likely that he is quite partisan on this subject, but his target audience, Guardian reading, left of centre professionals probably take little persuading.

The death of six Royal Military Policemen was uniformly described by all British newspapers as either a murder or execution, the men were unarmed, surrounded by a mob of Iraqis at a police station near Basra and individually shot in police cells. Whilst execution and murder might adequately describe their deaths, (the summary and extra judicial killings of unarmed men during wartime, outside the provisions of the Geneva Convention is unlawful and therefore murder) the two terms come with a great deal of connotational baggage and subtextual meaning(Last stand at Majar al-Kabir, Daily Telegraph). Execution implies some kind of sentence having been passed, a killing based on unjust rationale, or a killing based on the notion that British soldiers may be guilty of something. When reported in the Telegraph a week after the deaths, the sense that some Iraqis were operating beyond the normal codes of what could be construed as 'civilised' was implicit. The article headline makes a clear distinction between the military discipline of

the British and the anarchic nature of the Iraqis: “ Paras storm town where mob killed British soldiers.” (Paras storm town where mob killed British soldiers, Daily Telegraph) It goes on to quote L/Cpl Colin Rushworth as saying: “ The guys won’t let something like this get the better of them, because they are always professional at what they do.” (Paras storm town where mob killed British soldiers, Daily Telegraph). The emphasis on discipline, resolve and professionalism makes clear a binary opposition from the frenzied mob.

A Telegraph obituary repeatedly reminds readers of the professionalism of the men, quoting their commanding officer: “ All these men were highly professional soldiers and policemen. These deaths in action underline the challenging and difficult operations that the Royal Military Police are asked to undertake both in peace and times of conflict.”(Men who made the ultimate sacrifice, Daily Telegraph)

Another Telegraph article conjures images of Zulu or Gordon of Khartoum, describing the last stand of the Red Caps: “ The soldiers from the Royal Military Police had held out against an enraged mob, thousands strong, for about two hours, isolated and alone after their radio was lost with their Land Rover.”(Why were six soldiers left alone to face a rioting Iraqi mob?, Daily Telegraph).

In the same article the Telegraph involved itself in a post mortem of the killings, the article strongly implying that official incompetence may have been to blame: “...the main issue will centre around how six soldiers more used to policing than fighting came to be shot dead by civilians when better-

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armed troops had already been forced to withdraw from the area.” (Why were six soldiers left alone to face a rioting Iraqi mob? ) At no time in any articles was the rationale or legitimacy of invasion blamed or discussed, the absence of such a debate clearly sets the frame of discourse, tactics and strategy on the ground and the funding of the armed forces are all legitimate areas of discussion, the validity of the mission is not. Other articles, told with greater objectivity than the Mail but still within certain ideological parameters, based on the assumption of the legitimacy of the mission appeared on April 19th, April 20th and May 2nd, focusing on protesting Iraqis and presenting a nervous American military clearly not anticipating the level of animosity they faced from the Iraqi people. The fact that the focus of these stories in the Telegraph is on the US forces and not on the British occupation zone in the south is laden with implied meaning about how the British view their own peacekeeping skills, professionalism (a recurring theme) and ability to control situations. These articles were written before the ‘ red cap murders’.

Furedi writes: “ The widespread acceptance in the west of military intervention in other parts of the world is testimony to the effectiveness with which Third World nationalism has been discredited.”(Furedi, 26) In the examples shown above, the ‘ professionalism’, ‘ dedication’ and ‘ honour’ of the coalition forces are put to use, as Furedi suggests ‘ saving the Third World from itself.”(Furedi, 26) Iraqis are represented as angry mobs, (though the Telegraph does make considerable efforts to explore the causes of that anger), there is, in the case of Jessica Lynch the implication of torture and rape - only the Kampfner article presents a different view of the Iraqi medics.

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Linguist and activist Noam Chomsky in conversation with other activists, recounted in his book *Understanding Power*, said: “ What the media do, in effect, is to take the set of assumptions that express the basic ideas of the propaganda system...and then present a range of debate within that framework, so the debate only enhances the strength of assumptions.”(Chomsky, 52)

Within the small sample of articles present it is possible to see the limitations of discourse and the narrow parameters of debate, established by the assumptions of the writers and the publications they write for.