

**Media reflexivity in the war on terror:
Swedish media and the Iraq War 2003¹**

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In contrast to the previous Gulf War in 1991, the Iraq War in 2003 had already, before it started, been questioned on both legal and political grounds. It was criticised for being a violation of international laws and also for being illegitimate, morally and politically, even by allies that seldom deviate officially from the side of the USA. European political leaders were outspoken, and urged the Bush administration to move carefully and in concert with the traditional friends of America and the international community.

One of the most significant indications of legitimacy problems with this military intervention was that even prestige media in the USA later expressed uneasiness about their support for President Bush's Iraq policy. Between late May and mid July 2004, leading American newspapers confessed publicly that their reporting of the Bush administration's accusations against Iraq before the actual military intervention was launched in March 2003, had been uncritical and flawed. On May 26 2004, *The New York Times* foreign desk editors published an article in which they wrote that after having criticised the failings of intelligence reports, "especially on the issue of Iraq's weapons and possible Iraqi connections to international terrorists" over the last year it "...is past time we turned the same light on ourselves" (*NYT* 26-05-04). The major mistakes, according to this article, were lack of aggressive examination of claims about the threats from Iraq; trust in a circle of Iraqi informants, defectors and exiles bent on 'regime change' in Iraq, "people whose credibility has come under increasing public debate in recent weeks"; and that the charges against Iraq were more prominently displayed than those articles about which doubts were raised. Four days later, the press ombudsman of *NYT* added that the problem was institutional and not individual, not a question of placement

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of articles, and that the editors' *mea culpa* would serve its function only if it was followed-up with "a series of aggressively reported stories detailing the misinformation, disinformation and suspect analysis that led virtually the entire world to believe Hussein had WMD. at his disposal" (NYT 30-05-04).

Six weeks later, *The Washington Post* expressed regrets that pre-war articles raising questions about the threats of which Iraq had been accused did not make the front page. Howard Kurtz, the newspaper's media writer, signed the confession and the assistant managing editor, Bob Woodward, a journalistic legend after the Watergate revelations, was quoted as saying: "We did our job but we didn't do enough, and I blame myself mightily for not pushing harder... we should have warned readers we had information that the basis for this was shakier than widely believed. Those are exactly the kind of statements that should be published on the front page." He thought that he, as well as the intelligence officials, had been victims of 'group-think'.

Examining the newspaper's coverage retrospectively, one reviewer concluded that the US government had privileged access to front page appearance whereas critical views were far less prominently placed – if placed at all. Karen DeYoung, a reporter and former assistant managing editor who covered the pre-war diplomacy, said in the article: "We are inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power." This was evident the day after Colin Powell's speech before the UN Security Council, according to the *WP* ombudsman. "Not until the ninth paragraph did they offer a 'however' clause, saying that 'a number of European officials and U.S. terrorism experts' believed that Powell's description of an Iraqi link to al Qaeda appeared to have been carefully drawn to imply more than it actually said." (*WP* 04-08-12)

These professional self-confessions are as clear-sighted as one could wish for. The problem, of course, is that they came so late. But they are remarkable because it is rare for leading media to admit their shortcomings, even in retrospect, although mistakes almost as spectacular have been noticed in the records of the trade. For example, to my knowledge none of more prestigious news media, either in the US or in Europe, have regretted the way the 1991 Gulf War was depicted as a clinical war; afterwards they only released fragments of information contradicting that image, as if noticing long afterwards that only some 7% of the bombs were so-called smart bombs (Kellner, 1992:XX).

If such are the results for some of leading American newspapers' involvement in the propaganda war before Iraq was invaded in March 2003, what was the case with the European media? As mentioned by the *WP* some European officials had certainly raised doubts about American and British accusations against Iraq. Did the media on this side of the Atlantic display a more reflective and sceptical attitude towards the official motives of the 'war alliance' than their American counterparts? Is that why we have not seen any similar self-confessions for mistakes and things neglected from them? In other words: were they as much a mouthpiece of the superpower's propaganda as were the American media?

And did they develop reflexivity at a higher level than the US media managed at the time? These are the bottom-line questions behind this study of media reflexivity in connection with 'the new wars' (Kaldor, 1999; see also Ignatieff, 2000) in late modernity.

A few introductory remarks should be added about the general aims and background of this study. It takes three Swedish newspapers' images of the Iraqi War 2003 as the empirical ground for a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to the 'war on terror'. By applying some specific concepts from the CDA on a limited sample of media texts I will try to illustrate how contextual analysis can be conducted without neglecting detailed examination of the concrete media material. However, such an approach has necessarily to rely on a theoretical understanding of the fundamental conditions and the institutional setting of war journalism, because otherwise a relevant focus would be missing. As explicated in this article, this means contextual reading of the texts in relation to the historical and political setting, including the national and regional (e.g. European Union) levels, but also in relation to the international political situation and the diplomatic and ideological controversy released in conjunction with US/UK pressure for military intervention in Iraq in the autumn of 2002 and spring of 2003. In methodological terms, this means that I have based the analysis mainly on headlines and leads, although the entire texts have been thoroughly studied.

But this study also has another aim, however limited in this format – to present a concentrated representation of how some Swedish media depicted the Iraqi War 2003 against the backdrop of how they covered the so-called Second Gulf War 1990-91. In a comparative study of the media war at the time in more than five countries, we concluded that the war had never ended – and today one can only regret how true that prediction was. Furthermore, we concluded from the analyses that the national political contexts of the media affected the

content. For example, the security and foreign policy traditions of the respective countries meant that the media in non-aligned countries (e.g. Finland and Sweden) were more reluctant to relay the US war propaganda than, for example, the German and Norwegian media – not to mention the American media (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2001). In a study of the media war in connection with the Kosovo conflict 1999 we showed similar results, i.e. ‘nationalised images’ (cf. Riegert, 1998) and varying degrees of susceptibility to the NATO propaganda in British, Norwegian and Swedish media, particularly in the initial stage of the military intervention (Nohrstedt, Höijer & Ottosen, 2002).

In the Iraq War 2003, military intervention without a UN resolution was, according to the official Swedish position, a violation of international law that Sweden could not support. But this position was not expressed loudly and clearly, as we shall see. Rather, the Swedish government kept a low profile and let the leading EU powers, such as France and Germany, stand for its opposition against the policy of ‘the war alliance’. To some Swedes that was a surprise and disappointment considering the non-alignment foreign- and security-policy tradition reaching as far back as the Napoleonic wars. And within the Social-Democratic party some members were uncomfortable that the legacy of the late Olof Palme, a former Prime Minister with a worldwide reputation as a spokesman for the non-alignment movement during the Cold War, **had been forsaken.**

The objective in this study is, then, to analyse how a limited sample of Swedish media constructed the conflict discursively in this political and ideological context. My contextual approach takes advantage of the concept ‘discursive order’ as explicated by Norman Fairclough in his application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (see also the Introduction).

Analytical framework: ‘A global discursive order’

As indicated in the Introduction of the book, the general idea of using the concept ‘discursive order’ in studies of media content is to also include **inter-discursive relationships, i.e. media content**, in relation to other discourses such as public diplomacy, propaganda and humanitarian work. Given the rapid development and changes of the media landscape on the global level in the last two decades, these inter-discursive relations are not limited to the nation-states. On the contrary, important globalisation-promoting processes within the media

sector – for example concentration of ownership, advent of international satellite television channels with global reach and technical convergence between previously separate media forms (e.g. press, radio, television) due to Internet and telecommunication inventions – have connected media discourses beyond national borders. This is not to say that the notion of national media is definitely obsolete, but rather that national-local media discourses are interacting much more with global media discourses, and in far more complex ways, than ever before. Before elaborating on what this contextual approach means for the present study, just a few words on the conceptual tools applied.

Discourse analysis is a method for studying communicative action from a social science and partly linguistic point of view. The concept ‘discourse’ refers to all kinds of communicative actions such as language use in written or spoken form, visual images, gestures or behaviour (Fairclough, 1995: 54; van Dijk, 1998: 193-194). Its referential meaning concerns the *ways* in which language is used when talking about and understanding the world (Drotner et.al., 2000: 28). Communication is conceived as a kind of social practice with societal implications and effects, a ‘linguistised societal practice’ (Drotner, et al., 2000: 107). It can be compared with other actions in that something is accomplished (Nohrstedt, 1986: 48). But the relationship between the discourse and its social-political context is not only constituted by the discourse’s effects on the latter; it also comprises the ideological, political and institutional frames and norms that condition the ways in which communication is pursued. Hence, in several reciprocal ways discourse and context are mutually related.

A ‘discursive order’ is the actual configuration of a certain complex of discourses or “...a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning, i.e. different discourse and genres and styles” (Fairclough, 2003:2). The reason why this concept is needed in discourse analysis is that various discourses are usually mixed and interact with each other in certain ways. It is, however, important to clarify that when applying the notion of a global discursive order I do not subscribe to a deterministic structuralism which would deny any leeway for agents and discursive opposition. As Norman Fairclough has emphasised, a discursive order is contested terrain, and is more often than not challenged by some opposing social forces. Nothing is predestined in the ‘dialectics of discourse’ (Fairclough, 2003:3). Thus, to use the analytical concept discursive order does not imply that one excludes the possibility of critical reflections from opponents to it. On the contrary, *reflexivity* is explicitly mentioned as a dimension of the dialectics of discourse: “...people do

not only act and interact within networks of social practices, they also interpret and represent to themselves and each other what they do, and these interpretations and representations shape and reshape what they do” (Fairclough, 2003:4). And, as mentioned above, this particular aspect of the discursive order is central for this study.

This emphasis on the reflexivity dimension is also related to globalisation theory, the backdrop on which the historical setting of this study is based. In Stig Hjarvard’s discussion of how the public sphere is de-territorialised as a result of globalisation processes, reflexivity is another related consequence :

“.. due to the public sphere’s increased openness and connectedness to a world beyond national borders, including other public spheres, a *global reflexivity* gradually gains foothold... Thus, globalisation of the public sphere is not about the creation of *the* global public sphere, but rather about the increased presence of global connections within the national framework. This introduces a global reflexivity in the public sphere that, in the long run, will influence and alter the structure of the national public sphere and its relation to both political institutions and civil society.” (Hjarvard, 2001:24-25; emphasis in original)

Quoting a few lines like this may give the false impression that Hjarvard belongs to the naive *globalists* (cf. Held & McGrew, 2000). He does not and he underlines contradictory trends, i.e. that globalisation may widen and narrow views of the world at the same time. But when it comes to reflexivity it seems that Hjarvard sees a direct causal relationship that could be problematic. The aim of this study is to analyse the conditioning of global reflexivity in media discourses in particular, with regard to self-reflections within the context of the Iraq War 2003. The concept of discursive order is helpful in that endeavour, because it throws light on the institutional settings of media war reporting.

Which discourses, then, are ‘ordered’ in the present case? Focus is primarily on *media discourses* in relation to *public diplomacy*, *war propaganda* and *compassion*. The notion ‘public diplomacy’ refers to the political debates around issues of legality and legitimacy; for example, whether a new UN resolution was needed to make the military intervention in Iraq legal. By ‘war propaganda’ I basically refer to the discourse on possible Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction, but also to references from the respective parties in the conflict

as to the nature of the conflict, the warfare as such, military operations, and so on. The compassion discourse, finally, constitutes the discussions around the humanitarian aspects of the war – for example civilian casualties and human suffering. The study concentrates on the ways in which the political conflicts connected to the Iraqi War are discursively constructed by the media. How is the propaganda from the respective parties in the conflict mediated? What is placed at the centre of attention? Is information from the involved parties relayed with or without reservations or distancing remarks? And what is excluded from the media discourses? Hence the inter-textual relationships are not only studied with respect to connections, but also to rejections within the global discursive order.

Material

Three daily Swedish newspapers have been selected for the analysis: *Aftonbladet (AB)* is the largest daily newspaper, not only in Sweden but also in the Nordic countries, with a circulation of 442 100 copies on weekdays², and the leading tabloid. Its editorial position is independent Social-Democratic and it has defended the non-alignment tradition of Swedish foreign and security policy, and usually expresses rather strong critique of the USA in relation to international politics. *Dagens Nyheter (DN)* is the leading quality paper, with readers mainly in social and cultural elite groups. Its circulation amounts to 362 500 copies daily in weekdays. On page four *DN* publishes debate, and is generally regarded as the most important agenda setter in the country. Its editorials are officially claimed to be independent liberal, and during the 1990s they have urged Sweden to apply for NATO membership. *Expressen (EXP)* is the second tabloid in the sample. Before 1996 it was the largest daily paper in Sweden (Hadenius & Weibull, 1999: 64), but was then pushed back in the competition with *AB* and now sells 226,400 copies every weekday. Like the two other papers it is officially independent, and claims to promote liberal ideas. It belongs to the same leading media conglomerate in Sweden – the Bonnier sphere – as *DN* and, like *DN*, it has strongly argued for Sweden to become a member of NATO.

The periods from which the material has been selected are:

1. 5, 6, 7 February 2003: Colin Powell's report to the UN Security Council.
2. 14, 15, 16 February 2003: Blix's report to the Security Council; peace demonstrations worldwide.

² All circulation figures are from year 2003 (*TS-tidningen* 27 February 2004. Tidningsstatistik., www.ts.se, visited 040614).

3. 20, 21, 22 March 2003: the military attack on Iraq.
4. 2, 3, 4 May 2003: Bush declares end of the battle of Iraq.

The media material consists of editorials, debate articles and news, including feature items such as analyses and commentaries. Letters to the editor are not included. Visual images are not studied specifically, but have been integrated in the text analyses.

Disposition

In the following presentation of the main findings I will concentrate on four themes of particular relevance for a CDA analysis of the media content. Of these themes the first three will only be dealt with briefly, since I will concentrate mainly on the fourth. Firstly, *representation* of other discourses will be noted, i.e. inter-discursive relationships between the media discourses and media-external discourses as manifested in the former. Secondly, the *positioning* of the papers' stance in relation to the international and national levels will be analysed. With respect to the international level, emphasis will be placed upon how, in particular, the editorials take sides in the conflict between the members of the so-called war alliance and the various agents arguing for a peaceful solution to the conflict and criticising the military intervention policy. On the national level, the discursively constructed relationship to the government, public opinion and the peace movement are the prime focuses. Thirdly, I will analyse *identification* of a certain Swedish attitude to the conflict and its parties and main actors in the media discourses. This is basically deduced by close readings of the cases where Swedish citizens or opinions are mentioned. An evident example is when Hans Blix appears in the material – is his national identity emphasised and is he depicted as a representative, not only of the weapons inspectors, but of a Swedish way of handling conflicts as well? But there are also other items where Swedish people are mentioned and it seems worthwhile to take a closer look at whether these items are indicative of identity paradigms. Fourthly, I will elaborate on the *reflexivity* dimension of the media discourses.

The analytical focus is, then, on the ways in which the media texts establish what is regarded as a credible image of events and reality and what is not, and, in addition, what claims of validity they express for their own reporting. This theme further includes such issues as which specific information sources are ascribed credibility; to what extent war correspondents (for example embedded ones) can report accurately and objectively; and the media's role in the propaganda war.

Results

As indicated above the findings will be presented in a thematic order, but within each theme I shall report the results in a loosely chronological way based on the selected periods. The reason for this is that one of the objectives of this study is to catch as much as possible of the dynamics of the media discourses. Even if the media texts, as they emerge from the daily news reports, statements and political comments, cannot be studied in the same way as a sequential narrative, they are nevertheless pregnant with meaning linked to previous media texts, and open for a **bahtian** reading of layers of meanings. No doubt such a diachronic reading could – and perhaps should – consider much longer time-spans than the present study, but empirically that would demand other resources, in terms of time and manpower, than were available.

Representation of inter-discursive relationships

For the analysis of the inter-discursive relationships in this paragraph I have concentrated on the news material. I have looked for indicators of how the news texts relate to other discourses in terms of thematic focus, framing and selection of sources.

In the first period when the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, presents the accusations against Iraq for violations of the UN embargo on possession of weapon of mass destruction and repeated defiance of the UN inspectors, the media are, as expected, filled with extensive reports from the Security Council. But more interesting are the ways in which the speech by the US **Foreign Minister** are contextualised by what is mentioned about previous comments and expectations, and how Powell's and other speeches in the Council are presented. In the Swedish media, Powell's performance before the Council is framed both by proactive denials and by reactive critical and sceptical comments.

Particularly noticeable is a highly exposed interview with the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein published by all the three Swedish dailies on the very day that the USA reveals the accusations against the Iraqi regime. I shall later discuss the critical remarks concerning the American claims. Not only does the Iraqi leader have the opportunity to forestall Powell's speech, but also Powell himself, as *DN* relates what Powell had stated recently in an article published by an American paper – with the obvious purpose of avoiding inflated expectations of the coming speech.

The media coverage of the Security Council's session is rather selective; none of the other ministers, or even all the other speakers together, receives even a fraction of the attention directed at Powell.

In relation to the official Swedish position as explicated by Prime Minister Göran Persson and Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, the media discourse is docile when it comes to the key component in the non-aligned foreign policy of Sweden – namely the demand that the UN should decide if and when military intervention would be legitimate. On the other hand, the newspapers publish more sceptical comments about Powell's charges than Prime Minister Persson, who says that they 'had weight' (EXP 06-02; online edition).

In the first period, references to the peace movement and the anti-war opinion are less than frequent. Only *AB* takes some notice, and then on the editorial page (06-02). But neither in *DN* nor in *EXP* does anything equivalent appear – at this stage.

However, in the second period and in connection with Hans Blix's report to the Security Council on February 14, the three studied papers all focus heavily on the peace movement and the anti-war protests. *Expressen* is the most obvious example since the front page is designed to be used as a poster in demonstrations against the coming war, and the paper explicitly recommends such use (15-02). At this stage, media attention is strongly on public opinion both nationally and internationally. All dailies report about opinion polls which they have ordered or arranged themselves. *Dagens Nyheter*, for example, has found that "The Swedes support a UN attack. Six out of ten say yes to an operation in Iraq" (15-02), while *EXP* reports almost exactly the opposite: "64% of Swedes are against the war in Iraq – even if supported by the UN" (15-02). If public opinion is the main factor behind the remarkable swing in the positioning of *EXP*, as it is now becoming a contributor to manifestations of anti-war sentiment, it is more than ironic that the opinion polls are so contradictory and unreliable.

Another noticeable feature of the media discourse around Blix's report in mid-February is that the French representative is now at the centre of their attention. The proportion of relative attention is turned around in comparison to the Security Council's session a week earlier.

When, in the third period, the military operations start on March 20, a considerable number of war correspondents and freelancers working for the Swedish media are on the war scene in Iraq and the surrounding region. Reports are floating in from Baghdad, Amman, Kuwait City, Tel Aviv and Kurdistan. Permanent correspondents in, for example, New York and London, continuously bring the latest news, more often than not from the media accessible there. What inter-discursive relationships are then established in connection with the military intervention in Iraq?

It is of course no surprise that many of the reports are about the bombings and the ‘horror and awe’ they spread among the Iraqis. The media fascination with military technology and the drama of warfare is well known, and an essential part of the trade since its very beginning. Nor is there reason to raise one’s eyebrows when noticing that American and British news sources are, throughout the intensive war phase, taking a predominant position as information providers when it comes to developments on the battlefield. It is, perhaps, more surprising that Iraqi sources are seldom directly used. When Iraqi statements and information sources are mentioned, the material is usually taken from American or British sources, such as for example when *Expressen*, based on Sky-News reports, says that Saddam Hussein has commanded his pilots to crash their aeroplanes into allied installations in *kamikaze* attacks (21-03). Also remarkable is the very marginal role Arabic media sources play in the Swedish media compared with the importance ascribed to, for example, al-Jazeera’s international media war coverage (e.g. Kellner, 2004; Petley, 2004). This should not, however, hide the possibility that the Qatar-based TV channel and other Arabic television channels may have played a major role in framing the reports from correspondents employed by Western media companies. At the Allied Press Centre, the so-called ‘platform of truth’ in Qatar, for instance, al-Jazeera seems to have been both a respected and controversial channel for complementary ‘truths’ (Slapgard, 2003: 138 f., 155 f.).

Anti-war appeals and protests against the military intervention are still a major concern for the media coverage in the first days of the war in two of the Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Aftonbladet*, while *Expressen* mentions the no-war protests in only one article over the first few days (21-03).

At the national level the media relate only randomly to the political establishment in Sweden, probably because the Swedish government kept a low profile in the conflict. Prime Minister

Persson hardly appears at all and even Foreign Minister Lindh only twice addresses the issue publicly in *AB*. When Persson is mentioned in the three analysed papers it is in *EXP* that he is accused of hiding behind the bushes in this war (20-03), and of hypocrisy (21-03).

In the fourth period, when President George W Bush declares that the battle of Iraq is over and won, this manifestation of victory is at best noticed with some reluctance in the Swedish media studied here. It is not even mentioned by the two tabloids, *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*. In *Dagens Nyheter* the event is reported in an analytical item on the foreign news page in a six-column article with an ironic-critical angle. The spectacular staging of the press conference on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, with the president entering the deck from the cockpit of an aircraft, dressed as a pilot, is emphasised immediately, in the first sentence of the text. And in the next paragraph Bush's party-affiliate, Newt Gingrich, is quoted likening the president landing at the naval vessel to the fearless president in the Hollywood movie 'Independence Day', he who fights for the survival of the earth (03-05). The journalist certainly prioritises an American political discourse and the lion's share of the text is filled with quotations and references to Bush's speech. But the framing is clearly distanced and the paper underlines the tactical-strategic context with references, first to the political need to show the triumph over the Saddam Hussein regime and, second, to the setting of the agenda for the upcoming presidential election campaign. It is reasonable to regard mention of the Gingrich quotation and reference to the Hollywood movie as a latent critique of the Bush administration's propaganda and as alleged manipulation of public opinion in the USA.

In *Aftonbladet* the relation to the American public discourse is even more notably distanced, and not only because the 'mission accomplished' speech is ignored but also because a televised speech by Saddam Hussein is brought to attention through a well-exposed article, with footage covering a full page, on the same day that *DN* reports about Bush's speech on the USS Abraham Lincoln. Considering that *AB*, as recently as two days earlier, had focused on the fate of the Iraqi dictator, it is hardly a coincidence but, rather, a typical priority for this tabloid. A similar pattern was apparent in *AB* at the end of the Kosovo war when another dictator and enemy of NATO was at its centre of attention (Nohrstedt, Höijer & Ottosen, 2002).

Positioning of the media discourse in the conflict

In analysing the positioning of the media discourses, genres and discursive elements other than mere news are relevant. I rely primarily on elements of the media discourses which represent a more active and manifest positioning, for example editorials, debate articles, commentaries and analytical articles, but also news promoted on the front page, and news interviews. The newspapers' explicit standpoints in relation to the international political discussion about alternative ways to solve the conflict and attitudes toward the respective parties will first be addressed. Secondly, the positions taken by the dailies in relation to the national Swedish public arena will be studied.

In general the three Swedish newspapers change their positions in relation to the key issues in the conflict, from a moderately sceptical attitude towards USA policy in the first period to an unreservedly anti-war position in the second. To a large extent this seems to be influenced by the clear no-war emotion of the general public(s) so paramount in the media coverage at this time. For example, in the first period an editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* proclaims that this is the "Last chance in Iraq" and in the next period the war is imminent, but rejected by world-wide opinion: the headline is "Marching against the war". And in the lead the lack of support from the general public is underlined: "Today demonstrations against a war in Iraq are organised all over the world. It will be a massive popular manifestation, and some of the demands will, and should, also be heard in Washington". In *Aftonbladet* the editorial headline in the first period is "A General searching his war" (06-02) whereas in the second period the formulation is "Defeat for the war alliance" (15-02) and "The world says No" (16-02). *Expressen* also moves from a cautious and watchful attitude to an openly anti-war position, especially on the front page. The editorial "Wait with the war" (06-02) from the first period could be compared with the editorial "Beneath the gallows", in which the US military threat on Iraq is said to have an impact and particularly compared with the front page headlines from the second period, "The Swedish people: We want PEACE!" (15-02) and "All Sweden on the march" (16-02).

In relation to the more internal Swedish debate, the selected newspapers' editorial lines differ distinctively from each other. The Social-Democratic *Aftonbladet* tends to take a firm pro-government stand, mainly because it ascribes to the latter a stronger anti-war position than do the other two newspapers, affiliated as they are with the opposition in Sweden. In *AB* the Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh, appears in one debate article and also in an interview during the periods in the present sample. In the first article, with the headline "War can still be avoided", she relates to a Social-Democratic foreign policy tradition going back to Olaf Palme

and his last speech before the UN General Assembly. Palme had raised a warning about the misuse of the right to self-defence for legitimisation of military operations (14-02). In the interview, where the personal angle is paramount, Lindh's children's expectations for her are emphasised: "They are critical...they want mum always to work for peace". Interestingly, the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson plays a more marginal role in the *AB* references to the government's stand in the conflict than does Anna Lindh; this is why the *AB* image of the official Swedish line looks more consistently anti-war than it does in the two other newspapers; and because in both *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen* the main representative of the government is Göran Persson – in fact Anna Lindh does not appear at all in these two papers – and the government is further criticised for being either ambivalent or flatly hypocritical about the conflict. Some examples will suffice to vindicate this result: "Every other Swede distrusts Prime Minister Göran Persson's handling of the crisis" (DN 15-02); "The resistance to war strikes against Persson" (DN 16-02); "If the USA in the Iraqi War violates international law, why does Göran Persson not yield to the rules for weapon export?" (EXP 21-03) and "Persson does not live up to expectation" – with the additional lead conclusion: "His reputation is the war's first casualty" (EXP 21-03).

The tabloids, especially, have a tendency to be in express support of humanitarian appeals in armed conflicts. In the media discourse, this is manifested in various shapes and forms, with a positive focus on good examples, for instance relief workers risking life and limb trying to relieve suffering and distress. The objects of such reports are often Swedish heroes serving as models for identification among readers (this will be discussed further below). The humanitarian commitment is also manifested when the papers initiate fund-raising campaigns in aid of the victims of the war. This has happened before, for instance during the Kosovo War when *Aftonbladet* launched a campaign in aid of the banished Kosovo Albanians (Nohrstedt, Höijer & Ottosen, 2002). During the Iraqi War, however, it was *Expressen* which invested printing space and other resources in raising funds for those suffering as a result of the war. The paper proclaims that a 'fund-raising blitz' has been launched in cooperation with the Red Cross. The proclamation is made inside the paper where the cruelty of the war, especially the ways in which children suffer, are exposed. The Red Cross is said to be preparing for a million Iraqi refugees and the statement given by the Red Cross Head of Communications with respect to the Swedish campaign is: "It is enormously important to get the ball rolling immediately after the outbreak of war, says Katarina Mohlin". On the same page, the paper looks at all the questions children ask about the war. There is no end to the

questions, *EXP* claims. The Swedish Prime Minister does not escape the paper's critical Argus-eyes this time around either. Again, and on the same page, he is grouped together with the rest of the EU leaders in a negative way. Having described the endless suffering of the children and having discussed the campaign initiative, the paper goes on to report that the EU leaders had chosen to discuss milk quotas instead of the war during the present summit, and the headlining does not leave anything to readers' imaginations: "Milk quotas more important than the war. EU leaders not even able to express regret about the attack". In case any readers might have missed the moral accusation contained in the headline, it is followed by wording even stronger in its tone: "As the bombs fall over Baghdad, the EU heads of government discuss Italian milk quotas. The big question, whether it was right to go to war now, or whether one should have waited for a decision in the Security Council, was not discussed during the summit, Prime Minister Göran Persson says" (*Expressen* 21-03). From the perspective of *Expressen*, this media rhetoric most likely serves two appealing purposes. Firstly, the paper is displaying commitment as well as a concrete ability to take action in aid of the suffering children, which forestalls some readers perceiving the emotional journalism as a cynical exploitation of suffering. Secondly, this self-glorification can, in an advantageous manner, be highlighted against the insensitivity, arrogance and preoccupation with narrow material issues of the political elite. Humanitarian pathos nursed by compassion for the children of the war can thus be geared towards the very same lack of political leadership of the Social-Democratic government that is so consistently claimed by the paper, and can be contrasted to the way in which *Expressen* unreservedly praises the British Prime Minister, for instance in an editorial with the heading "Watch Blair!", in which one could read: "If Blair was to become one of the victims of war, it would constitute a great loss for world politics" (20-03).

Identification – Construction of 'Swedishness' in the media discourse

If the Swedish government or its representatives do not constitute prominent figures in the public sphere surrounding the Iraqi War, other symbols for national identity are more important within the media discourse. Even if the media companies do not have the express intention of contributing to the creation of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991), thus setting themselves apart from the educational system, the introduction of national language standards and the traditional writing of history, journalism as an institution assumes a representative function within the discursive order. The professional ideology views

journalists as representatives of an audience with certain common interests, opinions and views – otherwise it cannot be represented, which is the fundamental idea of journalism and the bourgeois public sphere. Consequently, the relationship between the media texts and the national subject and identity is constructed continuously and discursively (Wodak et al., 1999). Let us look at the ways in which this shows itself in the Swedish newspapers in connection with the Iraqi War.

It is in the tabloids that the identity markers appear in their most noticeable form, presumably because the papers relying on the day-to-day sale of single copies constantly need to re-establish the imagined fellowship with their readers. In *Aftonbladet*, the Swede is above all constructed as committed to peace and having humanitarian compassion. The close ties between the paper and its readers are strongly accentuated when opposition to the war is described. On February 7, a column by the political editor presents audience responses to an editorial two days before (not included in this analysis) in which the paper had strongly argued against the war. Around 95% of the e-mail letters are said to support the anti-war opinion of *AB*. The editor has never seen anything like this reaction. The column ends with two hopeful sentences: “Opinion against the war-madness is growing. Perhaps peace still has a chance?” In the other tabloid, *Expressen*, the audience is addressed on the front page as being affected by the threatening war: “How you are hit by the Iraqi crisis” (06-02). In the second period *AB* expresses hope on its editorial page owing to the massive protests against the war: “The world says NO”. And: “We are many, we are strong”. A few pages further into the paper the Swedish attitude is manifested: “Sweden says ‘No to war’”. A column extends this to the entire continent: “America’s arrogance irritates us Europeans” (16-02). On *Expressen*’s front page the Swedes want peace and they will demonstrate for it: “The Swedish people: We want PEACE! Cut this out – if you want to demonstrate today” (15-02). Even after the war has started the hope for peace is not lost: “The struggle for peace continues in Sweden” (*EXP* 20-03). This newspaper also invites its readers to help the victims of the war: “How you can help the victims” (*EXP* 22-03).

But the Swedish identity is also linked to concrete demonstrations of concern for the suffering of the Iraqi people as, for example, when so-called human shields are mentioned. One of them is a woman who shares the agony of the population in the Iraqi capital: “Swedish Ingrid’s horror night in Baghdad: ‘We hear bombs everywhere’” (*AB* 22-03). And in *Expressen* some other Swedish human shields are horrified: “The Swedes caught in Iraq. Sigge’s friend: This

is terrible” (21-03). The identification with the suffering Iraqi people echoes headlines immediately after September 11 2001: “Today we are all Iraqis” (*EXP* 20-03; 21-03).

Reflexivity – Discursive construction of validity claims

One theme that seems to receive more attention over time in the media coverage of war is the risk of flawed reporting because of propaganda and of manipulation by the involved parties. The experiences of the Gulf War 1990-91 are often recalled, and with them the illusions of clinical warfare and smart weapons. Media experts and researchers are interviewed about the problems for journalists giving a dispassionate image of the events in wars, and audiences are urged to be critical in their news consumption. Therefore, a crucial aspect of the discursive order is what regime of truth is created in the relationships between the media and various other claimants of possession of a correct image of reality (cf. Ekström, 2004).

The classic liberal press idea about fair reporting is to balance partial views with each other, thus achieving an objective report. It is, however, intriguing to notice that this principle is more often than not lost when it comes to war reporting. Rarely, if ever, will one find media coverage that devotes equal space and equal credibility to both sides in war, or even a reasonably fair balance between them. As Daniel Hallin has convincingly argued, there are norms in the media for what are regarded as legitimate and illegitimate conflicts and from that distinction it follows that only some views will count as relevant for the media (Hallin, 1986). There could be a number of reasons why some descriptions and some sources of information are not regarded: for example that they are connected with previously untrustworthy agents, or that they cannot be controlled as in the case of totalitarian regimes. Here I am not aiming at a discussion about whether the media has made rational choices and assessments when trusting, or not trusting, some sources of information. My objective is rather to study the ways in which media indicate in what sense and why its content should be trusted as valid and relevant, fair and credible. With the advantage of hindsight this has become very much more important after the complete debacle of the accusations about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and links to al-Qaeda that were displayed as major reasons for launching the attacks on Iraq in spring 2003.

The analysis below will look specifically at three aspects of the epistemological **problems**: first, how the media discourse relates to truth claims from the involved parties in the conflict *when they are explicitly discussed* (in the major part of the material the validity of presented

information is not addressed at all); second, how the professional conditions of journalists reporting from the war and the implications for the credibility of their reports are presented; third, (and if so) what is said in the media about attempts from the parties in the conflict to change the epistemological foundations for assessing the validity and trustworthiness of their claims. Such an analysis will not produce any conclusive findings with regard to truths and lies in the Iraqi propaganda war, or even tell us much about the degrees of truth in the media content. But it will hopefully give some empirical findings from which journalism practices and professional moral positions on ethical standards can be compared (cf. Ekström & Nohrstedt, 1996).

Owing to the limited material from the fourth period, only media material from the first three periods will be used in the remaining part of the reflexivity analysis.

First Period: Comments on the WMD evidence as presented by Colin Powell

On February 5, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, presents the accusations against Iraq for obstruction of the UN demands on the country to dismantle all weapons of mass destruction. The following day, February 6, Colin Powell appears on the first page of *Dagens Nyheter*: “USA provided Iraq evidence. Secretary of State Colin Powell accused Saddam for hiding weapons and threatening researchers”. According to an expert quoted in the article, the information was more serious than expected, but no definite proofs were produced. One full foreign news page is devoted to the speech by Powell and his allegations against Iraq. But the headlines of three commentaries on the very same page indicate that the speech was met with doubts: “No clear swing of opinion” is one example. The other two are: “Drawings were obviously no direct proof” and “Satellite pictures do not impress”.

Aftonbladet (AB), the Swedish tabloid newspaper with the largest circulation, has the story about Colin Powell’s speech in the UN Security Council as the major news on its front page on February 6: “All the US evidence against Saddam”. The editorial also addresses the Iraqi conflict and Powell’s argumentation in the Council: “A General searching for his war”. The argumentation by the US Secretary of State is described as spasmodic and said to throw long shadows back in American history – more specifically to 1964 and the lie about the Tonkin attack from North Vietnam on the US Navy that was used as a pretext for the start of the Vietnam War. The editorial rejects the alleged connection between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda. Furthermore the accusation that Iraq has a nuclear power programme is doubted

because, the editor argues, the IAEA, CIA and the weapons inspectors have all proved the opposite. The *AB* headline on the foreign news page is significant for the paper's sceptical position: "UN: Wait with the war". The subtitle supports it: "The Security Council wants more time for Blix to find weapons".

In relation to doubts concerning the American charges expressed in other parts of *Aftonbladet*, a remarkable line of reasoning is presented in the analyses written by one of its special journalists, Wolfgang Hansson. On February 6 his comments on the evidence presented by Colin Powell are more than sceptical: "Each of the 'evidence' taken for itself was not very impressive. Isolated conversations. Many buildings and lorries. What was in them was not revealed by the satellite images. But together the presented material created a massive and serious image of a country that very consciously tries to hide things and to stop the weapons inspectors' work. Which cannot surprise anyone." (*AB* 06-02). The next day the same journalist develops the argument a bit further to its conclusion in line with the baseline of Colin Powell's speech before the Security Council – namely, as the headline reveals, "Saddam decides whether there will be a war". In the lead, the argument is elaborated as follows: "The ball is with Saddam Hussein. He is the only one who can stop a war against Iraq." The precondition, according to the daily, is that the Iraqi president yields, not to the US threat, but to the Swedish head of the weapons inspectors: "But then he must surrender to Hans Blix." It is further mentioned that Blix is expected to visit Baghdad the coming weekend and after that report back to the Security Council. "If Blix still repeats that Iraq is not entirely co-operating, then that will be the starting signal for the war." In retrospect, it is revealing to note how the US propaganda trap closes around the journalist's perceptions and makes him put all the burden of proof on the Iraqi side: "Saddam must...bring forward some of the weapons he probably hides and make it look like he is really disarming. Only then is there a chance that the USA will cancel the war." (*AB* 07-02)

The second largest tabloid in Sweden, *Expressen*, also exposes the Iraqi crisis on its front page on February 6 with the headline: "How you are hit by the Iraqi crisis". The editor-in-chief is not convinced that military intervention can be justified by Powell's evidence as presented in the Security Council. In the editorial it is suggested that the weapons inspectors should be given time to accomplish their work. The headline states: "Wait with the war", and the subtitle adds: "It is difficult to be convinced that a quickly-forced war against Iraq would

make the US safer.” On the news pages covering the Iraqi crisis, the headlines are large and wide – the following two covering two pages each: “Here are 10 new pieces of evidence” and “How you manage the war”. With respect to Powell’s allegations the paper reports “...but the expert gives Powell the mark ‘Failed’”. Another article dealing with Powell’s appearance before the UN regards it a defeat for the US: “Iraq won the war – in the Security Council”.

In conclusion, all three of the Swedish newspapers in this study presented critical and sceptical responses to the proof brought before the Security Council. Obviously the impression was that Powell had not convinced the Council and the world about the crimes of which Iraq was accused. In retrospect, this was probably a more rational stance than was the case in many other media in the Western countries. But what does that imply for the media image of Iraq? Were the Swedish media more prepared to take what the Saddam Hussein regime said at face value or were they as critical and doubtful as they were to the US/UK – or even more so?

The very same day that Colin Powell makes his case before the Security Council, the Swedish quality paper *Dagens Nyheter* runs a big interview with Saddam Hussein. The headline on the first page states: “Saddam Hussein denies connection with al-Qaeda”. In the article on the inside page the Iraqi president is quoted in the headline: “Iraq has no interest in waging war”, and in the following text two key statements are reported from the interview. First: the denial of any connection between Iraq and the terrorist network al-Qaeda; second: the Iraqi president repeats that the country has no weapons of mass destruction. According to the Iraqi president there are other motives behind the US threat of military intervention. “Saddam Hussein said that the USA wants to control the oil fields of Iraq and is under influence from Israel... ‘It seems that the decision-makers in the US are motivated by aggression against our region that has been obvious for more than a decade’, he said.” There are no reservations or doubts about the Iraqi president’s credibility in this article other than the quotation marks in the headline. But when the *DN* correspondent in Amman reports the next day about the reactions there to Powell’s speech, the speech by Saddam Hussein is also mentioned. As predicted, according to this correspondent, the ‘dictator’ denied the three main accusations against Iraq. The uncritical relaying of Saddam’s message by the Jordanian media is noticed and believed to have been well received by the people he met, since they are “repeating, almost word-for-word, what Saddam Hussein had said the previous evening”. Besides this indirect reference, there is no mention of Iraqi comments on the accusations from Powell in *DN* on that day.

In the two tabloids *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, the presentation by Powell is as dominating as in *DN*, but here the Iraqi side is at least referred to in connection with the accusations, and the Iraqi reaction is total denial of the accusations.

Second Period: The Weapons Inspectors' Report

What about the critical attitude in the Swedish media when bringing the news that Hans Blix, the only Swede of some importance in this drama, has presented a report to the UN Security Council? The studied dailies do not have any doubts about the accuracy and credibility of the presentations by the UN inspectors, Hans Blix and Mohamed El-Baradei. In *Dagens Nyheter*, an analysis on the news page is headed "Both sides find support for their line" and it is noticed that positive as well as negative conclusions may be drawn. Nor are any critical comments of the reports to be found in *Aftonbladet* which, under a seven-column picture of Hans Blix, calls him "The world's most important Swede" (15-02). *Expressen* deviates slightly from the other two dailies by publishing a debate with the headline: "Chili Mallat wants to give Hans Blix a holiday. Liberating Iraq is more important than the UN's disarmament". The weapons inspections are only a pretext for making the military intervention look more like a multilateral concern and acceptable to the world outside the USA. Even if the Middle East expert suggests that Blix should be released from his 'mission impossible' there is no questioning of the credibility or accuracy of his report. Nor is there in the news coverage in *Expressen*. For the three Swedish newspapers in this sample the credibility of Hans Blix is beyond doubt. What is discussed to some extent is the political context of his mission and whether the weapons inspections are in reality more of a smoke screen than a real attempt to search for the 'smoking gun'.

Third Period: The First Days of the War

Following the expiry of the deadline issued by the Alliance, the media tension rises in the face of the outbreak of war. Front pages proclaim that the war has started (*AB* 20-03) and that time is up for Saddam Hussein (*EXP* 20-02). During the Gulf War in 1990-91, there was within Swedish media an ambition to show the 'true face of the war', i.e. to maintain independent reporting by focusing on the suffering and sacrifices of the civilian population. But as the war broke out, the media reporting was in all essentials dominated by the image of the 'clinical war', in which the consequences for the civilian population were more or less conspicuous by their absence. The question is what conclusions have been made since in the newsrooms, and

what measures were taken as a result when the Iraqi War started on March 20 2003. Were they able to avoid becoming a passive tool for war propaganda aiming at concealing innocent victims? And how did they inform readers of the risk that the news could become a channel for the propaganda of the parties involved? Since the experiences of the Gulf War 1990-91 clearly point to the media as being most vulnerable to manipulations at the initial phase of the war, I have chosen to study more closely the occurrence of media critique during the period March 20-22.

In *Dagens Nyheter*, Per Jönsson, *DN*'s correspondent in the Middle East and at the time stationed in Amman, had, on March 19, already declared that he intended to stay in Jordan and perhaps later cross into Iraq. His motivation was that “the chances are that Saddam would sacrifice his own population and release chemical and biological weapons...”. The heading emphasises that *DN* is not the only one making this assessment: “Many media leave Iraq”. Like other journalists, Jönsson is providing accounts of how the Coalition propaganda of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and recommendations to leave Iraq, had an effect on where the media stationed their correspondents, thus determining a certain framework for the reporting (comp. Slapgard, 2003). When the war breaks out, *DN* as well as several other Swedish media base their reporting on the accounts of freelance journalists who have made their way into Iraq, such as Åsne Seierstad.

Media critique in *DN* during the period March 20-22 is made up of four articles published on March 21 and 22 respectively. In addition, there is an indirect allusion to the propaganda war on March 20 in an article on some Swedish citizens with immigrant backgrounds travelling to Baghdad because, as cited in the headline, “We are the eyes that the US do not want there”. However on March 21, the first article during the period in which the conditions of media reporting is a central theme, is published, with the heading “Censorship and lies part of the game”. The problems of the media are here discussed in the same way as in a somewhat more exhaustive article the following day (see below). When *DN* in a short editorial article on the same day under the heading “Weapons of mass persuasion” discusses the war propaganda, attention is focused on attempts to influence the Iraqi resistance fervour with the help of flyers and fax machines. “Balancing act for the media” on March 22 is a headline referring to the difficulties of the media in connection with, *inter alia*, the report that ‘a large number of Iraqi soldiers’ have surrendered to the British-American troops. The article emphasises that the newsroom staff are making an effort not to become defenceless victims of the propaganda

war, by asking sceptical questions as well as by giving detailed accounts of the source material and drawing attention to media's vulnerability to propaganda influence. The article claims that mediation of disinformation can, however, not be avoided, as unconfirmed reports may also be of importance in their effects on public opinion. The article concludes with an observation that it would be wrong to interpret openness about the difficulties and uncertainties in reporting as resignation on the part of the media. "Doubts and reservations are part of all truths" (DN 22-03). On the same day, *DN* follows this up with an article giving an account of some of the conditions for media reporting: "Bold American TV venture on the front-line". The introduction states that the Iraqi War is covered by five hundred journalists, including several TV crews, who are part of the military forces. The significance of the so-called embedded journalists is, however, played down. The arrangement does not necessarily result in more information for the viewers and has "...so far mainly resulted in low-quality digital images of desolate desert landscapes". In Baghdad, the threatening attitude towards the TV companies is growing, the result of which might be that the only options left will be filming in secret, and image-free phone reports, or reliance on al-Jazeera. The Arabic TV channel is described in the following way: "The Arabic TV station, consistently used by Osama bin Laden, is the only station with permission from the Baghdad regime to film in large parts of Baghdad" (DN 22-03).

On the same day as fighting erupts, *Aftonbladet* chooses to give considerable column space to the problem of manipulated information (20-03). An entire spread is dedicated to the propaganda war and its consequences for the possibility of providing a fair image of the war. The main part of the spread discusses American psychological warfare in a report from the embedded reporter at a base in Kuwait. But two other articles discuss the conditions in Baghdad and how readers can defend themselves against propaganda. The former is written by the CNN reporter Nic Robertson from his experience from working in Baghdad, both during the Gulf War 1991 and now at the outbreak of war in March 2003. He says that all Western media in Iraq have to work through the Iraqi Ministry of Information, but that pre-censorship of the material has been removed. Media experts in the second article recommend the readers to, *inter alia*, compare different media reports and to make their own probability assessments. One of these experts is the author Philip Knightley and his prediction is that the Pentagon will be considerably harder on the journalists now than during the Gulf War and that many journalists will probably be killed; this because the big TV stations want to show the fighting live and because the Pentagon has warned the media that the military will not make

allowances if journalists get in the way. The editor-in-chief, Anders Gerdin, is also interviewed, on what measures *AB* takes in order to resist propaganda. He emphasises the importance of source critique, of careful sifting, of comparing different sources and of making sure that the sources are given. He admits that there is a problem in that the paper mainly uses Western news sources, but points out that the newsroom staff also have access to al-Jazeera and Iraqi TV. The importance of having one's own reporters on site in order to secure reliable reports is emphasised. Gerdin is also humble with respect to the paper's ability to be impartial: "No, that is of course not possible. When war breaks out, no media company can claim that they are 100% free from propaganda". He also expresses a certain resignation in the light of experiences in 1991. To the question "Is anything different this time compared to the last Iraqi War?" he replies: "I think that we and other media are more aware of the difficulties involved and are thus more critical. Before the last war, we all had good intentions, but once the war broke out it was not easy to resist the propaganda" (20-03).

Expressen also brings up the theme of media critique but waits to publish this material until the day after the outbreak of war. Three articles discuss different aspects of the media's vulnerability to the propaganda of both sides. As in *AB*, there are retrospectives of the Gulf War 1990-91, but in this case a considerably more optimistic conclusion is made. A column by Per Andersson with the heading "Bombshell" discusses the central role played by CNN in the Gulf War 1991. Many then believed that this was the beginning of a period of extreme concentration of media power. But it was in fact the opposite, and he claims that nobody any longer believes in clinical warfare (21-03). Over an entire spread with the headline "Iraq shows its victims" the paper exposes pictures of the injured. It is stressed that the reports of civilian casualties of 'George Bush's attack on Saddam Hussein' originate from the Iraqi authorities. In an adjacent article, the conflicting war descriptions of the opposing sides appear in the headline: "Propaganda flows from both sides". The preamble provides an example: "'Civilian targets', claims Iraq about the bomb attacks. 'Military installations', claims the US. 'Manipulation is becoming increasingly elegant. It is almost impossible to defend yourself against it', says Michael Nydén, PhD in Political Science." As do the other newspapers, *Expressen* depends upon experts being able to immunise readers against the infectious effect of propaganda. The third article on this day on the media critical theme promises a quick fix in the headline: "Experts help you to be more critical" (*EXP* 21-03). On the following day *Expressen* returns to Iraqi propaganda efforts to deceive the media and public opinion – the casualty bluff. The eye-catching article splashed over the paper reports

on the Iraqi Ministry of Information's attempts at magnifying the number of casualties in the nightly bomb raids. A number of false cases are uncovered by the reporter who has paid visits to a nearby hospital (EXP 22-03).

The conclusion of this survey is that while *Aftonbladet* mostly focuses its media critique on US attempts to influence reporting, *Expressen* distributes attention more evenly between the media manipulations of the opposing sides, which means that the Iraqi attempts at manipulating the media receives more attention in *EXP* than in *AB*. To a greater degree than the others, *Dagens Nyheter* avoids pointing fingers at any one side in the conflict when discussing the vulnerability of the reporting in the propaganda war's crossfire of accusations and counter-accusations, disinformation and lies. The paper achieves this in part by expressing itself in general terms, and in part by focusing mainly on how the media act in order to avoid becoming disinformers themselves.

However, the survey of the papers' explicit indication of source critique and their claims for truth would not be balanced without a discussion of the spreading of rumours and disinformation of which they, at the same time, are guilty. If the biggest lie in connection with the Iraqi War concerns the American and British motives for intervention, to which the papers remain relatively sceptical, there are quite a number of other examples of how the papers are pulled into the haze of direct lies, half-truths and staged news events of the propaganda war.

As already mentioned, the big lie about weapons of mass destruction led many Western media, including *DN*, to refrain from sending their own correspondents to Baghdad at the initial stage of the war (cf. Knightley, 2004:100 ff.). *Aftonbladet* writes that "Working Swedes may become Saddam's targets", the graphics and the text describing Iraq's missile arsenal as extensive, containing both Al Huseyn and Scud missiles – the former with a range of 650 km and the latter with a range of 300 km (*AB* 20-03). On the next day, the paper's correspondent in Kuwait gives accounts of gas attacks from Iraqi missiles: "The gas alarm sounds – in the desert. *Aftonbladet*'s reporter taken unawares by attack – kilometres from cover" (21-03) In other words, the paper is conveying the impression that there has hardly been any disarmament of Iraq's military capacity since the Gulf War 1991.

In the same way, or perhaps to an even higher degree, *Expressen* has fallen victim to misleading propaganda from the war alliance. The reporting of the first day of war offers,

among other things, insights into Saddam Hussein's resistance strategy: "Saddam's strategy. How he will strike back against the US". The newspaper knows for a fact that Saddam is becoming 'more and more desperate' and that the strategy includes chemical counter attacks, blown-up oil wells, destroyed bridges and 'murdering his own men'. The sources of this imaginative inside information are only referred to in terms of "...according to reports to the *Evening Standard*..." and "Iraq has, according to American information, access to hundreds of tons of poison gas...". The article is written by Magnus Alselind. Another example is the reports that Iraqi soldiers have started to surrender. With a reference to American military sources the paper states that at least 17 Iraqi soldiers have deserted. The problem with this report is not whether the information is true or false but that the journalist – in this case Mats Larsson – uncritically and one-sidedly relies on these sources, which leads to a **biased description** of reality. A Captain Darrin Theriault is given the opportunity to say that the US Military believes several Iraqi soldiers will surrender. The journalist knows, however, that this can create problems: "During the Gulf War, large groups of Iraqi soldiers chose to raise the white flag. The American forces were not quite prepared for this. Soldiers intended for combat in great haste instead had to take care of starving and exhausted Iraqis." A lot can be said about the way in which surrendering and fleeing Iraqis were treated during the Gulf War, for instance at what came to be known as the Killing Fields, but a more one-sided account than Larsson's retrospective can scarcely be found (20-03). On another spread, *EXP* highlights the risk of gas attacks on Israel from Iraq with an eye-catching headline: "Fear of gas. Nursery turned into shelter". As in the other papers, the journalist has deemed the reports of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction true, as have probably the civilians in the article who have turned their nursery into a gas-proof shelter. Thus, everything that is conveyed in the report about the family's efforts to protect themselves against possible gas attacks may be true in detail and yet the whole article is grossly misleading since the grounds for the protection measures, as well as for what the reporter implicitly holds to be true, are unfounded. In this way, this article well illustrates how vulnerable war journalism is vis-à-vis the manipulating menacing picture constructed by the Bush and Blair regimes as the propaganda platform for the war. The problem is not only, nor even primarily, that journalists convey an exaggerated threat against Iraq's neighbouring countries, but that entire populations' behaviour and opinions are governed in a way which, via the media, seems to confirm the seriousness of the threat.

A final example from *Expressen* has to be the story of Tariq Aziz's alleged escape. According to David Miller, who bases his analysis on reports in the *Sunday Mirror* and *The Independent*,

this was one of the Iraqi war's psychological operations in which disinformation played a central role in order to lure the enemy into a trap. By announcing a false report about the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, the idea was that he would be forced to deny this on TV and then be traced as he returned to Saddam Hussein's bunker (Miller, 2004: 93) In splashing the rumour of Aziz's escape all over the paper, *EXP* is thus joining, probably unaware, a game with more than one layer: "Tariq Aziz: We are ready to fight". In the preamble, the conflicting reports are mentioned: "Tariq Aziz is dead? Tariq Aziz has escaped? The reports caused a rise on the Paris Stock Exchange yesterday afternoon – but last night he appeared in his military uniform, pistol in hand, vowing to fight for Iraq" (EXP 20-03).

To sum up the reflexivity analysis: it is evident that the Swedish newspapers contain crucial and media-critical information which should facilitate reflections on the part of the audience about the accuracy and objectivity of the war coverage. The way in which this is achieved is both through well-exposed critical comments by experts, even more heavily exposed US and UK accusations against Iraq of WMD possession, and specific articles with media-critical information about attempts to manipulate the reports and other propaganda activities. In dealing with this theme attention is divided slightly differently in the analysed newspapers. Where *Aftonbladet* focuses mainly on attempts by the war alliance to control the media, *Expressen* is more occupied with Iraqi manipulation. *Dagens Nyheter* takes a neutral position when it comes to media manipulation, by expressing its comments on this topic in rather general terms and without pointing out any specific side in the conflict, and by concentrating on the measures taken by the paper in order to stop disinformation. But at the same time as the papers give attention to attempts at manipulation and criticise key components of the US/UK war propaganda, in particular the accusations of Iraqi possession of WMD, they contain a lot of material – especially visual – which actually presumes that the allegations against Iraq are true. This material includes speculations as to possible Iraqi counter-attacks with WMDs and the severe consequences for civilians both in Iraq and neighbouring countries. The media coverage of possible Iraqi WMD possession then becomes very contradictory, if not indeed totally confused.

The professional challenge for war journalism of how to manage the war propaganda, lies, half-truths and staged events, is discursively handled in an interesting way by the studied newspapers. By no means do I wish to disavow the difficulties involved in war journalism, but it seems that there are some epistemological problems that have not been properly

considered so far. Some instances of a peculiar logic have been mentioned above, for example the *AB* journalist who argues – after having rejected the US accusations of Iraqi WMD – that the only way Saddam Hussein could avoid war is to destroy a substantial number of such weapons. Or the *DN* journalist who writes that disinformation must also be part of the news, because it might have an important impact on the development of the conflict, and then ends with the conclusion that doubts and reservations are part of all truths. In retrospect, I assume that these are the kinds of comments in which the respective journalist will not find much consolation. I shall come back to this matter of professional concern in the conclusions below.

Conclusions

In this study, three Swedish dailies' discourses on the Iraqi War 2003 have been examined with a critical discourse analysis approach. The main theoretical focus has been on the ways in which the media discourses are contextually situated within the global discursive order. This means that inter-discursive relationships and re-contextualisations vis-à-vis other discourses such as public diplomacy, war propaganda and humanitarian compassion are especially relevant. But so are three particular aspects of the media discourses crucial for understanding the discursive order as a setting for media war reporting: first, how the media position themselves in the conflict and in relation to different standpoints; second, how they construct Swedish identity; and third, what kind of reflexivity they mediate.

With respect to the *inter-discursive relationships* the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Swedish newspapers relate both to the 'war alliance', Iraq and the peace movement's diplomacy and propaganda, i.e. although the US/UK alliance has a prominent position in the media discourses it is not dominant.
2. In the first period, i.e. in connection with the UN Security Council session in which Colin Powell presented accusations against Iraq for possession of WMD, criticism and questioning of the accuracy of the charges are frequent, based on experts' opinion and Iraqi denials.
3. In the second period, when the heads of the weapons inspectors presented their reports before the UN Security Council, the French and other European nations' critique against the war policy of the US/UK alliance became highly exposed in the media, together with news reports from peace demonstrations almost world-wide.
4. In the third and fourth periods the US/UK news sources attained a dominant position owing to the media focus on the military operations and the marginalisation of Iraqi and

Arabic sources. The Iraqi voices heard in the Swedish dailies are civilians fearing the consequences of the war. In *Aftonbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* the peace activists still get quite a substantial amount of attention.

In terms of the newspapers' *positioning in the conflict* the following three conclusions seem validated:

5. From the first to the second period the Swedish dailies gradually take a more explicit stand against the US/UK war policy.
6. On the domestic political scene the newspapers take different positions: *Aftonbladet* sides with the Swedish government's (read: Foreign Minister Anna Lindh's) line which is described as critical towards the war-alliance, while *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen* give voice to strong opposition against the government (read: Prime Minister Göran Persson).
7. In addition to points five and six, a humanitarian pathos is evident in the Swedish newspapers, mostly articulated in the two tabloids.

When it comes to the discursive *construction of Swedish identity* the results are:

8. Identity constructions of this kind are more common and prominent in the tabloids than in the quality morning daily.
9. The 'Swede' is depicted as committed to peace and motivated by humanitarian compassion.
10. Further he or she is brave, reliable and firm.

The conclusions from the *reflexivity analysis* are basically three:

11. There are many examples in the newspapers of reservations as to the validity of statements and information from the parties in the conflict. Above, it has particularly been noticed how the accusations from the US/UK side against Iraq for possession of WMD, and the allegations of Iraqi involvement in the terrorist attacks on September 11 2001, are framed with scepticism and doubts expressed by experts and journalists. Hence, the Swedish media obviously offer their audiences contextual information about the propaganda war and issue warnings that the media content can be infected by disinformation.
12. In comparison, the three dailies take different angles when addressing the topic of propaganda activities directed at media and public opinion. Both the two tabloids focus on how the parties in the conflict try to manipulate the news reports, but where *Aftonbladet*

primarily notices the activities de of the ‘war alliance’, *Expressen* is more occupied with Iraqi propaganda. In *Dagens Nyheter*, however, the coverage of media management efforts in the propaganda war is less concrete than in the tabloids. Here the angle is more on the anti-disinformation measures in the newsroom – as if this quality paper is anxious to assure its readers that its reports are credible.

13. The general problem from the reflexivity point of view is whether the media can protect themselves against a ‘regime of lies’ of the kind that was put in place by the ‘war alliance’. When the superpower USA, together with its allies, releases its massive resources – political, military and propagandistic – for actions of a global magnitude like the Iraqi War 2003, based on consciously false premises, then the contingent effects are likely to look like confirmations of the mendacious propaganda construction of reality. As exemplified above, in many ways the propaganda lies about Iraqi WMD did have discursive repercussions which – probably without the media’s intention – tended to confirm the fabricated accusations. Examples are the risk assessments when the media take decisions on where to place the war correspondents, graphic displays of Iraqi weapons, premature reports about Iraqi missile attacks on Kuwait and other neighbouring countries, speculations about how and when the dictator in Baghdad would use his WMD resources. These are all examples of discursive instances that at the time seemed to validate the US/UK charges against Iraq.

It is quite worrying that even media, such as the Swedish newspapers in this study, that reported extensively on the doubts and critique against the *causa bellum* arguments, in a somewhat similar way as later regretted by, for example, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, were carried away by the war drums. Bob Woodward mentions group-think as an explanation of why *The Washington Post* did not fulfil its duty as watchdog of the administration’s war policy. It seems that an almost global professional group-thinking of a kind influences media discourses in pre-war periods. As expressed by the Pentagon correspondent of the same newspaper about the psychological-political climate: “There was an attitude among editors: Look, we’re going to war, why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?” (*WP* 04-08-12). Epistemologically, this amounts to nothing less than acceptance of a view that the White House security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, allegedly expressed when asked about the proofs against Iraq. She implied that the threat from Iraq was so great that verification of the accusations was not needed (Slapgard, 2003:52). As an epistemological position this is an extremely wide-ranging relativism: if the threat is serious

enough the question of truth is subordinated. In order to legitimise pre-emptive strikes it would be sufficient that a state perceiving a threat could make it seem plausible that it is sincerely convinced of its seriousness. Besides the horrifying implications of this 'logic' for future conflicts, one should also notice the possible implications for journalistic practices. The exemplars mentioned above may indicate an epistemological drift from the justified reporting of *imagined* threats as such to representations of these threats as if *verified and real* in the mediated framing of the conflict.

Do the Swedish newspapers also have reasons to regret their reporting, in spite of having called attention to the flimsy evidence behind the accusations? The point here is not to reduce or neglect the importance of these doubts – it would of course be much worse if the US/UK charges had not been challenged in the media discourses – but to indicate that the relative importance of critical comments of this kind is more limited than often expected. That is partly evident in the self-critical remarks in the American newspapers mentioned above. Even if doubts and uncertainties about foundations for the administration's accusations against Iraq are noticed on inside pages, it does not erase the false impression given by the front-page exposure of the charges; that is admitted by the American editors. This is not to say that the Swedish newspapers in this study did not expose the critique more prominently than did these American media. They certainly did. Having said that, it is nevertheless worthwhile to consider the ambiguous and contradictory nature of a media discourse that, on the one hand, marks reservations about US/UK accusations of an Iraqi threat to world peace and, on the other hand, reveals that media and journalists take war propaganda for granted. Certainly, such a discourse is open to different interpretations and leaves its audience with deep uncertainty when trying to make sense out of it.

This ambiguity and multi-seminal nature of the Swedish media discourse is not totally unexpected if understood in relation to the notion of discursive order, primarily because it emphasises the institutional setting and other societal conditions that constitute the content and forms of the media discourses. With that in mind it is particularly relevant to look for the power and interest influences on the media discourses by way of control over the material world, the sequences of events, the access to information sources and distribution channels. Therefore, with this theoretical perspective it is natural to explore in what ways diplomatic conflicts and international political struggle, war propaganda and peace appeals, threat images and critical remarks about lack of evidences, have repercussions on several discursive levels.

In this study, this is implemented by, for instance, focusing attention to how the media's practical operations and graphics are conditioned upon the images of an Iraqi threat that the US/UK spun for propaganda purposes.

It is also important to pay attention to the self-interests of media companies and journalism as social institutions. Media and journalists on the news market are dependent on some credibility in the eyes of the audience. A well-exposed and far-reaching self-criticism and reflexivity may risk that credibility. And that is where the business interests of the news media companies are at risk, and limit reflexivity, which is illustrated by the reasoning in *Dagens Nyheter* when it claims to balance fair and accurate reporting on the one hand with disinformation on the other. That balance, the newspaper has it, is achieved by way of its public declarations of uncertainty and doubts about the truth value of the information it relays. To put it bluntly: truth is equivalent to disinformation plus marked uncertainty. By this disputable definition of truth, the reasonability of which depends on whether the media has managed to present the amplitude of the problems with respect to validity and accuracy in the actual discursive order, *Dagens Nyheter* maintains its truth claims to its readers. An affiliated discursive figure is used when the media rest the responsibility of the consequences of their professional judgements on their audiences. Journalists assisted by experts, often media researchers, comment on the risks that the news reports are polluted by propaganda with the explicit intention of assisting the audience to 'become more critical' – the bottom-line message to their publics being that at the end of the day the truth will eventually be established and reported to them. The question is: will it? As argued by the ombudsman at *The Washington Post* it seems that only if the media are prepared to extend their self-criticism into serious reporting on all the ways in which they misled the public – and were misled themselves – in the period leading up to the Iraq War 2003, will it be possible to take their regrets and apologies as more than a pretext to continue with business as usual. This has not happened yet, either in the US or in the Swedish media. The limit for media reflexivity is thus, so far, drawn where credibility and market position come at risk.

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