

JOURNALISM AND WAR: THE DISCOURSE OF PROFESSIONALISM AND THE LEGITIMATION THE 2003 IRAQ WAR

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an original study of Australian journalistic professionalism as observed during the Iraq War, 2003. Through an analysis of both in-depth interviews conducted with Australian Iraq War journalists and news discourse produced by Australian journalists at Central Command and 'embedded' during the Iraq war, it is argued that professionalism provides the framework of intelligibility used by war journalists to produce accounts of war. Professionalism also serves as a 'regime of truth', through which the centrality of professional norms in journalism are articulated. The paper then demonstrates that professionalism, however, serves to justify and legitimate journalistic practice and meaning construction while obscuring the co-opted, functional role played by journalism within contemporary war administration and military strategy. Drawing on discourse analytic concepts, this paper argues professionalism operates as a form of 'ideological fantasy', which both militarises journalism and conversely *journalises* the military.

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of professionalism continues to provide scholars of journalism with critical purchase upon the discipline and as I demonstrate in an analytic category with ongoing relevance for journalism scholarship. In this paper journalistic professionalism, conceived as discourse, is examined in the context of Australian war journalism. It is argued that professionalism plays a functional role, both in making war 'real' for consumers of war news and legitimating and normalising military strategy. In this paper professionalism is conceptualised, as it is within the field of journalism studies generally, as a commitment to the normative values of liberal democratic journalism. This conception of journalism maintains notions such as objectivity, independence and 'facticity' as central (Schudson 1978; Siebert et al 1956; Tuchman 1972) to journalism practice. Previously, scholars have articulated professionalism

as a form of ideology operative within liberal journalism which unconsciously reproduces conservative, status quo social and political norms (Gans 1980; GUMG 1976; Gitlin 1980; Hall 1977; Hall et al 1980). By contrast in this paper, I reconceptualise journalistic professionalism as discursive. Here, a discourse is a framework of intelligibility providing coherence to journalism as an occupation and distinguishing this occupational activity from other forms of social information production. Professionalism is then specific and purposeful formation of meanings which structure the 'horizon of possibility' for journalism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). I understand professionalism as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1980) within which contingent accounts of modern warfare are made 'real'. Moreover, this discourse has become sedimented to the extent that it is hegemonic within journalism, as well as ensuring journalism plays a functional role in broader political and military hegemonies, such as that currently exercised by the US and its military and political allies.

2 THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism as an analytic concept has long featured prominently within journalism studies (Carpentier 2005; Henningham 1996; Johnstone et al 1972; McChesney 2004; Reese 1997; Schudson 1978; Tuchman 1978; Tumber 2004). This concept has provided a fecund means for inquiries within the field. Generally, scholars have sought to understand the way in which journalistic representations are generated through the occupational 'ideology' of professionalism. I argue this category can be critically reinvigorated by its articulation as discourse.

Authors in the critical sociology of journalism have tended to view professionalism as inculcated through journalistic training and newsroom socialisation. In this account, professionalism powerfully shapes and regulates the production of news as organisational ideology. The observation by Tuchman (1972), that professionalism, as represented by the doctrine of objectivity (and its associated practices and norms), constitutes a "strategic ritual" in journalism neatly encapsulates this view and is widely cited. Others, such as Gans (1980) and Gitlin (1980), demonstrate how professionalism as a cultural phenomenon is bound to conservative cultural values. For these authors, professionalism in journalism results in the production of ultimately

conservative news perspectives, reproductive of dominant ideological meanings, such as faith in capitalism, political centrality, the legitimacy of the legal system and the moral virtue of the nuclear family. Recently, Soloski (1997), Reese (1997) and Deuze (2005) have all detailed the routinisation and standardisation of news production that professionalism produces, inculcated through bureaucratic organisation, institutional controls and behavioural norms. Recently Carpentier (2005) has demonstrated the utility of discourse theoretic concepts in analysing contemporary journalism and media identity, demonstrating that the 'professional identity' exerts a hegemonic power over journalists.

In this paper I develop the critical insights and interests of these perspectives in reconceptualising professional war journalism as discursive. In doing so, I use the critical power of discourse theory to illustrate professionalism as a hegemonic project within both journalism and society. In this view the norms of professionalism are subordinated to a concern over professionalism's control of the discipline and legitimation of journalistic practice. Professionalism also obscures the functional role played by contemporary war journalism within the wider cultural and political economy. In particular this paper emphasises the role professional journalism plays in normalising war and legitimating military strategy.

Within the field of war journalism studies scant emphasis has been placed on discursive understandings of professionalism, political and military conflict or the production of knowledge concerning war. Other studies of war journalism have concentrated on the domination of the media by military power and control, such as studies of the Vietnam War (Hallin 1986), the Falklands War (Tumber and Morrison 1988), and the Gulf War (Jesser and Young 1997). Kellner (1992) made an important contribution to the field, observing how the closeness between the military and modern media during the 1991 Gulf War corrupted the normative role of the professional news media and inculcated a 'militarisation of journalism'. This observation is echoed in more recent scholarship (Carruthers 2000), including that which focuses on the 2003 Iraq Invasion (Reese 2004). In this paper I draw attention to the manner in which the structural relations of war journalism encourage the ongoing militarisation of journalism. This paper also identifies

a converse, yet similarly problematic process evident during the Iraq War, the *journalisation* of the military, which is further detailed below and is considered a novel development within media-military relations, yet firmly in accord with military strategic intent.

Similarly, scholars sensitive to the culture and cultural importance of war reporting have drawn attention to the role played by war journalism in reproducing dominant cultural and political meanings. The journalism of the Gulf War has been heavily criticised in this regard, with scholars emphasising the 'video game' and 'war show' aspects of coverage which elide the material reality of war's destructive horror (Baudrillard 1995; Kellner 1992; Zelizer 1992). Pedelty (1995) has argued that professionalism limits the extent to which journalists are aware of their role in advancing military interests. An emphasis on objectivity, independence and 'facticity' creates an illusion of 'distance'. Pedelty (1995; 172) calls this, "conscious non-reflexivity". These authors however, along with commentators on the Iraq War, 2003 (Lewis 2004; Tumber 2004), emphasise the ideological role played by professionalism, that somehow presents a distorted or purposefully manipulated account of the 'reality' of war. In this paper I argue that professionalism constructs an account of war entirely consonant with its own discursive requirements and which, rather than reproducing ideology, plays a functional role within contemporary military-political hegemony.

3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In making this argument I appropriate discourse analytical concepts drawn from the discourse theory of Foucault (1980; 1972), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and Žižek (1989). In my conception, professionalism, as an arrangement of words, as a set of enunciations and articulations relating to journalism, organises and orients journalists, both theoretically and practically, towards their world and provides them with a framework of intelligibility that facilitates the pursuit of their normative socio-political function. In Laclau and Mouffe's radical materialist theory, discourse is expanded in scope, beyond linguistic features of social relations to include all social meanings. That is, discourse becomes co-extensive with the social (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This conception retains the Foucauldian (1980) insight that discourse is a

unity of power and knowledge, yet posits contingency, fluidity and overdetermination of meanings animated by antagonism, as socially constitutive and moving beyond the discursive/non-discursive binary which limits Foucault's analyses. It is in this discursive context that the possibilities for alternate, fluid, and potentially counter-hegemonic meanings exist. Nonetheless, this paper remains concerned with how social meaning becomes stabilised and fixed, as within both professionalism and representations of war. Here Laclau and Mouffe (1985) incorporate the Gramscian (1971) notion of hegemony at the political/cultural level, produced through discursive processes, into their theory in order to explain the sedimentation of meanings in the context of fluidity. Journalism can be understood as a profusion of potential meanings disciplined by professionalism. Within the present argument journalism is understood as both a discursive 'formation' (Foucault 1972) hegemonised by professionalism, while simultaneously functional within broader political-military hegemonies. In understanding hegemonic projects thus, the concept of ideology can be theoretically re-introduced as an analytic category. Žižek (1989) has reformulated this critical concept as 'ideological fantasy' to describe the process by which the hegemonic intent of discursive projects is 'overlooked' by agents. In this sense professionalism becomes a form of fantasy for journalists who fail to recognise the contingency and ultimately hegemonic functionality of their practice, what Pedelty (1995; 172) has identified as journalistic "conscious non-reflexivity".

This paper demonstrates the extent to which professionalism operates as a hegemonic discourse within journalism. Professionalism necessarily structures journalistic articulations and identities, producing forms of war journalism reflective of professional needs rather than an independent newsworthy reality. In this sense professionalism 'makes reality real'. Furthermore it is demonstrated the extent to which professionalism produces journalistic forms functional within broader extant political-military hegemonies.

To do this I draw upon original discourse-data produced through in-depth interviews with Australian war correspondents present in the Iraq theatre during the 2003 invasion. I combine this data with textual analysis of

news discourse published and broadcast by these Australian correspondents during the invasion period, roughly 20 March 2003 until 20 April, 2003. In gathering empirical material I surveyed news discourse drawn from the 'elite' news organizations, gaining access to the news content and narrative that 'set the agenda' for the Australian coverage of the Iraq war as a whole. Therefore, Fairfax Ltd newspapers, the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the News Ltd paper of national impact, *The Australian* and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) flagship radio news programs, *AM*, *The World Today* and *PM* were selected for analysis. Specifically, my analysis focuses on interviews and news discourse produced by four Australian journalists, two of whom were stationed at the Central Command military media centre (Centcom) and two who were embedded with the American military.

4 CENTCOM – THE MILITARISATION OF JOURNALISM

Within the interview discourse produced for this study, Centcom, the military and media command centre established outside the Qatari capital Doha prior to the Iraq invasion, is characterised as antithetical to the norms of professional journalism. For Australian journalists, the Centcom experience was characterised by restrictions on the release of information and controls placed on journalist's movements. Although journalists were conscious of the media management strategies enacted at Centcom, this was generally not articulated into news discourse, in this sense media management was not 'made real'. Rather, the Centcom media strategy is treated with the credibility, sincerity and professionalism of acquiescent journalists. In information poor circumstances, journalistic energies are turned towards the patriotic, dramatic and personal aspects of war coverage. As media-management makes information available strategically, rather than articulating a counter-hegemonic criticism of how Centcom journalists become functional in the information economy of war, as they willingly and enthusiastically publish that which is released to them. Here, the military functionality of journalism takes place as a result of professional need to tell war stories, rather than to understand and critique processes of war policy and administration.

Centcom has been both described as a “professionally challenging” (Harley 2006b) place to work and as “horrific” (Callinan 2006) by journalists posted there. Ostensibly, the media-management and control enacted at Centcom was a direct confrontation to journalistic professionalism. With its heavily regulated environment, scores of media managers and surreal media compound aesthetic, journalists found the work environment contrary to their professional values of openness, accountability and verification. As the ABC’s Jonathan Harley (2006b) states, “there’s just no narrative at Centcom... I don’t think you have anything effectively, because you’re at the whim of what you are being told and there is no way of verifying it.” alluding to the story-less nature of the centre, isolated as it was in the Qatari desert far from military operations. Indeed, the entire exercise at Centcom seemed designed not to thwart normative journalistic practice completely, but to limit its potency.

The control enacted at Centcom, over journalist’s movements, their access to information and interview sources ensured that those stories that were able to be produced were done so in accordance with military strategic interests. This control meant that rather than the institution of draconian censorship controls, an obvious affront to journalistic sensibilities, as had been the case in previous conflicts (Tumber and Morrison 1988; Kellner 1992) was unnecessary. By exerting indirect control through the strategic release of information, discursively required independence and freedom were still permitted, yet this strategy ensured that journalistic output remained within military hegemony and independence ‘performed’ rather than realised. Notably, while the Centcom experience was antagonistic towards professionalism, and ran contrary to liberal, professional values, little attempt was made by journalists to expose this aspect of the coalition war strategy. In this sense coverage was characterised by articulations that demonstrated journalistic professionalism yet remained within, and which did not criticise military strategic intent - allowing military authorities significant control over news narrative. However, rather than address and ‘make real’ the limitations of professionalism imposed by these circumstances, such limitations are overlooked. That is, the Centcom narrative and the military communication strategy are treated credibly and as legitimate, newsworthy information rather than as strategically motivated, designed and delivered military

communication. Professionalism in this sense is discursively restrained. Indeed, on the one hand, this antagonism between professional and military discourse *defines* professionalism as against or ‘outside’¹ militarism. However, as a discursive unity competing with military discourse to produce the reality of Centcom, counter–hegemonic articulations are uncommon, beyond the “strategic ritual” (Tuchman 1972) of professionalism, as exemplified by Harley’s reporting (see below). Theoretically, journalists emphasise professionalism, yet seek to minimise antagonistic relations, as these relations necessarily expose the impotence of journalist in circumventing the control exerted by military media management. As a consequence of this continued adherence to professionalism, much Centcom reporting was either blow by blow accounts of coalition military advances and operational matters or profile and feature pieces on Australian soldiers. That is, professional war journalism becomes concerned with articulating uncritical and at times, favourable accounts of military action, which at once remain both professionally based on ‘hard facts’ of military information and interviews, but which do not lead to direct confrontation with the military.

Many of Jonathan Harley’s (ABC) radio broadcasts consisted of accounts of coalition military developments, contextualised by comment from military officials. Harley’s reporting was representative of sober, serious news reporting. However, even while this reporting may have shrunk from the overt patriotism of other Australian journalists, his reports are nonetheless essentially conservative and reproductive of the military perspective, articulating from within the hegemony of normalised militarism;

Jonathan Harley: It was another disciplined public performance by general Tommy Franks in the face of growing scepticism about Operation Iraqi freedom and a mounting propaganda war with Iraq. But he promised to speak the truth from his Hollywood designed platform at Central Command.

¹ The concept of ‘discursive outside’ is used by Laclau to describe a counter or contrary discourse that is not subjected to the discipline or regulation of the discursive formation in question. For Laclau, a discourse or discursive formation is limited by its necessary exclusion of ‘radical otherness’, which threatens the unity or coherence of a discourse. The concept of a ‘constitutive outside’ provides the basis for the dynamic of social antagonism and the impossibility of the unity or closure of the social.

Tommy Franks: This platform is not a platform for propaganda, this is a platform for truth and so what I will do is I'll try to provide you the best balance I can and that is what I have asked our people here to do.

Jonathan Harley: The war in Iraq is being fought on many fronts and by both sides (*AM*, 25/03/03).

Although Harley was willing to occasionally articulate allusions to coalition propaganda tactics, the wider issues of military media strategy and the structural control exerted by the military remained unaddressed. Indeed, the professional discourse serves here to restrain journalists, preventing them from articulating antagonistic or counter-hegemonic positions, so as to remain professional. For Harley, his awareness of the coalition information control and manipulation remained implicit in reports, and while the opportunity for more critical perspective arose, such alternative perspectives were subordinated to an 'objective' reporting style that obviates such tendencies. Here professionalism asserts itself over journalistic awareness of manipulation, necessarily calibrating news production to professional requirements of impartiality, balance and 'facticity'. "I think you've got to keep perspective on it (control of the media)", argues Harley (2006b) in interview. "When you're in Centcom and you're reporting from military spin central...you always have to work that into your copy, but you just can't make that your copy, because it becomes repetitive". Thus, not only does professionalism restrain journalists, but it also offers the rationale for restraint. In effect professionalism encourages journalists to be aware of the forms of control and propaganda that beset them, but discourages attempts to analyse them, in a powerful example of ideological fantasy

Similarly, News Ltd's Rory Callinan was acutely aware of the control and strategic, hegemonic intent that characterised Centcom communication strategy. He articulates an awareness of the redundancy of the limited Centcom perspective, when political sources were providing more detailed information in Canberra, London and Washington than was available in Doha. Furthermore, Callinan's efforts to cover the Australian military's activities were

continually hampered by the draconian information controls, resulting in a “completely ridiculous” (Callinan 2006) situation. Nonetheless, a conventionally professional mode of coverage prevailed, concerned with battlefield information, military activities and official comments and self-consciously non-antagonistic. The majority of Callinan’s reporting focused on the activities and profiles of Australian military personnel. Although the ‘otherness’ of military authorities and their being outside normative journalistic identity is articulated in interview, critical and reflexive attempts to understand Centcom beyond the details of military operations are almost completely absent in Callinan’s news discourse. Such articulations can be understood as discursively impossible. The military as ‘other’ paradoxically provides the legitimacy for the non-antagonistic reporting of military affairs and personnel. While there is awareness of the vulnerabilities of journalists working in a controlled environment and the strain their professionalism may come under, this obvious domination does not result in antagonistic journalistic articulations, but in ever more circumspect journalism. As Callinan (2006) concedes, “I suppose you reach a point where you don’t want to (report critically)...I can see a point where you might get so desperate and might start thinking, “should I go a bit soft on these guys and they might start looking after us, or maybe take us to the next level”.

The effect of the professional discourse is to articulate a military-media antagonism which establishes a legitimate professional identity, but which also treats military pronouncements with credulity and a minimum of critical vigour. The journalists interviewed for this study acknowledged the professionally problematic nature of Centcom, but proceed as if this was not the case. Professionalism, as a form of fantasy ensures journalists are able to overlook limitations to their practice and continue to construct the required journalistic product and remain assured of their journalistic identity. A typical example of Callinan’s can be understood, and read, as both a professionally accomplished, objective piece of journalism and a military public relations release, celebrating the Australian military contribution;

Fourteen Hornets have been deployed to the region in what is the largest Australian air force contingent to go to war since Vietnam, according to the defence force.

Wing Commander Steve, whose full name cannot be published for security reasons, said the Australians had undertaken defensive air missions protecting ‘high value assets’ like airborne early warning and control aircraft.

The Hornets, which have a top speed of Mach 1.75, are equipped with air-to-surface missiles, laser guided and conventional bombs and are armed with a 20mm nose mounted cannon for ground and airborne targets.

Wing Commander Steve said the pilots might stay in the air up to eight hours at a time depending on the missions, but remained alert due to the adrenaline rush (*The Australian: World*; 21/03/03: 1).

At Centcom the media were put at an immediate disadvantage by the total control exerted by military officials. For Centcom journalists an independent, verifiable reality, against which to compare military pronouncements did not exist, rather they remained trapped within an information ‘bubble’ inflated by the military authorities. However, rather than precipitating a radical reassessment of their professional role, journalists were content to maintain their ‘objective’ position as conduits for official information, as media critics have noted, a central functionality of professionalism (McChesney 2004). Callinan’s reporting in particular was robustly patriotic and supportive of the Australian military operations. Both journalists are strikingly similar in their avoidance of critical perspectives on the activities at Centcom, remaining safely within the hegemony of militarism. Indeed, as shown by Callinan, an express willingness to ‘go easy’ on military sources was considered professionally expedient. Moreover, both reporters acknowledge the control to which they were subject, and indeed the professional identity requires antagonistic relations between the media and the military as constitutive, yet paradoxically, this antagonism does not yield more critical perspectives. The professional discourse restrains journalist’s ability to substantially criticise this area of the military campaign as doing so would necessarily entail the assumption of an opinion or perspective, proscribed by professionalism.

5 EMBEDDING – THE JOURNALISATION OF THE MILITARY

The policy of ‘embedding’ journalists within military units also created a professionally challenging environment for journalists. However, for journalists used to the exclusionary tactics of Western military forces, embedding also held out the promise of significantly greater access to soldiers and the ‘reality’ of war. Embedding was nonetheless subject to prescriptive guidelines. Unprecedented access was offered those journalists willing to agree to the Department of Defense Media Support Plan (Whitman 2003), which outlined the relationship between embedded journalists and their military hosts. In contrast to relations during previous conflicts (Kellner 1992; Tumber and Morrison 1988) widespread embedding symbolised a degree of sophistication on the part of American military-media managers. Rather than indulge in crude forms of censorship and overt control (such as characterised previous conflicts), such measures became unnecessary as the professional media’s own predilections for drama, visual spectacle and immediacy limited the potential for critical embedded perspectives (Cottle 2006; 95).

For embedded journalists their continued credibility and legitimacy as reporters would stem from their ability to continue to report ‘professionally’, that is freely, openly and on the record, without official interference (Carlson and Katovsky 2003: ix). That is, journalists sought to remain within the professional discourse and not to transgress the discursive frontier that separates, according to professionalism, journalism from militarism.

In this section the meaning produced through embedded journalism is analysed. I argue the embedded perspective, legitimated through professionalism, not only militarises journalism, but *journalises* the military, humanising and individualising soldiers so as to produce knowledge of war that overlooks the political and military processes of war administration and policy.

Embedding has attracted strong criticism for encouraging partial, cheerleader journalists, who were reproductive of a discourse of American military righteousness (Schechter 2003). Journalists interviewed for this study state, however, that their professionalism remained intact. “The short answer is that I didn’t adjust anything (about my practice) – I just went in there as an objective, professional journalist”, says the ABC’s Geoff Thompson (2006),

embedded with the US military transport corps. Similarly, Lindsay Murdoch (2006), travelling with US Marines for Fairfax Ltd, argues that the same principles and practices apply to embedded journalism as they do to any other form. Essentially, for these journalists, their normative professional practice is transposed into the embedded context unchanged, constructing 'embedded' as an un-problematic news location amenable to professional reporting techniques.

Murdoch (2006) and Thompson (2006) both state embedding was free from overt control over what could be reported, beyond particularly sensitive operational details. Embedding is articulated as both a positive development, permitting the all-important access a journalist requires, and as consistent with professionalism. Thompson's ability to report on the killing of civilians (*AM*, 10/04/03) and Murdoch's reporting of the use of napalm by US forces (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22/03/03: 1) can be taken as evidence of this fulfilment of normative aims of providing a 'watchdog' over official power. The professional legitimacy of these journalists stems from this freedom. Thus the logic of journalists accompanying military units is clear; to provide 'objective', credible and legitimate, yet favourable, coverage of military operations. This intent is stipulated in the Department of Defense Media Support Plan (2003). The freedom to report and to reproduce their professionalism is then, at least in part, contingent on journalists enunciating the central discourses of professionalism through their writing and broadcasting. This is the extent to which professionalism is credibly performed. In theoretical terms this may be understood as the maintenance of the 'discursive frontier' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005) between the military and the media, and the extent to which the military provide the 'constitutive outside' (Laclau 2005) for the professional identity. In this sense, embedded journalists must remain independent, objective and report that which is important for public understanding without compromise, remaining within professionalism and maintaining the military units with whom they travel as 'other'. In the case of Centcom although journalists were aware of their responsibility not to become complicit with military authority, their ability to articulate more critical discourse was curtailed and disguised professionalism. Similarly, embedded reporters emphasise the importance of professionalism. It is solely from this discourse

that their legitimacy stems, regardless of the efficacy of professionalism within the context of embedding in achieving its normative goals. Pedelty (1995) calls this paradox “conscious non-reflexivity” – through remaining conscious of the conventions of objective practice journalists remain unaware of the deeper cultural, ideological values and practices with which they are complicit. In this case these are the persistent normalisation of military perspectives and logic that is a feature of embedded reporting. As this paper demonstrates, journalists seek the discursive protection of professionalism and remain largely oblivious to the normalisation of war that their practice produces and the fulfilment of military strategic aims to which professionalism contributes. In this sense professionalism can be re-conceptualised as ideological fantasy.

Thompson considered his role as an embedded reporter in light of the reality TV phenomena and the so-called “You Tube” generation of media, which provide immediate coverage and a veneer of increased authenticity. For Thompson the traditional skills of journalism associated with professionalism; accuracy, verification and balance are ever more important in the modern era of instant global communications. Access in this context becomes a central legitimating consideration. “These days increasingly having worthy generic shots and worthy interviews and subjects doesn’t really cut it anymore. You either live or die by your access”, argues Thompson (2006). And, journalists continue to play an important role in making sense of ‘reality’ for audiences given their technical skills; “I think it’s really easy to underestimate the filtering process...taking white noise and turning it into something actually intelligible and interesting and illuminating”, says Thompson (2006). Murdoch’s articulation of embedding is straight-forward, underlining a commitment to the central tenets of professionalism; “...there’s no difference [as an embedded journalist], the principles aren’t any different and that includes war...[I reported] just what I could see and what I could quickly get out, with the limitations that I had” (Murdoch 2006). Professionalism is thus of central relevance in legitimating embedding for these journalists. Indeed, in the complicated and often confused context of war and real-time communication (Taylor 1996), the journalist’s role as arbiter of credible news and

understanding is maintained and closeness or access is an important signifier in this regard.

Murdoch's reporting most clearly illustrates the attempts by embedded reporters to articulate their professional identity by adhering strictly to the prescriptions of professionalism. As Murdoch has stated the reporting focused simply on what he could see, that which was evident before him. Murdoch reiterates the "naïve empiricism" (Tuchman 1978) at the heart of professionalism. An important consequence of this approach is the unavoidable focus of such a reporting style on the American/coalition activities, operations and perspectives, and for which the experiment of embedding has been heavily criticised (Tumber 2004; Reese 2004; Seib 2004; PEJ 2003). Murdoch's reporting is almost exclusively concerned with military operations and military personnel; descriptions of weaponry and equipment feature prominently, as these objects are both articulated into journalistic knowledge and 'made real' through discourse and aligned with the military's strategic aims to tell American stories and express military logics (Department of Defense Support Plan 2003). The following are typical accounts of military activities from early in the invasion:

The Iraqi gunners fired first, soon after US President George Bush had announced the attack on Saddam Hussein was underway.

It was a fatal mistake.

The Iraqi artillery unit, preparing for the American invasion, tested the range by firing registering shots at a spot where the American tanks were likely to cross from Kuwait.

American radar picked up the incoming shells and pinpointed their source.

Within hours, the Iraqi gunners and their Russian-made 112-millimetre howitzers were destroyed, as the Americans unleashed an artillery barrage that shook the ground and lit up the night sky with orange flashes.

"Dead bodies are everywhere," an American officer reported by radio (*The Age*, 22/03/03: 1).

And;

After two air strikes by British harrier jets, each dropping one 500-pound bomb, some Iraqis could be seen waving white flags and surrendering.

Referring to the air strikes, Captain Rick Crevier, commander of Fox Company of the 2nd Battalion, 1st US Marine Regiment, said: "It made sense for us to do this. Rather than send men in there, we're just going to destroy it" (*The Age*, 24/03/03: 3).

A more insightful form of coverage is attempted in Murdoch's feature writing about his embedded experiences. Little is added however, beyond those sentimental portraits that are a predictable accompaniment to the uncritical, descriptive reporting of the invasion. Indeed, the 'identification' with soldiers, that critics of embedding considered so dangerous (Seib 2004: 57), is here immediately apparent as the soldiers of the invading army are granted the chance to express the hardships that they are experiencing, and provided the journalistic space in which to express their perspectives. The following has the effect of providing little information except for humanising the perspective of homesick, American soldiers.

These marines – average age 20 – think little about the politics of this war, or about the street rallies back home and the anti-war messages that crackle through battered short-wave radios...

"I can picture my wife sitting on the sofa watching the television and bawling her eyes out," Hobbs says, musing that this is not the war he or his fellow marines had envisaged.

"I was thinking it would be like in the movies. I thought there would be bodies everywhere...action, heroics, that sort of thing. But there is nothing here...it's empty, desolate. Conditions are harder than I imagined" (*The Age*, 29/03/03: 7).

Thompson was less inclined towards celebratory coverage of American forces. However, the fantasy of professionalism remains evident in his account of embedding. Here a concern for enunciating clearly one's professionalism leads to a more deeply inquisitive reporting style than Murdoch. Yet, ultimately, Thompson's reports are weakly empathetic towards the soldiers and avoid a deeper and more critical position, in favour of pursuing correct professional practice. In this sense the very 'quality' of

Thompson's professionalism prevents the expression of deeper understandings. In such accounts the foregrounding of individualised soldiers experiences – the 'reality of the troops' – and articulating this into discourse effectively *journalises* the military. By privileging and 'making real' soldier's experiences and perspectives professional journalism actively supports the strategic intent of the military communications policy (Department of Defense 2003), which sought exactly this outcome.

Thompson (2006) considered embedding to offer the best coverage opportunities since Vietnam of the "American war machine". An interest in being 'up close and personal' with soldiers is evident from Thompson's earliest embedded reports. Embedding is justified in terms of professionalism. Although coverage focused on the narrow experiences of individuals or small groups of soldiers it remained 'fact-based' and an eye-witness account of reality. Here the consonance of embedding with broader cultural conditions and predilections is obvious. Embedding is largely drama and spectacle (PEJ 2003), designed to fill non-stop news cycles with rich, entertaining footage and detail, based largely on individualised experiences, both journalistic and military, while also fulfilling the strategic aims of military authorities in communicating their 'stories'. Embedding then offers - and professionalism is complicit in this function - the inverse of that which it purports. This aspect of embedding is not lost on journalists either, who acknowledge the limitations of embedding, yet 'professionally' participate in it nonetheless.

Nevertheless, for Thompson, the 'objective truth' of military life, in the form of first person interviews, is accurately represented though embedded reporting;

Geoff Thompson: Lance Corporal Timothy Galuga is just 21-years old. How do you feel about what's likely to happen in the next 48 hours?

Timothy Galuga: I'll see what happens, I'm ready to go. I've been ready to go, we've all been ready to go, just waiting for the ok to do our job and take it from there.

Geoff Thompson: Any concerns about the unknown?

Timothy Galuga: Ah, no. You know, fear of the unknown is normal, everyone has fear about that, but once you get used to the surroundings, you know, everybody will be alright. That's what marines do, we help each other out because we're all a big brotherhood here. You know, if somebody is lost out there, we pull them back in. We make sure everyone is alright you know. We'll be fine (AM, 20/03/03).

This interest in the soldiers themselves goes beyond Murdoch's concern over hardships and operational detail to attempts to explore the innocence, ignorance and inexperience that were manifest among American soldiers. As Thompson (2006) argues;

The way these guys are geared and wound up and have, certainly at the lower ranks level, a pretty simple idea of what they are doing, "we're gonna [sic] go an kill shit, this is fun", basically. But I knew that was interesting and newsworthy. But you don't need to grill Americans for them to say things and couch things in a way that was interesting. I wasn't goading them or anything; you didn't need to do that.

This reporting strategy served Thompson well, permitting many broadcasts in which the complexities, or lack thereof, of American attitudes were demonstrated;

Geoff Thompson: Within hours of going to church, Lance Corporal Charles Robertson is receiving orders to kill people he has never met and whose bodies he will probably never see.

Charles Robertson: Well, you have to definitely know that, believe that you're doing the right thing out here and pray a lot and get peace from God that you're doing the right thing 'cause if you don't think you're doing the right thing and then you go to church and you worship and then you're killing somebody, then. You know, it's something that causes a big conflict.

But, it's different to think about it 'cause, you know, usually you think about going to church in your nice clothes on a Sunday morning at home and going back and eating dinner with family . But out here you go to church and then three hours later you're sending rounds down, raining shit on people.

So, it's different. There's not an emotional, it's not much of an emotional conflict for me because like I said, I think I'm doing the right thing out here. (AM, 31/03/03).

Such reporting is professionally accomplished. Verbatim interviews convey 'realism', while the reporter remains aloof, allowing the 'facts' of the interviewees' responses 'speak for themselves'. Importantly for professionalism, verbatim interviews offer audiences direct access to 'reality as it is', and offer an ostensibly unadulterated account of newsworthy information, a central concern for the liberal, professional discourse. From this perspective embedding has been celebrated as allowing a close and detailed understanding of military activity (Thompson 2006; Murdoch 2006, Campbell 2006) and offering the opportunity for new understandings and conceptions of war. As Lewis and Brookes (2004) argue, embedding provided a useful counter-weight to the otherwise firmly controlled information sources at military briefings such as those conducted at Centcom. However this closeness to military operations and personnel, and a keenness to report 'up close and personal' must also be considered not only to systematically privilege coalition military perspectives, but to normalise, humanise and empathise with the subjectivities and experiences of (American) soldiers. Professionalism here, in its attempts to describe honestly the war experience, effectively justifies and normalises militarism, without a deeper consideration of the consequences of such a posture. As noted by Reese (2004; 250) coverage of the war integrates the "logic of military conflict into society, making it difficult to separate out the merits of the larger policy which became hopelessly woven into the larger story".

As noted and discussed above, Thompson witnessed and reported on the killing of civilians by American soldiers. The treatment of this issue usefully encapsulates many of the criticisms of embedding and professionalism that have already been noted and demonstrates clearly how the relationship established between soldiers and embedded journalists may impact the reporting of war. In reporting the 10 April killings, Thompson contradicts the soldiers' accounts of the fire-fight, stating clearly that, "they're all saying that they saw green and white tracer fire [that] comes from AK-47s,

so that's likely to be enemy fire. I never saw green and white tracer fire. Michael Cox, our ABC cameraman here, never saw green and white tracer fire" (AM, 10.04.03). However, having established the poor judgement of the military unit, Thompson goes on to excuse their incompetence;

Geoff Thompson: I think what's happened is that they got very excited and I think that they were very anxious...basically they were trying to keep civilian vehicles away.

They did warn the vehicle, they said, "back, back, back" but you must remember it is dark. The vehicles have got headlights coming up the back of the vehicle...

Linda Mottram: So, you're talking about highly trained American marines who are in a state of nervousness and excitement, who seem unable to determine what exactly is coming at them and who are even made more jumpy by civilian headlights from cars in a suburb, hardly an unsurprising encounter?

Geoff Thompson: That's right. They have their, I mean I think their operational procedures are to keep civilian vehicles away.

There's an assumption that civilians will know what this means, that they will know what it means when a marine waves them down in the other direction.

Clearly, this incident, this clearly tragic incident has proven that's not the case (AM; 10/04/03).

This episode is one that has been often referred to by Australian journalists as representing the capabilities of embedded journalists to report the realities of war free from censorship and has been celebrated as evidence of the permission granted to more critical perspectives by the American military (Campbell 2006; Kerr 2006; Gawenda 2008). Indeed, Thompson (2006) argues that, "we filmed young grunts shooting up a car full of civilians. Yes, it [embedding] does privilege their perspective, but it doesn't make them immune from criticism or surveillance". Critics, however, have pointed to the dangers of embedded journalists becoming socialised into military life and establishing relationships with soldiers beyond the impartiality demanded by professionalism (Tumber 2004; 202-203). Reese identifies this as the "militarisation of journalism" where a symbiotic relationship between soldiers and journalists and a naturalised logic of military operations and culture

imposes itself, “working against alternative frameworks of interpretation” (Reese 2004; 250). Thompson himself admits to feelings of compassion and empathy for the soldiers involved in the shootings:

I felt sorry for the young grunts...I felt sorry for them – I’ve been in those situations before, where it all gets blurred and everyone gets very excited and the blood’s flowing and rumour and misjudgement bubble to the surface very quickly. Coming off that battle high they couldn’t with any sort of sober perspective actually look at what happened, so yeah, I felt sorry for them...” (Thompson 2006).

This episode is articulated in news discourse as ‘clearly tragic’ rather than militarily incompetent. Here the soldier’s incompetence and the horrors of multiple civilian killings are elided, replaced with rationalisation and humanisation of the soldier’s action. Such representations, rather than posing deeper questions about the preparedness of the American military, the degree of care taken by the invading forces or the wider implications of violence on civil society, normalises the extreme violence of military operations.

Thus, embedding, while holding out a promise of close, open and ‘never before seen’ coverage of Americans at war, rather generated a reporting style that offered limited deeper understandings of war, beyond dramatic and exciting footage. Embedding appealed directly to professionalism, couched as it was in professional discourse, offering new possibilities to earnest war journalists. However, as critics have observed, embedding freed military authorities from accusations of “crude censorship” (Cottle 2006; 95) by offering greater access to information than previously, yet in a context that was favourable to the strategic intent of military communication planners. As has also been noted, embedded journalists provided a war narrative that emphasised spectacle, drama and the events and operations of war, rather than a contextualised understanding of war’s meaning (Lewis and Brookes 2004). The evidence provided by the present study supports this argument. As shown above, embeds, while close to the gritty details of military life tended to normalise war and humanise the soldiers with whom they travelled. Moreover, the individual perspectives of soldiers are articulated into mainstream public knowledge and ‘journalised’ through

empathetic and compassionate coverage. Such a tendency must be understood in the context of the professional discourse. Although embedding offered apparent openness to journalists and the professional freedom they enunciate as centrally important, professionalism ensured that the more complex issues of context, significance, the possible outcomes and ramifications of invasion and importantly, critical perspective were avoided in favour of the 'objectivity' of military facts and events, progress and infrastructure, drama and personalities.

6 CONCLUSION

Professional war journalism must ultimately be understood as complicit in the maintenance of military-political logics as hegemony. Professional journalism is centrally concerned with an objective, independent, fact-based approach. Through these articulatory and normative practices, journalism's socio-political responsibilities, its normative role is discharged. However, both news locations analysed in this paper demand serious compromises of journalistic norms, most notably of independence. However, it is through the professional discourse that such limitations are overlooked. Indeed, in overlooking the shortcomings of professionalism and articulating a war news discourse aligned with the strategic communication intent of Coalition military planners, this paper illuminates how the ideological fantasy of professionalism is functional within contemporary military-political hegemony.

Professionalism enunciates a journalism that is unnecessarily patriotic, uncritical and disproportionate. While the Australian component of the Coalition forces was comparatively small, coverage concerning Australian activities, both military and mundane was persistent and widespread. Legitimate public interest arguably exists in coverage of the Australian military's operations in the region; much news space was devoted to profiles pieces, inconsequential coverage, comedy pieces and gratuitous patriotism. Journalists are aware of the dangers of being 'caught up' in the excitement and fervour of war. However, they nonetheless reproduce such excitement and adventure as 'news'. This is due to the professional demands of mainstream news organisations, "picking that sort of stuff up" (Callinan 2006). Indeed, Australian angles are a professional's comparative advantage in a

media saturated environment, such as Iraq, 2003. The effect, however, as evidenced by the analysis, is a continued predilection for uncritical journalism that both naturalises and trivialises the war experience, while celebrating the Australian military contribution.

Such naturalisation of militarism is further evident in and a distinct feature of, the reporting both from Centcom and from embedded journalists. Here, although both locations of news confront journalists with a range of difficulties and constraints, rather than present critical perspectives, professionalism enunciates meanings that elide any deeper understanding of war beyond the personalities, experiences and operational details that characterise both forms. At Centcom although aware of the constraints placed on their reporting, journalists opted to treat the operation as legitimate and the news produced as credible. In effect a 'straw man' of access and crude propaganda is attacked, facilitating the expression and articulation of normative, professional identities, while deeper issues such as the systematic manipulation of information or the symbiotic relationship between the military and the media goes unexamined for fear of appearing biased or unprofessional.

In the case of embedding, an arrangement of protection and control of journalists by the military, the exercise was treated as any other assignment – journalists remaining “consciously non-reflexive” (Pedelty 1995) towards broader implications of presenting humanised, naturalised and often sympathetic accounts of (primarily) American militarism. Rather, the fantasy professionalism is overemphasised – reporting is based explicitly on witnessed events, and distance is established through the use of superficial language designed to keep the media and the military separate (such as distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’). Such rationally enacted and purposefully enunciated professionalism overlooks the persistence and power of providing the military perspective so clearly, repetitively and empathetically. Indeed, although Thompson is concerned to maintain a clear distance between him and those he covers; his personalised and humanised reporting of soldiers and military activities undermines any separation. The obvious danger here and one realised in the coverage of the Iraq war, is that as journalists bond and begin to identify (“I felt sorry for them”) with soldiers. In

these circumstances the normative professional scheme and its goals are displaced by a journalistic form that while asserting its professionalism serves to rationalise and normalise the deadly horrors of war.

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