CHAPTER THREE

GRUESOME ENTERTAINMENT:
THE REPRESENTATION OF THE IRAQ WAR
IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

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In autumn 2003 I started to say in class: “No, when the Iraq war is over...”. I could not finish the sentence, as a student asked: “If the war is over, what do you call the present situation?” I answered: “It is called ‘peace’.”

Iraq entered the news during the autumn of 2002 when American politicians stated that the country was threatening the world peace by producing weapons of mass destruction. During the winter of 2002, the world media began to talk about the “Iraq crisis”, and finally the war officially began on 19 March 2003 when the United States began to bomb the country. After a few months of fighting, on 1 May, President Bush declared that the war was over. Soon after, Italian troops left for Iraq, where they stayed until 2 December 2006.

This article focuses on the representation of the Iraq crisis and war in the leading Italian from the autumn of 2002 till the spring of 2003. By representation I mean the interpretation given to a phenomenon using language. Words not only represent reality, but they also create it. Today’s world and the information society are increasingly text based. As both a sense of security and one of threat can be produced with language, the study of the discourse used in a conflict is of vital importance.

I mainly use the method of critical linguistics as it was developed by Roger Fowler, Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress. Based on the systemic-functional grammar of M.A.K. Halliday, critical linguistics is one method of critical discourse analysis. In this kind of representational study the crucial features are transitivity and naming, in other words how different phenomena are called. I shall thus examine the choice of agents (subject) and the affected participants (objects) and types of predicates (verbs) to which they are related, as well as the argumentation strategies. In conclusion, I shall present the characteristics of the Italian press in the representation of the “case of Iraq” as a form of gruesome entertainment.

Representation is always created from a specific point of view. According to critical linguistic theory, any aspect of linguistic structure, whether phonological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, pragmatic or textual, can carry ideological significance; in other words, an ideology (or point of view) can be expressed in a variety of ways through the choice of words and grammatical phrasing.

Using three different case studies, the article aims to shed light on the representation of the Iraq crisis and war in the Italian press from different angles. The research is based on articles published in some of the most important and widely circulated newspapers and magazines: La Repubblica, Il Corriere della Sera and L’Espresso. The articles taken from the news magazine L’Espresso were published during the so-called crisis between 1.10.2002-1.3.2003. The articles dealing with the war were published in La Repubblica between 19 March and 1 May 2003. Finally, the articles concerning the politicians’ argumentation in favour of Italy’s participation are taken from Il Corriere della Sera also between 19 March 19 till 1 May.

All three journals are distributed worldwide, and all have daily updated, free Internet sites. Although they are politically independent, Il Corriere della Sera is considered to be the most right-wing, while the other two are more inclined towards the moderate centre-left parties. In the final analyses, all three are nevertheless controlled by the country’s big business. Both L’Espresso (founded in 1955) and La Repubblica (founded in 1976) belong to an Italian media conglomerate, Gruppo Editoriale Espresso, of which the main shareholder is the CIR Group (Compagnie industriales riunite), a holding company primarily in the hands of the De Benedetti family. Il Corriere della Sera was

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1 There is a vast bibliography concerning the Iraq war. From the point of view of military history, see e.g. Donnelly, Operation Iraqi Freedom; Carlisle-Bowman, Iraq War.

2 Halliday, An Introduction to Functional Grammar; Fowler-Hodge-Cress-Trew, Language and Control; Fairclough, Media Discourse; Hodge-Cress, Language as Ideology; Lehtonen, Merkitysten maailma, 44-8. The concept of ‘transitivity’ will be discussed in section 2.


4 The articles from both La Repubblica and Il Corriere della Sera are stored in their Internet archives. L’Espresso has only stored their articles since 2006, and therefore I have read the news magazine’s paper version.
founded in Milan in 1876, and many prominent Italian intellectuals and writers have collaborated with it. Today, the newspaper belongs to the RCS MediaGroup, the leading Italian publisher. Over half of the shares of the RCS Media Group are owned by large enterprises (FIAT holds about 10%) and banks: Mediobanca S.p.A., the leading banking group of Italy, is the main shareholder, with over 13% of the shares.5

“The rough Texan” and the essence of the crisis

The Iraq war of 2003 is the largest and most expensive war fought during the third millennium. It caused thousands of casualties among Iraqi civilians and soldiers, as well as for the countries that sent troops there. It was a historical war that tested the entire international security system and challenged both the future and relevance of the UN. During the entire event, the media, both in the US and elsewhere, played a crucial role by advertising the war before it had even broken out, and once it had started, by representing it to the Western audience.6

As sociologists nowadays agree, newspapers or media, instead of reflecting reality, rather produce it from a certain ideological point of view. The news is one product among others. Its publication is the result of a complex selection that reflects the ideology of the newspaper and the society to which it is addressed: these factors not only give relevance to a phenomenon reported as news, but also indicate how it is reported.7

Once the Iraq crisis was “created” by American politicians and the media, it was represented in different ways in different countries. For instance, in Germany and France the government and the media were strongly against the war. In Germany the press, polemically condemning the US policy, backed up Chancelor Schröder’s “adamant stance” of not involving the country in a war against Iraq.8 In France, the press was not in favour of another Iraq war, yet felt that it was inexorable. The attitude in the press changed from resignation to resentment and criticism. The newspapers questioned the motives and rationale for a war, pointing out that war should be the last resort after all other channels of communication and coercion have been exhausted. Others imagined scenarios and consequences that would unfold out of a war for the US, Iraq, the Middle East and the rest of the world, as well as for the French-American relationship.9

Likewise in Italy there was plenty of resistance against the war, and L’Espresso explicitly opposed it.10 During the so-called crisis, the news magazine published both Italian and foreign journalists’ articles polemically condemning the forthcoming warfare as illegitimate and strongly attacking America’s policy and intentions. As Giorgio Bocca, one of the most prominent Italian journalists, wrote in February 2002: “This war is an Open Sesam for the empire’s expansion, for the death in the cradle of any kind of international law.”11

Even though the reason for the crisis was the weapons of mass destruction that Iraq was supposed to be producing but which were never found, in different countries the focus of the press shifted away from its origins. For instance, in Germany the majority of reports in both print and television concentrated instead on the antiraw movement and raised the question of whether the peace movement in Germany was still alive.12 In L’Espresso, the real topic in most of the articles dealing with the situation of Iraq is instead the US and American politicians. In other words, the protagonist of the crisis as it is represented in L’Espresso seems not to be Saddam or his presumed weapons, but the United States and George Bush in particular.13

In addition to news being a product, print and broadcast media are part of the entertainment industry. This is an industry that knows how to capture and hold the attention of its audience with certain types of news that are represented with certain tactics.14 This is particularly evident in the way L’Espresso reports about the Iraq crisis by personifying it in George W. Bush and by caricaturing him as an international trouble-maker.

5 The RCS MediaGroup has also developed a strong international presence in the daily newspaper sector and even has interests in the Spanish market through the company Unedisa, which publishes the daily El Mundo. The most updated information about the news sources can be found on their Internet home pages.
6 Fowler, ibid.; Fairclough, ibid.
9 For instance, according to an opinion survey carried out by L’Espresso in October 2002, 83% were against an American military intervention in Iraq without UN authorization, and 12% would have accepted it. See Damilano, “Siam di destra e pacifisti”. In another survey in February 2003, even with the consent of the UN 72.5% of Italians were still against the war and 24.8% accepted it. If the war was waged only by the US and its allies without the consent of the UN, 85.5% of Italians were against it and 11.7% would approve. See Riva, “Tutte le bombe di George”.
10 Bocca, “La malafede dei cortigiani”.
11 Schlichting-Artur, ibid., 149.
12 For instance, in all of the articles dealing with Iraq, quantitatively the US and American statesmen were mentioned the most often, with approximately 27 mentions; George Bush with 16 mentions, Saddam Hussein 10, and Iraq 4.
13 Moeller, Compassion Fatigue, 10, 34.
In condemning the Americans and their policy, the German press used radical language and polemical expressions, such as “the PR machine of the Bush-warrior” or “the War that came from the Think Tank”. Following the same path L’Espresso openly reveals its opinion of Bush and his politicians in the way they are named in the articles. In addition to titles emphasizing their position as legitimate leaders of the country (President George Bush, the administration of Bush), the American politicians have also been given familiar names, such as “George”, “George W” or “W and his beloved ones”, 17 that indicate the magazine’s somewhat condescending attitude towards him. The clearly pejorative names, on the one hand, give an impression of arbitrariness and bellicosity, and on the other, of a barbarian troublemaker: “the emperor George W. Bush”, 18 “American imperialism”, 19 “the warrior president”, 20 “the masters of war”, “the rough Texan daddy’s boy”, 21 “the Yankees”, “the true crazy” 22 and “the ex-brat”. 23

According first to Halliday’s functional grammar and subsequently repeated by Fowler, transitivity is the foundation of representation, as it is the way a clause is used to analyse events and situations as being of certain types. 24 In transitional analysis, people with power are usually in the position of agents, of the subjects of the verbs, whereas people subject to power are treated as objects or patients. Verbs expressing mental actions, such as saying or thinking, are typical in political discourse. They are signs of power, for people with decisional power are quoted because their words and ideas are considered to be important. Instead, verbs expressing material action, such as ‘doing’, are less significant, and they are often a sign of a lack of authority or esteem. 25

Regardless of the fact that the crisis was supposed to be created by Saddam Hussein, in L’Espresso he along with his country are nevertheless usually treated as patients or objects of material actions. 26 The facts that, quantitatively, President Bush is the most common agent, his government the second most common, and Saddam only the third most common, further underlines Bush’s central position in the so-called crisis. Americans are usually the agents of verbs expressing verbal or mental doing, which means that the articles primarily report on their thinking and reasoning. Instead, Saddam Hussein is only the third most important agent of the verbs expressing material, concrete doing. Whereas Bush and his government “say”, “declare”, “consider” or “decide”, Saddam “liberates”, or “puts”. His statements are not considered important and they are not quoted. The other possible parties of the crisis, the Iraqi people or the UN, were agents in only a few cases. Their passivity in the whole situation is further emphasized with verbs expressing a state: they don’t think or do; they just “are”.

George Orwell’s newspeak, which he presented in the novel Nineteen Eighty-four, is a reduced language developed by a totalitarian state as a tool to control thoughts. In newspeak, not only are all the shades of meaning eliminated, but also undesirable words. 27 Going one step further, Halliday has coined the term ‘antilanguage’, by which he refers to the changing of the meaning of words when a topic is considered problematic. 28 Language users apply different kinds of euphemisms when addressing challenging issues. Thus, in war discourse, for instance, weapons become ‘products’, war turns into an ‘intervention’, the enemy is a mere ‘target’, and thereby the cruel nature of warfare is alleviated. L’Espresso, on the contrary, uses highly explicit and polemical discourse when representing the war. The aims of the Americans are not treated genteelly; for L’Espresso, what was to be expected was a war, and in the magazine the war was called ‘war’. Negative qualifiers or appealing metaphors further underline the horrific nature of the Americans’ intention, which is polemically entitled “war”, “bombard Iraq” and “massacre the country”. 29

The fact that in most cases the direct target of the warfare is Iraq also emphasizes the terrifying actions of the US. The still future war would be fought against a certain country, its army and civilians, and not, for instance, against an abstract “enemy”. 30 During the winter of 2002–2003, the coming war is explicitly depicted as an operation of Bush

15 Schlichting-Artur, ibid.
16 Pontoniere, “Presidente delle false promesse”.
17 “W e i suoi cari” in Riva, “Tutte le bombe di George”.
18 “l’imperatore George W. Bush” in Pedemonte, “George avanti tutta”.
19 “l’imperialismo statunitense” in Riva, “Yankee go home”.
20 “il presidente guerriero” in Pedemonte, “George avanti tutta”.
21 “un rozzo texano figlio di papà” in ibid.
22 “il vero folle” in Rifkins,”Operazione oro nero”.
23 “l’ex-ragazzo discolo” in Goldkorn “La pace nasce dai missili”.
24 Fowler, ibid., 70-1. Halliday’s redefinition of the term ‘transitivity’ widened the traditional division between the transitive and intransitive verbs. Transitive analysis focuses on the different parts of discourse and fundamentally answers to the question of who is doing (agent) what to whom (patient/object). See Halliday, ibid., 280-305.
26 The most common object was Iraq, and the second common Saddam Hussein.
27 Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-four, 45-59.
28 Halliday, Language as Social Semiotic.
29 “la Guerra”, “bombardare l’Iraq”, “ridurre il paese in poltiglia” in Fabiani, “Saddam cambia faccia”.
30 In most of the cases (20/35) the object is Iraq, in some 10/35 it is Saddam, and in five cases Bagdad as a metonymy of the Iraqi administration or the whole country, such as “attack Iraq” (attaccare l’Iraq), “war against Iraq” (la guerra
only, or of the Americans, aiming precisely at occupying Iraq and deposing Saddam. With the personification and the slang expressions, such as an “exhibition of muscles” or “call Saddam to account”, the news magazine depicts the operation as banal and labels Bush as a boor.

A cruel war without an aggressor

Nevertheless, the Iraq war officially began on 19 March 2003 when the United States began to bombard the country. The following day US troops crossed the southern border of Iraq from Kuwait. Following the path of L’Espresso, La Repubblica, from which the articles dealing with the war are taken, also condemns the war as illegal. As Ezio Mauro wrote in April 2003: “This is a war that is wrong and dangerous in its genesis as a model, because it is outside of the international legitimacy of the UN, with the United States after September 11 being at the same time the victim, the judge and the avenger.”

Consequently, La Repubblica’s style is also highly polemical when reporting the results of the warfare. It uses no euphemisms; on the contrary, the newspaper uses strong adjectives to highlight the meaning of the nouns. What is going on in Iraq is “war”, “the great attack”, “a furious battle” or “most violent and bloody battles”. To emphasize the seriousness and the consequences of the war at its advent, one journalist uses religious language, calling it an “apocalypse” or “the Flood”.

To complete the idea of an “apocalypse” occurring in Iraq, La Repubblica also gives substantial space to the civilians’ suffering. Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience. Watching and reading about suffering, especially suffering that exists somewhere else, has nowadays become a form of entertainment. For this reason, in the mass media, suffering is of vital importance. Whereas human beings have an innate appetite for sights of degradation, pain and mutilation, suffering is the one thing (rather than good news) that guarantees sales in the media.

In La Repubblica human casualties are indicated directly with explicit terminology such as “victims” (vittime), “dead bodies” (cadaveri) or even “deaths” (morti). The given details of the civilian victims make the description personal and intentionally even more emotional, as in the following passage:

Mahdi, 15, was in the street with his brother, 5, who at the first explosion was blown onto his neck, practically saving his life. A splinter hit him between the shoulder blades. He died in his arms in a futile trip to the hospital while Mahdi was whispered: ‘Come on baby, hold on.’

As Susan Sontag has pointed out, all images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic: they satisfy the wish to see something gruesome. The frankest representations of war and of disaster-injured bodies are of those who seem most foreign and therefore are the least likely to be known. Their suffering is easier to watch as it is not possible to identify with the victim. Not by accident, no detailed descriptions are given of the suffering of the allied forces, nor are the culprits of the Iraqis’ sufferings explicitly pointed out.

all’Iraq), “war against Saddam” (la guerra a Saddam), “his [Bush’s] battle against Saddam (la sua [di Bush] battaglia contro Saddam) and “an intervention against Bagdad” (un intervento contro Bagdad).

31 “Bush’s war” (la guerra di Bush) in Caraccio: “L’impero americano”. “The American war” (la guerra americana) / “the American looming invasion of Iraq” (l’incombente invasione americana dell’Iraq) / “defeat the dictator” (debellare il dittatore) in Claudio Rinaldi: “Non ci posso credere”.

32 “chiudere i conti con Saddam” / “la decisione di farla finita con Saddam” in Goldkorn, “Conto alla rovescia”.

33 “Questa è una guerra che resta sbagliata nella sua genesi e pericolosa come modello, perché fuori dalla legittimità internazionale dell’Onu, con gli Stati Uniti che dopo l’11 settembre diventano nello stesso tempo vittima, giudice e vinvide.” Mauro 10.4.2003.

34 “Guerra all’Iraq”; “il grande attacco” in “Inferno di bombe su Bagdad” / “una furiosa battaglia” in “Le truppe di terra avanzano” / “violentissimi e sanguinosi combattimenti” in “Bombardamenti su Bagdad”.

35 Valli, “Le ultime ore di Bagdad rassegnata all’Apocalisse”.

36 See, for instance, the following articles: Valli: “Nel cratere della morte gli incubi di una città assediata”; Bonini and D’Avanzo: “Bassora, la fuga dei disperati. La milizia spara sulla folla”; Caprile: “Hilla, la disperazione dei sopravvissuti”; Caprile: “Un popolo in fuga dal massacro di Bagdad”; “Due pillole per il mal di testa per amputare una gamba”; “Bombardamenti su Bagdad”.

37 Moeller, ibid., 10, 34.


39 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 55, 85 and passim.
Even though the casualties are depicted emotionally, when it comes to reporting the events of the warfare, the representation turns into a sterile analysis of a sort of strategic game in an Orwellian sense, with neither an aggressor nor victims. Usually, the events are simply called ‘war’, with no mention of location or parties. On some occasions it is specified that the war is being fought in Iraq (la guerra in Iraq); only a few times is the war described as being fought against Iraq (la guerra all’Iraq). Nor do the horrors of the war have any offender. As is reported in La Repubblica, the above-mentioned atrocities seemed to be caused by no one, and the war has broken out simply by itself. This effect is created with verbs dealing with natural phenomena, which give an impression of the war as a natural catastrophe without human intervention. Thus, there is a “rainfall of cruise missiles over Bagdad”, or “a storm of deadly cluster bombs [that] had struck the countryside” caused the death of some 50 civilians and wounded 100. Alternatively, “the bombs [are simply] falling” just by themselves.

In other cases, the agent disappears either with the nominalization of the verb in expressions such as “the bombarding of the zones south and south-east of the capital” that “continue”. The fights that aggravate or the attack [that] starts give the impression that the actions are out of the control of all the parties, with no one actually being responsible. The very same effect is also obtained by the use of passive constructions in which there are no human agents, as in the sentence “Meanwhile Baghdad has continued to be struck by bombardment”, or “the heavy bombardment of the allies has been effectuated”.

If the verb has a human agent, the (human) object is usually missing. Thus, in the sentence “the Americans have launched 72 missiles”, it is not specified against whom or where the missiles have been launched. Expressions in which both the agent and the object of the action are directly indicated are very rare, and frequently the target of these is not a human being, but a concrete thing, as in the cases in which “the United States’ forces have attacked the Iraq positions” or “Marines have engaged in a ferocious battle against enemy armoured units”.

If this linguistic strategy is aimed at rendering the Americans’ military actions innocent, the opposite effect is obtained when both the human agent and the human target are explicitly indicated. The one case in which this occurs is when the Iraqi “militia shoots into the crowd”, as if only the Iraqis were capable of shooting human beings.

The Iraq war has also been called a “technological war” because of the sophisticated technology used in it. In the representation of the conflict, the metonymical use of the technological weapons as agents gives the idea that the aggressors are not human beings, but that technology has started to dominate the situation and is acting independently. Therefore, we read that “the two Apaches opened fire with rockets and machine guns against the barracks, and soon after the fire attack of the allies’ jets joined them” or that “the fighters that took off from the aircraft carrier Roosevelt, which is located in the eastern Mediterranean, have bombarded the bunkers of some Iraqi commanders”. In addition to the impression of autonomous technology, pointing out the manufacturer of the weapons, both willingly or not, advertises the war industry, and switches the focus of the news to the technology from the event itself: the name and the location of “the aircraft carrier Roosevelt” becomes more important than the jets’ bombardment.

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40 “Guerra all’Iraq”.
41 “Pioggia di cruise su Bagdad”.
42 “una tempesta di micidiali cluster bomb s’era abbattuta sulle campagne” in Caprile “Hilla, la disperazione dei sopravvissuti”.
43 “cadono le bombe” in “Pioggia di cruise su Bagdad”.
44 “Continuano i bombardamenti sulle zone sud e sud est della capitale” in “Elicotteri Apache all’attacco su Bagdad”.
45 “i combattimenti che si inaspriscono” in “Due pillole di mal di testa per amputare una gamba”.
46 “Pioggia di cruise su Bagdad”.
47 “Mentre Bagdad ha continuato a essere colpita dai bombardamenti.”, “pesanti bombardamenti alleati sono stati effettuati” in “Le truppe di terra avanzano”.
48 “agli americani hanno lanciato 72 missili” in “Bagdad sotto i missili”.
49 “Le forze statunitensi hanno attaccato postazioni irachene” in “Bombardamenti su Bagdad”.
50 “i marines hanno ingaggiato una furiosa battaglia contro reparti blindati nemici” in “Le truppe di terra avanzano”.
51 “La milizia spara sulla folla” in Bonini and D’Avanzo, “Bassora, la fuga dei disperati”.
52 “La Repubblica”.
53 The Americans boasted in public about the advanced technology used in the war. Unmanned aerial vehicles flew at different altitudes, manned aircraft kept up a constant surveillance of the battlefields, and spotters on the ground used global positioning, satellite telephones and wireless Internet devices to shape and forward information.
54 “I caccia partiti dalla portaerei Roosevelt, che si trova nel Mediterraneo orientale, hanno bombardato nella notte i bunker di alcuni comandanti iracheni.” in “Bombardamenti su Bagdad”.
55 “I combattimenti che si inaspriscono” in “Due pillole di mal di testa per amputare una gamba”.

“US troops” and “pockets of resistance”

All in all, La Repubblica reports on the war in a sober manner. In contrast to the representation of the crisis in L’Espresso, one sign of an attempt to appear objective is that the journal never explicitly points to anyone as the guilty party, nor demonizes any of the parties involved in the conflict. However, like in the case of L’Espresso, in La Repubblica the most common topic quantitatively in the news articles is the allies, who become the real protagonists of the war. They are exclusively referred to with collective military terminology, for example, “soldiers”, “the allied troops”, “the marines” and “the forces”, sometimes with an attribute expressing nationality. As in most cases the references to the allies are in the position of an agent related to a verb expressing material or physical doing, the news is about what the allies do, for example, “the Allied troops had taken control of the area”.56 or “the US troops have conquered Karbala”.57 All this gives the impression of an organized and official, non-human entity that is acting almost automatically – like the technology – as no decision making, thinking or reasoning is reported to explain these actions, nor their ultimate goals.

The Iraqi soldiers, instead, are mentioned only half as often, and like the allies, they are also referred to with military terminology.58 However, in contrast to how the Americans are mentioned, they are sometimes indicated as human beings with terms such as “the Iraqis” (gli iracheni) or “men” (ummini). Only very seldom are they designated negatively with naming that gives the impression of an illicit activity, such as “bomber” (attentatore) or “kamikaze”. Even the term ‘enemy’ (nemico) is applied in only very few cases. Thus, the result is an image of a non-human collective (the allies) against armed men (the Iraqis). The invulnerability of the former is also seen in different indirect expressions with which casualties are reported, such as in the case in which occurred a “New fatal accident for the Anglo-American forces engaged in the operation ‘Freedom for Iraq’”.59

On the other hand, the insignificance of the Iraqi forces arises from the fact that on some occasions they are not even mentioned, as is the case for the battle of Umm Qasr where “U.S. Marines have had to cope with other pockets of resistance”60. Furthermore, in only approximately one fourth of cases are the Iraqi soldiers agents in an active phrase. They are most frequently in the position of patients or objects in an active sentence or circumstances, or an agent or subject in a passive sentence, for instance “hundreds of Iraqi soldiers might have been imprisoned”.61

Throughout the Bush regime, in the US the state regulated the visual material of any war. The phenomenon came to the forefront with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and it was baptized “embedded reporting”. Journalists agreed to report the events only from the perspective established by military and governmental authorities.62

Not surprisingly, in Italy as well the entire warfare is clearly reported from the Western perspective, as the focus is on the success of the allied troops and their war technology. This point of view is confirmed by the sources the newspaper uses and whom it esteems enough to quote.63 In La Repubblica, authorities (persons or institutions whose words are quoted directly or indirectly) are mentioned approximately 250 times. Most of them are the allies (approximately 4/5 of the cases); Iraqi sources are quoted some 40 times, and other Arabic sources less than 30 times.64 Among the sources taken from the allies are in equal measure the mass media, politicians and military sources (a total of 1/3 of all the ally-related sources). Among the other Arabic sources, the most important is the Al Jazeera TV channel (1/3 of the cases). Iraqi sources, which are a third of the total of allied sources, consist mainly of the government and its representatives.65 The Iraqi people are interviewed exclusively in news reporting civilian casualties and their suffering.

55 The allies are mentioned some 163 times, while the Iraq army was referred to less than half as many times, approximately in 80 cases, and the Iraqi people not even 30 times.
56 (Le truppe alleate avevano preso il controllo dell’area) in “Le truppe di terra avanzano”.
57 (Le truppe Usa hanno conquistano Kerbala) in ”Elicotteri Apache all’attacco su Bagdad”.
58 Army (esercito), soldier (soldato), troops (truppe). At the end of March the term “The Republican Guard” (la Guardia Repubblicana) became popular, in the second place, (7 / 81) in frequency of usage.
59 (Nuovo incidente mortale per le forze angloamericane impegnate nell’operazione “libertà per l’Iraq”.) in “Scontro tra elicotteri Gb”.
60 “In questa città meridionale, i marines statunitensi hanno dovuto fronteggiare altre sacche di resistenza” in “Le truppe di terra avanzano”.
61 “Centinaia di soldati iracheni sarebbero stati fatti prigionieri” in “Le truppe di terra avanzano”.
62 Butler, Frames of War, 64.
63 On the use of the source, see also Fowler, ibid., 210-4.
64 Other sources are approximately seven, including the Red Cross (mentioned once) and Kofi Annan (mentioned twice).
65 Other Iraqi sources are the mass media, 6; religious sources, 5; military sources, 3; and the representatives of the so-called opposition, 2.
as if they have no opinion on the ongoing war.\textsuperscript{66} The statistics confirm that the US triumphs not only on the battlefield, but also in the Italian mass media.\textsuperscript{67} 

The press and politics

Before the invasion, Washington had asked for Italy’s willingness to offer first logistical and later direct military help if war should break out.\textsuperscript{68} Common people and the leftist parties of the political opposition in government had been very much against any kind of Italian involvement, and demonstrations and strikes against the war started before the US invasion and continued afterwards.\textsuperscript{69} Although the right-wing government initially denied that Italy would have any involvement in the warfare when it began, the leading politicians slowly started to change their opinions.\textsuperscript{70} At the end of March, Italy gave permission to the US to send American parachutists from Italy to Iraq. On 10 April the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, spoke publicly about the possibility of an offer of concrete military aid to the US.\textsuperscript{71} A few days later (15 April), first the Senate and then the Parliament voted in favour of sending approximately 3000 Italian soldiers to Iraq in May.\textsuperscript{72} Soon after President Bush proclaimed on 1 May 2003 that the war had ended, Italian troops left for Iraq, where they stayed until 2 December 2006.\textsuperscript{73}

The news on the decision to send troops to Iraq is taken from \textit{Il Corriere della Sera}. The central feature of the news about the political decision making is the abundance of direct quotations from politicians’ speeches or their words, in most cases indicated by quotation marks. Quotations in the press have two basic functions: on the one hand, they are used to emphasize certain words or expressions, and on the other, to mark a citation. The meaning of a citation is to make the text more “objective”, to create the illusion that things speak for themselves.\textsuperscript{74} For this reason the direct, explicit voice of the newspaper on some occasions seems to be absent, and what I am merely studying is the language that the politicians have used and that has subsequently been reported in the articles.\textsuperscript{75} With this tactical choice of using citations, the author is able to avoid making statements of his/her own and instead puts him-/herself in the background in the role of a mere objective observer.

The war and the politicians

The image of the war that emerges from these particular articles of \textit{Il Corriere della Sera} is extremely abstract and sterile. In contrast to the polemical style of \textit{L’Espresso} and \textit{La Repubblica}, the language used in \textit{Il Corriere della sera} is a showpiece of Orwellian newspeak and the antilanguage of Halliday.

\textsuperscript{66} Haarman and Lombardo in their comparative linguistic research on war-related news point out that compared to the American or British TV channels the Italian Canale 5 and Rai1 hosted various voices. In addition to an attempt by Canale 5 newsreaders and correspondents to allot more space to Iraqi sources in their coverage of the war, an effort was also made to portray the actions and speech of Iraqis within their own cultural framework as well as a generic anti-war stance. See Haarman-Lombardo, “Introduction”, 22-3.

\textsuperscript{67} For the media sources used, see also Rantanen, “European News Agencies and Their Sources in the Iraq War Coverage”.

\textsuperscript{68} Sarzanini, “La squadra: carabinieri, sminatori ed esperti di armi chimiche”.

\textsuperscript{69} See for instance, Latella, “Roma e la pace, mobilitazione che colpisce”; “Guerra: blocchi, corte e centomila fiaccole”; “In piazza contro la guerra, la città si ferma”.

\textsuperscript{70} The Italian government that took the decision to send troops to Iraq was composed of a coalition of right-wing parties, among which the most important are Forza Italia, a populist neo-liberalist party of the Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, and Alleanza Nazionale, classified by political scientists as a post-Fascist party, the secretary of which, Gianfranco Fini, was the Vice Prime Minister in the spring of 2003. See Ignazi, Postfascisti?, Tarchi, \textit{Cinquanta’anni di nostalgia}.

\textsuperscript{71} Di Caro, “Non conto sulla sinistra per l’Iraq”.

\textsuperscript{72} In the Parliament the decision was approved by 308 deputies, 31 voted against it and 159 abstained. In the Senate the decision was approved with 153 votes, 26 voted against it and 2 abstained. Caprara, “Il parlamento vara la missione s Bagdad”.

\textsuperscript{73} According to an opinion survey carried out by \textit{L’Espresso} in October 2002, 48% of Italians were against participation in the war even with the consent of the UN, while 83% were against it without a UN decision. See Damilano, “Siam di destra e pacifisti”. According to a survey from February 2003, 77.7% of Italians were against sending soldiers to Iraq in case of war, and 20.2% were in favour. Riva, “Tutte le bombe di George”.

\textsuperscript{74} Tuomarla, \textit{La citation mode d’emploi sur le fonctionnement discursif du discours rapporté direct}, 163.

\textsuperscript{75} Of course the “objectivity” is only an illusion, since the author subjectively chooses which actions have “news value”, what to put in the text, which words or statements to report, even as direct quotations. Further, in many cases the language used by the politicians coincides with the language of the newspaper: the terms, expressions or statements that on some occasions might be within quotation marks, on other occasions are used directly by the journalist.
Whereas the main protagonists are the Italian politicians or Italy as a country, there are no real warriors. During the whole period, the aggressors in Iraq, George Bush or Saddam Hussein, the original reason for the war, and the Iraqi people are hardly mentioned at all. The tragic events on the frontline that led to the destruction of the Iraqi army as well as the brutal attacks against civilians by the US forces that caused thousands of casualties within the first few weeks of the war are seldom mentioned, if at all. The war that is discussed by the politicians is truly a paper war without weapons or victims, or reason: it is a war fought among politicians about the meaning of terms with the final aim of being able to ship Italian troops to Iraq with valid justification.

One linguistic strategy that renders the representation of the war ever more abstract is the abundance of mental and verbal actions, while very few physical ones are evident. As usual in political language, here too people are “saying”, “considering” or “deciding”, instead of “attacking”, “shooting” or “bombarding”, which would be rather normal terms in an article about war. Moreover, the metaphorical representation of processes as entities with the nominalization of verbs contributes to the idea that it is more a question of an intangible dilemma instead of a concrete course of action and a human catastrophe. For instance, when the newspaper writes about “sending the Italian troops on an operation of peace-keeping in Iraq”76 not only are the verb and the agent missing, but the meaning fades away with the use of a vague noun, “the operation of peace-keeping”, which does not indicate the true nature of the action.

In most cases the event itself is explicitly called “war” (la guerra); however, often no specification is made about where or against whom the war is being conducted. In some cases it is mentioned that the war is in Iraq (la guerra in Iraq). Only in a few cases is it specified that the war is actually being fought “against” Iraq (l’imminente guerra all’Iraq). Numerous synonyms and quasi-synonyms are also frequently employed when the topic is of a particular preoccupation or problem.77 On many occasions, and in contrast to the style of L’Espresso and La Repubblica, the journalists have used alternative words to soften the significance of ‘war’, such as ‘conflict’ (un conflitto), ‘military intervention’ (l’intervento militare), ‘direct intervention’ (l’intervento diretto) and ‘offensive actions’ (azioni offensive). Only in a few cases are the “truly responsible” for these “actions” mentioned, and the operation is called a ‘US intervention’ (l’intervento Usa) or ‘the Anglo American attack’ (l’attacco angloamericano), even though here as well the process is nominalized and the agent disappears in the adjective.

“On behalf of peace and culture”

Negotiating the political line of a country can be considered a negotiation of the country’s identity.78 By creating or emphasizing a certain identity, politicians are able to justify a certain role in the field of international politics.79 In this case the Italian government wanted the country to have an active role and participate in the war at any price – regardless of the fact that many people were against it. To sustain their point of view, the politicians needed to know which positions the public would accept, which positions must be defended and how these positions should be defended. In other words, the politicians must be aware of the Italians’ innate “identity”: their interests, values and beliefs.80 This will have an effect on the strategies of argumentation, the authorities to whom these strategies will apply and the terminology used.81

In the United States, the rationale for the war was initially motivated by the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Later, the scope of the threat was expanded, and Iraq was said to have connections with Al Quaeda and with 9/11. For this reason, dissent was considered unpatriotic.82 The war was thus justified by patriotism on the one hand, and by national and global security on the other. For Italian politicians the reasons to send the troops to Iraq were quite different and were related to national prestige and humanitarian issues.

Before the Parliament took the decision on Italy’s military participation in the war on 15 April, the authorities to whom the newspaper appeals are the US and Great Britain: Prime Minister Berlusconi will send military troops to Iraq as requested by the US and Great Britain, and as was promised by the Italian Prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in a phone call to President Bush before the war began.83 With such argumentation, the right-wing government not only

76 Verderami, “Un patto con Bush prima della Guerra: subito forze italiane”.
77 Fowler, ibid., 85.
78 On the Italian identity in the representation of the Iraq war, see Härmanmaa, “Missionaries of Peace”.
79 Researchers from different disciplines have different definitions of terms such as ‘identity’, ‘role’, ‘self’, ‘subject’, and so on. Here I agree with Ivanič, according to whom the term ‘role’ “refers to the public, institutionally defined aspect of identity”, whilst ‘identity’ is a more private aspect. See Ivanič, Writing and Identity, 10.
80 Lo Cacso, Grammatica dell’argomentare; Perelman, L’empire rhétorique.
81 Vocabulary is of great interest, for it can be regarded as a representation of the world by a certain culture or as the world is perceived according to the ideological needs of a culture. Fowler, ibid., 82.
82 On the war and the press in the United States, see Rutherford, ibid.; Dodge, The War in Iraq; different articles in Nikolaev-Hakanen, ibid., On the war in British mass media, see Lewis-Brookes-Mosdell-Threadgold, Shoot First and Ask Questions Later.
openly showed its pro-American policy, but Italy is also represented as a reliable country that cannot and will not rescind a promise it has given – although it is questionable whether Prime Minister Berlusconi had the right to make such a promise on his own.

In addition, Italy’s presence among the first foreign countries in Iraq becomes a sign of its political prestige on the international level. There was a sense of urgency, as Poland is already in Iraq and Spain, Denmark, Holland and Portugal are about to go there, too. The desire to gain political importance with participation in the war is also evident in the titles of the articles, such as “The phase of emergency starts and our country will participate among the first”, or “We and the USA will sow democracy”, which also gives the impression of a close collaboration between the US and Italy in the administration of Iraq. In “Within six months a command to Italy” the title is almost misleading, as the topic of the article concerns the quality and quantity of the troops that will be sent to Iraq. In fact, organization of the administration of the foreign soldiers is hypothesized about only briefly.

Importantly, Italy is not only a Catholic country, but the very centre of Catholicism. The strong presence of the Catholic Church has an influence on social life and civilian values. Furthermore, Italy was one of the aggressors in the Second World War, the memory of which and a sort of shame still persists among the adult population of the country. Therefore, any argumentation on behalf of sending soldiers to an occupied country to help the aggressor, against international law and without the consent of the UN, based on any kind of utility, would simply be unacceptable to the great majority of the people. Instead, the main reasons for why Italy should participate in the war are given as humanitarian.

The Kosovo war in 1998–99 marked the beginning of the new age of human rights enforcement, as, according to Tony Blair, the war was not fought for self-interest, but “over the values of civilization”. The terrorist attacks on Manhattan and Washington on 11 September 2001 set in motion a chain of responses that have made human rights intervention the legitimation of a new ethical order in international affairs.

This “culture of human rights” that dominates the Western military discourse since the Kosovo war is also the primary basis for right-wing politicians’ argumentation in favour of Italy’s participation in the Iraq war. Helping the invader to control a foreign country is transformed into ‘peace-keeping’. The activity of the Italians in Iraq will concern peace, which, on the other hand, shows the capacity of the politicians to foresee the future, since during the publication of these articles the war was still going on: the Italian “soldiers [go] to Iraq for peace”, there will be sent “an Italian humanitarian help to tormented Iraq”, and “in order to alleviate the sufferings of the Iraqi people”. The Italian mission is “a mission that will guarantee peace in Iraq”. Alternatively, the reasons are related to charity. The Italians will “do this task to defend the population”. The approximately 3000 soldiers will be sent to Iraq for a “humanitarian purpose”, to “guarantee the aid”, to “bring humanitarian help to tormented Iraq” and “in order to alleviate the sufferings of the Iraqi people”. The government has created a “humanitarian machine”, that will effectuate “a humanitarian intervention”, and contribute to “the humanitarian stabilization in Iraq”.

In addition to the topics of medicine, sanitation, the reconstruction of streets, bridges and buildings (that the allies had destroyed), a peculiar national characteristic of the Italian discourse about the war is the argumentation on behalf of the Second World War, the memory of which and a sort of shame still persists among the adult population of the country. Therefore, any argumentation on behalf of sending soldiers to an occupied country to help the aggressor, against international law and without the consent of the UN, based on any kind of utility, would simply be unacceptable to the great majority of the people. Instead, the main reasons for why Italy should participate in the war are given as humanitarian.

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84 Gaining an important role in international politics has been the goal of Italian politicians since the unification of the country, from the second half of the nineteenth century till now.
85 Verderami, “Un patto con Bush prima della Guerra”.
86 Sarzanini, “La squadra: carabinieri, sminatori ed esperti di armi chimiche”.
87 Di Caro, “Noi e gli USA semineremo democrazia”.
88 Nese, “Agli italiani il controllo dei villaggi”.
89 Pope Giovanni Paolo II openly and constantly expressed his disapproval of the war and continued to urge all the parties involved to find a peaceful solution. See Concetti, Giovanni Paolo II: la Guerra in Iraq, 139-230.
90 Justifying military and political interventions in Western discourse with humanitarianism is, in my opinion, a consequence of the misuse of Christian ethics.
91 Chandler, From Kosovo to Kabul, 1-15. For the current “humanitarian paradigm”, see also Aaltola, Western Spectacle of Governance and Hammond, “Humanizing war: the Balkans and beyond”.
92 Fregonara, “Aiuti e truppe, domani il voto”.
93 Franchi, “Ritorno alla ragione”.
94 Sarzanini, “La squadra: carabinieri, sminatori ed esperti di armi chimiche”.
95 Verderami, “I Paesi amici dei terroristi ora lo sanno”.
96 Fregonara, “Aiuti e truppe, domani il voto”.
97 Nese, “Soldati e mezzi a Bagdad non prima di due mesi e sotto comando inglese”; Caprara, “Soldati al Sud, aiuti al Nord”.
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Helpless Iraq and the Italian mission

In harmony with the prevailing “humanitarian culture”, in 2005 the UN World Summit acknowledged a “responsibility to protect” populations who are the victims of campaigns of extermination. The sentence created an obligation to send humanitarian help for people suffering from natural or human catastrophes. These norms, laws and institutions are nestled in discourses of compassion, responsibility and care, which in turn are attached to claims regarding the obligations the “international community” has to its weakest members.

In *Il Corriere della Sera* Iraq is represented, when it is represented, as a country that is in a state of extreme confusion and therefore desperately needs the Italians to rescue it and to react “to the nightmare of emergency” created in Iraq. Since no reason is given, the result is that the disorder was born out of nothing, as a natural catastrophe. Furthermore, it seems to have nothing to do with the ongoing warfare since the only concrete attributions about the nature of the disaster are related to criminality: it is “a country at the mercy of corruption, of speculation, of black market, of robbery and of spreading criminality”, a “disastrous country” and a country of “plundering and banditry”. The Iraqi people are mentioned only once as a passive group with no will of their own nor capacity to react in any way to the “criminality” that somehow and suddenly “has spread” in their home country. Thus, “the Iraqi people cannot be left alone”, whereas on Italy’s part, “it would only be vile not to stop the agony of Iraq”.

The most current term used to describe the nevertheless obscure activity of the Italians in Iraq, the true slogan of this cruel and disastrous adventure, is ‘mission’ (*la missione*). This term, in Italian, has many connotations and can be used with a military, political, civic or religious meaning. In any case, it always contains the idea of devotion, moral obligation or duty towards the army, the State, the society or the Church that has given the commission. In *Il Corriere della Sera* it is repeatedly mentioned that the Italians have a mission in Iraq. It is “a humanitarian mission of the Italian government”, a mission “that will guarantee peace”, a mission for the freedom of the country: “the mission of Iraqi freedom”.

Thus, in these articles, willingly or not, like the Iraqi people, the Italians are also transformed into a group of unconscious people, unable to make a decision of how to act and react in the face of war. Going to Iraq is represented as an obligation or a duty that they simply cannot decline – even though, who creates this obligation, what kind of sacrifices the filling of this duty will require and what the duty will actually entail are never clarified. Nevertheless, “Italy, therefore, will do her duty” as Italians “cannot and [they] must not stay unarmed when facing the situation of Iraq after the war”. Thus, since the Italians were “fully aware of [their] role”, they went to Iraq and remained there over two years.

Conclusion: Gruesome entertainment

It is not clear how many victims the Iraq war has required by now and how many it will still demand. Although the war officially ended in May 2003, the present situation, over ten years later, is all but peaceful. Throughout this whole process the media’s role was significant both in marketing the war in the beginning and, after war had broken out, in distributing well-selected information.

As David Dodge has pointed out, President Bush used the media to create the need to go to war. Bush claimed that the media had no “check and balance role”, and journalists received the bulk of their information directly from the Bush administration. In Italy, there is no reason to believe that the Italian press was under anyone’s direct control. Yet there too the journalists received most of their information from the allies, which obviously biased the way the events were reported and what was reported. Nevertheless, the Iraq war was one of the greatest and most expensive media events known in history that millions of people were able to follow on television in real time.

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98 Conti, “In prima linea per il patrimonio culturale”.
99 WHO World Summit, especially paragraphs 138-40; UN Prevent Genocide Adviser. See also Barnett, *The International Humanitarian Order*, 1.
100 Breda, “Emergenza umanitaria, l’apertura del Quirinale”.
101 Nese, “Soldati e mezzi a Bagdad non prima di due mesi e sotto comando inglese”.
102 Caprara, “Soldati al Sud, aiuti al Nord”.
103 Verderami, “I Paesi amici dei terroristi ora lo sanno”.
104 Lo Zingarelli, *Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana*. The idea of Italy’s mission has a long history and developed during the Risorgimento. See Härmänmaa, “Missionaries of Peace”.
105 Breda, “Emergenza umanitaria, l’apertura del Quirinale”.
106 Verderami, “Un patto con Bush prima della Guerra”.
107 Verderami, “I Paesi amici dei terroristi ora lo sanno”.
108 Dodge, ibid., 148-50.
The United States called the Iraq war “Operation Iraqi Freedom”; in Italy it was also named “Operation Antique Babylon”. The slogan synthesizes how the Italian media represented Italy’s involvement in the warfare as a humanitarian mission for the sake of both civilians and the cultural heritage. Yet the reportage of the Italian press on the Iraq crisis and war does not substantially differ from that of the European media. Although Italy’s press seemed to be very much against the war – as were the Italian people – the representation is nevertheless made from the Western point of view for a Western audience. The news is mainly about the deeds of the invulnerable and innocent allies, peppered with reports of Iraqi casualties that Westerners were able to follow and bemoan while safely sitting in their armchairs.

If the demonizing of George Bush in L’Espresso and the representation of the civilians’ agony in La Repubblica could be interpreted as strong statements against the war, they allow another explanation as well. Both Bush and the war disasters are reported in a way that attracts consumers’ attention and definitely sold newspapers and magazines. Whether one of these hypotheses is more reliable than the other is all the same for 15-year-old Mahdi, who lost his little brother, and for all the other victims of this Western “humanitarian mission”.

"WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH"
(G. Orwell)

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