

Invader or Liberator?

A Case Study of Two Photo Journals on the Iraq War

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Group Members: **Caroline Westergren
Dennis Bacsafra
Laura Verduijn
Maartje Wegdam
Stratos Vogiatzis**

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I. Introduction

The media coverage of the Iraq war is both global in scope and controversial in nature. There is a wide debate regarding the polarized and biased reporting depending on the sources and the format of the medium. Iraq dominated the news for months, led to unbridgeable political contradictions, and elicited vehement reactions all over the world. Due to the technology, the viewers had immediate access to the battle scenery and great amount of information. Still, the ethics that the media followed remain questionable. No doubt the biggest toll of the war in Iraq is human lives and human suffering, but the media have also suffered immensely in terms of credibility. As it was commented, one war was fought in Iraq, but at the same time another war was fought on our TV screens and in the magazines. It has been said that 'the first victim of the war is the truth' (anonymous). But this cannot justify any manipulation of the truth as far as the public is concerned. The media by its very nature selects and interprets. Sometimes the media reveal their 'true selves' when an extreme incident like the outbreak of a war happens. Therefore all the ambiguous terms that follow the media's ethics like objectivity, neutral coverage, and politics of the media are put to a test.

II. Research Design

The focus of this research is on printed forms of media...specifically, two photo journals, which dealt with the Iraq war of 2003. Printed forms were selected because the nature of still images allows more space for interpretation and thorough investigation relative to the fast editing of documentaries or broadcasts. Therefore, taking into consideration the veil covering this media coverage, the empirical research examines if the debate concerning the ambiguous bias of the media coverage towards the war in Iraq applies to these two photo journals. The focus of interest is in the analysis of two discrete journalistic approaches: the *Life*¹ approach in *The War in Iraq* publication and the approach of photographer Geert van Kesteren in his photography book *Why Mister? Why?*. These photo journals were selected for the following reasons:

- 1) *Life: The War in Iraq* was chosen because it is considered a trustworthy and valid source of information for American public opinion. Wall Street Journal called *Life: The War in Iraq* 'a thorough and thoughtful telling'. Also in the international community, it gained the recognition as a reliable and credible magazine.
- 2) Geert van Kesteren published *Why Mister? Why?* based on his experience in Iraq during the war of 2003. The photographer himself made the selections of the images and the book was published by a private collaboration. This editorial independence provides a different approach to the Iraq War coverage relative to *Life*.

Are US soldiers portrayed more favorably by an American media publisher than by an independent reporter within these photo journals? This research question is based on the assumption that the American media portrayed the US soldier as liberators whereas independent media portrayed them as invaders in the coverage of the war. How

¹ Life is a subsidiary company of Time Warner, which is one of the largest media conglomerate in the United States.

is the relationship between US soldiers and Iraqi civilians depicted in *Life* and in *Why Mister? Why?* How do techniques used by the two books emphasize the different ways of portraying US soldiers and Iraqi civilians? What strategies were used by each publication to downplay or reinforce the differences found? The hypothesis of the study is that *Life* portrays US soldiers in a more positive light relative to *Why Mister? Why?*. The research is designed to focus on the images where the relationship between Iraqi civilians and US soldier is depicted. And, in order to answer these questions, the methodology of content analysis and compositional interpretation will be used in combination as the research tools for exploration. These two methodologies will be elaborated in chapters IV and V.

III. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the theories that are at the basis of the research question will be discussed. The focus is on media representations of two parties in conflict, and the political economic forces that play a role in the media production process.

Media representations of two parties in conflict: “us” versus “them”

In general, the media show a tendency towards simplifying complicated situations in the news, in order to make it easier for their audiences to understand and process the news, within the given (broadcast) time or space (on a page) that they have. In cases of conflict, this mechanism very often results in a division of the parties involved in ‘the good guys’ and ‘the bad guys’. This is not something that is uniquely true for the media. In almost every society and individual, there is a tendency towards ethnocentrism, in which the ‘self’ or in-group is viewed as the center of everything, and all else regarded as peripheral and judged as such. In that way, the same attributes are perceived and justified as positive for the in-group, and, contrarily, as negative for the out-group (Sumner in Van Ginneken, 2002, p. 218). And, as Van Ginneken states in his book *Understanding Global News* (De Schepping van de Wereld in het Nieuws), this universal mechanism of ethnocentrism is inescapably present in society and as such also represented through the media.

McQuail wrote about the media (news coverage) in times of conflict, in *Media Performance*, that they are so much incorporated into their own nation states, that they are likely to be “carried along uncritically in popular international enterprises, where national ‘honour’ and ‘interest’ is thought to be involved” (p. 132). Another characteristic for media performance where coverage of conflicts is concerned, is the “strong interest by authorities in managing the flow of information and keeping some matters secret” (p. 241). The same point is made by Tumber and Palmer (2004) regarding the rules and restrictions the American government has laid upon the coverage of the embedded journalists in the 2003 Iraq war.

These three factors: ethnocentrism and the simplification of news events, the loyalty of the media towards their own nation state and the inclination of authorities in conflict to control the media output, attribute to a news coverage that is in favour of the in-group, or 'us', thus representing the actions of 'us' as justified and noble and of 'them' as unjustified and brutal. For this research on the portraiture of US soldiers in Iraq, this leads to the presumption that the American publication of *Life* would represent the US soldiers in a more favourable way than the Iraqi soldiers, and also in a way that emphasizes the noblesse and good intentions of the US army in Iraq. The book *Why Mister? Why?* by photographer Geert van Kesteren is for the same reasons expected to show the US soldiers and their mission in a less favourable way. Not only because the photographer is Dutch (and therefore less loyal to the US), but also because he stated in the introduction of his book that he wanted to show the war from the point of view of the Iraqi people.

Political economical factors influencing media coverage

Besides the three factors mentioned, there are also political economic forces that influence the media performance. In their book *The Global Media The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism*, Herman and McChesney deal with these factors in light of the recent rapid growth of a global media system, which is characterized by commercialisation of the media, which they see as a threat to the democratising power of the media and therefore to the public sphere. They mention government control and censorship, and media-ownership to be the two main players in this field. The government can act by withholding information or inflating certain threats (p. 5). The media owners because of their domination, together with the advertisers, tend to be politically conservative and, hence, hostile to criticism of the status quo (p. 191).

This would lead to roughly the same result as the earlier mentioned three factors of representation in times of conflict, namely that the American publication of *Life* might be influenced by control and censorship of the US government (by for example presenting the invasion of Iraq as a clean and noble mission, in order not to undermine the public opinion in the US supporting the war, and emphasizing the terrorism threat of

Saddam Hussein while not mentioning the absence of weapons of mass destruction). Again, the Dutch publication of Van Kesteren was expected to be more critical towards the US policy and less inclined to present their mission in a positive way (thus showing the US soldiers more as invaders than liberators, and paying more attention to the Iraqi civilians that are the victims of this war).

The theories of Ethnocentrism and of Political Economics take up the same position regarding media performance in times of conflict, both arguing that coverage will most of the time be in favour of the in-group and its status quo. They do this on different grounds though, Ethnocentrism operating on a universal, sociological/psychological level and Political Economics on the more specific basis of economy and commercialisation. So although both theories provide arguments that support the hypothesis of this study, it is important to note that exactly this difference in their approach asks for a critical stance towards both theories in terms of their exclusivity. Therefore the outcome of this study might provide arguments for questioning whether these theories can be regarded exclusively, or whether additional factors of potential influence on this kind of media coverage should be taken into account.

IV. Content Analysis

Methodology

Content analysis is the first methodology used to address the research question. This methodology is a key way of analyzing visual information sociologically by approaching the question with measurable variables (Gilbert 2001, p. 347). In this manner, the study will be conducted in a methodologically explicit manner. The level of analysis is the photo journal. Several categories or indicators are identified in order to quantitatively measure visual elements that are relevant to the research. And since the research question explores the possibility of a more favorable depiction by one photo journal over another, the categories chosen are focused on the portrayal of US soldiers, Iraqi soldiers, Iraqi civilians, and their interactions as visually represented in the images. The frequency of each category will be counted and a comparison chart will be produced to show the results from each photo journal. The selection of the images for analysis does not involve any sampling since all photographs in each book will be included². Absolute and relative frequency counts will be generated. But, the interpretation of the results will concentrate on the percentage of total images used since the volume of photographs in each photo journal varies considerably.

The categories for each visual element are listed below followed by a brief explanation why each one was chosen as an indicator for content analysis (please see Appendix A for the definitions of some terms used to describe these categories):

- *Total number of pictures in each book:* This category will show the volume or total amount of pictures contained in each photo journal
- *Total number of pictures used:* This category will show the number of pictures included in the analysis. This is also the number used to calculate the relative frequencies of the proceeding categories.

² The only exceptions are the pictures in the first chapter of *Life* since those photographs specifically involve the first Gulf War and not the Iraq War of 2003.

- *Number of pictures with an image of a US soldier:* This category will show which photo journal has placed more focus on the depiction of a US soldier in the Iraq war. The higher the relative frequency, the more emphasis is placed by the book on a US soldier.
- *Number of pictures with an image of an Iraqi soldier:* This category will show which photo journal has placed more focus on the depiction of an Iraqi soldier in the Iraq war. The higher the relative frequency, the more emphasis is placed by the book on an Iraqi soldier.
- *Number of pictures with an image of an Iraqi civilian:* This category will show which photo journal has placed more focus on the depiction of an Iraqi civilian in the Iraq war. The higher the relative frequency, the more emphasis is placed by the book on an Iraqi civilian.
- *Number of pictures with an image of an Iraqi civilian and a US soldier together:* This category will show which photo journal has placed more focus on visually showing a relationship between a US soldier and an Iraqi civilian. This depiction could either be positive or negative. So, a photograph will be counted as long as the two actors mentioned are present in the same image. The higher the relative frequency, the more emphasis is placed by the book on the soldier/civilian interaction during the Iraq war.
- *Number of pictures with an image of a US soldier with a weapon:* The measurement theory behind this category is that the photo journal which frequently shows images of a US soldier with weapons portray the US soldiers in a more negative way. Images of US soldiers with weapons appear more hostile relative to one with only a US soldier.
- *Number of pictures with an image of an Iraqi with a weapon:* The measurement theory of this category is that the photo journal which frequently shows images of an Iraqi with weapons portray the Iraqi more as a fighter. On the other hand, images of Iraqis without weapons equate them to a civilian.
- *Number of pictures with an image of a US soldier antagonizing an Iraqi civilian:* The photo journal which shows a higher frequency of a US soldier antagonizing

an Iraqi civilian portrays the US soldiers more negatively. This category will show which book has a less favorable view towards US soldiers.

- *Number of pictures with an image of an Iraqi civilian antagonizing a US soldier:* The photo journal which shows a higher frequency of an Iraqi civilian antagonizing a US soldier portrays the Iraqi civilian more negatively. This category will show which book has a less favorable view towards Iraqi civilians.
- *Number of pictures where there is no antagonist/protagonist or where the relationship between the soldier and civilian is unclear:* Some photographs will show both a US soldier and a civilian together. However, the depiction of their actual relationship could be difficult to ascertain just by looking at the picture. Those photographs will be measured in this category. Also, photos that do not show the soldier and civilian together are also counted in this category.

The validity of the categories listed above is based on the obvious conclusions that can be drawn from the frequency of occurrence in each book. For example, the book with a significantly higher frequency of images with US soldiers clearly show that the emphasis of the photo journal is on the portrayal of US soldiers, whether positive or negative. In regards to the categories that measure the number of pictures that portray US soldiers or Iraqis as antagonizing actors, the higher relative frequency will be viewed as an indication of a negative portrayal for either the US soldier or the Iraqi. There are no categories included which addresses the emotional aspects of the photographs. This is done deliberately because of two difficulties....coding emotions and finding a consensus among the group on how to define very abstract elements such as “heroic, violent, angry, welcoming, etc...”

Three persons took responsibility for coding the categories for the two books. In order to increase reliability, detailed written definitions were agreed upon prior to the start of any coding. In the small number of cases where there was some ambiguity, the disagreements were resolved after some discussion and clarification of the definitions.

The above categories were applied exhaustively to all the applicable pictures in each photo journal. They were checked to make sure that the data that comes out does not overlap between the categories. In this manner, the indicators are tested to fulfill the methodology's requirement of exclusivity (Rose, G. 61).

Results

Below are the results of the analysis:

Table 1: Content Analysis Results

Categories	<i>Life: The War in Iraq</i>		<i>Why Mister? Why?</i>	
	Counts	Percentage	Counts	Percentage
Total number of images in the book	121	N/A	229	N/A
Total number of images used	92	100%	229	100%
Pictures of US Soldier	43	47%	91	40%
Pictures of Iraqi Soldier	9	10%	12	5%
Pictures of Iraqi Civilian	54	59%	155	68%
Pictures of US Soldier and Iraqi Civilian	7	8%	57	25%
Pictures of US Soldier with weapon	21	23%	68	30%
Pictures of Iraqi with weapon	0	0%	5	2%
Pictures of US Soldier antagonizing Iraqi	6	7%	37	16%
Pictures of Iraqi antagonizing a US Soldier	0	0%	10	4%
Pictures where the relationship is unclear	86	93%	182	79%

Note: Percentages were calculated from total number of images used

Chart 1: Bar Graph of Content Analysis Results (By Count)

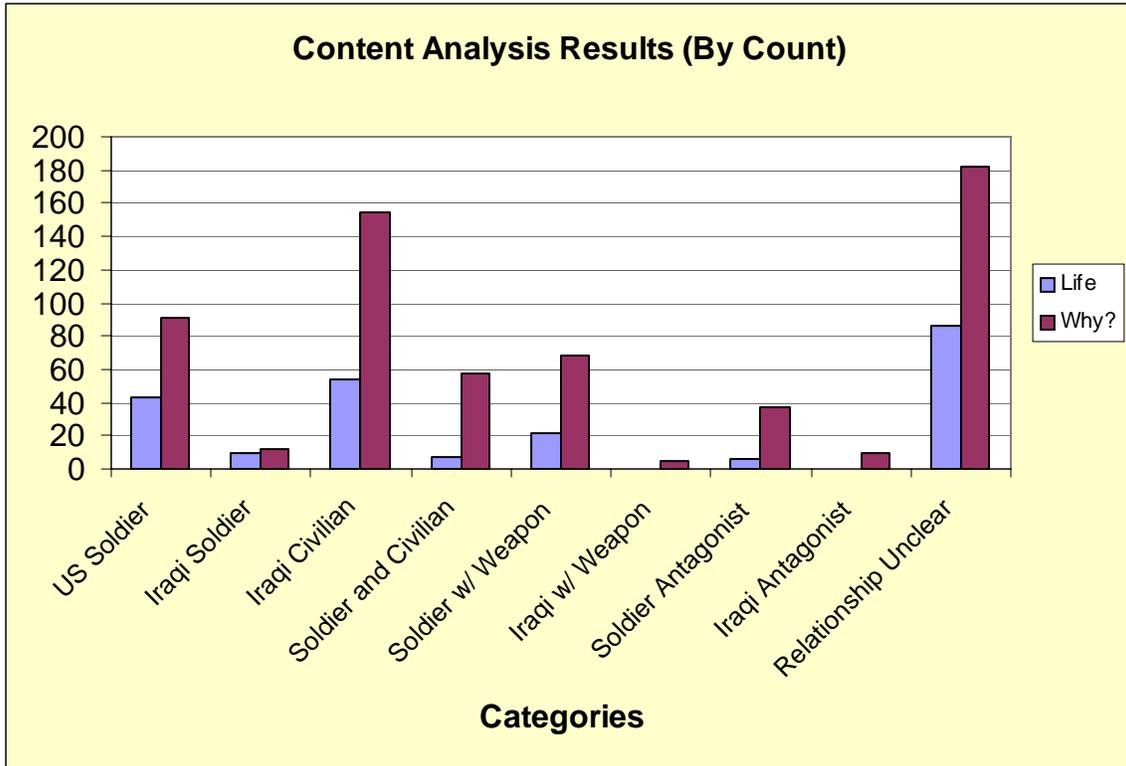
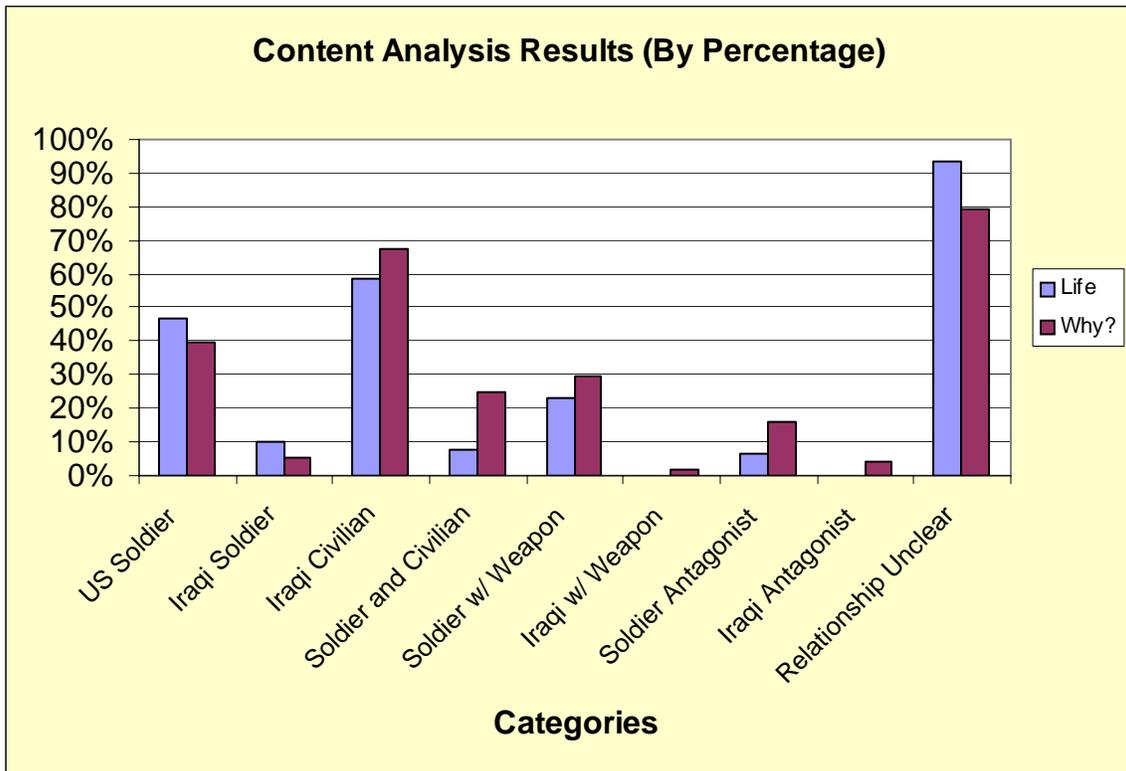


Chart 2: Bar Graph of Content Analysis Results (By Percentage)



These results lead us to several findings. First of all, the two photo journals only show a small difference in the frequency of pictures with a US soldier (i.e. 47% for *Life* vs. 40% for *Why Mister? Why?*). The same is true in regards to the frequency of pictures with Iraqi soldiers or Iraqi civilians between the two books. However, the difference between the frequency of Iraqi civilians and frequency of US soldiers within each book is slightly higher in *Why Mister? Why?* (68% - 40% = 28%) than in *Life* (59% - 47% = 12%). This difference might be a reflection of the photographer's, Geert van Kesteren, explicit goal to show the Iraq war from the Iraqi civilian's point of view. And, as a probable explanation, this goal translated into the conscious inclusion of more pictures with civilians relative to US soldiers. But, it is still important to point out that in terms of frequency of Iraqi civilian representation, the two photo journals only have a small difference (i.e., 59% in *Life* and 68% in *Why Mister? Why?*).

Also, it is clear from the results that the Iraqi soldiers are minimally represented in the journals (i.e., 10% in *Life* and 5% in *Why Mister? Why?*). It almost gives the appearance that the US soldiers are fighting a war against an invisible army. This apparent absence of the Iraqi army in the journals could be interpreted as an indication that US soldiers hugely outnumbered the Iraqi forces. However, estimates report the Iraqi army, headquartered in Baghdad, to be 375,000, including reserves and paramilitary (Robinson 2002). The total US forces deployed in Iraq were approximately 160,000 at a given time (Tyson 2003). So, the actual Iraqi soldier/US soldier ratio during the war is 234%. This is significantly much higher than what the content analysis results showed for the same ratio using actual counts from each book. *Life* has an Iraqi soldier/US soldier ratio of 21% while *Why Mister? Why?* has an Iraqi soldier/US soldier ratio of 13%. This discrepancy clearly shows the under representation of the Iraqi soldiers in the photo journals. Practical obstacles such as photographers not having as much access to Iraqi military troops like they have with the US troops could be offered as an explanation. If this were the case, they would have less opportunity to capture them in picture. Alternatively, the low number of pictures with Iraqi soldiers could mean that they are considered less significant in this war compared to other actors.

No definitive conclusions can be drawn from the difference in portrayal of US soldiers with weapons since the frequency of pictures for this category is almost the same (i.e., %23 for *Life* and 30% for *Why Mister? Why?*). This is also the case for the category that measures the number of pictures of Iraqis with weapons.

In percentage terms, the results also show that *Life* and *Why Mister? Why?* both have a high frequency of pictures without a clear relationship between antagonist and protagonist in the picture (i.e., 93% in *Life* and 79% in *Why Mister? Why?*). This is directly attributable to the fact that both journals also have a low frequency of pictures with US soldier and Iraqi civilian together (i.e. 8% vs. 25%). Although, compared to each other, *Why Mister? Why?* still contained a higher percentage of photos with both US soldier and Iraqi civilian from the total pictures used. Our definition of antagonist and protagonist requires that both parts be represented in the image. In this regard, there is not much opportunity for the viewer to judge the power relationship between the soldiers and civilians. On the few incidences that there is a clear antagonist/protagonist relationship, the US soldiers are depicted more frequently as being in control relative to the Iraqi. However, this conclusion applies to both books.

Our overall conclusion from this analysis is that the two photo journals have more similarities than differences in their portrayal of US soldier/Iraqi relationship. This is contradictory to our hypothesis that the photo journal from *Life* (being an American publication) would portray US soldiers more favourably. There are several possible reasons why this might have come about:

- 1) Perhaps the process of media embedding has resulted in the photographer of *Why Mister? Why?* empathizing and developing affinity towards “his own team”. This phenomenon was expressed succinctly by the embedded reporter from People Magazine who made the honest self-assessment that her primary concern became “the safety of her boys” after being embedded with them for months (Weapons of

- Mass Deception 2004). The same psychology could have affected the photographic coverage and selections of Geert van Kesteren.
- 2) The hypothesis was based on the media bias in the coverage of the Iraq war drawn from existing theories in ethnocentrism and the political economy of media coverage. Since the results of the content analysis disproved the hypothesis, it brings into question the soundness of these theories. Causes of media bias, at least with respect to the two photo journals used in the study, is more ambiguous and not as simple as predicted by these theories.
 - 3) The research was designed in light of several documentary films purporting that the bias in news reporting during the Iraq war was prevalent. These films include *The Control Room* (2003) and *Weapons of Mass Deception* (2004). Furthermore, documentaries such as *Outfoxed* (2003) made the assertion that patriotism and nationalism heavily influences the news selection that is aired to the public. Using these works as a basis, the hypothesis of the study was formed in order to probe if these claimed biases extended to the medium of photo journals. Based on the content analysis results, this is not evident.
 - 4) The bias between the two photo journals might truly be non-existent when it comes to volume of pictures used with certain portrayals. However, this does not automatically mean that there is no bias. If sheer number was not the strategy used, then the methodology of content analysis is incapable of detecting it. This highlights the limitation of content analysis as a methodology for investigating and revealing more subtle strategies.

The research question asked whether the media bias predicted by several theories and claimed by documentaries applies to these two photo journals. According to the content analysis results, this was not the case. However, the compositional interpretation portion of this research will focus on the expressive content of representative images.

V. Compositional Interpretation

Methodology

The results of content analysis do not say anything about the *way* in which both parties are represented, in terms of strategies used by the photographer, and which feelings or connotations they might generate with their viewers. In that way, the images that have the same subject, regarding the content analysis, can enhance very different interpretations because of their composition and expressive content.

In order to really find out the effect of an image on its spectator, one would have to do an audience/reception research, a method demanding a lot of time, preparation and conscious operationalization. But due to the limited timeframe, another qualitative research method was conducted so as to still be able to shed more light on the specific ‘message’ conveyed by the images. This was done through compositional interpretation of the images in question. This method, described by Rose (2003, pp. 33-53), was initially used to analyze and describe paintings, but is also applicable on (press) photography. With this method was given insight in the last part of the research question which was: *‘How do techniques used by the two books emphasize the different ways of portraying US soldiers and Iraqi civilians?’*

First, attention was paid to the production and social modality of the two books, in order to make the context clear. However, attention is focused mostly on the composition of the images themselves. Compositional interpretation tries to reveal the effects an image might have by paying special attention to its compositional modality (Rose, 2001, p. 34). There are five different aspects of an image that play a role in this modality.

The first aspect is the content. Although a broad view of the content is covered in the content analysis, compositional interpretation provides for a more specific view of what’s actually happening in the particular image. Colour and its saturation (purity of the colour) and value (lightness or darkness), issues as effect of colours and harmony are taken into account next. Furthermore, spatial organisation is examined, with the criteria:

perspective, figuration and focus. A look at the light is included, and finally an expressive content analysis in which is tried to capture the way the images look (Rose, 2001).

Selection of Images

The results from the content analysis were used to pick four images for deeper research. For a compositional interpretation that could be generalized to the entire books, used images had to be representative of these books, regarding the depiction of US soldiers in relation to Iraqi civilians. In order to pick the most representative pictures from the two books related to our research question this sample was selected as follows: First of all, from both books only the images that show a US soldier and an Iraqi civilian were used, since that is the topic where the research is focused on. Secondly, a look was taken at the percentages of those pictures that show;

- no clear antagonist/protagonist
- US soldier antagonizing an Iraqi
- Iraqi antagonizing a US soldier

Images were randomly selected from the most depicted criteria in each book. This resulted in the selection of two images from each book.

From the indicators used in the content analysis, it reveals that *Why Mister? Why?* focuses more on the relationship between US soldiers and Iraqi civilians than *Life* does. Often no clear protagonist or antagonist is shown if all the images in the book are taken into account. However, if a closer look is taken at only those pictures that show a relationship between US soldiers and Iraqi civilians, the outcomes are somewhat different. They serve as the basis for determining the sample for the compositional interpretation.

Table 2 below is a subset of the data from the content analysis results in Table 1. It highlights the precise division of those images that depict a relationship between US soldiers and Iraqi civilians. Two kinds of images seem important for deeper investigation, regarding the results of the content analysis.

Table 2: Division of images that show a relationship between US Soldier & Iraqi Civilian

Categories	<i>Life: The War in Iraq</i>		<i>Why Mister? Why?</i>	
	Counts	Percentage	Counts	Percentage
Pictures of US Soldier & Iraqi Civilian	7	100%	57	100%
Pictures of US Soldier antagonizing Iraqi	6	86%	37	65%
Pictures of Iraqi antagonizing a US Soldier	0	0%	10	18%
Pictures of US Soldier & Iraqi Civilian with unclear relationship	1	14%	10	18%

Notes: 1) Percentages were calculated from the 'Pictures of US Soldier & Iraqi Civilian'
 2) The variable 'Pictures of US Soldier & Iraqi Civilian with unclear relationship' was derived

As the above percentages show, the dominant relationship in both books is the one in which a US soldier is antagonizing an Iraqi civilian (86% percent in *Life* and 65% in *Why Mister? Why?*). Moreover, if an antagonist is depicted in *Life*, it is always the US soldier. Secondly, images that do not show a clear antagonist or protagonist (14% in *Life* and 18% in *Why Mister? Why?*) were substantially present and for that reason considered important for deeper investigation. From each of these kinds of images, a picture was randomly selected from each book, resulting in the four images used for the compositional interpretation as described below.

Results

Images with US Soldier antagonizing an Iraqi civilian

Life: The War in Iraq, by Damir Sagolj/Reuters, pp. 98-99 (See Appendix B)

This image contains in the upper left corner the arms and hands of a U.S. soldier holding a gun. The gun is pointed towards a group of 35 mostly male Iraqi civilians, who are sitting on the side of a road, about ten meters away from the soldier. The landscape behind them is wide and plain and reaches till the horizon. Of the Iraqis, one man has stood up and walks towards the soldier, his hands up in the air.

The dominant colors in the image are blue, brown and grayish. Most of the sky is clear blue, turning into a more neutral gray towards the horizon. Also the rest of the colors are quite low in vividness, which could be argued to contribute to the

neutrality/reality of the image. In contrast with the clear blue sky, the arms and gun of the soldier are very dark, making them a very dominant element in the image that looks even more threatening.

Regarding spatial organization, there is a clear distinction between the two main objects in the image: the US soldier, or what is visible of him, and the 35 Iraqis. The picture is taken from right beneath the soldier, as if the viewer were sitting right next to where he stands. This perspective makes him seem very large and inescapably close. Since only his arms and the gun that he holds can be seen, it is difficult to identify with the soldier. Moreover, his omnipresence and darkness in the picture and the fact that he is pointing his weapon towards the Iraqis, makes the viewer see him as not so much a person, but as a more abstract dangerous and threatening force in power.

The eye level of the viewer is that of the Iraqis, which is at the same time that of the horizon. This means that the photographer must have squatted next to the soldier to come to their height. But although the spectator is at their level, and facing them, he does not feel close to the Iraqis. Several things cause this. The fact that they are a group, that they are spatially somewhat distant from US and that their appearance in the picture isn't sharp are all factors that make them more anonymous to the viewer. Furthermore, their gaze doesn't seem to ask for our special attention. Most of them seem to look in the direction of the soldier, or of something near him, but not in an anxious way, as one would expect considering the weapon being pointed at them. For as far as can be told from their un-sharp features, they have the expression of the average person waiting. This is enhanced by their body language, some leaning on one arm or supporting their head with their hands.

The event takes place at daytime, somewhere outside. Hence the light comes from above, rendering the U.S. soldier in the dark, since he is portrayed from beneath. Despite the clear blue sky, the light is not very bright but a little hazy instead. The Iraqis too are not very brightly lit. This contrast between the brightness of the sky and the shadowy earth seems to emphasize the darkness of the war events that are occurring.

The image, through its compositional modality, seems in a way quite odd to the viewer. It is unclear how to interpret exactly what is taking place. It is unknown who is supposed to be the protagonist or antagonist of the image, since it is hard to judge whether the Iraqis are being held at gunpoint for a good reason, in other words, whether they are factually the protagonists in this situation. What is also unknown is whether the soldier is guarding on them alone, or whether there might be a whole platoon with him, out of sight of the viewer of this image, standing right behind the photographer. Thirdly, the indefinable gaze of the Iraqi's does not reveal anything specific about their mental well-being. These uncertainties are probably what make this image an intriguing one.

Why Mister? Why?, Geert van Kesteren, Iraq 2003-2004 (See Appendix C)

The content of the picture is two women sitting on blankets on the floor in a room of an Iraqi house. One woman holds a little girl crying hard. On the left, on the very foreground a part of the uniform of a US soldier is depicted, as well as a gun pointed towards the women on the floor. The face of the soldier is not shown. The rest of the picture is merely covered by the wall of the room. At the background stands a table and above that hangs a picture of an Iraqi man in the corner.

Looking at the spatial organisation, the central point is the girl in the middle. The soldier is also important, regarding his frontal position in the left. He is depicted very dominant, because he is taken from so close that he seems to be right above the women. The perspective of the camera enhances this effect; it is slightly above the women and just below the soldier's gun, from just behind the soldier.

The main colours in the picture are browns and greyish, and black is also dominant. The girl is the only distinction; she wears bright red clothes. That is at the same time almost the only clear colour in the picture. The rest of the colours are not vivid and clear, so the girl really is a central subject. There are some green and white blankets lying on the floor, but they are more in the background. The way the colours are depicted gives the image in a way a realistic and dramatic look. The lighting is another cause of

this. It seems no artificial light was used. Probably, the only light is the daylight coming from a window outside the picture. Shadows are not formed in the image, so in that way no clear contrast between light and dark is seen.

The focus of the camera however, provides for another kind of contrast, namely that between the US soldier and the women on the floor. The focus is on the women, so that the US soldier is too close to the camera to be sharp. The gaze of the three women is not into the camera. One woman looks down, one looks aside. The girl looks up frightened, beyond the camera.

At last, the expressive content is that of a US soldier frightening the women by its appearance. Although the gun is not pointed at them, it exerts power over them. The attention to the little girl, that doesn't seem to know what's happening, calls upon the innocence of children, and maybe on the uselessness of the war itself.

Images with no clear antagonist and protagonist:

Life: The War in Iraq, by Damir Sagolj/Reuters, pp. 102-103 (See Appendix D)

The image is taken outside and shows a U.S. marine medic in the foreground, sitting in the sand, his hands stuck in light rubber gloves. In his arms he holds a young Iraqi girl. The man is visibly moved, as you can tell from his facial expression, his eyes closed and the frown on his forehead. Behind him, his fellow-soldiers are busy doing something, what exactly remains unclear.

Almost the whole image is filled with the color of sand and of the brown-greenish U.S. military uniforms. The only two elements of different color are the white/grayish piece of sky you see in the upper right corner of the frame, and the clothes of the little girl and the light blue gloves that hold her. This makes the child and the hands of the medic stand out of the other elements in the image and emphasizes the feeling that she is not in a surrounding in which she belongs. The colors of her clothes being baby blue and light pink adds to the notion of her innocence and helplessness.

As noted above, most of the frame is filled with objects, that is, almost no horizon or sky can be seen. The U.S. medic with the girl consumes most of the space. They form a serene unity together, contrasting with the blurred activity of the U.S. soldiers behind them. Neither the medic nor the girl looks into the camera. They are attending to each other. The camera/spectator is on their level, looking straight at them from close by, but they don't seem to notice. On the other hand, one or two of the soldiers in the back do seem to pay attention (all the other soldiers are seen from behind) a sign that they are alert of their surroundings and aware of what is happening there. They do however stay very distant from the viewer, since they are too blurry to be recognized.

The light used in the picture is sunlight. It is not very bright, lighting only some parts of the sand, part of the medic's shoe and helmet and, most brightly, the little girl's bare feet. This use of light and, consequently, shadow makes the two in the foreground stand out of the other objects in the picture even more.

Through the way in which the objects in the image are organized spatially and the use of color and light, the viewer of this image cannot overlook the man holding the girl, but also cannot help but sympathize with them. Not merely the man's facial expression, but also the pose of his body, sitting in the sand, shoulders hanging down and one leg stretched forward, expresses his concern for the girl, who is herself too young to realize what is happening and instead directs her attention to one of the utensils in the soldier's uniform, looking at it and touching it.

Why Mister? Why?, Geert van Kesteren, Iraq 2003-2004 (See Appendix E)

In this image, three US soldiers in uniform are half-lying against a brick wall in a street. Next to them stands a bottle of water. Two children are playing among them. The child in the foreground touches the gun of the sleeping soldier. In the background, there is a fraction of a street with two women walking in the distance, away from the soldiers. On the other side of the street, just a wall is depicted.

The dominant colours are browns (sand, skin colour, walls, uniforms), greens (uniforms) and black (wall, weapon, hair, shadow). An exception is the blue bottle on the foreground. Because of the sun, there exists a sharp contrast between parts in the sun and those depicted in the shade.

The image is a close picture of the soldier and children. The viewing point is slightly above the level of the soldiers. Not a lot of background is shown and the camera focuses on them. They are thus the central elements in the image. They seem to form an entity. Also the gun the child holds is a dominant element, as well as the bottle of water. None of the persons looks into the camera. One is sleeping and of 'the middle one the upper half of the body is not shown. He lies behind the sleeping person. The child in the foreground is sitting with his back to the camera and looks away. The other child looks down. They all seem not conscious of the camera.

The expressive content is that the soldiers sit harmoniously down with the children and take a rest. The bottle of water and the sunglasses create a relaxed atmosphere. Finally, the position of the soldiers and the shade contributes to the creation of intimacy. Through that, the contrast between the innocent children playing with guns of soldiers stays clear.

Comparative Summary

Regarding the results of the compositional interpretation, the portrayal of US soldiers is indeed different in both books. This is not purely done by the depiction of the soldiers themselves. For example, the colours within the pictures of *Life* are far brighter than the colours in the images of Van Kesteren. The light in both *Life* pictures gives a slightly unrealistic and almost sincere impression. This is not the case in Van Kesteren's pictures, which are more natural. However, what makes their appearance mainly different is the depiction of the soldier-civilian relationship. To make clear which factors of this relationship mainly contribute to the differences found between the two books regarding the depiction of US soldiers in relation to Iraqi victims, the most obvious results have been compared.

In fact, in both pictures where the US soldier is the antagonist, he is almost depicted in the same way. Placing the US soldier above the civilians, in both compositions, enhances US power. The difference lies in the fact, that in the image from *Life*, the distances from of the civilians make the power of the US soldier more a central aspect than the suffering. Instead, the closeness of the victims in the pictures of Van Kesteren enhances the bad outcomes of the American power for them. Thereby, in both images with a US antagonist, the US soldier is anonymous. The victims, in contradiction, are as well quite anonymous in the *Life* picture, but very explicitly shown in the one from Geert van Kesteren, their faces filled with fear.

In the pictures with no obvious antagonist, a clear view of the face of the US soldier was shown in the *Life* picture and quite anonymous soldiers in the picture from Van Kesteren. Concluding, *Life* focuses more on the identity of soldiers, when they are shown in a positive manner. Also, the relationship between soldiers and children in the pictures without antagonist needs to be mentioned. The *Life* image shows a very conscious and caring relationship for the girl, while the children's presence is more coincidental in Van Kesteren's image. The soldiers don't really seem to pay attention. These factors altogether lead to the overall conclusion that this case study supports the hypothesis that the US soldiers are portrayed more favourably in *Life*.

VI. Conclusions

The combined methodology was the approach taken to address the research question if the American media portrayed the US soldiers more favourably. The content analysis results did not support our hypothesis. However, the results could be characterized as important from several aspects. From one hand, there is a difference brought about by the explicit goal of the photographer Van Kesteren to show the Iraq war from the Iraqi civilians' point of view. This offers support to the objective of this research to include a different approach in the depiction of the war. On the other hand, this research stands as a critique towards the theories of ethnocentrism and simplification of news events and the loyalty of the media towards their own nation state. The presumption that the American publication of *Life* would represent the US soldiers in a more favourable way than the Iraqi soldiers and in a way that emphasizes the noblesse and good intentions of the US army in Iraq, is not clear from the use of content analysis.

The limitations of content analysis as a methodology to describe strategies and techniques used by the photographers are also evident from the results. This shortcoming is partly attributable to the dependence on quantitative numerical data as the primary source of interpretation. However, the limitations of content analysis is partially compensated by the use of compositional interpretation as a secondary methodology for exploration. Examining the composition and expressive content of four images (selected from the results of the content analysis and based on the relationship between Iraqi civilians and US soldiers), the findings of the compositional interpretation support the argument that the US soldiers are portrayed more favourably in *Life*. Although the use of certain colours and light contribute to this argument, what makes the appearance of these pictures mainly different is the depiction of the soldier-civilian relationship. As it was mentioned before, in both pictures, the power of US soldiers is enhanced and it is placed in a more central aspect than the suffering. Moreover, the Iraqi civilians are depicted as quite anonymous in *Life* but very explicitly shown by Van Kesteren. The compositional interpretation asserts that *Life* focuses more on the identity of soldiers, when they are

shown in a positive manner. In contradiction to the content analysis, this methodology supports our hypothesis that the US soldiers are portrayed more favourably in *Life*.

The nature of this research does not permit the drawing of general conclusions about photo journals as a genre. Additionally, inclusion of only two photo journals in this study emphasized the weaknesses of both methods of analysis. In the case of content analysis, clustering of data sets and correlation tables cannot be extracted. Frequency tables and charts are the main tools for analysis when the sample size is small. In compositional interpretation, the subjectivity of the process, which is its major critique as a method, became more evident because of the limited use of images. For improved credibility of the research, more images should have been used for compositional interpretation. However, two criteria from each book seemed important. Due to time constraints, only one picture from each criterion could be selected from each book. This makes them difficult to generalize to the whole photo journal. In general, the same problem arises when only two of many photo books covering the war in Iraq are examined. This poses severe difficulty in generalizing among all other commercial publications on the same subject. Further research is suggested that will include more than two photo-journals, a larger number of images, a more extensive use of content analysis and additional variables.

Finally, the most important lesson from this research is that war and its portrayal is a matter of extreme complexity. Available theories on the subject should be used as an aid but its application must be handled with some caution. And, the corresponding methodologies used for investigation should be reflective of the complexity inherent in the subject matter. Only then can significant and valuable understanding be successfully derived from the research process.

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APPENDIX A

Definitions of Terms Used in the Categories

1. *US Soldier*: A person in the image which is shown wearing a US military uniform
2. *Iraqi Soldier*: A person in the image which is shown wearing an Iraqi military uniform
3. *Iraqi Civilian*: A person in the image which is not wearing any military uniform and is not a journalist
4. *Weapons*: This includes guns, knives, artillery, and military assault vehicles such as tanks, helicopters, and fighter jets
5. *Antagonizing*: A picture is coded as antagonizing if it shows a situation where a live US soldier or Iraqi behaves in a negative way towards a live Iraqi or US soldier. By negative, this means harassment, threats, or physical abuse directed at another person. In this manner, only pictures that contain both a US soldier and Iraqi civilian have a possibility of being coded as antagonizing.

APPENDIX B

Life: The War in Iraq, by Damir Sagolj/Reuters, pp. 98-99

Note: The above image is slightly cropped on the right side. This is due to the large size of the original photograph and limitations in the scanner surface.

APPENDIX C

Why Mister? Why?, Geert van Kesteren, Iraq 2003-2004

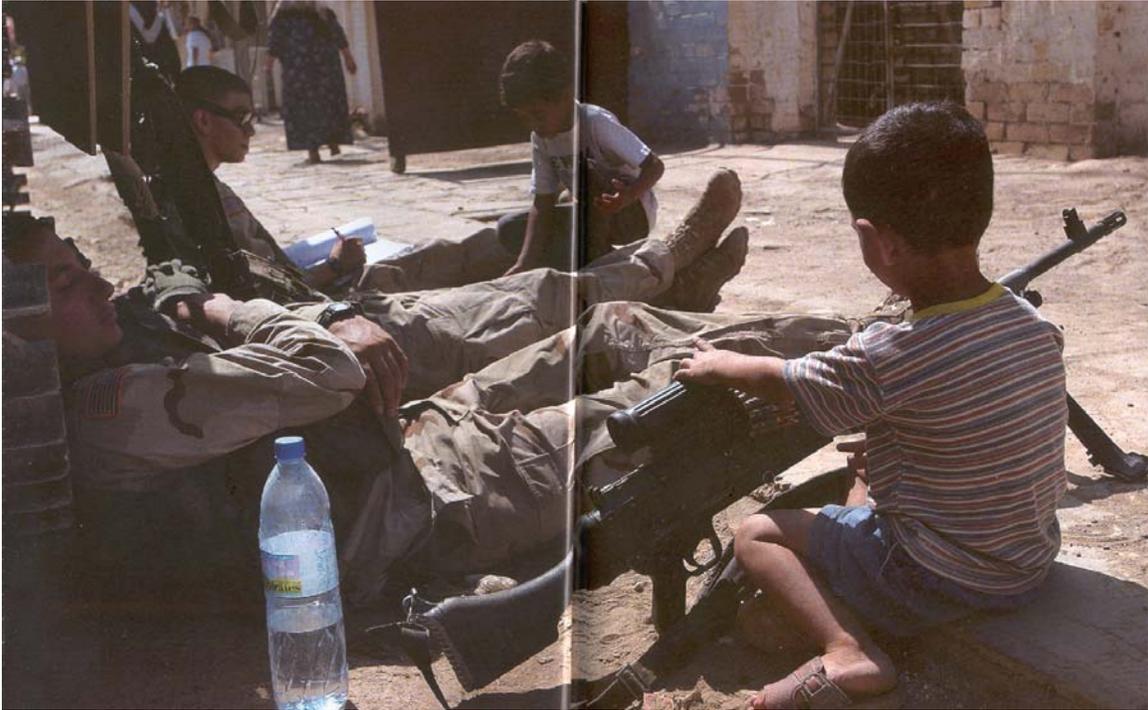
APPENDIX D

Life: The War in Iraq, by Damir Sagolj/Reuters, pp. 102-103



APPENDIX E

Why Mister? Why?, Geert van Kesteren, Iraq 2003-2004



Note: The line in the middle of the above image is due to the original photograph being printed on two simultaneous pages of the journal.