Making the News:
The Media and the Movement against the Iraq War

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Abstract

What follows is an investigation of unusual media behaviour. The 2003 Iraq War precipitated a series of demonstrations of unprecedented scale in a cause that often had majority support and challenged the authority of the government. The media's well documented tendency to marginalise or ignore protest was at least partly suspended as newspapers cleared their front pages to report on demonstrations and the BBC sent senior journalists to interview marchers. For once, protesters were making the news. My research has revealed a very different pattern of reportage to that anticipated by the widely used 'protest paradigm' that predicts the marginalisation and even criminalisation of protest. Although the record shows great unevenness across different media outlets, the coverage of some of the anti-Iraq War protests appears more comprehensive, even-handed and at times sympathetic, than any equivalent example in the literature. The central task was to investigate the nature of the divergence and find ways of explaining it. In the process, this exceptional moment could be used to probe the media's role in modern democracy and its attitudes to dissent at times of mass mobilisation and social stress. A combined textual and quantitative analysis of my research raised some interesting conclusions. Though important, structural or technological developments cannot explain the changes to the way protest was handled, as some of the literature argues. The evidence suggests that a contingent complex of social, ideological and political factors created a perfect storm that scrambled normal lines of communication. Interviews with participants and research into the context of the protests allowed me to fill out these suggestions and draw out more definite conclusions. At the same time, the analysis provided a test of theoretical models of media function, including versions of the 'propaganda model', broadly post-structuralist approaches, and more recent work suggesting a greater openness to dissent. Analysis of various theoretical approaches suggests, however, the importance of a model that can combine emphasis on the hegemonic role of the media, with sensitivity to contradictions that emerge between the moments of 'maintaining consent'.

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Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Exceptional times

On 28 September 2002, hundreds of thousands of people marched through the streets of London calling on the government to abandon plans to participate in an attack on Iraq. The demonstration was the biggest anti-war protest in Britain up to that time. If this was exceptional in itself, it was also an indication that Britain had moved into a period of politics that was unprecedented in a number of ways. The prime minister had committed the country to a major US-led war without majority public support. Indeed that commitment had been made secretly to US politicians without reference to the British cabinet, let alone parliament or the people (Rawnsley, 2010). This policy led to deep splits in the British establishment, which in turn caused turmoil in parliament and government circles (Kampfner, 2003).

The protest movement grew in size, peaking on the demonstration of 15 February 2003, which probably attracted 2 million participants. But the period was marked by a series of popular street mobilisations of record size, combined with sustained and mass opposition to the government's war plans. Protest, widespread opposition, splits in the establishment and government intransigence all led to a level of volatility and turmoil in British politics that at its height created a situation in which, according to one political commentator, 'British government, in the normal sense of the word, ground to a halt' (Kampfner, 2003, p.292).

Another highly unusual aspect of the situation was the response of the media to the mass protests. I was centrally involved in the events of the time as an officer of the Stop the War Coalition and the chief steward of the demonstrations. I was not alone amongst the leadership of the movement in being pleasantly surprised by the fact that after a period of being largely ignored, from the end of September 2002 for over a year, the anti-war movement received a relatively high degree of media interest. Anti-war activists are not used to media attention. The collective memory of activism in general is of being largely ignored, often traduced and sometimes demonised by the mass media. As we shall see, this impression is supported by most of the academic research into media coverage of protest. Nevertheless, in the run-up to and immediate aftermath of the biggest demonstration of all, on 15 February 2003, the huge anti-war

movement became the centre of media attention in a highly volatile political situation. More unfamiliar still was the sympathetic tone adopted by at least some sections of the media. Much media behaviour fell neatly into a caricatured version of right-wing press attitudes to protesters. Other experiences, being filmed by the BBC in our offices preparing for the demonstration, for example, were more unexpected. Senior staff from one mass circulation paper, the *Daily Mirror*, actually met with the organisers of the demonstration to discuss how to promote a protest and produced thousands of placards to be distributed at the demonstration itself. While it was clear even at the height of the movement Stop the War spokespeople were often denied access to some programmes or the pages of some newspapers, and that some parts of the media were openly hostile to the movement, we were getting much more favourable coverage than might have been expected. And whenever we had contact with the media it was noticeable how often we were being shown real sympathy, at least in private.

It was surprise at this unusual media behaviour at the time that led me to pursue research into the period some years later. My aim was to try and determine the circumstances that led to this aberrant attitude. Was it simply the scale of the demonstrations that had forced a revision of the normal attitudes? Was it the international nature of the opposition to war, or was this part of a longer term trend connected perhaps to technological or deep-seated political changes?

While it was these kinds of relatively immediate questions that preoccupied me as I considered the best way to pursue the research project, I soon realised that the period of instability around the start of the Iraq War could provide an unusual general insight into the role of the news media in contemporary Britain. Once the initial turmoil generated by the decision to invade Iraq had passed, the scale of the anti-war movement fluctuated. The demonstrations examined here took place in varied circumstances. The first and second took place in a period in which public opinion was opposed to government policy, the third when it was partially reconciled and the fourth when opinion had swung against the war once again. This sequence provided the opportunity to assess the media's changing attitudes to the movement as the scale of mobilisation, the nature of public opinion and the urgency of the situation altered. By examining how these exceptional events were handled, the research could probe the media's role in modern

democracy and identify particular factors that shape its attitudes to dissent at times of mass mobilisation and social stress.

I discovered that there is a large and growing body of academic work about the media's attitude to protest, including a debate about whether there have been significant changes over the last decade or so, and if so, why. As we shall see, the overwhelming bulk of the research confirms activists' impressions that the mainstream media tends to take a dismissive attitude to popular protest. So much so that students of the subject widely refer to a 'protest paradigm', which describes a series of negative frames the media characteristically deploy when dealing with marches, protests and civil disobedience (see, among many others, Chan and Lee, 1984; McLeod and Hertog, 1998; McLeod and Detember,1999). The paradigm predicts that the media will underplay the actual issues that motivate protest, reporting 'from the outside', providing little legitimacy to the protesters themselves, and focusing instead on the protest as a news event in itself and one which is newsworthy because it deviates from normal or even acceptable behaviour. In general the paradigm involves downplaying the importance and legitimacy of protest; at its more extreme it extends to demonisation and even criminalisation (Gitlin, 1980; Murdock, 1981; McLeod and Hertog, 1998).

Clearly, if nothing else, my research into the way the media approached the movement against the Iraq War was going to raise questions about the validity of the protest paradigm as a guide to media behaviour. I have already suggested too that shedding some light on the way the media reacts in moments of crisis and social stress could also provide an interesting perspective on the way the media functions and the guidelines and interests it pursues in general. Placing the news media's behaviour under the spotlight at a time of such crisis gives us a rare chance to measure its priorities, assess its relationship with public opinion, and make insights into how its various judgements and attitudes are produced. But I began to see too that in the process my investigations could put to the test various academic theories of media behaviour, including liberal, pluralist models and more radical critiques, which tend to predict a consistently hostile media attitude to protest in general and anti-war opinion in particular.

The defining background to these protests was of course the war on Iraq itself. The research could perhaps also make some contribution to our developing understanding of the function played by the mainstream media in wartime – a subject on which a good deal of work has been done, but about which much remains to be resolved. One of the central findings of what follows is the extent to which media behaviour can be volatile and unpredictable at times of social tension, to a degree that is perhaps often underestimated. In particular there appears to be a tendency in the literature to downplay the disruptive, destabilising impact that wars can have on the domestic scene.

1.2. War at home: the battle for hearts and minds

Wars are times of great social stress. They demand an unusual mobilisation of human and physical resources and they involve exceptional levels of sacrifice and personal risk, at least in the armed forces. Since the beginning of the 20th century some wars have led to a total mobilisation that has affected the lives of whole populations (Carruthers, 2000, p.4). These kinds of wars have involved the suspension of all sorts of norms, in the economy, politics and law. Their impact has sometimes been so far reaching they have 'transformed the political and social landscape' (Kolko, 1990, p.4). For these reasons and because they are in themselves extreme events, people tend to engage with wars more intensely than other political events. Modern wars – not just those that effect whole continents – have become a focus of popular consciousness, concern and debate. In the words of Vietnam War historians Daniel Hallin and Todd Gitlin, war 'is genuinely a part of popular culture in a way that politics rarely is' (Hallin and Gitlin, 1994, p.149). Whether or not they involve the kind of total mobilisation characteristic of the First and Second World Wars, all wars are inherently high risk projects for the politicians and others who decide to engage in them. Victory is never certain and defeat is likely to have a range of very serious consequences. Given the level of effort necessary, the risk to life and limb for large numbers of combatants and often civilians, the home front is critical for warring governments. Maintaining morale, both civilian and military, is important in itself to the war effort. But the unique circumstances generated by wars mean that there is always a danger of the development of discontent or protest. And protest at a time of such social exertion is particularly dangerous for the authorities.

Not all wars have unleashed such opposition. As we shall see, context is crucial. There was only limited campaigning against the Malvinas or Falklands War in Britain in 1982, and the Gulf War of 1991 was not strongly contested in Britain or the United States (Philo, 1995; Wilcox, 2005). But elites always have to contend with the difficulties of delivering the war effort and the dangers of mass dissent. Sustaining public opinion in such stressful times becomes a major preoccupation. This explains why it tends to be the case that war generates 'special measures' in the media. In the early 20th century British governments exercised particularly stringent control over the media in wartime. For the first 10 months of World War I, no reporters or photographers were allowed into the combat zone. Any that turned up were treated as 'enemy aliens' (Farrar, 1998, p.67). Such secrecy surrounded the war that no newspaper was allowed to report even on the despatch of the British Expeditionary Force. This was at a time when British journalists would receive co-operation from French or Belgian military units (Carruthers, 2000, p.64). Lord Kitchener's concession to complaints about this arrangement was to appoint one agent dubbed 'Eye Witness' to supply copy to the whole of the media. The person chosen was Sir Ernest Swinton, already attached to the commander in chief's staff; his reports were censored first by General Headquarters and then passed onto Lord Kitchener for approval. As a military officer Swinton was clear that his responsibility was to 'avoid helping the enemy' rather than the 'purveyance of news to our own people' (quoted in Haste, 1977, p.32). Media chiefs were unimpressed. One editor proposed that 'Eye Wash' would have been a better *nom de plume* (Knightley, 2000, p.86).

Although the blanket ban on actual correspondents was later relaxed, censorship remained stringent, according to one historian of the war:

> *A blizzard of regulation shaped what could appear in print, the government periodically notifying editors of topics which "should not be mentioned" and, wielding the ominous power of vagueness, indicating "subjects which should be avoided or treated with extreme caution". Mention of these instructions themselves was forbidden… When it was all over, the drumbeaters would be duly honoured: at least twelve knighthoods and half a dozen peerages were conferred on wartime correspondents, editors or owners, the peerages usually going to the owners.*
> (Hochschild, 2012, p.223)

The government's attitude to dissenters was harsh. Hundreds of deserters at the front were executed by firing squad and thousands of conscientious objectors were imprisoned. Some members of the public assumed similarly aggressive attitudes. High profile opponents of the war like Kier Hardie and Sylvia Pankhurst regularly faced attacks at meetings or in the street (Hochschild, 2012). The media played its part in generating an atmosphere in which such brutality was possible. Dissenters were bitterly demonised. The *Daily Express* claimed conscientious objectors were funded by the Germans, while the tabloid *John Bull* for example regarded the conscientious objector as 'a fungus growth – a human toadstool – which should be uprooted without further delay' (Hochschild, 2012, p.189).

Such attitudes may have reached a peak during the First World War but they are far from unique. Though a much more open policy was pursued during World War II in general, Prime Minister Winston Churchill was only just stopped from ordering a direct government takeover of the BBC and the outright suppression of the sometimes critical *Daily Mirror* (Carruthers, 2000, pp.70 and 82). Thirty years later, one journalist who had been accredited to the British Army for Reuters described the effect created by a combination of military censorship and buy-in from the journalists:

> *It's humiliating to look back at what we wrote during the war. It was crap… We were a propaganda arm of our governments. At the start the censors enforced that, but by the end of the war we were our own censors. We were cheerleaders. I suppose there wasn't an alternative at the time. It was total war. But for God's sake don't glorify our role. It wasn't good journalism. It wasn't journalism at all.* (Quoted in Knightley, 2000, p.333)

The Vietnam War was perhaps covered better than any other in the 20th century, though, as Knightley comments in his history of war reporting, 'this is not saying a lot' (Knightley, 1975, p.421). Even in this case the military authorities did their best to conceal losses and talk up successes, and they organised a sophisticated campaign to hide the real extent of the bombing campaign that became the strategic centrepiece of military strategy after 1969 'behind a screen of lies, evasions and newspeak' (p.421). More recently, during the Falklands War, *Evening Standard* reporter Max Hastings testified to the extent to which standard journalistic ethics are regarded as dispensable during times of war when he wrote that 'no British reporter could be

neutral when his own country was fighting: objectivity was a peacetime luxury, and reporting became an extension of the war effort' (quoted in Foster, 1992, p.158).

1.3. 'The first casualty'

It is perhaps not surprising then that much scholarship on the media and war stresses the way normal, 'liberal' practice is suspended in wartime. There is a widespread view that conventions of balance are abandoned when war breaks out. Christopher Norris for example, notes of the first Gulf War the way critical space appeared to vanish:

> *The lack of space or airtime given to those opposing the war showed dramatically the way in which the values of 'free-world' liberal democracy – those values in whose name after all, this war was being waged – can collapse when exposed to the coercive pressures of a wholesale ideological-conformist crusade.* (Norris, 1992, p.59)

There is also a concern that media get caught up in the remote military mobilisation in both a technical and an ideological sense:

> *Hygienically edited highlights of the action get replayed nightly on the news through ghostly green videos shot through the night-sight viewfinders of airborne artillery. In this screened space anything can happen but little can be verified.* (Hebdige, 1991, p.46)

Hallin and Gitlin make a more general, social assessment of the function of war coverage in the Western media, but they also stress the sense in which the media get caught up in the wider social mobilisation for war:

> *The primary role of the media in wartime in the Anglo-American world has long been to maintain the ties of sentiment between the soldiers in the field and the home front. Accordingly, journalists engage, as Buffalo anchor Richard Kellman put it, in active listening, taking popular sentiment, combining it with ideas and imagery produced at an elite level (in the White House or the Pentagon briefings) running it through their own ideology or collective memory (adding, for example, images of World War II or sixties' protest), and returning it to the public in the form of myth, the myth of war as expression of prowess or community.* (Hallin and Gitlin, 1994, p.161)

Norman Solomon, in his examination of wartime propaganda, articulates as clearly as anyone a widespread view not just of the concerted effort made by most media in the US to support their governments' cause in times of war, but of their general record of success:

> *When the huge news outlets swing behind warfare, the dissent propelled by conscience is not deemed to be very newsworthy. The mass media are filled with bright lights and sizzle, with high production values and lower human values, boosting the war effort. And for many Americans, the gap between what they believe and what is on their TV sets is the distance between their truer selves and their fearful passivity.* (Solomon, 2005, p.237)

This take on the way media functions in wartime has led to large and influential body of work aimed at exposing perceived bias and at challenging the official narratives allegedly promoted in the media to justify foreign interventions. As well as some of the work already quoted, a significant proportion of Noam Chomsky's writing falls in this category, as do important parts of the surveys by the Glasgow Media Group (Glasgow Media Group, 1985, for example). Recently, since the start of the War on Terror, there has been a new interest in the subject and a proliferation of studies that often tend to develop the narrative of media distortions and degeneration produced by war (see, for example, Freedman and Thussu, 2003; Miller, 2004; Bricmont, 2006; Hammond, 2007; Robinson *et al*., 2010). Both the frameworks and conclusions of the various contributors are diverse. As we shall see, there are a number of emerging new perspectives concerning media-state relations, particularly surrounding the role of new media, which challenge some established assumptions. In their analysis of some of the Iraq War coverage, Robinson *et al*. comment:

> *These developments might undermine or might reinforce the patterns of wartime deference that has been argued to exist by many scholars, but their existence makes it harder to be certain of what we think we know about news media and war.*
> (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.32)

Nevertheless it is fair to say the general tone of the literature tends to be one of pessimistic concern about the impact of war on the media. One of the recurring themes in recent literature has been the role played by the rhetoric of humanitarian interventionism in justifying a new round of wars, and the strange mix of moral rectitude and relativism in the media that has characterised this approach. Phillip Hammond goes as far as to argue that the media has played

an active role in creating an empty politics of spectacle that has helped to create the conditions for more wars:

> *Where the West has sought a new sense of purpose and mission in ethical foreign policy interventions, these have involved the abrogation of post-1945 principles of sovereign equality and non-interference, creating a new global space of regulatory governance rather than self-government. This was never an assertive imperialism, but always an Empire 'in denial'.... In staging a spectacle of war for values, the West created a new form of ethical anti-politics that has found its echo in al-Qaeda. Cosmopolitan law-enforcement meets international terrorism: not so much a clash of interests as a violent working out of the emptiness of postmodern politics.*
> (Hammond, 2007, p.14)

1.4. Cracks in the consensus

Suffusing media and communication literature then, is a sense of the loyalty of the media to government in time of war and its consequent role as something approaching a propaganda machine. There is also a common implication, indeed often enough an explicit judgement, made about the effectiveness of this machine. In the literature on war and the media much less space has been given over to another characteristic of wars, that of their tendency to generate dissent and opposition. Mention has been made of the way in which the total wars of the 20th century had a profoundly destabilising effect on most of the societies involved, which had far-reaching consequences. These are extreme cases flowing from the direct involvement of millions of people in scores of countries. But even much smaller conflicts since, from Suez to Vietnam, have had a habit of stirring controversy and generating opposition, even crisis at home. The war in Vietnam had a radicalising effect in many countries. It helped to generate an international movement that not only challenged the war but also raised a wide range of issues about the nature of contemporary society. Whatever the exact impact of the media coverage of the Vietnam War, there is no doubt that one of the reasons the Americans had to withdraw was that public opinion had turned against the war and more and more people were taking to the streets to prove it (Gitlin, 1980, p.19). In his history of the domestic conflict generated by Vietnam, Tom Wells argues not just that US society was divided but that the degree of polarisation at moments was threatening institutional meltdown. When, in 1970, the truth started to come out about Nixon's covert bombing campaign of Cambodia, there was an unprecedented youth revolt that closed down the university system, led to the killing by police of a number of students at Kent

State University and an articulated a sense of anger and betrayal felt by a large section of the population. The sense of crisis was palpable:

> *To many Americans, the domestic uproar following Cambodia and Kent State suggested that the country was becoming unhinged. Newspapers observed that the United States was as divided as it had been since the Civil War. The country was on the verge of a "physical breakdown", commented New York's Mayor John Lindsay. "The nation disintegrates," lamented John Gardner, the Johnson administration's Secretary of Home Affairs. "I use the phrase soberly: the nation disintegrates." McGeorge Bundy, one of the war's main architects who was now President of the Ford Foundation, declared: "Not only must there be no new incursion of American's across the Cambodian frontier, but nothing that feels like that to the American public must ever happen again… Any major action of this general sort…would tear the administration and the country to pieces… The chances of general domestic upheaval would be real.* (Wells, 1994, p.428)

This description illustrates well that one of the factors that can lead to mass dissent in wartime is precisely the scale of the deceptions that conducting wars tends to encourage. There is some recognition of this history in the literature on the role of the media during wartime. In her assessment of the effectiveness of war propaganda, Susan Carruthers recounts how, despite intense propaganda campaigns in different countries during the World War I, populations turned against the war in many if not all the participating countries well before the war's end in 1917 (Carruthers, 2000). Tony Shaw also notes that in Britain a largely loyal media failed to secure support for the invasion of Suez in 1956 and popular outrage at the conduct of the government led to the resignation of the prime minister soon after (Shaw, 1996).

There is also an associated narrative arguing that it was a critical media that 'lost' the Vietnam War in the US, a narrative mostly, but not exclusively, pursued by those responsible for the war. Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, believed that television pictures of Vietnam, 'showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war… The result was a serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home' (quoted in Hallin, 1986, p.3). Soon after, BBC commentator Robin Day suggested that TV reporting had made it impossible for democracies to fight a war 'however just… The full brutality of the combat will be there in close

up and colour and blood looks very red on the colour television screen' (quoted in Knightley, 2000, p.411).

The dominant approach, however, remains that characterised by Bruce Cummings who argued two decades later that the experience of the first Gulf War directly contradicted Day's hunch about the new technology of TV. For Cummings, war appeared not as 'blood and guts spilled in living colour on the living room rug' but through 'a radically distanced, technically controlled, eminently "cool", postmodern optic' (Cummings, 1992, p.121).

1.5. The focus on media power

As we have already seen, this sense of the media as remorselessly and effectively on the side of the status quo extends to the discussion of the way it deals with protest. More recent research suggests that the 'protest paradigm' has either changed radically in the last decade or so, or that it no longer applies in the new conditions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (see Cottle, 2008 and DeLuca and Peeples, 2002). But as we shall see, the theoretical approaches most commonly used to examine media and protest continue to emphasise the essentially supportive role it plays for the establishment. This is no doubt part of a general tendency to talk up the media's power, which has been a characteristic of much cultural and media studies at least since the end of the 1960s. As Stuart Hall points out in an essay on the history of media studies, the notion of a pluralistic media operating through open competition for opinion was influential in the 1940s and 1950s, but 'was not, however, destined to survive the testing times of the ghetto rebellions, campus revolts, counter cultural upheavals and anti-war movements of the late 1960s' (Hall, 1990, p.334). In Hall's opinion the radicalisation and disappointment of the late sixties' rebellion generated a strong and lasting sense that the media was a successful purveyor of the dominant ideology. It is certainly noticeable that different generations of media theorists coming from different perspectives and describing different technological structures tend to share this assumption of the potency of the media in the articulation of power. Nearly two decades ago Lewis H. Lapham expressed a version of what remains a prevalent, pessimistic view about the influence of television:

> *The average American household now watches television roughly seven hours a*
> *day… and the soap opera stars receive thousands of letters a week in which the*

adoring faithful confess secrets of the heart which they dare not tell their wives, their husbands or their mothers... The individual voice and singular point of view disappears into the chorus of corporate consciousness... in place of an energetic politics, we substitute a frenzied spectacle, and the media set the terms of ritual combat upon the candidates who would prove themselves fit to govern. (Quoted in McLuhan, 1994, p.3)

Today, Manuel Castells, a theorist who points to potential in the new media for a more open and democratic practice, nevertheless sees power and power relations as firmly embedded in communication technology:

> *I contend that the process of formation of power relations is decisively transformed in the new organizational and technological context derived from the rise of global and digital networks of communication as the fundamental symbol processing system of our time.* (Castells, 2009, p.4)

This general approach combines with a tendency amongst radical critics of the media's ideological role – many of them figures with significant influence in media studies – to make a strong assessment of the capacity of ruling ideas to secure the position of the elites or at least to close down dissent. This list includes writers from traditions including the Frankfurt School, Althusserian Marxists, post-structuralists – very often using the work of Michel Foucault as a starting point – and more recently postmodernist writers like Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Francois Lyotard (Wollin, 2010; Eagleton, 2007). In different ways and to varying degrees, each of these overlapping traditions stresses the extent to which power is embedded and disseminated through everyday experience, language and other interactions. For Althusser, ideology is a lived experience, and therefore lodged very firmly in everyday life. As Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out, Althusser's conception of ideology shares a great deal with the notion of the power of 'discourse' developed by his renegade pupil Foucault (Ahmad, 1992). For many of these thinkers, power has become bound up in the very texts that we consume, and the results are pernicious. If the very forms of creation and human interaction are inscribed with power relations, independent thinking or criticism is disarmed from the beginning. As Christopher Norris, a leading opponent of post-structuralist paradigms comments, 'The result of this widespread textual turn... is to encourage a retreat from any theory capable of mustering resistance to received ideologies' (Norris, 1992, p.96).

Noam Chomsky, one of the leading critics of both US military intervention and the support he perceives for it across the media, has developed a more institutionally-based critique of the way media operates in capitalist society. His 'propaganda model' treats society as radically divided and so does not share the pessimism implicit in many of the positions of the post-structuralists, for example. Nevertheless as critics have pointed out, its central assumption that there are a series of filters that virtually guarantee a media compliant with the basic attitudes of the elites leaves little room for internal dissent or opposition (see, for example, Freedman, 2009).

Such is the prevalence of this stress on the ideological power of the media that it has itself generated various critiques distinct from mere apologetics for the current media set up. This literature includes the works cited by Norris and Ahmad but also important contributions from Habermas (1984), Callinicos (1989), Wollin (2010) and Eagleton (2007). Many of these writers echo Hall's point that the pessimistic retreat from the notion of humans' ability to resist or oppose elite ideology was a product of historic defeats for progressive forces. From Ahmad's perspective in the early 1990s:

> *The global offensive of the Right, global retreat of the Left, and retreat also of that*
> *which was progressive even in our canonical nationalism, is the essential backdrop*
> *for any analysis of the structure of intellectual production and reception in our time.*
> (Ahmad, 1992, p.192)

1.6. The case of Iraq

Whatever its causes, this background of an overwhelming stress in media studies on the attempt and efficacy of the media in securing consent for elite rule in general and their wars in particular is one of the things that makes the case of the recent Iraq War of such great interest. The extreme sensitivity on display from governments in dealing with dissent in wartime means that any popular movements against war are delicate matters for politicians and for media practitioners alike. The way the media respond to them can tell us much about its role in society, its relationships with political elites, and its attitude to public opinion and to popular mobilisation. But the events during the Iraq War are of particular interest as a case study because despite the fact that war was unlikely ever to directly affect more than a tiny minority of the domestic population, the anti-war protests that began in 2001 probably formed the biggest cycle of political demonstrations on any issue in British history, and as the BBC reported, certainly

included the single biggest British protest demonstration ever, on 15 February 2003 (Mann, 2003).

There are plenty of reasons to believe that the size of the demonstrations itself forced a re-think about 'normal' responses to popular protest. On the Monday after the first in the sequence of historically large demonstrations, for example, the *Daily Telegraph* opened its editorial with the following comments:

> *It is no small achievement to galvanise 150,000 people, and the organisers of Saturday's protest against military action in Iraq have earned the right to be taken seriously. In a democracy, peaceful demonstrations are a show of strength by people who do not have a parliamentary majority on their side. The BBC has been much criticised for failing to give due coverage to the considerably larger Liberty and Livelihood March six days previously; but it was right to give plenty of air time to the anti-war protesters.* (*Daily Telegraph,* 2002)

As we shall see, such comments mark a clear break from the norm of newspaper commentary on demonstrations, let alone right-wing commentary on anti-war demonstrations. But the significance of the movement against the Iraq War was not just a function of its unprecedented size; it was a campaign whose demands at certain points had majority support, while they were overwhelmingly opposed in parliament. The movement therefore raised important issues for the media about representation and balance, questions that are normally viewed through the prism of parliamentary politics.

But there is still further significance to these events. Accompanying the demonstrations was an unusual level of political turmoil. The exact extent of the volatility is a matter of controversy that is examined in the thesis. But a series of politicians' memoirs and political commentaries attest to the sense of crisis in British politics generated by the decision to invade Iraq, a sense that was undoubtedly deepened by the mass movement itself, and Tony Blair's own memoir attests to the fact that the normal functioning of Westminster politics was disrupted to a significant extent (Blair, 2010). The research therefore throws light not just on the way today's media approaches mass protest but also on the way it operates when normal consensual relations in society are under strain. These events give us a good opportunity to assess media managements' perception of its own role in a crisis of legitimacy for the government.

The most obvious significance of the Iraq War movement as a case study for war and the media is that even on first sight, it at least partly appears to contradict the general picture painted in the literature on media and protest. It does this in two main ways. First, the sheer scale of the movement, and the results of the opinion polls that accompanied it, belies the idea implicit in much discussion of the media and war that opinion is relatively easily shaped by a compliant media. In fact, those who were promoting the pro-war agenda found themselves having to battle for hearts and minds with a series of influential counter arguments. As two of the organisers of the movement put it, describing the situation in late 2002:

> *Doubtless to their surprise, the pro-war governments were finding themselves on the defensive. Saddam didn't obey the UN? Well Israel flouted UN resolutions with impunity in its oppression of the Palestinians. Iraq was a dictatorship? So were many other regimes, including in the Middle East, which were backed by the West. The Iraqi people were suffering? But they also suffered from the Anglo-American bombing and sanctions. So the arguments raged back and forth. World politics was polarising around this question. The increasingly bellicose language of the US and British governments mobilised some support notably from right-wing presidents in Italy and Spain, Silvio Berlusconi and Jose Maria Aznar (but not their people). But it repelled more, including other European governments.* (Murray and German, 2005, pp.78-9)

The second unexpected development was, as we have seen, that parts of the media themselves started to reflect this popular scepticism, and even provide some encouragement to the anti-war movement. On the question of the coverage of the war itself, the most in depth study by Peter Robinson and others found that, 'At least at an aggregate level, British News Media coverage of the Iraq invasion confirmed to the predictions of the elite driven model'. But they qualified that overall judgement by noting that, 'In spite of this, not all coverage conformed so readily to the contours of the elite-driven model. Among particular news media outlets and certain subject areas, a more nuanced and diverse picture emerges' (Robinson *et al.*, 2010, pp.104-5).

When it came to the demonstrations against the war, there were undoubtedly moments when at least sections of the media started behaving in ways radically at odds with established models. Not only was there widespread and at times celebratory coverage of the biggest demonstrations, but some outlets actively encouraged their readers to participate in demonstrations. In the run-up

to 15 February 2003, when two million people joined the protests, the sense that something unusual was happening was confirmed. The coverage of the demonstration, with its souvenir supplements in the national newspapers and live coverage on Sky TV, had something of the flavour of a national sporting event. A comparison of my research findings with an examination of the theoretical and historical literature on media and protest underlined the unprecedented nature of the media's response to dissent during the Iraq War.

Of course the danger is that participation in the events described and probed will be inherently bias. I have done everything possible to construct a research programme that assesses the coverage dispassionately. I have used a carefully constructed coding system closely based on the work of previous relevant research. A range of interviewees from the media and the movement has also helped give me perspective and provide balance to my impressions. But I also started from the recognition that my experience has given me just that – only a series of impressions about the way the media worked during the protests. In that sense I started with few preconceptions, either about the nature of the existing literature on the subject, or about the coverage itself. My concern was only to discover the extent to which the events surrounding the demonstrations constituted something new, and if they did, to try and explain why this happened.

1.7. The shape of the argument
The next chapter – Chapter 2 – examines the existing literature in detail to assess the way protest, particularly against previous wars, has been covered in the media historically. Until recently there has been a virtual consensus that the historical record is one of marginalisation, often contempt and sometimes even criminalisation. Particularly since the Vietnam War, a significant body of literature has been produced investigating the way in which this 'protest paradigm' has operated to minimise the impact of protest. More recently there have been some dissenting views about protest reportage, particularly focusing on the experience of the last two decades. As well as tracing the emergence of the protest paradigm in the literature, this chapter examines select case studies and explores some of the controversies surrounding media and protest, including the recent debates about new media impact on the mainstream and the impact of geopolitical developments since 1989. It particularly examines claims that a combination of the political and the technological effects of globalisation have changed the way in which protest is handled in the

mainstream media. The chapter ends with a detailed examination of the literature on media coverage of the Iraq War. It also foregrounds methodological issues that arise out of the very different judgements that have been made about the way Western media responded to the war.

Chapter 3 delves deeper into the theoretical concepts that are used to examine media coverage of protest movements. The attempt here is to locate the intellectual methods most able to make sense of the complex interactions suggested above. This first involves exploring the way the suggestive and widely used concept of 'framing' is used to describe and understand the generation of meaning or value in news coverage. Frame theory has had a pervasive influence, as has the protest paradigm – a particular accumulation of framing devices – as a reference point for most of the major considerations of the way protest has been covered in the media. A close investigation of the concept and use of framing in media studies was therefore essential to establishing the intellectual bases for the dominant approach to protest coverage. After assessing the strengths and limitations of frame theory, the chapter goes on to take a critical look at some of broader theoretical models that have tended to inform media studies' approach to the coverage of protest. These include the 'propaganda model', post-structuralist analyses and Marxist accounts revolving around the concept of hegemony. The contention here is that there is a tendency built into some of these theoretical models to foreground the media's influence and power at the expense of a more nuanced understanding of how the media functions within a complex web of influences. A usable theoretical model needs to be able to explain the complexities clearly revealed by the experience of the Iraq War protests, in particular how a mass anti-war consciousness can develop in a situation in which according to the dominant view the media is likely to be overwhelmingly pro-war. Consideration of the experience of the Vietnam War opens up a discussion about the limits of any one-way 'transmission' model of media functioning. Care needs to be taken to leave open the possibility that social contradictions can play out in different ways and are not automatically contained within a mainstream discourse. Some of those most sensitive to the potential limitations of frame theory have looked to a Gramscian version of Marxism as the best means to relocate and explain frame production in a wider context. This has confirmed my sense of the importance of this explanation, and the chapter on theoretical approaches ends with an assessment of this developing tradition.

Chapter 4 introduces the original research, first outlining the research choices and second the various methodological approaches taken to the material. The methodology was constructed in order to provide insight from across a political range of the mainstream media into the media's changing attitude to the anti-war movement at its height. It focuses on the seven days surrounding key anti-war protests. It involved the coding of over two hundred stories concerning four of the major demonstrations in the period 2002 to 2005 from eight newspapers and one national TV station, the BBC. The aim has been a selection that allows an examination of broadcast, tabloid and broadsheet print media across the widest possible political range. The chapter also explains my choice of analytical categories designed to assess each piece in as many dimensions as possible. These included the extent and positioning of the coverage and its main subject, the main themes in each piece and the main participants who are mentioned. It also included the different types of people who are quoted or interviewed in every story that refers to the protests. Taken together, this information, combined with a record of headlines, journalists and presenters, allows us to establish each piece's overall attitude to the movement and its main 'framing ideas'. My research conclusions have been developed from a combination of the quantitative analysis derived from the coding of this sample with a textual exploration of the main themes and frames that emerge. My archival research has been supplemented by a series of interviews with media participants at the time. As I explain, accessing media staffers from across the political spectrum proved difficult, partly because there is clearly something of a climate of fear in some of the workplaces under consideration. Despite these problems, my interviewees included journalists, technicians and correspondents, as well as some of the key figures from amongst those in the Stop the War Coalition who dealt with the media and helped formulate what passed for a 'media strategy' at the time.

Chapter 5 looks at the some of the contexts, without which the protests against the war and the way they were covered could not be understood. As mentioned, it is quite obvious that when it comes to the impact of public demonstrations, size matters. It is also quite clear that the marked differences between media responses to anti-war movements cannot be explained by the size of the protests alone. The sociological makeup of the opposition movement, its representativeness and its militancy must also be factors. More widely, public opinion and its impact on political institutions all must be taken into account if the aim is to develop an explanation of media

behaviour. These are not the only important contexts. As my reading and research has proceeded, I have been reminded many times the extent to which all significant events gather their meaning and impact from their wider historical context. The 'great world events' of the moment quite clearly impinge on the nature of the reporting of protest. Popular opposition to the Suez adventure would not have been so widespread or effective if Britain and France had not been internationally isolated. Opposition to the Vietnam War was given an enormous impetus by the North Vietnamese's Tet Offensive of January 1968. The wider geopolitical situation had a direct and indirect impact on the nature of the news coverage of the Iraq War protests. Debates at the UN, terrorist attacks, divisions amongst the different governments in the coalition, all helped shape the way the media approached the demonstrators. Even wider factors, including the underlying causes of the war, have had a role in determining the participating governments' ability to put forward convincing arguments to justify their actions. For this reason at least some understanding of the dynamic of the war is important. The strengths and weaknesses of the combatants, the driving forces of the war, and the validity of the various justifications for military intervention all play an important role in setting the context for an explanation of apparently unexpected media behaviour.

Chapter 6 examines my research findings in detail. The research is probed in three overlapping registers progressively moving through quantitative to qualitative analysis. Using a statistical breakdown of my coding I assess the level of the coverage of the demonstrations in broad historical terms, before comparing the amount of coverage of each of the four demonstrations under consideration. I then move to a quantitative analysis of the data on the framing of the demonstrations, which for all its undoubted crudity, produces results that confirm initial impressions of unusual media attitudes to the protests in question. This basic, mechanical aggregation of frames used is then filled out by a more detailed examination of the framing devices used and the narratives they generate or comprise. In order to isolate the developing themes here I investigate the negative and positive framing devices separately. The elaboration of the frames used and the distillation of the assumptions and even arguments that inform them inevitably involve qualitative textual analysis and various subjective judgements. The chapter ends with a series of initial conclusions from the research. First, a summary of the extent to which unusual media behaviour did take place, then confirmation that the disruption to normal

patterns of behaviour was not permanent and that normal service was indeed resumed some time after the start of the war. This is important because it suggests it is not the validity of the protest paradigm as a research concept that is being questioned here, but rather the idea that it functions automatically and uniformly under all conditions. This is followed by some thoughts on indications in the material itself as to possible causes of the unusual media behaviour. Considering these of course involves relating the evidence gathered to some of the contextual material presented in the preceding chapter, but the nature of the frames used and the emergence of various themes in the reporting give us some important clues as to what were the novel preoccupations of those shaping media coverage.

Chapter 7 attempts to illuminate life on the inside of some of the institutions that organised and produced the media in the period under examination. It is based on a survey of the interviews conducted with journalists, technicians, producers, and relevant Stop the War officers. The interviews were conceived as means to try and map the links between the wider contexts generated by the war on Iraq and the media that was produced, in other words to help understand the dynamics of media mediation at a time of turmoil. Where successful, the interviews work on two levels. First they attempt to establish the facts about media functioning at the time – did managements or editors have particular attitudes to the war or the anti-war protests? Were there any interventions or special measures taken concerning the war? What was the balance of opinion on these issues in the media itself? And second, they attempt to establish what the media workers themselves thought or felt about the war and the protests, and what impact this had on the media. This latter line of questioning provided important points of view from people often familiar with many aspects of the media and political worlds, but it also gives an insight into the mind-sets of media practitioners themselves.

The final chapter attempts to bring the various elements of the analysis together and starts by returning to the two central questions: to what extent was there a break with past habits on display in the reporting of anti-war protest; and if there was a break, why? Interviews, textual and content analysis and context are synthesized to try and establish what combination of factors created the conditions for unusual media behaviour. The conclusions are then fed back into an extended discussion of the theoretical debates outlined in Chapter 3. My final task was to assess

what these findings tell us about the protest paradigm and more generally about the models of media analysis that dominate in media studies.

Chapter 2: The media and protest: the literature

2.1. A widening debate

Study of the media's treatment of protest was pioneered in the late 1960s and early 70s, and became a significant element in a growing focus on media bias in the 1980s. More recently, a substantial literature has developed, as media representation has become a central concern for many participants in civil society. Most of the early studies concluded that protest was not well treated in the media. Conclusions have been mixed, leading to a debate about whether a variety of changing conditions roughly since the emergence of the anti-globalisation movement at Seattle in 1999 have led to greater media openness toward protest. This chapter examines existing research on protest coverage in general, then specifically on coverage of dissent during key military conflicts in Britain's post-Second World War history. Next, it examines the findings of research on media and protest since Seattle and analyses the various different positions taken in the ensuing debate. Finally, it goes on to consider previous research into the coverage of the Iraq War, a body of work that is particularly important in its own right for this study, but also contributes significantly to the wider debate about media and dissent in wartime. This last section focuses first on how the war itself was covered but then assesses those elements of the existing research that relate to the coverage of protest.

2.2. 'Serving the military rather well'

Most of the relevant research suggests the media has not been kind to radical movements in general and anti-war protesters in particular. The majority of existing studies conclude that historically, demonstrations and protests are not considered part of the 'normal' political process by the media; rather, they are treated as aberrations. Because they are seen as coming from outside the mainstream they are therefore often regarded as in some sense 'deviant' or at least 'marginal' (Gitlin, 1980; Murdock, 1981; Miller, 2004). This means first, that protests are often ignored and, second, that when they are covered, the focus is not on the concentration of opinion and sentiment they represent but other things: unorthodox participants, the potential for violence or the number of arrests, for example (Murdock, 1981; McLeod and Hertog, 1998). So prevalent is the identification of this approach in the media that it has become known as 'the protest paradigm' (Chan and Lee, 1984; McLeod and Hertog, 1998; McLeod and Detember, 1999). The

result of the protest paradigm in practice for anti-war movements has been, in one commentator's words, that the media have 'served the military rather well' (Carruthers, 2000, pp.271-72). This finding has been supported by other studies of the UK peace and anti-war movements (Glasgow University Media Group, 1985; Murdock, 1981; Hollingsworth, 1986).

A typical case concerns a celebrated and sustained women's anti-cruise missile protest at Britain's Greenham Common US air base in the 1980s. According to Hollingsworth's study of the media coverage, the protesters 'are stigmatised as irrational and unrepresentative, and their motives are questioned. Their alternative explanations of political and social realities are reported in terms of the personal quirks of a few individuals' (Hollingsworth, 1986, p.4). In-depth and influential research into the biggest (and largely peaceful) anti-Vietnam War protest in Britain in the 1960s came to similar conclusions: 'Viewers and readers were not presented with various interpretations focusing on different aspects of the same event, but with basically the same interpretation which focused on the same limited aspect – the issue of violence' (Halloran *et al.*, 1970, p.1). Research into media coverage of anti-Vietnam War protests in the US also reveals that the assessment of what was newsworthy downgraded the issues that motivate protest participants. According to Hallin (2006), TV reports of demonstrations carried little discussion of the actual war; 'only 16 percent of film reports of anti-war marches and rallies had film of speeches with natural sound, while 64 percent of filmed reports on the anti-war movement contained no substantial discussion of the war' (p.201). In the same work, Hallin also notes a negative bias against protests: 'Negative statements about the anti-war movement outweighed positive ones in television coverage by about two to one' (p.210) and there was discrimination against spokespeople from the movement even when it came to presenting the anti-war case. Sixty-five percent of all criticism of the war came from various types of 'officials' or journalists (p.210).

In his account of the media treatment of the New Left in the US, Todd Gitlin also records a systematic 'deprecation' of the US anti-war movement. His lists of themes or frames through which the media viewed the anti-war movement include:

- Trivialisation (making light of movement in terms of language, dress, age, style

and goals);
- Polarisation (emphasising counter-demonstrations, and balancing the anti-war movement against ultra-Right and neo-Nazi groups as equivalent 'extremists');
- Emphasis on internal dissension;
- Marginalisation (showing demonstrators to be deviant or unrepresentative);
- Disparagement by numbers (under-counting);
- Disparagement of the movement's effectiveness. (Gitlin, 1980, pp.27/8)

As Simon Cottle and others have noted, remarkably similar conclusions can be found in studies of other radical demonstrations and popular movements, especially in examples dating from before 2000 (Cottle, 2008; McLeod and Detember, 1998). Analysis of news coverage of the Great Miners' Strike in 1984-85 in Britain, for example, found that 'coverage on the main news channels of the central issues of the dispute… was framed in terms which favoured the NCB (The National Coal Board) and the government. The issues the miners were fighting for… were marginalised or dismissed, with the exception of Channel 4 News' (Williams, 2009, p.40). A number of interviewees, mainly miners themselves, stressed how the issue of violence dominated the coverage of the strike (p.40). A more recent survey of the coverage of a wide range of protests in Washington, DC in the 1980s and 90s found a similar tendency toward sensationalism and the talking up of violence and extremist attitudes. It also came to the conclusion that though protesters clearly can influence media agendas, the way the media handles protesters is shaped by corporate interests. It predicted that as the media becomes more concentrated it will become more biased in its selection and description of conflictual interests, such as resistance to corporate globalisation (Smith *et al.*, 2001).

2.3. British wartime precedents
Studies of the media handling of previous British wars suggest a broad pattern of support for war. Even where voices critical of war were raised in the media, anti-war protest itself tends to be largely dismissed or at least treated as marginal. During the Suez crisis sparked by the French and British invasion of Egypt in 1956, some of the press opposed preparations for war, but they gave little voice to the many who protested against it. British public opinion and the political elite were split roughly down the middle by the invasion, which was to have a profound effect on Britain's standing in the world (Epstein, 1962, p.142; Murray, 2009, p.71). But accounts of the BBC's response to the controversy reveal an intense wariness of airing criticisms of the

government. In his history of the media coverage of the war, Shaw comments that, 'on the occasions when the BBC commentaries did brave the waters of controversy, they invariably came down on the government's side' (Shaw, 1996, p.146). According to the BBC's Director of Spoken Word at the time, this attitude was partly the product of direct government threats to introduce a new apparatus of government censorship and rumours of plans to take the BBC under direct government control (Grisewood, 1968, pp.43 and 200).

Especially in the run-up to hostilities, however, the widespread opposition to the war found some expression – even at times some encouragement – in some of the press. In October, the *Guardian* encouraged its readers to complain to their MPs (Turner, 2006, p.354). Weeks before the invasion, the popular press was speculating about disaffection within the ranks of the reservists who were preparing to take action against the Egyptians. The Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, held a meeting with several tabloid editors to try and scotch this story. This was just one among a number of confrontational meetings that ministers held with groups of editors to try and pull them into line (Shaw, 1996, p.65). As action approached, space for critical voices narrowed. On the day of Prime Minister Eden's first public ultimatum to the Egyptians, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Mirror* effectively dropped their opposition to war. This left the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Herald* as the only clear opponents of Eden's Suez policy on what was effectively day one of the crisis proper. According to Shaw's account, the BBC failed to produce a single genuinely objective, first-hand report of the RAF bombings (Shaw, 1996, p.139).

All the main political parties backed the Falklands war, and opposition was far more marginalised in the media. Anti-war protest was limited, but opinion polls showed widespread reluctance to go to war – even on the eve of the invasion 76 percent of the population wanted the UN to administer the islands pending a diplomatic solution. Despite this, only the *Daily Mirror* and at certain points the *Guardian* were critical of the war (Philo, 1995). The mood of the bulk of the media is suggested by the fact that, during the war, evening news bulletins often ended with patriotic homilies delivered by the newscasters themselves. Alistair Burnett, for example, shared with the audience of a main ITN bulletin the thought that 'It is usually willpower, plain people's willpower, that wins wars' (Philo, 1995, p.95). A Panorama programme 'Can we avoid war?'

aired on 10 May 1982 was one of the very few televised programmes to feature critics of the war option. The government very publicly attacked the programme. Former Cabinet Minister Geoffrey Rippon described it as 'one of the most despicable programmes it has ever been my misfortune to witness' (Wilby, 2006, p.2). Foreign Secretary Francis Pym told the Foreign Affairs Select Committee the next day that he was concerned Argentina was winning the propaganda war and he invited viewers to write directly to the BBC (p.2). Coverage of the anti-war movement appears to have been limited. There was no TV coverage of substantial local protests against the war around the country and, while three London rallies were reported on TV, the BBC at least ignored a 3,000-strong demonstration that marched down Fleet Street protesting at biased media coverage of the war (Glasgow Media Group, 1985). Coverage of other London rallies stressed 'revolutionary communist' and 'left-wing' participation: 'Several thousand people… among them revolutionary communists supporting Argentina… speakers including left-wing Labour MPs Tony Benn and Dame Judith Hart' (BBC news, quoted in Glasgow Media Group, 1985).

Media coverage of the first Gulf War in 1991 appears to have been a nadir for war reporting. Despite once again a marked reluctance for war among the general population, media coverage was even more uniformly positive than in the previous two cases (Thomson, 1992). When war became likely, of all the newspapers, only the *Guardian* even half-opposed military action. It changed its line and came out in favour of war on 17 January, just before hostilities started (Keeble, 1997, p.129). Once again, any coverage that was regarded as critical of the war was widely attacked. After a dramatic BBC report on the bombing of the Ammiriyah bomb shelter in Baghdad, which led to the deaths of hundreds of civilians, there was widespread media criticism of the TV coverage of the war, even though analysis shows that coverage was overwhelmingly pro-war (Wilcox, 2005). The *Daily Mirror* argued in an editorial, 'We cannot allow ourselves to be deflected by misguided, twisted individuals always eager to comfort and support any country but their own' (p.9). *The Sun* ran the results of a phone-in it had conducted, claiming that 2,600 people believed the ITV and the BBC had shown favour to the Iraqis, while only 139 thought they supported the allies (p.9). Coverage of the war was so uniformly supportive, and so integrated into the military viewpoint, that the French postmodernist intellectual Jean Baudrillard went as far as to argue that it may only have existed at all as a mass-media event (Baudrillard,

1995). Baudrillard was perhaps being playful, though he stood by his hypothesis even after the war had ended. His point appeared to be that the real significance of the war lay not in what actually happened but in the simulacrum, in the virtual realm:

> *The war exerts its ravages on another level, through faking, through hyper-reality, the simulacrum, through all those strategies of psychological deterrence that make play with facts and images, with the precession (sic) of the virtual over the real, of virtual time over real time, and the inexorable confusion between the two.*
> (Baudrillard, 1995, p.73)

Baudrillard's sceptical excess has been roundly and widely criticised, but even those quick to point out the dangers of his intellectual provocation have recognised the extreme collusion of the media in the controlled spectacle of the war that gave Baudrillard's speculations some traction. In a polemic against Baudrillard's positions, Christopher Norris accepted that the Gulf War involved such a massive concentration of media resources, in such close co-operation with the military effort, that it took on an almost 'hyper-real' aspect (Norris, 1992, p.122). He explains this first as a result of direct and internalised political pressures:

> *The production people were subject to enormous pressures of censorship, whether in the form of explicit directives from government or military sources, or through the workings of a self-imposed professional code which told them (in effect) that their jobs were on the line if they put out news reports of offered opinions at variance with the official account.* (Norris, 1992, p.60)

Later in the same book, Norris goes on to consider wider factors, from 'the willingness of government ministers to reproduce the Pentagon/White House line from day-to-day as required, to the virtual collapse of the parliamentary opposition (enforced by the Labour Party's shameful attempts to muzzle dissenting voices), and the effective confinement of critical opinion to the minority newspapers and off-peak TV programme-slots' (Norris, 1992, p.164). The relatively small protests against the war were greeted with a combination of silence in the majority of the media and hostility in some comment pages, particularly in the tabloids. *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn complained, 'As the UN deadline passed out crawled the usual collection of 'students', god botherers, *Guardian* readers, gays, Communists, Trots, men with beards and duffle coats, men with ponytails, wimmin in men's shoes and old hippies with worn-out Country Joe and the Fish LPs'. Not to be outdone, Brian Hitchen wrote in the *Daily Star* that the

demonstrations were 'mainly made up of assorted rat-droppings, together with misguided contingents from the clergy and fringe show-business' (quoted in Wilcox, 2005, p.11). In his detailed examination of the coverage across five newspapers on the first Gulf War in Britain, David Wilcox (2005) found that this kind of attitude to anti-war movements was one element of a characteristic package of responses that consciously or instinctively leads to an endorsement of war:

> *The bias in favour of the pro-war agenda is multiplied by the lack of reasoned opposition opinion in the press and by the willing reproduction of official interventionist statements. This is often done without serious critical analysis... by affiliating non-interventionist ideals with minorities in society and negative stereotypes, the press often reflects little more than a bigoted and biased conduit for pro-war propaganda.* (Wilcox, 2005, p.168)

2.4. Did everything change at Seattle?

Since the turn of the 21st century some authors have argued for the qualification of the protest paradigm. Two separate but related arguments have been presented. First, that in the new conditions of the 21st century there is more popular sympathy for protest, and so by implication most coverage of protest benefits movement organisations. Second, that for a whole number of reasons the 21st century media is less uniformly hostile to protest. Two studies of media coverage of the demonstrations at the Seattle WTO ministerial meeting in 1999 contrast with previous comparable findings. In their study of coverage of Seattle, DeLuca and Peeples (2002) conclude, 'far from discrediting or drowning out the message of the protesters, the symbolic violence generated extensive media coverage and an airing of the issues' (p.140). Andrew Rojecki also finds that this effect, combined with the ideological impact of the end of the Cold War, meant that the coverage of the Seattle demonstrations was less hostile than might have been expected: 'Initial focus on surface features – costumes and stunts – quickly deepened to the underlying issues they symbolised' (Rojecki, 2002, p.159).

In a study of the media coverage of the South Korean anti-government riots in Kwangju in 1980 and the democracy movement in China in 1989, Becky Shelley (2001) argues for a new importance of the role of the international media. She goes on to propose that globalised media can help develop the movements for democracy by arguing that 'the international media,

particularly through the medium of instantaneous broadcasting, set the agenda, create mass public opinion on a global stage and influence the actors in the dramas. This influence can serve a democratizing function' (p.4). A study of the emergence of the radical anti-neoliberal movement *Attac* in Germany has also confirmed that in the right conditions, media coverage can help build radical movements. The authors argue that in this case study, this is partly a result of contingent factors, particularly the fact that in the aftermath of the anti-capitalist demonstrations in Gothenburg in 2001 journalists were desperately looking for an organisation that could represent or embody the new protest movement. *Attac* was well placed to play that role. The report concludes that the emergence of *Attac* as the central organisation for the global justice movement in Germany was the result of a convergence of interests between *Attac* and the news media (Brand and Wissen, 2005).

Simon Cottle has summarised some of these new perspectives and suggested a number of possible explanations for the different research results. First, he argues that protest has become more mainstream: 'In Britain since the 1970s, as in many other Western democracies, protest and demonstration has increasingly moved from the political margins to the mainstream' (Cottle, 2008, p.862). Although this is perhaps counterintuitive to many on both left and the right who would regard the 1960s and 70s as historic high points of protest, there is supporting evidence for this. A 2003 ICM poll found 47 percent of the population said they regarded street protests against capitalism as justified and 81 percent agree with the statement that, 'If governments don't listen, peaceful protests, blockades and demonstrations are a legitimate means of expressing people's concerns' (ICM Poll cited in Doherty, Plows and Wall 2003, p.674). In their study of the dynamics of protest in Britain, Sanders *et al*. found demonstrations to be 'a growing channel of political expression'. They discovered a tripling of the number of people prepared to go on protests between 1983 and 2001 to 23 percent, although that figure remains well below the high point of 32 percent in 1977.

Secondly, Cottle points to the extent to which demonstrators have learnt to harness the power of the media and 'turn it to their advantage'. 'What is unprecedented is the extent to which protests and demonstrations today have become reflexively conditioned by their pursuit of media attention, and need to be if they are to get their message across and mobilise wider support'

(Cottle, 2008, p.853). Finally, he argues that the complexities of media technology and media flows in the era of globalisation have opened up the possibility of more diversity. Globalisation, he contends, creates an interpenetration of different takes on global events. Particularly at moments of polarisation of opinion internationally this can have the effect of fracturing media consensus. It also means that there is an increased internationalism, a potential sense of solidarity that in itself can generate more radical activism. The Internet, meanwhile, has also opened up media opportunities for activists, not just because it is a tool that activists can use but because it has had a subversive impact on the 'normal' channels of media function:

> *The Internet, while certainly no panacea for the continuing inequalities of strategic and symbolic power mobilised in and through the mass media, evidently contains a socially activated potential to unsettle and even potentially disrupt the vertical flows of institutionally controlled "top down" communications.* (Cottle, 2008, p.859)

Cottle's thesis needs to be examined critically, however. Other work from the last decade at least casts doubt on his claims and those of some he cites. Lee Artz and others have warned of the dangers of exaggerating the impact of new technologies on the actual content and attitude of media practitioners:

> *High expectations for media and other technology have marked each invention and innovation in mass communication history. But none has singularly delivered individual liberation nor brought abundance to all of society as promised… The use and impact of any communication means or practice ultimately depends more on the material social relations between classes and the attending cultural and social norms than on the inherent nature of any particular technology.* (Artz, 2006, pp.12-13)

More generally it is important not to confuse the argument that media coverage can benefit radical movements with the idea that it is intrinsically favourable. Brand and Wissen's (2005) research into the impact of media coverage on the *Attac* network for example does not conclude necessarily that the coverage was favourable in itself, only that it helped the movement grow. As we have seen, recent arguments to qualify the protest paradigm tend to be based on interpretations of particular experiences of the anti-globalisation movement. In terms of actual content and bias perhaps the most wide-ranging research into media coverage of the early phase of the anti-globalisation movement by Adler and Mittelman's is instructive here. They study of

the coverage of anti-globalisation protest in the quality press in the US, South East Asia and Britain. They come to very similar conclusions to those from previous generations.

> *To sum up, the power of mainstream media representation, aided by certain scholars and public intellectuals, produces four popular images of globalisation protesters: youthful and middle class, violence-prone, divided, and lacking coherent positions.*
> (Adler and Mittelman, 2004, p.200)

Nevertheless there seems to be enough evidence to suggest a range of developments in the last decade has significantly affected the way the media handles at least some protest. The rather scattered evidence provisionally suggests these changes appear to have increased the visibility of protest in the media. This should perhaps not surprise us. Shifts in public opinion, technological change, divisions among the elites, the scale of protest, and changes to foreign policy – all these things are bound to impact on the way protest is reported. Research into the biggest outbreak of protest for generations in Britain should help provide an insight not just into the extent to which they affect media coverage, but also the way these influences interact and play out. It should also help us to assess whether there has been a sea change in the relationship between protest and media in the last decade, as Simon Cottle and others suggest.

2.5. Covering the Iraq War: the literature so far

Existing research into the coverage of the war on Iraq itself, some of which touches on the how the anti-war movement was approached, comes to contradictory conclusions. In one of the earliest comprehensive studies of British coverage, Tumber and Palmer (2004) looked at the reporting of two 'left-wing' papers, the *Guardian* and the *Mirror*, and two 'right-wing' papers, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. They report that in the run-up to the war press coverage was split. 'UK press divided clearly along left/right lines on questions of policy: the left-wing titles clearly opposed, and the right-wing titles clearly supported' (p.85). Within this general picture there were important nuances. Though left-wing papers tended to 'look for bad news' about American policy, and right-wing papers 'looked for good news' (p.85), the *Mirror* was significantly more critical than the *Guardian*, particularly on the question of the general purposes driving US foreign policy, on which the *Guardian* was pretty evenly balanced (p.86). In general in this period, Tumber and Palmer argue there was a clear difference from 'the pro-US coverage' of the first Gulf War. In particular, they note that there was more anti-war opinion and reporting

than might have been expected in the right-wing press. Both the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* published articles 'favourable to the anti-war cause' (p.87). During the invasion phase, the authors point to a fairly sharp change in the reporting in all four papers that were now dominated by stories that would figure under the heading 'military good news' (p.109). Though their quantitative analysis does not extend beyond the war period, a qualitative survey suggests that the papers reverted to previous polarities, particularly after the lethal confrontations at Fallujah in early May 2003 (p.121). They find the *Guardian* is largely negative about the fortunes of the reconstruction effort while the *Telegraph* is much more optimistic. Overall they suggest a break with previous pro-war, pro-US coverage of war, particularly that of Vietnam. They argue that anti-war protest was given 'significant space and prominence' (p.165) in the media and a substantial proportion of the broadsheet press coverage of the pre-invasion phase of the crisis was given over to an analysis of the implementation and/or outcomes of the policy. This coverage was 'evenly balanced between negative and positive mentions' (p.165).

A major study of the US TV coverage of the war by Aday, Livingston and Herbert comes to even more positive conclusions. Their central finding was that 'the vast majority of stories on most American News networks, and Al-Jazeera, were in fact objective' (Aday *et al.*, 2005, p.18). Fox News was identified as an exception to this general finding partly because it consciously 'chose to abandon a major component of objectivity – detachment' (p.18). However, there are other findings presented in the study that throw a rather different light on the coverage and suggest a narrow use of the notion of objectivity in the study. First, the authors note that the American networks paid 'no more than scant attention to dissent in the United States' over the war (p.11). Secondly, they report that the US media were extremely selective about what they covered of the war itself. They 'shied away', for example, of 'visuals of causalities' (p.12) and they focused on 'its whiz-bang aspects at the expense of other important story lines' (p.16). The study's claim for the overall objectivity of reporting appears to be based almost entirely on an analysis of explicit story tone. The authors' coding was based on the use or non-use of 'value-laden phrases' or 'not reporting the story straight' (p.10). Thus when the authors conclude that 96 percent of coverage on ABC and CBS was 'neutral' (p.12), what they mean was that the reports contained little explicitly value-laden bias. In their summary of the literature, Robinson *et al*. develop a useful critique of this method:

A problem with this study is its definition and operationalisation of "objectivity" in terms of straight versus evaluative reporting by journalists. This portrayal of objectivity rests on a distinction between the language and tone used by reporters (which can either be critical, supportive or neutral) and the subjects of news stories which, according to their definition, are unrelated to the issue of objectivity. As long as a journalist avoids overtly partisan or emotive language, a report is understood to be objective according to the classification provided by Aday and his team. (Robinson *et al.*, 2010, p.20)

There are other studies that suggest a relatively balanced media discussion of the issues in the run-up to the war, and even of the anti-war protests. Verhulst and Walgrave (2010) analysed press coverage in eight Western countries in the two months leading up to the war, focusing on analysis of the reasons for the invasion. Overall, they found that 'the national newspapers produced a fairly balanced picture of the run-up toward war' (p.52). They claim that 'newspapers in all countries highlighted both sides' argument in the debate' (p.51). They found, however, that the pro-war arguments were more prominent in the countries most involved in the war, the US and Britain:

> *In both the war-initiating countries, the United States and the United Kingdom, pro-war arguments clearly were more salient. And when the media in these two countries explicitly took sides, they most often did in favour of war, which was exactly the opposite for all the other European countries in our sample*. (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2010, p.52)

A study in the same collection conducted a parallel investigation of coverage of the Iraq War protests in the weeks around 15 February (Rucht and Verhulst, 2010). It concludes that 'by and large, the demonstrators received newspaper coverage of which most organisers can only dream: protests were said not just to be the largest ever seen, but in addition, to have attracted ordinary people from all parts of the country and all layers of society' (p.255). The impression is given that, at least in the coverage of 15 February 2003, the protests received relatively extensive coverage and that the protesters' messages effectively penetrated the media (p.254), proving that the 'protest paradigm' had been discarded: 'In all countries, the media tended to stress the extraordinary diversity of the 15 February protesters' (p.255).

A study by Lewis *et al*. (2006) examines the output of television news in Britain concerning the Iraq War. It comes to rather more critical conclusions of the coverage. A large part of the study focuses on two central themes: the existence or otherwise of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, and the reporting of the attitude of the Iraqi people toward the occupation. The authors found that there were twice as many reports that showed Iraqis welcoming the occupation forces as being critical or antagonistic towards them (p.123). On the subject of weapons of mass destruction, they found that broadcasters were eight times more likely to suggest the existence of WMD than to imply doubt about their presence in Iraq (p.121). There was, they argue, 'a subtle but clear bias towards those two pro-war assumptions' (p.126). Other findings concern sources and authorship of reports. The most significant is perhaps that coalition sources constituted 46 percent of all onscreen sources commenting on the war (p.120). The varying conclusions of these studies can partly be explained as outcomes of the different research methods used. Rucht and Verhulst (2010), for example, come to the conclusion that 'The protesters were able to get their basic messages across' (p.24) in the media on the basis of a content analysis that tracked the number of times that reasons for opposing the war were mentioned in a random sample of articles mentioning Iraq. It is of course of some interest that various reasons were reported for not going to war. But context is very important here. Rucht and Verhulst's method cannot capture the way in which these reasons were framed, and therefore what the overall impact of each of the articles they coded was likely to be. Their textual analysis that led to the conclusion that 'Overall… protesters were taken seriously by most newspapers and covered in a neutral or even positive manner' (p.257), is based on just 130 articles and, as they themselves admit, can only be regarded as suggestive rather than conclusive.

Tumber and Palmer's account of the unexpectedly critical tone of the UK media coverage of the war is significant, but open to various interpretations. One problem is that they give no indication of how they assess positive and negative mentions of coalition activities. It appears as if such mentions have simply been aggregated, and that once again there has been no attempt to establish the overall context or frame in which they appear. In addition, there seems to be no distinction made between criticisms of the coalition's military tactics and questioning of the overall legitimacy of the war itself. Similar issues can legitimately be raised about the research reported by Lewis and his colleagues (Lewis *et al*., 2006). They also fail to discriminate between

substantive and merely tactical criticisms of the war, and they too make no attempt to assess the overall impact of particular stories by examining the way they are framed. They accept that their data 'ignores some of the more detailed content of the coverage' and that therefore it can only provide 'a glimpse into broader questions about the nature and tone of the narrative of war coverage' (p.126). It is also important to point out that once the timeframe is taken into account, there is slightly less disagreement than at first appears. Some of these studies only examine the period up to the outbreak of war (Rucht and Verhulst, 2010; Verhulst and Walgrave, 2010). Of those that extend their studies into the post-invasion period, two out of three note a change towards a less critical tone in the coverage after the war begins (Lewis *et al*., 2006; Tumber and Palmer, 2004). Although there are divergent judgements being made, it may be possible to make out areas of overlap.

These studies do not focus on the effects of the protests on the media and their limited time spans and relatively impressionistic research methods ensure they can tell us little about the impact of the movement itself on media attitudes. This issue has been examined, however, in the last two studies under discussion. Ian Taylor conducted in-depth research into the way a selection of local papers covered the anti-war movement in Britain between 1 January 2003 and 1 January 2004 (Taylor, 2009). The research concentrated on the interaction between local anti-war groups and the local press and relies heavily on interviews with local journalists and activists, but it also contains a content analysis of six local papers, coding most, if not all stories referring to the Iraq War in the period, and mapping 'the main sources quoted and referred to in the coverage, the main themes of the coverage and the amount of attention that the reports commanded' (Taylor, 2010, p.87). Despite the fact that Taylor does not explicitly consider the framing of the reports he examines, his careful analysis of the results of his research provides a nuanced account of how at least an important section of the local papers related to the war and to the movement in this period. Taylor's broad-brush conclusion on coverage of the war itself is that up until mid-March 2003, there was some openness regarding the debates around the war. Papers regularly carried editorials that contained at least 'gentle subversion' of the official government line that was more closely followed in the news stories on the war (p.185). The *Manchester Evening News* for example carried editorials headed 'Time is running out for Bush' and 'No Link to Al-Qaeda' on

days when their news stories were reporting Bush's statements that 'Time is running out for Iraq' and 'Straw: Iraq and Al-Qaeda linked' (p.185).

According to Taylor, 'editorial commentary was at its most resistant to the official line from early February to early March' (p.185). By mid to late March, however, 'the papers began to insist that whatever misgivings they and members of the public had about military action "we" all now have an obligation to support the troops' (p.186). Just less than 20 percent of news reports made a case or carried actors who made arguments in favour of military action in the period up to the war, and just over 21 percent made a case or quoted actors making a case against (p.190). In the two months after the war started, these figures shrank to 7 percent and 7.4 percent respectively. Taylor comments that, 'once the invasion started all of these interventions in the debate were squeezed, as around 70 percent of news reports after 20 March 2003 made no mention of the controversy – a pattern that was largely continued into the 'post-conflict phase' of the crisis' (p.191). Taylor finds that the attitude of the papers to the anti-war movement changed roughly in step with this pattern. Until mid-March, he argues, 'a majority of reports cast the anti-war movement in a favourable light… Then on the week beginning 10 March, fully ten days before the invasion began, the legitimacy of the anti-war movement in the local press plummeted' (p.230). From that moment a large majority of articles placed the movement in the 'sphere of implicit deviance' or even in some cases 'explicit deviance'. Up to early March, Taylor coded over 80 percent of relevant reports as placing the movement in the 'sphere of partial or full legitimacy' (p.230).

This change was partly reversed, however, after April until the end of January 2004, when just over half reports returned to treating the movement as at least 'partially legitimate'. Not surprisingly, Taylor finds that the high point of the movement's profile in the local papers was around the biggest demonstration on 15 February 2003. At this time he finds a clear break with the 'protest paradigm', with an emphasis on the scale of the march, the diversity of the people and the groups involved 'and the fact that so many people who took part were supposedly new to marching' (p.232). Taylor could find no mention of trouble on the demonstration despite violence figuring so consistently in the conventional reporting of protests. Taylor's nuanced and complex conclusions suggest that the reporting of anti-war activity 'can be seen to have had a

decisive impact overall in shifting the balance of coverage *towards* an anti-war direction'
(p.220). On the other hand he notes that only 8.5 percent of reports on the issue of Iraq were
dedicated to anti-war activity and that, though the movement often achieved a 'partial
legitimacy', it very rarely achieved the 'full legitimacy' so often achieved by British and
American government and military officials' (p.276). Overall 'coalition sources exercised a far
greater degree of influence in establishing and maintaining the 'terms of the debate'… about the
Iraq crisis through the pages of the local press than the anti-war movement did' (p.277).

Piers Robinson and his colleagues undertook a survey of British TV and national press news
reports of the Iraq War in the run-up and during the invasion (17 March - 18 April 2003) to gain
an in-depth understanding into the way the British media performed (Robinson *et al*., 2010).
Their overall aim was to establish whether the media performance supported the 'elite-driven',
'independent' or 'oppositional' model of news media (p.34). The research constitutes the most
in-depth analysis of a national media performance around the Iraq War, even if its timeframe is
very limited. The authors used a sophisticated methodology that included a careful examination
of sources used and the framing deployed as well as purely quantitative techniques. They
analysed the extent to which reporters themselves made 'critical contributions', identified the
subject matter of news reports and analysed the visual representation of the war, and in their own
words 'assessed the overall framing of news reports in order to determine the extent to which
reports reflected for challenged official narratives regarding the war' (p.51). Once again, their
findings paint a complex picture. They conclude that 'at an aggregate level, many of the
findings… are consistent with the predictions of the elite-driven model' (p.161). They found that
anti-war actors 'had a difficult time in gaining access to the British news media and winning
sympathetic coverage' (p.152). Having said that, they also found that 'several news media outlets
succeeded in generating coverage more generally that deviated significantly from the predictions
of the elite-driven model' (p.130). They note that Channel 4 news displayed a 'commitment to
professional autonomy' that led to a marked scepticism of official narratives, and that the British
press displayed a wide spectrum of opinion, including 'a strong anti-war element' (p.130).
However, they also make the point that journalists were much more likely to make 'procedural'
than 'substantive-level' criticisms of the coalition's performance (p.131). In common with a
majority of the other studies, they also found a marked change in the tone of coverage after war

started: 'From this point on, the news media itself became less accommodating to dissent' (p.155). In terms of attitude to the movement itself, Robinson *et al*. found the news coverage 'tells two stories':

> *Prior to military action and for a brief period after the start of the war, coverage of protest activity played more positively than negatively for the anti-war movement. Although coverage was to become more negative over time, this finding reflects an unusual and probably unprecedented degree of reporting favourable to a wartime protest movement.* (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.157)

However, things changed rapidly once the war started. With the war in progress, even the interjections of prominent politicians were deemed unacceptable by most media outlets. They go on to conclude, 'In short, despite the level of controversy surrounding the Iraq War, the presence of a powerful and popular anti-war movement, elite political dissent and an anti-war faction amongst newspapers, such political opposition to the war was beyond the bounds of acceptable mainstream debate (p.158). This research concentrated on the coverage of the war itself and only tangentially on the movement, and its main focus was on the period of the immediately around the invasion. But like the work of Ian Taylor on the local press, the research by Robinson *et al*. does tentatively suggest a weakening of the protest paradigm and at least a partial opening towards a mass movement. At the same time, there is plenty of evidence in the literature to suggest a continued media reluctance to take the arguments of the anti-war movement seriously.

Chapter 3: Theoretical approaches

3.1. Framing protest

This chapter considers the value of the various theoretical models most commonly used to gauge and interpret the performance of the media as it deals with protest. Whatever their wider approach most writers on the subject use some version of frame theory. As we have seen most also at least refer to a series of framing devices that have come to be called the 'protest paradigm'. The chapter starts with an examination and critical comparison of various closely related notions of framing and situates the protest paradigm within them. It then goes on to consider important work on the limitations of frame theory if used in isolation or without the context of a wider model of how the media relates to a range social determinants. Some understanding of the shifting interplay between political elites, public opinion and relations of power within the media is necessary particularly in order to understand the changing nature of framing devices. In the light of this, the chapter concludes with a discussion about which conceptual approach to media operation provides the best structure in which to situate the insights of frame theory. The strengths and weaknesses of the 'propaganda model', the post-structuralism of Foucault and his followers and a non-determinist Marxist method are considered as alternative ways of understanding the complex flows of power and determination through the modern media.

3.2 The theory of frames

Much of the analysis of media protest coverage has been informed by versions of frame theory (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod, 1995; Shoemaker, 1982; Murdock, 1981; Luther and Miller 2005). Frame theory is widely used across the social sciences and humanities, offering as it does a way to assess the impact of any communicating text. As Robert Entman explains in his attempt at a clarification of the theory, the concept of framing is often defined casually and researchers tend to rely on a tacit understanding of the concepts involved perhaps because the words *frame*, *framing* and *framework* are in common usage. What the various uses of the framing paradigm all attempt, in Entman's view, is to illuminate 'the precise way in which influence over consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as speech, utterance, new report, or novel to that consciousness' (Entman, 1993, pp.51-2).

In its application to the study of news media, framing theory is used as a method of analysing the multiple ways in which news coverage transmits a series of implicit assumptions. It attempts to uncover the attitudes inscribed in news reporting by identifying the series of frames that shape it. In some versions it also seeks to examine the source of these attitudes. Within this general field, there are a number of different conceptions of media framing, each of which emphasises different elements of what is normally conceived as a complex process. McLeod and Hertog (1998) explain framing first and foremost as the application of a 'narrative structure' by journalists that helps them assemble the various elements of their story. Neuman *et al.* (1992) argue for a wider definition of frames as 'conceptual tools which both journalists and the wider public rely on to 'convey, interpret and evaluate information' (p.60). In their study of media coverage of recent US anti-war protests Luther and Miller (2005) emphasise the selective aspect of framing, 'in constructing frames, journalists simplify, highlight, and make more salient, certain aspects of reality, while obscuring others' (Luther and Miller, 2005, p.79).

Frame theory has a number of important advantages as a way of understanding the generation of meaning in news. Neumann *et al.* (1992) suggest one reason why the concept of the frame has become widespread in the literature is that it recognises news production as collective and interactive rather than simply assigning assumptions about news to individuals' structures of thought. Another reason for its appeal is its ability to incorporate a wide variety of processes including selection of stories, selection of sources, general interpretative frameworks and even use of language. Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) for example both discovered subtle framing devices in their textual analyses of news coverage in the way journalists used quotation marks. Carragee and Roefs (2004) argue that the importance of the concept of framing lies both in its inclusivity and its sense of agency. Framing identifies and describes a series of active processes including agenda setting, story selection and interpretation that shape the generation of news stories. In support of this emphasis they quote another influential summation of Entman's, 'To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman, 1993, p.515). The process of framing stories is sometimes described as a series of

discrete functions or neutral categorisations (Carragee and Roefs, 2004). But the more integrated versions of framing theory have the strong appeal of explaining how a series of apparently neutral decisions have a powerful interpretative effect *when taken together*. The selection of 'what to think about' must clearly have an important impact on the media's impact on 'what people think'. The argument is that the selection of particular aspects of a story over others in other words automatically tends towards the promotion of a causal analysis. In this developing context particular use of language can lead to implicit moral judgments and even the promotion of particular remedies (Entman, 2007; McCombs and Ghanem, 2001; Carragee and Roefs, 2004).

3.3. The protest paradigm

A number of researchers have developed the concept of a 'protest paradigm' as a series of frames that are habitually used by journalists and media organisations in coverage of protests. The idea of a specific protest paradigm was suggested by Chan and Lee's investigation of the coverage of demonstrations in Hong Kong. They identified three paradigms characteristic of different sections of the local media according to their political orientation (Chan and Lee, 1984). Other writers too have explored the different responses to protest characteristic of media from different ends of the political spectrum. In one discussion of the protest paradigm, for example, McLeod and Hertog (1999) include an examination of the response of the radical press to protest. In general, however, the protest paradigm has tended to refer to a description of the framing of protest characteristic of the mainstream media that have, according to McLeod and Detember, become codified into a 'template… for the construction of a protest story' (McLeod and Detember, 1999. p5). The protest paradigm is commonly broken down into three main framing processes. The first is the narrative structure that generates the script for the story. This narrative is very often dominated by the actual or possible violence at the protest, and the accompanying implications of criminality or deviance (Gitlin, 1980; Murdock 1981; McLeod and Hertog, 1992). The second commonly identified element in the production or reproduction of the paradigm is the heavy reliance on official sources. Routine and often uncritical reference to officialdom is widely noted in the general literature on media practice but appears especially prevalent in the case of protest reporting (Fishman, 1980; Chomsky, 1989). The use of official sources makes life relatively easy for hard-pressed journalists and provides the appearance of objectivity. Protest situations, almost by definition, involve some degree of contestation between

protesters and the authorities, and so such reliance on official sources is likely to produce stories slanted to the perspective of the power holders (McLeod and Detember, 1999). A third protest paradigm characteristic involves the invocation of public opinion through interviews, opinion polls or just by implication in ways that suggest the isolation of the protesters from the mainstream. McLeod and Hertog have suggested the practice of interviewing bystanders as 'symbolic' members of the general public is itself likely to lead to slanted coverage as bystanders who haven't joined the protest self-select as unsympathetic (McLeod and Hertog, 1992).

Other analyses emphasise different aspects of the paradigm. A number of researchers have focused on the way protest reporting tends to concentrate on the protest event rather than its underlying cause (Gitlin 1980; Halloran et al 1970; Murdock 1981). In his discussion of the coverage of the 27 October anti-Vietnam protest in Britain, Graham Murdock argues that the focus on 'the immediate form' of protest events ensures that the news ignores the underlying content of the situation and consequently tends to concentrate on personalities, violence or the possibility of violence. In their 1992 study of 'informal cues' used by journalists when covering protests, McLeod and Hertog also note the prevalent focus on the actions rather than the issues of a protest. Such an emphasis provides an impression of objectivity but actually involves avoiding any consideration of the causes of the protest event. They argue this approach is almost always detrimental to the protesters, partly once again because it tends to lead to a focus on violence or tension, but also for the simple reason that it is the issues that motivate the protesters, and reports of their actions without a consideration of the issues can make the protest appear pointless.

There have also been attempts to categorise various frames of marginalisation. In McLeod and Hertog's more recent study of the media regulation of protest groups (1999), the authors describe eight common media frames that they believe marginalise protesters. These extend from the 'violent crime story' and the 'property crime story' to the 'moral decay frame' that has been used to present protesters as part of a wider narrative of a general social malaise. Other frames identified include the 'freak show' and the 'romper room', which suggests an infantile deviance amongst participants in protest (pp.312-313). As we have seen Todd Gitlin's research into the media treatment of the New Left and the movement against the Vietnam War in the US came up with a similar list of marginalisation frames, although for historical reasons his included anti-

communist tropes as well as emphasis on internal dissension in the movement (Gitlin, 1980)).

His description of the journalistic assumptions underlying protest reportage remains relevant:

News concerns the event, not the underlying condition; the person, not the group; conflict, not consensus; the fact that advances the story, not the one that explains it. Some of this treatment descends from the norms for the coverage of deviance in general: the archetypal news story is a crime story, and an opposition movement is ordinarily, routinely, and unthinkingly treated as some sort of crime. Some of the treatment follows from organizational and technical features of news coverage that in turn are not ideologically neutral. Editors assign reporters to beats where news is routinely framed by officials; the stories then absorb the officials' definition of the situation. (Gitlin, 1980, p29)

3.4. The limits of the frame: explaining difference

Examination of the framing function of the protest paradigm offers powerful and suggestive ways of analysing the attitudes implicit in protest coverage. It is a useful way of beginning to identify some general themes that appear to be common to at least a large proportion of media protest coverage. Frame theory is, however, perhaps best understood as a method or set of methods of analysing communication rather than the basis of a comprehensive explanation of media processes. Significantly, framing theory does not help explain the differences between coverage of different protests. This points to important limitations both to the predictive power of the method and to its ability to explain the way media functions. We have noted that there is evidence of new trends in protest reporting since Seattle in 1999 and these provide a challenge to the assumptions of the paradigm. But significant differences are also evident in the way protest was covered in earlier literature. As well as common themes, it is clear from the research that there were also marked differences for example between the way the 1984-5 Miners' Strike, the women's protests at Greenham Common and the anti-Iraq war movement at its height were handled. For all the media's hostility, the Miners' Strike appeared on the TV news most nights of its duration, often as the first item (Williams, 2009). The Greenham Common protests on the other hand were largely ignored (Hollingsworth, 1986). Although there was a strong element of demonisation and a hugely disproportionate stress on violence in coverage of the British Miners' strike, the media could not dismiss the miners in the same way as the women of Greenham Common. This was partly because there was widespread support for the miners, which in turn relates to the nature of the movements. Many working class people identified with the miners'

strike as a mass movement (Williams, 2009). The women of Greenham Common had less support and could be dismissed as marginal, not just because there were relatively few of them, but also because the women involved had taken life choices that larger numbers simply couldn't (Hollingsworth, 1986).

There have clearly also been important differences in the way opposition to Britain's involvement in Suez, the Falklands and the first Gulf War and subsequent wars have been covered. Despite what some historians have called the biggest government propaganda effort up to that point since World War II, we have seen how some of the newspapers reflected and reported on the widespread opposition to the Suez adventure, in some cases favourably (Turner, 2006; Shaw, 1996). In the subsequent two wars, the media was much more uniformly supportive of the war effort and dismissive or hostile to opposition. Coverage of the anti-Iraq war movement in 2003 clearly changed quite radically during the course of the war. As we shall see, at its height, it received more coverage than any comparable protest movement. There was also a marked change between coverage of the early and the later anti-Vietnam War movement in the US. After the radicalising events of 1968, the media started to take a much less dismissive attitude at least to some sections of the anti-war movement (Hallin, 1989, p.167). The Vietnam War remains perhaps the most closely and comprehensively analysed case study into the relationship between media and protest. The classic surveys by Hallin and Gitlin both draw on an examination of changes in public and elite opinion in their analyses. Public opinion clearly impacted on media coverage of Vietnam protests. Contrary to one establishment narrative that claims that liberal anti-war sentiment in the media lost the battle of hearts and minds at home (Nixon, 1978, p.350), Hallin argues that popular opinion swung against the war before the tone of coverage changed: 'Erosion in support started in 1966 while TV was still very committed to war. Well before Tet a plurality of public of thought the war a mistake. At least by the start of 1967 a plurality disapproved of Johnson's handling of the war' (Hallin, 1989, p.168).

According to Gitlin and Hallin the changing media presentation of the Vietnam anti-war movement was partly a response to changing public opinion and partly to the consequent transformation of the movement itself. Media attitudes to the very concept of what a protester was could shift in the face of a changing movement. As one CBS report in 1968 put it, 'the word

"protester" generally evokes an image of long hair and love beads. But today the crowds that marched and chanted and cheered looked more like a cross-section picked by the census bureau' (quoted in Hallin, 1989, p.221). TV News producer Max Frankel drew out a similar point in an interview with Todd Gitlin:

> As protest moved from the left groups, the anti-war groups, into the pulpits, into the senate – with Fulbright, Gruening and others – as it became a majority opinion, it naturally picked up coverage. And then naturally the tone of the coverage changed. Because we are an establishment institution, and whenever your natural constituency changes, then naturally you will too. (Gitlin, 1980, p.162)

Elite opinion was also important in the changing attitude of the media to protest over Vietnam. Gitlin and Hallin both find that the outbreak of debate inside the establishment over Vietnam had a strong softening effect on media attitudes to protest. Connected to this of course was the fortunes of war. Here, the different roles the media plays can come into conflict. Although its role in undermining the war effort has been over-hyped, there are no doubt some of the images and even some of the analysis from the frontline eroded both elite confidence and popular optimism in the war. The debate generated will have both given succour to the protesters and in Gitlin's words, helped 'shift the media framing' of the anti-war movement' (p.163). In the real world all these factors were not separate but interrelated and they had the effect of reinforcing each other. A pivotal moment was reached when opinion changed within the media itself. According to a news writer at the time, 'Even at ABC, traditionally the most conservative network, by 1970, most of the correspondents and news executives personally opposed the war' (quoted in Hallin, 1989, p.218).

Such reactions led to counter-reactions. Gitlin charts how, as the 'normal' assumptions are more and more widely challenged and the smooth consensual functioning of the machine changes, there is more direct intervention from the top management:

> At this point, the normal routines for constructing news and reproducing hegemony became, from the point of view of the elite, unreliable... Top media managers bridled at the results of hegemonic routines; therefore, from 1968 through 1973, and especially (but not only) under pressure from the Nixon White House, they interfered more directly in the news gathering process. (Gitlin, 1980, p.274)

In the literature on framing theory there has only been a limited discussion about different responses to protests and contrasts between different framing strategies. Consequently, their wider contexts have not been systematically explored. Where comparisons have taken place and differences been noted, the focus has tended to be fairly narrowly on the level of militancy of the protests themselves. Gamson (1989) and Shoemaker (1984), for example, who both do compare different media responses to protests, concentrate on the impact of different kinds of protests on media framing. Their conclusions are not neatly compatible. Gamson stresses the way in which forms of militant action attract media coverage, and the impact of this fact on protesters' behaviour. Shoemaker emphasises the extent to which extreme views or militant tactics encourage more critical media treatment. In general, as Robert Entman suggests, frame theory, even when it attempts to anchor its analysis in social process, has a tendency to stress the power and influence of the communicators, or, more accurately the institution organising the communication (Entman, 1993). This is because frame theory tends to narrowly locate the generation of meaning and understanding within the production process of the media themselves. It does not reach out to examine either the wider forces that shape media messaging or the complex social process of the untangling of communication by 'consumers'. So Entman points out that many influential studies, including those by Zaller (1992) and Kahneman and Tversgy (1984), come to the conclusion that media framing heavily influences wider opinion on most matters of social and political interest, because 'people are not generally so well – informed and cognitively active' on these issues (Entman, 1993, p.56). One of framing theory's strengths for Entman is that it helps us identify the dominant impact of a particular text and cautions researchers not to take 'fugitive components of the message and show how they *might* be interpreted in ways that oppose the dominant meaning' (Entman, 1993, p.56). This is a crucial corrective to analyses that uncritically accept the practice of 'balance' and an invaluable pointer in the assessment of the *intentions* of a text. Entman draws useful conclusions for the practice of content analysis:

> *Often, coders simply tote up all messages they judge as positive and negative and draw conclusions about the dominant meanings. They neglect to measure the salience of elements in the text, and fail to gauge the relationships of the most salient clusters of messages – the frames – to the audience's schemata.* (Entman, 1993, p.57)

I will come back to the important implications of framing theory for content analysis. Entman also makes important points about how an analysis of news framing can unpack the way debates are contained and limited in the media. Tactical divisions amongst elites reflected or aired in the media, can give the impression of open debate while allowing the marginalisation of more radical alternative views. Entman gives the example of the run up to the US invasion of Iraq in 1991:

> *In the pre-war debate over U.S. policy toward Iraq, there was a tacit consensus among US elites not to argue for such options as negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait. The news frame included only two remedies, war now or sanctions now with war (likely) later, while problem definitions, causal analysis, and moral evaluations were homogeneous. Between the selected remedies, however, framing was contested by elites, and news coverage offered different sets of facts and evaluations. The Iraq example reveals that the power of news frames can be self-reinforcing. During the pre-war debate, any critique transcending the remedies inside the frame (war soon versus more time for sanctions) breached the bounds of acceptable discourse, hence was unlikely to influence policy.* (Entman, 1993, p.55)

There is, however, a danger here that the dominant frame of a text is automatically considered as determining the dominant popular *interpretation*. The experience of the latest Iraq War suggests that non-official interpretations of political or social events can become extremely widespread, and that precisely 'fugitive' elements of a text can help generate or sustain very influential interpretations of events that run counter to official narratives. One example might be the extent to which people believed that the invasion of Iraq was motivated by US foreign policy makers' desire to control oil supplies, a view that was only rarely aired in the mainstream media.

With its tight focus on the media machine, frame theory also tends to discount the turbulence that can be generated by external events in the normally smooth interpretative flow of information through the media. This narrowness means that, in itself, frame theory is not adequate to explain the complex ways ideas emerge and proliferate in society. It does not have the scope for example to examine the way that in certain circumstances, the public airing of tactical differences among elites can encourage the development of more fundamentally divergent perspectives in the wider population. A view of public opinion as *passively* shaped by framing also tends to exclude the possibility that public opinion can feedback and impact on the framing process in the media. It helps reinforce a static conception of the framing process that does not help us explain shifts and

changes in protest coverage. The present research and some of the literature suggests that while elements at least of the protest paradigm are very widespread in protest coverage there are a number of variables that affect the way protest is covered, including changes in media technology, public opinion, and differences and developments in elite opinion. Any attempt to improve the explanatory power of framing theory needs to locate it in a wider social context and examine the various determinants that influence the nature of the frames used in particular cases.

3.5. The sources of framing

The lack of a comparative discussion about the framing of protest is linked to the relatively limited nature of the discussion about the sources of framing in general. When considered at all, explanation of the origins of frames often focuses on the sheer complexity of outside events and the development of newsroom-based routines as a way of dealing with it. Neuman *et al.* for example invokes the work of liberal sociologist Walter Lippman in their explanation of the origins of frames, 'In seeking to make sense of the political world, both the media and the public employ simplifying cognitive frames as hooks to capture a piece of the abundant flow of confusing and conflicting information from Lipmann's "world outside"' (Neumann et al, 1992, p.60). In their summary of the literature Luther and Miller similarly explain framing as the product of the 'effort to quickly comprehend and organise news material in a systematic and efficient manner' (Luther and Miller, 2005, p.80).

The 'communicative acts' approach adopted by McLeod and Hertog is explicitly an attempt to read frames directly from the texts themselves and therefore to bypass any wider discussion about how and why norms and deviance are defined. They admit that 'the forces of social control that impinge upon the production of news (antecedent processes) and those that shape media messages are outside the bounds of analysis' (McLeod and Hertog, 1999, p.308). Carragee and Roef argue that there is a recent tendency to treat frames in isolation from sponsors or influences which marks a break with some of the early work in the development of framing theory by Tuchman (1978), and Gitlin (1980) amongst others. As they put it, the outcome is that 'more research has been devoted to frames than to framing' (Carragee and Roef, 2004, p.212). Such a passive, isolated approach tends to mean that little consideration is given to the possible ability of movements to develop counter frames or to influence output themselves. Gamson and

Wolfsfeld argue for example that in the context of protest coverage, movement and media interaction should be considered as a 'struggle over framing' (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993, p.117). Others have argued that abstracting framing from any wider social process tends to mean that little consideration is given to a complex interaction between different actors including state elites and counter movements that determine media outcomes over protest coverage (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996; Zeld, 1996). Carragee and Roefs argue that the trend towards analysing frames in isolation from the influences that structure has led to a serious diminution in the scope of the scholarship. Such analyses 'provide a theoretically and conceptually impoverished definition of framing in several ways. They reduce frames to topics, attributes and issue positions and neglect frame sponsorship and the asymmetries of power that influence the ability of sponsors to shape the news agenda' (Carragee and Roefs, 2004, p.227). For these reasons they go on to argue that an important research priority is precisely the linking of frame theory with wider questions of power relations and hegemony.

3.6. Ownership and ideology

The increasing concentration of the media, particularly the news media, in the hands of a small number of commercial companies has been a central concern of media studies for some time (see for example Lorimer *et al*., 1994; Doyle, 2002; Davies, 2008). There are a number of different ways of measuring media concentration, including calculating the distribution of revenue across particular media landscapes or simply tracking ownership diversity. But as one summary of the research evidence around the globe found, 'regardless of the methods used, research indicates increasing consolidation across all areas that make up the media industries, with many industries reaching "highly concentrated" status, indicating that the industry is dominated by a handful of firms' (Albarran, 2004). Britain is one of the countries with the highest levels of media concentration, although comparison is complicated because domestic patterns of ownership are inextricably bound up with the process of globalisation (Doyle, 2002).

Critics of this process point broadly to two areas of concern for news media. The first is the danger of the direct influence of a small number of proprietors on news content. Brian McNair's 1994 research into the functioning of the UK press bore out this anxiety, arguing that 'the economic interests and political preferences of the proprietor continue to be the most important

determinant of a news outlet's editorial line' (McNair, 1994, pp.40-2). Analysing the global media configuration, Robert McChesney (1999) is more polemical about the influence of the large corporations. He argues that 'ultimately it is politically conservative, because the media giants are significant beneficiaries of the current social structure around the world, and any upheaval in property or social relations—particularly to the extent that it reduces the power of business—is not in their interest' (p.30).

In his analysis of what he regards as the 'failed state' of the British news media, Nick Davies (2008) makes more of the structural impact of the domination of the media by mass, profit-orientated organisations. For him it is the drive towards commercial sensationalism and cost cutting imposed by the market that is the key problem:

> *Owners and advertisers are only part of the reason for ideological problems in the mass media; and ideology is only part of the total problem of the retreat from truth telling. The important point here is that, as the new owners of the mass media have shifted their priority from propaganda to commerce, that shift has introduced whole new set of obstacles for truth telling journalism. In an imaginary world, we might remove Rupert Murdoch and all his influence on all his outlets: we could replace him with Rupert Bear; the Murdoch newspapers and television stations would continue to pump out falsehood, distortion and propaganda.* (Davies, 2008, p.22)

But the true implications of these questions of ownership can only be properly assessed when we have considered the most effective theoretical approach to the conceptual problems of media power and ideology.

The meaning of ideology

The word ideology has a number of partially overlapping meanings that imply different, although sometimes complementary, conceptions of the way dominant ideas are generated in society. In *Ideology: An introduction*, Terry Eagleton identifies six different definitions of ideology and explores their underlying assumptions, progressing from the most general to the more particular. His first definition is by far the broadest, simply pointing out that the idea of ideology suggests the 'social determination' of ideas; the second concerns the notion that ideologies tend to be associated with a particular 'socially significant group or class' (p.29). These first two can probably be regarded as consensual across the spectrum of approaches to ideology. The

remaining four, because they are more concrete, are more likely to be contentious. In his third definition, Eagleton suggests that the notion of ideology implies a competition between different world views: 'Ideology can here be seen as a discursive field in which self-promoting social powers conflict and collide over questions central to the reproduction of social power as a whole' (p.29). The active and especially the competitive conception of the circulation of ideology is largely absent from at least some of the models of ideology discussed below, and it is a telling absence. As we shall see without at least some sense of the potential for different ideological conceptions emerging in society there is a danger of falling into a bleak determinism that fails to grasp the complexities of real world opinion formation.

Eagleton introduces two further complexities on the basis of this insight. First, that for ruling elites the job of ideologies cannot be seen as simply imposing ideas but of 'securing the complicity of subordinated classes and groups' (p.30). This sense of ideology as a process that may involve some partial legitimisation of the perspectives of subordinate groups is a pre-condition for understanding media function in contemporary society, and probably all societies. Once again, however, it is missing from some discussion of ideology in academia today. The implications of his next definitional point, number five, also deserves more consideration. This is the simple point that much discussion of ideology concerns the legitimation of particular ruling groups through 'distortion and dissimulation' (p.30). This is hardly a controversial observation; the pejorative sense of the most popular use of the term 'ideology' implies exactly this element of deception. But it becomes important if—like some of the writers discussed below including notably Gramsci—one conceives of consciousness as something that is formed through a complex interaction of existing ideas and active experience. In that context it implies the possibility of ideological breakdown; that in some circumstances the experience of reality can trump the power of the most well organised ideological apparatus.

The final point in Eagleton's definitional list loops back to the first and introduces the idea that ideological effects might be generated or sustained by structural aspects of society as much as by dominant (or other) groups. This is an idea that must be handled with care. As we shall see, in the case of some post-structuralist thinking, it can lead to a circular and unhelpful notion of a society so impregnated with ideology that it is hard to see from what point of view we might be

able to perceive it as ideology, let alone critique it. In other hands, however, a more nuanced linkage of the ideology of individualism with the atomising effects of commodification, has more explanatory power. Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (Lukács, 1990) helps explain the staying power of ruling ideas but also their contradictory nature and therefore their vulnerability.

The following discussion of some of the most influential accounts of the functioning of ideology, conceived in Eagleton's broad sense, will draw on elements of this multiple definition. It is surprising how often, despite the extent and the richness of the literature on the subject, discussions of ideology fall back into one or two-dimensions. The emphasis in critical media studies tends to be on the power rather than the limits of ideology. Perhaps this can be explained by fear of relapse into liberalism on the one hand and on the other the pessimism that comes from the experience of decades of the dominance of elite explanations of the world. Whatever their origins, such simplifications need to be challenged. Only those models that can deal with the kind of complexities that Eagleton suggests can have the power to explain the events under discussion.

3.7. The propaganda model

The propaganda model developed by Chomsky and Herman is one of the most influential accounts of how power relations in society influence media outputs. It remains controversial but has a made a strong mark in academia, in radical movements and in some more popular critical accounts of media function (see for example Davies, 2008; Miller and Dinan, 2008; Edwards and Cromwell, 2006). The propaganda model provides a powerful vision of a media comprehensively controlled by the elites, and at least by implication a society dominated by ruling class ideas. Its starting point is that 'the media serve the interests of state and corporate power, which are closely interlinked, framing their reporting and their analysis in a manner supportive of established privilege and limiting discussion and debate accordingly' (Chomsky, 1989, p.10). One of the great strengths of the propaganda model is that it attempts to explain media behaviour by locating it within its wider social context and in a framework of powerful interests. It examines the mechanisms by which these interests are brought to bear on the media. It is structured round the notion of a series of five 'filters' which operate at different levels and in different ways to ensure that media output generally reflects or supports the interests of the elites.

One of those involves direct outside pressure, 'government and large non-media business firms are also best positioned (and sufficiently wealthy) to be able to pressure the media with threats of withdrawal of advertising or TV licences, libel suits and other direct and indirect modes of attack' (Herman, 1996). But, importantly, it is not a theory based mainly on direct, conscious intervention, rather it identifies and stresses a series of overlapping and reinforcing mediating factors that influence media output that are a product of the fact that the media operates in a capitalist environment:

> *The crucial structural factors derive from the fact that the dominant media are embedded in the market system. They are profit-making businesses, owned by very wealthy people (PR other companies); they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit making entities, and who want their ads to appear in a supportive selling environment. The media are also dependent on government and major business firms as information sources, and both efficiency and political considerations, and frequently overlapping interests, cause a certain degree of solidarity to prevail among the government, major media, and other corporate businesses.* (Herman, 1996, p.6)

Sympathetic as well as hostile critics have questioned the model's emphasis on the media's efficiency as a purveyor of ruling class ideas. Colin Sparks (2007) has outlined the internal tensions in the media omitted by the propaganda model as part of an attempt to 'refine' the model and Des Freedman (2009) has emphasised the importance of wider social developments in the shaping of media outcomes. In its defence it has been argued that the theory carefully avoids straying into the area of media effects because of the difficulty of research in this area (Mullen, 2009). Whatever the exact parameters maintained in formal discussions of the propaganda model, there is no doubt that its adherents often tend towards a 'strong' view of the social impact of elite control of the media. Two leading US proponents of the propaganda model in the US argue for example:

> *The type of political culture that accompanies the rise of the corporate media system worldwide looks to be increasingly like that found in the United States: in the place of informed debate or political parties organizing along the full spectrum of opinion, there will be vacuous journalism and elections dominated by public relations, big money, moronic political advertising and limited debate on tangible issues. It is a world where the market and commercial values overwhelm notions of democracy and civic culture, a world where depoliticisation runs rampant, and a world where*

the wealthy few face fewer and fewer threats of political challenge. (Nichols and McChesney, 2000, p.64)

The propaganda model provides useful and suggestive accounts of the various reinforcing ways in which ruling elites try to sustain their dominance over media messaging through a series of mediating filters. It has particular relevance for the protest paradigm. There is in fact an overlap between the model's 'filters' and some of the frames shown to be characteristic of the protest paradigm. What it does not provide, though, is a way of understanding or analysing the kinds of contrasts, shifts and changes in protest coverage that we have identified. As both Sparks and Freedman show too, it tends to assume consistent and sustained top down control over output and to downplay the possibility of the emergence of dissidence in media structures. It therefore cannot predict or explain the kind of internal tensions or crisis described by Todd Gitlin at the height of the Vietnam War.

3.8. Analysing discourse: Foucault and his followers

At first sight the work of Michel Foucault appears to provide a good starting point for an examination of the fraught interface between the media, mass protest and popular opinion. Foucault emphasises the power relations concealed in all social discourse and practice, and his work has certainly had an important impact on media studies, if often through subterranean channels. It has been pointed out in particular that many of his conclusions converge with those of some of the acknowledged pioneers of the discipline, including the Frankfurt school critics of enlightenment structures of knowledge Adorno and Horkheimer (Callinicos, 1999; Ahmad, 1992). Foucault's first great book, *Madness and Civilisation*, worked at the intersection of the two disciplines of sociology and psychiatry. It explored the idea that the treatment of madness played a social role in suppressing the non-rational language of insanity 'the language of psychiatry was a monologue constructed by reason that dominated insanity' (Foucault, 1965, p.8). His work developed the basic theme of the suppression by Western forms of reason of a range of non-rational, instinctive forms of experience or ways of being including 'Orient, dreams and sexuality, the blissful world of desire' (Foucault, 1965, p.10). The exclusion and repression of 'the other' by reason was inherently damaging but also led amongst other things to a failure to grasp the power practices deeply embedded in rationality and therefore in language and civilisation itself.

Foucault's subsequent work involved a series of attempts to unmask and examine the power relations invested not so much in a particular form or phase of society, but more intimately in the fabric of the culture and discourse of human civilisation. His most enduring theme is the linkage of power with knowledge. 'There is no power-relation,' he argues, 'without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power-relations' (Foucault, 1977, p.27). Foucault's developing thinking on power diverged more and more with Marxist-based approaches that had dominated radical French intellectual life up to the 1960s. The central, empirical problem for Foucault was that 'the proletariat has been thoroughly imbued with bourgeois ideology concerning morality and legality, concerning theft and crime' (interview quoted in Wollin, 2010, p.326). Crude links between class and ideology and between state and power didn't seem to explain this situation. The conclusions were spelt out in the *History of Sexuality* (1990), 'there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix', and, 'power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations' (p.94). This localisation of power was conceived very radically:

> *Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities and dis-equilibriums which occur in the latter.* (Foucault, 1990, p.94)

If it was a challenge to the dominant Marxism of the day, Foucault's position was also partially distinct from the textual post-structuralism of Lacan and Derrida which focused uniquely on the structuring power of discourse and tended towards a sense that there was no escape from the bonds of the text (Callinicos, 1999, p.82). Such an assessment of the text's power in shaping reality was taken to its most extreme, but nevertheless logical conclusion by Jean Baudrillard, in which he denied the very existence of the 1991 Gulf War, dismissing it, as we have seen, as a virtual reality, a mere product of the media matrix (Baudrillard, 1991). Foucault in contrast, emphasised the decentralisation of power, its deep imbrication in all forms of everyday life. He

argued that power actually 'produced' human behaviour and helped constitute individual identity (Foucault, 1980, p.119).

Nevertheless, Foucault's system often threatens to collapses truth into a system of power relations in ways which cast doubt on the very existence of a comprehensible reality, in an interview transcribed in Power/knowledge he argues 'truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces it and which extend it' (Foucault, 1980, p.133). This radical dispersal of power, which invests it with alarming, prior and presumably unknowable influence, including the ability to shape truth itself, clearly helped pave the way for the fundamental questioning of reality at the heart of post-modernist thought. Such radical collapsing of the subject into power relations leads inevitably towards a crisis of social or textual criticism. As another critic, Terry Eagleton, argues, in the work of Foucault:

> *Power is not something confined to armies and parliaments: it is rather a pervasive intangible network of force which weaves itself into our slightest gestures and most intimate utterances. On this theory, to limit the idea of power to its most obvious political manifestations would itself be an ideological move, obscuring the complex diffuseness of its operations.* (Eagleton, 1991, p.7)

Others have argued that Foucault's unavoidably intangible notion of power is in danger of losing all descriptive value:

> *By dispersing power in all directions, he paradoxically risked diluting – and hence rendering unrecognisable – its core elements and components. No longer exercised by a particular group or class, power circulates amorphously through individuals before re-centring itself – but where exactly? Ultimately, the workings of power seemed vague and nebulous.* (Wollin, 2010, p.341)

The conflation of power with knowledge, discourse and social interaction does more than question conservative or leftist assumptions of the way power is transmitted in society. Taken to its logical limit Foucault's line of thought threatens to undermine one of the central projects of the study of communication, the attempt to trace the relations between power, popular opinion and the dissemination of ideas, images and ideals within society. As Habermas argues, this leads away from the effective normative function of any critical theory, the assessment of institutions,

interests and political structures against a regulative standard, in Habermas's view that of the free access to ideas and information implicit in the 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1990, p.137). At its most extreme, a breakdown in meaning is implicit in Foucault's reasoning, 'for if there are no values and beliefs not bound up with power then the term ideology threatens to expand to vanishing point. Any word which covers everything loses its cutting edge and dwindles to an empty sound' (Eagleton, 1991, p.7). Investing discourse and media with such extreme powers of illusion or deception disarms all criticism. If everything is so impregnated with ideology or power then any opposition narrative or explanation becomes impossible. Attempts to establish a truth or moral position at odds with the mainstream are regarded as naïve in the face of the thick texture of power that engulfs us all. In the words of Christopher Norris, every kind of discourse is assimilated 'to a realm of generalised 'intertextuality' where judgements of a factual or ethico-political order are viewed as so many transient configurations of the omnipresent Nietzschean will-to-power' (Norris, 1992, p.163).

Such a weakening of explanatory concepts is carried over into the work of some of Foucault's contemporary champions. What Castells celebrates as his own 'eclectic perspective on power' (Castells, 2009, p.13) ends up in his most recent work as a radical lack of focus. Very much like in Foucault, here power appears to structure and shape society without having any dynamic, logic or anchor, it is unclear who wields it and in whose interests, 'any general statement about the sources of power', he says, 'is a matter of belief rather than a toll of research' (Castells, 2009, p.430). The result is that Castell's many fascinating insights end up floating free from overall explanation. So for example his interesting discussion about partisanship and loyalty structuring behaviour more than immediate economic interests comes to a dead end because is not linked to any attempt at causal explanation (p.154). The work of Foucault and those influenced by him remain important points of reference in any consideration of the way the media relates to popular opinion. In a general sense his discussions of the way discourse itself shapes understanding have an undeniable charge. They provide an important corrective both to liberal ideas of the media as unproblematic reflections of popular debate and of crude conspiratorial notions of the media as tools of domination in the hands of the elites. But for all his suggestive identification of discourse with power, Foucault's reluctance to map the relations of power means he is not much help when it comes to investigating how media messages are

shaped and how the media responds to wider developments in society. His method is particularly exposed by the need to explain changes in the way power is articulated or expressed in the media's social messaging.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Some of the limitations of Foucault's approach to discourse have been avoided by the diverse group of academics who have been engaged for the last 25 years in what they term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fusing elements of Marxist, Foucauldian, Althusserian and Gramscian thought, but also drawing on a wide range of linguistic theory, these writers have developed a multi-disciplinary approach that allows for a range of methodologies but insists on the socially rooted nature of all discourse (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2001; Van Dijk, 1982; Toolan, 1997). They follow Foucault and others in emphasising the socially constructive nature of discourse but they are clear that this nature is 'limited' by other social realities:

> *The socially constructive effects of discourse are thus a central concern, but a distinction is drawn between construal and construction: the world is discursively construed (or represented) in many or various ways, but which construals come to have socially constructive effects depends on a range of conditions, including for instance power relations but also the properties of whatever parts or aspects of the world are being construed. We cannot transform the world in any old way we want to construe it; the world is such that some transformations are possible and others are not.* (Fairclough, 2010, p.5)

This sense of the limitations of the power of discourse is normally combined in CDA with a preoccupation with the conditions of the production of discourse and its comprehension. Given its methodological range, the terms of reference for this interest in how meaning is produced vary widely. Van Djik (1982), for example, working in the disciplines of linguistics and social psychology, has worked on the interplay of texts and meanings that accumulate in the subject's consciousness over time in such a way as to create a frame of comprehension for texts:

> *A situation model, once activated—or actually being constructed, will not only supply the necessary basis of reference and co-reference for textual expressions, but will also serve as the locus for the actual use and integration of more general knowledge needed during comprehension.* (Van Djik, 1982, p.36)

Ruth Wodak has concentrated more on the comparative, historical study of the development of discourse, particularly in the evolution of discourses of racial identity and exclusion (see for example, Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). While influenced by Foucault, her work avoids collapsing power and language into one another. For Wodak, what distinguishes CDA is precisely its location of language and the other types of communications into a wider context of power and hierarchy, which as she argues, had been missing from much of the practice of social linguistics (Wodak, 2001, p.4). Norman Fairclough develops this point by stressing the dialectical nature of the approach to CDA based on the interaction between different social elements:

> *These elements are dialectically related. That is to say, they are different elements, but not discrete, fully separate, elements. There is a sense in which each 'internalises' the others without being reducible to them. So for instance social relations in organizations clearly have a partly semiotic character, but that does not mean that we simply theorize and research social relations in the same way that we theorize and research language. They have distinct properties, and researching them gives rise to distinct disciplines. Conversely, texts are so massively 'over-determined' by other social elements that linguistic analysis of texts quickly finds itself addressing questions about social relations, social identities, institutions and so forth, but this does not mean that linguistic analysis of texts is reducible to forms of social analysis.* (Fairclough, 2012, p.455)

The multi-dimensional aspect of the work of those involved in CDA is an enduring strength. The mapping of the analysis of texts, the processes of text production, distribution and consumption and analysis of discursive events as instances of wider social practice produces some rich and penetrating work. By examining the active role played by the fields and processes within which texts are constituted, they provide a means to link power and language in a way that avoids the crudities of some ideology critique. Not only does this approach provide a suggestive non-reductive framework for qualitative research, including an understanding of how ideology is 'carried' and sustained by practices and processes within institutions, it also allows for the possibility for contradiction to emerge within and between discourses, vital for our current purposes.

Sometimes, however, despite previously mentioned caveats, it is possible to detect an overestimation of the constitutive role of discourse in CDA. Fairclough has, for instance,

recently been focusing on the 'strategic role' that discourse has played in the development of globalisation:

> *Changes in semiosis (orders of discourse) are a precondition for wider processes of social change – for example, an elaborated network of genres is a precondition for 'globalisation' if one understands the latter as including the enhancement of possibilities for 'action at a distance', and the spatial 'stretching' of relations of power. And in many cases, wider processes of social change can be seen as starting from change in discourse.* (Fairclough, 2012, p.458)

Such a claim shows Fairclough arguing for a relatively strong sense of the influence of discourse, and certainly, as we shall see, heading away from the approach of hegemony theorists who would tend to reverse the causal process and see developments in discourse as 'starting' with wider processes of social change. Whether or not such strong and controversial claims for discourse are prevalent in Critical Discourse Analysis, perhaps inescapably, their work tends to concentrate on the discursive element of the processes under examination. For all their many insights they are not concerned to explore in detail the conflicts and contradictions in the wider social world that Eagleton, for example, foregrounds in his discussion of the nature of ideology.

3.9. Hegemony theory and Marxist accounts

In their calls to integrate framing theory with a wider, nuanced and contested social context, Todd Gitlin and Carragee and Roefs have pointed to a tradition that has attempted to has used the notion of hegemony as developed by Antonio Gramsci and others as a framework for examining media function and in some cases link it with frame theory (Gitlin, 1980; Carragee and Roefs, 2004). These authors stress the need for an integration that avoids the simplifications of many theories of ideology that downplay contradiction and underestimate the extent to which ideological processes constantly have to reproduce and rebalance themselves. Gitlin explains the importance of Gramsci and hegemony theory in the following way:

> *I want an approach attuned to the particular procedures of journalism, yet sensitive to the fact that journalism exists alongside - and interlocked with - a range of other professions and institutions with ideological functions within an entire social system. I want an approach which is both structural and historical that is which can account for both regularities in journalistic procedure and product, yet which at the same time can account for historical changes in both. Such an approach should encompass not only news and its frames, but movements and their identities, goals, strategies; it*

should comprehend both news and movements as contending conveyors of ideas and images of what the world is and should be like. (Gitlin, 1980, pp.251-2)

He goes on to describe how though 'everyday frames and procedures suffice to sustain the legitimacy of the system' most of the time, 'when political crises erupt in the real world, they call into question whether the hegemonic routines, left to themselves, can go on contributing to social stability' (p.272). Gramsci's theory of hegemony is indeed concerned with how dominant ideas are shaped and propagated in fully developed capitalist societies.

Gramsci: uses and abuses

It is a commonplace that Gramsci was concerned about the role that 'civil society' can play in the maintenance of various forms of class rule. But as Elizabeth Humphrys (2014) has recently pointed out, this emphasis in the great late work *Prison Notebooks* has been taken in many different directions:

> *They have been appropriated for a seemingly incommensurate range of projects, and it seems that everyone from Eurocommunists to revolutionaries, and from radical pluralists to progressive educationalists, can locate a Gramsci that suits their particular needs.* (Humphrys, 2014, p.367)

Perhaps more often than not, Gramsci's work is interpreted as a major re-evaluation of the Marxist tradition. It is often seen as representing a break from the model of social change embodied by the Russian Revolution that dominated the Marxism of the time in favour a more gradualist approach to social change based on the patient development of hegemony through the formation of 'social' or 'historic' blocs. Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party from the time of Gramsci's imprisonment until his death in 1964, cited Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in support of his adoption of strategies of co-operation with openly bourgeois parties after the second World War in 1964 (Martin, 2002, p.4). Gramsci's work was taken up internationally in the later 1970s to support the renewed stress on the need for alliances in the socialist movement, which was at the heart of 'Eurocommunism'. In the words of Perry Anderson, 'If one political ancestry is more widely and insistently invoked than any other for the new perspectives of "Eurocommunism", it is Gramsci's' (Anderson, 1976, p.6).

Interpretations of Gramsci stressing the need for defensive alliances with sections of the establishment, long perspectives for change and an emphasis on the need for 'cultural' strategies remained influential throughout the 1980s especially in Europe. Stuart Hall, for example placed a reading of the *Prison Notebooks* at the centre of his argument for such a defensive, long-term strategy for the left after the rise of Thatcher in Britain (Hall, 1987).

Gramsci has often been taken up in the realm of cultural studies in ways that echo this political interpretation. The attraction of Gramsci for the young discipline of cultural studies was that his later work appeared to stress the political importance of ideology and culture and to restore human agency to ideological processes. Citing the *Prison Notebooks*, Raymond Williams, one of the key figures of English language cultural studies, explained that the structures of hegemony 'have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended and by the same token… they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified' (Williams, 1973, p.8). This kind of take on Gramsci has been tremendously influential in cultural studies ever since, as one assessment of the history of the discipline explains:

> *The theory of hegemony was of central importance to the development of British cultural studies…. It facilitated analysis of the ways in which subordinate groups actively resist and respond to political and economic domination. The subordinate groups needed not to be seen merely as the passive dupes of the dominant class and its ideology.* (Edgar and Sedgewick, 2005, p.165)

These types of readings of the *Prison Notebooks* often involve not only a focus on the importance of the cultural terrain in the of securing of consent in developed capitalism, but explicitly or implicitly downplay the importance of wider determinants, and especially move away from the traditional Marxist preoccupation with class struggle:

> *In the work of Hall, Hebdige and McRobbie, popular culture came to the fore… What Gramsci gave to this was the importance of consent and culture. If the fundamental Marxists saw power in terms of class-versus-class, then Gramsci gave to us a question of class alliance. The rise of cultural studies itself was based on the decline of the prominence of fundamental class-versus-class politics.* (Lash, 2007, pp.68-9)

They have not gone unchallenged. Perry Anderson famously took issue with both the political and the cultural versions of these kinds of readings in his 1976 article *The Antimonies of Antonio*

Gramsci (Anderson, 1976). Here, Anderson locates Gramsci, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, firmly within the traditions of revolutionary Marxism: 'Gramsci not merely asserted the need for proletarian revolution in classical terms; many have done that verbally since him. He fought and suffered a long agony for it. Not merely his work, but his life is incomprehensible without this vocation' (Anderson, 1976, p.72).

Anderson, however, detects a certain confusion or ambiguity in some of Gramsci's formulations. He considers that Gramsci at times overstressed the importance of civil society in modern capitalism and correspondingly overestimated the importance of the 'war of position' as against the 'war of manoeuvre' in any attempt to challenge it: 'In the labyrinth of the notebooks, Gramsci lost his way. Against his own intention, formal conclusions can be drawn from his work that lead away from revolutionary socialism' (p.72). This was, however, for Anderson, not the essential thrust of the *Prison Notebooks*, it was rather that 'the conditions of Gramsci's composition in prison producing a non-unitary, fragmentary theory, which inherently allowed discrepancies and incoherencies in it (p.72).

Other critics of the Eurocommunist and culturalist interpretations of Gramsci have been more robust in the defence of Gramsci's positions. Peter Thomas (2009), for example, points out that Gramsci never maintained that the generation of consent operated as an antimony to coercion, rather, that he stressed the interdependency of coercive and consensual mechanisms of rule. Thomas particularly defends the coherence and relevance of Gramsci's model in which 'the state is an entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those it rules' (p.138). Thomas argues that in doing this he was building on Hegel's conception of civil society as an element or a 'moment' of the state. In another concise summary of Hegel's concept, also cited by Thomas, 'Civil society is the modern State conceived as a system of public authorities and autonomous bodies existing to further the private interests of individuals or their more or less organised groups, to protect their legal rights as persons, property, contract and so on, and to reinforce their mutual obligations' (Pelcyzynski, 1984, p.10).

Anderson's contention that a close textual reading of the notebooks reveals moments of ambiguity is hard to dispute. Whether or not these uncertainties point to more profound theoretical confusions is a more difficult judgement. The vital point in this context is that in much of Gramsci's argument 'hegemony' and 'domination' are both crucial elements in any class's accession to and maintenance of power:

> *Even before attaining power a class can (and must) lead; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but continues to lead as well (….) there can and must be a 'political hegemony' even before going to government, and one should not count solely on the power and material force which such a position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony.* (Gramsci, 2011, Vol. 1, p.44)

Consent and contradiction

Gramsci drew out the historical mechanisms through which civil society, far from being a neutral terrain, was structured to reinforce the project for the hegemony of the ruling group, 'the state has and demands consent, but it also "educates" this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations; these, however, are private organisms, left to the private initiative of the ruling class' (Vol. 1, p.153). State and civil society, consent and repression, therefore reinforce each other in combinations that depend on the political situation:

> *The theoreticians – philosophers, journalists, political parties, etc. contribute to the formal part of this process while the mass movements contribute to the substantive part through reciprocal actions and reactions, through 'preventative' actions before a phenomenon become dangerous, and through repressions when the preventions have been unsuccessful, late or ineffective.* (Gramsci, 2011, Vol. 1, p.155)

The central concern of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* was to explain the resilience of ruling hegemony in advanced capitalist countries as he himself had experienced it through the years of crisis after the World War 1. Of France's recent history, for example, he notes:

> *Bourgeois hegemony is very strong and has many reserves. The intellectuals are very concentrated (Academy, University, great Parisian newspapers and periodicals) and, although very numerous, they are very disciplined at the centre of culture. The military and civil bureaucracy has a great tradition and has attained a great homogeneity.* (Gramsci, 2011, Vol. 1, p.157)

Nevertheless, as Gitlin suggests, Gramsci's preoccupation with the interconnection of the autonomous elements of civil and political society was also the key to his understanding the 'limits to hegemony' that emerged in certain circumstances. The roles of the different elements of the 'integral state' normally complement each other but also have the potential to move into contradiction:

> *The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations – which therefore in certain situations are artificially multiplied…. In the period following the World War, cracks opened up everywhere in the hegemonic apparatus, and the exercise of hegemony became permanently difficult and aleatory.* (Gramsci, 2011, Vol. 1. p.149)

Such an understanding of the importance of contradictory pressures on the emergence of ideas is also apparent in the Gramscian notion of 'contradictory consciousness' and the distinction he made between 'common sense', by which he meant dominant ideas received uncritically from the past, and 'good sense', the actively formulated conceptions of a group that has become aware of its real place in wider society (Gramsci, 1971, p.324). Gramsci understood these concepts historically and materially, 'what must be explained is how it happens that in all periods there co-exist many systems and currents of philosophical thought, how these currents are born, how they are diffused, and why in the process of diffusion they fracture along certain lines and in certain directions' (p.327).

The aim of philosophy for Gramsci was the 'superseding' of common sense by good sense, but this coming to consciousness must itself be seen as part of a wider process:

> *Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies', from opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one. Even the unity of theory and practice is not therefore a matter of mechanical fact, but a part of the historical process.* (Gramsci 1971, p.333)

Gramsci and Lukács

Gramsci's analysis of contradictory consciousness and his conception of how it can be overcome tend to operate on the level of the institutions. His focus is very much on the way struggle and ideas are mediated in society. A few years before he began the *Prison Notebooks*, and unbeknown to him, another Marxist, Georg Lukacs, was also writing at length on problems of ideology and consciousness. Lukacs central work from the 1920s, the essays collected as *History and Class Consciousness* examines some of the same questions as the Prison Notebooks but in a different register (Lukács, 1990). Lukacs too is interested in the way in which working people much of the time internalise the ideas of the dominant class. Much more than Gramsci however, he understood this phenomenon as a product of the alienating economic processes at the very heart of capitalism:

> *Neither objectively nor in relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not.* (Lukács, 1990, p.89)

This powerlessness is ultimately a product of the fact that the laws of commodity production have penetrated in to every aspect of capitalist society:

> *The atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society; that for the first time in history the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified economic laws.* (Lukács, 1990, pp.91-92)

The radical negation of individual will that is involved in this process is for Lukacs double edged, 'in every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed by the immediacy of his existence' (Lukács, 1990, pp.165-166). People can react in two ways to this discovery. It can confirm in them a sense of fatalism - the inevitability of market relations and notions, the immutability of reality – or it can foment a sense of rebellion against that same reality. He arrives

at a concept similar to that of Gramsci's contradictory consciousness by a different route, but the idea is similar. For Lukács too, the way the consciousness develops in concrete situations depends partly on the context, Economic crisis can for example lay bare the essence of the economic system:

> *The further the economic crisis of capitalism advances the more clearly this unity in the economic process becomes comprehensible in practice. It was there, of course, in so-called periods of normality, too, and was therefore visible from the class standpoint of the proletariat, but the gap between appearance and ultimate reality was too great for that unity to have any practical consequences for proletarian action. ... In periods of crisis the position is quite different. The unity of the economic process now moves within reach…. For even if the particular symptoms of crisis appear separately (according to country, branch of industry, in the form of 'economic' or 'political' crisis, etc.), and even if in consequence the reflex of the crisis is fragmented in the immediate psychological consciousness of the workers, it is still possible and necessary to advance beyond this consciousness. And this is instinctively felt to be a necessity by larger and larger sections of the proletariat.*
> (Lukács, 1990, p.75)

As the last part of this quote suggests, as well as the emergence of objective conflicts and contradictions, for Lukács the development of a critical consciousness also depends on other factors, including institutional ones. Like Gramsci, Lukács foregrounds the importance of action, or praxis, as he sometimes calls it, in the emergence of coherent critical thought. But movements and institutions are necessary to focus action and make it practical, 'in so far as the principal of praxis is the prescription for changing reality. It must be linked to the concrete substratum of action if it is to impinge upon it to any effect' (p.126).

There are differences of emphasis. *History and Class Consciousness* often reflects the revolutionary optimism of the early 1920s, while Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are a response to the setbacks suffered by the revolutionary movements that began some years before he was imprisoned. All the same, both authors were at pains to analyse the two-sided nature of consciousness under capitalism and the complex ways in which the system can foster both illusion and illumination. *History and Class Consciousness*, with its focus on the structuring principles of commodity production, can perhaps be seen as providing a wider explanatory framework within which the *Prison Notebook's* examination of the struggle for hegemony can be better understood. But both are concerned to find the mechanisms by which ideas can be brought

into line with effective action and in the process both of them examine the complex interplay between class structures, experience and mediating institutions that shape the way we comprehend the world.

Complemented by Lukács' account of the commodification of consciousness, Gramsci's later work thus provides us with the basis for an understanding of the development of ideas in society that goes well beyond the simplicities of the propaganda model without succumbing to the indeterminacy of much discourse theory with its uncertainties about the locus of power. Power is not seen as simply imposed, but nor is the manufacture of consent ever complete. Events themselves, and the inevitable co-existence of different 'systems and currents of philosophical thought' periodically open up the possibility of different conceptions of reality emerging 'occasionally and in flashes' (Gramsci, 1971, p.327).

This complex approach to understanding the way that ideas are shaped have a particular relevance to the study of the media. The stress on contradiction in Gramsci's account has been taken up within media studies. Mike Wayne has recently pointed out how the War on Terror, intended as an assertion of US state power, has helped to generate popular cynicism about the American ruling elite. He argues that the fact that George Bush's cabinet was virtually an executive committee of the energy and defence industries was a source of a considerable crisis of legitimacy for his government (Wayne, 2003, p.98). As he argues:

> *The political crisis of liberal democracy stems logically enough from the growing evidence that the agenda is set before and after and outside the electoral process. Whether the state can afford to leak this kind of legitimacy and what impact this might have on media policy and on the conduct of current institutional regulators remain open questions*. (Wayne, 2003, p.117)

Drawing on the work of both Gramsci and Georg Lukács amongst others, Wayne goes on to point up a number of contradictions and tensions that can undermine the smooth production of ideology within the media. In particular he examines the contradictory role of the intelligentsia under capitalism. On the one hand he stresses the extent to which they are integrated into the system and share many of the values of the elites for whom they work. He explains their role as essentially to propagate the ideas and attitudes of the elites to a wider audience in accessible

terms. But concerned as they are with ideas, with questions of truth and accuracy, they cannot do this is in a streamlined and unproblematic way:

> *One way in which intellectuals have attempted to explain their social role has been to depoliticise what it means to be elaborators and disseminators of ideas. This involves uncoupling knowledge production from vested social interests, defining professionalism as rising above the social conflict between capital and labour and instead promoting 'objectivity' and 'rationality' as the very essence of what it is intellectuals do. Nevertheless, it is also true that while the ideology of 'objectivity, has, under the guise of working for all humanity, justified their role to capitalists, it has also inevitably led the intellectuals into conflict with their employers as and when the irrationality and partiality of capital has become too acute to ignore.*
> (Wayne, 2003, p.24)

Todd Gitlin's research into the crisis generated by the Vietnam War explores precisely what happens abnormal events challenge the 'normal' role of intellectual workers in the media:

> *Because the idea of "objectivity" and the standards of "newsworthiness" are loose, the hegemonic routines of news coverage are vulnerable to the demands of oppositional and deviant groups. Through the everyday workings of journalism, large-scale social conflict is imported into the news institution and reproduced there: reproduced however, in terms derived from the dominant ideology. Discrepant statements about reality are acknowledged – but softened, blurred, fragmented, domesticated at the same time. That is the vulnerability of the news system is not neutrality.* (Gitlin, 1980, p.270)

These kinds of complex explorations of hegemonic relations in society have the potential both to explain the prevalence of the framing devices characteristic of the protest paradigm but also the variations in protest coverage. By placing the media within a wider set of contested power relations they can help begin to explain both the durability of the protest paradigm and the way it can be modified. The frames of the protest paradigm will provide an essential research tool in investigating the assumptions implicit or explicit in coverage of the Iraq War protests. The theory of hegemony will be invaluable in creating an explanatory framework.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Research outlines

The research programme was conceived to establish the news media's attitude to a series of anti-Iraq War protests. Its central aim is to generate data that could allow comparison between the coverage of Iraq protests with the findings of previous research into how the media handles protest. But it also had to go beyond simple comparison and lay the basis for an attempt to explain differences, to try and draw out why the protest paradigm was at least strained if not stretched to breaking point during the events under discussion. This involves as detailed as possible examination of the coverage including charting the nature of any changes in the coverage over time and gathering clues to why such changes happened. It involves looking at the coverage itself to see if it provides evidence that particular events in the war, official politics or the protest movement altered journalistic perceptions. It also had to build in a chance to step back and examine the record of the coverage of the protests alongside the wider histories of the war, domestic politics and the ebb and flow of the protests. The core of the research is based on a content analysis of newspaper and television coverage of a selection of anti-war demonstrations between 2002 and 2005. The content analysis is supplemented by procedures suggested by frame theory, including carefully modulated textual interpretation. This is because in order to establish the attitude to demonstration expressed by various news pieces, straightforward content analysis is too blunt an instrument. As one critic of content analysis has pointed out, 'It is not the significance of repetition that is important but the repetition of significance' (Sumner 1979, p.69). In other words, mere quantitative procedures are not enough to analyse the creation of meaning. Issues of context and prominence in a text all have to be taken into account in order to gauge its significance.

4.2. Content, framing and the text

Such a structural method of analysis is proposed by another critic of content analysis, who concludes, 'Above all there is no reason to assume that the item which recurs most frequently is the most important or the most significant, for a text is clearly, a *structured* whole, and the place occupied by the different elements is more important than the number of times they recur' (Burgelin, 1972, p.319). The recording of the number of column inches or minutes of footage of

coverage, for example, can be useful when combined with a series of other assessments, but in itself tells us nothing about the approach a particular news item is taking. A long report can be unfavourable, and a short report can be very supportive in its attitude to protest. The use of various selected keywords can also help indicate judgements implicit or explicit in coverage, but they need to be placed in a context. Even this kind of structural analysis is best supplemented by a closer engagement with the flow of meaning in a text. Throughout the process of coding the data I have been careful to note particular stories or elements of stories that have struck me as important in the development of new frames, as particularly typical of common framing devices or as especially insightful into the kind of issues being addressed. Clearly such readings carry with them the danger of arbitrary or even loaded judgements, but such dangers can be limited by the readings being closely matched to the statistical results.

Similarly, it is important to record the types of actors interviewed, quoted or just mentioned in coverage of protest. Such a calculation is one way to help gauge the impact of the movement on media coverage. It helps to measure the extent to which protesters' messages penetrate the media, and give one indication of the general attitude of media practitioners towards those protesting. But tallying up the number of actors quoted from different categories can only take us so far. As Hansen argues in a study of media coverage of environmental protesters, to establish the weight accorded to different categories of actor it is necessary to take into account the web of assumptions that surround different appearances:

> *An example of the importance of this comes from research on media coverage of environmental issues, where content analysis of actors and sources have indicated that when environmental pressure groups appear as primary definers, they do so through the forum of "demonstration or public protest action" – a forum which carries considerably less legitimacy in Western democracies, than the forum of "formal political activity/Parliament" or the forum of "Science".* (Hansen, 1993, p.110)

It is not just that crude content analysis gives us too little information to draw conclusions about the stance taken. It can, in fact, lead to wrong conclusions. As Entman argues, 'unguided by a framing paradigm, content analysis may often yield data that misrepresent the media messages that most audience members are actually picking up' (Entman, 1993, p.57). In my own research it is clear that the recording of the same type participants on a demonstration can have a different

charge or significance in different contexts. More recent research into the media coverage of the Iraq War itself tends to confirm the need for a combination of quantitative and qualitative analytical methods in assessing the impact of coverage. We have seen, for example, how Robinson *et al*. point out that in at least two of the major studies of Iraq War coverage, by Tumber and Palmer (2004) and Aday, Livingstone and Herbert (2005), the categories used to 'measure' output were too broad or unrefined to provide properly illuminating results. Tumber and Palmer conclude that coverage of the war was largely negative or critical, but they make no distinction between in principle and tactical criticism. The category of negative mentions of the activities of coalition partners thus includes at least two fundamentally different approaches to the subject under discussion (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.21). Robinson *et al*.'s much more nuanced analytical approach allows them to make more valuable assessments on just this question:

> *In keeping with the theoretical distinction between procedural and substantive-level criticism, journalists showed far greater willingness to criticise tactical matters concerning the coalition's humanitarian performance than the substantive claims about its humanitarian intention.* (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.110)

Another conclusion of the study highlights some other limitations of quantitative content analysis. In the study they analyse the explanatory power of the 'indexing hypothesis' for their data. This hypothesis proposes that the arguably increased use of government and official sources in news-gathering has been an important factor in securing pro elite media news coverage. If proven, such a claim would suggest a close correlation between frequency of official sources used and levels of support for elite positions. But while Robinson *et al*. found evidence that official sources and government media operations 'played a significant role in shaping media coverage of the war' (p.165), they were cautious of drawing conclusions about direct cause and effect:

> *Although we found an association between official sources and supportive coverage, we also found that every news media outlet surveyed relied on official sources to a substantial degree, even though some of them produced significant levels of negotiated and oppositional reporting.* (p.165)

Thus although a content analysis of different sources used and actors quoted has some value, it cannot in itself be used a measurement of the attitude of a particular piece of reporting.

Attempting to establish the frames that shape the coverage is also important to give the work comparative value. As we have seen, much of the research into protest coverage has sought to identify the frames through which the media interpret protest events. The aim of the research is to collect enough information from each new item to allow us by a process of aggregating or cross-checking the information to make a reasonable assessment about the significance or framing at work within the piece. This will involve recording some relatively 'objective' information such as length and position within output, but also making some rather more subjective judgements about the subject of a piece, and the various themes contained within it. Establishing key themes clearly involves textual analysis. These details taken together will allow me to make an assessment of the key frames that shape each news item and to determine its overall attitude to protest. The approach bears comparison to that used by Murray *et al*. in their research into the media and the Iraq War, which in turn draws on some of Hallin's work on US media and the Vietnam War (Hallin, 1986; Murray et al, 2008). Murray *et al*. examined the prominence of protest in war coverage, the bias used and the difference between treatment of elite and grassroots dissent (Murray *et al*., 2008, p.11). As well as recording different story subjects and listing the different participants reported, they allocated a 'tone code' to subjects and actors. 'The tone code used would ultimately depend on how subjects were framed in the story. Thus while public protest is potentially damaging for war leaders, it could play either way depending on its treatment in each report' (Murray *et al*., 1993, p.12). Murray *et al*.'s research aimed to establish the extent to which the protest movement as a whole was able to influence of have an impact on the media's general approach to the war. My research focuses specifically on the way the media actively relates to and interprets protest itself.

4.3. The sample

The research falls into two parts. The first is an examination of the coverage of four episodes in the movement against the war in Iraq: the first of the large anti-war demonstrations on 28 September 2002; the two million-strong demonstration of 15 February 2003; the demonstration protesting the visit by George Bush on 20 November 2003; and the demonstration on the second anniversary of the war on 19 March 2005. The second part of the research is a series of interviews with relevant media personnel to investigate how these events were handled. These particular protests were chosen to develop an analysis of the coverage of the demonstrations in

the widest possible range of contexts. The demonstrations took place at different stages in the war and occupation, before and after the decision had been made to go to war, during the official conflict and during the subsequent occupation. The other main variables were the state of public opinion, the progress of the war/occupation, the extent of disagreement amongst the elites, and the size of the demonstrations. The 2002 demonstration was a large event estimated to have involved more than 150,000 by the police and between 300,000 and 450,000 people by the organisers. It took place before the war when opinion was overwhelmingly against action without a UN resolution, but the decision to go to war had not yet been taken. There were divisions within the political elites but still some uncertainty partly because the position of the United Nations on an invasion was far from clear. The demonstration on 15 February 2003 was the largest demonstration, with most subsequent estimates of participation ranging from one to two million (Verhulst, 2010, p.17). It took place before the war. An ICM tracker poll commissioned by the *Guardian* found 45-49 percent were against an invasion and 36-38 percent in favour. There was an open split in the establishment with the Liberal Democrats opposing the war and a small but significant minority of Labour figures speaking out publicly against it.

The third demonstration in November 2003 attracted an estimated 2-300,000 people and took place after George Bush's declaration of victory and when opinion was still narrowly in favour of the operation (45 percent in favour with 37 percent against according to the *Guardian*/ICM tracker). The divisions among the elites had been reduced or contained. The Liberal Democrats had withdrawn opposition after the war started and, despite the significant back bench rebellion in March, few Labour Party figures beyond a small group of left wingers had spoken out against the war. The pretext for this demonstration was the visit of George Bush to London. This may have had a significant impact on the scale of the demonstration and on the nature of the coverage, which presented the demonstration as more confrontational than any other. The final demonstration under consideration took place in March 2005, well into the period of occupation. By this time public opinion in Britain had once more turned against the war (the *Guardian*/ICM tracker poll at the time found 55 percent against British involvement and 33 percent who believed the occupation was improving the situation in Iraq). But the demonstration was of a smaller size with the organisers estimating that 100,000 attended. There were marginally more political and significantly more military figures publicly criticising the war at the time.

4.4. Selection of media

The research involves a content analysis of the coverage of the protests from four days before each event until two days after the events. This is because there is significantly more coverage of the demonstrations in advance than after they have taken place. In fact, there appears normally to be no significant coverage of the demonstrations after 48 hours has elapsed. The research examines a selection of the relevant output on BBC One – all items concerning the protests on the main 10 o'clock bulletin – and all articles and features that mention any protest in the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph,* the *Sun* and the *News of The World,* the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Mirror* and the *Guardian* and *Observer.* This selection allows an examination of broadcast, tabloid and broadsheet print media across the political range. Whereas the BBC was formally neutral, the *Sun,* the *News of The World*, the *Telegraph* and the *Sunday Telegraph* were pro-war, while the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Mirror* were anti-war until Spring 2003. The *Guardian* carried a wide range of opinion but was in its editorial line more critical of the war than supportive until the invasion began, at which time the paper moved to a more supportive position. All stories, commentary and features in the media outlets chosen which referred to the anti-war protest either in picture or writing were part of the sample. The newspaper sample was coded from photocopies of the actual newspapers themselves. Extracting the newspaper stories from copies of the actual papers allowed me to get a sense of the context in which the story was placed on the page. Seeing the juxtaposition of text with photographs is important. The full impact and significance of the 'demonstration supplements' run by a number of papers – essentially photo essays – could only be grasped by looking at the copies or film of the print editions. More broadly, it was useful to get an idea of the material that dominated the pages around the story. This proved helpful not just for judging the status accorded to particular stories, but also, from time to time, in sensing how reports fitted into a wider news narrative. It provided the opportunity, for example, to grasp the importance of the stories about the Iraq Dossier, which tended to dominate the news in the days before the demonstration in September 2002. It was also instructive to understand how events at the United Nations, which deepened and dramatised Bush and Blair's international isolation, dominated the news agenda in the days before the February 2003 demonstration.

4.5. Coding

A range of analytical categories was chosen, designed to assess each piece in as many dimensions as possible. These include the extent and positioning of the coverage and its main subject, the main themes in each piece and the main participants who are mentioned. It also includes the different types of people who are quoted or interviewed in every story that refers to the protests. Taken together, this information, combined with a record of headlines, journalists and presenters could establish each piece's overall attitude to the movement and its main 'framing ideas'.

Actors

Although an analysis of sources used and actors interviewed or quoted cannot be decisive in determining the attitude of a news item, it does provide certain pointers. In our context in particular it helps us establish the extent to which protesters or protest organisers are being regarded as legitimate participants in a national debate. It also provides some indication as to whether media outlets are considering the issues motivating the protests as opposed to simply treating the protest as an unexplained or even aberrant 'event', an approach widely reported as part of the 'protest paradigm'. All participants in all stories that mention protests are included in order to help establish the context in which protests are reported. They are grouped into nine categories in order to make distinctions between 'experts' and politicians (pro and anti-war), celebrities and other spokespeople within the movement, and protesters and 'ordinary people' both pro and anti-war.

Subjects

Every story that mentions one of the demonstrations is coded according to main subject. This, combined with a record of the length of the piece, allows us first to quantify the amount of coverage dedicated to the particular demonstration by aggregating stories whose main subject is the demonstration itself. Secondly, for other stories it allows us to begin to gauge the context in which the protests are presented. The subject categories were not pre chosen, but established in practice during the coding of the first two demonstrations.

Frames

Each story is also coded for main 'frames'. As argued, the framing of the news item is likely to be decisive textual factor in determining the impact of a particular piece of news reportage. Categorising news items according to 'frame' means making judgements about the key narratives, questions or assumptions that are used to shape a news item. News stories or reports tend to be lend themselves to frame analysis for a number of reasons. First, they tend to be short and therefore to contain no more than two or three key narrative or framing elements. The fact they are written or presented for popular and immediate consumption reinforces the need for a few clear and simple framing ideas. The immediacy and fast turnover of news production also biases towards simple, shared and perhaps sustained narrative approaches. For all these reasons framing ideas are fairly easily identifiable. A loose selection of framing ideas were pre-selected in line with the findings of previous research on protest coverage and with the salient elements of the protest paradigm in mind. But obviously the most common framing ideas could only be established through the research itself, and so the categories emerged during the process of the analysis of itself. The description of framing ideas was limited to one to four words in order to produce data sufficiently concise to be comparable. I have allowed for up to three dominant themes in each piece partly simply because one item can contain multiple narratives or themes but also because it is possible for a piece to be arranged around frames which actually appear to lead towards different attitudes to the event. So, for example, while the dominant theme in the *News of the World* editorial on September 29 2002 is 'extremist participation' a subsidiary theme is 'size/large'.

Attitude

An attempt is made to grade the overall attitude of the each piece to the protest according to four categories, 'promotional', 'favourable', 'neutral' or 'unfavourable'. The category 'promotional' was added because in a few cases some news outlets went beyond simply making a judgement on the demonstrations and started trying to consciously persuade readers to participate in demonstrations. This obviously marks an important development whose significance needs to be assessed above and beyond the normal matter of journalistic attitude. This is, of course, the most subjective element of the process of analysis. The key element in making this judgement is assessing the attitude of the reporter or the journalist towards the events and actors involved,

what Robinson et al call a 'reporter approach' (2010, p.51). In most cases where there was no judgement implied in the text or the script, the item was judged neutral. Other factors have been taken into account, however. The balance of pro or anti-war commentators and the kind of comments they are allowed to make cannot be regarded as an accidental element of a piece. They both shape the piece as a whole and suggest something about the intentions of those involved in the items production and therefore must be included in an assessment of the items overall 'attitude'. Coding TV reports clearly presents some particular issues. TV news operates in more dimensions than the newspapers. The length and prominence of the report remain important but any qualitative judgement about framing or attitude has to take into account the impact of the visual setting, the illustrative news footage used and the tone of the reporter or presenter. The context, too, in which a TV news piece is presented also, tends to have a stronger framing effect than that of newspapers. These multi-layered framing mechanisms were taken into account as much as possible during coding. For example, the fact that, as we shall see, one of the BBC reports in advance of the 20 November demonstration was introduced from Scotland Yard's security centre contributed to the sense that the overall attitude of the piece to the demonstration was unfavourable (BBC News, 18 November 2003). The fact that, on the other hand, journalists were embedded with the protesters in a number of pieces undoubtedly made a difference to the overall tone. Despite some editorial criticism of the demonstration on 15 February on the BBC, for example, a story in which the journalist spends the day with protesters is undoubtedly flavoured by the demonstrators' constant presence (BBC News, 15 February 2003).

4.6. Problems, pitfalls and solutions

Clearly these assessments involve a series of subjective or interpretative judgements as well as more objective measurements. A strong emphasis was placed on consistency of coding. But it is best to accept at the outset that an analysis of discourse will form part of the more subjective judgements such as 'overall attitude to the movement', themes and 'dominant frames'. As Robert Entman argues in his examination of frame theory, 'The major task of establishing textual meaning should be to identify and describe frames' (Entman, 1993, p.57). His argument is that merely quantitative content analyses fail to produce an analysis of meaning because by separating form and content they fail to 'measure the salience of elements in the text, and fail to gauge the relationships of the most salient clusters of messages – the frames – to the audience's

schemata' (p.57). Any final assessment of the meaning of a text must involve assumptions about the ideas of those on the consuming end. Even an examination of a text's producer's intentions implies some idea of what they consider to be their audience's opinions. But gauging the relationship of messages to the 'audience's schemata' is a notoriously difficult and perilous exercise which can only be seriously attempted after the initial research has been completed. What I am attempting here is rather to grasp the nature of the active framing process as engaged in by the producers. In other words, I attempt to analyse the output in order to try and understand the assumptions and attitudes towards the movement at particular times of those who shaped the coverage. Differences with previous protest coverage, or changes in the nature of the coverage under consideration can then open up an investigation into the different pressures that may have come into play.

Identifying themes and judging the relative salience of different elements within a news item are both crucial to any attempt to understand how it is framed. Both tasks involve making judgements about meanings and their hierarchy within a news piece. We shouldn't however exaggerate the difficulties of making judgements about frames and overall attitude. There are several fairly simple clues that can help to cross check judgements. In newspapers, the headline normally serves as a summary of the approach of the piece. For example, the headline on a piece in the *Daily Mirror* on the morning of the first demonstration I am examining was 'March for Democracy' (Pilger, 2002). Before reading the text, one can reasonably assume it constituted favourable coverage. The editorial in the *News of the World* the next day concerning the protest was headed 'Stand firm Tony'. Given that Tony Blair's war policies were the central focus of the demonstration, the suspicion must be that this editorial constituted a negative assessment of the demonstration. The length of the pieces and their position within the paper or the bulletin are also important. So too is the number of different types of people, whose participation in the movement they mention or whose opinions they seek. For example, the *Mirror* piece mentions anti-war MPs and anti-war celebrities as participants in the movement and interviews anti-war MPs, anti-war celebrities and anti-war non-movement experts. The *News of the World* editorial on the other hand only mentions anti-war MPs and a 'rag bag of hard line lefties'. These factors all help to arrive at the judgement that the piece in the *Daily Mirror* is actually promoting the demonstration and that its dominant frames are 'the importance of the demonstration' and 'why

war on Iraq would be wrong'. They help confirm the opinion drawn from a textual analysis that the attitude of the *News of The World* editorial towards the protests was unfavourable and that one of its dominant frames was 'extremist participation'.

There are two crucial general safeguards in the collection of the raw data through the coding of coverage. The first is the importance of establishing a consistent pattern of coding criteria that allow the generation of usable data without 'flattening' the meaning of each article or new piece. For example, I have a separate category for main subject and dominant frames. Built into the description of the frames is some sense not just of the subject matter but also of judgements being actively made. For example, while 'size of demonstration' might adequately describe the subject matter of a piece, a theme concerning the demonstration would be described as 'size/large' or 'size/small'. The second safeguard is to establish as many cross checks as possible. It is important to stress that while the ordering of a piece and the number of column inches or seconds of picture shown are important indicators of subject and of dominant frames, and attitude, they are not conclusive. The language used, the shape of the argument, the headline, the number of different points raised and the participants mentioned must all be taken into account when judging the themes or attitudes of a news item or comment piece. A *News of the World* editorial the day after the first demonstration under consideration, for example, starts with recognition that a large demonstration had taken place (*News of the World*, 30 November 2002). However, the fact that the figure ('tens of thousands') suggests a demonstration smaller than that suggested by the police's estimate (150,000), the nature of the headline, the fact that the piece contains a justification for war and a denigration of the participants all leads to the conclusion that though 'size/large' is a theme in the piece, the dominant frame is a negative one: extremist participation' and the overall attitude to the demonstration is unfavourable.

4.7. The interviews

The second part of the research involved conducting a series of interviews with media workers and leaders of the anti-war movement who had close engagement with the media at the time. As much as possible I selected interviewees who had some involvement in reporting on the protests, but I also wanted to interview a cross section of participants who could give insight into the operation of the media in different sectors and at different levels. There were a number of aims.

The first was to establish a sense of the normal editorial processes in the different media institutions, and the second was to assess whether they had changed during the period concerned. Third, I wanted to gauge whether there was a widespread anti-war opinion and mood inside media institutions, and finally, whether there was an unusual amount of discussion or controversy amongst workers or between workers and management around the issue of the war. The interviews were also planned to establish whether any of this had had an impact on the coverage. Todd Gitlin shows that at the height of about a breakdown of consensus on the war management in some outlets took matters into their own hands and openly impose their line. The interviews were important in trying to discover whether there was any similar sense in which the normal internal functioning of media had been modified by the existence of a political and social crisis. In practice securing a broad and wide-ranging set of interviews proved more problematic than expected. A number of key journalists from the target titles did agree to be interviewed including senior commentators and editorial staff on the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Observer*. I also secured interviews with key figures at the *Spectator* and the *Daily Express* at the time. Some staff at more junior levels of the BBC also agreed to interviews although one of them insisted on anonymity and more senior staff declined the offer (see Appendix 1). Meanwhile, senior management figures in the various outlets under scrutiny also turned down offers to be interviewed and despite a number of approaches no-one from the *Sun* or the *News of the World* would agree to an interview. One journalist at the *News of The World* who considered meeting eventually pulled out. He cited the current troubles at his workplace caused by the phone-hacking scandal and said that he would not be in a position to speak frankly.

It therefore proved hard to achieve a balance of interviewees across the political spectrum of the media and my sample did not provide me with the opportunity to question senior management about the role they played in the events under consideration. To make matters worse, a number of the interviewees who were willing to answer questions expressed reluctance to talk about specific events that had taken place at their own places of work during the period in question. If my sample was not as representative as I would have liked, many of the interviewees were knowledgeable and opinionated on the subject. A number of them provided not just accounts of events at the time but theories and analyses about how the media relates to other institutions in society that were not just thought provoking in themselves but gave an insight into opinion

within the media. Most of my interviews were deliberately recorded in the second half of my research programme, as the aim of the interviews was to attempt to discover the dynamics that led to the kind of media behaviour that my research was identifying, and my line of questioning depended on my research results. Each of the interviewees working in the media was asked a simple series of similar questions designed to draw them into the fullest possible discussion. First, what their role was within the process of the production of news and commentary; second, what they felt the media's attitude to the anti-war movement had been; and third, how they would explain that attitude. In order to encourage participants to make broader observations they were also asked whether they felt the war and the protests against it had created a crisis for the media and the wider establishment. The interviewees from the anti-war movement who had been in contact with the media from the outside were asked what their experience of the media had been. What that experience suggested to them about the media's attitude to the protests and once again how they would explain this attitude. They too were asked about their views on the wider impact of the anti-war movement on the media and politics. While the two groups of interviews were similarly structured, having asked the set questions, I encouraged interviewees to give their opinions on particular specialisms or preoccupations. The political journalists amongst the interviewees were unsurprisingly keen to comment on the big political questions thrown up by the war and the opposition to it, but it was notable that all of the media staffers were more than happy to give their views on the wider questions of media function, editorial control and so forth.

Chapter 5: Contexts

5.1. Why background matters

We established in Chapter 2 that the media's changing response to the anti-war movement will undoubtedly have a range of determinants. Clearly the size, make up and attitude of the demonstrations will be amongst them. The state of public opinion on the war is almost bound to be an important factor as well. Another vital part of the story too, is the way political forces line up around the issue of the war, particularly as the growing convergence of media and political elites has become so marked (Davies, 2008; Freedman, 2008). But the historical evidence suggests that wider factors have to be taken into account including the fortunes of the war, that the very basis, material and ideological, on which the war is fought, must impact on the way it is perceived both in society at large and in the media. The contrasting social impacts and historical reception of the First and Second World Wars, for example, must partly be explained by the way in which the latter could plausibly be presented as a people's war against tyranny while the former could not (Zinn, 2011; Cortright, 2008). In a slightly different register, the widespread popular opposition to the Suez War in Britain can partly be explained by Britain's isolation, and the fact that the US, Britain's key ally, opposed the war, partly using liberal arguments (Shaw, 1996). It has become almost a commonplace that the military impact of the Tet Offensive launched by the Vietcong in South Vietnam in 1968 had a profound impact in turning popular opinion against the war in the US and in opening the media to more critical voices (see for example Hallin, 1986).

The literature on the Iraq War suggests that questions around the rationale for the invasion have been central to the growth of opposition to the war. In his study of international attitudes to the war, for example, Bert Klandermans found that the one opinion shared by almost everyone surveyed in the anti-war movement was that the war's leaders had lied about the causes of the war and that 'the United States wants to invade Iraq to secure its oil supply' (Klandermans, 2010). The dynamics of the war itself must therefore be considered as part of the context shaping the domestic political situation, public opinion, the movement and the media's response. The alliances secured by the protagonists, the interests served by the war and the prospects for victory must all come into play. And they in turn will at least partly determine the arguments that can be

mobilised to back the adventure. In this chapter I explore some of these contexts, the state of public opinion, and the parameters and dynamics of the movement against the war. I move on to look at the wider picture, examining some of the literature about the history and motivations that drove the invasion of Iraq, and how and why the interventionist policies of the neo-conservatives came to dominate in Washington and Whitehall. In the light of this discussion, I then look at the evolving discourses that have been used to justify US and Western interventions around the globe over the last few decades, and the nature of the arguments used to promote Operation Iraqi Freedom. I end with an examination of the extent of the political crisis created by the war and the opposition.

5.2. Shifting opinion

The record of public opinion over the war in Iraq is striking in two respects. First, as a comparison with the earlier historical survey suggests, it reveals an unprecedented level of opposition to a major foreign war. Second, it produced one of the biggest shifts ever recorded in British public opinion (Travis, 2003). The *Guardian*/ICM tracker poll, the most extensive sequence on the subject, found that that popular support was on the side of the anti-war movement from August 2002 right up until mid-March 2003 (see Appendix 1, Chart 3). The only exception was a poll taken in the aftermath of the Bali bombing in October suggesting that the bombing boosted the gathering government argument for war. This effect was temporary. From November 2002 till the following March, according to these polls, anti-war opinion grew steadily. The balance of opinion changed dramatically once the war started with anti-war sentiment dropping 20 percent to just 30 percent by the end of March, just days after the bombing began. A third, slightly less dramatic but nevertheless important finding, is that by September 2003, anti-war opinion was starting to gain ground again. ICM polls, no longer commissioned only for the *Guardian*, indicate consistent anti-war majorities from that point on (see Appendix 1, Chart 3). Other polls tend to confirm this general pattern, with slight variations. An Ipsos summary follows a similar pattern but suggests that opposition to the war was as high as 62 percent in Britain by January 2004. By May 2007 the anti-war figure had climbed to 77 percent (quoted in Murray, 2007). YouGov polls suggest opinion was slower to turn against the war than the *Guardian*/ICM, but in general the YouGov polls follow the same general trend (see Appendix 1, Chart 1).

The *Guardian*/ICM data provides circumstantial evidence that the anti-war movement had an impact on public opinion. As the *Guardian*'s Alan Travis explained, 'From November 2002 anti-war feeling grew progressively stronger and peaked over the February weekend of the mass demonstration in London, when a majority of British voters – 52 percent – said they opposed the war' (Travis, 2003). The *Guardian* polls were based on the simple question 'would you approve or disapprove of a military attack on Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein?' This line of questioning leaves some ambiguities unexplored and comparison with other polls suggests it may have produced data that both underestimates overall anxiety about the war and overestimates the extent of the hardcore opposition. Figures for those polled opposing a war without a second UN resolution mandating an attack seem to be consistently higher than those produced for the Guardian. Ipsos Mori polls put the figure at 77 percent in January and 63 percent in mid-March 2003 for example, and reached as high as 91 percent in one case, again, interestingly, around the time of the demonstration (Hardy, 2003). On the other hand, there may be people who were registered as anti-war in the *Guardian* poll because they disagreed with the stated war aim of 'removing Saddam Hussein' rather than being against war under all circumstances, and there may also have been others who recorded an anti-war opinion not because they were against the war in principle but because there had not been a second UN resolution.

The dramatic shift towards support for the war once bombing began has been quoted as evidence for the 'equivocal' nature of an important section of anti-war opinion (Travis, 2003). Perhaps, however, the shift is most easily explained as an acceptance of the notion that doubts should be suppressed while British troops are engaged in fighting. There is a good deal of evidence that it was the increased support for the war that was 'equivocal'. Much of it started to swing back against the war relatively quickly, presumably on the basis of the experience of the conflict. A poll published in the *Times* in June 2003 asked the question, 'thinking about the build-up to the war in Iraq and everything that has happened since, do you think that taking military action was the right or wrong thing to do?' The poll found the proportion judging the war wrong had gone up 10 percent since late April to 34 percent, and those approving of the war had dropped 6 percent in the same period (Riddell, 2003). Interestingly, the same poll showed that when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: 'Britain and America deliberately

exaggerated the evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in order to win support for going to war' 58 percent said they agreed and 39 percent disagreed (Riddell, 2003). The finding that there was deep unease about the nature and aims of the war even amongst those who were prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt, at a time when opinion was swinging back against the war, suggests that the question of motivation may have played a crucial role over time in turning opinion against the war. The importance of the question of motivation was underlined by Walgrave and Rucht (2010) in their examination of key issues for anti-war protesters on 15 February, and this is suggested too by the consistency and scale of the opposition in the run-up to war. Certainly the return of majoritarian opposition just months into the conflict supports the idea of a public largely unconvinced by the narratives and arguments put forward to justify it.

5.3. The anatomy of the movement

The movement against the Iraq War is widely regarded as being the biggest protest movement in British history as well as the biggest ever co-ordinated global movement (Seppala, 2010, Walgrave and Rucht, 2010). Tony Blair himself admitted the unprecedented nature of the biggest demonstration on 15 February 2003, noting in his memoir, 'there has never been a bigger demonstration' (Blair, 2010, p.414). In Britain the movement was formed days after 9/11 at a mass meeting in central London. The success of rally, billed as 'Stop the War Before it Starts' surprised everyone, including MP Jeremy Corbyn, who was one of the speakers:

> *The place was absolutely heaving with people. I had trouble getting in. By the time I had struggled through the crowds into the main hall there had been a change of plan. A number of us were sent out around the building to speak at overflow meetings. I spoke at all of them, so by the time I got on to the main stage and made my speech there it was the third time I had spoken. Then I was sent outside and climbed on to a wall by a bus stop to speak to several hundred people outside the building. Even the people waiting at the bus stop listened. I was overjoyed that so many people had come out to show their concern.*[1]

Within a matter of weeks it had organised a demonstration of around 80,000 people to protest against the war in Afghanistan (Murray and German, 2005). This was a large mobilisation by the standards of the British anti-war movement. But through a series of protests and rallies the Coalition went on organise a series of historically significant demonstrations. The breakthrough

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[1] Interview with Jeremy Corbyn MP, 20 July, 2012.

came on the 28 September 2002 demonstration, the culmination a summer of mass rallies and meetings around the country. The organisers put the turnout at 400,000, and the police at 150,000 (Murray and German, 2005, p.93). The turnout for the demonstration almost certainly benefited from two accidental factors. The first was the publication of the Iraq Intelligence dossier a few days before the demonstration, which both concentrated the media and presumably people's minds on the issue of possible war on Iraq, and at least in some quarters increased the perception that the drive to war was based on flimsy evidence. The other contingent factor was the unplanned proximity of another mobilisation. The demonstration came just a week after the Countryside Alliance march in support of fox hunting, and in defence of the country way of life as the organisers saw it. This demonstration, which received a large amount of pre-publicity, attracted a big turnout of 400,000, and a good deal of sympathy in the establishment, illustrated by the fact unusual fact that the police and organisers' estimates for participation tallied exactly (Murray and German, 2005). In the run-up to the demonstration, the organisers of the Stop the War march identified a feeling that 'if the Countryside Alliance, loosely speaking for Conservative Britain, could mobilise 400,000, progressive Britain could not allow itself to do worse' (Murray and German, 2005, p.81). This probably helped to galvanise the demonstration. According to *Guardian* journalist Madeline Bunting, the extensive and detailed pre-publicity for the Countryside Alliance march, which included maps and instructions about where to gather, may have created a precedent that the began to shape the reporting of the anti-war demonstrations as well.[2]

But if there were contingent reasons for the size of the 28 September demonstration, the steady growth of the movement both up to and after 28 September suggests that it was mainly an expression of growing popular concern. The next major demonstration was on 15 February 2003. Not only had the movement grown exponentially since the previous September, but it had gone global. 15 February 2003 was a genuinely worldwide day of mass action. Though there was marked unevenness, country after country had their biggest protest in generations, or ever. Many of the biggest demonstrations were in Europe. Organisers in Rome estimated three million marched. In Madrid the movement claimed 1.5 million and there were massive marches in other Spanish cities. 45,000 people marched in Switzerland, its biggest demonstration since 1945.

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[2] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.

More than 100,000 marched in Norway in all, making it the biggest protest since 1917. But there were significant demonstrations in every region of the globe with the exception, apparently, of China. The biggest demonstration in the Middle East was in Damascus, where CBS estimated 200,000 marched, but there were protests across the region, including a co-ordinated demonstration in Tel Aviv and Ramallah. On the day, the Egyptian movement held a small illegal protest, but they were inspired by the global marches to call a breakthrough protest a few weeks later, which marked the re-emergence of popular protest in the country (Chan, 2009). The day in general and the London demonstration in particular surpassed most people's expectations, from the organisers through to social movement academics (Walgrave and Rucht, 2010, p.xiii). The scale of the mobilisation and the sense in which it dominated the capital on the day is once again well captured by North London MP Jeremy Corbyn:

> *On the day I got up early and went down to my local tube station. When I reached it there was a long queue outside and I thought London Transport have let us down, but I soon discovered this was a queue of people waiting to get into the station to go on the demonstration. So they saw me and one of the people in the queue said, "that's our MP, he's going to speak at the demonstration, let him through". And, amazingly, the crowd parted... I had to leave the demonstration early and as I walked North of Hyde Park I saw the remarkable sight of literally hundreds and hundreds of coaches lining Bayswater road, Edgware Road, North Carriage Drive, they lined all the roads in the entire area. It looked like the whole country had descended on the capital.[3]*

As we shall see, in general, the media registered the demonstration as being of at least unusual size, and also commented widely on its diversity. One colourful piece typical of features on the demonstration noted 'rookie Marchers stood with the Save the Lentil brigade and talked Iraq, Zoe Ball, Greenham Common and bladder control. The smell of Chanel No. 5 mingled with the aroma of cannabis. At Westminster there was a mass stop off at McDonald's. I spotted a Liberty Scarf, a National Trust umbrella and a little blue Tiffany Shop bag' (Johnston, 2003). The organisers' claim that two million people marched is supported by two opinion surveys conducted afterwards. An ICM poll conducted the day after the demonstration suggested that at least 1 person from 1.25 million households attended the London demonstration, research which, given the number of families attending, would suggest 2 million was perhaps an underestimate

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[3] Interview with Jeremy Corbyn MP, 20 July, 2012.

(Travis and Black, 2003). Another poll, conducted by YouGov for the *Daily Telegraph* found 4 percent of the population demonstrated on the day, a figure that translates to just over two million people (*Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 2003).

In the weeks after 15 February, up until the outbreak of war on 20 March, the movement concentrated on direct action, building to a climax on the day the bombing started. At this point the involvement, as far as it is possible to judge, remained high. Tens of thousands of school students walked out on 8 March and 21 March, and the Stop the War Coalition itself has collected records of over 250, strikes, walkouts, occupations and blockades of town centres that took place on that day (German and Murray, 2005, pp.192-195). Many involved were taken by surprise by the scale of the action. Union press officer Trevor Phillips recalls:

> *I was working in the HQ of the lecturers' union NATFHE. We were very supportive of the anti-war movement and I had a brief from the General Secretary Paul Mackney to give any support possible to people who wanted to take action. I had built up a network of people who pledged to do something, and on the day the war started I received mail from all over the country who were just walking out – often with their students – to show their disgust. I was astonished at the scale of it, people in many, many dozens of colleges walked out. Some people issued statements which were incredibly moving saying why, as teachers, they felt they had a duty and a responsibility to show an example by taking action. It was an incredible feeling; I was flooded with messages for hours. And people were taking a risk. I suppose they took strength and courage from the popular mood and fact that two million had marched weeks before. It would have been a brave management who would have punished them. Also some were led by the students who in some cases just said we are not staying in our classes, you can come with us if you want to! I have always felt very privileged to have been in that position, it was a very inspiring and also very upsetting thing.*[4]

Town and city centres around the country were closed by sit-down protests. The Mersey tunnel was blocked and the area round parliament in London brought to a complete standstill. In Leeds, two hundred Council workers walked out at just one office and joined hundreds more protesting in the city centre – all the main routes into the city centre were blockaded. Central Brighton was brought to a standstill by direct action involving more than one thousand people. Police used CS spray after protesters forced their way into the town hall. In Bristol over a thousand people, led by students from the City of Bristol College, confronted the police and ended up successfully

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[4] Interview with Trevor Phillips, 2 October, 2012.

blocking the M32 motorway. A rally in Piccadilly Square in Manchester drew over 5,000 people after students had poured out of Manchester Metropolitan University and blocked Oxford Road. In Cardiff the city centre was brought to a standstill as hundreds performed a die in the middle of the road. In Exeter 1,200 demonstrated, occupied the tax office while school students occupied the main bridge over the River Exe (Murray and German, 2005, pp.192-195).

The numbers on the demonstrations after the war started on 22 March were down on those of 15 February, but still high by any historical standards, with police estimating 200,000 in London (*Guardian*, 24 March 2003). The figures on the demonstration on 12 April 2003 probably fell below 100,000 according to the organisers (Murray and German, 2005). These declining turnouts matched the changed public mood that we have outlined, and perhaps too a general feeling of demoralisation amongst the activists (Seppala, 2010, p.63). By November 2003, as we have seen, opinion polls had started to swing back to opposition to the war. This change in mood, presumably combined with the opportunity to register dissent directly with George Bush as he visited London, produced what was probably the biggest weekday demonstration in British history on 20 November 2003. Stop the War organisers estimated that 2-300,000 participated on the day while the police estimated 70,000 (Boycott, 2003; German and Murray, 2005). There were two major demonstrations in 2004, which attracted numbers in the same range as the 12 April 2003 protest (Murray and German, 2005). The demonstration on 19 March 2005, the fourth of the events under examination here, was part of a much more modest international day of action marking the second anniversary of the start of the war. This time organisers estimated 100,000 attended and the police recorded the figure of 45,000 (*Observer,* 2005). The fact that there were large anti-war demonstrations in so many parts of the world suggests that widespread opposition to war was the essential factor in generating the mass movement. The international movement was, however, extremely uneven, suggesting that other, more subjective factors came into play (Seppala, 2010). There were in fact a series of important strategic decisions in the movement that led to its ability to grow fast. Stop the War convenor Lindsey German recalls:

> *There were debates had and decisions made at every turn in the movement. Some*
> *people argued against us working with the Muslim community, some were against*
> *mass demonstrations and didn't like the fact that when we organised direct action,*

we tended to organise mass action with school strikes and so forth, some people wanted us just to protest at military bases rather than demonstrate.[5]

According to key organisers, three things in particular were critical to the process of generating such large mobilisations. The first was establishing unity on the left over the issue. This was achieved by calling an initial meeting which brought together many of the key figures with a record of opposing imperialism at the very first rally, and insisting on a simple, limited platform (Murray and German, 2005, p.49). The second was a real commitment to reaching out beyond the usual suspects and finding ways to relate to wider society. This dictated a certain way of working:

> *A genuine "mass movement" reaching beyond the usual suspects, will inevitably encounter all sorts of views, prejudices and ideas which do not fit into with the principles of the left, for so long polished in splendid isolation. The movement, if it is to maintain its breadth and momentum, must accommodate that range of outlooks while remaining focused on its central objective, and not indulging behaviour that would be unacceptable under any circumstances.* (Murray and German, 2005, p.62)

The third factor was the movement's success in forging an alliance and helping to mobilise the Muslim communities in Britain. Not only did this bring a very large and motivated constituency into play against the war, it helped the movement to demonstrate diversity and in the process impact quite deeply on British society:

> *Prior to the Stop the War Coalition, mass Muslim activism and politics had been segregated to within the Muslim communities… The Stop the War Coalition dramatically shifted these relations and ushered in a new era for Muslim activism in Britain, where collaboration and inclusion with diverse activist groups became a real possibility and actual experience.* (Saleem, 2005, p.58)

If the international anti-war movement was not simply a spontaneous response to the threat of war, nor was it simply plucked out of the air by its organisers. As a good deal of the literature points out it was partly a continuation and adaptation of a politics of international protest that had been gaining ground for some time. This tendency in turn was part of a longer-term international trend towards mass protesting as part of the normal behaviour of larger and larger numbers of people. The organisers themselves note the importance of the experiences and the energy

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[5] Interview with Lindsey German, 31 October, 2012.

generated by what they call the 'anti-globalisation movement,' the largely youth-based protest movement that came to the world's attention at the time of the protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999. In their view this movement 'represented the first real glimmerings of an international revival of the left' (Murray and German 2005, p. 55). The early history of the anti-war movement was partly intertwined with the anti-globalisation movement. Cross fertilisation was natural, as Njoki Njehu, a leading intellectual figure in the anti-globalization movement put it, 'we're talking about peace on many levels, in talking about economic justice. These movements are not so split-without the World Social Forum and the global movement, there would not have been the massive anti-war demonstrations of 15 February' (Njehu, 2003, p.101). The large anti-capitalist mobilisations in Genoa and Barcelona in 2001 and 2002 arguably helped create the conditions for further mass mobilisations, and the formal call for the international protests on 15 February 2003 was made at the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002 (Tarrow, 2005).

The international dimension of the anti-war movement was part of a trend towards global protest co-ordination which included the widespread solidarity with the Chiapas uprising in 1995, the 'Battle of Seattle' in 1999 and the subsequent round of confrontations with the international financial institutions, and the campaigns against global climate change (Tarrow, 2005; Olesen, 2005). There is some debate as to the extent to which new practices and organisational forms of 'alterglobalism' helped shape the anti-war movement (Gillan and Pickerill, 2008; Seppala, 2010). There is particular controversy over the extent to which group autonomy and 'horizontal' forms of networking – both regarded by many as characteristic of the new global social movements – played a part in the reach of the anti-war movement. In what is probably the most comprehensive summary of the debate and the most in depth case study, Tina Seppala comes to the conclusion that, 'the British anti-war movement can actually be regarded as a mixture of both modern and postmodern analyses and elements, thus being somewhere "in between" new and old movements' (Seppala, 2010, p.331). The anti-war movement certainly inherited another important characteristic of the anti- globalisation movement, its tendency to generalise politically. One of the striking things about the anti-capitalist movement was the fact that it had fused massive mobilisations with radical, generalised politics, encouraging activists to at least modify the traditional left view that popular campaigns can only be mobilised around single

issues. The anti-war movement shared this approach. In the words of one of the Stop the War Coalition's founder members, John Rees:

> *Although nominally about a single issue it was in fact a broad critique of the economic and political imperatives of the new imperialism. The corporate backers of war, the economics of the oil industry, the environmental impact of war, the working of the military industrial complex, the fate of Palestine, opposition to the oppression of Muslims, the traditional concerns anti-nuclear campaigners, the history of Western colonialism, all fitted easily into the anti-war movement, deepening rather than narrowing its appeal.* (Rees, 2006, pp.222-3)

What seems to be unchallengeable is that the movement was part of, and an accelerator in, a wider, global, trend towards involvement in street protest. Since the early 1970s, a growing percentage of the UK population has reported taking part in demonstrations or other political activism. An examination of the British Social attitudes surveys over the three decades to 2003 shows an uneven but uninterrupted and dramatic rise in the number of people who say they have demonstrated against the government sometime in their life. In 1983 the figure was 2 percent of the population, from 1992 to 2000 the figure flat lined at around 8 percent, it then peaked at 12 percent in 2003 (Cousins, 2010). A similar, if slightly less marked trend is apparent in the World Values Survey which also shows a steady rise in the number of people saying they have participated in demonstrations over the same period (Cousins, 2010). These figures support the thesis of the 'normalization of protest', which has gained ground in academia since the 1990s. The thesis suggests that there is an increasing frequency, diversity and involvement in street protest which is becoming a strategy regular employed by large numbers of people to pursue their concerns (Fuchs and Rucht 1994; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001). In 2005, 6.4 percent of the British population confirmed participating in a demonstration in the last five years, responding to a question that had not been asked previously (Cousins, 2010). If this is correct it would mean in the first five years of the new millennium almost three million people in this country demonstrated. Over a third of these – 1.2 million – were aged between 12 and 25. There were of course a number of different protest movements active over the period, including the Countryside Alliance protest in September 2002, which attracted around 400,000 people, which is unlikely to have provided much of a cross over with the anti-war demonstrations. However, the most comprehensive research into the composition and politics of the worldwide protests of 15 February records a high level of people who have demonstrated previously. Suggesting 45

percent of demonstrators had previously been on a peace protest, 27 percent on a protest over social issues, and 25 percent against racism (Walgrave and Rucht, 2010, p.127).

This, then, raises the question as to whether the demonstrations were representative of the population as a whole, and also whether they managed to mobilize across the potential anti-war spectrum. Sociological information about the London protests is relatively sparse, the best information coming from an international survey of 15 February, based on just 4,500 respondents across eight countries (Walgrave and Rucht, 2010). The research shows a wide social, age and gender spectrum participated in the London demonstration. A narrow majority (54 percent) were women, 11 percent were under 24 and another 11 percent over 65, with the largest percentage in the 45-64 age range (39 percent) narrowly ahead of the 25-44 group (38 percent). The largest percentage in any social category falls in the 'professional, independent' bracket (34 percent), a category that presumably contains a wide spectrum of occupations. According to these figures managers made up 6 percent of the demonstrators and office and manual workers together 20 percent. Twenty percent of the respondents were students. The figures must be treated with caution not just because of the size of the sample but also because the categories allow a fairly loose self-definition. The survey's authors conclude that the protesters fitted the profile of the new social movements more closely than that of the population as a whole in that they were 'somewhat younger, slightly more female and especially much better educated than the average citizen'. They also find that the movement failed to mobilise evenly across the whole of the anti-war constituency, concentrating its attractive power in general on those with broadly left wing views (Walgrave, Rucht and Van Aelst, 2010, p.87). This is an overall statistical judgement of representational balance, not an assertion that the demonstrations were either politically or socially homogenous. The authors accept that the demonstrations drew on a very wide constituency and while not being fully representative, 'every group in society was represented to some extent' (p.90).

The question of representation has another aspect that as we have seen is sometimes suggested in the media coverage. This is the more active sense of representation and the suggestion that the anti-war demonstrations have provided the opportunity for people to express political opinions that find no outlet or reflection in the mainstream. The trend towards political street protesting

has coincided with a sharp lowering in the public's confidence in core institutions of political society and particularly in the relevance of the political process. The British Social Attitudes Survey records a relatively steady increase in the number of people saying that they 'almost never' trust the British government to place the national interest above the interests of their own political party from 10 percent in 1974 to 30 percent in 2003 (Bromley, Curtice and Seyd, 2004). The same surveys reveal a steep drop in the number of people who believe that there 'is a good deal of difference' between political parties, from 80 percent in 1987 to 15 percent in 2003 and just 12 percent in 2005 (Cousins, 2010). Not surprisingly there has at the same time been a steep decline in the membership of political parties over the same period. In 1983 just under 4 percent of the British population were members of the main political parties. This figure dropped sharply to 2 percent in the early 1990s rose slightly around the 1997 election and then fell again dramatically to just over 1 percent in 2005, with Labour leading the fall (Marshall, 2009). This decline in political engagement is part at least of a European and almost certainly an international trend. However, in Pippa Norris' study of what she calls a 'global democratic deficit', the UK parliament comes out worst in a Europe wide survey of trust in parliamentary institutions (Norris, 2011, p.76). Evidence from the academic studies of the movement tends to suggest this sense of the democratic deficit as one of the movement's determinants. Donatella della Porta stresses that the demonstrations were not an anti-political movement but that they do imply a growing divergence between a relatively politicised section of the population and the mainstream political establishment:

> *Strong identification with and deep embeddedness in movement networks are the best predictors of participation. Marchers are not anti-political: they have an interest in politics and believe in their capacity to effect public decisions. However, they are very critical of institutional politics.* (Della Porta, 2010, p.136)

In her study of the British anti-war movement, Tina Seppala comes to very similar conclusions.

> *Within the British anti-war movement there seems to be ever-growing scepticism towards representative democracy as well as parliamentary politics. In this regard, the idea of 'popular disengagement' from mainstream politics to which the critical state-centric approach often refers can capture quite well indeed the nature of current mistrust towards political parties and the institution of representative democracy.* (Seppala, 2010, p.172)

Seppala goes on to outline a double crisis of representation she regards as quite specific to the British situation:

> *Rather than considering the political system as such to be the main problem, some leftish anti-war organisations highlight that the Labour government's policies have stood in stark contrast to their own anti-war stance and political views more generally. Participation in the current anti-war movement seems to be very much "boosted" due to the political crisis perceived in the domestic sphere, which is simultaneously regarded as a crisis of democracy. One must ask whether there are actually two different kinds of crisis taking place simultaneously that are sometimes confused by both activists and scholars: a crisis of democracy manifested in dropping voter turnouts and an increasing distrust of politics in general terms, as well as a crisis of the left, which exacerbates the first crisis in not providing any alternatives for people on the left.* (Seppala, 2010, p.172)

There is no doubt that the demonstrations, particularly 15 February, were of an unprecedented scale and social breadth. However much participation was biased in favour of the better educated and the more left wing, the demonstrations mobilised constituencies that had never been seen protesting together on British streets. The available evidence also suggests that they should be seen not simply as single issue mobilisations. They clearly were responses to specific concerns over particular decisions, but they were also part of a growing trend towards seeing protest as a necessary element of civic engagement. They were not 'protests' in the weak sense of the word because they were seen as an attempt to actually change policy. In general they were shaped by a growing feeling of disillusion with parliamentary processes and specifically they were an emergency response to a feeling that opposition politics had failed, a sense perhaps of betrayal on an issue of central importance that led people with little choice but to take matters into their own hands.

5.4. Why attack Iraq?

There is a widespread view in the literature that the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 were a defining moment in world politics that marked a major shift in US foreign policy (see, for example, Bello, 2005; Roy, 2001; Gardner, 2009). But there were continuities as well as change in the post-9/11 world. Walden Bello has pointed to what he calls a 'democratic evangelism' that emerged during the Clinton administration summed up by National Security Advisor Anthony Lake's comment that a key aim of foreign policy had to be

the 'enlargement of the community of free nations' (Bello, 2005, p.30). There had been what Alex Callinicos describes as 'a drift towards achieving foreign policy objectives by the unilateral use of military force' in the 1990s under President Clinton. In 1998 the US and Britain had carried out the aerial bombing of Iraq unaided, the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 was carried out with no UN authorisation (Callinicos, 2009, p.223). Joris Verhulst cites Clinton's signing of the Iraq Liberation Act in 1998 as evidence that 'plans to get rid of Saddam Hussein were…not intrinsically born in the Bush administration, as would later be regularly assumed, but can be traced to actions years earlier' (Verhulst, 2010, p.3). We can only understand what happened after 9/11 if we see it both as a turning point and the culmination of an already existing trend. A loose group of foreign policy officials commonly referred to as 'neo-conservatives', including Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Richard Armitage, John Bolton and Paul Wolfowitz, had been promoting a turn to a much more aggressive foreign policy in Washington for a decade or more (Callinicos, 2009, p.50). They were grouped around William Kristol's Project for the New American Century and they were particularly focussed on Iraq. Eighteen of them, eleven of whom were to end up serving in the Bush administration, sent a joint letter to the Clinton administration in early 1998 criticising current foreign policy and calling for a policy of regime change in Iraq. In 1998 the Murdoch owned, Kristol edited, neo-conservative house magazine The *Weekly Standard* ran an issue headlined 'Saddam Must Go – A How to Guide' (Callinicos, 2009, p.51).

After 9/11, the balance of the internal argument in US foreign policy circles switched decisively. The dynamics of the situation are illustrated by the fact that many of Bush's responded to 9/11 as an 'opportunity'. This notion keeps coming up in the literature. According to Bob Woodward's account of Bush's inner circle at the time, based on interviews with more than a hundred administration sources and four hours of interviews with George Bush, at the first in-depth strategy cabinet after 11 September, Vice President Dick Cheney presented the situation as an opportunity to strengthen the US position in the Middle East (Woodward, 2002, p.91) In the same account Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz is reported to have said '9/11 gave the US a window to go after Hussein' (quoted in Woodward, 2002, p.83). Then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice has recounted how, a few months later, she called together her senior staff people of the National Security Council to discuss 'how do you capitalize on these

opportunities' in the wake of 9/11 (Lemann, 2002). In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Bush, who up until this time had been talking up an isolationist foreign policy approach, decided on an attack on Afghanistan. But he made it clear at cabinet that he regarded this as a prelude to an attack on Iraq. In Woodward's account, Bush's view on Iraq was that 'You have got to do something and do it well and that… if we could prove we could be successful in the (Afghanistan) theatre, then the rest of the task would be easier' (Woodward, 2002, p.84).

There have been a range of explanations for the political ascendancy of the neo-conservatives and the subsequent invasion of Iraq. Some have treated them as the product of a period of irrationality and paranoia gripping the Washington administration (Le Carré, 2006). Others, including notably Perry Anderson, (2007) have pointed to the influence of the Zionist lobby. It has also been common to see the rise of the neo-conservatives as a product or expression of the overwhelming supremacy of the US worldwide, even the achievement of untouchable hyper power status. Michael Hardt and Tony Negri's influential work published just prior to 11 September posits an 'empire' that has transcended national boundaries completely (Hardt and Negri, 2000). A more conventional analysis of the US role by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin (2004) argues that the US had been able to construct an informal empire powerful enough for it to play the role of managing the interests of the Western powers, thus providing it with the basis for global hegemony. President Bush was certainly not one to play down US power and its associated responsibilities. In one of his many rhetorical flights at the time he argued that 'Freedom is the almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. As the greatest power on earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom' (Bush, 2004). But a number of accounts of the period stress the fact that the actual documents of the neo-conservatives are characterised by a combination of hubris and anxiety about the global scene (Rees 2007; Harvey 2003). A Project for the New American Century report written in September 2000 presented the following prognosis:

> *The United States is the world's only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world's largest economy. Moreover, America stands at the head of a system of alliances, which includes the world's other leading democratic powers. At present the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible. There are, however, potentially powerful*

states dissatisfied with the current situation and eager to change it, if they can, in directions that endanger the relatively peaceful, prosperous and free condition the world enjoys today. Up to now, they have been deterred from doing so by the capability and global presence of American military power. But, as that power declines, relatively and absolutely, the happy conditions that follow from it will be inevitably undermined. (Kagan, Schmitt and Donnelly, 2000, p.i)

The existence of 'potentially powerful and dissatisfied states' was then, the cloud on the horizons of the post-1989 vista. The collapse of Communism had led to a period of triumphalism in the West as the West's main competitor had been removed from the scene. But the parallel reorganisation of the Western economies along neoliberal lines had itself partly been a response to economic challenges in the sphere of production. In 1945 the US share of world manufacturing production was around 50 percent, by 1980 this had dropped drastically to 31 percent and by the middle of last decade it was down to 25 percent (Rees, 2007, p.42). The surpluses that were recycled through Wall Street and increasingly London in the 1980s and 1990s more and more came from production centred abroad, in Taiwan, Singapore, The Pearl River delta in China and elsewhere (Harvey, 2003, p.66). The US boom in the early 1990s helped it to at least temporarily to pull Germany and Japan out of economic difficulties, but by the end of the decade the relationship had switched and it was Japan and Germany that were hauling the US out of slowdown (Harvey, 2003). The argument continues by pointing out that ironically the victory in the Cold War had caused a number of internal problems for the US. The vast military expenditure, which had been necessary to maintain the Cold War, had been a high price to pay for the bankrupting of the Soviet Union, a price that other powers had not had to pay. During the 1990s, compared to the sluggish performance of most of the Western economies China's rise was relentless. From 1994 to 2004 its average growth rate was 8.5 percent (Rees 2007, p.59). The rise of China was the most serious of a range of threats to US hegemony. The neo-conservative response was to continue to promote Wall Street as a financial centre, to continue to use the financial institutions as a tool to discipline other economies but most importantly to increase the use of military power to inhibit the possibility of new economic challengers becoming military great powers.

A series of National Security Strategy documents are cited to support this thesis. The 2002 NSS report is explicit about US fears of the development of major geopolitical challengers:

*We will strongly resist aggression from other Great Powers – even as we welcome
their peaceful pursuit of prosperity, trade and cultural advancement… we are
attentive to the possible renewal of old patterns of great power competition. Several
potential great powers are now in the midst of internal transition – most importantly
Russia, India and China.* (Quoted in Rees, 2007, p.30)

The focus on US vulnerability as a foreign policy driver is supported by more recent literature
from inside the US foreign policy establishment. Two recent articles by influential commentators
Zbigniew Brzezinski and Charles A. Kupchan are typical of much US 'insider' discussion of
contemporary geopolitics. Both centre their arguments on how the US can sustain its influence at
a time when its economic power is ebbing. Brzezinksi's article (2012), sub-headed 'US Grand
Strategy in an Age of Upheaval' addresses the issue of how to 'enlarge' the West in such a way
as at least contain China's growing power. Kupchan (2012), more alarmist in tone, speaks of the
threat of 'economic and political vigour is passing from the core to the periphery of the
international system' (p.67). An understanding of these anxieties is the key to explaining the fact
that the triumphalism that followed the collapse of Communism at the start of the 1990s was so
short lived. The sense of the inevitability of the spread of the US power and influence, which
was most imaginatively packaged in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* (1992), was
replaced by the mid-1990s with anxiety, re-armament and a growing interventionism. The
concern that during the Cold War other economic powers had been able to develop into potential
threats to the US under its military protection helps explain too the growing differences in
approach to the Iraq War between the US and 'Old Europe'. As foreign affairs commentator and
PNAC signatory Robert Kagan put it:

*The current situation abounds in ironies. Europe's rejection of power politics and its
devaluing of military force as a tool of international relations have depended on the
presence of American military forces on European soil. Europe's new Kantian order
could flourish only under the umbrella of military power exercised according to the
old Hobbesian order. American power made it possible for Europeans to believe
power is no longer important.* (Kagan, 2003, p.37)

It also sheds light on the importance of Britain's role in the Iraq War. It is clear from Kagan's
argument that the neo-conservatives saw Britain as a lone supporter in an ungrateful Europe.
Kagan argues the US needed Britain, 'not because British troops were essential to the success of

the invasion in Iraq. It was the patina of international legitimacy Blair's support provided – a legitimacy that the American people wanted and needed, as Bush officials well understood' (p.150). It seems evident from the documentation of the development of foreign policy that the attack on Iraq was not, as claimed, primarily a considered response to the concerns raised by the 9/11, but rather the culmination of a long campaign to re-orientate US foreign policy towards a more aggressive and interventionist posture in general and a more aggressive stance to Iraq in particular. This has important implications for our understanding of how the war played out with public opinion. If it is correct that 9/11 was little more than a pretext for the pursuit of a wider agenda, then the conclusion must be that there was a deception at the heart of the whole policy of the war on terror. In addition, the fact that the whole policy was being shaped by economic decline also meant that the policies that had served the US so well after World War II, which combined a commitment to decolonisation and massive aid programmes, were no longer open to it. It therefore had to rely more and more on open aggression at a time when its hegemony was more and more challenged and when it could offer less and less to its allies. In short, the US was entering into a period of international aggression to protect its influence at a time when it its competitors were more confident and its friends less dependent than ever before. This account of the real policy drivers for the war provides important clues to understanding the way the war played out in popular consciousness. It helps provide a background explanation to the splits amongst Western powers, the US's insistence on going it alone if necessary, and the widespread perception of its arrogance.

5.5. Arguments for intervention

The post-Cold War problem

Particularly in democracies, foreign wars always require a concerted effort to generate legitimacy for the war effort, 'building agendas for war' in Norman Solomon's phrase:

> *From the outset, the quest is for an image of virtual consensus behind the commander in chief. A media campaign for hearts and minds at home means going all out to persuade us that the next war is as good as a war can be – necessary, righteous, and worth any sorrows to be left in its wake.* (Solomon, 2005, p.1)

Historically, various forms of racism have been central to the effort to justify foreign interventions. The history of racism is inextricably tied up with the development of slavery, colonialism and empire (Kundnani, 2007; Losurdo, 2011). Biological racism originated in the attempt to justify slavery. At a time of enlightenment slavery could only be sanctified if it could be shown that the enslaved were an inferior species. Racism has played an important part in underpinning imperial wars ever since (Kundnani, 2007). But as David Harvey has pointed out, post-World War II, racist ideas carried particular problems for the US because of the specific role it played in and after the war. In this period, the US achieved hegemony by presenting itself as the opponent of the old colonial blocs and therefore as a champion of de-colonialism and developmentalism.

> *The dismantling of European based imperialisms also entailed the formal disavowal of the racism that had permitted the reconciliation of nationalism with imperialism. The UN declaration of Human Rights and various UNESCO studies denied the validity of racism and sought to found a universalism of private property and of individual rights that would be appropriate for a second stage of bourgeois political rule. For this to work demanded that the US should depict itself as the pinnacle of civilisation and a bastion of human rights*. (Harvey, 2003, p.55)

For decades the Cold War provided an alternative narrative for US interventionism. It allowed a military and economic struggle for influence in various theatres to be presented in the language of freedom and democracy. Interventions in Korea, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Cuba, Vietnam, and more recently Nicaragua, which were all argued for on the basis of rolling back the Communist menace (Solomon, 2003, p.2). The end of the Cold War removed this rhetorical justification for US intervention around the world. Economies flowing from the greater size of the US and its ability to reach into global markets ensured the US victory, and there was a brief period in which sections of the US foreign policy elites luxuriated in what they perceived as being of a moment of unchallenged supremacy. This was a period marked by significant defence spending cuts, particularly during Clinton's first term of office (Rees, 2007, p.55).

Neo-conservatism was more than anything a critique of post-Cold War triumphalism insofar as it led to a reliance on the benign spread of the free market and the cashing in of a peace dividend. Through the 1990s the neo-conservatives attacked what they perceived as the complacency

implicit in this policy. The 2000 Project for the New American Century report argued that Dick Cheney's warlike 1992 response to the end of communism had been vindicated by events:

> *Preserving the desirable strategic situation in which the United States now finds itself requires a globally pre-eminent military capability both today and in the future. But years of cuts in defence spending have eroded the American military's combat readiness, and put in jeopardy the Pentagon's plans for maintaining military superiority in the years ahead… Without a well-conceived defence policy and an appropriate increase in defence spending, the United States has been letting its ability to take full advantage of the remarkable strategic opportunity at hand slip away… And what Secretary Cheney said at the time in response to the DPG's critics remains true today, 'we can either sustain the [armed] forces we require and remain in a position to help shape things for the better, or we can throw that advantage away. [But] that would only hasten the day when we face greater threats, at higher costs and further risk to American lives. (Kagan, Schmitt and Donnelly, 2000)*

The temptations of Islamophobia

The neo-conservatives were for decisive military intervention abroad, but also strong, clear hierarchies and morality at home. In this they had a natural electoral base amongst the Christian fundamentalist right who shared their conservative moral views but also had a deep contempt for Islam. One of the leaders of the fundamentalist right Jerry Falwell for example publicly declared that 9/11 was a sign of God's anger at the permissiveness of modern American society. He went on to assure the world that Mohammed was the first great terrorist on one of the most watched current affairs programmes on US television (Harvey, 2003, p.191). The widely reported increases in the levels of Islamophobia in Western society have been linked to growing Western intervention in Muslim countries in a number of studies (Khiabany and Williamson, 2012; Said, 1982; Kundnani, 2007). This partly reflects a strong temptation amongst those promoting the War on Terror to resort to racist narratives to create the conditions in which they can pursue their war. Harvard academic Samuel Huntingdon has been the most influential proponent of the notion that the Muslim world was inherently destabilising and a barrier to the spread of 'civilised' Western values. His 1993 book *The Clash of Civilisations* gained widespread support on the right and its themes have been widely echoed by some more liberal voices (Huntingdon 1996; Kundnani 2007). In the words of Adnan Kundnani, 'Muslims are often framed in terms of their propensity to violence, their hostility to the modern values of democracy and pluralism, even their tendency to want to spread Islam forcibly if possible, all themes that dovetail nicely with

some of the central of the War on Terror' (Kundnani, 2007, p.25).

Islamophobia has great advantages as a means for trying to justify modern foreign wars. Although in reality it is a form of racism it often presents itself as a form of cultural critique or judgement (Fekete, 2009). Thus Islamophobia avoids the stigma of racism. This has allowed some intellectuals to indulge in the ritual demonisation of Islam as the centrepiece of a wider, supposedly progressive assault on the backwardness of religion. Another advantage is that it can be used to introduce restrictions on dissent at home. As Liz Fekete has pointed out, the parallels with McCarthyism can hardly be ignored:

> *As Islamism replaces communism as the new totalitarianism against which we are urged to unite, the 'Islam Scare' supplants the 'red scare'. While the 'reds' were potentially allied to the evil Soviet Empire, Muslims may be secretly allying themselves to an equally evil and totalitarian fundamentalist empire: the Umma of global Islam… For just as the 'red scare' was used to argue that traditional security methods could not adequately safeguard the US against the communist threat, the 'Islam scare' now holds that certain beliefs are so dangerous that any measure to restrict them is justified.* (Fekete, 2009, p.103)

However, especially in its strong version of the 'clash of civilisations', Islamophobia does have certain drawbacks for those responsible for the wars too. It could be a decidedly blunt instrument with which to carve a justification for a complex, not to say contradictory, policy in the Middle East. In reality some of the most conservative religious regimes are counted amongst the US key allies in the region. The project of persuading King Fahd of Saudi Arabia or the absolute monarchs of the United Arab Emirates to support a US-led war in the Middle East would not have been made easier if it was messaged as being a war on Islam. This difficulty explains the fact that despite some references to the crusades George Bush in general distanced himself from openly anti-Muslim rhetoric in his pro-war speeches. Even the most hawkish elements of the Bush administration could understand that an openly anti-Islam policy would create too many enemies at home and abroad. But if officials on both sides of the Atlantic have avoided framing the war in crude anti-Muslim terms, what has emerged in place of the 'clash of civilisations' discourse is a 'good Muslim, bad Muslim' dichotomy that sought to marginalise a radicalised minority at home and implacably anti-Western organisations and individuals abroad (Kundnani, 2007). Parallel to this has been a general tendency to link Muslim organisations and individuals

with the threat of violence and to exaggerate the dangers of Islamic terrorism in Western countries. In their examination of the many terror threats that have been reported since 9/11 in Britain, David Miller and Rizwan Sabir come to the conclusion that there is 'strong circumstantial evidence that official pronouncements on the alleged threat from "Islamist" political violence misstates the relative risk' (Miller and Sabir, 2012, p.89). They go on to argue that their findings show that official briefings on alleged 'plots' against the country are 'not always reliable, whether by mistake or design' (p.90), and that official sources have a tendency to exaggerate the threat levels.

Weapons of mass destruction

The impact of 9/11 served as justification for military action itself for a time. The war in Afghanistan initially secured relatively high approval rates because it came so soon after 9/11, and probably because it could plausibly be framed as a justifiable, even effective response (Harvey, 2003; Steele, 2011). This was far from the truth. There is in fact plenty of evidence to show that increasing hostility to the Taliban and the invasion itself was extremely counterproductive in the attempt to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice (Steele, 2011). Whatever the validity of the rationale for the attack on Afghanistan, the simple fact of the 9/11 attacks was not sufficient to win support for an attack on Iraq. Although some polls show that many Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was both linked to Al-Qaeda and the attacks on New York and Washington (Roy, 2004, p.82), and although, according to one influential history of the period, Paul Wolfowitz himself believed there was a 10-50 percent chance that Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks (Gardner, 2008, p.129), a link between Saddam and Al-Qaeda was too contentious to be openly argued by the governments in Washington or London. To circumvent this problem, the literature suggests pro-war politicians tended to two strategies. First, they interpreted the war on terrorism in the broadest possible terms. According to Naomi Klein, the discourse they used conflated the threat of terrorism with wider challenges, expanding the confrontation to one with irrationality itself. 'In this narrative, the US is fighting a never ending battle for its very survival against utterly irrational forces that seek nothing less than its total extermination' (Klein, 2004). Norman Solomon suggests that this widening of the threat was implicit in the shortening of the descriptor of the war from the war on terrorism. In his view, this was:

More than a space saver for headline writers…. "Terrorism" is a word about actions. "Terror" on the other hand, is a word fraught with numerous meanings, some appreciably more ambiguous; among the subtexts of the shortened term are vague notions that we can somehow effectively wage war on our own fear, a nuance that – once examined openly – hardly suggests an auspicious strategy. (Solomon, 2005, p.173)

Certainly Donald Rumsfeld's celebrated op ed piece in the *New York Times* days after the 9/11 attacks envisaged an expansive, broadly defined campaign: 'Forget about "exit strategies"; we're looking at a sustained engagement that carries no deadlines' it said. It went on to characterise the enemy as those 'committed to denying free people the opportunity to live as they choose' (Rumsfeld, 2001). But the protagonists of war on Iraq were not satisfied with this broadening of the concept of the war on terror. Leaderships on both sides of the Atlantic felt the need to substantiate their claims that Saddam Hussein was a threat to the West. This ended up being the single most important element in the attempt to justify the war on Iraq. In the views of Paul Wolfowitz, 'The truth is that, for reasons that have a lot to do with the US government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason' (Wolfowitz, 2003). But it was in this attempt to present a case that Saddam Hussein presented a danger to the West that those in favour of the war foundered most dramatically. Colin Powell made a televised speech to the UN Assembly on 5 February 2003, attempting to make the case that Saddam Hussein was an immediate threat. His speech contained a number of half-truths and mystifications, not least the fact that he failed to make clear that his main source for the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq had publicly argued that they had been destroyed (Solomon, 2005, p.45). The US press in general at first accepted this account, but the British and foreign press were much more sceptical, and in later months Powell's account was challenged even in the US mainstream (Ramesh, 2003, p.34).

Some months before, in September 2002, Tony Blair had asked the British Joint Intelligence Committee to come up with a report on Saddam's weaponry. He used the report as back up for the claim not only that Saddam had non-conventional weapons, but also that they could be used within 45 minutes of an order being given. The report was the central plank of the politicians' case for war (Kampfner, 2005, p.209). Two particular claims in the dossier appear to have been

based on falsifications. The first was that Iraq had been involved in sourcing illegal uranium from Africa in order to produce nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency itself went public in March 2003 to say that the documents on which this claim was based were 'obvious fakes' (Ensor, 2003). The second was the assertion that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction that could be readied for use in 45 minutes. The document's introduction, written by Tony Blair, highlighted the claim, 'The document discloses that his (Saddam's) military planning allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them' (The Stationary Office, 2002). The truth was not just that the so-called intelligence was dubious at best, but that ministers deliberately distorted it in order to make the case for war. BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan was vilified and later sacked for making this exact claim in a Today Programme report in May 2003. BBC Director General Greg Dyke was forced to resign over the issue in early 2004. Although the conclusions of the Hutton enquiry in 2004 tried to exonerate Blair and the government, the real picture has subsequently become clear. Even the government later admitted their information was unreliable. In October 2004 Jack Straw conceded that the sources for the 45-minute claim had 'come into question'. Five years later, according to the *Guardian*, information had come to light that the source of the claim was a taxi driver on the Iraqi-Jordanian border 'who had remembered an overheard conversation in the back of his cab a full two years earlier' (Sparrow, 2009).

At the Chilcot Enquiry, one of Blair's lines of defence was that the dossier was a non-event at the time, gaining significance only in retrospect. Parliament was in fact recalled to hear Blair's report on the dossier for one of only three times in the last decade, the other two being for 9/11 and the death of the Queen Mother. The 45-minute claim, written into the dossier's introduction by Tony Blair, became the basis for a series of sensational newspaper headlines including the infamous *Sun* splash 'Brits 45 Mins from Doom' (25 September 2002) and the *Evening Standard*'s '45 Minutes from Attack' (24 September 2002). The dossier was used as the centrepiece for Blair's own oft-repeated arguments in parliament and elsewhere that Saddam was a proven threat to the region, an argument that many felt swung the balance of opinion in parliament. The report has received other criticism from insiders. Ex-UN chief weapons inspector and US military intelligence officer Scott Ritter has spoken of it as a product of institutional failure at the heart of the UK security system that 'skewed UK intelligence about Iraqi WMD towards a preordained

outcome that was more in line with British government policy than it was reflective of ground truth' (quoted in Mackay, 2006, p.96). The process by which the intelligence was put together, and the influence on it of politicians, especially Alistair Campbell, later became the key issue in the major crisis surrounding the death of David Kelly affair and the subsequent Hutton Report, which is widely regarded to have damaged Tony Blair (Kampfner 2003; Morgan 2005; Mackay 2006). But even at the time the report apparently had little credibility in policy circles close to Blair. A British cabinet minister, loyal to the prime minister, has spoken of his doubts about the validity of the interpretation of the intelligence as early as 2003. 'I was told it would be hard for the Iraqis to get the delivery mechanisms to the front line because of dispersals. I was told the previous year that, in July 2002, they had started moving it out, and dispersing it' (quoted in Kampfner, 2003, p.209). At least some foreign officials appear to have been equally unimpressed. According to Kampfner, one unnamed European government official argued:

> *We know that in terms of the nuclear programme there was nothing of importance. Any assertion to the contrary was a pure lie…. On biological and chemical weapons we know the Iraqis attempted to get it. But we had no indication, no presumption that they had any capacity. It's one thing to have the elements, the ingredients and the precursors. There was no indication about the weaponisation of those elements. There was even less evidence about any ability to deliver weapons we didn't think they had*. (Kampfner 2003, p.208)

In other words the most central element of the initial case for war, the idea that Saddam Hussein was armed in such a way as to be dangerous to the West, was based on a very weak and controversial interpretation of disputed intelligence.

Humanitarian intervention and the struggle for democracy
In their assessment of the ideological support for war in Britain, Peter Robinson *et al*. point to the underlying importance of the narrative of humanitarian intervention: 'Although Iraqi possession of WMD remained the central justification for the 2003 invasion, the humanitarian case for regime change was a regular feature of the British government's rhetoric in promoting action against Iraq' (Robinson et al, 2010, p.60). In his study of Blair's motivations, Christopher Bluth has stressed the consistent ethical content in Blair's comments on the war. According to Bluth, the 'moral' case appeared in virtually all of Blair's speeches on the subject (Bluth, 2005,

p.600). This is consistent with a growing discourse of humanitarian intervention that has been noted on both sides of the Atlantic since the mid-1990s and which found its clearest expression in the rhetoric used to justify the bombing of Serbia in 1999 (Chandler 2005; Bricmont, 2006). Jean Bricmont describes what he sees as a dominant narrative in the West, which fuses together questions of humanitarianism and democracy:

> *The ideology of our times, at least when it comes to legitimizing war, is no longer Christianity, nor Kipling's "white man's burden", or the civilising mission "of the French Republic, but is a certain discourse on human rights and democracy, mixed in with a particular representation of the Second World War. This discourse justifies Western interventions in the Third World in the name of the defence of democracy and human rights or against the "new Hitlers".* (Bricmont, 2006, p.20)

Bricmont goes on to explain that one of the advantages of this approach is that it conscripts liberals into the service of the warmakers. He quotes Tony Judt approvingly on the situation in the United States. 'In today's America, neo-conservatives generate brutish policies for which the liberals provide the ethical fig leaf' (Bricmont, 2006, p.122). For all the advantages offered by the justification of the war in terms of human rights and democracy, both arguments turned out to present serious credibility problems. Noam Chomsky has noted that the pursuit of democracy has long been used as a way of justifying US military operations abroad. In the 1980s Ronald Reagan ran 'democracy enhancement' programmes to back up his interventions particularly in Central America, and, according to Thomas Carothers, who worked on them, they were very sincere. The only problem was the wrong person might win, so the US ran two parallel programmes, one to set up credible elections, the other to make sure their man won. The result of all this is, as Chomsky notes, is that 'Every administration is schizophrenic, beset by a strange malady. They support democracy if and only if it conforms to U.S. economic and strategic objectives.' (Chomsky and Achcar, 2007, p.43)

In the case of Iraq this central contradiction unravelled fairly quickly, ensuring that the democracy argument foundered. Paul Bremer, head of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq for the first year of occupation, actually cancelled elections in late 2003 out of concern that hostile forces might prevail (Harvey, 2007). The lies about weapons of mass destruction had no doubt corroded public trust but the fact that there was no sign of democratic

progress was likely to have been a significant factor in the draining of support for the war towards the end of 2003. The humanitarian argument was also problematic in practice. In the run-up to war it was never satisfactorily determined whether the invasion would fit the criteria in international law by which an intervention can be justified. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty report titled *The Responsibility to Protect* (ICISS, 2001) rules that intervention is only justified when it is likely to avert large-scale loss of life that can be averted in no other way. There has been a good deal of discussion about the relevance of 'responsibility to protect' to the situation in Iraq at the time (Robinson *et al*., 2010, pp.103-4), but even at the time of the invasion, the British Attorney General Lord Goldsmith made it clear that he saw no humanitarian grounds on which the invasion could be justified (Goldsmith, 2003). Failure to achieve a second UN resolution to back the war, and the rapid rise in the number of Iraqi dead during the invasion all threw more doubt on the humanitarian basis of the war.

The series of arguments and narratives used to justify the war on Iraq all proved to have limited coherence and credibility. This was because they were designed to camouflage the central fact that the US wanted war on Iraq primarily in order to bolster its global influence in a more and more threatening world. This was not a motivation that it judged sensible to publicise. But wars had been successfully spun before. The deeper problem for those trying to 'sell' the Iraq War lay in its source as an expression of the US growing vulnerability and isolation. The only argument left was the one about democracy. We have seen that part of the neo-conservative thinking is that removing dictators by overwhelming force 'frees up' societies for the market and spreads democracy. Previous US leaders were more sceptical. Ronald Reagan ran 'democracy enhancement' programmes to back up his interventions particularly in Central America. In fact he tended to run two. He knew the problem was that in elections the wrong person might win, so he ran one programme to set up apparently credible elections, and another to make sure their man won (Chomsky and Achcar, 2007).

In the case of Iraq there was little preparation, little planning for post-occupation and not much money to buy up loyal political elites or placate a traumatised population. The Iraqi people felt the terrifying force of Western style shock and awe and then were expected to accept a series of policies neoliberal programmes that were likely to lead to increased foreign corporate control of

at Iraqi resources, particularly oil. No wonder then that the occupiers quickly dropped discussion about democracy. In June 2003, the occupation authorities started cancelling promised elections in Iraq. According to the office of Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq – colonial governor effectively – 'the most organised political groups in many areas are rejectionists, extremists and remnants of the Baathists, they have an advantage over the other groups' (Rohde, 2003). A few months later Bremer imposed a series of decrees that included, 'the full privatisation of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign forms of Iraqi businesses, full repatriation of foreign profits… and the elimination of nearly all trade barriers' (quoted in Harvey, 2003, p.214). At the height of its power after the Second World War, the US had been able to back up its firepower with soft power, loans, and aid which had bound the West to it and helped to extend its influence throughout important parts of the developing world. Now, in the heat of real war the democratic veneer appeared to be burning off the neo-conservative project. David Harvey sums up these processes by stating quite simply that 'The US has given up on hegemony through consent and resorts more and more to domination through coercion' (Harvey, 2007, p. 201). In the end the sources of the drive to war had been hard to conceal. As David Armstrong described it, Dick Cheney's vision was relatively simple:

> *The Plan is for the United States to rule the world. The overt theme is unilateralism, but it is ultimately a story of domination. It calls for the United States to maintain its overwhelming military superiority and prevent new rivals from rising up to challenge it on the world stage. It calls for dominion over friends and enemies alike. It says not that the United States must be more powerful, or most powerful, but that it must be absolutely powerful.* (Armstrong, 2002)

5.6. A political crisis?

Political commentators, participants and historians are divided as to the gravity of the political crisis created by the Iraq War and the opposition to it. There is less disagreement about the fault lines that generated the crisis in the first place. Political journalist Andy McSmith has pointed out that one of the main problems for those trying to sell the war on Iraq in Britain was a popular distrust of Bush. In his view, 'There was a good deal of pre-existing antipathy towards the Bush way of doing things in British society. A distrust of interventionism, a distrust of unilateralism and a feeling that he was in thrall to corporate power'.[6]

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[6] Interview with Andy McSmith, 22 June, 2011.

According to Kampfner, Blair and his inner circle identified the problem of British antipathy towards Bush, but tended to interpret it as essentially an image problem with the man himself, rather than a policy issue. 'Blair would bemoan the fact that the British people did not appreciate the "President's sharp brain... acute powers of concentration and readiness to listen'" (Kampfner, 2005, p.199). The philosophical divide identified by Robert Kagan between the US and 'old Europe' was the neo-conservatives way of trying to understand this suspicion. Whatever the truth of Kagan's contention that Old Europe's preference for negotiations and dialogue was a reflection of the fact that the US had provided a protective circle within which such ideas could flourish, there is no question that those countries whose political classes tried to bridge this divide by supporting the war in Iraq risked creating domestic turmoil. For Andy McSmith, Blair's fundamental mistake was making a secret deal with George Bush. 'Once he had made that error, all the others flowed from it.' But this error was compounded by the wider problem that, being the junior partner in the so called special relationship, Britain had little leverage in Washington in John Kampfner's account:

> *Throughout this period, and the desperate months that lay ahead, Blair would fatally underestimate the contempt of many of Bush's advisers for the very concept of multilateralism. Officials in Washington were openly scornful of the view espoused by Blair that a new international order could be built on the ruins of the World Trade Centre. The administration would pursue its legitimate security concerns. If Britain wanted to go along with that – all the better. Blair was both master and prisoner of his influence. His leverage came with constraints.* (Kampfner, 2003, p.199)

The result of these stresses was a deep divide in British politics. In the assessment of political commentator Seumas Milne:

> *Even in the establishment there were relatively few who supported the war on Iraq. Central institutions of the state were divided; overall the Foreign Office was against the war, which is an extremely unusual situation. The Kelly affair partially exposed the rifts at the heart of the establishment, but actually Kelly was just one amongst many people in the security services and the civil service who were deeply concerned about the damage that was being done by the politicians to key institutions of the British state.*[7]

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[7] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26 May, 2011.

There are various views about the extent to which this turbulence destabilised British politics itself. Despite describing 'a high level of uncertainty and unease in government circles around the time of the invasion'. Andy McSmith's view was that the political culture was enough to contain the situation:

> *Blair never faced an existential crisis over Iraq because the cabinet in the end of the day were almost all prepared to put their own interests before their misgivings. MPs tended to take the same decision. On the back benches too self-interest tended to win out. There was a kind of dysfunction of the political process, which was partly the product of the recent expansion in the number of government jobs available. Careerism prevailed despite all the tensions.*[8]

Guardian commentator Madeline Bunting takes a similar view. 'Although passions were high, there was never a sense that we were on the precipice. Looking back on it there was never a time when our participation in the war was in serious doubt.'[9] In his account of the time, the Home Secretary of the day David Blunkett suggests that the regular rumours of Tony Blair's imminent resignation over Iraq were mischievous or at least misguided. 'It is strange looking back how, over and over again, material has appeared saying that Tony was about to resign. Apart from being untrue, it was also destabilising and extremely unhelpful' (Blunkett, 2006, p.538). John Kampfner on the other hand emphasises the extent of the panic in the Blair camp. His view is that Blair was badly shaken by the scale and diversity of the opposition to the war. Blair was 'shocked by the scale of the public hostility. Church leaders were speaking out. Former diplomats were speaking out. Labour MPs were signing motions in parliament, their confidence strengthened by safety in increasing numbers. It was around this time that the US Embassy told the State Department that Blair was in considerable danger and needed support' (Kampfner 2003, p.274).

Kampfner stresses the sense of menace and of emergency surrounding Downing Street in the last weeks before the war:

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[8] Interview with Andy McSmith, 22 June, 2011.
[9] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.

The British Government, in the normal sense of the word, had ground to a halt. A small group of cabinet ministers met several times a day. Hilary Armstrong the Chief Whip, and John Reid the Party Chairman spent their entire time trying to work out the extent of the forthcoming rebellion in the commons. (Kampfner 2003, p. 292)

Jeremy Corbyn takes a similar view:

It was a deep crisis for the government. There was a whole swathe of Labour MPs who were very unhappy about the plans even though they were not interested in being associated with the anti-war extra parliamentary action. There was a degree of panic in the Blair camp which expressed itself in endless briefings and meetings and arm twisting sessions involving a whole range of institutes and experts. Blair was on a kind of manic mission to get his way.[10]

Andrew Murray, chair of the Stop the War Coalition at the time, argues, that despite the fact that the parliamentary vote was not big enough to defeat Blair, the situation was knife edge, and reflected real social ferment:

I think there was a real crisis because not only had the case been war not been made, but the perception was that Britain was only dragged into this to stay on side to this most reactionary US president who people thought was a complete loon. And the scale of the movement was enormous and it was sweeping the whole country and that was bound to have an impact. On the question of the government falling, it's slightly more complicated. Blair was never going to lose the vote because the Tories would always have voted for the war. On the other hand had a majority of Labour MPs who weren't actually whips or ministers opposed it then could Blair have survived? Probably if another fifty or sixty MPs had voted against Blair would have had to go.[11]

While the vote in the Commons was undoubtedly the moment of truth for the government, the point at which Britain's participation would be decided, most accounts suggest the demonstration on 15 February played an important part in creating the tension. On that day Tony Blair was in Glasgow to explain his strategy to the conference of the Scottish Labour Party. 'This really was the moment of maximum pressure on him,' one of his closest aides was reported as saying, 'as he travelled up there, we just didn't know whether the event would turn into a fiasco' (*Financial Times*, 29 May 2003, p.17). The view that events came close to running out of Blair's control is

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[10] Interview with Jeremy Corbyn MP, 20 July, 2012.
[11] Interview with Andrew Murray, 26 July, 2012.

supported by one incident corroborated by a number of observers. On 8 March, just days before the invasion itself, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon phoned his opposite number Donald Rumsfeld to tell him that Britain might not be able to participate in the operation. His explanation was that 'we in Britain are having political difficulties, real difficulties, more than you might realise'. That very evening Donald Rumsfeld made a statement to the White House Press corps to say that the US was prepared to attack Iraq without British involvement (Kampfner, 2003, p.290). People very close to Blair were clearly losing their nerve. This interpretation of events is also supported by other inside accounts. Ex-*Daily Mirror* editor Piers Morgan describes conversations with Tony Blair in which he admitted he considered resigning and in which he recalled 'when things got really hot for me politically here, and it looked like we wouldn't get the second UN resolution, Bush rang me and said; If you want us to go it alone, Tony, and join up later on, then we will do that. I understand your problems' (Morgan, 2005, p.456). In his own memoir, Tony Blair admits to a sense of isolation, near panic and despair, 'the international community, UK public opinion was split. The Party was split, I was between numerous rocks and hard places…the strain on almost everyone around me was almost unbearable. At home in Downing Street I was a bit like a zombie' (Blair, 2010, p.424). After France, Germany and Russia issued a joint statement distancing themselves from the US in early March, Blair recalled Jack Straw telling him that he was finished without a second resolution. Days later, the Cabinet Secretary Andrew Turnball was looking into what the labour Party rules would mean for the government if Blair fell. Blair remembers, 'when I heard I laughed a little uneasily and I thought: these really could be my last days in office' (Blair, 2010, p.429).

A series of *Guardian* interviews with cabinet ministers conducted in April 2003, which formed part of a special investigation into the build-up to war, bears out the prevalence of this view in government circles at the time. The interviews show that core members of the cabinet were contemplating not just parliamentary defeat but the collapse of the government as a result of support for the war. Despite his testimony in his memoirs published in 2006, Home Secretary Blunkett is quoted as saying, 'everyone believed, in the run-up to that vote that Tony had put his premiership on the line and those who are very close to him would go down with him. I thought it would be a hit on the government as a whole.' Foreign Minister Straw said, 'the projected voting figures were very serious... I knew there would be a point at which Tony would resign and

I would resign as well. I told my wife I might well have to go over this. I think Tony assumed that I would go' (Wintour, 2003). The question then arises of course as to how Blair's immediate future, and Britain's participation in Operation Enduring Freedom, was secured. The backbench revolt of 122 Labour MPs was regarded as just small enough to allow the government to go ahead. Blair's success is often put down to his rhetorical brilliance and a series of persuasive speeches made to parliament, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Scottish Labour Conference. Privately people remained unconvinced by Blair's arguments for war. David Miliband's view was that only about ten backbenchers really supported Tony Blair on this (Campbell, 2012, p.469). Political commentator Andy McSmith is certain that if there had been an honest and open cabinet debate and a vote then it would have come out against the war.[12] As we have seen, one explanation for how discontent was contained relates to the internal functioning of government. Insider accounts all suggest Blair did not encourage collegiate government. Cabinet meetings were there to keep ministers up to speed and on message and involved little debate (see, for example, Rawnsley, 2012; Kampfner, 2005). When, on one of the rare moments in Spring 2002, cabinet members dared to question Iraq policy and forced a serious discussion on it, Blair was incandescent. 'A momentous occasion,' wrote Robin Cook in his diary (quoted in Rawnsley, 2010, p.83). Such practices could only be sustained by the wider culture that existed in parliament. In the words of Andy McSmith, 'a habit of quiescence had developed in parliament and the cabinet in recent years, at least partly as a result of the massive increase in the number of ministerial posts. A concern for career and favour dominated'.[13] Even though many were uncomfortable and fearful about the war, challenging Blair just seemed like too much of a personal and political risk. Clare Short, Minister for Development, exhibited this survival instinct most publicly. After taking a critical stance on the war and calling Tony Blair reckless in a BBC radio interview, she threatened to resign from the cabinet if Britain went to war with Iraq without a clear UN mandate. Just days before the attack, however, she u-turned and announced that she would remain in the cabinet and vote for war because the Prime Minister had assured her she would have a lead role in post-invasion Iraq (Rawnsley, 2012).

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[12] Interview with Andy McSmith 22 June, 2011.
[13] Interview with Andy McSmith 22 June, 2011.

For many, this was a pivotal moment. In the words of Stop the War convenor Lindsey German, it was both a decisive moment and symptomatic of the way that parliament let the people down:

> *Failure to stop the war was mainly due to the fact that a large number of Labour MPs went against the wishes of their constituents, as did many Tory MPs incidentally. If Clare Short had resigned, so soon after Robin Cook going, it might well have been impossible to continue. We now know how terrified the cabinet were of the opposition, but failing an open challenge, the momentum of war just carried them along.*[14]

Jeremy Corbyn argues that the government was able to exploit suspicions between MPs who were uncomfortable with the plans to attack Iraq and the smaller minority who took a more general position against the war on terror. But his graphic account of the day of the vote also corroborates the view that personal career considerations were an important factor in determining the outcome:

> *At the beginning of the day we thought there were two hundred Labour MPs who were dissenting into some degree or other. There were however considerable suspicions amongst a number of the Labour people. There were those of us including me who had voted against the war in Afghanistan. We were now being joined by large numbers of MPs who supported the Afghan war and thought it was justified…. With hindsight we didn't do enough on parliamentary lobbying in a detailed way of bringing Labour MPs together on it. When the day itself came the lobbying was very intensive by Labour whips intensive Blair and Brown, they were dragging in Labour MPs and offering them all sorts of things, secretaryships, baubles for their constituencies, delegation trips, you name it. Of course as principled supporters of peace we don't have these kinds of things to offer. You could see during the day our support was reducing… and I saw some MPs just sitting in the tearoom almost in tears with the dilemma of what to do. I remember one MP, I don't know who it was, saying to me "God, it's easy for you isn't it, you have just got to vote against". So I said, "What is different in your case?" And he said, "Well I have got my future to think of and you haven't". So I think you can see where they are coming from on that one.*[15]

Whatever the exact explanation for the success of Blair's containment strategy, the level of concern in Downing Street and the scale of the intervention by the government suggests that in the minds of the key protagonists, this outcome was very far from being pre-ordained. In the time

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[14] Interview with Lindsey German, 31 October, 2012.
[15] Interview with Jeremy Corbyn MP, 20 July, 2012

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running up to the vote, including the period of the great demonstration of 15 February, there was, in the government itself, a real sense of uncertainty about the future of politics. There was a feeling that Blair's pursuit of the war might take Britain into unknown political territory in which a whole cabinet might have had to resign due to popular opposition to a war.

Chapter 6: Protest makes the mainstream

6.1. Changing the paradigm?

This chapter will examine and analyse the data collected on the extent and type of the coverage of the anti-war protests. As we saw in Chapter 2, the protest paradigm predicts that the media will tend to ignore or downplay protest or view it through the prism of deviance or criminality (Chan and Lee, 1984; McLeod and Hertog' 1998; McLeod and Detember, 1999). It also predicts that the media will underplay the actual issues that motivate it, reporting 'from the outside', providing little legitimacy to the protesters themselves, focussing instead on the protest as a news event in itself and one which is newsworthy because it deviates from normal or even acceptable behaviour (Gitlin, 1980; Murdock, 1981; McLeod and Hertog, 1998). The aim here is to discover in detail how the coverage of the Iraq protests matched up to the paradigm, in terms of the extent of the coverage and the types of attitudes it displayed. In the process of such a detailed quantitative and textual examination of the evidence, we start to discover the main assumptions and preoccupations the media outlets under scrutiny bring to the subject. This in turn lets us begin to develop a sense of some of the drivers of the type of coverage revealed. The chapter starts with a comparative assessment of the extent of the coverage of the four sample demonstrations, on 28 September 2002, 15 February 2003, 20 November 2003 and 18 March 2005. It then goes on to summarise the findings about the reporting and the interviewing of participants, then into the attitudes, themes and framing identified in my sample. It looks at what the use of pictures, still and moving, tells us about attitudes to coverage and compares the coverage across the political spectrum. The chapter ends with a tentative series of conclusions drawn from a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis. These conclusions include a provisional assessment of the relative weight of a series of different factors in generating a period of highly unusual coverage of protest.

The discussion of attitude and framing inevitably involves a mix of quantitative and textual analysis. Framing devices overlap or merge into one another creating hybrids or ambiguity that cannot be fully explored using fixed categories. Most significantly, in order to use this research sample to go beyond description and suggest causes, sensitivity to the nuances and shades of meaning and to assumptions implied in certain formulations is essential. Without textual analysis

a quantitative assessment of framing can be a blunt instrument, without a quantitative analysis, textual investigation can dissolve into a series of impressions. Coding-based research, while seeking to remain as objective as possible, inevitably straddles the objective/subjective divide. The assessment of the 'attitude' of a report in itself involves a series of judgements and raises questions of point of view. The description for example, of a demonstration as 'big and angry' might be seen as positive by the demonstration's organisers but conceivably as negative by the writer or perhaps her reader. There is no simple resolution of this complexity. Meaning is a socially constructed communication and continually in flux. Any attempt to establish the value carried by a particular report from a 'neutral' point of view is inevitably informed guesswork, hovering between an attempt to judge the conscious attitude of the producers and its likely impact on the presumed audience. As the current work is primarily an examination of the approach of the media to a series of controversial events, it perhaps strays on the side of trying to assess changing conscious or implicit attitudes of the media, rather than starting from a reception-based approach, but undoubtedly elements of both approaches remain. It is, however, an interesting observation on the sample under review that the sense of a contradiction between the intention of the author(s) and the likely effect of a piece rarely comes into play.

Much reportage is couched in dispassionate terms. Journalists are specifically taught to hide or preferably suspend their opinions and emotions when reporting news and so their texts often give away little of their own attitudes. There are indeed a large number of reports in the research that have been judged 'neutral' in their attitude, that essentially outline broadly verifiable facts. It should be remembered however, that compared to the treatment predicted in the literature on the protest paradigm, such neutrality toward protest is itself remarkable. Despite all this, because of its relative rarity and the fact that it is partisan and controversial by its very nature, protest invites judgement more than many social phenomena. These judgements can very often be assessed by the tone of a piece or by the author or producers explicit statements. But this is not the end of the story. It is fair to say that given the aims of protest – to lobby, persuade sometimes block or force by the mobilisation of numbers of citizens – simple descriptions often do carry value judgements. So, themes or frames emphasising diversity, large size, social significance, unity of purpose are in this context taken as positives. Those suggesting the threat of violence, irrelevance, naivety and so forth are taken as negatives.

6.2. The level of coverage

Chart 1: Number of stories per demonstration
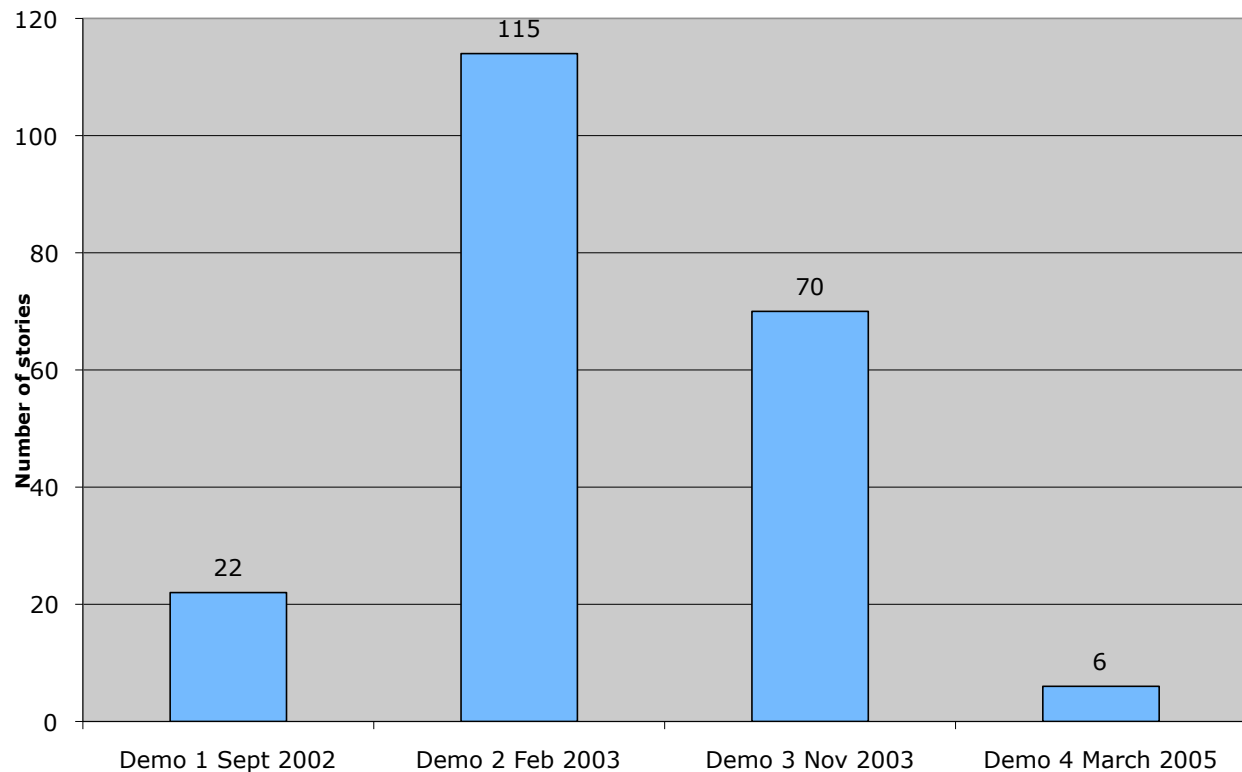
The level of coverage of the protests appears to be unprecedented (see chart 1). The demonstration on 15 February was not just widely reported on the front pages of the papers sampled but all of the papers except the *Sun* and the *News of the World* cleared many pages to report on different aspects of the protest. The *Sunday Mirror* cleared the front page for a demonstration photo beneath the headline '2m Say No. Are you deaf Mr Blair?' (*Sunday Mirror*, 2003). Pages two to nine were dominated by demonstration reports. The other papers ran features stories and photo spreads, vox pop style interviews with participants ('ordinary' and celebrity), and sent staff journalists on to the demonstration. The *Daily Telegraph*, an openly pro-war paper, ran a four-page special with a photomontage of the demonstration on Monday, 17 February featuring five interviews with participants entitled 'Why I marched' and one interview headlined 'Why I didn't march'. (This last was, strangely, an interview with Germaine Greer who expresses support for the protesters but argues she could not attend because of a pressing deadline!). The supplement also contains an eyewitness account by reporter Andrew Gimson 'embedded' with protesters travelling from Diss and a global round up headlined 'Wave of

protest ripples round the world' (*Daily Telegraph*, 2003). Meanwhile, BBC One ran 12 stories with a significant reference to the demonstration on its main evening bulletins in the seven days either side of the march, mostly over two and half minutes long. The level of coverage in advance of the demonstration on 15 February 2003, and to a lesser extent in September 2002 was also unusual. Of the dailies, only the *Sun* failed to flag up the demonstration on 15 February in advance, some provided maps, and all apart from the *Sun* reported on the organisers' (and sometimes the police's) prediction that it would be an unusually big demonstration. The *Daily Telegraph,* for example, ran a story headlined, 'Peace march could attract half a million' (Johnston, 2003). The *Daily Mirror* actually campaigned for participation on both demonstrations with plugs for the demonstration by John Pilger and Charles Kennedy amongst others on 14 February and 15 February, and openly headlined as such (Pilger, 2003; Kennedy, 2003).

28 September 2002

Coverage of the four demonstrations in the sample peaks with 115 items in the week of the 15 February demonstration. But already there is an unusual amount of attention paid to the demonstration of September 2002 (see chart 2). Overall there are 22 items mentioning it, including four in the *Guardian* and seven on BBC One. There is a wide a variation between the

different outlets with the *Sun* failing to cover it at all and none of the pro-war papers mentioning the demonstration at all in the build-up, while the *Mirror* previewed it during the week and ran a headline asking its readers to 'March for Peace' on its front page on the day of the demonstration itself (*Daily Mirror*, 2002). The *Guardian* also flags it up and reports on preparations and takes seriously organisers' sense of a very large movement developing. Two days before the demonstration the *Guardian* ran a long story headline, 'March organisers' target is to stage Britain's biggest ever peace demo' (Hall, 2002), over a piece which includes stand-alone interview clips with some of those intending to be on the demonstration and provides a map of the march route. The gap between the different papers' level of coverage partially closes after the demonstration when all the papers except the *Sun* carry reports, though as we shall see the tone and approach of the reports diverges sharply.

15 February 2003

Chart 3 Number of stories on 15 February 2003 demo by outlet
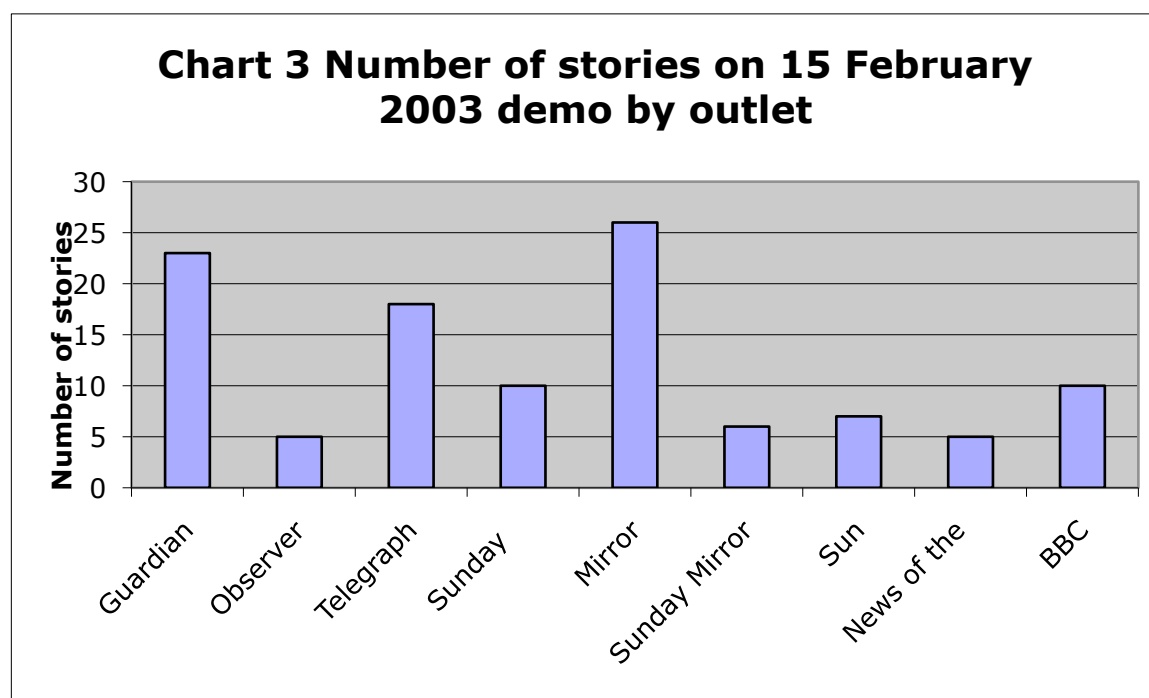
A similar pattern emerges over the week of the 15 February demonstration in 2003, but with a huge jump in the coverage and a growing convergence between titles (see chart 3). Across the sample there are 115 stories at least partly dedicated to the demonstration, the *Mirror* runs 27 stories, the *Guardian* 24, and the *Telegraph* is not far behind with 17. All the papers carry the

demonstration on their front page at least once, the *Guardian* and the *Mirror* run it front page on the day of the demonstration and in their Monday editions as well, though in the *Guardian* the actual report of the demo is the second item on the page following the main piece headlined 'Blair to defy anti-war protests'. The *Mirror*, the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* all preview the demonstration in some detail. The *Guardian*, for example, ran a report on Wednesday, 12 February headlined '1 Million could join grassroots protest' (Vidal and Wilson, 2003), and a story the following day headed '10 Million join world protest rallies' (Vidal, 2003), The *Mirror* as we have seen actively tried to ensure its readers attend. This time around all the other papers remark on the demonstration in advance and the preparations themselves have become newsworthy. All the papers including the *Sun* and *News of the World* carry extensive coverage in the demonstration's aftermath. BBC One runs four stories on its main bulletin on the day of the demonstration that refer relatively centrally to the demonstrations in London and Scotland, as well as a story the night before, discussing the likely significance of the demonstration and the diversity of the opposition that it is representing. In-depth news consideration of the demonstration and its impact continues through Sunday, 16 February and into the evening of Monday, 17. February when BBC One runs three news items that refer centrally to the demonstration. This pattern is repeated across a good deal of the press. The *Guardian* carries twelve items in its Monday edition and the *Telegraph* and the *Sun* carry eight and five items respectively on the same day. Taken together all this suggests that the demonstration was regarded as the most important story for three days concerning the central news issue of the moment – the prospect of war on Iraq.

The continuation of extensive coverage into the week following the march suggests that the media was still trying to assess the significance of the event and were not able to dismiss it as a merely routine protest. Interestingly discussion of the demonstration becomes integrated into the wider reportage of the Iraq crisis. This suggests that the media accepted that the demonstration had played an important part in the unfolding of that crisis, and that its impact would perhaps continue. In the case of the *Mirror*, which, as we have seen, was actively promoting the demonstration as part of its open campaign against the war, this was perhaps not surprising. But by speaking of Blair's defiance of the demonstration in its Monday edition, the *Guardian* too was investing the demonstration with at least putative power to influence mainstream politics

(MacAskill and White, 2003). Perhaps more surprisingly, the *Telegraph* did the same in its Monday paper. Under the main headline 'Blair feels heat in war of words', the subhead read, 'Iraq crisis threatens leadership, say backbenchers. Cabinet comes out fighting after huge march.' The link between growing political opposition and the demonstration is pursued in the article which reports that Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott was urging the public, 'to unite behind Mr Blair after the huge anti-war protest on Saturday' (Helm, 2003) Later in the piece the authors quote Labour backbencher Alice Mahon as urging the Prime Minister to 'back off':

> *Any leader who attempted to take his people into war when there is this level of opposition would be making a huge mistake,' she said. 'It is difficult when leaders get themselves into this position where they do not have the support of the country. The wise thing to do would be to back off.* (Helm, 2003)

This level of prominence and integration into the wider news agenda for a popular demonstration across the mainstream media is, judging from the literature, almost certainly a unique event.

20 November 2003

Chart 4: Number of stories on 20 Nov 2003 demo by outlet
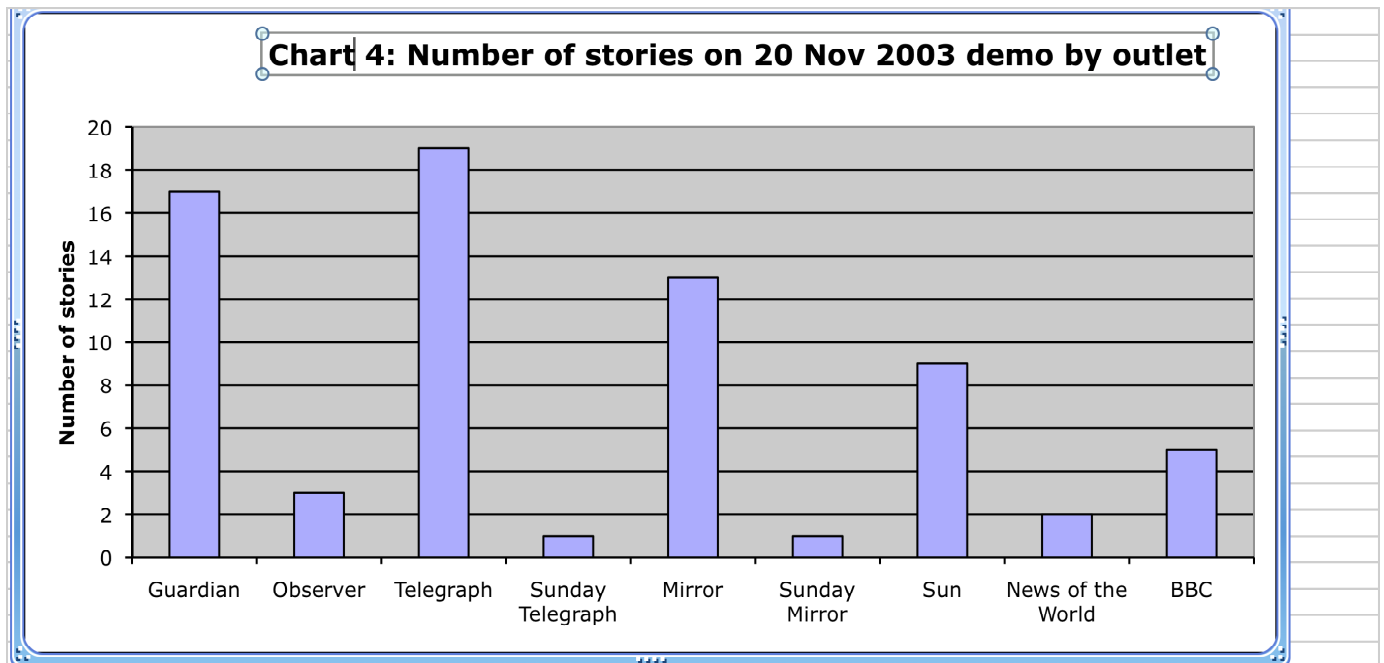
For the demonstration in November of the same year the volume of coverage, at 70 stories in the sample, is significantly down from the peak of February, but much higher than that in 2002 (see Chart 4). All four daily papers flag up the protests in advance, with the *Guardian* running seventeen stories in the week around the 20 November and the *Telegraph* nineteen. It is important to point out that these figures are not directly comparable with those for the other events, for two reasons. First, George Bush's visit, which was the focus of the protest, started two days before the main demonstration. Second, there were some smaller anti-war protests on these days, which did attract media attention and therefore speculation about the main demonstration. Having said that, the coverage was high by historical standards. The *Telegraph* for example ran five stories and features referring to it in the two days after the demonstration, of which three focussed almost entirely on the event. All four daily papers covered it extensively and the Sunday papers at least mentioned it, despite the fact that the demonstration took place on a Thursday as opposed to a Saturday as in all other cases. The *Mirror*, while not openly promoting the demonstration as it had in the run up to the two previous marches, ran stories broadly supporting the protesters' agenda on 18 and 19 November, 'Bush visit an affront to Britain' (Mirror 2003), and 'Maximum insecurity over Dubya' (*Mirror*, 18 November 2003), a piece that argued that the large police presence for Bush's visit was disproportionate. A good deal of the pre-demo coverage was focussed on issues of security and potential violence as opposed to preparations as it had been around 15 February. In all 17 or 24 percent of the 70 items in the sample had 'security, violence or potential violence' as the main frame of reference, as opposed to just 6 or 5 percent of the 115 pieces that were run about 15 February. Once again the news coverage for the protest had a long 'tail', extending to the 22 November in the case of the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*, and the 23 November in the case of the *Observer*, although this is partly to be explained by the continued presence of George Bush in Britain in the days after the demonstration. The marchers were again treated as part of the wider political debate around the Bush visit and the question of the war in Iraq, but as we shall see, in rather different and less flattering ways than around the 15 February demonstration.

Chart 5: Number of stories on March 18 2005 demo by outlet
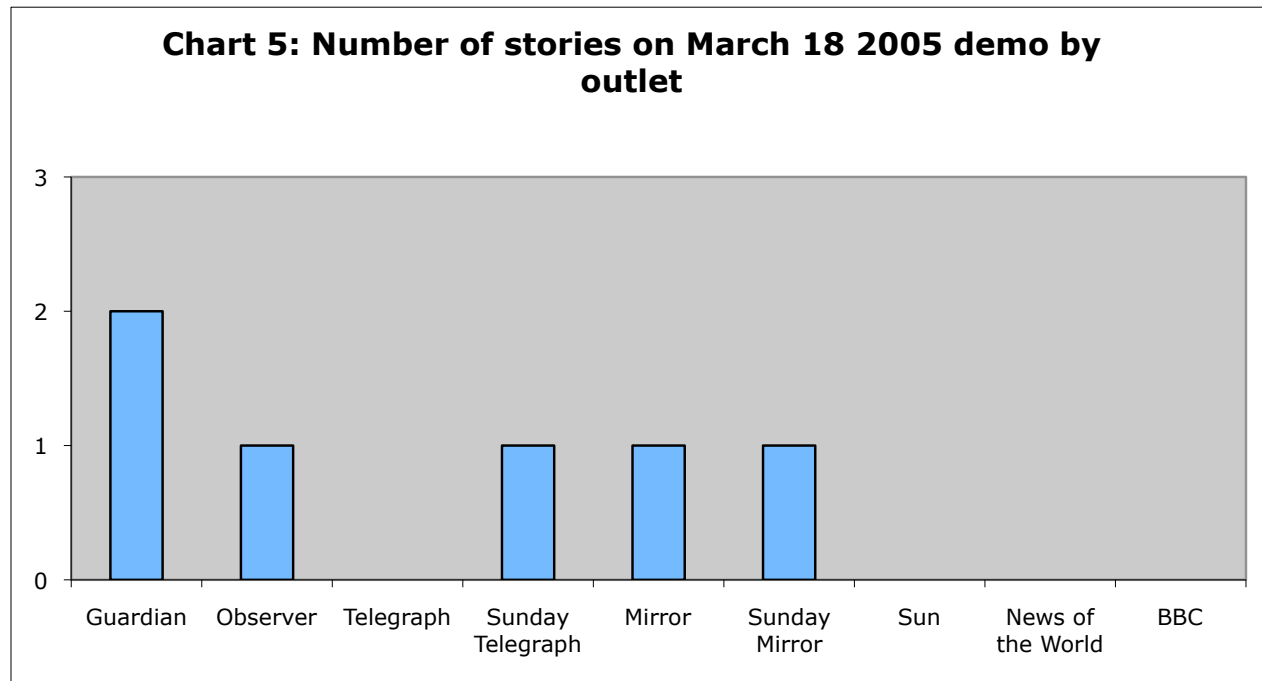
By March 2005 we have returned to more recognisable territory (see Chart 5). A demonstration of historically significant size, which organisers estimated as attracting 150,000, passes off with only a tokenistic recognition by the media, with only six extremely short reports across the sample, none on the front page or high in the running order. There is no coverage of the demonstration in advance, and despite the fact that it coincides with the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, most of the coverage that there is treats it in isolation from any wider discussion of the issues. Only one piece in the sample, Gary Younge's openly anti-war opinion article 'In a warped reality' (Younge, 2005), attempts to integrate the anti-war movement into the wider narrative around Iraq. 'The elections last year in Spain, and recent events in Italy are encouraging. They show that while the anti-war movement failed to stop the war, it has maintained a sufficiently effective presence to make a crucial difference and at moments to disable and discredit it'.

6.3. The participants

If the extent of the coverage was exceptional, the evidence suggests the coverage of these demonstrations also diverged from the established norms in the way it gave voice to the movement (see Chart 6). The protest paradigm suggests that movement spokespeople or demo participants rarely get a hearing in the media (Gitlin, 1980; Wilcox, 2005). In general, when

oppositional opinion is sought, it tends to come from voices within the establishment or the mainstream. There are some indications that this remained true in general in the debate about the rights and wrongs of the Iraq War. The most in-depth analysis of the British media debate about Iraq found that overall the elite driven model of the media best explains the output and that anti-war actors 'had a difficult time in gaining access to the British news media and winning sympathetic coverage' (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.152). Having said that they also found that 'several news media outlets succeeded in generating coverage more generally that deviated significantly from the predictions of the elite-driven model' (p.130). But in the stories sampled here referring to demonstrations there is actually a relative diversity of spokespeople and interviewees.

Chart 6: Who did the media interview/quote? All demos
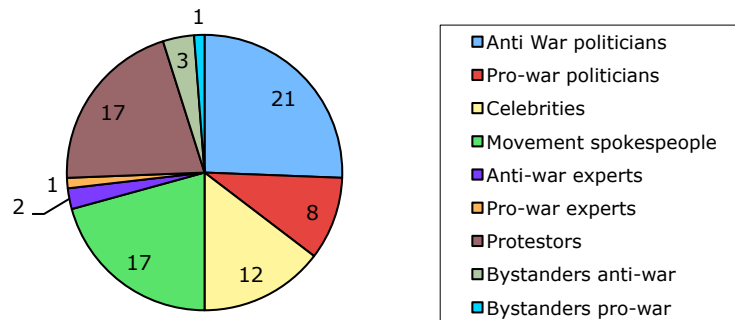
Legend:
- Anti War politicians
- Pro-war politicians
- Celebrities
- Movement spokespeople
- Anti-war experts
- Pro-war experts
- Protestors
- Bystanders anti-war
- Bystanders pro-war

Values shown: 1, 3, 21, 17, 1, 2, 17, 12, 8

Chart 7: Frequency that type of demo participants mentioned (all demos)

Legend:
- MPs
- Celebrities
- Ordinary people
- Muslims
- Muslims framed as extreme
- Socialists
- Socialists framed as extreme
- Movement leaders
- Anti-war military

Values shown: 33, 29, 38, 8, 6, 8, 19, 3, 4
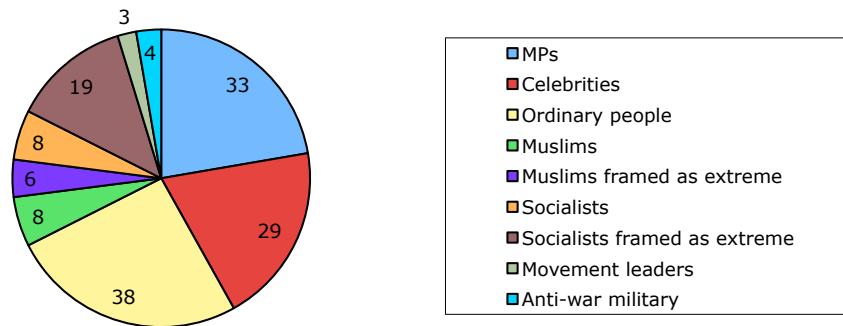
Across the sample there are 21 quotes or interviews given by anti-war MPs and 12 by anti-war celebrities. But there are also seventeen interviews or quotes taken from a range of other movement spokespeople, mainly representatives of the Stop the War Coalition. Interestingly too there are 17 interviews or vox pops with regular or unnamed protesters on the demonstrations, and three interviews with bystanders who are sympathetic with the aims of the movement. In the stories referring to 15 February 2003, for example, 17 (19 percent) obtain direct quotes from regular participants on the march and only eight (9 percent) from MPs and celebrities, and eight (8 percent) from various movement spokespeople. The BBC coverage included one story in which the journalist spent the day with a group of protesters discussing with them the experience of the day and their reasons for protesting. Another story featured a series of short interviews with protesters that lasted longer than the 'expert' and 'official movement' interviews taken together (BBC, 2003).

All this is testimony to a certain openness to the demonstrators, which reflects a sense of surprise and curiosity generated by the sheer scale and diversity of the demonstration, which is a characteristic of some of the coverage. Richard Williams wrote in the *Guardian* on 17 February, for example, that 'What astonished everyone who marched on Saturday… was the apparently limitless variety of those with whom they shared the streets of London' (Williams, 2003). Across

the coverage there are a large number of references to the wide range of different types of people on the demonstrations (see Chart 7). Another *Guardian* piece carried the sub-head, 'This was a day which confounded dozens of assumptions about our age' (Bunting, 2003). There is perhaps a possibility that a concentration on the character of the demonstrations detracts from the issues at stake in line with one of the predictions of the protest paradigm (see Chapter 2 above). But a great deal of the questioning of ordinary protesters concerns motivation, and so tends to lead back to an attentiveness to the issues that brought people on to the demonstration. As we shall see though, textual examination of the stories does suggest some evidence that the attitude to participants does not necessarily mark a complete break from previous practice. The extent of engagement with the rank and file voices of the demonstration should not be exaggerated. Most of the ordinary people interviewed are given a short vox pop or one line in an article. They are outnumbered by the MPs interviewed over the sequence as a whole and the significance of the demonstrations is largely assessed through editorial, journalistic or parliamentary voices. Nevertheless the presence of a reasonable number of participant's voices is unusual and significant. As well as representing one more recognition of the sheer level of popular involvement in the movement it is also perhaps a product of the fact that this was a movement that was largely organised and mobilised outside the structures of official politics. Michael White predicted in the *Guardian* on 15 February, that popular opposition to the war' (White, 2003). He turned out to be right. Only a handful of MPs were prepared to associate themselves with the movement, and only four or five spoke from the platform at the end of the demonstration.

6.4. Attitude and framing

The most striking aspect of the results, after the statistics for the sheer level of coverage of the first three demonstrations, concerns the attitude on display in the coverage. There is much more favourable or neutral coverage and even promotional coverage than the protest paradigm would predict (see Chart 7). Overall 99 of the stories, 46.3 percent of the sample, are coded as neutral in attitude, while 59 stories, 27.6 percent of the total, registered as taking a 'favourable' attitude to the protests. Seven percent of the items were actively 'promoting' of the protests and only 41, roughly 19 percent, were 'unfavourable'. These aggregates, surprising though they are, partly disguise the truly remarkable results for the first two demonstrations. Just over 60 percent of the coverage examined for 28 September was either 'favourable' or 'promoting' and just over 30

percent 'neutral', meaning that just two items registered as 'unfavourable' (see Chart 8). The results for the coverage of 15 February are only marginally less notable (see Chart 9). Thirty-seven percent and 39 percent of the coverage was favourable and neutral respectively while 8 percent was promoting. Only 17 percent, or 19 of the stories were unfavourable. The slight and perhaps unexpected tilt towards unfavourable coverage is best explained by the fact that the February demonstration was covered more evenly across the political spectrum. But despite this tilt, 15 February received the largest proportion of 'favourable' and 'neutral' coverage out of the first three demonstrations, only being surpassed by 19 March 2005, the results for which are heavily skewed by the fact that the pro-war press simply ignored it.

Chart 8: Attitude of coverage of 28 Sept 2002 demo by outlet
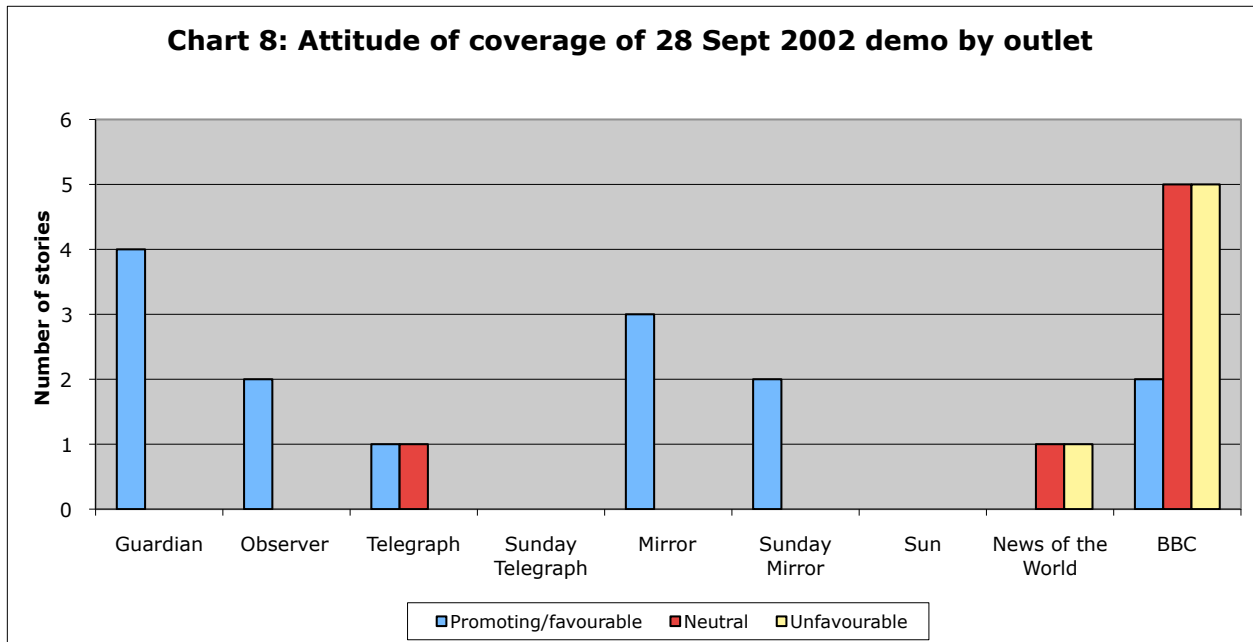
Chart 9: Attitude of coverage of 15 February 2003 by outlet

Legend: ■ Promoting/favourable ■ Neutral □ Unfavourable

Y-axis: Number of stories (0 to 30)

X-axis: Guardian, Observer, Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, Mirror, Sunday Mirror, Sun, News of the World, BBC
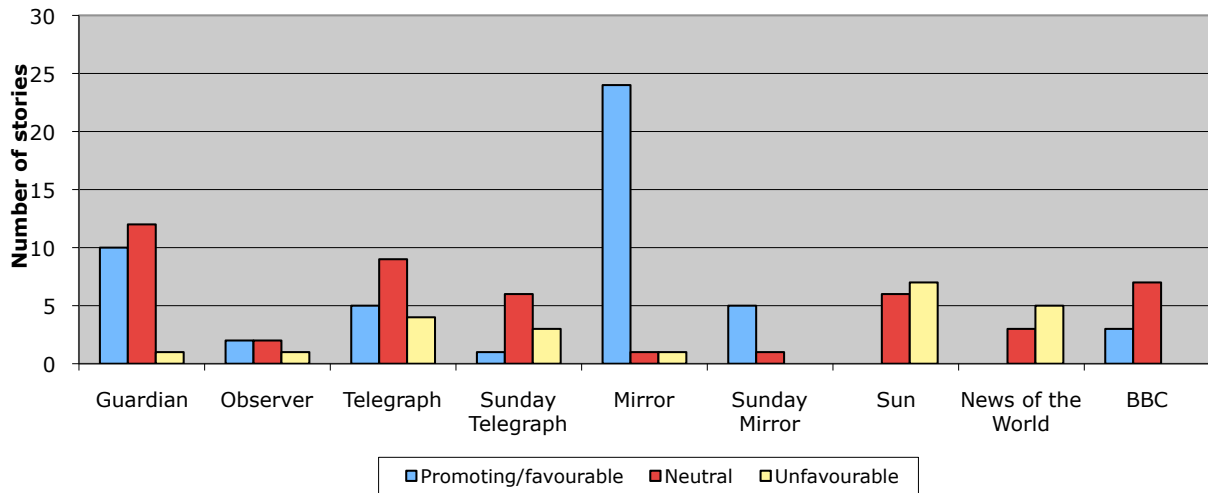
Chart 10: Attitude of coverage of 20 Nov 2003 demo by outlet

Legend: ■ Promoting/favourable ■ Neutral □ Unfavourable

Y-axis: Number of stories (0 to 16)

X-axis: Guardian, Observer, Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, Mirror, Sunday Mirror, Sun, News of the World, BBC

Chart 11: Attitude of coverage of 18 March 2005 demo by outlet
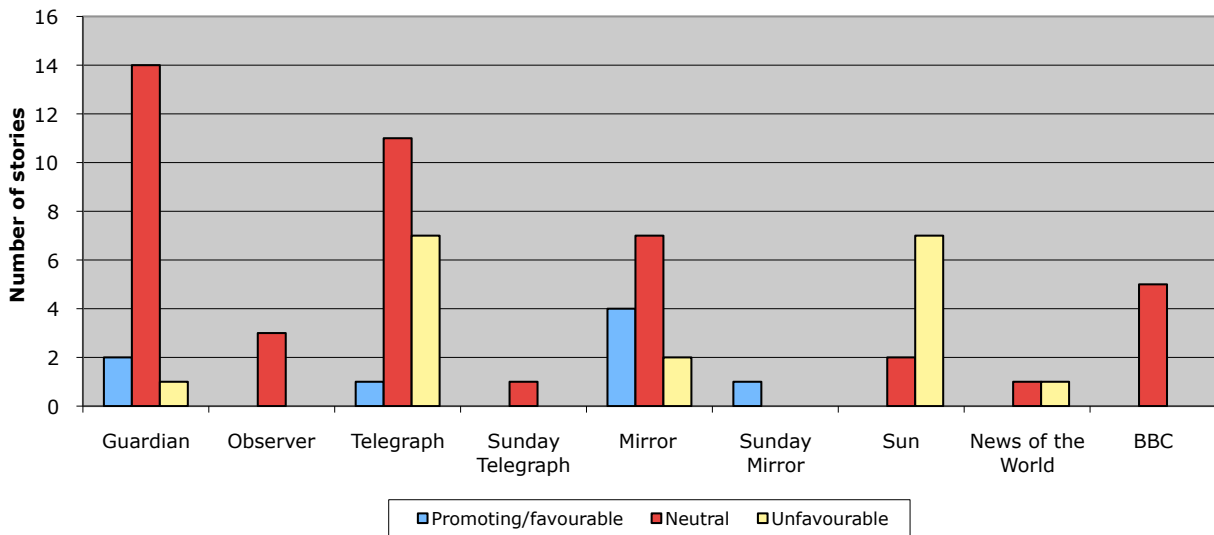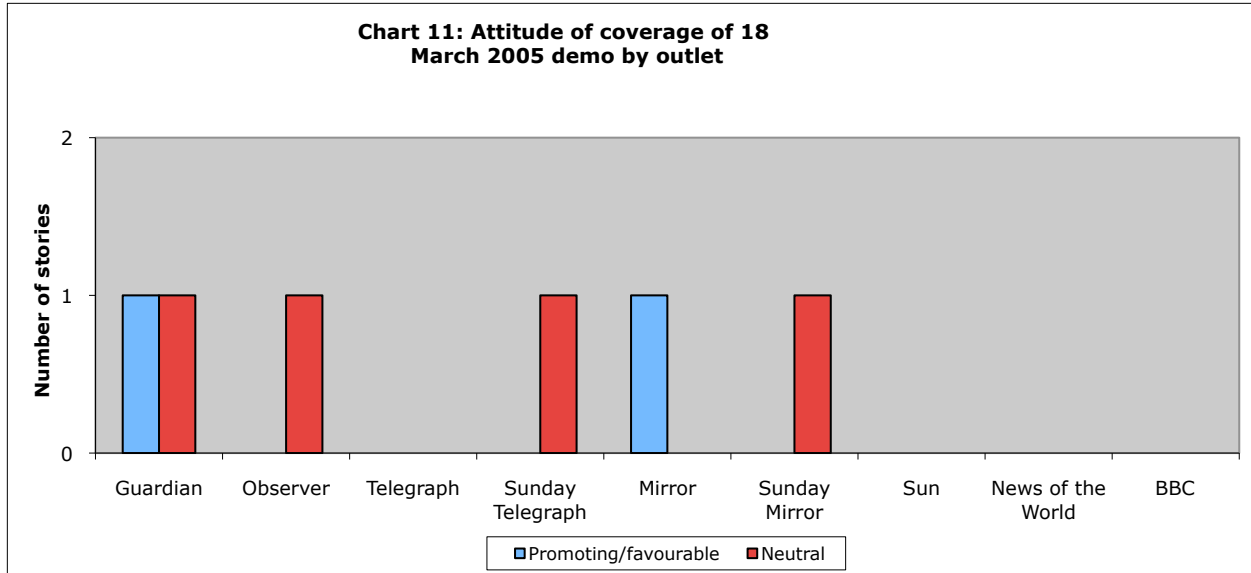
The moment, then, of the greatest focus on the movement across the broadest spectrum of the media was also the moment proportionately and absolutely of the most sympathy or at least objectivity toward the demonstrations. Again, this is not a finding that fits neatly into the protest paradigm or the general attitude taken toward protest coverage in the bulk of the literature. This last is an important point when it comes to considering the framings that are deployed in the coverage of the demonstrations. From the start of this sequence there were relatively few cases of the kind of negative framing characteristic of the protest paradigm in the news coverage itself. *In general* the news frames tended to be anodyne or positive. It is noticeable that the coding for subject matter and framing often overlap, suggesting if not objectivity then a reluctance to make tendentious judgements about the protests.

Positive framing

Chart 12: Frequency of some main frames

Chart 12: Frequency of some main frames — bar chart, Number of stories (0–50) across Demo 1 Sept 02, Demo 2 Feb 03, Demo 3 Nov 03, Demo 4 March 05. Legend: Large size, Significance, Violence.
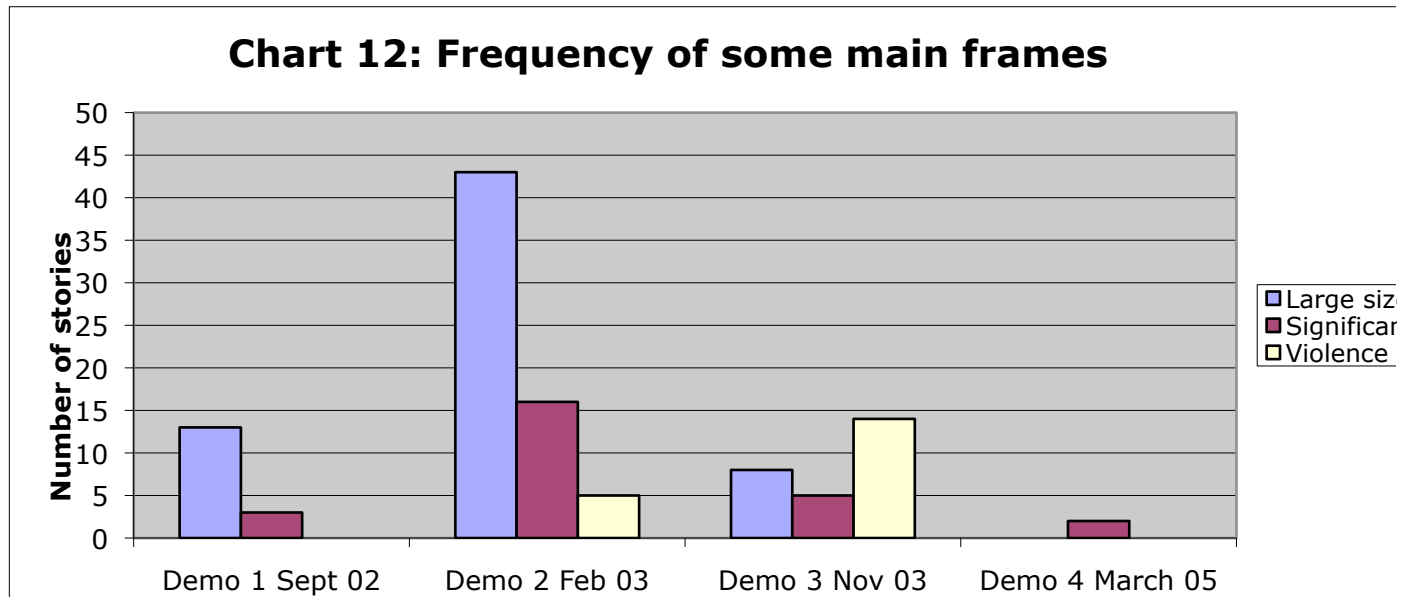
Most of the frames organising the material underline a common, positive attitude to the demonstrations (see Chart 12). The most common frame is 'large size' which is the main idea framing 37 percent of the stories analysed. A concern with the large size of the protest dominates the framing of the coverage of 28 September, with 65 percent of the stories approaching their reports from this point of view. There is a wider spectrum of approaches to stories concerning 15 February, but even here 45 percent of the items have 'large size' as their main framing device. The significance of the demonstration is the second most common dominant frame across the board, characterising 14 percent of the stories, closely followed by the related frames of 'diversity, breadth and representativeness' which together account for the main framing notions of another 12 percent of the surveyed material. 'Diversity' is far and away the most common secondary frame in the stories surveyed, flowing as it does so neatly out of comment on the size if the demonstration. It registers as the second frame in 41 percent of the one hundred or so stories for which more than one frame is recorded. Again and again, journalists remark on the novelty of the demographic mix: 'angry Muslims in PLO gear, tidy Hampstead ladies with their granddaughters in prams, a welter of students' and 'those following the route… included MPs trade unionists, religious leaders, Gulf war veterans artists, pop stars, students and many Muslim groups from across the country' and so on (Ferguson, 2002).

The diversity theme is sometimes linked with comment on the unity and/or harmony characteristic of the demonstration, with the *Observer* reporting 'an undeniable unity of purpose', and that, 'all the groups, the old left and new worried world of Islam, merged for the most part very easily' (Ferguson, 2002). The diversity frame develops over the period surveyed. In the reportage of the 2002 demonstration, it is notable that recognition of the unusual size of the demonstration is sometimes combined a little awkwardly with suggestions that extreme groups or 'the usual suspects' dominated. 'Around 150,000 protesters turned up to campaign against the Iraq War yesterday… Extreme left-wing groups, including the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Labour Party, were out in force, along with union delegates' (*News of the World*, 29 September 2002). We shall examine the development of these kinds of frames below. Another recurrent aspect of the diversity theme is a surprised and often faintly amused interest in the cross-class nature of the protest, and particularly the apparently strong showing from the middle classes: 'the men in deerstalkers and Barbours, the pro-protesters in neon knitwear, the students and the grandmas...there were nuns, toddlers, barristers… country folk and lecturers, dentists and poulterers, a hairdresser from Cardiff and a poet from Cheltenham' (Riddell, 2003).

Taken together, the different elements of size, diversity and the 'unusual' nature of the protests, combined with their apparent political unity or at least unanimity often appears to have generated a sense of surprise in the media. Running through the coverage there is a palpable sense that the usual categories, frames and responses are no longer fully functional or appropriate. Hence the prevalence of colourful, descriptive pieces, only interesting for new phenomena and giving a strong sense of individuals and the media collectively uncertainly trying to assess the movements' significance. Uncertainty or hesitancy about the significance of the protest transfers to the field of political analysis at times too. The editorial of the *Daily Telegraph* for example, on 30 September, starts by congratulating the organisers for attracting such a significant turnout and noting the diversity of those present. The piece then goes on to argue why the demonstration is wrong headed (*Daily Telegraph*, 2002). As the movement develops, the descriptive theme of diversity sometimes shades into the more highly charged and political area of representation, in its two related senses. First, the idea that the demonstration as a whole had a special social or a political significance because of its size and its makeup. The day after 15 February 2003, for example, the *Sunday Telegraph* carried an article with the strap line 'Yesterday's march

represented something much more than the ritual thrashings of the rent-a-mob left' (Syal, Alderson and Milner, 2003). In other places the idea emerges of the demonstration as a more active vehicle of popular representation, which is perhaps lacking, or only rhetorically present in the political mainstream. Reporting the same demonstration for example, Tony Rennel of the *Sunday Mirror* turns Blair's apparent concern with public opinion back on him saying 'If it helps you to understand, Mr Blair, helps you make sense of what happened on the streets yesterday, then think of all those people as a mighty focus group – and take notice' (Rennel, 2003).

At times the BBC also reflects this sense of the demonstrators 'carrying' popular opinion into the public realm. One interchange between a studio presenter and journalist on the ground reflects a strong estimation of the demonstrators' impact into the broad process of democracy and even geopolitics:

> *Presenter: Tony Blair is of course George Bush's closest ally and yet he has seen today by far the biggest ever demonstrations against his policy of supporting the war. Where on earth does he go from here?*

> *Reporter: If there is no second UN resolution Tony Blair will be faced with the biggest most dangerous decision of his career, whether to go into a war with America, and frankly, if he does, it's an "all bets are off" decision* (BBC, 2003).

The issue of a democratic deficit is occasionally brought out explicitly, it appears in eight stories about the demonstrations. After pointing out the disparate class background of the protesters on the November demonstration in the same year, Sam Leith in the *Telegraph* suggests:

> *Perhaps the Burkean idea of representative democracy has been so undermined by Mr Blair's "presidential" style of government that it has ended up leaving the represented feeling they aren't getting their democratic due. That, it's surely worth at least considering, is why people are taking to the streets.* (Leith, 2003)

By then a reading of the movement as a product of a democratic deficit had been stated in a number of different ways. The *Guardian*, for example, headlined its post-15 February vox pop section with the quote 'This government no longer speaks for me' (*Guardian*, 2003). Madeline Bunting comments on 17 February 2003 that 'Saturday proved that the decline of democracy has been overstated. What has changed is the pattern of political participation: political parties and

turnouts may be declining, but intense, episodic political engagement is on the increase' (Bunting, 2003).

Negative framing

As already suggested, the most common negative frames deal with the ideas of 'the usual suspects' or 'extremist participation'. They are most often deployed against the leadership or figureheads of the movement as opposed to the regular participants and therefore do not necessarily imply a completely negative attitude to the demonstration as a whole. But while this distinction between 'ordinary people' and 'the usual suspects' can mark recognition of the exceptional nature of the demonstration. It is also marshalled in attempts to question the validity of the protest. While the tone of the treatment of the more radical, organised protesters rarely reaches the kind of hysterical levels referred above in articles about anti-Iraq War protests in 1991, (Brian Hitchen's reference to 'assorted rat droppings', for example, in Chapter 1 above), nevertheless 20 percent of the 15 February stories refer to the participation of groups or individuals framed as extreme. The 'virgin protesters', as they came to be called, tend to be treated as more significant or perhaps even genuine than serial activists, or left wing campaigners. The day after the march Matthew D'Ancona comments in the *Sunday Telegraph* that 'A great many of yesterday's marchers were anti-Americans, haters of Israel, incorrigible pacifists, and tofu-eating surrender monkeys. But many were simply mystified' (D'Ancona, 2003). On the same day the *Sunday Mirror* takes the same approach, if rather more politely: 'While it is true that militants, anarchists, anti-capitalists and anti-Americans – what one weary PC called "the great unwashed" – were out in force, the heart and mind of the protest was ordinary people' (Rennel, 2003).

But the *Sun* develops an approach in which the ordinary people on the march are regarded as dupes of the hardened agitators who lead it. One headline after the 15 February demonstration ran 'Demo led by usual suspects' (Blamires, 2003). On the same day the paper congratulated the 58 million who did not come on the march, for not being 'suckered by has-beens like Tony Benn and Michael Foot or never-will-be Charles Kennedy'. As we shall see, a framing of demonstrators as violent or potentially violent develops later in the sequence, particularly around the anti-Bush demonstration. The other negative frames shaping the coverage of the movement

rarely involve out and out attacks on protesters, and often emerge from argument or polemics about the rights and wrongs of the issues at stake. Illustrating this is the fact that much of this kind of negative framing emerges in comment pieces and editorials rather than in the straight news items, although some news items, particularly those in the right wing press do contain echoes of the arguments used in opinion pieces. One fairly common frame positions the protesters as 'misguided', 'naïve' or 'complacent', often suggesting that though the protesters are well meaning their actions are in fact liable to have the opposite effect to that intended. This frame becomes more common after 15 February 2003, and mainly operates in the pro-war press. The *Telegraph*'s Mark Steyn writes colourfully in this vein a couple of days before the demonstration against Bush's visit. 'If it's a choice between letting some carbonated-beverage crony of Dick Cheney get a piece of the Nasiriyah soft drinks market or allowing Saddam to go on feeding his subjects feet first into the industrial shredder for another decade or three, then the "peace" activists will take up the lesser of two evils i.e., crank up the shredder' (Steyn, 2003). This approach is not entirely restricted to the right wing press however. In a piece headlined 'I'm ashamed by this march of the mugs' in the *Sunday Mirror*, Carole Malone pursues the same theme: 'What is it with the skew-whiff mentality of the liberal left in this country that they can demonise Blair and Bush, yet they totally ignore the biggest threat to world peace that is Osama Bin Laden?' (Malone, 2003).

This theme at times shades into a 'they don't know how lucky they are' frame that suggests that protests such as those being reported would not be allowed in the country being attacked. This is a good example of a frame that emerges out of one of the arguments used to justify the war – the defence of democracy, and as such suggests a conscious effort to challenge the protesters' agenda. This is certainly what appeared to happen in some sections of the media around the demonstration against Bush's visit in November 2003. Many on the pro-war right in the US were concerned about the advisability of the trip that had been planned much earlier. The *Guardian's* US correspondent Gary Younge picked up on this widespread concern:

> *"This is not a prediction but a terrible foreboding," writes David Frum, Mr Bush's former speechwriter who claimed credit for the phrase "axis of evil", in the right-wing weekly the National Review. "I fear that President Bush's imminent state visit to the United Kingdom is shaping up as one of the worst media debacles of his presidency." Mr Frum's analysis of the reasons for the dire predictions is not an*

uncommon view among Americans. "President Bush is not widely popular in Britain," he writes. "He will not receive a warm welcome from the larger British public." Newsweek goes further: "What Blair needs to do is distance himself from Bush, not hug him close." (Younge, 2003)

The *Telegraph* appears to have responded to this anxiety by opening up its pages to a series of pro-war commentators and to directly take on the demonstrators' case. Bush's ex-speech writer David Frum was invited to cover the Bush visit for the paper. His opening gambit was an opinion piece designed to flatter British public opinion by stressing the extent to which Tony Blair had managed to restrain George Bush's instincts at various points. 'At Britain's urging' he claimed Mr Bush returned to the United Nations twice to seek UN resolutions authorising the coalition to use farce against Iraq' (Frum, 2003). The next day his tone changed as he launched an attack on what he regarded as the hypocrisy of the anti-war marchers:

> *The war on terror has glaringly exposed the moral contradictions of contemporary political radicalism: a politics that champions the rights of women and minorities, but only when those rights are challenged by white Europeans; a politics that celebrates creative non-violence at home but condones deadly extremism abroad; and perhaps above all a politics that traces its origins to the Enlightenment – and today raises its voice to protect militantly unenlightened terrorists from the justice dispensed by their victims.* (Frum, 2003a)

Frum's articles were accompanied by the vicious attack on the protests by Mark Steyn quoted above and a rather more subdued critique of the protesters by Boris Johnson. They make similar arguments in different registers, Steyn arguing that there has been 'a 'post 9/11 grand harmonic convergence of all the world's loser ideologies, from Islamic fundamentalism to French condescension' and Johnson arguing that America had kept the peace in Europe for the past 50 years, and had fought for freedom everywhere from Guadalcanal or Panama Beach, not forgetting Bosnia, where Western Europeans had apathetically connived in the slaughter' (Steyn, 2003 and Johnson, 2003). George Bush took up a similar theme in his speech at the Banqueting House on the same day, as reported and elaborated in the *Daily Telegraph* on 21 November.

> *In the Banqueting House, Mr Bush challenged those in the West who would appease the Islamists in the hope of avoiding further retribution, a step which would simply confirm to the likes of Bin Laden that the secular democracies were ripe for the plucking. Those who protested against President's visit in London yesterday, please note. In Washington, Mr Bush challenged Muslims who live under oppressive and*

corrupt rulers to throw off that yoke, not in favour of theocratic despotism but a society where all governments are beholden to the electorate and the miserable failure to realise economic potential is rectified. (*Daily Telegraph,* 2003a)

For the first time, we can see what looks like a concerted attempt to challenge if not the legitimacy, then at least the rationale of the protesters. This is instructive in a number of ways. Both the anxieties of the pro-war commentators and the effort exerted by the *Daily Telegraph* to regain the initiative from the anti-war movement underlines the impact that the UK demonstrations against the war have had on both sides of the Atlantic. It also points of course to the intensely partisan and ideological media climate that surrounds the reporting of the protests, and to the close ties between the media and political actors. We can see here part of the media becoming a direct conduit for pro-war arguments being developed in the political world in the context of its commentary on the demonstration. And as we shall see, despite the pre-trip worries of leading Bush supporters, these types of arguments begin to gain traction in the wider coverage, if partly due to accidental factors.

Around the November demonstration, a more negative attitudes starts to develop, if not to dominate. Twenty-six percent of the stories are now unfavourable compared to only 14 percent for 15 February 2003, and the majority are neutral. Ten percent of the stories are favourable or promoting compared to 41 percent for the demonstration on 15 February 2003. The framing through which this attitude is articulated develops out of the context of the demonstration and focuses on security. There are echoes here of 15 February. Much was made on the Thursday and Friday before 15 February of a bomb scare at Heathrow Airport. All the dailies led with the story on their front pages, but this time the 'security' frame is much more prevalent and often directly focused on the protesters. Fourteen (or 20 percent) of the 71 stories concerning the demonstration are coded as mainly focussed on the possibility or reality of violence or disorder on demonstrations. Another four stories record subsidiary frames referring to violence or possible violence. This is partly because of the specific nature of the demonstrations that were a response to the visit of George Bush. But there is some semantic slippage going on here. Nowhere are the protesters reported to be planning to confront Bush directly, and yet the protests are often included implicitly or otherwise as one of the 'threats' to his safety. The *Guardian* reports for example that 'More than 14,000 police officers at a cost of 5 million pounds will be

on duty during the four day visit with tens of thousands of anti-war protesters are expected to take to the streets' (Steele, 2003). A complex cluster of meanings is generated around these issues. Some of the 'security' framing appears to lead criticism of the President's visit more than to the demonstrators. But there is clear evidence of an implicit conflation of protest and terrorism. The *Daily Mirror* perhaps recognised this two days before the main demonstration in its complaint about the number of police on the streets, and makes a (slightly confused) effort to disentangle the issues: 'However opposed people are to George Bush's state visit, no sane person can wish him harm… Even if there is now a serious threat of terrorist attack, the reason so many police are on the streets is the President's presence' (Roberts, 2003). Elsewhere, however, the two issues are not separated. The *Telegraph* deals with the terrorist threat and the protests in the same paragraph (Boffey and Steele, 2003), and in another article reveals that two issues are literally combined in the police's imagination: 'A major concern is that terrorists may try to infiltrate planned, peaceful demonstrations by the Stop the War Coalition' (Jones, Boffey and Steele, 2003). Elsewhere this conflation is more implicit. The *Guardian*, for example, publishes a picture of a policeman armed with a high powered rifle – presumably useful only against armed threats – over an article headlined 'Fortress London braced for anti-Bush demos' (Young, 2003).

This kind of approach is mirrored by the BBC. On 18 November on its main bulletin, journalist Margaret Gilmore structured her story about the demonstration around a long piece to camera filmed in the police command and control centre at Scotland Yard. Her introduction ran, 'The police and the security services have been put on a heightened alert today because of suggestions that Al-Qaeda cells are planning an attack in the UK this combined with the fact that a large number of protesters are going to be out on the streets is proving a security' (BBC, 18 November). The piece then cut to an interview with a police commissioner outside Scotland Yard, who outlined the security risks saying 'we are talking about a generalised threat level to the UK at the moment which does cause us some concern.' Later in the story, Lindsey German was interviewed about 'fears of violence' in which she argued that no violence had taken place on any of the many Stop the War demonstrations up to now, and that Stop the War was organising a peaceful, mass protest. Margaret Gilmore bridged out of Lindsey German's interview with the words 'but police fear other smaller protests could be less peaceful compounding the already complex security problems (BBC, 18 November). Clearly what we are

seeing here is the re-emergence of media behaviour predicted in the protest paradigm with a strong attempt to link protest with violence, in this case a series of attempts to conflate and confuse the issue of a possible (but unsubstantiated) terrorist threat with popular protest. In the BBC piece particularly, but also in much of the news coverage, this powerful framing excludes any discussion of the issues motivating the protest and puts the organisers on the defensive. Much more time and space is dedicated to elaborating the 'official' position of the police than that of the protesters. By literally placing itself in the police control centre and failing to question the police account of their concerns the BBC piece gives substantial weight to their narrative about the demonstrations. This framing is accompanied by a less favourable attitude towards the demonstrations. Both the 'violence' frames and the sense of a much more critical view of the demonstrations developed in the build-up to the Bush demonstration are reinforced in the retrospective coverage. This is mostly connected to the bombing in Turkey that took place the morning of the demonstration and killed amongst others a number of British tourists, an event which is everywhere given more prominence than the demonstration. This coincidence encouraged the development of the complex of frames linking the issues of terrorism and protest which had been gestating in some of the pro-war press in the days leading up to the demonstration. The most extreme of these paints the protesters as appeasers of terrorism: 'Mr Bush challenged those who would appease the Islamists in the hope of avoiding further retribution, a step which would simply confirm to the likes of Bin Laden that the secular democracies were ripe for the plucking' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2003). In other articles the protesters are accused of lack of respect for marching at all (*The Sun*, 2003), and as not understanding that the right to protest was won by people laying down their lives in the battle for democracy. *The Sun* for example quotes George Bush saying 'In some cases the measured use of force is all that protects us from a chaotic world ruled by force' (*The Sun*, 2003).

The final demonstration in the sequence in March 2005 on the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq received entirely favourable (43 percent), or neutral coverage (57 percent), but the key finding is that it was almost completely ignored in the right wing press and barely mentioned elsewhere, receiving just 7 percent of the coverage by story achieved by 15 February 2003. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that, while it completely ignores the demonstration, the day before the march *The Sun* extensively covered the award of the Victoria Cross to Johnson

Beharry, a British soldier wounded in Iraq (*The Sun*, 2005). This moment perhaps marks the culmination of a process in which the anti-war demonstrators went from being grudgingly accepted as mainstream, even by the right-wing press, to being marginalised once again.

6.5. Bucking the trend?

An examination of attitudes across the titles reinforces the impression that we are looking at a trend that at least partly transcends established political positions or traditional attitudes. As has been noted, some of the research into coverage of the issues of the war itself suggests that the press were predictably partisan. In one of the earliest comprehensive studies of British coverage of the war, Tumber and Palmer report that in the run-up to the war UK press coverage was split on the issues, and 'divided clearly along left/right lines on questions of policy: the left-wing titles clearly opposed, and the right-wing titles clearly supported' (Tumber and Palmer, 2004, p.85). In the days before the war started ex-editor of the *Guardian* Peter Preston confirmed this view. Claiming that in other countries there was a relatively open and volatile debate on the war, he complains that 'in Britain things are exactly as we're used to them'. The majority of the press, in his analysis, were firmly on Blair's side. The reason for the divergence from public opinion was a question of ownership: 'Our biggest papers are owned by Australian-Americans and Canadians. And that in times of national crisis does set us apart.' He goes on:

> *The four Murdoch papers – 36 percent of the national market – stand four square behind their boss. The two Telegraphs of Conrad Black pit "Old Europe versus New World" and, with magnificent predictability, hail the New World Dawn as Lord Black (the Telegraph's owner) delivers a very long lecture in his own Spectator praising that fine Blair "courage".* (Preston, 2003)

Editorially, five of the papers in the sample were pro-war right through the period under review, the *Observer*, the *News of the World,* the two *Telegraphs* and *The Sun*. The *Mirror,* the *Sunday Mirror*, and the *Guardian* were broadly opposed, at least up until the war started. The BBC's position is harder to define as we have seen. Unsurprisingly, if the outlets are simply lined up according to the extent and attitude of protest coverage, the results correlate. The *Guardian* and the *Mirror* run the most coverage and display the most sympathy to the protests, while the *Sun* and the *News of the World* register the least of both, with the *Telegraph* and the *Observer* as close neighbours and the BBC in the middle. But such a line up conceals some surprises.

The tabloids examined take polarised positions, with only 7 percent of the Sun's coverage neutral and none favourable, and only 4.5 percent of the Mirror's coverage unfavourable and just under 30 percent 'promoting', but the results for the rest of the sample are much more bunched. 52 percent of the *Telegraph's* coverage, for example, registers as taking a neutral attitude, as compared with 60 percent for the *Guardian*, and 67.5 percent of the *Telegraph's* coverage is neutral or favourable, compared to 93 percent in the *Guardian*. 'Neutral' is the dominant category for the BBC, the *Observer,* the *Sunday Telegraph,* the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Guardian* and a close second for the *News of the World* at 44 percent.

What we are seeing is a suspension or breakdown of the protest paradigm in some sections of the media and at least a modification across the board. In parallel across a good deal of the media new frames have developed within which protest is reported and interpreted. The new frames articulate a surprised recognition that the protests themselves were different because they mobilised way beyond what are regarded as the usual suspects, 'there are girls here with good nails and *really nice bags*' (Ferguson, 2003). The frame of unity and harmony also registers a sense of surprise that such a diverse movement can focus effectively, 'yet the movement has taken off and its subscribers, on yesterday's evidence, are not a reissued set of hoary peaceniks. These are organised people with clear aims' (Ferguson, 2003). These new frames allow or express a dramatically more favourable attitude to protest than any on record in Britain (see Chapter 1). Over the period under review, however, the historic protest paradigm re-emerges, albeit in a slightly modified form. As early as November 2003, partly for contingent reasons, the old filters of violence on demonstrations, naivety and lack of patriotism have started to reassert themselves, particularly in the context of the threat of Islamic terrorism. What does the research tell us about the reasons for the changing pattern of reporting and the break up and reassembly of a protest paradigm? Clearly size matters. Size is the key frame through which the demonstrations were viewed and discussed. Even the pro-war press recognised the size of the demonstrations give the movement a significance that cannot be ignored. But size alone can't explain the findings. The demonstration on 18 March 2005 was large by historical standards and received very little coverage.

The prevalence of discussion about the unprecedented diversity of the demonstrations suggests this perception has a special importance in the construction of the framework of reportage. These demonstrations were not just large; they also could not be placed in a convenient historical box. They were not predominantly pacifist or leftist or trade union demonstrations although all these groups were clearly present. From the journalists' point of view, the demonstrations often appeared to be representative of the population as a whole, although it is interesting that to illustrate this point reporters often stressed the participation of the middle classes. Perhaps one reason journalists often responded positively to the protests is that they saw many people like themselves on the march. A number of reporters/commentators admit to having friends on the demonstration. Sam Leith wrote in the *Telegraph*, for example, that 'My friends on the demonstration were not, for the most part "old hippies" or the semi-mythical "hardcore troublemakers" about whom we were routinely warned. They were: an algebraic geometer, a charity fundraiser, a publisher, a businessman, a brace of writers and the deputy editor of the *Spectator*' (Leith, 2003). The presence of these kinds of people on the demonstrations is in itself a sign that the issue of the Iraq War divided British society at many levels. The defection of the *Daily Mirror* to the anti-war cause is an illustration of the extent of the splits in the British establishment. It is clear from Piers Morgan's memoirs that the decision to take an anti-war view in the paper was driven more by his strong opinions on the issue than commercial opportunism (Morgan, 2005, p.374). The *Mirror*'s manoeuvres also illustrate how the media are not hermetically sealed from wider politics. For all the rhetoric of neutrality, balance or independence, in reality an issue as contentious and critical as the Iraq War can force people to take sides. In the words of Peter Preston, 'wars are make-your-mind-up-time for editors' (Preston, 2003).

The exceptional coverage of the movement took place at a time when there were clear if not always open divisions in the Labour Party, largely unspoken but widely recognised discomfort about the planned invasion in the cabinet, and a looming vote in the House of Commons on the war. International events, particularly the UN meeting that took place in the days before 15 February 2003, reinforce the sense of Bush and Blair's isolation. It is in this context that the framing of the demonstrations as representative of the people and the 'democratic deficit' frame begin to develop in the media. There is no question but that a sense of the scale of public

opposition to the war informs coverage of the demonstration. Headers or strap lines like 'We are the people' (Bunting, 2003) or '2m say no' *(The Sunday Mirror,* 2003) are common in the coverage. The exact state of public opinion as such is not a dominant frame or even a prevalent theme in the coverage however. The framing of the demonstrations as 'representative' is normally generated by observational detail and rarely if ever by reference to opinion polls. As we saw in the previous chapter, opposition to the war was at comparable levels in mid-September 2002 and February 2003, (around 45 percent according to BBC and ICM polls quoted in the *Guardian* on 24 September 2002 and the *Daily Mirror* on 13 February 2003). By the time of the virtually ignored second anniversary demonstration, polls show opposition was higher still, at 49 percent (see Appendix 1). A general perception of opposition to the war was crucial, but there is clearly not a calibrated correspondence between public opinion and either the level of coverage or the attitude taken by journalists and media outlets. Once the fact of mass opposition to the war has been established the extent or the attitude of the coverage does not appear to depend all that much on knowledge of shifts in public opinion.

One of the conclusions of existing analysis of Iraq War coverage is that the tone changed sharply after the war started, and that dissenting views were regarded as less legitimate after the war started (see Robinson *et al*., 2010). There is some support for this in the current research as 15 February was far and away the most widely covered demonstration. The fairly extensive coverage of 20 November, 2003 must qualify this finding however. It took place just a few months after the war had started and though the coverage was more negative than previously it was still extensive. The most sensible conclusion is that all of the factors listed above interacted to create a unique situation. What perhaps links the coverage of the first three demonstrations is the sense of novelty and uncertainty. In the coverage of all three in different ways there was a perception that normal politics had been suspended and normal popular behaviour had changed. The demonstrations were of a scale and a type that could not be ignored or written off. They clearly reflected wider public opinion and embodied opinions that were widely held amongst the circles journalists moved in. The discourse of 'representativeness' and 'democratic deficit' suggest both that some of the journalists themselves were being drawn towards an anti-war position and that the demonstrations were being interpreted and judged in a wider context.

The nature of the demonstrations was probably the most important driver of this sense of novelty. But their context was clearly contributing to the sense of uncertainty and the perception that society was moving into uncharted waters. During the run-up to the war Blair appeared to be more and more isolated domestically and internationally and the media was having to consider questions over the possible illegality of the war and the weakness of the arguments being deployed to justify it which were being aired by mainstream political figures. The US and Britain's isolation at the United Nations created further problems for the Bush Blair axis that were not necessarily easily surmountable. The interplay between these factors is graphically revealed in the way in the at times the demonstration reports are integrated into the wider discussion of the Iraq crisis. As we have seen, there is an important discussion in the academic literature about the continuing relevance of the protest paradigm. A number of different factors have been suggested to account for some observations of the breakdown of the paradigm and the developments of new approaches to popular protest by the media, or at least new outcomes. These factors include new media technologies, greater media savvy amongst protesters, and even the suggestion that the ubiquity of media in society has opened it up to alternative representations of reality embodied in protest (Cottle, 2008; Rojecki, 2002; De Luca and Peebles, 2002). Some observers have looked to the increased propensity for protest to explain shifts in the way the media handles it (Cottle, 2008). The analysis presented here suggests first that there are indeed circumstances in which the protest paradigm breaks down. My sample attests to the fact that three of the anti-war demonstrations in this period received unprecedented coverage in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Habitual responses were abandoned as it became clear that the demonstrations transcended the norms and the movement was approached with sympathy in some cases and at least surprise and genuine curiosity in many more.

The fact that the disruption to normal patterns of coverage was not permanent, and that old ways of seeing and understanding reasserted themselves, if in slightly modified form suggests that the paradigm should not be abandoned. The coverage of the November 2003 demonstration, while more extensive and contested than would be expected if the protest paradigm had not been disrupted, nevertheless witnesses the reassertion of familiar themes. Demonstrators are once again being categorised as serial protesters, as naïve, marginal, unpatriotic and potentially violent. By 2005 the demonstrators, although numerous by historical standards, are once again

regarded as marginal to the news agenda. What needs to be explained is how and why the paradigm was suspended.

Chapter 7: Behind the scenes: the interviews

7.1. Probing the media's role

Examination of the raw data of the coverage of the demonstrations in the last chapter indicates that at least important sections of the media responded to the anti-war movement in unexpected ways, with unusual levels of interest, neutrality and sometimes with sympathy. Chapter 5 gave some indication of the levels of turbulence in public opinion, the political world and official ideologies created by the war on terror. This chapter attempts to begin the process of connecting these two different elements of the analysis, to probe how it was that the wider, dramatic events surrounding the war and the opposition to it were mediated through the fourth estate to produce the results recorded. The chapter places under the microscope a series of interviews with media professionals who were working in strategic positions in the media at the time in order to help understand media behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 4, it proved difficult to obtain a sample of interviews that could match the breadth of the media coverage analysed. Senior management figures across the board failed to respond to repeated interview requests. Journalists and other staff at the *Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Sun* and the *News of the World* declined to be interviewed, in two cases citing concern about speaking publicly about their workplaces. Some of the staff who did agree to be interviewed also expressed reservations about discussing issues internal to their place of work and one BBC staffer wished to remain anonymous. This experience in itself speaks of a level of tension around some of the questions under examination here. Clearly for all the rhetorical commitment to a free media, the internal functioning of some media institutions is not always regarded as being a proper subject for public discussion.

The interview process was therefore not as fruitful as had been hoped. Perhaps most important, despite interviews with journalists from the *Observer*, the *Daily Express* and the *Spectator,* the pro-war elements of my media sample are under-represented. The lack of interviews with management figures combined with some interviewees' reticence to discuss internal processes meant that I had to piece together a picture of editorial processes and decision making from limited evidence. Nevertheless used carefully, the descriptions, opinion and analysis that were offered have provided important pointers to the dynamics that drove the coverage of protest at the time and in some cases to the wider pressures that shaped that coverage.

The initial aim of the interviews was fourfold. First, to establish the extent to which people in the media themselves felt something unusual or surprising was going on with reference to coverage of the demonstrations. The idea mainly being to try to get a series of 'second opinions' from the inside on the extent of the change to patterns of media behaviour. But this line of questioning was also designed to establish if there was a conscious process of reassessing attitudes to popular demonstration or whether this unusual media behaviour came about essentially spontaneously, as an instinctive adjustment to a new period. The second, connected, purpose of the interviews was to measure the impact within the media of the combination of unprecedented popular protest and tension around the Iraq War. Narrowly this meant discussing the direct influence of the demonstrations on media staff, more generally whether there had been any obvious controversies, stresses or even crises within the media itself to match the levels of turmoil in domestic and geopolitics. The third aim was to discover and critically assess the participants' own understanding of the dynamics behind the unusual events taking place. Some of the interviewees are themselves experienced political analysts with unique levels of access various influential figures both within and outside the media. Some of them are regular workers with direct experience both of the kind of routines, practices and culture standard in their institutions and of how these things changed, if at all, during the period under consideration. All of them were in the position of viewing the events from within the media complex. Their personal understanding of the politics of the war can therefore give us privileged historical insights into some of the events that took place within the media and political establishment, but it can also give us an idea of the kind of outlooks prevalent at different levels of the media operation. Finally, consideration was invited about if, when and how the interviewers believe there was a return to habitual patterns of movement coverage. The quantitative research suggests unambiguously that there was and that it had definitely taken place by 2005. Some understanding of how the protest paradigm reasserted itself can give important clues to the dynamics of its apparently temporary suspension.

While inevitably each of the interviews had a different overall shape and scope, each of the interviewees was asked a similar series of questions that form the structure of the chapter. First they were asked whether they were aware of an unusual approach media to the coverage of the

demonstrations, and if so how they would explain it. Second, they were asked whether they felt that the demonstrations combined with the crisis around Iraq had impacted in any way on normal procedures within the media. This second is a broad question potentially encompassing a wide range of issues. Had management referred specifically to issues around the demonstrations for example? Had there been any change in editorial routines associated with the marches or the issues connected? Or was there any evidence of a changed relationship between the media and other sections of the establishment, the military, politicians and so on? Before the more general issues were raised, each interviewee was also asked whether the demonstrations had a personal impact on them or a discernible effect on their colleagues. Each was then asked to judge the extent to which a real crisis of the institutions had developed around the Iraq War and the opposition to it and if so how this crisis could best be explained. Finally, participants were asked about whether they felt there had been any lasting changes to the media's approach to demonstrations, and if not how 'normality' had been restored. Clearly the interviews could not simply be taken at face value, as simple evidence for the views they express. They represent the subjective views of participants in a process, some of who are in positions of some authority within the very institutions about which they speak, talking to a (normally) unknown outsider. Others occupied more routine positions in the media and appeared at times to be apprehensive about saying too much about events that took place at the time, a fact that perhaps reflects the continuing resonance of those years. One interviewee asked to remain anonymous. It was clear from the process of recording the interviews, especially in the case of the more senior interviewees, that they were more comfortable and forthcoming talking in general about the media, the demonstrations and the Iraq crisis than they were giving in depth accounts of events in their own newsrooms. Nevertheless a range of telling experiences, anecdotes and insights did emerge, which, combined with the broader analysis generously offered, help us piece together some kind of picture of the internal dynamics of the media response to the movement.

7.2. A new approach to protest?

All of the interviewees see something new in the way that the Iraq protests were covered. Even Ed Vulliamy from the *Observer*, the most sceptical of the interviewees about any major transformation in the media at the time, comments that 'There was a step change in the level of protest coverage'. The weight of anti-war opinion was the crucial factor for him. 'At some point

the tide of opinion is so overwhelmingly strong that it is unstoppable,' he says. He also points to

at least one important case of entrepreneurial opportunism as a driver for the anti-war message:

> *The success of the Guardian website, particularly in the States, has its origins in the stance against the war. Millions read it in America because there wasn't much else out there. Partly this was idealistic on management's side, partly opportunistic.*[16]

Alan Jones specialised on the war, amongst other things, for the Press Association, and was

present at a large number of movement press conferences and in close contact with press officers

of the Stop the War Coalition. He saw the interaction between the media and the movement close

up:

> *I have never known a press response remotely like it. People were asking for graphics of maps of the demonstration routes in advance, local papers were wanting to be put in touch with activists and organisers from their area, it was something special. Many of your press conferences were packed which was a complete change from the usual indifference that there is normally in the run up to any kind of demonstration. On the day of the demonstrations there was a mob of camera crews and snappers the like of which I have never seen on a domestic protest. I have covered a lot of demonstrations and industrial disputes in my time and I can't remember there ever being a response like this, not just to the issues or outcomes of a campaign, but to the actual organisation of the events and the movement itself.*[17]

Jones's explanation for the media's novel approach lies almost entirely in the nature of the

demonstrations and the movement itself. He focuses on 15 February:

> *It wasn't a normal march. It was on an altogether different scale from anything I had witnessed. It was actually difficult to compare with previous demonstrations. It wasn't just that it was massive; it was so focussed, so intensely focussed. And for both those reasons it had a huge impact.*[18]

Other interviewees concurred to one degree or another both about the change in the nature of the

coverage and about the importance of the size of the demonstration in making this happen. They

tend to have slightly different theories though about exactly why 'size mattered'. Iain Bruce,

producer at the BBC World Service News TV at the time emphasises the challenge the

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[16] Interview with Ed Vulliamy, 17 May, 2012.
[17] Interview with Alan Jones, 20 June, 2011.
[18] As above.

movement made to the BBC's image as an honest broker in British society. According to him, 'the sheer scale of the demonstration' forced the BBC to reverse its normal policy of 'essentially ignoring protest':

> *When you have that many people on the streets it's just not credible to act like it isn't happening. Too many people are invested in it, if an event on that scale is not reflected in the mainstream then it is the mainstream that loses out in its bid to present as a faithful mirror to society. Whether or not they thought about it consciously those were the kind of issues in play.*[19]

For Yvonne Ridley, who was freelancing for the *Daily Express* at the time, the 'sudden outburst of popular feeling' was a social phenomenon that was hard to ignore. The size and the diversity of the demonstrations were both important in her assessment. But which sections of the press did it justice depended on their political outlook as well as their commercial sense of opportunity:

> *It (15 February) was an incredible march which brought together people who would normally cross the street to avoid each other. It was a bit like the death of Diana where suddenly this mass movement appeared from nowhere. Suddenly the people were setting the agenda with the media rather than the media setting the agenda with the people. I think that is one of the reasons why Piers Morgan (Editor of the Mirror) jumped on it in the way that he did. Up until that point the paper was a poor imitation of the Sun. In these circumstances I think he realised that it could have been revived as a real working class paper giving a voice to the people. That's a big niche. The Express was not interested unless there was going to be trouble. The Murdoch stable was unanimously pro-war and they weren't interested either.*[20]

Guardian columnist Madeline Bunting noticed a sharp change of approach at her own paper dating back to the demonstration of 28 September 2002. She compared the coverage of that demonstration with that of the Countryside Alliance a week earlier which had been a comparable size:

> *The Guardian responded very differently to the anti-war protests than it has to others. The comparable protest was of course the farmers' march which was a very big march not that long before the anti-war protests, but my vague recollection is we didn't do too much on that. In general we aren't terribly interested in demonstrations at all.*[21]

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[19] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2012.
[20] Interview with Yvonne Ridley 19 July, 2011.
[21] Interview with Madeline Bunting 14 July, 2011.

Bunting too sees the size of the demonstration as being the crucial factor in the changed attitude. 'Of course the size was absolutely crucial for all kinds of reasons. It's a massive morale booster and I think being part of such an enormous crowd of people has a huge effect on people.' Bunting's comment about the Countryside Alliance suggests of course that size was not the only factor in influencing her colleagues. She goes on to argue that it was partly the kind of people who were on the demonstration that was important:

> *The media did take a different attitude and partly this was because it was a demonstration that the middle classes were really prepared to back. I remember getting on the bus in Hackney and the bus was already full of middle class people all heading into town, and these were not the kind of people who usually go on demonstrations.*[22]

Fellow *Guardian* columnist Seumas Milne agreed that there was an 'unprecedented situation' in the media in the run up to the demonstration on 15 February:

> *When you have a situation in which the Daily Mail is giving a full promotion to a massive, progressive demonstration, you know something is up. It was only the explicitly pro-war press that was not actually pushing the demonstration. This is unheard of in my experience.*[23]

Milne agrees the record size of the movement was an important factor in shaping the way that the media responded. But he too suspects that composition was important as well and that these were demonstrations in which many who worked within the media would have participated. Andy McSmith, political correspondent for the *Independent* at the time, concurs. He notes not just that 'there were senior *Observer* journalists who went on the big demonstrations for example, as protesters', but also that 'my own kids were on the demonstrations, not just on the demonstrations but actually participants and organisers of the wave of school walk outs that followed on from the big demonstration – we were worried, but we were very proud as well'.[24]

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[22] Interview with author Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.
[23] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26 May, 2011.
[24] Interview with Andy McSmith, 22 June, 2011.

But for a number of interviewees, the wider context was also important in explaining the novelty of the style of coverage. For them, divisions in the heart of the establishment played an important role in generating a wider debate and more sympathy in the media for the protesters than might have been expected. For McSmith, 'there was opposition at the highest level to the war which had its roots in a cultural antipathy to the US positions and conduct.' In Milne's view, 'openness to the anti-war argument undoubtedly reflected the fact that there was real divisions within the establishment and at all levels and in all sections.' He goes on to give an example of how this directly affected media coverage:

> *One of the reasons why (Daily Mirror editor) Piers Morgan felt so strongly and was so confident in his opposition to the war was that his brother was in the invasion force and was telling him about the misgivings at the highest ranks of the army and probably at the Ministry of Defence.[25]*

Peter Oborne, who was a political editor on the *Spectator* at the time, also identified serious tensions not just in the establishment, but even the political right:

> *The right has divided into a pro-American section and a more sceptical wing over the last decade, but there were already serious disagreements. Put simply, the Foreign Office institutionally was against the war, though politically in favour, because it takes its orders from Downing Street. One hears anecdotally that ambassadors on Arab countries were against the war, one hears also about big splits in the intelligence services… The Conservative Party was interesting, there was a wing of the Conservative Party, Douglas Hurd included, which would have been against the war. The Party as a whole had surrendered its independence and conservative values to the Atlantic Alliance, but there was a real reluctance that went way beyond those who voted for the war. Many voted for the war with a heavy heart, including, so I am told, David Cameron. That took a lot of courage.[26]*

Paul Alexander, a news library worker and active trade unionist at the BBC, was also aware that the coverage of the demonstration was 'unusually favourable'. He saw this as a product of a growing awareness and interest in protest movements that had been developing since the end of the 1990s. In his view the growth of protest had already had an impact on the way at least some journalists were thinking about politics:

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[25] Interview with Seumas Milne 26 May, 2011.
[26] Interview with Peter Oborne, 17 May, 2012.

On the one hand the Countryside Alliance march had an impact. This was seen as the middle classes up in arms against Blair, and it helped create a news agenda around mass discontent and its expression through protest. But this agenda was already there in the background. Seattle and the anti-globalisation protests had created a big change. The protest and the movement it inspired were a challenge to what was for journalists (being on the whole ideas people), the slightly oppressive notion of technocratic politics, the notion there was no room for ideology or emotion in politics. The anti-globalisation movement brought emotion, solidarity and ideology back into the frame, but this time in a form that was different from the old left and therefore more palatable to the journos, addicted as they are to the contemporary and the novel. The level of interest can be also be traced back to the anti-capitalist Mayday protests, which did get a lot of coverage, but almost all negative. So there were similar things going on politically in both on the left and the right, which meant quite a spectrum of journalists were interested in alternative opposition to the government.[27]

Andrew Burgin, who worked as Stop the War's press officer at the time of the 15 February demonstration, was also aware of unique level of the coverage. For him the contrast with even the recent past was stark. 'In 2001 we contacted the *Guardian* to complain about the level of coverage of our early marches and we were openly told that it was not the *Guardian*'s policy to cover demonstrations.' Clearly, he says, 'something changed quite radically'. Burgin points once again to the size of the protests, but he also emphasises some other characteristics of the movement:

An important factor was the sheer dynamism and strength of our operation. The protests were very intense and in 2002 they were persistent. It wasn't a normal left-dominated movement, we managed to mobilise a huge breadth of social opinion, academics, show biz people, artists and so forth, and this had an impact. The anti-war movement began to develop itself as a separate, recognizable entity. People like Richard and Ruth Rodgers came on board, people who had been quite close to the Blair machine. And we made a particular focus on media work, partly doing our best to contact potentially friendly journalists, but also, more ambitiously, we made a special play for the media by setting up Media Workers Against the War at a huge rally in the Camden Centre with mainstream figures like Rosie Boycott speaking from the platform. At the same time the movement was visible everywhere, there were teams of flyposters going out all round London and the other cities. You shouldn't forget this made the mass opposition to the war palpable.[28]

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[27] Interview with Paul Alexander, 26 June, 2011.
[28] Interview with Andrew Burgin, 30 May, 2011.

Andrew Murray, chair of the Stop the War Coalition at the time, also agrees that the movement played a very important role in putting the arguments against war through a very successful national campaign that impacted on both politicians and the media. But he points out the timetable of events was helpful as well: 'You had a war which in a way had been declared in March 2002, or even from the time of the Axis of Evil speech in January 2002. So there was a space for the movement to take the agenda and for anti-war arguments to filter through.' Most importantly, he points to the sheer implausibility of the justifications for the war:

> *I think part of it was scepticism about George Bush, he was seen as a stupid reactionary and he was alarming to Europeans. He could possibly have turned that around after 9/11 if he had been cuter because there was a good deal of sympathy for the Americans in broad public opinion but he completely lost all that he came across as a dangerous man and I think that was the main thing. At the same time the shine had gone off Tony Blair, the phoney Tony tag had started to stick... There was a sense that the spin and dishonesty had started to have an effect. But you also have to look at it on its merits, the case for war was made very ineptly... They couldn't make the case plausibly, whereas the counter argument that it was an aggressive president committed to defending Israel and grabbing oil and resources was all too plausible.[29]*

Iraqi activist Sabah Jawad makes a similar point, but also argues that the recent history of hostility to Iraq played its part in generating scepticism about official government narratives:

> *The essential problem for the government was that their and the US's claims that Iraq had some connection with terrorism or 9/11 were just not believable. Iraqis did not participate in 9/11 and Iraqis have no history of supporting terrorisms in any situation. This was huge credibility problem. It meant that it was obvious their policies were not related to their rhetoric. But there was also a wide consciousness of what had happened in Iraq previously. Due to the history of the last Iraq War, the British public were aware of what had happened in the region, of the US and Britain's hostility to Saddam Hussein, but also even of the way in which the US had let down the Iraqi people at the end of the war and refused to support what was a popular uprising. Since then there was at least some knowledge of the dreadful regime of sanctions that had been imposed on Iraq, and the terrible suffering this had caused. All of this fed into scepticism, even a hostility to further attacks on Iraq.[30]*

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[29] Interview with Andrew Murray, 26 July, 2012.
[30] Interview with Sabah Jawad, 2 November, 2012.

7.3. Inside the institutions

If it is the case that there is a consensus amongst the interviewees over change in the coverage and a good deal of overlap in terms of the reasons given, there is a greater diversity of opinion about the impact the anti-war movement and argument had inside media institutions. The interviewees all tend to concur with Bunting, Milne and McSmith that there was a significant level of participation in the movement amongst media colleagues or family on the big demonstrations, especially 15 February. For Iain Bruce, for example:

> *[15 February] was special because it was so big and that meant that inevitably many people you knew were on it. If you have 2 million people in the street there are millions more people who know someone who was on it or works next to someone who knows someone who was on it. It becomes a different ball game, it starts to make inroads into all institutions, including the media.*[31]

In Paul Alexander's department at the BBC, 'A few people in my smallish department did go on the march, they weren't particularly marching types, but it was about going to war so it was different. The fact that it was under a Labour government had an impact as well.' Madeline Bunting didn't just go the march herself along with 'many other colleagues' but felt that it was a transformative event in her life and the lives of others, and she wrote about it as such in the *Guardian*. She felt the demonstration was:

> *A political Damascene moment…. in the same way that the Arab Spring was, going on it gave a sense of power in a really concrete sense. It was incredibly diverse but also we got the cars off the street and we took over the centre of London, one of the biggest and most avidly commercial cities in the world, to demonstrate civic protest. I remember walking past some of the fancy shops and it really was one of those incredible moments when you suddenly see everything very differently. People were paying no attention to the shops. Instead of people being interested or pre-occupied with their consumption this was a crowd of people pre-occupied with the political In some subtle way this transforms their sense of themselves and the sense of the polity, people like that when they come together they have power. They have the power to transform public space form a commercial space to a political space.*[32]

There is some disagreement about the extent to which opposition to the war had a wider impact within the workplaces. Most feel that it did. Participants from the print media particularly

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[31] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2012.
[32] Interview with Bunting, 14 July, 2011.

suggest heated debates and deep divisions at the highest level. Ed Vulliamy from the *Observer,* for example, remembers tension and deep-seated division between the editor and some of the most senior and respected journalists at the paper. 'Within the paper the dynamic was edgy during the build-up to the war. Paul Webster, the deputy editor, and senior correspondent Peter Beaumont, were extremely annoyed because there was no consultation about the leader that came out in favour of the war'.[33] Both Seumas Milne and Madeline Bunting report argumentative editorial meetings discussing the demonstrations and the issues motivating them. Bunting was surprised as well at the powerful response her article on the 15 February demonstration elicited in the *Guardian* itself. 'I wrote quite an emotional piece about being on the march and I remember getting e-mails from people in the building that I wouldn't have expected to get saying how much they liked the piece. I think that people recognised that something quite remarkable happened on that march'.[34]

At the BBC, up until the Kelly affair, the experience, at least amongst journalists, appears to have been different. According to Iain Bruce, 'The BBC newsrooms are strangely devoid of politics. There is a fiction that you have to support, that reporters must be unpolitical. That convention that you don't express your political opinions held pretty firmly'. There is more than a hint in Bruce's testimony that this apolitical atmosphere was sustained by fear as much as convention: 'I went on the demonstration and I met one or two other BBC employees, but I was never really sure who else went from my department as we didn't talk about these kind of things'.[35] Paul Alexander's experience in the BBC news library, however, was different. 'There was more debate about the march than any other political event I can remember. Those who went did so with pride, it was almost a matter of honour to anyone who felt themselves to be social democratic or old labour. Others were interested'.[36] Alice Mayne, a video editor, had similar memories of her experience around the time of 15 February at Millbank, the section of the BBC that deals with much of the parliamentary broadcasting:

> *Partly because we were based in central London, partly because we were close to political events unfolding, there was lots of talk and maybe a sense of excitement*

[33] Interview with Ed Vulliamy, 17 May, 2012.
[34] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 May, 2011.
[35] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2012.
[36] Interview with Paul Alexander, 26 June, 2011.

about the demonstration. People felt it was something different and also some people felt they should go on it. The marked contrast between these experiences and that in the newsrooms suggests that the convention of non-political behaviour was either not imposed or not sustained in technical areas.[37]

In a very different key, Peter Oborne attests to the impact the movement had on him and his colleagues. He argues that the movement had a profound effect on sections of the right wing press. At first he was sceptical, although impressed by the nature of the demonstration, which clearly 'did bring to together a number of disparate groups'. When he started to pay serious attention to the movement, 'I looked it at and learnt from it'. The result was a reassessment on many fronts:

> *To be honest, it made me rethink my attitude to the politics of the Middle East. I hadn't spent much time or energy examining what had happened and one of the reasons I wrote little about what was happening was that I felt ignorant about it and I make it a rule to only write about things that I have some knowledge of. But when I started to look into the situation I realised that the spokespeople for the movement were right in saying that the approach that was being taken was doing tremendous damage and that it was the opposite to a policy that would build respect for the West in the Middle East. The movement also opened my eyes to the central importance of the Israel/Palestine question and how the West was playing a regressive role in that conflict. It was an education in foreign affairs and it spurred me to read about and eventually visit the region.*[38]

In Oborne's view, this experience was not unique, even amongst those on the right:

> *I had the feeling that the right was actually learning from the left. Not from the New Labour part of the left but the anti-war element. In fact what was happening was that there was a division on the right between a pro-American, neo-conservative wing and a more sceptical right. The Mail started to break. The Murdoch papers took a pro- American line and the Express did too. The Telegraph was slower to adapt. But something quite fundamental changed in the Mail. It was connected to a change of attitude towards Israel and even a reassessment of Britain's post-colonial role in the world. But it was definitely at least partly triggered by the massive demonstrations and what they said about British public opinion.*[39]

As well as the general impact of the debates and mobilisation around the war, many interviewees mention direct interventions from management or from outside the media and discuss their

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[37] Interview with Alice Mayne, 16 July, 2011.
[38] Interview with Peter Oborne, 17 May, 2012.
[39] As above.

effects on output and atmosphere. Burgin, Milne and Ridley all refer to a climb-down by the *Guardian* management over their dismissive attitude to the first anti-war demonstrations after 9/11. According to Ridley, 'The *Guardian* had received severe criticism of the first march coverage in 2001. This generated a real controversy at the paper. The Guardian was quite stung by the criticism and the volume of letters and so forth it had received. It changed its policy of not reporting on demos, at least for the time being'.[40] If this incident revealed the direct impact of pressure from supporters of the movement both within and without the paper, there was a concerted effort by politicians and others to limit the influence of the movement and the anti-war arguments in the media. Andy McSmith recounts a story about what he calls the 'masochism tour', in which Tony Blair, Alistair Campbell and others did a circuit of the papers and the newsrooms, particularly the more liberal ones, to counter the anti-war arguments. At the *Independent*, McSmith remembers, they didn't get very far:

> *Alistair Campbell took the whole editorial team out to dinner. Once we were in the restaurant he asked whether people supported the war. Every single person present indicated they were against the war accept the proprietor and his wife. No one thought the spinning operation was particularly well judged to put it mildly. People went along but it put their backs up.*[41]

Andy McSmith in fact went on to talk about the extent to which the *Independent* moved into open opposition to the war and collaborated quite closely with the anti-war movement. At the *Observer* extremely close links had been forged between the editor, Roger Alton, the political editor Kamal Ahmed and the Blair government. According to Vulliamy, in 2002 and 2003, 'Ahmed and Alton could regularly be seen going off to Chequers for lunch with Blair'. Ahmed was a particularly committed Blair loyalist. 'There were occasions when Ahmed knew that stories were being written throwing doubt on Blair's arguments and he would arrange for Campbell to call Alton and explain the situation. There was one time when he got Blair himself to call Alton according to Nick Davies'.[42] The result of this level of co-operation, according to Vulliamy, was, first, a good deal of discontent and resentment and second, that the *Observer* failed to run potentially devastating exclusives which could have damaged Blair's build up to war. Vulliamy himself worked on a particularly explosive story featuring a senior CIA source

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[40] Interview with Yvonne Ridley, 19 July, 2011.
[41] Interview with Andy McSmith, 22 June, 2011.
[42] Interview with Ed Vulliamy, 17 may, 2012.

who was prepared to go public in the second half of 2002, saying that the US security services had no hard evidence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. 'Despite filing numerous versions of it, and repeated arguments with editorial, to my absolute amazement, it was never run'. Another story, this time about M15 officer Catherine Gunn who went public to expose US wiretapping of anti-war delegations at the UN, was run by the paper, but no follow up was tolerated:

> *When you get a story like that you expect to go with it for weeks. But they wanted it buried as soon as possible. (Political Editor) Ahmed was going around the offices saying "Hitler Diaries Hitler Diaries", implying that the story was made up and that Gunn was unreliable. Roger (Alton, the Editor) let us down. They were both meeting with the government fairly regularly, though I don't know exactly how often.*[43]

The situation at the BBC appears to have been more complex. In general the interviewees' sense was that the mechanisms of management control in the BBC were more complex, subtle and less interventionist than on at least some of the papers. According to Iain Bruce, 'It works in different ways on different stories. At my lowly level I am not aware that anyone ever told me you should do this or do that. You learn very quickly where the parameters are and if you overstep them people just look at you like you are some strange being from another planet.[44] The editorial line at the BBC in Bruce's view is directed less by diktat or debate and more by a series of micro-decisions including careful selection of who gets what job:

> *The actual people who are on screen reporting are almost certainly government loyalists on the whole. In reality who gets which jobs does depend on background and ideology, you don't get sent on the Iraq War if you are untrustworthy. One result of this process is that debate is kept to a minimum.*[45]

Niall Sookoo, who worked as a documentary producer at the BBC at the time, agrees with the way the mechanism operates in general. In his view, 'There are a set of routines and habits that are not necessarily codified anywhere but amount to an order of news worthiness, and order of merit, and the young journalist learns them by example, always willing to please'.[46] Despite these general points, the BBC employees interviewed do refer to a number of examples of direct

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[43] Interview with Ed Vulliamy, 17 May, 2012.
[44] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2012.
[45] As above.
[46] Interview with Niall Sookoo, 6 July, 2011.

intervention into the conduct of journalists at the BBC that betrayed serious concerns about the influence of anti-war ideas in general and that of the movement in particular. In different ways all these interventions appear to have had significant repercussions. Alice Mayne recalls being told that Newsnight editorial staff had received a memo making a distinction between two kinds of anti-war opinion, the more mainstream kind that involved criticism of the particular features of the Iraq War, and 'more marginal, ideological opposition to all wars', which it was claimed dominated in the leadership of the anti-war movement. 'It was clear journalists and producers were being encouraged to run with the first kind and ignore the second'. She remembers that the memo caused a fair amount of controversy and debate amongst the journalists. It smacked a little of a McCarthyite attitude'.[47] Even more controversial was the memo sent to all editorial staff at the BBC, banning them from going on the 15 February demonstration if they were not working at it. According to Iain Bruce:

> *Most people at the BBC were kind of shocked by the threat that BBC journalists were not supposed to go on to the demo. I guess it was shocking precisely because the demo was already on their radar and people had quite a lot of sympathy for it. My memory is a little uncertain but the general attitude was "bugger that" and I think even in the wider newsroom people were saying, "how ridiculous, we will go on the demo if we want to".[48]*

But the Kelly affair in July 2003 took matters at the BBC to a completely new level. Controversy around a report by BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan that suggested the government had 'sexed up' an intelligence dossier into Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was massively amplified by the surprise death of Gilligan's source David Kelly. Gilligan was hauled over the coals and eventually resigned in January 2004 along with BBC Director-General Greg Dyke and Chairman Gavyn Davies. Their resignations came after the Hutton inquiry criticised the BBC and politicians, particularly Alistair Campbell, vociferously attacked the BBC's conduct over the affair (Blair, 2010, p.463). Niall Sookoo argues that the Kelly affair, and particularly the effective removal of Greg Dyke brought together a number of different factors that destabilised the BBC:

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[47] Interview with Alice Mayne, 16 July, 2011.
[48] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2012.

The Kelly affair had a huge impact. Greg Dyke had been a very popular guy, he had won an increase in the licence fee, he didn't tell journalists what they could or couldn't do, he actually knew about work in TV, he had worked in it all his life, this was a good time to work at the BBC, and suddenly he was gone, there was a real sense if shock, and a sense of suddenly being exposed to what looked like a hostile government.

For Sookoo the main issue became the perception of direct government intervention in the BBC:

There was a feeling that the government was interfering in the affairs of the BBC which was sacrosanct and even a bit sinister so there was a big outcry and a great deal of anxiety. The question became the independence of the press. There were thousands of journalists and other BBC staff who put their name to a letter in the Times in support of BBC independence; this included top executives who were signing it.[49]

The impact of the Kelly affair, the disciplining of Gilligan and the issues it raised around government conduct over the war had a big impact on journalists even before the resignations. And it affected the way at least some journalists approached the movement:

This sense of the journalists being concerned about their independence probably spilled over to the coverage of the demonstrations, particularly the Bush demo. There is a kind of pack mentality with journalists, and most of the time this works for the government, they are all in the Westminster bubble and they move together essentially responding to the official indications I got the sense that there was anger at the fact they had been lied to over WMDs. I remember Radio Five Live broadcasting form outside the National Gallery in Trafalgar on the day Bush came, and that meant effectively they were with the protesters, doing vox pops, really encouraging people to speak their minds to them.[50]

Paul Alexander confirms the impact of the Kelly affair on BBC staff:

The Kelly affair created a sense of crisis in the BBC. You could even feel it in the library. When Greg Dyke came around after he was removed, cheers went up around the building, it was a very emotional moment. It was partly about the relationship between the government and the BBC which up to that time had appeared to be very good but suddenly had gone terribly wrong or at least was exposed as being very different from the one people thought existed. So this was about independence. It was also about the fact that the government appeared to have been caught lying and

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[49] Interview with Niall Sookoo, 6 July, 2011.
[50] Interview with Niall Sookoo, 6 July, 2011.

was now attacking the independence of the BBC as a way of protecting itself. This was seen as outrageous. There were other factors, we work very closely with the journalists and there was a lot of sympathy for Andrew Gilligan, there was a widespread feeling of "there but for the grace of god go I".[51]

The pent up feelings that fuelled the affair led to mass walkouts at the BBC on the day Dyke left the Corporation. Alexander's account of the dramatic events shows that these were not organised through the trades unions, but suggests they were partly spontaneous, partly encouraged by journalists, and sometimes at least tolerated by managers:

Seeing the anger at Greg Dyke going, I phoned my union rep Andy Love and asked him what the union was doing. He said he'd get back to me, but he didn't, so I ended up waiting in the library while others went downstairs to show their support for Dyke. A mass cascaded e-mail had gone round from journalists calling on people to come out of the building. People were being allowed out by their managers, not on strike, on the understanding that the walkouts would only last a short while, but nothing like this had ever happened before I am sure.[52]

7.4. The bigger picture: the view from the media

On the basis of insiders' testimonies, both the anti-war movement and, more generally, the controversies surrounding the war, had a significant impact within media institutions. There appears to have been enough sympathy with the movement to precipitate special measures by politicians and media management to try and convince journalists of the pro-war case, try to keep them off demonstrations, stop anti-war articles being published, restrict their interviews, and otherwise try to limit their freedom of action. Clearly the departure of Greg Dyke from the BBC was perceived by many as part of an open government assault on journalistic independence. The fact that the response of many workers at the BBC was to protest itself suggests that the anti-war movement was in some sense an ever-present factor in these events. Certainly the testimony suggests that these interventions at least partly had the effect of increasing rather than limiting media staffers identification or at least sympathy with the movement. This level of turmoil inevitably led to debate and speculation within the media about the root causes of the situation. Most of the interviewees had quite well developed views about the nature of the crisis faced by the media and the country at large at the time. Their insights as

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[51] Interview with Paul Alexander, 26 June, 2011.
[52] Interview with Paul Alexander, 26 June, 2011.

participants are useful in themselves in helping to place the media coverage into perspective, but also help to shed further light on thinking within the media at the time.

A recurring theme in the interviews is the extent of division that the war and the opposition to it opened up inside the establishment. For Iain Bruce, the sheer drama and turmoil around the Hutton Report was partly a product of the fact that 'big sections of the powers that be were never really convinced about the war in the first place. Hence the interest and the constant tension that there might be more people speaking out against it'.[53] For Niall Sookoo too it was the period after the Hutton report when divisions seemed to be at their strongest:

> *Suddenly, now, as people understood they had been conned, frustrations were so great that divisions were opening up amongst different parts of the establishment. Sometimes working on press for the Coalition you got a sense of that. I remember once with my press officer hat on, we were organising a hand-in of a petition to Downing Street by members of the military families. Downing Street was telling us it wouldn't be possible after the police had said they would try and facilitate it. We phoned the police back and they wanted us to make it very clear in any press release that this decision was nothing to do with them, and they thought the military families had every right to visit the prime minister.*[54]

Andrew Burgin was aware of deep anxiety about winning the argument for war inside the government from much earlier on:

> *From 2003 or 2004 there was an enormous crisis at the heart of the establishment. The pro-war people were worried by the demonstrations, but they were also worried about losing the argument inside the elites because opinion was very divided. There is no doubt that they were worried they would not get the vote through parliament, there was a widespread view that the war was illegal, and Robin Cook's resignation helped to deepen the sense of a government on the brink.*[55]

Peter Oborne argues that there were strong splits on the issue right across political and state institutions from the start over the fundamental issues of the war:

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[53] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2012.
[54] Interview with Niall Sookoo, 6 July, 2011.
[55] Interview with Andrew Burgin, 30 May, 2011.

Though the Foreign Office was publicly and politically in favour, institutionally it would have been against the war. One hears anecdotally that many ambassadors in Arab countries were against, that there was a major split within the intelligence services and so on. The Conservatives themselves were not fully on board, this was not a Conservative war – Conservatism is sceptical about big projects and big interventions. There was an anti-wing of the Conservative party, including not just people like John Barron MP but probably Douglas Hurd and I think Iain Duncan Smith was against too. His friends tell me even David Cameron says that he was very reluctant to vote for the war and that he probably wishes he hadn't.[56]

Seumas Milne shares the sense of fundamental division in the heart of the establishment:

There is no doubt however that the government was panicked by the level of the opposition, particularly by the opposition within the middle classes. What was worrying to them was that this was not the usual suspects; this opposition was clearly spilling over into the political establishment, this was becoming an argument within the government. The Foreign Office was never really happy with the plans for war, and as it came closer nor were whole sections of the political classes. There were lots of stories that David Kelly was just one amongst a whole number of security people who were in semi-open rebellion. This was all partly a product of the demonstrations but it also gave confidence back to the movement and helped to legitimate it.[57]

Oborne and McSmith both stress the extent to which these split concerned peoples' attitude to the US. According to McSmith, 'there was a perception in some circles that the US's brand of unilateralism was unhelpful, and alien to the way we like to do foreign policy'. For Peter Oborne the concerns ran even deeper:

Many people didn't like the fact that we seem to have surrendered our own interests to those of the US completely. This fact was blatantly symbolised in the media, where actual conditions of ownership partly determined the line-up. 35 percent was owned by Murdoch – a US citizen, 15 percent was owned by Conrad Black, a Canadian citizen, These people didn't have any stake in Britain and this had a lot to do with the fact that, with certain gleaming exceptions - mainly the Mirror and the Independent - this was not the medias finest hour.[58]

Vulliamy's analysis of what he calls 'government malfunction' at the time also focuses on the 'far too intimate' relationship between the British government and the US. He emphasises too

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[56] Interview with Peter Oborne, 17 May, 2012.
[57] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26, May, 2011.
[58] Interview with Peter Oborne, 17 May, 2012.

that it was a small clique of politicians and supporters around Blair who were 'transfixed by proximity to the centre of global power'. He witnessed airport meetings in late 2002 between Tony Blair and Jonathan Powell on the one side and Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld on the other at which he felt the power relations were 'painfully obvious and demeaning':

> *It was ludicrous, the body language was humiliating. Powell and Blair were like primary school prefects going to meet the headmaster. The problem was that whatever Blair and co thought they were doing there, Cheney and Rumsfeld didn't give a damn. They were going to go into Iraq and that was that. As far as they were concerned Blair was a useful dupe.*[59]

For Vulliamy this was the secret to the crisis in British society. 'This was a relationship that was of some use to the Americans but deeply damaging to Blair and co., who became utterly isolated, and to the British body politic as a whole.' Andy McSmith attests to the isolation of Blair and his immediate supporters on the substantive issues, but has a slightly more complex view of the way the situation played out:

> *It's a complicated situation. There is no doubt the Iraq war angered people in a new way. But remember the context. A lot of people actually had an interest in backing Blair. By and large, the right wing completely bought into the Atlantic Alliance, and the left in general supported Blair, this was only six years after the 1997 landslide and Labour was enjoying being ahead.*[60]

So there was a strange situation of deep concern and division at the centre of British politics and a kind of political impasse. McSmith is sure that if there had been an open, honest and voting debate within the cabinet, 'it would have come out against the war'. That this debate did not happen was, of course, partly down to Blair and the Blairites' non-collegiate, not to say undemocratic style of politics. But the fact that they got away with it was, in McSmith's view, in the end down to the problematic state of parliamentary politics more generally. 'The fact that there was no proper or serious debate in cabinet and the party has to be put down to a lack of political conviction in cabinet and beyond, to the self-serving nature of the politicians, and also to a short-termist view which amounts to a kind of corruption of the political system'.[61]

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[59] Interview with Ed Vulliamy, 17 May, 2012.
[60] Interview with Andy McSmith, 22 June, 2011.
[61] Interview with Andy McSmith, 22 June, 2011.

7.5. A return to order?

If there was a break with established patterns of movement reportage for some of 2002 and 2003, most of the interviewees agree that this was a temporary affair. For Alan Jones, the sudden experience of seeing the movement at the centre of a media scrum ended just as abruptly:

> *It all changed quite suddenly, and it changed when we went to war. As soon as the conflict started, attendance at the press conferences fell off sharply, and I guess coverage did too. The truth is, once Britain is involved in a military conflict, it's not going to stop it once it started. Why do people stop sending people to press conferences? I doubt this process was completely spontaneous. There is a saying that "once war starts – propaganda takes over". I am sure decisions, conscious decisions, were made. How much and what exactly goes on behind the scenes you can only speculate on. But of course meetings would have been held decisions would have been made.*[62]

For Madeline Bunting, the transition back to a more routine approach to the demonstrations was driven more by the failure of the movement to breakthrough than any conscious decisions:

> *We started to reduce our coverage because the big demonstration failed. The battle was over. I went to the second one, and it just wasn't the same. Once it has happened the debate has moved on and a demonstration about bringing the troops home is not just different, it has credibility issues. The troops are all out there you can hardly march them to the top of the hill and march them down again. It's not going to happen. It's just unrealistic.*[63]

For Bunting the main difference was impact, potential effectiveness, 'after the war is launched what does protest achieve?' Interestingly, she implies that part of the attraction of the early demonstrations for the media was that they appeared to have the prospect of winning, of making a difference. 'We are interested in the way the world moves forward. A protest is interesting if it is going to have an impact – if it's not it is routine'.[64] For Alice Mayne, the issue is quite simply how fast the media agenda moves. 'There is a premium on being cutting edge and keeping up or outstripping the competition. It's simple. If there is a big war on that Britain is involved in, we are going to be there and it's going to be items 1 to 5 on the Six O'clock News'. For Andrew

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[62] Interview with Alan Jones, 20 June, 2011.
[63] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.
[64] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.

Burgin, the main issue was the scale and vibrancy of the movement, once that had passed its peak, the media could move on. The unprecedented attention had been hard won but it was easily lost:

> It is important to remember that things in the media haven't changed permanently. The moment was created more than anything by the mass movement, journalists have almost by trade very short memories, they focus on the immediate and they move on. We created an unusual amount of space for radical positions in the mainstream, but this was driven by the movement.[65]

While most of the interviewees shared this view that the media's interest in protest was transitory. There were some important qualifications. Even for Burgin, this was not the whole story:

> Even after the war started the military families received a huge amount of coverage. The great advantage of the military families was that they provided a new angle into opposition to war, and one that could get round the hesitation of covering just more demonstrations that were by their nature smaller though still very big. This reflected an ongoing sense of betrayal by the country at large while at the same time remaining sensitive to the mainstream view that normal oppositional politics had to be suspended in time of war. Images of [military mother] Rose Gentle putting a wreath at the Cenotaph and so on, they went global, they symbolised and articulated the continuing opposition to war that had been to some extent driven underground by the spinelessness of most of the politicians.[66]

Jones, too, nuances the idea that the move to war ended press interest in opposition. Coverage of the Bush demonstration and the furore around the Hutton report suggested other factors were in play:

> When it comes to the demonstration at the Bush visit, as I recall there was a media scrum around it again. Partly this was because of the kerfuffle about Bush's security – that's a new angle especially in a war on terrorism, so that generated a whole lot of interest I guess. It was different as well; this was the first time the Brits were going to see the President of the United States of America in the flesh, and that made a difference. A change came again a bit later on with the Kelly affair, which was a defining moment in all sorts of ways. It both scared journalists and it created a sense

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[65] Interview with Alice Mayne, 16 July, 2011.
[66] Interview with Andrew Burgin, 30 May, 2011.

of alienation from the government. The whole question of protest and dissent became more fractious.[67]

For Peter Oborne, as we have seen, the movement was part of generating some deep-seated changes in the media landscape. He argues that the anti-war movement had a hand in creating a split that opened up in the right wing press and sections of the political classes who distanced themselves from an uncritical support of the Atlantic Alliance:

> *I joined the Daily Mail in 2006 and by that time the Mail was taking a mild anti-war position. It had been a reluctant supporter of the war. Paul Dacre started to throw his weight behind issues like collusion in torture, issues of human freedom, misuse of troops and so on and distanced himself from open support for Israel. So the ripples from the demonstrations spread far and wide.*[68]

7.6. The sources of sympathy

The interviewees were, then, unanimous that there was significant change to the way protest was covered at least during 2003. Most concentrate on 15 February 2003 as the key example, though there is reference, particular from Madeline Bunting, about the importance of the 28 September 2002 demonstration as a turning point. Despite the general view that it was the start of the war that led to the re-marginalisation of the movement, a number of interviewees mention renewed interest in the movement around the 'Bush demonstration' in November 2003, and some felt that there is longer, and in one case permanent, media legacy from the protests. While all participants saw the size of the demonstration as being a, if not the, critical factor in bringing change, there are a series of other explanations offered, and there are also different interpretations of why the size of the demonstration mattered. Mostly these accounts do not contradict, but can be seen as complimentary, partial insights into a complex process. Some are better substantiated than others. Alexander and Burgin's views, for example, that a narrative around new forms of street protest that was interesting to at least some journalists had been emerging for some time is plausible and finds some support in the literature but is difficult to prove. Journalistic participation in the demonstrations as a factor in the kind of response the movement got in the press on the other hand seems incontrovertible. Many of the interviewees went on the demonstration or admitted to having family and friends on it; most reported that colleagues went

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[67] Interview with Alan Jones, 20 June, 2011.
[68] Interview with Peter Oborne, 17 May, 2012.

in some numbers. Those that did go on the 15 February demonstration tend to speak about in highly charged terms as a near unique event that had particular potency.

The evidence for conscious policy change from the top in at least some parts of the media seems strong, with a number of testimonies of high level meetings having unusual types of discussion about the demonstration and the issues around it and at least one example of a deliberate change of policy regarding coverage of the marches substantiated at the *Guardian* to add to the clear case of official support for the demonstrators at the *Daily Mirror.* It is clear however that there was also concern and action from managements and the wider establishment to limit the amount of impact of the movement on the media, and this in itself suggests that a good deal of the impetus for change may have developed informally, outside the ambit of the normal managing structures and routines, and normally from the staff rather than the management. This impression is reinforced by the significant levels of participation by media staff in the movement and particularly on the demonstration on 15 February, and by the reports of real tension between staff and management at least at the *Observer*, the *Independent* and the BBC. In fact there is a recurring pattern of attempts by management and politicians to discipline journalists in various ways leading to increased resentment and perhaps increased sympathy for the movement. The most obvious example is the response to the departure of Greg Dyke from the BBC in January 2004. The fact that this moment crystallised out in thousands of BBC workers' minds as a real crisis of independence attests to the growing tension that had been building through the second half of 2003. The various wider accounts of the crisis around the Iraq War largely speak for themselves and will be considered in more detail in the next and final chapter. Taken together with the discussions about the movement they are, however, suggestive. They reveal the special position that some media staff found themselves in during the early part of the war; aware of the scale of the popular opposition to war on the streets but also partly privy to the very serious splits and confusion at the heart of the establishment.

Chapter 8: A break with the past?

8.1. Drawing conclusions

This chapter attempts an overview of the evidence presented in the study and weighs up the extent to which there was unusual media behaviour in the period under examination. Drawing on textual research, the interviews and the analysis of the wider context of the war, it goes on to examine the dynamics behind that behaviour and tries to assess the pressures that produced it, both within and without media institutions. This examination involves a discussion about the extent to which any uncharacteristic behaviour was a result of conscious management or editorial decision-making, a more ad hoc response to outside events or the general influence of anti-war sentiment on the staff. Evidence for the direct impact of the anti- war movement itself is also considered. Finally the chapter attempts to assess the significance of these conclusions for the theoretical debates that inform both the study of protest coverage and media and communications study more generally.

8.2. The balance of the evidence

The testimonies of media staffers examined in the previous chapter reveal a shared view that the media approach to the demonstrations in September 2002 and most markedly in February 2003 was exceptional. Alan Jones at PA had 'never seen a press response remotely like it',[69] Seumas Milne marvelled at an 'unheard of' situation in which even the Daily mail was 'giving a full promotion to a progressive demonstration'[70] and Madeline Bunting compared extensive Guardian coverage of the demonstrations to the norm, in which 'we aren't terribly interested in demonstrations at all'.[71] Their views are clearly supported by the data on the coverage analysed in Chapter 6. That analysis shows that there was extensive coverage of the demonstrations in 2002. The total of 115 items at least partly focusing on the 15 February demonstration across just nine media outlets (including four Sundays papers) over one week is undeniably a remarkable figure. Once the total is broken down into its sources, it becomes perhaps even more remarkable. The fact that the *Daily Mirror* ran 27 stories, the *Guardian* 24, the *Telegraph* 17 and the BBC 13, on its main evening news bulletins alone, testifies to the fact that across a large section of the

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[69] Interview with Alan Jones, 20 June, 2011.
[70] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26 may, 2011.
[71] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.

media, the demonstration had become the central feature of the week's news coverage. If the level of the coverage was exceptional, so too was much of the media's implicit assessment of the significance of the demonstration and the movement. 15 February was not viewed in isolation from the wider news agenda. The demonstration, as well as being extensively reported as a significant event in its own right, was seen as an integral part of a wider political process. Not only was it treated in much of the media as a legitimate reaction to important political developments but it was often assumed to at least have the potential to react back on to the wider political developments.

While 15 February 2003 was undeniably the high point for media coverage, it was part of a wider trend. The extent of coverage of the marches on 28 September 2002 and particularly 20 November 2003 was also impressive. The level of the coverage of the November 2003 demonstration – 71 stories in the week across the sample – suggest once again that protest had become a central preoccupation for large parts of the media. As we saw in Chapter 5, the evidence for a high degree of a benign and neutral approach to the all these demonstrations is also strong. According to the coding process a remarkable 90 percent of stories about the 28 September demonstration were 'neutral', favourable' or 'promoting'. This figure could partly be explained by the fact that more of the coverage was in the liberal or anti-war press, 39 percent was in the *Mirror, Sunday Mirror* and *Guardian* alone. But the data for the 15 February coverage show that the tendencies we are examining were not limited to one section of the media. The number of stories run in the Sunday papers on 16 February indicates the breadth of interest in the 15 February demonstration. On that day the *Sunday Mirror* ran 7 stories concerning the march, the *Observer* and the *News of the World* five each, and the *Sunday Telegraph* came out on top with ten. And yet despite this broad coverage, 84 percent of the stories coded on the demonstration showed a 'neutral', 'favourable' or 'promoting' attitude. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the figures is the percentage of the combined 'favourable' and 'promoting' stories for the first two demos; 61 percent for 28 September and 45 percent for 15 February.

The other key element of the story on which interviewees and statistics broadly agree is the decline in the extent and the friendliness of the coverage of the movement. The 'Bush

demonstration' of 20 November received a high level of coverage (70 stories overall), but this was well down on the figures for 15 February and this despite the fact that the story of the demonstration had a number of extra dimensions; the series of protests before and after the main march, the question of security for Bush, the fact that it was on a weekday. There was a more serious decline in the level of promoting and favourable coverage for the demonstration (from 45 percent for 15 February to just 11 percent) and a marked increase in the amount of unfavourable coverage (from 17 percent on 15 February to 29 percent). There was an even more marked change in the type of framing that was being used. Features characteristic of the protest paradigm were beginning to reassert themselves. The number of stories focussing on the naivety of the protesters doubled compared with 15 February and those concentrating on security, violence and damage rose form just 4 on 15 February to 17 on 20 November. The demonstration on the second anniversary of the invasion eighteen months later received a tiny amount of coverage in comparison with the earlier events – just six stories, none of them prominent or long, though none of them unfavourable. We saw in the previous chapter that most interviewees felt that the pivotal moment of change in attitude was the start of the war itself. Alan Jones from the Press Association put this case most starkly. 'As soon as the conflict started attendance at the press conferences fell off sharply, and I guess coverage did too. The truth is once Britain is involved in a military conflict it's not going to stop it once it started'.[72]

Piers Morgan reports in his diaries that Chairman of Trinity Mirror, Victor Blank, and Chief Executive Sly Bailey also saw the start of hostilities as a critical moment. At a long meeting with Morgan days before the war they told him 'forcefully' to be careful: 'When our troops go in, the public will rally behind them, whatever they thought of the political argument to go to war' (Morgan, 2005, p.160). The most thorough investigation of the British media coverage of the Iraq War in general also found that the moment the war started 'the news media itself became less accommodating to dissent' (Robinson *et al.*, 2010, p.155). The coverage of the 20 November demonstration, eight months into the occupation of Iraq, strongly suggests things are not quite so simple. A number of interviewees suggest an increased level of alienation amongst media staff through 2003 and into 2004 centring on the issues thrown up by the war. These include a sense that they had been duped about the reasons for going to war, a sense that journalists were being

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[72] Interview with Alan Jones, 20 June, 2011.

scapegoated for challenging official narratives and that the independence of the BBC was threatened by the government as a way of diverting attention from their own questionable conduct. Sookoo suggests that this sense of professionalism under attack might well have generated more sympathy for the movement from journalists in the second half of 2003.[73]

Both the figures and the interviews present a very different picture of media coverage of at least the first two demonstrations from that predicted in the 'protest paradigm'. As we have seen this paradigm dominates media studies' thinking about media response to protest. It is worth going back to Todd Gitlin's summary of his research into the main framing devices characterising coverage of the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations as a comparator:

- Trivialisation (making light of movement in terms of language, dress, age, style and goals);
- Polarisation (emphasising counter-demonstrations, and balancing the anti-war movement against ultra-Right and neo-Nazi groups as equivalent 'extremists');
- Emphasis on internal dissension;
- Marginalisation (showing demonstrators to be deviant or unrepresentative);
- Disparagement by numbers (under-counting);
- Disparagement of the movement's effectiveness. (Gitlin, 1980, pp.27-8)

Though we have seen that some of these approaches are present in the coverage of the demonstrations being looked at here, they are in fact relatively rare. Only four stories in total have 'small size' as their main framing device, while the most common frame of all is 'large size' which is the main idea framing 37 percent of the stories analysed. For the first two demonstrations only five have 'security/potential violence or damage' as their central concern, though as we shall come on to discuss, that number rises sharply for the demonstration on 20 November 2003. Far from the coverage suggesting that the marchers are in general 'deviant or unrepresentative' one of the most common ways in which the marches are approached is through the closely linked notions of 'diversity, breadth and representativeness' which together account for the main framing notions of 12 percent of the surveyed material. 'Diversity' is far and away the most common secondary frame in the stories surveyed. It registers as the second frame in 41 percent of the one hundred or so stories for which more than one frame is recorded. Once again these results are not confined to the liberal or anti-war press. In the pro-war *Daily Telegraph* the

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[73] Interview with Niall Sookoo, 6 July, 2011.

most common dominant frames of the coverage of 15 February are 'size, large' (50 percent) and 'diversity' (22 percent). The emphasis on 'trivialisation' and 'polarisation' noted by Gitlin in his research just does not register in the coverage of this sequence of demonstrations, nor does 'emphasis on internal dissension'. There is some 'disparagement of the movement's effectiveness', 'ineffectiveness' is the main framing for four stories across the sample, but after 'security/potential violence or damage', which is the main approach to the demonstrations in 9 percent of the stories – though marginal before 20 November – 'naivety' is the most common negative main framing device, characterising 18 stories, 8 percent of the total. So it is not just that negative framing is rare, a good deal of it is less hostile or dismissive than the kind of approaches recorded by Gitlin and others who have studied coverage of demonstrations in Britain, such as David Wilcox, who found that coverage of the anti-Gulf War protests in 1991 marginalised demonstrations. 'This is often done without serious critical analysis... by affiliating non-interventionist ideals with minorities in society and negative stereotypes, the press often reflects little more than a bigoted and biased conduit for pro-war propaganda' (Wilcox 2005, p.168).

8.3. The causes

There are indications in the research of three broadly separate processes at work that can explain this unusual media response. First, there appear to be cases in which senior editorial and managements themselves made more or less conscious decisions to modify their attitude towards protest based on their own political instincts. Second, there is a more pragmatic response to events themselves, which in some way may have forced the hands of editors. Third, there are a set of indications suggesting many among the wider media workforce were sympathetic to the movement, and that this perhaps had an impact on the nature and tone of the coverage. Distinctions and interplay between considered, official editorial positions, more immediate decisions on the basis of events and spontaneous sympathy and identification or indeed participation on the part of media staffers emerges very clearly from the personal testimonies of media workers. It is important because examining all these mechanisms should help us develop a multi-layered account of the impact of the movement and allows us to explore some of the issues concerning freedom and autonomy within the institutions. It is also relevant to the extent that

some of the testimonies gathered suggest that growing tension between managements and staff may itself go some way towards explaining the type of coverage that emerged.

The management

How far were managements and senior editorial figures a party to the development of new approaches to the protests, and what then seems to have been their motivations? The figures for the level of coverage suggest that in some cases by 28 September 2002, and across the board by 15 February 2003, top editorial decisions had been made to cover the demonstrations. While questions of tone and framing are no doubt the outcome of a complex process of interaction at a whole number of different institutional levels, it is reasonable to assume that decisions about running orders and front page content reflect senior editorial thinking directly. How and why were the decisions to cover the marches made? These are hard questions to answer definitively given the previously mentioned reluctance of media management to participate in the research and the reticence of senior journalists to discuss matters internal to their own workplaces. The answers to these questions may well be complex anyway. At the *Mirror,* Piers Morgan made a conscious decision to openly oppose the war on Iraq and throw the paper behind actively building the movement. His decision on Iraq appears to go back to scepticism at the West's overall response to 9/11. According to Morgan's diary he decided to start to question this approach publicly as early as October 2001. On 11 October he wrote that the attack on Afghanistan was:

> *Whipping up more of the anti-west sentiment that caused 9/11 in the first place. I decided to make a point with page one tonight. "Rubble reduced to more rubble" was the splash: "Is this relentless bombing actually getting us anywhere nearer to catching Bin Laden, or is it playing into his hands?" It's provocative, but I think the time has come to start really questioning what we are doing out there*. (Morgan, 2005, p.301)

The positions taken by the paper on Iraq were equally deliberate, and clearly debated through by the editorial team. In September 2002 he wrote in his diary, 'It's the first anniversary of 9/11 tomorrow and we decided to make a big point the 'war on terror' taking an image of the burning World Trade Centre and asking 'How many more flames are we about to fan?' (Morgan, 2005, p.349). Clearly, Morgan had discussions with the paper's owners, Trinity Mirror, over this

position. These talks grew more and more uncomfortable, but to start with management were supportive (Morgan, 2005). There is some support in the diaries for Ridley's implication (see Chapter 7), that Morgan saw capturing the anti-war readership as partly a commercial move. Morgan notes in his diary in 2002, for example, that he saw 'a real opportunity for the *Mirror* here to become the anti-Iraq War paper' (Morgan, 2005, p.374). But, judging by the tone of most of the relevant diary entries and the sheer consistency and seriousness with which the paper pursued the issue, Morgan and his team were mainly driven by the conviction that the war was bad policy. Seumas Milne suggests that this was a conviction reinforced by Morgan's contact with his army brother (see Chapter 7). Morgan's own diaries intriguingly suggest that it was also influenced by his sense of where the rest of Blair's cabinet stood. 'I just can't understand what the hell he (Tony Blair) thinks he is doing, supporting this nonsense. And nor can most of the cabinet or the party' (Morgan, 2005, p.374). As well as following his own political instincts Morgan was apparently reacting to the splits that, according to so many of our interviewees, ran deep in the British state at the time.

Policy at the *Guardian* was nothing like so openly and explicitly anti-war. It appears to have been shaped by a process of negotiation involving a proportion at least of the journalistic staff. It was also a product of management sensitivity to readers' concerns. We have seen that the *Guardian* management changed their policy of essentially disregarding demonstrations as a direct result of lobbying from readers, but it is also clear that they had some degree of openness to the issues internally. A meeting was organised for all journalists to discuss the line that should be taken towards the war which in itself showed an understanding of the potential divisiveness of the situation. In his interview, Seumas Milne suggests there is 'some evidence that the Editor was against the war'[74] but Madeline Bunting on the other hand, though not present at the meeting, notes that it was dominated by senior journalists and expresses surprise at the number of pro-war voices reported at the meeting, giving the overall impression that no clear editorial position was adopted, though there was clearly some latitude given to anti-war opinion.[75] The *Observer* is a diametrically opposite case to that of the *Mirror*. Once again it is clear that the paper's approach to the war and to the protests was set at the highest levels. Here it is obvious

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[74] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26 May, 2011.
[75] Interview with Madeline Bunting 14 July, 2011.

that the senior editors were effectively pro-war, in close touch with Blair's team, and that they did what they could to limit anti-war coverage in their paper. Ed Vulliamy, who worked on the paper at the time, put their approach down to ambition rather than deep conviction, 'They were not particularly ideological, their neutrality, their clueless ambition made them a push over for people like Blair who knew exactly what was happening'.[76] But the effect was the same.

The editorial policy at the *Sun* and the *News of the World* was, like that of the whole of the Murdoch stable, implacably pro-war. Rupert Murdoch has explicitly stated that he ensured his titles tried to shape the world agenda on Iraq (Davies, 2012). In Ridley's words he was 'simply not interested in the protests',[77] and this is borne out by the fact that they were the two outlets who covered the protests least. The *Telegraph* stable clearly remained hostile to the movement although it is interesting that they signalled in an early editorial that despite the movement being mistaken it should not be completely dismissed. At the BBC there is no evidence of an official 'softening' towards the movement and a good deal that senior editorial did what they could to limit the influence of the movement.

In general then, with the exception of the *Mirror*, and perhaps to a lesser extent the *Guardian*, the unusual coverage of protest can't be put down to political or in principle positions adopted at the editorial level. The fact that various positions were taken by different media outlets, however, will have had an impact across the media. In an extremely self-conscious industry, divided opinion at the highest levels will in itself have increased the diversity of reporting. Seumas Milne argues in his interview that particularly in the days before the dominance of online news 'the BBC very much took its cue from the news agenda in the newspapers'.[78] It is notable that all the outlets bar Murdoch's ran at least some pieces that were favourable to February demonstration. Some differences of opinion at the top editorial levels then did have an impact on the media coverage, but it is not sufficient in itself to explain the high level of coverage and the preponderance of neutral coverage across the board. Other factors must have come into play.

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[76] Interview with Ed Vulliamy, 17 may, 2012.
[77] Interview with Yvonne Ridley, 19 July, 2011.
[78] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26 May, 2011.

Staff attitudes and input

Because of the unusual nature of the industry, in which quite a large number of people have at least some creative and editorial input, the attitude of groups of staff beyond management within the media is likely to be important. While 'routine' media workers probably have a limited influence on the extent of the coverage of the demonstrations. It seems likely that their attitudes may have had a significant effect at least on the *tone* of the reportage. The evidence for sympathy and even engagement with the movement amongst media workers is reasonably strong, most of the interviewees believed that significant numbers of media staff were on the demonstration on 15 February and Burgin talks specifically of successful work by the movement amongst media workers. We have seen too, that there is evidence that media workers felt 'their type of people' participated or were sympathetic. Ridley, for example, is of the opinion that 'You would have been surprised by the number of journalists on the Telegraph who were and are anti-war and sympathised with the movement. The majority of journalists in my opinion were against the war'.[79] Both Burgin and Sookoo testify to obvious sympathy with the movement from camera operators and other technical crew. Burgin in particular talks of his contact with a layer of sympathetic staff in the media who were doing their best to get as much coverage as possible for the movement. And although some of the media staffers interviewed suggest a continuing reluctance to talk about the issues, others report an unusual level of political discussion and concern (see Chapter 7). The extent to which this affected coverage is of course hard to gauge, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that it had an important impact. A series of columnists including Euan Ferguson in the pro-war *Observer*, the *Mirror*'s Paul Routledge, the *Guardian's* Madeline Bunting and the normally pro-Blair Jonathan Freedland, wrote articles about the demonstrations which were not just sympathetic but in which they positioned themselves as activists rather than just observers. For Freedland, 'demonstrations have tremendous power. Their force grows rather than fades over time… The emotional experience of standing together in a shared cause serves as a political glue – it binds people into a movement. And it reveals the true state of public opinion more dramatically than any opinion poll ever could' (Freedland, 2003). In a piece called 'We are the people' Madeline Bunting was equally enthusiastic:

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[79] Interview with Yvonne Ridley, 19 July, 2011.

This was a day which confounded dozens of assumptions about our age… Saturday brought the 'entire business of a capital city to a glorious full-stop. Not a car or a bus moved in Central London the frenetic activities of shopping and spending halted across wide swathes of the city; the streets became one vast vibrant civic space for an expression of national solidarity. Furthermore, unlike previous occasions when crowds have gathered, this was not to mark some royal pageantry, but to articulate an unfamiliar British sentiment- one of democratic entitlement. (Bunting, 2003)

If high profile columnists were openly going over to the cause and writing about it in their columns, there is little doubt other sympathetic media staffers were having some influence on output. The level of sympathetic vox pops with marchers and movement spokespeople has already been mentioned (see Chapter 6). As these were mainly unlikely to be a product of direct editorial instructions from editors of what were on the whole pro-war publications, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion and this was at least partly a product of the fact that journalists identified both with the cause and with the demographic on the streets. The same conclusion must be drawn about the general favourable tone of the coverage.

The unprecedented ban on all 'front line' staff going on the demonstration at the BBC tends to confirm this sense. Imposed just before 15 February, it suggests that BBC management were concerned about the impact of sympathy with or involvement in the demonstrations on BBC image and output. According to Tom Leonard, the media editor at the *Telegraph* at the time, the e-mail listed which categories of staff should not attend the rally and included all presenters, correspondents, output editors and 'anyone who can be considered a "gatekeeper" of our output'. The fact that the BBC director general Greg Dyke 'reminded staff that they should remember their duty to be independent impartial and honest,' according to Leonard, suggests real worries (Leonard, 2003). This and the other attempts at reigning in anti-war sentiment in the media outlined in Chapter 7 appear to have deepened resentment amongst media workers. Attempts to limit discussion or involvement in the movement by management, political interference by outside agents and the growing sense of having been lied to by politicians around the war created both more sympathy with the protesters and a sense that the independence of the media needed to be defended. This sense reached peak around the Kelly affair and the aftermath of the Hutton inquiry, which in Tony Blair's own words 'helped to provoke the media into a fightback' (Blair, 2010, p.463). It was a fightback that appears to have been precipitated by journalists, producers

and technicians rather than managements as Alexander's account suggests. It led to what Blair himself described as a virtual breakdown in relations between the government and the BBC, 'relations between myself and the BBC never really recovered and parts of the media were pretty much off limits after it' (Blair, 2010, p.454).

8.4. Wider influences

If the relatively positive coverage of the anti-war movement was a product of a complex interplay between the attitudes of senior editors and staff towards the movement, this interplay itself was shaped by the wider reality of war and protest. The evidence both of media output and the testimonies of media workers suggests there were three main registers in which to consider the impact of events on the media. Each of these aspects of the situation created by the war and anti-war protest interacted with the norms and the self-perceptions that pervade the media.

Size of the demonstrations

The first and most obvious factor is suggested in BBC producer Ian Bruce's comment that, 'When you have that many people on the streets it's just not credible to act like it isn't happening, especially not given the levels of public opinion against the war'.[80] The central idea at least notionally informing practice in the liberal media in Britain is that of 'balance'. However problematic the concept may be and however far the media is from achieving it, a sense of the importance of balance, or the related ideas of neutrality and fairness dominate any serious discussion of media values here. Lip service is paid to these notions even in the politically partisan newspapers. Ignoring demonstrations of the scale of September 2002 and 15 February 2003 would have risked damaging all sections of the media's credibility, especially given that, as we have seen, the demonstrations attracted people from across the social spectrum. Recognition of this is suggested in editorial comments in the pro-war press. The *Daily Telegraph* started its defence of the government on the issue of Iraq with congratulation to the protest organisers for the scale of the turnout (*Daily Telegraph*, 2002) while the previous day's *News of the World* editorial also began by acknowledging a significant (though underplayed) turnout for the demonstration. 'Tens of thousands marched through London yesterday to voice their opposition to military action in Iraq.' Interestingly, the editorial then goes out of its way to register the

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[80] Interview with Iain Bruce, 10 April, 2010.

legitimacy of the anti-war argument before moving on to demonise the demonstration itself: 'We absolutely support their right to debate the conflict that may lie ahead. For no sane person wants to rush to war' (*News of the World*, 2002).

News coverage of the 15 February demonstration in the pro-war press shows clearly that the scale of the demonstration was a key consideration for editors and journalists across the board. As we have seen, 'size' was the most prevalent frame in which the first three demonstrations were considered (see Chapter 6). On the Monday after the demonstration *The Sun* carried the 15 February march as its second item on the front page of the paper and calling it 'the million-strong peace march', before saying that the demo failed and that 'determination to bring down Saddam Hussein looked stronger than ever' (Pascoe-Watson, 2003). The pro-war *Observer* cleared its front page to report on the demo under the headline 'One Million. And still they came', (Ferguson, 2003) while following up with a page two piece that essentially put its own, and Blair's case for war under the headline 'Blair stakes his political future on beating Iraq'. The fact that the *Observer* felt the need not just to underline Blair's defiance but to restate his case for war on the day after the demonstration suggests that the size of the demonstration was weighing heavily in the pro-war media's sense of how the argument was playing out in British society. Size clearly matters, and is one key determinant of media coverage. There is no clear evidence in the data however for a simple or automatic read off between demonstration size and either extent or attitude media coverage. The demonstration on 20 November 2003 received considerably more coverage than that of 28 September 2002, even though it was roughly the same size. It was also subject to a good deal more negative framing. The increased coverage may partly have been because it took place on a weekday. But the type of coverage, with its emphasis on security issues and strong arguments against the anti-war movement's case suggests that the context of the Bush visit and the serious fears in the establishment over the state of the war in Iraq were critical in shaping the coverage (see Chapter 6). The demonstration on 19 March 2005 was a good deal smaller still, but at an estimated 150,000, very significant by historical standards. The negligible coverage it received was in line with protest paradigm predictions and underlines the fact that context is extremely important in understanding the dynamics of media protest coverage.

Public opinion

The question of the influence of public opinion on the media coverage of the demonstrations is also a complex issue. As we have seen anti-war opinion grew relatively steadily from late 2002 and peaked around the time of the 15 February demonstration at 52 percent according to the *Guardian*/ICM polls sequence (see Appendix 1, Chart 3). Figures for those polled opposing a war without a second UN resolution mandating were much higher, reaching as high as 91 percent in one case, again, interestingly, around the time of the demonstration (Hardy, 2003). While anti-war sentiment dropped sharply in the weeks immediately after the start of the war, it climbed steadily from the autumn of 2003 on. By January 2004 some polls were showing more than 60 percent against the war once again (see Appendix 1). Both Andy McSmith and Seumas Milne in their interviews contend that journalists don't tend to take opinion polls very seriously, and it is certainly true that actual polling is not mentioned a great deal in the coverage of the demonstrations. However, as we have seen, the question of public opinion is present in the background especially in the more analytical coverage of the demonstrations. There is a fairly widespread comment on the diversity of the demonstrations, which often shades over into a sense of the 'representativeness' of the demonstrations (see Chapter 6). The idea of the demonstrations as being partly a response to a democratic deficit becomes something close to a journalistic cliché by the time of the November demonstration, referred to in the *Sunday Mirror*, the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* at least (see Chapter 6).

Nor can the question of public opinion be understood simply as an issue external to the media. As we have seen there are plenty of indications that the opinions and sympathies of journalists and media staffers came to play a role in determining print and broadcast attitudes to the protests, and these opinions and sympathies were, of course, part of wider trends. The number of articles explicitly supportive of the demonstrations, the positive headlines, the references to friends or colleagues on the marches (see chapter 6) and the all suggest a certain identification with the demonstrations as a genuine expression of the democratic will. We shall see how these sentiments were shaped by the wider political conjuncture, but they partly represent the expression of an otherwise suppressed anti-war feeling inside the media. It was almost certainly easier to put a positive spin on a demonstration of this scale than it was to directly challenge the perceived pro-war bias of particular stories, programmes or titles. Despite all this, it is clear that,

as with the size of demonstrations, there is no simple correspondence between the state of public opinion and protest coverage. Anti-war opinion was stronger for example at the time of the 2005 demonstration than it was for the Bush visit in November 2003. One compelling conclusion from this is that it is the *interaction* of public opinion and demonstration size that is important. But the background of the various demonstrations, the evidence of the framings, and the interviews all suggest that there are other elements of context that come into play.

Splits and a crisis

The big story for the more pro-war elements of the press on the Monday after the 15 February demonstration was that Blair remained defiant, but interestingly, even in the pages of the pro-war press, a note of doubt about Blair's future was starting to creep in. On Sunday, 16 February senior political correspondents wrote in the *Observer*, 'For the first time he (Blair) admitted his premiership was in danger if he was unable to ride out the storm, implying that to back down now in the face of the terrorist threat could spell the end of the New Labour Project' (Hinsliff *et al.*, 2003). Such sentiments were clearly partly designed to keep the party faithful on board by warning of the political consequences of open dissent. But such alarmist comments were hardly reassuring, and represent clear evidence that a major political crisis was an outcome being contemplated by insiders. We have seen that most of the media insiders interviewed focussed on splits in the establishment as being an important factor in the political background to the demonstrations. Both Milne's and Oborne's accounts suggest that core state institutions were either riven with disagreement over the war or, as in the case of the Foreign Office, generally, though privately, hostile.[81] As Peter Oborne shows, even important sections of the Conservative political establishment were uncertain as to the advisability of joining the Iraq War. We have seen too that a number of the published accounts of the period also give a similar picture (see Chapter 5). John Kampfner paints a picture an isolated political regime judged by the US ambassador to be 'in considerable danger' and believes that 'Blair's world was closing in on him' (Kampfner, 2005, p.274). Blair himself, though less explicit than some of the interviewees here about the actual line up inside government departments, admits to big splits and a deep sense of isolation, 'the international community, UK public opinion was split. The Party was split, I was between numerous rocks and hard places… the strain on almost everyone around me

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[81] Interviews with Seumas Milne, 26 May, 2011 and Peter Oborne, 17 May, 2012.

was almost unbearable. At home in Downing Street I was a bit like a zombie' (Blair, 2010, p.424). While this level of turmoil and uncertainty was rarely referenced in the news reporting at the time, such an extraordinary political situation was bound to have an impact on a media widely regarded to be heavily focused on internal Westminster dynamics. It would impact both on individual journalists and media workers and also on editorial policy. In his interview, as we have seen, Seumas Milne attested to the level of division within the establishment and anxiety in government generated by the opposition at the time. But he also explained that these splits helped to give credibility to the anti-war movement and helped change the way the movement was handled at an editorial level:

> *What was worrying to them is that this was not the usual suspects; this opposition was clearly spilling over into the political establishment, this was becoming an argument within the government. This fact – partly no doubt itself a result of the scale of the demonstrations, in turn gave legitimacy to the wider movement. This didn't happen in a simplistic way, and in fact the Stop the War Coalition itself was very rarely mentioned. But at least at the Guardian, where in the past there was an unwritten assumption that demonstrations are not news, that they are basically irrelevant to the political picture, this time around, when there was a large number of complaints to the paper (The Guardian), the editor responded and said openly to the team that significant demonstrations should be covered.*[82]

Two particular characteristics of the controversies inside the establishment appear to have had an important impact on the media. The first was its international dimension. Blair's comment quoted above points to simultaneous divisions internationally and domestically. These reinforced each other. In the run up to the war the British establishment in fact found itself on the fault line of a geopolitical confrontation which the *Daily Telegraph* dubbed 'Old Europe v. New World' (*Daily Telegraph*, 2003a). This split, while not fundamental enough to stop the war, or even to inhibit 'Old Europe' from participating when it came to it, did have material consequences as the Telegraph's article points out:

> *The determination to postpone war at any price has now led the governments of Germany, France and Belgium to put the future of the Atlantic Alliance at risk by vetoing Turkey's request for military assistance against an Iraq counter-attack in the event of war (Daily Telegraph, 2003a).*

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[82] Interview with Seumas Milne, 26 May, 2011.

This action no doubt contributed to the isolation of the pro-war government within Turkey itself, further deepening the isolation of the alliance for war. The international disagreements helped weaken the pro-war parties domestically and to ensure that opposition to the war gained more exposure. They also gave the anti-war arguments increased credibility. The proximity in time of one of the great crises in the UN with the global demonstrations on 15 February 2003 helped to give the impression of a 'perfect storm' of opposition with the movement and anti-war diplomacy reinforcing each other. Top news items were reporting on the growing level of international opposition to the war in the very days before 15 February. On 13 February the BBC Ten O'clock News ran a long piece by Gavin Hewitt talking of 'the growing confidence of Bush's opponents in the UN chamber' saying that proceedings at the UN had something of the political public meeting about them' (BBC, 13 February 2003). On 15 February itself the *Guardian* carried a front page tying domestic and international opposition together under the headline 'A case for war? Yes, say US and Britain. No, say the majority.' Its opening paragraph began, 'The US and Britain's drive to gain international backing for a war with Iraq was in deep trouble last night in the face of unexpectedly upbeat reports by United Nations weapons inspectors' (Borger and MacAskill, 2003). After discussing the 'rare applause' given at the UN Security Council to the Russian and French foreign ministers when they demanded more time for inspections, the article went on to say 'public unease about the drive towards war is expected to be underlined today in London, in one of the largest protest marches in recent times. If Mr Blair goes to war without a second resolution, he will face ministerial resignations and mass defections from the Labour Party' (Borger and MacAskill, 2003). This sense of a multiple, interlocking crisis was echoed by Simon Tisdall in the *Guardian* on the Monday after the 15 February demonstration, when he described Blair as 'assailed on all sides by unprecedented popular protest, at odds with Europe, outnumbered in the security council, with the Pentagon's clock inexorably ticking' (Tisdall, 2003).

The second important characteristic of this internal crisis was that, despite its seriousness, few politicians or public figures were prepared to go public about it, or to give voice to the widespread concerns about Blair's policies. Yvonne Ridley and Andy McSmith have suggested the majority of the cabinet probably opposed the war and yet only two Cabinet ministers, Clare

Short and Robin Cook, ever publicly opposed it.[83] The main consequence of Andy McSmith's point that 'the self-serving nature of the politicians' was a crucial element in the way the crisis played out, was that Blair got his way in the short term. Another was that politician's silence increased the significance of the demonstrations because they became the only real expression of majority opinion. Mary Riddell's article in the *Observer* on 16 February headlined 'The great unheard finally speak out' was typical of reportage that focussed on the demonstration as not just diverse but representative in way that the political classes are not (see Chapter 6). 'Labour voters who march' she writes, 'are deracinated from their leaders, and the Tories have none worth worrying about' (Riddell, 2003). This sense of democratic deficit regarded by key researchers as one of the reasons for so many British citizens decided to march in the first place (Sepalla, 2010; Della Porta, 2010). But the number of stories noted in the research chapter that go on to discuss the gap between public opinion and the political establishment suggest it was also one of the reasons why the demonstrations became an important part of the media coverage of the war. Ironically, given the literature's stress on the normal tendency for the media to look for 'balancing' arguments within establishment discourses and departments, the demonstrations became, at least for a short period, a reference point for journalists looking for a counterbalance to the dominant narrative that so obviously suppressed majority opinion. The sense of identification with the demonstrations noted above in some parts of the media surely also reflects a feeling amongst some media staff that the demonstrations could be a foil to the failure of the media itself to practice balance, neutrality and fairness on the issues of the war.

There is one last factor may help explain editorial decisions to cover the demonstrations relatively seriously, and this also flows from the sense of crisis already discussed. Across the background literature, the interviews and the media coverage itself there is often a sense of the political situation moving into uncharted territory. Hoon's phone call to Donald Rumsfeld days before the vote in parliament suggesting the vote wouldn't go well for the government is one indication of this, but there are plenty of others. Blair himself recounts the story of his cabinet secretary looking on to the rules should the government fall. Jack Straw admitted telling his wife 'I might well have to go over this' (Sparrow, 2009). Although the full details of the internal crisis came out in dribs and drabs after the height of the crisis, the seriousness of the situation was

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[83] Interviews with Yvonne Ridley, 19 July, 2011 and Andy McSmith. 22 June, 2011.

obvious to many. Having experienced four years of stable and relatively popular government, from 2001 right up to the beginning of the war on Iraq itself, Britain was in a highly controversial, isolated and exposed position in the world and deeply and bitterly divided at home. It was about to face the test of a major war on a scale not seen since decades. It was a position that appeared to be the result of the prime minister's personal will rather than the considered decision of the government as a whole. Taken together these things amounted to a position of considerable uncertainty. We have seen how opinions vary as to the depth of the crisis (see Chapter 5), but a sense of that exceptional and perhaps game changing events were taking place is palpable in both the interviews and a good deal of the reportage. As one right-wing commentator suggested, the stakes were very high, not just for Blair but for the country as a whole: 'Mr Blair now confronts a political vista outside his experience… to paraphrase Macbeth, if he should fail-well then he courts unknowable political trauma' (D'Ancona, 2003).

The demonstrations were impressive in themselves and of a size that could not easily be ignored, even by the pro-war media. The prevalence of the frames of diversity and size proves they made a big impact on media observers as popular embodiments of dissent. But what made them unavoidable for the media mainstream from the point of view of the editorial teams and media staff alike was the effect they had of dramatising the sense of unease and division that existed in the country in a way nothing else did. This sense representation carried by the demonstrations also had other implications. The extent to which the demonstrations themselves became news – often cited as a feature of the protest paradigm – in this instance suggests recognition of their potency or potential impact. It was not only that that they effectively symbolised opposition. Implicitly and sometimes explicitly, the coverage raised the prospect that in such a moment of division and uncertainty, the anti-war movement, by effectively *representing* majority popular opinion, was becoming an important political actor. This is why, immediately after 15 February, the attention turned to a damaged, isolated and weakened Blair and asked the question what next? Madeline Bunting says in her interview that 'what the media is interested in the end of the day is power. Demonstrations are interesting in as far as they might actually make a difference, have an impact'.[84] One reason why these demonstrations received so much coverage was that the

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[84] Interview with Madeline Bunting, 14 July, 2011.

thought – and the hope in some quarters – was beginning to emerge in the media that they might have the power to bring down a prime minister.

8.5. The meaning for media studies

What emerges from the sequence of events described is a breakdown in the habitual patterns of protest reportage predicted in the protest paradigm. This breakdown is temporary, followed within the period covered, by a progressive modification in coverage and eventually a return to what many commentators would interpret as business as usual; the delegitimation and marginalisation of a protest movement. The evidence is not that the protest paradigm is an invalid category of analysis, but that in certain conditions it can cease to apply. In the case under consideration it appears that a perfect political storm combining multi-dimensional splits in the establishment, mass opposition to a war, a crisis of political representation and a dynamic protest movement temporarily scrambled normal modes of communication. This has some important implications for theoretical approaches to the media for the simple reason that most of the conceptual models of media function seem ill equipped to explain this pattern of media behaviour.

The liberal/pluralist model

As applied to the news media, the liberal/pluralist model of media function posits the media as an independent set of institutions fulfilling their officially designated role as vehicles for essentially objective news analysis and comment. Despite providing the basis for the media's self-image and dominant official public discussion about the media, in general the liberal/pluralist model does not stand up to much academic scrutiny. As Robinson *et al*. comment in their discussion of the Iraq war coverage the paradigm receives 'little empirical support from the field of political communication' (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.46). Studies of war and protest coverage both appear to be particularly sceptical as to the value of the model. As we have seen most of the literature on the coverage of both war and protest concludes with varying emphasis that there is a systemic tendency in the media to downplay dissident views and underreport or denigrate protest (Wilcox, 2005; Smith et al, 2001; Cottle, 2008; McLeod and Detember, 1998; Murdock, 1981; Luther and Miller, 2005). On the question of Iraq war coverage generally, Robinson *et al*. come to the conclusion that the liberal pluralist model does not fit the pattern:

While there were varying degrees of supportive, negotiated and oppositional coverage across time, news media outlets and subject areas…in many ways, at least at an aggregate level, British news media coverage of the Iraq invasion conformed to the predictions of the elite-driven model. Press and television news relied heavily on coalition sources and supportive battle coverage prevailed even among newspapers that had opted to oppose the war. (Robinson *et al*., 2010, p.104)

Certainly, despite showing divergence from the 'protest paradigm' the current research cannot be interpreted as supporting the notion of an independent or impartial media in any simplistic sense. It produced, in fact, a picture of sharply inconsistent media behaviour. The relatively extensive, neutral or sympathetic coverage of some of the sequence of demonstrations under analysis was very striking but it was also exceptional and temporary. The sharp rise and subsequent decline in extent and neutrality of coverage around the pivot of 15 February 2003, and the virtual media neglect of the demonstration in March 2005, both attest to this. So does the sense of novelty and surprise about the coverage almost unanimously expressed by the interviewees. The attempts by editors, managements and politicians to actively intervene to deal with what was clearly perceived as an unhelpful and unhealthy level of sympathy with the attitudes and arguments of the anti-war movement also make a liberal explanation of events, with its emphasis on journalistic autonomy or at least even-handedness, difficult, or impossible to sustain.

The propaganda model

The findings also suggest limitations in some of the more critical theories of media function. The events described are clearly problematic for a mechanically understood theory of the media as driven by the priorities of propaganda. Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model is constructed around the idea of a set of permanent filtering mechanism that ensures that dissident opinions are marginalised or made safe 'even in a society that lacks such means of control as death squads, psychiatric prisons or extermination camps' (Chomsky, 1989, p.10). These mechanisms are, according to the theory, deliberately or otherwise embedded in the fundamentals of the way media is produced. 'The very structure of the media is designed to induce conformity to established doctrine' (Chomsky,1989, p.10). The filters operate at a number of different levels and include the nature of the paths to journalistic success and the penalties for dissent, the impact of corporate ownership and sponsorship, the tyranny of expert opinion and so on, and taken

together provides a compelling explanation for media function in 'normal' times. However, as we have seen, a number of academics suggest a certain inflexibility of the model (see Chapter 3), and there is no doubt that the propaganda model as normally presented does not have the capacity to explain the fluctuating situation captured in this research. It is clear that at least for a period of disorientation and dislocation, important sections of the British media were not working solely or in a simplistic way as a propaganda machine for the ruling elites, at least when it came to coverage of the protests. Despite continued big business or state control, important sections of the media temporarily approached the movement with sympathy and occasionally in a spirit of solidarity and support. The array of 'filters' that form the central mechanism of the propaganda model appear to have ceased to function, at least in the normal manner and the habitual 'adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organisation, market and political power' began to break down (Chomsky quoted in Norris, 1992, p.112).

That the reversion to type sometime after the November demonstration revealed this development as conjunctural does not make it any less important for a working theory of the way the media operates. It is arguable that the propaganda model does not explicitly rule out these kinds of developments, concentrating as it does on general tendencies and media norms and focussing on the internal operation of the media. But this is not really the point. Anyone interested in understanding the overall potentialities of the media, let alone ways of challenging possible in-built biases, needs to be able to explain the exceptions as well as the rule. Indeed the exceptional moments can provide especial insight into the matrix of forces that shape media behaviour in general.

Foucault and post-structuralist critiques
The research results also tend to support critics who point to the limitations of other critical theories of modern communication that see power relations as deeply embedded in the process of communication itself. There are a range of models of mainstream media function in which dominant ways of thinking are so enmeshed in public and private discourse that in some sense they become almost indistinguishable from 'the truth' (see Chapter 3). They take their theoretical points of departure from a spectrum of analytical positions ranging from structuralism through post-structuralism and more openly postmodernist positions. Some would trace their origins back

to the emergence of critical theory in the post war period (see, for example, Ahmad, 1992).
However, undoubtedly the most influential reference point in the promotion and development of
these positions is French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. Two influential critics of
post structuralism, Aijaz Ahmed and Christopher Norris, both argue that what they see as a one-
sidedness and fatalism of a range of modern media theory can be traced to what Ahmed
describes as Foucault's sense of 'a power which permeates everything and reproduces itself
copiously in all the pores of society and textuality but has no origin, no objects, even no agency'
(Ahmed, 1992, p.185). The critic's issue with Foucault's approach is it leaves no conceptual
space for opposition. So, while warning of the dangers of reductionism Norris too traces what he
sees as the capitulation to power of 'Postmodern/pragmatist thinking in large part to Foucault's
'genealogies' of truth, knowledge and ethical value systems' (Norris, 1992, p.114). Analyses
stressing the embeddedness of ideology in everyday life tend to be particularly prevalent in the
literature on war and the media. Considering bias and one sidedness in war reporting, for
example, in her analysis of the discourses of the War on Terror, Lena Jayyusi argues:

> *The issue here is not merely the "double standard", neither is it simply the "frames"*
> *used in media discourse; rather it is the systemic production of and naturalisation of*
> *the frames in the first place; the production of a discursive regime, itself embedded*
> *in imperial/colonial subjectivities, and synchronized with the imperial practices of*
> *the state, serving its self-image and reproducing it to effect. It is a productive order*
> *of affect, language and action.* (Jayyusi, 2011, p.40)

In this view not just the media but the world of entertainment and communication becomes 'an
entire industry working together to produce the regime of official 'truth' and the popular
conceptions, desires, fears and subjectivities which can enact and sustain it' (p.40). Here one of
the key problems is that the habit of reading social meaning from various forms of (normally
official) discourse encourages the view that the various contradictions that surround
communication in reality are neutralised or discounted. For example, in Jayyusi's essay
disjunctures between the official discourse and the reality of the War on Terror that she herself
(miraculously given her own analysis) perceives, 'only exhibit these discourses as enabling, as
productive: here the nexus between the military apparatus and the cultural apparatus is
demonstrable. It demonstrates how "truth" is, in Foucault's sense, produced through various
regimes of power and constraint' (Jayussi, 2011, p.39). As we have seen, Foucault and his

disciples have come under critical scrutiny particularly for a weakening of the explanatory value of the concept of power (see Norris, 1992; Eagleton, 1991; Habermas, 1990; Wollin, 2010; Ahmed, 1992, for example and Chapter 3). In his history of post-1968 French intellectual life, Wollin argues:

> *By dispersing power in all directions, he [Foucault] paradoxically risked diluting, and hence rendering unrecognisable – its core elements and components. No longer exercised by a particular group or class, power circulated amorphously through individuals before re-centring itself – but where exactly? Ultimately, the workings of power seemed vague and nebulous.* (Wollin, 2010, p.341)

If power simply 'circulates' through various social interactions without having any fixed co-ordinates, let alone source in social relations, its working are not simply vague and nebulous, but also presumably immutable. It can't be contested in any understandable way outside of discourse or language if its sources are so shrouded in uncertainty, and yet, because it is so ingrained in the means of communication, it cannot be challenged at the linguistic level either. The turn towards a linguistic analysis of power, which followed closely on the heels of Foucault's path breaking work, is quite widely accepted to have ruled out successful challenges to the dominant ideology or its vocabulary. Ahmed for example, argues:

> *If we accept the more extreme versions of the Foucauldian propositions a) that whatever claims to be fact is none other than a truth-effect produced by the ruse of discourse, and b) that whatever claims to resist Power is already constituted as Power, then there is really nothing for Theory to do except to wander aimlessly through the effects – counting them, consuming them, producing them – and in the process submitting to the interminable whisperings of Discourse, both as Origin and as Fate*. (Ahmed, 1992, p.70)

Such approaches clearly tend towards predictions of immutable media behaviour. They would struggle to explain how a counter-hegemonic movement of opposition to imperialist war can emerge let alone predict that it might be a part of reordering the categories and caricatures that normally frame it in the mainstream. Both sensitivity to the possibility of changing subjectivity, and the importance of the contradiction of lived experience are crucial in any attempt to understand the events under consideration. In the case being examined we have seen how an especially large, active and dynamic anti-war movement was one factor that challenged normal media responses to protest, but this took place in a context of deep shifts in the balance of power

internationally. For the majority of the US ruling class was persuaded that 9/11 was a chance to bolster militarily its declining economic position in the world. The resulting, international big power disagreements, divisions in the domestic establishment, a perceived gulf between the reality of the war on the ground and official narratives all contributed to an understanding of events that significantly diverged from the dominant discourse within the media. And these things in turn generated some media coverage that began to branch out of established patterns in ways that clearly displeased at least sections of the elites who took remedial action of various kinds. These attempts at discipline at least partly backfired. They had the effect in fact of helping to create more active, dissident subjects who showed growing signs of support for the wider anti-war movement. It is only by grasping this series of processes in its totality that we can begin to explain the unusual results under discussion.

Marxism and the theory of hegemony

Recently a series of approaches to the media have been developed that are capable of being more sensitive to the complexity of media function and to the potential for the promotion of oppositional points of view within the mainstream. They share two things. First, without collapsing into rosy, liberal, view of media function, they go beyond mechanical or one dimensional models of media operation by their sensitivity to the contradictory pressures that are at work within the media environment. Second, and connected, they tend to be alert to some of the wider, social determinants of media behaviour. The conclusions of these authors vary, foregrounding as they do different developments in their effort explain a complex reality. Arguably, the most successful attempts to synthesise the impact of the various determinants at work and to provide a framework that can explain the kind of events under discussion here are grounded in broadly Marxist accounts of a social struggle for hegemony, and make particular use of the work of Antonio Gramsci. A range of scholars have highlighted the way that divisions within or amongst the elites open up space for alternative and even independently generated ideas to have some traction within the media (Entman, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Robinson, 2002). Wolfsfeld, for example, has argued that, 'when the various factions within the government are promoting different frames about a conflict, it is more difficult to control the informational environment because journalists can choose a variety of sources' (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p.29). Others have pointed to the impact of both new information technologies and globalisation in limiting the

ability of particular national elites to monopolise the public news narrative (Cottle, 2008; Shelley, 2001). Still others have developed more nuanced analyses of the actual institutions of the contemporary media, in attempts to move beyond a simple instrumental view of the media as transmission belt for elite interpretations and attitudes. Some of these accounts tend to focus on the different institutional models or characteristics of the media that have developed in different countries that generate different types of journalistic behaviour and provide more or less autonomy for journalists (see, for example, Benson, 2004). Benson and others have also stressed the importance of 'the ethics associated with journalistic professionalism' which, especially in a situation of divergence in elite opinion can mean that journalists and other media staff can 'can draw strength and indeed a certain autonomy, no matter how feeble, from their colleagues' (Benson, 2006, p.284).

However, the idea suggested in some of this literature, that technological, structural or ideological change has generated a fundamental and perhaps permanent shift in the way protest is being covered is, as we saw in Chapter 2, contested in the literature. Certainly this perception sits uneasily with the widespread sense amongst the interviewees here that something new was happening around the anti-Iraq protests. Nor would it illuminate the sharp changes in the level of coverage of demonstrations recorded over the period in the statistical results, particularly the very clear return to paradigm norms represented by the almost complete failure to register the demonstration in March 2005. The notion, on the other hand, expressed by Simon Cottle amongst others, that an increase in the sheer level of protest is having a rather more short term impact appears however to be more plausible. Interest in the anti-globalisation movements and street protest more generally was referred to by a few participants as an antecedent to the kind of coverage seen here. But as we discussed in some detail even in our relatively small and concentrated demonstration sample, size proves not enough in itself to explain the vagaries of the coverage of protest. The development of these institutional analyses, attempts to place media operation its wider field of ideological operation and the stress on relative autonomy that emerges in certain circumstances, all represent important attempts to make correctives to the limitations of Foucault-inspired fusion of power and discourse and to the rigidities of the propaganda model. In one way or another they all betray a preoccupation with the potentially transformative effect of the *mediation* of meaning as it is generated by and transmitted through

the complex structures of modern society. However, because of their partial focus on one or two trends, none of them on their own are able to fully illuminate the behaviour of the media examined in this study, particularly the fairly dramatic and sudden nature in the shifts in attitude towards the movement on display, in some cases moving from outright dismissal of protest to fairly active and sympathetic engagement in a matter of months. What is needed is a theoretical framework that can explain *both* the norms of media behaviour which tend in general to exclude popular protest *and* the processes by which suddenly, protest can suddenly move centre stage, reverse the normal circuits of communication and start shaping media output. This necessitates a theory which incorporates the insights of the kind of structural analysis of the propaganda model, that can take on board a modified version of Foucault's sense in which power shapes language and behaviour most of the time but also the countervailing tendencies that open up different possibilities.

Gramsci is perhaps the most influential and sophisticated Marxist writer on ideology, consent and class power since Marx himself, and one of the most influential writers on soft power in general. The potency of Gramsci's theoretical framework lay in the sophistication of his understanding of the relationship between state institutions defined broadly and wider capitalist society. For Gramsci the ruling group's hegemony was not achieved simply by the maintenance of state power through repression but by a wider apparatus that translates a particular group's dominance in society as whole into political power. In the words of Gramsci scholar Peter Thomas:

> *A class's hegemonic apparatus is the wide-ranging series of articulated institutions (understood in the broadest sense) and practices-from newspapers to educational organisations and political parties-by means of which a class and its allies engage their opponents in a struggle for political power. This concept traverses the boundaries of so the so –called public (pertaining to the state) and private (civil society), to include all initiatives by means of which a class concretises its hegemonic project in a an integral sense.* (Thomas, 2009, p.226)

The state in other words gains its legitimacy not simply through force or even simple propaganda but by concentrating and making explicit the values of what Gramsci called civil society, the wider, non-political element of society. In the state, the ruling elite 'posits its own particular

interests as valid, or at least capable of providing leadership, for society as a whole' (Thomas, 2009, p.190). As we have seen, Gramsci has often been interpreted as simply stressing the resilience of the capitalist state and capitalist rule in general in the developed, or Western world. It is undoubtedly true that he emphasised the extent to which the state at the time was developing a mechanisms to more fully incorporate all classes into the project of the ruling elite. But the complex account of hegemony developed in the *Prison Notebooks* in fact has much wider implications than this. First, Gramsci always held an active view of hegemony, which he saw as process. Gramsci understood the role of the state as ensuring hegemony in two dimensions: 'A class is dominant in two ways; it is 'leading' and dominant'. It leads the allied classes, and dominates over the adversarial classes' (Thomas, 2009, p.163). This dynamic understanding of hegemony contains within it the sense of society and the ideas within it as contested. This contestation emanates from rivalry between different classes and class fractions over the organisation of the economy and society. It leads in all societies and all times to various degrees of ideological ferment, 'in all periods there co-exist many systems and currents of philosophical thought' (Gramsci, 1976, p.327).

Unlike the other accounts of the dissemination of ideas and the maintenance of elite power that we have examined, Gramsci's theory of hegemony can incorporate all the dimensions of ideology function suggested by Eagleton and discussed above. While Gramsci clearly sees ideology as a function of the way society is organised in a general sense, and dominant ideology as a set of beliefs that 'symbolize the conditions and life experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class' (Eagleton, 1991, p.21), he also understands ideology as a crucial part of a struggle for hegemony. He would have shared Eagleton's view of ideology as 'a discursive field in which self-promoting social powers conflict and collide over questions central to the reproduction of social power as a whole' (p.29). As Eagleton suggests in his fourth and fifth definitional points on ideology, implied in this understanding is the sense that ideology may often involve 'a readiness to sacrifice truth to less reputable goals' (p.29) and therefore that this divergence from the truth can become a weakness. Eagleton's sixth dimension of the notion of ideology is that of 'lived relations', the notion that ideology is partly a product of the 'structure of society as a whole' (p.30). Gramsci may not have emphasised the role of commodity fetishism in the construction of consciousness under capitalism in the way that Georg Lukács did, but the

limitations of individual practical experience were integral to his account of how ruling ideas could sustain themselves even amongst 'subaltern groups':

> *The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.* (Gramsci, 1976, p.333)

For Gramsci, it is precisely in this contradiction between the limits of individual active experience and the wider social reality that the old ideas can maintain their hold, 'powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity' (Gramsci, 1976, p.333). Once again, however, Gramsci's notion of 'contradictory consciousness' points to the way that elite ideas can potentially overcome.

Gramsci's analysis of hegemony was both an attempt to explain the resilience the Western capitalist order in his era, but also an attempt to understand its vulnerabilities. It served not to stress the integrative capacity of the capitalist state for its own sake but to explore the possibilities of challenging it. There are, in other words, in Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, clear indications of how the normal gulf between 'common sense' and 'good sense' can be traversed. These vulnerabilities can perhaps be grouped in three areas. Each of them serves to strain the coherence and therefore the potency of ruling class ideas. First, the implications of Gramsci's linkage between the state and the wider society was that while in 'normal' times politics and government tend to reproduce the relations of economic power relatively efficiently and discreetly, at times of stress and conflict its mediating role can break down. Turbulence and political or economic crises tend to create tension amongst different sectors of the ruling group and their allies making the role of leadership difficult and encouraging the circulation of alternative conceptions of society.

Secondly, at times of stress and dissent in civil society, the partisan role of the state can be exposed and contrasted unflatteringly with its neutral self-image, potentially undermining its ability to dominate and creating some turmoil within the institutions of the state themselves. As we have seen, Gramsci points to state violence and war as being likely instances of this. At the level of ideology this translates as the gap between ruling ideas and reality being exposed by the contradictions of the system itself in certain circumstances.

Thirdly, Gramsci regards contradictory consciousness as being a structural feature of life under capitalism. The everyday experience of 'subaltern groups' implies a worldview at odds with that of ruling groups. Most of the time, this conflict is kept in abeyance by a combination of individuals' limited experience, her failure to generalise from it, reinforced by the power of ruling 'verbal conceptions' or ideology. But clearly the fact that many people's 'practical activity' at least suggests a divergent understanding of the world is an important latent weakness of elite hegemony.

It is noticeable that all these potential fault lines in the maintenance of hegemony appear in the current research. First, national and international splits amongst the elites over the war were clearly evident and became intense enough to lead to open and public rows and clashes at the level of theory. Second, the immediate crisis created by 9/11 and the deeper, underlying crisis of US imperial power led it to take violent action that tended to expose the aggressive and self serving role of the US state and those of its supporters. And third, these major geopolitical debates and issues came at certain times to impinge directly on the practical activity of significant numbers of people working in the media. Media workers suddenly found themselves working in conditions that contradicted the 'normal' 'accepted' conventions of free speech and balance. Mirror journalists for example were engaged in what was essentially an extended challenge to the 'common sense' of war. Elsewhere, even senior journalists at the Sunday Times and the BBC for example faced restrictions and impositions that challenged their professional integrity and raised troubling questions about their organisations' impartiality.

The convergence of these interconnected factors provide the best available way to understand the ideological turmoil surrounding the war on Iraq. But for Gramsci, the central element in any real

challenge to a ruling group's hegemony was activity and organisation. Potential weaknesses in a particular formation's ideology could only be exploited by the self-organisation of an opposing group, and this required the development of a 'critical understanding of self' (Gramsci, 1971, p.333). The transition from common sense to good sense involved a process that dialectically combined consciousness and organisation, 'consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one' (Gramsci 1976, p.333). This process of coming to consciousness is itself an active one. What is necessary for particular viewpoints to have an impact in society is 'a cultural and social bloc' which can 'work out and make coherent' the 'problems raised by the masses':

> *A human mass doesn't "distinguish" itself, does not become independent in its own right, without, in the widest sense, organising itself: and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders.* (Gramsci, 1976, p.334)

Gramsci here is discussing, in the half-coded language imposed on him by his prison conditions, the development of a socialist counter hegemonic movement, based on a developing class-consciousness that has to be articulated by intellectuals 'organic' to the movement. But his insistence on the importance of active self-organisation as the central factor in any ideological challenge to dominant ideas is clearly relevant to our case.

One of the findings of the current research is that, despite the relatively positive approach to the movement taken in at least some of the media at the high points of the demonstrations, leading organisers and spokespersons of the Stop the War Coalition were relatively rarely interviewed. This reluctance on the part of the media to interview the 'organic intellectuals' of the movement is not to downplay their importance. One of the key characteristics of the movement, noted in a number of the interviews for this research, was the importance of the cycles of public meetings and rallies addressed by key anti-war speakers in between the big mobilisations that helped to provide ideological coherence to the movement and to challenge the 'common sense' of the elites. This argument was not brought to the movement 'from the outside', but very much in the spirit of Gramsci's understanding of the role of the 'organic intellectual', it served to clarify and develop existing instincts and opinions. It was a 'criticism of "common sense", basing itself

initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that "everyone" is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity' (Gramsci, 1976, p.336).

The 'organic intellectuals' of the campaign served to cohere and motivate a movement that in turn had a crucial impact on the media. There is accumulated evidence in the research that the record levels of coverage and the relatively sympathetic attitudes towards the anti-war protest was not just a distanced judgement about the correctness of the cause, but a product of the demonstrations themselves. It is not just the case as we have seen that many journalists and media workers came on the demonstrations or knew others who had. It was not just that the *Daily Mirror* positioned itself as an active supporter of the movement, including by producing placards for the demonstration on 15 February 2003. There was a widespread fascination in the media with the demonstrations, and an implied sense that the demonstrations themselves had changed the political calculus. The impact and ideological significance of the demonstrations is suggested in the comment pieces quoted by Madeline Bunting, Jonathan Freedland and Paul Routledge. Even the *Telegraph*'s Sam Leith suggested the demonstrations had become the expression of the popular will:

> *Perhaps the Burkean idea of representative democracy has been so undermined by Mr Blair's "presidential" style of government that it has ended up leaving the represented feeling they aren't getting their democratic due. That, it's surely worth at least considering, is why people are taking to the streets.* (Leith, 2003)

The articulation of anti-war sentiment by the Stop the War Coalition appears to have been an example of a counter-hegemonic movement in which, in Gramsci's words 'material forces are the content and ideologies are the form' (Gramsci, 1976, p.377).

It is no accident that in the midst of a widely recognised democratic deficit, a series of interlinked social and economic crises, war and a return of popular protest there has been something a revival of Marxist approaches to the study of the media, often with a strong to debt to Gramsci. Very much in this spirit, in *Marxism and Media Studies*, Mike Wayne argues state

institutions' service to the emerging neoliberal order have had the effect of eroding their legitimacy:

> *While the state's apparent withdrawal from taking any substantive responsibility for correcting market inequalities and chaos has enabled it extricate itself from the corporatism of the preceding era, it has served to lay the long term foundations for its own delegitimisation as the liberal democratic state. The political crisis of liberal democracy stems logically enough from the growing evidence that the agenda is before and after and outside the electoral process. Whether the state can afford to continue to leak this kind of legitimacy and what impact this might have on media policy and on the conduct of current institutional regulators remain open questions.* (Wayne, 2003, p.117)

These words, written before the full impact of the Iraq War on domestic society could be assessed, and years before the current economic crisis, appear prophetic. A number of other media academics have recently highlighted the importance of contradiction in understanding media behaviour as opposed to a simple stress on elite dominance. Sparks, for example has concentrated on divergent class interests in the media. His careful examination of the class structure of various media institutions concludes that 'Media organisations thus contain within themselves diverging interests and the potential of serious class conflict both over pay and conditions and over much wider issues such as editorial content' (Sparks 2006, p.125). Thussu and Freedman have begun to examine the coverage of the Iraq War itself within a wider understanding of both market forces and social struggle:

> *At a time when consensus starts to break down, sections of the media are forced to respond to major public debates. However, the critical stories that do emerge from mainstream media are not the result of an intrinsic pluralism or a deep-rooted commitment to "objective journalism" but reflect shifts of consciousness amongst wider layers of the population. The decision, for example, by the mass-circulation news-paper, the British Daily Mirror, to campaign against a US/UK attack on Iraq reflects its desire to articulate the views of the anti-war constituency as well as to compete with its main tabloid rival, the Sun. It is about politics and product differentiation. The stakes in reporting conflict are high but they are far from independent of the tensions that arise out of the struggle of political elites to get their way and the determination of citizens to stop them.* (Thussu and Freedman, 2003, p.12)

Deepa Kumar is one of a number of scholars to put the case recently for the relevance of Marx's dialectical method to media studies:
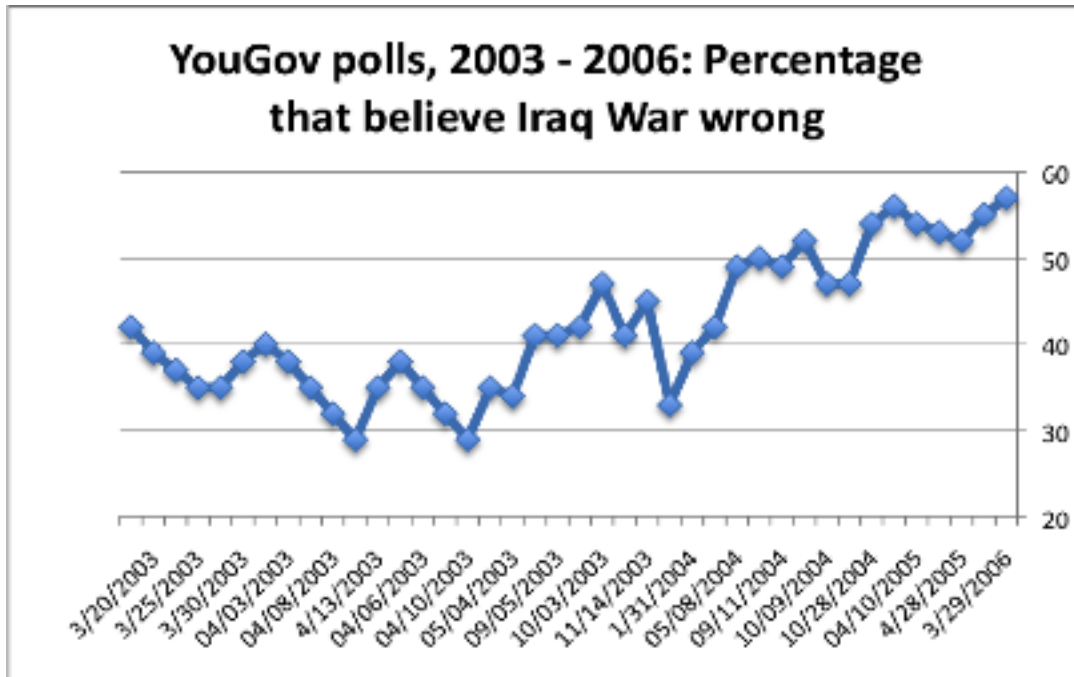
> *Mass mediated products are determined by various factors – the system of ownership, the process of cultural production, the level of struggle, the state of consciousness in society at a given time, and so on. A dialectical method of analysis would involve studying all these factors within a concrete historical context so as to explain the multiple mediations that infuse a product of culture.* (Kumar, 2006, p.85)

It is only such a method of analysis that *both* locates the media in its total social and political context *and* pays special attention to the contradictions that traverse it that has a chance of understanding the kind of complex and fast changing events examined here. The importance assigned to social division and contradiction in this kind of analysis is essential. Locating the media in a divided society held together by a structure of power is vital to explaining the way that popular dissent – on the face of it an eminently suitable subject for media scrutiny - is normally regarded as being of little interest. But attentiveness to contradiction is also the key to overcoming the one-sided and static nature of some of the radical critiques of the media examined above. The contradictions that exist inside the media, normally suppressed by some of the mechanisms described by Chomsky and his colleagues, can be activated by major turmoil in the wider world – itself the eruption of various normally suppressed social and political fault lines. Such a dialectical view of the world can comprehend how most of the time the media tends to deploy a discourse and a set of assumptions that are unobjectionable or favourable to the ruling elites, but that at certain moments of social stress sections of it can become a mouthpiece for opposition to government policies. It provides us with an ability to understand how for example the ideology of neutrality, independence and fairness which normally serves the media as a means to contain and defuse controversy, can, at a time when mobilised public opinion is being ignored, turn into a platform for dissent. As Kumar argues, such a dialectical method, at its best, is far from reductionist or mechanistic. On the contrary, its aim should be to understand how ideas can change, how power structures can be effortlessly hegemonic most of the time but generate social ferment at others. How, in our case, people can start to influence a process of communication of which they are normally passive carriers or consumers. It is this kind of complex understanding of an internally divided media within a conflicted, global context that is needed to explain the way in which some normally deferential establishment institutions began

to show sympathy with a radical, dissenting movement. How, for a short time, the movement and its supporters began to make the news.
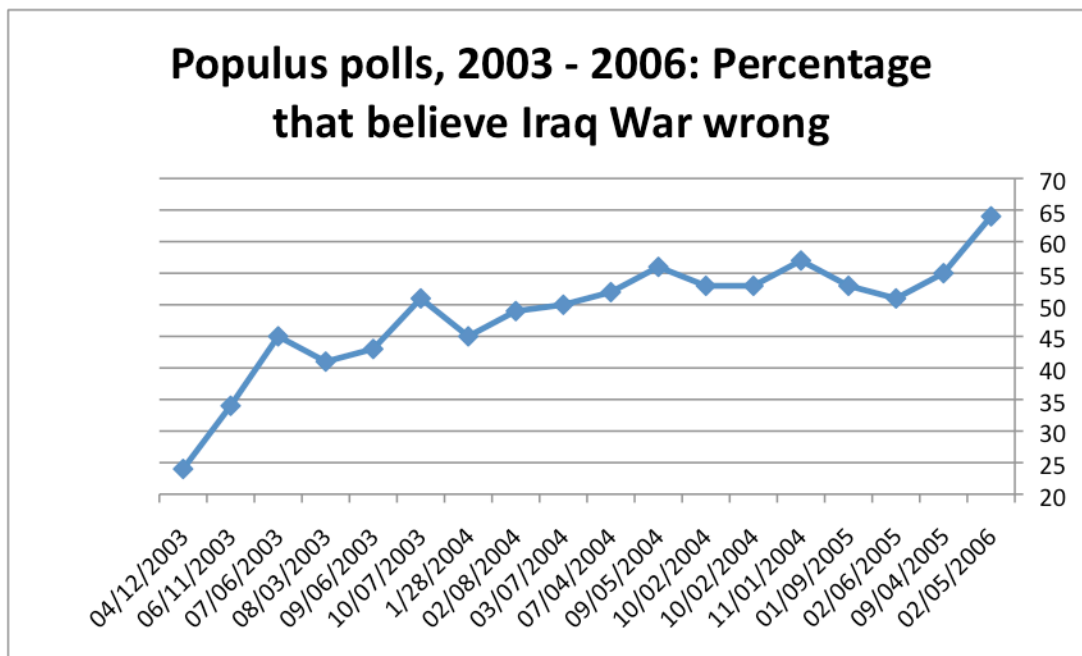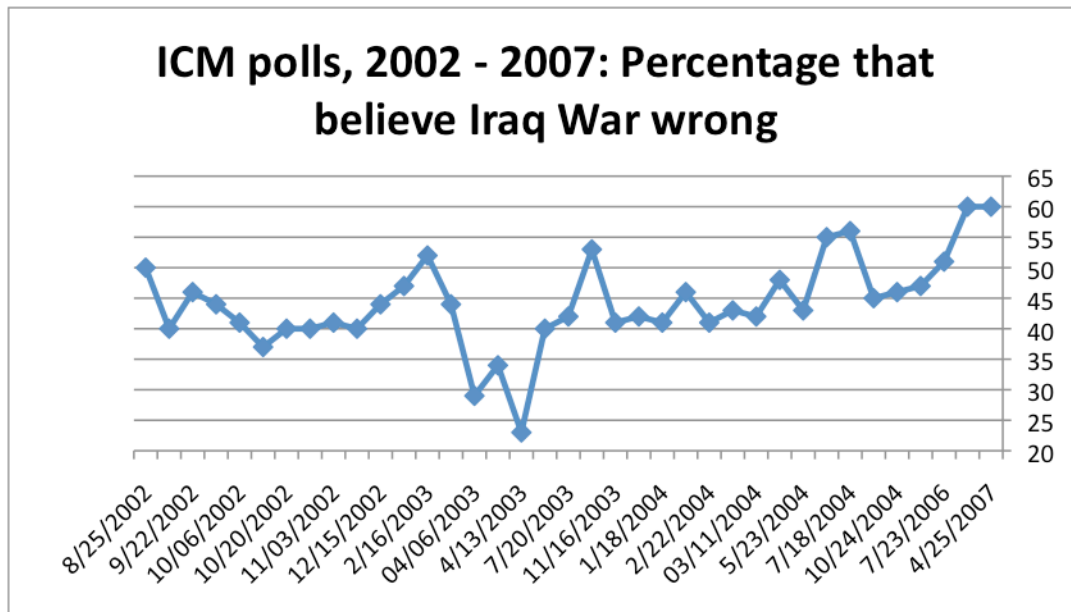
Appendix 1: Public opinion

Graph 1

Source: UK polling report, http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/iraq

Graph 2

Source: UK polling report, http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/iraq

Graph 3

ICM polls, 2002 - 2007: Percentage that believe Iraq War wrong

Source: UK polling report, http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/iraq

Appendix 2: Interviewees

Paul Alexander, librarian, *BBC*. Interviewed 26 June, 2011

Iain Bruce, journalist and filmmaker. Formerly assistant producer, *BBC 24*.
Interviewed 10 April, 2012

Madeline Bunting, associate editor and columnist, *The Guardian*. Interviewed 14 July, 2011.

Andrew Burgin, former press officer, Stop the War Coalition. Interviewed 30 May 2011.

Jeremy Corbyn MP, currently chair, Stop the War Coalition. Interviewed 20 July, 2012.

Lindsey German, convenor, Stop the War Coalition. Interviewed 31 October, 2012

Sabah Jawad, former journalist, officer Stop the War Coalition and leading member of Iraqi Democrats against War and Occupation. Interviewed 2 November, 2012.

Alan Jones, correspondent, *Press Association*. Interviewed 20 June, 2011.

Tony Lennon, research officer, formerly President, BECTU (Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union). Interviewed 26 June, 2012.

Alice Mayne, (not real name), videotape editor, *BBC***.** Interviewed 16 July, 2011.

Andrew McSmith, senior writer, *The Independent*, formerly political editor *The Independent on Sunday*. Interviewed 22 June, 2011.

Seumas Milne, columnist and associate editor**,** formerly Comment page editor,
The Guardian. Interviewed 26 May, 2011.

Andrew Murray, chief of staff, UNITE the union, formerly chair Stop the War Coalition. Interviewed 26 July, 2012.

Peter Oborne, columnist *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph,* formerly political editor, *The Spectator.* Interviewed 17 May, 2012.

Trevor Phillips, former press officer University and College Union, (previously NATFHE). Also formerly treasurer, Stop the War Coalition. Interviewed 2 October, 2012.

Yvonne Ridley, freelance journalist and broadcaster, formerly chief reporter, *Sunday Express***.** Interviewed 19 July, 2011

Niall Sookoo, former Producer, *BBC* current affairs and former press officer, Stop the War Coalition. Interviewed 6 July, 2011.

Ed Vulliamy, journalist and writer, formerly New York correspondent *The Observer*. Interviewed 17 May, 2012.

Appendix 3: Standard questions

a) Media worker interviewees

1) What was your role was within the process of the production of news and commentary?

2) What was the official attitude to the anti-war movement in the organisation you worked for? Was it different from that adopted towards other protest movements?

3) How was this attitude shaped within the institution? Was it discussed formally in management/editorial meetings or referred to by senior members of staff?

4) Did the official attitude change over the period under examination here?

5) What was the attitude to the anti-war movement amongst your fellow members of staff? Did this change in the period under discussion?

6) How do you feel the media in general responded to the anti-war movement compared to other protest movements?

7) How do you explain any differences?

b) Movement interviewees

1) What was your role in the anti-war movement at the time?

2) Did the media response to the anti-war movement compare with that of previous campaigns you have been involved in?

3) Was there a noticeable difference between the way different media outlets responded?

4) Did the media response change over the period under examination here?

5) How did the media campaign run by the anti-war movement compare to previous efforts?

6) Was there a difference between the response you received from 'routine' as opposed to 'editorial' media staff?

7) How would you explain any difference in media response with your previous experience?

Appendix 4: Coding

a) Sample coding schedule

CODING SCHEDULE

Paper/Channel		

1) Guardian   6) Sunday Telegraph
2) Sun   7) News of the World
3) Telegraph   8) Observers
4) Mirror   9) BBC
5) Sunday Mirror   10) Sky

Date						

Page

Type of item	

1) news report 2) editorial 3) feature 4) interview 5) comment

Before or after demonstration	

Length (words/minutes)		

Headline (Newspaper):

Pictures				

1) Demonstration 2) other protest 3) public meeting 4) other movement activity 5) map 6) suffering in Iraq 7) police

Author/Reporter:
Weight 1 - 5
Main Subject: e.g. public opinion about war, imminence of war, military problems

Frames concerning protest: (1-main, 2-secondary, 3-subsidiary) size, diversity, violence, celebrity participation, politicians' participation, extremist participation (left/Muslim), effectiveness, ineffectiveness, cost/damage

1)
2)
3)

Attitude to protest	

1) promoting 2) favourable 3) neutral 4) unfavourable

Actors mentioned				
Actors interviewed/quoted				

1) MPs 2) Celebrities 3) 'Ordinary people' 4) Muslims 5) Muslims framed as extreme 6) Socialists 7) Socialists framed as extreme 8) Anti war leaders 9) Anti war military

1) anti-war politicians connected to the movement 2) pro-war politicians 3) celebrities 4) other movement spokespeople 5) non-movement anti war expert 6) pro war expert 7) ordinary protestors 8) ordinary people anti war 9) ordinary people pro war

b) Coder reliability

A random sample of 10% (21) of the coded stories were recoded for attitude and framing to check the reliability of the overall sample.

The results were as follows:

Framing
1) 19 matched = 90% reliability
2) 18 matched = 85%
3) 16 matched (10 stories had no subsidiary frame recorded) = 76%

Attitude
20 matched = 95% reliability

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