

# The Visual Politics of Wars



# The Visual Politics of Wars

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The Visual Politics of Wars  
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Edited by Ibrahim Saleh and Thomas Knieper

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## INTRODUCTION

# BREAKING THE SILENCE: TRUTH AND LIES IN THE WAR ON TERROR

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War reporters have always tested the boundaries of what is safe and what is not. It's called risk minimisation—a form of reassurance when the stakes are too high and the near misses too close.

Reporting from war zones has always been a bold venture, but the last few years of covering wars, crises, and conflicts have marked a particularly dark and depressing time for journalists in the field. Most media outlets cannot afford full-time war correspondents so rely on freelancers, who make less money and receive no benefits such as expense accounts and security, or theft, health, and occupational disability insurance. New technology also means that anyone with a plane ticket and a phone can be a freelancer, which means more competition for stories—and lower wages—but also more reporters who do not really know what they're doing. Those ingenious people, daredevils and adventurers, take greater risks because they don't know any better.

Too often, when it comes to reporting on war, violence, and conflict, unverified “eyewitnesses” or unnamed sources are a feature of media stories, especially those that impact negatively on the story narrative. But what about the warped journalistic ethics behind the reporting of terror?

Clearly, the “Breaking the Silence”<sup>1</sup> story could only be achieved through finding different sources and using novella approaches to media as a middleman to avoid due diligence on the sources.

In recent years, we have been witness to an unprecedented emergence of new forms of visual politics—in particular when it comes to terror, crises, conflicts, and wars. Today, the visible shift from traditional wars into mediated wars, from traditional reporting into emotional reporting, from traditional entities of parties to movements, and from the sovereign nation state to autonomous spaces, identities, and practices—making such blindness on the part of the academic discipline of visual politics even more marked. In brief, the video is the missile, and we can use it to attain any goal.

Understanding these new developments in the visual politics of wars means stepping outside the formal boundaries of academic disciplines; it means mobilising an arsenal of concepts, theories, ideas, perspectives, and genealogies.

To cope with the ongoing changes in the dynamics, structures, and functionalities of visual politics, we must develop a kind of mapping research platform of “hybrid science.”

This series marks a new and agonising departure on the terrain of 21st century war. During the last century, war has been increasingly waged against civilians. This horrifying shift has prompted the development of a form of war reporting, exemplified in Bosnia, which is not about technology and hardware, but about human suffering, and which fuels public outrage. War reporting has not reverted to the military machismo of an earlier age, but sometimes it may appear that the visual politics of war leave the plight of the defenceless unreported.

The *Visual Politics of War* series is an attempt to make sense of this new terrain and to develop an alternative conceptual and theoretical arsenal for thinking the visual politics of autonomy. The series investigates central political, economic, and ethical questions raised by this new paradigm of autonomy.

Given this explosion of information and interest in the field of visual communication, reporting terror, political journalism, and political communication, there is an increasing need for a platform where cumulative research findings are synthesised into a form accessible to the

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<sup>1</sup> “Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror” was a Carlton Television production for ITV first broadcast on ITV1, September, 22 2003. Directors: John Pilger and Steve Connolly. Producer: Chris Martin.



scholar, student, and practitioner, as well as broad audiences. The *Visual Politics of War* annual series is intended to fill this need by publishing capstone papers that summarise and detail a systematic program of ongoing research on a given topic or theory.

The series will bring together a body of authors and researchers who are engaged, in various ways, with understanding contemporary political journalism, embedded coverage, identity politics, and the sociology of media from different perspectives, including: political theory, philosophy, ethics, literature and art, psychoanalytic theory, political economy, political iconography, and visual rhetoric history. Contributions explore themes such as the aesthetics of autonomous politics, critical genealogies of images, the idea of the commons, individualist ethics, migration and desertion, and the psychoanalytic structure of the radical political subject.

Each annual volume will include selected and peer-reviewed capstone articles that capture the wide range of subject matters studied by journalists, social scientists, and visual scholars that might relate to war, conflict, and crises around the globe. The papers in this inaugural volume showcase the diversity of topics and approaches in the field today.

Sebastian Gerth, in “The Emotional Impact of War Photographs,” closely connects the links between war photographs and media pictures in general. As a consequence, the depicted scenery will be judged largely from an emotional perspective that then leads to an individual opinion about a specific event. Such a conception shows specific, but multi-faceted, problems such as those caused by social injustice and the difficulty of conducting a normal everyday life within the context of wars and crises.

Eileen Culloty’s “Re-looking At War: Multi-modal Remediation As A Visual” examines multi-modal remediation as a visual strategy in war documentaries. Through processes of selection and juxtaposition, multi-modal remediation speaks, not to the moment of the iconic image, but to the contradictions and overlaps between multiple images.

Rasem Mohamed Al-Gammal, Eman Mohamed Soliman, and Heba Ahmed Morsy’s *Media, Culture, and Power in the Risk Society: The Case of Egypt*, a study of a society in a politically volatile situation, is the collective effort of academics with different backgrounds and experiences who have joined forces to examine the hypothesis that societies tend to transfer to democracy as a result of massive changes in the societal culture. Egypt suffered from massive changes in its societal culture resulting from the catastrophic conditions that Egyptians were exposed to and the physiological pressure that media systems imposed on them by

reproducing these conditions in their discourse—a discourse that triggered a sense of resistance and change.

Maria Teresa Nicolás argues that the objective of increasing the practice of peace journalism in conflict coverage must be reflected in how Mexican and Spanish newspapers pay special attention to the various models of “peace journalism,” or “constructive conflict coverage.” These models suggest alternative ways of conflict reporting in order to contribute to processes of de-escalation, peacebuilding, and reconciliation instead of escalating, exaggerating, or neglecting conflicts. Nicolás, in *Peace Journalism in Iberoamérica: Mexican and Spanish Newspaper Coverage of Conflict*, hopes to contribute in the application and examination of the framing theory by encouraging more studies and different hypotheses in order to help influence public opinion and policymaking to encourage the development of peace journalism.

Sathya Prakash Elavarthi aims to unveil the neoliberal turn in India that, when compared to countries with totalitarian regimes and powerful leaders, has its own distinct characteristics. Elavarthi attempts to examine and understand this economic phenomenon related to news media in the context of economic liberalisation and the re-configuration of power relations in Indian politics. Elavarthi’s manuscript is entitled *News Media Economy in Post-Liberal India: Narratives of Nation, Region and Power in Neo-liberal Times*.

*The Death of Muammar al-Gaddafi in Tagesthemen (ARD), The News at Ten (BBC) and Le journal de 20 heures (TF1)* by Eva Boller argues that Western governments, hard pressed to justify their decision to go to war, use the media as a conduit to present fabricated or manipulated events to justify their course of action to their voters. If media supports the war and gives reasons for it through arguments and visual framing, this can contribute to the population’s acceptance of military interventions. The study examines how the death of Gaddafi was presented through moving images in combination with text. Since the text guides the perception, it is important to not only listen to the words and look at the images, but also examine how both are connected and to what evaluations this might lead.

Noam Lemelshtrich Latar, in his paper *Can Robot Journalists Replace Human Journalists in the Coverage of Wars?*, argues that the visual images of the beheading of journalists by Isis, among other violent acts, reveal the vulnerability of journalists. Humans and algorithms fulfil different functions depending on the stage of the journalistic process, and both have unique advantages and shortcomings. Academic research shows that human journalists’ reports covering war zones are affected by the harsh conditions they experience in the field, witnessing dramatic human

suffering, by fear of reporting issues that will shed negative light on their "hosts," and even by whether they are embedded in the combat forces or are freelance.

The critical study presented by Azmat Rasul entitled *Elite Perceptions: South Asian English-language Newspapers and the War on Terror in Afghanistan* evaluates the relationship between the elite press and the governments of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan. This paper discusses how the media framed the Taliban in the context of foreign policies of the South Asian neighbours that had important stakes in conflict-ravaged Afghanistan. The central focus of the study revolves around the foreign policy positions of India and Pakistan on the Taliban factor in Afghanistan and the approach used by the elite press of these countries in responding to the initiatives of the foreign office. The authors employed content analysis to analyse the editorials of two English-language newspapers (*The Hindu* and the *Dawn*) to discover whether the relationship between the press and media is elite-driven, adversarial, or independent.

Sher Baz Khan's *Between Frame Sending and Frame Setting: How Reporting Conditions Shape Textual and Visual Frames of the "Af-Pak War" in the Local Media* explores the frame-setting and frame-building processes through the analysis of the routines of war correspondents, reporting conditions in the field, and the media's relations with military and militant groups. The research unpacks the nature of risk taking in reporting conditions in the war zones, information, and the episodic publishing blackouts that are imposed by the military and militant groups, as well as the inability of journalists to question and scrutinise the official frames before passing them on to the public discourse.

The last paper, *The Geopolitics of Visual Representation in News: The Case of Boko Haram*, is actually the reason behind the whole research project and this book series. Ibrahim Saleh and Thomas Knieper believe that within the context of the current period, characterised by public ambivalence towards weak public consent over the atrocities of war and violence, there is insufficient research that analyses the images related to volatile political settings with the aim of unpacking the underexplored visual dimensions and effects of emerging transnational public spaces. Hence, they fill in the gaps and examine whether the visual framing of violence in the Nigerian news prompts a certain ideological or cultural meaning. Indeed, the authors are aware that the visualisation process involves a complex mixture of the accentuation of difference and the increasing of standardisation. In a way, it is difference-within-sameness or

sameness-within-difference that best characterises the sociocultural condition of the media landscape as a whole.

The *Visual Politics of War* book series would not have come to fruition without the support of Cambridge Scholars Publishing and the colleagues who accepted places on the international editorial board. We would especially like to express our gratitude to those who worked to push the project forward during its preparation stages and to the colleagues who entrusted us with their manuscripts, accepting rigorous peer reviews and criticisms that allowed the book series to make an outstanding debut.

As we launch this new venture, our hope is that the *Visual Politics of War* book series will satisfy a unique intellectual niche in the media field to provide greater depth and breadth than a typical journal article, greater conceptual focus than a handbook chapter, and greater economy than a book.

The Editors: Ibrahim Saleh, Future University in Egypt,  
and Thomas Knieper, University of Passau

CHAPTER ONE

NEWS MEDIA ECONOMY  
IN POST-LIBERAL INDIA:  
NARRATIVES OF NATION, REGION,  
AND POWER IN NEO-LIBERAL TIMES

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**Abstract**

In recent years, the relationship between economic performance, civil conflicts, and wars has generated a considerable amount of interest. While there is a growing consensus that economics matters to conflict, there remains considerable disagreement as to how it matters and how much it matters relative to other political, sociocultural, and identity factors. For some analysts, economic factors are analysed alongside other factors as a means to improve the understanding of the complex causes and dynamics of war; for others, economics has become the explanatory framework for conflict analysis. This chapter attempts to understand India's tryst with economic liberalisation, the changing contours of political economy, and the re-configuration of power relations by analysing the changing nature of news media. The research attempts to engage with the trajectory involved in the near complete transformation of "news media" from a liberal to a neo-liberal institution. This chapter examines how the human conflicts and political costs of the onward march of neo-liberal capital are dealt with and diverted by the news media as active foot soldiers.

**Keywords:** Neo-liberal news media, news media in India, political communication in India, news media, power

## **News Media Market in India: Neo-classical Economic Analysis?**

In liberal political philosophy, the idea of free speech is secure when there are large numbers of news media organisations to ensure diversity and plurality. News media activity is also an economic activity, and news media organisations are also economic institutions. They have costs and revenues, and when costs exceed revenues, as happens with many news media organisations, somebody has to deficit finance them. Whether deficit financing comes from the market or the political class, it comes with its own objectives and goals.

In “free market economies,” most decisions concerning resource allocation are supposedly made through “price discovery,” a market mechanism wherein the forces of supply and demand interact freely. The relevant question to ask in this context would be whether free markets work well for resource allocation in the news media sector. According to media economist Robert Picard (1989, 17), “the relationship between price and resource allocation in media is quite unusual.” Many media services do not involve direct payment from the audience or the viewer, and in some cases involve only a partial payment. For instance, the newspaper and television news subscribers are heavily subsidised by advertising. Advertising accounts for almost 50–60% of revenues for magazines and 70–80% of revenues for some mainstream newspapers. The subscription revenues for newspapers are very meagre, and most television news channels are free to air. Without price as a direct link between producers and consumers, there is a failure to register consumer preferences with the producers. This in effect poses two problems:

- (1) A producer of media goods and services will not be able to determine what quantity has to be produced and at what cost
- (2) As a consequence of the first problem, the market forces will fail to allocate resources efficiently, resulting in Market Failure. Media economists argue that, “free markets fail to allocate resources efficiently in the case of media because media goods are public goods as opposed to private goods” (Doyle 2002, 64–66). (Private goods are goods whose value is destroyed on consumption by single use, while public goods are those whose value remains for others even after usage.)

A rational firm in neo-classical economic theory pursues profit and profit alone. Most of the news media firms in India are loss-making enterprises

and are being bankrolled by ambiguous sources. Most of the media firms in India seem to be working with alternative goals, especially of political and public influence. In the absence of purely profit-seeking behaviour from the firms, free markets fail and neo-classical economic models render themselves obsolete in providing proper explanations of such phenomena. At this juncture, it becomes necessary to fall back on heterodox economic approaches to understand the economic phenomenon in question. As the political economy approaches do not just stop with economic models, but rather try to explain the phenomena by historicising and contextualising, it becomes possible to explain the phenomena, even though the explanations themselves are subjective. By attempting to explain a social totality, these heterodox political and economic approaches brought a range of wider societal concerns back into their domain and helped economics move away from deterministic approaches of natural sciences to contingent approaches of humanities.

After India made a decisive transition to a liberal market regime in the 1990s, the media sector was deregulated along with many others. Publishing and film businesses, which were already open for private investment, fortified themselves with new capital inflows and reduced regulation. The broadcast sector, which had been a state monopoly, exploded onto the national media scene after deregulation. From 2 television channels in 1991 to 828 in 2013, the speed and scale of this transition has been breath-taking. With over 16,000 newspapers registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) and 400 TV News and Current Affairs channels, the Indian news media market seems to be very diverse and plural, and Indian democracy sound and vibrant. But the viewership shares of news media broadcasters tell a different story. The FICCI-KPMG 2013 national viewership figures, collated by genre, reveal that English news with a 0.23% share, Hindi news with 3.18%, and regional news with 2.78% reflect the marginal and decreasing interest in this genre (FICCI-KPMG 2013, 26). Put together, the total viewership share of 400-odd news and current affairs channels that constitute 50% of total TV broadcasters comes to a paltry 6.19%. Significant viewership shares in India go to General Entertainment Channels (GECs), which have a programming mix of soaps, reality shows, and film-based programming. Hindi GEC at 30.01%, Regional GEC at 20.18%, and Hindi Movies at 11.93% lead the pack in national viewership figures. Television news as a genre ranks fifth in viewer preference and in attracting advertising revenues, but ranks first in attracting investments. In the Western world, newspaper publishing is entering a phase of decline, but continues to grow and attract significant investments in India. The operational costs of news

media establishments have reduced due to digital technologies and convergence. Reduced costs have led to the further expansion of news media business, but the rate of revenue growth is limited. A genre that does not provide returns on investment, which does not attract viewers, paradoxically manages to attract significant capital inflows. This paper attempts to examine and understand this economic phenomenon related to news media in the context of economic liberalisation and the re-configuration of power relations in Indian politics.

### **Neo-liberalism with “Indian Characteristics” and the News Media Market in India**

“War and economy have become almost indistinguishable” (Werlhof 2005). If “economic development” is seen as an alternative to war and civil conflict, as it is often prescribed, then it could also be understood as a form of war. Unlike military interventions, the neo-liberal economic war is more ubiquitous in everyday life and therefore more enduring.

The neo-liberal turn in India, when compared to countries with totalitarian regimes and powerful leaders, has its own distinct characteristics. Pinochet in Chile and Deng in China had complete control over the political systems they governed. Even though Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in the United Kingdom were democratically elected, they demonstrated their remarkable abilities to manufacture consent for exercising strong actions in favour of market forces and against labour assertion. The coming together of Thatcher and Murdoch in using brute force to resolve the Wapping dispute was symbolic as to where the media stands ideologically in relation to labour rights. David Harvey’s work on neo-liberalism suggests that in the United States and the United Kingdom the political elite and the economic elite, including the media barons, were united in their efforts to restore class power.

In the Indian context, when liberalisation was ushered in, the national political elite were weak and failed to provide a powerful political agency to support the unhindered march of neo-liberal forces. The market forces were forced to negotiate with coalition politics and constant policy flux. Some economists are of the opinion that the forces of neo-liberalism would play out differently in India. Bardhan (2009, 31) explains the complexities of these market forces:

The progress of capital will be halting and hesitant, and the democratic process, however imperfect, will partly tame its brutalities. The Indian



transition is thus bound to be rather tortuous, though in the long run inexorable, and its narrative will be more complex than usual.

The neo-liberal forces have so far not been successful in finding enduring political agents willing to use hard power. In the absence of hard power, these forces were looking at ways of acquiring soft power to persuade, negotiate, and market their ideals.

Since news media institutions play a significant role in mediating political life, especially in countries with multi-party parliamentary democratic systems, the neo-liberal forces seem to view investments in news media systems as ideal means to further their goals. By its very nature, the neo-liberal capital would wish to consolidate media business and raise artificial barriers to entry to gain benefits of scale and propagate its ideology under reduced competition. However such “natural” economic behaviour of capital is subverted by the political class in India, which makes investments in news media subject to political influence. Political investments in news media subvert the market process by hindering the consolidation and concentration of media properties. In effect, the news media investments by the political class fragment the political-citizens, while investments by market forces work towards the consolidation of citizen-consumers. These two sets of investments work at cross purposes in the news media economy, but seem to arrive at a beneficial understanding for both at the level of the economy as a whole.

This situation seems to have given rise to two sets of media systems in India:

- (1) The media that addresses the citizen-consumers, who are integrated into the market economy and are ideologically neo-liberal
- (2) The media that caters to political-citizens, the unorganised working class, and the various politicised masses who stridently demand affirmative action and welfare measures, and are ideologically for state intervention

Media firms that are part of the first system are funded by corporate capital and are openly aligned with the neo-liberal forces. Media firms that are part of the second system are mostly outside the legal corporate economy and are funded by a variety of colourful sources ranging from extractive miners, infrastructure companies, liquor contractors, and real-estate developers with umbilical connections to the political power centres at federal and regional levels. Outwardly, these two sets of media systems present themselves as alternatives. However, in practice they interact and negotiate. In that sense, these two sets of media are mutually reinforcing

systems of a political-economic structure that enables a complex power-sharing arrangement between the neo-liberal national elite with global linkages and their rapacious and fragmented operations team—the regional class interests.

Even the news media organisations launched by the political class with the intention of acquiring public influence depend on commercial advertising by the corporate sector. The market forces use the advertising mechanism to co-opt influential news organisations and blunt the otherwise raw power of political forces. The political investments in news media are aimed at gaining enough popularity to win in the first-past-the-post electoral system. The electoral process, however deficient, bestows on the winning party the sole rights to negotiate with the neo-liberal forces. The fractured political forces compete with each other intensely with the help of the media to attain executive power. Writing about the democratic deficit engendered by globalisation, Sassen (2007) suggests that, “neo-liberal forces have perfected the art of negotiating only with the executive authority of the state and have largely contributed to the hollowing out of legislatures.” The difference between the voting share of a party that will sit on the treasury benches and the party that will sit in opposition is usually between 3–10%, making the political communication process extremely important in the first-past-the-post electoral system. The party in power gains immensely by negotiating with neo-liberal forces and further invests in news media and populist schemes to ensure its continuity in power. As Chakrabarty and Dhar (2014) state:

The exclusive wealth personified by *khas* (elite) enables them to, as borne by the Indian experience, control media (information, opinion, etc.), influence state policy and program (this connection is well known), create and influence think-tanks and educational institutions, and often control religious institutions, etc. It perpetuates “politics of corruption” thereby seriously undermining the honesty and depth of even grassroots political democracy ...

This functional reconciliation of the two sets of media systems proposed in this chapter can be substantiated by examining their sources of investments. Most of the news media outlets launched in the last decade and a half have been connected to “rent thick” industries in some way or another. Studies conducted on the sources of wealth of Indian billionaires have revealed that a significant number of them derive it from sources related to rent thick industries (Gandhi and Walton 2012, 10). Real estate, telecoms, petrochemicals, construction, infrastructure, cement, and mining are regarded as rent thick sectors in the sense that they are highly regulated

by governments and enjoy exceptional returns because entry is highly regulated through allocations, licenses, and permits. Of these, petrochemicals, telecom, and certain sectors of infrastructure, such as ports and coal mining, are under the control of the central government, while the rest are under the control of state governments. Most of the successful players in these sectors have close links with the political class at the centre and state levels. Most of the news media establishments have been getting funds from these sectors, and conversely even media companies have been entering “rent thick sectors,” underscoring the connections between rent thick sectors, the executive wing of the government, and news media. “[The] Jagran Prakashan Group, which runs *Dainik Jagran*, the largest circulated Hindi daily, in India, began with news media but later expanded into sugar mills, shopping malls, and textiles” (Ninan 2007, 204–5).

### **Neo-liberal Capital Attempts Consolidation in Indian News Media Markets**

Many political economy scholars have demonstrated that news media institutions in mature economies are deeply embedded in corporate power structures and therefore adopt a corporate liberal perspective (McChesney 1999; Dreier 1982; Gandy 1982). The market forces need news media to ensure that the market sentiments, investor confidence, and market-friendly policies are maintained. Their investments in news media establishments advocate free-market ideologies by emphasising the primacy of market forces in the allocation of resources, the sanctity of private property, and the virtue of small governments. On the flipside they are against the assertion of labour in any form and campaign for less government regulation.

In post-liberal India, the Indian corporates are following the American corporate model in making strategic investments in the media. Among the hundreds of news media establishments in India, the most successful newspaper publishers and broadcasters are being integrated into the corporate power structures through investments. Newspapers with high circulations such as the *Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times* already have significant investments from national and global private finance companies, investment companies, mutual funds, and insurance companies. India’s biggest private corporate group, Reliance Industries, made its media foray in 2012 with investments in Network 18 and ETV broadcast networks. Another big conglomerate, the Aditya Birla Group, took a controlling stake in the Living Media Group, which has influential

print and broadcast news media properties. Reliance is a leader in the petrochemicals industry, while the Aditya Birla Group is an important player in the cement and telecom sectors, all of which are regarded as “rent thick sectors.” The Blackstone Group, an American private equity firm, has acquired a 12% stake in the Jagran Prakashan Group, a leading Hindi news publisher. Many other important media groups, such as NDTV and the ZEE Network, also have investments from corporate groups and private investors. These investments are very strategic in the sense that they are made in news media companies with the largest circulations and viewership. Control over big news media groups helps corporates attain favourable coverage and filter any negative reportage. These investments also work as a deterrent against companies who want to use the media to discredit competitors. By leveraging on these investments, the established players in the news media markets further marginalise the weaker firms who are undercapitalised. Corporate investments and advertising in news media markets push the market structure towards oligopoly with a high degree of market concentration. The smaller, undercapitalised firms do exist along with the big players, giving the impression that the marketplace is diverse and plural. Across all language markets in India, media market structures are becoming oligopolistic with investments from the corporate sector.

The market forces go one link up in the news value chain by making investments in not-for-profit think tanks and public policy centres. These think tanks produce data and analysis that help market forces in exerting continuous pressure on government policy. Most of these public policy think tanks, supported by donations from private entrepreneurs, do “independent research” and advocate their ideas and views through the news media. The Hoover Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Brookings Institute are some of the globally renowned public policy think tanks. The Indian corporate groups have also started investing in such initiatives in the last decade. These American-style think tanks employ retired bureaucrats and defence personnel, leading academics and journalists, and bankers and research scholars as fellows. The Brookings Institute has recently opened Brookings India with donations from some of the biggest corporate groups in India. Subir Gokaran, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, joined Brookings as Director of Research immediately after retirement. Reliance Industries supported the Observer Research Foundation, which has been active in the last few years. News media establishments in favour of free-market ideologies give extensive coverage to the news and analysis produced by these think tanks, global multilateral agencies, and global ratings agencies. The news of ratings

downgrades by global ratings agencies such as Standard & Poor's (S&P), Moody's, and the Fitch Group can send the markets into a tailspin and force governments to respond to the concerns of corporate pressure groups. According to Harvey (2005, 40):

The "long march" of neoliberal ideas that Hayek had envisaged back in 1947 were channeled through the organisation of think-tanks (with corporate backing and funding), and the capture of certain segments of media, and the conversion of many liberals to neoliberal ways of thinking, created a climate of opinion in support of neoliberalism as the exclusive guarantor of freedom. These movements were later consolidated through the capture of political parties and ultimately state power.

The Indian corporate capital is attempting to replicate the American model of integrating news media markets in India. This effort has met with partial success, but is facing a formidable challenge from the political investments in media.

### **Narratives of Nation, Region, and Power in Neo-liberal Times**

In independent India, Nehru's government looked upon private media investments with suspicion. It felt this would lead to over-politicisation and contribute to secessionist tendencies in the new republic. Conversely, Jeffrey (1994, 762–3) effectively argues that advertising has steadily brought newspaper publishers into the ambit of the market economy and strengthened the Indian nation. He further argues that advertising income, an important source of income for the Indian-language newspaper industry, turned the industry into a vigorous sector of Indian capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s (1997, 75–6). News media's interaction with market forces increased with liberalisation and deregulation in the 1990s through advertising and investments. In post-liberal Indian politics, the nation took a back seat while the region made a comeback. Since the economic forces could only enhance their returns by exploiting natural and human resources in the regions, the emphasis went to the regions. With the help of global capital, the regional political elite made a comeback at the expense of the national political elite. The uneven infusion of capital at the regional level triggered an exercise resulting in the reconfiguration of power relations at the national level. The story of Indian news media became intricately tied up in this process.

News media institutions in post-liberal India have started exhibiting their new-found respect in the self-regulatory capacity of the market

forces, despite many reports about corporate involvement in scandals. According to Curran (2000, 120), “The political culture of liberal democracies is very alert to the threat posed by governments to the freedom of public media, but is much less concerned about the threat posed by shareholders to the freedom of private media.”

After the new economic reforms started in 1991, many scams involving corporates and market forces occurred almost routinely, such as the Harshad Mehta Stock Market Scam, the UTI and Global Trust Bank scams, the Ketan Parekh Stock Market Scam, the Satyam Scam, the 2G Scam, the IPL Scam, and Coal Gate, besides scores of others, which continuously hogged the headlines. All the wrong-doings are brushed off by the mainstream media as aberrations and systemic lapses. News media institutions place the blame for all these on political actors and further argue that reducing government controls through the next generation reforms can solve these problems.

These neo-liberal news media institutions have evolved elaborate criteria for evaluating governance. Their watchdog role is tempered by neo-liberal criteria that are reflected in their coverage of important events like the annual budget. They conveniently view the annual budget process as an economic process and not a political one. Any move to allocate resources to agriculture or social sectors is promptly condemned as unproductive populism. Year after year, news media institutions criticise finance ministers for losing yet another opportunity to push through big ticket ideas and pouring more funds into leaky channels (such as subsidies, welfare policies, health, and education). Policies such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) that promised one-hundred days of assured employment in rural areas are criticised by the mainstream news media for raising wages without raising productivity. The National Food Security Act of 2013 that promises to provide food grains at subsidised prices is criticised as an act of fiscal indiscipline on the part of the government.

Apart from providing critical coverage of the political and bureaucratic class, the news media started rating and ranking state governments on their performance. One such exercise is the annual *India Today—State of States Surveys*. This magazine claims that their report is as accurate a progress report on governance as any document from the planning commission. With such exercises, the assessment of the state’s performance has moved to the media newsrooms from Yojana Bhavan (the building that houses the planning commission of India). “In post-liberal India, the administrative regions in the planned economy have become autonomous economic regions competing with each other” (Rudolph and Rudolph 2001, 1541–2).

The states were encouraged to view themselves as enablers of business and the chief ministers were referred to as CEOs. Regions have become brands. Global Investor Meets, IT.coms, and others such as Vibrant Gujarat and Emerging Kerala aiming at industrial and investment promotion were provided extensive and uncritical coverage. By rating the leaders and laggards among the regions every year, news media organisations like *India Today* started playing the role of cheerleader of neo-liberal capital.

All the regional leaders who supported the reduced role of the state were hailed as visionaries, and others were encouraged to emulate them. Chandrababu Naidu, S. M. Krishna [Krishna Somanahalli Mallaiah], Navin Patnaik, and Nitish Kumar were bestowed with titles by the media and global pro-market institutions. Chandrababu received many media awards, including “IT Man of the Millennium” by *India Today*, “Business Person of the Year” by the *Economic Times*, and “Member of the World Economic Forums Dream Cabinet and South Asian of the Year” by *Time Asia*. The *Economic Times* gave the “Business Reformer of the Year 2009” award to Nitish Kumar. Pro-market news media institutions backed all the regional leaders who supported reforms.

While the first set of the media as discussed earlier has been involved in promoting neo-liberal ideologies, the second set with political investments started nurturing active partisan public spheres. The news media is expected to work within a rational framework by using reason in the public sphere. Like the “rational” actors in the discourse of economics, the idea of a rational framework in news public sphere is a theoretical construct and praxis. Most regional news media organisations seem to work with affective and performative frameworks in the public sphere. These news media institutions invoke all emotional issues, ranging from religion, caste, region, and language. The rise of Hindu Nationalism has been attributed to the growth of a virile Hindi-language press. As Ninan (2007, 224) explains, “The Dainik Jagran’s use of Ayodhya issue to establish its supremacy as a newspaper in Uttar Pradesh parallels the Bharatiya Janata Party’s sustained use of the Ramajnanmabhoomi campaign in Ayodhya to establish itself politically in UP.”

Ninan’s work further discusses how many Hindi newspapers in the Hindi heartland rode on Hindu nationalism to increase their circulations and readerships. As Muslim readership was almost nil at that time, all the papers competed for Hindu readers, and those which didn’t lost out to aggressive competitors. Ninan’s observation points to the synergy at play between partisan politics and a partisan media, which have been fuelling each other across India. *Eenadu* in Andhra Pradesh and *Sun Network* in

Tamil Nadu have come to be associated with strong regional parties built on the politics of linguistic nationalism. In Andhra Pradesh, the demand for the separate statehood of Telangana spawned a new set of news media institutions as the existing establishments owned by Seemandhra politicians, and investors were not supportive of this cause. Many newspapers and TV news channels were launched to support the cause of Telangana statehood. Of late, the partisan news media in a fragmented political space has been criticised for promoting leadership cults, and grief porn, for example.

Meanwhile, on the economic front, two decades of economic reform have begun to reveal the political costs. Reforms have been blamed as the cause for the suicides of hundreds of thousands of farmers and artisans, increased armed state interventions in mineral-rich tribal areas, and distress among fishing and pastoral communities because of the reduction in access to commons—non-private property owned by the local communities. Regional political parties realised that being seen as agents of neo-liberal capital was eroding their political base. The electoral defeat of Chandrababu Naidu and BJP in 2004 was a big jolt to political classes openly supporting neo-liberal expansion, and there was a severe political backlash. Responding to this situation, the competitive political interests cultivated a political base out of those who were left out of the mechanics of a free market through populist welfare policies. These new political forces further realised that they could not depend on the neo-liberal media to address their political constituency and therefore developed their own media properties. After the synergy between politics and news media institutions was demonstrated in several elections, it was replicated all over the country. Every national and state-level election beginning with the 1999 general election contributed to adding more and more news media establishments. India currently has hundreds of partisan news media establishments funded by political parties and families.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Neo-liberal philosophy is opposed to populism, but it seems to be more than willing to negotiate with strong demagogues. These powerful leaders who are elected through an electoral process become unaccountable by their sheer superhuman personae and deliver the goods for the business class. Y. S. Rajashekar Reddy, during his tenure as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, launched many populist schemes along with corporate and contractor-friendly policies. The new chief minister of Telangana, Chandrasekhar Rao, is following a similar model. Populism gave these



political leaders immense power and executive control over rent thick sectors. The proceeds from this rent economy are used to fund political activities, and a part of this largesse is moved as investments in news media properties. The 2G Spectrum allocation scandal exposed the issue of dubious investments in Kalaignar TV, owned by the Karunanidhi Family who run Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), an important political party in Tamil Nadu. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) are still conducting an enquiry into how an INR 2,140 million investment in Kalaignar TV was moved circuitously through a web of firms from Swan Telecom, one of the 2G licensees. The CBI is also conducting an enquiry into investments to the tune of INR 12,000 million in Jagathi Publications and Indira Television, the holding companies of Sakshi Newspaper and Sakshi TV, respectively. These media properties are owned by Jagan Mohan Reddy, son of the former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. Most of the investments in these companies are said to have come from rent thick industries like cement and infrastructure. The CBI charge sheet in this case makes accusations that they were quid pro quo deals in lieu of limestone mining leases for cement companies and land allocations for infrastructure and pharma companies. The Saradha Group Scandal involving the collapse of an elaborate ponzi scheme in West Bengal revealed that they ran many newspapers and television channels that provided partisan coverage to the Trinamol Congress Party. All of the eight newspapers, published in five languages, and TV news channels run by them, were closed down in the aftermath of the scam, affecting hundreds of journalists.

Scores of political parties and families in India own news media outlets. Even though they are not currently under investigation, dubious investments in these news media properties reflect the nexus between neo-liberal capital and the political class. Investments in the news media help the political elite to consolidate their positions by creating entry barriers for new political groups. This provides them with some predictability in the otherwise unpredictable context of multiparty electoral politics. Numerically strong lower-caste groups aspiring for political power accuse the news media of playing spoilsport with their ambitions.

As suggested earlier, the first set of news media establishments seem to be involved in valorising the markets and depoliticising the citizen-consumer, while the second set of media institutions have been involved in creating and sustaining partisan and emotional public spheres. The second set puts community ahead of the market, and thereby gives the impression that communication can function as a source of power in the hands of politicised masses. Even though this is true to some extent, its power is

limited because the purpose of these mediations is to create an elite group to negotiate with the market forces in the end. Since the political class is temporal, while the capital is more enduring, this reconciliation benefits the market forces in the long term. As long as the leadership of political fragments is willing to negotiate with them, neo-liberal capital is not really bothered about how the media economy is operationalised. In that sense, the loss-making Indian news media infrastructure can be viewed as “soft power” engendering consent for neo-liberal expansion in a supposedly “soft state.” Neo-liberal capital in the Indian context seems to be demonstrating its maturity and resilience in adopting specific strategies to tolerate and absorb resistances in its onward march, and the news media story is intricately tied up with this process.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF WAR PHOTOGRAPHS

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### Abstract

Using the concepts *media picture* and *war photography*, this paper will examine the construct of emotion in visual communication research. The explanation of emotion emergence used in this paper rests on the Component Process Model by Scherer (1984a; 1984b; 1987). Based on this, a model of the emotive potential of picture features is proposed and proofed against the example of selected war photographs by James Nachtwey. In order to do this, an exploratory, semi-structured interview study with 30 subjects was conducted. It can be concluded that the depicted protagonist was perceived as being most emotive especially if they are a child shown suffering in a home surrounding, and/or are of European origin. Viewer empathy, involvement, and their ability to verbalise their own emotional state were primary determinants of the strength of emotional appeal.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Nachtwey, war, photographs, emotion, interview

### Introduction

Photographic images of war have always been used to accentuate and lend authority to war reporting and prompt an unprecedented emotional visual coverage. The pictures we see of dead and wounded civilians and soldiers in times of conflict become social artefacts that may or may not stir our emotions or move us to action. Recognising the evolution of the nature of war, this chapter examines the role of pictures in representations of

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an abridged version of Gerth (2015).

violence that accompany various modern and contemporary conflicts. This approach of deliberately framing narratives through visual representations of complex conflicts has had implications on the way in which the world has understood and moralised the suffering of others limited to social distance. The purposeful framing of pictures has had profound effects on representations of communities, and has impressed a certain iconography of the suffering of others through a visual humanitarian discourse.

James Nachtwey, a famous contemporary photographer, witnessed a large number of violent crises in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Chechnya, and professes his desire to make a difference through the documentation of violent conflicts all over the world (Nachtwey 2000; 2007a; 2007b). However, this change can be made possible only if his photographs communicate the cruelty of war and its consequences in a lasting and authentic way. This is possible only if pictures are used as an instrument that influences people's perception of these events and arouses their emotions: "I have been a witness, and these pictures are my testimony. The events I have recorded should not be forgotten and must not be repeated" (James Nachtwey 2015).

To achieve this, Nachtwey wants to summarise social injustices and the difficulty of rebuilding a normal everyday life—issues caused by wars and crises in their multidimensional complexity—in just one picture. For this reason, his photographs are highly suitable as stimulus material for a study on picture and emotion. His goal was and still is to be the visual voice of the victims, primarily by triggering both disgust and empathy. In short, Nachtwey reaches his goals through a picture-driven induction of emotions. However, his photographic representations are not judgmental, but comply with journalistic and objective criteria (Abbott 2010, 212ff; Linfield 2010, 206).

This chapter first presents a link between the constructs of "media picture" and "war photography" (section 1). Then, emotion is discussed as a construct in visual communication research (section 2). Both these sections lead to a summary of a "Model of the Emotive Potential of Picture Features" (section 3), which is tested afterwards (section 4). The analysis is based on one central research question: which elements of war photographs are emotionalising, and why?

## **Media Pictures and War Photography**

This research attempts to explore the causal relationship between knowledge of an event, its actual "reality," and the reality generated by the news media. It grapples with epistemological questions regarding