CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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Conflict has many guises. The inclination is to think of war, but political, industrial, religious and cultural differences have ripped apart communities and nation states with the inevitable trauma that follows. Where there is violent discord, catastrophic upheaval and dramatic change the media have been there as witnesses and this book explores the complicated relationship between the reporter, photographer and film-maker and the audience. Journalism, and communication in all its forms, is influenced by propaganda, censorship, subjectivity and, in many cases, simple access to sources and resources, and how those texts, photographs and moving pictures are received differs according to the recipient's background and circumstance. This collection of original essays examines the reporting of conflict across the media and the arts and then looks at the outcomes, be it with the reader, viewer, listener, or even the journalists themselves. They came about as a result of a conference held at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) on the last day of March 2016. Its title was "Conflict, Trauma and the Media" and its inspiration was two-fold: the Department of Journalism's partnership with the Tim Hetherington Trust and to mark the 75th anniversary of Merseyside's most desperate time in the Second World War, the week-long Blitz inflicted by the *Luftwaffe* in May 1941.

Hetherington was a Liverpool-born, award-winning photographer who was killed by shrapnel aged 40 while he was covering the Libyan Civil War in 2011. He had reported on many conflicts including the second Liberian civil war and conducted a year-long study of forces fighting in Afghanistan during which he co-directed and co-filmed *Restrepo*, which won the Grand Jury Prize for the best documentary at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for best documentary at the 2010

Academy Awards.[1] He was also awarded the World Press Photograph of the Year prize in 2007. James Brabazon wrote of Hetherington in the *Guardian*: "The troubled corners of the world into which he shed the light of his lens are brighter because of him; the work he leaves is a candle by which those who choose to look, might see."[2] The trust that was set up in his name aims "to preserve the legacy of Tim's professional life as a visual storyteller and human rights advocate" and soon after the conference an exhibition was staged at LJMU to showcase his life and work.[3] His story, and excerpts from the television film *Which Way is the Front Line from Here?,* opened the conference, providing an inspirational sub-plot to the proceedings, but also underlining the dangers that surround journalists when they attempt to bring the horrors of conflict to a wider audience.[4] News, too frequently, is reported at the ultimate cost.

Had he been around during the Second World War, Hetherington would undoubtedly have, in his words, recorded "big history in the form of small history" in the late Spring of 1941 when Liverpool and the surrounding areas were subjected to seven successive nights of bombing. In Britain, only London suffered more aerial attacks than Merseyside, but in one week 1,741 people from the city, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey were killed, which, to put this into perspective, represented nearly three per cent of every Briton killed in air raids in a period of time that measured 0.32 per cent of the six years of war.[5] More than 50,000 Liverpudlians were made homeless and only 15 per cent of Bootle's housing stock was undamaged leaving a further 25,000 without a home. The misery, the feeling that the fabric of life had been ripped away from the local population, was underlined by the concomitant wreckage: 500 roads were closed to traffic; more than 700 water mains and 80 sewers were damaged; and rail transport, gas, electricity and telephone services were destroyed or badly disrupted.[6] The scale of the destruction, the

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[1] *Restrepo*. Directed by Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger. Outpost Films, 2010.

[2] James Brabazon, "Tim Hetherington Obituary", *Guardian*, April 12, 2001, accessed April 25, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/apr/21/tim-hetherington-obituary

[3] Tim Hetherington Trust, accessed March 31, 2017, http://www.timhetheringtontrust.org/about-us

[4] *Storyville.* "Which Way is the Front Line from Here? The Life and Time of Tim Hetherington". Directed by Sebastian Junger. BBC4, September 22, 2015.

[5] Juliet Gardiner, *The Blitz: The British Under Attack* (London: Harper, 2011), 322.

[6] May Blitz, Merseyside Maritime Museum, accessed April 25, 2017, http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/exhibitions/blitz/may.aspx

thousands grieving and the sense of hopelessness understandably left deep scars that confuse the modern day narrative of unflinching resilience. As one Liverpool woman wrote:

> [Winston] Churchill was telling us how brave we all were and that we would never surrender. I tell you something – the people of Liverpool would have surrendered overnight if they could have. It's all right for people in authority, down in their steel-lined dugouts, but we were there and it was just too awful.[7]

Another woman, who was a child in 1941, was more sanguine. "They tried to wipe us off the earth. They nearly did but they didn't quite, did they?"[8] The big history is Blitz fortitude and "all in this together" defiance; the small history, almost without exception, is more nuanced.

A conference is only as good as its ingredients, be they be the speakers, the papers or, indeed, the audience, and it was hugely satisfying that the LJMU event attracted 17 researchers from countries as diverse as Italy, Sweden and China and from across the regions and nations of Britain. They delivered inter-disciplinary studies that explored the many strands of the reporting and commemoration of disasters, man-made and natural. This book, a collection of those papers and other associated material, is loosely based on Stuart Hall's communication model of production (encoding), the texts (images and reports), and their reception by the audience (decoding), although the circular process that now exists between practitioners and their viewers, listeners and readers inevitably blurs distinctions.[9] The first half of the book concentrates on the film makers, photographers and journalists working in the field – sometimes literally as circumstance and deprivation require them to embed with fighters or suffering civilians. The second half studies the reactions of the audience, finishing on an upbeat note with two chapters that emphasise the constructive effect the media can have on potentially fractious and dangerous situations.

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[7] Marie Price, in *Forgotten Voices of the Blitz and the Battle of Britain*, ed. by Joshua Levine (London: Ebury, 2006), p. 412.

[8] Dorothy Laycock, in Merseyside Maritime Museum, accessed April 25, 2017, http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/exhibitions/blitz/blitz.aspx

[9] Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in *Media Studies: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 51-61.

Chapter Summary

War, as the biggest man-inflicted trauma, is, not surprisingly, a predominant theme in this book and the opening chapter of the encoding section encapsulates the "discussion" between journalists and their audience. Tim Markham argues that, while there is academic consensus that Western audiences do not care as much as they should about faraway victims of conflict, war and injustice, there is less agreement about reconnecting audiences. Recent theorisations of violence, drawing on Charles Taylor and ultimately Adam Smith, have emphasised the role that imagination might play in fostering understanding of the subjective experience of conflict.[10] In contrast, this chapter contends that both the pathologisation of audience responses to mediated conflict and the remedies intended to shake people out of their indifference rest on a misconception of how the recognition of other subjectivities plays out in everyday life. This chapter investigates the experience of media practitioners who self-evidently do care about others: journalists and media activists in Beirut, Lebanon, whose work focuses inter alia on the casualties and refugees of the war in neighbouring Syria. Seen at the level of the everyday, this experience can be similarly lacking in revelation, but its meaningfulness is not undermined by its banalities. The chapter argues that the dearth of intense moments of subjective recognition in ordinary contexts of media consumption is both rational and ethically defensible.

There is a gap in the literature about Guantanamo with little attention to how journalists have covered the detention centre or the contestation in the media about the moral gaze of the media spectacle. Anita Howarth's chapter addresses this with an exploration of the "Guantanamo chair", a device used in 2013 to restrain hunger strikers while force-feeding them. The control of information and images of Guantanamo has been part of the attempt by officials and successive White Houses to shape what Judith Butler has termed the "mandated perspective" of war whereby governments use framing to determine what is included and what is excluded from view, and thereby attempt to shape the meanings ascribed to the spectacle.[11] However, as Yasmin Ibrahim has argued, the making visible invites the spectacle and a moral gaze-that is the ascribing of meaning is more open than a "mandated perspective" suggests.[12] The

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[10] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1759]); Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[11] Judith Butler, "Photography, War, Outrage." *PLMA* 120:3 (2005): 822–827.
[12] Ibrahim, Yasmin. "The Non-Stop 'capture': The Politics of Looking in Postmodernity." *The Poster* 1:2 (January 25, 2011): 167–85.

chapter explores this contestation through an analysis of the images and discourses of the "chair", between on the one hand, the official framing that medicalized and sanitized "feeding" and, on the other hand, challenges to these framings through an experiential framing which re-inserted the "force" into "force-feeding".

While Howarth concentrated on photographs, the following chapter studies a different form of "text": the moving image. Valeria Mancinelli investigates the media and artistic representation of terrorism with a particular focus on airplane hijacking. The starting point is *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997) by Johan Grimonprez, a chronology of hijackings that denounces the media spectacle and seeks to detect the impact of images on our feelings, our knowledge and our memory. Other films, Eric Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi, and 27 Years without Images* (2011), an intricate and disorienting tale of the history of the Japanese Red Army (JRA), and Naeem Mohaiemen's *United Red Army* (2011-12), which reconstructs the hijacking of the flight 472 at the hands of the JRA by using the original sound recordings from the airport control tower, are also analysed. The videos explore in different ways the relation between cinema and guerrilla fighting, with the idea that starts to emerge, especially regarding the JRA, that the spectacle is the real battlefront. Today this "tradition" has mutated into a ruthless and aware use of the media by the terrorists. She contends that going back to the past will allow a more detached and open discussion in the future.

These first three chapters concentrate on media production; in the next Zhen Troy Chen addresses the impact of covering tragic events on the communicators themselves, with an emphasis on Chinese journalists. This chapter attempts to fill a gap as previous studies of this nature have been largely Anglo-American or European centric, but Chinese reporters have become an increasing presence in conflict zones since the 1990s even though many are not trained or prepared for the horrific scenes they will see and endure. Some have returned home to confront personal symptoms similar to the victims on which they reported, including post-traumatic stress disorder and secondary traumatic stress. This chapter addresses the challenges they face and includes interviews with four journalists working for leading Chinese national news outlets. The interviewees, who cover the broad spectrum of the media, text, photography and television, discuss the stress of being immersed in human tragedy and the need for greater emotional and psychological support for media practitioners in Chinese newsrooms. As one journalist put it: "I can feel I am a bit intense

doi:10.1386/post.1.2.167_1.

in everything I do, especially after I return home. I would drive very fast sometimes as if I was in the war zone and someone is after me."

The second half of this book concentrates on the decoders and Emma Heywood's chapter explores the influential role played by television in shaping attitudes and behaviours with regard to conflict. It investigates audience perceptions of violence in the foreign conflict coverage of three television news providers from very differing systems. These are *Vremya* from Russia's Channel 1, a national, state-aligned broadcaster; BBC *News at Ten*, representing a British public service broadcaster; and *20 Heures* from France 2, a media system with a long history of state intervention. A series of focus groups were conducted in the UK, France, Russia and the West Bank to determine participants' understanding of the conflict, their perceptions of violence in the coverage and levels of violence they considered acceptable. The groups also discussed victims, and hierarchies of victims, in the fighting and whether participants considered any levels of compassion had been created between them, as the viewer, and the victim. Focus group members also considered whether any particular countries and international organisations were dominant in the reports. The findings, which are supported by analyses of representations of the war in Gaza 2014, provide a valuable backdrop against which comparative studies into current conflict situations may be conducted.

The use of media by terrorists, discussed in Mancinelli's chapter, is relatively new; governments have a longer pedigree in attempting to manufacture consent, with all the tensions that implies between the executive and the media. Guy Hodgson's chapter examines the nadir in the relationship between the UK government and newspapers in the Second World War when Winston Churchill wanted to close the *Daily Mirror*. This was motivated by a Philip Zec cartoon that was received as intended by the public, but caused fury in Downing Street and it required the combined efforts of politicians and Fleet Street to stay Churchill's hand. Even so, the language in the admonishment of the *Mirror* by the Home Secretary in the Houses of Parliament was extreme and underlined the very real threat to the freedom the press in Britain. The chapter charts the response to this commination, initially by newspapers but secondly, by studying archives, the public. The findings show that readers generally opposed the government's warning, contrary to the traditional image of a British people made unquestioning by a determination to win the war. They also bring a new light on the relationship between newspapers and their readers and question the ability of the former to influence public opinion.

The book finishes on a positive note by stressing the benefits of the media in diffusing potential conflict. Simon Gwyn Roberts' chapter examines the communicative and political potential of networked communication in the specific context of marginalized linguistic communities, in this case the remnant Welsh-speaking population in Patagonia, Argentina, Descended from Nineteenth Century migrants, this "enclave" has been absorbed into the wider Argentinian ethnic and linguistic melting pot with Welsh-speaking residents now Argentinian citizens claiming dual linguistic/cultural heritage, and therefore represents a kind of archetype for a wider journey towards compromise, inclusivity and hybridity. The chapter looks specifically at the Welsh communities' use of social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter) to articulate community concerns within the wider context of Argentinian national politics. The Welsh-speaking community in Patagonia is both small (around 5,000 speakers) and dispersed geographically (the two main communities are separated by 600km of largely unpopulated desert). It is this latter point that provides the key rationale for this study, which explores the effects of networked communication shrinking long-standing "problems of geography". Historically, the Welsh-language media in Argentina was remarkably vibrant but also highly fragmented: with dozens of small-scale newspapers thriving across the region, all of which were generally restricted to individual towns and incapable of serving the community as a whole.

The final chapter, by Fiona Wyton and David Baines, completes the communication circle in that it reviews a project in which the decoders, in this case 398 children and young people, became encoders. Hosted in Northern Ireland by the Headliners charity, they worked together to report across community fault-lines and develop a shared vision by tackling hard issues of sectarianism and social, political and religious divisions. Groups from Catholic, Protestant and minority ethnic communities used media tools and journalism skills to produce and publish reports that demonstrated how communities could resolve conflict and share divided ground. In developing the project - *Distinctive Voices, Collective Choices* - Headliners drew on its expertise in developing a range of learning through journalism strategies to give young people, often from groups who are alienated, marginalised and disengaged, a voice and a hearing on issues that concern them. The project was evaluated through participant surveys at entry and exit to identify changes across a range of themes and data was continuously captured on multiple media platforms through participant observation. These young people were found to have developed deeper understandings of "shared space"; were better able and

prepared to discuss inter-community issues; and, equally, to relate to members of other communities by recognising similarity and respecting difference. They had developed a greater reflexivity concerning their own attitudes, opinions and behaviour towards others.

Tim Hetherington, when discussing the media in the context of conflict and trauma, said: "It's about personalisation. Often we see scenes of disaster and it's almost that we forget that the people imaged are individuals with individual stories and lives."[13] This book attempts to tell some of those stories.

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