

Narrating, framing, and promoting U.S. interests and interventions in the 21st Century: multimodal discourse analysis of Iraq, Ukraine, Gaza.

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Abstract

This paper provides theoretical and practical insights into the multimodal discourse that mainstream U.S. news conglomerates have used to promote the interests and interventions of the United States in the 21st Century in three locations of geo-strategic and economic importance, namely Iraq (2003), Ukraine (2022-) and Gaza (2023). The paper explores the interests and justifications behind these interventions and their tragic consequences and uses theoretical insights into narration, framing, and the strategic intermeshing of language, sound and image to conclude that CNN and Fox News reports support and promote U.S. aggressions, transgressions, and interests, by adopting a factual and curious tone, by channeling emotion to support U.S. interests and ideologies, by framing the U.S. as good and the Other as bad, by packaging atrocities as justice, by selecting their allies as sources, by neutralizing dissent, and by highlighting morality, military strategy, advanced weaponry, technology and infrastructure rather than grassroots Life-and-Death struggles.

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Context

In 2019, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace praised the global power and role of the United States, arguing that,

‘No other nation is in a better [global] position ... we still have the world’s best military, spending more on defense than the next seven countries combined; our economy remains the most innovative and adaptable in the world, despite risks of overheating and gross inequalities; advances in technology have unlocked vast domestic potential in natural gas ... and we still have more allies ... These advantages [will help us to] shape a new international order before others shape it for us’ (Burns 2019).

This paper agrees that the United States exercises global power through military and economic pressure, and that the current world order is based on gross inequalities and coalition-building (ibid). It concurs that the U.S. is engaged in re-shaping the international order to its own benefit (ibid), its current and most tragic case being Gaza. The central question then is, how do mainstream news reports support this ruthless pursuit of global power and profits, based on shaping and re-shaping the international order through military and economic pressure, inequalities and atrocities? The paper argues that mainstream televised news reports use multimodal discourse-- intermeshing language, sound and image-- to support U.S. interests in the 21st Century.

The global political and economic power of the United States is based on high levels of injustice and violence. The U.S. engaged in 46 military interventions from 1948 to the end of the Cold War in 1991 and in more than 200 operations thereafter, suggesting that the U.S. uses violence to promote its neoliberal business interests (Burns 2019; Kushi 2023). This paper reflects the claim that capitalism itself is based on violence and that ‘depending on one’s location in the distributed global network of production and consumption this violence will be experienced as physical, symbolic, ritualistic or psychological’ (Zwick 2018: 914).

This paper investigates the methods that mainstream U.S. media organizations have used, or are using, to promote or condone the interventions and atrocities that have been committed or precipitated in three important geo-strategic locations, Iraq (2003), Ukraine (2022-) and Gaza (2023-).

United; States;

Here are snapshots of atrocities that the U.S. has committed or precipitated in three geo-strategic locations in the 21st Century, Iraq (2003), Ukraine (2022-), Gaza (2023), suggesting that this is only the tip of the global iceberg (Zwick 2018; Burns 2019; Kushi 2023).

Iraq (2003)

More than 200,000 civilians have died in Iraq as a result of the U.S. intervention in 2003 (Hamourtziadou 2021). Here in Iraq the Pentagon created a climate of impunity (Global Policy Forum), killing civilians at check-points according to a 'shoot first ask questions later' strategy, using 360-degree Rotational Fire in crowded streets, and implementing kill-counts to maximize military productivity (Daragahi and Barnes 2006). Soldiers used disproportionate violence in their house searches, spraying living rooms with bullets and tossing in grenades (Paddock 2005). The U.S. Air Force claimed to operate with sophisticated, precision-guided missiles in order to minimize civilian casualties (CNN March, 2003) but also used bombs that could not claim precision, targeted apartment blocks (Human Rights Watch 2003), and raked the ground with cannon-fire.

On November 19th, 2005 a squad of U.S. marines raided houses in Haditha, killing ten women and children (White 2006). In Abu Ghraib prison, a product of a global neo-liberalized prison system, the U.S. and its allies built naked human pyramids (Human Rights Watch 2004). Other atrocities included torturing so-called unlawful combatants in Guantanamo Bay (Guardian Editorial 2023) and erasing the culture of Iraq (Palumbo 2005).

Ukraine (2022-)

The atrocities committed in Ukraine (2022-) can also be attributed to the United States and NATO, and their re-shaping of the political map. Russia has accused the United States and Europe of threatening their existence, and these accusations date back to 2014, the uprisings in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, and the genocide that the Ukrainian government perpetrated against (Al Jazeera 2022). The current invasion is estimated to have caused tens of thousands of civilian casualties, displacing around eight million people, exiling another eight million, and creating an ecocide that has damaged world grain supplies (D'Anieri 2023).

Missile strikes have been deadly. In March 2022, Russian missiles struck an apartment building in Iziun, killing at least 44 people, and a theatre in Mariupol, blowing up 600 civilians sheltering in the basement. In April 2022, these missiles hit the train station in Kramatorsk ending sixty-one lives. In September 2023, they fired a missile into a busy market in Kostiantynivka. In October they destroyed a village cafe and store, killing anyone that happened to be around.

President Putin placed Russia's nuclear forces on high alert, threatening the whole world (Wolfgang 2022). The invasion has also devastated the cultural heritage of Ukraine (Euronews 2022).

Gaza (2023-)

Then came Gaza, and an unsurpassed wave of atrocities that can be attributed to Israel, Europe and the United States. The U.S., its allies and Israel are at this moment causing unbearable suffering to the Palestinian people in Gaza, half of them children, bringing decades of impunity to a head, turning the world's largest open-air prison into the world's biggest and densest morgue (Amnesty International December, 2022).

The President of Israel, Netanyahu, reflecting the interests and ideologies of the U.S. President has promised to turn places where Hamas is hiding into cities of ruins, suggesting intent to exterminate the Palestinian people (Eichner 2022). On 13 October, the Palestinian

Ministry of Health noted 20 surnames had been removed from Gaza's civil registry, meaning every single person in that entire family had been killed. The United Nations later announced that Gaza had run out of body bags, this being one of the first gifts of international humanitarian aid to a population on the edge of genocide (Hulseman 2023).

Thesis statement and method

This paper claims that mainstream U.S. news organizations have used multimodal discourse (language, audio, video) to legitimize or obscure their role in these horrific transgressions of human rights. It uses multimodal discourse analysis to explore the interplay between language, sound and image in important mainstream U.S. news broadcasts to support the aggressions and transgressions of the U.S. and its allies, claiming that the image (Baudrillard 1995) plays a dominant role in this discourse

But how have these so-called free and democratic news conglomerates in the United States promoted, obfuscated and condoned these horrifying abuses of human rights?

This paper claims that the major news channels in the United States have used multimodal discourse analysis to promote their interests and exonerate their role in these ruthless military interventions, marshaling and coordinating language (monologue, controlled debate), sound and image to frame themselves as the guardians of freedom and democracy, thereby garnering public support or repressing public resistance to their Neo-Liberal policies.

Justifications, interests and public support

This part of the paper examines the nature and justifications of U.S. interests in Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza, and the degree of public support in order to contextualize the use of multimodal news reports to support their violent shaping and re-shaping of the international order (Burns 2019).

Justifying Iraq (2003)

President Bush issued a Presidential statement in November 2001, portraying the United States as a global defender of Freedom and Good (U.S. Presidential Statement November, 2001), suggesting that the U.S. has an exceptional role in international relations (McCrisken 2003), and invoking the principle of the just war (Lango 2014). This principle is enshrined in the Report of the United Nations High Level Panel (2004) that refers to the united role of nations in combating global threats such as mass destruction and terrorism (Lango 2014: 19).

Lango (2004) on the other hand suggests that the main purpose of armed international interventions must be to stop global threats, that these interventions must be a last resort, that these interventions must be proportional to the threat of destruction, and that these interventions must have a reasonable chance of success (p. 19).

In the case of Iraq, the U.S. invoked the principle of the just war, promising to disarm Iraq, to end its support for terrorism (Townshend 2002), and to free the Iraqi people, even though the United Nations inspection team had no evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction (United Nations 2022). The U.S. then ignored the UN Charter on Human Rights, invaded Iraq illegally (The Guardian 2004), and committed atrocities.

Other researchers place a much greater emphasis on the impact of the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11 on the decision to invade Iraq, on the role that this threat to U.S. power played in changing U.S. strategic calculations, on the rise of neo-liberalism (Riedel 2021) and on the rhetoric of terrorism and the demonization of the Other (Oddo 2011, 2014).

Interests in Iraq

Hinnebusch (2007) has highlighted a radical conflict between U.S. methods and motives behind invading Iraq. He suggests that the main method that the U.S. used to support the invasion is the trumped-up charge of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and the main motive behind the invasion is Israel and oil (p. 219).

Before the 2003 invasion, Iraq's domestic oil industry belonged to the nation and a decade later it belonged to foreign oil companies (Juhasz 2013), ranging from ExxonMobil and Chevron (U.S.) to BP and Shell (Europe). Before the invasion, there were only two obstacles to these vast oil profits, Saddam Hussein and the legal system in Iraq. The invasion solved both these problems. Since 2003, Iraqi oil production has increased more than 40% to 3 million barrels of oil a day' (ibid).

Public support

On 15 February 2003, a month before the invasion, there were three million people protesting in Rome (Guinness World Records 2007). Between 3 January and 12 April 2003, 36 million people across the globe took part in almost 3,000 protests against the invasion (Callinicos 2015). This paper suggests that mainstream U.S. news production at this time is designed to mitigate public resistance to the invasion.

Justifying Ukraine (2022-)

Russia justified the invasion of Ukraine by accusing Ukraine of committing genocide against the Russian-speaking populations of Donetsk and Luhansk and by accusing the U.S. and NATO of expanding eastwards and threatening its existence (Aljazeera December, 2022). Carpenter (2022) argues that the U.S. and NATO are to blame because of their threat to the existence of Russia.

U.S. President Biden characterized the Russian intervention in Ukraine as 'a brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification, [and] without necessity' (February, 2022). Ignoring the historical context, the threat to, and of Russia, the U.S. President insisted that 'Putin is the aggressor. Putin chose this war. And now he and his country will bear the consequences' (ibid).

Paralleling the discourse of exceptionalism and justice that the U.S. operationalized during the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. President legitimized U.S. intervention in Iraq by invoking its defense of 'Liberty, democracy, human dignity' (ibid).

President Putin (March, 2022) in contrast reminded his audience of the eastward expansion of NATO, 'moving its military infrastructure

ever closer to the Russian border’, of the atrocities that the U.S. has committed in the 21st Century, and of the killing power of Russia that ‘remains one of the most powerful nuclear states’ and ‘has a certain advantage in several cutting-edge weapons’.

Interests in Ukraine

The Kiel Institute (2023) has tracked \$155.9 billion from 41 countries and European Union institutions in financial, humanitarian, and military aid to Ukraine from 24 January 2022 to 24 February 2023. The United States has provided over \$29.3 billion in international trade and investment.

Justifying Gaza

Israel and the Palestinian people have been in conflict since the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and based on a self-serving law of return. The Gaza Strip and Israel have been in conflict since Hamas gaining control over Gaza in 2007 (Guardian 2007). Israel then imposed an extensive blockade of the Gaza Strip that devastated the people of Gaza, turning it into an overcrowded open prison (Amnesty International December, 2022). International rights groups see this blockade as collective punishment (Oxfam International 2023).

The U.S. President, Joe Biden (October, 2023) justified U.S. collaboration in the genocide in Gaza by appealing once again, as in the case of Iraq (2003) and Ukraine (2022-), to exceptionalism and justice, promising that ‘The United States stands with you [Israel] in defense of that freedom, in pursuit of that justice, and in support of that peace, today, tomorrow, and always’. Israel justified its massacres by attributing responsibility to Hamas, arguing that ‘Hamas wants to kill as many Israelis as possible ... has no regard whatsoever to Palestinian lives’ and has perpetrated ‘a double war crime: targeting our civilians while hiding behind their civilians, embedding themselves in the civilian population, and using them as human shields’ (Netanyahu October, 2023).

The President of Israel then rallied the support of the United States to its moral cause, portraying the conflict between Israeli soldiers and Gaza civilians as a battle between Good and Evil, and by threatening

to decimate each one of the Palestinian people, including all the children and the babies (as recorded in the Old Testament portrayal of the genocide committed against the city of Amalek),

‘This will be a victory of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life over death. In this war we will stand steadfast, more united than ever, certain in the justice of our cause ... Remember what Amalek did to you’ (Deuteronomy 25:17). We remember and we fight!’ (ibid).

President Netanyahu has consequently threatened to ‘turn all the places where Hamas is organized and hiding into cities of ruins’ (Eichner 2023).

Interests in Gaza

The U.S. has supplied 130 billion dollars of military aid to this apartheid regime since 1948, and current shipments include guided missile systems and 155 mm shells that are deadly inside a radius of 100 to 300 metres. President Joe Biden is currently promising about \$2 billion in additional funding to support Israel (NBC October, 2023).

The gas in Gaza has been valued at a staggering 523 billion dollars (UNCTAD 2019).

Theoretical insights

This research into the current discourse of mainstream U.S. news production and propaganda is based on three theoretical insights into news production: insights into narration, insights into framing, and insights into the role of the image, spectacle, the sublime.

Theoretical insights into narration

Theories of narration contrast two important insights into journalism, 1) the notion of objectivity that encourages journalists to separate facts from opinions and to state the so-called facts by adopting a ‘cool, rather than emotional’ tone (Schudson 2001: 150) and 2) the role of emotion in crafting engaging narratives that capture the hearts and minds of audiences (Peters 2011).

This paper suggests that there are two interwoven methods and styles of news reporting. The first method of news reporting is based on impartial, objective, unbiased, rational, factual reporting and on a state of political and emotional detachment (Sims 2007). The second method of news reporting embraces partial, subjective, biased, irrational, emotional reporting, political partisanship and emotional involvement (Pantti 2010: 169).

John Reith, the founder of the BBC adopted the first method, suggesting that journalism should inform and educate rather than entertain (1924: 17). Phillips (2022) has argued that his political agenda nonetheless revolved around promoting the interests and ideologies of the British Empire (Phillips 2022).

On the other hand, researchers have argued that Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism is based on strategic rituals of emotion embedded in strategic rituals of objectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). Such journalists outsource emotion by attributing it to sources, thereby grounding deep ethical issues in the language and experience of so-called ordinary people (ibid).

The Digital Resource Center (2023) grounds this debate between objective, unbiased and subjective, opinionated journalism in its historical context. In the past, newspapers belonged to political parties, but newspapers became businesses and broadened their readership and increased their profits through advertisement and sales by reducing political opinion. Horace Greeley, for example set up the New York Tribune in 1841 and segregated factual news reports from opinions, by labelling the opinion page 'Editorial Page'. Segmented fact and opinion is an important characteristic of U.S. news channels and papers.

This paper suggests that mainstream U.S. journalists intermingle fact and emotion to promote their interests and ideologies. MSNBC (2023) provides insight into this strategic use of emotion in promoting the invasion of Gaza,

'Last week, former Israeli Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said the quiet part out loud. Speaking in Tel Aviv, the former

journalist turned politician slammed the international media for what he saw as perceived bias against Israel. If the international media is objective, it serves Hamas. If it just shows both sides, it serves Hamas. If it creates symmetries between sufferings without first checking who caused it, it serves Hamas' (November, 2nd).

Emotion therefore performs an important role in the modern construction of so-called Truth,

'The types of discourse which [modern disciplinary society] accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucault 1980: 131).

Theoretical insights into framing

Framing, agenda-setting, and priming are inter-related. Framing provides insight into political perspectives (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Agenda-setting highlights the importance of political issues. Priming provides insight into audience exposure. This paper focuses on the framing of political perspectives, suggesting that mainstream U.S. media conglomerates frame the targets of their interest and interventions, the people of Iraq (2003), Ukraine (2022-), and Gaza (2023-) as responsible for the atrocities committed against them.

Researchers such as Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980), Neuman et al. (1992) argue that frames enable communication. Frames are the tools that must be used to 'convey, interpret and evaluate information' (Neuman et al. 1992: 62). Frames are 'principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters' (Gitlin 1980: 6).

Entman (1993) in contrast argues that journalists select perceived realities in order to make them 'more salient in a communicating text', thereby promoting 'a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (p. 52). Framing provides insight into 'the imprint of power' in

political journalism, identifying ‘the actors or interests that competed to dominate the text’ (p. 55). Kinder and Sanders (1996) characterize frames as ‘interpretive structures embedded in political discourse’.

Importantly, political frames do not dictate meaning because political texts do not control how events are signified (Hall 2011). Political texts interact with political attitudes (Iyengar 1991) and memories (Pan and Kosicki 1993).

D’Angelo (2002: 873) therefore argues that framing research should reflect four central empirical aims, 1) To analyze the conditions that produce frames, 2) To identify frames, 3) To investigate the interaction between frames and the individual’s mind, and 4) To analyze the influence of frames on public opinion. He suggests that framing studies have disregarded context before and after exposure: the influence of context on audience beliefs, attitudes, and practices (D’Angelo 2019).

This paper focuses on the conditions that produce frames (the neo-liberal interests behind U.S. news production) and the identification of one frame in particular, the one that attributes responsibility to the other side, in this case Iraq, Russia and Hamas/Gaza.

Theoretical insights into the image, the spectacle, and the sublime

The image plays a crucial role in this investigation of the multimodal discourse that supports U.S. interventions and interests in the 21st Century, arguing that mainstream U.S. news conglomerates interweave language, sound and image to manufacture consent. This part of the paper explores the potential role of the image in supporting U.S. policies.

This paper argues that the visual image plays a powerful role in supporting and condoning U.S. interests and practices in the three zones of conflict, Iraq, Ukraine, Gaza. Pfau (2005) discusses the use of embedded journalists and the use of images in portraying the Iraq conflict, arguing that televised news reports privilege visual content, and that embedded television news reports supported U.S. intervention in Iraq. Bucher and Schumacher (2006) argue that images are more easily understood, retained, and retrieved compared to language.

Gibson and Zillmann (2000) suggest that visual information influences 'impression and judgement'.

This paper suggests that the image can be used, 1) To provide evidence (Huxford 2008), 2) To generate emotion (Zelizer 2004), 3) To create illusions, detachment from the outside world (Baudrillard 1984, 1991), 4) To construct spectacle, and 5) To create a cynical sense of the sublime (Žižek 1989).

Firstly, images can be used to provide evidence based on the premise that the camera does not lie (Zelizer 1995). In this case, the image in political journalism can provide information or surveillance (Huxford 2008), acting as a watchdog, monitoring the abuses of government (Lasswell 1948) and other authorities such as the military in Gaza, Ukraine and Gaza. Silcock et al. (2008) for example investigated more than 2500 war images from U.S. coverage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and observed that only 10% of these images showed injury or death. He argues that 'the portrayal of the injured and dead by the mainstream U.S. media at the beginning of the Iraq war did not reflect the human toll in Iraq' (Silcock et al. 2008: 11), suggesting that mainstream political journalism tends to downplay the killing fields of war in order to generate support for the atrocities on which U.S. capitalism is based.

Schulzke (2013: 95) argues that professional soldiers operate in 'conditions beyond their control'. His research suggests that logic and morality are inevitable casualties of the fog and friction of war (p. 97), so it could be argued (Phillips 2021) that mainstream news production minimizes images and evidence in order to minimize public outrage.

Secondly, the image can be used to generate emotion, insight into the horrors that suggest that the so-called just war (Lango 2014) is mere illusion or pretext, and that armed intervention can never be justified. Zelizer (2004) for example claims that 'the about-to-die moment' predominated in coverage of 9/11, and that 'depictions of body parts, blood, and gore were generally nowhere to be found' (p. 29), suggesting that mainstream news production presents images of violence strategically in order to shield public gaze from unjustifiable

atrocities. News executives are therefore reluctant to target ‘inanimate objects or live bodies’ (ibid).

Thirdly, images can create illusion, detachment from the realities that exist outside of our televised existence (Baudrillard 1984). Baudrillard argues that there is no connection between the beautiful, spectacular entertainment or propaganda of war reporting and the realities outside, ‘The war [...] watches itself in a mirror: am I pretty enough, am I operational enough, am I spectacular enough, am I sophisticated enough to make an entry onto the historical stage?’ (Baudrillard 1991: 31 ff.)

Fourthly, the image can provide spectacle, suggesting that mainstream U.S. news reports divert the audience from the informational content of images to their emotional impact (Huxford 2008: 8). Debord (1967: 1) argues that, advanced capitalist societies have turned Life into ‘an immense accumulation of spectacles’ and advertisements, suggesting spectatorship has reduced the horrors of modern warfare and capitalism to appearance.

Finally, images can be used to create a sense of the sublime that overpowers us rather than persuades us through reason, evidence and spectacle (Longinus 1st Century C.E., 1906). Jameson (1991: 37, 38) argues that the sublime is a consequence of globalization, suggesting that we are submerged in an infinite stream of images that can never be assimilated.

Burke represents the sublime as ‘a state in which all the soul’s motions are frozen in horror’ (1998: 41). Lyotard (1984) connects our sense of the sublime to the representation of so-called realities. Žižek (1989) agrees, arguing that ‘no empirical object, no representation of itself can adequately represent the Thing’, suggesting that ‘sublime objects of ideology’, images of Freedom, Good, Truth represent ‘this permanent failure of the representation to reach after the Thing’ (p. 229). The U.S. public accepts the destruction of Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza in the name of sublime objects such as the Nation, Freedom, the Good.

Multimodal discourse analysis

This article uses multimodal discourse analysis as an approach to investigate the interconnection or intermingling between language, sound and image, between reason and emotion, between spectacle and the sublime. Multimodal discourse analysis is based on three insights into meaning (Halliday 1978): ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning. Ideational meaning provides insight into people and objects. Interpersonal meaning provides insights into social interaction. Textual meaning provides insight into the connection between text and context and into the use of structure.

Multimodal discourse analysis therefore provides useful insight into the nature and justification, use and abuse of political power through a broad range of modes: language, sound and image. It highlights connections between sound and vision in terms of intensity, framing, foregrounding, highlighting, coherence and cohesion (Kress 2011).

Multimodal discourse analysis also highlights the importance of polysemy, the interweaving of semiotic resources such as music, captions, voices, background sounds, tone, still images and footage that capture the interest, minds and heart of the public.

In the next part of this paper, multimodal discourse analysis will be used to explore the polysemy of mainstream U.S. news production in the case of Iraq, Ukraine, Gaza.

The sample

This paper uses two powerful news channels and eight important news reports to investigate the use of multimodal discourse to legitimize and support U.S. interests and interventions.

This investigation focuses on CNN and Fox News because these two news corporations have the highest revenues, audiences and influence in the U.S. and elsewhere. The revenue of CNN decreased 5% from \$1.9 billion in 2021 to \$1.8 billion in 2022 but in that same time period the revenue of Fox News increased 5% from \$3.1 billion in 2021 to \$3.3 billion in 2022, suggesting that although Fox News is increasing its revenue and CNN revenue is declining both news conglomerates have a strong profit orientation (Pew Research 2023).

License fees have remained stable, and although advertising revenue decreased 13% in the case of CNN, Fox News had a 11% increase.

CNN tends to attract Democrats and Fox News tends to attract Republican supporters (Pew Research 2020). This is, however changing because the leading shareholder in Warner Brothers Discovery is John Malone, a multibillionaire media magnate who supports ex-President Trump and has held 32% of the shares in News Corp. and Fox News. Malone has said he wants CNN to be more like Fox News.

Rupert Murdoch and Republican Party operative Roger Ailes set up News Corp. and Fox News in 1996 (Business Model Analyst 2023). But the parent company of Fox News is no longer 21st Century Fox, because Disney acquired this company in 2019.

There are other important similarities in the political, economic and ideological interests of CNN and Fox News. Their main advertisers are insurance, pharmaceutical, private healthcare and communications industries, and the main shareholders are multibillionaire global finance powerhouses such as Vanguard, SsGA and Black Rock. Black Rock has 112.5 billion dollars in capital and has invested 400 million dollars of that in Kreos Capital in Israel. Larry Fink, the owner of Black Rock has jubilantly supported the genocide in Gaza and has expressed that opinion through the Fox Business Internet platform (October, 2023).

The next part of this paper explores the strategies and methods that CNN and Fox news reports are using to promote and condone U.S. interests, interventions and atrocities in the 21st Century. It is based on a small sample of CNN and Fox news reports that represent two crucial stages in these interventions, the initial invasion and an important stage in the process of re-shaping the world order in Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza. This sample explores the multimodal discourse of CNN and Fox news reports on the invasion of Iraq (March 19th, 20th, 2003) and on the storming of Baghdad and the so-called Fall of the Saddam Hussein statue (April 9th, 2003), on the invasion of Ukraine (February 23rd, 25th, 2022) and on the siege of Mariupol (April 19th, 22nd, 2022), on the invasion of Gaza (October 10th, 13th, 2023) and on

the bombing of a hospital (October 17th, 19th, 2023), the goal being to shed light on the strategies and methods that U.S. news conglomerates use to promote the re-shaping of the world order to the benefit of the U.S. and the cost of the Other, the people. This paper admits that this is a small sample of mainstream U.S. news reporting across two decades of U.S. news reporting, interest and tragic intervention, but the goal of this multimodal discourse analysis is to delve deep into the mainstream media framing of Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza to the benefit of the U.S. and to the cost of the world.

Framing Iraq

CNN (March 19th, 2003) discusses the invasion of Iraq. The presenter adopts a factual tone, beginning with the caption ‘WAR WITH IRAQ HAS BEGUN,’ muting U.S. responsibility for this so-called war that is in fact an invasion. The factual tone is echoed in the business metaphors that reverberate through his discourse, the ‘targets of opportunity’ and the ‘area of probability’. These business metaphors suggest that it is nothing personal, that the atrocities are not intentional, that it is just about doing business. The main focus is weaponry and technology, the 40 Cruise missiles that have fired at Baghdad, their technical precision, the infographics in the studio. There is a sense of ethical responsibility expressed in the claim that ‘these missiles are so precise that they can hit from great distances a target within a few meters’, thereby minimizing civilian casualties. The producers have selected an ally of the United States as a source, former Defense Secretary, William Cohen, who supports the invasion, the ‘decapitation’ of Saddam Hussein, President Saddam Hussein but stripped of his title and status, and ‘the soldiers beneath him’ that are all ‘fair game’ or legitimate targets of opportunity. The presenter then asks him, ‘how good are these missiles?’ This gives the channel the opportunity to advertise U.S.-made missiles, their speed and killing power. The destruction of the Iraqi people is presented as a green satellite image, with the silhouettes of buildings in the background and random flashes of light.

Fox News (March 20th, 2003) discusses the invasion of Iraq, framing the invasion as part of the so-called war on terror based on the caption,

‘TERROR ALERT HIGH’. Responsibility for the violence is attributed to Iraq as a source of terror. The presenter as in the CNN report (March 19th, 2003) adopts a factual tone and uses business metaphors, telling the audience that all the designated ‘targets of opportunity’ have been hit. The adversaries have been reduced to two, ‘President George Bush has launched war against Saddam Hussein’. Rather than portraying Life and Death struggle, the casualties and mortalities, the reporter takes the audience on a virtual tour of one of Saddam Hussein’s residences. The final image is a random building on fire and a reference to a partner in the region, ‘There is a real fear that a Cruise missile might be launched towards Israel.’

CNN (April 9th, 2003) discusses the mixed reception that U.S. troops encounter in Baghdad. The main goal of this report is to promote the success of their mission, encapsulated in the spectacle of decapitating and bringing down the statue of Saddam, symbol of the regime. The caption frames the U.S. as good and liberating and democratizing Iraq, and the enemy as evil but under control, ‘US still continues to receive warm welcomes and some hostile fire.’ Language, sound and image are meshed to channel rational and emotional support. The caption reads, ‘President Bush caught a glimpse of this scene in Baghdad.’ The ropes are displayed, pulling down the statue of Saddam. The U.S. soldiers and equipment dragging down the statue on either side are cropped to frame the jubilant Iraqis. The voice-over, ‘Iraqis had begun pulling down the statue and later dismembering it by dragging the head through the street’, highlights the footage of Saddam’s head being dragged away in cart. The gap between CNN image and Iraqi reality is glossed over, ‘The location of the real Saddam Hussein remains a mystery’.

Later, the presenter in the studio presents this spectacle as historical fact, packaging the atrocities unleashed on Iraqi people as justice, liberation, democracy,

‘So, this is what history looks like. It was a statue falling. It was history making. It was a spell broken. People finding their voices again or perhaps for the very first time.’

CNN journalists accost the Iraqi Ambassador on his doorstep, who responds in cue, ‘The game is over. I hope peace will prevail.’

Fox News (April 9th, 2003) also focuses on the so-called fall of the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad, and the opening image and caption promote U.S. nationalism and business interests too. There is a U.S. flag in the top left corner of the screen and the caption reads, ‘STOCKS RISE AS TROOPS ENTER BAGHDAD’. The presenter interprets the footage of the statue being pulled down as people ‘wanting to pull down not just the dictatorship but also the symbol of the dictatorship.’ The report and ‘Central Command’ then inform people that the mission and the news program is not yet over, ‘Caution from central command saying that this war is not over yet, that there may well be pockets of resistance from within Baghdad.’ The CNN reporter in the square is embedded, selected and monitored to make sure he matches military and ideological objectives. He interviews the soldier that jumps down from a tank to make sure he doesn’t trespass. No Iraqis are interviewed about their own liberation, just a U.S. soldier talking about himself and his family back home,

‘I’ve gone from terrified to even grieving my own death, but I’ve worked my way through and it’s gone from acceptance and loving my wife even more, and you want to get back to that rope pulling more.’

Framing Ukraine

CNN (February 23rd, 2022) discusses the imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine and ‘the dire predictions of possibly tens of thousands of civilian casualties and millions of refugees’. The footage of military trucks moving fast along the highway on the Russian border is evidence of its imminence. The morality of the U.S. and its allies is displayed as a series of flags representing the nations that have imposed sanctions. The first source and supporter of U.S. interests is a former Defense Secretary that attributes personal responsibility to President Putin both for the intervention in 2014 and the current crisis, claiming that ‘Putin has always been a risk taker’ and that Russia is undemocratic. The next source, a former U.S. Marine argues that Russia must be persuaded to see the costs of their transgression. CNN then promotes the Democrat cause by inserting footage of former

President Trump praising Putin's strategy in declaring a large portion of Ukraine to be independent before moving in to claim the rest, thereby reducing the horrors of war to a chess game between leaders. Then there is a Democrat Congressman who preaches nationalism by calling President Trump unpatriotic. The next source is a Pentagon official that factually lists the defenses that the U.S. has moved to Europe, 'Defense of eastern flank inside European area of operations, infantry task force of 800 personnel, 8 F-35 fighter jets, battalion of 20 attack helicopters, 12 AH4 attack helicopters to reassure our NATO allies and deter aggression, part of the 900,000 US troops that are already in Europe.' Here CNN is promoting the multi-billion dollar U.S. defense industry.

Fox News (February 25th, 2003) is also analyzing Putin's invasion of Ukraine, focusing on strategy and infrastructure rather than Life and Death struggle. The opening computer animation presents unidentified anonymous concrete buildings set on fire although the caption is dramatic, 'RUSSIA INVADES UKRAINE, PUTIN LAUNCHES FULL-SCALE WAR FROM LAND, AIR, SEA'. The voice-over presents strategy, 'Russia's official role is to decapitate the Ukrainian government'. The report is informative and breathless, 'reports of renewed fighting, clashes in a number of different locations ... Russian forces worked their way up through Crimea, trying to make a land bridge so they can hit the capital of Kiev' but there is little footage or insight into the horrors of it all. The only sound is random explosions and the only image is of a random helicopter flying overhead. Next, a team of Fox presenters engages the audience by questioning their man out in Ukraine. The first presenter compares Ukraine to the Alamo, a siege in Texas in which Mexican troops massacred a U.S. outpost, 'The vibe right now in the capital it's got to be like in the Alamo? You know you are being surrounded and you are outnumbered. What are people thinking, what are they feeling, do people regret not leaving soon enough?' The reporter reassures the audience that the Ukrainian civilians are ready to fight. The next presenter highlights the loyalty, solidarity and bravery of the CNN staff and the Ukrainian people, 'Great job, you and the rest of our mates over there, standing shoulder to shoulder with you. Are the

Ukrainians determined to fight this out? Are they ready to fight to the death?’ The scene is set for a long series of lucrative arms deals.

CNN (19th April, 2022) discusses the blasting of the steel plant in Mariupol that is sheltering civilians.

The tone of the presenter is factual and informative, referring to Russian strategy and its consequences, to the fact that Russia is launching a large-scale offensive in the East, that the port of Mariupol is being besieged, and that there are ‘reports of intense shelling at a steel factory [and] video showing plumes of smoke rising from the plant’. First, there are maps of military strategy, of Russian troops and Ukrainian counter-offensive.

Next, there is footage of families camping inside the steel factory and of damaged infrastructure, bombed out buildings and rubble in the street. The language of the presenter is caring, referring to ‘images of mothers there with their children, desperate to get out’ but the footage and emotions of the victims are muted. Then the report returns to the maps, showing ‘significant fighting in the last 24 hours’ before interviewing the man in charge of the railway infrastructure. The Head of Ukrainian railways reassures CNN that he is continually rebuilding the railways, and that civilians are being evacuated and exiled in large numbers. There is footage of derelict buildings and rusted trains. Once again, CNN is focusing on military strategy and infrastructure rather than Life and Death struggle.

Fox News (22nd April, 2022) discusses two insights into the state of Mariupol: ‘Russian President Vladimir Putin says his forces have taken the Ukrainian city but the White House says otherwise.’ The presenter talks about the horrors of war, ‘the city mayor is issuing a plea for a full evacuation as gruesome new images show the horror on the ground’ but the report displays no gruesome images, only two Eastern Europeans hugging other next to a bus, and one telling the camera, ‘It really is hell, what is happening there!’ the first important source is U.S. President Joe Biden himself, telling the world, ‘It’s questionable whether he [President Putin] does control Mariupol’ and promoting the U.S. arms industry, ‘Sometimes we will speak softly

and carry a large javelin [missile system] because we are sending a lot of them as well!’

Framing Gaza

Fox News (10th October, 2023) is titled, ‘Israeli tanks awaiting order for Gaza ground invasion’. The caption is ‘ISRAEL AT WAR’ rather than Israel evacuates 1.1 million people and carpet bombs Gaza. This report immediately justifies the invasion by launching into a graphic description of ‘all the worst things that can happen to humans and more ... babies beheaded, people who were burned alive in their homes, women raped and dragged through the streets’. The presenter asks her audience not to look away, but supplies no visual evidence. Instead the report justifies and discusses military strategy, talking of ‘bodies of Hamas fighters all along the road, according to Israeli military 1000 Hamas militants,’ comparing Hamas to other terrorists such as Islamic State, and using euphemisms such as ‘softening up targets’ to exonerate Israel from the atrocity of carpet bombing Gaza. The only footage is part of an Israeli tank in the background. The captions blame it all on the enemy,

‘Biden: Hamas attacks pure unadulterated evil.

Israeli government: 100 hostages in Hamas hands

Hamas threatening to execute civilian hostages.’

CNN (13th October, 2023) has the title, ‘Israel warns 1.1 million people to leave northern Gaza’. Rather than give voice to the grief of each one of, or any of the 1.1 million Palestinian people being suddenly uprooted, the presenter immediately summons the international CNN correspondent in Southern Lebanon more than 250 kilometers from the Gaza border to speak on their behalf. The correspondent lists the obvious concerns, ‘there's very little fuel, the number of people, where are they going to go, where are they going to be housed?’ rather than condemning the authors of the crime of prohibiting ‘relief supplies, tents, food, water, medicine’. Once again blame is attributed to the enemy, to Hamas that have allegedly brought this horror on the Palestinian people, by ‘calling on people to stay in their homes, to stay put.’ He then predicts a bloodbath because ‘the

Israelis are calling them to leave.’ The language used to describe the Israelis, ‘calling them to leave’ is understated. The aerial footage also provides almost no insight into the horrors inflicted on the Palestinian people, there are isolated explosions and smoking buildings rather than the carpet bombing reported in other channels. The other source on the ground is an ally, a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Israeli army, no less. He unsurprisingly assigns responsibility to Hamas and explains military strategy, ‘we are continuing our activities against the Hamas terrorist organization and their infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip ... continuing our effort to make sure Hamas can never ever threaten Israel again’. He reassures the CNN audience that, ‘our operation is focused towards Hamas, not to the people of Gaza, because the people of Gaza are not our enemy’ and recommends ‘to the people of Gaza, go to the south, you should listen, go to the south’. This is the CNN prelude to genocide.

Fox News (17th October, 2023) claims that Israeli investigators have proven that an Islamic jihad rocket misfired and killed hundreds at a hospital in Gaza. The embedded reporter is hundreds of kilometers from the hospital and the bombing but is wearing the standard embedded reporter bullet proof vest. Here there is graphic footage of the hospital courtyard, blood on blankets, burnt out cars, and corpses on stretchers wheeled through hospital doors. The presenter refers to ‘stunning scenes, smoke coming from cars, people moving bodies around’ but the Israeli source reassures the audience that the IDF does not target hospitals. The presenter then thanks the reporter and promises to update the viewers if ‘there is more news from Israel regarding the next phase in their offensive’. Since then the Israeli bombing and destruction of hospitals has continued under the pretext of destroying Hamas tunnels.

CNN (19th October, 2023) discusses Israeli evidence supposedly proving that Hamas blew up the hospital in Gaza. The caption promotes the supposedly divine mission of Israel, ‘Israel at war [Fire in background].’ In this report, CNN uses a friendly U.S. military analyst to analyze evidence that it is a Hamas rocket that destroyed a hospital and killed at least 500 patients rather an Israeli missile. There are two high-tech satellite images of the hospital, one without and the

other with visible signs of craters. The U.S. Lieutenant General (retired) then points to an IDF radar image of the trajectory of the rocket and blames Hamas. The radar image is a product of the Iron Dome security system.

The U.S. supplied this system to Israel. Next, there is U.S. President Joe Biden again, arguing that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people, and passing off the death of the Palestinian people as collateral damage. Last up is a senior Israeli diplomat at the U.S. Embassy that packages Palestinian lives in terms of the need to 'extract a price tag from Hamas' and describes Israel like the United States as 'Liberal democracy with checks and balances' and Hamas as 'a terrorist organization'. The worldwide protests against these atrocities are dismissed in a simple caption, 'PROTESTS ERUPT AROUND WORLD OVER GAZA HOSPITAL BLAST'.

Conclusion

This paper has provided theoretical and practical insights into the multimodal discourse that mainstream U.S. news conglomerates have used to promote the interests and interventions of the United States in three locations of geo-strategic and economic importance in the 21st Century, namely Iraq (2003), Ukraine (2022-) and Gaza (2023).

The paper has explored the interests and justifications behind these interventions, relating them to the statement of the Carnegie Endowment for so-called Peace that suggests that the U.S. should re-shape the international world to its own benefit (Burns 2019), i.e. land, arms sales, and resources, these resources being oil in the case of Iraq (Juhász 2013) and gas in the case of Gaza (UNCTAD 2019). The main justification has been the dubious principles of U.S. exceptionalism and Freedom (McCracken 2003), and the just war (Lango 2014), and the main result has been the atrocities committed in Iraq and Ukraine and culminating in the proposed genocide in Gaza.

This paper then explored theoretical insights into the multimodal discourse that two mainstream news conglomerates, CNN and Fox News have used to legitimize the re-ordering of the international world to the benefit of the U.S., or at least big business in the United

States, and at the cost of local populations and oppressed minorities. These theoretical insights have included insights into narration (the strategic inter-connection between fact and emotion), framing (the attribution of responsibility to the enemy), and the strategic use of image to create evidence (Huxford 2008), to generate emotion (Zelizer 2004), to create illusions and detachment from the outside world (Baudrillard 1984, 1991), to construct spectacle Debord (1967), and to create a cynical sense of the sublime (Žižek 1989), that encourages audiences to channel their emotions into supporting U.S. interests, nationalism and capitalism

In sum, mainstream U.S. news reports have used multimodal discourse to promote the re-shaping of the international world to the profit of big business based in the United States, by adopting a factual and curious tone, by framing the U.S. and its strategic allies as good and its designated enemies as bad, by packaging atrocities as justice, by selecting allies as sources and by neutralizing dissent. This is the tragedy of mainstream U.S. news production in the 21st Century.

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