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INTRODUCTION

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Introduction: Reporting war – history, professionalism and technology

This special issue of the *Journal of War and Culture Studies* brings together a collection of articles around the theme of 'reporting war'. The purpose of this introduction is to explain why this should be a central concern for all of those interested in war and culture, and also to situate the reporting of war within its fuller historical context. Two main themes that we want to highlight as suggestive ones in understanding this history are, first, the development of the war correspondent as a personality and, second, the changing possibilities of media technology. In doing this, we hope to emphasize links and parallels between the articles published here and the issues that have enabled and bedevilled war reporting in the progress through an age of mass mediation, towards digital, individualized content.

We begin by asserting the difficulty of conceiving of war *without* mediation. As the theme of this journal reveals and explores, 'war' is itself a discursive set of activities. Max Weber's (1971) definition of the state as those that exercise

a monopoly over legitimate violence – and, accordingly, the right to wage war – is a revealing one. The representative discourses around 'war' reconstitute violence as not only acceptable, but a civic duty; situating human conflict within a set of organizing principles and according it with political and social ends. From the state perspective, war is offered as *necessary* violence, driven by obligation rather than anger and controlled by the principles of international convention. It is through these careful practices of representation and government that war is distinguished from undirected aggression.

Furthermore, the very success of war depends upon the representation of processes and outcomes: stronger occupying forces can be undone by images of their atrocities and maltreatment of civilians, and any participants with access to communication networks are free to declare 'victory' (Price 2010). Within this setting, it can be no surprise that warring authorities are so keen to maintain control over how their activities are reported. Nor should it be unexpected, as a number of the articles in this special issue will go on to demonstrate, that the changing character and scope of mediation has its own influence on the conduct and representation of the modern war.

The reporting of war is also important because of the controversy war involves. Putting lives at risk and taking the lives of others, even when sanctioned by the state, raises issues of personal morality and international law. Wars are enacted on behalf of nations, publics, and political and ethic groupings, and, as much critical writing shows, are the cause of discussion and dispute amongst even those collectives the conflicts pretend to serve. Ideally, war reporters should sustain and nourish public discussion: not just reporting on the activities of the authorities and forces involved, but watching, assessing and commenting upon them. As Phillip Knightley (2002) shows, the institutions of the mass media have always struggled with this responsibility, and the reporting of war is a complex mixture of the professional courage of the war correspondent, the relationship between news values and the spectacle of destruction, and the controlling hand of the state propagandists. Yet, all the while, the possibilities of conscientious war reporting extend beyond issues of legitimacy to encompass other matters of public sentiment. To take just one example, William Howard Russell's reports for *The Times* eventually led to public action in the form of improved nursing care for the soldiers at the front through the pioneering work of Florence Nightingale (Hood 2011).

WAR REPORTER AS PROFESSIONAL PERSONALITY

The representation of war has also found its way into public discourse as a matter of historical interest, in particular through a 2011–2012 exhibition at the Imperial War Museum North, 'War Correspondent: Reporting Under Fire Since 1914' (May 2011–January 2012). Yet, as the book that accompanies this exhibition makes clear, war reporting has been going on since the middle of the nineteenth century (Hood 2011). Beginning his own analysis with the Crimean War (1853–1856), Knightley's (2002) accomplished history of the war correspondent shows that the past 150 years have been fruitful ones in the development of a branch of journalism specializing in reports from the front line, proceeding from the nineteenth century's conflicts of empire through the first great war of the industrial era, the First World War (1914–1918), and arriving, we might add, at the global War on Terror.

By the end of the nineteenth century, war correspondents had become firmly established as part of every respectable newspaper's staff. The

Boer Wars (1880–1881 and 1899–1902), involving British soldiers and fought in the Transvaal, saw journalists reporting from the front line for the daily British papers. In setting out the laws of war, the First Hague Convention of 1899 included the provision that newspaper correspondents captured by the opposing side have the right to be treated as prisoners of war, provided they were in possession of accreditation papers for the army they were following. The British army had introduced a system to register war correspondents in 1889, whereby they were allowed to draw army rations and to use the military telegraph for despatches which would be censored by the military (see Pakenham 1991). Around 70 correspondents were accredited to the British army under this scheme during the Second Boer War, including Winston Churchill, who was working as the war reporter for the *Morning Post*. As Simon Popple's article in this issue shows, however, even at this stage, the output of journalists was moving beyond the written text, exploring the use of visual images in both the British press and popular culture. Indeed, in this regard, Popple helps shed new light on the contemporary representation of the Boer War.

At the start of the First World War, the tradition of war reporters and their relationship with the fighting forces came under close scrutiny by the British government as they sought to control the media's coverage of the conflict. After a chaotic first few months with reporters on all sides operating on an ad hoc system, Lord Kitchener established a scheme that has parallels with contemporary practices of 'embedding', whereby five journalists from approved London-based newspapers were officially credited by the Allied forces to take up reporting from the front from 1915, paid directly by the War Office rather than by their newspapers. Each was also kitted out in a khaki uniform appropriate to the honorary rank of captain, and given a 'conducting officer', who was usually a soldier too old or otherwise unfit for active service, who would escort them on their story-finding missions. These accredited journalists were billeted close to the front but within a 'safe' zone. Couriers were employed by the army to take journalists' daily despatches for transmission to their editors either by messenger or telegraph, after they had been checked by former journalist and effective censor C. E. Montague.

While control of these journalists was firm, this did not diminish the possibility for fame and renown. As a way of addressing the discrepancy between the pay of an army officer and that of a Fleet Street journalist, the War Office assured the five that they would be able to make up the difference by publishing memoirs about their time at the front. The best known of these accredited journalists, William Beach Thomas, subsequently became a celebrity in his own right. Yet his highly jingoistic and self-referential reports for the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* were despised by many of the soldiers serving at the front. His style of writing was ripe for parody, and the 'trench newspaper' *The Wipers Times* created its own reporter of renown, Teech Bomas, to send up the bombastic spirit of Beach Thomas's articles (see Brown 2006). We can see echoes of this form of journalistic celebrity today in Noha Mellor's article in this volume, where Mellor provides an insightful update on the memoirs of war reporters from the Iraq conflict. It is perhaps notable that such journalists follow in a tradition and appeal to a market established by the later memoirs of the First World War accredited journalists.

For journalists without official accreditation by the War Office, the logistics of getting to the front line were more problematic, with many of the telegraph lines out of action, and then they had little by way of infrastructure by which

to get their reports back to their editors. In any event, manacled by a national demand for unconditional patriotism, even the unattributed reporters' articles were filled with unstinting accounts of British heroism and German atrocities.

The Second World War, with the rise of radio, saw the still further development of those we might refer to as celebrity reporters. Among the British war correspondents, Richard Dimbleby, reporting for the BBC, rose to prominence as the first war correspondent to enter the Nazi concentration camp at Belsen in 1945. Perhaps a still more iconic example is Ed Murrow, who produced *This is London* for CBS during the Blitz, when stationed there in the early years of the war. Yet we have seen that with this level of visibility comes the expectation of state control. Even Murrow's broadcasts were subject to censorship, as a vigilant censor would sit beside him as he broadcast, ready to stop proceedings if Murrow was thought to be speaking out of line.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGY

It is easy to see that a discussion of contemporary war reporting should not be disentangled from the social, cultural and political developments of the last century and a half, and yet more examples of this are to be found in the advances in technology. Photography has become an especially visceral medium for portraying the consequences of war, with the American Civil War (1861–1865) regarded as being the first major conflict in which photographs were able to be taken. The place of the visual is explored in Katy Parry's article in this journal which looks at the use of images in the Iraq conflict. David Archibald and Mitchell Miller also discuss the strategic deployment of images in the digital age, where single sets of images can be reframed to meet divergent ideological ends, taking the example of the Israeli army's storming of a Gaza-bound aid ship in 2010 as their case study to show how visual images can go beyond simply recording an event, towards providing the raw materials of subsequent representational regimes.

By the time of the Second World War (1939–1945), technology had advanced and now radio and cinema became media platforms for reporting war. As with the First World War, the British forces issued official accreditation to journalists, but rather than the War Office, the Ministry of Information's public relations department was the responsible agency. The journalists became known collectively as 'warcos', a nickname that hints at their integration into military life at this time. As with the First World War, censorship was rigidly enforced. This system was widely criticized by the warcos, who accused the censors of deliberately delaying their written reports and too rigidly enforcing censorship. Most radio reports from the front were not 'live', but recorded on newly developed portable recording devices, and were scripted and subject to censorship. The issues around the production of 'live' broadcasts from the theatre of conflict are discussed in this collection by Angela Smith and Michael Higgins, as they look at the development of the 'live two-way' interview, linking broadcast studios to theatres of conflict. It is important to retain a clear notion of the political utility of the broadcast media, where both sides of a conflict are enabled to broadcast ideologically laden messages to the other. For example, Nelson Ribeiro's article in this special issue explores how the BBC's broadcasts to Portugal affected the population's perception of the war.

Censorship and the restrictions of technology are issues that have always been part of the package for reporting war (see MacGregor 1997). Not least,

we see this in the manner in which journalists' access to the front line continues to be reviewed by the military. As Smith and Higgins discuss here, Kate Adie's reporting of the First Gulf War (1990–1991) made use of live broadcast technology to link from the desert to the London studio, but restriction continues to be an important factor in a complex strategy of performance and representation. The First Gulf War saw reporters assigned to the front in 'safe' areas, similar to that found in the officially accredited journalists in the First World War, where the various journalists reported into a 'pool'. By the time of the Second Gulf War, otherwise known as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, a different policy was in operation, with journalists being 'embedded' with the troops on the front line. Katy Parry's discussion of the media's use of images emerges from this conflict's use of such journalists, who were able to produce more graphic accounts, and engage in a renewed struggle of limitation and expression.

A recent special edition of this journal (Volume 4, Number 2) was devoted to the War on Terror in news and popular culture. As articles in the present issue also show, the conflicts driven by this 'war' have been extensively reported and commented on. Initial patriotism following the attacks of 9/11 was evident in popular culture, such as the subsequent series of the New York-set sitcom *Friends* picking out US flags and FDNY iconography to show its support for city and country. As Lee Salter (2011) and James Rodgers (2011) show, and as this issue continues to explore, the reporting of this conflict has increasingly sought to problematize global conflict in a way that would have been unthinkable in 1914. Less optimistically, Elspeth van Veeren (2011) has highlighted the calculated media management of the reporting of the conflict by the administration of George W. Bush, which resulted in many sections of the mass media proving complicit in the administration's aim to promote the idea of the United States being involved in a 'good war'.

In this issue, we want to show that the reporting of war is a strategic endeavour, limited by government restriction and enlivened by expressive possibility, and this has been the case since the birth of the war correspondent. While the courage, renown and integrity associated with the war reporter gives a substantial level of power, this is routinely curtailed by reporting and professional restrictions and cultural expectations. What is becoming more interesting is the impact of competing accounts from cross-national sources, citizen journalism and the re-presentation of narrative images. As developments in media increase in pace, so do the complexities and nuances that characterize the reporting of war.

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