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THE "COMPETITIVE SYMBIOSIS" BETWEEN MEDIA AND STATE: THE 2011 MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LIBYA AS A CASE STUDY

LCol S.M.M. Godin

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Exercise Solo Flight

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THE “COMPETITIVE SYMBIOSIS”¹ BETWEEN MEDIA AND STATE: THE 2011 MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LIBYA AS A CASE STUDY

“A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. The press must be free from state interference. It must have the economic strength to stand up to the blandishments of government officials. It must have sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favour. It must enjoy the protection of the constitution, so that it can protect our rights as citizens.”

Nelson Mandela at the international press institute congress, 14 February 1994

INTRODUCTION

According to liberal democratic theory, freedom of expression, and consequently of the press, is the sine qua non condition to democracy. Ascertaining who informs the news discourse therefore becomes central to concerns about the democratic process and the media.² Questions regarding media access, media framing as well as source power are thus central to the discussion of issues of power in society and can be analysed through a study of the relationship between media and state. At the heart of the subject is the unequivocally important matter of who leads and who follows. Competing theories that range from viewing the media as a watchdog protecting society from the powerful elites to seeing the media as a lapdog to the state can help identify the locus of power and therefore the actors most likely to exert influence on society. Through a case study of the 2011 military intervention in Libya, specifically focused on the Canadian media coverage, this study posits that the relationship between the state and the media in Canada is very complex, with each actor playing different roles, at times leading and at times following, depending on the context. Set in a global network of competing interests, the

¹ The terminology “competitive symbiosis” was coined by Gadi Wolfsfeld in *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.13.

² Simon Cottle, “News Access and Source Power: Paradigms and Problems,” in *Option D: Unit 67 of the MA in Communications, Media & Public Relations*, Leicester: Department of Media & Communication, University of Leicester, 2001, p.6.

relationship between state and media is best described in the words coined by academic Gadi Wolfsfeld: competitive symbiosis, which entails that each actor tries to maximize what they get from the relationship at a minimal cost.³ The more the state is organized and has control over its political environment, the more it can regulate the flow of information.⁴ In a conflict environment, “those who control the situation have little problem controlling the news.”⁵ On the other hand, the media can exert influence by promoting certain conflict frames over others, thus setting the agenda of public focus, which in turns puts pressure on the political apparatus.

Prior to examining how Canadian media framed the military intervention in Libya, key concepts of agenda setting and media framing as well as source power and access will be defined and situated within a Canadian context. Then, the principal of normative control of the media will be assessed. The theoretical framework will subsequently be laid by analysing three paradigms – the manufacturing consent paradigm, the media contest paradigm, and the media culture paradigm – each offering different perspectives on the competing influences in mediatised conflict.⁶ A very brief overview of the Libyan scenario will then help contextualise this study’s main argument regarding the complex nature of the state-media relationship. Given the advent of new technologies and global media, the effects of globalisation on audiences will inform this study as individuals in very distance places can now sympathise with the predicament of remote people.⁷

³ Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.13.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.25.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.27.

⁶ Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*, New York: Open University Press, 2006, p.13.

⁷ Macnaghten Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. London: Sage Publications, 1998, p.248.

Through a review of existing literature and an analysis of 25 randomly selected news articles and comment pieces from major daily Canadian newspapers, both national and regional, this essay will then explore its main arguments. The situation in Libya was for the most part ignored by Canadian media prior to the intervention, as it suited western governments' intentions in the region, thus lending credence to the theory that media follows the state. Once western governments decided to intervene, the Canadian media started depicting the conflict in a more emotional manner, framing the intervention as Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and portraying Colonel Muammar Gadhafi as a brute, thus reflecting the western states views and legitimising the intervention. Although the media in Canada seemed to support, for the most part, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's decision to intervene militarily in Libya, there is a very important nuance on how they framed the conflict. Indeed, the media framed the conflict as R2P, in a way that was palatable to the Canadian public, but which referenced the Liberal Party of Canada's rhetoric not the governing Conservative Party of Canada.⁸ Therefore, domestically, the media informed the discourse of how and when military interventions in sovereign states should be legitimised.

CONCEPTS AT PLAY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Globalisation:

First, the concept of globalisation underpins any contemporary study of international relations and can help explain why states intervene in the affairs of others sovereign states.

⁸ See: Kim Richard Nossal, "The Use – and Misuse – of R2P: The Case of Canada," in *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, and Canadian newspaper articles such as: Geoffrey York, "The world debates a response to 'revolting' violence," *The Globe and Mail*, 24 February 2011, where the R2P terminology appears five times.

According to sociologist Anthony Giddens, globalisation is defined as “the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away.”⁹ Giddens further argues that this process is done through the news media.¹⁰ Thus the media play a central role in bringing images and narratives of conflicts to faraway audiences and therefore can influence the conduct of international relations.

Framing, Agenda Setting and Gatekeeping

In deciding which images and which narratives to present, media frame the conflicts.

According to sociologist Todd Gitlin, media frames help journalists organise the world for their audiences:

Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual. Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences.¹¹

Journalists frame the information according to existing cultural schemas in order for their audiences to make sense of the information.¹² By using established notions and frames of references, journalists are able to routinize the unforeseen.¹³ Therefore, by making parallels with mass atrocities from the past, such as the Rwanda Genocide, it is entirely possible that journalists not only helped explain the situation in Libya but also helped pave the way to an intervention. The comparison prompted countries, such as Canada, into action as they had pledged to never again sit idly by while human atrocities unfolded. In this context, recognising who informs the

⁹ Anthony Giddens, “The Globalizing of Modernity,” in *Media in Global Context*, edited by Boyd-Barrett, London: Hodder Education, 1997, p.19.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.26.

¹¹ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980, p.7.

¹² Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.33-34.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp.33-34.

media thus becomes the key to identifying the locus of power. Wolfseld argues that the media frames are manipulated by political influences.¹⁴ In his book *Mediatized Conflict*, academic Simon Cottle for his part, perceives the situation in a more multifaceted manner, arguing that “each antagonists [in a conflict] attempts to promote its own frames of the conflict to the news media in an attempt to mobilize political support for its cause.”¹⁵

Closely related to the concept of framing is the concept of agenda setting, which is defined as the process of media portraying certain issues, certain ways, more prominently and more frequently than others thereby affording them more importance.¹⁶ By framing issues and by setting the agenda, media therefore have the potential of swaying the public’s attention a certain way, which in turn may place pressure on the state. Thus, according to gatekeeping theorists Pamela Shoemaker, Tim Vos and Stephen Reese, correspondents, columnists and editors act as gatekeepers of the information that reaches the public by “selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news.”¹⁷ In brief, gatekeeping, along with framing and agenda setting, are inter-related concepts which assign informational power to the media.

Source Power and Access

In contrast, the concept of source power assigns informational power to the sources that provide reporters with information. They are often connected to the state’s central institutions and therefore represent the state’s interests. Declines in newspaper subscription and advertising

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.36.

¹⁵ Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*. New York: Open University Press, 2006, p.21.

¹⁶ Renita Coleman *et al*, “Agenda Setting,” in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.147.

¹⁷ Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese, “Journalists as Gatekeepers,” in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, New York: Routledge, 2009, pp.73-77.

revenues, coupled with increased pagination requirements, have translated into media downsizing and job cuts as well as an increasing reliance on sources, including governmental public relations sources, to fill newspaper pages.¹⁸ Academic Leon Sigal reasons that:

News is, after all, not what journalists think, but what their sources say, and is mediated by news organizations, journalistic routines and conventions, which screen out many of the personal predilections of individual journalists.¹⁹

In their book *Manufacturing Consent*, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky have consequently put forth the propaganda model in which raw information passes through several filters – such as the reliance of the media on official government sources for information – before reaching their audiences.²⁰ What's more, the relationship between reporters and their sources not only has the ability to influence public opinion in the short term but also has longer term effects in shaping cultural meanings.²¹ This long term effect of shaping meanings and ideas can, according to a constructivist approach, shape a state's identity and its practices in international relations and security issues.²² The concept of source power thus espouses the belief that media are dependent on their sources that, in the end, shape public opinion.

In a Canadian context, this essay argues that both the media and the state hold the power to influence the public in different circumstances and at different times and, as such, have a competitive as well as symbiotic relationship. It is important to note that this relationship has the potential to inhibit the media from accomplishing the fundamental role, which society expects them to fulfill, that of guardian of democracy.

¹⁸ Bob Franklin, Justin Lewis and Andrew Williams, "Journalism, News Sources and Public Relations," in *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, edited by Stuart Allan, New York: Routledge, 2010, p.202.

¹⁹ Leon Sigal, "Who? Sources Make the News," in *Reading the News*, edited by R. Manoff and M. Schudson. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, p.29.

²⁰ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, p.2.

²¹ Daniel A. Berkowitz, "Reporters and Their Sources," in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.102.

²² Matt McDonald, "Constructivism in International Relations Theory," in *Approaches to International Relations: Volume II*, edited by Stephen Chan and Cerwyn Moore, Los Angeles, California: SAGE, 2009, p.65.

Normative Function of the Media

The normative evaluation of journalists' roles assigns them the responsibility to disseminate information necessary for an effective democracy and healthy civil society.²³ In this view, journalists are expected to be the guardians of society. The watchdog role of the media suggests that, in a democracy, journalists are entrusted with the role of monitoring and scrutinising the government and other powerful spheres of society in order to protect the people from abuse.²⁴ However, academic Brian McNair argues that the commercialisation of the media, and the related competitive pressures, has created a situation where the standards of journalism have been lowered and information dumbed down, thus undermining democracy.²⁵

Simon Cottle has organised the aforementioned theoretical concepts and principles, which informs this study, into three paradigms, each helping to understand the powers at play in the Canadian military intervention in Libya in 2011.

The Manufacturing Consent Paradigm

The manufacturing consent paradigm posits that the media deliver symbols and messages to the general public on behalf of the dominant elite and as such are an "ideological state apparatus."²⁶ The model is known as a propaganda model because the media are seen as promulgating the values, beliefs and views of the dominant economic and political elites.²⁷ Although this model is criticized for "short-circuit(ing) the complexities and dynamics of

²³ Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*. New York: Open University Press, 2006, p.3.

²⁴ Brian McNair, "Journalism and Democracy," in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.239.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.242.

²⁶ Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*. New York: Open University Press, 2006, pp.14-15.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp.14-15.

conflict-driven representation unfolding through time,”²⁸ it nonetheless brings value to this study as one of the forces a play. Indeed, as will be argued below, the Canadian media, as other western media, only turned their attention to the civil war in Libya when it befitted the political elite.

The Media Contest Paradigm

As opposed to the manufacturing consent paradigm, the media contest paradigm takes into account the complexities of the political and social environments and sees the media as an arena for power struggles and contestation.²⁹ In this view, different actors compete for media attention in order to influence the public. As will be argued below, the Canadian media led, and was an arena for, the political debates regarding the R2P in Libya.

The Media Culture Paradigm

The media culture paradigm also sets to challenge the media consent paradigm by examining the intricacies of popular culture and the ways in which media infuses identity and everyday life.³⁰ This paradigm looks at how society defines itself, and how it relates to others, as “an integral dimension of mediatised culture.”³¹ This paradigm allows the analysis of the Canadian military intervention to look at specific domestic elements such as Canadian values and ethical concerns.

BACKGROUND

In the 1980s, Colonel Ghaddafi was despised by the West for his connection with deadly attacks against France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States as well as his

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.19-20.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.20.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.25.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.26.

unsuccessful efforts in bringing the Arab world together against western states.³² However, wanting to avoid similar consequences as the Iraq invasion of 2003, Colonel Gadhafi terminated his chemical weapons programme and starting building closer international relationships, including closer ties with the West.³³ His regime was thought to be rehabilitated and a success story directly attributable to the war on terror.³⁴ The United States even supported his authoritarian regime, turning a blind eye to what was happening within Libya, in order to gain his support against Islamic fundamentalists such as al-Qaeda.³⁵ While some Middle East specialists were aware of discontent in the Arab world prior to the Arab Spring, they did not predict the uprising. Although they went unnoticed by the West for the most part, there were however signs of dissatisfaction in Libya, with regular protests starting in 2007 in Benghazi over the 1996 Abu Salim massacres as well as repressive domestic policies.³⁶ Nevertheless, when civil war erupted in Libya, the international community reacted, starting on 22 February 2011 with the Organisation of Islamic Conference public criticism of Colonel Gadhafi's actions and the suspension of Libya from the Arab League.³⁷ A few days later, the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 1970, which imposed an arms embargo on Libya, amongst other things, and, on 17 March 2011, passed Resolution 1973, imposing a no-fly zone over Libya as well as authorising any necessary actions to protect civilians.³⁸

To be sure, Resolution 1973 reopened the discussions regarding R2P, a concept which Canada had played a central role in developing. Although the UN charter protects the

³² Aidan Hehir, "Introduction: Libya and the Responsibility to Protect" In *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p.2.

³³ *Ibid*, p.2.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.2.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.3.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.4.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp.4-5.

sovereignty, inviolability and equality of states under Article 2.1,³⁹ there is an international understanding that there should be exceptions allowing for intervention.⁴⁰ As was reasoned in 1859 by philosopher and political theorist John Stuart Mill, “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.”⁴¹ However, there has been a historical ambivalent willingness to define those exceptions and to take action when necessary. Through the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), Canada took the lead in defining when the international community could violate a state’s sovereignty on humanitarian grounds. The first fundamental principal of the ICISS is that “state sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself.”⁴² However, if a state is unable or unwilling to protect its people, “the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.”⁴³ Although the ICISS had not been ratified yet by UN members, it is under this umbrella of moral responsibility that Canada intervened in Libya.

Thus, Operation MOBILE was the Canadian military participation in the international response to the crisis in Libya, starting on 25 February 2011 with an evacuation mission of non-combatants.⁴⁴ In March 2011, Operation MOBILE became a joint combat mission, with the first air sortie by CF-188 Hornet being flown on 21 March 2011 and the last on 31 October 2011, the

³⁹ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945.

⁴⁰ This international “understanding” is not universally accepted in all circumstances.

⁴¹ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, edited with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb, London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1974 (first published in 1859), p.68.

⁴² Canada, “Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS),” *The Responsibility to Protect*, Ottawa: International development Research Centre, 2001.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, “ARCHIVED – Operation MOBILE,” last accessed 9 April 2016, http://www.forces.gc.ca/sites/FORCES_Internet/operations-abroad-past/op-mobile.page

day the combat phase ended.⁴⁵ The R2P debates were reinitiated in Canada, although not by the governing party but rather by the other official parties and the media.

WHEN THE STATE LEADS THE MEDIA

Prior to the Arab Spring and the outbreak of civil war, western media, including Canadian media, paid little attention to the situation in Libya, although there were outbreaks of violence in Benghazi and even outright massacres. The attention paid to the conflict and violence in Libya was so negligible that even the International Crisis Group, a non-profit and non-governmental organisation that endeavours to prevent conflicts, was surprised by the eruption of violence in Libya.⁴⁶ According to journalists Jo Becker and Scott Shane, the American government deliberately ignored the violence in Libya because they worried about the outcome of Colonel Gadhafi losing control, which could impact the help he provided the United States in the fight against terrorism in North Africa.⁴⁷ They quoted a retired Army Lieutenant-General who said that “He [Colonel Gadhafi] was a thug in a dangerous neighborhood. But he was keeping order.”⁴⁸

This view was echoed by a 2010 Amnesty International report which alleged that despite events such as the killing of 1,200 prisoners at the Abu Salim Prison in 1996,⁴⁹ western states overlooked human rights abuses in Libya in order to advance their own agendas:

⁴⁵ Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, “ARCHIVED – Operation MOBILE: Mission Metrics,” last accessed 9 April 2016, http://www.forces.gc.ca/sites/FORCES_Internet/operations-abroad-past/op-mobile-metrics.page

⁴⁶ Alex Bellamy quoted in Aidan Hehir, “Introduction: Libya and the Responsibility to Protect” In *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMilan, 2013, p.4.

⁴⁷ Jo Becker and Scott Shane, “The Libya Gamble Part 1: Hillary Clinton, ‘Smart Power’ and a Dictator’s Fall,” in *The New York Times*, 27 February 2016.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Amnesty International. *‘Libya of Tomorrow’: What Hope for Human Rights?* London: Amnesty International Publications, 2010, p.68.

The slow pace of domestic reform contrasts sharply with Libya's increased visibility on the international scene and prompts fears that members of the EU and the USA, rather than using the opportunity to encourage reforms, are turning a blind eye to the human rights situation in order to further their national interests, which include cooperation in counter-terrorism, the control of irregular migration, trade and other economic benefits.⁵⁰

Clearly, western states led media attention away from the intra-state violence in Libya in order to pursue their own agendas and interests. The lack of media attention to the situation in Libya prior to the Arab Spring and the outbreak of civil war, which accommodated western states, is thus a strong argument for the Manufacturing Consent Paradigm.

In the same vein, the state continued influencing the media by deciding when and how the conflict would be depicted. In Canada, at the beginning of conflict, the government was able to get public support for its decisions and actions by focusing media attention on exactly those matters that had been overlooked in the past. According to Kim Richard Nossal, "it was relatively easy to re-demonize both Gaddafi and his regime simply by recalling a string of past misdeeds."⁵¹ These comprised mostly of offences against the West, including the shooting of a British police officer by a sniper operating from the Libyan Embassy in London in 1984; the bombing of a night club in Berlin in 1986; as well as the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Scotland in 1988.⁵² The state's vilification of Colonel Ghadafi seamlessly transferred to the media's portrayal of the man, his troops and his regime.

In fact, an analysis of 25 randomly selected Canadian major daily regional and national newspaper articles, both comment and hard news, found that the media portrayed Colonel Gadhafi, his regime and their actions against the rebels in Libya in a negative light. With regards

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.9.

⁵¹ Kim Richard Nossal, "The Use – and Misuse – of R2P: The Case of Canada" In *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMilan, 2013, p.110.

⁵² *Ibid*, p.110.

to Colonel Gadhafi, the following terminology was employed: “the erratic 69-year-old leader;” a “rogue leader;” Gadhafi’s “iron fist;” a “delusional dictator;” a “maniac [journalist quoting rebels];” a “defiant” leader; a “tyrant;” a “particularly loathsome specimen;” a “killer colonel;” and an “erratic dictator.”⁵³ Similar language was used to portray Colonel Gadhafi’s troops and regime: “Gadhafi’s ruthless troops;” the “most brutal of regimes;” and “Col. Gadhafi’s henchmen.”⁵⁴ Likewise, the violence was described with emotionally charged epithets: “revolting violence;” the “fear of massacre;” the “atrocities;” the “menace génocidaire;” the “scenes of desperation;” and a “brutal, horrific civil war.”⁵⁵ Even when critics, such as former chief of staff to Liberal Ministers of National Defence, Eugene Lang, and former Canadian diplomat, Eric Clark, argue that there are inconsistencies in the Canadian government’s decisions to get involved in some conflicts and not others, they still frame the situation in Libya in a way that legitimises the intervention. Indeed, they refer to Colonel Gadhafi as a “tyrant” whose “word is worthless” and depict the situation in Libya as a “bloodbath.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Timothy Garton Ash, “How to intervene in Libya?” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 March 2011; Murray Brewster, “Canadian warship off to Libya; Frigate to provide relief, rescue, possible military action,” *Kamloops Daily News*, 2 March 2011; Clark Campbell, “Canada prepared to impose its own sanctions against Libya, PM says,” *The Globe and Mail*, 26 February 2011; Clark Campbell, “Cracks showing in NATO’s Libya strategy,” *The Globe and Mail*, 23 June 2011; Clark Campbell, “Harper vows to stick it out with NATO in Libya,” *The Globe and Mail*, 2 September 2011; George Jonas, “Worse than Gaddafi?” *National Post*, 24 August 2011; Mitch Potter, “Gadhafi vows to ‘cleanse’ Libya,” *Toronto Star*, 23 February, 2011; and Graeme Smith, “UN Libya resolution echoes Canadian-inspired concept,” *The Globe and Mail*, 19 March 2011.

⁵⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, “How to intervene in Libya?” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 March 2011; and Paul Koring, “Limited military options all loaded with risks,” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 March 2011.

⁵⁵ Clark Campbell, “Canada prepared to impose its own sanctions against Libya, PM says,” *The Globe and Mail*, 26 February 2011; Isabelle Hachey et Laura-Julie Perreault, « Pour ou contre l’intervention en Libye? » *La Presse*, 22 mars 2011; Graeme Smith, “Locals fear trick in Gadhafi’s offer of safe passage,” *The Globe and Mail*, 19 April 2011; Adam Taylor, “Situation in Libya could have broader regional effects,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 August 2014; and Geoffrey York, “The world debates a response to ‘revolting’ violence,” *The Globe and Mail*, 24 February 2011.

⁵⁶ Eugene Lang and Eric Morse, “Intervention in Libya: Justice and inconsistency,” *Toronto Star*, 16 June 2011.

Certainly, very few would argue that Colonel Gadhafi was not a brutal, erratic tyrant. However, journalistic objectivity requires information to be reported in a factual, balanced and neutral manner.⁵⁷ The media is expected to act as a vehicle, or transmitter, of unbiased information in order for audiences to make their own judgements on the issues presented.⁵⁸ Therefore, the journalists' role was not to qualify the type of leader Gadhafi was but rather to describe events using neutral terminology and letting audiences come to the conclusion that he was an erratic, brutal tyrant on their own. For example, by quoting Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard, journalist Clark Campbell simply relayed how Colonel Gadhafi's regime was blocking aid and how he was hiding in hospitals and mosques, allowing audiences to make their own judgements about Colonel Gadhafi's character.⁵⁹

Thus the government, aided by the media, depicted the conflict in an emotional manner in order to garner public support for an intervention and justify the military's operation in Libya. Academic Howard Tumber argues that media coverage of 'our wars,' meaning wars where we have troops committed fighting alongside our allies, calls out to the public's emotional involvement as opposed to the coverage of 'other people's wars,' which is more detached.⁶⁰ With regards to an intervention in Libya, the Canadian media were willing to go along with the government's objective of selling the war to the public for their own interests because, as stated by Tumber, "conflict sells and the emphasis on violence, and simplification of the conflict, increases the value of the commodity."⁶¹ Therefore, although the state led the media's attention –

⁵⁷ Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, 6th Edition, London: Sage, 2010, pp.201-201.

⁵⁸ John Hartley, *Communication, Culture and Media Studies – The Key Concepts, Fourth Edition*, Abington: Routledge, 2011, p.191.

⁵⁹ Clark Campbell, "Cracks showing in NATO's Libya strategy," *The Globe and Mail*, 23 June 2011.

⁶⁰ Howard Tumber, "Covering War and Peace," in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.387.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.396.

in the first instance *away from* the situation in Libya because it needed Colonel Gadhafi's support on the war on terror and in the second instance *on* the Libyan state of affairs and the necessity of intervention – the media also profited from the exchange. Later, the Benghazi email scandal would however see the media revert to a more investigative and pugnacious role when the United States administration was perceived to want to frame the attack on their diplomatic mission in 2012 in a misleading way. The complexity of the relationship between the state and the media is therefore best described as competitive symbiosis.

WHEN THE MEDIA SETS THE AGENDA

In the recent past, analysts have tended to argue that the media's influence in conflict settings is growing. In 1994, while he was the UN Under-Secretary for Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan remarked:

From Ethiopia onward, the role of the media took an entirely new tack. The target of reporting shifted from objectivity to sympathy, from sustaining intellectual commitment to engaging emotional involvement... It sometimes seemed that the media was no longer reporting on the agenda, but setting it.⁶²

Academic Alan Kuperman went as far as blaming the media for the genocide in Rwanda:

Western media blame the international community for not intervening quickly, but the media must share blame for not immediately recognizing the extent of the carnage and mobilizing world attention to it.⁶³

Just as the media were criticized for not bringing enough attention to the situation in Rwanda, media were also criticised, in some circles, for mobilising too much of the international community's attention on the conflict in Kosovo. In an article written for the *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, academic Virgil Hawkins illustrates such criticism of media frames:

⁶² Kofi Annan, "Peace-keeping in Situations of Civil War," in *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*, Vol. 26, 1994, p.624.

⁶³ Alan Kuperman, "How Media Missed Rwandan Genocide," in *IPI Report*, Vol. 6, No. 1, First Quarter, 2000, p.11.

In 1998 and 1999, the media seized upon a small-scale low-intensity conflict in Kosovo, portraying it as a major conflict through a ‘morality play’ lens, with the Yugoslav Government (or more specifically President Milosevic) as the evil party, and the Albanian population as victim. This was despite the fact that roughly half of the estimated 2,000 people killed in the 2 years prior to NATO intervention were Serbian, many of whom were the victims of attacks by the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a group recognised even in the US as a terrorist group. While it was true that the Serb crackdown on the Albanian insurgency was heavy-handed, Albanian methods were equally violent, and the conflict certainly did not fit the oversimplified good versus evil frame that the media had created for it.⁶⁴

In the Libyan case study, an important question regarding the impetus for international intervention remains. Although the Arab Spring and the ensuing civil war in Libya certainly explain the motivations, what was the trigger? In an interview with Becker and Shane, a United States State Department aide revealed that American officials were relying on reports from the media because they “did not have a particularly good handle on what was going on inside Libya.”⁶⁵ However, the media grossly overestimated the number of protestors killed just before the intervention. There were media reports of thousands of victims whereas Human Rights Watch only counted about 350 protestors killed prior to the intervention.⁶⁶ One could therefore speculate that the United States and the international community acted on false information. However, according to Becker and Shane, the reality was that “inside the Obama administration, few doubted that Colonel Qaddafi would do what it took to remain in power.”⁶⁷ The western states decided to intervene and were responsible for leading the media’s attention on the situation in Libya, as seen in the previous section. The media’s overestimations of casualties did however serve to shape the western publics’ perception of the conflict. The media were no doubt reporting numbers that were provided by the rebels, which led Kuperman to warn against propaganda:

⁶⁴ Virgil Hawkins, “The Price of Inaction: The Media and Humanitarian Intervention,” in *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, Tufts University: 14 May 2001, <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1504>

⁶⁵ Jo Becker and Scott Shane, “The Libya Gamble Part 1: Hillary Clinton, ‘Smart Power’ and a Dictator’s Fall,” in *The New York Times*, 27 February 2016.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

“beware [of] rebel propaganda that seeks intervention by falsely crying genocide.”⁶⁸

Nonetheless, the fact that the rebels’ plight was heard through the media and had such a significant impact on the international community is an argument for the Media Contest Paradigm.

Cottle contends that the fact that protests and demonstrations have been ‘demonstrated’ through the media is not new and points to the movements led by the suffragettes, Gandhi and Martin Luther King as examples.⁶⁹ He argues however that “what is unprecedented is the extent to which protests and demonstration today have become reflexively conditioned by their pursuit of media attention.”⁷⁰ Through media, protestors – or rebels in the case of Libya – gather wider support for their cause and gain legitimacy.⁷¹ Therefore, by displaying the situation in Benghazi in a manner that exaggerated the killings of protestors, who were in fact rebels, the media promoted their cause.

To be sure, how the media framed the conflict – how they highlighted the predicament, the views and grievances of the rebels – was all essential to what Cottle calls the “politics of dissent.”⁷² Wolfsfeld would add that the transactions between the rebels, who were attempting to promote their own side of the conflict, and the media, who were trying to piece together a story that was comprehensible to their audiences, were more than a business deal but a “set of cultural interactions.”⁷³ These interactions produced media frames, which in turn contributed to the social

⁶⁸ Alan Kuperman, "Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene," Policy Brief at the *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, Harvard Kennedy School, September 2013.

⁶⁹ Simon Cottle, “Reporting Demonstrations: The Changing Media Politics of Dissent,” in *Media Culture & Society*, Sage Publication, November 2008, p.863.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.863.

⁷¹ *Ibid* p.863.

⁷² *Ibid*, p.854.

⁷³ Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.31.

construction of the reality.⁷⁴ The continuous depiction of the violence could be viewed as one of the frames by which media constructed the reality. Cottle highlights the fact that “western media routinely self-censor red meat images of body horror on grounds of taste and decency.”⁷⁵

However, audiences now have access to a wide array of sources that may or may not accept the traditional, western media self-imposed code of ethics. Moreover, political activist Susan Sontag argues that although images of mutilated bodies can bring about opposing responses in audiences from “a call for peace to “a call for revenge,” they can be utilized “to vivify the condemnation of war.”⁷⁶

Consequently, as academic Fred Vultee argues, “(...) public opinion can be manipulated by securitizing or desecuritizing news accounts.”⁷⁷ Under the constructivism school of thought, and with the works of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, the Copenhagen School first introduced the notions of securitisation and desecuritisation in the international relations studies.⁷⁸ Expanding on the definition provided by the Copenhagen School of constructivism, political scientist Matt MacDonald provides the following definition to securitisation: “A process in which an actor declares a particular issue, dynamic or actor to be an ‘existential threat’ to a particular referent object.”⁷⁹ Given this definition, it can therefore be argued that the media

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.32.

⁷⁵ Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*, New York: Open University Press, 2006, p.95.

⁷⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003, pp.11-13.

⁷⁷ Fred Vultee, “Securitization as a Media Frame: What Happens When the Media Speak Security,” in *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, edited by Thierry Balzacq, New York: Routledge, 2011, p.77.

⁷⁸ Ralf Emmers, “Securitisation,” in *Contemporary Security Studies, 3rd Edition*, edited by Alan Collins, Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.131.

⁷⁹ Matt McDonald, “Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” in *Approaches to International Relations: Volume II*, edited by Stephen Chan and Cerwyn Moore, Los Angeles, California: SAGE, 2009, p.72.

helped securitise the situation in Libya by framing the conflict with violent images and emotionally-charged terminology.

The starting point to securitisation, according to the Copenhagen School, is the speech act, by which “an issue can become a security question through the speech act alone, irrespective of whether the concern represents an existential threat in material terms.”⁸⁰ The speech act thus give media the power to convince audiences of the existence of a threat by using, repetitively, language and images associated with security. In the case of Libya, the overestimation of casualties coupled with the terminology formed a speech act contributing to the construction of a reality where an existential threat existed.

Interestingly, Prime Minister Harper’s conservative government never referred to the intervention in Libya as R2P given that the doctrine was part of the liberal government’s legacy.⁸¹ Moreover, although numerous scholars have argues that the intervention in Libya was not a case of R2P, the terminology was utilised politically by the other parties as well as by the media, thus becoming part of the speech act and impacting the norm consolidation process.⁸² Newspaper articles, both news and comment pieces, brought to the public space the conversation about R2P, at times drawing parallels between the conflict in Libya and the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia.⁸³ The media therefore had a role in securitised the conflict in

⁸⁰ Ralf Emmers, “Securitisation,” in *Contemporary Security Studies, 3rd Edition*, edited by Alan Collins, Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.134.

⁸¹ Kim Richard Nossal, “The Use – and Misuse – of R2P: The Case of Canada” In *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention* edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMilan, 2013, p.136.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.111.

⁸³ Timothy Garton Ash, “How to intervene in Libya?” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 March 2011; Alice Musabende, “Why Libya, not Rwanda,” *The Globe and Mail*. 31 March 2011; Graeme Smith, “UN Libya resolution echoes Canadian-inspired concept,” *The Globe and Mail*, 19 March 2011; Ramesh Thakur, “Why the international community is powerless with Libya,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 10 March 2011; Margaret Wentze, “Blame R2P: The

Libya and framing it as R2P, a concept closely related to Canadian values, thus making a case for the Media Culture Paradigm.

COMPETITIVE SYMBIOSIS – TO WHO’S BENEFIT?

To be sure, the relationship between the media and the state, as seen in the sections above, is best defined as a competitive symbiosis in which both parties maximise their returns from the relationship. However, this arrangement undermines the normative function of the media. For how can an audience be well informed when it does not receive balanced and fulsome information? The Canadian intervention in Libya is a case in point. The state focused media attention on the mounting violence in Libya at a time that best suited it and the media framed the situation in a certain manner for its audience, securitising the situation. The media mostly went along with the government, which touted the operation as a success, and newspaper comments echoed the wave of optimism. For instance, the *National Post* reprinted the *New York Times*’ column by Nicholas D. Kristof, in which he wrote: “The mood in Tripoli seems largely tolerant and forgiving, and exuberant about the prospect of democracy.”⁸⁴ Even when the media mentioned R2P, it neglected to address other key components of the doctrine such as the responsibility to prevent and the responsibility to rebuild.⁸⁵ Absent was the debate on those responsibilities from the long-form journalistic pieces. Also absent was the debate on whether regime change is a necessary requirement of R2P.

Scholars filled the void. Political scientist Alexander Downes launched a debate within academia regarding the feasibility and viability of regime change in which he concluded that

Intellectuals go to war,” *Globe and Mail*, 26 March 2011; Geoffrey York, “The world debates a response to ‘revolting’ violence,” *The Globe and Mail*, 24 February 2011.

⁸⁴ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Hope for Libya’s future; The rebels, while inexperienced, have shown mercy to Gaddafi loyalists and are grateful for the West’s military assistance,” *National Post*, 12 September 2011.

⁸⁵ Canada, “Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS),” *The Responsibility to Protect*. Ottawa: International development Research Centre, 2001.

“getting the international community to intervene for humanitarian reasons is difficult enough. Regime change, in most cases, is probably a bridge too far.”⁸⁶ Academic Mary Kaldor responded that regime change needs to occur non-violently and that, in the case of Libya, airstrikes only served to “escalate the use of force and intensify political polarization.”⁸⁷ In contrast to this academic debate, the issues regarding regime change and the Canadian involvement in Libya were not questioned by the mainstream media at the time.

Kuperman argued that as opposed to most of the western media’s reporting of the first days of the uprising in Benghazi in 2011, many of the Libyan protestors were violent and armed whereas Colonel Gadhafi’s forces initially responded with non-lethal force.⁸⁸ As well, Kuperman proposed that while the government forces did eventually respond with force to the rebels, they did not use indiscriminate force or target civilians, as was reported by western media.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Kuperman argues that “the evidence shows that NATO’s primary aim had become to overthrow Gaddafi’s regime, even at the expense of increasing harm to Libya’s civilians.”⁹⁰ Had western media reported these facts, as presented by Kuperman, would the intervention have been legitimised in the same way? Where the media complicit in supporting western governments’ objectives? In the end, Kuperman believes the intervention backfired: the conflict lasted six times as long as it would have had otherwise; it worsened human rights abuses and increased suffering; and it contributed to Islamic radicalisation and proliferation of weapons in

⁸⁶ Alexander B. Downes, “Regime Change Doesn’t Work” Debate, *Boston Review*, 11 September 2011, <https://bostonreview.net/downes-regime-change>.

⁸⁷ Mary Kaldor, “Regime Change Doesn’t Work” Forum, *Boston Review*, 12 September 2011, <https://bostonreview.net/kaldor-peaceful-regime-change>.

⁸⁸ Alan J. Kuperman, “NATO’s Intervention in Libya: A Humanitarian Success?” In *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMilan, 2013, p.193.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.195.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.197.

the area.⁹¹ Kuperman also asks the following question: “whether these Libyan militants would have dared to challenge Gaddafi without the expectation of NATO support.”⁹² Journalistic interviews with Libyan rebels could potentially have shed light on this fundamental question. Was the West unwilling or unprepared to hear the answer?

CONCLUSION

Through a case study of the Canadian military intervention in Libya, this paper presented the view that the media does not always lead, nor does it always follow. Rather, it was argued that the media is involved in a complex relationship with the state, one that is both competitive and symbiotic, with each actor endeavouring to maximise what they get from the relationship. To be sure, the media profit even when following the state’s lead. In the Libyan case, western states, including Canada, seemed to have been the lead in so far as they decided when the conflict would be depicted to their national audiences. However, the media had noteworthy informational power in the ways in which the conflict was framed and securitised. Furthermore, in Canada, the media was a forum for the reopening of the R2P debate, a terminology that was not favoured by the governing party.

The study found that the media speech act was indeed influential and may even impact future decisions with regards to military interventions on the grounds of R2P. In a similar study, using a Critical Discourse Analysis framework to analyse British and international media coverage of the Libyan conflict, Andreea Varga found that:

⁹¹ Alan J. Kuperman, "Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene," Policy Brief at the *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, Harvard Kennedy School, September 2013.

⁹² Alan J. Kuperman, “NATO’s Intervention in Libya: A Humanitarian Success?” In *Libya: The Responsibility to Protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMilan, 2013, p.193, p.208.

(...) the role of the media is rather perspicuous in subversively rendering a distorted perception of reality, manipulating the readership into adhering to the ideology of Western superiority and its panacea interventions (...), invoking human rights as a pretext, and enciphering the financial motivation to intervene in Libya within the language structures.⁹³

Varga's conclusions can also be explained by the competitive symbiosis thesis. The Canadian and British state-media relationships are thus undermining the normative function of the media, which in turn threatens the very essence of democracy. Social media may be the lifeline for civil society insofar as propaganda does not succeed in dominating the discourse.

⁹³ Andreea Varga, "Discourse of Globalisation: A Case Study on the Libyan Conflict," in *Academic Days of Timișoara: Language Education Today*, edited by Georgeta Rață, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, p.121.

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