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European Journal of Communication 2010 25: 59

DOI: 10.1177/0267323109354226

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European Journal of Communication
25(1) 59–68

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DOI: 10.1177/0267323109354226

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Abstract

Our social consciousness reserves the role of fighter solely for men. Women are not considered as being authoritative or decisive actors in the context of war and violence. During armed conflicts or other violent crises, female *acting subjects* seem to leave the public (i.e. media) stage – a place where they are underrepresented even under normal circumstances. Furthermore, media coverage of war, it is said, largely assigns the role of the victim to women. However, there is not much *empirical* evidence to support this view due to the significant lack of longitudinal quantitative studies on media coverage of women during wartime. In order to investigate this, a *framing* analysis of media coverage of war between 1989 and 2000 was conducted in Germany. This article reports on the results of this framing analysis and the representation of women during wartime in quality German newspapers. It is the first longitudinal gender-specific framing analysis of war coverage ever carried out in any country.

Keywords

framing analysis, war coverage, women and violence, women and war

Introduction

Gender is a socially constructed category which produces asymmetries and differences and which determines the distribution of power between men and women. One can assume that the media play a significant part in the construction of gender roles. Media coverage of war is no exception to this, all the more since gender has played a central role

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in the media's coverage and promotion of war (e.g. Enloe, 1994, 2000a, 2000b; Rabinovitz, 1994; Wiegman, 1994). Turpin (1998: 15) assumes that gender-stereotypical media reports become particularly recognizable in war coverage. However, in the context of war and violence, women hardly seem to be present as significant actors in the public consciousness. It would seem that they are left to play the role of the victim (Fröhlich, 2000; Tuchman, 1979). An impressionistic observation assumes that men are somewhat expectedly depicted as active participants in war. Women, instead, are portrayed as people who disapprove of military and violent confrontations, and who act peacefully and are made to suffer during wartime (e.g. Elsthain, 1987; Enloe, 1994).

Theoretical reflections claim the following: in order to legitimize war, the military and political decision-makers foster and exploit the image of the peaceful yet weak and powerless woman in need of protection, as well as the image of the strong and powerful man, who is principally willing to go to war and protect and defend women, children and the elderly (e. g. del Zotto, 2002; Fröhlich, 2002; Stabile and Kumar, 2005). The accusation therefore stands: gender-stereotypical war coverage essentially reduces the experiences of women during war to an emotionalizing function of women, who are in turn supposed to give war coverage an 'affective impulse'. However, until now this question has not been investigated empirically in a *broad* and *representative* way.

Research focus and methodology

Although in the Anglo-American communication science field several empirical content analyses of war coverage have been carried out (e.g. Aulich, 1992; Bennet and Paletz, 1994; Zelizer, 1992), gender-specific questions have rarely been part of the quantitative content analyses. Hence, our project attempted to generate the first reliable empirical data for a gender perspective on the basis of a *broad longitudinal* framing analysis.

The data presented in this contribution stem from a longitudinal framing analysis of German newspaper coverage of international wars (event-centred coverage) and coverage of the German federal security and defence policy (discourse-centred coverage) between 1 January 1989 and 31 December 2000.¹ The analysis rests on the following definition of 'war':

War is a conflict which (1) at least once within the given research period meets all of the following criteria: (2) a mass conflict which is settled by at least two armed forces (official/regular troops, no paramilitary units or police forces) (3) at gunpoint, in the course of which the respective violence must be more than just sporadic, spontaneous, or isolated.

For 'German security and defence policy', the following definition was developed:

German federal security and defence policy comprises the following measures for the (1) protection of German citizens: all measures related to (2) the military in the (3) national sphere, within the scope of (4) international alliances, organizations and any systems of mutual collective security including activities of (5) peacekeeping and measures to cope with crises and to prevent conflicts. It also includes activities of (6) total defence in regard to the (7) official German armed forces.

The news sample came from the political sections of Germany's two most respected daily newspapers, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ). They are considered 'opinion leaders' among German media in general. In total, 10,104 articles on international wars and 3193 articles on the German federal security and

defence policy ($N = 13,297$ articles) were identified and analysed.² Apart from categories measuring the thematic framing of German war coverage in general, we also built categories that measured the framing of the ‘protagonists’ mentioned within the respective coverage. As ‘protagonists’ we considered individual persons as well as anonymous groups of people. The category ‘protagonists’ allowed for two further specifications: (1) ‘actor(s)’ and (2) ‘affected person(s)/victim(s)’. For each actor and each affected person/victim, the respective gender,³ nationality and actual performing role⁴ was identified. We also identified the respective type of war⁵ and the region where the war took place. The analysis also ascertained whether and how the respective protagonists were explicitly characterized with descriptions beyond simple demographic information. We conducted three tests of intercoder reliability.⁶ The mean of the intercoder reliability was .91, which represents a very good result.

Results

Only 2 percent or 249 of all actors ($n = 12,435$) and 1 percent or 96 of all victims ($n = 9601$) were women or girls in the media coverage analysed. At least on this broad level, the general assumption that women are being marginalized in war coverage is confirmed for the time being. In the following, we concentrate on the sample of news coverage of international wars. Table 1 shows the annual proportions of gender terms for topics related to war.

In almost all cases, gender-neutral terms dominated in both groups. However, the proportion of neutral descriptions is significantly lower in 1993, which is in favour of male descriptions. This partly also applies to 1999. How come? This development can most likely be attributed to the media coverage of the wars in former Yugoslavia.⁷ In 1993, German federal armed forces participated in the airlift into the besieged city of Sarajevo and in the monitoring of the no-fly zone above Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1999, the Federal Republic of Germany actively intervened in the military confrontations in Kosovo. Both military commitments reveal in the German media coverage a more individualized portrayal of the subjects involved. Here the perpetrators and the victims are given an identifiable face. Hence, the respective media coverage seems to be rather characterized through case examples or by an ‘episodic framing’ (Iyengar, 1991). This lends a greater power to convincing the audience and creates emotional involvement, which, in turn, can lead to a greater acceptance of the military intervention. However, considering that until now it has always been argued that *female victims* were instrumental in legitimizing the entry of NATO and the European community into the war in former Yugoslavia, it is certainly rather surprising that in the years 1993 and 1999 hardly any changes occurred in the proportions of coverage given to the female persons affected.

In view of the fact that in the 1990s women were playing a more active role in the armed forces, not only in the US but also in Germany, it would seem plausible that this would be reflected in the coverage through a terminology that includes both sexes, such as ‘male and female soldiers’. Thus, it is surprising that women as actors or as affected persons do not receive more mention in the coverage as members of the army (less than 0.5 percent) (Table 2). One might have assumed that their ‘exotic status’ in the army would have given them a certain news value. Instead, a very small proportion of women are mentioned in the role of ‘acting politician’.

Table 1. Annual proportions of gender terms in topics related to war in FAZ and SZ, 1989–2000 (line percentages)

Proportions	Actors (line percentages)			Affected (line percentages)		
	Man, boy (n = 444) (%)	Woman, girl (n = 135) (%)	Gender-neutral (n = 4988) (%)	Man, boy (n = 2216) (%)	Woman, girl (n = 78) (%)	Gender-neutral (n = 5160) (%)
1989	33	x	67	18	–	82
1990	45	1	55	21	1	78
1991	42	1	57	18	x	82
1992	34	1	65	23	2	74
1993	69	1	30	47	1	52
1994	48	2	50	32	2	66
1995	40	1	59	24	1	75
1996	43	1	55	29	1	70
1997	46	3	51	38	1	61
1998	43	2	55	30	1	69
1999	52	2	46	32	1	66
2000	45	3	52	35	1	63

Note: Due to the sampling design, which includes all possible cases, no significance tests were conducted. Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.
 Basis: All topics related to war that depict an actor or person affected.
 x: Less than 0.5 percent.

Table 2. Gender terms in topics related to war in FAZ and SZ, 1989–2000 (proportions)

Proportions ^a	Abstract (%)		International		National		Army (%)	Rebels (%)	Civilians (%)	Others (%)
	(n = 114)	(n = 779)	UN (%)	Others (%)	Politicians (%)	Others (%)				
Actors	(n = 114)	(n = 779)	(n = 3368)	(n = 1876)	(n = 1081)	(n = 374)	(n = 12)			
Man, boy	26	40	60	46	37	6	39			
Women, girl	–	3	2	x	x	2	1			
Both sexes	–	–	x	–	x	1	x			
Gender-neutral	74	57	38	54	63	91	60			
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100			
Affected/victims	(n = 168)	(n = 358)	(n = 2107)	(n = 1280)	(n = 865)	(n = 1616)	(n = 253)			
Man, boy	17	33	43	41	32	5	28			
Woman, girl	2	1	2	x	x	2	x			
Both sexes	1	x	–	–	x	2	x			
Gender-neutral	80	66	56	59	67	91	71			
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100			

Note: Due to the sampling design, which includes all possible cases, no significance tests were conducted. Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.
 Basis: All topics related to war that treat an actor or person affected.

^a Cases in which no definite actor or person affected could be identified are not included.

x: Less than 0.5 percent.

Table 3. Gender terms for actors and victims according to war type and war region in FAZ and SZ, 1989–2000

Proportions	Actors			Affected		
	Man, boy (n = 4410) (%)	Woman, girl (n = 135) (%)	Gender-neutral (n = 4988) (%)	Man, boy (n = 2216) (%)	Woman, girl (n = 78) (%)	Gender-neutral (n = 5160) (%)
Type of war						
Autonomy	62	79	70	64	74	59
Inter-state	15	10	10	13	9	16
Anti-regime	22	10	20	23	15	24
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
War region						
The Balkans	37	37	35	38	45	35
The Middle, Far East	38	24	33	36	19	36
Africa	15	7	17	15	5	16
Asia	6	28	8	6	21	8
South America	3	2	4	3	1	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Due to the sampling design which includes all possible cases, no significance tests were conducted. Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.
Basis: All topics related to war that treat an actor or person affected.

Table 4. Characterization of actors and persons affected in all topics (war and security/defence policy) in FAZ and SZ, 1989–2000 (proportions)

	Man, boy		Woman, girl	
	Actors (n = 1116) (%)	Affected (n = 706) (%)	Actors (n = 191) (%)	Affected (n = 31) (%)
Perpetrator, of which...	29	28	3	7
... Beast	5	5	–	–
... Aggressor (male/female)	18	5	3	3
... War criminal	5	17	–	3
Victim, of which ...	5	36	6	77
... Dead (male/female)	3	20	–	26
... Displaced (male/female)	x	2	–	7
... Raped (male/female)	–	–	3	35
War-related characteristic, of which...	26	13	25	3
... Peacemaker (male/female)	6	2	16	–
... Diplomat (male/female)	10	1	6	–
Nation, religion (patriot, fanatic...)	6	6	3	–
Politics, state (statesperson, hardliner, doer...)	15	9	19	10
Power (imperialist, world policeman, powerful person...)	7	7	–	–
Conscience (doubter, moralist, pacifist...)	9	1	25	–
Help (humanitarian helper, saviour...)	4	2	19	3
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: Due to the sampling design, which includes all possible cases, no significance tests were conducted. Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.

Basis: All topics that treat an actor or person affected.

^a Cases in which no definite actor or person affected could be identified are not included.

x: Less than 0.5 percent.

The quality papers *FAZ* and *SZ* mention civilians generally as an ‘amorphous mass’ and do not break away from the, on the whole, rather anonymous and superficially individualized portrayal of civilians. Gender-neutral terms are used most frequently (by far) with respect to civilians – this applies to civilian actors as well as to civilian victims (91 percent each).

Table 3 allows a more detailed look at the portrayal of women in war coverage as compared to the men or non-specified subjects and displays the relevant results for gender terms according to war types and war regions. Noticeably, the largest proportion of women is for wars for autonomy: 79 percent of the actors who are explicitly described as female and 74 percent of the females *affected* occur in this context. Interesting results also occur with respect to the region of the war. First, considering wars in Asia, the two newspapers *in relative terms* exhibit women more often than men. Second, considering wars in the Balkans region, there is a tendency to portray women much more often in the role of victim than is the case in the coverage of wars in other regions of the world.

Further explanations could be provided by the *explicit* characterizations (frames) which were coded for the persons mentioned (Table 4). Due to the low number of characterization cases for female actors and victims within the war coverage sample, we have added to the analysis here the coverage on security and defence. At a first glance, the ‘prime role’ of females is revealed here: that of the victim as a particular category of affected person (77 percent).

However – and this again puts the result into perspective – the characterization as a *victim* is also the dominant characteristic among male persons affected (36 percent). Moreover, it should be pointed out that among people characterized, female persons affected constitute a drastic minority compared with individually characterized female actors ($n = 31$ vs $n = 191$) and with male persons affected ($n = 31$ vs $n = 706$). Among *actors* characterized, the ‘prime roles’ of females as particular forms of actor are the peacemaker and diplomat (25 percent) as well as the doubter, moralist and pacifist (25 percent).

Summary and conclusion

The most important result of this analysis contributing to the gender perspective is the (still) *prevalent dramatic marginalization of women in media coverage of war*. And our longitudinal analysis does not show any positive trend between 1989 and 2000 in this respect. At least this is true for the German quality newspapers’ coverage. This (ongoing) marginalization might have a simple explanation: a gendered ‘unofficial/official’ news source dichotomy. As del Zotto (2002: 148) wrote in her study of media representations of the war in Kosovo, ‘the “unofficial/official” news source dichotomy is gendered because so much of women’s political agency is conducted through “non-official” channels’.

At first glance, the study also confirms previous assumptions concerning the dominant role of women in war coverage as *victim*. This role dominates among the characterizations of female *persons affected*. However, since this also applies to male persons affected, this study, on the other hand, also puts the previous assumptions into perspective: (1) female *persons affected* constitute a drastic minority compared with female *actors*; and (2) while the range of ‘prime roles’ of and characterizations for females affected is significantly narrower than for males affected, this range is significantly wider

for female actors compared to male actors (see Table 4). If at all, the *acting* female politician or diplomat as well as the *acting* doubter, moralist and pacifist are generally the dominating roles of women in war coverage.

The main result, namely the drastic marginalization of female subjects in war coverage, has an unpleasant side effect for the quantitative analysis of the data in general. Since the number of cases of female subjects ('actors' as well as 'persons affected') is low in total, quantitative data analyses are a problem when the data are not collected within a *longitudinal* study or on the basis of a *complete inventory count*. Furthermore, future studies should be supplemented with qualitative analysis.

Notes

1. The two-year project (summer 2001–summer 2003) was funded by the national German Research Foundation (DFG reference number: FR 976/7-1).
2. We did not build samples; therefore, statistical significance tests are not necessary.
3. Besides 'male' and 'female', 'gender-neutral' terms (e.g. 'the refugees suffered from . . .', 'the volunteers helped with . . .' or 'the troops moved . . .') and 'both sexes' (e.g. 'all inhabitants, women and men, fled . . .') were identified.
4. International: 'UN', 'other than UN'; national: 'politician(s)', 'army', 'rebel(s)' and 'civilian(s)'.
5. Autonomy, inter-state, anti-regime.
6. The test included all formal variables as well as an appropriate selection of content-related variables.
7. In fact, 56 percent of all topics in war coverage of that year were concerned with those conflicts.

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