Libya, The New York Times, and a Propaganda Model of the Mass Media

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LIBYA, THE NEW YORK TIMES, AND A PROPAGANDA MODEL OF THE MASS MEDIA

by

Randy LaPrairie

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Sociology
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This project derives a set of research expectations from the propaganda model, a structural model of the corporate news media developed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. The model predicts that the news media will reflect elite views and priorities and marginalize views outside the range of elite opinion. Consequently, it is expected that the media will tend to support the elite’s preferred modes of exercising state power in international affairs. This often entails demonizing official enemies of the United States in order to justify military interventions while downplaying the crimes of the United States and its allies. To see how well these expectations are borne out in recent times, I apply discourse and content analysis to a sample of the *New York Times*’ coverage of Libya in the weeks preceding the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya. Three research expectations are presented: Coverage will mirror the U.S. government story line, conforming to the tenets of American exceptionalism; Muammar Gaddafi will be demonized, the nature and extent of his crimes will be exaggerated; Gaddafi’s victims will receive extensive, sympathetic coverage, while black Libyan victims of the anti-Gaddafi opposition will be marginalized. The analysis of *New York Times* articles on Libya from February 15 to March 19, 2011, shows that the research expectations are met, providing empirical support for the propaganda model.
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Wenn getanzt wird will ich führen
auch wenn ihr euch alleine dreht
Lasst euch ein wenig kontrollieren
Ich zeige euch wie es richtig geht*

--Rammstein, “Amerika”

* When there is dancing, I want to lead
Even if you are alone
Let yourselves be controlled a little
And I’ll show you how it really goes
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many studies in the social sciences have documented news media subservience to the elite classes in the United States. That is, it is very well established that the mainstream news media often exhibit an elite bias, reflecting elite perspectives and priorities. This tendency has been observed especially in the domain of foreign affairs and war reporting. For example, a very large body of literature has demonstrated and criticized the American media’s subservience to the George W. Bush’s Iraq war agenda, which was predicated on the lies that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein had ties to al-Qaeda. In recent years, the invasion of Iraq has been the stock-in-trade case of elite domination of the American news media (see inter alia, Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2007; Boyd-Barrett 2004; Castells 2013; DiMaggio 2009; Goss 2013; McChesney 2008.)

What has less often been the subject of inquiry, however, is elite bias in more recent cases of American war-making. The case of Iraq was remarkable for the way in which the American media establishment systematically failed to challenge the Bush administration’s case for war, but it was by no means unusual. Just as remarkable, but less well known and less frequently studied, is the case of Libya in 2011, when the Obama administration and NATO, backed by certain Arab states, went to war against Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya. As much as Bush’s case for the invasion of Iraq, this war was also predicated on a gross distortion of reality, faithfully reproduced and disseminated by an obedient mass media (see especially, Forte 2012; also Campbell 2013; Prashad 2012; and chapter 5 in the present work).

The purpose of this project is, in part, to explain why the media perform this way. I use the case of Libya to “test” a political economy model of the mass media called the propaganda...
model, developed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. In brief, the model identifies five characteristics of the corporate media—concentrated ownership and profit orientation; reliance on advertising; dependence on official sources; flak (external pressure); and convergence in dominant ideology—that cause the media to exhibit elite bias. The particular news outlet I examine is the New York Times, held to be one of the world’s most exemplary newspapers. I present a quantitative and qualitative analysis of its coverage of Libya between February 15 and March 19, 2011, the dates marking the beginning of the popular uprising in Libya and the beginning of the NATO intervention, respectively. The official research question, then, is as follows: Does the New York Times coverage of the events precipitating the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya support the predictions of the propaganda model? The general predictions of the model are explained in chapter 2. Specific predictions regarding the Times’ coverage of Libya are presented in chapter 3.

As a sociologist, this question is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. The most obvious reason is that the media, and particularly the news, is one of the most important institutions of socialization in modern societies. It is widely held to be one of the fundamental components of free, democratic societies. If the media carry out a function that is contrary to democratic principles and the operation of a free society, then this raises serious questions about the fundamental nature of nominally democratic societies, about the prospects for the freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom of the press, and so on. But the question is also of interest because the social sciences have generally marginalized the propaganda model. If the model is well-supported empirically, as I try to show in the literature review below, and as I try to demonstrate with this study, then why is it marginalized? While this is not a question addressed at length in this study, it may entail other challenging questions about the autonomy of
academia *vis-à-vis* concentrated centers of power in the state and corporate sector, and the influence these power centers exert on the intellectual classes of our society.

The purpose of this study, then, is to see how well the *New York Times*’ coverage of the Libya conflict meets the expectations of the model. Empirical support for the model may serve to elevate the salience of the model for sociologists interested in questions regarding the power of the state and concentrated capital. The propaganda model may also be relevant to theoretical discussions in sociology. Though Herman and Chomsky distanced themselves from such an interpretation, the model comports with a materialist theory of ideology and social reproduction, given that it relates the production of ideology in the media to the capitalist mode of production and class interests associated with it. And insofar as the model may facilitate an understanding of the social production of ideology, it may be of interest to sociologists of knowledge.

Finally, the historical case examined in this study—the buildup to the NATO intervention in Libya—may be of value to lay readers and academics alike who are concerned about the role of the United States in global affairs and may facilitate a deeper understanding of the nature of American involvement in that conflict and in the world more generally.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE HERMAN-CHOMSKY PROPAGANDA MODEL AND MAJOR COMPETING THEORIES

This project tests predictions about the corporate news media associated with Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s propaganda model. In this section, I review the scholarly literature on the model. I have also included a review of some major competing or alternative models and theories of the news media. This latter part of the review is by no means exhaustive. This is because spatial constraints require that due attention is given to the propaganda model literature at the expense of a longer review of sociological theories of news. Therefore, I have tried to select competing theories that are (a) most current, (b) developed by sociologists, and (c) represent and build off the major theoretical contributions in this area of research. The chapter will proceed as follows. I begin with a brief discussion of what Herman and Chomsky dubbed the “standard view” of the news media, before turning to a review of competing theories, the first of which advances the standard view. I then review a more plausible contribution before turning to the literature about the propaganda model itself. The final section is a detailed exposition of the propaganda model and a review of Herman and Chomsky’s major findings in Manufacturing Consent.

The standard view about the news media is that privately owned (capitalist) news corporations yield a market of news choices which express a wide range of ideas and perspectives on the world. The public chooses from this market of news choices and thereby determines which ideas and perspectives win out in the market of ideas, and which news corporations succeed in the market of news commodities. State interference with this market system is usually held to threaten the freedom of expression and objectivity that supposedly
characterizes the commercial mass media, even if sometimes it is argued that state intervention may be required to uphold freedom of speech (as in cases where the “right to respond” is invoked). Because the news is objective and independent of political power, it serves a democratic function by providing information about the political process to the general public, who can then make informed decisions on the basis of this information. Variations of this view are propagated in civics textbooks, by governments, apologists for media privatization, the corporate media themselves, and the mainstream of scholarship. However, these conclusions are not borne out by the evidence. A large body of critical scholarship (some of which is reviewed below) refutes the idea that the news media are mostly independent of state and corporate influence and refutes the idea that the public influences available news media content through the market. This scholarship also renders untenable the claim that the mass media make available a diverse range of public opinion. Thus, the standard view of the media is best thought of as an ideology rather than a set of propositions that can be seriously entertained or supported with evidence.

The scholarly literature shows that a number of variables associated with the capitalist media system, such as concentrated ownership, reliance on government sources, and elite ideologies, do influence the content of the news in a way that severely compromises the independence and objectivity of the corporate media. In fact, most sources more or less agree that the media tend to reflect elite perspectives and ideologies. Most media scholars also do not doubt that this is due at least in part to the variables just mentioned. This is all true of mainstream scholarship as well as critical scholarship usually associated with the left. Where these two broad categories of research tend to disagree most is on the explanatory power or strength of these variables relative to others. The mainstream of scholarship, associated with the standard view, is
generally opposed to the idea that these and other variables impose structural constraints on the output of the media, preferring instead explanations that emphasize the actions of individual journalists, editors, and so on, and their professional commitments and intentions. This approach is exemplified most recently in the work of Michael Schudson, a Columbia University professor of journalism who specializes in the sociology of news.

News Media Theory

Michael Schudson’s *Sociology of The News* offers a sociological study of the institution of journalism, which he defines as “information and commentary on contemporary affairs taken to be publicly important” (Schudson 2011:7). Schudson does not offer any explicit theory or model of journalism or the media, but he may be best classified as a proponent of the standard view of the media, which maintains that the media present a range of perspectives that might be found among the general public. His major positive claim about the media is that the news is typically “(1) event-centered, action-centered, and person-centered; (2) negative; (3) detached; (4) technical; (5) official” (Schudson 2011:41). Schudson dismisses the propaganda model and theories that identify bias in the media, preferring instead the concept of news framing—“principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Schudson 2011:28). News framing is preferred to that of news bias as an explanatory concept because it “diminishes the extent to which evidence of selection can be automatically read as evidence of deceit, dissembling, or prejudice of individual journalists,” and therefore “we accept the possibility that news might speak in more than one voice” (Schudson 2011:30-01). Here, and elsewhere, Schudson focuses exclusively on the intentions of individual journalists, creating a false dilemma in which it is apparently impossible for bias to be systematic, rather than the intentional work of individual journalists or editors. The
possibility that actual “evidence of selection” and omission might indicate systematic bias, notwithstanding the intentions of individuals, is not considered.

Focusing on individual journalists, Schudson maintains that they are “detached,” in that “objectivity is [their] guiding principle, often religiously practiced” (Schudson 2011:43). Like sports commentators, journalists focus on “technical” aspects of news events, relying primarily on official, reliable sources (e.g., government officials) who can offer specialized technical knowledge, though journalists are critical and distrustful of these sources at the same time. These tendencies are the outcome of journalistic professionalism, which Schudson exalts throughout his book. Indeed, the “genius” of American journalism is its symbiosis of professionalism and commercialism (Schudson 2011:79). Professionalism in journalism became more firmly entrenched after the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, according to Schudson: these events led to a “more critical and watchful press” (Schudson 2011:190), and a “skeptical, critical, and aggressive accountability journalism” (Schudson 2011:227), as journalists came to be more distrustful of deceitful politicians. Thus, journalists maintain an uneasy relationship with politicians and other official sources on whom they depend for news; they cannot alienate their sources with aggressive and critical reporting, but they must also remain “detached” and somehow hold government officials accountable to the public, per their professional obligations.

So which tendency predominates? And which “little tacit theories” about the world inform news content? Schudson’s presentation does not make this connection explicit, but an answer to both questions is provided in the following statement: “In all political and economic systems, news ‘coincides with’ and ‘reinforces’ the ‘definition of the political situation evolved by the political elite.’ This basic generalization seems incontestable” (Schudson 2011:123). This is a stark admission for Schudson, given his central claim that the news “speaks in more than one
voice.” On another page, we learn more about the vocal range of the media: “the media give voice to all major parties (if not small dissident groups) and provide the common informational currency that alerts organized groups (if not unorganized and disaffected citizens) of political decisions that will affect their interests” (my emphasis, Schudson 2011:200). How much of the citizenry is “unorganized” and “disaffected” and what exactly these terms mean, are left unspecified. But if it is reasonably assumed that this is any kind of a majority, then we can infer from Schudson’s claims that the news “gives voice” mostly to the upper middle class and elite sectors of society—at best.

In addition to reliance on official sources, Schudson recognizes two other major institutional imperatives that shape the news: the need for profit, and pressure from advertisers. As we will see, these variables are identified by Herman and Chomsky in their propaganda model, though Schudson draws rather different conclusions about their function. Most news production is subsidized by advertising revenues, Schudson correctly points out. This has a disciplining effect on the media, which can be threatened by advertisers if they deem reporting as offensive to their interests. But, according to Schudson, the beauty of the corporate system is that in virtue of large capital accumulations, the major news organizations can shield themselves from these threats, as they can afford to lose advertisers. To a limited extent, this may be true. However, as Schudson also recognizes, corporate advertising is crucial to media survival insofar as the media depend on selling audiences with buying power to advertisers. Thus, as a general rule, large corporate advertisers will choose to sponsor the corporate media rather than working class or radical publications. This tendency makes it extremely unlikely that capital accumulation—and by extension, market competition—will entail a more critical news media enterprise.
Overall, then, Schudson’s sociology of the news is an ambivalent account of the social construction of news. On one hand, he tries to sustain the standard view of the news as independent and critical of the power centers of society, and the “voice” of diverse points of view, while on the other he admits that the media marginalize dissent and reflect elite interests and interpretations of the world. Furthermore, it is an old media myth that the Vietnam War and Watergate led to a more defiant and independent media. Schudson points to reporting during the later phase of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the Iran-contra scandal as examples of an adversarial press that challenges political authority. Yet, as Herman and Chomsky observe, media commentary on these events all occurred within the bounds of elite consensus and revealed, in their words, “exactly the opposite” of media independence and adversarial journalism. As Herman and Chomsky show in *Manufacturing Consent*, the media did not turn against the Vietnam War until a substantial portion of the business elite did, and well after the United States had dramatically escalated the invasion, which the media faithfully supported (Herman and Chomsky 2002:300-301). And while Watergate received much attention, a far more significant government subversion program, COINTELPRO, which targeted the general public, was revealed at approximately the same time, and received much less media attention (Herman and Chomsky 2002:299-300). Then, whereas the Reagan administration’s circumvention of congress during the Iran-contra affair was considered a scandal in the media, the administration’s dismissal of the International Court of Justice ruling against the U.S. attack against Nicaragua was not, nor was the administration’s support of the Contras prior to Iran-contra revelations (Herman and Chomsky 2002:300). While I consider below what Schudson offers as a response to Herman and Chomsky’s argument about these events, for now we will
simply note that it is both indirect and based on a complete misunderstanding of their actual claims regarding the media.

While Schudson’s reiteration of the myth of an adversarial press is no more persuasive than it was three decades ago, he does admit that in the domain of foreign reporting “the press’s objectivity weakens.” “Indeed,” Schudson concedes, “it weakened during the cold war in just the direction Chomsky and Herman suggested—toward hypercritical reporting of communist regimes and overly generous reporting of noncommunist authoritarian governments” (Schudson 2011:34). And, we might add, the statist and nationalist bias of the media’s foreign policy reporting has continued unabated since the end of the Cold War, a fact that Schudson does not explore, which is remarkable for a book written after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. And, what is more, elite bias has been identified in the domain of domestic news reporting as well (Herman and Chomsky 2002:xli-xlvii). But even if the media failed to conform to the standard view only with respect to foreign policy reporting, this reality alone seriously weakens Schudson’s central claims in *The Sociology of News*, namely that the press are critical of power, and reflect a broad range of public opinion.

Moving on to more critical scholarship, by far the most ambitious and comprehensive sociological work on the media and communication politics is Manuel Castells’s *Communication Power*. In this work, Castells attempts to show, among other things, where power lies in what he calls the global network society (Castells 2013:42) and how this power is exercised. In the global network society, according to Castells, “Power is primarily exercised by the construction of meaning in the human mind through processes of communication enacted in global/local multimedia networks of mass communication, including mass self-communication” (Castells 2013:417). Power, then, rests primarily in the networks of elites who control this communication
system. Castells attempts to explain both how political messages are constructed by the media, including the corporate news media, and how these messages are received by the public. For the purposes of this review, however, I am only concerned with how well Castells does the former, as this is the explanatory domain of the propaganda model. (That is, the propaganda model makes only predictions about the content of the media, not how it is received by the public. See the discussion below.)

Castells identifies several important mechanisms that shape the news, including agenda setting, in which the media decide what topics are most important by covering them more frequently; framing, in which events or issues are selectively covered so as to promote a certain interpretation; indexing, in which the government is the most important source of information for reporters and journalists; and the “cascading activation model” which describes a media hierarchy in which the leading publications like The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal are the agenda-setting news outlets, with the rest of the mass media tending to closely adhere to their story lines and interpretive frameworks. As a consequence of these factors, “Mainstream political elites wield the greatest control over news frames” (Castells 2013:163), and the media frames will tend to conform to the spectrum of elite opinion. When political elites are in agreement on a given matter, dissenting voices are barred from the media. These processes led the mass media to faithfully disseminate the Bush II administration’s lies about Iraq in its buildup to the 2003 invasion, with the consequence that a large majority of the U.S. population believed the Bush administration propaganda.

The above-mentioned observations constitute the major strength of Castells’s sociology of news production. But Castells also mentions at least three other important characteristics of mass media companies: They are increasingly concentrated into fewer corporations (Castells
2013:74); they are closely linked to the non-media corporate community through interlocking directorates and outside investors (Castells 2013:93-94); and they try to maximize their advertising revenue (Castells 2013:79). However, Castells never provides much in the way of explanation of why these factors are politically significant, and the explanation he does provide is quite limited. With respect to media concentration, Castells points out that corporate models of news entail greater emphasis on popular entertainment at the expense of quality news coverage and analysis—a fairly trivial observation. Concerning interlocking directorates, Castells says that this “is not without consequence,” but never says what the consequences are. Then he claims that the large financial institutions and venture capitalists on which the media depend “play no role in the day-to-day operations of their media investments” (Castells 2013:94) though he does mention in a footnote that “in 2007 Harbinger Capital Partners Funds and Firebrand private equity partners used their leverage of 4.9% combined holding in the New York Times Company to nominate four directors at the 2008 Annual Meeting” (Castells 2013:94). Again, the consequences of such actions are not spelled out, and even though outside investors do not play a direct role in the operations of media companies, they do exert pressure on the media by threatening to sell off holdings and applying other disciplining measures. As for advertising, Castells’s key observation is basically the trivial fact that the media depend on advertising revenue (Castells 2013:95), again missing the more politically relevant point that advertisers can also threaten the media by pulling advertising subsidies when they fail to tow the corporate or government line.

By focusing on the Internet as the hoped-for palliative to the power the elite exercise through their control of the media, Castells shifts attention away from a serious political economy analysis of the media. As just demonstrated, the closer his analysis gets to identifying
the profit orientation of the media as the mechanism driving media politics, the more superficial it becomes. No one network, Castells argues, given their numerous interrelationships, can be understood as being driven by a single “logic of value-making,” (e.g., the profit imperative) and therefore, the question of classical political economy, “what is value?”, has no definite answer in the network society (Castells 2013:28-9). But it is only by conflating exchange value, the actual concern of classical political economy, with normative value, that Castells is able to make this odd claim, as if the utility of political economy simply evaporated with the advance of electronic communications (which, according to Castells, facilitated the rise of the global network society).

The military, state, and the media may have their own institutional priorities and operating principles, as Castells suggests, but he does not explain why they all tend to converge around a shared interest in preserving private property and promoting elite ideology. The starting point for a political economy of the mass media is the observation that media companies are in fact profit-seeking businesses, whatever their other “values”, and that this has definite consequences for news production.

It is also curious that Castells does not mention Herman, Chomsky, or the propaganda model in his book. Indeed, leading communications scholar, Robert McChesney, maintains that Manufacturing Consent “remains the starting point for any serious inquiry into news media performance” (McChesney 2008:287). Herman and Chomsky anticipate some of Castells’s insights by about twenty years, and offer a simpler, more powerful explanatory model of news production that is supported with more evidence. But, it should be noted, Castells, like Schudson, conforms to a longstanding trend in mainstream academic literature of marginalizing Herman and Chomsky’s work. The major theorists of the media Castells and Schudson cite—Entman, Hallin, and Bennet, for instance—have all been critical, if not dismissive, of Herman and
Chomsky’s work, and this in spite of the fact that their own research tends to support the propaganda model (see Herring and Robinson [2003] for evidence and discussion of this trend).

The Propaganda Model and Its Critics

The propaganda model itself first appeared in Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, published in 1988. The book was based on some twenty years of research and media criticism, some of which appeared in other books co-authored by Herman and Chomsky, such as their two-volume Political Economy of Human Rights. While Manufacturing Consent became an instant classic among left-leaning social activists and dissidents, it received scarce attention from professional academics, and most of this attention consisted of harsh reviews and casual dismissals. Few of these scholars seriously engaged with the arguments and evidence Herman and Chomsky presented and many of them misinterpreted their claims (Herman 2003; Pedro 2011a). This dominant trend in academia was not interrupted until the early 2000’s, when a small group of sympathetic scholars began writing about the propaganda model, holding conferences to discuss it, and carrying out research to verify its empirical basis and test its claims. Most of these scholars are professors based in Europe.

Given the marginalization of the propaganda model in the mainstream academic literature, it is worth considering in some detail the major criticisms that have been leveled against it. If they are sound, then the propaganda model is probably not a useful framework for explaining the performance of the news media. But if they are not, then perhaps the model is worth considering for social scientists interested in understanding the media and power. Edward S. Herman (2003) himself provided a useful taxonomy of criticism in which he responded to these criticisms. They may be classified under the headings of (1) conspiracy theory, (2) failure to consider the intentions of journalists, (3) failure to take account of media professionalism and
objectivity, and (4) the model is mechanical, deterministic, and ignores contestation of power by journalists. I will also consider at length Schudson’s critique, as well as objections made with regard to Herman and Chomsky’s methodology.

The claims that the model suggests a conspiracy are not supported by any evidence. Such a claim was made by Robert Entman, among others, and has been refuted by both Herman and Chomsky. Entman’s charge, in brief, was that Herman and Chomsky claimed the media “consciously” design propaganda to serve state needs, a phrase they never used (Herman 2003). Rather than a conspiracy, Herman says that “the media comprise numerous independent entities that operate on the basis of common outlooks, incentives, and pressures from the market, government, and internal organization forces” (Herman 2003). On the basis of these observations, no conspiracy theory is required to explain elite bias in the corporate news media. As for the failure to consider the intentions of journalists, Herman notes that he and Chomsky did consult reporters, but generally “This line of criticism . . . is a diversionary ploy that essentially denies the legitimacy of a quantitative (or scientific) analysis of media performance” (Herman 2003). Reporters may or may not be aware of pressure to conform to official propaganda lines, but this is a different question; the propaganda model is concerned with institutional tendencies. A related critique, leveled by Daniel Hallin, that the propaganda model fails to account for the values of impartiality and objectivity associated with professional journalism, also does not pass muster. As Herman points out, professionalism in journalism arose as a way for press owners to give their publications a seal of legitimacy in an era when they were under increasing scrutiny for failing to represent the views of the general public (see also McChesney 2008). Professionalism, Herman notes, “has also internalized some of the
commercial values that media owners hold most dear, like relying on inexpensive official sources as the credible news source” (Herman 2003).

The critique that the model is mechanical and deterministic and ignores the fact that journalists and reporters do challenge elite frames has been made by Philip Schlesinger (1989), James Curran, Peter Golding, Graham Murdock, John Eldridge, and Daniel Hallin, all leading writers in the academic mainstream. Schlesinger’s review, Herman says, was the only one to summarize the propaganda model and discuss Herman and Chomsky’s evidence. Schlesinger criticized the model for not explaining the relative weights of each filter, and held that it was deterministic. Herman’s response to the latter point is worth quoting at length:

Any model involves deterministic elements, so that this criticism is a straw person unless the critics also show that the system is not logically consistent, operates on false premises, or that the predictive power of the determining variables is poor. The critics acknowledge that the case studies we present are powerful, but they don’t show where the alleged determinism leads to error nor do they offer or point to alternative models that would do a better job. (Herman 2003)

Elsewhere, Herman and Chomsky have pointed out that the weights of the filters can only be determined on a case-by-case basis. Herman also notes that the propaganda model “deals with extraordinarily complex sets of events, and only claims to offer a broad framework of analysis, a first approximation, that requires modification depending on local and special factors, and that may be entirely inapplicable in some cases” (Herman 2003). Finally, Herman and Chomsky do not doubt that reporters and journalists may challenge government narratives; but, consistent with an indexing hypothesis, they claim that this will tend to happen within the bounds of elite consensus. They also make the point that media are not monolithic and the model is not all
powerful. The implication is that the model describes strong *tendencies* and reporting may on rare occasions challenge elite frames.

Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, two sociologists specializing in media, added several criticisms of *Manufacturing Consent* (Lang and Lang 2004a; 2004b). The Langs’ critique of Herman and Chomsky’s case studies foundered on their lack of familiarity with the facts, as Chomsky and Herman made apparent in their reply (Chomsky and Herman 2004) in the same journal. For example, in criticizing Herman and Chomsky’s methodology, the Langs argued that Central America was consistently underreported in the 1980’s, providing an alternative explanation for the media’s more extensive coverage of the killing of Jerzy Popieluszko in Poland than the killing of 100 religious people in Central America, including Oscar Romero. But Herman and Chomsky point out that Central America was in fact extensively covered in the 1980’s, and generally El Salvador alone received as much coverage as Poland. Unfamiliarity with—if not a selective reading of—*Manufacturing Consent* was also obvious in their critique of Herman and Chomsky’s method of analyzing the media’s application of the term “genocide”. The Langs claimed, falsely, that Herman and Chomsky only used quantitative measures of the use of the term, whereas in fact, the latter also implemented qualitative analyses. Also of interest was the claim that Herman and Chomsky provided no criteria for choosing case studies and that they chose cases and data which demonstrated the political points they wanted to make (a point which Herman and Chomsky also address in the concluding chapter of *Manufacturing Consent*). Herman and Chomsky point out in their reply that the cases they chose were important in and of themselves, receiving ample coverage in the news media (e.g., the Vietnam War, wars in Central America, etc.), and filtered according to the predictions of the propaganda model. Furthermore, they reply: “If our model works well in these cases, it has proved its value, whatever our process
of selection” (Chomsky and Herman 2004:105). The number of cases Herman and Chomsky have addressed is sufficient to demonstrate a significant tendency. (I address these methodological concerns in more detail in chapter 4).

Finally, let us return to Schudson and his critique of Manufacturing Consent. As it is more recent than those critiques addressed above, it is worth seeing if it offers any original argument against the validity of the propaganda model. “Some scholars,” Schudson laments, “persist in emphasizing the media’s uniformity, which derives from its role as a necessary component of advancing the interests of corporate capitalism” (Schudson 2011:31). “To these critics, every apparent sign of debate or controversy merely covers up a deeper uniformity of views” (Schudson 2011:31). For Herman and Chomsky, he continues, “the New York Times is no better than Pravda, the propagandist official newspaper of the Soviet Union. The state is apparently little more than a front for the ruling class. This is a misleading and mischievous stance” (Schudson 2011:31). The first reason offered for this characterization is that the New York Times and Pravda comprised different institutional structures with different relationships to the state, and that Times journalists “almost always embrace professional ethics” (Schudson 2011:32). Furthermore, media owners “rarely seek to use the news as a soapbox for their own political views of whatever political orthodoxy they subscribe to,” (Schudson 2011:32) with the exception of FOX, MSNBC, and so on. The other three reasons Herman and Chomsky are “misleading and mischievous” are because there is, in fact, a “vital arena of legitimate controversy in the United States” (Schudson 2011:32), as in Schudson’s example, between the Republican and Democratic parties; because “there are multiple voices in the American news media” (Schudson 2011:33), as demonstrated by numerous examples of media scandals such as
the My Lai massacre, Iran-contra affair, and so on; and lastly, because the media must remain credible with the general public, particularly “critical subgroups” in Washington, D.C.

Let us consider each sub-argument. First, Herman and Chomsky’s remarks about Pravda and comparisons of the American media to it, suggest that the American media served similar social functions to Pravda, and that the publications were probably both bound by similar kinds of nationalist ideology and self-serving arguments. They would surely acknowledge that the institutional structures were different, but maintain that the propaganda functions were nevertheless similar. And as discussed above, the focus on individual journalists and professionalism is irrelevant when the object of study is systematic bias. Furthermore, Herman and Chomsky nowhere claim that owners use the media as their “soapbox”; again, they document and try to explain institutional tendencies. Next, concerning the “vital arena of legitimate controversy,” this claim is entirely consistent with that made by Herman and Chomsky. They maintain that debate in the media will occur within the limits set by “legitimate controversy” among elites; the media will represent the range of elite opinion, as Schudson basically accedes in his book. Next, the argument regarding “multiple voices” is directed at a straw person. Schudson’s overarching argument in this section of the book is that there are “multiple voices” represented in the media, which offer differential criticisms of government policy, rather than uniform support. But if the argument is contra Herman and Chomsky, it is misdirected, because they do not disagree with this claim in the first place. And if media commentary on the Vietnam War (including the My Lai massacre), Watergate, and the Iran-contra affair do not support Herman and Chomsky’s claims on this score, why not? Schudson does not say. Finally, it may be problematic for Schudson’s last argument that the media do not, in fact, maintain credibility with the general public, with only 40 percent of Americans trusting
the media in 2015 (Rifkin 2015). Moreover, the “critical subgroups” in Washington D.C. that
the media must be sensitive to, represent organized elite opinion, as Herman and Chomsky
discuss in Manufacturing Consent.

This overview exhausts the more serious criticisms of the propaganda model that I am
aware of. It is of some interest that most of the researchers who have criticized and dismissed the
utility of the model also have not actually disputed the operation of the filters or the quality of
the evidence offered by Herman and Chomsky. To quote Lang and Engel Lang (2004a), for
example, “few [communications and media scholars] would seriously dispute the existence of
such filters or Chomsky’s contention that they ‘narrow the range of news that passes through the
gates and even more sharply limit what can become “big news” subject to sustained news
campaigns’.” And as we have seen in the case of Schudson, mainstream scholarly criticism of
the propaganda model is based on misunderstandings, fallacious arguments, and an
unwillingness to engage with substantive claims and evidence. Moreover, as mentioned, much of
the critics’ own research augments the propaganda model. For these reasons, Herring and
Robinson (2003) conclude that the marginalization of Chomsky and Herman’s work in academia
is ideological, not scientific.

Supporting Literature on the Propaganda Model

This conclusion is in fact consistent with the “second order prediction” of the propaganda
model, that, to quote Chomsky, “If invalid, it may be dismissed; if valid it will be dismissed” by
mainstream intellectual culture. “The general prediction, at each level, is that what enters the
mainstream will support the needs of established power” (Chomsky quoted in Mullen 2010:677).
Andrew Mullen (2010) sought to test this claim, finding that “Since its publication in 1988 the
PM [propaganda model] has received very little attention within the field of media and
communication studies, the wider social sciences or the media” (Mullen 2010:677). Surveying articles in ten media and communications journals over the period of 1988 to 2007, he found that only 2.6 percent of 3,053 articles on media theory and media practice addressed the propaganda model. “This,” he adds, “is despite the fact that, certainly as far as the theoretical articles were concerned, attention to the work of James Curren, Jürgen Habermas, Stuart Hall, Daniel Hallin, etc. was standard” (Mullen 2010:679). Furthermore, Mullen documents that of 43 media and communications text books published over the same period, 21 books (43.8 percent) did not mention the propaganda model, 16 (33.3 percent) only included it in the bibliographies, and only 11 (22.9 percent) engaged with it substantively.

Andrew Mullen and Jeffery Klaehn were early leaders among the new generation of scholars who began to study and utilize the propaganda model in the early 2000’s. Klaehn edited a book containing a series of essays which discussed and implemented the propaganda model for empirical studies (ed. Klaehn 2005) in addition to publishing other articles (Klaehn 2002a; 2002b; 2009), two coauthored with Mullen (Kleahn and Mullen 2010a; 2010b). Among these articles and essays were some important and original research contributions. For example, Klaehn analyzed the Canadian media’s coverage of the genocide in East Timor, where Canada had economic and geopolitical interests, finding that the media minimized the genocide and downplayed Canada’s role. Many of Klaehn’s other articles are exploratory in character and contain similar content describing the model, discussing what has been said about it, methodology, and suggestions for further research; they do not advance an understanding of the model beyond what Herman and Chomsky have already written about it. Communications professors Joan Pedro and Brian Michael Goss have more recently made important contributions, both on the empirical foundations of the model’s filters, as well as original case studies.
demonstrating its continued relevance as an analytic tool. And though space does not permit a complete review of this work, several other authors have also used the propaganda model as a framework of analysis: Anderson and Kincaid (2013); Boyd-Barrett (2004); Dowler (2004); Good (2008); and Dolan, Johnson, and Sonnett (2011).

Summarizing these contributions, Anderson and Kincaid (2013) applied the propaganda model to samples of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, finding that the content of these satirical television programs usually reproduced hegemonic discourses, though also challenging elite ideology in limited respects, mainly by alluding to the mainstream media’s propaganda function. Boyd-Barrett’s 2004 article, discussed more below, showed how media coverage of the second Gulf War comported with the predictions of the propaganda model. Dowler (2004) used the propaganda model to analyze American and Canadian news coverage of crime, finding that in both cases, the media reproduced traditional elite attitudes about crime and punishment by marginalizing white collar crime and focusing on street crime. Good (2008) used the propaganda model to analyze how international newspapers covered climate change, finding that they tended to downplay the connection between climate change, extreme weather consequences, and the oil industry. Dolan, Johnson, and Sonnett (2011) showed how racism operates in conjunction with the class structure identified by the propaganda model, leading to television broadcast coverage of Hurricane Katrina that marginalized the opinions of blacks and reflected white middle-class perspectives, even though blacks figured prominently as subjects in reporting and had a large presence in New Orleans after the hurricane.

Pedro’s 2011 two-part article, “The Propaganda Model in the Early 21st Century” provides an authoritative literature review, an overview of the model with more contemporary supporting evidence, a discussion of its applicability to countries other than the United States,
validity in explaining news content on the Internet, and the plausibility of adding other filters to the model. Goss’s 2013 *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* provides several original paired case studies which provide further empirical support for the propaganda model, recent data supporting the existence of the model’s filters, and a discussion of the role of the Internet. Goss has also written a separate article on the flak machine, Accuracy in Media (Goss 2007). These works, along with the contributions of Klaehn, Mullen and others, have demonstrated the continued relevance of the propaganda model in the twenty-first century. In the remainder of this section I discuss important findings in the work of Pedro and Goss.

Concerning the validity of the model in countries other than the United States, Pedro notes that researchers have successfully tested the propaganda model in the U.K. (Robertson 2006), Canada (Klaehn 2005), Spain (Sierra and Vazquez 2006), and Australia (Baker 2007). Pedro cites one interesting study which showed that the Scandinavian “public service model” of the media, differentiated from market-driven models, yields a news media system that focuses more attention on public and international affairs, and results in a more even distribution of knowledge across the domestic population. On the international scope of the model, then, Pedro concludes

that the filtration process also occurs in other countries with mostly private/corporate media, although the filters may not be as fully developed as they are in the United States, and the political, cultural, and ideological environment may be somewhat more open (depending on the country). This confirms the consistency of the PM [propaganda model], as it demonstrates that there is a causal relationship between a weaker system of filters and a rather more open and
varied spectrum of opinion. In the few countries (Scandinavian) where the predominant model is a public service media system that is less exposed to market forces, media content is aimed at fulfilling a more positive social role. All of this suggests that the PM will be applicable to other advanced capitalist democracies, given the similar institutional arrangements. (Pedro 2011b:1911)

Adding to this body of comparative research, and reinforcing Pedro’s conclusion, Goss (2013) demonstrated that the London Guardian, which is partly subsidized by a trust, and therefore less subject to the filtering mechanisms of the propaganda model, differed quantitatively and qualitatively in its coverage of the 2011 London riots from the London Daily Telegraph, which has a conventional corporate ownership structure. The Telegraph engaged in a process of othering and demonizing the rioters, while the Guardian investigated the social, political, and economic context of the riots, and offered more coverage than the Telegraph.

With regard to the Internet and whether or not the propaganda model can be used to explain its content and operation, Pedro’s basic conclusion is that “the advent of the Internet has done little to change the type of information presented by corporate mainstream media, [and] the PM [propaganda model] continues to be perfectly valid for the description of online mainstream news production” (Pedro 2011b:1912). And “while the Internet is used for the empowerment of grassroots and protest movements, it is also increasingly being shaped and controlled by corporations, and used by political parties, reactionary forces, and even criminal groups for social control” (Pedro 2011b:1911). As one example of such state-corporate tampering, Pedro mentions the important case of WikiLeaks, which has been subject to government attacks and attempts by major corporations to stall its operations.
Other relevant facts concerning news on the Internet are discussed by Goss (2013:53-7;167-194). In particular, he points out that the corporate news publications dominate Internet news in terms of viewership, which vastly outstrips that of blogs. Citing Eli Noam’s work on media concentration, Goss reports that “Seventeen of the 25 most visited online news sites are organs of incumbent news firms. The four most visited sites (CNN, Yahoo!, MSNBS, AOL) account for more than half of all news-seeking by online readers” (Goss 2013:56). Moreover, as some successful blogs, such as Daily Kos, have come to resemble traditional news publications, requiring dedicated staff and incurring greater expenses, they are likely to become more constrained by the ownership and advertising filters of the traditional media. Furthermore, according to Goss, the Internet creates an interesting paradox: Because Internet advertising revenues are much lower than that of the print media, while Internet news viewership has increased and print subscriptions have declined, the major publishers are increasing viewership, but with less revenue. It turns out, then, that the Internet is actually reinforcing some of the filtering mechanisms of the propaganda model.

As reviewed by Pedro (2011b), a number of writers have suggested modifications or updates to the propaganda model in the form of additional filters. In this discussion, Pedro includes criticisms of the model to the effect that Herman and Chomsky neglected important factors that influence news production, such as the role of journalists and journalistic professionalism. As I have already addressed these criticisms, I will simply note that Pedro thinks these two factors should be thought of as “secondary filters” which operate under the constraint of the five primary filters. A more constructive critique, formulated by Sparks (2007), suggests that the role of the audience should be included as a “sub-filter,” according to Pedro.
Because the news media is in the business of selling audiences to advertisers (Herman and Chomsky 2002:16) the news must be presented in a way that is appealing to different audience segments. This explains some of the substantive and ideological differences between partisan media (FOX, MSNBC, etc.), mainstream liberal media, and the business press. “However,” Pedro notes, “the overall effect of the filters is the imposition of restrictions on what can and cannot be offered, regardless of what may interest the audience. While the elite are able to influence the media, the audience doesn’t have the adequate or effective mechanisms to make requests or demands. The audience generally chooses between the products that the media decide to offer” (Pedro 2011b:1919). All corporate news media are subject to certain constraints, as described by the propaganda model.

Pedro discusses two other possible extensions of the propaganda model. One is technology, a sixth filter proposed by Vanderlinder (in Pedro 2011b). Pedro summarizes Vanderlinder’s discussion of technology and media: “The technology of the medium imposes various limitations and constraints on the production and dissemination of news, influences the number of possible recipients, serves to create time-space reconfigurations, affects style, and leaves its mark on the culture of journalistic practice” (Pedro 2011b:2010-11). Contrawise, Pedro argues, in effect, that as technology is socially neutral, (i.e., a given technology can be utilized for the benefit one or another social group, depending on which group controls it), what is more important is whose interests are served by it. Technology, therefore, is best thought of as a secondary filter. The last proposed extension of the model concerns the direct or purchased influence of the elite. Boyd-Barrett (2004) has offered evidence of large scale CIA penetration of the mainstream news media, in which the CIA bankrolled journalists. While it should be noted that Boyd-Barrett’s article is an important contribution, Pedro points out that this element was in
The Propaganda Model

We turn now to the propaganda model itself and what it is, as described by Herman and Chomsky. I have also included discussion of more recent research findings that support Herman and Chomsky’s original formulation.

The propaganda model is a structural model of the news media in capitalist political economies. It describes the major forces that influence news production and explains how these forces cause the news media to function as a propaganda distribution system for the elite classes of society, biasing the news according to elite interests (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lix-lx). The model also engenders a series of predictions about patterns that will emerge in news output which exhibit this elite bias.

Two important key terms, propaganda and elite, merit some explanation. Here, “propaganda” refers to news that is oriented primarily toward the social reproduction of the class system and capitalist political economy (Pedro 2011a:1866). Keeping to Pedro’s definitions, by “elite” we mean “members of the upper social classes, who enjoy a privileged status in power relations. In particular, it refers to those who hold financial-economic power, political-state power, and military power, although it is not limited exclusively to these three sectors” (Pedro 2011a:1865-1866). Thus, the propaganda model describes the structural factors that enable those who own and control the news media to use it as a mechanism for social control, for the reproduction and maintenance of a definite social and political order in which they have vested interests. It is important to note, however, that the propaganda model makes no predictions or claims about the actual success of the media in performing this function. The major claim is
simply that this social control is in fact one of the major functional purposes of the news media, whether or not it is effective.

Crude state intervention is not necessary for the media to carry out this function. Rather, the model explains media subservience to state and corporate power largely as an outcome of the corporate structure of media companies and their integration into the economy. Media owners and shareholders preselect “right-thinking” people to fill management, editorial, reporter and other positions which facilitates ideological uniformity throughout the institution and throughout the industry (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lx). Herman and Chomsky maintain that “Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organizational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organizations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalized, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centers of powers” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lx). However, certain powerful agents do exert more or less direct pressure on the media to conform to elite preferences (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lx), as discussed below.

The propaganda model predicts that the corporate news will tend to reflect only the range of *elite* opinion on the issues where elite interests are at stake (Herman 2003). Thus, coverage of issues that fall outside the most salient concerns of elites, such as abortion rights, gun control, or school prayer (Herman 2003), will express a range of opinions and views that may reflect more closely those of the general public. Debate will also emerge in the corporate media on issues over which there is disagreement among the elite themselves. But where there is a strong elite consensus on a given topic, perspectives and opinions that fall outside of this consensus will tend to be filtered out. Therefore, private property and the associated organizing principles of liberal economics will not be questioned by the mass media. Or that the frequent U.S. military
interventions are anything but well-intentioned or that they are simply wrong—as opposed to merely strategically flawed, too costly, or mistaken—are positions that tend to go unexplored.

The original propaganda model, as formulated by Herman and Chomsky, is composed of five “filters” through which news must pass before it can be “fit to print.” In more concrete terms, these filters describe different structural constraints on the output of the media. Subsequent writers have proposed additional filters to strengthen the model, but in accord with Pedro’s assessment, these additional filters are best understood as being encompassed by the original five. The model, therefore, remains adequate in its original formulation, with some slight modifications that are necessary to reflect important historical developments. The filters are (1) size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media, (2) advertising as the primary source of revenue, (3) dependence on official sources, (4) flak, and (5) convergence in the dominant ideology (Pedro 2011a:1888), (formerly, anti-communism).

Size, Ownership, and Profit Orientation of the Mass Media

The first filter is size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media (Herman and Chomsky 2002:3). With major technological innovations in print production and the associated rise in capital costs, by the end of the nineteenth century significant economic barriers had been erected to entry into newspaper markets, which meant only the most wealthy entrepreneurs could afford to participate (Herman and Chomsky 2002:3-4). This process eventually led to the decline of the radical and working-class press as a ubiquitous news medium and ensured elite hegemony over mass media with any substantial readership. Thus, in free market capitalist economies, the most widely available news mediums are owned and controlled by people drawn from elite social classes. In the propaganda model this is held to be an important structural feature of the media that influences and shapes the content of the news.
As the mass media outlets themselves are corporate business enterprises, and increasingly integrated into the stock market and dependent on outside investment, their owners and managers must focus increasingly on the profitability of the firm. In conjunction with the size of the media companies, this creates competitive pressure which has engendered buyouts and mergers of major media firms, leading to increasingly concentrated ownership of the mass media. Herman and Chomsky maintain that this concentration of media resources creates a tiered mass media, with the largest and most prestigious firms setting the news agenda for smaller media companies, which may lack foreign correspondents and have fewer reporters and staff. “It is this top tier, along with the government and wire services, that defines the news agenda and supplies much of the national and international news to the lower tiers of the media, and thus for the general public” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:4-5). They also note that in 1988 the four major Western wire services accounted for approximately 80% of the global international news. The American wire services (AP, UPI) compete, and, dependent mostly on the American market for survival, are subject to the same domestic pressure to reflect elite perspectives as the rest of the media.

In addition to stock market integration and pressure from investors to focus on the bottom line, the large mass media corporations are tightly integrated into the greater corporate community through their boards of directors and parent companies. Outside directors from other corporations express their own interests through media directorships, as do board members and the managers of parent companies. Thus, shared interests of the capitalist class as a whole converge in the mass media through intercorporate links. The media also do business with and depend on major financial institutions for capital investment. “These holdings, individually and collectively, do not convey control, but these large investors can make themselves heard, and their actions can affect the welfare of the companies and their managers. If the managers fail to
pursue actions that favor shareholder returns, institutional investors will be inclined to sell the stock (depressing its prices), or to listen sympathetically to outsiders contemplating takeovers” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:11).

Ownership of the mass media by major non-media corporations, or *conglomeration*, is another important structural feature of the mass media. It often puts media corporations in a dubious relationship with controversial industries such as armaments, nuclear weapons production, the food industry, the oil industry, and the real estate industry (Pedro 2011a:1877). Pedro (2011a:1878) notes that increased conglomeration has also entailed greater financialization of the mass media, in which the media have become more dependent on the financial sector and responsive to its imperatives.

Finally, Herman and Chomsky point out that the mass media depend on the government for licensing and “general policy support,” and maintain important ties to government officials and politicians. Media outlets which fail to placate the government or are critical of government policy orientation can be threatened. Outside directors often comprise former government officials in a revolving door of regulators and media officials. Media companies also lobby on behalf of their interests to congress. Outside of lobbying, policy support also includes subsidies for nuclear and military production, as in the case of Westinghouse and GE, major media conglomerates, in addition to dependence on and support for government policies that are directed at penetrating markets overseas for both media and non-media products.

The first filter, then, describes how the position of the corporate media in an advanced capitalist political economy subjects the mass media industry to market forces which limit ownership to the very wealthy; reinforces a profit-maximizing corporate model; concentrates ownership of the majority of media outlets into a handful of mega-corporations; links the mass
media closely to the financial-corporate sector and the government and military; and through all these factors, directs the social-political orientation and commitments of the mass media toward elite priorities and away from popular concerns of the general public that are at odds with the profit imperative and government policy.

Dependence on Advertising Revenue or the Advertising License to do Business

As corporate advertising subsidies became essential to lowering the price of a print copy, newspapers that could not procure such advertising were automatically at a disadvantage in the market. In addition to the increased capital costs associated with large-scale print operations, the failure to obtain corporate advertising also contributed to the decline of the British working-class press. Herman and Chomsky argue that “With advertising, the free market does not yield a neutral system in which final buyer choice decides. The advertisers’ choices influence media prosperity and survival” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:14). Advertisers’ choices, in turn, are politically motivated. Corporations want to advertise their products to segments of the public with purchasing power. Herman and Chomsky maintain that readers of radical and working-class publications tend to be drawn from lower social strata, biasing the advertisers’ choices in favor of the large corporate media and wealthy audiences. Moreover, corporations do not want to advertise in publications or fund television programs that interfere with the “buying mood” by exposing corporate ties to Third World dictators, for example, or state crimes. Thus corporate advertisers tend to promote a conservative news agenda.

The fact that advertisers can and do pull funding for papers or television programs has a disciplining effect on the media such that the influence of this filter occurs without any direct pressure or threat from advertisers (see also Pedro 2011a:1881). But several examples of such withdrawals of funding are worth mentioning. Herman and Chomsky relate the story of a public-
television station that lost its corporate funding from Gulf + Western after it aired a documentary that was critical of the role of multinational corporations in the Third World, and an NBC documentary on environmental problems that failed to air due to lack of sponsors. The documentary assigned blame to corporations and so it did not fit the desired image of corporate sponsors (Herman and Chomsky 2002:17). More recently, Pedro (2011a:1880-1881) recounts a Spanish journalist’s story about an energy company that reneged on a sponsorship due to the newspaper’s previous coverage of pollution that negatively affected the company. And Cromwell and Edwards (2006) show how the dependence on advertising and other components of the propaganda model have shaped the media’s coverage of climate change in a way that filters out mention of scientific analyses that link climate change to the material accumulation processes endemic to capitalism.

Dependence on Official Sources

Generally, production cost is proportional to production time, and news is no less subject to this economic reality than any other commodity. For journalists and reporters, this means that they must have readily available and reliable sources of news that require little fact checking or background research to establish source credibility. The conventions of professional journalism hold that the major centers of power—government and business—are prima facie credible, and more or less objective, sources of information. Thus reliance on these sources helps cut expenses, entailing a symbiotic relationship between the mass media and the powerful, elite-dominated, sectors of society. The media rely on these sources for information, while government and business, in turn, depend on the media as reliable conduits of their own perspectives and interpretations of reality.
Government agencies and business news-promoters facilitate corporate media access through a number of means described by Herman and Chomsky: press conference rooms and press conferences scheduled to meet news deadlines; advance copies of speeches and forthcoming reports; and organized photo sessions (Herman and Chomsky 2002:22). These powerful bureaucracies, the authors note, effectively subsidize the mass media with privileged access, and function as gatekeepers. The media can be excluded from this privileged access if they fail to disseminate the official line, or are otherwise adversarial to the fundamental interests of the state or institution.

These powerful bureaucracies, and in particular, the federal government, inundate the media with stories and information, which, according to Herman and Chomsky, “serve sometimes to foist a particular line and frame on the media . . . and at other times to help chase unwanted stories off the front page or out of the media altogether . . .” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:23). Because the government is a major source of news on national and international affairs, the media are receptive to this constant stream of information, enabling the government to set the news agenda and framework on important issues (Herman and Chomsky 2002:23). Pedro (2011a) cites several studies which show that significant proportions (ranging from 17 to 60 percent depending on the medium and country) of media output are derived “wholly or mostly” from elite public relations material. This research also shows that imperatives toward increased production make journalists more dependent on these prepackaged news releases.

Another important consequence of the media’s dependence on official sources is that the media rely overwhelmingly on current or former government officials and corporate-sponsored “experts” who reinforce the official propaganda line. Dissenting intellectuals and activists tend to be marginalized, though they are occasionally included on mainstream programming to present
the appearance of a balanced presentation of ideas. But the majority of experts are preselected on
the basis pro-establishment ideology. Herman and Chomsky presented data on experts on
terrorism who appeared on the “McNeil-Lehrer News Hour,” finding that “a majority of the
participants (54 percent) were present or former government officials . . .” (Herman and
Chomsky 2002:24). The majority (76 percent) of expert sources on the network stations in the
early phase of the 2003 invasion of Iraq were also current or former government and military
officials (Whiten 2004). Many other experts are drawn from conservative think tanks which are
financed by corporations and provide a revolving door between the State Department and CIA to
nominally private and non-partisan organizations (Herman and Chomsky 2002:24).

Flak

“Flak” refers to criticism and harassment of the mass media for failing to follow a
particular agenda leveled by specialized organizations or individuals. Flak takes many forms,
such as “letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress,
and other modes of complaint, threat, and punitive actions” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:26).
“Flak machines” are connected to and supported materially and ideologically by the major
centers of power, receiving large streams of funding from the corporate sector, and receiving
regular attention from conservative politicians and media pundits. Flak conditions the media to
avoid taking certain positions or presenting inconvenient facts that might elicit flak, and, as a
result, incur expenses.

Flak-producing organizations are numerous and influential in the media industry. Some
of these organizations are the Media Research Center (see Goss 2013), the Commonwealth
Foundation, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, and Accuracy in Media (AIM). Like other
right-wing think tanks, their names and stated objectives sometimes disingenuously suggest a
non-partisan, objective position with respect to the media or political culture. AIM, for example, presents itself as “a non-profit, grassroots citizens watchdog of the news media that critiques botched and bungled news stories and sets the record straight on important issues that have received slanted coverage” (cited in Goss 2009:458). In reality, AIM is lavishly funded by the corporate sector, and specializes in portraying the mass media as having a strong “liberal” (i.e., progressive) bias, usually making its case on the basis of false and manifestly absurd claims (see Goss 2009). Herman and Chomsky write that AIM’s function “is to harass the media and put pressure on them to follow the corporate agenda and a hard-line, right-wing foreign policy” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:27).

Goss (2013:142) makes an important distinction between flak organizations and progressive activist organizations such as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) or Media Lens, which employ similar tactics in their attempt to influence the mass media. First, the right-wing flak machines are connected to and supported financially by major centers of power, receiving streams of funding from the corporate sector, and receiving attention from conservative politicians and media pundits. This is not true of progressive activist organizations, which rely largely on public contributions, and are often dismissed in the mainstream media as partisan or otherwise illegitimate. Representing dissenting viewpoints, they are marginalized. Secondly, as Goss puts it, “activism may be defined as actions performed in good faith toward pro-social ends, typically in confrontation with authority. Flak, by contrast, trades on bad faith, is malicious as needed, and is often utilized to thwart pro-social change in favor of the status quo or for reactionary purposes” (Goss 2013:142-3). Thus, activist organizations are differentiated from flak machines on the basis of structural features and orientations toward existing power structures.
Dominant Ideology

This filter originally concerned anticommunism, but with the demise of the Soviet Union and the virtual disappearance of Communism, it has been necessary to modify it. Different modifications have been proposed by different writers. Herman and Chomsky have proposed including free-market ideology in addition to anticommunism, noting that “Adding it to the residual power of anticommunism in a world in which the global power of market institutions makes nonmarket options seem utopian gives us an ideological package of immense strength” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:xvii-xvii). Pedro’s reassessment seems more on point, however: “In general, atemporal terms, the ideological slant that this filter identifies refers to the discrediting of opposing voices and the dismissal of anything that might lead to democratic social change, or that simply diverges from the elite view, either internationally or domestically” (2011a:1888). He goes on to note that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in foreign policy discourse the official enemy of monolithic communism was replaced by a host of enemies from the Third World: Milosevic, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Saddam Hussein, Hamas, Gaddafi, and so on. This seems more in accord with the functional role attributed to anticommunism in Manufacturing Consent.

According to Herman and Chomsky’s original formulation, anticommunism served a double policy function in Western political discourse. On one hand, it was utilized to mobilize domestic support for intervention in Europe and the Third World. Western leaders emphasized the violence and abuses associated with certain Communist states, on this basis “elevating opposition to communism to a first principle of Western ideology and politics” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:29). States that were associated with communism, governments that extended civil liberties to communists, or even mildly social democratic governments that could be colored as communist, could then be legitimized as targets of Western aggression and
subversion. The role anticommunism played in various U.S. interventions in the Third World is well known. On the other hand, in domestic politics, anticommunism was used to keep the popular social leanings of liberals in check, while politicians had to present themselves as sufficiently tough on communism at home and abroad. Underlying this anticommunism was the threat communism posed to the domestic class structure (Herman and Chomsky 2002:29) and the system of economic and military domination capitalism engendered abroad.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, American policy planners turned their attention to alleged threats to Western interests posed by developments in the Third World (Chomsky 1991; Huntington 1993). Dangerous actors in the Third World replaced the global communist conspiracy as the new enemies. This shift was reflected in mainstream political discourse, and fit the old Cold War pattern of good vs. evil, us vs. them, or friends vs. enemies, that was functional for maintaining the capitalist order. This pattern emerges in contemporary elite ideology in different ways. For example, in the discourse of “humanitarian intervention” and its relative, “the Responsibility to Protect,” or “the war on terrorism,” “the war on drugs,” “the clash of civilizations,” “American exceptionalism,” and so on. These concepts all consist of a strategy of othering, in which we are supposed to feel morally superior to whomever the evil enemy happens to be, and therefore justified in inflicting on them whatever kind of punishment the national leadership decides is appropriate (Pedro 2011a:1890).

These ideological frameworks serve to mystify the real interests and motives of the controlling elite, which dominate policy formation and mainstream discourse on policy through the mass media and other channels of elite opinion such as public education. This is apparent in the mass media’s dichotomous treatment of actors in international affairs. As Herman and Chomsky have documented so thoroughly in their classic works, in the Cold War era, the crimes
of Communist states were harshly condemned and closely investigated by the media, while the crimes of U.S. client states and the United States itself were either ignored entirely or justified as necessary, if sometimes regrettable, in the fight against Communism and the defense of the “free world.” This dichotomous treatment continues in the post-Cold War period, where U.S. clients such as Israel or Saudi Arabia escape serious scrutiny and condemnation for their crimes, while official enemies such as Iran or Gaddafi are the focus of sustained propaganda campaigns replete with lies, fabrications, and suppressed evidence.

Herman and Chomsky write: “It should be noted that when anti-Communist fervor is aroused, the demand for serious evidence in support of claims of “communist” abuses is suspended, and charlatans can thrive as evidential sources. Defectors, informers, and assorted other opportunists move to center stage as ‘experts,’ even after exposure as highly unreliable, if not downright liars” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:30). As I show in chapter 5, this principle is still operative in mass media coverage of international affairs, of course making the requisite substitution of communists with the evil others. I also show that while the communist threat may have subsided, it is still private property and global hegemony that are at stake.

The Predictions of the Propaganda Model and Manufacturing Consent

The structural constraints operating on the mass media, as described by the five filters of the propaganda model, suggest that the news media will be a reliable channel of elite perspectives and ideology. Or, what amounts to the same thing, the centers of concentrated power in the society exert a strong influence on the news agenda and framework of analysis that is available to the public. The government and corporate sector have a major influence on what events are covered and how, what information is allowed to be reported, and who will be supported and who will be vilified in coverage of foreign and international affairs. Given that
Herman and Chomsky specialize in international affairs and U.S. foreign policy analysis, this last determination took on particular salience in the set of predictions and related concepts they derived from the propaganda model and their prior research on which it was based.

Key here are their terms, worthy and unworthy victims. These refer to the victims of enemy states, and victims of client states or the U.S. government, respectively. The terms are meant to be partly ironic, and derive their meaning from the differential treatment these victims receive in the mass media. Worthy victims will receive extensive coverage and the media will carry out a thorough investigation of their victimization with a search for responsibility in the leadership of the criminal state or organization, expressing much moral indignation at their crimes. Unworthy victims, by contrast, will receive a different treatment. They will receive limited coverage and the media will balk at assigning blame to state leadership. Here, rather than the expression of indignation and horror, the media will serve up apologetic explanations for criminal acts or explanations that otherwise remove or obscure criminal agency. This dichotomous treatment results from the different utilities these victims have for directing public outrage at official enemies and away from the U.S. government and its allies.

Thus, media coverage of worthy and unworthy victims, of official enemies and allies or the home country, will differ in terms of total coverage time and space and in terms of quality of evaluation and analysis. The differential treatment is also manifest in the fact that, according to Herman and Chomsky, “Reports of the abuses of worthy victims not only pass through the filters; they may also become the basis of sustained propaganda campaigns” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:32). “Conversely, propaganda campaigns will not be mobilized where victimization, even though massive, sustained, and dramatic, fails to meet the test of utility to elite interests” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:33). One of the most remarkable exhibitions of this
tendency is seen in the U.S. media’s coverage of Khmer Rouge atrocities from 1975 to 1979, which formed the basis of a sustained propaganda campaign (see Herman and Chomsky 2002:260-295), compared to its coverage of the U.S.-backed Indonesian massacres in East Timor from 1975 onward, which were suppressed. In the first volume of Political Economy of Human Rights, Chomsky and Herman showed that once it began, U.S. media coverage of this latter massacre fell to almost zero (Chomsky and Herman 1979:129-204).

Some of the other major findings presented in Manufacturing Consent were that, as mentioned previously, the media dedicated far more attention to the 1984 murder of Jersey Popieluszko, a Polish priest and resistance leader, than to the murder of one hundred religious martyrs in Latin America, including Oscar Romero. The authors argued that Popieluszko’s murder was instrumental for Western anticommunist propaganda, whereas the religious victims were not, victimized as they were by U.S. clients. As another part of their investigation of media coverage of Latin America, marshaling the partly ironic concepts of legitimizing and meaningless elections, Herman and Chomsky also showed that elections in Nicaragua were evaluated by the media according to different standards than those applied in coverage of elections in El Salvador and Guatemala. The latter countries were U.S.-backed terror states in which elections were held under conditions of extreme terror intended to quell popular resistance. Elections in Nicaragua, by contrast, were held under far more free and democratic conditions, in which the popular Sandinista government was not systematically murdering its population. In spite of these and other differences, the American media assailed the elections in Nicaragua, while legitimizing the elections in El Salvador and Guatemala. Herman and Chomsky attribute this difference to the fact that the Reagan administration was trying to legitimate its
attempt to overthrow the Sandinista government, while concealing the nature of the terror states it was supporting.

In their discussion of the Vietnam War, Herman and Chomsky pointed out that the media conformed closely to official government perspectives. For example, the views of the anti-war movement were marginalized and the “righteousness of the cause and nobility of intent” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:172) of the U.S. war effort were rarely questioned. The perspectives of the victims of the American onslaught were rarely sought out as sources: “Only very rarely did U.S. reporters make any effort to see the war from the point of view of ‘the enemy’—the peasants of South Vietnam, Laos, or later Cambodia—or to accompany the military forces of ‘the enemy’ resisting the U.S. assault” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:177). The dominant frame in media coverage of the war was that the U.S. was defending South Vietnam against the “internal aggression” of the NLF, while ignoring the fact that the U.S.-backed government in Saigon was not democratically elected and was not popular among South Vietnamese, who largely supported the NLF. And that the U.S. carried out aggression in South Vietnam was virtually never entertained as a possibility in the media, even though, as Herman and Chomsky illustrate in detail, “The United States attacked South Vietnam, arguably by 1962 and unquestionably by 1965, expanding its aggression to all of Indochina with lethal and long-term effects” (Herman and Chomsky 2002:184). Herman and Chomsky also documented how the media were complicit in making the large-scale U.S. bombings of Laos and Cambodia “secret bombings” by failing to cover them.

Conclusions

This literature review has demonstrated several things. First, the propaganda model is and remains a powerful explanatory framework for social scientists interested in the performance and
function of the news media. Although it has been marginalized in the mainstream of scholarship—as it predicts—media researchers have not shown that the premises underlying the model are inconsistent or that it is not empirically supported as claimed. If anything, they have shown just the opposite. Not only is the model extremely well supported—both in terms of claims about the structure of the media, and in terms of its predictions about media performance—but it is also a relatively simple model that still encompasses the theoretical contributions of more recent and sometimes more complicated theoretical frameworks. It is also more plausible than the standard view of the news media.

Even though a significant body of research supports the propaganda model, its relative obscurity, and the social and political significance of its central claims, indicate a troubling lacuna in the existing literature. Insofar as sociologists have not shied away from politically sensitive and challenging domains of inquiry, Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model deserves a place in the sociological cannon alongside such influential contributions as Mills’ analysis of the power elite, Foucault’s meditations on the capillary nature of power, and other staples of social theory.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS

The major research question my thesis will answer may be stated as follows: Does the *New York Times*’ coverage of the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya comport with the predictions associated with Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s propaganda model? The choice of this question is justified on several grounds, which I outline below, followed by an outline of research expectations.

There are two classes of research questions associated with the propaganda model: Those regarding its empirical foundations, and those regarding the performance of the model and its ability to explain observed phenomena. Or, as Pedro says, “Submitting a model to empirical examination is an important step toward validating it; however, it is also necessary to analyze the relevance, consistency, and exhaustiveness of its operating principles or categories (for the PM [propaganda model], the filters), and their capacity for application to a wide range of general contexts” (Pedro 2011a:1870). Therefore, the question addressed in this work belongs to the latter class of research questions; that is, those regarding the performance of the model. Much recent research has been dedicated to investigating the empirical foundations of the model, whether the model remains relevant in the twenty-first century, how well it predicts media performance in countries not the United States, and so on. In light of this research, it seems reasonable to take for granted here that the model remains relevant in spite of the emergence of the Internet, remains consistent with the facts about the structural aspects of the media, and applies well to the media in many capitalist democracies. What remains then is to satisfy our curiosity not that the model is valid, but *how* exactly it is operating in specific cases, and what this tells us about our society, historical circumstances, and so on.
Moreover, the propaganda model has never been used as a tool for analyzing the case I have chosen. This case is also of special interest for the model, apart from practical concern, in that it is suitable to test the model’s predictions regarding worthy and unworthy victims, the two terms given by Herman and Chomsky to the victims of U.S. enemies and friends, respectively. The model predicts that victims of official U.S. enemies will be given extensive, sympathetic treatment by the mass media, whereas victims of U.S. clients and allies will be largely ignored and justifications will be adduced for their victimization (see the discussion in chapter 2, p. 41). This aspect of the propaganda model has been given little attention in empirical studies utilizing it. The case selected for this study allows comparison of the Times’ treatment of an official enemy—the Muammar Gaddafi regime—to that of U.S. allies—the anti-Gaddafi opposition, and their respective victims during a civil war. We would expect the victims of Gaddafi’s repression to be considered worthy victims, and the victims of the anti-Gaddafi insurgency unworthy victims, thus demonstrating dichotomous treatment in one case study.

The choice of the New York Times is justified on the grounds that it is one of the major papers “of record” in the United States. This has significant consequences for not only the way readers think about the world in the present, but also how history is subsequently written and understood in mainstream scholarship. And while the study is limited to the Times, as a major publication it offers some insight into general news reporting in the United States, due to the “cascading” effect of news production, in which the major publications serve as the agenda-setting media (Castells 2013:164). Furthermore, it is well known that distortion and extreme ideological bias are standard for the right-wing media, particularly FOX News, Breitbart, and so on. However, what is probably less well understood, at least in the popular imagination, is that the liberal news outlets are no less subject to elite structural bias, as Herman and Chomsky and
many other observers have demonstrated. As Goss puts it, the *Times* enjoys a “lofty reputation” and “suffers no lack of modesty.”

The newspaper self-regards as “the world’s greatest news-gathering organization (...) a colossus astride the globe”; “To work at our newspaper is to experience awe,” boasts one editor . . . [media scholar, James] Curran posits the *Times* as best exemplifying “why the American model of responsible media capitalism has admirers around the world.” (Goss 2013:95)

“As the *Times* often showcases the pinnacle of US news tendencies, its discourses furnish a stringent test in evaluating the nation’s news performance on an immensely important topic” (Goss 2013:95). Goss was referring to the coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but his point is relevant for other topics as well. Furthermore, insofar as the *Times* represents the outer limits of mainstream progressive opinion, a focus on the liberal media provides insight as to the “bounds of the expressible,” to paraphrase Noam Chomsky.

In accordance with the predictions of the propaganda model, then, the research expectations of this study are as follows. (1) The *New York Times*’ coverage of the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya will reflect the range of elite opinion in the United States, as evidenced by the *Times*’ close adherence to official government analyses of events. Commentary and reporting will downplay or ignore facts and topics that are inconsistent with official narratives, and will generally fail to provide historical context that challenges the assumptions underlying official narratives and U.S. government pronouncements to do good, to uphold human rights, democratic values, and so on. Coverage will thereby support the policy needs of the state. (2) Specifically, the *Times* will emphasize the crimes of the Gaddafi regime with extensive coverage in which Gaddafi will be portrayed negatively as a dictator, villain, war criminal, and so on. There will be
little or no sympathetic coverage of Gaddafi and his crimes will be exaggerated. (3) Gaddafi’s victims—the anti-Gaddafi rebels—will be portrayed as innocents, peaceful protestors, and democratic reformers, and their plight at the hands of the Gaddafi regime will be given much sympathetic attention. They will be treated as worthy victims and their crimes downplayed or ignored. Conversely, the victims of the anti-Gaddafi rebels—black Libyans and African migrant workers—will be either ignored or portrayed as pro-Gaddafi mercenaries.
CHAPTER 4

METHOD AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to demonstrate and measure the hypothesized tendencies outlined in the preceding chapter, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed. Specifically, critical discourse analysis and content analysis were used, as these are the methods that were utilized by Herman and Chomsky in their original studies (Klaehn 2009; Mullen 2009), and are often employed in similar media studies. I begin this chapter with brief explanations of what is meant by “critical discourse analysis” and “content analysis” in the context of this study. Then I outline the specific research design applied in this study and explain how these methods work with it. Variables and concepts are then defined and operationalized. And questions regarding reliability and validity are addressed in the final section.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a research method which attempts to identify how social relationships shape discourse, and how, conversely, discourse shapes social relationships. Thus, it is assumed that discourse is a social activity that cannot be considered separately from a given social and historical context. Therefore, this is an appropriate method to use for analyzing text when the expectation is that historical social conditions—such as those identified by the propaganda model—are expected to influence the text in ways that are likely reproduce these social conditions.

According to Fairclough and Wodak, as discourse is socially constitutive, “it gives rise to important issues of power.” They elaborate further that
Discursive practices may have major ideological effects: that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people. So discourse may, for example, be racist, or sexist, and try to pass off assumptions (often falsifying ones) about any aspect of social life as mere common sense. Both the ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them are often unclear to people.

Therefore, critical discourse analysis “aims to make more visible these opaque aspects of discourse” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:357). That is, it tries to show how certain discursive practices embody assumptions about the social world that arise from and reinforce power relations. It can do this by elucidating double standards and unstated assumptions, criticizing problematic interpretations, narratives, and descriptions, refuting fallacious arguments, presenting conflicting evidence, and so on. These are the methods I used to criticize the *New York Times* in chapter 5. And analogous to Foucault’s method, as outlined by Hall (1997), critical discourse analysis can also identify the rules that “govern the way that a given topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about” (Hall 1997:346). The concepts offered by Herman and Chomsky—for example, *worthy* and *unworthy victims*—engender rules that govern discourse in the mainstream media.

Another important characteristic of critical discourse analysis is that it is “engaged and committed” to intervening in social life “on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups, and that it openly declares the emancipatory interests that motivate it” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:358). This follows from a fundamental principle of critical
social science that total objectivity and political neutrality *vis-à-vis* the social totality is impossible. (See, for example, Abromeit 2011:141-84, 227-245, passim., for an exposition of how this philosophical stance was developed by Max Horkheimer.) But, as Fairclough and Wodak also note, this “does not imply that CDA [critical discourse analysis] is less scholarly than other research” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:358), as it remains a rigorous, systematic form of analysis, subject to many of the same rules of traditional empirical science, such as reproducibility, generalizability, and grounding in empirical observation.

While critical discourse analysis provides the qualitative design aspect to this study, it is also buttressed with the more quantitative approach of content analysis. Holsti defines content analysis broadly as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1968:601). In traditional content analysis, rules are specified for identifying and coding certain features of texts, such as particular words or phrases, themes, text length, number of paragraphs, sentences, or words, so that systematic, objective comparisons between or within texts can be made. Thus, content analysis is useful, Holsti states, “whenever the problem requires precise and replicable methods for analyzing those aspects of symbolic behavior which may escape casual scrutiny” (Holsti 1968:602). And content analysis may be used to “test hypotheses and make inferences about (1) characteristics of the text, (2) causes or antecedents of the message, or (3) effects of the communication” (Holsti 1968:604). In this study, I am concerned with the first and second objectives: Identifying characteristics of texts and linking them to a causal explanation.

Holsti identifies several ways in which content analysis may be incorporated into a research design. These suggestions, it may also be noted, apply equally well to critical discourse analysis. According to Holsti, comparisons can be made between documents derived from a
single source or from two or more sources (Holsti 1968:605). When comparing messages from a single source, the comparisons can be made over time in order to demonstrate changes that occur in the source. Additionally or alternatively, comparisons can be made between documents from a single source in different situations. This can be useful for demonstrating how different historical contexts influence the message or how different subjects are presented. According to Holsti, “Hypotheses may be tested by comparing the messages of two or more difference sources. Usually the purpose is to relate theoretically significant attributes of communication sources to differences in the messages they produce” (emphasis in original, Holsti 1968:605). We may add that hypotheses can be tested, and theoretically significant attributes of communication sources can be related to content, using only a single source, which is the approach taken in this study.

Another possibility for content analysis designs (which, again, applies to critical discourse analysis as well) is the comparison of content data “to some standard of adequacy or performance” (Holsti 1968:605) For example, “Many studies have employed a priori standards defined, often implicitly, by the investigator’s preferences” (Holsti 1968:605). However, Holsti cautions against this approach, and outlines other ways of deriving standards of adequacy. His remarks on these matters are important in the context of this study, especially as they pertain to the problem of operationalizing bias:

Even when a priori standards are made explicit, the problems of defining operationally such deviations as “bias” have rarely been dealt with in a satisfactory manner. An alternative to the deductive approach is to derive standards inductively from content data. A representative sample of messages produced by a class of communicators may provide norms against which the products of any single communicator may be compared. This technique has often
been used in mass media research: the content of a given newspaper, magazine, or network is compared to the performance of the medium as a whole. A third type of standard against which content data may be compared is one defined by *noncontent indices*, such as aggregate data or expert opinion. (Holsti 1968:605)

The problem identified here by Holsti will be addressed in the sections below. For now, it is simply noted that both a priori standards and noncontent indices providing standards of comparison will be developed and implemented in the application of content analysis and critical discourse analysis in this study.

Overview of the Research Design

The propaganda model predicts that the news media will tend to function as a propaganda system for societal elites insofar as the range of opinion expressed in the media will tend to reflect only the range of elite opinion, with dissent and criticism that falls outside of this range marginalized. An obvious way to demonstrate this tendency is through a careful analysis of media output covering a given topic to see how closely it conforms to or challenges elite perspectives. Therefore, the research design necessitates comparisons among at least two classes of data: that contained in the sample of media output, and that which provides some standard of performance to which the sample can be compared.

The empirical data that was collected and analyzed in this study was drawn from articles published by the *New York Times*; specifically, articles on the 2011 conflict in Libya. The articles were obtained through the LexisNexis Academic database, using the search term “Gaddafi” for the period February 15, 2011 through March 19, 2011. These specific dates were selected because they correspond to the beginning of a series of protests in Benghazi which precipitated the civil war, to the beginning of the NATO bombing. Events that took place during
this time period provided the Obama administration and leadership in France and Great Britain with the pretexts for military intervention. Therefore, an understanding of the events that took place during this time is essential for understanding the propaganda that facilitated Western military involvement.

As events unfold, a narrative emerges from reporting and opinion pieces that contains both objective elements ("hard reporting") such as historical facts presented in chronological order, and subjective elements ("soft reporting"), such as interpretations given to the facts, circumstantial inferences, calls for particular kinds of responses, and so on. This narrative must then be compared to alternative sources of information and frameworks of analysis.

This alternative framework constitutes the “standard of performance” conceptualized by Holsti. In this study, I relied on the expert analyses provided by dissident scholars, as well as reports from human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and documents from intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union and the United Nations. I also relied on news reports, including those appearing in the *Times* itself. This is a legitimate practice inasmuch as key facts do pass through the filters described by the propaganda model, though often placed near the end of an article, mentioned only once in passing, or presented in isolation from other facts which may give it meaning (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lxii-lxiii). It should also be noted that the decision to rely on critical, dissenting experts is justified insofar as these authors are leading writers in their fields, regardless of their social and political commitments. In the final analysis, we are concerned with arguments and their premises, evidence, and facts—not persons.

Following these prescriptions, I constructed a historical narrative on the history of United States-Libya relations and the civil war in Libya. The narrative contains two parts: one providing
a general background to the conflict, demonstrating U.S. special interests in weakening or deposing the Gaddafi regime, and one that overviews in detail the weeks preceding the NATO intervention. This overview includes important facts and topics that were likely to be left out of coverage because they conflicted with the official story. Thus, the narrative presented at the beginning of the chapter provides a standard to which the discourse produced by the *Times* can be compared. If a body of facts can be presented that contradicts official sources, and if it is subsequently found in an analysis of the *Times* samples that these facts tend to be marginalized or excluded, then it may be concluded that the *Times* conforms to elite interpretations of events. If, however, these facts do receive coverage proportional to those facts which support elite interpretations, then we would draw the opposite conclusion. This is a quantitative approach appropriate for content analysis.

There are two important points to be made regarding this methodological approach. The first is that it is not simply that “evidence of selection” is “automatically read as evidence of deceit” or bias, as Schudson (2013:30-31) maintains in his critique of news media bias as an unserviceable concept. Rather, it is that a series of facts entirely or largely absent from reporting can be presented which all belong to a particular class of facts, namely, facts which are incompatible with official propaganda lines and official government policy. This is a methodologically sound way of operationalizing the concept of elite bias. The second point is that the historical account I present in this work and compare to the *Times* sample is based on information that was publicly available at the time the events reported on were occurring (Chomsky and Herman 2004:105). This obviates the possibility of creating a narrative in which information that was unavailable to reporters is used to demonstrate the systematic omission of this very information, which would obviously prove nothing and be absurd. But the fact that
publicly available information of a certain kind tends to be omitted from media coverage may provide evidence of bias, though other factors must be considered, such as the source of the information and how widely distributed it was by the source.

In addition to quantitative analysis of reporting, it is important to show qualitatively how a given topic is treated in the news media. Some topics and facts are inconvenient for those in power and require careful treatment so that they can be made to fit in plausibly with official story lines. Here the concepts of worthy and unworthy victims are especially useful for the analysis. If in the Times sample the victims of the anti-Gaddafi opposition tend to be dehumanized, their suffering is ignored or somehow defended, and little or no outrage is expressed at their plight, it may be concluded that the Times conforms to elite perspectives. And, in conjunction with this tendency, if the Gaddafi regime’s victims tend to be given sympathetic treatment, their suffering is clearly linked to its actions, and outrage is expressed at their plight, it may be concluded that the Times exhibits an elite bias. This would also support the related victimization expectation of the propaganda model. If, on the other hand, such a dichotomous treatment cannot be demonstrated, if victims of friends and official enemies tend to be given similar treatment, then the opposite conclusions are warranted and the victimization expectation would not be supported. Demonstrating these tendencies requires the application of critical discourse analysis, involving as it does a comparison of how oppressed social actors are positioned in the discourse and analysis of how well the discourse supports the predictions of the victimization expectation. The expected dichotomous treatment of victims was also assessed using content analysis, in which total amounts of coverage given to the two classes of victims was compared.

Critical discourse analysis was also used to evaluate the nature of policy criticism in Times reporting and commentary. It was expected that, in conformity with elite frames, criticism
of foreign policy in the press would be limited to strategic concerns and pragmatic calculations of costs and benefits—political or economic—to the United States. That is, criticism would never rise to the level of moral condemnation in which the alleged good intentions of U.S. leadership and foreign policy are put into question (per research expectation number 1. See p. 47). Policy may be mistaken or too costly, but never simply wrong, and never for geostrategic purposes. If this tendency is observed, it may be concluded that the Times conforms to an elite framework of analysis, which traditionally engenders some form of American exceptionalism, the belief that the United States is a unique moral force in the world, motivated solely by abstract principles of democracy, liberty, freedom, justice, and so on, and rarely self-interest or material gain. If criticism moves beyond this framework and extends into the realm of social criticism in which this framework is called into question, the expectation would not be supported.

To summarize, then, the research design involves the analysis of data derived from a sample of New York Times publications on the conflict in Libya. This civil war in Libya was chosen on the basis of features—diplomatic relationship to the U.S. of parties to the conflicts, and so forth—that enable testing of the expectations derived from the propaganda model, a form of theoretical sampling. The unit of analysis is the newspaper article. The independent variables are described by the five filters of the propaganda model. The three main dependent variables are (1) treatment of politically salient facts, (2) treatment of victims, and (3) scope of foreign policy criticism in the Times. The first variable will be measured by comparing the Times to a historical account derived from authoritative sources on the topics. The second variable will be measured by comparing the treatment of the two classes of victims. And the third variable will be measured by comparing the Times to the theoretically established constraints of elite opinion and again to the historical accounts provided by the author. The measurement of each variable
requires qualitative discourse analysis as well as quantitative analysis in which objective measures will be obtained using statistics derived from a content analysis.

The three variables described in this section may, in turn, be taken as a kind of index of the central construct at stake in this study: elite bias in the New York Times. Figure 1.1 (page 59) shows the relationship between the components of the propaganda model, the dependent variable and its separate components, the research expectations, the operational definitions provided below, and the indicators of the dependent variables.

Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Coding

Though much has already been said regarding major concepts featured in this study and how they are operationalized, this section provides an outline of central concepts and operational procedures that link them to empirical measures. Coding procedures are presented in appendix B.

Beginning with the central concept of “elite bias,” we note that the Webster’s dictionary defines “bias” as “An inclination or preference, esp. [especially] one that interferes with impartial judgment.” Working from this definition, in the context of news media analysis, we can then define elite class bias provisionally as an inclination or preference for those facts and perspectives which corroborate elite views. Also following from the dictionary definition, this preference would interfere with an impartial judgment, namely, one which included the facts and perspectives considered important by non-elite classes and group formations. Ipso facto, this could only be achieved through a failure to adequately consider non-elite perspectives. Therefore, we need not be concerned that the definition implies that the preference does in fact interfere with impartial judgment. And keeping to the definition provided earlier, “elite class” refers to those members of the upper social classes who wield the most economic, political, and
Figure 1: Schematic Diagram of the Research Design

Note: This figure shows the relationship between the propaganda model and the various components of the research design. While I have used the language of positivistic science in the headings of the figure, it should be noted that I have not treated “elite bias” strictly as a quantifiable, continuous variable in this study, and hence, I have not carried out “hypothesis testing” in the strict sense.

The figure should be understood as demonstrating that the propaganda model predicts elite bias, which in turn is understood in terms of three other variables: Treatment of topics, treatment of victims, and the limits of debate. Treatment of topics is indicated by compatible topics, incompatible topics, and the framework of analysis; treatment of victims is indicated by treatment of anti-Gaddafi protestors, rebels, and black Africans and Libyans; limits of debate are indicated by the presence or absence of political economy analysis and American exceptionalism. The indicators, in turn, are defined operationally in terms of the quantitative and qualitative dimensions described above.

military power. Combining the two definitions, then, we arrive at the following expanded conceptual definition of “elite class bias”: a preference for those facts and interpretive
frameworks which corroborate the views of the social classes wielding the most economic, political, and military power, and a tendency to ignore those facts and interpretive frameworks considered important by non-elite social classes and group formations.

This definition of bias is basically consistent with that found in the social science literature. Buss and Hofstetter defined media bias as “selectivity . . . which may or may not lead to unbalanced, inequitable or unfair treatment of individuals or issues” (Buss and Hofstetter 1978:518). (Note the connection to the research expectations regarding worthy and unworthy victims and the demonization of Gaddafi.) One study (Fitzgerald, Campbell, Sivak 2001), which utilized content analysis to measure bias, operationalized bias in press articles as a failure to give approximately equal coverage to both pro and con sides of a prominent political debate, though the authors did not provide an explicit conceptual definition. Leading communications scholar, Robert Entman, notes that bias is a “curiously undertheorized staple of public discourse about the media” (Entman 2007:163) and has sought to provide a definition informed by framing theory. Framing, as defined by Entman, is “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (Entman 2007:164). Working from a commonly held view of bias as content bias—the preference for one side over another in news coverage—Entman defines content bias as “consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of government power” (emphasis in original, Entman 2007:166). Like the conceptual definition of elite bias employed in this study, Entman’s definition of bias emphasizes politically relevant patterns or tendencies.

The news media topics chosen for this study necessitate that elite bias is operationalized in a way that makes it relatable to the particular subject matter engendered by these topics.
Different topics would require different operational definitions. In this study, three dependent variables were derived from subject matter to provide measures of elite class bias relevant to the domain of foreign affairs reporting: treatment of facts and topics, treatment of victims, and the nature of foreign policy criticism. Definitions or descriptions of these variables beyond what has already been provided would be superfluous, but more precise operational definitions (measurement procedures) can now be provided.

Treatment of Politically Salient Topics

The topics and historical facts incorporated into the narrative comprising the standard of comparison are events and facts that figure prominently in the scholarly literature, regarded by experts as politically salient. Some of these topics were then recorded onto a frequency table with three columns: one containing a brief description of the topics themselves, and two containing spaces to record the number of articles in which they are mentioned in the New York Times sample. The table was also divided into two parts: one containing topics that are compatible with the official government agenda in Libya, and one containing topics that are incompatible with the official agenda. Thus, raw measures of the frequency of occurrence in the samples could be recorded and clearly displayed, enabling a comparison of the two classes of topics. (The table used during data collection is the one shown in appendix C.) Additionally, a summary of the Times narrative is presented and compared to the baseline narrative. This summary highlights the facts and events that were salient in the paper’s coverage and establishes the general framework of analysis that guided reporting and commentary.

Because it is important to show how topics that are inconvenient for official propaganda lines are treated when they aren’t simply ignored, the summary of the Times narrative was accompanied by a discussion of how such topics were dealt with. When such topics did appear in
the samples, the following five questions were addressed with respect to each one: (1) How many times is the topic mentioned in the entire sample? (2) How is the topic or fact presented in relation to other key facts? (3) Where is the topic or fact positioned in the article(s) and paper(s)? (4) How much attention is given to it in the article(s) (e.g., total number of lines)? (5) What is the framework of analysis in which it is presented (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lxiii)?

Worthy and Unworthy Victims

With respect to the victims in each conflict, the following questions were asked about them: (1) Is outrage and indignation expressed at their plight? (2) Does their victimization lead to a search for responsibility at the top? (3) Does their victimization lead to a call for state military intervention? (4) How often are they or their representatives consulted as sources? (5) How much coverage do they receive (i.e., total number of articles) (cf. Herman and Chomsky 2002:34-35)? The first three questions require qualitative descriptions while the other questions entail quantitative measurements.

The quantitative analysis described here is different from that employed by Herman and Chomsky in that they measured coverage of individual victims. This analysis employed here measured coverage of classes of victims. It does not appear that there are difficulties associated with this procedural difference, as long as coding instructions specify when the classes of victims are being mentioned or described as such, rather than being mentioned simpliciter. This approach also enables the researcher to demonstrate how the victims of enemies and clients are employed differently for different propaganda purposes.

Limits of Foreign Policy Criticism

To discern the ideological limits of foreign policy criticism in the Times samples, the following questions were asked about U.S. and ally foreign policy and exercises of state power:
(1) Does policy analysis include political-economic explanations of foreign policy (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lx)? (2) Are the stated intentions of state and military leadership ever critically scrutinized (Herman and Chomsky 2002:lx)? (3) Is foreign policy ever characterized as morally unacceptable? (4) What is the general character of foreign policy debate in the samples? The first three questions measure simple dichotomous variables that can be answered positively or negatively, while the fourth question requires a detailed summary description.

The coding process used coding sheets for each article and two kinds of recording sheets. (For examples of each, see appendix C.) A coding sheet was filled out for each article. It contained spaces to fill in the following information: date; title; total number of lines; section (page number); type (article, op-ed, etc.). Then, depending on whether the article discussed victims, the following: class or name of victim; whether outrage or indignation is expressed or philosophical generalizations about violence and conflict are made instead; whether there is a search for responsibility; whether the victims figure as sources; and total lines dedicated to victims. The coding sheet also contained a notes section for illustrative examples of how victims were described, interesting quotes, and comments regarding data recorded on the recording sheets.

The first recording sheet was described above. The second recording sheet for recording data about policy analysis featured a simple table. This table contained rows for placing article dates and titles, and three columns for recording if and when three possible kinds of discourse appeared in articles published on those dates. Heading the three columns of the table, the three kinds of discourse were listed as: Political economy analysis of state power and policy; intentions of state leaders are questioned; policy is characterized as immoral. The data recorded here only pertained to U.S. policies and actions.
Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

The major construct examined in this study is that of elite bias in news coverage. In this study it is composed of three main variables, which were linked to empirical phenomena (*New York Times* article content) through 14 indicators. Since these indicators are measured using both quantitative and qualitative methods, it is not possible to carry out statistical tests of construct validity. However, unless otherwise demonstrated, the 14 indicators selected provide an exhaustive operational definition of the construct of elite bias in the context of reporting in which they are applied, demonstrating content validity. As can be seen by comparing the questions formulated above to the citations provided along with them, this operational definition is in fact consistent with that used by Herman and Chomsky in their original study, indicating criterion validity. Furthermore, the predictive validity associated with this construct has been demonstrated by Herman and Chomsky (2002).

Issues pertaining to the internal validity of Herman and Chomsky’s original research design have already been addressed, but may be revisited here in the context of this study. In general, proposed alternative explanations of the phenomena predicted by the propaganda model—namely, generally lower coverage of a geographical region as accounting for lower coverage of a given conflict, and researcher bias—have been ruled out (see the discussion of the Lang and Engel Lang critique in chapter 2, p. 18). In this study, overall coverage of Middle East affairs is sufficient enough to rule out the possibility that certain matters pertaining to conflicts in this region are less likely to be covered. Such an explanation is plainly implausible with respect to reporting on the Middle East in the American press. And as to whether or not the case has been selected for this study because it supports the desired conclusions of the author, the response is that the true reason for selecting the case of Libya is derived in part from the
theoretical requirements of the model and in part from the author’s own interests. With respect to the former, the model requires examples in which news coverage is about reporting of our own military adventures or those of a client, and one is about those of an official enemy. Or, the sample involves a case in which these two classes of actor are both present. This criterion is met. The selection of this particular case was also motivated by the author’s interest in Middle East politics and history. My own familiarity with these events and how they appeared to be covered in mainstream news outlets suggested that they demonstrated the predictions of the propaganda model. However, demonstrating whether or not they really do requires systematic scientific analysis. Of course, many other cases could have been selected, and the spatial constraints of a Master’s thesis required that I choose only one. But it is not apparent that any of this biases the sampling method.

Researcher bias or influence should also be minimized in this study by using the provided historical background as a standard of comparison, focusing the data analysis on the 14 questions that constitute the operational definition, and following the coding procedures for the content analysis. All of this makes possible some degree of reproducibility and a check on the reliability of the methods employed.

Finally, regarding generalizability, this study tests the ability of an existing model to explain, or predict patterns in, a new set of data. In the terms of qualitative methodology, this is referred to as an “illustrative method,” in which a model is confirmed or rejected depending on whether or not it is able to explain new data (Nueman 2003:451-52). Thus, the results of this study will be “generalizable” to the extent that they add to an already existing stock of case studies which support the propaganda model. In a sense more specific to quantitative methodology, generalizability may be taken to mean inferences from the data analyzed in this
study to some larger population of cases. Here, that could mean, for instance, a generalization about how all American news outlets or articles covered the case focused on in this study. But without carrying out the time consuming work of making specific empirical observations using the appropriate methods, making such an inference is practically impossible, though this study could form the basis of further research. Because inferential statistical analysis is simply not possible given the nature of the object of study, generalizability must be addressed in terms of an illustrative method.

**Strengths, Weaknesses, and Limitations of the Design**

The major strength of this research design is that it establishes a sound framework for analyzing the performance of one of the leading news outlets in United States, indeed in the world. It offers a serious challenge to the premises of conventional thinking about this particular outlet, and the liberal media in general. It searches for a less apparent, more scientific assessment of the *New York Times* that moves beyond surface appearances and ideology, as good sociology often does.

Of course, strengths are often also weaknesses. The time and space limitations of a Master’s thesis, and the nature of the methodology required for this study, limited the analysis to one news outlet and one case study. As mentioned above, this may not tell us very much about how the news media in general covered Libya during this time, though it does provide some grounds for speculation and further hypothesis formation, given what is known about the tiered structure of the news industry. Preferably, the study would also include a case which seems likely to reject the hypotheses of the propaganda model, as Herman and Chomsky sought to do in *Manufacturing Consent* by examining claims made regarding the media and Vietnam, Iran-contra, and so on, discussed earlier.
The delimitations of the study should also be made clear. As mentioned in previous chapters, this study is concerned with the discursive output of the media as a propaganda system, *not* with the effects this system may have had on readers and whether or not this propaganda is or was effective in mobilizing public opinion in favor of elite priorities. These are different questions. While some survey data will be provided to at least cast some light on this interesting question, the actual aim of this study should be kept in mind throughout. The study is also only concerned with discursive content, the written words and specific narratives produced by the *New York Times*. It is not overly concerned with the nature of the medium, either as a newspaper, or as an online news source, nor is it concerned with visual content such as photographs. This focus on textual content may also constitute a weakness of the study, insofar as different mediums may have different effects on discourse and propaganda techniques. However, it is ultimately arguments, discourses, and frameworks of analysis which influence the total “discursive formation,” to use Foucault’s term.

To repeat an earlier point, the study is mostly concerned with how the model operates in specific cases, and empirical evidence that demonstrates this, rather than with the structural features of the media described by the model, and the empirical evidence that illustrates these structural features. The latter has been the domain of many other studies, but I have chosen as the goal of this project a careful analysis of media output to test the expectations of the propaganda model. This focus, in my opinion, constitutes an important strength of this study. For, as mentioned before, critical discourse analysis, and the tradition of critical sociology in general, openly and unapologetically sides with oppressed and socially downtrodden peoples. A careful investigation of a leading newspaper in the United States that may have facilitated major crimes
against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war, and so on, is an important piece of political activism for those who wish to understand and put an end to such heinous crimes.
CHAPTER 5

THE NEW YORK TIMES’ COVERAGE OF THE 2011 NATO INTERVENTION IN LIBYA

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the New York Times’ coverage of the civil war in Libya during the period of February 15, 2011, through March 19, 2011. The analysis uses as a basis of comparison a historical narrative constructed from both primary sources and existing literature on that conflict. This literature, which includes Prashad’s Arab Spring, Libyan Winter, Forte’s Slouching Towards Sirte, and Campbell’s Global NATO, is all based on publicly available information about which any Times writer reporting on Libya would have known. To contextualize the 2011 conflict, I also provide an account of Libya-United States relations from 1969 onward. This historical context establishes that the United States had special geostrategic interests in removing Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi from power, explaining his demonization as an official enemy and U.S. support for the anti-Gaddafi insurgency. Thus, the 2011 civil war provides the historical circumstances required for testing the worthy victims hypothesis of the propaganda model: victims of official enemies will be worthy of support, our outrage and indignation. This case study also stands on its own as a comparison of worthy and unworthy victims given that the U.S.-backed side of the civil war—like Gaddafi—also carried out atrocities.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin with the broader historical background from Libya’s 1969 revolution through 2011. I then present a detailed account of the events from February 15 to March 19, 2011, the period which is the focus of this study. Then I analyze the Times’ coverage of Libya during this same period. This section is divided into four parts: a general discussion of topics included and excluded in the Times; a look at worthy and unworthy
victims in the conflict (especially Arab Libyans v. black Africans); the range of debate on policy options for the United States; and letters to the editors, op-eds, and editorials. The focus on this 33-day period is important because February 15 may serve as the beginning of the 2011 civil war, and March 19 marks the beginning of the NATO military intervention. Therefore, events that occurred during this time provided the *casus belli* for the West. Carefully considering what actually happened and what was known (and not known) at the time enables one to see very clearly how the Obama administration and the media made a dubious case for humanitarian intervention in Libya.

**Historical Background: Libya-U.S. Relations, 1969-2011**

Tensions between the West and Libya emerged after the 1969 revolution led by Muammar Gaddafi. The revolutionary government sought to remove Libya from the reach of Western political-economic domination and Gaddafi quickly closed the U.S. and British military air bases inside Libya.

The revolution was a popular one, and later, one of the major initiatives of the new government was to use Libya’s oil wealth to raise the standard of living for the general population. Gaddafi nationalized oil companies, redistributed land and property more equitably, expanded welfare programs, and encouraged worker control of several firms (Prashad 2012:106-7). However, the Libyan Jamahiriya—approximately, the Libyan “state of the masses”—was always undemocratic from the standpoint of the Western liberal tradition. Moreover, the new social programs disproportionately benefited the Western part of Libya relative to the East. This was due to tribal rivalries in which the Sa’adi tribes in the East—those who dominated under the former regime of King Idris—were marginalized by Gaddafi and his tribe, the Gadhadhfa
(Prashad 2012:112-113). According to Prashad, this “meant that the Eastern part of Libya became a hive of conspiracy against the regime” (Prashad 2012:113).

Yet, the social programs were effective. In 2010, Libya scored very high on social indicators, placing 55th out of 170 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index; first among African countries, and fourth among all Arab countries (Prashad 2012:105). The literacy rate was 90 percent. The programs were expensive, however, and in the 1980’s Libya’s ongoing war with Chad began to exert additional pressure on the Libyan economy. Under these conditions political tensions within Libya heightened. In addition to tribal rivalries, the new middle class that formed as a consequence of the social programs began demanding more political power (Prashad 2012: 111). A crucial split within the regime also emerged between those known as the “reformers” and the conservative “hard-liners”. Both groups were led by Gaddafi’s own sons, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi (the reformers) and Mutassim Gaddafi (the hard-liners). The difference between these two factions turned largely on matters of economic policy, with the reformers favoring opening Libya to greater Western economic penetration, and the hard-liners, who were skeptical of such moves, fearful that opening Libya to greater Western investment was an invitation to neocolonialism. To the hard-liners, such moves would be contrary to the principles of the Jamahiriya.

In the 1980’s and 90’s Libya was also subjected to routine subversion and aggression by the United States and Europe. In addition to the Reagan administration’s plot to assassinate Gaddafi, this included military provocations intended to create pretexts for bombing, as in 1981, when the United States shot down two Libyan fighter jets in the Gulf of Sirte (Forte 2012:70), and in March 1986, when massive military mobilizations in the Gulf of Sirte did provoke a Libyan response, which was then used as a pretext to bomb a missile defense system in Sirte
The CIA also implemented various strategies to destabilize the Gaddafí regime, and attempts were made to convince Egypt and Sudan to invade Libya. The Gaddafí regime orchestrated the bombing of a nightclub in Berlin, most likely as a response to the March 1986 military exercises in the Gulf of Sirte. In turn, the United States used this as a pretext to bomb Tripoli and Benghazi in April, killing 60 to 100 civilians (Chomsky 1986/2002:87-94). This is the context in which the Gaddafí regime undertook bombings of international airliners, Pan Am Flight 103 and UTA Flight 772, leading to U.N. sanctions against Libya in 1992. Western subversion continued into the 1990’s, when in 1996, Great Britain’s M16 attempted to assassinate Gaddafí with the help of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), an al-Qaeda cell based in eastern Libya (Forte 2012:79-80).

In an attempt to resolve the many problems afflicting Libya, Gaddafí eventually attempted to find a middle ground between the reformers and hard-liners in the regime. He did this by making several concessions to the West, including cooperating in the Lockerbie proceedings, and later, providing support for the United States in the so-called War on Terror, halting Libya’s weapons of mass destruction programs, and in 2008, agreeing to pay $1.5 billion in compensation for the various bombings. All of this cooled relations with the West. The U.N. sanctions were suspended in 1999, and fully lifted in 2003. In 2006, Libya was removed from the U.S. State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism, and in 2008, all outstanding claims against Libya were dropped through Executive Order 13477, signed by George W. Bush (Prashad 2012:125-126). By straightening out relations with the West, Gaddafí appeased the reformers, but remained loyal to Libyan nationalism and autonomy. And by cooperating with the United States in the War on Terror, Gaddafí also hoped to squash Islamic extremism inside
Libya, particularly in the east, where it had taken root after various Libyan jihadists had returned from the 1980’s war in Afghanistan and the civil war in Algeria.

While Gaddafi was seen as an ally in the War on Terror, and had improved relations with the United States and Europe, he continued to be a problem for imperial planners in Washington. In the early 1990’s, Gaddafi had turned away from the Arab League countries toward Africa. In the spirit of the influential Pan-Africanist, Kwame Nkrumah, he began to pursue a vigorous Pan-African policy in which Libya would make massive investments in development and aid projects across several African states (on these projects, see Forte 2012:156-167). Gaddafi led in the formation of what became the African Union, founded in 1999 in Sirte, Libya. He played a leading role in the African Union, and Libya, along with Algeria, Egypt, and South Africa, provided around 75 percent of the its budget (Campbell 2013:134). And in 2009 Gaddafi was elected its chair.

The African Union was problematic for Western leaders principally for two reasons: It sought to create a common African military defense system, in addition to a commercial trade zone with financial institutions that could have freed Africa from economic subordination to, and dependence on, the West. Indeed, the African Union had ambitions to create a whole body of parallel institutions to Western-led investment banks, international criminal tribunals, and military defense alliances, which were seen by many African leaders as instruments of neocolonialism. Gaddafi was a vocal supporter of creating these parallel institutions as a way to achieve African sovereignty, and he gained support for them through the African Union. At the 2009 A.U. Summit in Libya, member states agreed to Gaddafi’s plan to create an African Defense Council under a new supranational African Authority, which would replace the A.U.
Commission, the executive branch of the African Union (Forte 2012:169). At the summit, according to Forte,

Gaddafi maintained that, “from a legal standpoint, international bodies and third-party states had no right to interfere in the internal problems of another state.” The role of the AU should instead be “to mediate between opposing factions in an effort to bring peace.” However, if internal conflict were to be intensified by exogenous forces (he provided the example of oil-thirsty foreign governments in Sudan), then the AU had a duty to intervene in a protective capacity. (Forte 2012:168)

The implication of this stance was clear: Western military intervention in African affairs was not welcome, and the African Union could become a bulwark against it.

Such developments as the formation of an African Authority troubled U.S. diplomats and the Obama administration, as revealed in the diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks in 2010, and analyzed by Maximillian Forte in his authoritative work on NATO’s military intervention. Such a military defense system was a direct challenge to the presence and purpose of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) on the continent, which Gaddafi had always opposed, believing that it infringed on African sovereignty and was likely to increase terrorism. In addition to the Organization for African Unity, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) was one of the intergovernmental organizations that provided the foundation for the creation of the African Union. CEN-SAD, comprised of 23 African states, was founded in Libya in 1998, and its purpose was to foster economic development and security for member states. It was opposed to foreign military intervention in Africa, and in 2007, issued a statement rejecting the presence of AFRICOM in any CEN-SAD state. This troubled U.S. diplomats, who dismissed CEN-SAD as a
“Libyan organization.” Such a characterization was plainly untenable, however, given Gaddafi’s popularity among CEN-SAD states, whose ministers unanimously supported his chairmanship of the African Union in 2009 (Forte 2012:171-172). AFRICOM remained a major point of disagreement between the Libyan government and a U.S. general who visited Libya twice in 2009 and attempted to shift Libyan opinion on AFRICOM (Forte 2012:200-202).

As an idea, AFRICOM itself was the creation of the oil industry, backed by a select group of Congress members and military officers. In 2002, they issued a white paper, titled, “African Oil: A Priority for U.S. National Security and African Development” (Forte 2012:190). In the paper, Africa was identified as a major source of natural resources, especially oil and strategic minerals, and as such, it would be “projected onto center stage in global affairs” (in Forte 2012:191). Its authors argued that a “sub-unified command structure” in Africa was desirable to secure “U.S. investments” and prevent “U.S. rivals such as China, adversaries such as Libya, and terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda” from securing “political, diplomatic, and economic presence in parts of Africa.” This would send “a powerful signal of long-term U.S. commitment to regional stability and development” (in Forte 2012:192). The paper, Forte notes, “was submitted to Congress on May 23, 2003 . . . Virtually all of their recommendations were followed, in many cases in the same form and even with the same language” (Forte 2012:190). In addition to the aspirations of U.S. oil firms, the paper reflected increasing concerns in Washington over Chinese investment in Africa and continued difficulties negotiating with Gaddafi in Libya, difficulties that would not lessen as time went on. The Gaddafi regime would deny lucrative U.S. investment opportunities in Libya (e.g., Bechtel in 2008), and in 2006, the expansion of the U.S. embassy (Forte 2012:58;78-79).
Therefore, it is clear that the African Union, and especially Libya, were major obstacles to Western, and especially U.S., geostrategic and economic interests. This was true in spite of the fact that Gaddafi had made major diplomatic concessions to the Western powers.

United States diplomats were keen on the fact that Gaddafi’s Pan-African policies were resented by many Libyans, who saw Libyan wealth being spent to uplift the rest of Africa while conditions deteriorated inside Libya, especially after the global recession began in 2007 (Forte 2012:169-170). Development inside Libya was slowed down, too, by neoliberal economic reforms approved by Gaddafi. These reforms were in effect by 2007, and included relaxing restrictions on the import of consumer goods, privatization of banks, and easing currency regulations (Prashad 2012:142). Then, in the third quarter of 2008, there was severe inflation, especially in food prices, leading to social unrest (Prashad 2012:143). Economic pressure on the Libyan economy in conjunction with Gaddafi’s Pan-Africanism has also been linked to the fomentation of anti-black racism inside Libya (Forte 2012:177). Gaddafi had implemented an open-door policy towards African migrants, and black African migrant workers made up large proportions of the agriculture and construction labor forces. They filled menial work positions that many Libyans did not want, but became objects of scorn for disaffected and unemployed Libyans. In 2000, during which time Libya endured an economic crisis, there was a series of anti-black pogroms across Libya that included lynchings and butcheries in which perhaps hundreds of black Libyans and African migrants were murdered (Forte 2012:172-174). Firmly entrenched in Libyan society, anti-black racism endured through 2011, and the 2011 war would see ethnic cleansing of blacks from entire towns carried out by the U.S.-backed rebels.
The Events Precipitating the 2011 NATO Intervention

On February 15, 2011, the arrests of human rights lawyer Fathi Terbil Salwa and novelist Idris al-Mesmari sparked mass demonstrations in Benghazi. They, along with lawyer Salwa al-Dighaili were leaders of the February 17 Movement, “formed to commemorate the date of the 2006 police firing in Benghazi at a demonstration which killed ten, and to build the movement for civil liberties that grew out of it” (Prashad 2012:94). The arrests were part of an attempt by the Libyan government to preemptively suppress protests scheduled to take place on the 17th. But these actions only aggravated protestors. In Benghazi, they clashed with police, who attempted to quell the demonstrations. The news spread to other towns, sparking more protests, and in al-Bayda and Az Zintan, the protesters became violent, burning down a police headquarters and police station.

By February 18, Gaddafi’s security forces had killed fifty-five people in Benghazi, along with others in al-Bayda (23 killed), Ajdabiya (3 killed), and Derna (3 killed) (Human Rights Watch 2011b). As early as the 17th, rumors began to appear on Twitter of black African mercenaries flown into Libya by the government to repress and kill the protestors, though these messages were from unreliable sources outside of Libya and the claims were not corroborated by independent observers (see Forte 2012:210-215). The authors of these Twitter messages claimed that black African mercenaries, hired by Gaddafi, were “killing everybody” and raping women in their homes in Benghazi. In spite of a lack of independent confirmation, the black African mercenary Twitter stories were quickly picked up and uncritically disseminated by the Western media, as discussed more below. Accused of being Gaddafi loyalists or mercenaries, black Libyans and black African migrant workers became targets of the protestors, in what had quickly transformed from a mass protest into a violent rebellion in only a few days. (For details on the
few early reports of attacks on African migrant workers, see Forte 2012:224-225.) According to an anti-Gaddafi “activist,” on February 18, the rebels captured a military base in al-Bayda, executing 50 black “mercenaries” and two Gaddafi loyalists. And in Derna, it was claimed that “a number of conspirators were executed. They were locked up in the holding cells of a police station because they resisted, and some died burning inside the building” (Black and Bowcott 2011).

On February 20, Human Rights Watch reported at least 233 deaths across five Libyan cities, though it did not specify who the victims were or their loyalties (though the article did mention one protestor who was killed) (Human Rights Watch 2011a). By February 21, Benghazi was firmly under the control of the rebels, and remaining Gaddafi loyalists were “butchered by angry mobs” (Prashad 2012:96). On the 21st it was also reported that Gaddafi had deployed the air force against civilian protestors in Benghazi. A similar claim regarding aerial attacks on civilians was made by Ali Abd al-Aziz al-Isawi, the defected Libyan Ambassador to India (Prashad 2012:148). However, there was little evidence to substantiate these claims. Indeed, on March 1, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, when asked at a press conference about reports of air attacks on Benghazi, replied: “We’ve seen the press reports, but we have no confirmation of that,” a statement backed up by his colleague, Admiral Mike Mullen (in Forte 2012:242; U.S. Department of Defense 2011). The next day, Radio Netherlands Worldwide (Radio Netherlands Worldwide 2011) reported that Peter Bouckeart of Human Rights Watch found no evidence of black African mercenaries in eastern Libya where they were allegedly captured by the rebels. They were in fact Libyan soldiers of African descent. Moreover, Human Rights Watch had not yet been able to confirm that there were mercenaries in the west or central regions.
Even though the rebels had taken over military bases, police stations, and committed acts of violence constituting war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity, the Western media, human rights agencies, the United Nations, and defecting Libyan diplomats focused almost exclusively on Gaddafi’s repression of what were still being described as “peaceful protestors.” On February 21, a Libyan mission to the United Nations denounced Gaddafi in New York. There, Libyan Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ibrahim Dabbashi, claimed: “The regime of Qaddafi has already started genocide against the Libyan people” (Moynihan 2011). He reiterated the African mercenary story, calling for the implementation of a no-fly zone to prevent Gaddafi from flying in more of the alleged mercenaries. The U.N. Security Council released a press statement the next day, emphasizing government attacks on “peaceful demonstrators,” and Libya’s need to “meet its responsibility to protect its population” (United Nations 2011). It said nothing about how the peaceful demonstrators were targeting black Libyans and African nationals, which unlike Dabbashi’s claim, was realistic and confirmed by independent observers.

Dabbashi was among the first of many high level defectors who would claim genocide was occurring in Libya. The cry of “genocide,” along with the African mercenary myth, was intended to provoke Western military intervention and would become a key propaganda line to justify waging war to publics in the United States and the rest of the NATO countries. Indeed, on February 23, Obama announced that his administration was mulling over actions to take against Gaddafi. And on the 25th, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated via Twitter that “I have called for an emergency meeting in the North Atlantic Council today to discuss Libya.” NATO, he said, would be “prepared for any eventuality” (in Forte 2012:240). On February 26, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1970, which again emphasized Libyan
state repression of “peaceful” protestors, calling for a halt to violence, free travel for foreign nationals fleeing violence, an arms embargo, and asset freezes for certain Libyan government officials. It also referred the Gaddafi regime to the International Criminal Court. President Obama told German Chancellor Angela Merkel that Gaddafi had “lost legitimacy” and must “leave now,” with similar declarations coming from secretary of state, Hillary Clinton. The predominant narrative in Western discourse at this time, then, was that it was peaceful protestors defending themselves against the violent repression of the Gaddafi regime, rather than a civil war between a violent, and increasingly armed rebellion and the Libyan government. It was the narrative of the rebel leadership and Western heads of state.

Meanwhile, inside Libya, there were more defections from the government and the rebellion was swelling its membership and weapons stockpiles. On February 27, the National Transition Council (NTC), the new self-appointed transition government of Libya, was formed by Gaddafi’s former Justice Minister, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, and ex-Interior Minister ‘Abd al-Fattah Younis, who would become the military leader of the rebels. Not coincidentally, the NTC was made up of the reformers from the Gaddafi regime. There were mass defections in the army, with ten thousand troops joining the rebellion in the east, now fully under control of the opposition. On March 1, several high-level military leaders also defected to the rebellion. At this point in the conflict, then, the rebels commanded their own army. They shot down three Libyan Air Force jets (Prashad 2012:153) and by mid-March had secured several towns, including Misrata, where upon defeating Gaddafi’s forces on the 13th, they took command of as many as one hundred tanks (Prashad 2012:154). From February 21 on, several fighter jets defected, supplying the rebellion with its own air force, and on March 13, Libyan Air Force Colonel Ali
Atiyya defected. Two days later, the rebels used their air power to destroy three government warships off the coasts of Ajdabiya and Benghazi.

While the rebels had made significant gains in only a matter of weeks, ousting Gaddafi’s forces from several towns and major cities in the East and West, Gaddafi still had support from the populations in the central towns where his forces were able to expel the rebels. Importantly, Gaddafi had major support in his home town of Sirte, which resisted the rebel insurgency and supported Gaddafi until his assassination there in October, 2011, and which would become the site of major war crimes committed by the insurgents and NATO. Still with a significant base of support in the country then, Gaddafi proceeded to attack the rebels, advancing towards Benghazi on March 14, where his forces were held off at Ajdabiya (Prashad 2012:160), a strategically important city 100 miles south of Benghazi. “It is at this point,” Prashad notes, “that the calls began to intensify for either a ‘no-fly’ zone or some kind of intervention to prevent a massacre” (Prashad 2012:155). Of decisive importance, on the 13th, the Arab League made a request to the U.N. Security Council for a no-fly zone. On March 17, reiterating earlier announcements, Gaddafi announced on state television that an assault on Benghazi was imminent, but that amnesty would be offered to those who surrendered, and an escape route would be opened to the east to avoid a protracted battle, an important point lost on the Western media, which preferred the image of Gaddafi the mass murderer (Kuperman 2011; Landler and Bilefsky 2011). Yet, the claim made by the NTC and Western leaders was that a massacre, if not “genocide”, would be carried out by Gaddafi’s forces in Benghazi. Gaddafi’s forces mobilized outside of Ajdabiya, still held by the rebels on the 17th.

Before turning to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, which established a no-fly zone and provided the legal cover for overt Western military intervention (the CIA and M16
were already inside Libya assisting the rebels in mid-February and early March, respectively [Mazzetti and Schmitt 2011]), it is important to consider the A.U. peace process that was already under way, and almost entirely ignored by the Western media and heads of state, as discussed below. After an initial meeting on Libya on February 23, on March 10, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the A.U. Peace and Security Council set up the High Level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya, which drafted a “roadmap” for a diplomatic solution to the conflict (Dewall 2012; Prashad 2012:188-189). Paragraph 7 of the Council’s communiqué contained the core of the A.U. peace proposal:

. . . the current situation in Libya calls for an urgent African action for: (i) the immediate cessation of all hostilities, (ii) the cooperation of the competent Libyan authorities to facilitate the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy populations, (iii) the protection of foreign nationals, including the African migrants living in Libya, and (iv) the adoption and implementation of the political reforms necessary for the elimination of the causes of the current crisis. (African Union 2011)

The communiqué also noted that Gaddafi had committed to “embark on a path to reforms.” Prashad notes that “Gaddafi respected the African Union. . . . If anyone could influence Gaddafi, it was the African Union. By all indications, Gaddafi did not want to become an utter pariah, at least not in the eyes of those whom he sought out as his peers (the African leadership). That was the only possible lever” (Prashad 2012:189).

The Council established the African Union Panel on Libya, comprised of five heads of African states and a team of African foreign ministers. The Panel included Mali’s Amadou Toumani Touré, Uganda’s Oryem Okello, and South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, all widely respected
figures in African politics (Prashad 2012:189). The A.U. plan was to fly the Panel to Libya on March 20 and engage in dialogue with all parties to the conflict, as stipulated in the roadmap. However, the peace panel was blocked by the no-fly zone imposed by UNSCR1973, which went into effect on March 20. According to Prashad, there were “assurances from both Tripoli and Benghazi that they would entertain the mediation” (Prashad 2012:190). Thus, while the A.U. proposal was not without problems (see Dewall 2012), and would not have guaranteed an end to the conflict, the U.N. Security Council, and in particular the United States, France, Great Britain, and Lebanon, undermined the most likely route to a peaceful resolution to the civil war in Libya at this early stage. This was in fact the view of African leaders involved in the A.U. plan. And as we shall see, mention of this stage of the A.U. peace effort was virtually nonexistent in New York Times reporting.

The Obama administration was initially reluctant to support a no-fly zone over Libya, in part because of the likely political consequences of military involvement in another Muslim country. But the Arab League request to the U.N. Security Council provided a seal of approval for Western intervention. After much debate, on March 17, the Security Council passed Resolution 1973, with five countries abstaining: Brazil, China, Germany, India, and Russia. Pressure from Washington on Zuma—a phone call from Obama—was necessary to get the crucial vote from South Africa to pass the resolution. While Resolution 1973 noted the efforts of the A.U. High Level Committee to Libya, it gave priority to the League of Arab States “in matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security in the region” (United Nations Security Council 2011). It established the no-fly zone, and, crucially, gave member states authorization “to take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970 (2011) to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under the threat of attack . . .
including Benghazi” (United Nations Security Council 2011). The key clause, “notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970,” which referred to an arms embargo, contradicted paragraph 13 of 1973, which called for an arms embargo—based on paragraphs 9 and 10 of Resolution 1970! This gave Washington the “flexibility” to arm the rebellion if they decided to, as White House spokesperson Jay Carney put it (Prashad 2012:223). Resolution 1973 also condemned “the continuing flows of mercenaries,” calling on the Libyan government “to prevent the provision of armed mercenary personnel to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya” (United Nations Security Council 2011), even though the veracity of the mercenary claim was still an open question. The March 10

A.U. Peace and Security Council communiqué cited above took a much more reserved approach to the mercenary allegations, calling for further investigations. And even though its major ostensive purpose was the protection of civilians, Resolution 1973 made no explicit reference to the crimes perpetrated against black Libyans and African nationals by the rebels, and condemnation came down exclusively on the side of the government.

The Human Rights Watch reports cited above were among the few credible reports available on the number casualties inside Libya during the period of February 15 to March 19. Based on these reports and others from Western news agencies, some of which are cited above, one can only piece together a very rough approximation of what actually happened inside Libya during this time and the scale of the violence. Yet, the narrative that does emerge is quite different from the one perpetuated by the elite Libyan defectors, anonymous Twitter accounts, human rights organizations, the United Nations, and Western governments. The dominant narrative was that of peaceful protestors resisting a violent dictator, rather than a civil war between a deadly, armed rebellion and a longstanding regime, however detestable, threatened and attempting to hold on to power. The “peaceful protestor” story was credible through
February 17 at the latest. But by February 18, the claim that the uprising was uniformly “peaceful” was no longer plausible. And arguably, by February 22, with mass defections from the Libyan military, including some high-level figures, a full-scale civil war had erupted. Also implausible was the claim that Gaddafi was carrying out anything approximating a “genocide” or mass killing of civilians, or that such an atrocity was impending in Benghazi. For this there simply was no evidence beyond the outlandish claims of Libyan dissidents and selective interpretations of Gaddafi’s belligerent pronouncements on Libyan state television. Finally, there was very thin evidence that Gaddafi had imported mercenaries from other African states. Yet, this was unanimously treated as fact by those in the elite power bloc mobilizing against Gaddafi.

According to the propaganda model, then, we would expect the New York Times to emphasize and exaggerate Gaddafi’s crimes and focus extensively on his regime’s victims while downplaying the context of the civil war. We would expect it to conceal or minimize the crimes of the anti-Gaddafi opposition and downplay anti-black racism and the killing of blacks. We would also expect blacks to be conflated with mercenaries. Bouckaert’s report that there was no evidence of foreign mercenaries in eastern Libya will be downplayed or ignored, as will the A.U. peace effort. There will be extensive coverage of government aerial attacks, but little to no coverage of rebel air attacks. All of this will be in accord with the opposition’s perspective on the conflict, which will be the dominant perspective; there will be many interviews with anti-Gaddafi Libyans, but few if any interviews or quotes of pro-government Libyans. There will be few or no interviews with black Africans or Libyans, and the perspectives of the Gaddafi regime itself will be dismissed. And finally, we would expect the range of debate to be limited to an American exceptionalism framework in which the United States’ official pretext of protecting civilians is not questioned.

Summary of the Coverage: Topics Included and Excluded

The New York Times began covering the protests in Libya on February 16 (February 17 in print), noting the unrest in the context of the Arab Spring. This very early coverage balanced the violence of the regime with that of the protesters, who in Benghazi, it was pointed out, were armed with gasoline bombs and rocks, and had set fire to a police station and security headquarters in Az Zintan, as noted above. Gaddafi was described as “erratic and quixotic,” and it was noted that he traveled with female bodyguards and lived in a tent (Cowell 2011a). Gaddafi’s person was a central theme in the Times coverage, where he was invariably treated with contempt, described as “erratic,” “megalomaniacal,” “evil,” “clownish,” “incoherent,” “a Stalin who aspired to become a Marx,” and so on. This theme appeared in at least 19 articles (see table 1.1 on page 87).

The relative balance that characterized the first day of coverage gave way to a sustained propaganda campaign by no later than February 23, when Libya figured prominently in the Times until the bombing began on the 19th. Protestor violence largely dropped out of reporting after the 17th. The focus shifted to Gaddafi’s “violent crackdown” on protestors and civilians, a leading theme which appeared in 33 articles. Protestor violence was only featured in 6 articles, often described as occurring within the context of “battle” or self-defense. The February 18 rebel killings of “mercenaries” and “conspirators” was mentioned in one February 24 article (Fahim 2011b) that appeared on page A-10, and which characterized the victims as mercenaries, as if this was a simple matter of fact. The mercenary story was another leading theme in the Times sample, appearing in 35 articles—more than any other theme in my analysis. The initial source on the mercenaries, it appears from Times reporting, was anti-Gaddafi Libyans, who were
Table 1.1. Topics Covered by the *New York Times* on Libya Between February 15 and March 19, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics compatible with U.S. government agenda</th>
<th>No. articles dealing with topic</th>
<th>Percentage of articles dealing with topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gov. crackdown on protestors, civilians</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaddafi’s personality</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign mercenaries</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaddafi’s February 21 air attacks on Tripoli</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews or quotes of anti-Gaddafi Libyans</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaddafi air strikes after March 5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics incompatible with U.S. government agenda</th>
<th>No. articles dealing with topic</th>
<th>Percentage of articles dealing with topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestor violence</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel killings of “mercenaries”, “conspirators”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen on “no confirmation” of gov. airstrikes</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-black racism/violence against blacks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews or quotes of pro-Gaddafi civilians</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews or quotes of black Africans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March A.U. peace effort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouckaert’s report finding no mercenaries in eastern Libya</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel air strikes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This table presents a list of topics that are compatible with the U.S. government agenda in Libya and a list of topics that are incompatible with it. The table shows that the compatible topics tended to receive more coverage than the incompatible topics. The third column shows the percentage of articles of the sample which contained this topic, based on a sample of 203 articles (see appendix D).
frequently interviewed and quoted (29 articles), and Western officials like John Kerry who presented no independent evidence of mercenary deployment by Gaddafi. Peter Bouckaert’s finding that there were no mercenaries in the eastern Libyan prisons he visited was not mentioned, though the *Times* did make note of his reporting from eastern Libya when he made this observation.

Though one could read about the U.N. Security Council’s condemnation of the use of force against “peaceful demonstrators” and find other generalizations about “peaceful protestors,” the *Times* did not usually emphasize that the protestors were peaceful. However, its reporters often blurred the distinction between armed rebels and civilian protestors, and they did so too frequently for this to be written off as occasional sloppy reporting. On February 19, for example, Anthony Shadid wrote that “protestors had wrested control of several towns, including Bayda and Darnah . . .” (Shadid 2011a). And on February 21, when Benghazi fell to the rebels, David Kirkpatrick and Mona El-Naggar reported that “protestors” fought government security forces for control of Benghazi (Kirkpatrick and El-Naggar 2011a). Very typical for the *Times*, Marlise Simons referred to “widespread condemnation of the bloody crackdown in Libya against antigovernment protestors” (Simons 2011), as if the “crackdown” was directed solely at protestors. The frequent conflation of armed rebels with protestors helped sustain the preferred image of besieged civilians resisting Gaddafi’s “bloody crackdown on protests,” rather than give the impression that there was a civil war, which could have legitimized Gaddafi’s later, though not initial (i.e., on February 15), use of force, which *at that time* was directed at protestors. This distorted image was also promoted in Dabbashi’s announcement in New York that Gaddafi was “killing the Libyan people” (Protess 2011), which became a favorite refrain in the *Times* and Western commentary more generally. Gaddafi was routinely described by *Times* writers, heads
of state, diplomats, and others, as “killing,” “slaughtering,” “butchering,” or having “declared war on” “his own people.” While the Gaddafi regime surely fired on, and killed, many civilians, the locution “killing his own people” implied that Gaddafi’s actions were principally against a civilian population rather than armed insurgents. And never were the rebels described as at war with or killing their own people, which they, like the regime, certainly were, given that they too were belligerents in a civil war.

Only by February 25 did the Times begin regularly describing the anti-government fighters as “rebels,” a “well-armed revolutionary movement” (Fahim and Kirkpatrick 2011c), properly differentiating them from civilian protestors. And only by early March did the Times begin to concede that Libya was “sliding into civil war” (Fahim and Kirkpatrick 2011b), even though it had been at civil war arguably since the 22nd, when eastern Libya had fallen to the rebels. As the Times moved towards a civil war framework, the “bloody crackdown on protestors” story line was superseded by somewhat more realistic reporting that focused on rebel and government clashes as the two factions fought for control of various cities and towns. This occurred around the time when the regime began its offensive to take back eastern Libya and Zawiyah and the existence of a civil war could no longer be denied.

On February 28, a U.S. diplomat was quoted in the Times as saying that the no-fly zone hoped for by the rebels would be considered only if there was a significant increase in “state-sponsored violence.” In the Times, when the rebels advanced on Tripoli and Sirte, this was not considered an important uptick in violence, and these events were hardly noticed. But as Gaddafi began the offensive to take back the east, the Times and the rebels got their wish, and on the front page of the next day’s March 1 edition, one could read about Gaddafi’s “escalation of hostilities,” replete with alleged aerial attacks, moving Libya “a step closer” to civil war. Only in
the 12th paragraph was it noted that the alleged airstrikes could not be independently confirmed (Fahim and Kirkpatrick 2011d). The source of information on Gaddafi’s “escalation” was, of course, the rebel leadership, who were undoubtedly following very closely the Western media, and had read that more serious consideration of a no-fly zone in the Security Council would require an escalation of violence. Along with the mercenaries, Gaddafi’s alleged air attacks was a key propaganda motif in the Times reporting, as the stated purpose of a no-fly zone went from preventing Gaddafi from importing mercenaries to preventing air attacks on civilians (Bumiller 2011), even though there was no reliable evidence that there were such air attacks (or mercenaries). In a March 2 web article from the Times, Steven Erlanger quoted Shashank Joshi, Associate Fellow at London’s Royal United Services Institute: “There have been no large massacres, air power is being used in a calculated way and he [Gaddafi] is launching probing attacks” (Erlanger 2011). This contrarian analysis did not make it to the print edition the next day. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Michael Mullen’s March 1 statement that airstrikes on civilians could not be confirmed was not reported.

Even as it could no longer be ignored that a bona fide civil war was being fought, emphasis was typically on Gaddafi’s military actions and alleged brutality toward civilians. As the regime advanced into the east—countering the rebel effort to overtake Sirte—and counterattacking in Zawiyah and Tripoli, David Kirkpatrick reported on the front page of the March 5 edition that Gaddafi “counterattacked with brutal force,” using “military power against his own citizens” (Kirkpatrick 2011b). With only 3 out of 40 paragraphs dedicated to the fighting in the east, he focused mostly on the repression of civilian protestors in and near Tripoli, as told from the perspective of anti-Gaddafi Libyans. In line with Kirkpatrick’s slanted analysis, throughout the edition there were numerous references to Gaddafi’s use of violence against
civilians and unarmed protestors. Rachel Donadio’s lead paragraph in a March 5 web article began, “In response to the murderous tactics of Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi’s militias against unarmed protestors . . .” (Donadio 2011), and J. David Goodman opened a web article highlighting Gaddafi’s “harsh crackdown on demonstrators” (Goodman 2011), mentioning nothing about armed rebels or a civil war. Mark Landler’s front page article on the 6th quoted former State Department director of policy planning, Anne-Marie Slaughter: “The international community cannot stand by and watch the massacre of Libyan protestors. In Rwanda we watched. In Kosovo we acted” (Landler 2011a). Poor and tawdry comparisons to historic conflicts in Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Iraq were frequently invoked to justify Western military intervention, an interesting propaganda maneuver I deconstruct below. For now, we note that the emphasis on real or alleged violence against protestors and the relative downplaying of the civil war context in which this occurred assisted Western decision-makers in making their case for military intervention, which was predicated on protecting civilians from a massacre.

After Gaddafi’s renewed offensive, coverage emphasized the asymmetry of forces in the conflict. In a front page article, Anthony Shadid (2011b) reported that, after the government assault on Ras Lanuf, “The momentum shifted decisively,” illustrating “the asymmetry of the conflict.” And the attack on Ras Lanuf by the government constituted a “vicious counterattack against its own people.” Shadid warned that limited Western actions short of military intervention seem “unlikely to be able to reverse the momentum.” He cited a rebel fighter who lamented the superior organization and training of the government forces. “There was a growing sense among the opposition,” Shadid continued, “echoed by leaders in opposition-held Benghazi and rebels on the front, that they could not single-handedly defeat Colonel Qaddafi’s forces.” Yet, towards the end of the article, opposition spokesperson Essam Gheriani is quoted as saying
of Ras Lanuf that “It’s not a permanent setback,” and spokesperson Abdul Hafiz Ghoga claimed that the rumors of its fall were not accurate. Overall, however, the article gave the impression of rebels in retreat, panicked, and disorderly. Shadid might as well have written that the rebels were in dire need of benevolent U.S. military leadership and assistance. This was indeed the conclusion towards which U.S. political leadership was moving, and the *Times* was apparently eager to assist them in arriving at that conclusion.

The *Times*’ focus on rebels in retreat and “leaderless” (Bronner and Sanger 2011) disarray continued for the next several days. They were also characterized during this time as virtually begging for a Western-imposed no-flight zone, now supported by the Arab League. With few exceptions, a no-flight zone was the only solution that the *Times* would entertain for the conflict in Libya. The A.U. peace plan was mentioned only once in the sample, several days after it was released, and in passing:

> While the Arab League was quick to suspend Libya last month and has even asked the United Nations Security Council to impose a no-flight zone to stop Colonel Qaddafi’s attacks on his own people, the African Union has taken a more cautious stance, deciding only on Friday [sic] to send negotiators who will meet with both sides. (Gettleman 2011)

In spite of his reported willingness to engage the opposition through the A.U. framework, the *Times* characterized Gaddafi as adamantly against negotiation and dialogue with the opposition, quoting an interview from the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale*: “Dialogue with whom? The people are on my side” (Shadid 2011c), and emphasizing his will to “fight to the last man” (Kirkpatrick 2011c). And while it was reported that Gaddafi offered amnesty to the rebels if they surrendered, this article was placed on page A-4 of the March 15 issue. (Ghoga and Younis’s more optimistic
picture of the rebel predicament was also noted in this article. They touted their “sizable fighting force” and fleet of one hundred tanks, facts relegated to the thirteenth paragraph [Shadid and Fahim 2011]). The obvious implication is that if Gaddafi will not negotiate, what other solution can there be to stop the massacre of civilians?

As the Security Council debated the substance of what would become Resolution 1973, the Times summoned the expert authority of Human Rights Watch’s Tom Malinowski, who was quoted as saying that Gaddafi will “stage a bloodbath” in Benghazi if not stopped. In the same article, Ibrahim Dabbashi appeared again, this time warning that there could be a “genocide” if the West did not intervene within the “next 10 hours” (Landler and Bilefsky 2011). These are incredible claims, as discussed above, that served no other purpose but to mobilize support for military intervention. They were not treated with any caution by Landler and Bilefsky. (Gaddafi had not carried out large-scale massacres in the cities and towns he recaptured, and exactly which ethnic group would be the target of “genocide” was unclear.)

The contradictions of the Western move towards military intervention emerged clearly and fully in the front page article of the March 18 issue (March 17 online), the day before the intervention began, and the day after Resolution 1973 passed. It pointed out that Gaddafi offered amnesty to those who would surrender and noted that the regime was willing to enter a ceasefire. But if both or even one of these claims was true, why was military intervention still necessary? Bilefsky and Landler wrote that diplomats spoke of a “moral imperative” to protect civilians, and “the political imperative of [the] United States not watching from the sidelines while a notorious dictator violently crushed a democratic rebellion.” Bilefsky and Landler elaborated: “The vote was also a seminal moment for the 192-member United Nations and was being watched closely as a critical test of its ability to take collective action to prevent atrocities against civilians.
Diplomats said the specter of former conflicts in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Darfur, when a divided and sluggish Security Council was seen to have cost lives, had given a sense of moral urgency to Thursday’s debate” (Bilefsky and Landler 2011). But, again, what evidence was there that civilians were threatened to the extent they were in Bosnia, Rwanda, or Darfur? Or Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, or in Iraq under Saddam? Beyond unsupported, and occasionally ludicrous claims from the likes of Malinowski, Dabbashi, and various Western political elites, there simply was none. One couldn’t find it in the *Times*, nor any human rights report, but it did not stop the *Times* from faithfully and uncritically disseminating these claims on a daily basis. The *Times* did occasionally claim that there were civilian massacres during the March government counterattack, in Zawiyah for instance (Fahim and Kirkpatrick 2011a), but its correspondents never produced evidence of anything approximating systematic mass murder.

We can recall Herman and Chomsky’s quip that when official enemies are vilified, the demand for serious evidence in support of claims of their abuses is suspended, “and charlatans can thrive as evidential sources. Defectors, informers, and assorted other opportunists move to the center stage as ‘experts’.”

Worthy and Unworthy Victims in Libya

A quantitative analysis of the *Times* sample reveals quite substantial differences in the number of references to the three categories of victim in the Libyan civil war. As victims, anti-Gaddafi protestors and civilians received the greatest number of references, having been mentioned in 42 articles or other items (lists, quotes, *The Lede* blog, etc. Hereafter I will also refer to these items as articles). They were mentioned as victims in 17 front-page articles and 6 editorials. Anti-Gaddafi rebels were mentioned as victims in 5 articles, and 2 front-page articles.
By contrast, blacks were mentioned as victims in only 5 articles total, 1 front-page article, and 0 editorials.

Table 1.2. Worthy and Unworthy Victims in the *New York Times*’ Coverage of Libya, February 15 through March 19, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victims/Parties to Conflict</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Front-page articles*</th>
<th>Editorials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>% of row 1</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Anti-Gaddafi Protestors/Civilians</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Anti-Gaddafi Insurgents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Black Africans/Black Libyans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These articles are also included in the overall count of articles in the “Articles” column.

Note: This table shows three classes of victims in the Libyan civil war and the respective volume of coverage they received in terms of number of articles in which they were mentioned when the subject was their victimization. Anti-Gaddafi protestors/civilians are the reference group because they received the most coverage; percent coverage of the anti-Gaddafi insurgents and black Africans/black Libyans is given as a percentage of the total number of articles on anti-Gaddafi protestors/civilians (e.g., 5/43 = 11.6%).

In general, references to anti-Gaddafi Libyans as victims were numerous and prominent in reporting. A casual reader would have been very likely to read about Gaddafi’s “violent crackdown on protestors” or the “slaughter of his own people”, or find dramatic quotes from anti-government Libyans. Far less likely, however, would it have been for a reader to ever encounter an article mentioning anti-black racism in eastern Libya, or the killing of blacks there (see also table 1.1 above). When black victims were mentioned, they were either called mercenaries (Fahim 2011), mentioned towards the end of the article (Cowell 2011b), or their victimization was effectively blamed indirectly on Gaddafi by attributing it to Arab Libyans’ fear of mercenaries (Fahim 2011; Cowell 2011b; Otterman 2011; Kirkpatrick and Sayare, 2011).
Fahim’s February 27 article also claimed that “Libya has become a dangerous place to be a black man, after Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi used African mercenaries to kill opponents of his government” (my emphasis, Fahim 2011a), as if anti-black racism did not exist in Libya prior to the supposed arrival of Gaddafi’s mercenaries. And while black African migrant workers were occasionally interviewed—they occasionally provided lurid details to Times correspondents about the consequences of being black in eastern Libya—the Times provided only one quote from a black African that expressed outrage and indignation at being harassed, attacked, and killed by Arab Libyans (Kirkpatrick and Sayare 2011). (This is all the more remarkable given that one third of the Libyan population was black.) Quite the opposite was true regarding the anti-Gaddafi protestors and rebels; dramatic quotes expressing outrage at government violence and crimes saturated Times reporting on Libya.

The killing of Arab civilians in Libya merited the outrage and indignation of Western political leadership and the Times editors—for example, when on February 22, “witnesses” and “residents” in Tripoli claimed that mercenaries were strafing crowds with machine gun fire and government planes were bombing protestors (Kirkpatrick and El-Naggar 2011b). As the country was at this time blocked to foreign reporters, these claims could not be independently verified. Such reports were enough, however, to earn the righteous condemnation of Western officials like Hillary Clinton, who blamed the regime for the bloodshed, “which she called ‘completely unacceptable’,” as reported by Landler on the following day (February 23) (Landler 2011b). Obama would chime in, too: “The suffering and bloodshed is outrageous, and it is unacceptable.” “These actions violate international norms and every standard of common decency. This violence must stop” (Cooper and Landler 2011). To this, Clinton added that the administration “will look at all possible options to put an end to the violence, to try to influence the
government” (Cooper and Landler 2011). Again, on February 27, the *Times* reported that Obama condemned the use of “mass violence against his own people” (Wyatt 2011). And so on. Similar responses to the violence perpetrated against black Libyans by the “peaceful protestors” could not be found in the *Times* from the editors or state officials.

While it is undoubtedly true that the regime was killing civilians (and insurgents), meriting outrage and condemnation, the claims featured in the *Times* regarding this killing were frequently outlandish, and occasionally absurd. We have already seen that Dabbashi was an important source on the conflict in Libya, claiming “genocide” was occurring or would occur. On February 24, Italy’s foreign minister, Franco Frattini, was cited as claiming that 1,000 “civilians” were killed in “clashes,” only citing “credible sources,” which were not identified. Frattini argued that “nothing can justify the violent killing of hundreds of innocent civilians” (Donadio 2011b). Of course, Frattini could not have known whether the hundreds of casualties were “innocent” civilians or otherwise. On February 26, Libya’s ambassador to the United Nations, Abdurrahman Shalgham, defected, and compared Gaddafi to Pol Pot and Hitler, as reported on the front page. In the other front-page article on the 26th, Cooper and Landler wrote that Gaddafi was “killing more of his people every day in a desperate bid to remain in power” (Cooper and Landler 2011), as if rebels could still be described as “his people”. The active voice implied that the killing was systematic, or at least deliberately intended to exterminate the opposition. France’s Sarkosy went as far as to claim that the killing was systematic, as reported in the same edition: “The systematic violence against the Libyan people is unacceptable and will be the subject of investigations and sanctions” (Arsu and Erlanger 2011). To add to the eerie picture of systematic extermination, the *Times* occasionally reported on the regime’s alleged removal of bodies from the streets in an effort to cover up its crimes. Of course, the possibility
was never considered that the soldiers were removing their own dead from the streets, as anti-government Libyans were the only authorities on this matter.

With respect to Herman and Chomsky’s worthy and unworthy victims hypothesis, then, we can conclude that it is well-supported by this sample. The *Times* made Gaddafi’s attacks on civilians a central theme in its reporting in the first month leading up to the intervention, while downplaying or not reporting at all the crimes of the anti-government opposition, namely the killing of black Africans and Gaddafi loyalists. It is likely that the disparity in the extent of coverage reflects a real disparity in the scale of killing on both sides, but the qualitative analysis reveals that the differential treatment of blacks and Arab Libyans was not only in terms of volume. Furthermore, a reader could always be sure that the killing of civilians was attributable to Gaddafi. But the killing of blacks was often contextualized as in response to the alleged mercenaries and sometimes glossed over without a search for responsibility or entirely without comment (see, for example, Fahim [2011b]). And the victimization of blacks was never identified as a problem to be addressed with any kind of state intervention or intergovernmental action, unlike Gaddafi’s killing of civilians or his advance on Benghazi. Nor did the victimization of blacks cast any doubt on the credibility of the democratic aspirations of the Libyan opposition in Benghazi where these crimes were reportedly occurring. Black Africans did appear as sources, but far less frequently than Arab Libyans, and their moral indignation was infrequently expressed (once).

The Range of Debate

As noted above, and indicated in table 1.1, the reporting of events was told almost exclusively from the perspective of the anti-Gaddafi resistance. Protestors and the NTC leadership were the primary authorities on the course of events transpiring inside Libya.
Interviews with pro-Gaddafi civilians were featured in only 3 articles, where they were dismissed as part of Gaddafi’s “personality cult” (Kirkpatrick 2011a), bought by the government, or as out of touch with reality. By contrast, there were 29 articles with interviews or quotes from anti-Gaddafi Libyans. In the *Times*, Gaddafi was never portrayed as having real civilian support; pro-government protests could only be contrived by the regime (Kirkpatrick 2011c). The Gaddafi regime’s perspective on the conflict was also dismissed, usually without any argument. For example, Gaddafi’s claim that Western intervention was motivated by oil interests was with few exceptions an untenable proposition in the *Times*, as was his claim that the rebels were influenced or otherwise infiltrated by al-Qaeda, which was certainly plausible in eastern Libya with the al-Qaeda-linked LIFG. The range of debate on “What Should Be Done About Libya?” generally conformed to these constraints on analysis.

There were two extreme opposite positions in the debate presented in the *Times*. One was represented by Michael Ratner of the President Center for Constitutional rights, whose letter to the editors (New York Times 2011c) slipped through the propaganda model filters. He pointed out that there is no “widely recognized legal exception for so-called humanitarian intervention, and for good reason. Often such claims are a fig leaf for intervention in countries that are of strategic importance for oil or other reasons.” He went on to compare Libya to the situation in the Ivory Coast, which did not merit Western intervention, as did another letter writer. And, in a different issue, another letter contributor pointed out that “our reaction . . . to any atrocity is always mediated by self-interest. Morality is, first and foremost, a utilitarian concept. If we learn that lesson maybe we will finally stop proselytizing about freedom and democracy” (New York Times 2011g). However, this letter appeared on March 17 (March 16, online), when
deliberations for intervention were already well under way. Furthermore, these three letters were very unusual aberrations in the *Times*—three critical drops in a sea of propaganda.

On the other side was the extreme hawk position, held by Anne-Marie Slaughter, John Kerry, and others: “The international community cannot stand by and watch the massacre of Libyan protestors. In Rwanda we watched. In Kosovo we acted.” This was the most common position featured in the *Times*. Added to Slaughter’s choice examples were other historical comparisons. For example, the no-flight zone over Iraq was frequently invoked, its alleged purpose to protect Kurds from Saddam Hussein. Let us quote one of Lander’s articles:

> Arguments that limited airstrikes can’t work were belied in Kosovo, where 78 days of NATO strikes in 1999 stopped Serbia’s leader, Slobodan Milosevic, from persecuting the ethnic Albanian population. Proponents of a no-flight zone also say that in the decade after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, America and its allies used the tactic effectively to shield northern Iraq’s Kurds and, in the south, Shiites whose unaided 1991 revolt had failed. (Landler 2011a)

All of these comparisons are inappropriate for two reasons. First, there was no reason to believe the scale of the killing was anywhere close to Serbia, Iraq, or Rwanda. The second reason is that these comparisons are all based on myths. Recent scholarship suggests that the United States had special interests in Paul Kagame’s rise to power in Rwanda in 1994. And it shows that Kagame and the RPF were principally responsible for initiating the genocide and responsible for most of the killing. That the United States simply let a genocide happen there is implausible (Herman and Peterson 2011; Herman and Peterson 2014; Philpot 2013). The comparison to Iraq is predicated on the idea that, historically, the American elite actually cares about Kurds. In *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky showed that the mass media’s
treatment of Iraq’s Kurds under Saddam was very different from its treatment of Kurds in Turkey, where their repression and killing was similar to that in Iraq. In short, Iraq’s Kurds were worthy victims, Turkey’s were not. And Chomsky argues that “Uncontroversially, the bombing [of Kosovo] preceded the ethnic cleansing and atrocities, which were, in fact, its anticipated consequence” (my emphasis, Chomsky 2003). Thus, the Times was building war propaganda on war propaganda.

A popular argument against intervention was represented by an op-ed by Maureen Dowd (Dowd 2011). She invoked U.S. experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and the consequences of these invasions as an argument against intervening in Libya. She was critical of Bush-era neoconservative, Paul Wolfowitz, who had criticized Obama’s Libya approach as too soft. She mentions his “guilt over how the Bush I administration coldly deserted the Shiites and Kurds who were urged to rise up against Saddam at the end of the 1991 gulf war.” The lesson, contra Wolfowitz, is that the eventual NATO-imposed no-fly zone did not stop Saddam from using helicopters to slaughter Kurds. She doesn’t draw the more relevant conclusion that saving Kurds wasn’t a real concern of the Bush I administration in the first place. (As vice president under Reagan, Bush I helped Saddam in gassing Kurds in the 1988 Halabja massacre.) Dowd went on to cite “reformed interventionist” David Rieff, who argued that “Gaddafi is a terrible man,” but “committing the United States to endless wars of altruism” is “folly”. None of this rises above ideology. The underlying assumption, almost never questioned in the Times, is that the United States does wage altruistic wars. Thus, the hypothesis regarding American exceptionalism was borne out quite well in the sample.

A similar argument against intervention was sometimes advanced that the United States did not have a “plan B” if the no-flight zone failed to overthrow Gaddafi (Douthat 2011). Oddly
enough, this argument appeared in an op-ed entitled “Iraq Then, Libya Now.” It was ironic given that it implicitly called for the overthrow of a government (which is illegal under the U.N. Charter), and also strange, given that the establishment was claiming its aim was the protection of Libyan civilians—not overthrowing Gaddafi. The legality of overthrowing Gaddafi was almost never questioned or even featured as a topic of discussion in the *Times*. Thus—with the rare exceptions of the three short letters cited above—even when the *Times* presented a position opposing intervention in Libya, it still conformed to elite ideological constraints and did not oppose war on moral or legal grounds, again in accord with the predictions of the propaganda model.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ argument that a no-fly zone risked mission creep was another position in the debate that received regular attention. Sometimes it was argued that an intervention could cause America’s good intentions to appear suspect and create “anti-American sentiment.” Another version of the argument was that our efforts would appear to be a grab for oil, which would damage our reputation (Kristof 2011). But that the intervention really was about oil was almost never entertained. That it was a humanitarian intervention at all is cast further into the realm of implausibility when one considers past U.S. interventions in Iraq or U.S. support for Israel’s aggression in Gaza. For an imperial power cannot legitimately claim humanitarian concerns one day, while aiding and abetting mass murder on another.

With the exception of three short letters to the editors, then, the range of debate available in the *Times’* in the run-up to the intervention conforms remarkably well to the expectations of the propaganda model. The paper regularly featured interviews with the anti-Gaddafi opposition, and almost never with pro-Gaddafi Libyans; and when it did feature perspectives of pro-Gaddafi Libyans, they were casually dismissed. A political economy analysis linking Western military
involvement in Libya to oil interests was not seriously entertained. And the good intentions of Western leadership—that is, the nominal war aim of protecting civilians—were almost never questioned.

Letters to the Editors, Opinion-Editorials, and Editorials

One might expect that a newspaper’s letters to the editor and op-ed sections would provide an opening for a greater range of opinion and debate. To an extent, as I have already shown, this was true in the sample analyzed here. However, it must be remembered that the letters to the editors and op-ed contributions are selected by the editors themselves. Thus, the propaganda model filters can be expected to be operative in the case of letters to editors and op-eds, in addition to editorials and regular articles.

In the sample of *Times* content analyzed in this chapter, some letters to the editors that defied the expectations of the propaganda model did slip through, as already discussed. But as also pointed out, these were very unusual aberrations. It would be redundant to review at length all the letters, since most of them reproduced the propaganda lines already reviewed. There was much to be read about “the killing by the Libyan leader of his own people,” “the wholesale slaughter of civilians,” a “crisis that is reminiscent of Rwanda, Cambodia and countless other cases of butchery” (New York Times 2011b). One could come across calls for the West to intervene with economic sanctions and militarily if necessary to remove Gaddafi, the leader of a “cruel and dictatorial regime” (New York Times 2011e). Writers condemned Western “hand-wrapping,” trumpeting our responsibility to protect “those who value freedom and democracy as we do” (New York Times 2011g), and so on.

Op-eds were scarcely better. The op-ed contributors all presented pro-intervention perspectives or noninterventionist positions that still conformed to the predominant narrative and
attendant assumptions, as in the contributions of Maureen Dowd and Ross Douthat, reviewed above. As expected of a propaganda model, the experts selected to contribute op-eds were all pro-establishment figures, including a former government official (Anne-Marie Slaughter). Not one op-ed contributor presented a radical critique of military intervention, like that of Vijay Prashad for example. Some contributors were bitterly anti-Gaddafi, including the Libya scholar Dirk Vandewalle, who condemned Gaddafi and the mythical mercenaries for the killing of “hundreds of civilians.” Hisham Matar was another anti-Gaddafi op-ed contributor. He praised the civility of the rebels in Benghazi who tried captured “mercenaries” in courts (Matar 2011). This would have required some explanation had Peter Bouckeart’s inconvenient finding been reported. One wonders if Matar read about the civility of the Benghazi mobs who chased down blacks with machetes.

I conclude this discussion with a note about the editorial staff’s own contributions. The editors were adamantly pro-war, even before the Obama administration took a definite pro-intervention stance. In an early editorial entitled “Libya’s Butcher,” they called for Gaddafi to be “condemned and punished by the international community” for killing “220 protestors” (New York Times 2011a). (Recall that the loyalties of the victims reported by Human Rights Watch were not known, or at least not specified in their publicly available report.) The editors utilized all the propaganda tools available in the Libya kit. They claimed that Gaddafi “will slaughter hundreds or even thousands of his own people” if the United States doesn’t stop him, invoking Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda. Readers were told that the Obama Administration needs to “find ways to stop the killing,” what they referred to as “mass atrocities,” implying systematic mass extermination (New York Times 2011d). Later, they were critical of Obama for not taking action, calling for a no-fly zone, recalling Bush I’s noble effort to protect Kurds by way of
comparison (New York Times 2011f). In sum, the *Times* editorial board faithfully served the propaganda needs of the Obama administration and the power bloc that was determined to overthrow Gaddafi.

Conclusion

Gaddafi claimed that the West’s intervention was motivated by an interest in Libya’s oil supplies—the largest in Africa. He also predicted that a military intervention would destabilize Libya and lead to tribal anarchy. Even though these claims could not be seriously entertained by knowledgeable intellectuals like those who write for the *New York Times*, the first was entirely plausible, even likely, and the second came true. In fact, the NATO intervention destabilized a large portion of Northern Africa, leading to a coup in Mali, creating a massive flood of refugees into neighboring countries, and created fertile ground for ISIS to take root inside Libya. The world would be horrified when ISIS released a video of a mass execution of 21 Coptic Christians on a Mediterranean beach in Libya. And Libyan tribes and militias are still at war at the time of writing.

That the intervention was not genuinely motivated by the desire to protect civilians was further evidenced by NATO’s actions once the intervention began. Sirte, where civilians were not threatened, was bombed as early as March 27, almost routinely until Gaddafi’s assassination on October 20. It was the most heavily bombed part of the country. Overall, NATO launched 9,600 airstrike missions, targeting Sirte, Bani Walid, and other towns where civilians were not threatened by Gaddafi. One bombing on September 15 killed 47 civilians in Sirte. On September 25, NATO bombed an apartment in Sirte, killing 7 civilians. In Majer, on August 8, NATO also struck a farming compound from the air, methodically killing several civilians, including those who came to pick up the dead. This is only a sample of NATO atrocities (see Forte 2012:90-
It should also be noted that NATO let scores of civilians perish in the Mediterranean as they attempted to flee the war. The U.S.-backed rebels also carried out (real) mass atrocities and ethnic cleansing. After Gaddafi’s brutal assassination (assisted by U.S. intelligence and air power), some 500 bodies, civilian and fighter, were discovered in Sirte. CBS reported that 300 bodies were discovered in a mass grave. They were apparently executed with their hands behind their back and most of them were black (in Forte 2012:112-113). Sixty-five bodies were also discovered in Mahari, which served as a base for opposition fighters in Sirte. The town of Tawergha, inhabited mostly by black Libyans, was ethnically cleansed by Misrata insurgents (Forte 2012:115). And so on. As Horace Campbell argued, if the goal of the NATO mission was to protect civilians, it failed miserably.

The analysis presented in this chapter shows that the New York Times failed to challenge the official interpretation of events inside Libya prior to the NATO intervention and failed to challenge an administration that was making a phony case for war. As predicted, Gaddafi’s crimes received ample attention and his victims were given extensive, sympathetic coverage that elicited much outrage, condemnation, and calls for the power of the full range of Western intergovernmental institutions to be brought against Gaddafi. Gaddafi and his regime were branded as evil others and their claims were not given serious consideration. Neither were pro-Gaddafi Libyans. The anti-Gaddafi rebels were often portrayed as peaceful protestors and democratic reformers and their crimes were virtually invisible. They, along with other anti-Gaddafi Libyans, were treated as worthy victims. Black Africans, by contrast, were unworthy victims, ignored or portrayed as mercenaries. Thus, the research expectations regarding Libya presented earlier, and the hypotheses of the propaganda model itself, are well-supported by the sample of New York Times articles reviewed here.
Moreover, a case can be made that the *New York Times* facilitated one of the most significant war crimes of the 21st century, insofar as the U.N. Responsibility to Protect doctrine was illegitimately applied, Resolution 1973 did not authorize regime change, and NATO and its allies deliberately targeted civilians and/or carried out ethnic cleansing. According to the 2012 Chicago Council Survey on American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, only 19 percent of Americans completely opposed the intervention (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2012). How many more would have opposed it had the *Times* and the rest of the Western media provided more critical and honest coverage?
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter, I will assess how well the data presented in the previous chapter fit the expectations of the propaganda model and make a determination as to whether or not they support the research expectations presented at the outset. I will then provide an affirmative or negative answer the research question. I also comment on how well the data fits the standard view of the media and Castells’s theory. Finally, I will make some suggestions as to further research questions inspired by this project.

The Case of Libya and the Propaganda Model: Discussion

The research question guiding this project is as follows: Does the New York Times’ coverage of Libya in the weeks preceding the 2011 NATO intervention comport with the predictions associated with the propaganda model?

The propaganda model hypothesizes that the news will reflect elite perspectives and priorities. In other words, it will tend to exhibit an elite bias. Elite bias, it will be recalled, was defined as “a preference for those facts and interpretive frameworks which corroborate the views of the social classes wielding the most economic, political, and military power, and a tendency to ignore those facts and interpretive frameworks considered important by non-elite social classes and group formations.” The research expectations regarding the news coverage analyzed in this study, then, are as follows:

(1) The New York Times’ coverage of events precipitating the intervention will reflect the range of elite opinion in the United States, as evidenced by the Times’ close adherence to official
government analyses of events. Analysis and debate will occur within an American exceptionalism framework.

(2) Thus, the Times’ will emphasize Gaddafi’s crimes with extensive coverage in which Gaddafi will be portrayed negatively, his crimes exaggerated. There will be little or no sympathetic coverage of Gaddafi.

(3) Gaddafi’s victims—the anti-Gaddafi rebels and protestors—will therefore receive extensive sympathetic coverage, in which they will be portrayed as innocents, peaceful protestors, and democratic reformers. Conversely, the victims of the anti-Gaddafi rebels—black Libyans and African migrant workers—will be either ignored or portrayed as pro-Gaddafi mercenaries.

The data I have presented on the Times sample provide variable support for these hypotheses that is difficult to quantify. The quantitative data provided in tables 1.1 and 1.2 provides purely quantitative measures of elite bias. The data presented in table 1.1 supported the research expectations, indicating that topics that were compatible with the U.S. government agenda tended to receive much more coverage than those topics that were incompatible with it. With respect to research expectation 2, table 1.1 shows that Gaddafi’s “crackdown” was a leading topic. This is an indication of the extensive coverage accorded to Gaddafi’s repression of protestors and rebels. Some topics that did not corroborate the U.S. government narrative were entirely absent from the sample. Table 1.2 shows that Gaddafi’s victims (anti-Gaddafi protestors and insurgents) received extensive coverage, while the victims of the anti-Gaddafi faction (blacks) received very little coverage, providing support for research expectation 3. However, this quantitative data does not tell us much about the framework of analysis followed by the Times, how key facts were presented in relation to other facts, how key facts and topics were positioned in the articles and papers in which they appeared, whether victimization invoked
indignation, and so on. That is, it doesn’t tell us about important qualitative dimensions of coverage.

The qualitative analysis of the coverage in the previous chapter does provide evidence that the Times generally conformed to the U.S. government framework of analysis. The Obama administration sided with the Libyan anti-Gaddafi opposition, and it was this opposition whose narrative provided the framework of analysis for the Times regarding events in Libya. No pro-Gaddafi perspectives were treated as tenable. The general framework imagined Gaddafi carrying out systematic mass murder on a scale reminiscent of Rwanda, Kosovo, or Cambodia, against civilian protestors who opposed him. It included the mythical story of the mercenaries, which served a triple propaganda function. First, the mercenaries supplied the early pretext for a no-flight zone. Second, the mercenaries could be used to show, falsely, that Gaddafi had very little domestic support. And third, the mercenaries could be used to obscure the nature of anti-black racism and violence carried out by the anti-Gaddafi opposition; the blacks killed were mercenaries or they were killed because the opposition thought they were mercenaries. All of these findings support research expectation 1. Coverage was saturated with dramatic quotes from anti-Gaddafi Libyans, but featured only one quote from a black African condemning the treatment of blacks. About Gaddafi’s crimes, much outrage was expressed by the Times editors and through quotes from various government officials—though mostly Europeans, Americans, and Libyans—but not other Africans. These findings support research expectation 3.

If not entirely excluded, facts and topics that could have cast doubt on this framework of analysis were downplayed. Because the image of systematic killing was preferable to a civil war framework of analysis, early coverage of the conflict conflated rebels with protestors. A civil war framework would have diverted attention away from civilians and unarmed protestors to the
armed rebellion, in which case it would have been harder to justify a “humanitarian intervention”. Thus, the *Times* focused on Gaddafi’s clashes with civilians rather than on fighting with rebels once the government began its counterattack on cities and towns taken over by the rebels. These tendencies provide support for research expectation 1 and 2. And given Gaddafi’s close relationship with the African Union, and the possibility that it could have brokered a peace between the government and the rebels, it was not convenient for the *Times* to attend to this topic; the topic’s one appearance was in the middle of an article, mentioned in passing. This supports research expectation 1. And in spite of Gaddafi’s willingness to negotiate with the rebels under the A.U. framework, he was portrayed as against negotiations, bent on mass murder. And this in spite of an offer of amnesty to rebels in Benghazi, only mentioned in passing in the *Times*. This supports research expectation 2. In other cases, too, inconvenient facts which qualified the official story line were kept out of lead paragraphs and placed deep in the article, tendencies that support research expectation 1.

The adherence to the official government line was also evidenced by the general conformity to an American exceptionalism framework. Only one item in the sample—Michael Ratner’s letter to the editors—offered a political economy analysis of the impending intervention. Another letter pointed out the Obama administration’s hypocritical concern for conflicts in some countries but not others, and one presented a moral argument. These letters to the editors notwithstanding, all other contributions to the debate in the pages of the *Times* conformed to elite ideology. Even when editorial writers made anti-war arguments, these were still made within the confines of elite ideology. Anti-war and pro-war editorials alike were premised on war propaganda from previous conflicts; that is, myths about America’s benevolent
role in world affairs. The editors were adamantly pro-war, and opinion-editorial contributors were all pro-establishment figures.

Therefore, I conclude that the research expectations received overwhelming support from the data in the sample of articles I analyzed and that an affirmative answer can be given to the research question. *There is almost zero evidence that can be interpreted as contrary to the research expectations.* As we would expect of a propaganda model, the *New York Times* conformed to the Obama administration framework of analysis; Gaddafi, an official enemy of the United States, was thoroughly demonized and his crimes were exaggerated; and Gaddafi’s victims were treated as worthy victims, while the anti-Gaddafi opposition’s victims were treated as unworthy. All of this served the interests of the U.S. government, oil industry, weapons industry, and military, and the powerful elite who dominate these institutions.

The Five Filters

With respect to the operation of the propaganda model filters, Edward S. Herman (1998) has described the structure of the *New York Times* in a way that is consistent with the propaganda model. Regarding the size and ownership filter, the *Times* is owned by a publicly traded company—The New York Times Company—with billions of dollars of annual revenue; it depends on the banking industry for lines of credit, assistance underwriting its bonds and notes, and buying and selling properties; and it maintains ties with the larger corporate community through its board of directors. In 2011, it had ties to Chevron and the telecommunications industry through directors Robert Denham and Doreen Tobin, respectively.

Herman also notes that managerial changes in the late 1970’s led the paper to greater dependence on corporate advertising—the second filter—which entailed a shift to the right for the paper. Herman observes that
the paper was reoriented toward softer and more advertiser friendly news, and the common "policy" root of news, editorials, and book reviews became more conspicuous. Rosenthal [the newly installed executive editor] established a Product Committee, and openly emulated Clay Felker's New York magazine's pioneering of a news product featuring gossip on the shows, restaurants, discos, attire, decor, and other cultural habits of the upwardly mobile, attractive to fashion trade and other advertisers. (Herman 1998)

These structural features of the Times have not changed and they are important predictors of the Times’s policy orientation.

My analysis has also shown that the Times depended overwhelmingly on government officials and establishment experts as sources (and a fortiori, anti-Gaddafi Libyan dissidents), and so reporting did not conflict with the government agenda on Libya. Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, and Robert Gates were frequently quoted and their perspective shaped reporting and commentary. As noted, op-ed contributors were all pro-establishment figures or former government officials. Former State Department director of policy planning Anne-Marie Slaughter provided her seal of approval for “humanitarian intervention”, and Libya scholar Dirk Vandewalle of Dartmouth provided an anti-Gaddafi contribution. Thus, the third filter—dependence on official sources—did entail news coverage that mirrored the perspective of these official and expert sources. The perspective was reflected in the story line and in the ideological framework that informed reporting and commentary. It would appear that the dependence on official sources was one of the most powerful filters in this sample of Times reporting.

The influence of flak on reporting was not apparent from the analysis of the coverage alone. Determining an empirical relationship between flak and news content is difficult when the
influence of flak may be present without direct applications of it by flak-producing agents. Ethnographic research may therefore be necessary to establish its effectiveness in particular cases such as the one analyzed in this study. This could include, for example, interviews with those *Times* correspondents who reported on Libya and are cited in this work regarding their own views on what was happening in Libya and how they reported on it. However, it is not in doubt that flak has had a strong influence on the paper in the past. Boyd-Barrett (2004) shows that *Times* journalists feared being labeled “anti-American” and threats to their careers that could result from challenging the Bush administration during the build-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Similar fears prevented journalists from reporting critically on Reagan-Bush anticommunist policies in Central America in the 1980’s.

While the cases discussed by Boyd-Barrett are about the media’s relationship to conservative Republican administrations, if is generally true that high-level reporters mostly fear the government and lower level reporters fear retaliation from within their own media institutions (Boyd-Barrett:441), then it is plausible that the same kinds of pressures on journalists influenced *Times* reporting during the Libyan civil war. As I have demonstrated, the editorial board was as pro-war, if not more so, than the Obama administration. For this reason, pressure on low-level reporters to conform to the pro-war line was likely very great. As in the case of the build-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, high-level journalists would not have wanted to alienate their sources inside the Obama administration.

Finally, the influence of the fifth filter—dominant ideology—was clearly on display, as already discussed at length. This filter was as equally as influential on coverage as the reliance on government officials and establishment experts. Indeed, these two filters are closely related, as it would not be possible for the media to rely on government sources if the media were critical
of elite ideology to begin with. High-level journalists would not be granted privileged access, and so on.

The Standard Model of the Media and the Communication Theory of Power: Alternative Explanations?

If anything approximating a pluralist model of the news media held explanatory power, the New York Times would have covered the events precipitating the NATO intervention quite differently. The pluralist or “standard model” maintains that the news carries out a democratic function by challenging government officials and criticizing their policies so that the public can be informed as to whether or not certain policies are in their interest. If the media actually performed this way, then the Times would not have exhibited the tendencies described above. For example, it would have properly characterized the rebel takeover of several Libyan towns and cities and the fighting between the rebels and the government as indications of a civil war, not overwhelmingly as repression of “protestors”. It would have criticized Ibrahim Dabbashi for claiming a “genocide” was underway in Libya, and criticized Anne-Marie Slaughter and John Kerry for comparing the conflict to Rwanda and Kosovo. It would have criticized the anti-Gaddafi opposition for attacking and killing blacks. These killings would have led the Times to question the alleged democratic aspirations of the government opposition and the morality of providing support for them. It might have cautioned readers against supporting an aerial bombardment of Libya and given more warnings about the dangers of mission creep, perhaps drawing parallels to the recent U.S. experience in Iraq. And so on.

Manuel Castells’s communication theory of power would seem to make similar predictions regarding the performance of the news media as the propaganda model, incorporating as it does the indexing hypothesis, framing theory, the cascading activation model, and so on. Castells maintains that “the construction of meaning” occurs “at the source of political power”; it
is the political elite who “wield the greatest control over news frames” (Castells 2013:163), especially in the domain of foreign affairs. Yet, Castells says, “what I consider a truly abstract, unverifiable proposition is the power of the capitalist class, of the military industrial complex, or of the power elite. Unless we can specify who exactly holds power in a given context and in relation to a given process, and how his or her power is exercised, any general statement about the source of power is a matter of belief rather than a tool of research” (Castells 2013:430). Alternatively, Castells offers the following methodological prescription:

And so, I am not identifying the concrete social actors who are power-holders. I am presenting a hypothesis: in all cases they are networks of actors exercising power in their respective areas of influence through the networks that they construct around their interests. I am also proposing the hypothesis of the centrality of communication networks to implement the power-making process of any network. And I am suggesting that switching [i.e. connecting] different networks is a fundamental source of power. Who does what, how, where, and why through this multi-pronged networking strategy is a matter for investigation, not for formal theorization. Formal theory will only make sense on the basis of an accumulation of relevant knowledge. But for this knowledge to be generated, we need an analytical construction that fits the kind of society we are in. This is the purpose of my proposition: to suggest an approach that can be used in research, rectified, and transformed in ways that allow the gradual construction of a theory of power that can be disproved by observation. (Castells 2013:430)

Castells goes on to say that in his book he has followed this methodological approach. But how this approach is different from one that identifies capitalist class interests as an
important predictor variable is unclear. And similarly for the military-industrial complex and elite class interests. Castells is right to ask for empirical verification of connections between networks of elites in specific cases. But ultimately, Castells’s glib dismissal of elite and Marxist theories as less empirically verifiable than his own seems to be politically motivated and is unconvincing. “Network of political power” is a much more politically neutral (and vague) conceptual formation.

The propaganda model calls attention to the symbiotic relationship between the news media and private and state power in a way that is uncontroversial and empirically supported. It also identifies the profit imperative of capitalist news media firms as a reason for their dependence on and deference to these information sources. Historical analysis—like the one presented in this work regarding the history of United States-Libya relations—can also go a long way toward establishing elite priorities on particular policy questions, and therefore how the media will address them. That a powerful elite constituency comprising persons in the Obama administration, members of Congress, the military, and the oil industry had shared interests in deposing Gaddafi is not simply a matter of belief. It is an inference based on the purpose of the U.S. military presence on the African continent, namely to ensure U.S. investment opportunities and control of resources. It is also based on the fact that Gaddafi was identified as an obstacle to U.S. economic and military penetration of the African continent.

Whether one chooses to identify the likely actors as “switchers” and “programmers” or as constituents of an elite or military-industrial complex, one is confronted with the same methodological problems regarding empirical verification. Often, one cannot know exactly what decisions are being made behind closed doors, by whom, and why. This can be impossible to know without leaked or declassified documents. Nevertheless, an explanation of the American
press’s coverage of the Libya conflict that failed to consider the geostrategic interests of the U.S. political economy and diplomatic relations between the United States and Libya would lead to a failure to explain dramatically different policy orientations toward—and media treatment of—criminal states such as Israel in 2008-9 or Bahrain around the same time as the Libyan conflict in 2011. Compared to what befell Gaddafi’s Libya, these states can carry out massive violence without much criticism in the mainstream media. Therefore, a communication theory of the media’s performance would be limited vis-à-vis the propaganda model for a failure to explain why political economy analyses of our own policies are off the elite agenda and nonexistent in mainstream commentary. It would not explain this characteristic of mainstream news reporting. Castells is certainly correct that the analytic framework must match the society in which we live; hence the importance of the propaganda model’s fifth filter, convergence in the dominant ideology, including as it does the need for official enemies and the American exceptionalism framework.

Suggestions for Further Research

One direction for further research, then, would be a comparative case study that compared media coverage of conflicts in American ally states and enemy states. This is an approach taken in Herman and Chomsky’s classic work. Particularly salient in the contemporary period would be a comparison of the media’s treatment of the current civil war in Syria, where Russia and Iran are bolstering the Assad regime against U.S.-backed rebels, to the current war in Yemen, where the United States and Saudi Arabia are the most powerful belligerents. Another revealing comparison would be that of media treatment of any of Israel’s recent murderous assaults on the Palestinians of Gaza (in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014) compared to its treatment of
the civil war in Libya, or some other conflict in which the United States demonized an official enemy.

Yet, to the present writer, what is of most interest is the possibility of expanding the model, or supplementing it with an entirely different model, that explains the structural elements of academia that lead it, too, to perform a kind of propaganda function on behalf of state power and capitalist social relations. This is a direction that has been suggested by Noam Chomsky. He has said of the propaganda model:

It doesn’t go far enough in my opinion. I think this [tendency to reflect elite ideology] is not only true of the media, but also it’s pretty much true of the general intellectual community, academic scholarship, public intellectuals, and so on. One thing this model leaves out and should be expanded to cover, is there is a general intellectual culture of which the media are an institutionalized crystallization. So, they represent it in a very clear, specific form, but you find pretty much the same thing in the general intellectual world. (in Smolski 2016)

If this is true, then a rich domain of research remains largely unexplored.

In this study, to establish the historical background to which I compared the New York Times, I relied on scholars who are as equally critical of state power and capitalism as Chomsky, who offer similar accounts of American and Western global domination that draw on the same body of analytic concepts. Journalists are often said to compose the first version of history, which historians then modify or add to with their own interpretations and evidence. But if the basis of official history is propaganda, what then becomes of it? The reason I did not rely on, say, Ethan Chorin’s account of the 2011 civil war in Libya, Exit the Colonel, is because it reproduced exactly the same myths and distortions found in the Times. Chorin is closely aligned
with the political and economic elite in the United States, having worked for the State Department and Shell Oil. One wonders how these kinds of connections bear on the work of elite scholars.

Finally, a related question about professional academics: Why has the invasion of Iraq in 2003 received so much more attention from media scholars than the case of Libya? Or Afghanistan? Or Palestine? Could the liberal bias of professional academics explain this difference? Is it more politically palatable to criticize a Republican administration than it is to criticize a Democratic administration?
APPENDIX A

Authoritative Sources on Libya

The three authors I cited and referred to most frequently on the history of United States-Libya relations and the civil war are Vijay Prashad, Maximilian Forte, and Horace Campbell. I have provided the following notes on their reputation as scholars and reviews of their work in the event that the reliability or accuracy of the history and the “standard of comparison” which I presented in chapter 5 is in question.

Vijay Prashad is a leading historian, journalist, and international relations scholar. He is the George and Martha Kellner Chair in South Asian History and Professor of International Studies at Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut. In 2013, he was the Edward Said Chair at the American University in Beirut. He regularly appears on DemocracyNow! and the Real News Network. He was a guest on National Public Radio in the buildup to the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya. He has authored several books, including *The Death of the Nation and the Future of the Arab Revolution*, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*, and *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*. His works have been positively reviewed in academic journals and have received numerous awards. The major count against his book, *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter*, the book I referenced in this project, is that it does not contain a bibliography, though it does contain occasional in-text references to news articles. Nevertheless, Prashad’s account of the Libyan civil war is consistent with that in the other books I referenced, and it is not factually inconsistent with events reported in the *New York Times*. The book received a positive review in the international affairs journal, *Perceptions*, where the reviewer concluded that “It is a vital resource to understand the past and present of the Arab Spring and the reaction of the international community” (Bardakçi 2012).
Maximilian Forte, author of *Slouching Towards Sirte*, is less well known than Prashad, but he is a first-rate scholar. He is Associate Professor of anthropology at Concordia University in Montreal. To my knowledge, his book on Libya has not been reviewed in mainstream academic social science journals. Thus, Edward S. Herman, in reviewing it, says the book has been marginalized (Herman 2014). But reviews of it are available in leftist academic journals and publications. It was reviewed positively in the *Monthly Review* (Ajl 2013). The book was also positively reviewed by Damir Mirkovic, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Brandon University, who wrote that “On the whole, the book is a powerful argument against the humanitarian myth promoted by western powers to mask the imposition of their dominance on other societies” (Mirkovic 2014). Reviewers note that it is meticulously researched and documented, as it surely is; the references section of his book contains 29 dense pages.

Horace Campbell is a professor of African American Studies and Political Science at Syracuse University. He has also been featured on DemocracyNow!. He is the author of several books on African politics, including *Barack Obama and 21st Century Politics: A Revolutionary Moment in the USA*, *Pan Africanism, Pan Africanists and African Liberation in the 21st Century*, and *Rasta and Resistance: from Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*, a seminal work on Rastafarianism. His book, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya* has also received several positive reviews. For example, in the journal *New Political Science*, Hoffman (2014) says of it that “Campbell offers a highly informative account of NATO intervention in Libya that instructively situates the intervention within a set of global economic and political dynamics.” Campbell’s account parallels that of Prashad and Forte.

It’s worth noting again that each of these books presents an account of the civil war that is based on information that was publicly available at the time of the civil war; any journalist
could have come to the same conclusions as those reached by Prashad, Forte, and Campbell regarding events in Libya between February 15 and March 19, 2011. Most of the “hard reporting” found in the *New York Times*—basic facts, chronology, actors, and so on—parallels the accounts given by each of these authors. The authors made extensive use of mainstream media reporting from news outlets in the United States, Europe, and Arab countries, and from the major global news agencies. They also included reference to contemporary documents from the United Nations, the African Union, and Human Rights Watch, all publicly available. Therefore, inconvenient facts marginalized in mainstream reporting, but found in these works, cannot be said to have been unavailable to journalists who were reporting on Libya. And that such facts have been regarded as essential to an understanding of the conflict by expert authorities indicates that they have not simply been selected *ex hypothesi*. It should be clear that such facts or topics fit into a coherent and plausible framework of analysis, but one that is different from that found in mainstream reporting.
APPENDIX B

Coding Manual

For the list of topics in table 1.1, the coding procedures are straightforward. Any time a topic is mentioned in an article, the article is included in the count of articles mentioning that topic. The article is not counted twice if the topic appeared more than once in the article. Data is also recorded on the placement of the topic in the article (how many paragraphs deep) and in the volume (page number). The placement of the topic in the article may be irrelevant if the entire article is on that particular topic.

The following topics are from table 1.1. An article is counted as including one of these topics according to the following criteria:

1. Crackdown on protestors: any time the phrase “crackdown” is used in an article in reference to Gaddafi’s response to mass demonstrations or rebels.

2. Gaddafi’s personality: any time Gaddafi is described as, for example, “erratic,” “idiosyncratic,” “megalomaniacal,” etc., or space is dedicated to describing his lifestyle or personality.

3. Foreign mercenaries: any time reference is made to foreign/African mercenaries present in Libya.

4. Interviews or quotes of anti-Gaddafi Libyans: any time an interview or quote from an anti-Gaddafi Libyan is featured or referenced. The anti-Gaddafi political orientation of the person should be clear.
5. Gaddafi February 21 air attacks on Tripoli: any time reference is made to these government air attacks, on this date, in Tripoli.

6. Protestor violence: any time anti-Gaddafi protestors are described as participating in violent acts, such as possessing gasoline bombs or rocks, setting facilities on fire, attacking police stations, attacking black Libyans, or similar acts.

7. Rebel killings of “mercenaries”, “conspirators”: any time anti-Gaddafi rebels are described as killing mercenaries or pro-Gaddafi conspirators.

8. Anti-black racism/violence against blacks: acts of violence against blacks or Libyan racial animosity towards blacks is described.


10. Interviews or quotes of black Africans: an interview with a black African, whether a Libyan, or from another African country. Not including heads of state or political leaders.

11. March A.U. peace effort: reference to or discussion of the African Union (A.U.) peace effort, including the February 23 or March 10 A.U. meeting, the A.U. High Level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya, the diplomatic “roadmap”, or the peace panel of African heads of state.

12. Bouckaert’s report finding no mercenaries in eastern Libya: Human Rights Watch or Peter Bouckaert’s reporting from eastern Libya, including mention of his finding no evidence of mercenaries in rebel-controlled prisons.


With respect to the data presented in table 1.2, the following criteria were used to determine when a victim or class of victims was referred to: (a) casualty counts specifying number of victims of a particular incident (not cumulative counts for the entire conflict) in which victim loyalty is specified (anti-Gaddafi protestor, rebel fighters, etc.), (b) descriptions of attacks when victim loyalty is specified, (c) reference to Gaddafi killing “his own people” (to be coded as anti-Gaddafi protestors/civilians) (d) “crackdown” is used to describe government action, if protestors are specified as victims of “crackdown”. Any one criterion is sufficient.

For coding data on U.S. foreign policy analysis, the following categories are used.

1. Political economy analysis: a form of foreign policy analysis that links policy decisions to economic interests, such as gaining control of foreign oil reserves, protecting existing investments, or creating market-investment opportunities.

2. Intent of state leadership questioned: when official policy declarations are scrutinized as dishonest or concealing some special interest such as economic gain or geostrategic goals.

3. Policy as immoral or wrong: when a policy is criticized on moral grounds. Explicit appeals to morality are required. Here is an example: “our reaction . . . to any atrocity is always mediated by self-interest. Morality is, first and foremost, a utilitarian concept. If we learn that lesson maybe we will finally stop proselytizing about freedom and democracy.”
4. American exceptionalism: an argument regarding foreign policy, either pro or con, that does not include one of the three categories above. Instead, it includes arguments or critiques that make one or more of following assumptions: (a) the United States plays a benign and positive role in world affairs, (b) the United States does not act in its own self-interest, (c) the United States is not motivated by material gain, (d) the United States may make mistakes that have unfortunate consequences, its policies may be mistaken or too costly, but its actions are never inherently wrong.
## Article Coding Sheet

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<td>Philosophical generalizations about violence/conflict?</td>
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<td>No</td>
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APPENDIX D

The Sample

This appendix contains the complete sample of articles used in this study. It was obtained from LexisNexis Academic using the search term “Gaddafi”, the New York Times as the source, from February 15 and March 19, 2011. The list of articles below is taken directly from the bibliography downloaded from LexisNexis, the items arranged in chronological order. Items that were omitted from the sample are marked with an asterisk. Items were omitted if they only mentioned Gaddafi or the conflict in Libya in passing and the subject of the article was not the conflict in Libya.

"Italy's Trials." The New York Times. (February 20, 2011 Sunday)


Kareem Fahim. "In Libya, 'We Won.' Then a Rebel Becomes a Martyr.." The New York Times. (March 4, 2011 Friday)

"Tumult Continues Throughout the Region." The New York Times. (March 4, 2011 Friday)

"Developments in the Region." The New York Times. (March 4, 2011 Friday)

"Tumult Continues Throughout the Region." The New York Times. (March 5, 2011 Saturday)

Tom Kuntz. "Libya's Late, Great Rights Record." The New York Times. (March 6, 2011 Sunday)

"Upheaval Continues Around the Middle East." The New York Times. (March 6, 2011 Sunday)


Kareem Fahim. "In Libya Revolt, Youth Will Serve, or at Least Try." The New York Times. (March 12, 2011 Saturday)


Helene Cooper. "U.S. to Name A Liaison To the Rebels In Libya." The New York Times. (March 12, 2011 Saturday)


"Developments in North Africa and Across the Middle East." The New York Times. (March 15, 2011 Tuesday)


APPENDIX E

HSIRB Approval Not Needed

Date: October 17, 2016

To: Gregory Howard, Principal Investigator
    Randy LaPrairie, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 16-10-35

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled “The New York Times' Worthy and Unworthy Victims” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individual and your scope of work does not meet the Federal definition of human subject.

45 CFR 46.102 (f) Human Subject
(f) Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains

(1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or
(2) Identifiable private information.

Intervention includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered (for example, venipuncture) and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes. Interaction includes communication or interpersonal contact between investigator and subject. Private information includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (for example, a medical record). Private information must be individually identifiable (i.e., the identity of the subject is or may readily be ascertained by the investigator or associated with the information) in order for obtaining the information to constitute research involving human subjects.

“About whom” – a human subject research project requires the data received from the living individual to be about the person.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.
REFERENCES


