



## PERFORMED WARS

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Ever since World War 1, the intervention of technological inventions in the field of warfare has increased manifold times. All war inputs like arms, ammunitions, skills etc. have evolved into more dangerous and much more hybrid and sophisticated knowledge. Over the time mass media too has become an indispensable part of warfare, in fact its role has become equally significant as that of arms and ammunitions in a warfare, and in order to achieve and maintain this elevated position, it has undergone a drastic journey of evolution, not only in terms of technological advancement but also in relation to its ultimate goal of bringing the reality in the light. Over the time its goals and intentions have been significantly governed by dominating factors like commercialization and globalization. Visual representation of war can easily be termed as a silent weapon of mass destruction, which holds the power to sway the mouth of a cannon during a war.

Nikolas Mirzoeff, in his article "Watching Babylon" particularly talks about the uphill journey of visual media. He talks about how images have transformed from being mere passive and supportive agent of reality to assuming the role of more active and assertive agent. Instead of backing the reality, pictures particularly have assumed a sacrosanct position, which was earlier enjoyed only by reality, Pictures themselves have become particularly unquestionable.

In order to substantiate this point we may bring into focus, the so called historical achievements of America being the very first country to successfully land a manned aircraft on the surface of moon.

Many questions and criticisms have been raised in relation to this path breaking achievement, many critics have merely termed it as an act of superimposition of its dominance, in relation to the growing importance of Russia during time of cold war.

Critics have come up with strong arguments that it was only after Russia in the year 1957, launched sputnik-1, the very first artificial satellite, that America in order to limit the growing importance of Russia in the field of space technology, claimed to launch its very first, manned aircraft.

Very interestingly all criticisms and triggering arguments were thwarted down irrationally by circulating few pictures of an American astronaut standing on a white surface with holes, standing close to a waving American flag. Circulation of assertive imagery by media in a large number is a way of positively reinforcing the idea of a constructed reality.

The extent to which the media tries to use various pictorial representations to construct a false sense of reality for its viewers can be further highlighted from the very recent inhuman act of America under the governance of President Donald Trump, to attack Afghanistan with a non-nuclear weapon GBU-43. Various media houses in US, all day long reported about how, under the leadership of Mr. Trump America had finally embarked upon the noble task of purifying Afghanistan of the terror of hostile terrorist groups like Taliban, but due to intentional selection and editing, western media deliberately failed to highlight the fact that, GBU-43, though not a nuclear weapon but is just one grade behind the nuclear weapons in terms of mass destructions.

The missile has been rightly nicknamed the “mother of all bombs” and is the largest non nuclear bomb. Reuter, a UK based news agency, very accurately quotes that the bomb was an “ultra – heavy explosive type, which is equivalent to eleven tones of TNT, with a blast radius of around 1.6km” and the area where the bomb was dropped had a village barely 5km away from the scene of action. With all the facts on the table, Reuter very conveniently, selectively reports that the area where the bomb was dropped, “witnesses said that the ground shook from a shockwave, but {interestingly} houses and shops appeared unaffected”.

Reuter is not the only media agency which indulges in myth weaving, rather it has become a primary occupation of mass media in general, in fact it would not be incorrect to say that the perceived reality of the consumer is actually a constructed myth of media, Mortensen too highlights this idea by saying that “once a story has been forged in the shape of a myth it in turn becomes unquestionable rather it occupies a position even above reality, and one way by which it does so, is by careful and intentional selection, framing and editing, in order to paint false or half truth in the color of reality.

Intervention of media in the combat zones can be traced as back as WW1 and since then its scope has, but increased. Many a times, instead of unveiling the truth they actually indulge in selling the truth at the expense of the sentiments of the consumers. Therefore Mortensen very rightly puts the idea that media has made war into a business of entertainment, with the ultimate aim of extracting as much of revenue as possible.

Wars are no longer real they have turned into performative art, where even the soldiers have become photographers. Media in turn has become an operating tool in the hands of the most powerful, using war as an ultimate tool to achieve their gain.

The gulf war was one such performed war where soldiers were actors, and the war was fought to achieve material gain. It seems very ironical when we pay attention to the fact that, the gulf war was the most reported and most widely covered war in the history of media, still it was unable to provide its viewers the reality or the truth behind the constructed war against the gulf, and the real intentions of the few driving agents remained veiled behind the false propaganda of welfare of the masses. Media very effectively reduced the terror and trauma of the gulf war, to nothing more than a video game war

“one by one [Iraqi soldiers]

Were cut down by attackers

They could not see or

Understand ....another

Burst of fire tore him apart”

The gulf war is a classic example of the shortcoming and the ultimate failure of the western media to question the real intentions of U.S in particular, in the wide spread destruction and reduction of Iraq into nothing but ruins. Media framed representations, have particularly helped western countries to shed off their guilt, as the western media, actively indulge in the role of reversal and portraying America and the other western countries as protagonist fighting against the dark forces of evil to save humanity. Such assertive positive reinforcement deters the audience from questioning the very obvious.

This technique of positive assertion as an idea is further coupled up with the idea of flooding the minds of the viewers with imagery, all of them via various routes hinting towards the same intended analysis. Mortensen elaborates upon this point and says that too much of exposure to any particularly framed imagery makes the viewer more and more immune or rather indifferent to such imagery, thus rendering them uncritical of such imagery, “the argument is that the mass of pictures weaken our critical apparatus and reduces us to uncritical visual consumers” who remain particularly unmoved by the trauma depicted in the pictures, videos or any other form of visual representation.

Media in turn has become a corporate image makeover company working on capitalist grounds. It has merely reduced to a powerful tool in the hands of the government of powerful nations in particular, who with its help try to legitimize their act of violence and terror. This point can further be understood in relation to the example of 9/11 attack.

After September 11 attack all Muslims residing in America had prepared themselves for a severe retaliation by the angry Americans, but the rage of the angry Americans was not only limited within the physical boundary of the country rather the terror encapsulated many Muslim countries. After the attack U.S. under the leadership of President Bush declared an outright war against Afghanistan, killing indiscriminately.

It was by the virtue of the creative skills of media that America was still portrayed as a victim and the entire Afghanistan and all Muslims as the ultimate culprit. It was the representation of the attack on the twin towers by the western media which in turn gave validity to every gruesome act of violence and terror committed by America in the name of eliminating terrorism, and for the larger welfare of the humanity.

Ever since the cessation of cold war, world has found itself to be indulged in another type of war namely virtual war. Government of powerful countries nowadays use media as opposed to indulging in an actual war to trigger and exploit the sentiments of their citizens and to gain their approval for the war, thereby making them share the burden of guilt. In order to further substantiate this point we may look at the classical example of china’s territorial boundary issues in South China Sea. Instead of actually asserting its dominance and claim over various islands of South China Sea, china has embarked upon a soft policy to turn the table around. It asserts its dominance over the sovereign islands, by depicting them as a part of its territory, in its map. The map of china printed on its official passport incorporates these territories as a part of its own territory, thus instigating a war like situation at the world level without any weapon but merely with the aid of a picture which is still supported and endorsed by the media of china.

The deceptive role that media plays via visuals, has proved to be an undeniable factor in escalating international tension. Governments nowadays fight passive wars, shielding themselves behind visual media, and it would be very incorrect if we do not mention India in the list.

The map of India itself puts forward a deceptive picture before its viewers. The demographic representation of the territorial boundary of India with respect to its neighbours is highly contentious and disputed, but the map of India fails to put forward all these issues before its viewers. The region in the north, above Jammu and Kashmir, has the strategic location of Siachin glacier, which is militarily important for any country. This region is administered by Pakistan and claimed by India, similarly Arunachal Pradesh in east is a contentious boundary issue with china, which is administered by India but claimed by china, but the map of India fails to give space to these issues and thus gives them a false sense of reality. It is thus media which with the help of various kinds of visual representation of the so called reality tries to shape the reality for a much larger audience.

One major support point that media puts forward to support its role in the warfare is that they enlighten their audience with those aspects of war with which they earlier were oblivious to, but in this due to process they also spell out the real intent behind its act of selective quoting or representing. Therefore combat zone imagery acts as a double edged sword which needs to be handled carefully not only by consumers but also by the producers.

Much sadly over exposure to stirring visuals of combat zone, have left the viewers more and more insensitive to such sensitive imageries. Just as death was the highest form of art for Sylvia Plath, her obsession and her over exposure to

death had uprooted all her fears related to the ambiguity of death, which in general is the source of fear for the others. Very similar to this, excessive exposure to uncensored pictures of warfare, accompanied by their abundance and easy access has made warfare trauma a routinely sensation, making them accustomed to more and more violence. Furthermore it is not only media which has changed its course of path, but the demands of the viewers too have undergone a drastic change, viewers have transgressed from being mere passive spectators to virtually experiencing war. They have accepted war as a source of entertainment, which bears little resemblance with reality and is considered to be staged and perform.

Media has proved itself to be a very important instrument in the Warfield, and its importance ever since World War 1 has only but increased with time. One probable reason why it has been able to maintain its high status throughout is because of its dynamic nature, following the golden rule of Darwin, and has over the years learned to adapt itself. It knows that over exposure to war imagery may turn viewers uncritical and unappreciative of war, therefore they have devised newer ways of involving viewers within the war, thereby making them feel the burden of their guilt. One such method is to confuse war with nationalism. Unless and until you appreciate and support your country in a war you cannot term yourself a nationalist. Moreover media indulges in the act of turning everything into black and white, leaving no scope for walking down the middle path. Not only does it rise the question on the intention of the media in general which deliberately tries to over sensitize or under sensitize any matter according to its own sweet convenience, but also on us as viewers and readers as to what do we intent to devour upon. Mortensen says that while watching any video from any battlefield, “the spectator is actively involved in generating new knowledge, experience and awareness which did not exist in that particular form before”, therefore it is an idea worth spending some time upon as to what knowledge does capital driven media intents to depart and what knowledge are we allowing to fabricate our thinking process. Therefore other than being involved in an actual war in a battlefield a relatively much larger war is being fought by various media contenders for the so called right version of reality.

#### **WORK CITATION**

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