

"I KNOW THAT IT IS BUSH'S FAULT"

*How Children in Germany
Perceived the War in Iraq*

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The war in Iraq was the subject of media interest in Germany long before the military action began. "The war-in-waiting" became an issue in the Bundestag (lower house) elections and took on a significance of its own (*Der Spiegel*, 37/2002). The majority of the press reported critically on the "immoral war" (*Die Zeit*, 2.1.2003), and initial press analyses show that when the war started, most media coverage reflected opposition (COM-DAT, 2003, p. 29). Public opinion was clear: We are against this war.¹ Demonstrations against the intervention in Iraq were part of daily newspaper reporting, as was coverage on TV that reported about it and commented more often against the war (Eilders, 2003). In this respect, the public climate in Germany was quite different from that in the United States of America or Israel, the two other countries that have participated in the study to be described (see Seiter, chap. 2, this volume; Lemish, chap. 3, this volume). Accordingly, the war in Iraq became relevant to children and a part of their reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Given this background, it was natural to ask how children constructed their comprehension, emotions, and attitudes concerning issues related to the war in Iraq.

Different studies have been carried out about the nature and meaning of media coverage of war and terror for children. Many studies have focused on the effects of media coverage and investigated reactions of fear and stress

(e.g., Walma van der Molen & Konijn, chap. 4, this volume). Another approach has sought to understand how children seek to inform themselves about events (Hoffner & Haefner, 1994). For example, one study found that children remember bad news better than good news—specific scenarios from war reports and personalized events far better than abstract ideologies (Toivonen & Cullingford, 1997).

Aside from the studies that focused on the effects of war coverage, which applied quantitative methodology for the most part, there are few qualitative studies that have sought to understand the children's perspective. Two Australian qualitative studies on the Gulf War (Gillard, Haire, Huender, & Meneghel, 1993) explored the ways children constructed their own meanings from the coverage and whether social positioning, such as gender, patterned their recollections in any way. In one study, 30 children of 2, 4, and 6 years of age from Canberra were interviewed in a public school, drew pictures about "what they thought war looked like," and responded to stimulus pictures. The researchers found an especially clear gender difference. Boys were noticeably more interested in the topic and knew more details. In their paintings, they drew a rather humanless war, and they concentrated on technical details. The girls were rather uninformed and stressed the suffering of people (Gillard et al., 1993). In the second study, 30 children ages 11 to 12 years old discussed the issue in groups, filled in a questionnaire, and drew a picture. The pictures drawn were dualistic, with a clear partition into good and bad persons; thus, Bush and the Allies were identified as the forces for good, whereas Hussein and Iraq were portrayed as doers of evil. Similar to the first study, boys' pictures depicted weapons and machinery in intricate detail, whereas the girls created human images of prisoners of war, including Saddam Hussein and Kurdish refugees. Gillard and her colleagues (1993) proposed that there was coherence "between the (male) genres of news and adventure and boys' detailed account of the outstanding events and images of the war" (p. 106).

Following the approach developed by Gillard and her colleagues, we undertook a qualitative study whose purposes were to ascertain: (a) how children dealt with the 2003 war in Iraq, (b) the emotions and images they connected with the topic, and (c) the information from media reports they would like to receive.

METHOD

To investigate the prior questions, we interviewed German children in the first 8 days of the "official" war in Iraq (March 20–27, 2003). The grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and action-oriented reception

studies (e.g., Buckingham, 1993; Tobin, 2000) were applied. According to these approaches, children are active meaning makers who construct their view of political events with the help of media texts, among others.

Eighty-seven children from all over Germany (46 girls, 41 boys) between 6 and 11 years of age were interviewed, in addition to 6 Iraqi refugee children 9 to 13 years of age living in Germany at the time. Although the results of these qualitative data cannot be considered representative, they do suggest interesting tendencies.

A qualitative, topic-centered interview included demographic, information-based, and open questions that served as starting points that allowed the children to articulate narratives, as well as their own ideas and positions. In addition, creative parts of the interview process were included. We asked the children to devise a TV program about the issue; the children were also asked to draw pictures of what they think is happening at the moment in Iraq as well as a second picture of what they want to see about war on TV. The interviews were conducted in the children's homes, in their own rooms, by the IZI interviewers' network and included 23 interviewers (17 women, 6 men²).

Analysis of the interviews was conducted, first, by means of a qualitative content analysis of the transcribed interviews. Here the central aspects in each answer were condensed, coded, and categorized by means of MAX-QDA software (e.g., Kvale, 1996). The second step of the analysis sought to determine the children's subjective construction of meaning: That is, we sought to determine, from the children's point of view, how they understand war, their inner picture of war (Klemm, 2003), and the roles they believe are assumed by the opponents. Biographical analyses of the meanings made by children were typified along with the children's pictures, which were viewed as an aesthetic articulation that could only be understood through understanding each child's perspective and comments (see Götz, Lemish, Aidman, & Moon, 2005).

RESULTS

Children's Knowledge About the War

Children Knew About the War in Iraq, and Television Was Their Main Source of Information. Most of the children we interviewed knew there was a war; only 3 out of the 93 had not yet heard about it. The children knew that bombs were being dropped, houses were destroyed, and people were dying. Some of them connected these events with Saddam Hussein, but few linked them with the events of September 11. The media were the main source of children's information, primarily the TV, followed by the radio and newspapers. Concerning TV most of this information came from news programs they had watched, sometimes together with their parents. The channel most often cited as the first point of contact with the news was

ZDF,³ followed by ARD⁴ and RTL.⁵ Some children had specifically chosen to watch children's news programs and special reports on the subject.

The War Was a Topic of Discussion at School and at Home. Many of the children had also discussed the war within their immediate social world. It was a topic within their peer group and at school. At least half had discussed the subject with their teachers and indicated that special events about the war had taken place at both class and school levels. Also many reported drawing pictures or praying during lessons and attending demonstrations. The war had also been discussed at home. Nearly two thirds of the children interviewed said they had talked about the war with their parents when the subject arose on the way to school or during dinner. Parents had explained the situation or discussed it with them in simple terms.

The depth of the children's knowledge about the war varied. Some described how they had picked up fragments of information from the media or from discussions, but could not exactly identify the source. Others proved to have highly detailed knowledge of the current situation and the context and were able to discuss the subject in great complexity during the interview.⁶

Reason for War: Iraq Has Weapons It Should Not Have and Bush Just Wants the Oil. The majority of the children identified both sides, the United States and Iraq, as the parties making war with one another. Some believed that the war was the *fault* of the United States of America, that is, of George Bush and the Allies. For example: "I know that it is Bush's fault" (Kerem, B, 9);⁷ and "Well, the ones who are attacking, that's America and Britain, and the ones who have to defend themselves, that's Iraq" (Oliver, B, 10).

The children were far more familiar with the name *George Bush* than with the name *Saddam Hussein*. When asked why the war was taking place, the children cited two principal reasons: Iraq's possession of weapons, and Americans' and British desire for access to oil. A number of children linked the war with the events of September 11. It was rare for German children to blame Saddam Hussein for the war, while some of the children confused Saddam Hussein with Osama Bin Laden. Oil was mentioned as a central reason for the war, as is expressed in the following examples:

Well, Bush, yeah, he says it's because of Saddam Hussein, because they want to free the country. But I don't think that's what it's about at all. I think there are lots of reasons, maybe it's a bit because of that, but it's because of the oil, too. Because America hasn't got many oil-wells and Iraq has quite a lot. (Jan, B, 9)

Maybe it's because in Iraq the oil's so cheap. And maybe the British haven't got much money any more and so because it's so cheap, they want to have it. (Katinka, G, 9)

Children's Perceptions of International Public Opinion: The Whole World Is Protesting. Most of the children were sure that most of the world was against the war. They believed they had seen evidence of this in coverage of demonstrations and protest actions. According to these children, people in general, but above all the Iraqis, simply could not be for the war because they had to bear the consequences and because people were being injured. Further, they believed that no one except Mr. Bush could accept this argument. Some of the children believed that Bush actively desired the war, and that those who agreed with him were content to see the Iraqi people suffer: "I think the President of the USA, he really wants there to be a war. Because they've got all the weapons and I think they want to try them out, really properly" (Kathrin, G, 11).

A smaller proportion of the children thought there might be differences of opinion about the war. Most, however, constructed an *us* and *them* scenario, with *us* (those who opposed the war) firmly occupying the moral high ground.

Children's Emotional Reactions and Dreams to the War in Iraq. The news that the war had started provoked an emotional reaction from the children. They spoke about fears that they themselves would be affected by the war and conjured up scenarios of a Third World War. The initial reaction of many was categorical opposition and, seemingly, a total lack of comprehension as to why the war was happening. Many of the children told the interviewers that they often thought about the war, and even those who did not really want to consider the issue reported that they "simply had to" think about it.

A great deal of the children's thoughts focused on the fate and suffering of the Iraqi people: "The poor people, their dads are being killed, or their husbands. They're sad" (Fabian, B, 7).

The children put themselves in the position of the children in Iraq and imagined their suffering from a child's perspective. They also contemplated their own positions and desired a rapid finish to the war. Some also mentioned that they had thought about the current military action and considered the basic question of why there was a war.

Conducted just after the war had begun, only a small number of the children interviewed said they had actually dreamt about the war. The few dreams related were of war scenarios and the children's own involvement in fighting, with them as victims, either because a family member had died or because they themselves had been killed. For example; "Once I dreamed my family got shot. That's why I sometimes think about the war and I get really worried about Germany getting involved in the war" (Sandra, G, 10).

Although it is difficult to interpret these statements from the children, it is nonetheless obvious that the scenarios seem threatening and expose a number of different fears. In two cases, however, boys had dreamt that they

were the aggressors. For example: "Yeah, sometimes I've dreamt about the war, that I was there wearing a uniform and that I had to shoot someone. I didn't like that" (David, B, 10).

Perceptions of the War Coverage

The majority of the children reported having watched programs on the Iraq war on TV. A number of them had been searching specifically for information, while others had watched with their parents or had simply picked up some details by chance. They did not always understand all the information. However, the majority of children interviewed agreed that children should not be protected from the subject of war.

Because it does affect children, because it's important for people in other countries to know about it. And even if it's sometimes scary, you should know what's happening in other countries and I think it's quite important that we know about the war, even if it's quite a long way away. (Anastasia, G, 9)

The children liked the fact that the media used pictures to help them imagine the situation. They praised the comprehensive reporting and were impressed that the reporters were risking their own lives to provide us with information. They also enjoyed antiwar reports and coverage of protesters calling for action.

The children felt that the media coverage had helped them understand the real significance of war: "Cos now I understand, cos at first I just thought they were thrashed a bit, but now I've seen that there is fire" (Alexandra, G, 8). Although Alexandra's concept of the war has little in common with the cruel reality of the situation, if anything helped the children get an idea of the war it was the pictures. From a child's perspective, they are extremely important for comprehension and can provoke an emotional reaction:

It (the report) didn't help me much, and the radio didn't either, but the pictures did. The pictures really made me think about it and realise they've really got something wrong. (Ivett, G, 8)

Ivett describes how it was the pictures that *made* her decide to oppose the war. Presumably she means that the pictures led to an emotional reaction that then led her to think about the war. For her the most important realization was that *they*—presumably those in the world who hold the balance of power—had really "got something wrong." This realization, a step toward

developing a critical political perspective, is an important milestone in terms of political education.

As already mentioned, children's first exposure to the topic was usually through media coverage designed for adults. However, a quarter of the children said that they regularly watched *logot*, the news program on the children's channel KLKA run jointly by the two German public service broadcasters ARD and ZDF. The children who had seen special reports on the topic on children's news programs or on *Kikania*⁸ praised these programs highly:

On KLKA there's a thing called *logot*, and they always explain everything really well so children understand and so they don't get frightened (. . .) What I liked about the children's programmes was that they talked with the children really openly about things, and that they tried to explain them to the children with words the children understood, and so I understood it better than when I watched the grown-up's news with mum and dad. (Anastasia, G, 9)

Different to the findings of Gillard et al., both boys and girls appeared to be informed and interested in the issue. One reason for this may be that programs such as *logot* have been produced especially for children by a group of dedicated editors, most of whom are women.

What Children Would Have Liked to Have Seen

Information and Explanations With Comprehensible Words and Pictures That Were Not Frightening. Most of the children considered the news to be important even if they did not watch it regularly. Some of the children wanted to find out very specific information and had fundamental questions, such as "How do nuclear warheads and chemical weapons work?" They also had questions about the specific division of power, such as "Who has the best weapons?", as well as general questions about the current situation (see Fig. 1.1).

I want to know: Who is fighting against who? Who else is involved? Who's got the best chance of winning? What do the soldiers look like? How many of them are there and what weapons have they got? What does it look like in Iraq, have lots of things been destroyed? Have people been injured? How many? (Ludwig, B, 9)

However, sometimes the children's questions were basic. Take, for example, Johannes (B, 7), who wanted to know how an atomic bomb works. The chil-

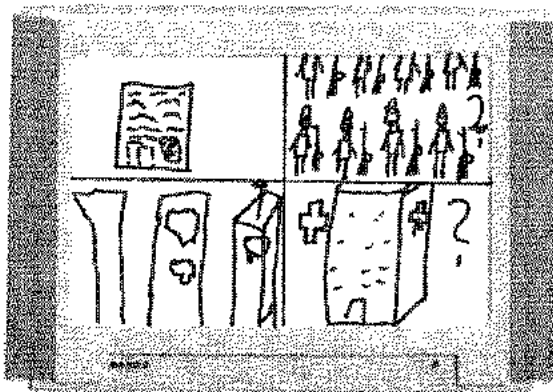


FIG. 1.1. Ludwig seeks answers to his questions on the war.

dren thought that experts should have explained the situation. They wanted coverage that showed honest pictures of the war without shunning the realities of war: "I would show the bombs dropping, so that people know how awful it is, what's happening there. So people see pictures of it and how everyone's getting shot and stuff" (Pepe, B, 10).

However, it was also important to them that the information was not too frightening: "I would explain it to children using words they could understand and try to do it so they weren't frightened and didn't just turn off the TV and run away and hide" (Anastasia, G, 9).

Many of the children criticized the lengthy reports on the Iraq war that contained jargon they did not understand. Others criticized news reports for not being exciting enough or not containing enough information. It seems that a balance must be achieved, whereby coverage is honest, not too frightening, and contains comprehensible and interesting information, without overstepping the mark in terms of pedagogical ethics.

More Reports From the Perspective of Those Involved. If they were planning the programs, the children said they would include not only information on the situation of the war, but they would also report on the status quo in Iraq in terms of people's daily lives there. They wanted specific information on how the war affected those involved.

Katinka: Yeah, what it's like for the people, they never show that anywhere.

Interviewer: So what do they show instead?

Katinka: Just war, war, war, where they're shooting. (Katinka, G, 9)

As viewed by Katinka, the coverage concentrated on showing clashes between the opposing forces, yet she wanted to find out more about the circumstances of the people involved. Kathrin (G, 11) told us how she imagined a war scenario in which a mother and her children were forced to flee their home. The father had been shot and was lying on the grass, and the houses were burning. The mother was urging her children to hurry and there was no time to pick up the teddy bear that had fallen on the ground (see Fig. 1.2).

Kathrin then said that if she could design her own program, she would interview this mother or another mother so she could tell of her suffering (see Fig. 1.3). The children were also particularly interested in the lives of children in Iraq, and some identified themselves with those children. They tried to imagine how they would feel in that situation and asked questions about how the injured and the war orphans were being cared for. Their



FIG. 1.2. Kathrin: The father's dead, the mother flees with her children.

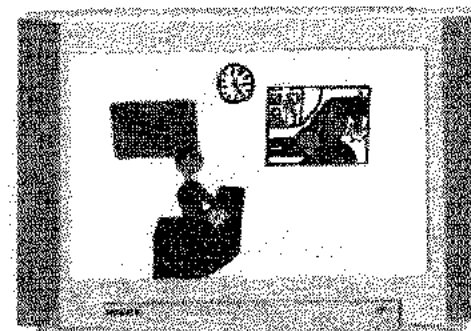


FIG. 1.3. Kathrin: The mother talks on the news about her family's suffering.

desire was for there to be some hope and relief, such as when they saw that the children were still able to laugh despite all that was happening. Such inclusions would make the reporting more palpable.

Show Alternatives to War. The children not only desired information on specific situations, but they also would have liked to have been presented with alternatives to the war. First, there was the desire for the war to reach a swift conclusion. The children had a strong desire for peace, and not all child viewers interviewed were interested in receiving additional information on the war in Iraq. Some of them would have liked to have been presented with more information on why people begin wars in the first place and how the war could have been avoided.

In their programs, children would have shown opposition to the war. Angela (G, 10), for example, would have invited the German Chancellor, then Gerhard Schröder, and a child onto her program and both would have emphasized the senselessness of a war in which people die unnecessarily (see Fig. 1.4).

In theorizing about programs they might have created, the children showed no desire to preserve the neutrality that journalism as a rule at least attempts to observe. Janine (G, 10) had hoped that *logos* presenters would explicitly give their own opinions. Others would have liked to hear more about demonstrations and to have been given more ideas of what they could do to show their objections. These ideas and suggestions from the children strongly indicate that children desire media coverage to reflect their own opinions.

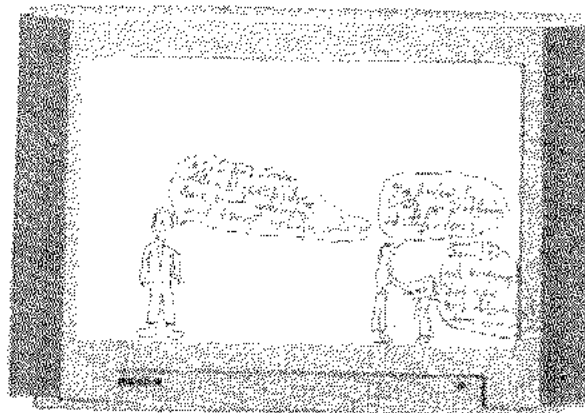


FIG. 1.4. Angela: A child and Chancellor Schröder talking on TV about the nonsense of war.

The Children's Stories and Drawings of the War

In the interview, we asked the children to draw on a piece of paper the first thing that came into their minds when they thought about the war. In these drawings and in the stories the children told the interviewers about them, the children articulated their concept of the unfolding events.

Scenes of Close Combat, War Devoid of Humans, Suffering, and Destruction. Battle scenes dominated many of the pictures drawn by the children. As in the 1993 study by Gillard et al., such appeared to be the case slightly more often in boys' pictures than in those drawn by girls, however such was not as pronounced a gender division as that found by Gillard et al. (1993). Arrows were employed to note the actions of shooting, fleeing, injury (wounds spurting blood), and suffering in both boys' and girls' drawings. Whereas battle scenes were the main focus of the pictures, the pictures generally portrayed two sides—often one man against another or one group against another. There were images of close combat, where people with drawn pistols were shown shooting at one another. The children's images of war may have been based on fictional TV scenes that were adapted to the current situation, (e.g., by adding green combat uniforms).

However, battle scenes were also depicted as a scenario devoid of humans. Planes dropped bombs on houses or, as in three pictures, flew into high-rise buildings. Here images of night attacks seemed to be mixed with definite relics of the media coverage of the events of September 11. In terms of appearance and size, the skyscrapers and planes resembled the pictures from New York more than the reality in Baghdad.

Although some children drew battle scenes, weapons, and the destruction of houses, others focused on the suffering of people, drawing dying or already dead persons, grieving relatives, and frightened people. They drew people crying and attempted to represent the suffering of the injured in their pictures. Sonja (G, 7), for example, drew a person bleeding to death (see Fig. 1.5).



FIG. 1.5. Sonja: People suffering in war, illustrated by a victim spouting blood.

In some of the pictures, families are portrayed sitting in air-raid shelters, safe but anxious. The events drawn by the children also reflect emotional suffering. For example, Linda (G, 10) drew a dramatic scene in which a mother is throwing a teddy bear out of a burning window to her daughter with the words, "Bye-bye my little daughter" (see Fig. 1.6).

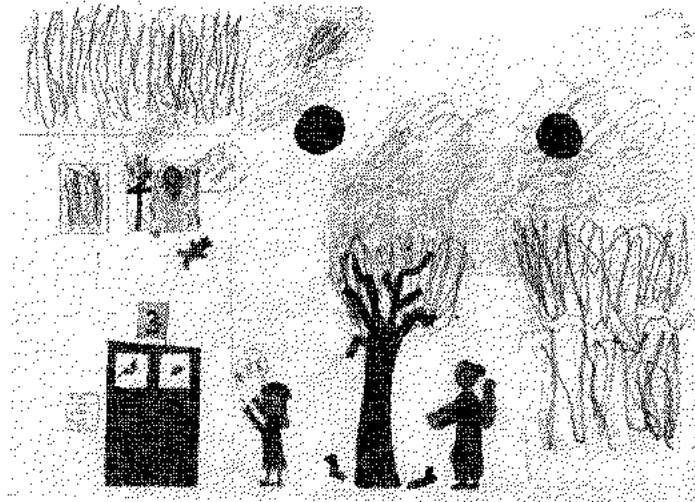


FIG. 1.6. Linda: A mother in a burning house throws a teddy down to her daughter, saying her final goodbye.

The Desire to Support the Weak and Attack George Bush. Several of the children expressed a desire to support Iraq and Saddam Hussein. Ines (G, 8) hoped "(. . .) that the Iraqi soldiers will be stronger." Ines had presumably gathered information that was often the subject of public discussion at the time—namely America's clear military supremacy—and she decided to be on the side of the weak and wanted to support Iraq. She hoped "that they win the war." She also hoped that the Americans would be imprisoned, as portrayed in her picture.

Thomas (B, 6) fantasized about an attack on George Bush. "Because Bush, he's big and powerful and he's destroying another, smaller country. They haven't got a chance." He imagined a scenario in which Bush would be shot. He would be hit in the arm, but not necessarily killed because then, Thomas believed, the Americans would immediately elect a new President and then cease military action. That would take "a few days, fourteen or so,"

said Thomas, but then the war would be over. Simon (B, 9) also imagined scenarios in which George Bush was personally attacked. He imagined a guided missile being dropped by an Iraqi plane and heading directly for Bush. Not until at the last minute Bush shouted, "Stop, no more war!", would the missile be called off.

The aim of the children was to end the war. In imagining how it might end, the two boys used specific terms they had heard in the media, such as *guided missile* and *elect*, and combined these with their understanding of war. Both boys believed that threats would force an end to the war. Because in their minds George W. Bush personified the war, they believed that it was necessary to attack him.

Saddam Hussein as "Somehow" Not Good Either. Only a few of the German children interviewed were critical of Saddam Hussein. Their perceptions were totally different than those of children in the United States (see Seiter, chap., this volume) or Israel (see Lemish, chap. 3, this volume), where Hussein was quite definitely seen as an opponent or a troublesome politician. Some, however, believed that the dictator had only himself to blame for what was happening. Robert (B, 9) explained the war like this: "See Bush found out that Saddam Hussé [sic] was treating the Iraqis badly and that he was holding on to all the donations that people had sent to the Iraqis." Elly (G, 10) assumed that Saddam Hussein "hadn't behaved very well towards the other countries and they had also done some things which maybe weren't so good."

Thomas (B, 6) also knew some details about Saddam Hussein: "Saddam, see, he attacked another country with chemical weapons. Really he's bad, too." He told the interviewer that "Paul's teacher thinks Saddam is worse than Bush. And well he is. But at the moment Bush is stronger." Thus, his desire was clear: He wanted to attack Bush.

The children were basically aware that Saddam Hussein was a problematic character, but they had no tangible idea of what this meant. In their pictures and stories of how they imagined the war, there was no mention of Saddam Hussein.

Although adults are generally aware that Hussein the dictator posed a real problem, partly due to the last Gulf War, at the time of the interviews there was little public discussion of him in Germany. This may explain, in part, why the children were much less aware of his history. Although they did seem to be aware of the potential significance of the people involved, they did not really understand the consequences of actions they proposed taking. As stated in a previous citation, some children noted that having more background information, designed to be comprehensible and interesting for children, would have assisted their understanding of the war.

Americans Who Like Killing. Several of the pictures and stories feature Americans enjoying the war and finding delight in shooting Iraqis. The drawing by Julia (G, 9) was particularly potent on this point; she drew three American soldiers with smiles on their faces shooting at Iraqi children (see Fig. 1.7). The adults she portrays are extremely large, and two are portrayed aiming their weapons at a child who is screaming "Mummy." When asked by the interviewer if she had intended to draw the soldiers with smiles on their faces, Julia answered, "Of course! They want to shoot the children!" Once again the question arises as to how a 9-year-old can create such an image.

A source of these fantasies could be pictures of American soldiers who are laughing or even cheering. Various media sources showed pictures of American soldiers speaking confidently about the war and at least smiling, if not celebrating. Another source is presumably the death of children in Iraq. Although, the reports (rightly) did not show exactly how they died, it is likely that Julia combined the two sources of information and imagined how the children had died. Thus, she created a scene, probably influenced by fictional scenes from other media, in which the soldiers were smiling because they had been overjoyed at the prospect of going to war and were shooting defenseless children just as a firing squad would do.



FIG. 1.7. Julia: U.S. soldiers executing Iraqi children with a smile.

Misconceptions

Julia's picture, in particular, clearly shows the extent to which children become involved with the topic of the war. They absorb specific pictures, action episodes, and connotations from the media coverage. Current events are then combined with what they know from previous events such as, in this case, the September 11 terror attacks and fictional stories. In trying to understand and integrate current images and information obtained from general public discussion of the war, the children made linkages between the individual pieces of information and impressions. In doing so, they create misconceptions that are from their point of view extremely plausible, but that in reality are problematic (e.g., the desire to provide Saddam Hussein with more weapons, to bomb George Bush, or smiling American executors).

Many things obvious to adults, such as the fact that, like other soldiers, American soldiers do not enjoy killing, especially children, were not clear to the children interviewed, some of whom were confronted with a tangible war and its significance for the first time. Consequently, targeted support of the children through child-oriented reporting was needed. In fact, programs such as *logo!* provided a great deal of such information. Ideally reports should have included more of this kind of material as background information on Saddam Hussein and should have been open to basic questions such as "Why do wars happen?" or "Do soldiers like killing people?"

The Perspective of Iraqi Refugees Living in Germany

The attitudes and their approach to media reporting were significantly different for the six Iraqi children-refugees included in the interviews. Although it is a small sample, it widens the view to those children who were not born in Germany and who are involved in the conflict in quite a different way.

Notably, of course, the topic did have special meaning for families of Iraqi refugees. In their view, the topic of the war in Iraq is permanently present, although the parents do not always discuss details with them. Telephone calls with relatives and worries about the welfare of the ones who stayed behind are always on the family agenda.

The emotional concern of Iraqi children was explicitly higher. Their fears are partly existential, mostly personal: They are worried about relatives in Iraq whom their families try to contact daily by telephone and who are highly disconcerted if they are unable to reach them. Their attitude toward the war, too, was influenced by their personal status. On the one hand, their

parents experienced the difficulties of living under the regime, and they came to Germany as political refugees. On the other hand, the American invasion is an acute threat to their relatives and friends.

From a structural perspective, their reconstruction of the political background to the war was quite close to what the German children told us. It was built on singular elements of knowledge and terms, and so some misconceptions could be found. However, the content differs in several ways. Alaya, for instance, relates the background of the war: "Many also say that Saddam Hussein isn't good. The American Republic has decided that Saddam Hussein must leave now and an American wants to become our president" (Alaya, G, 11). "My mother said, why do the Americans need this war: (. . .) Saddam said I don't give you oil anymore. The Americans need so much and they don't have as much as Saddam Hussein, e.g. oil. The Americans said we need everything that is in Iraq."

Both of the constructions of the background for the war were from an Iraqi point of view. They contained arguments, that could not be found in the German sample at all, like the Americans wanting the richness of Iraq and especially Saddam Hussein and their desire to become Iraqi president.

Another important point in the interviews is the self-assessment of the Iraqi children in their peer group. For example, it was not easy at all for Iraqi children to express their position in conversations with friends or classmates. At school, teachers and classmates approached them about the war in a straightforward manner; however, these pupils did not always find it easy to articulate their views. One reason for this is emotional concern, as 11-year-old Alaya puts it: "It's difficult, all those questions, if someone dies or so." Another reason is the clear dualism with which the topic is treated in class. Ayse (G, 9) recalled that a list was compiled on the blackboard of pupils in her class who were for and against the war. Not one pupil identified him or herself with the pro-war side. "Then I didn't say anything anymore," recounted Ayse. For her, the context is much more complicated than a simple pro or con position.

This ambivalence is also reflected in the children's dreams. Erhan, for example, says the following about his dream:

I had a dream, it was a silly dream, (. . .) I saw that I'm in Iraq, in the middle, and I'm dressed like Action Man [TV character] and all the Americans come towards me and I killed all of them. But then comes another Action Man, just like me. . . . He had a weapon and he shot at me. I went down and got up again. But in the end I got the best of him. (Erhan, B, 13)

Without overinterpreting this dream, it seems clear that Erhan believes he is under attack by the Americans. He identifies with the role of the Iraqis.

Nonetheless, he doesn't wear their uniform, but rather that of a media action figure. This is in line with previous research that has found that media characters take part in children's make-believe worlds (e.g., Götz et al., 2005; Taylor, 1999). In his dream, the Americans are not the only ones attacking him, but he is reinforced by his own army. This fantasy may well be related to his situation as a refugee, in general, and to the specific distinction he feels needs to be made between political escape from the Iraqi dictator and identification with the Iraqi people.

The children handled this ambivalence in other ways. Alaya, for example, preferred retreat: "I'm also against war but I prefer not to interfere," she tells us. Some of the boys, such as Erhan, take an explicit position, but they also ask their classmates to consider the complexity of the situation:

There is also a boy who says that the Americans do it best with their weapons. We asked why he thought so? He said it was because in Iraq, people are hungry and they die, there is no medicine, nothing. Then we said, "You're right. Saddam is bad, but the people can't help it! They are as old as you and me." (Erhan, B, 13)

Given this ambivalent perspective, they have an interesting view of the media. For the Iraqi children interviewed, German reporting is superficial. They find the media to be insensitive, for example, when a report by a war correspondent in Iraq is positioned immediately after a commercial break: "They show chocolate and bikes and then that people die!" (Erhan, B, 13).

Another point that hurts the feelings of the Iraqi children interviewed is the treatment of cultural differences:

In our country, women wear a headscarf. I don't like them showing this: A woman has been hit at the knee. And they show that. And she says: "Don't undress me. My husband will kill you." Why then do they show that? They'd better show something else. (Alaya, G, 11)

This scene was shown in the afternoon news magazine on the private German channel SAT.1, accompanied by a deprecating comment about the limited possibilities for assistance. Alaya is distressed by this kind of reporting, and in expressing her opinion she applies the frame of reference of her Muslim culture in which women wear headscarves and enshroud the female body. The image of a woman whose injured leg can be seen, albeit slightly, is offensive to her feelings. She suggests that more cultural sensibility might have been expected from the journalists.

For the Iraqi children, as viewers, Arabic channels such as Abu Dhabi and Aljazeera are more authentic in their live reports. They appreciate their

up-to-date reporting: "What happened yesterday is not what happens today. Everyday there is something else. You should know every minute what's going on" (Merve, G, 13). She is especially interested in reports from the perspective of those people who are directly affected by the events: "I want to know what the people in Iraq say," demands Merve. Erhan formulates what he wants presented as follows: "How does your heart feel? What happens to you?" Besides this interest in current events, there is also a hidden threat, as Ayse (G, 9) tells us: "I also don't want to see how my family cries out and so." What seems to be expressed here is their fears for their friends and/or relatives in Iraq and presumably the shame concerning the emotional outbreaks in front of the camera.

The Iraqi refugee children wish for peace as they look to the future. Ayse (G, 9) hopes for a peaceful solution where "Saddam and Bush will sit down together and clink glasses with champagne and talk about something good there, so that everything ends with the Iraq war." "What I wish to see in the news on TV on Aljazira is that there's a mosque and all people pray that everything will be all right again. And the sun is shining and nice blue clouds."

With regard to resolution of the conflict and the future of Iraq, it is interesting to note that the Iraqi children alone showed positive concern for the future of Iraq, whereas German children imagined the future of Iraq as a country in ruins and with a lack of water. Accordingly, Erhan had a vision of an economically flourishing city with a big building of the company Mercedes-Benz (see Fig. 1.8).

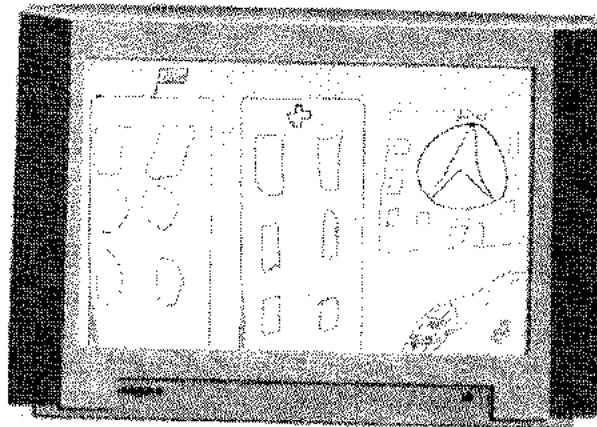


FIG. 1.8. Erhan: The dream of a booming economy in Iraq.

I would like to see that Iraq is becoming very nice, not as it is now. Very big houses, a very good hospital and the biggest company in the whole world. Mercedes should be there because I love Mercedes-cars. (. . .) Also because one can earn good money there. (Erhan, B, 13)

DISCUSSION

Hegemonic Discourse Is an Opportunity and a Problem

The outcomes of the study clearly show how children combine media images and public discourse with their own issues and patterns of interpretation. In Germany, the majority of discussions about the war in Iraq, whether in the media or at school, was clearly against the war.

This war may well have been a rare situation in which children's opinions and actions on global political topics corresponded so well with those of adults. No matter how childlike their comments on the topic, they coincided with the views of the adults. Comments such as "(. . .) if Bush keeps on like this, he'll become a dictator, too" (Jan, B, 9); "The first thing I thought was how stupid Bush is" (Pepe, B, 10); or even vulgar observations, such as "Bush is a wanker" (Thomas, B, 6), were probably received with an indulgent smile by the adults, because the children were actually expressing something that some of the adults may well have already thought to themselves. This mutual agreement may have added to the children's confidence and encouraged them to become more active in expressing their views. Whether at school or at home, they may have learned that it was worthwhile to become politically active, even if only on a small scale. This is an important experience that can encourage children to learn about and become involved in politics. Yet the danger of this hegemonic discourse was that it led children to develop a simplistic idea of good and evil that had decreed that Saddam Hussein was 100% good and George Bush was 100% bad. This personalization and development of a simple idea of good and evil is not untypical in children's understanding of media coverage of war (Gillard et al., 1993), but it leads not only to stereotypes and clichés, but also to concrete problems in dealing with others who hold a different view. This was especially the case for the Iraqi refugees, because this hegemonic discourse made it difficult for them to express their perspectives, emotions, and more complex views of the war situation. Thus, there is much that can be learned and discussed from such a study with regard to the role of the media in developing a sustainable peace pedagogy.