

# Constructing social categories and seeking collective influence: self-categorization and the discursive construction of a conflict

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## ABSTRACT

The study is addressed to provide an illustration of how social categories are actively constructed within the context of argumentation, and how category constructions may be central as strategy of collective influence. This is achieved through an analysis of how the Gulf war of 1990-91 was portrayed in the discourse of politicians and in the mainstream and *oppositional* British media, and how social categories were argued over. In particular, the main aim is to show how the nature of the social categories involved in the conflict was represented, the ways in which alternative representations were argued over, and the significance that category definition had in popular understandings of the war. Qualitative analysis of material collected during the conflict from four daily newspapers editorials, parliamentary debates, political speeches of pro- and anti-war leaders and activists, and laypersons accounts was carried out. The analysis indicates, firstly, that dominant and *oppositional* elite differs in their arguments concerning the nature and categories involved in the conflict, by showing a reverse symmetry of categorical representations of the conflict. Secondly, ordinary people also differ in their construction of social categories and those supporting a given stance share the category constructions of the respective elite. The study contributes to outline a rhetorical approach to category definition.

*Key Words:* Construction of social categories, self-categorization, rhetoric, conflict.

## RESUMEN

El estudio pretende proporcionar un ejemplo sobre cómo las categorías sociales son activamente construidas dentro del contexto de la argumentación, y cómo la construcción de las categorías puede ser central como estrategia de influencia colectiva. Dicha asunción se aborda mediante un análisis sobre la manera en la que se representó la guerra del Golfo de 1990-91 en el discurso de los políticos y de los medios de comunicación británicos dominantes y alternativos, y cómo se definieron las categorías sociales. En concreto, la principal finalidad es mostrar cómo se representaron las categorías sociales implicadas en el conflicto y se plantearon representaciones alternativas, y cuál fue su implicación en la comprensión popular de la guerra. Se realizó un análisis cualitativo del material recogido durante el conflicto de editoriales de cuatro periódicos diarios, debates parlamentarios, discursos políticos de líderes pro- y anti-guerra y de activistas políticos, así como explicaciones de la población general. El análisis indica, primero, que la elite dominante y de la oposición difieren en sus argumentos sobre la naturaleza y las categorías implicadas en el conflicto, mostrando representaciones asimétricas. Segundo, que la

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población también difiere en su construcción de las categorías sociales del conflicto, y que quienes apoyan una posición determinada comparten las construcciones de las categorías de la elite respectiva. El estudio contribuye al desarrollo de una aproximación retórica a la definición de las categorías.

*Palabras Clave:* Construcciones de las categorías sociales, auto-categorización, retórica, conflicto.

This paper addresses the ways in which social categories are construed and argued over, by raising what we see as an important omission in the social psychology of groups in general and of inter-group relations in particular. There is a strong evidence which shows that the way by which people locate group boundaries determines who they see as friend and who they see as foe, who they support and who they oppose. The implication is that, how people construe the categorical structure of social reality can have profound societal consequences. However, although social psychologists have devoted considerable effort to mapping the consequences of inter-group relations for our understanding of others, they have devoted far less effort to the study of how we understand inter-group relations. In fact, most research on inter-group relations has taken the groups for granted. Even self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987), which has marked a decisive break with the dominant individualism of social psychology which portrays group processes in general as both irrational and pernicious, shares one thing in common with prior models. The way in which this theory defines group membership is still explained principally in terms of automatic and intra-psychic processes. Perception, even if it were perception of social reality, is something that happens within individual perceivers. Moreover, for self-categorisation theory, the implication is that social reality is self-evident, unambiguous and therefore amenable to cognitive computation. Instead, we stress that the nature of social reality is rarely transparent and is frequently a focus of contestation. In common with discursive and rhetorical psychologist (Billig, 1987; 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) we propose that the nature of categories is open to argument, and that the categorization issue needs to be analysed at a rhetorical level. Hence, instead of there being a one way direction of causality from social reality to social categorisation, it is necessary to examine the way in which both are disputed in arguments between different parties. Consequently, categories are not fixed but are flexible and they are constructed and represented within the language.

In this work we will show that the categories involved in a conflict should not be taken for granted, since different parties to the conflict may have different ideas of what the sides in the conflict actually are. We will also show that context and categorisation can both be contested; indeed, they are a prime site of debate. Finally, we will show that category constructions can be related to projects of collective influence. As recent studies (Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; 2001; Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997), which have stressed the construction of social categories within the language as a strategy of influence, we suggest that the definition of social categories

has important consequences for collective action; indeed, social categorisation determines the contours of social mobilisation. If, according to self-categorisation theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987), the effectiveness of political rhetoric –in terms of social influence– will depend upon the ability of the speaker to represent the protagonists in any event such that the largest possible constituency is on their side, it follows that the ways in which the social categories involved in a given event are defined will become a key issue of political debate. Hence we expect that those interested in mobilising collectivities will be actively involved in defining social categories, and that those with differing projects of collective mobilization will both offer different definitions and also contest these definitions between themselves.

All of these arguments are examined through an analysis of the rhetoric surrounding the Gulf war (1990-91)<sup>1</sup>. Shortly, after Iraqi forces had moved into Kuwait in August 1990, a plethora of arguments and counter-arguments were shown, generating a great amount of debate and media coverage (Renshon, 1993). This great global controversy provides a good illustration of how social categories are actively and discursively constructed within the context of argumentation. Concretely, the present study has two main purposes. Firstly, it is mainly addressed the ways by which social categories were constructed and argued over by mainstream and *oppositional* spokespersons and media; that is, in broad terms, by the elite discourse (van Dijk, 1993). Secondly, it is addressed the way by which elite category constructions were matched by popular conceptions. That is, do people who support or oppose the conflict have different notions of who is opposing whom, and those different notions are similar to those expressed by the dominant and *oppositional* spokespersons and media? Following what Besson (1990) has called the *entrepreneurs of identity*, that is, those journalists, politicians and political activists seeking to shape collective action, it will be illustrated to what extent the category constructions of laypersons matched those of the entrepreneurs. While it might be able to say that these entrepreneurs construct categories in order to seek influence, it is quite another thing to show that they are successful in getting individuals to accept these categories or that those who support them share their constructions of categories. Similarly, it could be argued that, even if politicians and activists differ in terms of the way they present the categories involved in a conflict, the ordinary population may also share the same viewpoint.

The focus of the analysis is, therefore, how social categories are discursively constructed (Edwards, 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and the way of they constitute different strategies for mobilization. Following recent studies (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; 2001; Sani & Reicher, 2000), we are concerned with how language was employed in order to construct concrete aspects of categorisation. Concretely, our main is to compare and to contrast how *mainstream* and *oppositional* sources defined the social categories involved in the Gulf war and the implications it had for the population. It is predicted that: firstly, *mainstream* and *oppositional* sources will show different constructions of the categories involved in the conflict; secondly, such as self-categorization theory presupposes (see Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), an important aspect of political rhetoric will be to attempt to define social categories in such a way as to maximize those sharing a common categorisation with a particular perspective,

that is, in a conflict –such as the Gulf– politicians will seek to represent the protagonists in such a way that the largest possible constituency will be on their own side; and, thirdly, such as could be presupposed from the *entrepreneurs of identity* conception (Besson, 1990), those individual holding pro (or anti) war positions may share the constructions of the pro (or anti) war elite.

## METHOD

### *Materials*

A triangulated account of the conflict was analysed on the basis of materials collected from different parties: mainstream and ‘oppositional’ elite accounts, and popular accounts surrounding the conflict. With respect to ‘mainstream’ sources, official statements of the main political leaders and parliamentary debates relative to the conflict were recorded and transcribed. Editorials of four main daily newspapers (The Daily Mail, Mirror, Telegraph and Guardian) were collected since the announcement of the start of military action (January 15<sup>th</sup>) to the last day of the war (February 28<sup>th</sup>), and evening TV news program were video-recorded. As for *oppositional* sources, the speakers at the major anti-war demonstration during the Conflict, which took place in London on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1991, were tape-recorded and transcribed; and all the leaflets, pamphlets and papers on sale during the demonstration were collected. While this was not a comprehensive selection, it represented a wide cross-section of the various groups involved in the anti-war movement.

With regard to ordinary people, a group of university students from Exeter University (n= 42), who had espoused different positions on the crisis as given in the attitude responses –eighteen were against the war and twenty four in favour of it, took part on the study. Each day the Mail, Mirror, Telegraph and Guardian were made available to subjects since early in the morning, as well as some video materials from news programs. They were then brought together in the interview room with the papers in front of them and asked to discuss the material that they had read and watched. While the discussions were initially focussed upon the day’s papers and news, individuals were free to discuss anything else of relevance. They were asked to indicate anything which had particularly affected them from any source of information (papers, television, other media and personal discussion). The accounts given to the images that were stressed constitute the corpus of the analysis. Those images constituted a symbolic universe of the conflict, by representing a full range of the images of the conflict - political leaders, military people, armaments, war activities, casualties, property and environmental destruction, and so on .

### *Procedure*

The analytic procedure adopted here was similar to that used in other studies (Reicher, 1985; Reicher, 1996; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; Sani & Reicher, 2000), which have analysed texts in order to show how social categories are actively constructed and

contested through language. Following those studies, qualitative analysis of our materials was carried out on two levels. The first level is to examine the nature of the constructions contained in leaders and media accounts. Concretely, it is examined the nature of categories invoked by 'mainstream' and 'oppositional' sources, the way in which the scope of those categories is defined and the implications in terms of how individuals are positioned relative to the conflict. The second level of analysis is to examine how the categories were represented, and how particular forms of language were used in order to build up these representations. In short, the analytic procedure consisted of systematic reading and re-reading the material according with the main themes relate to the specific conceptual concerns of the study (Kellehear, 1993). Therefore, attention was focused on the accounts that were used to achieve and sustain specific categorical representations of the conflict. Extracts of the accounts will be reproduced to make more general theoretical points about constructions of categories.

## RESULTS

Consistent with the author's overall concerns, results from the analysis are divided into three major sections: (1) constructing categories and seeking support for the war; (2) reconstructing categories and seeking support against the war; and (3) popular constructions of categories. In the three sections, it is distinguished between ingroup and outgroup constructions.

### *Constructing categories and seeking support for the war*<sup>3</sup>

The analysis of the political leaders' rhetoric surrounding the first Gulf war showed how the arguments used around the question about what were the coalition war aims were shifting as the war progressed. Concretely, the use of categories was shifting as time goes on trying to establish an international coalition. At the beginning, the war was mainly about oil. When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1990, President Bush declared that the fight was about oil, that is, about the importance of the oil for the West and the dangerous consequences if Saddam Hussein controlled the oil. Other Coalition leaders stressed the same argument. Speaking in parliament, the British foreign minister stated:

"We –the international community– cannot afford to allow Saddam Hussein to go smiling home out of Kuwait with two islands or an oilfield in his pocket" (Douglas Hurd, statement in parliament, 7,9,90).

By this construction of the conflict, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait only threatened those who were oil dependent. The conflict became defined as the rich western nations at one side, and the Arab countries and the third world in general on the other side. This construction of the conflict, although may play a part in mobilizing domestic support, becomes a liability when one speaks to a global audience. In fact, two months later the rhetoric of the Coalition leaders changed. A war about oil turned into a war against

aggression. George Bush (October 16<sup>th</sup>) argued that the fight was not about oil, instead it was about naked aggression. Douglas Hurd (December 11<sup>th</sup>) pointed out in parliament that the war was not a matter of oil. It was in the Bush speech to the United Nations on 1<sup>st</sup> October when President Bush presented the Gulf war into the context of the *New World Order* metaphor. In a key passage, he explained the broader issue in which the Gulf conflict was inscribed:

“The present aggression in the Gulf is a menace not only to one region’s security but also to the entire world’s vision of our future. *It threatens to turn the dream of a New World order into a grim nightmare of anarchy* in which the law of the jungle supplants the law of nations” (George Bush, statement in UN speech, 1,10,90).

This emphasis on international law to support the *New World Order* was stressed in the Bush speech on the start of military action:

“We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations *a New World Order, a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle governs the conduct of nations*. When we are successful –and we will be– we have a real chance at this new world order, an order in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfil the promise envisioned of the United Nations’ founders” (George Bush, statement in TV speech, 15,1,91).

The *New World Order* was an enduring metaphor which implied important values that appealed almost everybody: it was about peace, justice and security, a world where the strong respect the right of the weak and a world in which nations recognized their shared responsibility. It was, therefore, used to suggest that the conflict was being conducted on behalf of the whole world and to support the pro-war construction of events and categories. Firstly, *we* were representing the whole world; secondly, *we* were at war with Saddam Hussein not with the Iraqi people. In fact, in the President Bush’s speech on the start of military action, Bush opposed systematically the whole world to Saddam Hussein. It was assumed that the coalition was the whole world. The coalition was described in terms of a *family of nations*, implying friendship and brotherhood:

“Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq; it is the liberation of Kuwait. It is my hope that somehow the Iraqi people can even now convince their dictator that he must lay down his arms, leave Kuwait and let Iraq itself rejoin the *family of peace-loving nations*” (George Bush, statement in TV speech, 15,1,1991).

What Bush described in his speech as a *family* was a strong metaphor. This view suggested that all nations were of the same opinion and disregard the fact that the different nations could have different reasons for supporting the UN-resolutions against Iraq. In fact, when Bush told the UN that the issue was whether aggression would pay, he made the Iraqi action a threat not just to Kuwait, just to the Middle East but to the whole world and its hopes for the future. By this construction of the conflict, the whole world stood on one side and Hussein stood on the other:

“I am convinced not only that we will prevail, but that out of the horror of combat will come the recognition that *no nation can stand against the world united*, no nation will be permitted to brutality assault its neighbour” (George Bush, statement in TV speech, 15,1,1991).

This change in the rhetoric around the war had important implications in terms of mobilization. The problem with the earlier construction, in which the context was *our* access to oil, was that it placed the developed oil dependent countries in opposition to the oil producers. In other words, the categories that flew from such a definition of social reality were *the West* against *the Arabs*. By contrast, the *New World Order* discourse broadens the ingroup to include everyone bar the figure of Saddam Hussein. According to this construction, not only were potential allies in the Middle East part of the ingroup, but also the allied offensive was conducted against an enemy of all Arabs rather than being an attack upon part of a common Arab group. Consequently, defining the issue as *reversing Saddam's aggression* implied to plead for a position and mobilizing for that position, implied universalising the pro-war constituency (Reicher, 1991, 1993).

### *Representing the ingroup*

Whether the *New World Order* metaphor was utilized as an abstract concept to justify the war, this abstract concept needed to be made concrete (Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Billig, 1988). The concrete reality of the war was not represented as the clash of two military forces but rather as Saddam against the world. More concretely, the conflict was represented in such a way that Saddam stood for Iraqi troops while allied troops stood for the coalition. Moreover, there was a great contrast between the portrayal of Coalition and Iraqi troops (Saddam Hussein being a ‘metonymic’ substitute of the latter): whereas the ingroup were humanized –were given relationships, emotions and volitions– the outgroup was dehumanized. With regard to the representation of the ingroup, firstly, if the *family of nations* metaphor was used to refer to the Coalition, Allied troops were made symbols of the *family of nations*. Denying a possible historical analogy with the Vietnam War, President Bush asserted at the beginning of the war:

“I’ve told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight. *Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world*, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back” (George Bush, statement in TV speech, 15,1,1991).

The commander of allied forces in the Gulf, General Norman Schwarzkopf, stressed in a statement to American forces:

“The President, the Congress, the American people and indeed *the world stand united in their support for your actions*. You are a member of the most powerful force our country, in coalition with our allies, has ever assembled in a single

theatre to face such an aggressor” (General Schwarzkopf, statement in TV speech, 17,1,1991).

Secondly, the actions of the troops and their values were those through which the coalition defined itself. They represented the values that constituted the civilized community of nations, the values that characterized the *New World Order*. Hence, in a way, the allied troops stood for civilization, constituting themselves a metonym. Just on the start of military action, President Bush pointed out:

“I’ve called upon Hollywood and Walter and J.P. and Jackie, and *all their courageous comrades in arms*, to do what must be done. Tonight, America and the world are deeply grateful to them and to their families” (George Bush, statement in TV speech, 15,1,1991).

The British Defence Minister, Tom King, speaking in parliament openly exhorted everybody to match the troops:

“We must show the same fortitude as was shown tonight by those pilots and those aircrew who had been out yet again –another night on another mission. All returned safely, I am happy to say. They can expect the courage that they are showing of us as well” (Tom King, statement in parliament, 21,1,1991).

What is more, if the troops were made symbols of the Coalition, the allied commander (General Schwarzkopf) was considered as the prototype of the ingroup. Not only he was considered as the man who conducted the Coalition to success, but also he was ascribed positive personal qualities. In broad terms, mainstream media and spokespersons displayed clear evidence of the individuality ascribed to ingroup members. Characteristics of *our boys* were selected in such a way as to make them prototypical of the ingroup. That is to say, they, like the ideology of the Coalition, were represented as consciously choosing, as concerned with democracy, as tough and brave but also as tender and emotional. Thus, in the press and television, there were many images that stressed a particular humanized view of the ingroup. Particularly, there were many images that stressed the humanity and individuality of Coalition troops, as well as images of emotionality. Many pictures referred to *our boys* were backed up by stories about the troops in which their actions and values were those through which the Coalition defined itself. For example, only on the first day of war coverage, the Mail had six personalized pictures of troops and six stories talking about individual servicemen, and the Mirror had eight pictures of troops and eight stories talking about them.

In this context, the flag was one of the principal symbols that was used to suggest that support for the conflict went along with the entire national category. For instance, the Mirror (16,1,91) filled a quarter of its front page with a photograph of the youngest sailor serving in the Gulf against the background of the flag. The same day the entire front page of the Sun was also devoted to a picture of an anonymous soldier superimposed on the British flag and printed on it was *Support our boys and put this flag in your window*. Somehow, the pro-war media made use of the flag as a symbol



of Britishness and patriotism to mobilize people to support the troops, and therefore to support the war (Newsinger, 1991). This appeal contributed to an important *construction of involvement*: we are British people and, given the Britishness is defined in terms of *democracy standing up against bullies*, we should support the coalition cause:

“Britain is bearing the brunt in men and money of Europe’s contribution to the allied war against Saddam Hussein. That is a matter of pride for us and shame for the other” (Mirror, 28,1,1991).

This indicates how individual involvement was argued over with reference to existing identities. And, although a given identity need not necessarily to point to one position or another, it is evident that in this case it framed the way in which positions were argued over.

These personal attributes applied to troops were extended to the technology of war, especially in the case of high-tech armaments. It was described as *precise*, *smart* and *accurate* (while Iraqi missiles were described as *unpredictable* and *wild*). Somehow, it was suggested that effective weapons were *good* weapons, or at least, morally superior. A clear example in this line was the use of the *surgical strike* metaphor by mainstream media. This metaphor, which implied to describe the state like a body and to identify malignancy, suggested that cutting out *sick parts of the body of Iraq* was necessary, and that this was possible with great accuracy and without killing the country. The description of the Coalition air force successes on the first day of the war explained it clearly:

“Its breathtaking laser-guided bombing facilities enabled it to attack military targets in the middle of a hugely crowded city like Baghdad and remove them with *surgical efficiency*” (Mail, 16,1,1991).

### *Representing the outgroup*

The idea of accurate suggested by the *surgical* metaphor pointed out how the focus of the other side was on the Iraqi leader. Saddam Hussein was used to signify the whole panoply of the Iraqi invasion. He was systematically a *metonymic* substitute for Iraq, for its government and military forces. In a way, the conflict was characterized by employing two mirror images forms of metonym (Reicher, 1991): If the allied troops stood for the Coalition, Hussein stood for the Iraqi troops.

*The outgroup personalising.* In the dominant construction, the war was caused by Saddam Hussein’s decision to send troops into Kuwait, and his refusal to order their withdrawal. When Bush spoke of Iraq, he made clear that he was not speaking of the Iraqi people. In his speech on the start of military action he asserted:

“Tonight 28 nations, countries from five continents –Europe and Asia, Africa and the Arab League– have forces in the Gulf area, standing shoulder to shoulder against Saddam Hussein” (Bush, statement in TV speech, 15,1,1991).

When John Major addressed the nation as Prime Minister on the outbreak of

war, he explained that the Coalition was acting *to end Saddam Hussein's ruthless occupation of Kuwait*. And in his first parliamentary debate on the conflict, he pointed out:

“Our problem is not with the people of Iraq but with the dictator of Iraq, who has created the invasion of Kuwait” (John Major, statement in Parliament, 18,1,1991).

This was repeated time and again in the press. Just on the first day in which the actual shooting war was covered (January 17<sup>th</sup>) the Mail carried the headline *Most Destructive Air Armada Blasts Saddam*; the Mirror covered half of its front page with the headline *Let Us At Him* next to which was a picture of the Iraqi leader entitled *The target: Saddam Hussein*. In short, this repeated metonym suggested that Saddam Hussein alone was under attack or suffering. What is more, given the political necessity of coalition building and hence to include Arab nations as part of the ingroup, it became particularly important to deny that Arabs were in the outgroup (Reicher, 1993). There was considerable media evidence of relevance to this issue: the official version that the Coalition was only attacking Saddam, the counter-argument that the Coalition was attacking Iraqi people, the counter- counter- argument that since Saddam Hussein had killed far more Arabs than any Western source, then in attacking an attacker of Arabs the Coalition was a defender of Arabs. Thus, Coalition leaders stressed the opposition between Saddam, his own people and other Arabs.

In fact, Saddam Hussein was accused time and again to destroy the proper Iraqis: *Saddam uses Iraqis as 'human shields'* (Mail, 8,2,91). One of the most clear concrete examples was the *Baghdad bunker bombing* of 13<sup>th</sup> February. Following the attack on the bunker in which Iraqis died, there was a great debate over if was it a command centre and over what was really a military target and what was not. These controversies were central in the media coverage, mainly trying to deny that this was an instance of the Coalition killing civilians. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, all papers reported the Coalition claim that the bunker was a military communications centre, and some of them commented that there was been Saddam who had deliberately put civilians there. Thus, for instance, the front page of the Mail showed a photo of the bodies wrapped in blankets after the direct hit on the bunker with the headline: *Were civilians deliberately put in bomb target bunker? Victims of Saddam's war*. The logic of all these arguments seems to be as follows: If *we* were against Saddam and Saddam was against Arab people, therefore we were friends of the Arab people. Hence, the conflict was represented as the world against the lone figure of Saddam Hussein.

The personification of the war was accompanied by the *pathologisation* of Saddam. In broad terms, pro-war sources saw Saddam as being inherently pathological. His aggression was considered totally irrational. Concretely, time and again the popular press described the Iraqi leader as mad, evil, crazy, psychotic, etc. The Mirror (16,1,91) said that he was *psychotic*, and the Mail (18,1,91) called Saddam *hypomaniac*, qualifying him as *a personification of evil* (4,2,91). John Major himself talked of him as evil:

“I think Saddam Hussein and his regime *is thoroughly evil* and I believe it is

entirely right for the United Nations to give the authority that it has done and I am delighted that this has the overwhelming support of this country, even though I regret it does not have the Honourable Gentleman's support as well" (John Major, statement in Parliament, 18,1,1991).

The demonization process of Saddam Hussein was stressed through the *Hitler analogy*. The comparison to Hitler was used frequently by the mainstream media and by American officials. Bush talked about *rid the world of Hitler-Saddam*, and suggested that Saddam was worse than Hitler was. He claimed that the invasion of Kuwait was *Hitler revisited, a totalitarianism, a brutality that is unprecedented in recent times* (Bush, statement in TV speech, 23,10,1990). This was a powerful analogy. It presupposed that, as Hitler myth, Saddam was an irrational demon, a villainous madman; reinforcing the argument that he was a despotic and dangerous figure against which the whole 'free world' had to be united:

"The gathering message is that *Saddam –this mad beast, this foaming tyrant– has, like his armed forces, to be destroyed*. He must be pursued and dismembered. The demonology of the outrages makes that, well, obvious" (Guardian, 30,1,1991).

This argument was even more powerful by comparing Saddam *to a snake*:

"President Bush cannot let Saddam Hussein fall back on Baghdad with his armed forces and his nuclear and chemical weapon potential still in being. Macbeth was right, *it is no good scotching snakes, they have to be killed*" (Telegraph, 27,1,1991).

*The oil spill as a concrete representation of Saddam actions.* As the Gulf war developed, Saddam's acts were used to justify the insanity of this leader. Even if of questionable accuracy, one of the most powerful images which were employed to suggest Saddam's threat to civilization related to oil spills in the Gulf. On January 24<sup>th</sup> 1991 news broke of a major oil spillage in the Gulf. When the Coalition wanted to stress the illegitimate and indiscriminate destructiveness of Saddam, it was argued that he had deliberately caused oil to be spilled into the Gulf. The spill was represented as a deliberate act of *environmental terrorism* perpetrated by Saddam. In illustration of this, media reports were accompanied by images of oil-soiled sea birds. However, although it was in connection with this slick that the pictures of oil soaked cormorants appeared throughout the media, it was quite probably that these images came from previous oil spills. They could not have come from the spill that was being alluded to because of it was out to sea, while the birds in oil were by the shore. So, this was a false concretisation, but it had a great impact. Firstly, mainstream media used these images to demonstrate the Saddam's threat to the stability of the Middle East:

"As the Gulf war develops, Saddam Hussein almost daily commits new acts which affront rational world opinion, the deliberate pollution of the Gulf and the attacks upon Israel being the most conspicuous. In one sense, these are helpful to the allied coalition, because they emphasise that Iraq's ruler poses an intolerable

*threat to the peace and stability of the Middle East*" (Telegraph, 29,1,1991).

Secondly, although the pictures of the birds did not come from the slick that was being talked about, in a short space of time, the cormorants clogged in oil became a powerful concrete image, which excited a powerful emotional reaction. These images were used to concretise the construction of Saddam as a threat to the world, as the following headlines displayed it: *Outrage as evil dictator unleashes the biggest oil slick world has ever seen. Saddam poisons the sea* (Mail, 26,1,1991), *Poisoned by the depravity of Saddam. Victim: A cormorant doomed to a horrible death from the Gulf oil slick unleashed by Saddam* (Mail, 27,1,1991), *Evil Saddam sets torch to giant oil slick* (Mirror, 27,1,1991), *Sickening: A dead cormorant on the shores of the Gulf –victim of Saddam's "black death" slick* (Mirror, 28,1,1991). Thus, although it was not clear that the slick itself might have even been caused by coalition bombing, mainstream media insisted that it was a deliberate act committed by Saddam Hussein:

"The oil slick is an obscenity. It has amazed the world. It is the biggest environmental catastrophe of its kind. But *it is not an irrational act by a sick Saddam –it has its own deadly logic*. Nor should we be so amazed but it. We already knew that he is totally ruthless and prepared to sacrifice many thousands of lives rather than give ground" (Guardian, 28,1,1991).

In short, if the impact of an argument can be increased through providing concrete instances or decreased by maintaining it at an abstract level, this was a clear attempt to render negative outgroup behaviours concrete.

### *Re-reconstructing categories and seeking support against the war*

At the anti-war rally of February 2<sup>nd</sup> there were a number of positions relative to the conflict, which showed that the anti-war movement was quite diverse. For some the war was a matter of leaders against ordinary people, for others it was a matter of the Western imperialism against the Arab world, for yet others it was a matter of capitalism against those who threatened its interests. Hence, there was a number of versions of the nature not only of the ingroup (was it all ordinary people, all underdeveloped peoples and those in solidarity with them, all workers), but also of the outgroup (Herrera, Reicher & Verkuyten, 1991). For the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) the issue was about defending profit at any cost. Those involved were *the grim reapers of profit* on the one side and the mass of ordinary people on the other. But that was not the only position expressed at the demonstration. Several far-left groups expressed their view that the war was an act of imperialist domination through papers and leaflets. These groups were quite explicit in arguing that, since the war was about maintaining the grip of the ruling class, then the oppressed have a particular interest in opposing it. Thus, the disagreements in the anti-war camp as to what the war was all about were integrally tied to different notions of who stood at the core of the anti-war side. However, for all their differences, all shared one common conviction: their opposition to the dominant arguments about war, being the counter-argumentation the main instrument

used by the anti-gulf war speakers and political activists. The heterogeneity became homogeneity insofar as it rejected a global ingroup definition. As different ordinary people argued when we asked about their feelings after the demonstration, this demo showed *different people uniting for one cause, and a mixture of people with a mixture of motives who feel strongly against the war*. Specifically, their common conviction was a rejection of the official line that this was a war to liberate Kuwait. The chairperson of the CND and one of the speakers in the anti-war demo, strengthened that this was not *a war of morality but a squalid scramble for oil*. A Palestinian, professor at Columbia University who sent a message to demo, went onto:

*This (war) is not about the liberation of Kuwait; it is about the American destruction of Iraq, the projection of U.S. power, the establishment of a long U.S. military presence in the Gulf and the control of oil (Edward Saeed, statement in anti-war-demo, 2, 2, 1991).*

For anti-war protesters, this was not a war against aggression; this was not a *just war*, a war of moral principle worthy of universal support. It was actually about oil and Western interest, influence and stability in the Gulf-region:

Our rulers would have us believe that this a war of liberation, to safeguard the right of small nations like *little* Kuwait to self-determination. A *just* world crusade against aggressors. This is nonsense. The roots of the present conflict lie in over a century of imperialist domination in the Middle East. A history of western interference, of borders being drawn and redrawn to suit the needs of imperialist powers with coups and military action ensuring their political and economic hegemony over the region. *It is to preserve this domination that the west has gone to war* (AWG)<sup>4</sup> (Anarchist workers group, 2, 2, 1991).

In this line, the anti-war sources contested one of most powerful metaphors used by the pro-war ones: *The New World Order* metaphor (NOW). As we have shown above, this metaphor was used several times by President Bush and other speakers to justify and mobilize support towards war. However, for anti-war speakers this NOW was nothing more than a new imperialism, a system that would keep the US at the top and the Third World at the bottom. It was reinterpreted as *the New World giving orders*. The *Workers Fight* entitled a leaflet as *The Gulf War: the order of the rich powers at work in the Middle East*. One of the speakers in the anti-war demo asserted:

We are leading the world to a New World Order, claims President Bush. A NOW *on the bodies of millions of innocent people, a NOW on the ruins of a whole region*. Is this a New World Order against our world that hates the United States, the Western culture and Israel? And what about the Kurds, is this a New World Order without the rights of Palestinians and Kurds? (Admiral Schmalings, statement in anti-war demo, 2, 2, 1991).

It was argued that there was not a real NOW, because there was nothing new in it. It was as imperialistic as before. It represented negative values such as greed, power,

and world domination:

George Bush has nakedly declared that the real purpose of this war is to establish a NOW which will last one hundred years. *This order is nothing other than the same old imperialist law of exploitation and plunder of the poor by the rich; aggression, interference and bullying to the weak by the strong; and domination of the whole world by the West (SRIM) (Supporters of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, 2,2,1991).*

Whether the NOW metaphor was used by pro-war elite to define the sides as the whole world against Hussein, anti-war sources stressed that this was an attempt to impose western control over the Middle East, in the interests of oil and power. In fact, anti-war protesters used *Vietnam War* as a historical analogy to characterize the conflict as a disastrous attempt of colonial domination. Whether pro-war elite tried to discard the Vietnam-comparison, repeating several times the message that *this will not be another Vietnam*, anti-war one pointed out that the Gulf War was somehow similar to Vietnam War, and it could lead to the same devastating consequences:

The Gulf war would indeed become similar to the Vietnam war, with a whole population determined to risk everything in order to defeat the invaders, only the Iraqi people would be better equipped to fight a war than the Vietnamese were. *Then it could turn into another Vietnam, only worse (WF) (Workers Fight Internationalist Communist Union, 2,2,1991).*

In short, what the different versions shared in common was their rejection of the *official line* and an insistence that those who gained by the war were narrower than the whole world -this was a war of sectional interest to be supported by a few- since those who lost by the war were broader than Saddam Hussein.

### *Re-representing the ingroup*

An important aspect of the anti-war rhetoric was to contend with the fact that theirs was a minority position and the great majority of media material and national opinion was in favour of pursuing the conflict. One means of criticizing the pro-war position was to re-represent it in terms of the categories used by the anti-war movement.

*Counter-arguing the dominant construction of the ingroup.* As we have shown, a potent symbol used by pro-war media was the flag, the *Union Jack*. It was utilized as a symbol of Britishness and patriotism to mobilize people to support the troops. Anti-war sources contested the use of this symbol. For ones the Union Jack sticker did not represent patriotism but jingoism and racism: it was a sticker from the jingoists and racists (Socialist Worker, 2,2,1991). For others patriotism meant something totally different. As a Trade Union Representative said in reaction to a young man who spoke before her and who stated that he had left the army in order not to fight:

It is always very difficult to follow a speaker like the young man that we've just

heard and it takes an awful lot of courage to come and do what he has done and said what he has said on this platform here today. *These are the young patriots, not the ones with the Union Jacks in their lapel* (Terry Marsland, statement in anti-war demo, 2,2,1991).

For the *Green party* “support our boys” meant to work for a cease-fire:

SHOULDN'T WE BE SUPPORTING OUR *BOYS* IN THE DESERT? The best support we can give to all our servicemen and women in the Gulf is to work for an immediate cease-fire and peacetalks. Only a negotiated settlement can stop more lives being lost. A Middle East peace conference is in everyone's interest (GP) (Green Party, 2,2,1991).

*Contesting a false abstraction: how a false abstraction became concrete.* Relevant considerations apply when one analyses how the effects of the war upon Iraqi civilians were portrayed. During the conflict, the general claim was that civilian damage was minimal due to the precision of high-tech armaments: ‘The war is being addressed simply as a military operation to liberate Kuwait with minimum casualties’, was said (Telegraph, 5,2,1991). Speaking in parliament the British Defence Minister (21,1,1991) asserted: *The whole House has seen the pictures of spectacular achievements in terms of accuracy.* However, anti-war sources reported that if we saw *spectacular achievements in terms of accuracy*, that was because it was all we were allowed to see. In fact, although Coalition leaders did what they could to limit images that might suggest that Iraqi people were being targeted, other sources were not so reticent. Both the Iraqi media and others began to show pictures of Iraqi civilian casualties and damage to civilian and religious property. Leaflets informed explicitly on it:

We have respect for the people of Iraq’, said George Bush on Monday. Is that why he is trying to destroy Iraq’s factories, roads, railways, dams, water works, power stations –everything that supports its towns and cities? Signs of Bush’s respect are slowly emerging. *You don’t hear of them in the coalition’s military briefings, on television or in the tabloid press.* But messages smuggled out of Iraq and a handful of small articles reveal the truth –coalition bombing has caused carnage in Iraq. Iraqi television has shown dead children being pulled from bombed buildings (SW) (Socialist Worker, 2,2,1991).

When this issue began to be alluded, British military experts did not deny the possibility of such casualties but they did deny the veracity of those images that were provided. It was suggested that these casualties might not in fact be injured, that they were soldiers not civilians, or that the Iraqis had deliberately injured them. Similarly, it was alleged that material damage of Iraqi homes might have been work of the Iraqi regime. This is a well known phenomenon: while accepting the abstract probability of civilian damage, the ability of specific images to stand as concrete representations of such damage was being contested. This false abstraction was strongly contested by the anti-war sources. In broad terms, anti-war sources used a more direct and concrete language than pro-war did, especially when they referred to civilian casualties. Firstly,

they informed against how the war was being fought, stressing the consequences of the high-tech, and the non-precision bombing, through very concrete expressions such as *high-tech barbarism, they have butchered children just for oil, the bloody price of US power, George Bush, baby killer*. Secondly, they contested the metaphors used by pro-war elite on precision bombing. Where the latter talked about the successful of *surgical strikes*, the anti-war talked of *weapons of mass destruction*. The *Socialist Worker* booklet stressed: *The result of "surgical strikes" is civilian destruction*; and other sources reported:

We are supposed to believe their anaesthetised talk of how the *Allied* war effort is being conducted with *surgical strikes* and *precision bombing* so that there are no *unnecessary casualties*. Yet in the Sunday Times (20 January) description of B-52 carpet-bombing it states: "The effect is like a small nuclear bomb [...] Casualties come not from shrapnel but mostly from massive concussion and internal bleeding". This is *surgery* designed to show terror and to kill on a mass scale (SRIM) (Supporters of the Revolucionary Internationalist Movement, 2,2,1991).

Where the pro-war elite spoke of *minimal collateral damage*, anti-war sources talked of civilian casualties (men, women and children):

Western military spokesmen cynically describe these deaths as *collateral damage*. But to us, they are Iraqi people being massacred. The politicians may say that the Iraqi people are not the coalition's target, but they stand to be the main victims of the war (WF) (Workers Fight, 2,2,1991).

Thirdly, anti-war sources contested the pro-war assumption that the focus of the war was on Saddam. They informed against Saddam as the target of the war by showing that those who were 'blasted' and 'softened up' were Iraqi people, while Hussein himself safely sat out the war:

The war against Iraq waged by US, British and French imperialism is a crime against humanity and a new crime suffered by the Iraqi people. Behind the smokescreen of the military censors and the capitalist media, the carnage suffered by Iraq's civilian population is incalculable (BLYC) (Bulletin of Lonfon Young Communists, 2,2,1991).

### *Re-representing the outgroup*

Whether in dominant accounts Iraqis were substituted metonymically by Saddam Hussein, such representation was challenge in the 'oppositional' discourse.

*Counter-arguing the dominant construction.* Anti-war protesters contested the pro-war construction of the outgroup. Although they did not deny that Saddam was a brutal dictator, they focused on against those who benefitted from the war. They strengthened that supporting the Middle Eastern peoples, did not mean supporting the political regime of Saddam Hussein:



Defending Iraq is not defending Saddam. The people of Iraq have the right to fight against the destruction of their nation, against an imperialist imposed solution. We defend Iraq *despite* Saddam, not because we support his regime (SCG) (Socialist Campaign Group, 2,2,1991).

Not only they questioned the attribution of responsibility upon Saddam, but also the demonization process. On the one hand, they assumed that Saddam Hussein was a *brutal dictator*, but they questioned the extent of his responsibility for the war. They reported that while they have been opposing Saddam for several years, Britain and US had been backing him up:

We know the enemies of peace. John Major, George Bush. We know their hypocrisy –their attempt to smear the peace movement with support for Saddam Hussein when virtually the entire leadership of the anti-war movement was opposing Saddam Hussein when *he was still being propped up by the British and US governments* (SCG) (Socialist Campaign Group, 2,2,1991).

On the other hand, although ‘oppositional’ media agreed that Saddam was bad, they rejected the idea that he was mad. That is, they did not deny that Saddam was a brutal dictator, but they thought that it did not mean that he was a madman:

There is no disagreement over whether Saddam is a despicable torturer and tyrant; Saddam’s regime is utterly repressive and hostile to any form of democracy. But the fact of the matter is *that Saddam Hussein is not mad –he is ruthless, yes, but he is not mad* (SCG) (Socialist Campaign Group, 2,2,1991).

They tended to suggest that, if anything, he was playing out logic made possible by the West. This had the twin consequence of constituting the West as a cause of Saddam’s aggression rather than simply responding to it and also undermining the pro-war notion of the war as a crusade against aggression:

Saddam Hussein did not invade Kuwait because he is a madman but because Iraq, an impoverished Third World nation, was in deep economic and political crisis (AWG) (Anarchist Workers Group, 2,2,1991).

In this context, the anti-war sources contested the *Hitler analogy*. They did not agree that Saddam were as Hitler, not because of his actions (Saddam also committed crimes against his own people) but because of his position (the Gulf War situation and Hitler’s time were not comparable):

But isn’t Saddam Hussein a new Hitler? Yes, he is a national socialist who has committed atrocities against his own people; *but there are big differences between Saddam’s position and that of Hitler in 1939*. Hitler was not encircled by hostile armies, nor was he being strangled by sanctions by the whole world (GP) (Green Party, 2,2,1991).

The use of this analogy was, according to the anti-war sources, very powerful because it assumed that Saddam was a villainous madman, justifying the impossibility of negotiating with a madman. In short, they considered that the Hitler analogy and, in general, the demonization process were strategies from pro-war elite to justify war.

*Contesting Western political leaders.* Anti-war sources displayed a strong rejection of Western politicians, considering them as those who really made decisions. As one of the speakers at the anti-war demo said: “It is their war not ours”, arguing that the protest was against politicians:

The protest against this erroneous war is not a kind of hostility against the people of the United States, Great Britain, France or other countries of the coalition or of Iraq. *The protest is directed against politicians taking war easy, too easy.* The protest is directed against politicians in all countries who contact or support war without being attacked or endangered in their own physical existence (Admiral Schmalzing, statement in anti-war demo, 2,2,1991).

The contrast between those politicians who gained from the war at one side, and those ordinary people who lost from it at the other side, was made clear in the anti-war speakers:

This is not as we are being told by our political leaders a *war of morality* but a squalid scramble for oil, *orchestrated by politicians* with the demeanour of bailiffs, who circle the world collecting revenues from most countries who would rather pay in cash than blood. *They are the grim reapers of profit who head up the international profit and loss columns of dead and wounded*, and determine that the cash balance should always be in their favour. So who loses in this obscene process of accounting? It's not hard to discover that the losers are the mothers and fathers, the husbands and wives, the orphan children: they're the losers (Chairperson of the CND) (majorie Thompson, chairperson of the CND, statement in anti-war demo, 2,2,1991).

In a way, the anti-war elite construed a narrow outgroup category. The world against Saddam became Bush and Major against the Iraqi people. There were lots of examples that showed this construction. The Socialist Worker talked about *victims of Bush's war*, referring to the damage made to Iraqi people through the so-called *surgical strikes*:

General Powell is preparing for a bloody land war. He promises to ‘cut off and then kill’ the Iraqi army. This is the reality of Bush and Major’s *surgical strikes* of their ‘just war’ (SW) (Socialist Worker, 2,2,1991).

Bush and Major were accused of being responsible for the war because of their interest in the area, and of provoking a *mass terror bombing of Iraq*:

We are supposed to condemn Saddam Hussein for “war crimes” for his treatment of the pilots while supporting *Bush and Major’s mass terror bombing of Iraq which has undoubtedly killed thousands of civilians* (SRIM) (Supporters of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, 2,2,1991).

In short, instead of representing the war as the world against Saddam, anti-war sources talked about an ingroup category of ordinary people who suffer from the war, and an outgroup category who benefit from the war. On the one hand, they focused more on rejecting the idea of a ‘clean war’ and on trying to stress the extent of injury and hardship to innocent people. But, on the other hand, although the outgroup category was more difficult to make concrete, it was represented by those politicians who often operate behind the scenes.

### *Popular constructions of categories*

We have above shown that different sources construed the categories involved in the conflict in different ways, but if we wish to provide further evidence for a rhetorical approach to category definition we need to show how a population of non-activists construed the same event in terms of different categories.

### *Ingroup constructions*

As well as in the elite accounts, two different constructions of the ingroup were defined. While pro-war popular accounts indicate how they stressed all the elements of the NWO rhetoric of coalition leaders, anti-war popular accounts contested the pro-war construction of categories, rejecting most of their arguments. Thus, in the pro-war accounts Coalition troops were considered symbols of the *family of nations*, symbols of the ingroup. They were represented as a united force for a common cause, implying friendship and brotherhood:

‘Proud – The coalition shows a joining together to promote one goal.’

‘Good! The international community has done well to pull together in time of war.’

Moreover, the troops were predominantly viewed in terms of positive characteristics. As the ideology of the Coalition, this positivity was related to their prototypicality in terms of representing the wider ingroup, possessing the defining attributes of this ingroup and achieving its aims. They were represented as brave and tough:

*‘The heroes of the war – The complete dominance of the shy had a vital role to play in the success of the campaign.’*

*‘Good! It is these people to whom we owe our Victory! I thank them.’*

They were also described as tender and emotional. This was especially relevant in the accounts to the images that portrayed *British casualties*:

'I feel and empathise with this gentleman who has fought for justice, liberty and righteousness. A sad figure.'

'Sad since these guys are so brave and it was so degraded being paraded on television looking battered. Sorry for families of POW involved.'

All these comments show how effectively since it was given personal knowledge of Coalition troops and since their values and emotions were made personal by mainstream media, people feared for them; being their suffering a matter of acute concern. What is more, whether there was a certain construction of involvement in the elite discourse, appealing to the Britishness in order to make support to the Coalition cause, individuals' accounts demonstrate that this construction was successful, as it is reflected in their comments to the *British soldiers*:

'The real heroes respect for them. British. These people were brave and courageous.'

'Patriotism. Men want to defend their country. Makes me feel proud of them.'

In fact, those who made possible the Coalition victory and the achievement of the ingroup objectives were made symbols of the Coalition. On the one hand, this was clear in the case of the most famous leading military figure in the Gulf conflict, Norman Schwartzkopf. He was made a prototype of the ingroup not only by the mainstream media, but also by the pro-war people. He was considered tough, brave -a symbol of the Coalition victory, and he was also viewed in terms of positive personal characteristics:

'General Schwartzkopf is a great man. He has co-ordinated the whole allied offensive. This picture should be viewed with a sense of pride.'

'Schwartzkopf is the symbol for the Coalition victory. He is the man that made it happen.'

On the other hand, the coalition armaments, especially the high tech-armaments, was considered a means for achieving the ingroup objectives. As in the mainstream sources, it symbolized the Coalition power, and the precision with which the ingroup was attacking the outgroup. The accounts relating to images of *cruise missile firing* and *Coalition tanks* demonstrate it:

'Gives good impression of long range accuracy.'

'This appears to be a great show of strength and force, and makes me feel as if the coalition had a good fighting machine and was efficient.'

Particularly relevant were the accounts in terms of *high-tech precision*, stressing the *accuracy* of bombing when they referred images of bombing, especially this of a *bombing of a bunker*. According to the claim of the mainstream media that the bunker was a military communication centre, the participants' accounts to the image that showed the explosion of the bunker (without casualties) stressed the precision bombing of military targets:

'This reminds me of the television shot I saw of the particular bombing. It was accurate and was aimed at non-civilian targets. This makes me glad of our technology and effectiveness at work.'

'Proud since the allies targeted military targets and hit them. It causes the least civilian death –they were accurate but Iraq just fired scud missiles in the direction of the country.'

### *Counter-arguing the pro-war construction*

If pro-war laypersons viewed the troops as representing the civilized ingroup, in terms of being prototypical of ingroup values, anti-war ones saw them predominantly in negative terms. Their ingroup prototypicality was replaced by insensitivity to the killing and suffering that they inflicted:

'This annoys me -although they may be so happy etc. -what about the suffering that is happening out in Kuwait and Iraq - self centred and smug.'

'Makes a lethal killing machine appears mundane and common place.'

The same kind of accounts was given in reaction to the Norman Schwartzkopf image. Whether the pro-war respondents considered him as a prototype of the ingroup, anti-war responses were:

'He could blow you away with a twitch of his finger. Also, he seems distinctly arrogant. The American *Kick Ass* syndrome.'

'This picture makes me feel quite angry, as all the way through the war this man seemed smug and talked about kicking people's asses all the time'.

Moving on to the images of Coalition armament, whether pro-war participants viewed them as a mean for achieving the ingroup objectives, anti-war ones stressed the widespread and murderous effects of the technology by using concrete expressions such as: *war as a computer game, impersonal war, mass-destruction, war is so mechanical, dissociation of action*, etc. For instance, in relation to the images of *Cruise missile firing* and *Tornado aircraft* they commented:

'We can kill you, wholesale, by the pressing of a button, as if we were playing Space Invaders, we do not have to feel guilty or think that we are killing human beings.'

'Impersonal war. People giving and receiving fire. It cannot even see, hard to relate to people.'

*Contesting a false abstraction.* As anti-war elite, laypersons contested the pro-war false abstraction. This was especially relevant in the case of the *Iraqi corpse* image. This image, which appeared in the Observer newspaper, portrayed the charred corpse of an Iraqi and it was sufficiently rare and shocking to provoke over 100 letters

to the paper. In most of the letters, which we obtained from the editor, people expressed their gratitude because it created one of the few chances to see the full horror of the allied bombardment. Respondents also expressed this point very clearly:

‘That brings it all into frightening and kicking perspective. Very frightening, dramatic, and brings it all to you, what really happened. *This is the side of the war they tried to conceal in the media.*’

This kind of accounts were also expressed in relation to other pictures which had been withheld by mainstream media, such as *B52-Bombers* dropping bombs: *Indiscriminate destruction, despite coalition assurances of strategic precision bombing*. The lack of the precision bombing and therefore the indiscriminate destruction of Iraqi civilians were especially stressed in the accounts that were given to the images of *Iraqi casualties* and *damage to civilian property*:

‘More and more Iraqi casualties, well, we know the coalition bombs work.’  
 ‘Did not the allies so well, because civilians living there must be pretty pissed off.’

Special mention required the images that displayed the *bombing of a bunker* in order to show how the effects upon Iraqi civilians were portrayed. As we have above commented these pictures, which showed how Coalition bombs hit a bunker in Baghdad leading to extensive civilian casualties, led to considerable controversies as to whether the bunker was used militarily or whether the Coalition was attacking civilian targets. Anti-war participants principally reacted to the image that displayed only the gutted bunker (without casualties) in terms of the negative effects of high technology:

‘Shows power of a bomb -potential number of people killed could be quite high, and you cannot even see them.’  
 ‘Shows how easy it is to destroy with machines, dissociate yourself from the act easily.’

With regard to the image that displayed the allied action accompanied by civilian Iraqi casualties, which show a row of bodies outside the bunker, ordinary respondents reacted in terms of the broad targets of the war, stressing their disgust at Iraqi suffering:

‘Realization that the war was happening and death was real, a lot of anger and feeling for those people who have lost everything.’  
 ‘Sadness, even though precision bombing is used, always innocent people are hit.’

The stress was principally on the victims as ordinary human beings, not simply as Iraqis, as is reflected in the following quotations relative to *Iraqi casualties*’ images:

‘He portrays personal agony and pain and ugliness of war. Shows the supposedly wicked enemy is still human.’

‘Horrible suffering of a human being -does not make any difference that he is Iraqi.’

In short, as in the elite accounts, for those who supported the war the ingroup was the Coalition and the troops were made symbols of the *family of nations* –ascribing them qualities to make them prototypical of the ingroup-. While those against the war rejected the key elements of the pro-war construction and construed an ingroup category much more in terms of ordinary people who suffer from the war. The accounts overwhelmingly stressed their disgust at Iraqi suffering, although the emphasis was on the victims as human beings.

### *Outgroup constructions*

As well as in the elite’s outgroup constructions, those who supported the war did not only attribute the responsibility for the war to Saddam, but they also considered Saddam as the responsible for the Coalition casualties and even for the Iraqi casualties.

*The outgroup personalising.* The accounts relating to those pictures which had been usually highlighted in the mainstream media, such as *British casualties*, showed that Saddam was considered as the person responsible for the war and for the casualties:

‘Pathetic and sad since a vulnerable child is caught up in a world-wide war caused by Saddam.’

‘Another victim of Saddam. It makes me angry’.

Following this argument, they indicated that the only enemy was Saddam, and therefore the attack was only against him. As one of the laypersons said in reaction to the *Night firing over Baghdad* image: *The sad thing is they did not kill Saddam Hussein.* This account clearly shows that the only who was considered under attack was Saddam, and not the Iraqi people. Moreover, one means to reinforce this construction was by accusing Saddam to destroy the proper Iraqis. Although in the pro-war participants’ accounts there were some expressions of disgust at Iraqi suffering, they were more likely to see casualties as a normal and unavoidable consequence of war. What is more, the stress tended to be on Saddam Hussein’s responsibility for the Iraqi suffering or at least that the casualties were innocent victims in the war against Saddam. The accounts relating to images of *Iraqi casualties* pointed out how the Iraqi people were considered victims of their leader’s acts:

‘It is sad. Probably an innocent victim of the Saddam Hussein war.’

‘Innocent child caught up in greedy Saddam’s game.’

Alongside this kind of accounts, there were others in which respondents denied that the Coalition killed civilians. The accounts to the *Baghdad bunker bombing* were one of the clearest examples. Whether mainstream media reported that Saddam had

deliberately put civilians in bomb target bunker, the participants accounts to the image which displayed *Casualties of a bunker bomb* stressed they had been victims of Saddam's war:

'War will always produce civilian casualties but this was the largest number of them killed possible because they were placed a military target, such is the politics of war.'

'Senseless killing. Makes me sorry that they are so indoctrinated, they still believe in Saddam when it is his fault they are being killed.'

As it can be seen, two arguments reoccur. Firstly that these were not casualties caused by the allies but by Saddam. The second was that the victims were not innocents but may be the accomplices of Saddam. Moreover, not only pro-war participants personify the outgroup, focusing on Saddam Hussein as the main responsible for the war and attributing him Coalition and even Iraqi casualties, but also they dehumanizing him. Thus, they reacted to the *Saddam Hussein's image* in terms of his responsibility for the war, and by dehumanizing him as *demon, mad* or *evil*:

'We're part of UN, who tries to promote justice and freedom for all. In this case Saddam has violated freedom of whole country and we should respond to this by allowing our forces to form a coalition to fight back'.

'Saddam Hussein is a very dangerous man. He's a mad, killing-senseless nutter! He's so self-centred thinking about nothing else but himself and his own 'ego' boosting and wealth. He's greedy. He also doesn't care about the environment'.

They also talked about Saddam's Islamic rhetoric in order to display his *religious delusions*:

'Evil man or deluded man. Attacked mercilessly for a belief that I cannot understand or would not like to'.

'Cross since Saddam Hussein is always going on about the war as a holy war against the devil etc. He tries to make his people follow him by making out the allies are devils. He is a mad man'.

This demonization process was emphasized by the *Hitler analogy*, as well as the elite did. This analogy presupposed that Saddam was a dangerous figure against which the world had to be united:

'Saddam Hussein has been turned into another Hitler'.

'If we allow Hussein to invade Kuwait he will continue with the aggression like Hitler did before the II World War'.

In short, as we have pointed out, this demonization process had an important implication: the necessity to repress those who are inherently dangerous. Not only this implication was stressed by mainstream media, but also by ordinary respondents:



'This ruthless, hard, uncaring, evil, wicked what I would hate to call a man, has caused much pain and cost to the nation. Shoot him!'

*The oil spill as a concrete representation of Saddam actions.* As we have above commented, whether the origins of the oil slicks released into the Gulf and who was responsible for them were a matter of controversy, they were presented by mainstream media as a deliberate act committed by Saddam. The pro-war accounts to the 'oil' images were in the same vein. Although ordinary respondents principally reacted to the images of the wildlife coated in the oil in terms of the animal suffering and the environmental damage, they also stressed Saddam Hussein's responsibility for the oil. For instance, with regard to the Oil well ablaze image, they commented:

'Shows the great pollution caused by Saddam's deliberate attacks on oil wells, makes me angry for the destruction of the environment.'

'This is the most sickening thing of all of Hussein's atrocities. The effect on wildlife, the earth, the sea and the people will be long and hard.'

Those images that displayed the cormorants clogged in oil or else drowning in the slick, provoked a powerful emotional reaction. As in the mainstream media, the birds were made symbols of the suffering perpetrated by Saddam:

'This is the greatest tragedy of the whole war. An oil slick 100 miles long -an environmental disaster perpetrated by Hussein alone. For just this -he should be shot. The dead bird symbolizes the helplessness of a country run by this man'.

Summing up, the pro-war responses indicate that, as in the elite construction, Saddam Hussein was used to signify the whole panoply of the Iraqi invasion. If the ingroup side was considered universal and based on general values, the 'other' side was reducible to its leader.

### *Counter-arguing the pro-war construction*

As in the elite accounts, anti-war laypersons contested the dominant outgroup construction. Firstly, although they agreed that Saddam was a brutal dictator, they rejected the assumption that he were a mad man. Secondly, they focused on against Western politicians, as those who really benefited from the war. Thus, the anti-war ones argued that the defence of Iraqis did not mean the defence of Saddam. They recognized that he was a dictator and a bad person, but they did not dehumanise him. They considered Saddam as one of the responsible for the war, but not the only one: *One of the people responsible for the war (not the only one). He is a hypocritical man.* They principally wrote of Saddam in terms of hypocrisy and they criticized him to turn the war into a Holy War:

'I am concerned at the humanitarian aspects of the conflict. Hussein is talking of

a Holy War, which I view as hypocritical’.

‘What a hypocrite! The man is not really religious, and uses Allah as an excuse. He does not believe in what he is saying’.

However, instead of demonised him, they argued that he was playing his own logic:

‘We are lead to believe that he’s a mad-man by press coverage, however, I think he’s simply very calculating.’

*Contesting Western political leaders.* Although anti-war participants were much more explicit about the ingroup category than the outgroup category, they focused against Western politicians as those prosecuting the war -it is reflected in the following quotation referred to an *Iraqi casualty: Futility of war, no one can win, everyone except politicians loses out*. Thus, those images that for pro-war respondents were like symbols of Saddam actions, for anti-war ones were the result of the strategy of politicians. This was the case of the images that displayed the oil slick. None of the anti-war participants singled out Saddam. For them, the birds and the oil stood as symbols of the innocent suffering when leaders go to war. They represented leaders against the suffering of innocents:

‘Sad that the wildlife has to suffer because of politicians’.

‘Poor animals, they did not ask to be dragged into this. Also remind me about the ecological disaster this is aiding, and the fact that world leaders are more concerned about killing each other than sorting the world out’.

Similarly, in the anti-war accounts of the Coalition casualties’ images the stress was against political leaders:

‘Anti-Iraqi propaganda is used by the coalition leaders to show how ‘inhumane’ the enemy is. Are we better?’

‘Classic propaganda used by politicians to create greater support of the war amongst the general public’.

The accounts relating to images of George Bush and John Major showed explicitly the reaction against Western politicians. Anti-war respondents principally react to both images in terms of their responsibility for the war and by criticizing their actions. Thus, as for George Bush, while pro-war respondents stressed his contribution to the world unity (“Good ideas of world unity. Fight for justice”), the anti-war ones viewed him as one of the responsible for the damage caused, and as someone who benefited from the war:

‘One of the people responsible for the dead and damage caused’.

‘Discussed to my husband the way Bush is coming across in all this –he appeared initially as a welcome relief to Reagan, but he is almost as bad- his performance during addresses to public/congress are so overstated and emotive that I am left

feeling really alienated from what he is saying –maybe it’s a cultural gap – in US it seems to be all or nothing “Because we’re Americans!”- or totally cracking up as over Vietnam –their manner is very inflammatory’.

Moving on to the John Major image, while pro-war participants saw him predominantly in terms of positive characteristics (“I think he has done a very good job. Proud”, “He inspires confidence as a quiet, capable man coping with a difficult situation”), the anti-war viewed him in terms of negative characteristics. They thought he was someone who benefited from the war, and they considered him as a puppet under Bush’s thumb:

‘Someone who benefits from the war, safe in the UK rather than on the front line, takes all the glory of winning. No risks all gain politically’.

‘Puppet, marionette. Just one of many under Bush’s thumb’.

Summing up, in terms of the outgroup constructions, the accounts show how while pro-war respondents focused on the Iraqi leader, anti-war ones focused more on the allied leaders. In broad terms, as well as in the elite accounts, the anti-war laypersons undoubtedly pointed to a different definition of categories than those of the pro-war ones. They construed an ingroup category by stressing the broad targets of the war and an outgroup category by stressing those who benefit from the war. That is, by saying the war involves Bush or Major against the Iraqis, individuals distance themselves from involvement in a way that would not be possible if they use an inclusive category.

## DISCUSSION

The paper reports supportive evidence for our arguments, by showing how any construction that implies the definition of a particular category is open to contestation. According to our hypothesis, first of all, *mainstream* and *oppositional* sources hold fundamentally different views as to what the sides were, and both parties contested these constructions. Secondly, for both pro- and anti-war sources, the rhetoric was based on defining as broad an ingroup as possible, in order to mobilize a mass popular movement for or against the war. Thirdly, not only activists and politicians differed over what the sides were in the conflict, but rather these differences could be equally found amongst a lay population. In other words, the category argumentation we have found amongst leaders is not relevant for leaders alone. The different category constructions of those subjects holding different positions matched the dominant and oppositional elite constructions. In the mainstream media and leaders, as the conflict began and images and accounts of two armies fighting each other replaced the abstract representations of conflict, two reversed forms of metonymy were employed: while Saddam Hussein came to stand for Iraqi forces, the allied forces came to stand for civilization in general. Hence the war was construed as the civilized world against Saddam Hussein. The same construction was (re)produce by the pro-war population. By contrast, the anti-war popular

accounts matched anti-war activists by talking on a broader category for those under attack by coalition forces (either Iraqi people or those who suffer at wars in general) and a narrower category for those forces themselves -they were seen to represent merely the political leaders rather than the whole peoples or even the world in general. Overall, there was a match between what we might call entrepreneurial and ordinary category constructions.

Although the anti-war movement was quite diverse, and there was a number of versions of the sides involved in the war, what these versions shared in common was their rejection of the official line and an insistence that those who gained by the war were narrower than the whole world, since those who lost by the war were broader than Saddam Hussein. Being up against this official line which was supported by the mainstreammedia and constituted the official position of all the parliamentary parties, it was necessary for the anti-war groups to take an oppositional line by seeking to show the shortcomings of the mainstream as much as by pushing their own alternatives. The main point of attack, then, was to deny that the war was against Saddam Hussein and to expose the wider category that came under coalition attack. The same could be argued over those subjects who were against the war. Even if it is simplistic to see anti-war subjects as homogeneous, their very heterogeneity reinforces the point that the way in which categories are constructed may be different for different parties in a dispute. We have analysed the difference between mainstream and oppositional spokespersons and media and between a lay population supporting or against the war. It might have been equally possible to refine the analysis in order to look at the differences of construction between different anti-war factions. Of course, the psychological status of these differences remains open to question. They may reflect differences in cognitive representation between groups or they might be linguistic constructions used to functional ends (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). However, for our aims -whichever stance is taken-it remains true that people do not only differ in their evaluations of ingroup and outgroup, but they also differ in the definition of what those groups are (Herrera & Reicher, 1998; 2001; Potter & Reicher, 1987). This has serious implications for psychological research, which has tended to take categorical structure for granted (Reicher, 1997a,b).

Moreover, the fact that not just political leaders, media commentators or activists construed the nature of the conflict and of the categories involved in such different way, but also these differences have been equally found amongst a lay population, provides further evidence that the nature of social context (and hence social categorisation) is not self-evident. In this sense, although obviously it cannot conclude that there is a causal relationship, it contributes to outline a rhetorical approach of category constructions (Billig 1987; 1988; 1991). An approach in which the issue of who is involved in a conflict and hence how ones stand in relation to each other constitutes a matter of debate (Potter & Reicher, 1987; Roberston & Reicher, 1998). If constructions of events do not occur in isolation but in the context of alternative accounts, it follows that those who wish to impose a particular viewpoint need to deal with competing views either implicitly or explicitly. Hence, instead of seeing categories in predominantly perceptualist terms, it is important to examine the rhetorical construction of categories by political

leaders for the purposes of collective influence and the ways these category constructions are appropriated and used by those who support these different mobilisations (Besson, 1990).

Before concluding it is important to raise an issue. Having shown that leaders construct categories to seek collective influence and having also shown that individuals echo these constructions, it remains to be shown how people 'absorb' and discuss elite discourses. In contesting traditional perceptualist models of categorization, it would be wrong to think that only leaders have agency in defining categories but those followers reproduce them passively. By looking at the way in which laypersons talk about phenomena like the Gulf conflict, we have found that, like their leaders, their categorisations are expressed in argument with their opponents and in attempting to persuade others to their side. Hence, while we would expect category definitions to have influence effects, we do not wish to represent lay population as simply passive recipients of leadership rhetoric. Even if lay subjects were not explicitly involved in the issue of mobilisation, it can be argued that any response is an act of communication and, therefore, involves persuasion. Their conversations with relatives, friends, etc. carry implications for the stance that should be taken. We assume, then, that -in contrast to a hypodermic model- subjects are not passive sponges absorbing elite messages but active thinking individuals (Croteau & Hoynes, 1997; Jowett & O'Donnell, 1992; Thompson, 1990).

Overall, although there is much to be done on the proposal approach, the paper point to the theoretical dangers of taking categorisation for granted. As we have shown, different parties hold different constructions of social categories involved in a conflict. Conversely, the ways in which one constructs the categories should affect which party one adopts. Therefore, defining who the sides are could determine who is to be mobilized in favour of or against an event. Thus, defining the Gulf conflict as the civilized world against Saddam Hussein would lead people to positioning themselves as part of the civilized pro-war group. Conversely, if the war is self-interested leaders against ordinary people, people are more likely to define themselves as part of the ordinary anti-war group. What all this shows is that the ways in which the categories in a conflict are framed may be an important aspect of the conflict itself.

#### Notes

- 1 All the material was collected in Britain -where the official government policy was to support the coalition both diplomatically and militarily. During 1990-91 I had the pleasure of stay at Exeter University and want deeply into the study of category constructions together with Stephen Reicher. I am very grateful to him for all his help. Part of the credits for the research must to go to him.
- 2 Concretely, the images represented the following: Destroyed Iraqi tank, B-52 Bomber, Saddam Hussein, General Schwartzkopf, Bombing of a bunker, British POW, Iraqi casualty, Coalition tanks, Casualties of a bunker bomb, President Bush, Dead bird in oil, British casualty, Grieving Iraqi, Bombs damage in Iraq, British pilots, Coalition troops, Night firing over Baghdad, Israeli casualty, Tornado aircraft, Destruction in Baghdad, Bombed Iraqi convoy, Cruise missile firing, John Major, Iraqi corpse, Bandaged Iraqi casualty, Oil well ablaze, Bird floating in oil slick, British soldiers, and Iraqi tank blown up.
- 3 Bold type in the quotes is my own emphasis throughout.
- 4 Initials in the quotes refer to the leaflets of the following groups: GP= Green Party; SW= Socialist Worker; AWG= Anarchist Workers Group; WF= Workers Fight; BLYC= Bulletin of London Young Communists; SRIM= Supporters of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement; CND= Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; SCG= Socialist Campaign Group.

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