War and Imprisonment: A Discourse Analysis Exploring the Construction of Meanings and Realities Surrounding COVID-19 Within Mainstream News Media

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Contents

Abstract

This paper explores how the utilization of language has the capacity to construct meanings and realities. To varying degrees, mainstream news media have evidently exploited the concepts of war and imprisonment in response to the COVID-19 crisis to generate different meanings and realities of events. The terms that are associated with the themes of war and imprisonment have been studied in relation to their social and historical contexts, as well as its contemporary application to COVID-19. This paper serves to investigate the various meanings and realities that can be created as a result of the discursive styles used within mainstream news media.

1.0. Introduction

On the 31st January 2019, a new infectious disease was reported in China and was later identified as the COVID-19 virus (World Health Organization, 2020a) – otherwise more frequently known as the 'Coronavirus'.

As the impact of the disease expanded on a global scale, and as various events unfolded, mainstream news media utilized the use of language to convey an assortment of meanings and realities that were relayed to the general public. Global news outlets diverted their attention to the virus, leading it to become a large focal point for reporting.

Sharma, *et al.* (2017: 302) notes how the dissemination of information is "vital" during the period of a public health crisis, and the representation and framing of such diseases is "crucial to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole", which functions to "heighten expectations of pandemic[s] and perpetuate the perception of risk" (Abeysinghe and White, 2010: 371). News media is consumed by over three quarters of people in Western societies (Rane, Ewart and Martinkus, 2014: 29), and has the potential to construct, shape, and influence public perceptions in multiple ways, therefore allowing for the creation of meanings and realities in both the public and personal spheres.

The framing techniques, narratives, and the ways in which certain linguistic styles are interwoven in mainstream news media exert a powerful influence among audiences. These components not only have the capacity to shape the way in which audiences perceive COVID-19 as a singular entity, but also has the capability to construct meanings and realities of the events that occur as a result of the disease emerging.

Within this paper, I will examine the use of language and linguistic styles within the context of COVID-19, and how they can construct and shape different meanings and realities.

2.0. Hypothesis

Mainstream news media plays a vital part in constructing meanings, realities, opinions and feelings about social issues and topics. The ways in which certain issues are represented within mainstream media can influence how audiences perceive the world around them. It has been suggested that the "majority of the public form their perceptions of risk about public health issues from the media" (Wahlberg and Sjöberg, 2000, cited in Sandell, Sebar and Harris, 2013: 861).

The media is a "key source of health related information" (Hilton and Hunt, 2010: 941), and the portrayal of events surrounding COVID-19 can play a powerful role in how the public form their ideas, perceptions and realities of it. By investigating the linguistic elements of mainstream news articles, realities and meanings can be built based on the spectator's own interpretation, which takes into account the social and historic factors, as well as the collective memory – whether that be at a personal level, or within the wider context of a community.

For the purpose of this research, it can be hypothesized that mainstream news media constructs particular meanings and realities regarding war and imprisonment. By analysing the elements of discourse, various meanings and realities can be created through the different narratives, framing techniques, and language conveyed within the news. Discourse analysis not only provides an insight into the different constructions of social realities within numerous media texts, but also aims to reveal the potential interpretations that audiences and individual spectators may have in response to the meanings and messages conveyed.

The notion of quarantine and lockdown restrictions perpetuates the idea of imprisonment due to the constant exposure of articles that concern emerging confirmed cases of the virus, which inevitably results in the isolation of the individuals in question. On the other hand,

war is a concept that carries an emotional sentiment based on the preconceived ideas that audiences may have of war – whether that be in the traditional sense of a "prototypical war" (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 4), or in the sense that signifies war as a practice to tackle social, health, and economic related issues within society (Bertram, *et al.,* 1996; Alexandrescu, 2014; Coleman, 2013; Buchanan and Young, 2000; Breakey, 1997; Zarefsky, 1986; Mirghani, 2011).

It is important to note that this form of discourse analysis will draw upon the potential meanings and realities that are constructed within news narratives. I contest that there are numerous interpretations of media texts, since interpretation is a subjective viewpoint that lacks the possibility of a definitive outcome. Different interpretations of meanings and realities are dependent on the individual perceptions of events and the semantic associations that one may have towards them. Individual interpretations can vary and are not always the same, thus a conclusive outcome can be difficult to determine.

I intend to explore the ways in which the concepts of war and imprisonment surrounding COVID-19 can be interpreted, what different meanings are conveyed and how these contribute to the constructions of reality.

3.0. Literature Review

The use of language plays a huge role in the production and construction of meanings and realities. Not only are meanings and realities "produced and exchanged at every personal and social interaction in which we take part" (Hall, 1997: 3), but they are also shaped through the mass media – which then circulate between cultures and societies.

Abeysinghe and White (2010: 371) note that the media hold a "key social … position" when it comes to defining and communicating risks, information, and events – especially when "scientific uncertainty exists". The conveyance of such risks, information, and events can influence public perceptions and allow for audiences to construct their own meanings and realities from them. Mainstream news media help to shape agendas and reinforce attitudes (Garnett and Lynch, 2016: 200; Jones and Norton, 2018: 197) by "repeatedly covering a certain issue" which then establishes it on "the public agenda [and] provide[s] issue related criteria" (Scheufele, 2004: 407).

It has been argued that the news is a "socially manufactured product" (Thompson, 2019) whereby the "words, images, … phrases" (Druckman, 2001: 227) and the selection of certain aspects of a "perceived reality" are connected together in a "narrative that promotes a particular interpretation … [that] works to shape and alter audience members' perceptions" and ideas (Entman, 2010: 391) – which therefore suggests that there is "no such thing as unmanipulated writing, filming or broadcasting" (Enzenberger, 1974: 74).

Hall's Theory of Representation (1997: 28-9) involves two stages – the first refers to the "concepts which are formed in the mind … [that] classifies and organizes the world into meaningful categories", and the second entails the production and use of language to construct and convey meanings (Hall, 1997: 28-9). Language translates the concepts "formed in the mind" (Hall, 1997: 28) to a shared conceptual map, which then gives us what

we know as representation. Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2010: 4) state that language is embedded in the "overall cognitive capacities of man", with the communication of it depending of the "shared linguistic conventions and codes" (Hall, 1997: 25). Linguistic signs are not a conclusive link between a thing and its sound pattern, not is it necessary a sound. It is, instead, the hearer's psychological impression (Chandler, 2017: 14), which is how we, as individuals, understand the world from a meaningful perspective.

Representations are "a ubiquitous and necessary part of social life, since they … produce a shared understanding and help individuals to make sense of the world around them" (Abeysinghe and White, 2010: 370). The ways in which they are presented aid the audience in interpreting such messages – that, along with the collective memory and existing knowledge, can then assist an individual's own construction of meaning.

When it comes to language, there are "some words or phrases [that] mean much more than they appear to; in the jargon, such a word or phrase functions as an ideograph" (Berkowitz and Liu, 2014: 308) of sorts whereby audiences can construct meanings from. Discourse goals can be "accomplished by using specific figures of speech" (Roberts and Kreuz, 1994: 162) – otherwise known as figurative language. While there are eight frequently used forms of figurative language (Roberts and Kreuz, 1994: 160), it is important to note that for this analysis of the construction of meanings and realities (See Chapters, 6.0., 6.1., 6.2.) surrounding war and imprisonment, the elements of metaphor and hyperbole will be explored as opposed to the remaining styles.

Metaphors are a frequent aspect of figurative language that appear within mainstream news media. They are important as they can "influence how billions of people interpret health concerns and have influenced the general public for decades … [and although] they continue

to change over time, [the] context in which metaphors are used may change" (Angeli, 2012: 205-8). Embler (1963: 403) states that the:

> *"... transitory portion of a metaphor is often sleeved from among prevailing images of one's time, from among those particulars affect us emotionally and impress people of the time as having unusual power and meaning."*

The metaphorical structures of embodied experiences are defined by Stockwell (1999: 510) as "idealised cognitive models" (or ICMS). These contribute to the conventional communications in which individuals participate in that consists of the "shared ICMs and image schemas" amongst communities, which factors into an understanding of the world and influences how new concepts can be psychologically structured. From here, the question then posed is: "What messages do metaphors convey and how may this potentially influence the publics' perceptions of risk?" (Petersen, 2005: 203).

Metaphors have the capability to enhance representation within mainstream media (Cottle, 2000: 48). Most metaphors are "relatively conventionalized mappings, blends, or even clusters" (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014: 168) that are used for emblematic and explicatory purposes, which can therefore shape "public perceptions in different ways" (Reintjes, *et al.,* 2016).

It could be argued that some aspects of metaphorical language contain hyperbolic tropes due to the overlapping of elements (Greenbaum, 2016: 11). Hyperbole is defined as the "overstatement or exaggerated language that [serves to] deform facts by making them appear much larger than they are if looked at objectively" (Mahmood, Obaid and Shakir, 2014: 211). Such rhetorical tools can "help to describe, persuade, emphasize and recognize the main idea" (Mahmood, Obaid and Shakir, 2014: 213) of texts by making them appear "more

powerful, interesting and attractive", thus highlighting the importance and power that language has in society (Sudarsono, Samola and Maru., 2016: 8).

Entman (1993, cited in Entman, 2010: 391) notes that there are four functions of news framing, which are to define problems, specify causes, convey moral assessments, and to endorse remedies. The framing of certain events in particular ways is not only an "omnipresent process" (Entman, 1993, cited in Entman, 2010: 391), but it can also reveal what information is considered as relevant (Druckman, 2001: 228). The linguistic tools and metaphors used to convey such information can be regarded as "potentially powerful triggers of specific conceptualizations … [and are the] key building blocks of human thinking" (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014: 153), which enable the creation of "semantic associations within an individual's schemata" (D'Angelo, 2002: 876).

With regards to the representation of pandemics within mainstream news media, the existing knowledge and schema of societies is called upon to "process that information" (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 12), allowing for audiences to "make sense of [the] new information by deciding how the new material fits into the understandings and feelings" (Entman, 2010: 391) of previous events. This triggers the collective memory, which aims to "define news and give it perspective and context" (Berkowitz and Liu, 2014: 307). Collective memory is characterized by its:

> "… distance from the everyday [memory]. Distance from the everyday marks its temporal horizon. Cultural memory has its fixed point … [which] are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation and institutional communication" (Assman and Czaplicka, 1995: 129).

Collective memories are not just formed from lived experiences, they are also a part of a memory that is retained within cultures and communities through social interactions,

regardless of it being a personal lived experience (Honigsbaum, 2018; Carr, 2020). The collective memory that is triggered during the time of a pandemic is associated with the "suffering and threat to the survival of society [which] partially explains the psychological impact" (Van Damme and Van Lerberghe, 2000: 512). While pandemics "make for a particularly compelling topic … [due to its] continuing story with worldwide impact" (Blakely, 2003: 884), it can be contested that the media use the tactic of "scaremongering" (Sandell, Sebar and Harris, 2013: 862), which can, in turn, emphasize the perceptions of risk that it poses (Beck, 1992, cited in Abeysinghe and White, 2010: 371).

Wallis and Nerlich (2005: 2629) observed the cultural framing techniques used during the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) while focusing on the metaphorical aspects of language within the media. They noted that the British media's coverage of SARS "employed … distinct and unusual" metaphors that presented "SARS as a killer" in order to "discuss the characteristics and effects of the disease" (Wallis and Nerlich, 2005: 2632; See Chapter 6.1). The metaphors adopted by mainstream news media, and its capacity to "communicate the emotional connotations" (Davis, *et al.,* 2014: 499), can play a prominent role in influencing the perceptions of audiences (Angeli, 2012: 205).

War metaphors are one of the "standard metaphor systems for disease in the West", however news coverage of the SARS pandemic avoided and neglected the use of war metaphors as a result of the "coincidence" between the pandemic and the Iraq war (Wallis and Nerlich, 2005: 2630-2). Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau (2018: 4) state that nowadays, the "war on *x* is so ubiquitous and so embedded in partisan squabbling", and that its usage within linguistics in relation to science and medicine is "not new" (Wenner, 2007: 1), nor is it a new rhetoric to describe other problematic areas within society. The frame of a war against *x* has frequently been adopted to highlight issues of homelessness (Breakey, 1997), piracy (Mirghani, 2011), drugs (Buchanan and Young, 2000), cancer (Coleman, 2013) and poverty

(Zarefski, 1986), to name a few. These linguistic techniques are adopted, often with hyperbolic tropes, to place emphasis on the threat that such issues pose by evoking a sense of fear (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 6; Greenbaum, 2016: 11).

Framing pandemics as a "war" has the potential to evoke certain thoughts, feelings and fears that individuals may have about traditional wars (Brewster Smith, 2002: 249) which can, in turn, motivate "people to pay attention, change their beliefs, … take action … [and help them to] recognize the threat … pose[d] to public health" (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 13).

War metaphors also have the potential to create and reinforce the binary opposites (Hall, 1997: 235; Alexandrescu, 2014: 27) of the in-group and the out-group. To put this into context, the binary oppositions elicited by the war metaphor creates the differentiation between 'us' – the healthy, the living – and 'them' – the infected, the dead. Another opposition that comes into play is 'us' – the general public – and 'it' – the virus.

It could be argued that metaphorical aspect of war and its hyperbolic tropes create "an exaggerated perspective" (Greenbaum, 2016: 12) of the threat presented by COVID-19. The war against the virus is not a literal war, nor a conflict between states. Therefore, by introducing the virus as a threat to society, it has the potential to "distort [the] reality" (Greenbaum, 2016: 12) of it.

The representation of reality within mainstream news media is "sought … through the linguistic part" (Mizan, 2004: 4). Just as language is a "social and historical product of culture" (Blakely, 2006: 1), it can regarded that the production of news and the emergence of disease is a product of culture too (Blakely, 2003: 884; Heider, 2008: 2; Berkowitz, 2011: xiii).

Thompson (2019) notes that many of the events that happen "in reality which do not get reported in the news and those which do appear in the news are placed in a particular order of priority and are 'framed'", which therefore contribute to the "simulated reality" that individuals experience and rely on to "provide a conceptualized image of the real world" (Fields, 2006: 3). The audience is:

> *"... driven to believe that there is a one to one relation between language and reality and that language has the capacity to objectively reflect reality. However, ... there is no such relation between language and reality because language does not reflect reality, but constructs it" (Mizan, 2004: 12).*

Realities are constructed in a similar way to the construction of meanings – via interpretation, existing knowledge and collective memories. The collective memory of a group or community contributes to a constructed reality and identity (Tajfel, 1982: 11; Hirschberger, 2018: 3), with the memory representing the reality or serving as a means to protect it (Haseman, Nazareth and Paul, 2004: 592).

As already stated, the collective memory is called upon when processing new information in accordance with what an individual already knows and / or has experienced about the event or issue in question (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 12) – one may deem the reality of COVID-19 as a "serious and imminent threat to public health" (Atkinson, 2020: 2; Mahase, 2020: 1; Griffith, 2020: 326), whereas another may not see it from the same perspective. Such realities can be perpetuated through the framing techniques that depict war and imprisonment within UK news media.

It can be argued that popular culture plays a role in influencing individuals about public health concerns – whether that be through the creation of meanings or portraying a false reality of events. Virus films that revolve around epidemics that cause "apocalyptic events

serve to instil the public with fear, which may turn to panic when similar situations arise" (Pappas, *et al.,* 2003: 942). The level of uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak from both credible mainstream news outlets and medical experts (Sky News, 2020a; Nuki, 2020) can create and construct the notion of fear amongst audiences, thus prompting the false realities of popular culture to come into play – as demonstrated by Kendal (2018: 8), who remarked that fictional popular culture can pose a "real risk [of] audiences adopting inaccurate beliefs about disease transmission and developing a sense of mistrust in health and government institutions".

The combination of new information, collective memory, existing knowledge and the influence of popular culture on constructing meanings and realities can lead to the prospect of self-efficacy – which illustrates how "individuals view their ability to act in certain situations" (Sandell, Sebar and Harris, 2013: 862), thus reflecting perceptions, interpreted meanings, and realities of pandemics.

Audiences are "characterized by their inability to be witnesses to the events narrated on the news. Therefore, the only way to know what is happening in this world is through the [news] reports" (Mizan, 2004: 11), which allows for individuals to decode news messages in a variety of different ways to then construct their own meanings and interpretations of realities about the world. Audiences decode and interpret messages within the media based on their "existing psychological, social, cultural, health and socioeconomic factors" (Vaughan and Tinker, 2009: 324). The "codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical" within certain degrees of "'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange" (Hall, 1973: 54), which therefore plays a role in how audiences acknowledge and decipher the meanings within the conveyed messages.

The general public rely on mainstream news media to report "accurate and up-to-date information in order to make informed decisions" (Garfin, Silver and Holman, 2020: 355) – therefore resulting in audiences taking either a dominant, negotiated or oppositional approach (Hall, 1997: 59-61) while reading such texts. Essentially, the individual can either accept, question or reject the text's intended meaning. If we apply this to the context of a pandemic, it can be understood that accurate and updated information influences the decisions and opinions of individuals regarding the pandemic itself, health protective behaviours (Garfin, Silver and Holman, 2020: 355), and any actions undertaken, either personally or within communities, relating to the outbreak.

As many people experience pandemics though the consumption of mainstream news media (Davis, *et al.,* 2014: 499), it can result in the "psychological distress" of individuals due to the "repeated exposure" (Garfin, Silver and Holman, 2020: 355) of the same news items and / or events surrounding a specific topic. The reality of events, and the responses to them, are experienced "vicariously through the word[s] created by journalists" (Fields, 2006: 3) and, therefore, enable audiences to create their own perceptions, meanings, realities, thoughts, and feelings of the events surrounding COVID-19.

4.0. Methodology

A mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis was undertaken for this research – with the aim of understanding the potential meanings and realities that can be constructed from the narratives portrayed within mainstream news media throughout February 2020.

Tversky and Kahneman's *The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice* (1981) formed the foundations for this research. They determined that the use of language and the technique of framing problematic situations with hypothetical outcomes influences the ways in which participants responded while making decisions. It became apparent that the hypothetical scenarios and outcomes were, in fact, the same – however the construction and framing of the outcomes impacted the participants' perceptions, thus selecting certain outcomes based on what they deem to be the most superior outcome (Appendix A).

Although this paper does not concern any form of participatory research, it will, however, focus upon how language plays a vital role in communicating meanings and realities. The concepts surrounding war and imprisonment are preserved through the linguistic styles of mainstream news media, and I intend to explore how these concepts can potentially form different social realities and meanings from the perspective of a UK audience.

The sample data will consist of news articles from five different news outlets. These are as follows:

- *BBC News;*
- *The Guardian;*
- *Sky News;*
- *The Independent; and*
- *The Telegraph.*

BBC News, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* are typically considered to have a left-centre political stance, with *BBC News* ranking higher in factual reporting in comparison to *The Guardian* and *The Independent* (Huitsing, 2019; Huitsing, 2020a; Huitsing, 2020b). *Sky News* also ranks high with regards to factual reporting; however, it maintains a neutral, less biased political perspective (Van Zandt, 2020). Contrastingly, *The Telegraph* is deemed to favour a right-wing audience (Huitsing, 2020c). Although this research does not involve politics, the aforementioned political stances do play a role with regards to the language that these news outlets use.

The data was collated using the 'Advanced Search' feature on social networking site Twitter. Articles tweeted from the above news outlets surrounding COVID-19 were eligible for further analysis, and these were based on the tweeted articles that came under the 'Top Tweets' section of the search for each respective day throughout February 2020. The exceptions for analysis included:

- *The Independent* Premium;
- *BBC News'* Newspaper Headlines;
- Letters and / or opinions from readers;
- Listed articles (e.g. Top ten books to read in lockdown);
- Participatory articles (e.g. Have you been affected by COVID-19?);
- Cartoons;
- Video articles;
- Photo galleries;
- Daily summaries;
- Live updates;
- Podcasts; and

- Articles that have been updated any longer than two days after its initial post on Twitter.

After the data sample had been collected, the quantitative analysis commenced. This consisted of calculating the frequency of explicitly stated terms that are associated with war and imprisonment. Below are the terms that were tallied:

War:

- War
- Fight
- Battle
- Victim
- Survive
- Combat
- Explode
- Bomb
- Victory
- Win
- Attack

Imprisonment:

- Prison
- Jail
- Lockdown
- Quarantine
- Isolate
- Confine
- Trap
- Draconian
- Stranded
- Caged

The rules by which the above terms were calculated were based primarily on their significance and relevance to COVID-19 within the narrative of each article. The variations of each term (e.g. fighting, fought; isolated, isolation; confined, confinement, etcetera) had also been calculated as part of the quantitative collection. If any of the above terms were mentioned as part of a different context (e.g. references to quarantine during times of other infectious diseases; references to actual wars, etcetera), they were excluded from the final total.

Afterward, the collated terms were analysed with reference to their historical and social context – drawing upon the possible interpretations of meanings and realities within the conveyed messages. Discourse analysis formed the qualitative element of this research, which allows for potential interpretations that are "shaped by the factors beyond the sentence" (Hagoort and van Berkum, 2007: 801).

It is important to note that the examined meanings and realities are from the perspective of February 2020 – a time where lockdown restrictions were imposed in countries outside of the UK. Due to the fact that the majority of the UK population were incapable of witnessing the events of COVID-19 themselves, this analysis will allow for the construction of potential meanings and realities during a period whereby the UK had yet to have a lived experience of COVID-19 and the effects of lockdown. Therefore, enabling the creation of meanings and realities based on the narratives of mainstream news media.

5.0. Findings

During February 2020, a combined total of 470 articles were tweeted via *BBC News*, *The Guardian*, *Sky News*, *The Independent*, and *The Telegraph*. These are represented below in a circular, statistical graphic that illustrates the proportions of articles attributed to each news outlet during the 29-day period.

Table 1: Number of articles

The Telegraph, 107

BBC News, 94

The Guardian, 74

Sky News, 105

The Independent , 90

■ BBC News ■ The Guardian ■ Sky News ■ The Independent ■ The Telegraph
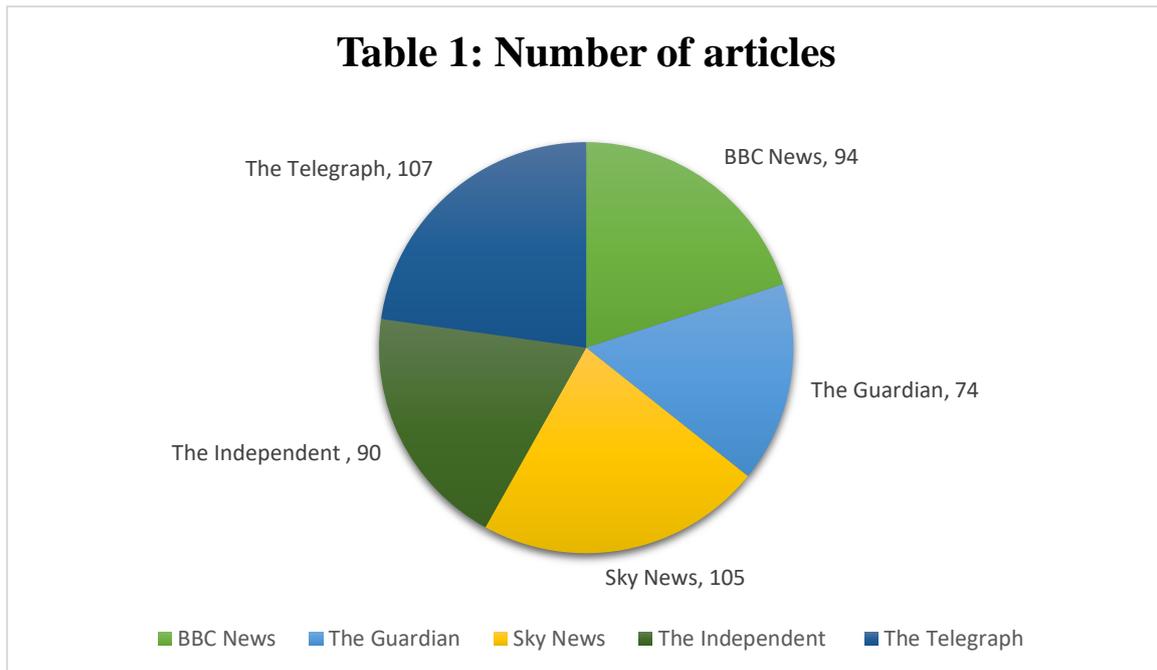
The Telegraph tweeted the greatest number of articles associated with COVID-19, resulting in a 23% proportion of the literature. *Sky News* published 22% of the articles compiled within the data, and *BBC News*, *The Independent*, and *The Guardian* had posted 20%, 19%, and 16% of the articles respectively.

With regards to the concept of war, the associated terms were primarily expressed via *The Telegraph* and *Sky News*. Although it has been discussed that *Sky News* typically refrains from using loaded language (Van Zandt, 2020), it has become apparent that the discursive styles used within the literature can elicit an emotional response due to their usages of the war rhetoric. *The Telegraph*, on the other hand, has been noted as an outlet that strongly

conveys loaded language (Huitsing, 2020c), which is validated within the results. The results demonstrate that both outlets used the associated war terms 62 times each (See Table 2).

The terms 'fight' and 'victim' were the two most prominent expressions used within the context of war. Although these two terms are used within their own contexts in the different narratives, it could be argued that the linguistic relationship between them signifies that the fight against COVID-19 can result in the materialization of victims.

The concept of imprisonment is conveyed much more in comparison to the concept of war (See Table 3), however this appears to be a result of the production of messages that involve the accounts of lockdown restrictions countries outside of the UK and the isolation and quarantine of individuals as the number of confirmed cases increases.

It did become apparent that the specific visual connotations and conceptualizations of 'prison' were not conveyed as prominently as initially assumed. Despite this, the concept of imprisonment in relation to the terms 'prison', 'caged', and 'jail' – used a combined total of 10 times within the literature – can further provide audiences with the mental imagery of a prison, thus constructing the reality of lockdown restrictions, quarantine, and isolation as an experience that can be compared to the concept of imprisonment.

Table 2: Frequency of war terms
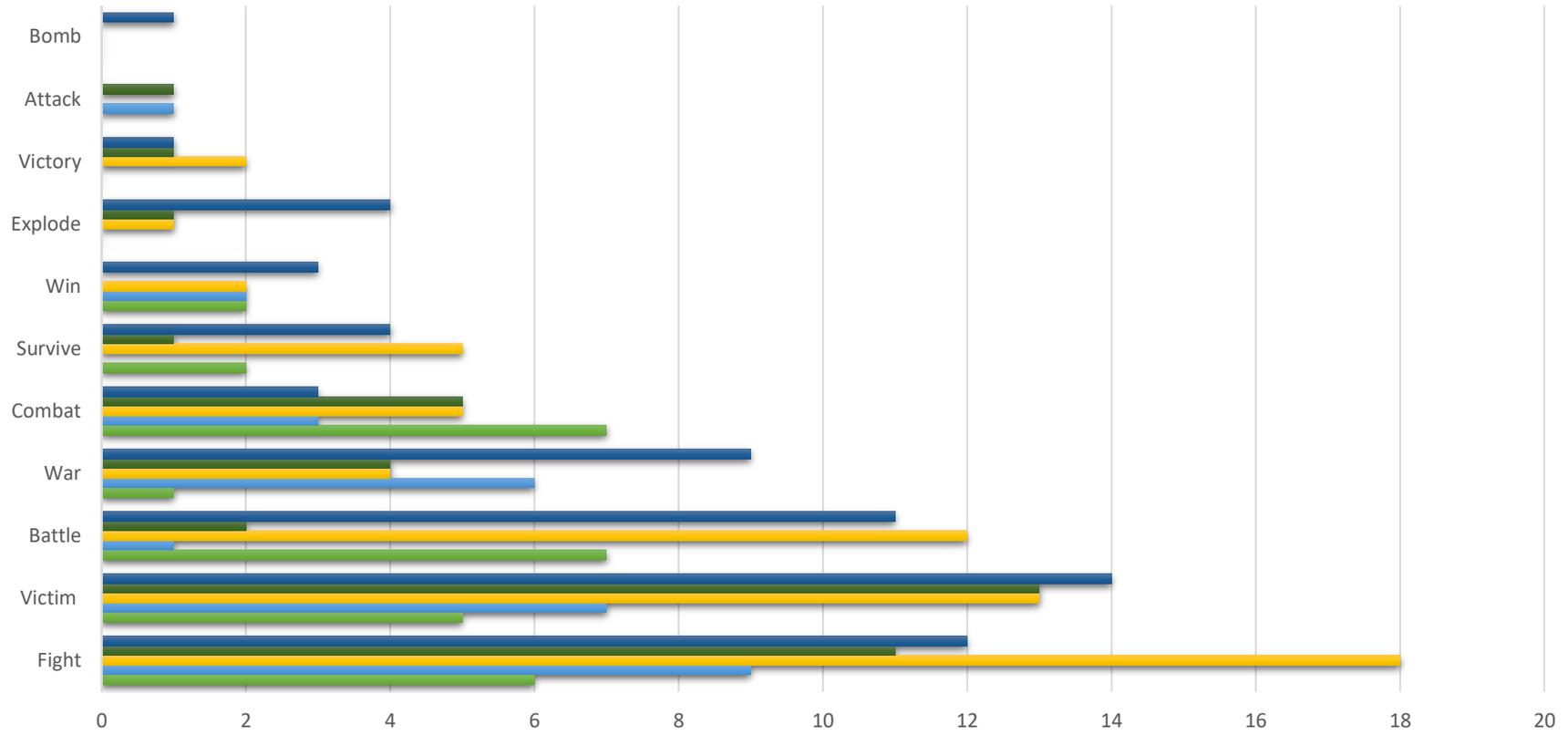
	Fight	Victim	Battle	War	Combat	Survive	Win	Explode	Victory	Attack	Bomb
The Telegraph	12	14	11	9	3	4	3	4	1	0	1
The Independent	11	13	2	4	5	1	0	1	1	1	0
Sky News	18	13	12	4	5	5	2	1	2	0	0
The Guardian	9	7	1	6	3	0	2	0	0	1	0
BBC News	6	5	7	1	7	2	2	0	0	0	0

Table 3: Frequency of imprisonment terms
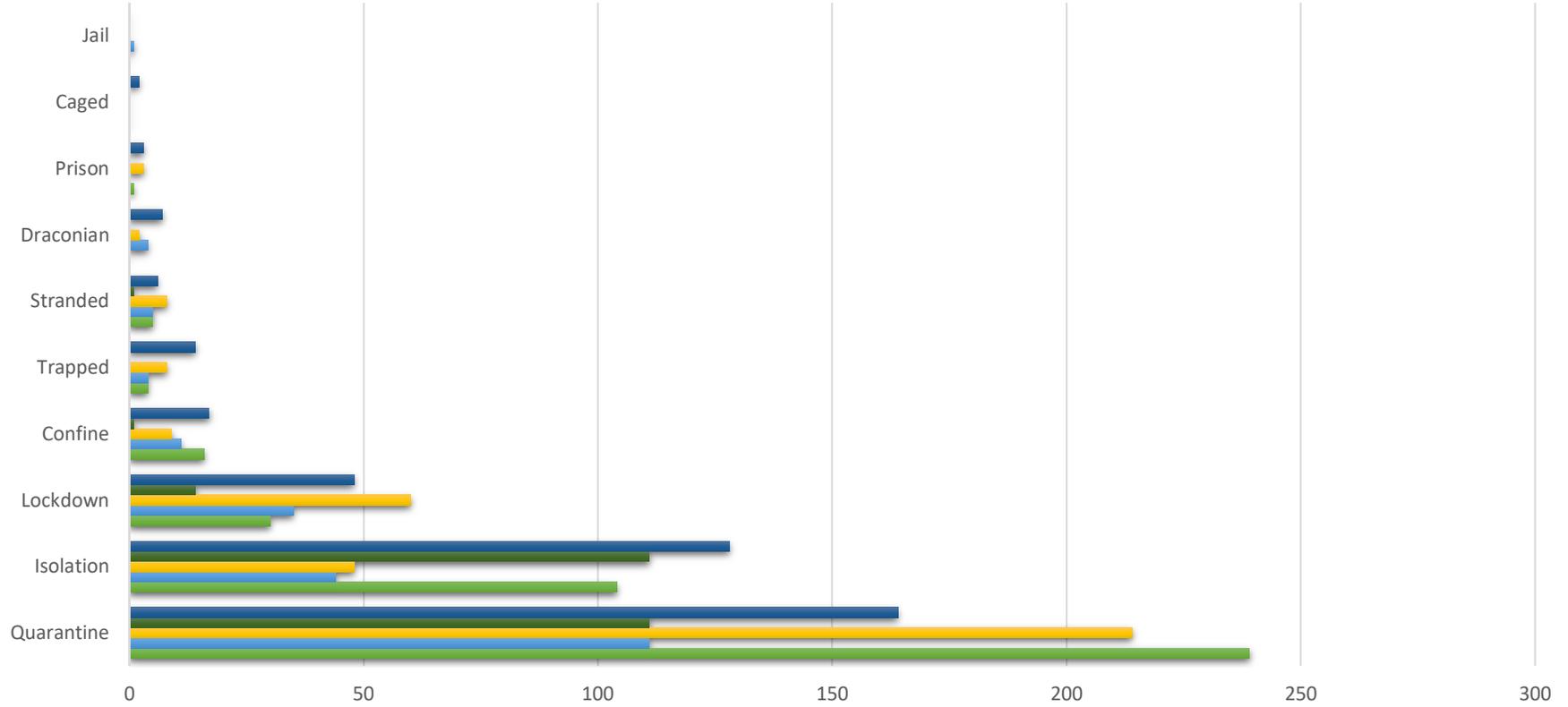
	Quarantine	Isolation	Lockdown	Confine	Trapped	Stranded	Draconian	Prison	Caged	Jail
The Telegraph	164	128	48	17	14	6	7	3	2	0
The Independent	111	111	14	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sky News	214	48	60	9	8	8	2	3	0	0
The Guardian	111	44	35	11	4	5	4	0	0	1
BBC News	239	104	30	16	4	5	0	1	0	0

6.0. Discussion

The war metaphor gives meaning to COVID-19 by attributing the threat of war to the virus. Swanson (2014) identifies similar aspects of war and imprisonment through their fear-driven features, and the reliant process of "dehumanizing and demonizing people, either [as] enemies in a war" or as infected 'prisoners',

By waging war against the disease, it then facilitates the binary oppositions of 'us' / 'it'. When 'it' infects a host, the 'us' / 'them' opposition is constructed, allowing for the concept of imprisonment to be applied. The infected individual is then subject to quarantine and isolation, consequently becoming the prisoner confined within the physical boundaries of their home (Ansay, 1999: 2) or the restricted areas of a quarantine facility, which reinforces the concept of imprisonment as a result of waging war against COVID-19, therefore emphasizing the threat and severity of the virus in both aspects of war and imprisonment.

6.1. The War Against the Virus

The phrase "war against the virus" (BBC News, 2020a) contributes to an understanding of COVID-19 as a threat that symbolises a life-threatening situation (Demjén and Semino, 2016: 385) on a global scale. War is "essentially a military confrontation between two armed groups or organizations" (Bartov, 1989: 99), with its consequences adding up to "casualties, destruction of property [and] environmental damage," to name a few (Grant and Hundley, 2008: 189).

International policies to deal with the spread of microorganisms on a global scale have "often been shaped by militaristic metaphors of 'biosecurity' and 'warfare'" (Larson, Nerlich and Wallis, 2005: 244) that perpetuates the rhetoric of a traditional war which helps audiences to decode the suggested threat in "accordance with an interpretation scheme" that is defined by previous experiences and knowledge (Alexandrescu, 2014: 24). To describe the crisis of

COVID-19 as a "war" expresses the situation as a duel (Howard and Paret, 1976: 75) which then establishes it as a system of binary opposites, with the virus acting as 'the Other' (Hall, 1997: 225). The Other is defined by the representations of difference, and how "'difference' is represented as the 'Other'" (Hall, 1997: 8). It allows for the assumption that 'we' are deemed as the "good", and that the 'Other' is believed to be "wicked" (Kellner, 2007: 628). If we apply this to the context of the COVID-19 crisis, it can be interpreted that 'we', the general public, are good and that the virus is an evil and "wicked" entity. The projection of "evil onto the Other" creates the notion that the opposite of evil is good, thus promoting the "struggle [of] a cosmic battle between good and evil" (Kellner, 2007: 628).

The adoption of war metaphors within mainstream media enables the schematic knowledge of a community to be called upon (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 12), thus triggering the collective memory of a traditional, "prototypical war" (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 4). It is widely accepted that everybody "knows what a war is" (Carbonaro, 2020), and the conveyance of a war scenario provides a sense of risk and urgency. War metaphors have the ability to create fear, anxiety and panic because "the stakes are higher are there are tremendous risks" involved within a war, such as the loss of life, resources, and the evocation of "feelings of despair" (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 4), which allows audiences to understand the gravity and extent of situation and events (Carbonaro, 2020).

Wallis and Nerlich (2005: 2632) regard metaphors of war as a typical metaphor system for disease, and by representing the emergence COVID-19 cases as such, it can be argued that the label can "carry different connotations" (Strachan, 2009: 22) whereby a series of interpretations can come into play. The association of war with COVID-19 can generate the interpretation of the "suffering the threat to the survival of society" (Van Damme and Van Lerberghe, 200: 512), which can, in turn, amplify the perception (Flusberg, Matlock and

Thibodeau, 2018: 7) of COVID-19 and the threat that it poses. The framing techniques the media use to portray the events surrounding COVID-19 allow for audiences to comprehend the narrative (Mallinson, Kielhofner and Mattingly, 1996: 338) and form an understanding of the severity.

Sun (2010: 20) notes how the mappings of concepts connect "the source domain of war and the target domain of disease", which can be presented as follows:

Source: "War"	Target: "Disease"
a) Enemy	➢ Disease
b) Soldiers	➢ Doctors and nurses
c) Weapons	➢ Medicine
d) Battleground	➢ Body
e) Winning a war	➢ Curing a disease
f) Losing a war	➢ Failing in treatment
g) Strategies in a war	➢ Strategies of treating a disease

(Sun, 2010: 20-1)

BBC News (2020a) paraphrased China's President, Xi Jinping, saying that "China was confident and capable of winning the war against the virus" at the beginning of February 2020, while COVID-19 was still primarily contained within China (Chen, *et al.,* 2020: 6). This constructs the notion that China is leading the war against COVID-19 while instilling audiences with confidence of success. China launched a peoples' war against the epidemic (Drury and Gregory, 2020; Nuki, *et al.,* 2020) in order to control and manage the spread of the virus, which denotes the unification and mobilisation of all citizens regardless of individual political, social, religious and economic perspectives (Zinn, 2014: 381). In the historical situation of war, the people's war was a term that was frequently propagated in

order to promote the impression of a "national heritage" whereby the population had made "terrible sacrifices" (Lyneham, 1994) to win a war against "an enemy of unspeakable evil" (Zinn, 2014: 381) – something in which COVID-19 has been alluded to. Although the virus itself had not been directly referred to as 'evil' within the literature, it can, however, be interpreted as being evil through *The Independent*'s mention of the virus as "the beast" (Moore, 2020) – therefore illustrating the beast as a symbolic representation of the devil (Armstrong, 1952: 3).

By the end of February 2020, former Chancellor George Osborne said that the UK government needed to go on a "war footing" (Lintern, 2020a; Donnelly and Rayner, 2020), with health experts drawing up a battleplan that included a "war room" (Sky News, 2020b; Doward and Campbell, 2020). To draw up battle plans signifies that a country is ready for war (Collins Dictionary, n.d.), thus emphasizing the aspect of war while conveying the message that the UK is now involved in the war against COVID-19. The aspect of a "war room" alludes to the Second World War, where "a group of basement offices in Whitehall served as the centre of Britain's war effort … known as the Cabinet War Rooms" (Imperial War Museum, n.d.). The interdisciplinary and interdepartmental room employs the use of strategy, large quantities of data, "artificial intelligence and cognitive efforts" (Helbing and Seele, 2017: 458), as in a war situation, which becomes the "need of the hour" (Pattanaik, 2019).

It was reported by *Sky News* that Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke about "fighting 'shoulder to shoulder' against the deadly coronavirus" (Haynes, 2020; Sephton, 2020). This is significant of the unification between the two countries due to their common goal of managing the outbreak, as well as their common enemy of the virus. Such a statement could also be symbolic of a potential "personal relationship" (Beene, Kubiak and Colton, 2005: 1) between the two leaders. The element of

"stand[ing] together – shoulder to shoulder – [would imply] that an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us" (Orsborn, 2016: 259), thus strengthening the alliance of countries within the "global fight" (Robbins, 2020a) against the virus.

The concept of war is further accentuated through the various terms used to describe the actions and activities undertaken by governments and health professionals in order to tackle the outbreak, as well as describing certain events.

Wallis and Nerlich (2005: 2633) note that the metaphorical aspect of war and fighting conveyed within news media were used during the SARS outbreak, therefore conceptualizing the virus as a "physical force" that needed to be fought against. The same qualities can be attributed to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Actions and activities undertaken by governments, as highlighted by Sun (2010: 19-20), can be associated with the tropes of war. The war term 'to fight against' conveys "such a meaning to us that the struggle between the human body and physical disease is like a war" with the typical activities involving "attacking and defending" (Sun, 2010: 19-20). A synonym of 'fight' – 'combat' – was another prominent term used to convey similar meanings, which contributes the aspect of the virus being a physical entity that we, as the general public, need to combat against.

Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, stated: "Vaccines are our best defence against a host of deadly diseases, including coronavirus" (Lintern, 2020b; BBC News, 2020b), thus representing that medical advancements and the mobilisation of medicines are not only a "defence against mortality" (Argent, 2017: 35), but a defence within the war against COVID-19. Despite there being "no licensed medication" to cure the virus (World Health Organization, 2020b), mainstream news media had described recovered patients as being "cured" of it (BBC News, 2020c; BBC News, 2020d; Hope, 2020). The

term 'cure' "lends itself much more easily to talk of 'annihilation' and 'eradication' with its goal to gain complete 'victory' over the virus" (Nie, *et al,* 2016: 3).

The Telegraph reported that China had deployed "new weapon[s]" in its "battle to control the coronavirus outbreak" (Chowdhury, 2020). These weapons were the distribution of robots that served to deliver food and medication to patients at the Provincial People's Hospital in Guangdong. The need for robots suggests that the virus poses a level of risk that demands the elimination of human contact between patients and doctors, therefore underpinning the concept that war metaphors segregate individuals, signifying that disease is fought against in isolation with "support only from a distance" (Grant and Hundley, 2008: 189). Chengeta (2016: 461) observes the positive aspect of robots within a war environment by their offering of "military advantages", with the capacity to undertake certain jobs that reduce the "risk to one's own soldiers". Soldiers are signified through the health workers who are at the forefront of suggested battle (Newey, 2020a; Kuo, 2020; Boseley, 2020a; Joshi, 2020).

Dr. Li Wenliang was one of the first health workers to alert Chinese authorities to the emergence COVID-19, to which he was reprimanded and accused of "spreading rumours and disrupting social order" (BBC News, 2020e). He was "forced to sign a letter stating that he would not publicly discuss his concerns again" (Newey, 2020a) – which could be indicative of the Chinese authorities potentially attempting to conceal the outbreak. He subsequently contracted the virus himself and later died, leading to users of Chinese social media hailing him a "hero", and alluding to the Chinese authorities who failed to act upon his warnings as "evil" (Newey, 2020b; Hegarty, 2020; Marcus, 2020) – therefore representing the heroic and villainous concepts within a mythical narrative. News outlets frequently adopt mythical narratives in order to reframe the audience's comprehension and "understanding of news and public life" (Lule, 2005: 108) Lule (2005: 102) argues that

myths are an essential part of social narrative whereby the models of myth are "fundamental figures and forces, such as heroes, … villains, [and] plagues".

The Telegraph reported that Dr. Li "died in the front line fighting the virus" (Tsang, 2020), which not only signifies the act of dying in the line of duty, but also reinforces the symbolism of soldiers. Chinese media had depicted the war against the virus as a "heroic struggle" (Sky News, 2020c) which further intensifies the severity of the outbreak. It can be accepted, as a result of the shared conceptualized mappings, that the distinctive qualities of a hero are described as courageous, loyal, sacrificing and magnanimous (Field, 1933: 372), which therefore illustrates health workers as the leading actors in the fight.

The Independent remarked that "all health workers are fighting an endless war" (Wong and Yiu, 2020) which reinforces the "pressing reality of the unknown" (Reio Jr., 2020: 147). Uncertainty is constructed through the aspect of time – its indefiniteness in relation to the extent of the crisis, and how such an indefiniteness of time poses a threat to human freedoms (Le Poidevin, 2011: 456). The fear surrounding uncertainty can be "fruitful because it can motivate us to be curious and exploratory to reduce" it, however it can also "make us anxious and hesitant", thus bringing about the "fear of the unknown" (Reio Jr., 2020: 147).

Sky News referred to the crisis as a "global fight" (Robbins, 2020a) which reinforces the binary oppositions between 'us' / 'it'. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization, remarked that "we should fight hard as one human race to fight this virus" (Buncombe, 2020). The use of the term 'we' creates a sense of unification on a global scale, as well as serving as a rhetoric that aims to build a connection between Adhanom Ghebreyesus and audiences, which allows for a more personal conveyance of messages to spectators. This then constructs the notion that individuals all have a role to play within this unconventional 'war'. Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau (2018: 4) note that there

is a "hierarchy to military force". Its application to the context of COVID-19 has been demonstrated below:

Roles (as defined by Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 4)	Its application to the current context of COVID-19
➢ Leader	➢ Represented by governments
➢ Lower-level fighters like ground troops	➢ Signified by health workers
➢ Those who have a stake in the outcome even though they are not actively involved in combat	➢ General public

Just as in a historical war environment, the men went to war and, in their absence, the women were "drawn into [the] wartime economy" of the labour market "through a variety of mechanisms" (Goldin, 1991: 741). If we apply this to the current context, health workers are represented as the 'men' fighting on the front lines, and the 'women' are represented as the general public, who still have a role to uphold in managing the spread of COVID-19. All the aforementioned roles have the "ultimate goal of … obliterating the opposing side" (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 4).

To attack and defend against COVID-19 preserves the notion of the virus as a physical 'thing'. It could be argued that diseases can be personified. Schlozman (2014) notes that:

> *"We make the immensely primitive microbe impossibly sentient … [which has] allowed [for a] better acceptance of quarantine. … If the threat is portrayed as sentient, historians have noted that those who are threatened will more willingly comply with suggested, sometimes even draconian precautions"* (See Chapter 6.2)

The WHO remarked that COVID-19 is "public enemy number one" (Boseley, 2020b; Donnelly, Gardner and Hymas, 2020). Personifying a disease gives agency to it, with the rhetoric calling for a deep commitment to a war-like response (Larson, Nerlich and Wallis, 2005: 250; Hartmann-Mahmud, 2002: 428). Not only that, but it contributes to the notion of COVID-19 having the same capabilities of a physical threat. The fear that can be evoked through the labelling of 'enemy' can "encourage people to 'fight' [the virus] in their own personal lives" by "promot[ing] beneficial behavioural change" (Hauser and Schwarz, 2015: 67).

Adhanom Ghebreyesus also stated that COVID-19 is the worst enemy and is more powerful in "creating political, social, economic upheaval than any terrorist attack" (Gordon, 2020; Boseley, 2020b). Terrorist groups are formations of people who use of threatening actions that involve:

- *"serious violence against a person; ...*
- *"serious damage to property;*
- *"endangers a person's life (other than that of the person committing the act); [and]*
- *"creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or section of the public"*

(Home Office, 2020: 3-22)

The comparison between COVID-19 and terrorism adds to the notion of it being a physical 'thing' that creates more destruction and fear than the above attributes, thus preserving the concept of war and the accepted actions by which to fight COVID-19. However, Feigenson, Bailis and Klein (2004: 993) found that the perceptions of terrorism varied based on the native country of a particular audience. What one may perceive as a virus posing a larger threat than terrorism may be the opposite interpretation from another individual – this is based on the collective memory of a community and / or country and their experiences of

terrorism. By comparing COVID-19 to terrorism, a semantic relationship can be formed as a result of both spectacles having the capability to carry out acts of societal destruction. Pizam and Smith (2000: 135) identified that the instruments used to carry out terrorist attacks are primarily weapons that consist of guns and bombs to cause destruction. The concept of weaponry can be applied to the virus as its capacity to perform destruction could be represented via terms that relate to artillery. While the use of 'guns' within the war against the virus was not used within the literature, there was, however, one instance of the term 'bomb'.

"Bomb" was referred in an article from *The Telegraph* (Yan, 2020). A mobile phone was described as a "germ bomb", thus representing the device as a bomb filled with germs – as opposed to explosives – waiting to explode and infect nearby hosts. The rise in positive COVID-19 cases had been alluded to an "explosion" (Bodkin, 2020; Donnelly, 2020), therefore portraying the virus as a bomb, with its impact rapidly affecting the surrounding individuals. It could be argued that super-spreaders (Newey, 2020b; Sky News, 2020c) are indirectly represented as a bomb due to their "higher ability to infect others" (Stein, 2011: e510) which symbolizes them as an explosive device with the capacity to cause harm and death. According to Gallagher (2020, cited in BBC News, 2020f) super-spreaders have been demonized in history, referring to them as a wicked and threatening being.

COVID-19 has been branded a "killer" (Halligan, 2020; Moore, 2020). The metaphor of a 'killer' serves to "exploit various well-known features" of it, which typically consist of stalking and striking, and the characteristic of being mysterious (Wallis and Nerlich, 2005: 2632). Wallis and Nerlich (2005: 2634) identify the killer metaphor as a "single, unified entity" that differs from the militaristic metaphors of war. It had been described that the virus "attacks" (Gu, 2020) people. Such a term further characterized COVID-19 as a literal, physical 'thing' with the capacity to commit a form of assault on a person.

Sun (2010: 19) discusses that the viral pervasion of the body permits the conceptualization of viruses as "invaders". It then falls on to the patient to "resist the disease in order to survive. In this sense, virus[es] or diseases are conceived as enemies who people should fight against". There was only one instance of the term "invade" within the literature (Gordon, 2020). The concept of invasion can present the virus as an army (Lockhart, 1980: 13), thus signifying it as a collection of soldiers that attacks the body with "ruthless efficiency" (Gordon, 2020). The "efficiency" of the attack portrays its invasion as a swift and rapid event that can debilitate its hosts. To be "ruthless" can be regarded as showing no mercy or compassion, therefore personifying the virus with emotional traits. By adding emotional traits to the virus, audiences can then recognize the abilities and effects of the virus based on how they understand and process the feelings associated with the element of being ruthless.

Not only can viruses and diseases be personified, but they can also be subject to objectification and "animalification" – a term used to describe metaphors relating to animals (Blomberg, 2017: 213; Gläser, 1971: 278; Dynel, 2009: 33). Although the virus itself is not directly alluded to as an animal, it is still implied within two separate articles from *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* (Evans-Pritchard, 2020a; Qin and Wee, 2020). This was achieved by portraying medical authorities as struggling to "tame" the virus (Qin and Wee, 2020), a term used to describe the domestication of animals which, therefore, implies the virus has animalistic traits and needs to be brought under control.

The effect of objectifying diseases is that the patients "are naturally seen as containers for those objects" (Hodgkin, 1985: 1820), which can lead to the victimization of those who have contracted COVID-19. It could also be argued that entire communities are regarded as containers of the virus. This is demonstrated through *Sky News'* analogy of the virus having "spilled over" (Crawford, 2020) to Hong Kong and *The Independent*'s description of it being "leaked" out of Iran (Holmes, Roth and Beaumont, 2020). Hodgkin (1985: 1820) argues that

this representation of containers "comes so naturally to us that it is difficult to see how this view is anything but helpful" which further underpins that the virus is an "independent existence".

War metaphors isolate individuals through the context of confronting and battling disease in "isolation with support only from a distance" (Grant and Hundley, 2008: 198) which perpetuates the "salient feature of victimization" as a result of an "external agent" that causes the "victim to suffer" (Gruman and Sloan, 1983: 40). This reinforces the binary oppositions of 'survivor' / victim' and 'us' / 'them'.

The Telegraph reported that the passengers on board a cruise ship "struck by the coronavirus" (Smith, Ryall and Donnelly, 2020) felt as if they were being viewed as "lethal weapons" where those who are contaminated "could infect the local population" (Arana, 2020). This representation serves to maintain the 'Other' – defined by the simple characteristic that they might have contracted the virus – consequently leading to the 'imprisonment' of passengers in the form of quarantine (Explored further in Chapter 6.2). Not only are infected persons the victim of danger, but they also become the source of danger (Wang, Farquaher and Lai, 2009: 150), thus creating the notion that they are both the victim of infection and the "monster" (Froula, 2010: 196).

The term 'victim' to illustrate the cases and deaths from COVID-19 elicits varying levels of how audiences can perceive such an identification. Identifying a person as a patient can be regarded as an unrelated aspect of wellbeing, however, by identifying someone as a "victim", it can then be considered in relation to the "lower well-being" and "lack of agency" (Park, Zlateva and Blank, 2009: 5431-34) of a person – which then poses the question: "Do we equate victimization with weakness?" (Peternelj-Taylor, 2015: 63).

Contrastingly, the term survivor can refer to an "extremely wide range of experiences" whereby the identity "revolves almost entirely around the exclusion of suffering and pain" (Orgad, 2009: 152). Identifying a 'survivor' offers a variety of "apparent advantages in terms of psychological well-being" (Park, Zlateva and Blank, 2009: 5434). An article published by *Sky News* (Robbins, 2020b) detailed the experience of a Thai woman's diagnosis and hospitalization as a result of her contraction of COVID-19. Her recovery was described by her daughter as "one in a million" – a hyperbolic expression of an "extraordinary rare" (Ammer, 2013: 322) occurrence that highlights the significance of her survival, which, therefore, accentuates the threat posed by COVID-19. The framing of 'surviving' COVID-19 could represent that people do not simply recover, but they survive. The verb 'survive' is defined as continuing to live or exist after coming to close to dying, thus intensifying the severity framed within news outlets.

One woman, a resident of Wuhan, spoke of her "heart-breaking struggle for survival" (BBC News, 2020g). This sensationalistic approach of a lived experience can evoke feelings of sympathy and illustrates the tough circumstances that not only this resident has had to come to terms with, but also constructs a reality of Wuhan that portrays current life as an effort to survive. The Oxford English Dictionary (1918) defines survival as the continuation of life after an event – simply remaining alive. The essence of survival could allude to the concept of the survival of the fittest, whereby individuals who do not suffer from underlying health conditions are more likely to survive the impact of the virus. This creates a reality of surviving in Wuhan as a difficult endeavour, further emphasized in an article by *The Guardian* that likened the Hubei province to a "post-apocalyptic" setting (Blackall and Obordo, 2020). The framing of post-apocalypse is typically associated with cinema, with the "recurring theme … [of] the end of the world as we know it" (Fisher, 2010: 70), however the apocalypse could be applied to the historical scenario of the World Wars, where "many

people believed it heralded the end of the world as they had known it" (Zapotoczny, n.d.). The connotations of the apocalypse – the mass loss of life, lack of civilisation and the destruction of society – further illustrates the reality of China based on the knowledge audiences have about the apocalypse within popular culture. Although the concepts of war and apocalypse are not conveyed within the same narratives, it could be concluded that the semantic relationship between the two terms serves to portray the setting of the apocalypse – due to lockdown restrictions – as the result of the war against the virus. If we apply the environments of 'war' and 'apocalypse' to a contemporary society, it has been largely hypothesized that "World War Three" (Hughes-d'Aeth and Nabizadeh, 2017: 439) would establish the end of the world with the advent and advancement of nuclear weapons and technology.

With regards to the prospect of victory over the virus, it was amplified by Prince Andrew. The Prince "pray[ed] for the speedy control and victory over the virus" (Sky News, 2020d; Petter, 2020) – instigating hope for the end of the 'war'. The rhetoric of 'victory' serves as a concluding element to the event through the expectation of elimination and eradication of COVID-19. Losing the war against the virus is not an option because the "entire biographical history and constructed self-identity" of the survivors is dependent on "ultimately being victorious" (Boylstein, Rittman and Hinojosa, 2007: 284). To be 'victorious' over a virus would elicit notions of a cure or a vaccine to prevent the virus' spread and infection rates.

Metaphors can "offer a communicative entryway to unfamiliar territories" (Grant and Hundley, 2008: 181), however critics suggest that war metaphors can be "misleading at best, and harmful at worst, resulting … in risks to personal and social wellbeing" (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018: 2). The mobilization and utilization of war metaphors challenge the "freedoms of movement, autonomy and diversity" (Larson, Nerlich and Wallis, 2005: 244) of communities, which can consequentially form the concept of

imprisonment being conveyed as a result of the introduction and implementation of global lockdown restrictions – which will be discussed within the next sub-chapter.

6.2. Society as a Prison

When cases of COVID-19 began to rise, lockdowns and quarantines were imposed in numerous countries (BBC News, 2020h; Kuo and Graham-Harrison, 2020). The unprecedented scale of confinement across whole populations (Odriozola-González and Planchuelo-Goméz, 2020: 3) further heightened the risk and severity of COVID-19. Previous disease outbreaks did not require the need for containment (Wilder-Smith, Chiew and Lee, 2020: e102) on the same level that has been experienced during the COVID-19 crisis, thus amplifying the potential impact of the virus.

The concept of quarantine is "radically embedded in local and global health practices" (Gensini, Yacoub and Conti, 2004: 257), and reinforces this notion of society acting as a form of imprisonment. The prison rhetoric might lack "the frisson associated with conventional imprisonment" (Wang, Farquaher and Lai, 2009: 150), however it still serves as a "powerful reality in many societies" with "notable works of literature and art … employ[ing] the image of the prison to give substance to a thought or feeling" (Embler, 1963: 403). The concept of imprisonment is not stated within the literature; however, it is asserted through the terms that describe it as such – e.g. 'caged', 'confined', 'trapped'.

Nerlich (2020) and the Public Interest Research Centre (2020) had very briefly discussed the notion of crime and punishment as a prominent concept that is preserved through the use of the above terms – however there appeared to be a lack of in-depth research regarding this topic, which resulted in forming the foundation for this particular area of research. This chapter will build upon the concept of crime and punishment and introduce the idea of society acting as a prison environment while COVID-19 is present.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2007a; 2007b) defines 'prison' as:

- *Noun.* The condition of being kept in captivity or confinement; forcible deprivation of personal liberty, imprisonment

- *Verb.* To put in a place of confinement; make a prisoner of; to keep in prison or other place of confinement; to detain in custody; imprison

Although the idea of a prison is typically characterized by the "walls, … guards, keys, the tail, the conviction, the sentence, the shutting of the door, the confinement, and the escape" (Embler, 1963: 408), the concept of the prison that will be conveyed within this chapter is that of its metaphorical imagery and connotations. The "level of connotation" between the "visual sign" of imprisonment and its "contextual reference and positioning" within this discourse of "meaning and association, is the point where already coded signs intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions" (Hall, 1997: 56). Oleson (2020: 18) raises the point that a "nation cannot be a prison", however when the elements of "confinement and lost liberty" are applied, it can result in the characterization of an assembly of institutions, leading to the interpretation of an "institution of social control".

To apply the concept of the prison to the wider context of society, I argue that, while lockdown restrictions and quarantine measures are in place, whole communities or counties act as the prison, and individual houses represent the prison cells. As Armstrong (2018: 1) contends, the expression of 'prison' is a "familiar metaphor of waiting … [with] the cell visualis[ing] imprisonment as a waiting experience defined by immobilisation". From a philosophical perspective, nothing is more acquainted than the "threat [that] time poses, or seems to pose, to human freedom" (Le Poidevin, 2011: 456). The American definition of lockdown further supports the notion of imprisonment as it defined as an "emergency

security practice in which prison inmates are locked in their cells and denied the usual privileges … outside" of it (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2010a).

While it can be mistaken that the terms 'quarantine' and 'isolation' are used to represent the same things, it's important to note the different definitions between them. Quarantine can be defined as a "coercive social distancing model that removes those who have been exposed to disease and might become sick, but who have not tested positive for disease or manifested clinical symptoms of disease from the community", whereas isolation involves the removing of individuals who are "confirmed [to be] sick from the population for treatment and recovery" (Hills, 2020: 2). Under lockdown restrictions, infected people, and those exposed to them are quarantined and, potentially isolated if they are confirmed to be a positive case, thus creating a "segmented, immobile, frozen space … [where] each individual is fixed in his place", with any movement outside of it is done so at the risk either of contracting the virus (Foucault, 1973: 195), or at the risk of infecting other individuals.

Quarantine is one of the "oldest and most effective tools of controlling communicable disease outbreaks" (Wilder-Smith and Freedman, 2020: 1). However, Hills (2020: 2) disputes it as an "outdated" method that involves the "unjustifiable violation of an individual's rights to justice, autonomy, privacy and liberty". Being confined and restricted in "one's movements is … experienced as a constraint on freedom itself" (Bauböck, 2009: 7) that gives the sense of feeling "stuck, caged [and / or] forced by others to endure a period of empty time" (Armstrong, 2018: 1).

When Chinese authorities imposed a lockdown on the Wuhan province (World Health Organization, 2020c: 10), the concept of a prison could then be applied to the city, with residents being confined within the "physical boundaries of [their] home" (Ansay, 1999: 2). It appeared to be that the first reaction of local governments is:

"... militarism, as if that is the only or most reliable tool they have. ... Whole communities, regions and countries are placed under lockdown ... that is tantamount to quarantine and imprisonment for whole communities ..." (Kamara, 2016: 196)

… which not only reinforces the binary oppositions between 'Us' / 'Them', but also illustrates those that are in involuntary lockdown are symbolic of the 'prisoners' within the analogy of a prison.

The concept of imprisonment is further perpetuated within *The Guardian*'s article "Wuhan facing 'wartime conditions' as global coronavirus deaths reach 724" (Graham-Harrison, 2020). Not only does this overtly reinforce the concept of "war", but this constructs a particular reality of the circumstances portrayed. The article reported:

"Authorities in Wuhan city have started going door to door checking temperatures, and rounding up suspected coronavirus patients for forcible quarantine in stadiums and exhibition centres that are serving as warehouses for the sick ... [Chinese politician Sun Chunlan] said: 'There must be no deserters, or they will be nailed to the pillar of historical shame forever'" (Graham-Harrison, 2020)

The method that the Chinese authorities have taken to detect cases could be argued as a somewhat invasive and intrusive process whereby the personal freedoms of the public are being imposed upon, therefore constructing the idea that those who are suspected to have contracted the virus must be forced into a quarantine facility away from the luxuries and private spaces of their own homes – thus creating the impression of infected persons as criminals, which can lead to their marginalization from not only authorities, but also from the general public. Note the use of the phrase "suspected coronavirus patients", indicating that individuals are being forced into quarantine based on a possible suspicion, not necessarily a proven case. It is "only because of their bodily symptoms that they are legally

restrained", therefore the "prisoners are themselves victims" (Wang, Farquaher and Lai, 2004: 150). The article also stated that some people in Wuhan feared that they were "being sacrificed for the national good", which could signify that they are "more fearful of the 'treatment'" than they are of the virus (Kamara, 2016: 196). It has been discussed that the justice system in China was "plagued by unfair trails, … torture and other ill-treatment" (Amnesty International, 2019), therefore constructing the potential reality that illustrates China as a nation with a strict regime that serves to protect its supposed integrity.

Chunlan asserts that the public should comply with these regulations (Graham-Harrison, 2020), which is further reinforced by the implementation of punishment should they not "follow official rules on containing the new coronavirus" (Culbertson, 2020). *Sky News* published an article concerning these punishments that individuals face if they do not conform to the new rules, however then proceeded to state that authorities did not specify the penalties (Culbertson, 2020) – allowing for the constructionist approach to take place. The constructionist approach to media texts is based upon the spectator's own construction of meaning (Hall, 1997: 25), consequently enabling audiences to create their own realities of China based on preconceived ideas.

An article published by *The Telegraph* claimed of the "rough treatment" of those suspected to be carrying the virus, with "video footage emerging of citizens being dragged from their homes by police … and taken to specially built quarantine compounds" (Coughlin, 2020), which highlights the severe actions taken by authorities – therefore constructing a modern reality of 'draconian', whereby those who may not even be violating lockdown restrictions are still considered to be worthy of punishment.

The term "draconian" (Roth, 2020; Bodkin and Zampano, 2020; Rizzo, 2020) had been used to describe the measures China had been taking to minimize the risk and spread of the virus.

'Draconian' is defined as the strict implementation of rules. The historical context of draconian relates to the Ancient Greek legislator, Draco, who introduced a series of particularly severe and harsh penal provisions (Tzeferakos, *et al.,* 2019: 58) where death was the penalty for almost all criminal offences (Augustyn, 2020). Although this particular representation of China's draconian measures is a hyperbolic reference to Ancient Greece, it could be argued, from a contemporary perspective, that such the violation of the measures imposed result in severe consequences.

The Guardian published an article that exposed the experience of quarantine in Wuhan as resembling a "jail" (Blackall and Obordo, 2020). This not only emphasises this argument of society as a prison, but also serves to portray the reality of Wuhan as a strict environment where there is a lack of privacy and physical confinement (Ritchie, 2004: 274) at the hands of the authorities.

Ritchie (2004: 274-5) examines the use of the term 'jail' in its physical and schematic domain, that is, by the ""iron bars, … locked door, … fixed sentence, punishment, strict schedule of activities, lack of privacy, physical confinement, [and the essence of] being watched". The schematic knowledge of 'jail' can be applied to the above example (Blackall and Obordo, 2020). Residents of Wuhan cannot "leave their own flat, … [and] are unable to even open windows" (Blackall and Obordo, 2020) – representing the symbolic "iron bars" on the windows and the "physical confinement" (Ritchie, 2004: 274) they are subjected to. This example also illustrates the sense of entrapment felt by both residents and travellers who just so happen to be within the country as lockdown restrictions were introduced, thus creating the impression of powerlessness as a result of their lack of free movement. This "vulnerability and powerlessness" (Moore, 2008: 40) regarding the absence of free movement is a reminder that the "core aspect of what it means to be free" (Bauböck, 2009:

7) has been diminished as a result of the concept of 'imprisonment' that residents face while strict measures are in place.

The essence of being watched can be strongly related to the social management enforced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a core ideology (Hoffman, 2018: 42) that was present prior to the pandemic. This was accentuated by technologies employed by the Chinese government in order to detect cases of COVID-19. *The Telegraph* reported that the use of facial recognition and infrared surveillance cameras that can detect fevers were in use in order to "identify citizens carrying the virus" (Cogley, 2020). This can be interpreted as breaching personal freedoms from the perspective of audiences who do not live in a "surveillance state" (Qiang, 2019: 53). On top of that, it had been reported that the police had deployed enforcement drones to "chase down" individuals who were not wearing masks in public (Samuel, 2020) which symbolizes the constant surveillance that the public are subjected to – therefore reinforcing the concept of society as a prison. The surveillance systems are representative of the global positioning systems (GPS) that law enforcements use to "know (theoretically) the location" of offenders (Oleson, 2020: 22) within the community – signifying that individuals who are not wearing face masks are deemed as offenders.

What had been seen in China constructed a reality of lockdown since the method of it had not been implemented in the UK as of February 2020, nor had such a technique been introduced in modern Britain on this scale before (Pym, 2020 cited in BBC News, 2020f) . The reported narratives of events in China could have contributed to how audiences perceived the lockdown that, at the time, was yet to come. The first instance of 'imprisonment' within the UK as a result of COVID-19 was when Britons evacuated from Wuhan were subject to a 14-day quarantine commencing the beginning of February (BBC News, 2020i).

BBC News stated that evacuees will spend two weeks in a designated quarantine facility but made it clear that it was "not solitary confinement" (BBC News, 2020i). Solitary confinement is a frequent practice within the prison and justice systems that restricts and confines a prisoner "alone in a cell for all, or nearly, all of the day with minimal environmental stimulation and minimal opportunity for social interaction" (Grassian, 2006: 327). However, the emphasis of reaffirming that the reality of the quarantine facility was not solitary confinement suppresses any preconceived notions that audiences may have which bear resemblance to a form of imprisonment whereby the evacuees would have minimal contact with other people. Once their period of quarantine had come to an end, the terms 'released' and 'freed' were frequently used (BBC News, 2020j; Perraudin, 2020; Adams, 2020; Stubley, 2020), implying that their time there can be likened to a "fixed term" (Ritchie, 2004: 274) prison sentence in a facility where they are separated from the rest of the world. *The Independent* reported that the evacuees were "let out through the locked gates" that surrounded the facility (Parveen, 2020) – such an account further underpins the notion of imprisonment due to the shared conceptualized mappings of the physical imagery of a prison (Embler, 1963: 408; Ritchie, 2004: 274).

One person subject to the 14-day quarantine threatened to "abscond" (BBC News, 2020f). The term 'abscond' typically refers to the escaping from an institution, such as a prison, without permission or to avoid prosecution or punishment (Collins Dictionary, n.d.; Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2010b). This illustrates the quarantine facility as a prison by constructing the notion of the lost freedoms and the fixed sentence (Ritchie, 2004: 274) that comes with the metaphorical image of the prison. As a result, the government announced that law enforcements were given new powers to force individuals suspected of having contracted COVID-19 into quarantine if they were considered to pose a risk to public health (Parveen, 2020; Telegraph Reporters, 2020).

The new legal powers further assert the notion of imprisonment within the community, whereby those that are in quarantine will "not be free to leave" (BBC News, 2020k). The implementation of these legal rules allow for authorities to "possess a variety of powers to restrict the autonomy and liberty of persons … because they are infected with, or have been exposed to, dangerous, contagious pathogens" (Fidler, Gostin and Markel, 2007: 620), therefore requiring the compliance and cooperation between authorities and the public (Wilder-Smith and Freedman, 2020: 2) to enforce and adhere to such restrictions. However, the powers that the authorities have over suspected infected persons, and the potential to admit them into forced quarantine, could construct a reality that is akin to the methods adopted by China – which could be deemed as controlling.

Jeremy Hunt, former Foreign Secretary, was paraphrased in an article from *Sky News* as saying that Britain should prepare for the "worst case scenario" which could mean the employment of "'draconian' measures" (Parsons, 2020). The meanings conveyed demonstrate the potential introduction of strict measures within the UK which enable audiences to interpret this as the adoption of the same draconian measures as China that have been exhibited thus far – therefore constructing a possible future reality.

The concept of imprisonment can be narrowed down from whole communities and countries to individual establishments, as demonstrated by the reports that emerged of individuals confined to cruise ships and international hotels. Thousands of passengers were confined to their cabins on cruise ships Diamond Princess, World Dream, and Westerdam – however the events on board the Diamond Princess were largely focused upon within mainstream news media more so than the World Dream and the Westerdam. Due to the emergence of a confirmed COVID-19 case from a former passenger, the Diamond Princess was put under quarantine as a result – confining more than 3,000 passengers to their cabins (BBC News, 2020l). The ship had been likened to a "floating prison" (Donnelly & Smith, 2020), with

individual cabins serving as the prison cells whereby passengers were not allowed to leave for any reason (Robertson, Marris and Joshi, 2020), thus underpinning the notion of imprisonment. It was reported by *BBC News* (2020a) that "there was no interaction with other passengers" and basic "food was brought to the room [cabin]", which can construct a reality of the ship portraying elements of solitary confinement. One passenger was quoted by *The Telegraph* saying that if she were to leave her cabin and run down the corridor, she would expect:

> *"... the black-clad hall monitors, who keep a vigilant eye on our doors over their protective face masks, would immediately jump into action and sedate me before dragging me into quarantine somewhere else."* (Arana, 2020)

This not only reinforces the concept of imprisonment, but also represents the passengers as prisoners – the 'Other' – who pose a threat to the rest of the ship, regardless of whether they have contracted the infection or not. The element of being "stranded" was a large focal point when reporting the accounts of passengers on board the cruise ships (Yan and Malnick, 2020; Mercer, 2020; BBC News, 2020m). The adjective of 'stranded' refers to a degree of helplessness and the aspect of being stuck without transport (Collins Dictionary, n.d.) – which constructs the reality of immobility. Although the immobility of individuals is prevalent as a result of the various travel restrictions and quarantines imposed upon them, it can be argued that this upholds the concept of abandonment, as well as the sense of waiting. The stranded individuals are then "confronted with the captivation in relation to their surroundings" (Diken, 2011: 97).

The Telegraph reported the "reality of family life in a coronavirus quarantine" (Oliveira, 2020) after they were subject to it after disembarking from the Westerdam cruise ship. The headline explicitly states "the reality" of the quarantine they are experiencing, therefore

constructing a reality amongst audiences. It was reported that they had "been caged up for so long" on board the ship, and that the quarantine within their home establishment made them feel as if they were "caged up again" (Oliveira, 2020). Although they are not literally "caged", it can be asserted that the aspect of quarantine resembles the metaphorical mental imagery of a prison – thus underpinning the notion of imprisonment within the boundaries of the family home.

A hotel in Tenerife was placed in quarantine after a visitor was confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 (BBC News, 2020n). The preventative measures that the hotel had taken mirrored those that had been witnessed onboard the Diamond Princess – for example, guests confined to their rooms, receiving food packages, and the inability to leave the premises (Siddique, Jones and Bennett, 2020). The building was "cordoned off" with the erection of a red barrier and was guarded by police officers (Siddique, Jones and Bennett, 2020) – thus demonstrating the essence of a prison. The experience had been alluded to as the "holiday from hell", insinuating that the occurrence is one of an evil doing (Oestigaard, 2009: 314). Purgatory is a form of hell that consists of "limited time and suffering" (Oestigaard, 2009: 319), which is demonstrated through *The Telegrsph*'s inference that guests were "left in limbo waiting to learn their fate" (Siddique, Jones and Bennett, 2020).

To curtail the concept of imprisonment even further, it could be argued that COVID-19 itself imprisons the body. Wang, Farquhar and Lai (2004: 590) state:

> *"As soon as a body manifests a sign, the body must be fixed: the imprisonment of the body is thus manifested. This is an entirely bodily captivity, centring solely on the body; but this kind of imprisonment involves not even the slightest moral punishment or censure. On the contrary, those who have now been imprisoned are innocent; they*

are simply docile citizens, they have done nothing wrong. They have ... not revolted

against the law ... It is because of their bodily symptoms ..."

… that they are experiencing a form of imprisonment. Oleson (2020: 27) notes that "we must never minimize" the experience of imprisonment by attributing a concrete form to the concept. He also remarks that to "accurately define the contours of the prison and its carceral cousins is to acknowledge the experience of those confined".

Although the concept of bodily imprisonment is not explicitly stated within the literature, the virus can be deduced as an entity that imprisons the body, rather than the body acting as a prison for the virus. Therefore, the imprisonment of the body serves to create the notion of infected individuals as prisoners, which can lead to their marginalization as a result of their 'Otherness'. This emphasizes the binary oppositions of 'us' / 'them' – which can be contextualized as 'the healthy' / 'the infected'.

Marginalization is not limited to the confirmed cases of the virus. It can be formed based on the stereotypes and misconceptions that individuals may have about the virus. One example of this was witnessed in Ukraine, where the efforts to quarantine evacuees from China were met with violence from local residents. *The Guardian* (2020) reported:

"Ukraine's effort to quarantine more than 70 people ... was plunged into chaos ... as local residents hurled stones and buses carrying the evacuees and engaged in violent clashes with people. ... Demonstrators, some of whom appeared drunk, put up road blocks, burned tyres and clashed with hundreds of riot police".

The attempt to quarantine evacuees is merely a precaution based on their, if any, exposure to the virus. The misconception portrayed within the above example illustrates that the marginalization may stem from the assumption that the evacuees have come into contact with COVID-19 and, therefore, have the potential to spread the virus within Ukraine.

There were other instances of marginalization surrounding the virus, however these were racially and discriminatorily aggravated. At a time when COVID-19 was largely contained within Wuhan, it was reported by *Sky News* that residents of Hong Kong do not "trust the 'mainlanders'" from Wuhan, they are under the assumption that people from Wuhan "will escape any quarantine and go out in Hong Kong and just spread their virus" (Crawford, 2020). It has been observed that the integration of mainland China with Hong Kong have led to social movements of resistance and "separatist tendencies" (Pang and Jiang, 2019: 4), therefore indicating that COVID-19, and its emergence in Hong Kong, further sustains the pre-existing political tensions that residents of Hong Kong have towards mainland China. This led to the victimization of people based on prejudiced stereotypes of mainland China, and the assumptions they may have about the virus. It also reinforces the concept of imprisonment, with the quarantining of Wuhan representing a prison in which people from mainland China can escape from, signifying them as prisoners with the ability to pose a threat to the public health of the residents of Hong Kong in the same way that criminals can pose a threat to society – however, this may depend on one's perception of crime and rehabilitation.

Stereotyping is how we, as people, identify difference by grasping the few, "simple, vivid memorable ... and widely recognized characteristics about a person, [and] reduce everything about the person to those traits" (Hall, 1997: 258). Stereotyping also functions to divide the "normal ... from the abnormal" (Hall, 1997: 258), which enables individuals to comprehend the different, or the 'Other'. This was demonstrated through the racial attacks towards Chinese and Asian communities (Campbell, 2020; Smith and Torre, 2020). Douglas (1966, cited by Hall, 1997: 236) argues that "social groups impose meaning on their world by ordering things into ... systems", therefore triggering the response of stereotyping,

marginalizing and oppressing both evacuees and people of Chinese and other Asian ethnicities – the 'Other' – based on the preconceptions they may have of the virus.

It has been argued that the realities of imprisonment are so frequently used within Western literature that there "can scarcely be any doubt that the prison image describes with emotional intensity the feelings and thoughts which people have about freedom" (Embler, 1963: 408). The mental connotations and shared conceptual maps that audiences have with regards to the image of imprisonment promotes the feeling of restriction (Embler, 1963: 403-8). Hills (2020: 10) contests that there is nothing to prevent a person from staying at home from their personal commitments, however when it comes to be that they do not have any choice but to stay at home as a result of lockdown restrictions, it is no longer a voluntary act, therefore constructing a notion of enforced discipline (Winograd, 1993: 193).

7.0. Summary

To varying degrees, mainstream news media have evidently utilized the concepts of war and imprisonment in response to the COVID-19 crisis to generate different meanings and realities of events. Although these are interpretive concepts that can elicit different levels of understanding, comprehension and individual subjectivity, this paper has demonstrated the potential meanings and realities that can be identified and construed as a result of propagating such notions.

It can be difficult to draw upon a definitive conclusion of the potential impacts that war metaphors and themes of imprisonment have on audiences due to the interpretive nature of discourse. Scholars have contested that the use of war metaphors and the prison rhetoric serves to convey emotional valence (Embler, 1963: 408), as well as possessing the ability to change the perceptions and behaviours of audiences in accordance to the severity of the topic in hand (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau, 2018; Brooks, *et al.,* 2020).

It has been discussed that the high consumption of "stress-inducing" mainstream news media, as well as its prominence on social media platforms, has had a negative impact on mental health and personal wellbeing (Mind, 2020: 3-24). It is not explicitly stated what is deemed to be "distressing news" (Mind, 2020: 24), therefore it is unclear to identify the extent to which themes of war and imprisonment had with regards to the negative psychological impact of audiences.

While this paper has explored the potential meanings and realities that are constructed within mainstream news media narratives, future research would be beneficial to measure the level of psychological impact that the conveyance of themes associated within war and imprisonment have among the wider population.

8.0. Appendices

8.1. Appendix A

Tversky and Kahneman's The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice

"We have obtained systematic reversals of preference by variations in the framing of acts, contingencies, or outcomes. These effects have been observed in a variety of problems and in the choices of different groups of respondents. Here we present selected illustrations of preference reversals, with data obtained from students at Stanford University and at the University of British Columbia who answered brief questionnaires in a classroom setting. The total number of respondents for each problem is denoted by N, and the percentage who chose each option is indicated in brackets. The effect of variations in framing is illustrated in problems 1 and 2.

Problem 1 [N = 152]: Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimate of the consequences of the programs are as follows:

- If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. [72 percent]

- If Program B is adopted, there is 1/3 probability that 600 people will be saved, and 2/3 probability that no people will be saved. [28 percent]

- Which of the two programs would you favor?

The majority choice in this problem is risk averse: the prospect of certainly saving 200 lives is more attractive than a risky prospect of equal expected value, that is, a one-in-three chance of saving 600 lives. A second group of respondents was given the cover story of problem 1 with a different formulation of the alternative programs, as follows:

Problem 2 [N = 155]:

- If Program C is adopted 400 people will die. [22 percent]

- If Program D is adopted there is 1/3 probability that nobody will die, and 2/3 probability that 600 people will die. [78 percent]

- Which of the two programs would you favor?

The majority choice in problem 2 is risk taking: the certain death of 400 people is less acceptable than the two-in-three chance that 600 will die. The preferences in problems 1 and 2 illustrate a common pattern: choices involving gains are often risk averse and choices involving losses are often risk taking. However, it is easy to see that the two problems are effectively identical. The only difference between them is that the outcomes are described in problem 1 by the number of lives saved and in problem 2 by the number of lives lost. The change is accompanied by a pronounced shift from risk aversion to risk taking. We have observed this reversal in several groups of respondents, including university faculty and physicians. Inconsistent responses to problems 1 and 2 arise from the conjunction of a framing effect with contradictory attitudes toward risks involving gains and losses."

(Tversky and Kahneman, 1981: 453)

9.0. References

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