

# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Fantasy Themes And Rhetorical Visions In The 'BRENT SPAR' Crisis: An Analysis Of Articles Appearing In German And French Newspapers



## *1. Nature and Consequences of the 'Brent Spar' Crisis*

In June 1995, the giant oil corporation Shell attempted to sink its obsolete oil platform, 'Brent Spar', in the North Sea, 190 kilometers north-east of the Shetland Islands. Their plans were approved by the British government and by the signatories of the Oslo Convention for the protection of the marine environment (*Shell 'Brent Spar' calendar of events: 1*). Shortly before the scheduled deepwater disposal, the environmental organization Greenpeace began a "high-profile campaign" (Thompson 7.3.96) in opposition to Shell's plan. The 'Brent Spar' crisis started on the 30th of April when Greenpeace activists occupied the platform and held it for three months.

The 'Brent Spar' crisis was extremely complex because what Shell had considered to be a British domestic issue actually turned out to be an international "fracas" involving the countries surrounding the North Sea (Seaman 1996: 4). Greenpeace's and Shell's actions caused a three month long conflict over the seas, disagreement among the European governments, public demonstrations and boycotts, fifty fire-bombed fifty Shell service stations, and a war of words in the European media. On the 20th of July 1995, Shell aborted its operation and towed the oil platform to the Norwegian Erfjord, where it was and is still moored and decaying. Up to the present, no clear answer has emerged as to whether an offshore or onshore solution is best. That the platform's fate is still uncertain reveals the complexity of the issue and further, proves little about who (Shell or Greenpeace) is right or wrong.

The 'Brent Spar' crisis has long lasting consequences for the financial situation and the reputation of both parties. Greenpeace has spent a total of \$1.4 million on their campaign in opposition to sinking the oil platform. Although Greenpeace

was forced to apologize to Shell in September 1995 and admitted that "their sampling on board of the 'Brent Spar' was flawed" (*Shell press release* 9.5.95), Greenpeace's enhanced reputation, a result of the 'Brent Spar' crisis, remains unchanged. Shell's position on 'Brent Spar' has led to long-term financial consequences as well as damage to their public reputation. Shell gas stations have experienced losses due to a 'Brent Spar' boycott (*European Energy Report* 3.29.95). Further, Shell pays \$54,000.00 a month to 'park' its obsolete platform in the Norwegian fjord (Thompson 8.14.96). Shell has also spent enormous amounts of money in responding to the crisis, and public trust building, not to mention the new form of disposal.

## *2. Purpose of the Study*

One question that arises when reflecting on the 'Brent Spar' crisis is how the newspapers' communication created symbolic realities that motivated masses of people in different European countries to take sides for or against Greenpeace and a giant like the Shell oil corporation. My study provides an answer to this question by analyzing all press articles that appeared from April 30 to July 20, 1995 in two major German newspapers, 'Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' (FAZ) and 'Die Süddeutsche Zeitung' (SZ), and in three major French newspaper, 'Le Figaro' (LF), 'Le Monde' (LM), and 'La Libération' (LB). Germany and France, which represent the core power group of the European Union, border the Northsea. Furthermore, the two nations are the subjects of my study because they reflect different national reactions to the crisis. Ultimately, the text analysis explains the persuasive appeal of the press and provides an understanding of the development of the crisis.

## *3. Bormann's Fantasy Theme Analysis*

The text analysis of the press texts is based on Bormann's fantasy theme analysis which he developed on the grounds of Bales' (1970) small group communication research his own 'Symbolic Convergence Communication Theory'. Bormann (1972) states: "The explanatory power of the fantasy chain analysis lies in its ability to account for the development, evolution and decay of dramas that catch up groups and change their behavior" (399). I use Bormann's notions of fantasy themes and rhetorical visions to look for themes in the press texts in order analyze how argumentative discourse operated in the crisis and to demonstrate how attention was drawn towards Shell's actions in Europe. A fantasy theme is a "dramatizing message or part of a message and includes characters (personae) in

action within a given scene" (Bormann 1977: 130). The symbolic reality that can be constructed from an accumulation of fantasy themes over time forms composite dramas and chains out among a mass public. This reality is what constitutes a rhetorical vision (130). In the following analysis, I examine recurrent rhetorical patterns that led to the creation of fantasy themes and visions that were created during the 'Brent Spar' crisis in Germany and France.

#### 4. *"David against Goliath": Fantasy Themes in Germany*

Recurrent communicative patterns in the German press included the choice of words in the press coverage, the use of quotations, and the structure of the texts. They helped to establish narratives in which 'dramatis personae' were created and situated in a dramatic war-like scenario. Fantasy themes were created in the German press that depicted Shell as the villain, as the insensitive, capitalist giant whose only interest was profit. Greenpeace was characterized as the hero, the small non-profit organization that was concerned with the well-being of the environment and thus also with the well-being of humanity. The German press formed a rhetorical vision of a 'green war' referred to as the 'Brent Spar'.

David against Goliath was an apt metaphor for the rhetorical vision surrounding the confrontation between Greenpeace and Shell. The German press used words with a positive connotation and expressions to describe Greenpeace. The organization was referred to as "environmental protectors", (e.g. SZ 5.23.95: 12; FAZ 6.9.95: 6), an "environmental protectionist organization" (e.g. SZ 6.16.95: 7; FAZ 6.9.95: 1) or "activists" (e.g. SZ 5.24./25.95, 6.8.95: 12; FAZ 6.12.95: 27). These positive names characterized Greenpeace as an organization that pursues altruistic goals, such as the protection of nature. The fact that the organization was represented by its members, "the protectors" and "the activists", aroused sympathy and allegiance by making the organization more human and tangible, easy for the readers to identify with. Greenpeace was depicted as the hero.

In contrast, Shell was depicted as a villain. Shell's image suffered because the corporation was depicted as a group of greedy capitalists. The 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' labeled Shell a "cool calculating corporation" (6.19.95: 20) and the 'Süddeutsche Zeitung' reported that "Shell is saving money..." (6.19.95: 3). Another article criticized Shell and the British government for placing cost over environmental concerns and noted that "the ecological consequences of the disposal did not play a role in the decision" (FAZ 6.21.95: N1). The article also reproached Shell with "a form of economizing which buys short term savings of expenses with long term risks that are not calculable and expensive to pay for".

An author of an article of the 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' remarked: A lot of people mistrust this global corporation merely because of its size. They associate the corporation with political and economic power, and further with behavior that does not regard the so called little man, the average person (6.20.95: 16).

The German press portrayed the oil corporation as only interested in containing costs. Shell was characterized as a greedy, capitalist-mongering entity, and a selfish villain. The press aroused fear that Shell would harm nature, and, because Germans link their well-being as humans to the well-being of nature, the fear touched their very own existence.

Apart from the more obvious choice of words, the press also employed text structure and quotations as the subtle rhetorical devices which supported the construction of the hero and the villain, thus generating a dramatic scenario. The articles extensively affirmed Greenpeace's dramatic description of the battle on the water and mostly quoted Greenpeace members at the beginning of the text; Shell's point of view was only briefly cited near the end. In general, the structure of press articles is based on a hierarchy of relevance (Van Dijk 1988: 41): The title mirrors the most important information of the text, followed by the subtitle, the lead, the beginning of an article, etc. The further the article proceeds, the more specific the information becomes and thus less important to the everyday reader. Newspaper readers usually pay the most attention to the beginning of articles and often do not continue reading to the end (Van Dijk 1988: 142).

Almost every single article in the German newspapers placed dramatic messages from Greenpeace in top positions. Titles of articles fostered a good impression of Greenpeace, and portrayed an evil Shell. These are some of the titles: "Greenpeace activists rammed on the Northsea" (SZ 6.12.95: 6), "Despite international criticism: 'Brent Spar' on its way to the sinking spot" (SZ 6.13.95: 6), "Christian Democratic Party furious at Shell because of oil platform" (SZ 6.13.95: 5), "Garbage, Shell, and the sea" (FAZ 6.14.95: 17), "Protest wave due to the sinking of the oil platform" (SZ 6.14./15.95: 1), "The Shell boycott shows effects" (FAZ 6.16.95: 1), "Contradictory statements from Shell" (SZ 6.17./18.: 6), "The garbage cannot be sunk in the sea: A study of British scientists/Poisoned mud inside the platform" (FAZ 6.21.95: 3). Such powerful assertions, placed on the top of the articles, aroused strong emotional reactions for the environmental organization and against the oil corporation. Clusters of meanings unified in the media's war scenario and created a rhetorical community with a rhetorical vision of a green war named 'Brent Spar'.

The platform 'Brent Spar' became a symbol of the Shell corporation and the

danger that was connected with it. The name 'Brent Spar' was made the keyword of the crisis. Anger over and fear of Shell's actions were aggravated by the press reports which made the oil platform a symbol of the threat posed by Shell. The newspapers' emphasis on the platform's hazardous contents, its immense size, and its heavy weight all contributed to its symbolic status. In almost every article, the content of the rig was mentioned. For instance: "According to Greenpeace, there are at least 100 tons of poisoned mud, such as arson, cadmium, lead and slightly radioactive waste" (FAZ 5.15.97: 3); or "... 'Brent Spar' with 130 tons of poisoned waste on board" (SZ 6.17/18.95: 6). The mention of toxic waste aboard the oil rig scared the hyper-sensitized public.

There were constant allusions in the newspaper coverage to the rig's size and weight: "About hundred tons of poison would thus sink into the sea with the platform," (FAZ 6.14.95: 17); or "the whole station is 140 meters high, 32 meters are above the sea level; it was kept in position by chains and heavy anchor blocks," (SZ 6.17/18.95: 4). The rig was described as a gigantic monster that could break free of its chains and destroy the Northsea and thus threaten human existence. In contrast to the rig's dangerous waste and its massive size and weight, it was frightening for readers to discover that the "outer jacket of the 'Brent Spar' is only two centimeters thick" (FAZ 6.21.95: 3). The German media's representation of the oil platform signaled danger and inflexibility, characteristics that the press also attached to the oil corporation. For Germans, the oil platform took on the symbolic meaning of a monster, the 'Brent Spar', which also represented Shell, a destroyer of nature.

According to the press, the invasion of the Northsea had to be repelled and the sea had to be saved. Calls for action, such as "the sea must not be misused as the garbage can of an oil corporation," by the president of the Churches' Week were accompanied by applause from 80,000 participants (FAZ 6.19.95: 2). These statements sounded like war chants which promoted the battle on the sea. "The sea must not be misused as a garbage can" was stated by politicians and civilians as a war slogan and was frequently repeated by the press (FAZ 6.14.95: 17; 6.16.95: 6; 6.17.95: 1). As masses of people, both civilians and politicians, embraced the war fantasies, the drama escalated.

War analogies repeatedly appeared in the newspaper coverage: "The battle against the sinking of the British oil platform 'Brent Spar' near the Scottish coast becomes more and more bitter," (SZ 6.12.95: 6). Dramatic messages were reminiscent of war-time reports, for example:

Despite constant bombardment with water cannons, Greenpeace managed by

helicopter to supply its two members, who landed on the platform on Friday, with food, clothes, and blankets (FAZ 6.19.95: 2).

Unequal battle: According to Greenpeace, an accompanying ship of the 65,000 ton oil platform 'Brent Spar' deliberately tried to spray one of the two occupants of the platform with a water cannon. The man did not fall overboard only because he got stuck in a barbed wire fence (FAZ 6.20.95: 3).

This sample of the press coverage illustrates how Greenpeace was symbolically "humanized" because it was represented by the five demonstrators whereas Shell was "dehumanized" because it was represented by a ship and the violence of a water cannon.

During the course of events, the German press labeled British members of the 'Northsea Protection Conference' "outsiders," (FAZ 6.9.95: 1) "brake pads," and "the black sheep of the European Northsea Protection Conference" (6). Another article stated that "the British government, which deflected the massive protest with stoic composure, is also on the losing side" (SZ 6.22.95: 4). The derogatory remarks in the press clearly mirrored Germany's disapproval of the British government's support of the oil corporation.

The British public was referred to in a similarly derogatory manner by the German press: "The fact that the British tolerate the pollution of the sea with great composure is not explicable by the difference in mentality," (SZ 6.22.95: 4) and "In particular the British, who, as inhabitants of an island, consider the sea as a way of transport and as a dustheap, receive minus points in their environmental performance" (FAZ 6.20.95: 3). According to the new meaning inhabiting the German newspapers' rhetoric, the British government and the public became accomplices of the oil corporation.

Now Greenpeace and Germany were fighting together against the evil Shell and its British accomplices. Another brick was laid in the building of the scenario. Antipathy and anxiety towards Shell and its allies were aroused. The 'Brent Spar' vision became a symbolic reality and constructed a meaning for the 'Brent Spar' issue that neither Shell, nor any of the European governments had anticipated. The war-like scenario became so intense that individuals felt compelled to unify and take action. The early war chant "the sea must not be misused as a garbage can," became the aggressive slogan "Shell to Hell" (FAZ 6.17.95: 2; SZ 6.17/18.95: 6).

The rhetorical vision of the green war committed people à la Robin Hood, so that even illegal means were justified in the battle for the good of environmental

protection. Behavior such as occupying the platform, flying helicopters in illegal areas, exaggerating the amount of poison on board the rig, doing financial harm to Shell's franchisers by boycotting their gas stations, attacking the owners of Shell gas stations all became justifiable, as did shooting at Shell gas stations. These were all illegal or unethical acts justified under the banner of ecological protection. The 'green war' reality produced a crooked logic. The evil, the violence and other illegal actions, were tolerated and even supported so that the preservation of the environment, would triumph. This demonstrated how the rhetorical vision of the 'Brent Spar' war created a new reality in which ethics and legality were reversed.

##### 5. *"The Green Guerrilla against Shell": Fantasy Themes in France"*

Contrary to the German newspapers, recurrent rhetorical devices in the French coverage of the 'Brent Spar' crisis, such as metaphors and similes, certain types of quotations, and the structure of the articles, helped to create fantasies about Shell as the victim of the villains, the green terrorists led by Greenpeace and backed by Germany.

According to the press coverage, France did not have an active role in the 'Brent Spar' drama but instead played a neutral part. Fantasy themes conveyed through the French caused anxiety that green issues could take over French policy-making and gain control over decisions in industry.

The title in 'Le Figaro' "The green Guerrilla against Shell" (6.21.95: 12) reflects the fantasy theme that was created by the French press with respect to the battle between Greenpeace and Shell. Greenpeace was characterized as the leader of a "green Guerrilla" troop that used physical force, radical means, and illegal action in order to interfere in Shell's plans. In contrast, Shell was characterized as a corporation that simply tried to do its business, namely the sinking of their oil platform according to their best knowledge, but became the victim of Greenpeace's zealous campaign. Greenpeace was depicted as an egotistic and radical villain that interfered in domestic British business and policy. The positively connoted term Greenpeace was rarely used in the French press coverage but instead was replaced with metaphors and similes. These metaphors and similes subtly portrayed Greenpeace as irrational, dangerous, radical, and terrorist, evoking antagonistic feelings.

According to Johnson (1987), new metaphors "can give new meaning ... to what we know and believe" (139). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that a metaphor "has an explanatory power of the only sort that makes sense to most people" (34).

Metaphors have an illustrative and an affective function. Johnson (1987) further remarks that a "metaphor can acquire the status of truth" (142) and illustrates "the power of metaphor to create a reality" (144). Metaphors are very powerful rhetorical devices that contribute significantly to the creation of fantasy themes and rhetorical visions.

The following example of the French coverage of the 'Brent Spar' crisis is loaded with metaphorical expressions. The press declared that the environmental organization changed from "crusades for baby seals" to one that took advantage of "the unexpected opportunity to gild their escutcheon," at a point in time when Greenpeace was "confronted with difficult structural and financial problems" (LF 6.21.95: 2). Herewith, the French press suggested that Greenpeace, a non-profit organization, became capitalist and economically competitive. The assertions in the newspapers implied that Greenpeace used the 'Brent Spar' issue not for the purpose of fighting for environmental protection but rather to brush up its reputation and to motivate monetary donations. The French press presented an organization that, in protest against the sinking of the 'Brent Spar', did not pursue the altruistic goal to save nature like it used to, but instead was selfishly interested in its own success.

The metaphoric label "muscular ecology" (LF 6.21.95: 2) was a title in reference to Greenpeace to ridicule the organization. The metaphor depicted Greenpeace as foolish and irrational because it used physical strength to present a show and attract attention. However, the metaphorical term also produced anxiety because it implied that Greenpeace actually was strong, powerful, and misguided.

Further, the French press observed that the ecologists had changed and their control had become stronger: "They gazed at each other as their hair was growing longer in the same time the wool of the lambs from Larzac [a remote French village] was growing. Forget this, they cut their hair short, sometimes under the force of order" (LF 6.21.95: 2). This was a reference to cutting your hair as being "gung-ho military." Although the comparison of the ecologists' hair to the "wool of the lambs" drew an odd picture, the statement clearly illustrated that the ecologists had become more active and strictly organized, almost like a military unit. The French press implied that the ecologists had to be taken more seriously than before, that they had gained control, and that they might be dangerous in the future.

This impression was fortified when the press accused Greenpeace of "triggering the revolt" (LB 6.19.95: 26) and members of Greenpeace were called "militant ecologists," (LB 6.15.95: 20; 6.18.95: 18) "militants," (LB 6.21.95: 5; LF 6.21.95:



12), and "two militants, 'green berets' of a new kind..." (LF 6.21.95: 5). These terms for Greenpeace, emphasized the organization's new radicalization. As mentioned above, the environmental organization was also equated with a "green Guerrilla," (LF 6.21.95: 12) which alluded to both unconventional warfare, such as engaging the enemy behind its own lines and to highly motivated revolutionaries who are willing to die for their cause. The picture of a "green Guerrilla" encouraged to fantasize about a violent Greenpeace which would strive for victory by any means.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, one editorial mentioned that "it is, without any doubt, too excessive to talk about ecological terrorism, when wilder activists act in countries like Algeria" (LF 6.21.95: 5). Although the metaphorical term "ecological terrorism" was considered an inappropriately extreme label for this situation, it was nevertheless still used, which meant that the allusion to terrorism was embedded into the mainstream consciousness.

In comparison to the slanderous representation of Greenpeace as the villain, Shell was depicted in a neutral way, as "the oil group Shell," (LM 6.10.95: 2) "oil people," (LF 6.21.95: 1) "Shell," (LB 6.18.95: 18; 6.21.95: 6; 6.22.95: 21) "the oil corporation Shell," (LM 6.16.95: 1; LB 6.21.95: 1) and "the firm" (LM 6.21.95: 25). The French press gave a picture of Shell that detached the oil corporation from the whole scenario on the Northsea. The non-accusatory description of Shell fit well with the media's depiction of Shell as the victim.

In the French coverage of the 'Brent Spar' crisis, Shell was characterized as a rational and responsible corporation that became the victim of Greenpeace's extreme reaction. The titles, "Shell whom no one likes" (LM 6.20.95: 16) and "It is Shell whom no one likes anymore" (LB 6.21.95: 1) implied pity for Shell. The press portrayed Shell as the whipping boy. In addition, the passive voice in the title "It is Shell whom...", implied that Shell was a victim.

In the media's drama, the protagonist was forced to defend itself from the antagonist's attacks. War metaphors and the reports of war-like situations, always with Greenpeace as the main antagonist, dramatized the scenario. For example: "its [Shell's] project... triggered an anti-Shell front," (LB 6.18.95: 18) "the platform was conquered by a helicopter of the Greenpeace organization that successfully brought two militants to the platform," (LM 6.18./19.95: 3) "ecologist extremist commandos," (LM 6.20.95: 16) "the iron arm that the ecologists aimed at Shell...", (LF 21.6.95: 1) "the muscled action is part of a deterrent arsenal of the tough wing of the 'Greens,'" (LF, 6.21.95, p. 2) "due to the impressive wall of shields, Shell gave up the sinking," (LF 6.21.95: 12) and "four more activists succeeded in taking over the platform by helicopter despite the efforts of Shell's

protection ships" (LM 6.22.95: 2). The French press coverage focused on Greenpeace's occupation of the platform. The use of war terminology and imagery reinforced the fantasy of the green villain who initiated the conflict.

Slowly, the war fantasy chained out. By declaring that "Greenpeace is on its war foot," (6.21.95: 12) 'Le Figaro' conveyed the idea that it was Greenpeace that declared war. This statement implied that Greenpeace started the war. 'Le Figaro' continued: "On Monday, the association sent the Solo, its fleet's most powerful ship, and dared to oppose the sinking" (6.21.95: 12). This narrative sounded like a war report that vividly described Greenpeace's attack and aroused tension and anxiety. In contrast to the detailed description of Greenpeace's attack, once again, Shell's response was not mentioned. The war scenario aroused hostility towards the villain and parlayed pity for the victim.

During the war, the French press also constructed fantasy themes of Germans as being "fanatically ecologically correct" (LM 7.2./3.95: 1). The French attitude towards the Germans during the 'Brent Spar' crisis was further influenced by phrases in the press such as: " 'Stop this madness,' screamed the General Secretary of the Christian Socialist Union" (LM 6.16.95: 1). The idea of the stern General Secretary of the CSU "screaming" to stop the sinking was ridiculous. The reaction of Germany's politicians was presented by the French press as hysterical, emotion clearly ruling over rationality. This method of reporting led to French antipathy towards Germany.

The strong disapproval of Germany's reaction was further reflected in remarks such as "It is a sign of these times that the oil corporation Royal Dutch Shell's project to sink the oil rig 'Brent Spar', that had come to the end of 30 years of good and loyal service in the North Atlantic, aroused a big fuss in Europe, and particularly in Germany" (LM 6.20.95: 16). The personification of the oil rig created the illusion that the 'Brent Spar' needed to be treated like a loyal employee that had done his/her service for the public and now deserved honorable retirement. The French press accused Germany of unnecessary intervention into the affair of Shell's oil rig.

The press continually articulated its belief that the disposal of the 'Brent Spar' was not Greenpeace's or Germany's business but rather a British domestic issue. The press wrote that Germany's mass protests were extraneous since "this collective phenomena is even more surprising as the German coasts are absolutely not menaced by a possible black sea" (LM 6.16.95: 1). This attitude that a country should only interfere in another country's decisions when that country is directly endangered was clearly espoused in the French press. The

quoted statement also implied that France was wary of mass protests against French policy, for instance their nuclear testing.

One 'Figaro' article, typical of the French press coverage, quoted Shell's president who explained that Greenpeace's estimation of the amount of toxic waste on board the oil platform was "exaggerated, irresponsible, and alarming" (6.21.95: 12), thereby reinforced the fantasy theme of an extremist Germany that interfered with an innocent Shell's plans. The article further printed the president's detailed explanation of the exact content of the oil rig which included the following imagery: "The very weak rate of radioactivity, which is naturally formed in the inside of the platform, is not higher than the rate that emanates from a couple of houses built on Aberdeen's granite". With this vivid comparison, the president explained that the oil rig's amount of toxic waste was harmless. He further claimed that the sinking option "is what is best for the oil industry of today." The quotation from Shell's president was followed by a lengthy description of the emotional uproar and bombing attacks in Germany (LF 6.21.95: 12). Germany became a companion villain with Greenpeace in the 'Brent Spar' crisis.

The whole scenario was dramatized when the German environmental movement was placed in an aggressive, humorous light. The 'Libération' used ridicule exaggerations to the green movement, writing that "in Germany, a sport sailor who sails on the North Sea sees himself getting a ticket if he throws nothing more than a tissue over board" (6.15.95: 20). This imagery of polluters as law offenders presented the Germans as uptight and rigid. The antipathy was aggravated when the press explained that "nothing provokes as much indignation in Germany as contempt of the environment. Polluters are considered criminals, and their carelessness is considered supreme contempt of your neighbor" (LM 6.16.95: 1). These two press statements exaggerated their claims by suggesting that polluters are treated like criminals or even murderers in Germany. This encouraged the idea of Germany that overreacts and French dislike of Germany.

Illustrations of Germany's attitude toward the sinking of the oil rig and in-depth description of the protests of various German groups furthered the dramatization. The press vividly described the situation in Germany: "Deserted gas stations, angry franchisers and a ruined image: the project of the British group Shell... ignited a very spectacular boycott movement in Germany. ...a gas station in the region of Frankfurt was shot at six times by a driver, without the incident hurting anyone." (LB 6.15.95: 20). The dramatic messages about the situation in Germany inspired the readers to fantasize about the radical, terrorist-like Germans fighting

for the environment. The antipathy that was initially aroused turned into hostility as Germany became Greenpeace's accomplice and a danger to France.

Negative feelings in France were fortified by constant details of the events in Germany (e.g., LB 6.15.95: 20; 6.18.95: 18; 6.19.95: 26; 6.21.95: 6; LF 6.21.95: 12). A typical description that French readers were exposed to looked like this: The protests against Shell's plans have been particularly lively in Germany, where from the churches to the unions, from Chancellor Kohl to the east German ice skater Katarina Witt, from the social-democratic party to the popular tabloid Bild, everyone raised in opposition against the project of sinking the 'Brent Spar' (LB 6.21.95: 6).

The long description with its parallel form "from... to..." exemplified the German situation and dramatized it by emphasizing how strong and unified the protest was in Germany. The dramatic messages portrayed the Germans as fanatic in their protest caused by an emotional uproar. The fantasy theme of Germans who transformed into radicals aroused the anxiety that France, with its plans for nuclear tests in the Murorora Atoll, would become the next target.

The French coverage of Germany's reactions to the 'Brent Spar' crisis took on a general anti-German attitude in environmental matters. Many articles dealt with the protests in Germany rather than with the reactions in France or with the 'Brent Spar' issue itself. Articles were titled "Shell boycotted in Germany," (LB 6.15.95: 20) "Shell's anti-ecological move scandalizes Germany," (LM 6.16.95: 1) "In Germany, the boycott keeled Shell over," (LB 6.19.95: 26) and "In Germany, Robin Hood effect" (LB 6.21.95: 6). Although the protests in the Netherlands were as passionate as those in Germany and Dutch bombed gas stations, the French press focused exclusively on Germany, conveying an anti-German attitude to the readers.[i] 94

Moreover, the Germans were reproached: "there is some hypocrisy on the part of the Germans to make themselves the moral censors of the behavior of a multinational oil corporation from which they consumed products with an indifferent greediness" (LM 6.20.95: 16). This form of criticism fed the new reality that depicted Germany as a second villain in the 'Brent Spar' war. Finally, the war came to an end. Metaphors depicting a downward direction were used to emphasize Shell's defeat. Lakoff and Johnson point out the existence of "orientational metaphors," (14) in which spatial orientations up and down correspond with happy/positive and sad/negative (15). They also explain that "Having control or force is up; being subject to control or force is down" (15).

The press in France reported that the war was over because "the ecologists made

the oil people fold" (LF 6.21.95: 1). In French, to "fold" literally means to fold something in half, like a piece of paper. The oil corporation could no longer resist Greenpeace's and Germany's attack and consequently "put down their arms" (LF 6.21.95: 12). The war resulted in the "capitulation of one of the largest oil corporations to the ecologists," (LM 6.22.95: 2) and was a "triumph for Greenpeace" (LM 7.2./3.95: 1) and Germany.

To sum up, a rhetorical vision of 'ecological fanaticism' was built by the accumulation of fantasy themes that characterized Greenpeace as a "dreadful watchdog" and a militant policeman of the "good world market." The fantasy themes also portrayed Germans as fanatic green "moral censors" (LM 7.2./3.95: 1) with extreme ecological demands. The French press implied that Shell was the victim, and next time the victim could be France. The rhetorical vision aroused fear that in the future, France might be targeted and treated like a criminal by the "watchdogs" of the environment. Imaginary headlines reading "France accused of eco-negligence" and images of hysterical Germans floated into French minds. The rhetorical vision of ecological fanaticism evoked anxiety.

## *6. Conclusion and Future Implications*

This study illustrated how the media's argumentative discourse created fantasy themes and rhetorical visions based on the symbolic potential of environmental issues in the 20th century. The analysis of German and French newspaper articles illustrated that the press used fantasy themes and rhetorical visions, which impacted the development of the 'Brent Spar' crisis. In Germany, the fantasy themes involved simple images which depicted Greenpeace and Germany as the hero(ines) of nature and guardians of human existence while, in sharp contrast, Shell and Great Britain were depicted as the greedy, environmentally hostile villains. The German press interrelated the fantasy themes to form a rhetorical vision of a green war which was given the name of the obsolete oil rig 'Brent Spar'. The 'Brent Spar' issue was assigned a new meaning.

In comparison to the German press, the French national press constructed fantasy themes concerning the 'Brent Spar' crisis in direct opposition to Germany. For French readers, Greenpeace was depicted as a war-engaging, militant "guerrilla" organization, while Germany was characterized as a fanatic bully for green issues. Both villains were accused of meddling in another sovereign nation's domestic affairs. Furthermore, the French press propelled Frenchmen to consider Shell a victim. The fantasies gave rise to the rhetorical vision of ecological fanaticism of Greenpeace and Germany. The French press conveyed its

disregard for the German response to the 'Brent Spar' crisis and an anti-Greenpeace and anti-German attitude was proliferated by the French press.

This study exposed the details in which the 'Brent Spar' issue took on a bizarre development whose outcome – the renouncing of the offshore disposal – is still in doubt. It is still uncertain whether the offshore or onshore solution will prove be more environmentally friendly and feasible. The Shell corporation and the British government obviously underestimated Greenpeace and the public's position on the oil platform's disposal. The creation of various fantasy themes (partly based on previously existing clichés), the internationalization of the 'Brent Spar' issue, and the public's drive for participatory democracy went far beyond the consequences that were anticipated by Shell and Great Britain. The strong opposition in Germany against the sinking of the oil rig caused an oppositional reaction in the French press' coverage that resulted in a common consciousness that violated the post-war friendship between Germany and France and the German-French axis of the European Union (EU).

Although the background information was abundant, the data rich and valuable, and the analysis in-depth, I do not claim that the study was exhaustive. Data from the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, and Norway, countries that also dealt with the crisis, were omitted due to the restrictions of a Master's Thesis. Further, television coverage, which also plays an integral role in the creation of fantasy themes, was not included in the analysis. Overall, this study has significant implications for future research.

It revealed the effectiveness of Bormann's method in improving our understanding of peoples' thoughts, emotions, and motivations. Further, the study showed that the concepts of fantasy themes and rhetorical visions are universal and that the method is applicable across cultural and language boundaries. Similar analyses of crises would bring about significant insight into the their nature and could help to improve crisis communication and management. Future studies of rhetorical discourse should be generated to explore phenomena such as racism and sexism and thus raise our awareness and knowledge of the power of rhetoric and the construction of symbolic realities. Moreover, Bormann's fantasy theme analysis, in combination with cultural studies should be applied to current written or oral accounts of other incidents: Researchers could study events such as the mass suicide of members of Marshall Applewhite's Heaven's Gate sect in California, separatist wars such as in the former Yugoslavia and Chechenya, the rebel war in former Zaire, or the violent historical development of relations between Palestinians and Israelis. These analyses would provide a better

understanding of international crises and, in the best case, would lead to an improvement of peace processes.

## NOTES

i. The newspaper's focus on German protests could be related to a historical antipathy between France and Germany that caused several wars and can still be observed today in the permanent political and economic competition.

## REFERENCES

- Bales, R. F. (1970). *Personality and interpersonal behavior*. New York, NY Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Bormann, E. G. (1972). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(4), 396-407.
- Bormann, E. G. (1977). Fetching the good out of evil: A rhetorical use of calamity. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63, 130-139.
- Bormann, E. G. (1982). Colloquy: I. Fantasy and rhetorical vision: Ten years later. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68, 288-305.
- European Energy Report (3.29.96). *Shell shrugs off Brent Spar, sect. energy*. Lexis Nexis.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (5.15.95). Greenpeace setzt Protest auf Ölplattform fort, 3.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.9.95). Nordseeschutz-Konferenz in Esbjerg begonnen, 1.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.9.95). Vierte Internationale Nordseeschutzkonferenz eröffnet: Großbritannien wieder in der Außenseiterrolle, 6.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.12.95). Greenpeace: Mal konfrontativ, mal kooperativ: Spendenrekord in Deutschland/ International Hauptgeldgeber, 27.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.14.95). Müll, Shell und das Meer, 17.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.16.95). Der Shell-Boykott zeigt Wirkung, 1.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.16.95). Zunehmender Boykott von Shell: Außenminister Kinkel gegen Versenkung der Ölplattform im Meer, 6.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.17.95). Schlechte Argumente, 1.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.17.95). Weiterer Anschlag auf Shell-Tankstelle, 2.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.19.95). Shell prüft Entschädigung, 2.
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.19.95). Shell-Chef Herkströter auf

Tauchstation, 20.

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.20.95). Der Müll, das Meer und die Moral, 3.

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.20.95). Klimaschutz und Umweltpolitik in Grossbritannien: Beim Wettlauf der guten Vorsätze sehen sich die Briten in bester Position: Die Ideologie ist der Technik voraus/Ein Minister für Kommunalverwaltung und Umwelt, 3.

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.20.95). In der Nordsee steht der Ruf der Shell auf dem Spiel: Eines der größten und rentabelsten Unternehmen der Welt/Große Selbständigkeit der Konzerngesellschaften, 16.

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.21.95). "Der Abfall kann nicht auf See versenkt werden": Ein Gutachten britischer Wissenschaftler/Giftiger Schlamm in der Plattform, 3.

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6.21.95). "Brent Spar"-nicht des Meeres Tod: Sicherheit und Kosten bestimmen über die Entsorgung/Ölplattformen im Betrieb schädlich, N1.

Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

*Le Figaro* (6.21.95). Les écologistes font plier les pétroliers: Shell abandonne son projet de saborder une plate-forme en mer, 1.

*Le Figaro* (6.21.95). Écologie musclée, 2.

*Le Figaro* (6.21.95). La compagnie renonce à immerger une plate-forme pétrolière: Guérilla verte contre Shell: Les organisations écologistes, au premier rang desquelles Greenpeace, appelaient à un boycottage des stations de la marque à la coquille, qui a baissé les armes, 12.

*Le Monde* (6.10.95). Conflit sur les plates-formes pétrolières désaffectées, 2.

*Le Monde* (6.16.95). Le dérapage anti-écologique de Shell scandalise l'Allemagne, 1.

*Le Monde* (6.18./19.95). Europe: Brent Spar, 3.

*Le Monde* (6.20.95). Shell qu'on n'aime pas, 16.

*Le Monde* (6.21.95). Le projet de sabotage d'une plate-forme déclenche une tempête contre Shell: La société pétrolière continue d'affronter les protestations de Greenpeace, 25.

*Le Monde* (6.22.95). Shell cède à la pression de l'opinion européenne: Soumise à une campagne de boycottage lancée par Greenpeace et relayée largement en Allemagne et dans les pays nordiques, la compagnie anglo-néerlandaise renonce à



saborder sa plate-forme pétrolière Brent Spar dans l'Atlantique, 2.

*Le Monde* (7.2./3.95). Le triomphe de Greenpeace, 1.

*Libération* (6.15.95). Shell boycotté en Allemagne: Pour son projet de couler une plate-forme en mer du Nord, 20.

*Libération* (6.18.95). Shell insiste pour démonter sa plate-forme, 18.

*Libération* (6.19.95). En Allemagne, le boycott fait chavirer la Shell: Le projet d'immersion d'une plate-forme au large de l'Ecosse coûte cher à la compagnie, 26.

*Libération* (6.21.95). La compagnie pétrolière cède au boycott: Mer du Nord: C'est Shell qu'on n'aime plus, 1.

*Libération* (6.21.95). Le projet d'immersion de la plate-forme pétrolière a été abandonné, 5.

*Libération* (6.21.95). En Allemagne, l'effet Robin des Bois, 6.

*Libération* (6.22.95). Shell: La mobilisation a payé: Bruxelles s'oppose à toute destruction de plate-forme en mer, 21.

Seaman, P. (1996). *The media: Solutions to an international challenge* (Presentation at the British Nuclear Industry Forum).

Shell Brent Spar calendar of events (1995). London: Shell-Mex House.

*Shell press release* (9.5.95). Greenpeace letter to Shell UK. London: Shell-Mex House.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (5.23.95). Räumung der Ölplattform vorerst gescheitert, 12.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (5.24/25.95). Polizei räumt besetzte Ölplattform, 12.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6.8.95). Greenpeace-Aktivisten verlassen "Brent Spar", 12.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6.12.95). Greenpeace-Aktivisten in der Nordsee gerammt, 6.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6.13.95). CSU wegen Bohrinsel empört über Shell, 5.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6.14/15.95). Protestwelle gegen Versenkung der Ölplattform, 1.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6.16.95). Proteste gegen Shell weiten sich aus: Auch niederländische Politiker rufen zu Benzin-Boycott auf, 7.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6.17/18.95). Shell am Pranger, 4.