

# A Chinese peace prize winner's view on freedom and democracy

An analysis of the problem representation in Liu Xiaobo's  
view on the Iraq war

# Abstract

This paper contains a study of the Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo's texts on the Iraq war, and the implications of the problem representation encompassed in his view on the war. By use of the "What's the problem represented to be?"-approach by Carol Bacchi, I have found that the problem representation in Liu Xiaobo's texts on the Iraq war is "lack of democracy and freedom". Because of the problem representations discursive content the effects of the problem representation are everything from difficulties for structurally discriminated groups to voice their misfortune and creation of new discontent groups, to loss of material assets and human lives.

Due to this, the Iraq war that Liu Xiaobo justifies in terms of spreading freedom and democracy cannot be justified in that way, since the consequences of the problem representation might lead to the very opposite.

*Keywords:* problem representation, Liu Xiaobo, Iraq, freedom, democracy

本论文对诺贝尔和平奖获奖者刘晓波关于伊拉克战争的文章进行深刻分析。本论文使用 Carol Bacchi 的 What's the problem represented to be 理论解释刘晓波对伊拉克战争的问题表征的含义。结论表示这些文章的问题表征是“民主和自由的缺失”。这个问题表征导致弱势群体有困难表达自己的不幸，不满群体的产生，物质资产和人命的损失等。

刘晓波的这个表征的后果是限制而不是推广自由和民主，因此不能成为伊拉克战争的正当理由。

关键词语：问题表征，刘晓波，伊拉克，自由，民主

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# 1 Introduction

In December 2010 Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China" (Nobel Prize, 2013). When the student protests took place on Tiananmen Square in 1989, Liu returned from being a guest lecturer at universities in Europe and the USA and took part in the protests. It led to him being sentenced to two years in prison, and, according to the Nobel Prize committee, it started his over twenty year long fight for a more open and democratic China. Liu was in 2008 a co-author of Charta 08, a manifesto advocating democracy and respect for human rights in China, which he was subsequently arrested for and later sentenced to eleven years of imprisonment for inciting subversion of state power, a charge that Liu constantly denied (Nobel Prize, 2013). He remains imprisoned today, and his wife Liu Xia has been held incommunicado in house arrest since Liu Xiaobo's award announcement (PEN American Center, 2013).

At the same time as Liu Xiaobo received his prize for his non-violent human rights struggle, voices were raised noting that Liu has made several conspicuous claims, such as that the Israel-Palestine conflict is a cause of the Palestinian's provocation, that China would have been a better society had it been colonized by the West, and that all major wars that USA became involved in are ethically defensible (Sautman & Hairong, 2010).

In my essay I am interested in finding out what Liu says about the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the following war and its consequences, but also what lies behind his notion of this war as being justifiable. Liu is my starting point of interest, but it is however the discourse he represents that is of my main interest in this essay, meaning that my essay will show what kind of effects and consequences such a view or discourse as Liu's can lead to. The Iraq war is interesting due to many reasons, one of them being that conflict has resurged in the country with the bloody attacks of the Islamic terrorist group called IS (Islamic State), and as such it is very interesting to look closer on the modern

history of this country. The Iraq war was also a war that was very contested in both America and internationally, and a part of the American "war against terror" that is still going on today. From the point of view of a Western reader, as myself, it will also be interesting with a Chinese person's perspective on the Iraq war, which is a point of view that might not be as influenced by post-colonial ideas and the possible negative effects of humanitarian interventions. At the same time it is also interesting to look closer at a Nobel Peace Prize winner's positive stance on war when he has received his prize for his non-violence. It is also a critical enlightening example of a discourse on democracy and freedom.

To answer my research question I will use the policy analysis approach by Carol Bacchi named "What's the problem represented to be?"<sup>1</sup>. This is a discursive analytical method, aimed at making implicit problems in public policies explicit instead, and then scrutinize these problems closely. The "problem" refers to the kind of change implied as desirable in a particular policy proposal, for example lower unemployment rates or decreasing inequality of salaries between men and women. By answering six questions that Bacchi poses regarding the problem, I will be able to make explicit Liu Xiaobo's assumptions and presuppositions that enabled him to regard the Iraq war in a certain way, and analyze the implications of this view.

While this is a method focused on governmental public policies, I aim at applying this to Liu Xiaobo's personal viewpoint on the issue of the Iraq war. This is perhaps not a policy in the word's narrower sense, but I believe the method could be stretched to fit other contexts such as this as well. My paper will therefore also produce a relevance for the research regarding policy analysis by answering whether this methodological approach is applicable or not in a slightly different context.

My research question is as follows:

- **What is the problem represented to be in Liu Xiaobo's view on the Iraq war, and what implications does this problem representation lead to?**

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<sup>1</sup> I will, just as Bacchi herself, shorten the approach's full name to simply WPR at most times in this paper.

## 1.1 Material

In order to use Bacchi's method one needs to have more information about the background of the policy, in other words, how and why the said policy came about. I have therefore looked for biographies and information about Liu Xiaobo and his life in order to get a deeper understanding of his point of view.

The Chinese source material, Liu Xiaobo's texts, has been taken from his blog at the following web page: <<http://blog.boxun.com/hero/liuxb/>>. I have collected the blog posts by searching for "Iraq" and "Bush" in Chinese on the page, and have in that way found a number of blog posts relevant to the topic of this essay. I also searched for "freedom" and "democracy" since they are recurring themes when reading Liu's texts, and also to better understand his view on the problem representation in his texts on the Iraq war. Note however how the search results only applies to the title of each respective blog post, so some posts might have been missed out. These searches resulted in more posts than was possible to include in this paper, and I hence had to choose a few to analyze, in total around 30 pages of text. My choice of which blog posts to use have rested upon the content of the title and whether or not it seemed to fit into the purpose of this essay, meaning both if they applied to the Iraq-war as a case or gave me more information about Liu's personal views on the concepts. I have tried to avoid those texts regarding China. While these might show Liu's notion of freedom and democracy as concepts as well, it is more applicable to the case of the Iraq war if I use texts he has written regarding freedom and democracy in a more general manner, or adapted to the international stage. These limitations on the source material might weaken the analysis somewhat, and had I more time and space, reading all blog posts regarding the concepts would have been desirable. I am **nonetheless** aware of this and will thus adjust the analysis accordingly, in essence not make too large claims of my results.

For my methodological approach I have used texts written by Carol Bacchi herself, the founder of the 'What's the problem represented to be?-approach', especially her book "Analysing Policy: What's the problem represented to be?" from 2009. The method is a post-structural approach inspired by Foucault, and

therefore also an interpreting method from the start. Nevertheless, since Chinese is not my mother tongue, it will give cause to yet more interpretation from my point of view. But the social constructivist discursive approach does not believe there is a general truth applicable to everybody, and that language assists in forming reality rather than just describing it (Bergström & Boréus, 2005:305). What however is necessary to take into account is what assumptions, expectations and prejudices that I personally might possess, when reading the material. It regards both what assumptions I have about the Iraq war, but also about Chinese thinkers; how I expect them to be and think, and how they "should" think about the Iraq war. As a white Swedish female with political views leaning towards the left, my view of the Iraq war is that it was an unjust war caused by an American fear of new terrorist attacks, where Iraq was suspected to harbor al-Qaeda. Regarding Chinese thinkers, I would expect them to, due to living in a strict autocratic society, to have ideas that might not fall well into the Western notion of freedom and democracy. This might also be the case due to the fact that China has a long-standing philosophical tradition of its own, differing from Western philosophy. As Carol Bacchi notes, one can argue that policy has a large cultural dimension taking shape in specific contexts (2009:ix).

## 2 Theory

Regarding my theoretical approach I will mainly rest on the post-modern WPR-approach both as my method and my theory, in accordance with how discourse analysis can be used as both (Bergström & Boréus, 2005:306). I will however here introduce some basic theory about the fundamental concepts of freedom and democracy, in order to be able to define Liu's notion of these concepts in a more coherent manner. Both these two concepts are well known, but when looking deeper into their meaning, it is clear many political conflicts can be boiled down to conflicts about the definitions of these concepts. They are also recurring themes when reading the blog posts from Liu Xiaobo about the Iraq war, and part of his problem representation.

### 2.1 Democracy

Democracy is widely accepted as something inherently good and positive today, but that is not the case for all periods of time. In essence the word means rule of the people (Lundström, 2009:16). Among political scientists, the word democracy is in general regarded as a factual claim about a polity without for that matter having expressed a value of whether this polity is good or bad (Lundström, 2009:17). For example, many countries that have some sort of elections and where the political power is changing are often defined as democracies even if they are lacking complete democratic rights and freedoms for all citizens (Lundström, 2009:23). Thus, democracy is not by definition good and just, but when reading Liu Xiaobo's texts it is obvious that it is something desirable in his point of view.

Lundström notes the often-made confusion between democracy and liberalism. Democracy is collective citizen power over a state, whereas liberalism is focusing on the individuals' freedom *from* the state. Democratic rights and freedoms are sometimes the same as individual rights that liberals have fought for,



such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. But democratic arguments for these rights are about political equality and not individual freedom. Hence, classical liberals arguments for other rights such as private property is not something than can be motivated as a democratic right (2009:26-27).

There are a couple of different strands of democratic ideas. The *elitists* are skeptical to letting politics be run by moral and higher ideals, and argue that in large industrialized states democracy has to be reduced to a controlled elitist rule due to the masses being ignorant and incapable of formulating thought-out political standpoints (Lundström, 2009:24-25). *Participatory democracy* is arguing that wide public political participation is an important part of democracy, and is also a moral development and duty for the individual citizen (Lundström, 2009:27-28).

## 2.2 Freedom

Central to the idea of freedom are two concepts: the free will, and responsibility (Näsström, 2009:76). Free will has been discussed differently over time, but determinism, that all our choices are determined beforehand by circumstances, is central. If one adheres to determinism and says that everyone are determined by societal or natural laws, which in that case means that a person's actions are inevitable, it results in difficulties for holding people responsible for their actions, and the morality is questioned. Responsibility is hence also central, which today often is looked upon as something individualistic and voluntaristic. One can, and sometimes should, say no. Morality in this sense seems to imply a free will, but the free will also seems to undermine morality (Näsström, 2009:76-79). The debate on free will and responsibility is still going on today, influencing the discussion on freedom. I will below present two traditions on freedom: the liberal and the developed republican (Näsström, 2009:82).

The *liberal* tradition is mainly focusing on negative freedom, i.e. freedom from something or freedom as non-interference or non-involvement. This type of freedom is the basis for many rights of today that we connect to modern states, such as freedom of religion, speech and thought. In this sense we are free as long

as we unhindered can act after our own wishes, and unfree if someone or something stands in our way (Näsström, 2009:82). This view leads to certain consequences, for example that individual incapacities to enjoy freedom is not a question of them being unfree but simply incapable, for example not being able to move due to illness. Hence, every restriction on individual freedom comes from external sources, and not internal. Another consequence of the liberal view on freedom is that there is no necessary connection between freedom and democracy. The main point is non-interference as freedom, and as such an autocratic state might be just as free as a democracy. Freedom is however always in the liberal point of view something both separated from and protected by the state (Näsström, 2009:82-83). If non-interference is the freedom ideal then a lot of the political life seems to be unnecessary, all one needs to do is leave the individual alone to develop her originality. But how the wishes and interests of the individual are created is not included in the liberal discussion. The individual is after all part of a greater context in the society with its values and power structures, and it is hence not always easy to discern one's own wishes from someone else's, or not let oneself be governed by fear or greed. In the end, according to Näsström, it seems that there *are* internal issues that stops us from being completely free (2009:84).

The *developed republicanism* differs from liberalism in its view on the political order. In this tradition they focus on positive freedom, and this freedom is regarded as self-governance and is consequently a prerequisite for democracy. People need to take control over those powers ruling over them, and in that sense freedom will be to live under laws one has given oneself, in the words of Rousseau. Redistribution is also more central in this perspective, because the conditions for enjoying freedom are also fundamental. One is not free if one has to work extra long hours to provide for one-self. This view of freedom as self-governance has often resulted in demands of democracy and justice, but there is also a problem regarding the difference between what people say they want and their common or rational will, something that can easily be misused as public force on individuals or groups. The emphasis on community and rationality can hence be used to both increase self-governance but also to exclude and silence different groups in society (Näsström, 2009:85-86).

### 3 Method

Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" is based on six questions, that will answer what the problem is represented to be in a specific policy. The *problem* does not carry its usual meaning in this context, but refers to the kind of change implied in a particular policy proposal (Bacchi, 2009:x-xi)<sup>2</sup>. While Liu Xiaobo's texts cannot be said to be a policy in its traditional meaning, I consciously stretch the definition since the method still seems to give me interesting answers and might not be bound to public policy matters. One aim of this paper is however, as mentioned, to test whether or not this method can be stretched to a wider meaning or not.

The approach focuses on governance rather than government, which means a broader sense of the state to include other "governing" actors, such as professionals and social scientists (Bacchi, 2009:xx). While Liu has not been involved in the Chinese government affairs, he has been a lecturer in universities and has had influence on the politics of China as an activist.

The six questions that need answering are as follows (from Bacchi, 2009:xii):

1. What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
6. How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The WPR approach by Bacchi is influenced by Foucault's notion that practical or prescriptive texts provide entry-points for identifying problematizations. It rests on the premise that what somebody says they want to do about something

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<sup>2</sup> Bacchi continuously puts the word *problem* in apostrophes, i.e. as this: 'problem'. Since I have explained here what problem means in the WPR context I will not follow her suit, but ask all readers to bear this in mind.

indicates what they think needs to change and hence how the problem is constituted by them. Bacchi argues that it is therefore possible to take any policy proposal and work backwards to deduce how it produces a problem (Bacchi, 2012:4). In this way problematizations/problem representations and not problems are in the center of the analysis (Bacchi, 2009:xiii).

Problematization [...] is the set of discursive and non-discursive practices that makes something enter into the play of the true and the false and constitutes it an object for thought (whether under the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.).

(Foucault, 1988:257, in Bacchi, 2012:4)

Implicit problems in public policies are made explicit and then scrutinized closely in the WPR approach. To accomplish this, the six questions above are posed. (Bacchi, 2009:x). The aim is to probe the premises that underpin particular problem representations, or problematizations (Bacchi, 2009:xiv). The approach creates an opportunity to question taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in government policies and policy proposals by problematizing the problem representations it uncovers within them, and is in this sense a critical analysis (Bacchi, 2009:xv).

Another point worth noting is that the WPR approach does not concern the intentionality of certain suggestions but rather the deep conceptual premises within the problem representations, in other words, finding what assumptions and presuppositions that made it possible to make certain promises and to develop certain policies (Bacchi, 2009:xix). In my case this means focusing on Liu Xiaobo's assumptions and presuppositions that enabled him to regard the Iraq war in a certain way. I will now go into each of the six questions of the WPR method and explain them in more detail.

### 3.1 What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?

The first question of the WPR approach is to clarify and identify which problem representation one is looking at in a specific policy. This might be a challenging task since policies in general are interconnected with other suggestions (Bacchi, 2009:2-4).

Liu Xiaobo does not give special policy recommendations or suggestions in his text, but one aim of this paper is just to stretch the use of the WPR approach. What I will do is try to use the texts of Liu Xiaobo and formulate a possible suggestion from this and working backwards from there.

### 3.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

With this question I will need to pose questions about the understanding that underpins Liu Xiaobo's problem representation, or problematization, asking questions such as "What is assumed?", "What is taken for granted?", "What is not questioned?". This question does not aim to look at the assumptions of the policy maker, Liu Xiaobo in this case, but rather the assumptions of the problem representation. Bacchi suggests that one start by looking at governmental or political rationalities (e.g. neo-liberal, communitarianism, neo-social democratic), as well as discourses, to help identify the underlying presuppositions. A discourse is language, but also assumptions, values, presuppositions and signs in what Bacchi calls conceptual premise or logics. It is a way to identify the meanings behind the language (2009:6-7). The first purpose of the discourse analysis in the WPR approach is to reveal the underlying assumptions and preconceptions in problem representations, i.e. this question 2. The second purpose is regarding question 4, identify and reflect upon the silences (Bacchi, 2009:9).

To go into the use of discourse analysis it is necessary to regard some main ideas. To start with there are *binaries*, or dichotomies, for example public/private, national/international, male/female, economic/social, legal/illegal. These do all exist in the public debate, where one side of every binary is excluded from the other, as well as there being an implied hierarchy between the sides so that one is more important or valued than the other. Because of this it is important to see where the binaries appear in the analyzed policy and how they function to shape the understanding of the issue (Bacchi, 2009:7).

*Key concepts* are another form of analysis, and they exist in public debate in the form of for example "health" or "welfare". The key concepts are relatively abstract open-ended labels, which result in people filling them with different

meanings. Disputes over these meanings are often connected to political visions. One task in the analysis is then to identify key concepts in the problem representations “and to see which meanings are given to those concepts” (Bacchi, 2009:8).

*Categories* are concepts that are central in how governing takes place, for example age, disease and sexuality categories. Bacchi suggests looking closer at people categories, such as students, taxpayers, citizens, and homeless. The creation of these type of people categories affects the ways in which governing takes place significantly, as well as for how people think about themselves and about others (Bacchi, 2009:9).

### 3.3 How has this representation of the problem come about?

The third question has two objectives; the first one is reflecting on developments and decisions that contribute to the formation of identified problem representations, the second objective is recognizing that competing problem representations exist both over time and across space, meaning that things could have developed quite differently. This question is inspired by Foucault’s genealogical theory. In essence it means starting from the present and going back to trace the roots of a problem representation, and avoiding taken-for-granted assumptions about a natural evolution of the historical roots. That is achieved by identifying specific points in time when key decisions were made and taking an issue in a particular direction, hence creating a focus on process and also putting attention on differential power relations where some groups have more influence on making sure that a particular problem representation becomes dominant (Bacchi, 2009:10-11).

### 3.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

In this question one tries to see what fails to be problematized. The discourse analysis from question 2 comes to use here, because binaries simplifies complex issues making it possible to point out where this simplification distorts or misrepresents certain issues. This question will draw attention to tensions and contradictions in the problem representation being analyzed. Genealogies in question 3 draw attention to competing problem representations, and also therefore assist in the task of identifying silences in those problem representations that gain institutional endorsement (Bacchi, 2009:12-14). Liu's problem representation has not gained Chinese institutional endorsement, but he does however supports the actions of the American and British governments in Iraq, meaning his problem representation has institutional endorsement in some contexts and in other not. Bacchi notes that cross-cultural comparisons can help the analysis to make clear that certain ways of thinking of problems reflect "specific institutional and cultural contexts and, hence, that problem representations are contingent" (2009:14). It will in this sense be interesting noting if whether Liu's problem representation is a product in the context of "Western" culture or not.

### 3.5 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

The WPR approach has the assumption that some problem representations create difficulties for some social groups and for some social groups less so. These effects are of three kinds, and more subtle than in common evaluations of "outcomes" (Bacchi, 2009:15).

The first type of effect are *discursive effects*, that follow from limits imposed on what can be thought and said. These effects have clear links to question 2, 3 and 4, which are all connected to discourse analysis in certain ways. Problem

representations and the discourses which frame them limits the kinds of social analysis that can be produced, which can have devastating effects for certain people (Bacchi, 2009:15-16).

*Subjectification effects* are the second type, i.e. how subjects and subjectivities are constituted in the discourse. This means that discourses make certain subject positions available, positions that persons assumes and then making sense of the social world from this point of view. In this sense who we are and how we feel about ourselves and others is to some extent the effect of subject positions made available in public policies. Dividing practices are in this context common, setting one social group against another, for example unemployed versus the employed. Often it is also implied who is responsible for the problem, making it necessary in the analysis to bring these assumptions into light (Bacchi, 2009:16-17).

The last kind of effect are *lived effects*, those effects that impacts life and death, and on the material perspective of the problem representations (Bacchi, 2009:17).

### 3.6 How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

This question addresses the means that are used for certain problem representations to reach their target audience and achieve legitimacy. The role of media in disseminating and supporting particular problem representations is for example important to analyze in this question, as well as the possibility of resistance or challenging the problem representations (Bacchi, 2009:19).



## 4 Analysis

I will here conduct my empirical analysis by answering the six questions of the WPR approach. In the next chapter I will summarize my findings and what implications they have.

### 4.1 What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?

As mentioned earlier, Liu Xiaobo does not give any specific policy recommendations or suggestions in his texts. But it is clear that he supported the Iraq invasion by the American-British allied forces, which leads me to formulate his “policy suggestion” as just that: *having an intervention/invasion in Iraq to overturn the despotic rule in the country*. The problem representation in this policy suggestion becomes “lack of democracy and freedom”, as seen for example in his blog post about the brave Iraqi people making history, he mentions how the free countries of today has an undeniable responsibility to create world peace, defeat tyranny and spread democracy (Liu, 2005a).

### 4.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

For question two I will firstly look at the political rationalities underlying the problem representation, and then go on to look at the discourse of it.

I find it fairly straightforward that liberalism is the political rationality in the problem representation, and hence an underlying assumption. In his blog post about proof on freedom, Liu discusses liberalism and the importance of individual freedom. He argues that without freedom there cannot be impartiality, equality, pluralism, development, independence, sincerity, honesty or tolerance (Liu, n.d.).

A liberal assumption of freedom constitutes as mentioned above a negative view of freedom, and as Näsström points out, the consequential view that restrictions on individual freedom always comes from external sources, and that democracy and freedom are not necessarily connected. Freedom is seen as non-interference (Näsström, 2009:82-83). This will as we will see return in the problem representation's view on freedom.

I will now move on to look at the discourse of this problem representation.

#### 4.2.1 Binaries

In the texts by Liu I have found the following binaries, which are in many ways interconnected to each other as well.

To start with there is *democracy/dictatorship*. Democracy has in this case the higher level of the hierarchy, being something higher valued in the texts. In the texts this does for example appear when Liu describes how people who have for a long time lived under tyranny will long even more for democracy, freedom and peace (Liu, 2005a). He also notes how dictatorship and tyranny and their ideology of hatred and violence are the reason why there are still wars and conflicts in the world (Liu, 2005b). It is also illustrated in a blog post Liu wrote about the Taiwan-China relationship and the USA's involvement in the conflict. Here he notes how Taiwan's greatest superiority in the conflict is the country's democratic system, and that the dictatorial system of mainland China is the greatest threat to Taiwan (Liu, 2005c)

This leads on to another binary, namely *peace/war*. Here the hierarchy is not necessarily evident. Liu propagates for war to achieve peace, but in the end peace is the goal and war just a means to reach that goal. Due to this I choose to classify peace as being the higher valued. In Liu's texts he argues that war has to be used when all peaceful means has been used and not produced any results, writing how using military force is the second best option after peaceful means (Liu, 2005a).

There is also the binary of *freedom/tyranny*. This binary is perhaps not as obvious as the previous ones, where the words are in some extent antonyms of each other. It is however something Liu often puts as opposites to each other, making this binary quite clear anyhow. Liu for example quotes Bush, who said that the continuing existence of freedom, security and peace was more and more

dependent on the termination of tyranny (2005a). This is also reiterated in another blog post about Bush, where Liu mentions how he had said that whether or not freedom exist in one land is increasingly dependent on the success of freedom in other countries, i.e. that it is necessary for freedom to win over tyranny everywhere (Liu, 2005b).

#### 4.2.2 Key concepts

There are plenty of key concepts named in the text but I will focus on the two main ones for the aims of this paper, namely freedom and democracy, which are also the concepts I have been searching for when selecting the material.

Liu argues that the soul of every person is longing for freedom due to freedom coming from human nature itself (2005a), or as he reformulates it in another text, that human nature is by nature pursuing freedom (n.d.). He also praises the Bush-doctrine's goal to spread freedom and democracy (2005a). In a blog post about the UN resolution 1546 and the rebuilding of Iraq a general message comes through from Liu. Below is a rough translation:

There are no free lunches in the world. The success of the cause of freedom also have to endure long periods of complications, especially at times when the power of freedom is tried in despotic regimes, terrorism and other similar evil power's advancement. Sometimes one inevitably has to pay a violent price to be able to achieve the final victory. Since the Second World War the Anglo-American alliance has paid an enormously big price in life, property and even the country's reputation in order to root out tyrannical regimes. Those who are not prepared to pay the price and only want to ride on other free countries, what reasons do they have to not give legitimacy to the rebuilding after the war?

(Liu, 2004a)

It seems that Liu sees freedom as being in a constant battle with tyranny and evil, and something worth sacrificing lives for. The existence of freedom is in many ways thanks to the USA and the western values that it has spread to other countries, according to Liu. He argues that politics in essence is about people's freedom and dignity, and shows how free governments has made decisions harming productivity in a country for the sake of freedom's long-term vitality, for example Abraham Lincoln and the start of the American civil war over slavery (Liu, 2005b).

Liu also notes how freedom is a prerequisite for world peace, and that the “freedom alliance” of the USA and United Kingdom is a step in the right direction to “light the freedom fire in people’s hearts” that one day “shall illuminate our world’s darkest corners” (Liu, 2005b). Freedom will undergo hard trials, and sacrifices in human lives will have to be made, in order to fight terrorism and other who tries to restrict individual freedom (Liu, 2001). This is for example illustrated in his strong belief that the Anglo-American “freedom alliance” will win the war in Iraq, who paid a high price with 9/11 but through never yielding to the terrorist’s (who he calls hooligans) threats and blackmail will be able to create a free, democratic and peaceful Iraq (Liu, 2004c). This goes as well for the whole world in Liu’s view, that in order to create world long-lasting peace one must have freedom (Liu, n.d.).

Going back to free governments sacrificing productivity for freedom, this is something part of Liu’s view on *democracy*, just as well as sacrificing lives for it. When elections were held in Iraq Liu is very pleased over this democratic development, and the right of Iraqi people to be able to vote. He judges it as a surprisingly successful election, despite 26 Iraqis had been killed due to the elections. Liu argues that they have died in order to rebuild the freedom of Iraq (Liu, 2005a).

Liu quotes both Kant and Lukes when naming some arguments for liberalism. To start with he reiterates that freedom is the natural condition for human nature, but that this natural condition cannot guarantee individual freedom being restrained in anarchic “laws of the jungle”. Government is needed in order to guarantee the power of freedom, but this is a man-made societal contract, always inferior to the natural freedom. In this sense individual freedom is the goal that is realized through the tool of public authority, and the government is somewhat of an employee to the employer, i.e. the people. If a government violates freedom the masses possess a legitimate right to revolt against the tyranny, Liu writes when referring to Lukes. He also quotes Kant when summarizing that all persons are free, all subjects are equal and all citizens are independent. This is based on that all persons possess an inborn rationality that can be used bravely to not blindly follow authority but instead govern one’s own actions, choosing one’s own morality, and thinking for one self. This also results in every individual’s development of it’s own rationality (Liu, n.d.). With this, Liu

touches on democracy in a large extent as well. Lundström writes that democracy is collective citizen power over a state (2009:26), which is what Liu describes with Lukes societal contract based on the guaranteeing of freedom.

In the end, it sounds as the liberal freedom and democracy in Liu's view very much goes hand in hand. Lundström warns for confusing these two concepts, seeing as democracy is about political equality and collective citizen power over a state, whereas liberalism is about individual freedom, and freedom from a state (Lundström, 2009:26). In Liu's view democracy can only exist with freedom, and freedom can only exist with democracy. In this sense he takes a step away from the liberal tradition when it comes to freedom, who believe that freedom is non-interference and therefore an autocratic state can be just as free as a democratic one (Näsström, 2009:83). Liu could perhaps rather be placed under the strand of developed republicanism, where freedom is regarded as self-governance and therefore a prerequisite for democracy, and rationality is often emphasized. (Näsström, 2009:85-86), very much as Liu argues himself in his blog posts as mentioned above.

#### 4.2.3 Categories

Categories are something that does not fit my chosen material all too well, since I've chosen to sidestep the WPR approach somewhat with its strict focus on policy and therefore my case does not aim to "fix a problem" for certain people. I will however from the information I can find in the material discuss the categories of *free people* and *unfree people*. These categories could also to some extent be exchanged for different nationalities, which in Liu's texts often are Iraqi people and Chinese people as unfree, and Americans and Brits as free people. These categories are central in how the governing of the war in Iraq takes place.

When Liu discusses the scandal of the mistreated prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, he regrets the human rights violations of the prisoners of war and the insult of the Iraqi people, but even more so he regrets that this scandal polluted the sacrifice of the American troops, damaged the USA's reputation and impeded the American policy of democratization in the Middle East (Liu, 2004b). Liu also thinks that the dead Iraqi's during the national elections are a sacrifice worth making for democracy and freedom (2005a). The unfree people of Iraq are

hence needed to sacrifice lives for becoming free, but if they do it seems that the sacrificed lives of free people are worth more.

### 4.3 How has this representation of the problem come about?

To pinpoint exactly how this problem representation came about for an individual currently imprisoned is a difficult task, especially since there is little written about Liu as a person besides his human rights activism. I can also not find specific points where Liu has made certain decisions, but will make an attempt based on secondary sources.

The reason for Liu receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 was first and foremost his co-authoring of the Charter '08 in 2008 where he calls for democracy and human rights in China, together with other intellectuals from China (Nobel Prize, 2013).

Jumping to the day after the terror attack on September 11 2001 against World Trade Center and Pentagon, Liu writes how this was not an issue about contrasting cultures or ethnicities, but rather about evil battling over life, freedom and peace, aiming their struggle at innocent common people. From this day he condemns the terrorists, talking about their evil human nature, calling for a war to protect life, freedom and peace. He also mentions that he has friends in USA (Liu, 2001).

When the student protests in 1989 at Tiananmen Square started to erupt, Liu returned to China from having spent some time as a guest lecturer abroad during the 1980's. He quickly became critical of the movement having a too emotional language and a cult of charismatic leaders, being clearly influenced by the culture of Chinese communism. Liu instead propagated for rationality, order, calm and moderation as ways to achieve democracy. At the Tiananmen Square he lead non-violent protests such as hunger strikes, and confiscated and destroyed weapons that the protesters had come across. After the events of June 4 1989 Liu Xiaobo was arrested and sentenced to prison for two years, which lead him to become the dissident he is today (Jaivin, 2010).

During the 1980's before the Tiananmen massacre, Liu had during achieved some notoriety for harshly targeting the, in his view, poor accomplishments of the Chinese literature and culture. When he started as a guest lecturer in western universities he became more political, and started to focus on the philosophical notion of civil society. Linda Jaivin, an Australian author and Chinese translator who knew Liu Xiaobo during this time, describes him as having “unending, opinionated, stuttering rants”, often quoting from his own work, but being very intelligent and warm-hearted (Jaivin, 2010). A similar view seems to be shared by Liu's friend Zha Jianying, saying that he “could be overbearing, and at times unbearable. But his critical lance was accompanied by genuine courage and political conviction.” (Moore, 2010).

Liu was the child of well-educated parents, part of an intellectual family that in his teenage years were sent to the countryside of Inner Mongolia, as part of Mao's campaign to correct bourgeois tendencies and learn from farmers and villagers (Moore, 2010).

According to the WPR approach, these past developments in Liu's life can have contributed to his problem representation of “lack of democracy and freedom”. In his teenage years, Liu's individual freedom was clearly affected by him being forced to move to the countryside and work as an unskilled laborer, and then later when repeatedly having been sentenced to prison or labor camps. Little is written about Liu's years and impressions in the West, but it is quite clear he was inspired by the free democratic societies he encountered there, and thought that the Chinese culture and civilization in many ways was inferior to that of the West, especially USA. Perhaps his time spent there, as well as still having friends there, affected his strong point of view on the terror attack against the country. Having seen countless innocent people being killed at the Tiananmen Square this could also have affected his deep resentment to such actions, to kill innocent people in peacetime (Liu, 2001). The events he has experienced during his life, both living in the autocratic China as well as having experienced life in the democratic USA, might hence very well have affected his view and the problem representation in his texts, for example he argues that American idealism is a result of Protestantism and its universalism (Liu, 2005b). Perhaps he saw the lack of the Protestant tradition in China as a reason to learn from those countries with a Protestant belief system.

When trying to analyze this, there is somewhat of a jump between Liu's non-violent struggle on Tiananmen square to his call for war the day after the terror attack against World Trade Center. According to Moore, Liu argued that the 1989 student protests interrupted the process where the Communist party was gradually democratizing and reforming itself. The previous relaxed environment was after 1989 replaced by antagonism, terror and tension. Liu has similarly argued that political reform should be gradual, peaceful, orderly and controllable, and that bad government is better than the chaos of anarchy. He has also praised the results of China's reforms (Moore, 2010).

Can one then imagine that the problem representation could have developed otherwise, becoming something else than what it did? Bacchi argues that this is always the case, that competing problem representations always exists over time and across space. Liu criticized the student movement in 1989 for interrupting a gradual political reform process that was underway anyway in China, and for being too populist in its charismatic emotional expressions. Why he ended up criticizing the movement, seeing the harmful effects non-governmental forces could have, is unclear. But this view could very well have lead to a much more autocratic problem representation, where Liu could have argued for a strict control of different opinions for the sake of order and stability, meaning that China wasn't ready for democracy. Another route the problem representation could have taken is a much more non-violent stance, arguing that violence to create order is never justifiable since sacrificing the life of innocent people for the sake of community values never can be right and just. At the moment he rather says both, that community values will always be inferior to individual freedom, but that individual sacrifices are worth the cost for spreading freedom (Liu, n.d., 2005a).

#### 4.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

In this question I will look at what fails to be problematized in the problem representation of "lack of freedom and democracy". I will begin to look at



binaries from question 2, and then move on to the genealogical approach from question 3.

#### 4.4.1 Binaries

I will in this question begin to look closer on the binaries from question 2. What I mainly found was the binaries of democracy/dictatorship, peace/war and freedom/tyranny. Binaries are in themselves simplifying a complex issue, and I will start by looking closer at *democracy/dictatorship*.

As Lundström shows, democracy does not necessarily by definition means something good and just. Many countries that have elections and changing political power still violate human rights and freedoms (Lundström, 2009:23). To say that democracy in itself is desirable is in that sense somewhat of a hollow statement. Many new democracies are very instable, much as how the Islamist organization IS or ISIS today has destabilized and shaken parts of Iraq with brutality and violence (BBC, 2014). Liu argued as mentioned above that a bad government is better than anarchy. What he means with bad government is unclear, does this stretch to a bad democracy or even a dictatorship? Is dictatorship preferable over anarchy? And why is anarchy of the people non-desirable? Does he concur with the elitist strand of democracy theory, that the large masses are ignorant and incapable of formulating thought-out political standpoints? This does not go hand in hand with his rationalist view on freedom, that all people can find their own morality by use of their inherent rationality. Neither does it go together with his view that people have the right to revolt against a tyrannical government due to the societal contract.

Liu argues, as mentioned above, that freedom is something inherent in humanity by nature, and does thus adhere to natural law theorists who argue that all human beings can use their rationality to reach our common morality and humanity. They also argue that the common human nature results in common moral duties, which according to some includes humanitarian intervention, because we have a duty to help those in need in all parts of the world (Holzgrefe, 2003:25-26). When it comes to the binary of *peace/war*, the effects of military humanitarian interventions in order to create peace and democracy are however much debated. Military humanitarian interventions in countries' internal affairs, in

essence if a state did not protect the rights of its citizens, were for a long time unthinkable due to it affecting the state sovereignty. Due to an increase of intra-state conflicts and civil wars after the Cold War, the UN launched the principle of Responsibility To Protect (R2P), which justified interventions in a state who could not protect the rights of its citizens. However, questions remain regarding whether foreign intervention can create large societal transformations, and what incentives states have to intervene in other countries. Is it humanitarian rights-based reasons, or is it because of something else, for example acquiring control over natural resources or similar (Säkerhetspolitik, 2013)? These questions remains unanswered by Liu, and as the situation in Iraq shows today with the attacks of IS/ISIS in the north part of the country towards many minorities and innocent people, the war started by the USA in the country has not lead to sustained stability and peace.

*Freedom/tyranny* is the last binary I will discuss. As shown above freedom is a very wide concept, and Liu adheres to developed republicanism in many ways. This perspective argues that people need to take control over those powers ruling over them and have self-governance (Näsström, 2009:85), but when the foreign armies invaded Iraq, one could argue that this is a power ruling over the Iraqi people that the Iraqis could not control. They had no democratic voting rights over the American troops, and there was certainly no self-governance, which through Liu's view on freedom, hence created a very unfree situation for the Iraqi people. The developed republican perspective also puts an emphasis on community and rationality, but this can lead both to increased self-governance but also to exclude and silence different groups in society (Näsström, 2009:86). This lack of freedom would cause democratic effects since certain groups might be silenced. Liu does not address these issues, but instead simplifies to say that it is worth sacrificing lives for freedom.

#### 4.4.2 Genealogies

In Liu's text there is some confusion, because as mentioned above he argues that community values are always inferior to individual freedom (Liu, n.d.), but that individual lives can be sacrificed for the sake of spreading freedom to other communities (Liu, 2005a). He also mentions that the opposite of individual

freedom is coercion or force, which is to deprive and restrict people of their individual freedom (Liu, n.d.). When advocating war, Liu seems to ignore the effects of war on restricting people's freedom – both those innocent people being restricted in their lives due to their country being under attack, and those soldiers being sent away to a foreign country to fight. All he says is that also liberal politics need “necessary evil”, and that free societies also need to use force and coercion at times (Liu, n.d.).

The problem representation of “lack of freedom and democracy” is also reflected in the foreign policy of the former US president Bush, who argued that world peace could only be created by spreading freedom all over the world (Liu, 2005b). China however, the context where Liu comes from, strongly condemned the US' invasion of Iraq in 2003, and has regarding the crisis in Iraq today with the IS/ISIS attacks said that America's attempt to spread democracy in Iraq collapsed at the first blow, and that the US has tried to spread democracy in unsuitable soil. What alternative measures they propose are however unclear, but China has large interests in Iraq due to the country's oil (Tiezzi, 2014). That the US argues in terms of freedom and the greater good, is as Liu notes, part of the American political tradition (2005b). That China argues for non-interference in other countries' affairs, is notably not all different from the liberal view on freedom as non-interference from the state. It is also more aligned with the strong support of state sovereignty that was the overall norm in the world up until the end of the Cold War.

## 4.5 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

In this question I will look into the effects of the problem representation on different social groups.

### 4.5.1 Discursive effects

The discursive effects of the problem representation are connected to the discursive analysis under question 2, 3 and 4. The problem representation of “lack

of democracy and freedom” resides in a discourse influenced by the liberal thought tradition where the value of freedom is the biggest priority. Democracy is nothing necessary by default in this tradition, but freedom should both be separated from and protected by the state (Näsström, 2009:83). As such, democracies are usually better on protecting freedom than autocracies.

The discourse surrounding the problem representation is also characterized by the key concepts of freedom and democracy. The view of freedom as something inherent by nature in all human beings, as well as something connected to an inborn rationality in all people, results in the view that one should not blindly follow a government but instead choose one’s own morality. It results in a discursive effect in form of the view that all restrictions on freedom come from external sources, meaning that the discourse does not admit that an individual can be influenced by the values and power structures in a society or community, or by fear or greed. Here Liu’s problem representation rather falls into the category of the liberal view on freedom.

In the end everyone are supposed to be able to look past these issues and still react in a rational way in accordance with their individual freedom. For social groups that have restricted freedom due to structural reasons in society, this type of discourse is harmful. For example, women are in all societies structurally discriminated against in different ways, but according to this view women are expected to look past this and act as they had the same freedom as men. If their rights were restricted by tradition or law, as in Iraq (Unicef, 2011), this would in fact be a restriction of freedom in accordance with the problem representation’s view on freedom as non-interference. This effect becomes even more serious when thinking about the reports of grave violence against women by ISIS, where women are systematically kidnapped, raped and tortured by the organization (Johansson, 2014).

As discussed earlier, Liu fails to address the effects of war in a broader sense. The problem representation in his texts can be used to justify war. The logic in the problem representation is that war can create freedom that in turn will create peace, something of an oxymoron. Justifying wars within the frame of the discourse in terms of spreading freedom and democracy, will lead to a view of warfare and violence as something possibly positive. This in turn can for example result in that non-violence and opposition against wars can be harder to show and

produce within the discourse, and receive much opposition. The American government is for example today expected by many to act in the Iraq crisis, but is also always taken into account when any military crisis occurs in the world. For an American president to be completely against any wars does not seem possible.

#### 4.5.2 Subjectification effects

Bacchi notes how subject positions are often created by implying who is responsible for a certain problem, and setting one social group against another (2009:16-17). In the case of “lack of democracy and freedom”, those responsible are the people adhering to “evil ideologies” like nazism, militarism, communism, nationalism, fundamentalism and terrorism (Liu, 2004c). These ideologies are all creating a lack of democracy and freedom in this view, hence them being “evil”. In the case of Iraq and Liu Xiaobo, it is always terrorists who are to be blamed, even though other people are also sometimes behaving in an “evil” way, for example Chinese people on the Internet who after the terrorist attack on September 11 gloated at the American misfortune and celebrated the attack (Liu, 2001). It is difficult to say what the terrorists felt about being put to blame for the attacks, probably this was not a big problem since they took on responsibility for it. However, the attacks caused a wide fear of Islam, causing many ordinary Muslims to also being forced to bear some of the blame when being grouped together with the terrorists. This could very well affect them to become frustrated and angry, creating more possible terrorists.

The “unfree people” that are also created through this problem representation could either benefit from this view or be harmed by it. The problem representation does not necessarily by default lead to war (it is only Liu, and the US, who have propagated for war in those terms), meaning that if one would create freedom and democracy in other peaceful ways, this would most likely benefit the unfree people who would become free (depending of course on what meaning is given to the word “free”). To however view a group as lacking in something, in this case freedom and democracy, easily leads to the conclusion that those who have freedom or democracy must help them. Being in a dependency situation can easily create feelings of inferiority, and for the “helpers”, i.e. the free people, create a feeling of superiority. These feelings do not even necessarily need the action of

helping to exist. Just being branded as having freedom and democracy, those things being something positive and good, might create a feeling of satisfaction, and the opposite goes for those being branded as not having these good and positive things in their lives.

#### 4.5.3 Lived effects

The last kind of effect are *lived effects*, those effects that impacts life and death, and on the material perspective of the problem representations (Bacchi, 2009:17). “Lack of democracy and freedom” as a problem representation has been used to justify invasions and wars, wars that have lead to many deaths, as well as great changes in many peoples lives, both from those people in the country being invaded and the country that invades another. People have been displaced from their homes, been severely injured, or lost a member of their family. Long-term effects of that can be loss of income, trauma, failed education, anger, frustration etcetera. The material effects of war also include destruction of important infrastructure, homes and communities.

### 4.6 How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The problem representation has been produced by Liu Xiaobo on his blog, and has not been spread widely among many before his reception of the Nobel Peace Prize, and also mainly among like-minded Chinese (Johnson, 2012). Chinese media or government does not disseminate this particular problem representation of “lack of freedom and democracy” in the country. The problem representation does however exist as part of the American media and government as mentioned above, as well as the American cultural values. The problem representation did receive more attention after Liu received his Nobel Peace Prize, and his positive stance on the Iraq war as well (Johnson, 2012). This view and also his positive view on colonialism has since 2010 been criticized by some (see for example Sautman & Hairong).

To in this context resist or challenge the problem representation is not impossible since it has been done. It might however differ greatly between different contexts. In the USA it might be harder to challenge, whereas in an African and Asian context it has been challenged, as well as in the European context. In some of these contexts the problem representation might be formulated the same, but with a larger awareness of post-colonial power structures and other views on freedom and democracy.

## 5 Conclusion

My research question was “What is the problem represented to be in Liu Xiaobo’s view on the Iraq war, and what implications does this problem representation lead to?”. The case of the Iraq war was interesting since the war was contested from the start, and the country has yet again deep problems with the ISIS attacks. It was also, as this paper is produced in a Western context, interesting to get a Chinese view (while not typical) on the Iraq war, as well as the case of Iraq being able to produce a critical example of a discourse on democracy and freedom.

My results show that the problem is represented to be “lack of democracy and freedom”, where freedom is self-governance, non-interference and a prerequisite for democracy. Freedom is also in the problem representation connected to an inborn rationality in all human beings and a natural part of human nature. As such, the problem representation can have harmful effects on structurally discriminated groups, can create frustration and anger among those targeted as responsible for the problem, can glorify war and violence, and can create many serious effects on human lives and material aspects of societies. Looking at these effects solely it is necessary to think about the “problem” differently, and especially put a different meanings into the key concepts of freedom and democracy.

The methodological approach with the WPR method was central in the thesis, with an aim to widen the approach to areas and texts that are not public policies. There has been some problems however with this. One example is question 3 where I looked at how the problem representation came about, which was a more difficult task when it was a question of the personal views of one individual. Another example is in question 4, where one is supposed to look at “silences” in the problem representation. Since I have not read all texts by Liu Xiaobo I cannot be sure of whether the silences are real, or just something he doesn’t discuss in my chosen material. The texts I have chosen were however quite randomly picked out, and it would perhaps be unlikely to expect Liu to argue very differently in other contexts.



The results of my paper show however that the WPR approach can be used at least to some extent in another context, and as such the paper has added to the literature on policy and discourse analysis. And for the world this paper shows that the definitions one put in words such as freedom and democracy can have serious effects, and what effects these might have had in the case of the Iraq war.

## 5.1 Further research

Further research in the area could consist of comparing my results with that of the Chinese official policy, and/or American official policy regarding the Iraq war, and compare the problem representations across time, cultures and spaces (see Bacchi, 2012:6). Further research could also consist of reading more of Liu Xiaobo's texts on the subject to develop this paper's body of information more and hence enabling making stronger arguments and conclusions.

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