

Iraq's December 2005 Election: Reporting Democratisation in The Australian and Middle Eastern Print Media

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Abstract

Throughout the coverage of Iraq since the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s and especially since September 11, the Western mainstream Media have eschewed key historical and contextual data about Iraq, thereby serving to reduce and homogenize the complexity of the issues surrounding the region and the conflicts therein. In so doing, the media has tended towards Orientalism (Said, 1978) by trivialising Iraq and its people and thereby reinforcing the hegemony of the West over the 'backward, barbaric' East. Building on earlier research (Isakhan, 2005a), this paper further examines the reductive and homogenising reporting of Iraq in the Western media by using both quantitative and qualitative assessment methods to compare and contrast the discursive practices used to construct the Iraqi election of December 15, 2005 in Australia's leading daily newspapers with newspapers from the Middle East. In essence, it finds that while the Australian media propagates Orientalism through its one-eyed coverage, the Middle Eastern papers are more contemplative, focusing on the impact that this election could have throughout the region.

Keywords: Iraq, Democracy, Media

Introduction

Orientalists were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over. (Said, 1978: 207)

Iraq – the nation that we know today – resulted from the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War (Braude, 2003: 3). During this time, much of the Middle East plummeted into an unparalleled level of disorder. A territorial crisis ensued and the fighting between a myriad of ethnic and religious groups went unchecked. Britain and France moved into much of what are now Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Israel with an emphasis on curtailing chaos by imposing order. Nation-states were hastily designed (Jordan was famously drawn by Winston Churchill in the back of a taxi), ancient peoples were divided and new identities were born. In 1921, the many different peoples of the three previously autonomous regions, or vilayets, of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul became Iraqis (Cordesman & Hashim, 1997: 60, 71).

Politically, Iraq has undergone a number of violent struggles throughout its short history. Not least of these was the military coup in which the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1968 and, just over a decade later, Saddam Hussein "elected" himself to the presidency in 1979 (Cordesman & Hashim, 1997: 61). It was not long after this that Iraq first came to the attention of the Western media as an ally of the US during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1990. Here, Iraq was portrayed as a nation struggling towards nationhood and secularisation with its leader, Saddam Hussein, a symbol of "our" resistance to the spread of fundamentalist Islam and the dogma of that quintessential Eastern despot, Ayatollah Khomeini (for a scholarly investigation into Iraq's representation in the British Press from 1980-2003, see: Seymour, 2004).

However, it wasn't until Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2 1990 that the Gulf War began and Iraq shifted from US ally to enemy number one. Iraq was now the new threat to international stability, while Saddam Hussein himself was compared to the megalomaniacal and bloodthirsty kings of the Ancient Near East (which was further compounded by his own tendency to employ ancient Mesopotamian history and symbology in both his political rhetoric and the many grandiose portraits that scattered the country). Many have since been critical of the media's role in reporting this "clean" war (Kenney, 1994; P. M. Smith, 1991), with Keeble asserting that "Media manipulation...[had become]...a central military strategy" (1997: 8). This prompted further critique, such as Virillo's belief that the mass media had allowed the realities of war to be substituted by an information market of propaganda and illusion (2002) and – most provocatively of all – Baudrillard's essay, "The Gulf War did not take place" (1991).

The cataclysmic events of September 11 2001 and their coverage by the media has attracted similar criticism to that of the Gulf War (Dixon, 2004; Green, 2002; Green & Maras, 2002; Greenberg, 2002; Venkatraman, 2004) and ultimately led to the invasion of Iraq by the "Coalition of the Willing" in 2003. This too became a media spectacle, with 24-hour live updates and daily reports from the front line. Once again, the world's attention was focused on Iraq. However, unlike the critics of the Gulf War, the research and criticism of this war has primarily focused on the control that the US has exerted over the world's media. The Pentagon made two key strategic media control decisions in the early days of the war. They limited journalistic exposure to the war by reporting the "facts" to the world's media at "Central Command", or CentCom, in Doha, Qatar (some 700 miles from Baghdad), and they devised the notion of "embedding" journalists with military platoons (for more information on these and other issues, see: Artz & Kamalipour, 2005; Miller, 2004; Rampton, 2003; Rutherford, 2004; Schechter, 2003).

What is common throughout the coverage of Iraq since the Iran-Iraq War and especially in the world since September 11, is that the Western mainstream Media have eschewed key historical and contextual data about Iraq, thereby serving to reduce and homogenize the complexity of the issues surrounding the region and the conflicts therein. In so doing, the media has played a central role in constructing the all-encompassing Middle Eastern / Muslim / Arab 'other'. The rich histories of the region and its wealth of religions, cultures and languages etc. become one. We know them only through disorder and opposition: non-white, non-western, non-Christian, non-civilized.

It is important to note here that the events of September 11 and the current situation in Iraq have occurred concurrently with a series of events in Australia. Since 2001, Australia has seen the 'Ethnic Gang Rapes' in the suburbs of south-Sydney, the 'Tampa' crisis, the 'Children Overboard Affair', repeated raids by the Australian Federal Police and ASIO of the homes of suspected terrorist cells across Australia, the Bali bombings, the return of Mamdouh Habib, direct threats against Australian cities by Al Qaeda and the 'Cronulla Riots'. While some scholars have focused on these Australian events and the role that the Australian media has played in demonising Middle Eastern – Australians (Manning, 2004b; Poynting, Noble, Tabar, & Collins, 2004), only a limited amount of analysis has been conducted on issues surrounding the Australian media's representation of the war in Iraq (Manning, 2004a)

Earlier work by the author (Isakhan, 2005b, 2005c) has attempted to address this by focusing on the fact that the Australian media has neglected to adequately report on the complexities of Iraq's cosmopolitan society. Specifically, Iraqi society is considered "the most spiritually diverse in the Middle East" (Braude, 2003: 65) and is home to "numerous racial and religious minorities...(including) Turkomans, Persians, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Jews, Yazidihs, Sabeans, and others" (Batatu, as cited in: Cordesman & Hashim, 1997: 71). To put things in perspective, 40 distinct minority groups have been identified across the Arab World (Hourani, 1947: 1-2), many of these having their own language, culture, religion, food, history, dress and customs. Yet, despite this heterogeneity, the Western media has failed to report on the complexity of Iraqi society. While much Western scholarly and media attention has been given to the plight of the Kurds (Robinson, 2002: 20) and the split between the Sunni's (who make up about 20% of Iraq's population but held the majority of power under Hussein) and the Shi'ites (who form the majority within Iraq) (Keeble, 1997: 12), little attention has been paid to the plethora of other Iraqis.

This research paper extends previous work that focused on Iraq's January 2005 Election (Isakhan, 2005a) and forms part of a larger PhD project. Specifically, this paper examines the reductive and homogenising way that the Western media covers Iraq by focusing on the reporting of Iraq's December 2005 elections. Firstly, it is important to note that this has occurred within the larger framework of what appears to be something of a 'shift' towards democracy across the Muslim world. This has included Algeria's first elections in 1999 and, in the same year, Indonesia's first free parliamentary elections since 1955. Following this, 2005 was an extraordinary year in terms of democracy in the Middle East. Specifically, this has included democratic developments in Palestine (first election), Egypt (first multi-candidate popular vote), Saudi Arabia (first municipal elections), Pakistan (local body elections), Lebanon's first free election in many years (post-Syrian withdrawal) and Afghanistan's first parliamentary elections in four decades. Following this, there was also the unexpected election of Ahmadinejad in Iran and, in early 2006, the ascension of the controversial group Hamas to power in Palestine.

Although each of these elections has attracted both the attention and criticism of the Western media, it is arguably Iraq's democratisation that has been the focus, once again bringing Iraq to the centre of the world stage. Since the handover of Iraq's sovereignty from the US-led coalition to the Interim Government in June 2004, the country has set about making the transition from despotism to democracy. Most significantly, on the 30 January 2005, some 8.5 million Iraqis voted to elect a national assembly who were charged with the ominous duty of drafting the Iraqi constitution (for a detailed analysis of media coverage of this election, see: Isakhan, 2005a). After much deliberation and after missing the original deadline on 15 August, the committee approved a final draft of the Iraqi constitution on the 28 August. Following this, on the 15 October, Iraqis again take to the polls, effectively ratifying the proposed constitution and, a permanent government is currently in the process of being established following a further national vote on December 15 2005 (the above dates appear in many sources, but for a detailed list of all but the revised August date, see: Diamond, 2005a: 11). While scholars from a myriad of fields have addressed many of the issues surrounding Iraq's 'shift' to democracy (Anderson & Stansfield, 2004; Arato, 2003; Benomar, 2004; Braude, 2003; Byman, 2003; Darwisha, 2004;

Diamond, 2005a, 2005b; Gilbert, 2004; Lawson, 2003; Nader, 2003; Telhami, 2003; Tripp, 2004; Zubaida, 2002), little attention has been paid to the construction of these events in either the Western media, or that of the Middle East.

This study therefore attempts to address this lack of scholarship on Iraq by investigating the representation Iraq's December 2005 election in both the Western (Australian) print media and that of the Middle East (Lebanon, Turkey and Kuwait). It is expected that the Australian print media will follow the Orientalist (Said, 1978) tradition of media coverage of the East in general and, more specifically, of Iraq since the Gulf War. On the other hand, it is expected that the Middle Eastern media will consider Iraq's elections in terms of its potential for creating a more egalitarian and stable Middle East and an independent Iraq.

Methodology

Four Australian and four Middle Eastern newspapers were analysed for the period of six and a half weeks (December 10, 2005 – January 25, 2006, inclusive). The decision for this time-period was based around both the date of the election itself (December 15, 2005) and the release of the uncertified results (January 20, 2006). This allowed for the study to cover news reports from the lead up to the election (December 10-December 14), the election itself up to the announcement of the uncertified results (15 December-19 January) as well as the actual announcement and a short period thereafter (20 January-25 January).

The Australian newspapers consisted of: *The Australian*, a News Limited broadsheet that is circulated nation-wide; *The Courier-Mail*, which is also a News Limited broadsheet and is the only Metropolitan newspaper of Queensland, based in the state capital of Brisbane; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, a broadsheet published out of Sydney – Australia's largest and most iconic city – by Fairfax and; *The Age*, another Fairfax broadsheet which is published in the Victorian capital of Melbourne.

These four newspapers are representative of the two largest newspaper conglomerates in the country, News Limited, owned by Rupert Murdoch, and John Fairfax Holdings which is owned by the triumvirate of the Commonwealth bank of Australia, Colonial and the Permanent Trustee Company (Report, 2002). While it is therefore clear that these two sets of papers (*The Australian* and *The Courier-Mail* as one set and *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* as another) rely heavily on the same foreign news sources, the fact that they have some of the largest circulations in the country (Report, 2002) and serve not only the three largest metropolitan areas in Australia (Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne), but also the entire country (*The Australian*) warrant them worthy of investigation. Indeed, it is fair to say that these newspapers do much to inform the Australian populace about the events in Iraq and, in this context, the Iraqi election in particular. Additionally, the selection of these four newspapers replicates other research into Australian coverage of the war in Iraq (Manning, 2004a).

The Middle Eastern papers were chosen for different reasons altogether. Essentially, they were selected according to three main criteria: firstly, due to the researchers' lack of language skills, they had to be in English; they had to be based within the Middle East and produced by and for the (English reading) people of the region; and finally the newspapers needed to be readily available. According to these criteria then, the Middle Eastern papers analysed in this study include: *The Daily Star*, a Lebanese daily; both

the *Andolu Agency* and *Dunya*, daily newspapers based in Turkey; and the *Kuwait Times*, a daily newspaper published out of Safat, Kuwait.

Unlike the Australian newspapers, these Middle Eastern sources are not written in the majority / native tongue of the country to which they belong. The use of the English language does suggest that these papers are aimed at the expatriate community as well as the upper (English reading) classes of the country rather than the bulk of Arabic or Turkish reading people within their respective countries of origin. However, despite this, the papers have been selected because they are all produced within the Middle East, by and for the people living and working in this region. This aids the assumption that they would reveal more about the interests, opinions and beliefs of these people in a general sense than any Western based / produced media. In fact, Rubin claims that such English-language newspapers published in the Middle East tend to be "...more explicit, open, and far-reaching" than those published in the respective native tongue (2006: 4).

The actual newspaper articles were obtained by using the 'Search' function of Factiva (www.factiva.com), which contains more than 9, 000 sources from 152 countries (Factiva, 2005). To search for the relevant articles, the search terms "Iraq and democracy" were entered, the time frame was limited to the time period mentioned above, each respective newspaper was specifically selected (i.e. one at a time) and the search was set to examine the 'Full Article.'

This search yielded a total initial return of 116 articles across the four Australian newspapers and 52 from the four Middle Eastern papers. However, a number of the articles counted in this initial result from Factiva were deemed irrelevant. To refine the data to more manageable numbers and salient articles, the following types of articles were deleted: letters, book reviews, brief editorial comments, world watch (or any news in brief), obituaries and interviews. As well as this, only the first edition of each paper was included in the data set to prevent the data being skewed by the repetition found in second or later editions. Finally, excess data such as the name of the paper, author, number of words, date, language and distributor were removed as a high presence of words like "English" (for language) could also skew the data. This process of refinement left 67 Australian news articles and 38 from the Middle East (for a further breakdown see Table 1). Each of the separate articles were then grouped first by their respective newspaper, then by country (in the case of the Middle East papers) and finally divided into the two geographical regions: Australia and the Middle East.

Table 1: The number and percentage of articles from each of the newspapers

Region	Country	Newspaper	Initial Result	Final Result
Australia	Australia	The Australian	64 (55%)	33 (49%)
		The Courier-Mail	14 (12%)	10 (15%)
		The Sydney Morning Herald	19 (16%)	15 (22%)
		The Age	19 (16%)	9 (13%)
TOTAL			116 (100%)	67 (100%)
Mid. East	Lebanon	Daily Star	31 (60%)	25 (66%)
	Kuwait	Kuwait Times	13 (25%)	9 (24%)
	Turkey	Anadolu Agency	7 (13%)	3 (8%)
		Dunya	1 (2%)	1 (3%)
TOTAL			52 (100%)	38 (100%)

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

To perform the content analysis component of this study, a program named Leximancer (www.leximancer.com) was used. This software was developed at the University of Queensland by the Key Centre for Human Factors and Applied Cognitive Psychology and is capable of analysing large collections of text by either an automatic or a manual (user defined) process whereby the program tags, maps and mines the data set. It then produces a series of concept clusters that are represented a number of ways: graphically, in word lists that constitute each concept, in a table showing rank, percentage and frequency and in their relationship to other concepts within the text (for more information of the many uses of Leximancer, see: A. E. Smith, Grech, & Horberry, 2002).

For each concept that Leximancer extracts from the articles, it also produces a full reference library, where the actual instances in which the particular words relating to the concept are found. As well as this, each of the words is weighted in their relationship to each concept so that the data is not skewed by the frequency of irrelevant words or concepts. As is explained in the User's Manual (Leximancer, 2005), this means that a word, sentence or paragraph is only tagged as being related to a set concept if the sum of the weight of each particular keyword is higher than a set threshold.

Most importantly, though, Leximancer tracks the co-occurrences of the concepts that it extracts. This means that Leximancer is not only capable of providing a basic content analysis with descriptive statistics, but that it is able to discover the key discourses or concepts within a text, what they are made up of and how those discourses stand in relation to others within the text. There are, therefore, several advantages to using Leximancer in such a study. Firstly, it is time efficient, allowing a large quantity of data to be analysed at the click of a button. Additionally, by setting Leximancer to automatically mine the data, any researcher bias is removed from the process, thereby removing issues such as coder reliability and subjectivity. This has quickly made Leximancer a sought after tool which has now been applied to a variety of media studies, the most relevant of which would be Liu's (2004) investigation into the representation of Chinese ethnic groups in Australian newspapers.

As the focus of this study was to discover the ways in which the Iraqi election was represented in the Australian and Middle Eastern print media,

the analysis was conducted on two levels. Firstly, the data was analysed by Leximancer to identify the top 10 concepts within the Australian and Middle Eastern coverage in order to gain an initial insight into the data. In order to compare and contrast the ways in which the election was represented in each data set, the top 10 concepts were further divided across five broad Themes: 'Iraq', 'US', 'Democracy', 'Politics and People', as well as a final miscellaneous theme entitled 'Other' (see Table 2). Following this, the 5 highest ranked co-occurrences for each of the top 10 concepts were examined, with the co-occurrence of concepts from within the same Theme being excluded from further analysis (see Appendix A for the Australian data and Appendix B for the Middle Eastern data). Although this data would enable further quantitative assessment, this paper is primarily concerned with extracting more qualitative results which are explored further in the discussion.

Table 2: The Four Themes and the Top 10 Concepts per Region

Theme	Aus. Top 10 Concepts	Rank	Mid. East Top 10 Concepts	Rank
Iraq	Iraq	1	Iraq	1
	Iraqi	7	-	-
US	US	2	US	3
	-	-	American	5
	Bush	6	Bush	9
Democracy	Democracy	3	Democracy	4
	Election	8	-	-
Politics and People	-	-	Arab	2
	People	4	-	-
	Political	5	-	-
	-	-	World	6
	Government	9	Government	7
	-	-	Political	8
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	People	10
Other	Year	10	-	-

Results

The Australian Print Media (Appendix A):

Not surprisingly, the leading way in which the Iraq election was portrayed in the Australian newspaper was via the theme 'Iraq' (made up of the concepts Iraq (ranked 1) and Iraqi (7)). Overall, this theme co-occurred most prominently with the concept of 'US', followed by 'People', 'Democracy', 'Bush' as well as 'Political', 'Government' and the one-off appearance of an unsurprising term, 'Security'. Following this was the theme of 'United States' (US (2) and Bush(6)) which co-occurred strongly with the concepts 'Iraq', 'Iraqi' and 'Democracy', along with 'People' and 'Political' and the one-off, 'Troops'. The theme of 'Democracy' (Democracy (3), Election (8)) was found to co-occur most strongly with the concepts 'Iraq', 'US', 'People', 'Political' and 'Government' accompanied by another unsurprising one-off term, 'Vote'.

Next, the theme 'Politics and People' (People (4), Political (5) and Government (9)) co-occurred most strongly with the concepts 'Iraq' and 'Iraqi'. It also co-occurred strongly with 'Democracy,' 'US,' 'Bush' and 'Elections' with a reference to a final one-off co-occurrence, 'Parties'. Finally, the miscellaneous concept of 'Year' (10) (most likely explained by the fact that the news studied covered the final days of 2005 and therefore included reflections on that year in Iraq) co-occurred with 'Iraq', 'US', 'Political', 'People' and 'Democracy'.

The Middle Eastern Print Media (Appendix B):

As with the Australian papers, the foremost way that the election in Iraq was portrayed in the Middle Eastern media was via the theme 'Iraq' (Iraq (1)). Co-occurring most significantly with this, were the concepts 'US', 'American', 'Democracy', followed by 'Iraqi' and 'Bush'. The 'United States' (US (3), American (5) and Bush (9)) was the second theme which co-occurred very prominently with 'Iraq' followed by 'Political' and 'Arab'. Additionally the 'United States' theme also co-occurred with 'Middle East' (which does not appear as a concept, but does appear 3 times as a co-occurrence in the Middle Eastern data), followed by 'Democracy' and 'World'. Following this was the theme of 'Democracy' (Democracy (4)) which co-occurred with 'Iraq', 'World' and 'Bush' as well as the already mentioned term 'Middle East', followed by 'Political'. The largest theme for the Middle Eastern data, 'Politics and People' (Arab (2), World (6), Government (7), Political (8), People (10)) is better understood when broken down by concept: The concept of 'Arab' co-occurs strongly with 'World', 'Year' (which appears as a whole concept in the Australian data above), 'American' and the interesting one-off co-occurrences of 'State' and 'Public'. 'World' – as has been stated – co-occurs strongly with 'Arab' as well as 'Iraq', 'Democracy', 'US' and 'Bush'. The concept of 'Government' is made up of co-occurrences with 'Iraq', 'Iraqi', 'Political', 'Elections' (which appears as a concept in the Australian data but as a series of 2 separate co-occurrences in the Middle Eastern data) and 'American'. 'Political' appears to co-occur with 'Iraq', 'Democracy', 'Government', 'US' and the revealing one-off co-occurrence of 'Process'. Finally, the concept of 'People' is made up of 'Iraq', 'Iraqi', 'Democracy', 'Government' and the second appearance of the co-occurrence 'Elections.'

Discussion

These crude quantitative results enable a more thorough interpretation through the use of the qualitative approach called discourse analysis. This approach has a long-standing tradition in Cultural Studies, and has been applied to the study of newspapers by many media theorists (such as: Fairclough, 1995; Tolson, 1996; Van Dijk, 1991). In this context, media discourses can be seen to be made up of socially constitutive language which journalists use to "...reflect the norms and values of the cultural context in which they work and, thus, draw on the tools provided by the hegemonic ideology when constructing news frames" (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002: 651). This type of media analysis therefore reveals both the pervading ideology of the context in which the text is written and the types of discourses used to construct certain events or peoples (Pietikainen & Hujanen, 2003: 256-257). Specifically, by closely examining the ways in which the Iraqi election has been constructed and represented in both the Australian and Middle Eastern print media, we can begin to understand the discourses that underpin these texts, the ideological environ in which they are produced and the ways in which these are disseminated to the respective readership.

The Australian Print Media:

As has been discussed at some length in the introduction, the Western media has tended to homogenise, simplify and even demonise the Middle East generally and Iraq since at least as far back as the Gulf War. It is therefore not surprising to find that the Australian media has continued in this vein during its coverage of Iraq's democratisation. This is evidenced by the results of the quantitative analyses outlined above which reveal a lack of references to concepts such as 'Arab' or 'World' and co-occurrences such as 'Middle East'. Here, the Australian media has viewed the Iraqi election through a relatively narrow optic, eschewing key information about the region, its people and the impact that Iraq's election might have upon them.

These results are further supported by closer scrutiny of the coverage itself. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Australian coverage tends to focus on the details of the various factions and elements vying for power in the complicated matrix that is Iraqi politics as well as the ongoing violence there. Underlying this is repeated justifications for the continued Australian involvement in Iraq and warnings about the dangers of a "cut and run" strategy (including an article by Australia's (former) Defence Minister, see: Hill, 2006). Indeed, these dangers are said to include a military coup, leading to the rise of another Saddam style despot (Belkin, 2006) and that without such a strongman (or political consensus), Iraq is doomed to anarchy (Behm, 2005). Alternatively, Iraq would crumble into three separate states (Clemons, 2005) or become a safe-haven for Al Qaeda similar to Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban ("Reporting for Duty," 2006).

This type of coverage is coupled with extensive praise for the December elections as a "milestone" on Iraq's journey towards democracy. While this is no doubt true, the Australian media often reports this as further justification for the war in Iraq and in support of the stated objectives of George W Bush to implant democracy in the heart of the Middle East in the hope that it will spread across the region (for details, see: Bagaric & Morss, 2005; Gawenda, 2006). For example, in *The Australian* Joshua Muravchick (re-printed from the Los Angeles Times) states, "Some of the credit for reversing this [the poor levels of democracy in the Middle East prior to 2003] belong to President George W. Bush's strategy of promoting freedom and democracy, including by means of war in Iraq" (2005). The irony of promoting freedom and democracy with war is apparently lost in such coverage, which is not particularly surprising given both Australia's close relationship with the United States and its involvement in the 'Coalition of the Willing'. Furthermore, there are also instances of broad assumptions and complete ignorance of Iraq's long culture of civil society, heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism (for more on this, see: Isakhan, 2005b, 2005c). Such coverage asserts that "Iraqis are not used to democracy...and they have little tradition of tolerance" ("Another Positive Step," 2006) and that "they feel that violence remains the more pragmatic way to achieve justice and to protect one's interests" (Clemons, 2005).

Collectively, this kind of coverage can be seen as analogous to the discourses uncovered by Said in the academic, bureaucratic and literary texts of the early modern period as detailed in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978). What is of particular relevance here is Said's assertion that the hegemonic group or coloniser (in this instance, the US / Australia) generate certain forms of knowledge about those that are subordinated or colonised (the Iraqi's / Middle East), and that this knowledge is disseminated to the

general public (via the Australian media). This has served to construct the people of the Orient as “degenerate, primitive or backward, uncivilized, (and) unreliable” (Poynting et al., 2004). This representation leads to the assumption that Middle Easterners - even when offered democracy and freedom – either cannot rise above their cruel, brutal ‘nature’ or that they are simply unable to grasp the complexities of this Western concept. Essentially, this reflects the colonialist adage that lies at the heart of Orientalism – “that it may be impossible to ‘reform the savages’” (Seymour, 2004: 356).

The Middle Eastern Print Media:

The Middle Eastern newspapers tell a very different story altogether. Where the Australian media follows in the Orientalist tradition of marginalising and homogenising the East, the Middle Eastern papers tell a much more balanced story. This can be seen via the theme of ‘Politics and People’ which is made up of five concepts (as opposed to the Australian media which has only three). Specifically, this theme contains the very prominent concept of ‘Arab’ (which ranks second after ‘Iraq’) and ‘World’ (neither of which appear in the Australian data) as well as three references to the co-occurrence of ‘Middle East’, as well as ‘State’, ‘Public’ and ‘Process’.

As is to be expected, a closer analysis of the Middle Eastern articles supports these findings and negates much of the Australian coverage. Firstly, the Middle Eastern coverage is much more critical of America’s foreign policy, particularly the war against Iraq and the goal of spreading democracy across the Middle East. This coverage includes mention of the fact that the US did not seek the advice of the leaders of the region prior to the Iraq war (Nacheva, 2006), the double standards of the West when dealing with certain Arab tyrants (Alrabaa, 2006a) and, more generally, America’s “policy of imperialism and creating problems for countries that do not agree with its policies and interests” (Al-Sabah, 2006). Perhaps these sentiments, and others, are best summed up by one such report which states,

Even the most committed democracy advocates in the region are concerned about the idea of U.S. involvement in their countries. In Iraq, the Americans have proven that although they may have the best of intentions, they are capable of horrible bungling and catastrophic errors. They can be duped by faulty intelligence, they can fail to adequately plan for their military adventures, they can commit egregious human rights abuses and they can refuse to admit their mistakes. While there are many in the region who welcome democracy, there are few who would welcome too much American assistance in this regard. And none would wish for themselves the kind of instability that we see in Iraq. Therefore even those who support vibrant relations with the West are fearful of excessive American meddling. (“Can America convince the Lebanese that it has good intentions?,” 2006)

Almost as if by reaction to the assumptions and ignorance found in the Australian coverage, the Middle Eastern papers point out the indignation felt when Western countries lecture the region “on human rights, political and social rights for women, democracy, freedom of speech, fairness and religious tolerance” (Al-Baddah, as cited in: Alrabaa, 2006b). The offence taken here stems from the claim that each of these values can be found in Islam and that they were in fact developed in the Middle East and then “spread across the globe” (Al-Baddah, as cited in: Alrabaa, 2006b). Furthermore, much of the Middle Eastern reportage goes on to document the

recent rise of Arab public opinion (Bar'el, 2006) and the effectiveness of the citizenry in rebelling “against the many indignities and inequities that he or she has endured in silence for decades – mostly vibrations of abuse of power by unelected, unaccountable elites from their own country or abroad” (Khouri, 2005). Many such reports go even further, detailing the specifics of the democratic developments across the region that have occurred in recent years. This discussion is wide ranging, and points to promising signs in countries as diverse as Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and of course, Iraq.

Overall, this seems to suggest that the Middle Eastern papers not only represent the interests of the Middle Eastern region as a whole, but reflect a keen awareness of the political machinations in Iraq and their consequences for the region. Here the Middle Eastern media avoids Orientalising Iraq's democratisation and challenges such discourses. Instead the Middle Eastern media reveals a discourse of public contemplation and concern over both the current disorder in Iraq and the wider regions democratisation. Additionally, it could also be argued that these papers show a greater concern for the people of Iraq, seeing them as less of a distant, barbaric enemy and more of a trouble-stricken part of the wider Arab / Muslim world.

Conclusion

The quantitative results of ranked concepts and their co-occurrences as well as the qualitative analysis reveal that the Australian and Middle Eastern news sources studied see Iraq's democratisation very differently. While it is not particularly surprising that the two sources tend to focus more on their respective region, it is the discourses that underpin this coverage that reveal significant differences and opposing ideological positions.

Firstly, the Middle Eastern coverage of the Iraq election can be seen to forego the Orientalist tradition of homogenising and demonising the Middle East, and focuses instead on the questions and issues facing the Middle East as a region. Specifically, Iraq's elections raise questions regarding its political process and the broader implications it may have across the Middle East. More broadly, the Middle Eastern print media tend to view the democratic developments across the region as less of a triumph for Western political ideology and more of a logical progression. The coverage of these issues in the media construct the Middle East as a heterogenous region made up of not only a number of nation-states, but also a number of ethnic, religious and cultural groups. Furthermore, this Middle Eastern coverage does not reveal a backward, barbaric Orient that is simply incapable of adopting or understanding the sophisticated Western concept of democracy. Instead, it reveals a gradual and contemplative yet well informed move towards democracy; perhaps most revealing in juxtaposition to the West's haste rather than as a sign of the East's backwardness.

The analysis of the Australian print media, on the other hand, reveals a reductionism and essentialism not found in the Middle Eastern sources. Collectively, the Australian coverage can be seen to align itself with not only much of the coverage of the Iraq war but of the Middle East more generally in the Western media. More to the point, the Australian print media seems to report the Iraqi election as both a justification for the war and as confirmation of the Us-led struggle to implant – and watch spread – Western democracy in the heart of the Middle East. This therefore raises a number of questions regarding the coverage of Iraq's election, particularly by the Australian print media. Specifically, the Australian media must be careful not to be reductive

in its coverage of Iraq and avoid falling back on pervading ideologies. In this way, the Australian media can move beyond Orientalist discourses and report a more well-balanced story; one that frames Iraq in less insular ways and more in terms of the consequences that events such as the Iraqi election may have throughout the Middle East. Here, the Australian print media can not only play a role in eschewing Orientalist discourses but they may also serve to re-think the binary opposition between East and West. Finally, by telling a more well rounded and historically accurate story, the Australian print media can play a role in abating the conflict in Iraq and aiding the shift from despotism to democracy.

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