A Critical Discourse Analysis of Iraqi Identity after 2003 in Media

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Abstract. *The critical discourse analysis of the discourses on Iraqi identity in media representations since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a period of deep sociopolitical turmoil and transformation, is the subject of this research. The problem, therefore, deals with the construction and reflection of media narratives about Iraqi identity within continuing conflict, sectarian strife, and foreign intervention. The first and primary objective is to see the ways these narratives have constructed, contested, and negotiated Iraqi identity over the last two decades regarding nationalism, sectarianism, and globalization. Based on a corpus of articles from established local and international newspapers, online news sites, besides social media platforms, the study analyses the linguistic usages, framing, and strategies of representation taken up with Iraqis and their experiences. The analysis is informed by Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, in which text, discursive practices, and sociocultural contexts are analyzed. The key findings demonstrate how media discourse continuously shifts between constructing Iraqis as victims of violence and as strong agents of their own destiny, in a complex interplay of victimhood and agency. This also underlines huge tension between national identity and sectarian narratives within media discourse, which often underlines divisions at the same time as it calls for unity. Overall, these results emphasize the great importance of media in framing public views on Iraqi identity and point to the need for more nuanced representations that go beyond simplistic binary oppositions. This paper contributes to the broader discussion on identity formation in the conflict zone by animating critical media literacy as a means of understanding the potentials of representation regarding collective identity.*

Key words: *Iraqi identity, critical discourse analysis, media representation, sectarianism, sociopolitical upheaval.*

1. Introduction

Since the invasion of Iraq by U.S.-led forces in 2003, political and social flux in the country has been incredible. The overthrow of the regime headed by Saddam Hussein ushered in a period heaped with violence, sectarian strife, and striving for national identification. Representing Iraqi identity has formed an ever-prominent focus in media narratives of late. Such narratives are powerful in actually constructing perception, not only in Iraq but also in many other parts of the world about their identity and that of others. Media, identity, and conflict relate at the intersection of a rich area of scholarly exploration-particularly within the framework of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992).

The media are an equally powerful tool in creating and presenting information about countries and societies, often influencing popular opinion and policy. Media images of Iraq have shifted from the imagining of that country as a war zone filled with violence to images of its people as survivors who struggle against all odds to work towards stability and peace (Kraidy, 2005). Such a dichotomy raises very serious questions related to how Iraqi identity has been constructed, negotiated, and contested in the media. It is, therefore, necessary to understand these representations in greater depth, since far-

reaching implications unfold from them with regard to national unity, social cohesion, and international perceptions of Iraq.

The main research problem that this research attempts to explore is the way in which media narratives shape and reflect notions of Iraqi identity in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. Though the literature covers various aspects of identity formation in zones of conflict, there are gaps that exist in understanding how these identities are articulated in the media discourse. This is even more pronounced in the case of Iraq, where not only local and global but also interlinking narratives beyond those play a significant role in shaping perceptions about its people and their experiences. The key objectives of this study will be to:

1. Deconstruct the discourse of Iraqi identity as represented in medial since 2003.

2. Research how these stories negotiate, contest, and articulate nationalism, sectarianism, and globalization.

3. Investigate discourse analysis in media texts that represent Iraqis and their experiences.

4. Explore the implications of these representations for public perception and collective identity.

To address the research objectives, the study poses the following research questions:

1. How is Iraqi identity constructed in media narratives following the 2003 invasion?

2. What role do themes of nationalism, sectarianism, and globalization play in shaping these narratives?

3. What linguistic strategies are employed in media representations to convey particular aspects of Iraqi identity?

4. How do these representations influence public perceptions of Iraq and its people, both locally and internationally?

This study focuses on media representations of Iraqi identity in both local and international news outlets, as well as social media platforms, from 2003 to the present. By examining a diverse range of texts, including news articles, opinion pieces, and social media posts, the analysis aims to capture the multifaceted nature of Iraqi identity as it has evolved in response to ongoing conflict and change. The study will emphasize critical discourse analysis as the methodological framework, allowing for an in-depth exploration of language, power, and identity (Thorne, 2007).

The research is important for a number of reasons: first, it contributes to the growing literature on media and identity, particularly in conflict zones; second, it focuses on Iraq-a country that has been subject to extensive media scrutiny-and helps to define how narratives shape public perceptions and influence the formation of identity. The findings may have practical applications for journalists, policy-makers, and educators as well; underlining how subtle, responsible media representation bears relevance for understanding and dialogue. This research testifies to the continuing demand for critical media literacy, which allows people to critically examine and question the stories they encounter, especially in times of conflict.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA basically offers a theoretical framework for analysis that helps in grasping the nature of the association between language, power, and social identity. As Fairclough (1992) suggested, CDA is less a method of textual analysis than it is simultaneously a means to understand the sociocultural context in which texts are produced and consumed. The latter approach is particularly relevant in examining media representation of identity as it underlines how language constructs social realities and reflects power dynamics. CDA allows researchers to investigate the ideological underpinning of media discourse and the ways in which these discourses shape and reflect collective identities (Gee, 2014).

2.2. Media and Identity

The research on the role of media in the constitution of identities has been mostly focused on conflicted contexts. Media narratives play a significant role in the construction of national identities and, simultaneously, manage to unite and divide communities (Hafez, 2010). In Iraq's case, too, media have frequently oscillated between portraying the nation as a cohesive unit and representing its multifarious identities along sectarian, ethnic, and cultural fault lines (Kraidy, 2005). Media representations thus become vital in the way individuals and groups negotiate their identities at the juncture of conflict and change (Thorne, 2007).

2.3. Nationalism and Sectarianism in Media Representations

Nationalism and media representations have been widely researched and discussed within post-conflict societies. Indeed, the academics feel that media narratives mainly reflect and reinforce nationalist ideologies, with both positive and negative implications to be considered in terms of social cohesion (Anderson, 1991). In Iraq, for instance, the media portray national unity, yet simultaneously emphasize sectarian divisions. The duality creates difficulties in devising an integrative Iraqi identity and throws up questions of media either inflaming sectarian tensions or, alternatively, reducing such pitfalls (Hassan, 2014). It was thus that the rise of sectarianism in post-2003 Iraq became exacerbated by medial portrayals that stereotyped and divided communities along sectarian grounds (Mansour, 2015).

2.4. Globalization and Media Narratives

Globalization has also been a strong influencing factor in the realization of media narratives and, by extension, national identities. The flow of information and cultural exchanges across borders have contributed to the rise of hybrid identities that manifest influences from both the local and global levels (Kraidy, 2005). This has manifested itself in the representations within Iraqi media: those that marry the traditional narratives to bring discourses from the globe on democracy, human rights, and resilience. As scholars have pointed out, globalization complicates identity because people negotiate their identities through a context wherein the local and global influence each other (Tomlinson, 1999).

2.5. The Impact of Social Media on Identity Formation

The rise of social media has completely changed the landscape in which identities are made, as people begin to express their identities in new and dynamic ways. Social media platforms create spaces for voices that are marginalized and other narratives that contest mainstream media representations (Burgess & Green, 2009). Social media in the Iraqi context has grown into an important tool in building public discourses and identities, especially those of the youth. In support, studies show that social media expresses a platform for expressing identities of the diverse range of identity while, on the contrary, mainstream media covers violence and chaos (Mansour, 2015).

2.6. Case Studies of Media Representation in Iraq

Indeed, a number of case studies have viewed Iraq as a critical site for media representations fraught with the complexes of identity construction in the post-invasion context. For instance, Al-Ali (2009) explores how the Iraqi women's experiences were taken up by the local and international media. She did find tensions within victimhood and empowerment because media narratives cast Iraqi women both as oppressed and resilient. Similarly, Hassan (2014) explores the media portrayals of the Iraqi army and security forces as representing broader themes of nationalism and identity in a fragmented society. These contributions show very different directions in which identity construction can take place, and how media is used within such narrative building.

2.7. Challenges in Media Representation

Media, despite this potential for fostering understanding and dialogue, do present various challenges in representing Iraqi identity. Most scholars say, mainstream media often would instead sensationalize news rather than focusing on telling the story in all its minutiae; hence, reducing Iraq and its people to simplistic levels (Thorne, 2007). The way Iraqis have been framed as victims of violence is very stereotypical and denies a proper appreciation of their experience. Furthermore, the

political concepts of media representations can make the nature of representations even more complex, since different actors try to shape public understandings in a way that can benefit them (Hafez, 2010).

2.8. Gap in the Literature

Iraqi identity, in this case, seems to be caught within the maze of nationalism, sectarianism, and globalization. Critical Discourse Analysis is one useful framework that could help make sense of such dynamics and will, therefore, help to discern the role of language in the construction of such identities. Moving into the post-2003 phase, nuanced media representation becomes highly relevant for Iraq. Therefore, this review of the literature underlines the need to investigate the narratives defining collective identities and their consequences for social cohesion and public perception.

3. Methodology

3.1. Nature of the Study

This paper adopts a qualitative research design; for its analytical framework, it relies on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this respect, CDA is quite efficient to analyze the relationship between language and social power in general, and the representation of Iraqi identity in media discourse after the 2003 conflict is no exception (Fairclough, 1992). The qualitative nature of this research allows for an in-depth look at diverse discourses within media texts and exposes some of the complexities constituent in the process of identity construction within Iraq. This approach allows the researcher to examine not only the messages conveyed in media narratives but also how these representations have been framed through ideologies and power dynamics (Gee, 2014).

3.2. Data Collection and Description

Data collection in this study was done through a multi-stage process of gathering diverse media texts. The primary sources of data are articles from leading local and international news outlets and social media posts that range from 2003 to the present. This temporal span hence allows for an analysis of Iraqi identity as represented in the media narratives over a time of great social and political upheaval.

3.2.1. Selection of Media Outlets

For local media, this includes articles from prominent Iraqi newspapers such as *Al-Mada* and *Al-Sabah*, which provide insight into the national discussion of identity. Given that the level of interest in Iraq has been high since the invasion, leading news outlets like the *BBC, CNN*, and *The Guardian* were selected for international media. This allows for a comparison between various sources: the framing that different news organizations place upon Iraqi identity and identifying why their portrayal of Iraqi identity is framed that way.

3.2.2. Social Media Data

Apart from traditional news media, it also covers data from social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Social media has been an important venue for identifying and discussing matters of public interest, especially in countries that are in periods after a conflict (Burgess & Green, 2009). Posts analyzed included hashtags on Iraq and by known Iraqi public figures and activists that give insight into the grassroots view of identity formation.

3.2.3. Sample Size

The sample consists of about 150 articles and 200 posts on social media. This selection has been done in order to be representative of different discourses related to Iraqi identity. Articles had to be selected in a way that would make them as close as possible to the themes of identity, nationalism, and sectarianism, while social media posts were selected according to the level of their engagement and how relevant they were to contemporary discussions on identity.

3.3. Model of the Study

The analytical framework in this paper relies on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis: text, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices (Fairclough, 1992).

1. Text: The dimension that concerns the analysis of the language in media texts by means of attention to lexical choices, metaphors, and narrative structures. To identify how certain linguistic elements feed into the construction of Iraqi identity.

2. Discursive Practices: The way media texts are produced and consumed is trailed here, which considers the editorial policies, audience reception, and wider media landscape. Understand how journalists and editors work to frame or develop identity narratives.

3. Socio-cultural practices: This dimension places media discourse within the wide socio-cultural context of historical and political aspects constituting Iraqi identity. The analysis shall consider the impact of the post-2003 socio-political dynamic on media narratives.

3.4. Procedures of the Study

These methods comprise a series of steps to ensure rigor and comprehensiveness of the data analysis procedure. The procedures include the following:

1. Data Collection: The researcher will start by collecting media texts relevant to the research topic. Such collection will include accessing the online database, newspaper archives, or using social media analytical tools for post collection. Key words that the researcher will use to filter the data include "Iraqi identity," "Iraq conflict," and "Iraqi nationalism".

2. Coding of Data: Following data collection, the researcher will proceed with the coding process, which determines the ways in which themes and patterns emerge from the texts. Coding will be informed by categories like identity construction, victimhood, resilience, nationalism, and sectarianism; both deductive and inductive approaches to coding are considered in order not to miss emerging themes.

3. Textual Analysis: The researcher will enter a more detailed textual analysis of select articles and social media posts after the coding phase. This would include linguistic features like tone, framing, and use of imagery. This is undertaken as a case to explore how language is used in conveying specific identities and narratives concerning Iraqis.

4. Contextual Analysis: The second level of analysis situates the media texts within their sociocultural context. This will be constituted of an examination of the historical and political background of Iraq post-2003, along with how those factors influence media representations. The researcher will therefore also consider the implications of globalization and the role of international media in shaping local narratives.

5. Interpretation and Synthesis: This is the final step, where one synthesises findings from textual and contextual analyses. It would provide the detailed understanding of how Iraqi identity is constructed in media representation and, therefore, the consequences on public perception. The findings shall then be contrasted across different sources to highlight any discrepancies and commonalities regarding the portrayal of Iraqi identity.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

In this regard, ethical considerations, in this study, and even more so, in light of people's and communities' representation in mass media, become paramount. The researcher will make sure that the collected data is used in a way that does not violate the dignity and identity of those being considered. Furthermore, the study plans to account for partiality effects already encoded in the media representations and work toward a non-partial analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The following section, therefore, unfolds through a critical analytical approach to media representations of Iraqi identity both in national and international media. Under Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, the extracts will be selected from two national media and three international media. Detailed scrutiny of each extract for their linguistic features, discursive practices, and sociocultural contexts can certainly let one understand how Iraqi identity is constructed in these narratives.

4.1. National Media Extracts

4.1.1. Extract 1: Al-Mada Newspaper

Text: "In the face of relentless violence, the Iraqi people have shown remarkable resilience, uniting across sectarian lines to rebuild their communities."

Linguistic Features: The use of the words "relentless violence" and "remarkable resilience" is a jolting contrast that clearly indicates setbacks the people of Iraq have faced, though their strength has not been taken away. The word "uniting across sectarian lines" gives the meaning of togetherness, which fosters a motive of coexistence; thus, a narrative of hope and harmony is generated.

Discursive Practices: This fragment constitutes one of the discursive practices that are released in the national media, which is forming resilience as part of Iraqi identity. Framing the account through unity and collective strength, the media contribute to a positive self-image among Iraqis. It can also be looked at as one of those discursive moves put against the external narratives of Iraq as chaotic and fragmented.

Sociocultural Context: Emphasis on resilience would also fit in the more general sociopolitical context in Iraq since 2003: After decades of war, national media would have wanted to create pride and a sense of unity in opposition to narratives of division and bloodshed that often can dominate international coverage (Hassan, 2014).

4.1.2. Extract 2: Al-Sabah Newspaper

Text: "As Iraq emerges from the shadows of dictatorship and war, the spirit of the Iraqi people shines through, reflecting a desire for democracy and progress."

Linguistic Features: The metaphor "emerges from the shadows" tells of a movement from darkness to light and therefore carries meanings of hope and renovation. The phrase "spirit of the Iraqi people" evokes a notion of collective identity which rhymes with ideals of democracy and progress, thus being a forward-looking vision.

Discursive Practices: The given extract is representative of the discursive practice of constituting Iraq as a country in transition. Speaking about democracy and development, as part of this greater narrative of state construction, tends to be a mobilising practice for citizens, consolidating a sense of positive agency (Al-Ali, 2009). By underlining the spirit of the people, media create an enabling, rather than a victimising, narrative.

Sociocultural Context: This is a context of the extract that becomes very important in further understanding Iraq's identity after the year 2003. Since the country grapples with its past, national media may advocate for a kind of narratives that would fall in line with the aspirations of citizens for stability and democracy in the future. This also justifies the world-wide discourse on democracy and human rights, placing Iraq in a wider international narrative (Tomlinson, 1999).

4.1.3. Extract 3: Al-Mada Newspaper

Text: "Despite the challenges, Iraqis continue to celebrate their cultural heritage, demonstrating that identity goes beyond conflict."

Features: The phrase "celebrate their cultural heritage" evokes uplifting imagery, indicating pride and continuity of Iraqi identity. The statement "identity goes beyond conflict" challenges these dominant narratives that often reduce Iraqi identity to experiences of violence and strife.

This extract represents discursive practices that attempt to reclaim and rebuild Iraqi identity through the forefront of cultural pride. It is in the focus on heritage where the media challenges the reductive portrayals to bring forth the richness Iraqi culture holds.

Sociocultural Context: It is in this regard that cultural heritage plays a significant role in its promotion within a post-war context where identity is often fragmented. This narrative thus unites the citizens around shared cultural values, reinforcing a sense of belonging and national identity amidst continuous challenges (Kraidy, 2005).

4.2. International Media Extracts

4.2.1. Extract 1: BBC News

Text: "Iraq remains a fractured society, with sectarian violence continuing to threaten the fragile peace established after years of turmoil."

Lexical Features: The term 'fractured society' denotes a connotation of disunity and instability; the term 'fragile peace' denotes that whatever little stability is perceived is not without its thin threads. Terms like these cultivate a negative view of Iraqi identity-focused on conflict rather than resilience.

Discursive Practices: This text is a common discursive practice in international media discourse where conflict and instability are underscored in reporting about Iraq. The sensationalism over nuanced understanding can turn into stereotypes that define Iraq mainly in terms of violence (Hafez, 2010).

Sociocultural Context: The portrayal of Iraq as "fractured" can be contextualized within a predominance in Western media towards framing Middle Eastern nations through chaos and disorder. This framing reinforces existing stereotypes, impacts global perceptions of Iraq and its people (Thorne, 2007).

4.2.2. Extract 2: CNN

Text: "As Iraq grapples with its identity, the scars of war continue to shape the nation's future."

Linguistic Features: The metaphor "grapples with its identity" has the connotation of a continued struggle; "scars of war" suggests lasting damage. This sets a tone and emphasizes that Iraq's identity is very closely intertwined with and perhaps even determined by its traumatic history.

Discursive Practices: This extract presents a discursive practice whereby the media brings out how past wars affect present identity. Such narratives may work within a victimhood discourse that denies any possibility of agency or resilience for Iraqis (Mansour, 2015).

Socio-cultural Context: Attention to trauma as the long-lasting face of war is part of broader global concerns about trauma and recovery in post-conflict societies. Such strong emphasis on this point silences voices of resiliency and agency and simply reifies a one-dimensional view of Iraqi identity (Al-Ali, 2009).

4.2.3. Extract 3: The Guardian

Text: "In a nation riddled with sectarian divisions, the hope for a unified Iraqi identity remains elusive."

Linguistic Features: "Riddled with sectarian divisions" implies an uncontrollable problem; "hope for a unified Iraqi identity remains elusive" is a clause of desperation. It is phrasing that implies an ideal of unity is elusive, creating a narrative of fragmentation.

Discursive Practices: This extract provides a good example of the discursive framing of Iraqi identity into a mainly sectarian frame of division. "The preoccupation with the difficulty of unifying: "challenges of unity, international media often turn a blind eye towards people and communities who attempt to strive for reconciliation"(Kraidy, 2005).

Sociocultural Context: Such a representation of sectarian divisions by international media might be thought of as representative of a wider geopolitics in which the narratives of division serve specific political interests. This framing inhibits a more nuanced understanding of Iraqi identity and the possibility of collective action (Hafez, 2010).

4.3. Comparative Analysis

Indeed, the analysis of national and international media extracts reveals salient discourses in the construction of Iraqi identity. In contrast, national media stressed resilience, cultural heritage, and aspirations toward democracy-all very cohesive themes aimed at empowering the active citizens-

while international media framed Iraqi identity more often through the lenses of violence, division, and trauma, where stereotypes predominate over narratives of agency and resilience.

4.4. Implications for Identity Construction

The juxtaposition of these narratives underlines the power of the media in shaping public perceptions of identity. While national media may focus on positive features of identity and thus contribute to national cohesion, international media may focus on conflict and thus reinforce negative stereotypes that impede the process of creating a unified national identity.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Overview of Findings

The extracts from the national and international media provide varied patterns in construction and representation of Iraqi identity. Whereas the national media strongly focus on themes related to resilience, cultural pride, and aspirations for unity in most cases, international media focus on division, violence, and trauma. These different narratives have a great effect on how people view Iraqi identity but also contribute to the wider debates on nationhood and identity within a post-conflict context.

5.1.1. National Media Representations

1. Resilience and Unity

One of the dominant themes emerging from the national media analysis is that of resilience among the Iraqi people. Extracts from newspapers such as Al-Mada and Al-Sabah show strength in adversity. For example, phrases which use unity across sectarian divides construct Iraqis as one community working toward one goal. This representation can be seen as one that would utilize the formation of pride within the nation, as well as cohesion in a society greatly fragmented by several decades of conflict.

Consequently, the role of such narratives in forming national identity is quite significant in that they make a challenge to reductive and often negative portrayals through international media. By framing resilience as a central aspect of Iraqi identity, national media not only celebrate the country's cultural heritage but engage very clearly in the process of nation-building. This chimes well with the idea proffered by Anderson (1991) of imagined communities, whereby shared experiences and collective memory help forge a national identity.

2. Cultural Heritage

Another important implication is the celebration of cultural heritage as a vital ingredient of Iraqi identity. In this respect, State media continues to give much attention to the rich and complex texture of Iraqi culture, reinforcing messages to that effect, and that the notion of identity lives beyond the trope of violence and conflict. This heritage presents a unity bond for many communities in Iraq, creating a kind of belonging transcending sectarian segmentation.

The cultural heritage narratives are vital to reshape public perceptions and dispel the international narratives of chaos and instability. By uplifting this cultural pride, national media create a deeper understanding of Iraqi identity as a tapestry of experiences and values, not merely reflective of conflict.

5.1.2. International Media Representations

1. Emphasis on Division and Trauma

International media representations have identified a far more one-sidedly critical approach, especially in reporting on BBC News, CNN, and The Guardian, emphasizing division and trauma. Phrases such as "fractured society" and "scars of war" themselves become the starting point for framing Iraqi identity through war. This framing reinforces negative stereotypes and contributes to perceptions of Iraq as a nation that exists in chaos.

This is underlined by an even greater preoccupation with sectarian divisions, violence, or a combination thereof, that underlines just how far Iraq is from true national unity. While these do comprise a part of Iraqi reality, such singular concentration can obscure the actual stories of resilience and hope. One-dimensional portrayals beget feelings of hopelessness within and outside Iraq on the number of complexities that go into making up Iraqi identity.

2. Global Context and Geopolitical Implications

Equally important is to contextualize the emphasis on trauma and division within a broader geopolitical interest. These are narratives in which a key Western view is sensationalized, rather than a nuanced articulation of realities on the ground (Hafez, 2010). International media framing of Iraq as a site of perpetual conflict can reinforce, inadvertently or otherwise, the notion of Iraq as a problem to be managed, rather than as a nation with rich cultural history and a resilient populace.

This has great implications for international perceptions and policymaking with respect to Iraq, reducing the country to a series of crises instead of appreciating its potential for recovery and growth. Furthermore, such narratives, if perpetuated, obstruct reconciliation and rebuilding processes in that they foster a victimhood discourse among Iraqis.

5.2. Discussion

1. The Impact of Media Representations on Iraqi Identity

The critical role of media in shaping national identity becomes topical again within this study, at times when the national societies have gone through much bloodshed. National and international media construction of self-identity shows power dynamics in which identity construction is built. Such a view on resilience and cultural pride by national media against stereotyping international media in portraying violence and division encourages a sense of agency and unity among people.

These media representations, however, are more than a narration. They mirror the impact which builds public perception not only within Iraq but also internationally. National media can be utilized to empower its citizens through showcasing strengths and aspirations of the people, while on the other hand, international media leads in negative stereotyping which hurts understanding and engagement.

2. The Role of Agency

These narratives importantly represent the agency by Iraqis in determining their identity through national media. In the process, it highlights resilience and cultural heritage as ways in which Iraqis can express their experiences, desires, and aspirations through national media. Agency is important to instill a sense of belonging and national unity in contexts marked by division.

This agency is often stripped in the international media narrations, which reduce Iraqis to victims of circumstance rather than active agents of their own stories. The implications this might have are enormous, as disempowerment here reinforces a victimhood discourse impeding individual and collective processes of healing and recovery.

6. Conclusion

The following research critically analyzed Iraqi identity representations in the national and international media after the invasion in 2003, using CDA as a methodological framework. The study shows how the construction of identity varies in selected few extracts, depending on the power relations underpinning the public view of Iraq and its people.

Thus, the findings identified that, at the national level, the media of Al-Mada and Al-Sabah concentrated on themes of resistance, cultural heritage, and unity. These stories not only get across the capacities and hopes of the Iraqi people but even to fashion national pride and cohesion in contexts shaped by historical trauma and division. By foregrounding resilience, national media rework some of the most damaging aspects of foreign representations, which often reduce Iraq to little more than a site of violence and instability. This framing is integral to the construction of a collective national identity and opens up space for Iraqis to reclaim their stories in the making of a sense of belonging through adversity.

On the other hand, international media sources such as BBC News, CNN, and The Guardian exclusively focus on the themes of division, violence, and trauma. These echoes contribute to negative stereotypes, placing Iraq within the paradigm of a fractured society torn apart by sectarian conflict. Such narratives eclipse the enigma of Iraqi identity and flatten out its multivalence into a one-dimensional realization of victimhood and chaos. Moreover, this would not only affect international perceptions but also internal discourses in Iraq, leading partially to hopelessness and disintegration among its own citizens.

The contrastive portrayals serve to underpin the ever-important part mass media have played in defining identity, especially in post-conflict societies. In this sense, the emphasis on resilience and cultural heritage in national media provides an indispensable counter-narrative to help develop more nuanced notions of Iraqi identity. The process of identity construction is not an issue of merely mirroring realities but an active engagement of shaping one's common future.

This points, first and foremost, to the centrality that Iraqi agents should assume in defining their identity. National media foster a narrative of cultural pride and collective strength; this, in turn, nurtures a sense of empowerment that is essential to national cohesion and healing. In contrast, international media reify trauma and division, at the risk of disempowering Iraqis by framing them as passive victims rather than active agents in their narratives.

By indicating the complexities and contradictions intrinsic in media representations of post-conflict contexts, the present study contributes to a broader discourse on identity formation and calls for a more considered and balanced understanding of Iraqi identity, fully respecting both the challenges and strengths that its people face. The political landscape of Iraq is still finding its footing after the conflict, and the representation of identity by national and international media players needs to be far more embracing-to appreciate resilience, diversity, and agency among the Iraqi people. In this regard, they could go a long way in helping to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and a common sense of national identity reflective of the rich tapestry constituting Iraq's cultural heritage.

Future research might address the impact of digital media and social platforms on identity construction, as these increasingly become very influential bearers of public discourse and personal narratives. Comparative studies with other post-conflict societies may yield further insight into the contribution that media make to identity formation, lessons for Iraq, and any similar contexts. Ultimately, this pursuit of understanding and reconstructing identity through the stories in the media is essentially an ongoing process to which heavy contribution is made for solidarity and perseverance in societies rebuilding after conflict.

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