Media discourse and Iraq's democratisation : reporting the 2005 constitution in the Australian and Middle Eastern print media

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Abstract

This paper analyses in detail the coverage of two milestones in Iraq's shift towards democracy: the drafting and approval of the constitution by Iraq's interim government (August 2005) and the ratification of this constitution via the Iraqi polls (October 2005). Aside from some rudimentary quantitative analysis, a critical discourse analysis method is utilised to compare and contrast the discursive practices used in three of Australia's leading daily newspapers (The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age) with three Middle Eastern English-language papers (The Daily Star, Anadolu Agency and the Jordan Times). The paper finds that the Australian print media continues the neo-Orientalist tradition of media coverage of Middle Eastern democracy, while the Middle Eastern press eschews these discourses in favour of a more open, varied debate on Iraq's constitution and the future of democracy across the region.

Introduction

The issue of democracy and the Middle East in the late 20th/early 21st centuries has been highly contentious from at least as far back as Huntington's essay on "The goals of development" (1987). Huntington argued that each region of the globe has its own individual religio-cultural essence that plays a large part in determining receptivity to democratic systems (Huntington, 1987, p. 24). In his later work, Huntington isolated two such religio-cultural examples, namely Islam and Confucianism, and labelled them "... profoundly anti-democratic" (Huntington, 1991, p. 300), claiming they would "... impede the spread of democratic norms in society, deny legitimacy to democratic institutions, and thus greatly complicate if not prevent the emergence and ef-

fectiveness of those institutions" (Huntington, 1991, p. 298). Huntington's most influential book *The clash of civilisations and the remaking of world order* (1998), which builds on his earlier work, goes even further by claiming that the early 21st century will be marred by the battle – both physical and ideological – between these anti-democratic "civilisations" and the West.

Although the notion that "... social and cultural forces thwart democratic possibilities in the Middle East is not new" (Kamrava, 1998, p. xiv), Huntington's argument has garnered wide support from neo-conservative foreign policy pundits and neo-Orientalist academics alike. One such example is Kedourie's work on *Democracy and Arab political culture* (1994), which details several democratic experiments that sprang up across the Middle East throughout the first half of the 20th century (namely Iraq 1921-1938, Syria 1928-1949, Lebanon 1926-1975 and Egypt 1923-1952). The central reason these attempts at introducing constitutional rule to the Middle East failed, according to Kedourie, is that the people of the Middle East have historically been accustomed to "... autocracy and passive obedience" (1994, p. 103). Kamrava takes this argument a step further by stating that "... it is the forces of primordialism, informality and autocracy that have shaped and continue to shape the parameters of life in Middle Eastern societies" (1998, p. 32). It is this fundamental lack of a democratic history, Kamrava argues, that has left the Middle East without the necessary social and cultural dynamics to foster various democratic movements, institutions and classes that make up a thriving civil society and give rise to democratic governance (Kamrava, 1998, pp. 31-32). Indeed, the Middle East's inability to produce a functioning civil society has also been commented on by Gellner, who cites the purported inseparability of religion and state as a preventative factor (1991).

However, there has also emerged a significant body of work running counter to these scholars. For example, on the issue of civil society, many scholars have challenged those who dismiss Middle Eastern developments towards democratisation (Al-Sayyid, 1993; Bellin, 1995; Brand, 1995; Crystal, 1995; Entelis, 1995; Hicks & al-Najjar, 1995; Hinnebusch, 1993; Ibrahim, 1993; Kazemi, 1995; Khiabany & Sreberny, 2001; Kingston, 2001; Muslih, 1993; Nanes, 2003; Norton, 1993; Richards, 1993; Roy, 1995; Sajoo, 2004; Skalli, 2006; Tetreault, 1993; Toprack, 1995), with one writer labelling them as "... orientalists and mongers of ethnocentrism" (Ibrahim, 1995, p. 30). Foremost among this body of work are the contributions found in the twin volumes of *Civil society in the Middle East* (Norton, 1995b), where the editor claims that "... civil society is today part of the political discourse in the Middle East ... [it] is the locus for debate, discussion, and dialogue ..." (Norton, 1995a, p. 25). Norton also notes that there is no reason why Western models of democracy should be adaptable to other regions and that the Middle East is more likely to "... evolve its own characteristic style of democracy, no doubt with an Islamic idiom in some instances" (Norton, 1995a, p. 5).

The region has experienced some extraordinary developments in recent years. First, the Moroccan local and parliamentary elections of 1992-1993 "... were more open than earlier ones", with the 1997 elections being even more so (Eickelman, 2003, p. 39). Likewise, there was a series of elections throughout the early to mid 1990s in Yemen, Algeria and Jordan, although these brought with them only limited steps towards democratisation (Amawi, 1994; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1998, p. 186). During the late 1990s, regimes such as those of Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia also made some progress towards democratisation, initiating limited experiments with consultative councils (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1998, p. 186). More recently, Algeria held another election in 1999, and its subsequent 2004 election was heralded by one Western observer as "... one of the best conducted elections, not just in Algeria, but in Africa and much of the Arab world" (Ottaway & Carothers, 2004, p. 24). In Egypt, the 2000 parliamentary elections "... were for the first time supervised by a judiciary which is not always in line with the regime" (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004, p. 374), and, in 2005, President Mubarak called on parliament to amend the constitution so he could be challenged for the leadership in the nation's first multi-candidate popular vote (Zambelis, 2005, p. 91). In 2002, Qatar introduced a new constitution that permits,

for the first time in the country's history, the citizenry (including women) to partake in direct and secret voting (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004, p. 374). In addition, 2005 saw some extraordinary democratic developments across the Middle East. These included a successful series of public demonstrations across Lebanon (dubbed the "Cedar Revolution"), following the assassination of Rafik Hariri, that saw the ousting of Syrian troops and, subsequently, the first free election in many years (Rubin, 2006, p. 230). Saudi Arabia held municipal elections, the first of any kind in this nation for decades (Zambelis, 2005, p. 91). Furthermore, Palestine held its first election, leading to the ascension of the controversial group Hamas to power in early 2006, Pakistan had local body elections and Afghanistan held its first parliamentary elections in four decades. More recently, Kuwaiti women made history in June 2006 when they not only voted, but also ran for parliament in the national elections (despite making up more than 50 per cent of the voters, no women were elected).

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. 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 January 30, 2005, 8.5 million Iraqis voted to elect a national assembly which was charged with the ominous duty of drafting the Iraqi constitution. After much deliberation and after missing the original deadline of August 15, 2005, the committee approved a final draft of the Iraqi constitution on August 28. Following this, on October 15, 2005, Iraqis again took to the polls, effectively ratifying the proposed constitution, and a permanent government has recently been 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, p. 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 paper seeks to closely examine the many discourses used to construct Iraq's recent democratisation in both the Western (Australian) print media and that of the Middle East (Lebanon, Turkey, Kuwait and Jordan). More broadly, this project has involved critiquing many of the misconceptions about Iraq's political history, including a detailed account of its ancient culture of democratic governance known as "Primitive Democracy" (Isakhan, 2007a), addressing the democratising role the Iraqi press played at various points throughout the 20th century (Isakhan, 2007b) and discussing the current plight of Iraq's many religious and ethnic minorities (Isakhan, 2005b).

Methodology

The sample data

Four Australian and five Middle Eastern newspapers were analysed for a period of three months (August 1-October 31, 2005, inclusive). The decision for this time period was based on the dates that made up the process of drafting and ratifying Iraq's constitution: the proposed constitution approval date (August 15), the actual approval date (August 28), the national vote to ratify the constitution (October 15) and the announcement of the results (October 25). This allowed for the study to cover news from three key periods: period 1 covered the lead-up to and approval of the constitution (August 1-30), period 2 covered the lead-up to and national vote to ratify the constitution (September 1-October 17), and period 3 contained coverage that followed the ratification of the constitution up until the announcement of the results and a short period

thereafter (October 18-31). (Note that the dates were extended to allow the lag time in coverage between the events in Iraq and their coverage in both the Middle Eastern and Australian press).

The Australian newspapers consisted of: *The Australian*, a News Limited broadsheet circulated nationwide; *The Courier-Mail*, another News Limited broadsheet, that converted to a tabloid in 2006, and is the only daily metropolitan newspaper in Queensland's state capital, Brisbane; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, a broadsheet published out of Sydney – Australia's largest city – by Fairfax; and *The Age*, another Fairfax broadsheet, published in Melbourne, capital of the state of Victoria.

These four newspapers are representative of the two largest newspaper conglomerates in the country, News Limited, owned by Rupert Murdoch, and John Fairfax Holdings, 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*), make them worthy of investigation. Indeed, it is fair to say that these newspapers do much to inform the Australian populace about 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, 2004).

The Middle Eastern papers were selected according to three main criteria: 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 they needed to be readily available. According to these criteria, the Middle Eastern papers analysed in this study were *The Daily Star*, a Lebanese daily; the *Anadolu Agency* and *Dunya*, daily newspapers based in Turkey; and the *Kuwait Times*, a daily newspaper published in Safat, Kuwait. The *Jordan Times* was added after the researcher was able to visit the headquarters of this newspaper in Amman in mid 2006.

Unlike the Australian newspapers, these Middle Eastern sources are not written in the majority/native tongue of the country to which they belong. Earlier work by Schaefer compares a number of US newspapers with African English-language papers. Here Schaefer claims that although the "... language of publication [of the African English-language press] necessarily gives them a smaller readership ... at the same time they are significant in ways analogous to the elite status ..." (2003, p. 95) of the US newspapers. Similarly, the Middle Eastern English-language press can be seen as comparable in status to the Australian papers studied here. In addition, each of the Middle Eastern papers has been selected because it is produced by and for the people living and working in this region. This aids the assumption that the newspapers would reveal more about the interests, opinions and beliefs of these people in a general sense than would any Western based/produced media. Indeed, 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, p. 4).

With the exception of those from the *Jordan Times*, each of the newspaper articles was obtained by using the "search" function of Factiva (http://www.factiva.com), which contains more than 9000 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 (that is, one at a time) and the search was set to examine the "Full Article". The *Jordan Times* articles were retrieved using the same keywords in the database kept at the publication's news room in Amman.

This search yielded a total initial return of 292 articles across the four Australian newspapers and 113 from the five Middle Eastern papers (note that due to *Dunya's* emphasis on domestic events, it yielded 0 articles within the set time frame and was thus removed from further analysis). 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), film and TV reviews and obituaries. As well as this, only the first edition of each paper was included in the data set to prevent the data being skewed by repetition in second or later editions.

However, due to the extended time period, the data sample included many articles that contained the keywords "Iraq and democracy" but were not directly related to the drafting or ratification of Iraq's constitution. These included several articles that discussed other issues, such as the continuing insurgency and violence in Iraq, Iran's desire to develop nuclear energy, Egypt's election, US foreign policy and the broader "War on Terror", Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip and developments in Afghanistan. Each of these articles was systematically removed from the data sample so that only those that dealt directly (although not exclusively) with the drafting and ratification of Iraq's constitution remained.

This process of refinement eliminated both *The Courier-Mail* and the *Kuwait Times*, leaving three Australian newspapers (*The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*) with a total of 31 articles and three Middle Eastern papers (*The Daily Star, Anadolu Agency* and *Jordan Times*) with 25 articles (for a further breakdown see Table 1). It should be noted here that both the Australian and Middle Eastern data rely heavily on one newspaper each, with *The Australian* constituting 23 of 31 (74 per cent) of the Australian articles and *The Daily Star* making up 21 of 25 (84 per cent) of the Middle Eastern articles. Clearly, this circumscribes the degree to which the findings can claim to be representative of the broader nation or region, its media and its attitudes towards Iraq's democratisation. The reader should therefore keep in mind that future references to "the Australian media" or "the Middle Eastern media" are accurate in that they represent more than one source from the respective nation or region, but are not intended to be representative beyond the parameters of the data collected here.

Table 1: Number and percentage of articles, average number of words and time period

Region	Country	Newspaper	Initial result	Final result	Av. words	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
Australia	Australia	The Australian	126 (43%)	23 (74%)	819	8 (35%)	8 (35%)	7 (30%)
		Courier-Mail	23 (8%)	-	-	-	-	-
		Syd Morn Her	63 (22%)	4 (13%)	652	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
		The Age	80 (27%)	4 (13%)	668	2 (50%)	-	2 (50%)
TOTAL			292 (100%)	31 (100%)	713	11 (35%)	9 (30%)	11 (35%)
Mid East	Lebanon	Daily Star	90 (80%)	21 (84%)	1012	9 (43%)	8 (38%)	4 (19%)
	Kuwait	Kuwait Times	10 (9%)	-	-	-	-	-
	Jordan	Jordan Times	2 (2%)	2 (8%)	748	2 (100%)	-	-
	Turkey	Anadolu Agency	11 (10%)	2 (8%)	488	-	-	2 (100%)
	Turkey	Dunya	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL			113 (100%	25 (100%)	749	11 (44%)	8 (32%)	6 (24%)

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Once the process of refinement had been completed, a few simple quantitative methods were applied to better understand the nature of the data being examined. This included the average

number of words per article, the spread of the articles across the three periods studied (see Table 1), the types of articles examined (that is, opinion editorials, politics/world news and local news; see Table 2) and the contributors or writers of each of the articles (staff writers, newswires, Middle Eastern experts, and so on; see Table 3).

Qualitative analysis: critical discourse analysis

Although there are many different qualitative methodologies, the one considered most useful for this study was that of discourse analysis. Specifically, discourse analysis developed out of the poststructuralist movement (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994, pp. 92-94), following Foucault's notion that discourses are "... practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak" (1969, p. 49). Here, discourse analysis can be seen as a broad term used to describe a number of theoretical and analytical frameworks that enable the analysis of the construction of knowledge and identities (Pietikainen, 2003; Pietikainen & Hujanen, 2003). This enables a systematic approach to the reading of texts while avoiding the condensation of meaning that is implicit within the quantitative approach (Jensen, 2002, p. 248). Despite criticisms regarding its interpretational limits, its subjectivity, its irreproducibility, its ad hoc nature, its use of commonsense knowledge and its tendency to overemphasise both the power of the text itself and its interpreter (Banister et al, 1994, p. 104), discourse analysis encourages a more complex, unique, holistic and multi-faceted explanation about a given text (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994, p. 140).

The most erudite and relevant discourse analysis that relates to this study is Said's work on *Orientalism* (1978). In order to complete this seminal work, Said conducted a discourse analysis of an astounding number of academic, bureaucratic and literary texts from the early modern period, when the colonisation and construction of the East seems to have been at its peak. What is of particular relevance here is Said's assertion that the hegemonic group or colonisers generate certain forms of knowledge about those who are subordinated or colonised, and that this knowledge is disseminated to the general public in various ways. In this way, the people of the Orient are constructed as "... degenerate, primitive or backward, uncivilized, (and) unreliable" (Poynting, Noble, Tabar & Collins, 2004, p. 35). This representation leads to the assumption that Middle Easterners — even when offered democracy and freedom — either cannot rise above their cruel, brutal "nature" or 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, p. 356).

Discourse analysis has also been applied to the study of newspapers by many media theorists (such as Fairclough, 1995; Poynting et al, 2004; 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, p. 651). This type of media analysis therefore reveals the pervading ideology of the context in which it is revealed and the types of discourses that the media draws upon, and is conscious of the media's role in constructing the representations of certain events or people (Pietikainen & Hujanen, 2003, pp. 256-257). Specifically, by closely examining the ways in which the drafting and ratification of the Iraqi constitution 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 their respective readerships.

Results and discussion

The Australian print media

The 31 Australian articles that detailed the drafting and ratification of Iraq's constitution in August to October 2005 were an average of 713 words in length and were evenly spread across the three time periods being investigated (see Table 1). A total of 68 per cent (21) of the articles were opinion editorials, 29 per cent (9) were politics or world news items and only 3 per cent (1) concerned local news (see Table 2). Interestingly, more than half (52 per cent, 16) were written by staff writers, 22 per cent (7) were reprinted from another newspaper (e.g. *The Times*), and four (13 per cent) were written by either staff writers or correspondents with the help of a newswire service. The Australian press also printed 4 articles (13 per cent) written by Middle Eastern experts or commentators from the Western world (these included former Australian Foreign Minister, Labor leader and Governor-General, Bill Hayden; Australia's former Ambassador to Iraq, Rory Steele; co-author of *The war over Iraq*, Lawrence Kaplan; and an Associate Professor at the University of Sydney, Helen Irving). However, the Australian articles studied here did not include any commentary from Middle Eastern experts or commentators from the region, nor any written by Iraqis who may have been directly involved in the drafting of Iraq's constitution (see Table 3).

Table 2: Types of articles examined

Region	Country	Newspaper	Type of article - opinion editorial	Type of article - politics/world news	Type of article - local
Australia	Australia	*The Australian*	13 (57%)	9 (39%)	1 (4%)
		Syd Morn Her	4 (100%)	-	-
		The Age	4 (100%)	-	-
TOTAL			21 (68%)	9 (29%)	1 (3%)
Mid East	Lebanon	*Daily Star*	11 (52%)	10 (48%)	-
	Jordan	*Jordan Times*	2 (100%)	-	-
	Turkey	*Anadolu Agency*	-	2 (100%)	-
TOTAL			13 (52%)	12 (48%)	-

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 3: Contributors

Contributors	Australian press				Middle Eastern press			
	Aust	*SMH*	*Age*	Total	*DS*	*JT*	*AA*	Total
Staff writers	10 (43%)	2 (50%)	4 (100%)	16 (52%)	6 (29%)	-	2 (100%)	8 (32%)
Staff writers/ correspondent with newswire	3 (13%)-	1 (25%)	-	4 (13%)	6 (29%)	-	-	6 (24%)
Article from other newspapers	7 (31%)	-	-	7 (22%)	-	-	-	-
Middle Eastern expert/ commentator/academic from the western world	3 (13%)	1 (25%)	-	4 (13%)	3 (14%)	1 (50%)	-	4 (16%)
Middle Eastern expert/ commentator/academic from the region	-	-	-	-	5 (24%)	1 (50%)	-	6 (24%)
Individual involved in Iraqi constitution	-	-	-	-	1 (5%)	-	-	1 (4%)
Total	23 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	31 (100%)	21 (100%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)	25 (100%)

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The Australian data appear to focus much attention on the debates and differences between the Shi'ite majority and the Kurdish and Sunni minorities, particularly focusing on the difficulties involved in getting the disenfranchised Sunnis to take part (Iraqis set for deal on national plan, 2005; Philp, 2005b), their threat of civil war (Steele, 2005) and their failed attempt to vote down the constitution at the referendum (Sunnis fail to derail Iraqi charter, 2005). This is coupled with coverage that critiques Iraq's National Assembly for missing the initial deadline of August 15, including headlines such as "Iraqis fail to agree on new constitution" (Philp, 2005a) and "Floundering fathers – the big picture" (Floundering fathers – the big picture, 2005), although there is some coverage that runs counter to this, offering a more optimistic view (for example, Delayed, not derailed, 2005; Irving, 2005). However, there is a distinct lack of contextual or background information on any of the three main groups in Iraq or the major political parties vying for power. In the only article that does provide some background information regarding "Iraq's Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds [who] were arbitrarily bundled into a single state by the British when the Ottoman Empire was dissolved after World War I", it is used to justify the fact that they are having "... such difficulty in finding a constitutional formula for co-existence in a representative democracy" (Building on sand, 2005).

The emphasis on the disorder surrounding the drafting and ratification of Iraq's constitution as well as the looming threat of civil war is coupled with a kind of optimism surrounding the "domino effect" theory of Iraq's democracy influencing similar developments across the region. Although there is some resistance to this theory, with Kaplan stating that "... gone is the hope that Iraq would be a liberal democratic beacon for the rest of the Arab world" (2005), the ratification of Iraq's constitution is generally seen in positive terms. First, the "... phenomenon of 10 million Iraqis voting for a new constitution must rank as a signal moment in Arab history" (Sheridan, 2005), and as an "... extraordinary spectacle of Iraqis embracing a system unknown in that region" (Haines, 2005). Furthermore, it is said to have already "... had a flow-on effect on democratic movements in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia" (The Iraq crucible, 2005) and may well continue to "... act as a catalyst for reform elsewhere ... [fanning] the cause of freedom in this important part of the world" (Haines, 2005).

The detailing of both the current chaos in Iraq and the democracy "domino effect" theory seems to be underpinned by the thesis that the "Coalition of the Willing" (including Australia) must "stay the course" in Iraq. This is clearly expressed by one journalist: "There is no choice but to stay the distance, unless the sacrifices of two wars [Afghanistan and Iraq] are to become nothing more than a terrible waste." (A tougher task than expected, and no easy exit, 2005) This sentiment is reiterated several times, including claims that Iraq's government "... has thanked the US and its allies for their efforts and implored them to stay the course" (The Iraq crucible, 2005) and that "... millions of Iraqis have voted, in effect, for staying the course" (Haines, 2005). These claims are also accompanied by a warning that there is "... a long way to go before the rule of law is established in Iraq, and all its citizens know their rights are respected" (Giant step forward, 2005), with one writer claiming that "... it may take until 2010 before all this bears fruit" (Haines, 2005). We are further warned that if the "Coalition of the Willing" were to withdraw now, the cost would be "... even heavier than the immediate bloodletting it would occasion in Iraq – it would set the cause of democracy and civilised values back everywhere" (The Iraq crucible, 2005). Finally, we are reminded that:

> Whatever the Americans got wrong, they got one big thing right: that, if you persevered, Iraq had the potential to function as a free society in a part of the world where no such thing existed. (Steyn, 2005)

In one of few actual critiques of the constitution itself, Paul McGeough of *The Sydney Morning Herald* states that although the constitution will "... give hope to American diehards who will claim the process and the document are proof of democracy at work ..." it is really a "... Clay-

ton's constitution – a conflicted, contradictory unity bill for a country tearing itself apart, accepted in a vote dictated by the fault lines of Iraqi history" (McGeough, 2005). However, this is quickly shot down by a writer at *The Australian*, who calls McGeough a "... comic doom-monger" who refuses to acknowledge that Iraqis have voted in favour of "... the most liberal, democratic, federal and pluralist constitution in the Middle East" (Steyn, 2005).

More broadly, the issue of Middle Eastern democracy causes some debate between the Australian papers during their coverage of the drafting and ratification of the Iraqi constitution. First, Australia's former Foreign Minister, Labor leader and Governor-General, Bill Hayden, paraphrases Huntington's central thesis (Huntington, 1987, 1991, 1998) in *The Australian* by calling for the US to "forget about democracy; not all peoples in the world want democracy or are capable of sustaining that method of governance" (Hayden, 2005). This article is heavily critiqued in *The Age*, where it is referred to as "... pop anthropology about how and why Middle Easterners are ill-suited temperamentally to the politics of consensus" (Parkinson, 2005). Despite this critique, a later article in *The Australian* makes such references to Huntington's work explicit by directly quoting a passage from the chapter "Islam's bloody borders" in *The clash of civilisations* (1998). In this chapter, Huntington explains that the majority of civilisational conflicts have occurred along the borders that separate the Muslim from the non-Muslim world. Here, Mark Steyn uses Huntington's theory to justify wars such as those in Iraq, claiming that "pushing back the Islamists on their ever-expanding margins will never be enough ... Sometimes war is worth it" (2005).

The Middle Eastern media

The 25 articles from the Middle Eastern newspapers studied here were an average of 749 words in length and 44 per cent (11) of them were from period 1, 32 per cent (8) from period 2, and 24 per cent (6) from period 3 (see Table 1). The articles were fairly evenly matched in terms of them being 52 per cent (13) opinion editorials and 48 per cent (12) politics or world news items, with no local news found in the sample (see Table 2). In terms of contributors, the Middle Eastern media included articles written by staff writers (32 per cent, 8) and those written by staff writers or correspondents with the help of a newswire service (24 per cent, 6). The Middle Eastern press appear to have included a broader range of experts or commentators than the Australian press, including 24 per cent (6) from the region (these included associate producer of a Peabody Award winning news program and campaigner for women's rights in the Middle East, Souheila Al-Jadda; Associate Professor of International Relations at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Melissa Benli Altunisik; former director of Israel's Foreign Ministry and Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Shlomo Avineri; President of Isik University in Istanbul, Professor Ersin Kalaycioglu; founding member of The Jerusalem Fund, George S. Hishmeh; and a columnist with the Nexus Syndicate in Washington, Mustafa Malik) and 16 per cent (4) from the Western world (including a staff member at the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and documenter of Saddam Hussein's "Anfal" campaign, Peter Galbraith; senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and author of several books on Arab politics, Dr Nathan Brown; Middle East researcher at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, Molly McKew; founder and president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute and senior analyst at influential polling firm Zogby International, James J. Zogby). While the Middle Eastern sample data did not contain any articles reprinted from other newspapers, it did include an article written by Iraq's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations and a Principle Drafter of Iraq's Interim Constitution, Feisel Amin Al-Istrabadi (see Table 3).

Similarly to the Australian print media, the Middle East data focus on the debates and differences between the Shi'ites, the Kurds and the Sunnis (for example, Iraqi oil minister survives

murder attempt, 2005). There is particular mention of Sunni concerns over the constitution (Iraq charter ratified despite Sunni rejection; Allegations of tampering surface amid violence, 2005; US official dismisses Sunni concerns Iraq's new constitution will lead to break up, 2005), their failure to agree (Iraqi negotiators finish draft charter after failing to win Sunni support; Bush hails document as "inspiration" for supporters of democracy, 2005) and both their right to vote "no" as well as concerns over their threat of civil war (Democracy in Iraq requires a willingness to compromise, 2005). The difference between this and the coverage found in the Australian media is that the Middle Eastern texts are also accompanied by an emphasis on compromise (Democracy in Iraq requires a willingness to compromise, 2005) as well as extensive explanations of the three groups and their key political parties ("An existential debate" on the nature of Iraq's future; Dr Nathan Brown discusses the mounting pressure and potential pitfalls facing the Constitutional Drafting Committee, 2005; Galbraith, 2005). This is also accompanied by concerns for the rights and role of women in the new Iraq, particularly over the interpretation of Islamic law which, although it "... gives protection to women", other contemporary Islamic states "... have proven disastrous for women" (Al-Jadda, 2005).

The Middle Eastern newspapers published elements of the draft constitution without any commentary or opinion in one article (Key elements of Iraq's draft constitution, 2005). This is followed by a number of articles and opinion pieces from across the political and ideological spectrum. This includes a rather detailed set of critiques of the Iraqi constitution which highlight its key problems (Avineri, 2005; Kalaycioglu, 2005) and claim that instead of ending Iraq's sectarian divisions, it may "... set the stage for new battles" (Galbraith, 2005). The Sunni dimension to this critique is made explicit via McKew's assertion that the Sunnis are on the losing end of Iraqi power sharing, referring to the constitution as a "... vendetta against the Sunnis for the atrocities of Baathist rule" (2005).

There is, however, much praise for the constitution, which is cited as "... the most progressive document of the Muslim world" (Iraqi negotiators finish draft charter after failing to win Sunni support; Bush hails document as "inspiration" for supporters of democracy, 2005), as evidence of "... at least measurable progress on the establishment of a political process" (Despite slim odds of success, it is worth pursuing the dream of a democratic Iraq, 2005) and as "... an important step in that it represents progress toward participatory democracy" (It's not the Iraqi vote, but the political process, that matters most, 2005). This optimism is reiterated by one of the principle drafters of Iraq's interim constitution, Feisel Amin Al-Istrabadi, who claims that:

> Much of the current talk about the draft's various provisions thus misses the point. Regardless of whether the referendum succeeds or fails, and regardless of the details of the constitutional text, what is most important is the establishment of constitutional processes and institutions in Iraq, before and after the referendum. (Al-Istrabadi, 2005)

Although the Middle Eastern papers do include one article which refutes the likelihood of Iraq's democratisation, on the grounds that it is a "... strange pastiche of three disparate provinces of the old Ottoman Empire" (Avineri, 2005), much of the coverage seeks to dispel the myths surrounding the issue of Middle Eastern democracy. With regards to Iraq, several authors seek to remind their audience that this is not Iraq's "... first written constitution" (Kalaycioglu, 2005), and that Iraq was a democracy for several years (1921-1938), with "... 10 parliamentary elections and nearly 50 cabinets" (Malik, 2005). In terms of the democracy "domino effect theory" so often espoused by opinion leaders and journalists in the Western world, the Middle Eastern papers offer their critique, stating that Iraq's successful adoption of a democratic constitution would not necessarily "... presage the flowering of democracy in the rest of the Middle East" (Hiro, 2005; see also Zogby, 2005). In fact, this author goes on to further critique Western understandings of Middle Eastern democracy by attacking the Huntingtonian notion that the Middle East is "profoundly

anti-democratic", claiming that "... contrary to the prevalent view in the West that all of the Arab world is an undemocratic desert, there are two oases: Lebanon and Yemen" (Hiro, 2005).

Finally, the Middle Eastern coverage of the drafting and ratification of Iraq's 2005 constitution also details a number of broader regional concerns. First, there is the more general concern about Iraq's ongoing problems and their impact across the region. The break-up of Iraq into further sectarian violence and civil war is seen as a threat to the stability of the region (Hiro, 2005), particularly because the country has become a "... breeding ground for a new generation of terrorists" (Zogby, 2005). Second, specific countries such as Turkey are said to be paying close attention to the developments in Iraq and evaluating them according to their own interests in the region, particularly the Kurdish issue of northern Iraq (Altunisik, 2005; Ankara pleased over ratification of new constitution in Iraq, 2005; Turkey has always assumed patient and sapient stance in fight against terrorist elements in north of Iraq, 2005). Last, the broader concerns expressed in the Middle Eastern coverage include claims by Saudi jihadis that they would demand elections across the Persian Gulf as "democracy would bring 'Islam to power' there as it has in Iraq" (Malik, 2005). At the same time, there is much concern over Iran's involvement in Iraq (Hishmeh, 2005), with one author pointing out the "ultimate irony" that:

> By bringing freedom to Iraq, the Bush administration has allowed Iraq's Shi'ites to vote for pro-Iranian religious parties that seek to create – and are creating – an Islamic state. This is not ideal but it is the result of a democratic process. (Galbraith, 2005)

Conclusion

Following the invasion of Iraq by the "Coalition of the Willing" (of which Australia is a part) in 2003, came the realisation that the initial reason for entering Iraq – Saddam's alleged stockpile of Weapons of Mass Destruction – was a grievous intelligence error. In the years since, the Bush administration, with varying degrees of success, has been able to spin the war's *raison d'être* and redefine the parameters of victory. In the first State of the Union address of his second term, American President George W. Bush clearly committed America to the twin goals of proliferating democracy around the globe and ending tyranny across it (for a full transcript, see Bush, 2005). Underpinning these assertions were the dual discourses of the "domino effect" theory of democracy spreading across the Middle East and "staying the course" in Iraq. Interestingly, these discourses have been tied to another (seemingly contradictory) discourse espoused by neo-Orientalists such as Huntington (1987, 1991, 1998), namely that the Middle East and Islam are "profoundly anti-democratic" (1991, p. 300).

Given the importance of the Iraqi debate to the 2004 federal election in Australia (McCallum & Blood, 2006, pp. 2-4) as well as Prime Minister John Howard's continuing commitment to the "Coalition of the Willing", it is of little surprise that the aforementioned discourses are prominent in the Australian coverage of the drafting and ratification of Iraq's constitution. Here the Australian media (largely constituted by reports from *The Australian*) choose to focus much of their attention on the disorder and chaos in today's Iraq, and detail the debates and disagreements between Iraq's three major groups, the Shi'ites, the Sunnis and the Kurds. However, this coverage is not supported by details of the three groups or their political parties and instead discusses the possibility of civil war and continued violence. While this coverage is overwhelmingly negative, it is coupled with a sense of optimism regarding the "domino effect" discourse and the hope of spreading democracy across the region. At a time when the Iraq War is growing in its disfavour among the populaces of both America and Australia, coverage of the current chaos in Iraq (without any substantial background information) and the optimism surrounding the "domino effect" discourse are cleverly linked to support the broader discourse of "staying the course" in Iraq.

The competing discourse that Iraq, the Middle East and Islam are "profoundly anti-democratic" (Huntington, 1991, p. 300) appears at first to be in clear opposition to the "domino effect" discourse and to even undermine the notion of "staying the course". However, the presence of such a competing and contradictory discourse seems to stem from the focus on the ongoing chaos and violence in Iraq as well as the deep-seated tensions between its three largest groups. The emergence of Huntington's work into popular discourse has meant that it stands often without critique and allows simple, reductive "pop anthropology" to be reported as near fact. This neo-Orientalism is clearly problematic and stems from the notion that even when given democracy and freedom, the people of the Middle East are too backward and barbaric to embrace a future free of tyranny and despotism. In other words, coverage that details the successes in Iraq's democratisation is linked to the optimism surrounding the "domino effect" discourse, while coverage that emphasises the violence and disagreements supports the "profoundly anti-democratic" discourse, with both then seen as reasons for "staying the course".

The Middle Eastern media studied here (made up mostly of articles from *The Daily Star*) tell a very different story. First, it consists of a broader, more open and varied debate on Iraq's constitution and its implications throughout the region. These articles include elements of the draft constitution published without any commentary or opinion, an article written by one of the principle drafters of the constitution itself, one article entitled " 'An existential debate' on the nature of Iraq's future", an article detailing the rights and role of women in the new Iraq, comments from Saudi jihadis, an article written by a documenter of Saddam Hussein's "Anfal" campaign and a number of other commentators and experts from within the Middle East and from the West. While this coverage does detail the chaos in Iraq and the disagreements between the key groups there, it balances this coverage with an emphasis on compromise and by giving details of these groups, their political parties and their stances on certain issues. In addition, this coverage details both heavy criticism and astounding praise for Iraq's constitution

Much of the Middle Eastern coverage studied here also moves on to dispel many of the myths surrounding Middle Eastern democracy. Beginning with Iraq, these reports are careful to assert that not only is this not Iraq's first written constitution, but that it is not even Iraq's first attempt at a functioning democracy. Furthermore, the Middle East papers go on to directly challenge the "domino effect" discourse by pointing out that the developments in Iraq will not necessarily lead to democratic developments across the region. In addition, the Huntingtonian discourse of the region being "profoundly anti-democratic" also comes under fire when we are reminded that democracy is not a foreign concept in the Arab world and has been successful in at least Lebanon and Yemen.

These challenges to both the "domino effect" and the "profoundly anti-democratic" discourses therefore undermine the "stay the course" discourse prominent in the Australian media. This is further reiterated by the fact the Middle Eastern print media are quick to point out the "ultimate irony" of all three of these prominent Western discourses. This irony is that the Bush administration's desire to plant democracy in Iraq and watch it spread across the broader region may well bring a pro-Iranian Islamic religious party to power. Implicitly, the fact that this is happening democratically stands in stark opposition to the notion that the region is unable to democratise. This then parallels the work of Norton and others who claim that the Middle East is likely to "...evolve its own characteristic style of democracy, no doubt with an Islamic idiom in some instances" (1995a, p. 5).

Finally, these differences in the discursive practices used by the Australian and Middle Eastern print media studied here raise a number of interesting questions regarding the coverage of the drafting and ratification of Iraq's constitution in 2005. Specifically, the Australian print media must be careful not to be reductive in their coverage of Iraq and avoid falling back on pervading discourses regarding democracy in the Middle East. Here, the Australian media could learn

much from the English-language papers of the Middle East in developing a more open and varied debate concerning Iraq's democratisation and its consequences for the broader region. The Australian media may then move beyond the ideologies espoused by foreign policy pundits and neo-Orientalists to instead offer a more genuine critique of Iraq's democratisation and Australia's continuing role in the "Coalition of the Willing".

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