



A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE  
REPRESENTATION OF IRAQI KURDS AND  
SHIITES IN TIME AND NEWSWEEK BEFORE AND  
AFTER THE US-LED INVASION

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This research is carried out to examine the change in the representation of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites before and after the US-led invasion through a critical discourse analysis of forty *TIME* and *Newsweek* articles published during November, 2002-March, 2003 and January-May, 2007. The reason for choosing these time periods is that before the invasion both Iraqi Kurds and Shiites were seen as United States allies. However, anti-US Shiite groups emerged after the invasion while Kurds remained loyal to the United States. The study is limited to using Fairclough's three-stage analysis. Firstly in the *Description* stage, *vocabulary*, *ergativity* and *implicature* analyses are used to examine headlines and discourse features, specifically, *naming choices*, *lexical choices*, *overcompleteness* and *voice* are used to examine full-text articles. The second stage of the analysis, namely *Interpretation*, establishes a link between the text and the discourse practice, and finally, the third stage *Explanation*, deals with explaining the relationship between the interaction and social context. The comparative analysis shows that both newsmagazines represented both Iraqi Kurds and Shiites positively before the invasion. However, the representation of Iraqi Shiites changed substantially in the examined period after the invasion. By observing the political context during both periods, the study reveals that an important factor controlling the representation of both groups was the nature of the United States' relation to both Iraqi Kurds and Shiites during the studied periods.

## خلاصة البحث

تم القيام بهذه الدراسة من أجل فحص التغييرات التي طرأت على تمثيل أكراد العراق وشيعتهم قبل الغزو الأمريكي وبعده من خلال القيام بتحليل الخطاب اللغوي لأربعين مقالاً من مقالات مجلتي تايمز ونيوزويك التي تم نشرها في الفترة من شهر نوفمبر 2002 إلى شهر مارس 2003 ومن شهر يناير إلى شهر مايو 2007. ويرجع السبب في اختيار هاتين الفترتين إلى أن النظرة العامة تجاه أكراد العراق وشيعتهم خلال الفترة الأولى تشير إلى كونهم حلفاء للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، أما الفترة الثانية فقد شهدت ظهور العديد من الجماعات الشيعية المناهضة للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، بينما بقي الأكراد على ولائهم للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. واقتصرت الدراسة على استخدام تحليل فيركلوف ذو المراحل الثلاث، ابتداءً بمرحلة الوصف التي تم فيها استخدام تحليل المفردات، والأرجينية والتلازم لفحص العناوين الإخبارية، ومظاهر الخطاب. أم بالنسبة لتحليل النص الكامل للمقالات فقد تم النظر إلى اختيارات التسمية، والاختيارات المعجمية والعبارات المبتسرة والاقتباس. أما المرحلة الثانية من التحليل المتعلقة بتفسير النص فقد حاولت إنشاء رابط بين النص وممارسة الخطاب. وأخيراً جاءت المرحلة الثالثة والتي هي الشرح لتتناول شرح العلاقة بين السياق التفاعلي والاجتماعي. لقد أظهر التحليل المقارن أن كلتا المجلتين أظهرتا أكراد العراق وشيعتهم بشكل إيجابي قبل الغزو، ولكن تمثيل شيعة العراق تغير بصورة كبيرة في فترة ما بعد الغزو الأمريكي. ولدى ملاحظة السياق السياسي خلال الفترتين محل الدراسة تبين الدراسة أن عنصراً مهماً قد تحكم في تمثيل كلا المجموعتين ألا وهو طبيعة علاقة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية بأكراد العراق وشيعتهم خلال الفترتين المدروستين.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (English Language Studies).

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## DECLARATION

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*To my parents*

*Munjid and Sua'ad*

*Without their knowledge, wisdom and guidance none of this would be possible*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Abstract in Arabic .....	iii
Approval Page .....	iv
Declaration .....	v
Copyright Page .....	vi
Dedication .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	viii
List of Tables .....	xi
List of Figures .....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background .....	1
1.1.1 Iraqi Kurds .....	3
1.1.2 Iraqi Shiites .....	4
1.1.3 Ba'ath Party .....	6
1.1.4 Iraq-United States relations .....	7
1.1.5 <i>Time</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> .....	9
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	10
1.3 Research Objectives .....	10
1.4 Research Questions .....	11
1.5 Significance of the Study .....	11
1.6 Scope and limitation of the Study .....	12
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	13
2.2 Development of CDA .....	15
2.3 Principles of CDA .....	16
2.4 Approaches in CDA .....	18
2.4.1 Van Dijk: Socio- Cognitive Analysis .....	19
2.4.2 Wodak: Discourse-Historical Analysis .....	21
2.4.3 Fairclough: Critical Discourse Analysis .....	23
2.5 CDA and the Media .....	25
2.5.1 News Production and Consumption .....	27
2.6 Studies on Media Representations of Minorities .....	30
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	33
3.2 Research Design .....	34
3.3 Data Collection .....	35
3.4 Data Analysis .....	36
3.4.1 Naming Choices .....	40
3.4.2 Lexical Choices .....	40

3.4.3 Overcompleteness .....	40
3.4.4 Voice .....	41
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....</b>	<b>43</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	43
4.2 TIME and Newsweek .....	44
4.2.1 Headline Analysis .....	46
4.2.2 Full Text Analysis .....	69
4.3 Tabulated Summary of Results .....	115
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>119</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	119
5.2 Summary of Research .....	119
5.3 Implication of the Study .....	128
5.4 Limitation of the Study .....	130
5.5 Recommendation for Further Research .....	130
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>APPENDIX I .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>APPENDIX II .....</b>	<b>141</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
3.1	Fairclough's Three-stage Analytical Framework	35
3.2	Total Number of Articles on Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in 2002/2003 and 2007	36
3.3	The Analytical Framework Used in this Research	37
4.1	<i>TIME</i> News Articles on Iraqi Kurds and Shiites Published Before and After the Invasion	44
4.2	<i>Newsweek</i> News Articles on Iraqi Kurds and Shiites Published Before and After the Invasion	45
4.3	<i>TIME</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> Headlines, on Iraqi Kurds Published Before the US-led Invasion	48
4.4	<i>TIME</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> Headlines, on Iraqi Kurds Published After the US-led Invasion	57
4.5	<i>TIME</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> Headlines, on Iraqi Shiites Published Before the US-led Invasion	59
4.6	<i>TIME</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> Headlines, on Iraqi Shiites Published After the US-led Invasion	61
4.7	Tabulated Results of the Headline Analysis for <i>TIME</i> and <i>Newsweek</i>	68
4.8	Naming Choices Used to Represent Kurdish Officials Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	70
4.9	Naming Choices Used to Represent Kurdish Officials Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	72
4.10	Naming Choices Used to Represent Pro- and Anti-US Shiite Officials After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	75
4.11	Naming Choices Used to Represent Shiite Officials Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	78
4.12	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Kurdish Armed Forces Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	81

4.13	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Kurdish Armed Forces Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	83
4.14	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Kurdish Civilians Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	86
4.15	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Kurdish Civilians Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	88
4.16	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Shiite Armed Forces Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	89
4.17	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Shiite Armed Forces Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	93
4.18	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Shiite Civilians Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	96
4.19	Lexical Choices Used to Represent Shiite Civilians Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	98
4.20	Direct and Indirect Quotes by Iraqi Kurds Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	106
4.21	Direct and Indirect Quotes by Iraqi Kurds Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	107
4.22	Direct and Indirect Quotes by Iraqi Shiites Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>TIME</i> )	110
4.23	Direct and Indirect Quotes by Iraqi Shiites Before and After the US-led Invasion ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	111
4.24	Representation Iraqi Kurds in Full Texts ( <i>TIME</i> )	115
4.25	Representation Iraqi Kurds in Full Texts ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	116
4.26	Representation Iraqi Shiites in Full Texts ( <i>TIME</i> )	117
4.27	Representation Iraqi Shiites in Full Texts ( <i>Newsweek</i> )	118

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
1.1	Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Iraq	6
4.1	Illustration of Research Design	43

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

Some hold the view that journalism exists to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position in the world and journalism's "success or failure – in other words, the degree to which it is doing what it should– rests on the extent to which it achieves this fiduciary role" (Richardson, 2006: 7). Putting this into consideration, Richardson introduces additional sub-goals of journalism, one of which is that it disseminates the views of the powerful. The circulation and promotion of the views of the powerful is better described as propaganda, and while journalism is often shaped by the agenda of such propagandists, it, nevertheless, remains relatively distinct and separate from them.

On a similar note, Fowler (1991: 101) maintains that "news is not just a value-free reflection of facts. Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position". In other words, "when we speak or write we always take a particular perspective on what the world is like" (Gee, 1999: 2). Moreover, people can be both informed and controlled by language, and can of course, inform and control others, or as Hodge and Kress (1993: 6) believe, language is "an instrument of control as well as communication".

For Van Dijk (2000: 25), "if there is one notion often related to ideology it is that of power". One can therefore define power as the possession of the ability to shape actions and since the most prominent feature of print media is conveying information and interacting between reader and writer, it cannot be free from the

struggle for influence or power which is, for the most part, accomplished through ideology. From this, one can conclude that ideologies form the social representations of the beliefs shared by certain groups and consequently control the social practices of a group in a society, consequently controlling the structures of text and talk in media discourse.

According to Reath (1998: 50), printed media "are not simply vehicles for delivering information. They guide the ideological stance of the reader". When utilizing specific language features, different media influence one's understanding and knowledge of the world. In effect, the language used is not authentic seeing that it is determined and administered by dominant world-views or ideologies, or as Fowler (1991: 11) says, "the world of the press is not the real world, but a world skewed and judged". In other words, a newspaper or a magazine presents "its perception of 'reality' in the form which it regards as most suitable for its readership" (Hodge & Kress, 1993: 17).

Another important factor relating to the subject of media discourse is access. Fowler (1991: 23) claims that, "newspapers in part adopt this language for their own and, in deploying it, reproduce the attitudes of the powerful". Van Dijk (1993b) called these "powerful people" elites, referring to those who can influence the structure of language and then society. On the other hand, common people do not have an active role in shaping media discourse. As a result, mass media has a powerful role and influence in shaping the attitude of its audience.

Chomsky (1989) argues that stories and news published or aired in mainstream media, for the most part, correspond with the foreign policies of respective states. It has also been maintained that representation of international stories and actors by the media corresponds to the general stereotypes and common beliefs of the western

societies about them. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate the function of language as a social practice in itself and as constituting other social practices, such as media discourse.

Given the power and significance of news journalism to contemporary society, it should come as no surprise that the discourse of newspapers and magazines has been, and continues to be, scrutinized. Therefore, this study aims to examine the representation of two ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, namely Kurds and Shiites in two US-published newsmagazines (*TIME* and *Newsweek*). The analysis of these printed media does not aim to show that there is an intrigue on the part of its news writers to deceive and betray the public. Rather, the major purpose of this research is to show how media workers and journalists' linguistic choices differ from one ideological point of view to another in the representation of the same event or people. Thus, the more practical objective of this study is consciousness-raising through language.

Considering the fact that this thesis intends to study how two major ethnic and religious Iraqi groups are represented in American press before and after the U.S-led invasion, the following sections will examine the historical background of Iraq's Kurds and Shiites, and their relationship with the Ba'ath regime (Iraq's ruling party prior to the fall of Baghdad) and the United States. Finally, a brief background about Iraq-United States relations and some information about the newsmagazines to be analyzed will be included.

### **1.1.1 Iraqi Kurds**

According to the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation), Kurdistan is a territory of 520,000 km<sup>2</sup> spread over different countries in the Middle East (Iran,



Iraq, Turkey and Syria). In Iraq, the Kurds live in the north in an autonomous area of 36,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The Kurds make up 15-20 percent of the Iraqi population and run their own administration (Iraq Demographics Profile, 2010). This, however, was not always the case, during the late 80's, the Ba'ath regime feared an uprising in the north which eventually lead to the launch of the genocidal al-Anfal Campaign (1986-1989). Some 180,000 people were slaughtered; many through the use of chemical weapons. The Halabja poison gas massacre of 1988 alone resulted in the deaths of over 5,000 people. In 1991, after their defeat by the allied forces in the Gulf War, the Iraqi armed forces withdrew from most areas of Iraqi Kurdistan. The UN created a no-fly zone in the Kurdistan area in order to protect Kurdish civilians (Head, 2010). In 1992 the elections for a parliament were held and a coalition parliament was formed by the two dominant parties at the time, the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party). Since the 1992 elections, life in the Kurdish region had been fairly stable; however, Kurds continued to demand independence and therefore welcomed and assisted the U.S-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Anderson & Stansfield, 2004).

### **1.1.2 Iraqi Shiites**

The Shiites constitute about 60-65 percent of the Iraqi population (Iraq Demographics Profile, 2010), mostly in the south upwards to Baghdad (see Figure 1.1). Like the Kurds, Shiites in Iraq were radicalised by two major events: the Ba'ath crackdown on Shiite political activity in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the crushing of the 1991 uprising and subsequent persecution of Shiites in the South. As a result of the cruel 1990s, Khomeinist ideas gained far more purchase with the poverty-stricken and desperate younger generation (Cole, 2003).

The press officers of the White House used the subjugation of the Shiites as a powerful propaganda tool to demonise Saddam. The rather naive belief flowing from this was that, once liberated from the Ba'ath regime, Shiites would choose to fit neatly into a new secular government in which all of Iraq's ethnic and religious groups would be represented (Anderson & Stansfield, 2004). However, the US-led invasion of Iraq proved to be a windfall for Muqtada Al-Sadr. Muqtada's young clerical devotees who reopened mosques and other Shiite institutions, established neighbourhood militias, captured arms and ammunitions from Ba'ath depots, took over hospitals, and asserted local authority in East Baghdad, Kufa, and some neighbourhoods in Najaf, Karbala, and Basra. They engaged in crowd politics, calling for frequent demonstrations against the Anglo-American occupation, sometimes managing to assemble crowds of five to ten thousand Sadr devotees (Cole, 2003). With the progression of the U.S-led invasion, Shiites took arms creating several resistance groups and killing hundreds of American and Iraqi troops.

It is important to mention that both Iraqi Kurds and Shiites were considered as allies of the United States before the 2003 invasion, this however changed after 2003; Shiite militants took to the streets and "declared war" against the central government and began a wave of sectarian cleansing in Baghdad and other Shiite dominated areas. On the other hand, the Kurds sustained a positive relationship with the United States and quickly adapted to the new situation.

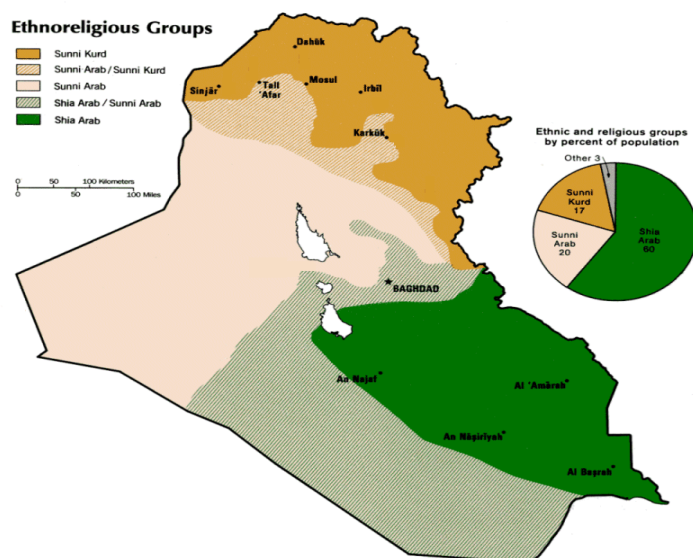


Figure 1.1: Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Iraq

### 1.1.3 Ba'ath Party

The Ba'ath Party in Iraq, like its counterparts in other Arab countries, was derived from the official founding congress in Damascus in 1947 (Batatu, 1982). Unlike popular belief—that the majority of Ba'ath party members were Arab Sunnis—the majority of the primary group were Shiite Arabs (53.8%), Sunni members made up 38.5% and the Kurds constituted 7.7% of the party. The members of the Ba'ath party were diverse in ethnicity and religious orientation. Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Foreign Minister is a Catholic, Taha Yassin Ramadan, Iraq's vice president is a Kurd, and Muhammad Saeed al-Sahhaf, Iraq's Information Minister is a Shiite, to name a few.

It is important to point out that the reason behind the torture and killing of the large number of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites was because the Ba'ath party felt threatened and sensed an inevitable uprising from the north and south. Therefore the Kurds and Shiites of Iraq suffered greatly not because they were Kurds and Shiites, but because they were seen as a threat to the ruling dictatorship. Therefore, like the Kurds and

Shiites, Sunnis who held different opinions or stood against the Ba'ath party were also "dealt with". In 1969, Sunni religious leaders Abdul Aziz Al Badri the Imam of Dragh district mosque in Baghdad, Al Shaikh Nadhum Al Asi from the Ubaid tribe in Northern Iraq, Al Shiakh Al Shahrazori, and Al Shiakh Mohamad Shafeeq Al Badri, were killed.

One can conclude that the entire Iraqi population suffered under Saddam's rule, and only those loyal to the Ba'ath party were able to guarantee their survival (Batatu, 1982). The plight caused by the Ba'ath party ended on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2003 when the U.S-led invasion succeeded in entering Baghdad. However, this started another era of oppression for the people of Iraq.

#### **1.1.4 Iraq-United States Relations**

Like many of the world's nations, the United States' relations with certain countries frequently changes from ally to enemy. In most, if not all cases, the United States collaborates with counties or "groups" that share common interests and, sometimes, common enemies. In 1980 the United States and Iraq shared a common enemy (Iran), and so during the Iraq-Iran war, the U.S quickly took Iraq off the list of countries supporting terrorism, and came to the aid of Iraq when the United Nations Security Council sought a resolution condemning Iraq. The United States funnelled large amounts of money and weapons to Saddam assisting in the war against Iran. Iraqi-American relations deteriorated in the years following the Iraq-Iran war; in 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait and as a punishment, the United States imposed sanctions, rejected a diplomatic settlement, and began to transfer troops to the Middle East in preparation for war. In 1991, the United States launched an all out offensive against Iraq; it destroyed Iraqi military targets as well as civilian targets. On February 24th of the

same year, the United States started what would become known as the 100-hour war. 100 hours was all it took for ground troops to drive the Iraqi's out of Kuwait and back into Iraq making the total number of Iraqi casualties between 100,000 and 200,000 (Gruehl & Twitchell, 2003)

Although American press asserts that it is not affected by the government, claiming objectivity or neutrality, it seems quite evident that the change of the United States' relations with Iraq during the 1990's had had some effects on the representation of the country and sometimes its people in American press (Sheyholislami, 2001).

In 2003, nearly 600 journalists working for news agencies from around the world traveled alongside U.S. and the coalition forces as they invaded Iraq (Lindner, 2008). The war in Iraq brought a rare showing of praise for the American media. A Pew Center study found that 74 percent of those surveyed on coverage of the war gave the media a grade of good to excellent in providing engaging coverage of the war (Lichter & Lichter, 2003). This, however, proved to be a curse rather than a blessing. Each of the 600 journalists sent to Iraq to cover the invasion and its aftermath brought their own package of beliefs and ideologies which they later integrated with their news-reports, therefore, contradicting stories about the reality of the situation in Iraq emerged proving -the quite obvious fact- that it is rather impossible for the media to be objective or to present the reality of things, simply because—in addition to the discussion above—different reporters will, in most cases, view the same event differently.

### 1.1.5 *TIME* and *Newsweek*

*TIME* and *Newsweek* are two of the United States' highest grossing weekly newsmagazines. *TIME* magazine was created by Luce and Hadden in 1923. According to Luce and Hadden, *TIME*'s main aim is to "serve the modern necessity of keeping people informed" (Tungate, 2004: 164). The distinctive *TIME* writing style is a chief factor in its popularity. The prospectus of the magazine explained its goals in detail, as follows:

People are unformed because no publication has adapted itself to the time which busy men are able to spend on simply keeping informed... *TIME* is interested—not in how much it includes between its covers—but how much it gets off its pages into the minds of its readers (p. 166).

Therefore, *TIME*'s articles are concise and written in relatively simple language.

*Newsweek* was founded and launched approximately a decade after *TIME* by Thomas J.C. Martyn in 1933; it is the second-largest weekly magazine in the U.S., having trailed *TIME* in circulation and advertising revenue for most of its existence, although both are much larger than the third of America's prominent weeklies, U.S. News & World Report (Newstrust, 2010). *Newsweek* emphasizes more interpretative stories. Over time it has developed a full spectrum of news-magazine material, from breaking stories and analysis to reviews and commentary. *Newsweek* is generally considered the most liberal of the three major newsweeklies (Groseclose & Milyo, 2004). Both *TIME* and *Newsweek* contributed greatly in reporting events that took place before and during the U.S-led invasion, and like most media outlets, neither *TIME* nor *Newsweek* claim complete objectivity in their reporting, therefore allowing external elements such as the writers own view to seep into its articles.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The legitimacy of the U.S-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 sparked heated debates in the international community. Almost immediately, reporters were sent to the war torn land to convey the reality of the situation. Articles written for different newsmagazines and newspapers portrayed U.S soldiers, the Iraqi people and the fallen regime in different ways. Therefore, putting the many external elements effecting news production into consideration, one would reach the conclusion that the process of news making is never objective. The subjectivity of the media and its ability to shape public opinion create a lethal combination of public manipulation. Therefore, media representations of ethnic or religious groups play a vital role in manipulating how people view events.

The media representation devices employed in news articles that depicted both Kurds and Shiites before and after the 2003 U.S-led invasion of Iraq would have shaped public opinion in discreet ways which can be revealed through an analytical investigation of the language employed by the media. Therefore, this study will not only shed more light on the representation of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in American media, but also provide a better understanding of the ideologies news sources are associated with.

## **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of this research is to find out how news articles written in *TIME* and *Newsweek* magazines represent both Iraqi Kurds and Shiites at two different time periods (specifically, four months before the 2003 US-led invasion and the corresponding period three years after the invasion), and whether or not each group is represented in a different way depending on the nature of its relation with the United

States. The reason for choosing to analyze articles published four months prior to the invasion is simply because the number of Iraqi related articles increased substantially in the months that preceded the U.S-led invasion and analyzing articles published in the corresponding period three years subsequent to the invasion provides the two magazines with sufficient time to develop new patterns of representing Iraqi Kurds and Shiites. This study also aims to fill the gap in the existing body of literature with regard to academic analysis of news reports on the U.S invasion of Iraq since research on this conflict is relatively scarce and limited to newspaper articles and contents of various websites.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This paper will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the language features used in the representation of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in *TIME* and *Newsweek* before the U.S-led invasion? How are these features different in the two magazines?
2. What are the language features used in the representation of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in *TIME* and *Newsweek* after the U.S-led invasion? How are these features different in the two magazines?
3. How did the patterns of representation of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in *TIME* and *Newsweek* change over the course of the two time periods?

#### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Due to the U.S-led invasion of Iraq, the emergence of magazine articles about Iraqi Kurds and Shiites has become relatively more frequent. However, there has not been any analysis of the manner in which each group is represented within the theoretical