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"Oriental Despotism" and the Democratisation of Iraq in *The Australian*
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Introduction

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the publication of Edward W. Said's seminal text, *Orientalism*. It was here that Said first noted that the colonial period had seen the West (or more specifically the European colonial powers) approach the East (and here Said focuses on the Islamic / Arab world) with a sense of superiority – intellectually, politically, culturally and militarily – and that this superiority therefore justified the domination and domestication of the Orient. Via his discourse analysis of an astounding number of academic, bureaucratic and literary texts from the colonial period, Said was able to demonstrate that this sense of superiority was underpinned by a matrix of interdependent discourses, institutions and practices which he termed *Orientalism* (*Orientalism* 2-3). The net output of Orientalism was therefore an ideological fantasy, a fantasy that bore no relation to the reality and complexity of Middle Eastern society – its myriad of cultures, religions, peoples, customs, and histories. Firstly, this Orientalist fantasy served to homogenise, demonise and stereotype the Middle East according to fairly reductive and negative terms, such that the Oriental was viewed as the "other." Here, Said pointed out that the hegemonic group or colonisers generate certain forms of knowledge about those that are subordinated or colonised, and that this knowledge is disseminated to the general public in various ways. During the nineteenth century, these knowledges were distilled down from "essential ideas about the Orient – its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness – into a separate and unchallenged coherence" (Said, *Orientalism* 205). Clearly the unquestioned tendency to view the people of the Orient as deficient and inferior "others" served the colonial agenda in continuing to dominate and control sections of the East. Secondly, the ideological fantasy of Orientalism had the effect of marginalising or, more accurately, silencing, the histories and cultures of these "others." In this way, Said concluded that the people of the Orient have been "rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory - taken over" (*Orientalism* 207).

Perhaps more relevant here is Said's *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine how we see the Rest of the World*. Here, Said applies the methodology that he had so rigorously outlaid in *Orientalism* to the function of the Western media (particularly that of the United States) and its coverage of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. In many ways this later work represents the culmination of the conception of Orientalism as Said moves beyond the annals of colonial history and literature to demonstrate how the legacy of Orientalism has been passed down to more contemporary political situations and their construction in the media. Indeed, Said's analysis demonstrates that Western hegemony over the East did not end with the colonial period, but continues today via not only the West's dominance of the East, but also via more subtle forms such as the media. In an extended quote that seems eerily prophetic given the current "War on Terror" and its media coverage, Said writes,

> For most Americans …[and, presumably, other Westerners] the branch of the cultural apparatus that has been delivering Islam to them for the most part includes the television and radio networks, the daily newspapers, and the mass circulation news magazines …[and the] cinema. Together, this powerful concentration of mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam and, of course, reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media…. Thus, if the Iranian crisis is regularly rendered by television pictures of chanting "Islamic" mobs accompanied by commentary about "anti-Americanism," the distance, unfamiliarity, and threatening quality of the spectacle limit "Islam" to those characteristics; this in turn gives rise to a feeling that something basically unattractive and negative confronts us. Since Islam is "against" us and "out there," the necessity of adopting a confrontational response of our own towards it will not be doubted. (*Covering Islam* 43-44)

In recent years, and particularly since the events of September 11 2001 and the subsequent "War on Terror," an entire body of scholarship has sought to extend Said's analysis to the Australian news media and its role in stereotyping, homogenising, victimising and demonising people of Middle Eastern descent or of the Islamic faith (Poynting et al.; McCallum and Blood; Manning *Dog Whistle Politics;* Manning *Us and Them;* J. Lewis "Paradise Defiled"; J. Lewis "Propagating Terror"; Lewis and deMasi; Akbarzadeh and Smith; Abdalla and Rane; Isakhan "Re-Ordering Iraq"). One very specific example is Peter Manning's investigation of the reporting of issues related to Islam, Arabs and the Middle East for a two year period including 12 months before and after the 9/11 attacks in two major Sydney newspapers. Although this period included coverage of events as diverse as the Palestinian Intifada, the controversial "ethnic" gang rapes in Sydney, the arrival of asylum seekers in Australia, the events of September 11 and the Australian federal election of 2001, Manning found that there was a "remarkably consistent view of Arab people and people of Muslim belief" which relied on racialised stereotypes, portraying them as "violent to the point of terrorism" and "as tricky, ungrateful, undeserving, often disgusting and barely human" (*Dog Whistle Politics* 44-45) (see also his: "Australians Imagining Islam"; *Us and Them*). In *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* the authors go one step further to argue that these media discourses have served to create a climate of fear and paranoia surrounding issues relating to Arab / Middle Eastern / Islamic "others." These people have been reduced to the role of "folk devil," caught up in an ongoing cycle of "moral panic" where "Middle Eastern can become conflated with Arab, Arab with Muslim, Muslim with rapist, rapist with gang, gang with terrorist, terrorist with "boat people," "boat people" with barbaric, and so on in interminable permutations" (Poynting et al. 49).

Arguably, this construction of the Middle Eastern / Arab / Islamic "other" has also played a role in the Australian news media's coverage of broader global events such as the Iraq War. Indeed, a recent body of literature has accused the Australian news media – particularly the Murdoch controlled newspapers – of displaying "an intellectual orthodoxy and an ideological uniformity that is remarkable, overt and long-standing" (McKnight 54). Following on, others have argued that this "ideological uniformity" is best illustrated by the Australian Murdoch papers in their coverage of the Iraq War (Isakhan "Media Discourse and Iraq's Democratisation"; Manne *Do Not Disturb;* Dimitrova; Manning "A Colonial State of Mind"; Tuckwell; Hirst and Schutze). Along these lines, Robert Manne states that

> On the road to the invasion of Iraq, and through the … bloody chaos since Baghdad's fall, almost every Australian newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch has supported each twist and turn of the American, British and Australian policy line. ("Murdoch and the War on Iraq" 75)

In this way, the contemporary Australian news media has not only played a part in propagating Orientalist discourses concerning the people of the Middle East and of the Islamic faith, it has also failed to offer a robust discussion of Australia's role in the "Coalition of the Willing." Instead, it

has provided the Australian populace with a limited discursive field that continues to engender the kind of myths and images that have long demarcated the divide between Oriental backwardness and Western civility.

Despite the significance of this emerging body of research, there have been very few studies which have attempted to extend Said's framework to the Western media's coverage of democratic developments in the Middle East. Perhaps the only precedent here can be found in John Richardson's *[Mis]Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. Here, the author argues that, in the case of democratic developments in Turkey and Pakistan, the (right-wing) British press appear wary or even scared "of the prospect of Islamic-leaning democratically elected political parties" (89). Indeed, they seem to cover such developments as if the election of Muslim governments or Muslim political parties is antithetical and disadvantageous to the prospects of democracy across the region. Richardson goes on to note that the British broadsheet coverage of the 1997 Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) conference held in Tehran served as a forum for British journalists to reduce the internal politics of Iran at the time to a binary opposition between the moderates, represented by the then recently elected President Katami and the traditional hegemons, the religious conservatives. This good guy / bad guy dialectic is clearly problematic and, as Richardson goes on to demonstrate, is indicative of a broader discourse where the Western or European world is equated with democracy, while Islam / Middle East remains the locale of despotism. Richardson refers to this as the media's "ontological framework" where "Islam = backward; the West = progress" (102).

This "ontological framework" and its binary distinction between the Western tendency towards democracy and the Eastern predisposition to despotism is itself a very long-held and deep-seated discourse. Indeed, much research has successfully demonstrated that from as far back as the Western world has considered itself to be politically significant in terms of its propensity for cosmopolitanism, egalitarianism and democratic practices, there has been a concurrent discourse premised on the assumption that the Oriental "other" is prone to barbarism, backwardness and despotism (Hartog; Springborg; Rubies; Arjomand; Grossrichard; Figueira; Turner *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism;* Lichtheim; Sahay; Turner *Weber and Islam;* Salvatore). This binary distinction is explicit in the work of some of the most influential scholars in the field of Middle East politics and International Relations in the late twentieth / early twenty-first centuries. For example, Bernard Lewis has made a number of sweeping statements about the nature of Middle Eastern politics under the authority of the caliphs, which he saw as an era of "almost unrelieved autocracy, in which obedience to the sovereign was a religious as well as a political obligation" (48). According to Lewis, this is a rather predictable consequence of the fact that Islamic law itself

> knows no corporate legal persons; Islamic history shows no councils or communes, no synods or parliaments, nor any other kind of elective or representative assembly. It is interesting that the jurists never accepted the principle of majority decision – there was no point, since the need for a procedure of corporate collective decision never arose. (48)

Similar sentiments have also been expressed throughout the work of Samuel P. Huntington. As early as 1984 Huntington was arguing that "among Islamic countries, particularly those in the Middle East, the prospects for democratic development seem low" ("Will More Countries Become Democratic?" 216). Several years later, Huntington furthered this notion in his essay "The Goals of Development," by arguing that each region of the globe has its own individual religio-cultural essence that plays a large part in determining receptivity to democratic systems ("The Goals of Development" 24). In his later work, Huntington isolated two such religio-cultural examples, namely Islam and Confucianism, and labelled them "profoundly anti-democratic" (*The Third Wave* 300), claiming that 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 effectiveness of those institutions" (*The Third Wave* 298). Building on this early work, Huntington's essay and later book based around the notion of a "Clash of Civilisations" took

these ideas even further by claiming that the early twenty-first century will be marred by the battle – both physical and ideological – between these anti-democratic "civilizations" and the West ("The Clash of Civilizations?"; *The Clash of Civilizations*).

Not surprisingly, both Lewis and Huntington have received a plethora of criticism from across the political and ideological spectrum (Seib; Heazle; Islam; Gupta; Hammond; Kalam; Mazrui; Rashid; Gerges; Buruma and Margalit; Ajami; Bottici and Challand). Perhaps most scathing of all have been those criticisms offered by Said who has referred to Lewis as the "perfect exemplification of the academic whose work purports to be liberal objective scholarship but is in reality very close to propaganda *against* his subject material" (*Orientalism* 316). Similarly, Said has argued that Huntington's "Clash of Civilisation" thesis is not only a "reductive and vulgar notion" ("Israel, Iraq and the United States" 226) but an example of "the purest invidious racism … a sort of parody of Hitlerian science directed today against Arabs and Muslims" ("Dignity and Solidarity" 293). Despite such staunch opposition, both Lewis and Huntington have received widespread support and the highest accolades from conservative newspaper columnists, neo-conservative foreign policy pundits and Orientalist academics alike, not to mention the fact that their work continues to guide the Bush administration's understanding of the Muslim world and the Middle East to this day (Islam).

Utilising the framework outlined by Said and extending the work of Richardson, this paper seeks to examine the ways in which the "ontological framework" which delineates Western democracy from Oriental despotism – as found in the work of scholars such as Lewis and Huntington - has been utilised in the Australian news media's coverage of the series of democratic events in Iraq throughout 2005. In order to achieve this task, newspaper reports from *The Australian* were collected and analysed according to the method of critical discourse analysis. Overall, this examination found that *The Australian* tended to eschew its responsibility to foster varied debate and discourse on the democratisation of Iraq, especially given Australia's involvement in the "Coalition of the Willing," to instead rely on Orientalist tropes such as that of "Oriental despotism" and the "Clash of Civilizations." In this way, *The Australian* can be seen to have reduced the complexity of Iraq's rich and detailed political history as well as its multifaceted political present down to a simplistic Orientalist analysis that explains away Iraq's democratisation and justifies continued occupation.

Covering the Democratisation of Iraq in *The Australian* newspaper

Following the invasion of Iraq by the "Coalition of the Willing" in 2003, came the realisation that the initial reasons for entering Iraq – Saddam's alleged stockpile of Weapons of Mass Destruction and his links to Al-Qaeda – were grievous intelligence errors. In the years since, the Bush administration, with varying degrees of success, has been able to spin the war's *raison d'etre* 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 (Bush). To achieve this goal in Iraq, a series of democratic elections and a national referendum were held throughout the nation in 2005. These included national elections on the 30 January 2005 which saw some 8.5 million Iraqis vote to nominate a national assembly who would go on to draft the Iraqi constitution. After much deliberation and after missing the original deadline of 15 August 2005, the committee approved a final draft of the Iraqi constitution on the 28 August. Following this, on the 15 October 2005, Iraqis again took to the polls, effectively ratifying the proposed constitution and a permanent government has more recently been established following another national vote attended by 11 million Iraqis on December 15.

Not surprisingly, this series of events attracted the attention of the Australian print media. Unfortunately, this coverage was generally pessimistic, often relying on Orientalist stereotypes and assumptions about the Middle East and, more specifically, its tendency towards "Oriental

despotism." For example, earlier work by the author ("Iraq's December 2005 Election"; "Media Discourse and Iraq's Democratisation"; "From Despotism to Democracy") has included a series of analyses which compared and contrasted the coverage of these events in several of Australia's leading daily newspapers (*The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age*, and *The Courier-Mail*) with a collection of Middle Eastern English-language papers (*The Daily Star* of Lebanon, *Anadolu Agency* and *Dunya* of Turkey, as well as *The Kuwait Times* and *The Jordan Times*). Despite the differences and debates within and between these various media outlets, overall this research found that while the mainstream Australian media tended to be reductive and Orientalist in its coverage of Iraq's democratisation, the English-language Middle Eastern press studied here generally encouraged a more open and varied debate concerning Iraq's democratisation and its consequences for the broader region.

This paper seeks to build on this earlier research by more closely examining the coverage of the democratisation of Iraq throughout 2005 in *The Australian* newspaper. *The Australian* is an organ of the nations largest newspaper conglomerate, *News Limited*, owned by Rupert Murdoch, and is the only nation-wide broadsheet in the country ("Control of Major Australian Media"). Indeed, it is fair to say that *The Australian* plays an "agenda-setting" role, informing the Australian populace about global events such as the war and ongoing occupation of Iraq. The articles studied here were obtained using the keywords "Iraq and democracy" in the "search" function of Factiva (factiva.com) and the data was refined by eliminating any brief articles (such as letters, TV reviews etc.) and those which were not directly related to the events mentioned above (such as those which focused on contemporaneous events like the ongoing violence in Iraq or the Egyptian elections of 2005 etc.). Finally, these reports were analysed according to the method of critical discourse analysis (Fowler; Tolson; Fairclough; Van Dijk) where media discourses are understood 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 and Wilkins 651). Specifically, by closely examining the ways in which the democratisation of Iraq has been constructed in *The Australian* newspaper, 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 readership.

Starting with the coverage of the January election in Iraq, we see that the complexity of Iraqi politics is reduced to a binary opposition between the forces of democracy (the United States and the broader "Coalition of the Willing," Western civilisation in general and the majority of "ordinary" Iraqis) versus the propagators of terror (Al-Qaeda, Pro-Saddam Sunnis [often seen as the majority of Sunnis] and various domestic and foreign insurgents). This analogy of the ideological battle between democracy and terror is invoked repeatedly, with Australia's former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, weighing into the debate by claiming that the Iraqi election is symbolic of "a crucible for the struggle between democracy and freedom and the forces of totalitarianism and terrorism" (Downer) (see also: Rothwell "Iraqis Suffer for Their Suffrage"). What is particularly interesting here is that while the myriad of legitimate political groups in Iraq and their respective ideologies and policies are all but ignored, figures such as Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi are cited repeatedly. Here, *The Australian* has eschewed the complexity of Iraqi politics, preferring the sensationalism of bin Laden's claim that those who participate in the election are infidels (Costello) and apostates whose deaths should not be prayed over (Shawcross) as well as Zarqawi's declaration of "an all-out war on this evil principle of democracy and those who follow this wrong ideology" (cited in Sheridan; see also: Rothwell "Allawi Urges Vote against Terror"; Rothwell "Bloody Dawn to Iraq Democracy"; Rothwell "Insurgents Strike into Kurdish Enclave"; Costello).

Much of the coverage of Iraq's democratisation is also reductive, relying on Orientalist clichés regarding the Middle East's tendency towards despotism as well as simplistic analyses of Iraq's political history. For example, in one particular op-ed two former US Secretaries of State, Henry Kissinger and George Schultz, argue that democracy is unlikely to take hold in Iraq because it is not as homogenous as the societies of the West, but that instead it "is a society riven by centuries

of religious and ethnic conflicts with little or no experience with representative institutions" (Kissinger and Shultz). The notion that Iraq has "no liberal past to draw from" (Kaplan) is repeated several times, with the January 2005 elections therefore viewed as an unprecedented moment in Iraqi history (Devine; Rothwell "Troops Must Go"). These sentiments are reiterated later the same year, during the coverage of Iraq's December 2005 election, where Iraqis are seen as "not used to democracy … and they have little tradition of tolerance" ("Another Positive Step") and that "they feel that violence remains the more pragmatic way to achieve justice and to protect one's interests" (Clemons). Inherent in this kind of coverage is the widely held view that modern Iraq (as well as the broader Middle East / Islamic world) has emerged from a long history where barbarism, violence and despotism have always triumphed. Here, the work of Orientalist scholars such as Bernard Lewis have done much to perpetuate and legitimate this view, so much so that it has achieved the status of a received wisdom, rarely questioned even by US Secretaries of State or renowned journalists.

Later, during the coverage of the drafting and ratification of the Iraqi constitution (August-October, 2005), *The Australian* seizes the opportunity to justify Australia's involvement in the ongoing occupation of Iraq. Here, we are warned that if the "Coalition of the Willing" was 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"). Similarly, the coverage of the December election details the dangers of a "cut and run" strategy, including a military coup, leading to the rise of another Saddam style despot (Belkin) and that without such a strongman, Iraq is doomed to anarchy (Behm). Alternatively, Iraq would crumble into three separate states (Clemons) or become a safe-haven for Al Qaeda similar to Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban ("Reporting for Duty").

More broadly, the issue of Middle Eastern democracy is raised several times throughout *The Australian's* coverage of Iraq's democratisation. Here, Orientalist scholarship such as that of Lewis and Huntington is both explicitly and implicitly cited as justification for the inability of the Middle East to adopt models of collective governance. This is made clear during the coverage of Iraq's January 2005 election where one anonymous journalist informs us that "the Arab world provides Iraq with no model for a fully functioning inclusive democracy" ("Brave Iraqis Inspire Lovers of Democracy"). More explicitly, an article by Michael Desch entitled "Folly in exporting liberty" directly cites Huntington's work as evidence of the claim that,

> because they lack the requisite institutional and cultural foundations, neither Afghanistan nor Iraq will likely become stable democracies. And weak and unstable democracies usually suffer from serious internal problems and are more likely to go to war than non-democratic regimes. (Desch)

Later, during their coverage of the drafting and ratification of the Iraqi Constitution, the issue of Middle Eastern democracy is invoked by Australia's former Foreign Minister, Labor Party leader and Governor-General, Bill Hayden, when he paraphrases the central thesis of "Oriental despotism" 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). Along these same lines, 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*. In this chapter, Huntington proposes 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" (Steyn).

Finally, at the time of Iraq's December 2005 election, a Professor of Sociology at Melbourne's La Trobe University, John Carroll, penned an article for *The Australian* entitled "How the West got stronger." Here, Carroll claims that since the events of September 11, 2001, Australia has

witnessed some profound changes in its society, politics and culture. These changes, according to Carroll, fulfil the predications of Huntington's thesis of a looming "Clash of Civilisations." Specifically, he claims that Australia's moves to strengthen ties to the United States are demonstrative of the fact that

> the world is dividing along civilisational lines; in the short to medium term, Islam versus most of the rest. A Western nation with a modest-sized population on the edge of Asia must maintain close ties with the dominant power in its own civilisation…. Britain … [and] the US. (Carroll)

The emergence of Lewis and 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. The perpetuation of this type of Orientalist scholarship is clearly problematic and tends to reinforce 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. As has been detailed above, such reductive thinking is evident in much of *The Australian's* coverage of the series of elections and the referendum held across Iraq in 2005.

Conclusion:

The military invasion and occupation of Iraq by the U.S.-led "Coalition of the Willing" not only evokes the colonial period in that it continues the relationship of Western hegemony over a subjugated East, it also brings to the fore the dialectic between the West's alleged proneness to democratisation and the supposed Oriental tendency to despotism. This long established dualism continues today in the works of prominent scholars of Middle Eastern politics such as Lewis and Huntington whose work underpins much contemporary foreign policy, scholarship and media coverage of the region. So widely held is the notion that the Middle East is antithetical to democratisation that *The Australian*'s coverage of the democratic elections and the referendum that occurred across Iraq in 2005 does not manage to move beyond this simplistic and reductive Orientalist framework. This is not particularly surprising when one considers that in reporting these events *The Australian* has relied on key opinion pieces from senior US and Australian political figures (such as Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, Bill Hayden and Alexander Downer), well known neo-conservative foreign policy pundits and polemicists (such as Lawrence F. Kaplan, Mark Steyn and Michael C. Desch) and a whole range of journalists, commentators and foreign correspondents, each of which situate their work around the received wisdom of "Oriental despotism."

By employing such a framework, much of the coverage of Iraq's democratisation in *The Australian* rides rough-shod over the complexities of Iraqi politics, both contemporary and historical. There is no pause for consideration of Iraq's long struggle towards egalitarianism and democratisation, just a reductive, simplistic analysis based more likely on the autocracy of Saddam than any genuine analysis of Iraqi or Middle Eastern history. Indeed, a more scholarly engagement with Iraq's long and rich history reveals not only that ancient Iraq was home to some of the earliest forms of collective governance, known as "Primitive Democracy" (Isakhan "Engaging 'Primitive Democracy'"), but also that the modern nation state of Iraq has been home to some of the more dynamic, diverse and democratic parties and factions found across the region since its inception in 1921 (Al-Musawi; Dawisha; Davis). This is to say nothing of the fact that *The Australian* has profoundly misunderstood – or at least under-reported – the nuanced and sophisticated political landscape that is post-Saddam Iraq. Indeed, at the time of the elections and referendum of 2005, Iraq was home to a panoply of political, religious and ethno-sectarian factions, each of which was forming policy agendas, engaging in complex political alliances, debating and deliberating over key issues of the state and campaigning vigorously in the nations media (Isakhan "The Post-Saddam Iraqi Media"). These developments were all but ignored as *The Australian* opted for sensationalised stories of violence, quotes from nefarious figures such as bin Laden and Al-

Zarqawi and pejorative op-eds about why Iraq is incapable of democracy.

This is particularly problematic because *The Australian* plays such a central role in determining the parameters of debate on issues such as Australia's ongoing commitment to the "Coalition of the Willing." Indeed, given Australia's participation in the Orientalist project of invading, colonising and democratising Iraq, its only nation-wide broadsheet has a certain responsibility to the Australian people. It is charged with the duty of not only providing a diverse and detailed debate on Australia's involvement in Iraq, but also in moving beyond Orientalist tropes and stereotypes to provide a more accurate picture of Iraq's long and complex history and its contemporary political landscape. In these tasks, *The Australian* has abjectly failed the Australian people, providing instead a limited discursive field in which Iraq's democratisation is re-told according to the dominant narrative in which the Western world is the legitimate legatee of democracy and therefore reserves the right to democratise – *under fire* if necessary - the despotic Middle Eastern "other."

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