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Kirkuk conflict in its ethnic/political media: the Turkmen newspaper *Alqal'a* as a model

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This article explores the Kirkuk conflict through the Turkmens' newspaper *Alqal'a*. Using agenda-setting and framing/priming for theoretical background and qualitative content analysis as a method, two macro-themes, related to the conflict, are found to be fundamental therein. These two main themes are: (1) exclusion and (2) self-confirmation. The two macro-themes overarch several micro- or sub-themes and are closely related to each other. They are set to inform the readers about what to think and how to think about the conflict. While 'exclusion' constitutes the cause, 'self-confirmation' is the latter's effect.

Keywords: ethnic conflict; Iraq; media and conflict

Struggle over and conflict in Kirkuk

The struggle over Kirkuk, Iraq, involving different Iraqi political and ethnic groups on the one hand, and various foreign powers (e.g. the UK, the US, and neighbouring countries) on the other hand, has persisted for quite a long time, and it seems that the prospects of a sustainable solution to this conflict in the near future are not strong. This struggle in modern times goes back at least to the last days of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of modern Iraq in 1921.[1] The US occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent new Iraqi Constitution of 2005 which, in article 140, outlined some specific procedure to solve the conflict by the end of 2007 at least promised some kind of resolution.[2] In reality, article 140 was not implemented. The article itself, as we will see in this study, instead of helping to solve the conflict, turned out to be another quarrelling point of the struggling groups and one of the factors which escalate the tension among those groups as some dismiss it and others favour it. After more than 10 years since the American occupation of Iraq commenced, the conflict seems to be deepening.

The rationale

Knowing each group's (whether political or ethnical) concerns and ideas about the conflict might shed some lights to understand the conflict. Although there can be different ways to understand the conflict and the contending groups' views about it, this study intends to detect some of the political/ethnical groups' ideas/concerns about the conflict as they are reflected in their media organs. The media have a great role in disseminating and promoting messages among the mass audiences. Although audiences have an active

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role in decoding the messages in media content according to their uses, gratifications and notably according to their values and beliefs despite the senders' intended messages/meanings, nevertheless, the media have various ways to influence these audiences. These means of influence, for example, can be seen in how the content of the media represents, constructs and portrays reality, or how it guides the audience or draws their attention to think about certain issues or events, even telling the audience how to think about the certain issues which they emphasize.

There are different ethnic groups which inhabit Kirkuk such as the Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens and Assyrians.[3] This pilot study focuses on one of these ethnic groups' political organization's media.[4] In particular, the study examines one of the struggling political/ethnical groups' media organs, namely, one of the Iraqi Turkmen Front's (ITF) newspapers called *Alqal'a*.

ITF is one of the major Iraqi Turkmen political organs under which several Iraqi Turkmen political parties and organizations, which represent different ideological views, are united.[5] Although there are different media organs owned/funded by ITF (such as magazines, newspapers, radio and satellite televisions) which publish and broadcast in Iraqi Turkmen language, the reason behind choosing this particular newspaper for this study lies in that it is published in Arabic. Arabic is the only language in the province of Kirkuk which is understood and used by the majority of people in Kirkuk regardless of their ethnicities and mother tongues. Moreover, Arabic is one of the major languages of Iraq, and it is used by the majority of Iraqis. Thus, the ideas reflected in this newspaper can be reached to a broader audience as it published in Arabic. Furthermore, by publishing the newspaper in Arabic, it is intended, in the first place, to convey the ideas about different issues which concern the ITF/Turkmens to other groups/ethnicities.

Literature review

There is a well-established literature of examining media content to know more about conflicts among different groups about different issues around the world. Yet, to our knowledge, there is none about Kirkuk's conflict (i.e., examining Kirkuk ethnic groups' media and how the conflict is reflected in Kirkuk's different ethnic groups' media). This section of the study will focus on how some studies, using certain methods, examined conflicts in media/communication.

Identifying or determining the main ideas or themes of media texts has been the focus of different media researches using different methods/explaining approaches. Although these methods and approaches take different names and seem to have different purposes, their main goal virtually is the same: to deconstruct/analyse the texts for explicit and implicit meanings/ideas. Almost all these methods/approaches are utilized to examine the text in order to answer the main question of '*what* has been there (said, written, shown, etc.)'. For example, issues such as *who* said *what*, *how* it was said and *why* it was said are the details of 'what has been said' explicitly or implicitly though they (who, how and why) greatly influence 'what has been there' in terms of presenting it to mass audiences. And here is the point; different researches, in addition to trying to identify what has been said in the texts, focus on one or more aspects of the details of 'what has been said'. While the 'agenda-setting' approach, for example, focuses on what has been said, 'priming'/'framing' centres on how the issue was said, that is, what aspects of an issue were salient in the text. Moreover, 'media representation' emphasizes how others or

events, for example, are portrayed and presented in the media.[6] However, this study focuses on 'what has been said', that is, identifying the main themes of the text.

Agenda-setting is a competent tool to recognize the issues salient in the media. Therefore, it is efficient in identifying the most important issues or ideas of media content especially if these media organs represent particular groups (i.e., not 'objectives' or they are partisan). Yet the impacts of issues salient in the media on the audience are equally important. Although the audiences can be active and decode the messages according to their knowledge, beliefs and interests, still the media can affect and shape their ideas. The impacts of salient issues in the media on an audience can vary due to different factors. Soroka, for example, in a research examining the relationship between agenda-setting in the media, the public and the policy-makers in Canada, emphasizes the attributes of an issue and their role in influencing the audience. Soroka points out that different agenda-setting researches reached different impacts for issues emphasized in media on audiences and that is related to the attributes of the issues emphasized in the media content (Soroka, 2002, p. 266). Zucker (cited in Soroka, 2002, p. 266) 'suggests that the more obtrusive an issue is – the more likely individuals' experience it directly – the less potential there is for media effects on public opinion'. Soroka goes on and lists some other hypotheses of various authors about how and to what extent the media can affect public opinion. One of these hypotheses, which is relevant to this study, suggests that 'issues that involve dramatic events or conflict should have an increased potential for media attention and effects on public opinion' (Soroka, 2002, p. 267). It is the aim here to search for such issues which might or 'should have an increased potential' to be reflected in the media organ which is examined in this study.

McCombs (2003), one of the agenda-setting theory pioneers, also emphasizes the power of the media in setting the audience's agenda or shaping their opinions. McCombs claims that 'the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public' (McCombs, 2003, p. 2). Yet there are other factors, beside the media making some issues salient for the audience and therefore shaping their opinions about these issues, which can influence certain groups' opinion about particular issues. One of these factors is the group's or public's readiness to be influenced by the media. Contrary to what agenda-setting theory claims, in many cases (especially in conflicts), audiences seek certain ideas, opinions or news items to satisfy their values or beliefs regardless of the 'objectivity' or the 'subjectivity' of these ideas or news items. To put it in a different way, audiences are eager to watch, hear or read their side of the story in media. In the time of conflict, it is hard for an ethnic group, which believes that its members are oppressed, to trust the oppressing group's media no matter how 'objective' the oppressing group's media are. In such situations, the group will turn to alternative media, particularly to their own media or to those which they believe reflect their voices. It is this very point which may encourage the researchers to believe, to some degree, that the issues reflected in a certain ethnic group's media could reflect some of their (the ethnic groups) main concerns about the conflict.

Related to agenda-setting, framing is another way to know what aspects of an issue are emphasized or included and what aspects are excluded or overlooked in the text. In 'US Media Framing of Foreign Countries' Image: An Analytical Perspective', Saleem (2007), quoting Entman (1993), defines/explains framing as selecting 'some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text … in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Saleem, 2007, p. 131). While

agenda-setting examines the issues which the media focus on in their content, framing is about examining the emphasized aspects of the salient issues.

Likewise, Kim, Han, and Scheufele (2010, p. 301) examine how the news priming, by emphasizing certain aspects of salient issues, affects the audience's evaluation of the salient issues in media and how the media, by priming, set the standards by which the audience judge these issues. Moreover, like Soroka, Kim et al. also examine the degree of impacts of different salient issues on the public. According to them, there are several ways to examine the degree of salient issues' effects on the audience. One of these ways, for example, is the degree of 'accessibility'. They argue that '[i]ntensive news coverage can prime an issue, making the issue more accessible in memory' (Kim et al., 2010, p. 302). Regardless of the ways how the media affect the audience by making some issues and some of their aspects more salient, their research findings, particularly about the ways by which the citizens evaluate the South Korean president, support the theory of agenda-setting and priming. They find that 'issues made prominent in the [South Korean] media become important dimensions of presidential evaluation' by the audience (Kim et al., 2010, p. 309). Accordingly, priming can be considered an influential technique whereby some issues/concerns become important to certain groups.

The media representation/portraying approach, on the other hand, is in fact another way to construct meaning about groups and events by presenting/portraying them in certain ways rather than another. The media do not convey 'reality' or do not tell us 'what is there'. Whether 'objective' or 'subjective', the media construct 'reality'. This construction of reality depends on different factors. One of these factors lies in the beliefs/values and interests of the individuals or the groups which construct events, issues or others. According to these beliefs/values or interests, the issues, or events, or others can be portrayed negatively (e.g., others) or positively (e.g., us). This kind of manipulation of reality by the media will simplify issues or events, especially conflicts. It thus will isolate or remove them from their context and makes them difficult to understand as it does not introduce diverse information/data or views about the issues or events or people. Ismail (2008), for example, shows in her study how the US news media portrayed the second Palestinian intifada. She reaches a conclusion where she wonders whether simplifying a 'complicated political conflict [i.e., the second Palestinian intifada and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] … at the expense of providing sufficient, meaningful context to understand the nuances involved' will leave room for the audience to negotiate the news (Ismail, 2008, p. 196). Nevertheless, certain groups' media's simplification, inclusion or exclusion of certain issues or events or portraying others negatively imply the importance of certain issues and unimportance of others to these groups. Therefore, one can identify these issues as the main concerns of these groups.

Different media organs, according to their beliefs, values and interests, obviously introduce different and often contradicting ideas. To Ellis (2006), although these contradicting ideas of different groups can play negative role in times of conflicts, they can be looked at as positive elements or factors in resolving conflicts if these media organs of struggling parties transcend themselves from 'first-order dysfunctional interaction' to 'second-order functional interaction'. 'First-order dysfunctional communication or interaction system' 'leads to persistence and stagnation rather than transformation' of the conflict towards a resolution as each party adheres to its views of the 'truth' (Ellis, 2006, p. 157). Ellis mentions the Israeli-Palestinian struggle as an example of such a 'first-order dysfunctional communication system' where the two parties go nowhere in the cycle of continuous blame of each other (Ellis, 2006, p. 156). Ellis suggests that such

unworkable system should be transformed into more workable system which he calls 'second-order transformational change'. According to Ellis, workable, transformational change 'comes when the relational system or parties in conflict do more than simply affirm two choices [i.e., each party adhering its own perspective]' (Ellis, 2006, p. 159). Ellis argues that '[t]he Hegelian dialectic … where a synthesis transcends a dichotomy, is the essence of transformational change' (Ellis, 2006, p. 159). This 'synthesis' or the new way of dealing with the conflict, Ellis argues,

> is even true with respect to the media where conflicting parties use the media to communicate with one an[o]ther. Messages circulate via the media and form a relational order … that is part of the governing communication system and emerges as a conceptual framework for understanding messages between contending parties. (Ellis, 2006, p. 165)

It can be inferred from Ellis's argument that the media content (messages, ideas, perspectives, meanings and so forth) of the struggling parties can create common grounds for 'positive' negotiations towards resolving the conflict if the struggling parties step out of their fundamental views of the conflict and adapt a new 'relational order' in order to understand each other rather than adhering to their own perspectives. After all, each party's perspectives or knowledge of other party and the conflict are not pure 'facts'. They are created through filtration (Ellis, 2006, pp. 159–160). A 'second-order functional interaction' in media/communication 'could involve preparation for negotiation, issue analysis, mediation, relationship transformation, problem solving, [and] reconciliation' (Ellis, 2006, p. 165).

The newspaper

The newspaper examined in this study, as mentioned earlier, is called *Alqal'a*. It represents and is funded by ITF. Although at least two-third of the newspaper's content reflect Iraqi, Arab and international issues (political, economic, cultural, literature, sports and entertainment), it stresses and emphasizes ITF's/Turkmens' concerns and perspectives of Kirkuk's conflict, in the remaining one-third of its content. These concerns and perspectives are emphasized mostly in the front and second pages and in different parts of the paper, particularly, for example, in the editor-in-chief's articles on the last page (page 12). The paper targets both the Iraqi Turkmens and other Iraqi ethnic groups, and it is published in Arabic.

The items which are examined in this study appeared in the issues of the newspaper during the period of 3 October 2011–31 October 2011. There is no certain reason behind choosing this very period of time for this study. For example, the time period was not chosen because of a significant/major event which is related to or has a great impact on the conflict. Rather, the aim was examining the content of the paper in order to identify the main ideas of the paper which are related to the conflict from different dimensions. Moreover, this study is a pilot project which might be important before conducting a research about the topic at a full scale.

Alqal'a is a weekly newspaper, and it consists of 12 pages. Each issue of *Alqal'a* has the same section appears on the same page. In addition to the front page and the last page (page 12) which is called 'The White Place' or 'The White Spot', the second page of *Alqal'a* is called 'Echos', the third 'Strategy', the fourth 'Features', the fifth 'Your Rights', the sixth and the seventh 'Sport', the eighth 'Culture', the ninth 'Open Dialogue', the tenth 'Our Life'

and the eleventh 'Oasis'. About one-third of 'Your Rights' page, that is, page five, is allocated to horoscopes, crosswords, proverbs, heritage and so forth and called 'Entertainment'. On the other hand, depending on the length of the dialogue, a third or quarter of 'Open Dialogue' page, that is, page nine, is allocated to economics and called 'Economy'. Examining all the pages of *Alqal'a*, the related items to the study's topic were mostly found on front page which consisted of news reports, editorials and analytic articles, second page 'Echos' consisted of interviews (mainly with ITF's figures), a weekly column, opinion articles, some news items, and sometimes feature articles, a full page dialogue on page nine ('Open Dialogue' page) and the editor-in-chief's articles which always appeared on page twelve ('The White Place' page).

Forty-eight items in *Alqal'a* were related to the topic of the study. Of 48 items, 24 items were news stories, four editorials, four analytic articles, two editor-in-chief's columns, two newspaper writers' weekly columns, six interviews and six opinion articles in four issues of the newspaper. One of the issues of *Alqal'a* (24 October 2011, issue No. 295) could not be obtained.[7]

It is important to mention that any findings, analysis and conclusion in this study are limited to the mentioned period of the time during which the newspaper's content was examined in this study and not necessarily represent the whole Turkmen ethnic group's ideas or opinions about the conflict.

Theoretical context and methodology

The theoretical background of the study lies in the theories of media effects such as agenda-setting and framing/priming which deal with the way media set their content in order to influence, explicitly or implicitly, the audience by telling them what to think about and how to think about the issues they set for them to think about. Moreover, media representation theories (e.g., how media represent, portray or construct their views of others and events) have also used as a theoretical background in this study.[8]

The method used in this study to determine the main themes of the newspaper is qualitative content analysis. Qualitatively examining the themes/ideas/concepts in the media content, unlike the quantitative content analysis researches, is related to meaning construction rather than assuming that there are manifest, visible, explicit, fixed meanings (usually the words or phrases) in the content and the researcher typically isolates and counts them as 'facts'. Moreover, quantitative content analysis 'ignores the broader context within which communication takes place and therefore is only able to deal with what is on surface' (Williams, 2003, p. 157). Identifying the ideas in the media content is, thus, related to meaning constructing and how these meanings are constructed and for what purposes and in which context. Creating and interpreting meanings in communication mainly depend on the context within which the meanings are created and interpreted according to the different circumstances and interests of the individuals or groups.[9]

There is a basic concept behind examining and identifying meanings/ideas/themes in qualitative content analysis. This concept consists of 'convention/agreement'. A word, written or spoken, for example, has no meaning unless a certain society/ethnic group's members agree on its meaning. Convention/agreement is used as an overarching under which the techniques of meaning identifying in texts are used. Basically, the users of certain languages create meanings according to some arbitrary rules of the languages the users agree on. Identifying the main ideas in the text, in this study, is related to the convention of the language (in this case Arabic language in which the text is produced).

It is conventionally related to the producer's and the analyst/researcher's knowledge of the text which is written in Arabic.

Finally, after identifying the themes related to the conflict in Kirkuk in the newspaper, these themes are categorized according to their common elements/characteristics. These categories are further examined to establish major themes/concepts under which sub-themes are classified according to their similarities. This is done by employing knowledge/cognition notions. According to Reisberg (2007, p. 288), 'we need concepts in order to have knowledge, and we need knowledge in order to function'. Identifying ideas or themes or concepts are the elements 'without which cognition cannot proceed' (Reisberg, 2007, p. 288). Knowledge, particularly the shared knowledge of individuals and each individual's own knowledge, is then an essential tool to create and recognize concepts. Reisberg offers different ways to classify or categorize concepts. In this study we employ two of these categorizing ways, namely *prototype* and *exemplar* according to which our study's categories are produced.[10] Prototype is the ideal or the centre of the category. In other words, it constitutes the 'average [elements or characteristics] of the various category members' (Reisberg, 2007, p. 292). Thus, if a case has similar characteristics of the prototype, then most probably it is included under that certain prototype category; if not, then the case is excluded and does not fit under this very category (Reisberg, 2007, p. 292). Exemplar, on the other hand, functions in an opposite manner to prototype. For example, instead of judging whether the member of a category has similarities with the ideal or the prototype, one uses the member of a category as an exemplar to judge other items or cases in order to see whether they have similarities with the exemplar or not and thus whether both the exemplar and the judged item or the case can be included in the same category (according to their similarities) or not (if they do not share any significant similarities), and this, according to Reisberg (2007, p. 298), is called 'exemplar-based reasoning'.

Analysis

Diverse themes emerge from *Alqal'a* regarding conflict in Kirkuk. It appears that the issues, themes, ideas and opinions about the conflict in Kirkuk, which are reflected in *Alqal'a*'s news reports and its editorials, editor-in-chief's articles, weekly/non-weekly comments/opinions columns and articles, analytic articles and interviews (mainly with ITF figures), reflect each other. In other words, they complement each other and set to tell the readers what to think and how to think about the conflict. Two major (macro) themes, deduced from several sub-themes (micro-themes), appear to be the main concern of the newspaper about the conflict. These two main themes are: (1) exclusion and (2) self-confirmation. Both issues are strongly related to each other. According to the newspaper, Turkmens see themselves excluded, neglected and marginalized by other 'powerful' groups. As a result of these feelings/beliefs, the newspaper focuses on issues of self-confirmation. It focuses on issues such as the Turkmens existence and that they have to have equal rights just like other ethnic groups.

Exclusion

Exclusion, neglecting, marginalization, degrading of and targeting Turkmens physically (killing, assassinating and abducting them) appear to be one of the main concerns of *Alqal'a*. As a result, conflict/tension in Kirkuk and among its ethnic groups is escalated.

Others, such as the Kurds, successive Iraqi governments and foreign powers and UN's organizations, to a less degree, are blamed for this escalation. These concerns manifest themselves in different news items, interviews, commentaries and editorials of the newspaper under several sub-themes.

Imbalanced power and rights

'Not allowing the Turkmens to share power in Kirkuk with others (e.g., the Kurds and Arabs)', 'Turkmens not having equal rights like others' and 'portraying them as minority' are some of the sub-themes which imply the exclusion or marginalization of Turkmens.

Others, particularly the Kurdish authorities, are accused of excluding Turkmens from sharing power both in civil administration and security forces and for not having equal rights like others (e.g., the Kurds).[11] For example, in his weekly opinion column 'View', under a subtitle 'Security balance', Katana (2011, p. 02) notes that one of the important reasons behind the increasing violence in Kirkuk, which mostly targets the Turkmens, according to the official and the ITF announcements, is the imbalance in the security forces in Kirkuk. The opinion column appears to be accusing the Kurdish authorities of monopolizing the official and non-official security forces.[12] While Katana (2011, p. 02) confirms that 'everyone' in Kirkuk assert that one of the main reasons behind the increasing violence in Kirkuk is the imbalances in the security forces (i.e., controlled mainly by the Kurds), he accuses the Kurdish parliament member Khalid Shwani of denying this fact. Likewise, in an interview (Hurmuzlu, 2011, p. 02) with Kasim Kazanchi, the president of the ITF Kirkuk branch asserts that:

> They, in the Iraqi Turkmen Front, are very anxious about the [bad] security situation [in] Kirkuk … and that there [could be] many reasons [behind this situation] and among them is the obvious imbalance in security institutions and marginalizing the Turkmens and not allowing them to participate in building the newly established state's [i.e., new Iraq] institutions.

In addition to excluding the Turkmens from sharing the power in security forces and not including them in building the institutions of new Iraq, in an interview Ali Mahdi ('Ali Mahdi', 2011) and an editorial of *Alqal'a* ('Targeting the Turkmens in their properties as well', 2011, p. 01) the newspaper remarks that the Turkmens have no similar or equal rights like the Kurds and the Arabs in gaining their property rights back which were seized by Arabs during the old regime (pre-2003 regime) and by Kurds in post-2003. Ali Mahdi, ITF's spokesperson and a member of KPC, states that the Turkmens have problems with Arabs who seized their lands pre-2003 and the Kurds after 2003. Similarly, the editorial comments that the Turkmens are not only targeted physically. It seems, according to the editorial, Turkmens lands are also targeted. The editorial claims that only 10% of those Turkmens who were forced out of their lands were compensated.

The issue of how the Turkmens were/are represented by other major Iraqi ethnic groups (particularly by their political groups and by the state institutions and constitutions) plays a role in exclusion, marginalization and degrading of the Turkmens and consequently affecting their rights (i.e., deprived of their or having less rights). According to the newspaper, power and rights should be based on humanity and citizenship not on the basis of majority/minority classification. The editorial ('Real start', 2011, p. 01) plainly emphasizes this notion; it asserts that '[a]ny society which respects its

fractions [diverse ethnic groups] does not deal with terms as majority and minority for everyone have responsibilities towards the country and have the same rights'.

Equal rights which are built on citizenry, according to some of *Alqal'a*'s writers (Kopurlu, 2011, p. 02), will lead to positive results and it is for the interests of the state (i.e., Iraq). In other words, it could lead to decreasing violence and help resolving the conflict among different ethnic groups. Kopurlu thinks that if the state guarantees citizens' rights, their trust in the state will increase and he wonders what prevents these citizens, after obtaining their rights, from being loyal to and sacrificing themselves for the country.

Turkmens are targeted

Targeting Turkmens and marginalizing them are another theme emphasized, explicitly and implicitly, by *Alqal'a* which denotes/connotes how they are excluded and disregarded. During the period of time in which the issues of *Alqal'a* are examined in this research, it seems that attacks against the Turkmens (abducting, exploding and assassination) were increasing, and as a result many Turkmens (particularly the skilled Turkmens and the rich) either terminated their activities (e.g., not going to their works, schools) or left or were planning to leave Kirkuk and seeking secure and safe places. Targeting Turkmens, attacking and marginalizing them, according to the newspaper, seem to be an old issue which existed in pre-2003 and continues to present.

Targeting Turkmens (exploding their institutions, abducting their rich people and assassinating and threatening their experts and skilled figures such as the doctors) is emphasized throughout *Alqal'a*'s examined issues in this study.[13] For instance, several Turkmens' civic and political institutions, such as the 'Iraqi Turkmen Women Union', 'Turkmen Veterans Association' and the ITF's branch in Chinichiler habitation, were bombed in Kirkuk city ('The Turkmens will request', 2011, p. 01). Moreover, the newspaper asserts that 'in the last two months [i.e., August and September 2011], Kirkuk had seen the abduction and assassination of many doctors among them Yildirim Abbas Aldamirchi who is considered one of the Iraq's distinguished neurologists … [these actions] mostly targeted the Turkmens' ('Alsalihi: the security in Kirkuk', 2011, p. 01; 'Alsalihi: we will not compromise', 2011, p. 01). According to the newspaper, the Turkmens are targeted more than any other ethnic groups in Kirkuk. Ali Mahdi, the ITF spokesperson and the Turkmen member of KPC, claims that 'Kirkuk had seen … many terrorist attacks during the last three months and the Turkmens, whether doctors, or business men, or innocent civilians, were the first targets [of these terrorist attacks] … and more than 90% of these attacks [targeted] Turkmen people' ('Ali Mahdi', 2011, p. 02). Mahdi goes on and claims that:

> the number of the Turkmen martyrs [who were killed] approached five thousand since 2003 and the [number] of wounded [is] five times [more than] of the martyrs [numbers] and the ransoms paid [by Turkmens to the kidnappers] were more than fifty million dollars. [Some of our] towns were totally wiped out in Tallafer and its villiges, Taze, Amirli, Tuz, Yingice, Dakuk, and residences in Kirkuk city.

It is apparent in *Alqal'a* that targeting Turkmens has close ties with Turkmens' demands of sharing power (at least in security forces) with other ethnic groups (particularly the Kurds) to protect themselves. Earlier, in the above section/them, we have already seen

how the Turkmen figures (mostly politicians) are demanding power-sharing in the security forces in the province of Kirkuk believing that 'the obvious imbalance in security institutions and marginalizing the Turkmens' are among the most alleged factors of targeting the Turkmens (Hurmuzlu, 2011, p. 02).

In addition to violently targeting the Turkmens, *Alqal'a* stresses other kinds of targeting the Turkmens such as marginalizing, neglecting and degrading them. Allami (2011) in his commentary 'Let Kirkuk be a model for future Iraq and real citizenry' argues that:

> One of the hegemony/controlling and excluding ways [of others in Iraq] is represented in the domination of the bi-classification of the Iraqi society's structure. The Iraqi Arab and Kurdish politicians used to make this kind of bi-classification to be dominant which considers the Iraqi society consisting of Arabs and Kurds only and not recognizing the existence of other [Iraqi] ethnic [groups].… The consequences of this, for example, was the consolidation of the constitution and its applications of this bi-classification … [As a result of this,] recognizing the Iraqi Turkmens as a third ethnic [group after the Arabs and the Kurds] was not recognized. (p. 02)

Marginalizing Turkmens or neglecting them (e.g., not recognizing them as a third ethnic group of Iraq) is related, to a certain degree, to the fact that the Turkmens 'did not have enough representatives in [new 2005] constitution-writing committee' according to Arshad Alsalihi, the president of ITF ('The president of', 2011, p. 01). Marginalizing of any ethnic group and the conflict in Kirkuk, Allami (2011, p. 02) believes, should be looked at and solved within 'a real democratic Iraq based on equality and the principles of modern citizenry'.[14]

The Iraqi governments

It is understood from *Alqal'a*'s news reports, editorials, editor-in-chief's articles, opinion and analytic articles and from the several interviews with ITF political figures that the main actors who play a big role in marginalizing and excluding the Turkmens are the Kurdish authorities of both the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP; as will be illustrated in the next section), yet the main accused/blamed actors of Turkmens' marginalization, throughout the newspaper's examined issues, are the Iraqi governments and parliament in post-2003 Iraq. Because of the post-2003 Iraqi governments' neglecting of the Turkmens and leaving them under the pity of 'non-constitutional forces', namely, the Kurdish forces (see, for example, Katana, 2011), *Alqal'a* tells the readers that the Turkmens are marginalized and excluded.

The accusation of the Iraqi government and parliament of neglecting the Turkmens manifests itself in different sections of the newspaper. It is expressed by several ITF's figures whether in news reports or interviews, or by *Alqal'a*'s editorials. Yet in a news report ('The Turkmens demand Almaliki', 2011, p. 01), Ali Hashim, the vice president of ITF, explicitly asks the Iraqi prime minister Nuri Almaliki to interfere and visit Kirkuk especially after the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's president Masud Albarzani's visit to Kirkuk on 26 October 2011. The news report conveys that:

> Mr. Ali Hashim Mukhtar Oglu, the vice president of Iraqi Turkmen Front, asked the Iraqi prime minister, Mr. Nuri Almaliki, to visit Kirkuk city … asserting that Maliki's visit to

Kirkuk … will confine the persistently unceasing targeting actions against the Turkmens for years.

Moreover, in a news report ('The president of Iraqi Turkmen Front', 2011, p. 01), *Alqal'a* states that Arshad Alsalihi, the ITF president, had 'criticized the Iraqi ministers council and the parliament for not taking care of [neglecting] what is going in Kirkuk'. Alsalihi, in the same news report, criticizes the government about being biased by stating that the government had quickly sent 'after a few hours' a high ministerial delegation to investigate a terrorist act that happened in Karbala (the sacred Iraqi Shi'ite city), yet 'the same thing did not happen with Kirkuk in which the Turkmens face … killing, abduction, expulsion, marginalizing, and exclusion acts on daily bases'. Likewise, the editorial of *Alqal'a* (The Turkmen national celebration, 2011, p. 01) accuses the Iraqi government and the Iraqi parliament of not being serious about the violent actions such as assassination of the Turkmens' skilled people, abducting and blackmailing which target the Turkmens in the first place.[15]

Kurdification

Another theme in *Alqal'a* which is related to the exclusion and the assimilation of the Turkmens manifest itself in 'Kurdification' of the areas which Turkmens inhabit.[16] 'Kurdification', which is presented in the newspaper explicitly, also can be inferred from latent meanings and it takes different shapes. The Kurdish authorities, for example, are changing the names of Turkmen areas. According to Musullu (2011, p. 02), one of the oldest bridges' name in Kirkuk was changed from 'Altabakchali' into the Kurdish name 'Khabat'. The name 'Altabakchali' plays a big role in the conflict between the Kurds and the communists on the one hand and the Turkmens on the other hand. Nadhem Altabakchali was the commander in-chief of the Iraqi army's second brigade just before what the Turkmens call 'the 1959 massacre' of the Turkmens and who, as the Turkmens believe, stood by them. Musullu states that:

> one of the two oldest bridges over Khasa Chay [Khasa river in Kirkuk] had the name of (Altabakchali) since the first quarter of sixties of the last century until the occupier's [the Americans in 2003] feet, and those [the Kurdish forces] who came with them, landed on Kirkuk's seized soil and the bridge's name was changed by the power of the seizer [the Kurds] from 'Altabakchali' into 'Khabat' and the purpose [of changing the bridge's name] is known and obvious.

The article goes on and claims that the one who changed the bridge's name (i.e., the Kurds)

> was an active element in terrorizing acts [which were committed against] the Turkmens before and during July 1959 [massacre] and the martyr 'Nadhem Altabakchali', the commander-in-chief of the second brigade, was lurking [always alert] to prevent the massacre [yet] he [Altabakchali] was removed from his position and another [person] was brought [to be the commander] who cooperated with [those groups][17] in order to execute the wicked plan by those who hold ropes in their hands and on their shoulders.[18]

'Kurdification' of Kirkuk in *Alqal'a* is also explicit in one of its editor-in-chief's article (Almufti, 2011a, 2011b, p. 12). According to Almufti, Kirkuk's status is supposedly to be

a 'disputed land' (according to 2005 Iraqi Constitution), that is, it neither belongs to Iraq nor to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, yet the Kurds filled every place ('every corner, every electricity pole … and painted every wall' in Kirkuk with Kurdish flags).

And finally, the news report ('The Turkmens will boycott', 2011, p. 01) implicitly accuses the Kurdish forces, who entered Kirkuk with the Americans and controlled Kirkuk after 2003, of changing Kirkuk province's demography. The news points out that:

> Kirkuk province, [which has a] unique social structure with Turkmen characteristics, identity, and architectural features, was subjected to aggressive demographic changes before and after April 2003 [after the American occupation] in attempt to deform its real population and seize, gradually, its wealth and its legislative, executive, and administrative powers.

The role of foreign powers/organizations

Foreign powers, such as the Americans, and international organizations, such as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), are also blamed for neglecting the Turkmens and being biased. Local groups/parties (i.e., the Kurds) are accused of depending on these foreign forces (i.e., the Americans) to achieve their interests. We already saw in Musullu's (2011) opinion article how the writer implicitly accuses the Kurdish forces 'who came with the American forces and seized/occupied Kirkuk'. Such a statement implies that the occupiers (the Americans) are biased by preferring and allowing certain groups to do whatever they like. Similarly, Allami (2011, p. 02) argues that Kirkuk's conflict should be solved 'based on equality and the principles of modern citizenry … and not by force which depends on the foreigner's [power, i.e., the Americans or any foreign power for that matter]'.

Likewise, the UN's UNAMI is called to be neutral and not prefer a certain group at the expenses of others. In the interview (Abdulla, 2011b, p. 02), Hasan Turan, the president of KPC and ITF's member, states that 'the existence of the UNAMI [in Kirkuk] … is important as it is a neutral [organization] and stands at the same distance from every party [i.e., neutral] … We want [UNAMI] to play the mediator role'. This implies that the ITF calls the international organization (i.e., the UNAMI) not to prefer others (e.g., the Kurds) at the expenses of the Turkmens for example.

Self/foreign protection

As a result of being excluded, targeted and left vulnerable and not trusting the others, Turkmens, according to *Alqal'a*, particularly the ITF's figures, demand either to create their own security forces, or ask the international security forces to protect them. For example, Ali Mahdi, the ITF's spokesperson and member of KPC, says that because the central and local governments are neglecting our calls to protect the Turkmens, therefore, the ITF is determined to establish 'a self-protection force to protect Turkmen citizens' ('Creation of self-force', 2011, p. 01). Moreover, Mahdi asserts that creating a self-protection force to protect the Turkmens is the [Turkmen] people's demand ('Ali Mahdi', 2011, p. 02). Equally, Kasim Kazanchi, the president of ITF's Kirkuk branch, describes a Turkmen demonstration, which the ITF called for, and which was held against targeting of the Turkmens, as 'a clear message which entails that the Turkmens' patience is ended and it is the time to protect ourselves by ourselves' (Hurmuzlu, 2011, p. 02). A similar self-protection force creation is demanded by the delegation of Tisin (a Shi'ite Turkmen

town in Kirkuk province) while visiting the president of the KPC, Hasan Turan. The news report ('Turan', 2011, p. 01) conveys that Sahib Mahdi, the head of the delegation, demanded 'to re-open the Tisin police station and their personnel must exclusively consist of [Tisin's] residents' as the suffering of residents of the town continues even after the fall of the old regime.[19]

Moreover, the idea of asking international forces to protect the Turkmens (if the central government and the Iraqi parliament keep neglecting and not protecting them) is also asserted by ITF's members. For example, in the news report ('The Turkmens will request', 2011, p. 01), Arshad Alsalihi, the president of ITF and Iraqi parliament member, in a press conference at the parliament asserts that because targeting the Turkmens continues and that the Iraqi government and parliament are incapable of protecting the Turkmens, therefore 'he will request international help'. On the other hand, the vice-president of the ITF, Ali Hashim, in an interview (Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02) affirms that:

> if … the direct targeting of Turkmens continuous and the central government remains as a spectator [does not do anything] and does not find solutions, does not achieve security balance, and does not support creation of Turkmen self-protection forces, we will [contact] international organizations in order to create an international protection force to keep security in Kirkuk for what the Turkmens suffered is a genocide and annihilation of their areas.

It is apparent from such themes that *Alqal'a* is representing the Iraqi Turkmens as situated in a dangerous environment in which they are continuously targeted and excluded. Against such beliefs and feelings of being or going to be annihilated or assimilated, the self-confirmation of one's existence is going to be an important element in the conflict. And this is the second major theme, namely the 'self-confirmation', which is emphasized in *Alqal'a* and examined in the next section.

Self-confirmation

The self-confirmation of Turkmens in *Alqal'a* in the face of an existential threat is overtly and covertly noticeable in sub-themes represented therein. These include asserting Kirkuk's identity (i.e., Kirkuk is a Turkmen/Iraqi province) and it is part of Iraq (versus part of the Kurdistan Region), the Turkmens versus others (particularly the Kurds) and by asking/emphasizing the support of other Iraqi ethnic groups (particularly the Arabs) and important Iraqi figures of the Turkmens and their cause. The first two sub-themes (i.e., Kirkuk's identity and Turkmens versus others) are intertwined and complement each other in different ways. For example, when Kirkuk's 'Iraqi/Turkmen' identity is asserted, Turkmens, versus others (mainly the Kurds), are shown as Iraqis/patriot Iraqis.

Kirkuk's identity

Kirkuk, in *Alqal'a*, is shown as an Iraqi province with Turkmen characteristics and culture. *Alqal'a* asserts that Kirkuk should not be annexed to the 'northern region' of Iraq.[20] In the news report ('The president of', 2011, p. 01), Arshad Alsalihi, the president of ITF and a Turkmen member of Iraqi parliament, asserts that 'the Iraqi people, the Turkmens among them, absolutely reject annexing the Iraqi [province of] Kirkuk, which has Turkmen characteristics, to (the northern region) [i.e., Iraqi Kurdistan Region]'.[21]

Alternatively, Kirkuk as an independent region with its own self-government (autonomous) shared by Kirkuk's all ethnic groups within Iraq is emphasized in *Alqal'a*. Ali Mahdi, the ITF's spokesperson and the Turkmen member of KPC, proclaims that the ITF has a project called 'Kirkuk Region Project'. According to Mahdi, this project 'is the only choice and acceptable project by all parties, whether Iraqi, regional or international, and it is considered a balanced administration which brings stability to Kirkuk, Iraq and the region' ('Ali Mahdi', 2011, p. 02). Ala'a Allami in ('Let Kirkuk be a model for future Iraq and true citizenry', 2011, p. 02) suggests similar ideas. He thinks that:

> the solution [for the Kirkuk conflict] … lies in [giving] self-governing to the Kirkuk's people as a multi-ethnic-groups' city [which can] establish a region by itself like other Iraqi regions and Kirkuk region can equally have special relations with the federal government in Baghdad and with the [Kurdistan] region as well.[22]

The emphasis of 'Kirkuk as an Iraqi province', 'Kirkuk is or has Turkmen characteristics', 'Kirkuk is not part of Kurdistan Region' or 'Kirkuk has to be an independent region' appears to be made mostly against the Kurdish claim that Kirkuk is a Kurdish province, and it is a part of Kurdistan Region or Kurdistan in general. It appears that, according to *Alqal'a*, the Turkmens are cautious about their existence and worried about being further marginalized or excluded, among other reasons, if the Kurdish claim 'Kirkuk is a part of Kurdistan' becomes true.

The self/existence-confirmation of Turkmens in *Alqal'a* is asserted against the Kurdish claim of Kirkuk being a part of Kurdistan Region. This manifests itself when debating some of the new (2005) Iraqi Constitution's articles (e.g., articles 140 and 142). Article (140), Section 2 of this constitution indicates that:

> [T]he executive authority elected in accordance with this Constitution [2005 Constitution] … accomplishes completely (normalization and census and concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of their citizens) … by a date not to exceed the 31st of December 2007. (Iraqi Constitution, p. 88)

It seems that article (140) played a big role in escalating the conflict among different Iraqi ethnic and political groups in- and outside of Kirkuk. Related to the province of Kirkuk, this article indicates that there will be a referendum, after normalization of the situation and a census in Kirkuk, to determine the identity of Kirkuk: that is, whether it will remain as an Iraqi province or it will be annexed to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. This will be determined, of course, by the will of its citizens which they will express in the referendum. Article (140), according to *Alqal'a*, does not exist anymore. Its implementation constitutionally expired on 31st December 2007 as the article itself indicates that ('The disputed article 140', 2011, p. 01; 'There is no possible', 2011, p. 01). Moreover, *Alqal'a* emphasizes article (142) of the Iraqi Constitution which, by implementing it, may lead to the amendment of (or even removing) article (140)[23] in the Iraqi Constitution ('The constitutional amendments', 2011, p. 01; Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02; 'Turkmen members', 2011, p. 01).

To further assert Kirkuk's Iraqi identity, it seems there is a 'war of slogans' about Kirkuk's identity in which *Alqal'a* is involved to a certain degree. While the Kurds emphasize the slogan of 'Kirkuk is Kurdistan's heart', or 'Kirkuk is the Kurds' Jerusalem', *Alqal'a*, on the other hand, emphasizes the slogan 'Kirkuk is Iraqi' which appears on the top of each page of *Alqal'a* (pages 2–11 in the middle) and beside the

newspaper's name on the front and last pages. Moreover, the analytic article ('There is no possible', 2011, p. 01) quotes ITF's spokesperson Ali Mahdi saying that 'Turkmeneli [Turkmens' home or land or area in Iraq] is our aim and Kirkuk is our heart'.

The Turkmens and the Kurds

The confirmation of self-existence also manifested in how *Alqal'a* represents the Turkmens. It portrays Turkmens as who/what are they and what they want and reject, consequently, what makes them different from others (particularly the Kurds who are negatively portrayed) and what their political parties do for them. The theme 'Us, the Turkmens, and them/others', as we will see, is related to 'Kirkuk identity' theme to a great degree.

Not only *Alqal'a* represents the Turkmens as Iraqis,[24] it also asserts that they are 'patriot Iraqis'. Ali Hashim, the vice-president of ITF and a member of Salahaddin Province Council, in his interview with *Alqal'a* states, as he addresses the Iraqi Arabs, that 'the Turkmens are Iraqis and patriots' (Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02). In a different way, but reflecting a similar picture of Turkmens (as patriot Iraqis), Allami in ('Let Kirkuk be', 2011, p. 02) argues that:

> the Iraqi Turkmens, for example, did not get involved in creating armed militias to support British forces during the colonial invasion [of Iraq in the First World War] and did not raise separation or antagonism slogans against Iraq's Arabic and Islamic identity which [the identity] was against the western control [of Iraq] … [And] this is the real loyalty [to Iraq].

In addition to presenting them as patriot Iraqis, *Alqal'a*, as illustrated earlier in this study, asserts that the Turkmens are the third main ethnic group in Iraq and not a minority.[25]

'Others' (the Kurds in particular although they are not named overtly) in *Alqal'a* are shown as the opposite to what the Turkmens are and want. It is apparent from above that the Kurds, unlike the Turkmens who are against annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan Region and want it as an independent region, are presented as pro-annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan Region and are separatists (the news report 'Rasul', 2011, p. 01). In the latter news report, which is adopted from a Kurdish newspaper called *Aso*, Kosret Rasul, the first deputy of General Secretary of the Kurdish political party PUK (the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani's party) asserts 'the time is suitable to declare a Kurdish state' with Kirkuk as a part of it.

Moreover, while the Turkmens are shown as pro-negotiation to solve the problems in Kirkuk, the Kurds are shown as having no such intention. Instead, they are portrayed as a significant element in the escalation of conflict. The analytic article ('There is no possible', 2011, p. 01), for example, conveying ITF's statement in response to Barham Salih's authoritarian assertion of Kirkuk's Kurdish identity, clearly says that 'the Iraqi Turkmen Front asserted several times that dialogue [is] the best way to solve all unsolved cases in Iraq including Kirkuk's fabricated case'. The article continues and asserts that while 'the Turkmens are suffering from a degraded security situation, others [the Kurds], [are] busy in achieving [their] interests on expenses of [Kirkuk's] sons' [people] bloods'. So does the editor-in-chief in her article 'Calmness and dialogue' as she emphasizes that solving the unsolved issues 'whether among the groups in Kirkuk or between Baghdad [the federal government] and Erbil [the capital of the Kurdistan Region Government] needs calmness and not escalating' (Almufti, 2011a, 2011b, p. 12). It seems from the editor-in-chief's article that the Kurds are the ones who are escalating the conflict in

Kirkuk by their acts (such as running up the Kurdish flag everywhere in Kirkuk) as if it is a part of Kurdistan Region. After suggesting that 'the Iraqi situation needs calmness and dialogue' the editor-in-chief emphasizes that the Turkmens 'absolutely do not wish escalating or insisting on something which may lead to unwanted escalation'.

The accusation that the Kurdish side are intensifying the conflict in Kirkuk in contrast to the Turkmen willingness to negotiate is clearly stated in the editorial and the news report of *Alqal'a* in the 31 October 2011 issue. Both the editorial and the news report assert that the official and political figures from the 'real' Turkmens' political parties (including ITF) explained to (Masud) Albarzani (the president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region) when they met him while he was visiting Kirkuk the Turkmens sufferings from the actions of the two major Kurdish political parties, namely the KDP and PUK (the editorial 'Real start', 2011, p. 01, and the news report 'The Turkmens demand Almaliki', 2011, p. 01).[26]

Finally, to further confirm the existence of the Turkmens as a political entity, *Alqal'a* shows that there is a vital political organization, namely the ITF (a coalition/union of several Turkmen political parties) representing the Iraqi Turkmens to defend and protect them and struggle to gain their rights. The ITF as the real representative of Turkmens and as the defender and protector of them mostly appears in the news reports which convey the news/activities of the ITF's main figures (specifically the president of the ITF) or their views about particular events (particularly the conflict in Kirkuk). For example, in the news report ('Creating self-protection force', 2011, p. 01), ITF's spokesperson and the member of KPC Ali Mahdi emphasizes that the ITF is 'the legitimate and the only representative of Iraqi Turkmens [whose land starts from] Talafar [in the northwest] to Alaziziya [in central east of Iraq]'.[27] Similarly, Mahdi asserts that the ITF is 'the mother [political] party of the Turkmen people in achieving and protecting Turkmens' demands and rights' ('Ali Mahdi', 2011, p. 02).[28]

Arabs as potential allies for reinforcing the self-existence of Turkmen

Although, in general, *Alqal'a* shows the Turkmens as being targeted and excluded, this sub-theme ('presenting Arabs as allies for reinforcing self-existence') and the one which follows ('Iraqi prominent figures, and others, supporting the Turkmens') in *Alqal'a* connote a message to those, who target and exclude the Turkmens, that the Turkmens are not alone.

Unlike the Kurds, the newspaper represents Arabs as Turkmens' brothers. The Arabs and Turkmens' destiny is portrayed as connected, and Turkmens' relation with Arabs is shown as strategic, historical and deep-rooted. Ali Hashim, the vice-president of ITF, in an interview with *Alqal'a* (Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02) sends the following message to Arabs: 'they [the Arabs] have to enlighten [their people] that the Turkmens' destiny is linked to the destiny of their Iraqi brothers and that Iraq's unity combines [them]'. Hashim goes on and says that 'any harm that happens to any Turkmen is harm to his Arab brother and Kurdish brother'. Although Hashim includes 'Kurdish brother' in his message, he says that 'there is a patriotic/nationalistic project [and] its aim is Iraq's unity and keeping Kirkuk [within this united Iraq]'. Therefore, Hashim cautions the Arabs to be aware of extremists and criminals, and those 'who have foreign [suspicious] projects [annexing Kirkuk to Kurdish region]'. Finally, in his message to Arabs, Hashim states that:

> the Turkmens' relations are strategic, historical, and deep-rooted with Arab tribes … [and because] the Turkmens are Iraqis and patriots and lived in tyranny and oppression over 100 years, [therefore,] it is your duty [Arabs duty] to maintain the relations [with Turkmens] and

protect their areas and villages from the obtrudes/strangers who attempt to [damage] this relationship.

Allami (2011, p. 02) furthermore seeks to contradict the claim that is often offered that the Arabs are recent arrivals in Kirkuk, brought there by the previous dictatorial regime (i.e., Saddam Hussein's regime). Allami states that Arabs lived in Kirkuk long before Saddam Hussein's regime and according to the 1957 census (adapted from Batatu)[29] Arabs and Assyrians then consisted of more than 20% of Kirkuk's population. Allami concludes his argument about Arabs' existence in Kirkuk by saying that:

> it is true that Arabs' immigration to [Kirkuk] increased during the republican era [after 1958] … and it is true that the totalitarian regime [Saddam Hussein's regime] forced big numbers of [Kirkuk's] Kurd and Turkmen population to leave it in the last years but it is also right that the aim and the solution should be [the] returning of those Kurd, Turkmen, and Assyrian citizens who were forced to leave [Kirkuk] and not hold [Kirkuk's] Arab residents responsible for what happened. There should not be offensive campaigns against [Arabs to force them to leave Kirkuk] after [the fall] of the regime [Saddam Hussein's regime] as it [forcing Kirkuk's Arabs to leave] really happened … for this is not going to be in the interest of any ethnic group in Iraq.

Defending the Arabs' presence in Kirkuk and showing them as brothers, that the Turkmens' destiny is intertwined with Arabs, that Turkmens' relation with Arabs is strategic, historical and deep-rooted, and calling on Arabs 'to maintain the relations [with Turkmens] and protect their areas and villages from the obtrudes/strangers who attempt to [damage] this relationship' imply self-confirmation by calling for an alliance between Arabs and the Turkmens against those who target their existence in Kirkuk. Put differently, if anyone thinks that the Turkmens are an unaided, weak target, the newspaper tells them that they are wrong. It seeks to assert that they have allies in their plight.

Prominent Iraqi figures and others supporting the Turkmens

The self-confirmation or existence-confirmation of Turkmens in *Alqal'a* is not only asserted through this claim of Arab support for the Turkmens, but it is also claimed that they enjoy the support of powerful Iraqi figures.

In the news report ('Muqtada Alsadr', 2011, p. 01), Muqtada Alsadr, the powerful, influential Shi'ite leader of the Mahdi Army and the Sadr Movement, asserts that the Turkmens 'must live in peace in Iraq, and all their demands must be fulfilled'. He thus sent a decisive message to 'everyone who tries to target [the Turkmens] and their existence'.

Similarly, Usama Alnujayfi, the Iraqi parliament speaker, in the news report ('Alnujayfi', 2011, p. 01) says in a seminar held in London, UK, that 'the Turkmens suffered from tyranny, marginalization, exclusion, and expulsion before and after 2003, asserting … that this main [group] in Iraq must get their full rights'. Moreover, the news report conveys Alnujayfi's assertion that the Turkmens must get important positions, such as the vice-president position, in the state. Furthermore, Alnujayfi, as *Alqal'a* conveys, emphasizes that Kirkuk is an Iraqi city and that it is not 'negotiable/bargain and not displayed to be sold'.

Yet another prominent supporter of Turkmens cited in *Alqal'a* is the well-known Kurdish figure, Mukarram Altalabani.[30] In an interview with him (Aljozi, 2011, p. 09)

Altalabani criticizes the Kurdish leadership for not acknowledging Turkmens' rights. The interviewer asks Altalabani about Turkmen-Kurdish relations and he answers that in his book *Kurdistan and the Turkmens* 'he criticized the Kurdish leadership, and says that Turkmens are their brothers'. '[W]ell,' Altalabani goes on, 'when a father dies, brothers will have equal rights. What are the rights you give the Turkmens in order they become your brothers [?]'.

Finally, in the news report ('The European', 2011, p. 01), we find that the European-Iraqi committee in the European Parliament criticizes 'continuous targeting of Turkmens' in Iraq and 'criticizing [the Iraqi] government and the local government [in Kirkuk] of not being serious about defending Turkmens and not creating a special force to protect them and defend their lands'.

Conclusion

No doubt the media can play a role and/or be one of the factors (among other factors) in escalating conflict among competing groups or, conversely, can be a helping factor of easing the conflict or even resolving it. The media can be used as one of the tools to promote and sustain certain ideas or goals among the public about certain issues (or conflict) and mobilize the public towards these certain ideas or goals. This study's main aim was to identify the dominant ideas (or themes, or concerns) of an ethnic/political group, namely the Iraqi Turkmens, which is involved in struggling over Kirkuk with other groups (e.g., Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians among others).[31] The rationale behind such an attempt is to concentrate on certain ideas, which are reflected in the newspapers, and see whether one can find in them some common ground for totally new dialogue and negotiation which can help in resolving conflict rather than escalating it. As put by Ellis (2006),[32] one needs to bring the conflict, by depending on communication means, out of its futile cycle where each involved group clings to its narration of the conflict.

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Notes

1. Before and during the First World War (1914–1918) the struggle over Kirkuk, which was then part of what was called Mosul Province (Vilayet) in Iraq under the Ottomans, was mainly between the failing Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. The latter occupied Iraq at the end of

www.

the First World War under a League of Nations mandate. Kirkuk continued to be a bone of contention between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire (later the modern Turkey) well after the end of the First World War and the establishment of modern Iraq (the Kingdom of Iraq, created by Britain in 1921). After the establishment of modern Iraq, the struggle over Kirkuk gradually shifted and became an internal issue. It became one of the central conflict(s) between the successive Iraqi governments and the ethnic groups (particularly the Kurds and the Turkmens who constituted the majority of the province's population). Moreover, and particularly after the *coup d'état* of 1958, Kirkuk became a centre of conflict among its ethnic groups (Turkmens, Kurds and Arabs) on the one hand, and between these ethnic groups (including their political groups) and the Iraqi governments of 1963 and 1968.

2. See Constitution of Iraq, article 140, for example, on the Republic of Iraq, General Secretariat for the Council of Ministers' website: http://www.cabinet.iq/default.aspx.

3. The order in which these ethnic groups are mentioned above has no significance in terms of which one constitutes the 'majority' or 'minority'. The terms 'majority' and 'minority', as we will see later in this study, implies a kind of discriminatory notion for some who prefer the term 'citizenry' instead.

4. A more worthwhile study, of course, will be examining of all ethnic groups' media. This study can be considered as a first step in doing so.

5. ITF was founded in 1995 and some of its major political parties and organizations are: Turkmen National Party, Turkmeneli Party, Iraqi Turkmen Justice Party, Turkmen Decision Party, Independent Turkmen Movement, Turkmen Islamic Movement and Turkmen Brotherhood Club.

6. Textual analyses (e.g., 'discourse analysis', 'critical discourse analysis' and 'semiotics') are also concerned with the ideas of the texts, but mainly focus on the 'why', 'how' and 'who' sides of the issues (e.g., why it was said, how it was said and who said it and for what purposes) and make the issues of power relation among groups, resistance and struggle their aims in studying, analysing media texts.

7. All the issues of the newspapers examined were in hardcopy. *Alqal'a*'s 24 October hardcopy issue could not be obtained (was not available). During the data-gathering stage of the study a copy of the missing issue found online on *Alqal'a*'s website. For later analysis, the newspaper's website was removed and thus the mentioned issue could not be obtained even from the newspaper's website. When, at a later time, *Alqal'a* reappeared online, the missing issue was not included in the archive.

8. For details about these media theories and the issues of meaning constructing in media see, for example, Williams (2003, pp. 121–189).

9. For similar ideas, see Berger (2011, p. 206), and Deacon et al., (2007, p. 119).

10. Different authors/researchers use different terms/labels/names for this procedure. For example, in qualitative analysis of data, the researcher labels each line or paragraph according to the line's or paragraph's main theme, and this is called 'open coding'; then she/he clusters groups of themes under different labels or themes, and this is called 'axial coding' (Neuman, 2006, pp. 460–464). Yin (2011) on the other hand calls the 'open coding' and the 'axial coding' 'level 1' and 'level 2' coding, respectively (pp. 186–191). Finally, adopting from van Dijk, Chrisco (1995) calls them as 'microthemes' and 'macrothemes' (pp. 14–15).

11. This theme, the demand of the Turkmens of sharing power in security forces and administration, which denotes and connotes the idea of excluding of the Turkmens, is one of the most emphasized and repeated themes throughout the examined issues of *Alqal'a*. In addition to the examples given under the subtitle 'Imbalanced power and rights', this theme appears in several other places in the newspaper's examined issues in this study. See, for example, the news reports ('Alsalihi: the security in Kirkuk', 2011; 'General Turhan', 2011; and 'Kirkuk region', 2011) and the interviews (Abdulla, 2011a; Abdulla, 2011b; and Aljozi, 2011).

12. By non-official forces, Katana mostly refers to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Government's forces.

13. 'Targeting Turkmens', in addition to the examples given above, is also emphasized in the weekly opinion column of Katana (2011, p. 02), the editorial ('The Turkmen national celebration', 2011, p. 01), interviews (Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02; Abdulla, 2011b, p. 02) and news

reports ('In order to defend Turkmens' legitimate causes', 2011, p. 02; 'Debating ways', 2011, p. 01; 'Alsalihi meets', 2011, p. 01; and 'Kirkuk region', 2011, p. 02).

14. A downgrading of the place of the Turkmens is also emphasized in other places in *Alqal'a*. For example, it is emphasized in the news reports ('At the Iraqi Cultural Week', 2011, p. 01; 'Iraq's Embassy', 2011, p. 01), the editor-in-chief's (Almufti) article ('The Turkmen Elite', 2011, p. 12) and the interview (Abdulla, 2011b, p. 02).

15. 'Accusation/blaming of the Iraqi government and the Iraqi parliament' in *Alqal'a* is also emphasized in the news reports ('Alsalihi: the security in Kirkuk', 2011; 'Creation of self-force', 2011; 'The Turkmens will request', 2011; and 'Alsalihi meets', 2011), the editorial ('Targeting the Turkmens', 2011) and the interview (Hurmuzlu, 2011).

16. The 'Kurdification' theme in *Alqal'a* is also related to the second main theme 'self-confirmation' which will be examined later in this study.

17. The new commander was a communist. By 'groups', it is referring to the Kurds and the communists.

18. Those who hold ropes in their hands and on their shoulders' refers to the Iraqi communists and their supporters who put themselves as the guards of the 1958 coup. The slogan 'There will be no conspiracy [against the coup] as long as there are ropes' was one of their several slogans against anyone or any group would thought they oppose the coup [the revolution according to them]. The slogan means that they (the communists and their supporters who put themselves as the guards of the coup) will execute by ropes or exterminate (by any tool) anyone they think or suspect as being against the coup.

19. Tisin, once a town near Kirkuk city, now one of the city's southern parts, is a Shi'ite Turkmen area which, during Saddam Hussein's regime, faced aggressive marginalizing and arresting, imprisoning and executing of hundreds of its people.

20. The ITF and many Turkmens, as well as many Arabs and many members of other Iraqi ethnic groups, avoid calling the Kurdish region as 'Iraqi Kurdistan Region'. Instead, they call it 'North of Iraq' or the 'Northern Region'.

21. Kirkuk's identity as an Iraqi province with Turkmen characteristics and culture is also emphasized in the news reports ('Alsalihi: the security in Kirkuk', 2011; 'Balance' 2011; 'The Turkmens demand Almaliki', 2011; and 'Turkmen members', 2011), the interviews (Abdulla (2011a) and 'Head of the hiring committee', 2011), the analytic article ('The disputed article 140', 2011) and the opinion article (Allami, 2011).

22. The idea of creating an independent 'Kirkuk Region' with a shared power by all ethnic groups of Kirkuk is also emphasized by Hasan Turan, an ITF member and the president of KPC in the interview (Abdulla, 2011b), the analytic article ('There is no possible', 2011) and the news report ('Kirkuk region', 2011).

23. Article 142, Section 1 indicates that:

> The Council of Representatives shall form at the beginning of its work a committee from its members representing the principal components of the Iraqi society with a mission of presenting to the Council of Representatives, within a period not exceed four months, a report that contains recommendations of the necessary amendments that could be made to the Constitution. (Iraqi Constitution, p. 89)

24. *Alqal'a* emphasizes Turkmens' Iraqi identity right from the front page of each issue. The very first line of the front page of each issue starts with a large font statement which reads 'I am Iraqi'.

25. See the sub-theme '*Turkmens are targeted*' under the main theme '*The issue of exclusion*'.

26. Representing Turkmens positively/the Kurds negatively such as showing the Turkmens as 'pro-negotiation' and the Kurds as 'escalating the conflict in Kirkuk' is also stated/implied in other places in *Alqal'a*. See, for example, the news reports ('Alnugeyfi', 2011, p. 01; 'The Turkmens will boycott', 2011, p. 01), the interviews with ITF's three main figures, Ali Mahdi, the ITF's spokesperson, Kasim Kazanchi, ITF's Kirkuk branch's president, and Hasan Turan, ITF's executive council member and president of KPC, where all assert ITF's new strategy which consists of openness to and dialogue with everyone (see 'Ali Mahdi', Hurmuzlu, 2011, p. 02, and Abdulla, 2011b, p. 02), and Ali Hashim, the vice-president of the ITF, who accuses the

Kurdish side of trying to annex Kirkuk to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and separate from Iraq (Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02).

27. The ITF and Turkmens call the land between these two cities/towns 'Turkmeneli' which means the Turkmens' home or land.

28. The role of the ITF, as a protector of Turkmens and demander of their rights, is also asserted by other ITF figures. See, for example, the news reports ('The president of', 2011, p. 01; 'Alsalihi: the security in Kirkuk', 2011, p. 01; 'Alsalihi: we will not compromise', 2011, p. 01; 'Discussing', 2011, p. 01; 'The Turkmens will request', 2011, p. 01; 'The Turkmens will boycott', 2011, p. 01; and 'Alsalihi meets', 2011, p. 01) and the interviews ('Ali Mahdi', 2011, p. 02; Hurmuzlu, 2011, p. 02; and Abdulla, 2011a, p. 02). Also see the editorial ('Turkmen national celebration', 2011, p. 01) and the analytic article ('There is no possible', 2011, p. 01).

29. Allami mentions Hanna Batatu's book which is titled, according to Allami, *The Communists, the Baathists, and Free Officers*, without giving further details. In fact, Hanna Batatu is a Palestinian-American scholar (1926–2000). Batatu, according to *The New York Times*, is 'an authority on the contemporary Arab world who was best known for his writings on Iraq and Syria', and his book about Iraq is called *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Baathists and Free Officers* first published in 1978 (Pace, 2000).

30. Mukarram Altalabani is one of the Kurdish Altalabani tribe/family's prominent members. The present Kurdish Iraqi president Jalal Altalabani belongs to this tribe/family. Mukarram Altalabani, who was a communist and a minister in 1970s when there was a coalition between Baathists who controlled the government and the Iraqi communist party, is presented in the interview as having played the role of mediator between Saddam Hussein's regime and the Kurdish leaders.

31. As mentioned earlier, this study is considered as a preliminary research for a further more full-scale research about the issue by examining all involved ethnic groups' media organs.

32. See the last part of the literature review of this study.

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