

The Representations of Ideology in the Front Covers of Selected Iraqi Children Magazines: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

No matter how simple a text might look in addressing young readers, still it is not free from ideology. Ideologies are socially shared systems of beliefs that are systematic, intentional, and controlled by the domination and power of a group within a particular society. Ideologies can not only be represented by verbal modes of communication but even by other kinds of semiotic modes such as *visual images*. Consequently, the following study tries to explore the way ideology could be represented through visual images in the front covers of *AL-Mizmar*, an Iraqi children magazine, during two highly disturbing periods of the Iraqi socio-political ruling state history, the 1970s and 1980s. The researcher argues that the way visual images used in the front covers of *Al-Mizmar* magazine reflects an explicit representation of the ideology adopted by the ruling state. What is more, it is also argued that there is a more drastic shift in ideology representation observed in the use of visual images in *Al-Mizmar* front covers throughout the 1970s than it is the case in the 1980. It is found that this shift is due to the foundational changes of interest and power of the Iraqi ruling state at the period under consideration. The analysis of the data revealed rather interesting and likely crucial findings that assert the researcher's initial arguments regarding the controversial relation that holds between political ideology and media in its visual mode.

Keywords: *Ideology Representation, Multimodality, Visual images, Framing, Foregrounding.*

1. Introduction

Ideology has received a great attention in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) during the last two decades. In fact, it is considered by many advocators in the field of critical discourse research as being one of the cornerstones of critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2001; Va Dijk, 2003; Wodak, 2004). Van Dijk, one of the most prominent figures in CDS, (2006:121) states that "Ideologies are foundational beliefs that underlie the shared social representations of specific kinds of social groups. These representations are in turn the basis of discourse and other social practices". He adds that ideologies are largely expressed and acquired by discourse, that is, by spoken or written communicative interaction (ibid).

For Threadgold (1990: 107), spoken and written communicative interactions are not linguistic categories but among the very "processes by which dominant ideologies are reproduced, transmitted and potentially changed". In her view, ideologies that underlie texts tend to be "hidden" and texts are never "ideology-free nor objective" (ibid). Simply speaking, no matter how simple a text may look, it is never free from ideology.

So, in order to reveal these hidden ideologies, critical discourse analysis (CDA) begins first by examining the textual features of that text and then moving to explanation and interpretation. This may include, as Clark (1995:33) puts it, "tracing underlying ideologies from the linguistic features of a text, unpacking certain biases and ideological presupposition underlying the text and relating the text to other texts, and to readers' and speakers' own experiences and beliefs". Elaborating on the kind of analysis mentioned by Clark (1995), Gee (2004:7) states that this kind of analysis must include two types of aspects: *Framing* and *foregrounding*. The *framing* of the text takes into consideration how the content of a particular text is presented, along with the kind of perspective the writer or the speaker is taking. *Foregrounding*, on the other hand, includes what concepts and issues are emphasized and what others are backgrounded or played back (ibid).

Although the way of analysis mentioned above provided critical discourse analysts with a useful linguistic toolkit for systemic linguistic description of texts, yet there is more to textual analysis than linguistic features. It is obvious that text can be a combination of words and other modalities, such as pictures, films, video images, and sounds. These *modes of communication*, as Paltridge (2012:170) describes them, are

what multimodal discourse analysis makes use of when analyzing texts. He adds that among these modes of communication, *images* are of central concern to multimodal discourse analysis. Images may include photographs, diagrams, maps or cartoon figures (ibid).

One of the theories available for analyzing multimodal discourse, and the one adopted in the current study, is Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory (2006) mentioned in their book: *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. It presents a framework for analyzing and understanding visual images, and the interaction between verbal and visual components in media discourses. Kress and Van Leeuwen, two forerunners of a comprehensive theory of visual communication, have considered semiotic modes other than language in various kinds of discourses. They believe that the changing patterns in mass communication is where the boundaries between language and visual elements in printed material are being minimized and limited.

Putting these important facts in mind, this paper tries to explore ideological representations via multimodality in the front covers of Iraqi children magazine (Al-Mizmar). In fact, the aim of the study is twofold: the first is what is mentioned above and the second is to prove that ideology representation via visual images in children's magazines can shift due to the changes in the socio-political status of the Iraqi ruling class. In order to achieve these aims seven front covers were selected, within two critical stages in the socio-political history of Iraq:

1. The 1970s stage (a shift of identity towards Arab nationalism with slight humanity biases)
2. The 1980s (where the ideological representation was largely dictated by the culture of war, i.e. the Iraq-Iran war in the 80s)

The paper is divided into three main parts: the first part, which is the theoretical background of the study, tackles three basic issues. First is the issue of ideological representation in critical discourse studies, second is the issue of ideological representation in children literature. Lastly, discussing the theory of multimodality from a critical discourse analysis perspective. The second part deals with the methodology of the study, where the analytic frame work, the data of the study, and the analysis and results are discussed. Finally, the third part of the paper is concerned

with the conclusions of the study, where the main findings of the study will be presented.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Ideology Representations in Critical Discourse Studies

Fairclough (1992: 87) describes Ideology as a *social phenomenon* that relates *texts* and *discursive practices* to *society*. He argues that ideology is a property of context and text, reproducing and transforming the *social practices* behind its production. He thinks of it as being vague in nature though very crucial at the same time (ibid).

On the other hand, Van Dijk (2003:23) argues that ideology is a part of power, and thus it can either be found in the social context or through the attribution of text. He claims that "ideologies can be adjudged desirable or undesirable depending on the consequences of the social practices based on them, thus both racism and antiracism are ideologies". He continues by adding that "Ideologies may thus serve to establish or maintain social dominance, as well as to organize dissidence and opposition" (ibid). Van Dijk also makes clear that ideologies most of the time become shared so widely that they seem to have become part of the generally accepted attitudes of an entire community, as obvious beliefs or opinion, or common sense (2004:112). Thus, what we experience today are widely accepted as social or human rights, were and are ideological beliefs of socialist movements.

As for *representation*, in discourse analysis, the term representation refers to how language is used in a text to assign meaning to people, social groups, objects or events. Fairclough (2003: 27) defines representation as being a text of the world through the description of its physical, social or mental process or phenomenon. He observes that representations in texts are usually influenced by the producer and that they do not reproduce reality accurately. For Fairclough (ibid), texts can tie representation closely to the concept of ideology (ibid).

According to Kress and Leeuwen (1996:45), "Representations are used to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system." Representations show a relationship between the participants, the actions they perform or do not perform, the setting in which they are placed, and the ideologies they want to convey.

Based on the above observations two important points relevant to our study should be made clear: the first that all aspects of textual representation, from topic outcomes to the expressive forms of discourse, are informed and shaped by ideology. And, the second is that ideology is systematic and purposeful which is controlled by virtue of domination and power of a group in a particular community or society.

2.2. Ideology Representations in Children Literature

As for Ideological representation in children literature, McCallum & Stephens (2011:3) state that the exploration of ideology in children literature appeared during the late 1980s. During that period discourses interrogating social assumptions about gender, race, and class began to impact upon the production and reception of children literature (ibid).

One of the first studies conducted in this area was Bob Dixon's(1987) book entitled *Catching Them Young*, that was conducted in order to explore the ideas, attitudes and opinions authors try conveying to children through novels and stories and the ways in which this is done. Later on another study was carried out by Peter Hollindale (1990) which argued that there is a need in analyzing the hidden unaddressed assumptions of texts and not only to focus on the explicit negative content. McCallum & Stephens (2011:6) argue that what triggered these studies was a kind of a "Marxian assumption that ideology was invariably negative in impact".

However, ideology representation in relation to children literature was argued from a *critical discourse studies* perspective by John Stephens (1992). Stephens (1992:8) pointed out that there cannot be a narrative without an ideology: "Ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language". Whether ideological representation is negative, positive, or more or less neutral will thus be determined by the ideological positioning of a text within culture (ibid).

From what has been mentioned above, the researcher believes that among the many types of narratives that address young readers, magazines can be texts embedded with high amount of hidden ideologies. Moreover, the researcher also believes that these ideologies can be presented through other types of semiotics other than language, like visual images, since children are always fond of visual modes more than verbal ones.

2.3. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA)

Multimodality as an approach can be traced back to Michael Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics. Halliday views communication as social semiotics which means that language as well as other kinds of human meaning-making are seen as functional social practices, which in turn should be analyzed in a social, cultural and other context in which they occur (Paltridge, 2012; McIntyre, 2010; Kress, 2011).

Inspired by Halliday's work, researchers interested in modes other than verbal language have set out to develop consistent "grammars" for those modes. The most prominent figures working in this new social semiotic framework are Kress and Van Leeuwen with their work which is entitled "*Reading images: The grammar of visual design*" (2001). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001:2) "common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes" thus arguing for breaking down the "disciplinary boundaries between the study of language and the study of images." They claim that, all texts are multimodal, which means that there are other linguistic means of communication such as rhythm, intonation, facial expressions, gesture etc. accompanying spoken and written language.

Studying texts with images and sounds has presented challenges to conventional discourse analysis, which has valued modes of language through speech and writing over visual images or music. In their semiotic analysis of newspaper front page layouts, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) show how conventions related to the positioning of headlines, blocks of text, and photographs produce meaning and coherence. They also show how visual cues (size, color, contrast) produce hierarchies of meaning and how frames like lines and spaces produce separations or connections. They emphasized the importance of layout analysis in the critical study of newspaper language.

When coming to CDA, Multimodality has recently become more common among researchers in the field. Ledin and Machin (2015:44) state that Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) has made it possible to draw out buried ideologies and power relations. It has made it possible to understand the power and meaning of texts through activating several modes (such as visual, verbal, and aural) (Machin, 2007; Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2011). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) argue that most work done in CDA has focused on verbal texts, or on the verbal parts of multimodal texts. With their theory of *grammar of visual design*, they intend to broaden the approach suggested by CDA, to include the structure and use of other multimodal features like *images and layout*. The new framework of analysis enabling it to "*explore the way*

that individual elements in images, such as objects and settings, are able to signify discourses in ways that might not be obvious at an initial view."

Putting these crucial observations in mind, it is obvious that young readers are more attracted to visual modes than verbal ones. According to the analytic framework of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), images play a central part in multimodal discourse analysis. These images may include: photographs, diagrams, maps, and cartoon figures. In fact, they argue that these images have a grammar of their own. Thus, by applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) analytical approach to Multimodality with a focus on visual images, an analysis of the front covers of nine Iraqi children magazines will be carried out in the following section.

3. Method of Analysis

3.1 The Analytical Framework:

The analytical framework adopted in the study is that of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) *visual grammar analysis*. Based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar of verbal language, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) state that visual images can have three basic meanings, the experimental, the interpersonal, and the compositional. Among these three types of meaning the study will focus on the compositional meaning since it is more specific in dealing with how the visual modes are organized on cover of texts. The compositional meaning, which resembles Halliday's textual meaning, is concerned with two basic elements: *Framing, and Saliency*.

Framing is defined as "a resource for visually connecting and disconnecting elements in a composition" (McIntyre & Busee, 2010: 441). It is related to the existence or absence of framing devices. These devices can be frame lines, empty spaces, colors incoherence, etc. which may help separate certain elements in a text, framing them in a way that makes these elements somehow look different from their own surrounding.

Saliency, on the other hand, refers to the degree readers are attracted by the visual elements. It is mainly related to the layout of the text i.e. how certain visual elements are organized. This organization may be established through foregrounding and backgrounding of certain visual elements depending on the amount of the informational load that could be carried by such elements.

3.2. The Data of the Study:

It is important to mention that from the 1970s until the period after 2003 the Iraqi political system witnessed a turbulent series of social and political shifts. These shifts were accompanied by ideological campaigns funded and supervised by the ruling class in power especially in children literature. Thus, nine front covers taken from Iraqi children magazines are selected for the analysis. The researcher believes that the way by which the visual elements are presented and selected in these front covers reflect an aspect of the socio-political representation of ideology that is encouraged and sustained by the formal Iraqi regime in power. There is a likely correspondence between the ideological attitudes adopted by the Iraqi regimes and the visual elements represented in the front cover of these nine magazines. So, as previously mentioned in the introduction, the researcher divided the series of socio-political shifts into two main stages:

- 1.The 1970s (a shift of identity towards Arab nationalism with slight humanistic biases)
2. The 1980s -90s (a shift of identity towards a loaded ideological representation with strict military biases).

The front covers analyzed are taken from the Iraqi magazine *Al-Mizmar*. This magazine is the first Iraqi magazine targeting children under the age of 18, which is issued monthly by the Child Culture Department in the Iraqi Ministry of Culture. It acquires its uniqueness and importance from the fact that it targets a wide section of audience (both of children and adolescent readers), a matter which was not actually tackled by any other available magazine at that time. Most magazines are usually directed to either children or adolescents exclusively.

3.3 The Analysis and Results:

The first three covers go back to the 1970s. during this period, the Iraqi state generally witnessed fair amount of freedom which made it possible to open a small humanitarian window in the body of Arab national identity. This of course expressed the ideology of the Iraqi ruling regime back then. The front covers, as we will see, are

full of diverse drawings and rich colors not to mention the decline in the appearance of military uniforms and events in photographs and drawings as compared with the front covers of the 1980s.

In the first front cover of Al-Mizmar (1976) in image (1) below, we can notice that the cover carries a photograph of a theatrical scene rich in various designs and costumes, especially the distinctive Arabic costumes like Al-dishdash and the Arabic gown. According to *saliency*, the central Arabic character wearing the full Arabic costume with his arms wide open as a symbolic gesture for openness and acceptance for the other is foregrounded in the cover. We can also tell that this openness and acceptance is only exclusively within the context of the Arab national identity, which was the ideological identity of the ruling regime in that decade. This is obvious from the backgrounded images in the photo like the Arabic palm tree standing straight behind the central character, and the children surrounding him wearing the traditional Arabic outfit who are flying around him with happiness and joy. Also, the verbal element in the cover, ***Good Morning, Dear Happiness***, positioned at the top of the cover, contributes to the interpretation of the central character's gesture, as if he is pronouncing the words.

As for *framing* we can see that the photo is covering all the front cover space. The photo is left natural with no framing so as to also indicate openness and acceptance.



Image (1) the front cover of Al-Mizmar 1976

The front cover of Al-Mizmar (1979) in image (2) shows an amazing color diversity. This diversity reflects the openness to other religious and cultural heritages other than the Arabic one. The Indian god *Krishna* appears with her multiple arms as a foregrounded image in the cover. The central positioning of the image along with her multiple arms and smile on her face reflect the symbolic context that calls for tolerance and openness to other religions. The cover image is framed with a green thick line which indicates that all the visual elements within the frame is interrelated.



Image (2) the front cover of Al-Mizmar 1979

The third front cover in image (3), is also consistent with the previously mentioned covers which are full of colors in the foregrounded graphics and backgrounds of these covers. This cover also reflects the Iraqi regime's ideology at the 70s that of openness and acceptance but this time on the industrial level. Three workers dressed in their working overalls are foregrounded in the center of the cover. The background is a huge working site full of large buildings and work equipments to indicate the progress in building and industry at that time. The images are framed within a big green frame to indicate the visually connectedness of these images.

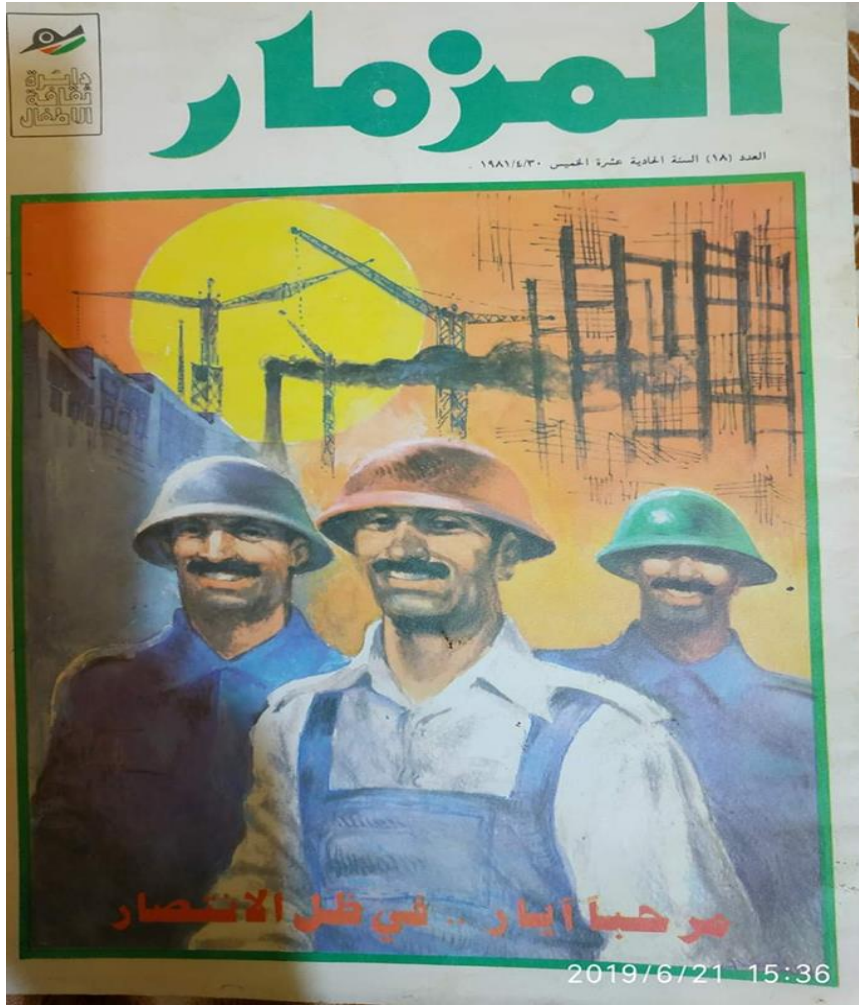


Image (3) the front cover of Al-Mizmar 1979

The following four front covers analyzed below reflect the strict transformation of ideology in the 1980s, where the ideological representation was largely dictated by the culture of war, i.e. the Iraq-Iran war which lasted for 8 years. Since the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war in September (1980), the ideological discourse of the ruling regime has been formed within a very narrow angle of cultural militarization that does not listen to any voice that rises above the voice of the battle. This ideology can be observed in Al-Mizmar front covers through the prevalence of *battle images* and the spread of *paintings* with limited use of colors.



Image (4) the front cover of Al-Mizmar 1980

In the front cover above, the magazine apparently decided to adopt the "war correspondent" style that accompanies the military units in their field battles and take photographs of the bloody battles. The front cover space is occupied by four photographs of four different areas in the Iranian border city Al- Muhammerah, which was occupied by Iraqi forces in 1980. According to *framing*, as we can see, the photographs are separately framed by a thin red line to indicate that they are visually presented in an equal way. Thus, the *salience* of these four photographs are the same, i.e. there is no photograph that is foregrounded on the expense of the other. There are two photos that participated in the embodiment of the scale of the devastation and destruction left by the battle, while the remaining two photos attempt to show that the Iraqi forces maintained some aesthetics sites of the city like in the photo of the "Corniche", and the photo of the house that appeared standing with its proper roof, free from any military casualties.



Image (5) the front cover of Al Mizmar 1981

As for the front cover in image (5), we can notice the ideological representation through the welcoming dichotomy between the military identity and the Arab national identity, in other words, between the heavily armed Iraqi soldier and one of the Muhammarah residents who is wearing the traditional Arabic outfit. These two characters are foregrounded in the image against a background full of smoke and war casualties. The foregrounded and backgrounded elements in the cover are all framed within a red frame to indicate a kind of continuity and not separation in events. As we can also see, only four colors are basically used in the image, this could be so to reflect the after war atmosphere and the difficult and challenging tasks the Iraqi military forces went through. The appearance of the citizens of Al Muhammara wearing the traditional Arabic outfit is a clear reminder of the Arab ethnic identity of this Iranian border city.

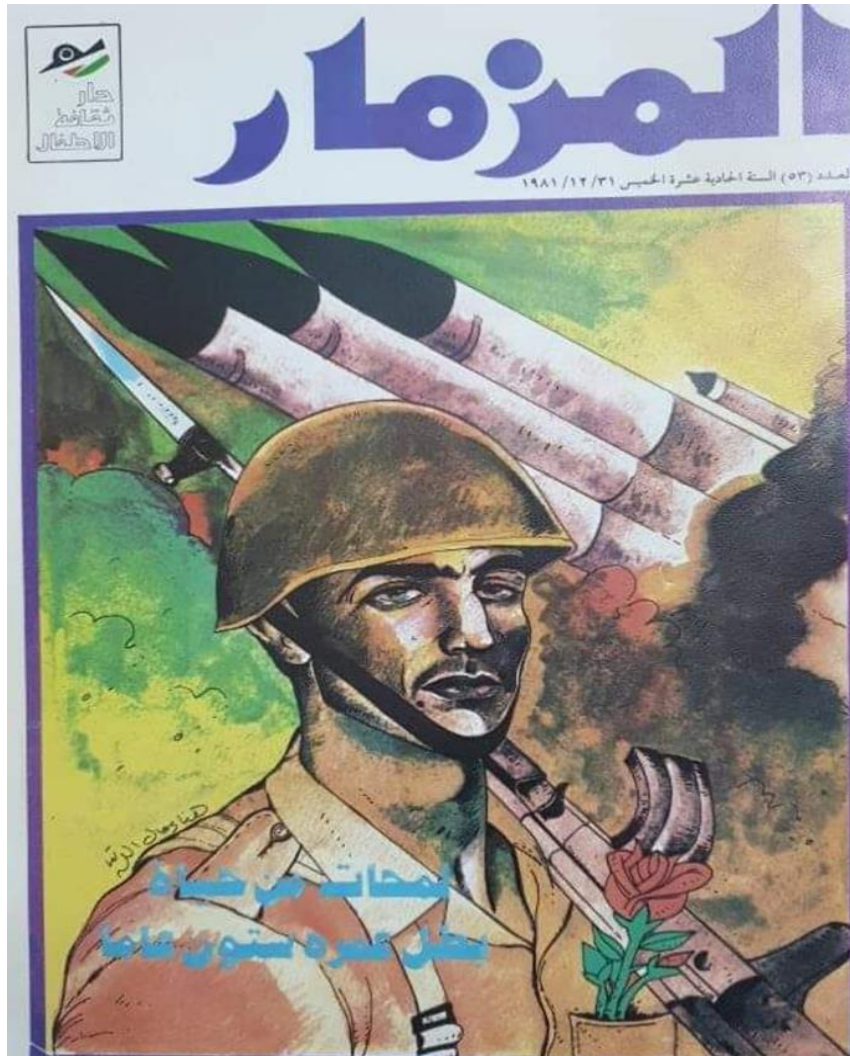


Image (6) the front cover of Al Mizmar 1981

The image of an Iraqi soldier dressed in his full military outfit is shown in image (6), with big eyes and a sharp look to make a sort of eye contact with the viewer. The symbolism of war and peace can be noticed through his rifle resting on his shoulders and a big red rose resting in his pocket. The image of the soldier with the rifle and the rose is foregrounded against a background full of rockets and smoke. The background indicates power and victory. All the visual elements are distributed in a way that they cover all the space of the front cover. The visual elements are all framed within one frame to indicate a sort of connection and relation. The ideological content of the cover is distinctively military and is reflected in the sharp lines used, whether in the face or eyes of the soldier or the big rockets behind him.



Image (7) the front cover of Al Mizmar 1988

In image (7), the front cover of Al-Mizmar is occupied by two photographs, the first one with a big square framing which holds most of the background space of the cover and the second photo is a round framed one placed on the left corner of the cover. The square one is a photo of Shatt Al-Arab located in the city of Al-Basra, a boarder city that faced big battles during the Iraq-Iran war. Because the magazine is published in 1988, a year that marked the end of the eight-year war, we can notice that the square photo is full of blue. The blue (sky and water) overwhelms the rest of the colors and occupies the overall background, in a clear indication of a kind of correlation between the blue color and the victory in the war. This square photo is backgrounded against the rounded photo placed on the left top corner. The photo shows the Iraqi former president Saddam Hussein dressed in his military uniform, honoring a number of Iraqi military leaders by awarding them courage medals. The photo is foregrounded because it is fronted from the square one. Although the two

pictures are framed separately we can notice that there is a kind of fusion between them since there is an overlap between the frames of the two photos. The images in the cover clearly reflect the military ideology, where victory is expressed through courage medals presented to brave soldiers and leaders.

4. Conclusions

Through carrying out a multimodal critical discourse analysis of ideological representations in the front covers of an Iraqi children magazine (*Al-Mizmar*), the researcher draws the following conclusions:

1. As socially shared systems of beliefs, ideologies cannot only inhabit texts via language and narrative forms but they can also do so by using other multi-modes of communication such as visual images, especially when addressing young readers. Visual images, whether *photographic* or *painted*, always encode a sort of a hidden ideological message that can be decoded on the part of the receiver. Ideological representations can be easily presented to children through the use of ideologically loaded visual images that appear on the front covers of certain magazines of children narratives.
2. Through the multimodal analysis of the front covers above the researcher has also shown that ideological visual representations are deeply promoted and legitimized by the ruling class in power. what is more, such visual representations could be shifted due to the ideological shifts in the socio-political orientations of a given regime. As shown in the analysis of *Al-Mizmar* front covers, the magazines, published during the 1970s, are full of diverse drawings and rich colors reflecting a kind of tendency towards modernization, openness, and acceptance of the world outside, which of course expressed the ideology of the Iraqi ruling regime back then. Surprisingly the front covers of the same magazine, published throughout the 1980s, witnessed a radical ideological shift in the political exploitation of visual images. The appearance of military uniforms and war battlefields in photographs and drawings can be clearly noticed and this was a direct repercussion of the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war in September (1980). This could be ascribed to the influences of the bias ideological representations during that period which has shifted towards a focus on Arab nationalism with fully charged military biases.

3. The analysis also asserts what was mentioned previously in the study that ideology is systematic and purposeful in the sense that it is controlled by means of the political domination and power of a given group in a particular community or society.

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