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**THE REPRESENTATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN AL-TAHRIR SQUARE AND TUNNEL MURALS: A VISUAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS****A B S T R A C T**

This paper investigates the collective identity of the participants in October uprisings that broke out in Baghdad against the Iraqi government in 2019. It studies this in the light of visual discourse analysis model suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and van Leeuwen (2008) by examining randomly selected murals painted by amateur protestors as well as professional painters on the walls and concrete blocks in Al-Tahrir Square and Tunnel where the uprising took place. This qualitative examination focuses on the representation of the protestors in the murals and how it reflects different aspects of their collective identity. The findings show that the painters' could convey some different elements of their fellow protestors' new collective identity. The study also reveals that they were too unbiased to reveal even the negative elements, and too socially brave to publicly announce their challenge to the old patriarchal social norms and some of the established social beliefs and traditions.

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تمثيل الهوية الجمعية في جداريات ساحة و نفق التحرير: تحليل خطاب مرئي

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**المخلص**

يتناول هذا البحث الهوية الجمعية لمحتجي انتفاضة تشرين التي اندلعت في بغداد ضد الحكومة العراقية عام ٢٠١٩. و تأتي دراسة الهوية الجمعية في ضوء نموذج تحليل الخطاب المرئي الذي وضعه كل من كريس و فان ليوين (٢٠٠٦) و فان ليوين (٢٠٠٨) على مجموعة من الجداريات التي رسمها مجموعة من المحتجين من الرسامين الهواة و المحترفين على الجدران و الصبات الكونكريتية في ساحة و نفق التحرير وسط بغداد حيث جرت جل أحداث الانتفاضة

هناك . و تركز هذه الدراسة النوعية على كيفية تمثيل المحتجين في هذه الجداريات و ما يترتب عليه من انعكاس لجوانب هويتهم الجمعية . و تظهر النتائج تمكن الرسامين من ايصال بعض العناصر المختلفة لمكونات الهوية الجديدة للمحتجين كما تظهر عدم تحيزهم في اظهار حتى الجوانب السلبية منها و جرأتهم في اعلان نزعة التحدي للمعايير الاجتماعية الابوية القديمة و بعض التقاليد و المعتقدات الاجتماعية الراسخة .

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** الهوية الجمعية ، المحتجين العراقيين ، الجداريات ، تحليل الخطاب المرئي.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On the 1st of October 2019, the first phase of the civil uprisings and sit-ins pervaded the capital and most of the southern provinces of Iraq. Then it was resumed more vehemently again on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month in an attempt to force the political system, which has been governing the country since the overthrow of Saddam's regime in 2003, to stop foreign intervention and give up power to more efficient and politically independent figures. These popular uprisings were not the first of their kind in the recent history of Iraq after 2003. Similar uprisings had broken out in 2015 in Basra and found their way to the other southern cities and Baghdad calling for a solution to the widespread corruption in the state institutions, unemployment, and the general deterioration in public services and infrastructure. The 2015 movement was viewed as an intra-sect conflict between Shia't protestors and a Shia't government which failed in its duties (Jabar, 2018).

However, 2019 uprisings differ in that it gained wider currency and it was supported and escalated by a different strata of the people especially in Baghdad, the most populated city (more than 10 million people of different sectarian, social and educational backgrounds). This movement continued relentlessly for more than four months until the crowded gatherings of the protestors were obliged to stay at home because of the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. During that period, the protestors faced forms of violent suppression by pro-government militias and riot police who used live bullets, pepper and tear gas bombs to kill the unarmed people. The uprisings in Baghdad was characterized by a new and unprecedented form of protesting that took an artistic and cultural nature. The whole site of Al-Tahrir Square (the stronghold of Baghdad's protestors) turned into a huge carnival of different activities such as music, dancing, intellectual forums, and the most relevant to the subject of this study, painting. Many young amateurs and professional painters had a great opportunity to exploit the dull blank spaces on the walls of Al-Tahrir and turn them to a colorful gallery of murals through which they could express the young angry generation's messages and ambitions. They portrayed their new collective identity which contests forms of sectarian, religious, ethnic, social class and professional identities that had been manipulated and politicized by the ruling parties to mobilize as much supporters to maintain their existence in power.

## 2. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The concept of identity has been attracting scholars in different fields to tackle it. But each discipline focuses on a different level of it. Psychologists, for instance, use this term, or personal identity, to refer to the idiosyncratic attributes that shape the individual's uniqueness;

they define it as the "individual's comprehension of him or herself as a discrete, separate entity" (Sharma and Sharma, 2010, p. 119). Social scientists, on the other hand, have a different account for identity and they use the term social or collective identity to describe a person's recognition of his/her membership to a particular social group. (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

According to the Social Identity Theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), the self-concept is categorized into two aspects: personal and social. The personal identity focuses mainly on a person's individual characteristics such as traits, talents and sociability. On the other hand, the social identity is derived from an individual's knowledge of the emotional significance of his belonging to a social group(s). It is argued that individuals' self-awareness is only identified in terms of their relationship to other individuals (Hall, 2004). Therefore, people who are similar to us are categorized within the in-group, while people who are different are categorized within the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Social Identity Theory is also concerned with self-categorization and the phenomenon of the 'in-group' whose members are similar to us, and the 'out-group' whose members are different from us in terms of their values, beliefs, attitudes, reactions, styles of speech, behavioral norms, and other properties that are assumed to be related with the relevant in-group (Turner et al, 1987). Thus, group labels based on categories such as nation, gender, ethnicity, religion, sect, occupation and other considerations of belonging to a group are often used to be identity formations that often serve as "social variables against which forms of social behavior or linguistic usage could be measured" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 24). Additionally, the theorists believe that collective identity can be formed by the characteristics of situations in which the collective identity shows up, especially when the individual is among a group of other people (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Ashmore et al (2004) find that the collective identity of any group is a phenomenon that should be analyzed within its context. They believe that it is a multidimensional concept that refers not only to the individual's awareness of his membership to a category but also "a set of cognitive beliefs associated with that category, such as stereotypic traits thought to be shared by category members or ideological positions that define the group's goals" (Ashmore et al, 2004, p. 82). Accordingly, they propose a framework for the elements of collective identity which includes: self-categorization, evaluation, importance, attachment and sense of interdependence, social embeddedness, behavioral involvement, and content and meaning.

### **3. THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.**

The notion of social actors is central to the investigation of collective identity in discourse and its social context. Collective identity connects between the social identity and the individual one, and it supports the role of the individual as a social actor (Simon, 2004). In this term, Simon & Klandermans (2001) mention that collective identity has a powerful ability of mobilization during social and political movements. It has two steps to work; it takes the social identity into the individual one, and then, makes it possible for an individual to participate as a social actor in a collective action or movement (Simon, 2009).

To underline the significance of collective identity to social movements, it should be explained first that when a social movement arises against what its members believe to be oppressive, it challenges identities imposed by an out-group who act according to the strategy of 'divide and conquer'. And when the out-group actors feel threatened by the in-group, they try to undermine the legitimacy of the movement's identity. Thus, as a reaction, the movement's members become more tenacious to their threatened collective identity (Jasper & McGarry, 2015). In other words, the movement's members assume a collective identity to be as a protecting shield or as a symbol that characterizes and legitimizes their position.

The Iraqi protestors' collective identity was created due to their awareness of the unjust treatment by the government and the cultural stereotype imposed on them as being vandals, Baathists or tools for foreign agendas. Therefore, the painters used murals as a memorialization and a documentary tool to show the purpose behind the uprising. This act was viewed as a peaceful weapon against their opponents and the government.

#### **4. GRAFFITI, MURALS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Jakob (2013) mentions that graffiti and wall painting is a practice that is older than human civilization. It was basically performed for the purpose of communication, decoration and reshaping the physical environment. Nowadays, it is considered a form of street arts that involves writing or painting oversized images on walls in public spaces. Other street arts include a variety of many other forms involving stenciling, carving, scratching, sculpturing, painting and other visual techniques such as collage and mosaic.

Graffiti in its modern form emerged in the 1960s in the United States performed by African Americans and Latino young people as a form of protesting in social and civil rights movements, then, it spread worldwide, and now it can be seen in almost every large city (Rabon, 2016). Today, it became the most common popular art around the world, and a graffiti artwork is a token that usually carries a social or political message of protest (Marschall, 1999).

This form of street art is usually performed by marginalized and disparate individuals in heavily secured, and hard-to-reach places by using spray cans or cheap types of paint on blank walls in public spaces such as buildings' facades and bridges. It is condemned as illegal behaviors and an act of vandalism in some countries so it is challenging and requires brave and audacious artists and enough time out of the eyes of guards and authority surveillance (Caldas, 2015). In other countries, graffiti has a cultural value that has a positive effect on economy and tourism industry such as in Bristol in the USA, Shoreditch in the UK, Buenos Aires in Argentina, Karakas in Venezuela and Stavanger in Norway where festivals and street art galleries attract high numbers of tourists every year (Keays, 2015).

Moss (2010) suggests that murals are a kind of graffiti style, but they are more planned, when very large images painted on walls to be seen by the public to express a specific socio-political message in an emotional and influencing way. Murals also establish a relationship between the artists and community members, and this relationship in turn influences what is presented in the image.

Golden et al (2006) distinguish three types of murals each differs in terms of its context and purpose. First, Graffiti murals which are illegal and they are painted without getting consent from the owners of the property or the relevant authorities; and community members are not involved in the process of painting. Second, Memorial murals which are a type of graffiti murals used to commemorate victims of violence. And third, environmental murals which are mainly painted to decorate cities and neighborhoods, and to present art to the public outside galleries and museums. This third type of murals is approved by urban planners and municipalities, and sometimes funded by the state, non-profit organizations or agencies. This type of murals is supposed to be unbiased and free of any ideological indication. Community-based murals are those where the artists work in cooperation with the local residents who fund, support and sometimes get involved in the process by brainstorming and discussing possible themes with the artists to address an issue that concerns them and their community.

Murals are highly influential in social movements and political protests. They constitute a means for political activism and resistance and a medium to express identity and to call for change. Therefore, many scholars in sociology, socio-psychology, political science, media and communication have discussed the significant roles they have in movements and protests. In this sense, Rolston & Berastegi (2016, p. 2) state:

*"Murals help create, confirm and support a collective identity for the social movement. For marginalized groups in particular they are a form of pride. As such they speak in the first, often main and sometimes only instance to members of the in-group. ... Murals are a form of communication. As often larger-than-life size visuals they can be striking and emotional in ways that other forms of political communication, such as a pamphlet, may not be. They are longer-lasting than speeches and accessible to those not immediately present at demonstrations".*

In her sociological study on the role of art in social movements, Adams (2002) suggests three functions: to portray the hard conditions of life lived by the movements' members, to depict the out-group as the evil part, and to suggest another mindset and different ways of thinking.

Doerr & Tune (2007) add that as a visual art, murals are tools for cultural and collective meaning production. When they are presented in the public sphere, they become the vehicles to create a collective identity and to visualize the protest movement messages. This visualization makes it possible to understand the context of the movement, and its impact on the authorities, the media, and the audience.

Marschall (1999) believes that murals have the potential to start a social and political change by activating public awareness, resonating social criticism, creating a particular identity for the group, enhancing team spirit, and supporting the group's members actions. They also give its practitioners the feeling of being useful to their community and devoted to its goals. This sense unifies and directs their collaborative efforts towards doing the right actions, and not to resort to violence. In the same context, Barnett (1984, p. 15) states that "murals are freeing ordinary people from ways of seeing that are not their own and helping

them take control of their perceptions, which is necessary to their taking charge of their own lives”.

Santino (2001) finds that murals set up the background of the daily life of communities and subconsciously let them think in a particular way. And finally, Goodnow (2006) suggests that they have the power to intensify and deliver verbal arguments on a specific issue in a visual form that words cannot.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

Most of the photographs of the murals under investigation were taken in Al-Tahrir Square and Tunnel, some of them were collected from Google Images as many of the original works were later distorted. The collected photographs hit 75 snapshots but they were filtered and reduced to only 62.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006), and van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-functional approach to the analysis of visual discourse and the visual representation of social actors is adopted to answer the research central questions: 'how does the visual representation of the protestors reflect aspects of their collective identity?' As this paper deals with a social action, it should be rationalized, and therefore it is "no longer oriented toward meanings, values, and beliefs, but toward strategies; no longer towards questions like "Is it true?" "Is it good?" but towards the questions "Does it work?" "Does it achieve its purposes?" as van Leeuwen (2008, p. 3) poses.

In order to answer the research questions, the social actors (the protestors) should be examined in terms of how they are depicted as social actors. This approach, stemming from Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar, provides us with a socio-semantic analytical parameters, on the basis of which the selected murals will be tested and interpreted in the next section to find out how their collective identity is represented.

## **6. THE ANALYSIS**

### **6.1. Depiction of social actors**

The way people are presented in any image conveys a lot about the ideology of the producers of that image. In the present case of study, the producers (the painters) and the depicted people belong to the in-group and have the same views, values, and goals which means that the message is not biased and the murals reflects a clear idea on their vision of themselves.

#### **6.1.1. Inclusion**

Through the examination, it is observed that the painters heavily include the in-group (the protestors) and decrease references to the out-group (riot police and politicians). The in-group representatives appear in most of the murals, especially the teenagers and the youth of the post millennial generation, whereas the older and aged generations appear only three times in the selected sample. Moreover, they are depicted very old, weak and disabled. The young people included can be identified mainly by their haircuts, clothes, physique and behavioral actions.





Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

In murals such as in (1, 2, 29 and 30), the age group of the protestors is estimatable by the distinctive puffy, spiky or messy and boyish haircuts, most of the Iraqi post-millennial adolescent males wear. This kind of hair style is less common among the 1990s and older generations. The funky and casual clothes with the rolled sleeves and legs also reveal how young they are in terms of the time of the uprisings took place. Although the paintings are not that professional, but the general outline show adolescents and children with skinny bodies, immature physical features, without beards and mustaches.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

In murals such as those in (5, 6 and 7), the physical features of the depicted protestors show how strong and physically capable they are. The huge muscles and the six packs in Figure (7) tell that those protestors enjoy well-built physique and good health, the matter which indicates their approximate age of young adults.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

In the above examples (8, 9 and 10) as well as in (14, 26, 28 and 37), the uncovered hair and its style, the makeup and manicure as well as the fresh facial features give an idea on how modern, lively and relatively unreserved those women are, if compared to the stereotyped image of an old Iraqi woman, who is often represented as a grieved, wrinkled woman with her traditional wide black gown (abaya).



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

The depicted behavioral actions represent some of the criticized demerits that came as natural by-products of the uprisings of young people. These actions give an impression of some of the protestors being immature, reckless, aimless people. In Figures (11 and 12), we can see actions that are socially indecent to be performed or shown in the public. An image of passionate kissing in public - as if the act itself is normal in public in the Iraqi society - is shocking and impudent for the Iraqi society in general. The same applies to the girl wearing lipstick in Figure (12) -who is made even more distinctive than the others in the same mural via her different direction of standing and the red shirt - as being careless and detached from the situational reality others in the same figurative Iraqi boat are fully involved in. Presenting some protestors behaving pointlessly reveals the tendency of most of the young post-millennial generation to assert their existence by challenging the cultural and social legacies in an anarchist frivolous way. They are meant to be viewed as defying every restrictions that prevent them from living a liberal life free of any impediments, mainly the religious and social norms and values.

Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure



17

Figures (12, 13 and 14) are the only ones among the randomly selected sample showing the in-group's old men. Their approximate age is clear through their clothing and grey mustaches and beards. And to enhance the image of the old generation of being helpless, they are painted weak and disabled (with a crutch and a wheel chair).

The evident inclusion of the young people reflects the fresh, lively, youthful and rebellious spirit and mentality those protestors wish to add to their collective identity. However this youthfulness is associated with a strong endeavor to self-realization through socially unacceptable behaviors.

As for the gender of the included in-group, it can be noticed that the heavy presence of female protestors is a considerable phenomenon. They appear either equally foregrounded



with males or solo. Moreover, a variety of ages ranging from female children, young girls to old women are included. Presenting all these women in the murals breaks the old social restrictions that limited and underestimated the role of women in social and political movements. The heavy presence of women in the murals and in the actual uprisings adds a considerable feminist aspect to the collective identity.

### 6.1.2. Role

The semantic roles ascribed to the depicted protestors explain further aspects of their collective identity and the way they wish to present themselves. The analysis leads to two perspectives: first, some of the processes those protestors are involved in tend to metaphorically symbolize them and their issue. Second, the murals reveal shy and implicit roles of the out-group. This is done through often putting the protestors as participants in conceptual representations; a kind of representation that displays the participants "in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 79).

In order to portray that part of the collective identity which is related to the protestors' belief and image of themselves they are sometimes statically shown involved in conceptual symbolic processes. This type of processes, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest, unfold the meaning behind the existence of the participant or his identity. Symbolic processes are of two types: symbolic attributive in which there are two participants: the (Carrier) whose meaning or identity is represented by the other participant (the Symbolic Attribute). The second type of symbolic processes is the symbolic suggestive, in which there is only the (Carrier) whose meaning comes from within its own attributes.



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21

Figures (18, 19, 20 and 21) are examples of the metaphorical presentation of the protestors as Carriers involved in symbolic suggestive processes, in which their value emanates from the metaphorical meaning of their representation. In Figures (18 and 19), the Iraqi flag colors represent the symbol for the protestors' national identity. In Figure 18, the figurative representation shows the nation as terribly aggrieved and badly affected by both the US and Iran. In Figure (19), the protestors are presented as enragedly brave with two marginal lion faces that are contrasted with the devilish one in the middle representing the out-group. In Figure (20), the iconic rickshaw (tuktuk), which was the only available vehicle to transport the injured during the uprising, carry the attributes of the historical deity Lamassu (or the winged bull), which was the symbol of power, courage and wisdom in the ancient

Sumerian and Assyrian civilizations in Iraq. In Figure (21), the protestors are akin to a butterfly: cheerful, peaceful and colorful (with different social backgrounds).

On another front, the narrative by which the protestors want to market themselves to the world is achieved via a variety of visual propositions with some vectors (processes) and different roles for the participants.



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25

In the above four Figures, the protestors are given the role of an Actor who has a tangible influence on reality. The angel child (in Figure 22), as well as the old woman and the bleeding hand which carries the Iraqi flag (in Figure 23) represent the doers of sacrifices to maintain the tenacity of Iraq, metaphorically represented by the flag. In Figures (24, 25 as well as 52), the actors also have a metaphorical effect through an obvious vector representing a process directed towards the goal, i.e. the out-group. The actors in these examples are depicted in a position of some kind of power obtained not by the means of any weapons or authority but by giving sacrifice (pulling the out-group to fall down in Figure 24), sarcasm (flushing the escaping Iraqi Prime Minister at that time, Adil AbdulMahdi who is portrayed in a caricature manner in Figure 25), and also freshness and hope (the colorful picture of a sunny day being painted by a child on a riot policeman’s shield), see Figure (52).



Figure 26



Figure 27

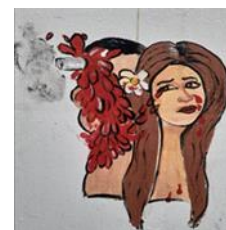


Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30

Conversely, the protestors are also often given the role of the Goal who receive the action of an anonymous Actor. They are portrayed in scenes with an absent actor that read ‘something is happening to someone’ without exactly knowing who and what caused the event. Putting the protestors in such an agentless event emphasizes their vision of themselves as being the victim of not only the government and its militias but also of other implicit enemies including international organizations, such as the UN in Figure (29). It is supposed to be supportive to the Iraqi people, yet it is the opposite; or at best, indifferent to their issue as the UNICEF in Figure (30), which is depicted not as an actor but a neutral participant standing aside without any reaction to the murdering of the child, with the phrase of his very own tongue ‘*Were are you*’ above.

### 6.1.3. Individuals / Groups

In this binary distinction, we can divide the collected murals into two groups. In the first one, we find the protestors portrayed in homogenous dense crowds to the extent that only a general outline of what look like human figures appear in the far horizon or background of the landscape. The depiction of homogeneous groups can be translated into the protestors’ and painters’ desire to bring out that side of their collective identity as being consolidated, unified and coherent. They want to say that regardless of all the religious, sectarian and social differences, they upraised all together for one reason and to achieve the same goal.



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

In the above Figures (31, 32 and 33), the homogeneous blurred crowds are preceded by foregrounded symbols of them: the hand making a victory sign, the lion with its grandeur and bravery and the Iraqi flag. All of these foregrounded symbols boost the image of them as being intrepid, triumphant and cherishing their union under the national identity. This image is further supported by some phrases written on other murals using a collective first person pronouns “I”, “we” and “us” referring to the protestors in general without any differentiation. Most of these phrases became hashtags on social media at the time of the uprising. For example: *كفانا نموت و يحيا الوطن* (Enough death for us, long live the homeland), *يلا نعيش* (Let’s live), *نريد وطن* (We want a nation), *نازل أخذ حقي* (I am going out to grab my right), *نحن شعب لا يخاف الموت* (We (the people) do not fear death).

The protestors are also displayed as distinctive individuals, and this presentation is viewed as serving particular scenes directly relevant to the protestors’ narratives that would not be influential to building up the collective identity unless they are shown in this way. Painting distinctive individual protestors reveal their characteristics, specific roles, actions, features, clothes, tools and sex (as noticed earlier in the murals in Figures 1-30). All of these details help form different aspects of their overall representation and convey their identity.



Figure 34



Figure 35

Unplugging the battery with the phrase (*the government is running out*) in Figure (34) express the image of the protestors as being victorious, in control and almost overthrowing the government and ending the uprisings in their favor. In the next mural in Figure (35), the distressed mother carrying a shroud (perhaps for her son or daughter) represents helplessness and brokenness with the chain around her neck and shoulders. However, the Iraqi flag which replaces her sad features is a symbol for her only hope of a stable homeland.



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38

Al-Tahrir muralists also touch upon particular iconic individual characters relevant to previous well-known discourses, contexts or movements. The contexts of the original images that depict those characters have some intertextual inspirational connotations so that they can be borrowed to give a further value in shaping the collective identity. For instance, Banksy's famous work originally painted in 2003 as a protest against the construction of the West Bank Wall in Palestine is well employed in Figure (36) to fit Al-Tahrir protestors' identity. In this mural, the protestors see themselves similar to the 'Flower Thrower' angry man who is using a bunch of flowers instead of weapons as a sign of advocating for peace. The '*We Can Do It*' image in Figure (37) is another famous poster which was first designed during World War II in the USA, and then it was reproduced many times in different campaigns and movements to empower women. This mural in Al-Tahrir magnifies the feminist role in the uprising and decreases gender discrimination in their collective identity. Similarly, the protestors display themselves as revolutionists who dream of a unified country and want to make radical social reforms and to eliminate huge social classes' differences. This aspect of their collective identity is clear in murals showing the Figure of Che Guevara whose picture became an icon of social revolutions around the world in all popular cultures.

The martyrs are also shown as recognizable individuals, and their depiction falls in three patterns: injured and dead bodies, figurative representations, and real known Figures. Paintings of injured and dead bodies are shocking, and they trigger a sense of bitter sorrow for the viewers for their brutal murder. Martyrs are also represented figuratively as angels or as in mass funerals. But the most dramatic representation is that of specific real individuals who were well-known civil activists, poets, journalists and photographers, and whose fate was very tragic. They are portrayed as foregrounded individuals in many murals (as in



Figures 1, 39, 40 and 41) to commemorate them, and to always refresh the viewers' memory of their sacrifice.



Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41

#### 6.1.4. Categorization (Specific/Generic)

van Leeuwen (2008) suggests that categorizing people in a visual discourse is about sorting them on the basis of some cultural or biological features, or a mix of both. The cultural distinction can be achieved by focusing on some culturally-related characteristics, such as the type of clothing, haircuts or whatever concrete things the depicted people carry or have that has a particular cultural reference. Biological distinction, on the other hand, can be visually achieved by exaggerating certain physical features to convey positive or negative connotations that the sociocultural group who produced it think to be intrinsic and genuine.

In the selected sample, we find some references to the social background of the protestors. One of the indicators is the "Abaya", the traditional black gown stereotypically worn by the Iraqi Muslim middle and lower class women, especially those living in popular areas and conservative communities (Examples are in Figures 5, 6, 15, 23, 35 and 42).

It is also noticeable that the young male protestors and the martyrs are portrayed shirtless or wearing undershirts or shaggy clothes in the public. The matter highlights their image as being from the extremely destitute class of the Iraqi people who hardly have proper clothes to put on (see Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 27 and 34). Other depicted clothes do not indicate much further about specific professional and educational background of the protestors, in spite of the fact that school and university students were heavily effective and permanent participants in the uprising and sit-ins. This matter led to a complete deadlock in schools and universities in the heated cities.

Indicators to the religious aspect of the collective identity are hardly found in the selected sample. They are very rare, blurred and backgrounded. Moreover, reference to more liberal ideology and rejection of political and extremist religious policies is occasionally observed.



Figure 42



The sentence (*We are the victims of an exaggerated religion*) at the bottom in Figure (42) expresses the orientation of the protestors whose collective identity seems to go beyond any religious or sectarian identity, at least the politicized ones.

## 6.2. Social interaction between the depicted participants and the viewers

Al-Tahrir murals act as a medium of interaction between the protestors who want to express their collective identity, on the one hand, and the potential viewers, on the other. And due to the detachment between the physical contexts of creating and viewing any image, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose, the painters resort to some communicative resources and manipulate them to encode the social interaction they want to establish with the viewers. The following visual configurations blueprint the protestors/painters attitude towards the viewers of the murals.

### 6.2.1. Gaze

The way a depicted participant looks towards the viewer has certain communicative functions in image analysis. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) classify the gaze into two types: 'demand' and 'offer'. In a demand gaze, the viewer is invited to do something, to have a particular imaginary relation with the depicted participant who gazes directly at him.

By this direct eye contact, the depicted protestors are made fully facing the viewers insisting upon them to recognize their values, characteristics, ambitions and significance. They want to say like: *Come and join us, defend our issue, or continue what we have started*. The angry demand gazes can be interpreted as a blame to those who did not join or support them, as in Figures (8, 9, 18, 29 and 48). The protestors want to establish a direct long term communication with viewers as long as these murals would stay on the walls of Al-Tahrir Square and Tunnel.

In an offer gaze, the depicted participants do not look directly to the viewer, as they are presented as 'items of information' offered to the viewer to think about them, or about what they have in mind and want to tell.



Figure 43



Figure 44



Figure 45



Figure 46

In the above four examples, the protestors gaze at something out of the image, and the viewer here is invited to imagine to whom the protestor in Figure (43) makes a thumbs up, what do the two women in Figure (44) try to catch, and what the veiled woman in Figure (45) looks at. And as the protestors are ardently looking upward with aspiration, the goals of their sights must be something superior, sublime or hard to reach. The viewer is tempted to imagine the same horizon and aspire for the same goals. The girl in Figure (46) urges the viewer to read what she requires: *All what we want is life*. The protestors here want to attract the attention to their own suffering of lacking the basic means of life, yet, they are looking for a better far reality.

### 6.2.2. Social Distance

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the size of the depicted participants contributes to the interactive relation between them and the viewer. The more the participants are shown close to the viewer, the more intimate and informal the relationship between them is intended to be, and vice versa.



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49

It is observed that the majority of the murals show the individual protestors at a medium and close distances (revealing the shoulders and face), whereas crowds of protestors are situated at a far public distance. The near distances are used to set stronger contact between the depicted protestors, who want to impose themselves heavily, and the viewers. This close positioning is often accompanied by a direct demand gaze and a fully frontal involvement, a technique which enhances the casual relationship with the viewer and makes him/her feel emotively penetrated. Whereas when accompanied by an offer gaze, it interprets as an urgent incitement to imagine what the protestor is looking at, as in Figure (49).

### 6.2.3. Involvement

Another type of interaction and connection can be made by the angle of twist the participants are turned to. The angle of positioning can range from full involvement 'frontal', half detachment 'oblique' to back view of participants. Each angle has a different interpretation, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) discuss. The frontal angle implies that what is in the image is part of a world the depicted participants are involved with, while the oblique angle implies the opposite. Whereas the first impression a viewer can get of the back view is vulnerability and trust. The majority of the murals give the viewers an impression of belonging to the protestors' world by presenting them in a frontal or slightly slanted angle.



Figure 50



Figure 51



Figure 52

With the back view in the above three examples, the young protestors are shown exposed to the chance of being attacked, harmed, or killed. However, they give the impression that they trust the viewer and ask him/her to sympathize with them and support their issue.

#### 6.2.4. Power

Another aspect of the interactive communication between the participants and their viewers is the vertical point of view from which the participant is captured. The height of this vertical angle, whether from above the depicted participant or below him, can give two opposite meanings. If a depicted participant is seen from above, this would give the viewer the impression that the participant is inferior, insignificant, flat or submissive. On the other hand, if he is viewed from below, this would give the viewer a more positive impression of the participant as having the upper hand. The protestors in the collected sample never present themselves in a lower position. All the murals show them at eye level which means that they put themselves equal to the others (may be those who opposed, criticized and underestimated them).

#### 6.3. Compositional meaning

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the presentational and interactive meanings of participants in an image cannot be fully recognized without accounting for the overall pictorial composition. They connects between the aspects of both meanings via three devices: information value, salience and framing. In this study, it has been observed that the painters of Al-Tahrir murals exploited these devices to reveal further aspects of the collective identity.

##### 6.3.1. Information value

The positioning of a picture's constituents (the participants and the relations they have with each other and with the viewer) contributes to their overall meaning. Each area in an image can give a specific information value to the elements, and any change in the orientation of any constituent would result in a different meaning.

##### - Right and left (Given and New information)

According to the horizontal coding orientation in the Arabic culture (in which writing is from right to left), the right side is the area of the Given information the receiver is assumed to know already, while the left side is the area of the New information that the receiver must pay attention to as it carries most of the intended message.



Figure 53



Figure 54



Figure 55

In Figures (53, 54, 55, as well as earlier in 25 and 52), the protestors doing acts of resistance and struggling in front of the out-group, who represent the government, are presented as Given. They convey the impression that they are already embedded in the whole atmosphere of resistance, and their action is self-evident, agreed upon or an established base of the message. Whereas the 'others' who are portrayed as escaping or about to vanish are presented as New. This triggers the sense that this situation of being defeated (after long years in corrupted power) is not yet so familiar and needs a special attention and celebration.

### - Top and bottom (the Ideal and the Real)

When an image's components are arranged vertically, both the upper and lower areas ascribe certain different meanings to what occupies them. The top section of an image represents what is abstract, idealized and glamorous. Also it has the most emotive and highlighted part of the whole meaning. The bottom, on the other hand, represents what is specific, realistic, practical and down-to-earth details of the message.



Figure 56



Figure 57

The girl overlooking from a supreme position as an angel and the bleeding martyr in Figures (56 and 57) are presented as majestic, honorable and sublime. The top positioning boosts this impression and gives them an abstract and a more foregrounded value. The lower part of the mural in Figure (56) includes the real world of the protestors who are shown deeply involved in fervent acts of resistance. Figure (57) is different in that only the martyr on the top is colored to enhance his salience and solemnity with his red blood being poured over the dull and blurred black-headed people and clergymen who represent the suppressive out-group in the bottom.

### 6.3.2. Salience

Salience, as it is defined by Kress and van Leeuwen, refers to the emphasis given to a particular element to be foregrounded in order to attract the viewers' attention to it. It can be realized by a complex interaction of some visual indicators through which viewers can subjectively measure the degree of importance. The Iraqi flag is observed to be salient in many murals to emphasize the national identity. Similarly, the muralists had their way to focus on the uprisings launched in Baghdad (and attracted protestors from other provinces) more than those coincided in other middle and southern cities. One of the tools to do that is focusing on some iconic features in Baghdad such as Baghdad Tower (Figures 8 and 58), the Turkish building (Figures 33 and 56), Freedom Statue (Figures 17, 58 and 60) and Al-Jumhuriya bridge (Figure 62), where the most agitated crowds gathered and bloody clashes took place at the heart of Baghdad.



Figure 58



Figure 59



Figure 60



Figure (59) is a creative example of intertextually borrowed theme of a trendy Netflix series' *'La casa de papel'* poster. The original poster shows a masked face and eight names of a bank-robbery gang members named after famous cities and a ninth name of the chief '*Professor*' in the middle red bar. The reproduced poster specifies Baghdad in the red bar and lists the names of eleven middle and southern Iraqi provinces in the white bars. In this mural, the protestors view Baghdad as the leading and most heated city, and present themselves as disparate and have nothing to lose to reach their goal, just like the characters of the show.

### 6.3.3. Framing

Framing, as Kress and van Leeuwen illustrate, refers to the spacial boundaries around a group of components within an image. Framing joins things together so that they appear connected and belonging to a single group. Accordingly, the more framing is obvious, the more the framed area is shown as a distinct unit of information.



Figure 61



Figure 62

In Figures (57, 61 and 62), the framing of two different groups or realities is made clear by the use of colors. The protestors are painted within colorful spots, surrounded by the grey areas of the concrete blocks on which the other dimmed world is painted in black and white. In Figure (61), the young man standing in the obscure side which represents the current miserable reality trying to draw the curtain from the coming vivid, fresh and colorful future he dreams of. In Figure (62) the protestors in the colorful side of الشعب (the people) are framed within a colorful half of the mural in opposition to the out-group الشغب (the riot police). Al-Jumhuriya bridge, where most of the bloody confrontations took place, is painted with green on both sides of the mural, as it is considered as a symbol and an extension to the side of (the people).



## CONCLUSIONS

The visual analysis of the representation of October, 2019 protestors in the selected murals of Al-Tahrir Square and Tunnel shows that the painters' choices (although many of them are not systematically planned or intended due to the chaotic situation, hastiness and danger at the site and time they were painted) could convey an outline of the characteristics, traits, beliefs, values, backgrounds and narratives of the majority of the protestors. These elements have contributed to the formation of their collective identity, which was a point of strength for advancing their movement. The observed aspects of the collective identity can be summarized as follows:

- 1- The uprising was predominantly youthful and led mainly by the post-millennial generation of people who find themselves more entitled and capable for making radical social and political changes than whom they believe to be the ineffective and infirm older generation.
- 2- The protestors insist upon proving themselves different, unreserved, more liberal and challenging many of the traditions than the previous generations. This aspect of their collective identity could reflect a negative image of being anarchists sometimes and without practical and clear agenda and goals for being rebellious to the social norms.
- 3- The new collective identity is characterized by the strong presence of femininity, the matter which decreases the bias in the equation of gender roles in the mainly patriarchal society.
- 4- The national Iraqi identity in general is predominant with special reference to the Baghdadi one on many occasions. The protestors show themselves as a consolidated and unified members despite all the social differences. Therefore, there is rare reference to educational, occupational and religious identities. However, clear indications were found to the middle and lower classes of the destitute people to represent most of the protestors, and to add this aspect to their identity.
- 5- They show themselves the victims of mainly foreign powers and anonymous enemies. However, they are portrayed brave, victorious, supreme, peaceful and the proper heirs of the great ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia.
- 6- The protestors present themselves as embedded in resistance and about to take over and announce a great new event of defeating the iniquitous politicians and government.
- 7- At the same time, they try to establish good, intimate and trustworthy relationship and obtain recognition, acknowledgement and empathy of their fellow citizens and invite them to take their bright side and look through the same perspective.

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