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Telling Stories or Informing the Public

Narrative aspects of Åsne Seierstad's
journalism in Politiken on the war in Iraq 2003
A comparative analysis

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

This study develops a definition of narrative journalism and a qualitative method for analysing the narrative dimension of news stories. The method is applied in an in-depth analysis of four front-page articles by the Norwegian journalist Åsne Seierstad. The articles were published in the Danish newspaper Politiken as part of the paper's coverage of the war in Iraq 2003. In terms of style, these articles are compared to the coverage of the same events written by another news journalist, Erik Thomle of Jyllands-Posten and are held up against the general norms of factual/objective news journalism. The analysis demonstrates that out of four articles, one was purely narrative, two were semi-narrative and only one was definitely non-narrative. However, when applied to a larger sample of her articles – 18 front-page stories published from January to April 2003 - the narrative style proved to be less dominant. But still, Seierstad was to a large extent using literary techniques in her journalistic writing on Iraq which is unusual in news journalism and especially in front-page articles on hard news topics such as war and conflict. The study argues that the use of literary techniques allows for a different perception of the stories, and that a semi-narrative style that combines narrative writing with the classical news style is more efficient in regard to communicating content than the factual/objective news style is when applied on its own.