
SPORTS AND POLITICS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES OF MOHAMED SALAH'S WORLD CUP 2018 STORY IN THE BRITISH NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract: Plenty of excitement was around Mohamed “Mo” Salah who led the Egyptian team “Pharaohs” to enter the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. Mo who plays soccer for Egypt, as well as for Liverpool, England, is the Premier League's top player this season and is the team's best player and one of the most talked about stars entering the tournament. He faced a crisis because of Chechnya leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

Mo Salah's performance used to impress the British media identifying him previously in the Guardian as Liverpool's savior, but questions are raised about their newspapers coverage after the circulation of the photos of Salah with Kadyrov. Sometimes, newspapers construct identity and that is a key area of investigation within this study.

In this context, and because this story attracted much news coverage at all, the present study attempted to examine how has the British newspapers websites covered Mo Salah in the 2018 FIFA World Cup? And whether the English press injected political assertions into its coverage constructing identities for Mo Salah, and if so, what are the types of constructed identities? Also, how has the newspapers differed from each other in the construction?

This paper will depend on two theories which are the Identity theory and the Social Responsibility theory.

This paper will depend on the Discourse Analysis in order to measure and evaluate the ways in which identities have been constructed in the time frame.

The seven British newspapers websites that are included in this study are The Sun, Metro, Daily Mail, London Evening Standard, The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent.

Keywords: International News, News Coverage, Identity, World Cup 2018, Mohamed Salah, Ramzan Kadyrov, Egypt, Chechnya.

Introduction: “The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude”, a quote stated by George Orwell. The idea, implied by this quote, is that “everything is political”. That means everything is linked in a way or another to politics. Football has always been political. The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia have made it clear that sports and politics are not separable easily in the news coverage and identity construction.

Last season Mohamed “Mo” Salah became an international player and a star ranked beside Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Neymar Jr. and that is because his goal scoring feats for Liverpool, who he helped reach the Champions League final. He was injured in the match against Real Madrid and subsequently missed Egypt's opening World Cup 2018 match. The crisis he faced started from the photos that was captured for him walking beside Chechnya leader Ramzan Kadyrov when he did not find Salah in the training stadium because he was still recovering from his injury at the hotel, he went to drive him back to his team and took pictures with Mo on their way. From here, it became a major talking point at the World Cup where Egypt was hosted by him in Grozny. Later on, Kadyrov made Salah an honorary citizen of the Chechen Republic in a celebratory dinner. Subsequently, anonymous reports spread about

Salah's considering quitting the Egyptian national team over concerns that he is being used for the football association's propaganda. However, Mo Salah did not engage in topics beyond football or to be used for anyone's political image. Taking into consideration that it is not the first time for Kadyrov to take pictures with players and celebrities as he already did that before with Ronaldinho, Mike Tyson, Steven Seagal, and Van Damme, etc.... That is why question is raised here about the British newspapers coverage, Why with Mo Salah in particular?

Research Problem: The research problem tries to find out the extent of identity construction in the British newspapers websites towards Mo Salah. This study examines how has the English newspapers websites covered Mo Salah in the 2018 FIFA World Cup? And whether the British press injected political assertions into its coverage constructing identities for Mo Salah, and if so, what are the types of constructed identities? Also, how has the newspapers differed from each other in the identity construction? Consequently, it will check whether the constructed identity was done on purpose or not. In this context, the study attempts to find out the identity types used in the news and sports pages such as personal, cultural, gender, racial, economic and national identity, etc...

Research Importance: Several factors show the importance of this study. At the beginning, studying the identity discourse is not less important than studying how events are being covered and presented in newspapers and that is due to the link of the identity discourse with leading the public in an indirect way. This requires the need to analyze the identity discourse in the newspapers to stand on the various dimensions of its role in drawing identities.

Also, the coverage Mo Salah received in the English press generated attention and that is because he barely registers in the mainstream press coverage except when he scores a goal with Liverpool. He was never part of controversial coverage.

Finally, this case study allows for the contribution of new research to an already existing literature and affords an additional viewpoint, namely, the relation between the news coverage sports events, and identity construction.

Research Goals: This study seeks to analyze the identity constructions of Mo Salah in the media discourses of seven British newspapers websites, using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

It also aims to identify the discursive practices and the underpinning ideologies that contributed to discourse formations promoting specific identity construction for Salah.

Literature Review:

Media and Politics in World Cups Coverage: Importantly, for the purposes of this study, the literature has observed an increasingly close connection between sport and politics in the news coverage.

Serra and Shaw (2014) ⁽¹⁾ study attempted to examine the media coverage of the South African newspapers for the 2010 World Cup that was hosted by South Africa. Results reported that the coverage included noteworthy political, social and cultural dynamics of nation building. Also, two different themes were present. The first was the "success" theme referring to the security, planning and implementing the World Cup, while the second one was the "build-up of games" referring to the benefits South Africa gained from hosting the World Cup. It was quite clear that "constant political interference in sport". In addition to the media discourses that stabilized and planted new perceptions about South Africa redefining their identity.

The idea of the new perceptions and the image promotion was addressed too in (Moloi-Siga, 2012) ⁽²⁾ study where the news coverage of The New York Times (U.S) and The Guardian (UK) newspapers for the 2010 World Cup was explored concentrating on how South Africa was portrayed in their coverages'. Results found that The New York Times coverage was "critical" in its representation of South Africa,

while The Guardian coverage seemed to be more “pessimistic”. The most important issue is that South Africa was well portrayed in both newspapers.

Like (Serra and Shaw, 2014) study, media, sports and politics are not separable was discussed too in (Chari, 2010) ⁽³⁾ study which addressed the portrayal of the 2010 World Cup in two weekly Zimbabwean newspapers coverage. Findings proved that sports are complicatedly and involvedly linked with politics, economics, and culture and that is reflected in the news coverage. It was found that The Sunday Mail newspaper highlighted the “economic benefits” that will return to South Africa because of its hosting to the World Cup, while The Standard newspaper highlighted the “social aspects of football”.

National Identity Construction in World Cup News Coverage: In terms of research, there appears to be very little published academic about the availability of constructed identities in the news coverage as the only few found revealed that national identity was clearly constructed in the coverage of the World Cups’ teams in many of the analyzed newspapers.

Nicholson, Sherry, and Osborne (2014) ⁽⁴⁾ study investigated the news coverage of all major daily Australian newspapers for the 2010 World Cup. The study was trying to find out the construction of the Australian national identity in the news coverage of the studied newspapers. Findings showed the national identity was clearly constructed in the studied newspapers as the coverage depended severely on acquainted, expected aspects of Australian national identity which is identified as being loyal, fair and team-oriented attitude. In other words, the newspapers depended on linking their previous well-known cultural characteristics with the national identity putting it on papers.

National identity construction was also examined in (Vincent et al.,2010)⁽⁵⁾ study where it tried to find out the construction of the English national identity in the 2006 World Cup that was hosted by Germany in English national newspapers which are The Times, The Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror and The Sun. Findings revealed that the newspapers coverage was the total opposite of the used slogan by the hosting country which was “a time to make friends” as they covered it from the angle of “us vs them”. And about the national identity construction, it was clearly present in the coverage as it was used as being a “defense mechanism against the realities of devolution within the United Kingdom, and the Europeanization and globalization”.

Denman (2011) ⁽⁶⁾ study aimed too at finding out the way the U.S. national team identity is represented in The New York Times, The Guardian, Buenos Aires Herald, and The Sunday Times at the time of the 2010 U.S. World Cup. Results confirmed that the 2010 World Cup coverage included signals that the mixture of “performance and media attention together” draw an image for how a World Cup team “sense of self and perception by other teams and countries is formed”.

Also, another issue was addressed in the literature review studies as it was revealed in (Muresherwa, 2017) ⁽⁷⁾ study’s results that the time frame may affect and differ from a period of coverage to another. The study questioned the ways the Brazil and Rio de Janeiro, the hosting country of the 2014 World Cup was portrayed in the news coverage of Brazil and South Africa as the research aimed at exploring the impact of the media on the Brazilian tourists’ markets. Results showed that the representation of Brazil differed according to the time frame as the pre-period was better than lead-up period.

Theoretical Framework:

This study will depend on two theories which are:

Identity Theory: “Identities are the traits, characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is”. Identities can be concerned about the past when you are talking about the previous true identity of the person, can be concerned about the present when you are talking about the identity of the person nowadays and can be concerned about the future when you are talking about the wishing identity of the person in the future according to his actions of the goals he is willing to achieve. In other words, Identities are changeable as stated in (Leary & Tangney, 2012) ⁽⁸⁾ handbook.

In the identity theory, (Stets & Burke, 2000) ⁽⁹⁾ showed that the point of commitment was presented. It has two characteristics as discussed by Stryker and Serpe in 1994. The first one is the people who the person is attached to through the identity. This means the stronger the commitment, the greater the salience. The second one is the depth of the person's attachment to the people around. This means the stronger the attachment, the greater the salience.

Identity theory questioned the reasons why saliences changes over time. Another question is identifying the ways self-meanings are linked to the person's behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000)⁽¹⁰⁾.

Stets (2014) ⁽¹¹⁾ pointed out that the gender identity was the first one measured by Burke. Then later ethnic identity was measured too by White and Burke. Then age identity was measured by Mutran and Burke.

Social Responsibility Theory: The Social Responsibility theory adopts a concept opposite of that of absolute freedom. This theory states that freedom is not an absolute right, but it is a right, duty and responsibility at the same time. That is why media is asked to fulfil certain obligations towards the society. The media must establish and develop professional standards which must include truthfulness, objectivity, balancing, accuracy, diversity which reflects the diversity of ideas and opinions, respecting public values, taking care of public interests, avoiding all that may affect it negatively and respecting the privacy of the individuals (Hassan, 2012) ⁽¹²⁾.

Methodology: This study is an analytical rather than descriptive. The study will depend on the Survey method to answer the research questions and fulfil its goals and measure and evaluate the ways in which identities have been constructed in the time frame. The researcher has used this methodology in an attempt to find out and explain the identity construction in the British newspapers by using the discourse analysis tool that will be used to examine the seven newspapers. The comparative method was also used to compare and contrast the newspapers.

Times Frame of the Study: The Time Frame will mainly cover the Mo Salah story and all what was published about it.

Study Sample: The seven British newspapers websites that are included in this study are The Sun, Metro, Daily Mail, London Evening Standard, The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent.

These newspapers were chosen because of their national prominence, high circulation, their sports coverage, and because they signify various features and aspects of the British newspaper market, and consequently appeal to different demographic segments or readers. ⁽¹³⁾

Study Questions: This study will address the following research questions to study the constructed identity for Mo Salah in the British newspapers websites coverage.

1. How do the selected newspapers' discourses construct Mo Salah identity in the 2018 FIFA World Cup?
2. Till what extent, the British press injected political assertions into its coverage constructing identities for Mo Salah?
3. What are the types of the constructed identities?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the selected newspapers when constructing his identity?

Results:

The Independent Newspaper: Once the competition began, following the opening ceremonies, it turned out that the news coverage was not so much covering Egypt in the World Cup as mainly it was covering the prominent teams and the ones who are nominated for winning the 2018 Cup. However, from the day Kadyrov gave Salah the honorary citizenship in the celebratory dinner, the Independent newspaper started its coverage about Mo Salah.

The published articles are basically doing the very thing it criticizes the Egyptian government for accepting what the Chechen leader Kadyrov was trying to do with Mo Salah taking advantage of him for the purpose of “propaganda.” In a way, the articles and its publishing newspaper are the ones themselves adding pressure on Salah to retire, believing that it is the right thing to do and thus by implication, criticizing Salah if he fails to do so.

At the beginning in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah risks fresh controversy after being granted honorary Chechnya citizenship by Ramazan Kadyrov”,⁽¹⁴⁾ The Independent newspaper stated that Mo “sparked” the problem since the first photo was circulated between him and Kadyrov notifying their readers with the story from the beginning when he picked him from the hotel and drove him to the training stadium and through this period, he captured images and posted them greeting 5000 fans watching Egypt practice.

The newspaper highlighted that the Chechen leader “denied” using Mo for “propaganda purposes” referring to his words that he is not the one who invited to host the Egyptian team, but they are the ones who came to us by themselves “chose us themselves”. It was highlighted too that the Egyptian team’s press officer did not comment on anything stated by Kadyrov.

Mo Salah did not make a statement (on Twitter or during interviews) about thinking or planning not to play in the Egyptian national team at any match of the World Cup or his considerations of quitting or retiring. Thus, what the articles in The Independent newspaper are doing can be considered political journalism as they do not verify stories before publishing them but which instead spread rumors based on “has been told” heard (as The Independent article put it).

A look at the second piece in the coverage which is titled “World Cup 2018: Mohamed Salah considering Egypt future over political controversy with Chechnya leader”⁽¹⁵⁾, it stated that “the Independent has been told that Salah believes he has been used politically and is considering ending his affiliation with the Egyptian national team as a result”. They also used a correct background information to manipulate their readers referring to the usage of the official team sponsor WE with the agreement of Egyptian Football Federation to Salah’s image on the airplane taking Egypt to Russia showing that he entered a “battle” with them “over the use of his image rights in April”.

The word battle here is not suitable because Salah did not enter a sustained fight as they described. Conflict was more suitable for the previous situation they were explaining because he explained that because his sponsor is Vodafone, his images cannot be used by WE as they are competitors and therefore, the problem was solved.

Also, in the third piece entitled “World Cup 2018: Egyptian FA member brands reports Mohamed Salah could quit international football as ‘big lie’”,⁽¹⁶⁾ the newspaper insisted on the idea that Mohamed Salah is “weighing up his international future over the controversy that has come from him being filmed with Chechnya leader Ramzan Kadyrov”, although Mo Salah did not say a word about this issue. However, this piece was mainly addressing quotes from Egyptian FA board member Essam Abdel Fattah who made sure that Salah’s quitting is a “big lie” in an attempt from him to change the image of the whole story making it clear that “we’re guests in this men’s land and he invited us for a dinner” and “we can’t refuse something like that and this is very normal. (Critics) are mixing politics and sports? We’re a sports team and nothing can involve us in politics”.

The same idea was repeated again in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah goal: Egypt star refuses to celebrate after scoring vs Saudi Arabia at World Cup 2018”⁽¹⁷⁾ where they stressed on the idea that his “international future was called into question”. In addition to the piece titled “Mohamed Salah shows Egypt exactly what they will be missing if he leaves them behind after World Cup 2018”⁽¹⁸⁾ where they stated that “Salah is ready to walk away from the national team” because of the “headache that has led to the growing speculation”. This was one of the pieces where The Independent newspaper was pushing him to take this decision quoting an anonymous player “close to the player” expressing that his “future

with the international team hangs in balance. And if this does prove to be Salah's final appearance in an Egypt shirt" highlighting what Egypt will miss if it was his last match with them. However, in the piece titled "World Cup 2018: No problems, no points, no happiness – Mohamed Salah lips into the shadows shrouded in sadness and controversy" ⁽¹⁹⁾ Salah stated clearly that he will not comment because "No tweet because no problems".

However, the pieces in the outer frame seems to take Salah's side knowing well that he was used as a propaganda tool by Kadyrov without knowing, throwing the blame on the Egyptian Football Federation who settled all this story with the Chechan leader who they agreed from the beginning for his host to them in Chechnya, distorting the national identity of Egypt as all what was written about them was clearly negative. That was clearly expressed in the piece titled "Mohamed Salah shows Egypt exactly what they will be missing if he leaves them behind after World Cup 2018" where they considered the Egyptian Football Federation decision "controversial and scarcely believable decision to base themselves in Chechnya". Also, the journalist focused on using "if" putting assumptions that Salah may leave because of the mistake the Egyptian FA did and presuming too how miserable the team will be after him if he left.

Negative identities were clearly present for the Egyptian Football Federation because of their actions ignoring the explanation they gave in their own pieces. While, positive identities were constructed for Mo Salah and that helped the newspaper on insisting on his quitting from the national team.

From those positive identities given to him in all the previous stated pieces are "international superstar", "Liverpool forward", "Liverpool man", "Like Lionel Messi", "injured talisman" and "heartbeat of his team". Another issue noted in the identities given to him that they addressed him once by being "Egypt's best player", ignoring to identify him with this throughout their coverage. This can be simply added to the whole image they were trying to draw pushing him to take a fateful decision.

In conclusion, The Independent newspaper injected political assertions into its coverage constructing positive identities for Mo Salah and negative ones for the Egyptian national side trying to force him in a particular direction.

The Guardian Newspaper: The Guardian newspaper started its coverage from the very beginning from the day the Chechen leader hosted the Egyptian team in Chechnya in a piece entitled "All eyes on Ramzan Kadyrov as Chechnya hosts Egypt in World Cup" ⁽²⁰⁾ judging the story from the very beginning that Kadyrov is "a step closer to political goal of being Putin's link to Middle East with arrival of Egyptian team" injecting political assertions into its coverage linking sports with politics, not even waiting for the story to be clearer drawing a negative identity for Mo Salah because of the Egyptian team who he leads stating that he was part of the team who "snatched up the dubious grand prize" a World Cup training base in Chechnya". Noting that the word dubious means that the hosting is under suspicion, however, still nothing pointed to any political issue in the story.

The Guardian used the religious identity in its first piece as it linked Mo's religion to the story where it stated that "a world-famous Muslim footballer who celebrates each goal in a display of faith, has provided some consolation" to the Chechens. The journalists tried to show that Salah is considered an icon for moderate Islam and his Islam is the appropriate version of Islam to be practiced worldwide and this puts even more religious strain on him constructing his religious identity.

Adding to their first piece, in the one titled "Mohamed Salah 'honored' with gift of citizenship from Chechen leader" ⁽²¹⁾ they referred that Kadyrov took "advantage" of Mo Salah's stay with the Egyptian team in Chechnya who they identified as "Russia's most controversial Republic". The newspaper was writing from the standpoint that Salah is unclear about his viewpoint of what was happening with him. In other words, he is not clear about whether he agrees or disagrees about Kadyrov's actions. The journalist stated that "it is not clear what Salah thought of all this" explaining his actions by "playing the role of polite guest, smiling when appropriate".

At their last piece titled “Mohamed Salah ‘happy’ with Egypt amid Chechnya political symbol furore”⁽²²⁾, it was clear from the Guardian newspaper that Salah is happy with the Egyptian team rejecting all the reported rumors that spread about his quitting and at the same time, he is angry refusing all what is happening around from the Chechen leader according to reports from the Associated Press.

But likely as the Independent newspaper, the Guardian did not leave the coverage without notifying their readers about the consequences that may happen if Salah took the decision of quitting his national team “if Salah were to quit the national team, it would be a major embarrassment to the federation and the government, which decided to base the team in Grozny” because of their usage of him as a propaganda tool for Kadyrov.

Negative identities were clearly present for the Egyptian Football Federation because of the decisions they took which inserted Salah into these controversies. Also, different identities were constructed for Mo Salah like the religious previous stated identity. In addition to the different personal identities such as “Liverpool superstar”, “megastar”, “Liverpool’s forward”, and “Liverpool player”. Again, it is noticed that his national identity (Egyptian) was not presented in any of the Guardian’s pieces coverage.

The Telegraph: The Telegraph newspaper coverage raised a question about their insisting on putting the responsibility on Mo Salah about the decisions it is known well that he is not responsible about. For example, stating that “serious doubt has been cast over the wisdom of Mo Salah’s Egypt basing themselves in Chechnya” in the piece titled “Mo Salah paraded by Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov as propaganda tool”⁽²³⁾. The decision was never his and it goes all to the Egyptian Football Federation, even if this time we pointed out that they might mean to identify the Egyptian team by stating his name because he is a well-known prominent celebrity, then when it is repeated once again, it cannot be accidental. It is again found in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah given honorary citizenship of Chechnya by strongman ruler accused of human rights abuses”⁽²⁴⁾ when the journalist quoted Alexander Agapov, President of the Russian LGBT Sport Federation asking the Egyptian Football Association, The Liverpool Team and Mo Salah about “the dubious honor bestowed on him”, although it is known that The Liverpool Team and Mo Salah are not responsible about any decisions taken about the place the team will base at during the World Cup.

Age identity was attached to Salah at the piece entitled “Egypt finish bottom of group after World Cup’s oldest player saves a penalty but Saudi Arabia strike with last kick of the game”⁽²⁵⁾ as he was identified as being “25-year-old” and once addressed as being “26-year old” in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah will not retire, says Egyptian FA”⁽²⁶⁾

The Telegraph coverage did not differ a lot from the previous analyzed coverages’ as it reported anonymously that Mo Salah is “reportedly unhappy” and talked in the same way about the retirement and so on. Neutral identity was given to the Egypt as they did not blame them directly like the other newspapers.

London Evening Standard: In its only published piece entitled “Mo Salah Chechnya row” Egypt star ‘considering future’ with national team after being used as ‘political symbol’ by controversial leader Ramzan Kadyrov”⁽²⁷⁾, the constructed identity for Mo Salah was totally different from the ones in previous analyzed newspapers as they identified him as being “Egypt star” and “his team” and they constructed a national identity for him ignoring the team he is playing at (Liverpool) like the other newspapers.

But likely as the other newspapers, the only piece published addressed the consequences that may happen if Salah left believing that “it would be a major embarrassment to the federation and the government”. The newspaper made it clear through all the sentences that what happened for Salah was because of the Egyptian federation and the decisions they took that made Salah “angry” and “annoyed” blaming them for playing with Mo making him a “political pawn”. They clearly drew for them a negative identity.

Daily Mail: The Daily Mail started its coverage with a piece titled “Egypt prepare for final World Cup match against Saudi Arabia as Mohamed Salah is offered citizenship by controversial Chechnya leader”⁽²⁸⁾ where it focused on telling their readers that Kadyrov is used to host celebrities and that is not new at all giving examples with “Maradona, Luis Figo and Steve McManaman” reminding their readers when they all were hosted at 2011 in Grozny when they were at the “exhibition game marking the opening of a new 30,000 seat stadium”. Also, the coverage included Kadyrov’s hosting to Ronaldinho who posted by himself his own photos with the Chechen leader. In addition, to Floyd Mayweather, the boxer player who was filmed with him. The piece ignored too inserting links between the base of the Egyptian team and Mo Salah “the squad have been training at their base in Chechnya”, dealing with the story as a normal coverage about the Egyptian team who lost their matches against Uruguay and Russia and is going to play against Saudi Arabia. The honorary citizenship was simply highlighted without any bias in covering this issue. Moreover, Mo Salah’s positive achievements was clearly presented and that constructed for him positive personal identity portraying him as being a great player explaining how he achieved his “global celebrity status” reminding their readers that he scored 44 goals and that he won the Premier League’s best player award. That is beside considering him a “role model of children aspiring to be footballers”.

The newspaper investigated and reported that Hector Cuper, the Egyptian team coach is the one responsible about the choice of the base in Grozny and he is definitely not “politically motivated” as stated in the piece titled “Egypt FA defends choice of Grozny for World Cup base”⁽²⁹⁾ confirming through FA chief Hany Abo Rida that the “Egyptian political leadership did not interfere at all in whether Grozny would be chosen”. In addition, Hany Abo Rida’s statements and announcements were reported in the piece titled “Egypt defends choice of Chechnya as World Cup base”⁽³⁰⁾.

The Daily Mail was the only newspaper who denied the reports by proving that Salah is not going to quit as in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah considering retiring from Egypt duty over controversy with Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov”⁽³¹⁾, the journalist reported that what was being told around was rumors and quoted an official source “Essam Abdel Fattah” to comment about the story to find the truth from the beginning before going after those rumors. Also, in the piece titled “Egyptian Football Association: No retirement plans from Mohamed Salah”⁽³²⁾, the journalist made sure from another different source “EFA” and “Ramy Abbas, Salah’s agent” about the story.

And in order to make sure, The Daily Mail in its piece titled “Egypt FA deny Salah unhappiness at Chechnya publicity”⁽³³⁾, another source “Alvi Karimov, Kadyrov’s spokesman” said that the reports that showed that Salah was unhappy was untrue focusing on the British and U.S media who he accused them of spreading “such false stories because they were unhappy that Russia’s hosting of the World Cup and Chechnya’s hosting of the Egyptian team had been a success”.

Other published pieces confirmed about the same stories that the newspaper already published like the one titled “Mo Salah is pictured centre stage with Chechen leader at lavish banquet in his palace - a day after star threatened to quit Egypt team for links to notorious LGBT-persecuting warlord”⁽³⁴⁾, “Hector Cuper leaves role as Egypt boss after World Cup exit while questions remain as to whether star man Mohamed Salah will quit”⁽³⁵⁾ and “Mohamed Salah apologizes as Egypt crash out of World Cup without a point before insisting: ‘We will back in 2022’”⁽³⁶⁾

Neutral identity was given to Egypt in all the pieces except the piece titled “Love for Salah offers refuge from Egypt’s World Cup exit”⁽³⁷⁾, where negative identity was constructed as they described Egypt as a “nation already fatigued by economic hardship and political woes deeper into misery” and also blaming them for their choice of the base who caused the team to travel hours and hours. In other words, their decision as a country cost them a huge loss showing the “much of anger” which was directed at the government and the Egyptian Football Federation. Drawing in front of it a positive personal identity for Mo Salah who they portrayed as “the heart of Egyptian hopes”, “the man who appears to be easing the country’s frustration and heartache”.

Throughout all the previous stated articles, age identity was present “26-year-old”, national identity such as “Egypt forward”, “Egypt star” and “Egypt’s talisman” was present too and various personal identities were constructed such as “striker”, “star player” and “talismanic striker”, etc... Also, the team he plays at “Liverpool” was attached to him remarking his achievements too such as “Liverpool’s forward”, “Liverpool’s striker”. The national identity was present and that indicates that the newspaper did not ignore it.

Metro: “It is not the first time Salah has clashed with the Egyptian FA”, is the sentence repeated in almost all Metro’s coverage like the piece titled “Egypt star Mohamed Salah considers retirement from international football”⁽³⁸⁾ where they focused on distorting the relationship between Mo and Egyptian FA, however, there were no confirmed reports and it seemed to be a rumor. This relationship they described as being “irreparable”, although the incident they are reporting about happened before the World Cup and still Salah traveled with the Egyptian team to Russia and that means that there is no problem in their relationship. That is beside their believing that Salah is going to “weigh up his future with Egypt”, however, there is nothing that proves that Salah is doing so.

Again, the same issue was addressed in the piece titled “Egypt FA speaks out over Mohamed Salah’s potential international retirement”⁽³⁹⁾ where this time they described the previous incident as being “high-profile controversy” and putting the same construction on the ongoing story too. Also, in this piece the journalist described his quitting matter as being “retirement controversy surrounding Salah”. However, in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah ‘perplexed’ by reports he’s set to walk out on Egypt’s World Cup squad”⁽⁴⁰⁾, it was written that Salah is training normally and is concentrating in the coming matches and that gives a prove that he is not considering quitting and retirement as the newspaper kept repeating throughout their coverage.

Likely the coverage in the piece titled “World Cup fans panic after Mohamed Salah’s subdued goal celebration vs Saudi Arabia”⁽⁴¹⁾, the newspaper described the previous story as being a “tension between Salah and the FA” and highlighting that the previous one added to the new one which caused a “massive backlash” as it was noted that Mo “feels” that the Egyptian FA knew what was going on and left him to be used as a “political pawn” linking that to his decision of “quitting”.

Quitting matter did not end yet, as in the piece titled “Mohamed Salah scores Egypt’s first World Cup from open play since 1934”⁽⁴²⁾, the journalist depended on anonymous reports who “suggested Salah was considering quitting international football “after what they described as being “tensions” between him and the Egyptian FA that led at the end to the “controversial” problem that he is facing nowadays.

The Sun: The highest circulated newspaper in UK concentrated on Salah’s national identity in most of the published pieces identifying him as “Egypt star”, “Egypt’s talismanic star” and “Egypt superstar”. It represented him twice only as being a “Liverpool star”.

Also, the age identity was present in 75% of their coverage as he was represented as being “26-year old”.

No identity was given to Egypt at all as they did not focus in their coverage about them and they did not merge any incidents together and they did not put the responsibility on them and this was clearly shown in the piece titled “Mo Salah handed honorary Chechen citizenship by notorious warlord Ramzan Kadyrov”⁽⁴³⁾ as they stated that the “Egyptian team’s World Cup training camp is based in the region”.

The Sun pieces contradicted each other. At the first piece titled “Mo Salah denies reports he has asked to leave World Cup early and return to Liverpool after Egypt elimination”⁽⁴⁴⁾, they presented the report they received which stated that there are “speculation that Salah wanted to return to Liverpool early to maximize his summer break before the Red’s first pre-season game” and at the same time they denied it in their headline.

Then at the piece titled “Mo Salah considering quitting international football with Egypt over Chechnya outrage”⁽⁴⁵⁾, they portrayed Salah as being “furious” and on his way to take his final decision to quit after “being used in Chechen politics” and all that was according to anonymous reports.

Also, in the piece titled “‘Hope He’s OK’ World Cup 2018: Mohamed Salah refuses to celebrate Egypt goal amid rift rumors as Liverpool ace joins exclusive 50 goal season club”⁽⁴⁶⁾, the journalist stressed on the quitting issue and linked that to his refusal for celebration after scoring a goal in Saudi Arabia’s match explaining that he “believes the Egyptian FA have allowed him to become a political pawn”.

Conclusion: This study of the British newspapers of Mo Salah’s story demonstrates politics cannot be split and separated from sports. The merging of sports and politics led the British newspapers to interpret and analyze the result of sporting stories and issues in political standings.

The newspapers differed markedly in their treatment of a sports story and their extent of injecting political assertions in their coverage constructing identities through it.

The English press used the ideological and political discourse when writing about a sports story where Mo Salah has become the chess piece that everyone tried to force into a particular direction by the written word. Definitely, each newspaper varied by the number of articles it published and by the amount of identities constructed, but it was clear that almost all except The Daily Mail was trying to push him to retire and quit from the Egyptian team.

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