

The Historical Genesis of the Public Sphere in Iraq, 1900–1963: Implications for Building Democracy in the Post-Ba‘thist Era

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Recent interest in applying the concept of the “public sphere” to the Middle East reflects increased concern with the lack of democratization in the region. In the West, the concept has had an enormous impact, especially following the publication of Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. As is well known, Habermas’s volume laments the decline of a space that he calls the bourgeois public sphere, a process that, in his view, has undermined democracy in Europe. Habermas did not intend his concept to speak to the political traditions of non-Western societies.¹ Nevertheless, the theoretical underpinnings of the concept would seem to possess a generality that transcends any specific geographical region. While the public sphere in its most democratic form may have emerged in early modern Europe, there seems no logical reason why a space in which citizens engage in reasoned discourse, and which is not under the control of the state, should not be able to develop and function in a wide variety of social contexts. This chapter poses the following questions: What does it mean to apply the concept of the public sphere to Iraqi politics and society? What analytic traction do we derive from such an application? Can the concept help us better understand current efforts to bring about a democratic transition in Iraq? Or does the pervasive violence that has characterized post-Ba‘thist Iraq vitiate the concept’s significance?

The concept of an Arab public sphere

Prior to discussing Iraq, we need to recognize that the concept of the public sphere is relatively new to Arab analytic and political discourse. On the one hand, the concept offers the possibility of promoting a better comprehension of the possibilities of democratic change and greater individual freedoms in the Arab world. It raises important questions about the determinants of political participation, cultural tolerance, individual rights and the rule of law. These issues are of particular concern in Iraq and the Arab world where violence, political instability, authoritarian rule and the lack of movement towards democratic governance are far too prevalent.

Raising the issue of the public sphere in Arab Iraq draws attention to the question of the public sphere in Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq's three northern Kurdish provinces. Much has been made of the development of civil society building in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially since it was able to achieve autonomy from the south following the February–March 1991 Intifada, and the subsequent imposition of a “no-fly zone” by the United States following the uprising. By extension, the literature on post-1991 Kurdistan implies a dramatic growth in the Kurdish public sphere as well.

While this essay does not devote as significant attention to the development of a Kurdish public sphere as it does to the Arab public sphere, many analysts now recognize that the optimism expressed after 1991 that Kurdistan would become a truly democratic region of Iraq was misplaced. The two main Kurdish political parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) continue to maintain a tight hold on the reins of power. Access to positions of political influence and economic power are still determined by family and personal ties to the leadership of the KDP and PUK. Civil society organizations that operate in an official capacity require government licenses. The independent media, e.g., the newspapers *Awene* and *Hawalati*, are frequently subjected to threats for articles critical of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Critics of the KRG have been sentenced to jail terms for criticizing members of the Barzani family, which controls the KDP and the KRG. Human Rights Watch has documented human rights abuses in state-run prisons.² Corruption is widespread as it is in the south. While the Kurdish public sphere will be addressed in greater detail below, the

example of Iraqi Kurdistan suggests that we think carefully about the relationship between civil society and democratization and, by extension, the relationship between the notion of the public sphere and its implications for democratization as well.³

The problems that the KRG has experienced since 1991 resulted in the creation in 2009 of a new political movement, known as Gorran [Change]. In the July 2009 KRG Regional Parliament elections, Gorran organized a vigorous campaign, despite extensive government intimidation and the firing of its candidates from government employment. Nevertheless, Gorran won 25 of the 110 seats in the KRG regional parliament. Along with the 15 seats won by a fellow opposition coalition, the Reform and Services List, the two movements were able to garner 40 seats in the parliament. In the March 2010 national parliament elections, Gorran was able to win 8 seats. These developments point to the deep dissatisfaction that large numbers of Kurds feel with the KRG political elite and to a strong desire for democratic change.

The notion of the public sphere has not been conceptually visible because most analyses of Iraqi politics have focused on the behavior of political elites. The lack of focus on nonelite dimensions of Iraqi politics and society has not only had the effect of representing political processes as venal and corrupt, but has obscured the civil society building and democratic impulses that characterized much of early and mid-twentieth-century Iraqi politics. It has also tended to obscure the efforts to reconstitute a functioning civil society following the collapse of Saddam Husayn's Ba'thist regime in 2003.

Epistemological and methodological concerns

Its conceptual utility notwithstanding, deploying the concept of the public sphere in the Arab and Iraqi context raises two sets of concerns, one epistemological and the other theoretical and normative. From an epistemological perspective, the concept's Western origins open its application and usage to the criticism of ethnocentrism. Put differently, does a concept derived from the Western historical experience enhance our ability to understand Arab politics and society? Is the use of the public

sphere in the context of Arab politics and society an example of applying an “imported” concept? Further, deploying the concept to Arab societies raises questions from an “ordinary language” philosophy perspective. Because the concept does not enjoy widespread currency in the Arab world, the lack of socially agreed-upon rules or criteria for its application, either by Arab or Western scholars, runs the risk of creating an analytic discourse that can be accessed by only a small circle of academics and intellectuals. How can a concept, whose Arabic equivalent—*al-majāllāt al-‘amma*—resonates minimally with Arab intellectuals and the educated Arab public, be of use in analyzing Iraqi and Arab politics, disseminating the results of that analysis and influencing politics in any meaningful manner?⁴

The second set of concerns is theoretical and relates to the larger framework within which to contextualize the concept of the public sphere in Iraq. What is the nature of the Iraqi public sphere? When did it make its historical appearance and in what form? What are the historical referents, specifically institutions and processes, that would allow us to speak of a public sphere in Iraq? What were the factors that promoted its development, particularly at a certain historical juncture? Is the public sphere limited to particular locales and social strata of Iraqi society? What contributions has the public sphere in Iraq made to social and political life? Answers to these questions will allow us to delineate more precisely what we mean by an Iraqi public sphere as well as to assess its impact. As I will argue, the rise of the public sphere cannot be divorced from the political economy of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iraqi society and the manner in which tribe, ethnicity and social class interacted to produce the Iraqi nationalist movement. In other words, the concept must be historically contextualized if the dynamics that determined its development, structure and impact are to be adequately understood.

If we can speak of an “Iraqi public sphere” from the early part of the twentieth century, and I will argue that we can, what are the normative implications of this analysis? Does the concept’s application to Iraq enhance our understanding of the possibilities of reestablishing civil society and promoting democracy in the post-Ba’thist era? What are the concept’s implications for those seeking to create a more participatory and tolerant Iraq? While the intention of applying concepts that

promote understandings of the development or lack of development of democratization in the Arab world is laudable, the issue of cross-cultural knowledge and the problem of a “private language” need to be addressed if we are to make sense of how the concept of the public sphere might enhance our understanding of ways to promote greater political freedom and tolerance in the Arab world. If the concept of the “public sphere” as applied to the Arab world lacks a praxis dimension, because a wide range of intellectual and political actors are unable to incorporate it in their political discourse, can the concept have a significant political and social impact?⁵

In addressing these epistemological concerns, a counterargument can be made that the problems associated with applying Western concepts in non-Western contexts are often exaggerated. In this view, inserting Western concepts into non-Western analytic and political discourse does not necessarily result in ethnocentrism. For example, a concept closely related to the public sphere, that of “civil society” [*al-mujtama‘ al-madani*], faced similar problems when it began to be used by Arab scholars such as Dr. Sa‘d al-Din Ibrahim, founder and former director of the Cairo-based Ibn Khaldun Center, who emphasized projects built around this concept.⁶ Initially, the concept was not well known or widely used in Arab political discourse and had a distinctive Western stamp. Nevertheless, the concept of civil society has achieved widespread currency in Arab political and academic circles and is now an integral part of the region’s intellectual discourse.⁷ A number of Iraqi newspapers that appeared after the Ba‘thist regime’s collapse in 2003, such as *al-Sabah* and *al-Mada*, contain specific sections devoted to civil society in their daily editions.⁸

From a different perspective, the literature on democratic transitions provides another example of the danger of overemphasizing the problems associated with applying Western concepts in non-Western contexts. The notion of the “prerequisites of democracy” that preoccupied much of the modernization literature of the late 1950s and early 1960s ultimately proved to be a poor predictor of the development of democracies in non-Western societies.⁹ The spread of democratic governance to many areas of the non-Western world during the 1990s, following the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, points to the problematic character of much of the prior theorizing on “democratic

transitions,” which argued that a nation-state needs to reach a certain level of economic development before democratic governance can take hold. The fact that many poorer countries such as Mali, Benin, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal and Bangladesh have, in recent years, been able to establish and sustain democratic polities, at least in the sense of participatory elections, suggests that, in certain instances, concepts may travel across cultural boundaries with fewer problems than might, at first glance, seem possible.

Civil society and the public sphere

An examination of the intellectual trajectory of the concept of civil society may help to better situate its (as yet) less established intellectual cousin, the public sphere, in the Arab and Iraqi context. The growth of interest in the concept of civil society in the Arab world reflects a reaction to at least three political developments during the late 1980s and 1990s. The first was the exhaustion of the ideology of pan-Arabism following the 1967 Arab–Israeli War. Instead of achieving its three promised goals, unity, freedom, and socialism [*al-waḥda*, *al-hurriya*, *al-ishtirākiyya*], pan-Arabism brought instead greater authoritarianism, intensified struggle among the most powerful Arab states over who would lead the new unified “Arab nation,” and the spread of corruption as pan-Arabist political elites exploited the state public sector for nepotistic gain after nationalizing foreign capital.

The second factor influencing the spread of the idea of civil society was the rise of Islamist political movements during the 1970s and the successful creation of an Islamic republic in Iran following the overthrow of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi’s regime in 1978–1979. Although many Arabs initially saw the Iranian revolution as anti-imperialist and a precursor of greater social and economic freedoms, the intensification of authoritarian rule and human rights abuses under the Khomeini regime undermined the idea—prevalent among pan-Arabists as well as pan-Islamists prior to the Iranian Revolution—that revolutionary change would, ipso facto, bring about the hoped for political, social and economic reforms sought by many Arab intellectuals and political organizations.

Third, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its East bloc allies in 1991 not only deprived many authoritarian pan-Arab regimes of financial and military support, but also underscored the contrast between the new democratic freedoms many former communist states came to enjoy and the lack of such freedoms in the Arab world. This concern was intensified by the spread of democracy to most non-Western regions but not to the Arab world, producing the idea of an “Arab democracy deficit.” Although the importation of Western parliamentary forms of government under British and French colonial rule between World War I and World War II proved largely to be a failed experiment that discredited Western liberalism, Arab intellectuals began to reexamine Western liberal thought during the 1990s to enhance protection of the individual whose interests had been completely subordinated to the corporatism that informed regimes inspired by the two ideologies of pan-Arabism and radical Islam.

The recent Arab interest in the concept of the public sphere, a domain in which reasoned discourse can occur and which is open to large numbers of civic-minded citizens, reflects the influence of the same socio-political forces that earlier promoted the concept of civil society. In this sense, the public sphere can be seen as an extension of the concept of civil society. In large measure, interest in both concepts reflects a rejection of the rigid corporatism inherent in both pan-Arab and Islamist thinking that makes no room for individual rights or political and cultural pluralism. Increasingly, many Arab scholars, including many Iraqi intellectuals who were in the forefront of such thinking following the disastrous 1991 Gulf War and subsequent failed Intifada, have realized the extent to which the corporatist structure inherent in both ideologies has facilitated the suppression of cultural tolerance and political participation as well as the spread of human rights abuses.¹⁰

Both the concepts of civil society and the public sphere can be seen as part of a process of reexamination of Western liberal political thought which is being rehabilitated in certain Arab intellectual circles.¹¹ What implications does this process have for the possible analytic utility of the concept of the public sphere? Whether derived from the writings of Tocqueville, Mill, or Habermas, the notion is deeply embedded in the Western historical experience.¹² The emergence of individual rights, and

liberal political thought more broadly defined, has not only given the notion of public sphere a distinctive Western stamp, but has configured it as a category that has been criticized as excluding certain groups and the interests that they represent. Women, gays, people of color, and religious and ethnic groups are “undertheorized” in the liberal discourse of the public sphere.¹³ One could argue that notions of economic inequality are likewise ignored due to the failure of liberal thought, generally, to systematically theorize the concept of social class and distributive justice. The issue of historical contextualization raises the question of whether the concept of the public sphere can be “broadened” to incorporate a larger conceptual universe. This is particularly important in the Iraqi context where what we can call the public sphere has always been linked to populist [*al-sha‘bī*] political and social impulses as well as questions of social justice [*al-‘adāla al-ijtimā‘iyya*]. A further examination of Habermas’s formulation of the public sphere might be instructive in addressing the concept’s historical and sociological specificity.

Habermas and the concept of the public sphere

In interrogating the concept of the public sphere, we find that one problem with Habermas’s original formulation is his lack of clarity on the actual dynamics of its genesis. Given this shortcoming, Habermas’s assertion that the public sphere’s conceptual utility is limited to a particular social historical experience is open to question. Habermas is clear in linking the emergence of the public sphere to the rise of capitalism and the spread of markets during the Industrial Revolution. The political changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, which led to the development of representative institutions and the notion of individual rights, were associated with the rise of a particular social stratum, namely the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, whose increased political influence was, according to Habermas, facilitated by the development of the public sphere. However, the spread of capitalism and the development of markets, the core processes of the Industrial Revolution, have not been limited to Western societies. While the democratic impulses generated by capitalism’s spread may not have been as developed in non-Western societies

as those that emerged in parts of Western Europe, particularly England, these impulses can in fact be found, suggesting the development of local public spheres outside the West.

The development of capitalist relations of production and attendant markets on a global scale would seem to indicate that the necessary conditions for the rise of the public sphere are not limited to the European experience. Contra Habermas, I argue that it is not especially useful to consider the public sphere as a “Western” concept. Rather, we should explore whether the conditions for its application exist in Iraq and, if they do, we must examine the public sphere’s functional equivalents in Iraqi society and their impact on the political process.

Applying the concept of the public sphere to Iraq necessitates constructing it in a logical and systematic manner. The logical antecedents for the rise of the public sphere, in whatever geographical locale, require significant changes in social and political *consciousness*. Creating a public sphere logically requires not only prior changes in consciousness, but a particular form of consciousness, one that embodies *discontent* with the existing political order. Further, the notion of the public sphere implies the development of a *critical sociopolitical mass*. In other words, there must be growth in the number of members of the discontented social strata who are willing to transform their feelings of discontent into forms of behavior that seek to change understandings of political authority and the structure and practices of existing political institutions. Only when a certain numerical threshold has been reached, and the discontent of particular social strata crystallizes into oppositional ideologies, such as occurred among Habermas’s entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, can one begin to envision the necessary conditions for the emergence of the public sphere. Beyond these developments, there are other logical antecedents to the rise of the public sphere. One of the most important is the commitment to the idea of *nationhood* and an emergent notion of *citizenship* by those social strata interested in bringing about political change. Thus, the notion of the public sphere is intimately bound up with changes in *political identity*.

In sum, the concept of the public sphere must be historically and socially contextualized and be seen as part of a process that is brought about by significant economic and social transformation. Because the public sphere requires changes in the world views of those who seek to

construct and use it, the public sphere cannot be considered merely as a physical locale or space, but must also be viewed as part of a *participatory process*. If we are to deploy the concept to better understand efforts, both historical and contemporary, to develop civil society and democracy in Iraq, then we need to examine both the institutional manifestations of the public sphere and the forms of political discourse that have occurred within its structural parameters. Further, we need to differentiate this discourse in terms of the impact of the historical-social processes that influenced its specific forms. All of the preconditions just delineated for the emergence of the public sphere were met, I would argue, in Iraq during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁴ As I will document, the type of critical discourse that Habermas associates with the public sphere began to appear in Iraq in the late 1800s. However, this emerging discourse would not have been possible had it not been for the profound social and economic changes that occurred in Iraqi society during the nineteenth century. Set in motion by Iraq's integration into the world market, these changes caused the transformation of the Iraqi economy from being largely subsistence in nature and, to the extent that trade existed, regionally focused, to one that was tied to European markets, particularly the British economy. This integration process was accompanied by the social transformation of the countryside. As land values increased over the nineteenth century, and the Ottomans exerted vigorous efforts to sedentize Iraqi tribes, many tribesmen were transformed into peasants. Reacting to what often became repressive agrarian conditions, many peasants abandoned the land for urban areas. This shift of the population from the countryside to urban areas had important social and cultural ramifications by disrupting traditional patterns of ethnic consciousness and values. With the growth of an Arabic education system, urban areas came to provide the critical mass of intellectuals and political activists that was instrumental in creating the Iraqi public sphere.

Contextualizing the public sphere in Iraq

An assumption that informs this chapter is that the notion of the public sphere must first be recast to correspond to the political and social

realities of those societies to which it is applied. If the public sphere represents a discursive space in which reasoned discourse can occur, and a participatory space open to all segments of society, then it can direct us to a better understanding of the possible origins of processes in Arab society that can promote ideas and institutions that underscore tolerance and dialogue, core values that underlie all forms of democratic governance. The significance of the public sphere (and civil society), beyond providing a political and social space for the individual citizen, is the manner in which it helps provide a solid foundation for processes of *democratization*.

Arab notions of democracy often diverge from those in the West. This is especially true when comparing Arab and late industrializing countries. In the latter, hegemonic notions of the market, especially after the collapse of communism, have marginalized the idea of social democracy, such as practiced through the American New Deal policies of the 1930s, for example, and instead focused on a narrow and formalistic definition of democracy organized around the notion of competitive elections and the circulation of elites.¹⁵ Throughout the twentieth century, Iraqi notions of democracy consistently placed emphasis on freedom from foreign domination [*al-istiqlāl al-tāmm*] and social justice, usually referred to by the nationalist movement as “the social question” [*al-qadiyya al-ijtimā’iyya*]. This understanding of democracy signifies that, in the modern period, the majority of Iraqis have not viewed political freedoms exercised in a context devoid of national independence and economic security as meaningful.¹⁶ These concerns suggest a contradiction between the political discourse of the Iraqi public and the emphasis on laissez-faire economics and state withdrawal from the market that is so central to much Western theorizing of democratic processes and transitions. Indeed, the failure of the rigid market-oriented “neoconservative” vision of democracy and its lack of resonance with Iraqi society was evident in the incredible failure of United States policy in Iraq under the Bush administration beginning in 2003.¹⁷

Institutional manifestations of the Iraqi public sphere

Historically, the public sphere manifested itself in Iraq in a multiplicity

of sites and venues. The first site entailed the rise of poetic expression in the late nineteenth century. Whereas poetry had traditionally been largely expressed in classical genres and in apolitical terms, or had been used to extol the virtues of the Ottoman viceroy [*wāli*] in Iraq, as European states increasingly encroached on the Empire's territory, many Arab inhabitants began to criticize the Ottomans for their inefficacy in staving off European colonialism. Poetic expression became one of the most visible examples of the anger felt by the empire's Arab subjects. However, this poetry was only the explicit expression of a process that had begun much earlier among Arab inhabitants of the decaying Ottoman Empire who were engaged in a complex and extensive discussion over the future direction of their society.¹⁸

A second site for the rise of an Iraqi public sphere was the development of an Iraqi press. This development was especially evident after the so-called Young Turk Revolt of 1908. The emphasis on the notions of progress and reform advocated by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which led the revolt, had a salutary impact on the small and largely secular Iraqi intelligentsia, which founded a large number of newspapers after 1908. Beyond reporting the news of the day, these newspapers also established a forum in which the emerging idea of Iraq as a unified political and socio-cultural entity could be addressed.¹⁹ Often, newspapers were affiliated with political or reform-minded organizations that were part of the growing Iraqi nationalist movement, indicating that they reflected only the apex of a much larger infrastructure linked to the emerging public sphere.

The third site for the development of the public sphere was the emergence of physical spaces in which nationalist and oppositional discourse could occur. Coffeehouses, social clubs associated with newly formed professional organizations, and literary and artists' salons [*majālis al-adab*] were the most prominent institutional components of the Iraqi public sphere.²⁰ The most established and widespread of these spaces, discussed in greater detail below, was the coffeehouse [*al-maqhā*].²¹

Conceptualizing the public sphere

What follows is a conceptual framework in which to situate, historically and

socio-politically, the concept of the public sphere in Iraq. This framework is derived from four empirical characteristics of the pre-1963 Iraqi nationalist movement that were fundamental to the development of an Iraqi public sphere: cross-ethnic cooperation; the commitment to associational behavior; national forms of political communication; and artistic innovation that both valorized local culture and challenged political authority.

Cross-ethnic cooperation

The political praxis of Iraqis from the early twentieth century onward underscores, over and over again, a commitment to *cross-ethnic cooperation*. The numerous empirical examples of such political and social cooperation belie the essentialist notion of Iraq as an “artificial” nation-state torn by ethnic and confessional divisions.²² Iraqi nationalist discourse assumed an inclusive quality from its inception, from efforts by Sunni and Shi‘i notables in Baghdad to develop an Arabic language education system after the turn of the twentieth century, to the unified chorus of Sunni and Shi‘i poets in their criticism of the Ottomans for their inability to stop European encroachment on the Empire’s Arab provinces.

During World War I, Iraq’s Shi‘a population bore the brunt of the British invasion of the country, which began in Basra in the south. Issuing religious decrees [fatwas] condemning the British invasion, Shi‘i clerics [*al-mujtahidūn*] were careful to emphasize that they represented all of Iraq and not just its Shi‘i population, indicating a desire for cross-ethnic cooperation. It is important to note that the religious decrees were intended to defend not some vaguely defined Islamic community [*al-umma al-islāmiyya*], but rather the notion of Iraq as a nation-state with geographically defined boundaries, an inherently modern concept. The self-rule that the shrine city of al-Najaf enjoyed once the Ottomans had withdrawn between 1916 and 1918 was characterized by a tolerance reflected in the promulgation of a proto-constitution that established the rights of the inhabitants of the cities’ different quarters.²³ Similar tolerance characterized the neighboring shrine city of Karbala’ as well.

Those who initiated the June–October 1920 Revolution—what Iraqis call “the Great Iraqi Revolution” [*al-thawra al-‘irāqiyya al-kubrā*]—self-consciously organized nationalist demonstrations that included all

Iraq's ethnic groups, even going to the homes of Jews and Christians and asking them to join, asserting that they were full Iraqi citizens. Sunnis and Shi'a prayed in their respective mosques, celebrated their respective holidays and rituals, and competed over which sect could produce the most effective nationalist poetry. The central role of poetry in Iraqi nationalist discourse not only reflected the influence of the oral tradition in Arab culture, but also the mobilization of the most prominent form of expression in Iraqi society. Poetry became an important vehicle for linking urban nationalists and rural villages and tribes. In a syncretic fashion, cross-regional and cross-ethnic communication was encouraged through building on a cultural heritage shared by all groups in Iraqi society.²⁴

In 1928, the Minister of Education, who traditionally held the one Shi'i portfolio in the government, tried to dismiss a Syrian secondary school teacher, Anis al-Nusuli, who had written a history of the 'Umayyad Empire that some Shi'i clerics found offensive. This effort led to extensive street demonstrations by Iraqi students of all ethnic backgrounds who invoked the idea of freedom of expression in demanding that al-Nusuli be reinstated. The significance of the "al-Nusuli affair" was that it demonstrated the constructed nature of sectarianism in Iraq. It also demonstrated its generational component. While Sunni and Shi'i Arabs (and other ethnic groups) in Iraq's various ministries had an incentive to stress sectarianism as a mechanism for enhancing their political influence, sectarianism was of little interest to those outside government, such as students, who lacked a stake in the dominant Iraqi political economy. Younger Iraqis, who were socialized through the nationalist movement, rejected a political community defined in ethnic or confessional terms which they saw as part of an outdated and corrupt political system, and a colonial strategy of "divide and conquer" designed to set one ethnic group against another.

During the 1930s, Iraqis of all ethnic groups joined the General Strike of 1931 in response to British efforts to dramatically increase municipal electricity rates [*rusūm al-baladiyyāt*]. Faced with national opposition that crossed ethnic lines, the British ultimately backed down and rescinded the proposed increases. What was particularly striking about the General Strike was the cooperation between Iraq's traditional artisan sector, recently united in a national organization, the Association

of Artisans [Jam'iyyat Ashab al-Sana'i'i], and the nascent labor movement that had begun to organize unions during the late 1920s, especially in the Iraq State Railways, among the port workers of Basra, and in the oil sector. Indeed, it was the Association of Artisans and the new labor unions that played the central role in organizing opposition to the British. Once again, cross-ethnic cooperation was critical to the strike's success.²⁵

Many other examples can be given to demonstrate cross-ethnic cooperation, such as strikes against British and Iraqi-owned firms that refused to give workers decent salaries and working conditions. What was notable about many of these strikes was the workers' refusal to return to work until imprisoned strike leaders were returned to their jobs, especially when this refusal came even after offers of increased salaries or better working conditions. The solidarity manifested by workers from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds was indicative of the lack of penetration of sectarian consciousness among large segments of Iraq's lower classes. After the July 1958 revolution, there was a veritable outburst of labor union activity and organization. By the summer of 1959, over 200 labor unions were registered with the Iraqi government.²⁶

The post-World War II nationalist uprisings, such as the Wathba [Great Leap] of 1948, the Intifada of 1952, and the demonstrations and riots of 1955 and 1956 against the Baghdad Pact and the Tripartite invasion of Egypt by Britain, France and Israel respectively, were hallmarks of cross-ethnic solidarity. The June 1954 elections, the most open in Iraqi history prior to those held in 2005, underscored not only the ability of Sunni and Shi'i Arabs to work together to win seats in the Iraqi parliament but to unite political parties of different ideologies.²⁷ Despite efforts by the newly formed Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party to disrupt the National Electoral Front [al-Jabha al-Intikhabiyya al-Wataniyya], formed in 1952 between Iraqist, or local nationalists, and moderate Arab nationalists, i.e., the Independence Party [Hizb al-Istiqlal], the parties in the Front never wavered in their solidarity.

Commitment to associational behavior

The second conceptual component that underscores the existence of a public sphere in Iraq is a *commitment to associational behavior*. From the

onset of the nationalist movement, Iraqis have been joiners and began developing a network of civic, commercial, intellectual and political organizations. This was especially true after the Young Turk Revolt, which emphasized the Turkish character of the Ottoman Empire and constitutional rule. The example of Turks organizing to bring about political change, the inability of the Ottomans to protect Iraq and the Empire's other Arab provinces from European colonial encroachment, the CUP's "Turkification" of the Empire, and the growth of Iraqi urban areas and concomitant expansion of the press and education systems, set the stage for Iraqis to organize in the context of a growing sense of national identity.

Many of the early (pre-1914) organizations were not exclusively Iraqi, but rather Arab organizations formed in Istanbul or Cairo that had considerable Iraqi membership. Al-'Ahd [Covenant], an organization of Arab, primarily Iraqi, officers within the Ottoman army, was probably the most prominent of these early efforts at political organization. Mention may also be made of the Arab-Ottoman Brotherhood Society [Jam'iyat al-Ikha' al-'Uthmani-al-'Arabi], the Literary Assembly [al-Muntada al-Adabi], the Ottoman Administrative Decentralization Party [Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya al-Idariyya al-'Uthmani], the Reform Society [Jam'iyat al-Islah], the National Scientific Society [al-Nadi al-Watani al-'Ilmi], the Mosul Literary Club [al-Nadi al-Adabi], the Mosul Scientific Club [al-Nadi al-'Ilmi], and the Islamic Renaissance Society of al-Najaf [Jam'iyat al-Nahda al-Islamiyya fi al-Najaf].²⁸ These are just some of the many examples of Iraqi political, cultural and social organizations that were formed well before the actual founding of the modern state under the Hashimite monarchy in 1921.

These organizations were followed by many others after the war's end and once Iraq was placed under a League of Nations Mandate given to Great Britain in 1920, especially political parties. The Haras al-Istiqlal [Guardians of Independence], a civic and political organization largely composed of ex-Ottoman civil servants, became powerful and highly respected. In addition to political parties and labor unions, professional organizations, such as the Lawyers Association [Jam'iyat al-Muhamin], were formed during the late 1920s, later followed by the teachers', journalists' and engineers' associations.

To the list of political organizations, professional associations and

labor unions can be added the large number of literary and artistic organizations that began to develop during the 1930s and especially after the end of World War II. These included the artists who formed the Pioneers [al-Ruwwad], the Society for Modern Art (or Baghdad Group for Modern Art), the Iraqi Writers Association, the sizeable group of intellectuals associated with the journal, *New Culture* [al-Thaqafa al-Jadida], which appeared in 1953 and was subsequently closed by the government, and poets who organized the highly innovative Free Verse Movement.²⁹

National forms of political communication

A third characteristic of the nationalist movement was embodied in the spread of *national forms of political communication* that were cross-regional and cross-ethnic in orientation. The Young Turk Revolt, the British invasion of Iraq, the 1920 Revolution, and the placing of Iraq under a League of Nations Mandate encouraged the expansion of the Iraqi press, which increased dramatically after 1908. Iraqi newspapers not only became fora for criticism of British colonial influence in Iraq and the demand for complete independence [al-istiqlāl al-tamm], but a space in which poets, writers and critics could disseminate their artistic creation. Some of Iraq's most important writers and poets, such as Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid, Anwar Shawwal (Ibn Suma'il) and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, were also journalists, indicating that many Iraqi intellectuals assumed multiple roles.³⁰ While the Hashimite monarchy and the British frequently closed newspapers and publications critical of the government, the groups that published these newspapers quickly reopened them under new names. The tenacity with which newspaper publishers circumvented the state's efforts to suppress them was a strong indicator of the desire of Iraqis to communicate with one another and represents a critical component of the public sphere.

Another important indicator of the desire to communicate across regions and ethnic groups was the growth and politicization of coffeehouses in urban areas. Some of the most prominent coffeehouses in Baghdad were historically associated either with prominent merchant families and located near major markets, or were venues for traditional intellectuals [al-udabā'] to meet. This was true, for example, of the series

of four coffeehouses in the Hamada Market run by the 'Ukayl tribe that was known for its involvement in foreign trade.³¹ With the rise of the nationalist movement during the late nineteenth century, many coffeehouses began to supplement their more traditional functions. Rather than just providing a venue for relaxation and the sharing of information, whether commercial or social, or as a meeting place of men of literature, coffeehouses began to assume an increasingly political character.

As an old and well established institution, the coffeehouse's venerable status as a popular [*sha'bi*] venue made it an ideal space for an emerging nationalist political discourse. With the expansion of commerce in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a new clerical middle class [*al-effendiyya*] emerged that was linked to employment in the expanding economy and in the state bureaucracy. Despite constituting a small social stratum, this new middle class used the coffeehouse as a space in which to discuss and crystallize their thoughts on political, cultural and social affairs.

Members of the middle class did not have the material wherewithal with which to create private literary salons. Not possessing large homes in which to meet, these *effendiyya* instead increasingly frequented the coffeehouse. As nationalist sentiment increased, particularly as the Ottoman Empire was unable to prevent the expansion of European colonialism into its former territories, and especially after the 1908 Young Turk Revolt sought to impose a more Turkish identity on the Empire's remaining provinces, the coffeehouse became a space associated with a discourse of political opposition.³²

Thus, the growth of the coffeehouse reflected the impact of social class, namely the expansion of the clerical middle classes and their desire for a public space in which to share political, social and cultural information. Put differently, the coffeehouse, as the reflection of an expanding public sphere, demonstrated the inability of traditional forms of discourse, such as the literary salon [*majlis al-adab*], to accommodate the needs and desires of a new social stratum. Gradually, specific coffeehouses became identified with particular political tendencies. That Iraqi nationalists would often return to one or another coffeehouse after a political protest was evidence of the political significance of these spaces.³³

It was the internal dynamics of the coffeehouse that were most

interesting. Here the poor, who were either illiterate or unable to purchase daily newspapers, could hear the news read and discussed. Here also, nationalist poets read their verses to the crowd. Because the government frequently sent informers to nationalistically oriented coffeehouses, poets were forced to hide their thoughts in allusion and double-entendre, thereby educating the audience in the processes of decoding the subtleties of political critique inherent in the poetry being read. In this manner, the coffeehouse became an institution that encouraged the development of a sophisticated political discourse in which nuance and subtlety became the watchwords of communication. A “traditional” institution came to be transformed not just into an important instrument of the nationalist movement, but as a space in which Iraqis were socialized into the important political tendencies of the day. Through their transformation into an institution with a national, rather than a local or urban district focus, certain coffeehouses became famous in nationalist circles and thus attracted some of Iraq’s most prominent political activists and intellectuals.

With the maturation of a new generation of nationalist youth in the late 1920s and 1930s, many existing coffeehouses acquired a more politically oriented clientele, and new politically oriented coffeehouses continued to open. During the early 1930s, the ‘Arif Agha coffeehouse became a meeting place for teachers who had been purged from government service and for opposition journalists. Other coffeehouses, such as the al-Rusafi and al-Jawahiri coffeehouses, named after some of Iraq’s most famous poets, also were noted meeting places for intellectuals and activists.³⁴

Considering the growth in programmatic political parties, the rise of the press, the expansion of coffeehouses and their restructuring along more explicitly political lines, and the development of a network of social clubs [*al-andiyya*], which represented the interests of professionals, charitable and religious groups, and sports groups, we see that Iraqis had developed an extensive network of communication by the end of the 1930s, indicating a national consciousness and a desire to communicate across ethnic and regional barriers.

Artistic innovation

All of the aforementioned processes contributed to and were reinforced by

the artistic activity that was stimulated in large measure by the nationalist movement. A fourth factor contributing to the growth of a public sphere was *artistic innovation that expanded the boundaries of political discourse*. One of the most important literary phenomena was the development of the Iraqi short story. The short story was especially well suited to being published or serialized in daily newspapers, especially given the lack of printing presses and the high cost of publishing a full-length novel. Iraqi short story writers, such as Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid, ‘Abd al-Malik Nuri, Gha’ib Tu’ma Farman, Edmund Sabri, Shakir Khusbak, and others, became famous not just in Iraq but throughout the Arab world from the 1930s through the early 1960s. In chronicling, among other themes, the socio-cultural and psychological disruption caused by the breakdown of the rural economy, the migration of large numbers of Iraqis to urban areas, and the political corruption of the Hashimite monarchy under British colonial domination, short story writers were able to convey to the populace at large a strong sense of what was wrong with Iraqi society and the need for political action to bring about social justice and democratic rule, along with independence from foreign rule.³⁵

Perhaps the most impressive of the artistic developments of the pre-1963 era was the Free Verse Movement, which resulted in an innovative and radical change in Arab poetry. Under the stimulus of the poetic innovations of Nazik al-Mala’ika, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati in particular, Iraqi poetry not only broke with the classic *qaṣīda* form in poetic expression, but used poetry to challenge tradition in daring ways. Drawing heavily on symbolism from Iraq’s ancient civilizations and its Arabo-Islamic past, Iraqi poetry during the 1950s used tradition both to reinterpret the past and push the boundaries of cultural and political expression in radical directions. While much artistic expression of the 1950s lacked an explicit political component, and frequently was very pessimistic about the future, the sum total of work produced was radical in nature in encouraging the Iraqi citizenry to challenge political and cultural authority, rather than to uncritically subscribe to views fostered by the state or traditional authority, e.g., religious authority.

In the plastic arts, the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, led by the Iraqi sculptor and painter Jawad Salim, combined an interest in Western sculpture and painting with a strong interest in the artistic

accomplishments of Iraq's ancient civilizations as well as in Islamic civilization. As the artist Shakir Hasan noted at the time, the Baghdad Group sought to achieve the same revolutionary developments in the realm of painting and sculpture that Iraqi poets had achieved in the realm of poetry.³⁶ What is notable is not only the symbiosis among the Iraqi intelligentsia of the period, but the challenging of hegemonic discourses of authority and tradition in literature and the arts, which implicitly challenged political and traditional authority. The impact of the rich artistic milieu of the late 1940s and 1950s was to promote a greater respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as a critical building block and legacy for civil society and democratic governance.

Challenges to the public sphere

This brief overview of the public sphere's empirical manifestations within the context of the pre-1963 Iraqi nationalist movement demonstrates the necessity of contextualizing the concept in a larger structural nexus to fully understand its political impact. The political ramifications of the public sphere can most easily be demonstrated by comparing the few nationalist groups that did adhere to a sectarian definition of Iraqi political community and those that promoted a more tolerant understanding of political community. In discussing sectarian identities, we need to distinguish between Iraqist, or local nationalism [*al-waṭaniyya al-irāqiyya*], and pan-Arab nationalism [*al-qawmiyya al-ʿarabiyya*] in Iraq. While accepting and respecting Iraq's predominant Arab culture, Iraqist nationalists argued that creating a democratic state based on social justice and tolerance for ethnic diversity took precedence over creating a pan-Arab nation. Pan-Arabists countered by arguing that only through joining a pan-Arab state [*al-waṭan al-ʿarabi*] could Iraq hope to confront Western colonial domination and achieve the historical greatness it had enjoyed under the Arabo-Islamic empires, particularly the 'Abbasid Empire, centered in Iraq.³⁷ Sectarian nationalist organizations were invariably pan-Arabist in ideological orientation and largely grounded in the (rural and tribal) Sunni Arab community.

Almost all groups that emphasized sectarian identities and

political community were Sunni Arab and drawn from the military. As noted above, one of the earliest of such groups, *al-'Ahd*, was comprised of Ottoman army officers primarily from Iraq. Already prior to World War I, *'al-Ahd* developed hostility to the antisectarian *Haras al-Istiqlal* [Guardians of Independence], which drew upon former Ottoman civil servants and intellectuals and emphasized the open (multi-ethnic) nature of its membership. Many of the politicians who dominated the state under the Hashimite monarchy were former members of *al-'Ahd* and Sunni Arabs as well. Indeed, it was not until 1947 that Iraq had its first Shi'i prime minister, Salih Jabr. I would argue that Sunni Arab sectarianism was grounded in the privileges they derived from their ties to the state, both under the Ottomans, and later under the Hashimite monarchy. Members of *al-'Ahd* saw, in the development of a multi-ethnic nationalist movement, a threat to these ties if Iraq's definition of political community were to include all the country's ethnic groups, particularly the majority Shi'a, as active players in politics. Indeed, one sees parallels between attitudes among members of the 'Ahd and ex-Ba'athists and radical Islamists after 2003 who support the ongoing insurgency in Iraq because, like their predecessors, they too refuse to accept an Iraq defined by political pluralism and cultural tolerance.

A second example of sectarian nationalism is the coterie of army officers that dominated Iraqi politics between 1937 and 1941. This group included political activists associated with the pro-fascist Nadi al-Muthanna [al-Muthanna Club] and the so-called "Four Colonels" (or "Golden Square") who provided the military support for the Axis-leaning government of Rashid 'Ali al-Gaylani, which challenged British rule in May 1941. While ideology certainly played a role in the sectarian outlook of army officers who supported pan-Arabist policies, it must be recognized that army officers feared that Iraqi nationalists, who derived much support from non-Sunni Arabs, would deprive them of their privileged ties to the state bureaucracy and the military. If Shi'a, Kurds and other ethnic groups obtained access to government positions irrespective of ethnic background, Sunni Arabs would lose much of their political and economic influence.

In explaining this sectarian orientation, social class played a critical role. Because many of the Sunni Arab army officers, members of the

intelligence service, and government bureaucrats were drawn from the economically marginalized river towns of the so-called “Sunni Arab triangle,” they viewed access to state employment as their main source of economic well-being. To be forced to compete with Shi’a, Kurds and other ethnic groups for positions within the state apparatus, especially in light of declining economic opportunities in the Sunni Arab river towns, inspired strong feelings of hostility towards non-Sunni Arabs. In short, while pan-Arabists drew upon a relatively small sector of society with privileged access to the state, namely rural and tribally based Sunni Arabs, the larger Iraqist component of the nationalist movement predominated and offered a “big tent,” namely a political movement that was open to members of all Iraq’s ethnic groups, and one that stressed the need to link political freedoms to social justice.³⁸

The public sphere, political instability and violence in post-Ba’thist Iraq

In light of the violence that has characterized Iraqi politics and society since 2003, what relevance does the concept of the public sphere have for post-Ba’thist Iraq? Can it not be argued that the complete destruction of civil society by Saddam Husayn’s Ba’thist regime between 1968 and 2003, two major wars resulting from Iraq’s invasion of Iran in 1980 and its seizure of Kuwait in 1990, the brutal repression of the 1991 Intifada, and the harsh United Nations sanctions regime between 1991 and 2003, destroyed all of the public sphere’s positive residues?

Apart from the positive role that the historical memory of civil society building and the expansion of the public sphere can have on contemporary Iraqi society, a factor discussed below, the impact of the public sphere can still be seen in some of the dominant forms that Iraqi politics has assumed since 2003. Perhaps this impact can best be understood by asking the following question: why have sectarian militias and insurgent organizations devoted so much time and so many resources in an effort to eradicate Iraq’s professional classes? Why has so much violence, in the form of assassinations, physical intimidation, and kidnapping, been directed at professionals, particularly university academics, journalists,

physicians, artists, prominent sports figures and entertainers? The professional classes do not control any militias, or significant amounts of economic resources; why, then, are these groups the subject of attacks? Why are professionals viewed as such a threat, and by whom?³⁹

Answers to these questions are important because they reflect the power of ideas, particularly in historical memory, to influence and shape contemporary Iraqi politics. As numerous public opinion polls since 2003 have indicated, Iraqis continue to identify themselves as Iraqi, rejecting the division of the country along sectarian lines. Representing the most educated sectors of society, Iraq's threatened and dwindling professional classes constitute the most visible example of the antisectarian tradition of Iraqi society. Because the professional classes are highly respected by large segments of Iraqi society, their views are still heavily influential.

However, ideas of cross-sectarian tolerance and cooperation threaten the political and economic agendas of sectarian militias, death squads, insurgent groups and criminal organizations. These groups increasingly filled the post-2003 political and economic vacuum that resulted from a weak and faction-ridden central state, a moribund economy, the lack of social services and the near collapse of the education system during the 1990s. These groups intimidated local populations to assert their control over them, often by using physical violence to force Iraqis to think in terms of vertically defined political identities, namely according to which ethnic group and religious sect they belong, rather than in national and cross-ethnic terms. Because Iraq's educated middle and especially professional classes still believe in an Iraq defined in Iraqi rather than sectarian terms, they have been, ipso facto, viewed as a serious threat by the radical organizations that have proliferated in post-Ba'athist Iraq.

The professional classes in Iraq maintain an important position of power precisely because they provide a model that corresponds to the sentiments of Iraqi public opinion and an alternative to the attempt by radical political organizations to impose sectarian politics on Iraqi society. Professionals in Iraq thus represent an intellectual elite that helps to keep alive the idea of a tolerant and nonsectarian politics in Iraq. The only weapon they possess is their *ideas*, which invariably are antisectarian and support the tradition of cross-ethnic cooperation that extends back to the

twentieth-century nationalist movement. That these professionals, who reject sectarian values, remain high profile targets of Sunni insurgents and Shi'i militias, points to the overwhelming rejection by Iraqi society as a whole of a sectarian model. Indeed, a BBC/ABC public opinion poll, conducted in April 2007, indicated that 94% of respondents indicated that they rejected dividing Iraq along sectarian lines.⁴⁰ In other words, sectarian forces view professional groups in Iraq as threatening due to their rejection of sectarianism and their ability to articulate the antisectarian sentiments of the populace at large. Their daily activities, e.g., the multi-ethnic composition of Iraqi sports teams, also belie sectarian identities. Athletes have been killed because they wear shorts or because they play sports that are considered "anti-Islamic." Women entertainers and public employees who do not dress in ways considered appropriate by radical forces have also been subject to attack.

These considerations point to the power of ideas and the fact that the public sphere still resonates with contemporary Iraqi society, even if in ways that expose antisectarian Iraqis to physical threats and violence. The fact that university academics continue to teach and journalists continue to write articles that implicitly and explicitly attack sectarian politics indicates that a struggle continues within Iraqi society in the context of what Gramsci would call a "war of position."⁴¹ Despite great danger to themselves, many professionals, through their behavior, pronouncements, and written texts, make daily statements supporting the idea of Iraq as a multi-ethnic and tolerant society. That many sectarian leaders, such as Muqtada al-Sadr, feel the need to frequently make reference to national unity and antisectarianism is yet another indicator of the power of these ideas. If sectarian ideas did in fact hold sway among large segments of the Iraqi populace, then sectarian groups would find little incentive to make reference to national unity and emphasize an Iraqi identity, rather than one based on one's ethnic group or religious sect.

While conditions in Iraq do not point, in the near term, to the revival of the type of public sphere that existed during the late 1940s and 1950s, there is a "path dependency" that suggests the continuation of a historical memory of the pre-Ba'athist era that offers a vision of building an Iraqi civil society based on nonsectarian norms. The attack on the secondhand book market and the famous al-Shabandar Coffeehouse in

Baghdad's al-Mutannabi Street in March 2007 was an indicator of the continued hostility of sectarian groups toward a historical memory based in tolerance, diversity of knowledge, and cultural pluralism.⁴²

One way in which Iraqis have been able to circumvent physical violence is through the Internet. A dramatic expansion of the public sphere after 2003 can be found in the rise and spread of the blog. Of course, computer usage was severely restricted under the Ba'athist regime. However, once Iraqis, especially those living in urban areas, obtained access to the Internet, either through their own computers or through the large number of Internet cafés established after 2003, they began to create a wide range of blogs in both Arabic and English. Iraqi bloggers have become an important source of information about politics, government corruption, human rights (including women and children's rights as well as those of refugees and displaced persons), artistic trends, the United States occupation, and the abuses of Islam by radical Islamists. Although these blogs have generated anger in government and sectarian circles, they have been impossible to shut down.⁴³

The state and the public sphere

Despite the strides made in the development of an Iraqi public sphere and a larger civil society, stimulated by the pre-Ba'athist nationalist movement, neither a well developed civil society nor public sphere can by themselves assure the development of a tolerant, participatory and democratic society. This point underscores the problems inherent in a conceptual perspective that only focuses on one dimension of society, in this instance the public sphere and the closely related notion of civil society, without taking other components of the political system into account.

Politically, the core problem of modern Iraq has been the institutional weakness of the state. Consequently, the vibrant civil society and public sphere, which developed under the aegis of the Iraqi nationalist movement, have never benefitted from an institutional framework that would allow them to translate their contributions into sustainable political practices. The lack of institutional development has meant that the participatory and tolerant qualities that characterized politics at the mass

level in Iraq have not engendered positive change at the level of the state. Instead the state has either been characterized by weak and venal elite coalitions that Iraqis referred to as the “merchants of politics” [*tujjār al-siyāsa*], such as those under the Hashimite monarchy between 1921 and 1958; or by corporatist forms of political organization dominated by an authoritarian ruler, such as emerged under ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim (1958–1963), and subsequent Arab nationalist and Ba‘thist regimes. One of the main problems of Iraqi society has resided not only in the inability of Iraqis to agree upon a common definition of political community, but also in the continued disjuncture between a vibrant civil society and public sphere, on the one hand, and a weak and ineffectual state on the other.

The problem of the lack of state capacity and weak legitimacy came to a head after the overthrow of Saddam Husayn’s Ba‘thist regime in 2003. In the wake of the Ba‘thist regime’s fall, Iraq has experienced severe political instability, which has raised serious doubts about the possibility of creating a democratic polity. The violence plaguing Iraq since 2003 has been caused, in large measure, by the fear of different groups, defined not only ethnically but also in terms of social class, region, age and political background, that they will be denied access to political participation and economic opportunity in the “new Iraq.” This problem has been exacerbated by the self-conscious destruction of most aspects of civil society by the Ba‘thist regime during its rule between 1968 and 2003 and the lack of development of any political institutional infrastructure that would provide the framework for establishing a democratic polity. If to an ineffectual central state we add a dysfunctional economy with unemployment rates reaching 60 to 70 percent, especially among youth who constitute over 60 percent of the population under age 25; extensive corruption in the Iraqi government, particularly in the distribution of Iraq’s oil wealth; and the penetration of government ministries, such as the powerful Ministry of Interior, by sectarian forces, then it is not surprising that democracy has faced difficulties in finding fertile soil in post-Ba‘thist Iraq.

The public sphere and Islam as “invented tradition”

These considerations are especially important when we consider the

distorted understandings of Islam that have been promoted by Sunni insurgent organizations and Shi'i militias in Iraq. The ideas being disseminated by radical groups in the name of Islam, whether Sunni or Shi'i, point to the efforts not only to intimidate and suppress antisectarian forces in Iraq, but to create a sectarian political culture that represents the antithesis of the public sphere. The argument by the late leader of al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers [al-Qa'ida fi Wadi al-Nahrayn], Abu al-Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, that democracy is a form of political organization that the West is trying to impose on Iraq—one that is alien to Iraqi political culture—is just one example of the attempt of Islamist radicals to distort historical memory, much in the same way that Saddam Husayn and the Ba'th Party attempted to control understandings of the past through the Project for the Rewriting of History [Mashru' I'adat Kitabat al-Tarikh].⁴⁴

Because the national education system largely collapsed under the United Nations sanctions regime between 1991 and 2003, and is still dysfunctional in many areas of Iraq (even in the Kurdish north), young Iraqis often receive their knowledge of Islam from groups that seek to serve their own sectarian agendas. Even purported religious leaders often have only a superficial understanding of Islam. A good example is Muqtada al-Sadr, who received a poor education during the 1990s, and spent much of his time in political organizing. One of the critical processes for reconstituting the public sphere in post-Ba'thist Iraq is the need to reestablish the national education system and provide access to education to large numbers of Iraqi youth. However, there is little prospect for the education system to play a central role in the socialization of Iraqi youth until the problem of continued economic stagnation is addressed.

Reconstituting the public sphere in post-Ba'thist Iraq: The use of historical memory⁴⁵

As already noted, one objection to many of the arguments proffered in this essay is that the positive impact of the public sphere is vitiated by the violence that has plagued Iraq since 2003, (notwithstanding its relative decline beginning in the summer of 2007). In the remainder of this chapter I will focus on the manner in which historical memory [*al-dhā'ira*

al-tārīhiyya] might be used to reconstitute the tradition of the vibrant public sphere and civil society in Iraq.

While the creation of a nascent civil society and public sphere in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is relatively easy to document, can this rich tradition be translated into a political praxis that can help offset the pernicious legacy of Saddam Husayn's Ba'ṯhist regime, the impact of the largely incompetent United States occupation of Iraq, and the rise to power of sectarian political organizations? One tool that has not been theorized adequately, nor used as a form of public policy, is historical memory. Certainly Saddam and the Ba'ṯ Party realized the power of historical memory as evidenced by the resources the regime devoted to its Project for the Rewriting of History, of which Saddam was the titular head. Saddam and the Ba'ṯ sought to use historical memory to restructure the Iraqi citizenry's understandings of the past. While the results of the Ba'ṯist regime's efforts were uneven, the question is whether a different type of historical memory, one that promotes a growth of the public sphere and civil society and a transition to democracy, can be deployed for these desired ends.

The core of the ideas proposed here is for democratic practitioners, both inside and outside Iraq, to mobilize the progressive historical memory of the pre-1963 era to promote democratic change as part of a process of invigorating the public sphere. A key principle underlying these ideas is that the democratic transition should be derived from the Iraqi historical experience and not one imposed from without.⁴⁶ Another important component of political praxis is to link the development of the public sphere during the twentieth century to new forms of the public sphere in post-Ba'ṯist Iraq. Because many radical forces claim that there is no tradition in Iraqi political culture that valorizes democratic practices, and by extension the notions of a tolerant civil society and active public sphere, these groups argue that democracy is alien to Iraq and a tradition that the West, particularly the United States, is trying to impose on Iraq.

Media

One manner in which both progressive forces within the Iraqi government and those in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can help

promote the public sphere's reconstitution is through the use of the media and the Internet to disseminate the accomplishments of the pre-Ba'athist nationalist movement. Iraqi newspapers, for example, have played an important role since 2003 through the use of the Internet to distribute their editions when it is often not possible to sell a newspaper in a particular section of a city or in a town due to harassment by sectarian organizations. As noted above, blogs are also an important source of information for Iraqis about all aspects of their society.

One of the most successful ways in which the former Ba'athist regime carried favor with the urban middle classes was through promoting Iraqi folklore. The *Journal of Popular Culture* [*Majallat al-Turath al-Sha'bi*] was highly popular and its issues sold out quickly when they appeared in Baghdad kiosks. While the Ba'ath Party tried to insert political and social subtexts in its efforts to promote folklore, the regime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim (1958–1963) provides a model in which folklore was likewise promoted, but to enhance, rather than divide, the Iraqi populace through stressing its unity in diversity.⁴⁷ The Iraqi government could follow the Qasim regime's lead by promoting folklore not just in the form of state-sponsored publications but more importantly in the visual media, namely television and film. Under the Ba'athist regime, for example, the television program, *Baghdadiyyat*, which explored aspects of Baghdad's folklore, such as folk poetry and the artisan production of particular quarters, attracted a large viewing audience. In light of the continued violence in Iraq, and the constraints that this violence places on the movement and activities of large numbers of Iraqis, the Iraqi government could take greater advantage of the media to disseminate the historical memory of a tolerant political culture. Promoting folklore in government sponsored publications, in the press, on television and in film, would resonate highly with Iraqis, many of whom still maintain rural roots and ties to rural social structure. Not only is folklore a subject of great interest to Iraqis, but one that emphasizes their cultural commonalities. As such it offers another means to overcome the distrust generated by the pernicious Ba'athist legacy.

The creation of an extensive number of Web sites could also provide Iraqi youth, many of whom have no memory of the pre-Ba'athist era, with valuable information about the basic social, cultural and economic

prerequisites for building civil society and democracy. Using such Web sites to emphasize not only religious and ethnic tolerance, but gender equality, and a respect for social difference generally, could help to offset the message of sectarian groups who seek to use xenophobic and particularistic identities to promote their political and economic agendas. Moderate clerics could provide explanations on Web sites and electronic bulletins of Islam and its relationship to questions that interest young Iraqis in particular, such as guidance on morals, gender relations, and marriage. Greater use of television and radio could likewise enhance this information campaign. Not only would such a campaign strengthen the national reconciliation process, but it would work to expand the public sphere.

Conferences of nationalist intellectuals

Innovative policies could also include organizing conferences of older Iraqi intellectuals that would draw attention to the accomplishments of the past. Many of these intellectuals are elderly and still reside in Iraq. At the conferences, which could be organized by sympathetic Iraqi government agencies, e.g., the Ministry of Culture, or NGOs, at relatively little cost, Iraqi intellectuals could discuss the relevance of their work to the current phase of Iraq's attempt to end sectarian violence and work to create a more tolerant society, critical prerequisites for any attempts to begin a meaningful transition to democracy. Subventions could be found to reissue earlier works published by democratically oriented nationalist intellectuals, as well as to solicit new reflections by older intellectuals. Creating a number of national conferences of historians, secondary school teachers and interested intellectuals that would be held in the Arab south as well as Kurdish north, even if held in Iraqi Kurdistan or outside Iraq, given the current security situation, could be used to highlight aspects of the pre-1963 legacy of civil society building and democratic practices which could provide the basis for illustrating concepts intended to promote a democratic political culture in Iraq.

Promoting the institutions of civil society and efforts to reconstitute the public sphere could also be accomplished by providing low cost loans for establishing coffeehouses organized by civic, intellectual and artistic

groups. Since the fall of the Ba'athist regime, there has been a revival of intellectual and artistic life, despite efforts by insurgents, who seek to reimpose authoritarian rule, to assassinate Iraqi intellectuals, journalists, artists, entertainers and sports figures.⁴⁸ Many of these organizations possess few resources. With small loans, they could organize coffeehouses that could both be used to expand their activities, or, in dangerous areas, to organize underground, and to attract a larger following. Indeed, a number of foreign organizations have been funding the underground activities of Iraqi NGOs engaged in a wide variety of projects from empowering women to teaching conflict resolution. This proposal reflects yet another relatively inexpensive strategy that could be used to encourage the rebuilding of civil society as part of a more long-term transition to democracy in Iraq.

Rewriting secondary school and university textbooks

These efforts at creating a new historical memory could also entail the rewriting of textbooks, both at the secondary school and university levels, which situate the concepts of civil society, tolerance, privacy, human rights and the rule of law in the Iraqi historical and cultural experience, rather than in abstract theoretical paradigms. While many youth no longer attend schools, they do watch state-run television channels, listen to state-run radio stations, or access the Internet where materials highlighting Iraq's past could be posted. For teachers and students, using the Iraqi experience as the dominant (but not exclusive) model for explicating concepts designed to promote greater appreciation for democratic practices would no doubt resonate more highly with Iraqi students than relying primarily on historical examples drawn from non-Iraqi settings.

A significant development that has received little attention is the extent to which many Arab Iraqis who have fled to Iraqi Kurdistan have been welcomed there. In light of the continuous efforts by successive Arab governments in Baghdad to militarily suppress the Kurds, even including the use of chemical weapons during the late 1980s, this reception of Arabs by Iraq's Kurds is quite remarkable. This reception has even gone so far as to include the development of an Arabic secondary school system for

the children of Arab Iraqis who have moved to the north on the part of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Because the Kurdish region has yet to develop meaningful democratic governance, the move of many educated Arab Iraqis to Kurdistan provides the opportunity for democratically minded Kurds and Arabs to join together to create truly autonomous organizations of civil society and a vigorous public sphere through challenging the KRG to live up to its own democratic discourse.

As ever larger numbers of Kurdish youth find political participation restricted and economic opportunity unavailable, Iraqi Kurdistan has begun to witness a process similar to the Arab south, namely the rise of political opposition that decries the nepotism and corruption of the two main Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK. Here is an opportunity for Iraqis of Arab and Kurdish ethnicity to strive to build a nationalist movement with meaningful democratic foundations. Because many Arab entrepreneurs from the south have shifted their investments to the more stable north, resources potentially exist to fund activities designed to expand civil society and the public sphere. This is not to say that the KRG would welcome these activities, but it is also loath to undermine its support among Western governments and NGOs, and to create a hostile climate for Western investment, should it move to sharply curtail efforts to expand democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Conclusion

It would be naïve and unrealistic to think that the historical memory of Iraq's accomplishments in developing a public sphere and nascent civil society prior to 1963 can by itself promote the democratization of Iraq. However, the historical memory of the pre-1963 nationalist movement can provide important building blocks for a democratic transition. One of the most important of these building blocks is to help instill in democratically minded Iraqis a sense of trust in the national body politic, namely that Iraqis can work in concert, and across ethnic lines, to promote a democratic political culture. The development of this sense of confidence—a critical form of social capital—is crucial to offsetting the efforts of sectarian organizations to impose a rigid and intolerant political

culture on post-Ba'athist Iraq. As I have noted, numerous public opinion polls indicate that Iraqis reject dividing Iraq along sectarian lines while still adhering to an Iraqi sense of political identity.⁴⁹ Iraq's modern historical memory can thereby not only help Iraqis reestablish a sense of trust in cross-ethnic cooperation but instill a sense of pride and self-confidence that is crucial to resisting efforts by authoritarian forces to return Iraq to the dark era of authoritarian rule.

The reconstitution of a political process that indicates the beginning of the building of a new sense of trust is already evident in Iraq. Despite all the prognostications that Iraq would be unable to engage in a democratic transition, three successful sets of elections were held between January 2009 and March 2010. The Arab provincial legislative elections that were conducted in January 2009 demonstrated a marked decrease in the power of sectarian political parties, especially the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (ISCI), and the participation of a raft of new candidates who were secular in orientation and concerned with the lack of services in their respective areas. In July 2009, the Kurdish political leadership suffered a major setback when the Gorran movement was able to mobilize a large number of votes from Kurds dissatisfied with corruption and nepotism within the KRG and with the lack of employment opportunities.

The March 2010 elections for the Iraqi national parliament [Majlis al-Nawwab] were held without significant violence, with security being provided by the Iraqi Army rather than American forces, and were judged by international observers to have been fair. Popular pressure to use an "open list" rather than a "closed list" system meant that voters knew which candidates they were voting for and thus were able to elect delegates based on merit rather than those chosen by party elites. The high turnout rate of 62.4%, the loss by 62% of former delegates of their seats and the fact that 22% of the new delegates were Iraqis under the age of 40 speaks to a significant renewal process in Iraqi politics. While political elites continue

to try to thwart the will of the people, Iraqis will continue to press for the institutionalization of a new democratic politics in Iraq. Iraqi voters seek to ensure that there will be no return to the type of human rights abuses that they suffered under the Ba'ath and to press for improved government services and the ability to enjoy their newfound freedoms of expression and political participation.

Viewing the efforts to mobilize historical memory as part of a process that occurs in spaces that constitute the public sphere can provide Iraqis with another potent concept in moving their society toward greater political and cultural tolerance. The fact that the discourse of the public sphere in Iraq (and elsewhere) is synthetic, in the sense that it combines discourses drawn from politics, literature and the arts, points to the benefits of incorporating it into the analysis of modern Iraqi politics and society. Rather than limiting our analysis to the realm of political elites and the exercise of political power, a focus on the public sphere draws us into an arena where a Gramscian war of position is constantly underway as counterhegemonic discourses are formed and contested. Much of the tension surrounding the idea of the public sphere as an imported concept dissolves when one realizes the length of time and extent to which processes associated with the functioning of the concept in the West have historically been operative in Iraq.

Notes

1. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), xvii. However, Habermas seems to contradict himself when he states, in discussing the development of civil society and the public sphere, “We are dealing with Greek categories transmitted to us bearing a Roman stamp,” 5. The revival of Roman law, the development of neo-Platonism and the revival of classical forms of art and architecture during the Italian Renaissance are other examples of the adaptation of civic discourses and aesthetic forms to new historical settings. See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974), 26–29, 148–149, 425; Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald T. Witt, *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); George Holmes, *Florence, Rome and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986); and Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), for additional examples of the revival and adaptation of conceptual frameworks and discourses from one historical epoch to another, in this case from antiquity to the Renaissance.
2. Human Rights Watch, *Caught in the Whirlwind: Torture and Denial of Due Process by the Kurdistan Security Forces* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 2007). The *Human Rights Watch 2010 Report* indicates serious abuses of human rights in both the Kurdish and Arab areas of Iraq, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87714>, as does Amnesty International in *Iraq: Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, February 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE14/006/2009/en>; see also “Killing Taints Iraqi Kurdistan Image,” *New York Times*, 18 May 2010, which discusses the torture and killing of a 23-year-old Kurdish journalist, Zardasht Osman, for writing critical articles criticizing the KRG leadership.
3. I am well aware of the contradictions inherent in considering Iraq as an exclusively Arab society when its non-Arab Kurdish population comprises between 15 and 20 percent of the population. Nonetheless, the continuation of authoritarian forms or rule among the traditional Kurdish leadership, particularly the Barzani family/clan/tribe and, to a lesser extent, the

Talabani, suggests parallels between the Kurdish and Arab experiences. Still, I would argue for the need for a separate analysis of Iraqi Kurdish society. This analysis is especially important for the period after 1991, when Iraqi Kurdistan was able to break away from the Ba'hist controlled south, and significant advances were made in civil society building and democratization by the Kurds. However, many Kurds complained bitterly, during interviews I conducted in Arbil in the fall of 2008, about the lack of democracy in Iraq's Kurdish provinces and the restrictions placed on the independent (i.e., nonparty) Kurdish press and establishing civil society organizations. See my "Many Kurds Support Iraq, Not Independence," *Newhouse News Service*, 16 December 2008, fas-polisci.rutgers.edu/davis, and "The Puzzle of Federalism in Iraq," *Middle East Report*, 247 (Summer 2008): 42–47. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss this issue in detail, there has been, historically, significant and continuous cultural, economic and social interaction between Arabs and Kurds in Iraq. Perhaps the most recent indication of this interaction is the fact that the president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, a Kurd and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), memorized almost all of the poetry of Iraq's most famous 19th century Arab poet, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawhiri. See *al-Hayat*, 27 April 2008.

4. It should be noted the Arabic term currently used to designate the public sphere, *al-majāllāt al-‘amma*, is formulated in the plural, adding a further complication. Someone could raise the question as to why the term is singular in English (and German) while plural in Arabic.
5. This problem recalls the "private language" debate between ordinary language philosophy and logical positivism, best represented by Ludwig Wittgenstein and A.J. Ayer respectively. Wittgenstein argues that only concepts whose criteria for usage are socially grounded, i.e., understood by the society at large, possess meaning. Concepts whose criteria of application are limited to a small coterie of practitioners face the problem of not being understood outside the group for whom they constitute a "private language." See his *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953); and *The Blue and the Brown Books* (New York: Harper, 1958). See also George Pitcher, ed., *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1966), especially Rogers Albritton, "On Wittgenstein's Use of the Term 'Criterion,'" 231–250; A. J. Ayer, "Can There Be a Private Language?" 251–266; and Rush Rhees,

- “Can There Be a Private Language?” 267–285.
6. See, for example, Moheb Zaki, *Civil Society & Democratization in Egypt, 1981–1994* (Cairo: The Ibn Khaldun Center and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 1994).
 7. See Falih ‘Abd al-Jabbar, *al-Dawla, al-Mujtama‘ al-Madani wa-Mustaqbal al-Dimuqratiyya fi al-‘Iraq* [The State, Civil Society and the Democratic Transition in Iraq] (Cairo: Ibn Khaldun Center, 1995).
 8. For the online editions of *al-Sabah*, see <http://www.alsabaah.com>; for *al-Mada*, <http://www.almadapaper.com>.
 9. This literature was, of course, highly influenced by Seymour Martin Lipset’s famous essay, “Economic Development and Democracy.” See his *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday & Co, 1963 [1959]), 27–63. For a critique of this model, see Larry Diamond, “Universal Democracy?” *Policy Review* 119 (June 2003): 6.
 10. See, for example, ‘Abd al-Karim al-Izri, *Mushkilat al-Hukm fi al-‘Iraq: Tahlil li-l-‘Awamil al-Ta’ifiyya wa-l-Sansur fi Ta’til al-Hukm al-Dimuqrati fi al-‘Iraq wa-l-Hulul al-Dururiyya li-l-Taghallub ‘alayha* [The Problem of Political Rule in Iraq: An Analysis of the Sectarian and Chauvinist Factors in Preventing Democracy in Iraq and the Necessary Solutions to Surmount Them] (London: n.p., 1991); Farhud Ibrahim, *al-Ta’ifiyya wa-l-Siyasa fi al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi: Namudhij al-Shi’a fi al-‘Iraq - Ru’ya fi Mawdu‘ al-Din wa-l-Siyasa fi al-Mujtama‘ al-‘Arabi al-Mu’asir* [Sectarianism and Politics in the Arab World: The Case of the Shi’a in Iraq, An Overview of Politics and Religion in Contemporary Arab Society] (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1996); and Hadi Hasan al-‘Alawi, *Aswar al-Tin fi ‘Uqdat al-Kuwayt wa Idiyulujiiyyat al-Damm* [Mud Walls in the Kuwait Debacle and the Ideology of Expansionism] (Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, 1995).
 11. For a discussion of this trend within the context of writers concerned with Arab-Islamic *turāth*, see Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
 12. For a discussion of the Western tradition of the public sphere, see Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), especially his “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere,” 1–50.
 13. See, for example, Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas*

- and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109–142; and Michael Schudson, “Was There Ever a Public Sphere,” in the same volume, 143–163.
14. For an elaboration of these preconditions, see my *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005), 29–108; for the development of similar preconditions in Egypt, see my *Challenging Colonialism: Bank Misr and Egyptian Industrialization, 1920–1941* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), especially 12–79.
 15. On the notion of democracy as the process of selecting between circulating elites, see Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).
 16. Davis, *Memories of State*, 46, 52.
 17. For a discussion of the failures of Bush administration policies in Iraq, see my “Rebuilding a Non-Sectarian Iraq,” *Strategic Insights* 6, no. 6 (December 2007), <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2007/Dec/davisDec07.pdf>.
 18. Davis, *Memories of State*, 40–44, 47.
 19. For a listing of many of these newspapers, see Zahida Ibrahim, *Kashf al-Jara'id wa-l-Majallat al-'Iraqiyya* [Index of Iraqi Newspapers and Journals] (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, Dar al-Hurriyya li-l-Tiba'a, 1976).
 20. For a discussion of the literary salons in Baghdad, see Husayn Hatim al-Karkhi, *Majalis al-Adab fi Baghdad* [Baghdad's Literary Salons] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 2003).
 21. On the Iraqi coffeehouse, see 'Abbas Baghdadi, *li-alla Nansa: Baghdad fi al-'Ishriniyyat* [So That We Do Not Forget: Baghdad in the 1920s] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1998), 119–130; see also Buland al-Haydari, “Baghdad Bayn Maqahi al-Ubada' wa-Udaba' al-Maqahi” [Baghdad Between the Coffeehouses of the Men of Letters and the Men of Letters of the Coffeehouses], *al-Majalla* 493 (24 July 1989): 50–53. I am grateful to the late Mai Ghassoub, former director of al-Saqi Books, for giving me this reference.
 22. Eric Davis, “The New Iraq: The Uses of Memory,” *Journal of Democracy* 16 no. 3 (July 2005): 55–57.
 23. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 19–20.
 24. Davis, *Memories of State*, 47–49. This Muslim conception of the Christian

- and Jewish communities as integral parts of Iraqi society contrasts with the appellation given to Christians and Jews in Egypt who had often resided there for lengthy periods of time as “*al-mutamisriyyun*” (“would-be Egyptians”). Unlike in Iraq, non-Coptic Christians and Jews were often drawn from foreign communities resident in Egypt. On these groups, see my *Challenging Colonialism*, 93.
25. Kamal Mazhar Ahmad, *al-Tabaqa al-Amila al-Iraqiyya: al-Takawwun wa-Bidayat al-Taharruk* [The Iraqi Working Class: Its Formation and Early Activities] (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid li-l-Nashr, 1981), 127–154.
 26. For more information on the Iraqi working class, see my “Utopia From Below’: The Inclusionary Discourse of the Iraqi Working Class,” Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, 22 March 2000; and my “History for the Many or History for the Few? The Historiography of the Iraqi Working Class,” in *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*, edited by Zachary Lockman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 271–301.
 27. For the best study on the June 1954 elections, see Ja’far ‘Abbas Humaydi, *al-Tatawwurat wa-l-Ittijahat al-Siyasiyya al-Dakhiliyya fi al-‘Iraq, 1953–1958* [Developments and Internal Political Tendencies in Iraq, 1953–1958], 82–103.
 28. For a list of the political parties formed prior to and following the 1920 Revolt, see ‘Alaywi, *al-Ahzab al-Siyasiyya fi al-‘Iraq al-Sirriyya wa-l-‘Alaniyya*, 53–82.
 29. Davis, *Memories of State*, 48, 50–51, 82, 92–93, 97–99.
 30. See, for example, Salim Taha al-Takriti, “al-Jawahiri Sahafiyan” [al-Jawahiri as Journalist], in *Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, edited by Hadi al-‘Alaywi (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Andalus, 1969), 195–214; Davis, *Memories of State*, 49.
 31. Baghdadi, *li-alla Nansa: Baghdad fi al-‘Ishriniyyat*, 119.
 32. I am indebted to Dr. Riyad ‘Aziz Hadi, vice-president for academic affairs and former dean of the faculty of law and political science, Baghdad University, for much information on the history of the coffeehouse in Iraq. Written communication, “al-Maqahi,” 26 September 2007.
 33. Davis, *Memories of State*, 95.
 34. Baghdadi, *li-alla Nansa: Baghdad fi al-‘Ishriniyyat*, 124; Davis, *Memories of*

- State*, 94–95.
35. For a discussion of the Iraqi short story see Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, “The Sociopolitical Context of the Iraqi Short Story, 1908–1968,” in *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory and Popular Culture*, edited by Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1991), 202–227.
 36. Buland al-Haidiri (al-Haydari), “Jawad Salim and Faiq Hassan and the Birth of Modern Art in Iraq,” *UR* 4 (1985): 19.
 37. Of course, there were many subtexts to the struggle between Iraqist and Pan-Arab nationalists in Iraq. For a discussion of the formative components of these two ideological tendencies, see my *Memories of State*, 13–15.
 38. Eric Davis, “History Matters: Past as Prologue in Building Democracy in Iraq,” *Orbis* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 232.
 39. For details on these attacks, see “Horror at Gruesome Murder of Two Iraqi Journalists,” *Reporters Without Borders*, 16 May 2005; Sophie Hebden and Wagdy Sawahel, “Iraqi Intellectuals Targeted by Assassins,” *Mail & Guardian* (South Africa), 4 July 2006; Abduhussein Ghazal, “Slated for Killing: More than 450 Iraqi Intellectuals Fear for Their Lives,” *Azzaman*, 8 May 2006.
 40. For results of the poll, see Global Policy Form, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/resist/2007/0319iraqpoll.pdf>.
 41. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 229–235, 238–239.
 42. On efforts of sectarian forces to suppress coffeehouse culture, see “Book Market Fire Piles on the Misery for Broken Baghdad,” *The Independent*, 1 November 2003; Phillip Robertson, “The Death of al-Mutannabi Street,” *Salon.com*, 26 August 2005. For the history of the Shabandar coffeehouse, see Muhammad Ibrahim Muhammad, “Maqha al-Shabandar fi Baghdad” [The Shabandar Coffeehouse of Baghdad], *Majallat al-Turath al-Sha’bi* [The Journal of Popular Culture] 38, no. 2 (2007): 142–145; and “Baghdad Car Bomb Kills 20 on Bookseller’s Row,” *New York Times*, 6 March 2007.
 43. For some of the more important Iraqi blogs, see Dr. Toufic al-Tounji at <http://altonchi.blogspot.com/>; Jassim al-Rassif at <http://arraseef.blogspot.com/>; alressd at <http://alressd.maktoobblog.com/>; <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/>, written by Riverbend, a young Baghdadi woman who wrote *Baghdad Burning*; last-of-iraqis.blogspot.com, written by Muhammad,

a 25-year-old Iraqi dentist in Baghdad; livesstrong.blogspot.com, written by a 15-year-old Mosul girl; astarfrommosul.blogspot.com, written by "Aunt Najma," a 19-year-old engineering student from Mosul; <http://iraqthemodel.blogspot.com/>, written by two young Iraqi men, Omar and Mohammed; and <http://hammadorabi.blogspot.com/arabic/>, a Web site probably written by an Iraqi Shi'i hostile to U.S. occupation. For one of the best Iraqi blogs, see <http://shekomakoiniraq.blogspot.com/>, which has a very sophisticated set of articles on a wide variety of political, historical and cultural topics.

44. Saddam wrote extensively, whether by his own hand or with the help of ghost writers, on the topic of the rewriting of Iraqi history. See, for example, Saddam Husayn, *Hawla Kitabat al-Tarikh* [On the Writing of History] (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriyya li-l-Tiba'a, 1979).
45. The following section draws heavily on my *Strategies for Promoting Democracy in Iraq*, Special Report No 152 (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, October 2005); and "The New Iraq."
46. One of the unfortunate aspects of postwar United States policy in Iraq, and of many well-meaning Western NGOs, is to try and encourage change solely through the use of concepts and strategies of democratization derived from either the West or from Western efforts at democratization in other countries, e.g., the Balkans. For a critique of United States foreign policy in Iraq, see my "Domino Democracy: Challenges to United States Foreign Policy in a Post-Saddam Middle East," in *Patriotism, Democracy and Common Sense: Restoring America's Promise at Home and Abroad*, edited by Fred R. Harris and Lynn A. Curtis (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 201–218; and "Prospects for Democracy in Iraq," E-Notes, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 30 June 2004.
47. *The Journal of Popular Culture* began to be published again after 2003 with the same high quality that characterized its articles even under the Ba'athist regime.
48. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Assassinations Tear Into Iraq's Educated Class," *New York Times*, 7 February 2004; Oliver Poole, "Killings Lead to Brain Drain from Iraq," *Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2006; Bryan Bender and Farah Stockman, "Iraq's Violent 'Brain Drain' Called a Threat to Future: Killers Target Academics, Professionals," *Boston Globe*, 30 November 2006; Associated Press, "Judge Gunned Down in Baghdad," 14 January 2008.

49. One of the most powerful demonstrations of Iraqi nationalism, one which included all Iraq's constituent ethnic groups, was the outpouring of support for the Iraqi national soccer team after it defeated Saudi Arabia and won the Asia Cup on 29 July 2007. Significantly, Kurds who flew the Iraqi flag in Arbil were threatened with imprisonment if they did not immediately lower them. This information was derived from interviews that I conducted in Arbil, October and November 2007. See BBC News, "Iraq Celebrates Football Victory," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6921078.stm (29 July 2007); and Jorvan Vieira, "If Ever Anyone Needed a Win..." *Observer Sport Monthly*, 2 September 2007.