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# Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East

Struggles, Histories, Historiographies

Edited by  
Zachary Lockman

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Zachary Lockman

23. *Awraq 'Ummaliyya*, no. 6 (April 1986): 1.

24. For example, Amina Shafiq, *al-Idrab* (Cairo, May 1986); Amina Shafiq, *al-Tabaqa al-'amila al-misriyya: al-nasb 'a, al-tatawwur, al-nidalat* (Cairo, January 1987); Taha Sa'd 'Uthman et al., "bi-taklif min maktab al-'ummal al-markazi li-hizb al-tagammu' al-watani al-taqaddumi," 100 *'amm min al-nidal: fi dhikra al-mi'awiyya li'l-'id al-'alumi li'l-'ummal, mayu 1886-mayu 1986* (Cairo, May 1986).

25. *Sawt al-'Amil* also published a booklet in solidarity with the strike of the railroad engineers and stokers: Ahmad Sharaf al-Din, Ilhami al-Mirghani, and Sabir Barakat, *Kijlab 'ummal al-sikka al-hadid fi ihamanin 'amman, 1906-1986* (Cairo, 1986).

26. Among them are *al-Samaya'iyya* [The Workmen] for the Helwan Iron and Steel Company; *al-Fajr* [The Dawn] for Mahalla al-Kubra and Charbiyya province; *al-'Ard* [The Land] for the Talkha fertilizer plant; and *'Ummal Shubra al-Khayma* [Shubra al-Khayma Workers] for the Shubra al-Khayma area.

27. *Qadaya Fikriyya* (al-Tabaqa al-'amila al-misriyya: al-turath, al-hadir, afaq al-mustaqbal), no. 5 (May 1987). The editor of *Qadaya Fikriyya*, Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, is considered to be a leading member of the Communist Party of Egypt.

28. Taha Sa'd 'Uthman, "al-Itizam wa'l-mawdu'iyya fi kitabat ta'rikh al-tabaqa al-'amila al-misriyya," in *Ta'rikh misr bayna al-mamaj al-'ilmi wa'l-sira' al-hizbi: a'mal nadwat 'al-iltizam wa'l-mawdu'iyya fi kitabat ta'rikh misr al-ma'asir, 1919-1982, al-qabira, 1987*, ed. Ahmad 'Abd Allah (Cairo, 1988), p. 289.

29. Taha Sa'd 'Uthman, *Min ta'rikh al-tabaqa al-'amila al-misriyya: mudakkirat wa-watba'iq*, 3 vols.: *al-kitab al-ithni* (Cairo, 1982); *al-kitab al-awwal: kijlab 'ummal al-nasj* (Shubra al-Khayma, 1983); *al-kitab al-italib: al-tabaqa al-'amila wa'l-'amal al-siyasi* (Cairo, 1988).

30. For example, the editorial of *Awraq 'Ummaliyya*, no. 6 (April 1986): 1, obliquely defended the prohibition of strikes by the Nasserist regime.

31. Ahmad Sharaf al-Din, "Astar madhbahat Kafr al-Dawwar," *Sawt al-'Amil* nos. 3-5 (October 1985, January 1986, April 1986). These articles are based on extensive historic research, and the author intends to see an expanded version published as a book. On the call for a workers' party and further criticism of the Nasserist regime, see Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam, "Wad' al-tabaqa al-'amila fi misr," *Sawt al-'Amil* no. 6 (May 1986): 11-17.

32. Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), pp. 4-5. Przeworski's current attraction to rational choice theory would probably lead him to reject this formulation now.

33. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York, 1980), pp. 81, 83.

34. O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject," pp. 202-203.

35. Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 8.

## 10

## History for the Many or History for the Few? The Historiography of the Iraqi Working Class

One of the most radical working-class movements to appear in the Middle East developed in Iraq between the early 1930s and the 1958 Revolution. Encompassing workers from all sectors of the Iraqi economy, the movement exhibited a level of worker solidarity unparalleled in the region. Following the 1958 Revolution, labor radicalism began to decline and the Iraqi working class lost its prominent role in Iraqi politics. With the massacre or imprisonment of thousands of Iraqi communists and leftists following the 1963 coup d'état that overthrew 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, the movement lost many of its leaders, and labor activism declined still further. Following the seizure of power in 1968 by a Ba'th party faction controlled by Saddam Husayn, workers became even more tightly controlled, particularly by state-dominated labor organizations formed to ensure worker quiescence.

The significance of the Iraqi working class lies not just in the rise and decline of its political power but also in the vision it proffered for Iraq's political, social, and cultural development. Put differently, the cooperation among the diverse ethnolinguistic and confessional groups that formed the Iraqi working class represented a view of Iraqi society that emphasized social justice and tolerance of cultural difference, what is referred to later as the progressive discourse of the Iraqi working class. Although fully supportive of Iraq's Arab character and committed to independence from British colonial control, working-class organizations emphasized the primacy of class over nation and the need for a cross-class alliance as a means of addressing Iraq's multiethnic and multi-confessional character. In their view, true democracy could be achieved only if Iraq were freed from colonial domination, class inequality, and cultural repression.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the chauvinist nationalism used by the Iraqi state to justify the recent invasions of Iran and Kuwait, the history of the Iraqi

working class assumes added significance. The emphasis of working-class organizations on cross-cultural and multiethnic alliances stands in stark contrast to the thinly veiled racism and politics of exclusion promoted by the state under the Arab Socialist Ba'ath party. Understanding why the Ba'ath party's vision of society prevailed over that advocated by the Iraqi working class, the Communist party, and their leftist supporters requires a historical analysis and answers to a number of prior questions.

First, how was it possible for such a high degree of worker radicalism to develop during the prerevolutionary period? If politics in Iraq is in fact governed by ethnic and confessional cleavages, how were labor organizations able to recruit workers from such a wide variety of ethnolinguistic and confessional backgrounds? Equally important, why did worker radicalism dissipate so quickly after the 1958 Revolution? What are the implications of these developments for the role of workers in politics, not only in Iraq but elsewhere in the Arab world? For those who have argued for an inexorable march in the Middle East toward greater political participation and equality following the overthrow of monarchies and their replacement by radical nationalist regimes espousing leftist ideologies, the history of the Iraqi working class may be less than encouraging. Nevertheless, despite its ultimate failure to enact its vision, Iraqi working-class history offers great inspiration not only to those political movements that oppose the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad but to labor movements outside Iraq as well.

#### *Rethinking Working-Class History: Concepts and Method*

As implied by this volume's title, rethinking working-class history entails an reexamination of past research, offering alternative ways of viewing such research, and posing new conceptual frameworks for the study of labor activism. Beyond these concerns, the history of the Iraqi working class poses an additional question. If the decline in this class's political activism represents a historical experience specific to Iraq—an "internal problematic" as it were—then the question remains what those who are not part of this experience, such as Western academics, hope to accomplish through studying it. Clearly, scholars studying working-class movements in the Middle East (and elsewhere in the Third World) hope their work will encourage greater distribution of wealth and political

power and increased life chances for the poor, women, and culturally oppressed minorities. The choice of working-class movements as a topic of study, then, reflects a desire to contribute toward positive social change in the Middle East. What contribution can research and writing by those outside Iraq make, and what form should this take? Why are we writing about workers whose cultures and political practices are very different from our own? Who constitutes our audience(s), and what do we wish to convey to it (them)? In short, what do we hope to accomplish through our writing?

Cynics might argue that Western academic interest in Middle Eastern workers represents a subtle form of Orientalism. Although the object of study differs from the classic concerns of Orientalists, it might be seen as yet another form of the "escape into the exotic." This would be especially true if such study allowed academics to enjoy vicarious political participation through the action of Middle East workers given declining participation and relative political passivity in the West. This form of "Third Worldism" could be seen as pernicious if it were meant to leave to Third World workers the role of active agency in bringing about progressive social change while abdicating a responsibility to enact social change "at home."

To avoid confusion, Western researchers need to make explicit how they view their subject and what they hope to accomplish in examining it. One way of achieving this end is through linking our writing on Iraqi or other Third World workers to American society. Workers in the West and those who advocate a "politics of tolerance" have much to learn from the Iraqi working class. In making such linkages, we offset the potential, however unintentional, to construct more binary oppositions juxtaposing "us" to "them" and to transform Iraqi workers into yet another exotic element of Third World culture that remains beyond comprehension, thereby "proving" once again the impenetrability of Third World society. In my view, the problematic of the Iraqi working class is centered around the issues of oppression, cultural difference, and participation: oppression in the sense that workers in Iraq as in most other countries have suffered greatly both from existing working conditions and the consequences of their own efforts to improve these conditions; cultural difference in the sense that opposition to working-class demands represents a metaphor of the refusal of successive groups that have controlled the Iraqi state to accept the notion of Iraq as a multiethnic, multiconfessional, and multilinguistic society; and

participation in the sense that workers have largely been excluded from political and economic decision making in Iraq.

Our efforts should be directed at expanding Western consciousness about the relationship between what transpires in Iraq and what occurs in our own society. With the end of superpower conflict and the threat of thermonuclear war, the global cleavage pitting the industrialized "North" against the underdeveloped "South" has assumed greater prominence as demonstrated by the recent Gulf War. Considering the everincreasing economic interrelationship of the two regions, it behooves citizens of advanced industrialized countries to adopt at least an empathetic if not sympathetic perspective toward non-Western societies. If only on practical, if not on moral-ethical, grounds, the continued economic deterioration of the Third World, of which the oppressive conditions of workers and other sectors of the lower classes represent the most serious manifestation, bodes ill for the continued economic prosperity of the advanced industrialized countries.

More directly, it has been argued that the United States has intervened in the internal politics of Iraq on numerous occasions. From the formative American role in establishing the 1955 Baghdad Pact, to the alleged role played by the Central Intelligence Agency in the overthrow of the Qasim regime in 1963, and the significant contributions by the Reagan and Bush administrations (as well as other European states) to the economic and military strength of Saddam Husayn's regime prior to the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the United States bears its share of responsibility for political developments in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, far from representing an "exotic other" that bears no relationship to American society, the Iraqi working class, and the larger society of which it is a part, has suffered from the United States' complicity in backing repressive regimes in Iraq.

#### *Marxism and the Study of Working-Class History*

The shadow that has haunted all studies of working-class history in the Middle East is Marxian political economy. For many Marxist theorists who have studied the Middle East, the development of capitalist relations of production, the region's integration into the world market, the spread of nationalism, the overthrow of monarchies and their replacement by republican regimes, the nationalization of foreign and

domestic industry, and perhaps most important the radicalization of sectors of the working class, peasantry, students, and intelligentsia all augured well for the ultimate development of socialism.<sup>3</sup> However, actual historical change has not borne out this optimism. The ascendancy of Nasserism in Egypt, Ba'thism in Syria and Iraq, Algerian socialism, and other forms of radical Arab nationalism such as Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi's blend of Arabism and Islam have not necessarily led to a more liberatory politics in these societies or a more equitable distribution of economic wealth. In certain respects, workers, peasants, and students possessed greater autonomy to engage in political protest prior to the coming to power of purported revolutionary regimes than afterward.<sup>4</sup> With the rise of what 'Issam al-Khafaji has called *state capitalism* [*al-ra'smaliyya al-dawliyya*] and its attendant "parasitic bourgeoisie" [*al-burjuwaziyya al-tajfiriyya*], social inequality and standards of living in the Arab countries that experienced radical nationalist revolutions have not changed significantly since the overthrow of the ancient regimes.<sup>5</sup>

A core problem that has afflicted many studies of working-class movements and broader political economies of the Middle East that were strongly influenced by Marxism is the notion that the understanding of social change in the region could be derived from the application of "science" and the development of "laws" of historical movement. This understanding is highly reified and ethnocentric because it is based on the historical model presented in *Das Kapital*, which in turn is derived from the Western tradition, particularly the British experience. Recent works such as Chakrabarty's study of Indian jute workers demonstrate all too clearly the fallacies inherent in the attempts to apply uncritically Western models of social change that are based in universalistic-scientific notions to an understanding of worker consciousness, activism, and solidarity.<sup>6</sup> If anything, workers today play a more diminished role in Arab politics than they did during the 1940s and 1950s, if strikes, political demonstrations, and the number of independent worker organizations are used as indicators of political participation.<sup>7</sup> In Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Algeria, replacing the ancien régime with radical nationalist elites did not lead to greater social equality but rather to the rise of new bourgeoisies closely tied to the state.

Making sense of the Iraqi working class necessitates the "deconstruction" of much of the teleological thinking in the Marxian paradigm as it has been applied to the Middle East. One of the first Marxists to grasp the importance of transcending a narrow class analysis

in an effort to understand the potentialities for workers and members of the lower classes to confront political and economic oppression was Antonio Gramsci. In attributing great significance to the impact of nationalism, Gramsci not only called attention to the need to situate workers in a broader social context but also to the need to integrate culture and ideology into any study of social change.

In many respects, Gramsci's analysis of *risorgimento* Italy is highly relevant to the Middle East, particularly Iraq. Rather than confronted with a working class struggling to expand its political freedom and economic power within an established nation-state and well-defined system of hegemony, Gramsci instead faced a labor movement that functioned within a nascent political community in which there was considerable dissent over the definition of national identity. The lack of agreement over the concept of the Italian nation-state, strong regional loyalties that countervailed allegiances to a central state, and the significant geographical discrepancy of wealth between the northern and southern portions of the country remind us of many of the problems faced by twentieth century postcolonial Arab countries. Because the contours of the Iraqi nation-state were being debated in the 1920s at the same time as the formation of the Iraqi working class (paralleling the Italian situation somewhat earlier), class and national consciousness were intertwined. As both countries were also seeking to shed foreign domination, clearly each case requires a focus on both class and nation when analyzing working-class consciousness.

Among Gramsci's most important contributions for understanding social change are his notions of the "historical bloc," the "organic intellectuals," and the "war of position."<sup>8</sup> The notion of a historical bloc is based on the premise that no political regime can rule for long if it is unable to convince subaltern groups that its interests coincide with their own. This structure of thought expands the ideological-cultural component of class struggle and draws us away from simply envisioning this process in terms of overt conflict. For Gramsci, subaltern groups must internalize the ideology of the ruling class if that class is to exercise what he calls *hegemony*.

The notion of the "organic intellectuals" is thus key to Gramsci's thinking because each class must have members who articulate its interests and aspirations. These organic intellectuals engage in a "war of position" in articulating contending visions of the future that compete in the public sphere for the allegiances of social groups. In this conceptual

framework, history and myth become intertwined as ruling groups in particular seek to promote a socially constructed past that serves their interests while simultaneously obscuring the contributions of the subaltern classes to historical change and social development. In trying to understand the development of working-class politics in Iraq, a key question would be the extent to which the organic intellectuals of the working class were able to articulate a vision that not only appealed to workers but also to potential allies among other classes or social groups. To what extent were they able to forge a counterhegemonic "historical bloc?"

In arguing that much if not most historical writing is socially constructed, Gramsci anticipated many elements of more recent phenomenological and poststructuralist writings. Because historical writing has been dominated largely by the ruling classes, it conforms more to myth than to some notion of objective truth. As such, it must be "deconstructed" for subaltern groups to gain a better sense of their own place in history.<sup>9</sup> The organic intellectuals of the working class are key in helping to promote this understanding. A number of questions that need to be asked in the Iraqi context are how has the history of the Iraqi working class been constructed, why has it been constructed in certain ways, and what has been the impact of this construction both on the working class's ability to improve its situation and the larger society of which it is a part?

For Marxist theory, the impact of Gramsci's writings has been to both enrich the study of working-class movements and in a curious sense, to undermine it. Gramsci's statement that "every man (woman?) is a philosopher" indicates his rejection of the image of the industrial worker that pervades socialist realism, both in its literary form and in visual representation. In place of the heroic worker who unquestioningly follows the vanguard party's directives in the struggle for socialism, an image that dominated Leninist and Stalinist readings of Marx, Gramsci substitutes a more fluid scenario in which workers assess their own interests and provide indicators to their leaders as to when efforts to bring about revolutionary transformation are appropriate.

Gramsci's approach endows Marxism with greater flexibility, but it erodes its more traditional (and positivist) linear form by demonstrating that the outcome of history is not preordained. The potential for multiple levels of consciousness historically relativizes processes of social change. Within this analytic framework, class consciousness is no longer shaped

and molded in some rigid and fixed sense by "material conditions." Because workers act on historical forces as much as they are acted on by them, the trajectory of "history" can no longer be that confidently predicted. In other words, the logical outcome of a humanist as opposed to a Leninist reading of Gramsci is to chip away at notions of teleology and "scientific" understanding of the role of the working class in social change.<sup>10</sup> If we examine Gramsci's writings on Italy, it is clear that he was well aware of the possibilities of regional, religious, and nationalist identities acting as cross-cutting cleavages to undermine working-class solidarity.<sup>11</sup> Thus working-class consciousness, the direction of social change, and the potential for worker solidarity all become more problematic than in "economistic" readings of Marxist theory.

In seeking to free the study of working-class history from the shackles of economism and positivism, does not Gramsci's theoretical fluidity ultimately deny the working class any privileged position in the process of social change? In other words, if worker responses to material conditions are not predetermined and are open to wide variation, in what sense does "the working class" retain its significance as an object of study? The problem of theoretical arguments that profess universalistic application has been compounded by recent anti-Orientalist, post-structuralist, and postmodernist critiques. Although the critique of Orientalism seems first and foremost an attack on ethnocentrism in Western research, the efforts of poststructuralism and postmodernism seem more closely tied to attempts to break down binary oppositions, linear notions of progress, and male-centered theories while simultaneously introducing greater conceptual anarchy into the approaches brought to the study of social and cultural change. The impact of these critiques has been to erode the notion of a unified vision or predetermined historical outcome. From feminist and Third World perspectives, the notion of "a vision" is often seen as an exercise in power whereby white, economically privileged Western men impose their own understanding of the force and direction of social change under the guise of objective theory.<sup>12</sup> In examining workers, how can an implicit teleological argument that somehow history is being made by the working class and will ultimately lead to the implementation of socialism be avoided?

A volume on Middle East labor history necessarily privileges workers, if only by making them the central focus of study. What form does this privileging take? Certainly, Western scholars' interest in workers

reflects a reaction to the emphasis of Orientalism and modernization theory on the role of "Great Men of History" and political, economic, and cultural elites. There has been an attempt to rectify the shortcomings of "top-down" history with history from the "bottom up." The focus on excluded groups fills important lacunae, but how does studying workers assist in transcending the conceptual shortcomings of prior paradigms? If the study of workers is not limited to performing an "additive function," namely, filling in the empirical or descriptive gaps left by the prior research of Orientalists and modernization theorists, then students of labor movements in the Middle East need to be concerned with developing new conceptual approaches as well.

In understanding social change in a capitalist or nascent capitalist economy, Marxian political economy privileges workers in at least two ways. First, following the labor theory of value, workers are conceptualized as residing in the "bowels of the whale." Put differently, because workers are most intimately linked to social reproduction by producing surplus value through their labor power, they, more than any other social group, experience society's tensions or contradictions most directly and severely. Through studying workers, then, one presumably obtains the most authentic understanding of the fundamental stresses and strains of a capitalist system, whether nascent or fully developed.

This assumption makes sense because an understanding of the Iraqi working class's development tells us much about why Iraq has experienced such violence during the twentieth century, why the Iraqi Communist party was able to acquire such a large following, and why the country has experienced revolutionary upheaval. Not only did the Iraqi working class experience many of the social tensions of Iraqi society but it also actively strove to bring about social change through strikes, by participating in mass demonstrations and educational programs, and in supporting forces seeking to bring about social change.<sup>13</sup> Thus Iraqi workers can be seen as both reflecting social tensions and as agents seeking to bring about change to relieve these tensions.

However, to argue that the study of workers allows the researcher to grasp fundamental characteristics of ongoing social change does not necessarily require acceptance of the labor theory of value or a teleological view of history. It does not necessarily mean that, in some abstract or reified sense, workers are more important than, say, women, or confessional or ethnolinguistic groups, in understanding social change or that they will necessarily at some point in the future seize control of the state.



The application of other concepts of Marxist theory are also problematic. The notion of the development of the forces of production has served an important heuristic function as well as an empirical function. One of the most obvious examples is the introduction of the assembly line into modern industrial production, which led Gramsci to formulate his concept of "Fordism."<sup>14</sup> However, to attempt to derive a projection of working-class behavior and consciousness from a change in the forces of production is highly problematic. The mode of production—the more inclusive concept from which the forces of production is drawn—can also be problematic if efforts are made to deduce the types of behavior that workers should be expected to engage in given the level of development of the (capitalist) mode of production.

In summary, a study of Iraqi working-class history will not necessarily yield any predictions about the future. No teleology can be derived from the study of Iraqi workers. Indeed, to attempt to do so is, at one level, to rob workers of their own agency. Care must be taken not to confuse what is seen as scientific prediction with a normative imposition of what we feel Iraqi workers "should" do. We should even be skeptical of the notion of *the* history of the working class, as if it were some type of objective reality in a positivist sense. Instead, I would suggest the contingent nature of all existing histories in that each is socially constructed and each reflects, in the elements or events it emphasizes, its own normative proclivities. Because access to these histories is largely filtered through "organic intellectuals," whether of the state or the working class itself, it behooves us to examine the role of intellectuals in the presentation of histories of the Iraqi working class.

These arguments do not represent a plea for theoretical anarchy or even solipsism. They neither deny the utility of Marxist concepts, which often serve important heuristic functions, nor do they suggest that we avoid making predictions. Rather the thrust of the arguments is for the need for a broader epistemological and conceptual terrain within which to understand workers and their actions. It was precisely the narrowness of the Iraqi Communist party's conceptualization of the Iraqi working class that helps answer a question posed earlier. In assuming that the revolutionary overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 represented a major step forward in an inevitable coming to power of the working class and other subaltern groups such as the peasantry, the Iraqi Communist party seriously underestimated the extent to which large segments of the middle and lower middle classes opposed such

an outcome. The massacre and imprisonment of thousands of communists and leftist sympathizers, labor leaders, and workers in 1963 following the overthrow of the Qasim regime was the ultimate and tragic demonstration of the shortcomings of this thinking.

What these observations indicate is the crucial character of Gramsci's notion of the "war of position." How a sociopolitical group or movement views the world and its ability to articulate that vision to the larger society is crucial to its success or failure in achieving its goals. The Iraqi working class possessed tremendous political support during the 1940s and 1950s but was unable to ultimately translate this support into political power. Without reducing the Iraqi working class's historical experience to the realm of conceptualization, many of its problems resided in its faulty vision of social change. Conversely, the vision of radical Arab nationalism in the form of the Ba'athism, however unattractive, proved more effective in capturing the political mood and imagination of the postrevolutionary era. With these thoughts in mind, what do competing historiographies of the Iraqi working class tell us about the visions and strategies that contending political forces in Iraqi society have used in relation to the working class and how they affected its fortunes?

#### *Competing Historiographies of the Iraqi Working Class*

In making conceptual sense of Iraqi working-class history, existing writings may be divided among three historiographical approaches.<sup>15</sup> Chronologically, the first to appear is what we might term the *Orientalist* historiography of the working class. Expressed in British and American consular reports, in studies by colonial officials and businessmen, in Western newspaper articles, and in incidental comments in travelogues, this perspective most often viewed Iraqi workers with disdain and condescension.<sup>16</sup> A second historiography emerges from the writings of Iraqi communists and leftists. Articulated in pamphlets, speeches, and newspaper articles during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, this literature portrayed the Iraqi working class as the vanguard of social change in ridding Iraq of Western imperialism and developing a democratic society in which minority rights would be respected. Since the 1970s, this writing has taken the form of longer articles, primarily in the Iraqi Communist party's journal, *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida*, in the journal of the Center of Socialist

Research and Studies in the Arab World, *al-Nabj*, and in a number of book-length studies.<sup>17</sup> A third type of historiography has been defined largely by Ba'ist ideology. This represents the most recent writing on the Iraqi working class and has taken the forms of newspaper and journal articles, a limited number of monographs, and most recently, an examination of the portrayal of workers in Iraqi literature.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Who Is a Worker?*

In these writings, what exactly is meant by the Iraqi working class? If little has been written on Iraqi workers considering their significant role in twentieth century Iraqi politics, there has been even less reflection on what the term *worker* or *working class* actually connotes. Whether in Orientalist, Marxist, or Ba'ist writings, petty merchants, artisans, industrial workers, and service workers are often lumped together conceptually as an undifferentiated mass. Although all sectors of the working class exhibited radicalism from the 1930s onward, industrial and service workers sustained a higher level of political activism over time than petty merchants and artisans, who are also categorized as workers. Conceptual reflection on what it means to be a worker is not an issue treated systematically in the existing literature.

How are we to understand the concept of worker in Iraqi society? This is not an abstract question as different types of workers demonstrated varying levels of political activism. Why, for example, did railway workers, port workers in Basra, oil workers, and workers on British military bases exhibit a more sustained level of radicalism than workers in the traditional craft and small industrial sectors in urban areas, especially Baghdad?

Gramsci's notion of the historical bloc is instructive here. The closer ties of urban artisans and craftsmen to members of the commercial middle class, due especially to a certain level of shared financial interests, meant that it was easier for nationalist ideas to penetrate this stratum of workers. Because more prosperous (but by no means wealthy) merchants often appropriated the role of organic intellectuals for artisans and craft workers, class consciousness seems to have been increasingly subordinated among these laborers to the more corporatist form of nationalism articulated by the urban middle classes during the 1930s and 1940s. A good case in point is Ja'far Abu Timman—a representative of middle-level merchants in Baghdad, president of the chamber of

commerce, and the leader of the nationalist Ahali group—who was able to assume the role of spokesman for artisans and crafts workers.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, among the three historiographies, only Ba'ist writings discuss the appropriation of the oppositional voice of workers by other groups or social classes. However, this concern is treated ideologically rather than analytically. That is, Ba'ist historians' concern with this issue extends only to asserting that Ba'ist party members played key leadership roles in strikes and other labor actions in helping workers achieve their goals. Their comments shed little light on why some workers actually allowed their goals to be articulated by organic intellectuals from outside their ranks.

Viewed from "the bottom up," it can be argued that, having often been urban residents for at least several generations, many artisans and craft workers did not experience the sense of dislocation experienced by workers in more recently established sectors of the Iraqi economy, such as the rail system, the port of Basra, military bases, and oil installations. The development of a significant labor force outside the traditional craft sector began with a short section of the Iraqi state railways that was completed prior to World War I as part of the German effort to construct a Berlin to Baghdad railroad. It was only after the war that the railway began to expand throughout the country and a large work force was hired. Likewise, economic activity in the port of Basra increased dramatically after the war's end with Great Britain's occupation of the country, leading to an increase in the size of the work force there as well. Similarly, once Iraq was placed under mandatory status by the League of Nations, the establishment of military bases led the British to recruit large numbers of Iraqi workers to service these installations. However, the Iraqi oil industry produced the largest increase in workers. By the end of the 1920s, the Iraq Petroleum Company (formerly the Turkish Petroleum Company) had significantly increased its production following the signing of a concessionary agreement with the Iraqi government in 1925. Large numbers of workers were needed not only to operate the oil fields but also to lay the lengthy pipelines needed to transport the oil to terminals.<sup>20</sup>

In discussing the rise of working-class consciousness, little effort has been made to link its development to the weak sense of nationhood that existed in Iraq during the formative period of the working class. Apart from the urban artisan and crafts sector, the vast majority of workers in newly established industries and British military bases were

peasants who were recent migrants from rural areas, particularly southern Iraq.<sup>21</sup> These peasants, who were forced to migrate to urban areas by the deterioration of the agricultural sector and oppression by tribal shaykh-landlords, brought with them very little loyalty to any national boundaries or national consciousness. Many already had a history of political activism, having been involved in the 1920 Iraqi Revolution against the British, in struggles with the shaykhs and their agents, the *sirkals*, or in struggles with other tribes over agricultural land.<sup>22</sup> In light of their participation in previous conflict and their lack of or weak ties to urban social structures, peasants who became workers were particularly susceptible to developing incipient forms of class consciousness and, conversely, often not susceptible to internalizing forms of consciousness derived from classes higher up in the social order. In short, these workers often demonstrated greater class solidarity than support for the Arab nationalism of the middle classes.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of rural-urban migration on the formation and development of the Iraqi working class still waits to be explored. Did migrant peasants retain their sense of rural origins once they entered the industrial labor force?<sup>24</sup> To what extent did prior conflict with tribal shaykhs condition them to adopt radical political perspectives? Was worker solidarity strengthened by the fact that peasants from particular areas tended to congregate in certain industries, thereby combining preexisting ties, particularly clan identity, with new forms of solidarity? Because migration continues unabated and is considered potentially threatening by the state, as evidenced by its efforts to return peasants to the countryside, this issue requires far more analysis than it has received to date.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Social Differentiation of the Iraqi Working Class*

Apart from scattered references by communist intellectuals, the question of gender is largely absent from definitions of who is a worker.<sup>26</sup> Most (male) writers assume that to discuss an Iraqi worker means a male worker. The extent of female participation in the labor force remains largely unexamined. Nor has the relationship between family structure and worker radicalism been explored. To what extent did the deprivations that Iraqi workers suffered at the hands of foreign companies and the Iraqi government adversely affect the family and how did this in turn influence workers in their ability to organize themselves? Put differently,

the lack of any systematic study of the interaction between public and private spheres and its impact on worker activism and solidarity demonstrates an insensitivity among both Arab and non-Arab students of the Iraqi working class to the impact of gender relations and family structure.

One of the most contentious issues in discussing Iraqi society is its ethnolinguistic and confessional composition. Communist intellectuals strongly emphasize that party-led worker organizations that opposed the British and the monarchy drew upon workers from all social strata of Iraqi society. Indeed, one of the party's strongest claims to legitimacy derives from its argument that, alone among contending ideologies, its ideology offered the only means to integrate Iraq's major ethnic groups through emphasizing solidarity based on class rather than Arabism. Nevertheless, among publically available documents, only Western diplomatic correspondence and reports openly discuss the issue of ethnic diversity. As might be expected, diplomatic documents use ethnolinguistic and confessional differences to construct a conceptual prism through which all political and social behavior is evaluated.<sup>27</sup> The analytic silence on this issue is striking in both Marxist and Ba'athist historiography. For Marxists, social difference is simply overcome within the working class (and peasantry) through class solidarity. Ba'athists refuse to recognize that social difference has ever been politically salient in Iraqi society. To the extent that it is recognized, Ba'athists argue that such consciousness resulted from colonial attempts to divide and conquer the populace. Because colonial domination has ended, so too has the problem. The failure of both Iraqi and Western writers of varying ideological perspectives to systematically examine internal differentiations among Iraqi workers represents another serious shortcoming of existing studies.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Periodization*

Although often implicit in their writings, the issue of periodization is rarely made explicit by students of the Iraqi working class. The most comprehensive study of the Iraqi working class, the lengthy doctoral thesis by 'Abd al-Razzaq Mutlaq al-Fahd, focuses on the period between 1922 and 1959.<sup>29</sup> Al-Fahd divides his study into two sections: the first covers the period between 1922 and 1937, during which workers directed their efforts at organizing unions or syndicates (*al-miqabat*), and the second

reports, and from the speeches of Saddam Husayn are deemed sufficient proof that party and working class interests are synonymous.

Another characteristic of Ba'athist historiography is to subsume worker activity under the leadership of other groups. During the postrevolutionary period, especially after 1963 and even more so after 1968, this takes the form of Ba'ath party leadership that supposedly instills in workers an understanding of their class interests and national responsibilities.<sup>33</sup> In treating the pre-1958 period, an even more pernicious form of rewriting labor history is to portray worker political activism as merely an extension of the manipulative politics of competing factions of the corrupt parliamentary elite that ruled in conjunction with the monarchy. A prominent example of this type of historiography is a study of the 1931 general strike protesting a law by the British that imposed a series of municipal fees or taxes on urban merchants, artisans, and vendors (*qanun rusum al-baladiyyat*). Although accepted by the Association historical interpretation that the strike was organized by the Association of Iraqi Artisans (*jam'iyyat ashab al-sana'i'*), the author, Sami 'Abd al-Hafiz al-Qaysi, argues that, once the association's president, Muhammad Salih al-Qazzaz, requested help from Yasir al-Hashimi, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, against the prime minister at the time, Nuri Sa'id, the strike was transformed from "a worker demonstration to a political weapon in the hands of the parliamentary opposition."<sup>34</sup>

Despite its revolutionary pretensions, Ba'ath party emphasis on the central role of elites rather than the workers themselves in its own interpretations of working-class history demonstrates a curious conflation of Orientalism and Leninism. Ba'athist writings parallel those of British and American diplomats in Iraq during the prerevolutionary period who constantly observed that, were it not for outside agitators, particularly communists, workers would not have engaged in violent activity or held out for "unreasonable demands."<sup>35</sup> Both Orientalist and Ba'athist historiography implicitly deny the working class the right of agency to determine its own future. Workers are viewed as childlike and politically immature and hence incapable of undertaking any independent political activity on their own. This view also dovetails with the Leninist principles on which the Ba'ath party was modeled in which the vanguard party imparts revolutionary consciousness to subaltern groups. In both structures of thought, little or no effort is made to view the world from a perspective gained from consultation with workers themselves such as espoused, for example, by Gramsci.

A third characteristic of Ba'athist historiography of the Iraqi working class is what may be termed *formalism*. In discussing the period following the 1963 overthrow of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, the emphasis is not on actual working conditions but rather on laws implemented by successive governments under the Ba'ath to improve working conditions. The few Ba'athist studies of Iraqi working-class history manifest a curious dualism. Following the traditional chronology of worker activism against British colonial rule and the monarchy prior to 1958, they employ an empirical approach, albeit one that downplays the leadership role of the Iraqi Communist party and the achievements of worker organizations independent of nationalist political elites. In writing about the period after 1958, and especially after 1963, empirical analysis gives way to a formal-legalistic approach that assumes that class conflict and exploitation no longer exist and that the interests of the state and the working class converge. A patronizing tone imbues these writings, as workers are admonished to live up to their national responsibilities, particularly through striving to increase levels of productivity in Iraqi industry.<sup>36</sup>

The analyses of Ba'athist intellectuals, both those writing directly about the working class and those writing about Iraqi industry, demonstrate the impact of Western writings on industrial management. These writings are distinguished by their emphasis on abstract notions of efficiency and their complete ahistoricism.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, Ba'athist conceptions of politics spill over into the socioeconomic sphere. Political history as well as socioeconomic history begin in 1963, once the first Ba'athist regime came to power. After 1968, history is replaced by abstract conceptions of utility, rationality, and efficiency. That is, all group and individual interests are subordinated to the needs of the corporatist nationalism of the Ba'ath in which the highest emphasis is placed upon economic and military growth and greater efficiency in political repression (although, of course, the latter goal is never officially stated). If Iraqi Marxism bears witness to the shortcomings of teleological thinking, Ba'athism offers us the ahistoricism of a neo-Taylorism. In this latter discourse, working-class history is lost altogether.

Other forms of Ba'athist writings that bear upon Iraqi workers likewise assume a patronizing and instrumentalist perspective. For example, workers are discussed in relation to illiteracy campaigns and how they may be enticed (forced?) to join them.<sup>38</sup> Programs of reverse migration are discussed for peasants and unemployed workers, who are seen as better served by returning to the countryside.<sup>39</sup> In the name

of revolutionary ideology, the Ba'athist regime has worked to obliterate the historical memory of Iraqi workers, which is a prerequisite for the type of abstract categorizing of workers that allows them to be ideologically channeled in directions that benefit those who control the state.

#### *The Progressive Discourse of the Iraqi Working Class*

If studying Iraqi working-class history does not allow us to model the future, to make any necessary predictions about the direction of social change in Iraq, in what sense does it contribute to a more liberatory politics inside and outside of Iraq? I would suggest that a study of Iraqi workers underlines the fallacies inherent in Eurocentric notions of history, particularly Orientalist discourse. It also helps us to better understand the current regime's efforts to rewrite the history of the Iraqi working class in ways that are intended to manipulate workers and increase their subordination to the state. Progressive discourse, then, signifies that the history of the Iraqi working class provides us with a deeper understanding not only of the main contours of social change in twentieth century Iraq but also of the possibilities for greater social justice in Iraqi society.

#### *The Fallacy of the Sunni-Shiite-Kurdish Triad*

An examination of Iraqi workers during the twentieth century demonstrates the fallacy of viewing Iraqi society through a conceptual lens that portrays historical change as governed by an unholy trinity that pits Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds against one another. Contrary to Orientalist understandings of Iraqi society in which the logic of collective action is reduced to essentialist notions of ethnolinguistic and confessional identity, studying Iraqi workers demonstrates that, to the extent that confessional differences have divided Iraqi society, they have been most influential among the *upper and middle* and not the lower classes. Indeed, it was the "liberal" politicians of the monarchical period and the factions of the military, Ba'ath party, and Nasserists that came to power after 1958, rather than workers and peasants, who attributed the most significance to these categories. Indeed, this is overwhelmingly substantiated in Western diplomatic sources and leftist studies of the working class.<sup>40</sup>

What is again striking about the working class is that ethnolinguistic and confessional differences did not play a significant role in breaking

down worker solidarity or impeding political activity. In the worker activism documented by al-Fahd during the late 1940s and early 1950s in the oil fields, in the Iraqi state railways, in the port of Basra and on British military bases, what is most striking was the inability of the British or Iraqi authorities to use social difference as a mechanism for dividing workers. The strength of class solidarity demonstrated by workers, particularly during strikes, buttresses the Iraqi Communist party's claim that class solidarity can transcend ethnolinguistic and confessional cleavages.

In many ways, then, the working class has historically displayed much greater "rationality" than the Iraqi bourgeoisie. In attributing causal primacy to a tripartite conflict centered around sociocultural differences that are conceptualized as immutable, Orientalist discourse implicitly tars the Iraqi populace with the brush of irrationality. In other words, Iraqis are seen as responding first and foremost to "primordial instincts" that take precedence over "rational calculations." To the extent that this model has any explanatory validity (and for reasons other than those posited by Orientalists), it applies most closely to the political elite of the pre-1958 era, which was composed of factions that coalesced around economic and political interests that defined themselves in sectarian terms. This same type of model could be applied to the post-1958 period, where regional-sectarian cleavages also help to explain elite behavior. Sunni-Takriti domination of the Iraqi state is the most prominent case in point. Where the Orientalists are wrong is in reducing all behavior to a sectarian dimension without realizing that sectarian, political, and economic interests are inextricably intertwined and to separate out one from the other yields only a partial analysis.

Where Orientalists are even more shortsighted is in including sectors of the lower classes under the sectarian rubric. In none of the strikes and worker demonstrations that I have examined did ethnolinguistic or confessional differences play any significant role in dividing worker loyalties. Indeed, Western diplomatic records, largely unsympathetic to worker demands, underline the tremendous amount of worker solidarity throughout strikes and demonstrations despite the use of armed force to bring them to an end.<sup>41</sup> Prior to 1958, the Iraqi working class maintained a corporate identity in formulating goals and maintained solidarity in achieving these goals to a much greater degree than did any of the political elites that have controlled the Iraqi state (or even the leadership of the Iraqi Communist party).

*The Iraqi Working Class and the Notion of "Rational Choice"*

If the historical experience of the Iraqi working class erodes the notion of Iraq as a society guided by immutable ethnolinguistic and confessional identities, then it also casts doubt on theories of rational choice that have gained popularity in recent years in the study of working-class movements.<sup>42</sup> As noted previously, one of the most striking characteristic of the Iraqi working class, especially prior to 1958, was its radical character. By radical I mean the struggle to gain an independent voice for labor organizations and to link the activities of these organizations not only to immediate working-class interests but also to larger questions of social, economic, political and cultural equity. The political activities of Iraqi workers help erode the notion of Third World peoples as passive, unaware of their vital interests, and unable to act collectively in "rational" ways designed to achieve specified ends. They thus raise questions as to whether rational choice theory, in which the concept of utility understood in an individualistic sense is given conceptual primacy, is really ethnocentric and ideological. The concept can be seen as ethnocentric, given its derivation from the Western historical experience (where its applicability is open to question), and ideological, as it is more normative than empirical, that is, rational choice becomes what ought to be and not just what is. In this sense, rational choice theory could be viewed as a form of neo-Orientalism. Unless Iraqi workers act according to an individual calculus based on acceptable Western norms, they are not viewed as engaged in "rational" behavior.

In many instances, strikes occurred where it would have been "rational" for workers to accept higher wages and improved working conditions and declare an end to their labor action. One example is the strike of oil workers in the Kirkuk oil fields in July 1946. Approximately 200 miles northeast of Baghdad, this region is particularly interesting given its ethnic mix of Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans and Assyrians. According to the predictions of rational choice theory, oil workers should have ended their strike once they achieved an improvement in material benefits. A rational calculus of costs and benefits should have bounded the strike. Nevertheless, workers frequently refused to return to work until what may be called political demands were met by foreign companies or the Iraqi authorities. These included such demands as the reinstatement of workers fired from their jobs due to political activism.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, this demand in no way advanced the material

or other interests of striking workers who retained their positions. Furthermore, this demand runs against the notion of the "free rider" mentality that Mancur Olson and others have argued afflicts all collective organizations, particularly those organized around Marxian notions of class solidarity.<sup>44</sup>

Other demands included greater control by workers over the work environment; for example, a diminution of the power of supervisors and foremen to discipline workers. Workers consistently called for an end to the British occupation of Iraq and rule by corrupt politicians. Indeed, workers provided the backbone of the two largest uprisings against the Iraqi monarchy, the Wathba of 1948 and the Intifada of 1952. Thus demands for immediate improvements in material conditions were invariably tied to larger nationalist goals of independence and social equity.

It is true that the renegotiation of the concessionary agreement between the Iraqi state and the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1952 (in large measure possible due to working-class militancy, which the state used as a weapon to induce concessions from the consortium) led to a decline in the number of strikes as a result of expanded state spending and a decline in unemployment, but the Iraqi working class struggled for goals throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s that would, by the definition of rational choice theory, not be in their rational interest to pursue. An example would be the frequent refusal of workers to return to work despite offers of higher wages and better working conditions; instead workers (often drawn from diverse ethnolinguistic and confessional backgrounds) refused to return to work until fired union leaders and strike organizers were reinstated in their jobs. Further, the notion of the "free rider" so prominent in rational choice theory fails to explain why workers exhibited such a high level of solidarity and cooperation.

The historical experiences of Iraqi workers point to the dangers of rational choice theory. In its refusal to historicize its subject and its reduction of consciousness to a simplistic means-end dichotomy, rational choice theory reflects many of the same problems as the neo-Taylorism of contemporary Ba'hist theorizing. Technology, efficiency, and "science" become the highest goods and thus ends in themselves. The recent attempt by some Marxist theorists to base their analyses of working-class behavior on rational choice models is, I believe, fraught with many dangers because it can never remain true to the systemic holism that Marx saw as so central to his work.<sup>45</sup>

*Iraqi Workers, Agency, and Social Difference*

To the extent that some of the characteristics of Iraqi workers can be conveyed to Western audiences, it is perhaps simultaneously possible to break down some of the pernicious stereotypes that prevail about Third World peoples. It is also perhaps possible to speak to Westerners about problems of social and cultural difference. In other words, what does the story of Iraqi workers tell us about our own efforts to overcome differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and regional cultures?<sup>46</sup> It is particularly significant for American workers that Iraqi workers were so successful in overcoming the cleavages that those in power sought to create in their ranks because, in the American context, race and gender have been manipulated on numerous occasions to "divide and conquer" labor solidarity. In telling a story about Iraqi workers, then, a crucial dimension should, in my opinion, be the Western backdrop against which this narrative is developed.

One of the most prominent characteristics of contemporary American society is the retreat from the gains in social equality that were achieved during the middle and late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the most important efforts in this regard has been the attempt to erode the confidence of workers and members of minorities in their ability to take control of their lives. Retrenchment in government funding, elimination of state institutions that offered marginalized groups greater opportunities for self-empowerment, and legal decisions circumscribing the power of workers have all been used to roll back progressive gains. Following a long American tradition, ethnic groups, social classes, men and women, and minorities have been set against one another while corporate and state policies that have adversely affected them have largely remained unchallenged. The experience of Third World workers such as those in Iraq—workers with far fewer economic and legal resources at their disposal than their American counterparts—needs to be conveyed to union leaders and union members in the West. It can provide an example of how the salience of social difference can be reduced among workers striving to achieve greater social justice. This is a task to which Western intellectuals should, in my opinion, devote more effort.

*The Iraqi Working Class and the Rewriting of History*

Perhaps the most profound example of the impact of the Iraqi working class on Iraqi society can be seen in the massive effort currently

underway by the state to reinterpret Iraq's history and popular culture. Although the factors that led up to this effort are complex, it is no exaggeration to say that it is in large measure a response to worker and lower class radicalism. One of the central concerns of the state in pursuing the "Project for the Rewriting of History" (*mashru' i'adat kitabat al-tarikh*) is to restructure historical memory. Of all the aspects of Iraq's past, the most threatening to the state is worker radicalism and the close ties of the Iraqi working class and labor organizations to the Iraqi Communist party. The very fact that the state feels it so essential to reinterpret the way in which Iraqis understand twentieth century labor history, and the effort it has made to remove the Communist party from any role in that history, indicates the potential threat that it still feels from radical sectors of the working class.

An important contribution of Gramsci's writings has been to enhance our awareness of the fact that not all power is exercised through force and overt coercion. Gramsci's concept of hegemony calls attention to the efforts of those who control the state to attempt to obscure notions of class interests through processes of socialization that can occur in the family, the educational system, religious institutions, and under the influence of the mass media. In this model, the concept of historical memory looms large because one of the keys to achieving hegemony is to convince subaltern groups to believe in the historical construction of political community propagated by the ruling class. Anticipating Foucault, hegemony theory as articulated by Gramsci argues that control through self-discipline by subaltern groups themselves is a much more efficient form of domination than the exercise of force and violence. Thus it is possible to see current efforts by Ba'thist intellectuals to rewrite the history of the working class as just as dangerous as the efforts of the colonial state to use force and violence to suppress attempts by workers to implement greater social justice.

Although I have discussed the reinterpretation of history and popular culture in modern Iraq in greater detail elsewhere,<sup>47</sup> suffice it to say here that one of the key components of this effort is to replace class with nationalist consciousness. Attempts have been made to penetrate Iraqi history at several critical periods beginning with the country's ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, as well as its pre-Islamic Arab past, the 'Abbasid period, and the period of colonial domination following World War I. To give history a more populist character, more recently a strong emphasis has been placed on folklore. The attempt

to demonstrate a continuous national identity in Iraq over time is made through an emphasis on the love of the land as expressed in such cultural idioms as poetry and folktales.

Although the more recent effort to promote concern with folklore bestows a more populist aura on the state, the appropriation of the past, whether in terms of the "high culture" of written discourse or the "low culture" of folklore, is part of the attempt to construct hegemony. In reexamining history and popular culture, the state uses intellectuals to impose interpretations that alter traditional understandings, exclude others that are seen as threatening, and in many instances, create wholly new readings of the past. This is especially true regarding attitudes toward Iran and Persian culture fostered by the state following the Iran-Iraq War. Efforts to reinterpret the historical relations between Iraqis and Iranians in excessively conflictual terms (perhaps best exemplified in the "Qadisiyyat Saddam" campaign) represents not only an effort to foster chauvinist feelings but also an effort to further deny social difference in Iraqi society.<sup>48</sup> In other words, hostility toward Iranians becomes a metaphor for rejecting the notion of Iraq as an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous society.

The struggle to counter the attempt to restructure the historical memory of the Iraqi working class as well as the country as a whole continues to be carried on by the Iraqi Communist party, leftist elements of the Kurdish community, and, to a lesser extent, by Shiite religious political organizations such as the al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya. Complaints by Iraqi officials of low productivity in Iraqi industry indicate the persistence of resistance by workers albeit outside an organizational context. Perhaps most difficult for students of the Iraqi working class is the ability to gain access to oppositional folk culture generated by the masses, such as folk poetry and music. One of the (difficult) tasks of future research will be to determine the degree and effectiveness of lower class resistance to Ba'hist efforts to impose their hegemonic ideology on Iraqi society as a whole.

## Notes

1. Ibrahim Husayn, *Lamabat mu'jaza min tarikh al-haraka al-niqabiyya al-'iraqiyya* [A Concise Overview of the History of the Iraqi Working Class] (n.p.: Manshurat al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1982), p. 6.

2. See, for example, Middle East Watch, *Human Rights in Iraq* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1990) pp. 102-114; Adel Hussein and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 50-51, 63, 65-66, 68-70, 93-94, 152-153; and Committee Against Repression and for Democracy in Iraq (CADRI), *Saddam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction?* (London: Zed Press, 1986), p. 32, where it is argued that the CIA helped the Ba'ih party overthrow 'Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1963. See also my "The Persian Gulf War: Myths and Realities," in H. Amirahmadi, ed., *The United States and the Middle East: New Directions in Foreign Policy* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 251-285, for a discussion of support by the Reagan and Bush administrations to Saddam and the Ba'ih.

3. For examples of this perspective, see Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, (London: New Left Books, 1980); Samir Amin, *The Arab Nation* (London: Zed Press, 1978); and Mahmoud Hussein, *Class Struggle in Egypt, 1952-1970* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

4. For an analysis of the rise of authoritarian regimes espousing variants of radical Arab nationalism, see Khalid Hasan al-Naqeb, "The Rise of the Authoritarian State in the Arab East," in E. Davis and N. Gavrielides, eds., *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory and Popular Culture* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), pp. 36-70.

5. 'Issam al-Khafaji, *al-Dawla wa'l-tatawwur al-ra'smali fi'l-'iraq, 1968-1978* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 1983), pp. 16, 165-184; and Ra'smaliyyat al-dawla al-wataniyya (Beirut: Dar Ibn al-Khaldun, 1979), pp. 173-201.

6. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

7. This would seem to apply to the non-Arab states of the region as well such as Iran after the 1978-79 Revolution, Turkey after the rise of the military, and Israel following the decline of the Labor party after 1977.

8. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 6, 12, 15-16, 20, 56, 366, 377, 418.

9. Of course, this raises the thorny issue of what constitutes an objective basis for the individual or group seeking to deconstruct a myth or myths.

10. For a Leninist reading of Gramsci, see Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980).

11. Antonio Gramsci, *Il Vaticano e l'Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1974); *Il Risorgimento* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977), especially pp. 86-117, 131-133, 137-139; *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), pp. 28-51.

12. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 131-132, 142; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 21, 36-37, 63.



13. There is a large body of writing in Arabic on the Iraqi working class. By far the best and most comprehensive study of the Iraqi working class is 'Abd al-Razzaq Mutlaq al-Fahd, "Tarikh al-haraka al-'ummaliyya fi-l-'iraq, 1922-1958" (unpublished doctoral diss., Cairo University, 1977).
14. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 279-318.
15. It will be noted that nothing is said about religio-political thinking as a possible fourth historiographical school. This is not to argue that Islamicists or Islamic radicals, particularly from the Shiite community, were not sympathetic to the plight of workers. Certainly many were. However, religio-political discourse has had relatively little to say about the working-class movement in Iraq.
16. See, for example, John Dos Passos, *Orient Express* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), esp. Chapter 9, "Baghdad Bahnhof"; pp. 103-113; also Freya Stark, *Baghdad Sketches* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1938). See also British Foreign Office documents, e.g., FO371/6923, "R.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Summary, Iraq, for Sept., 1933"; FO371/24562, "Iraqi Personalities for 1939"; FO371/68459, Basra Consulate-General Monthly Summary, December, 1947; FO371/110896, VQ101/1, "Political Conditions in Iraq, 1953"; and United States Consular documents, e.g., 890.G00/176, Sloan to Secretary of State, Feb. 3, 1932; 890G.002/77, "Political Situation in Iraq—Shiah-Sunni Factor," Sept. 26, 1933; and 890G.917/1-345, L. Henderson to Secretary of State, Jan. 3, 1945.
17. See, for example, al-Fahd, *Tarikh al-haraka*; Kamal Mazhar Ahmad, *al-Tabaqa al-'amila al-'iraqiyya: al-takawun wa-bidayatal-taharruk* [The Iraqi Working Class: Its Formation and the Beginning of its Mobilization] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar al-Rashid li-l-Nashr, 1981); Ahmad al-Nasiri, "Hawl al-tufayliya wa namuha fi-l-'iraq" ["On Parasitism and its Growth in Iraq"], *al-Nabj*, no. 2 (November 1983): 234-278; 'Issam al-Khafaji, "al-latawwur al-'ra' smali wa-l-tabaqa al-'amila al-'iraqiyya" ["Capitalist Development and the Iraqi Working Class"], *al-Nabj*, no. 4 (May 1984): 228-254; "Min al-nidal al-niqabi ila-l-thawra" ["Revolution Through Working Class Struggle"], editorial, and Rajih Mustafa, "al-Tabaqa al-'amila fi zill al-hukm al-diktaturii" ["The Working Class Under Dictatorial Rule"], *al-Tabaqa al-Jadida*, no. 120 (May 1980): 23-24 and 25-32 respectively; Abu Dhikri, "Nazara fi qawanin wa-tashri'at al-'amal fi-l-'iraq" ["An Overview of Labor Laws and Legislation in Iraq"], *al-Tabaqa al-Jadida*, no. 157 (August 1984): 97-107; and Ibrahim Husayn, *Lamabat*.
18. See, for example, Razzaq Ibrahim Hasan, "al-Haraka al-niqabiyya al-'ummaliyya fi-l-'iraq" ["The Labor Union Movement in Iraq"], *Afaq 'Arabiyya*, no. 9 (May 1976): 19-43; 'Abd al-Razzaq Ibrahim Hasan, *al-Shakhsiyya al-'ummaliyya fi-l-qissa al-'iraqiyya* (Baghdad: Dar al-Huriyya li-l-Tiba'a, 1977); Razzaq Ibrahim Hasan, *al-Sibaqa al-'ummaliyya fi-l-'iraq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Arts, Dar al-Rashid li-l-Nashr, 1979) (kitab al-jamahir) [a book for the masses], no. 32; Khalid Muhsin Mahmud al-Rawi, *Tarikh al-tabaqa al-'amila al-'iraqiyya, 1967-1975* (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar al-Rashid li-l-Nashr, 1982). See also the various issues of the official publication of the General Union of Iraqi Labor Syndicates [al-Itrihad al-'Amm li-l-Niqabat al-'Ummal], *Wa'i al-'ummal*.
19. Hanna Bataatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 295-297.
20. E. A. Kinch, "Social Effects of the Oil Industry in Iraq," *International Labor Review* 75 (Jan.-June 1957), pp. 194-195, 199; Hamid Ja'id, *al-Haraka al-'ummaliyya fi-l-'iraq* (Baghdad: Dar al-Salam Press, 1974), pp. 9-10; al-Fahd, *Tarikh al-haraka*, pp. 447-471, 485-503, 505-509, 547-558; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, "Labor and National Liberation: The Trade Union Movement in Iraq, 1920-1958," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 5, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 152-153.
21. For an explanation of the factors that caused peasants to migrate urban areas, see Makki Muhammad Azeez, "Geographical Aspects of Rural Migration from Amara Province, Iraq, 1955-1964" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, April 1968), especially pp. 182-196; al-Fahd, *Tarikh al-haraka*, pp. 22-31.
22. Wamidh J. O. al-Nazmi, "The Political, Intellectual and Social Roots of the Iraqi Independence Movement" (unpublished doctoral diss., Durham University July, 1974), pp. 221-224; Bataatu, *The Old Social Classes*, pp. 143-144, 146, 151, 152.
23. For documentation of this point, see al-Fahd, *Tarikh al-haraka*.
24. A number of studies conducted by graduate students in the Department of Sociology at Baghdad University during the 1970s suggest that peasants did retain ties to their rural origins. See, for example, Ibrahim Mushab al-Dulaymi, "al-Hijra al-mi'akisa: Dirasa ijtimaiyya li-abwal al-mubajirin min madinat Baghdad" [Reverse Migration: A Sociological Study on the Conditions of Migrants from Baghdad] (unpublished masters thesis, Baghdad University, 1976); and Muhammad Harbi Hasan, "Aham al-mushakil al-'ummaliyya fi masani' Baghdad" [The Most Important Workers' Problems in Baghdad Factories] (unpublished masters thesis, Baghdad University, 1974).
25. On efforts to encourage peasants to return to rural areas to join agricultural cooperatives, see the study of the experimental project of 1876 participants in five cooperatives in al-Wasit province by al-Dulaymi, "al-Hijra," especially pp. 127-128.
26. See, for example, Yusuf Salman Yusuf (Comrade Fahd), *Min watha'iq al-bizb al-shuy'i al-'iraqi: kitab al-rafiq Fahd* [From the Documents of the Iraqi Communist Party: The Writings of Comrade Fahd] (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1976), p. 409; on the role of women in strikes, see "Liqa' ma' al-rafiq Nasir 'Abbud: ta'sis niqabat 'ummal al-muwani, idrabat, muzahirat iyyar fi-l-Basra," ["An Interview with Comrade Nasir 'Abbud: The May Strikes and Demonstrations in Basra"], *al-Tabaqa al-Jadida* no. 152 (March 1984): 54.
27. See note 12.
28. Only al-Fahd, *Tarikh al-haraka*, and Bataatu, *The Old Social Classes*, contain the beginnings of such an analysis.
29. Al-Fahd, *ibid*.
30. Ahmad, *al-Tabaqa*.