

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous contribution to this book provided by the General Endowment Fund of the University of California Press Associates.

Memories of State

*Politics, History, and
Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*

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University of California Press

BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

4 Memory, the Intelligentsia, and the Antinomies of Civil Society, 1945–1958

The period between 1945 and the 1958 Revolution constitutes the most active and participatory era in twentieth-century Iraqi political, social, and cultural life. Following the end of World War II, several new political parties—including the National Democratic and the Independence parties—were formed, and the Iraqi Communist Party significantly expanded its social base. In 1946, workers were given the right, soon rescinded, to organize labor unions for the first time.¹ Cultural movements proliferated. In literature, Iraq was at the forefront of innovative trends such as the Free Verse Movement, which was led by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Nazik al-Mala'ika. In the visual arts, the Pioneers Movement (al-Ruwwad) was stimulated by the contact of Iraqi artists with European painters who had resided in Iraq during the war. This group was followed by other artists' organizations such as the Baghdad Association of the Friends of Art (1952) and the Baghdad Association for Modern Art (1953).² Sculpture and architecture also witnessed important innovations.³ The journal *Sumer*, founded in 1945, began to make important contributions in the field of archaeology, reflecting an intensified interest in Iraq's ancient, pre-Islamic civilizations.⁴ Numerous archaeological excavations were sponsored by the Directorate of Antiquities, which published the findings of its research in *Sumer*. The renewed focus on antiquity coincided with the recourse to symbols drawn from ancient Mesopotamian culture by poets such as Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, and many others.⁵

The postwar period was also one of the most turbulent in modern Iraqi history. Political violence directed against the state by nationalist forces reached levels unprecedented in Iraq. Tensions between Iraqist and Pan-Arab nationalists likewise intensified, although they were partially subordinated to the desire of both groups to overthrow the existing order. Despite

the level of conflict, large numbers of Iraqi intellectuals look back nostalgically to the 1950s as a modern golden age. To what degree was this period unique in Iraqi politics and cultural development, and what was its impact on state and civil society? How did the postwar period shape the contours of the 1958 Revolution and help structure the discourse about the future of political community in Iraq? How has an emerging historical memory of this era since the 1991 Intifada shaped visions of post-Ba'thist Iraq?

The period between 1946 and 1958 saw the sharpening and deepening of three cleavages in state-society relations. The first pitted the monarchy against the nationalist movement. The 1948 Wathba and Palestine debacle, the Intifada of 1952, the 1955 Baghdad Pact, and Iraq's failure to respond to the Tripartite Invasion of Egypt in 1956 leading to another *intifada* represented the main points of conflict between the state and the nationalist movement. Perhaps most importantly, the constant pressure on the state by students, intellectuals, and workers through demonstrations, critiques, and strikes paved the way for the military's overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 by eroding what little legitimacy the monarchical state still possessed.⁶

The second cleavage, the strengthening of the radical wings of both Iraqist and Pan-Arab nationalism, which first became apparent following the Bakr Sidqi coup, intensified the divisions between the two movements. The more radical exponents of both ideological perspectives were represented by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party, respectively. The two major groups involved in the struggle for parliamentary seats by antimonarchical forces were the National Democratic Party, headed by Kamil al-Chadirji, and the Independence Party, headed by Muhammad Mahdi al-Kubba. Although these two parties respected each other—they participated in a number of political alliances, such as the 1954 National Front—the ICP and the Ba'th Party did not demonstrate a similar tolerance.⁷ Without any reformist concessions by the state, radicals within both wings of the Iraqi nationalist movement gradually assumed greater prominence, if not political dominance.

The third and most diffuse cleavage centered around historical memory, pitting intellectuals and artists against one another as they questioned the role of tradition in Iraqi society. Intellectuals demanded greater freedom of expression during the postwar era through a reduction of political repression and the removal of many of the constraints imposed in the past. Cultural production thus reflected great soul searching by intellectuals of all cultural and ideological persuasions and set "modernists" against "traditionalists." This amorphous and multifaceted cleavage, which involved debates about cultural inclusion and exclusion, the opposition of innovation to

tradition, and the attitude toward reinterpretation of the past, often transcended immediate political concerns because it involved intellectuals not formally affiliated with any specific political party or organization or because it concerned abstract issues. However, discourse concerned with aesthetics, historiography, and literary forms invariably had political overtones. Calls for greater freedom of expression necessarily involved a challenge to state prerogatives. An important subtext of this cleavage was the debate, to emerge with greater vigor after the 1958 Revolution, between intellectuals committed to a pluralist vision of an Iraqi political community with permeable cultural boundaries and those who sought to ground definitions of political community in a nostalgic reading of the past and a mystical "Arab spirit."

Postwar intellectual production must be seen as an integral part of political development because it provides a broader understanding of the content and direction of change, particularly in the realm of civil society, than a focus limited to the immediate political struggles of the day. Most intellectual production during this period advocated a more cosmopolitan and participatory form of Iraqi culture and society. Hence it opened political and social space, at least conceptually, for many groups that had heretofore been marginalized, such as women, workers, peasants, and radical intellectuals.⁸ Even if intellectual contributions during the postwar era did not lead to immediate political change, they provided an inspirational legacy or historical memory that democratically oriented forces could draw upon in the future.

Although "traditionalists" were often considered synonymous with the Pan-Arabists and "modernists" with the Iraqist nationalists, this was not always the case. Among Iraqist nationalists we find in the realm of poetry, for example, a split between innovators such as Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (in his early years as a communist) and traditionalists such as Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (a classicist despite the populist quality of much of his poetry). Some modernist innovators, such as Nazik al-Mala'ika, were Pan-Arabists, while others, such as al-Sayyab, changed positions from a leftist Iraqist nationalism to support for Pan-Arabism. However, even though most intellectuals were deeply concerned with the fate of Palestine and the issue of colonial control of the Middle East, few adhered to an ethnically exclusive Pan-Arabist vision such as the one articulated by Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh in *The Knights of Arabism in Iraq*. The postwar intellectuals' interest in experimentation, stemming from a dissatisfaction with the ability of past cultural forms to help them understand and interpret contemporary Iraqi society, led them to explore a myriad of historical symbols and experiences.

Although the historical memory drawn from Iraq's Arab-Islamic heritage, primarily the al-Jahili and 'Abbasid periods, was rich and vast, intellectuals also appropriated symbols from Iraq's pre-Islamic civilizations. They also looked to authors such as T. S. Eliot for Western treatments of the relationship between tradition and innovation.⁹ With the spread of communism in Iraq, symbols of social justice and equality for peasants, workers, and women also entered cultural discourse. To have accepted Pan-Arabism in its parochial form as defined by Sati' al-Husari, Yunis al-Sab'awi, and Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh would have constrained the experimentation with new cultural forms that most Iraqi intellectuals so avidly pursued.

Although the first two cleavages focus more narrowly on state-society relations, the third allows us to explore broader developments in civil society. Most political studies of this period have concentrated on the first two cleavages, which, for the most part, suggest a process of decline and decay. However, a study of cultural production during the postwar period, including works on history and politics, demonstrates a vibrant intellectual life that suggested alternatives to the authoritarian politics that had dominated Iraqi political life. Fortunately, this cultural production established a historical memory to which Iraqi intellectuals can return as an inspiration for a transition to democracy.

Inherent in the emerging foundations of a nascent civil society with participatory impulses was a counterhegemonic ideology directed against the state. Intellectuals, most of whom identified with the left, defended the interests of the urban and rural poor. *Sawt al-Ahali*, the NDP's official organ, played a key role in promoting this issue. The new linkages, however tenuous, that developed after 1945 between workers and reformist elements of the middle and upper middle classes who were concerned with combating social injustice contained the ideological and institutional seeds of a new democratic and reform-minded social order. It is noteworthy that during the 1950s the vanguards of Pan-Arabism, the Independence and Ba'ath parties were headed by Shi'is. In other words, the dyads, Pan-Arabism/Sunnism and Iraqist nationalism/Shi'ism, that framed much of the politics and political discourse under the former Ba'athist regime did not conform to stereotypical understandings of Iraqi politics. It would take the February 1963 coup d'état, the Thermidor of the 1958 Revolution, to accelerate and deepen the institutionalization of sectarianism.

A number of factors contributed to the new levels of violence between the state and the nationalist movement during the late 1940s and 1950s. The continued influx of rural migrants into urban areas created large disaffected

communities of semiemployed or unemployed workers. Among regularly employed workers, especially those in the growing oil industry, militancy increased, especially in response to ICP agitation. The postwar years saw the highest rate of inflation in Iraq to date, which negatively affected the salaried middle class, artisans, and workers. Civil servants, whose jobs were tenuous because of erratic pay and politically motivated dismissals caused by frequent changes in government, earned low salaries. A severe housing shortage caused by urban overcrowding added to these economic pressures. The loosening of political constraints on Iraqi communists during World War II and the brief liberalization of politics and social life immediately at war's end during Tawfiq al-Suwaydi's ministry raised expectations of a postwar era during which social reforms would finally be enacted. When the al-Suwaydi ministry was replaced by Arshad al-'Umari's highly repressive government, these hopes were dashed, convincing many nationalists that only through street demonstrations and violence could meaningful change be achieved.

Two events in 1948 exacerbated the hostility between the state and the nationalist movement. The first was the Iraqi government's efforts under Prime Minister Salih Jabr to renegotiate the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in Portsmouth, England. News of these negotiations, which suggested that the British presence in Iraq would be extended, produced a violent reaction. Huge demonstrations in Baghdad and other cities ensued, leading to street battles between demonstrators and the police. Dozens of protesters were killed. Dubbed the Wathba, or "Great Leap," this event more than any other symbolized the revulsion that the nationalist movement felt toward the monarchy. The Wathba increased the strength of the ICP, which used popular sentiment and police violence to mobilize new cadres. Despite efforts by some Pan-Arabists to entice Independence Party members to leave street demonstrations, in which many communists and leftists participated, political solidarity of all the ideological tendencies within the nationalist movement was the uprising's hallmark.¹⁰

The Wathba's legacy did not end with the violence of January 1948 but continued with a series of militant strikes. This militancy was particularly evident among strikes by oil workers, among the highest-paid members of the working class. British labor advisors noted that these strikes were political in nature and seem to have been inspired, if not organized, by the ICP.¹¹ When labor unrest failed to subside, the government imposed martial law. The martial law regime, which continued until the following fall, allowed the government not only to repress communists, workers, and nationalists, but also to stir up animosity against the Iraqi Jewish community over the

unrest in Palestine in an attempt to divert attention away from domestic social problems.

It is instructive to examine the political elite's perceptions of the proposed treaty as a measure of changes in political power that had occurred both within Iraq and regionally between 1930 and 1948. Correspondence between the regent 'Abd al-Ilah and Salih Jabr indicated that, whereas the regent sought to extend the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in largely the same format, Jabr warned him that political conditions had changed and that the treaty would have to correspond with similar treaties between neighboring Arab countries and the British.¹² The regent, still thankful that the British had restored him to power in 1941, was keen to please his colonial overlords. Although equally pro-British, Jabr was much more attuned to political realities and threatened to resign as prime minister if Iraq were not allowed to assume control of the two strategic air bases used by the RAF, al-Habbaniya and al-Shu'ayba.¹³ This correspondence is an indicator of the power that had accrued to the Iraqist and Pan-Arabist nationalist movements by 1948. No longer could political elites act with impunity in concluding treaties with Western powers.¹⁴ Increasingly, the sentiments of the politically mobilized middle classes and workers provided a backdrop against which elites were forced to structure their behavior.

The maneuvering around the proposed Portsmouth treaty shed important light on the Iraqi political elite and its relationship to the larger nationalist movement. When Nuri al-Sa'id brought a broad spectrum of the political elite to England to debate the treaty during the fall of 1947, the details of the treaty had already been worked out between the British, the regent, Jabr, and Nuri.¹⁵ However, the fact that Nuri felt compelled to have all sectors of the Iraqi political elite endorse the treaty was another indication that the leaders of the state recognized that they needed broad social support for their actions, especially those relating to the British. In other words, the invitation of a large delegation to come to London was both a tacit recognition that the political elite no longer marched in lockstep with Nuri and the monarchy, and a recognition of the nationalist movement's strength. The delegation's extensive interrogation of Nuri and 'Abd al-Ilah indicated that the Iraqi political elite was beginning to question, if only in a preliminary way, many of the assumptions underlying the traditional political system. It also indicated that the elite was losing its cohesiveness and self-confidence, thereby paving the way for its eventual overthrow in 1958.¹⁶

The Wathba is extremely significant in yet another regard. Although Iraqi Pan-Arabists have identified the origins of the July 1958 Revolution in the 1941 uprising and the 1948 Arab defeat in Palestine, it was in fact the

Wathba that stimulated the Iraqi Free Officers Movement (known prior to the 1952 Egyptian Revolution as the Nationalist Officers)¹⁷ to consider overthrowing the monarchy.¹⁸ Learning of serious opposition to the Portsmouth negotiations, Salih Jabr returned to Iraq in January 1948 to explain the treaty's objectives and have it ratified by the Iraqi parliament. Instead, his efforts only intensified the scope and violence of nationalist demonstrations, forcing him to resign and flee Baghdad. Having brought down an Iraqi government for the first time not only encouraged the nationalist movement, but it also provided nationalist army officers with a model for replacing the hated monarchy. If unarmed citizens could, through street demonstrations, cause a ministry to fall, then the army could likewise intervene to bring about political change.

Coming on the heels of the Wathba, the Iraqi army's unsuccessful campaign against Zionist forces in Palestine during the spring and summer of 1948 exacerbated antipathy toward the state. The realization that the Arab defeat resulted from poor preparation and collusion between Arab politicians and Great Britain deeply angered the officer corps, especially Iraqi and Egyptian officers.¹⁹ The Iraqi army lacked arms and had to hire private vehicles because there were not even sufficient government trucks to transport troops and supplies from Iraq to Palestine.²⁰ Once at the front, Iraqi units were placed under Glubb Pasha (John Glubb), the British commander of Jordan's Arab Legion, the best trained of the Arab armies. Despite a number of successes against Zionist forces, the Iraqi army lacked the ability to carry out a coordinated military campaign with other Arab armies. The ill-equipped Iraqi force, which did not even possess tanks or land mines, was no match for the Zionist Haganah, which enjoyed superior organization and shorter supply lines.²¹

The army's chagrin was compounded upon learning that Glubb Pasha actually sought to prevent Arab forces from making any significant military progress against Zionist units. In light of the recently documented collusion between King 'Abdallah and Zionist leaders to divide Palestine, these perceptions were legitimate.²² The disastrous Arab campaign not only added to the army's bitterness that resulted from the unsuccessful 1941 uprising, but it also bolstered the conspiratorial worldview to which many Pan-Arabist officers subscribed and which was a core component of Pan-Arabist historical memory.

By intensifying sectarian feelings, the Arab defeat in Palestine undermined efforts to develop a more pluralist and open political culture. It also undermined the Iraqist nationalist movement just as it was making great strides in mobilizing support. The fact that the ICP included Jews, Shi'is,

Kurds, and representatives of virtually all Iraq's minority populations made its commitment to Arab issues suspect to Pan-Arabists. The Pan-Arabists considered their suspicions justified when the ICP, after initially condemning Zionism as an ally of imperialism, reversed its policy, albeit very reluctantly, in response to Soviet pressure to support the November 1947 United Nations' resolution partitioning Palestine into an Arab and Jewish state.²³

For many Arabs and Iraqis, the establishment of Israel represented the continuation of European colonial influence and the further fragmentation of Arab society. In Iraq, the Palestine issue became a convenient weapon for the state and Pan-Arabist forces, such as the Independence Party, to attack the ICP, which had Jewish members, and the National Democratic Party, which did not actively promote Pan-Arab unity. Anti-Jewish feeling intensified as Iraqi Jews began to be deprived of their citizenship and the entire Jewish community, one of the oldest in the world, was placed under a cloud of suspicion. Iraqi Jews became the new al-'Ajam, the modern reincarnation of the al-Shu'ubiya movement, as a purported fifth column for British colonial influence in Iraq. That many Iraqi Jews had requested British citizenship following World War I and the wealth of some urban Jewish families created resentment among parts of the populace, particularly the middle classes. However, by all objective criteria, the Iraqi Jews were thoroughly integrated into Iraqi society and considered themselves to be fully Iraqi. Already during the late 1930s, Pan-Arabist pressures had led certain positions in the Iraqi bureaucracy to be considered off-limits to Jews.²⁴ Thus the state used anti-Jewish hostility, stemming from the Iraqi Jewish community's identification with the British and then with Zionism, to divert attention away from social and economic problems and toward the issues of "authenticity" and "ethnic purity" promoted by Pan-Arabists.

While Iraqi nationalists intensified calls in 1948 for social reforms in light of a record high rate of inflation,²⁵ the populace's attention, especially that of the middle classes, was diverted away from economic issues to the Arab defeat in Palestine. In the southern port city of Basra, for example, the local press and Pan-Arabists affiliated with the Independence Party accused the local Jewish community of collusion with Zionism.²⁶ As the British consul general noted in September 1948, the martial law courts imposed after the Wathba used the issue of Palestine and alleged Zionist sympathies among Basra Jews to mete out unjust sentences in trials devoid of due process. The most egregious sentence was given to Shafiq Ades, a prominent merchant and head of the Basra Jewish community, who was alleged to have smuggled arms to Palestine and was sentenced to death by a local military court and hanged on September 23, 1948.²⁷

As the partition of Palestine moved toward reality, Pan-Arabists increasingly were associated with anti-Jewish sentiments while Iraqi nationalists supported Jews against Pan-Arabist and government attacks. In Basra, British consular reports described a press that, with the exception of one newspaper, tried to incite hostility against the large Jewish community. During the spring of 1948, the demonstrations of the local Independence Party had a distinctly anti-Jewish tone. The left-leaning NDP, on the other hand, attracted Jewish support. As the British consul general pointed out, cries of "Long live Stalin," "Long live the Iraqi Jews," and "Down with the regent" were heard at NDP rallies.

However, the consul general also pointed to the "traditionally good relations between all the communities living in Basra [that] have so far survived the strain of the political feeling aroused by the partition of Palestine."²⁸ For example, during the fall of 1948, Christians, Jews, and Shi'is made speeches at a party to commemorate the forty-day anniversary of the death of a local Sunni notable, Shaykh Ahmad Nuri Bashayan, which was attended by the heads of all four communities. The local notables—whom the British referred to as "the better class Moslems"—were relieved when, shortly after Ades's execution, the Courts Martial in Basra were closed and anti-Jewish agitation subsided. Subsequently, many notables admitted to British officials that numerous injustices had been committed, even though none spoke out against them.²⁹

Events in Basra in 1948 corresponded to behavior that occurred soon after the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1968, namely the fabrication of spurious espionage charges against some of Iraq's remaining Jews, leading to a public spectacle designed to divert attention from social ills and intimidate citizens not to challenge the state. The prejudicial behavior of the harshest judges—the president of the Basra Law Courts, 'Abd al-Nadir Kamil, and the president of the Third District Court-Martial, 'Abdallah al-Nahani, were overheard at parties deciding sentences for Jews yet to be arrested—is not the main issue. Rather, the same timidity of the educated and notable classes in not protesting what many would later admit was a travesty of justice occurred in 1948 as in 1969. In 1969, there would be no public response to public hangings of Baghdadi Jews at a time when the new regime of Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and Saddam Husayn still rested on a weak social base. The lack of active protest by the citizenry in both instances created a political vacuum that facilitated authoritarian rule. As in 1948, events in 1969 promoted a historical memory centered around notions of conspiracy and xenophobia (for example, the idea that Jews were responsible for the nation's ills) that the authoritarian state could mobilize at a later time for even

more pernicious ends, such as torture and executions. This state-generated memory was used as a counterpoint to the more inclusionary and participatory memory stemming from the Wathba and the 1952 and 1956 *intifadas*.

Although reformist parties such as the NDP, and especially the ICP, were able to attract the sympathies of an ever-larger number of supporters, the NDP was never able to develop a truly mass following, and the ICP swerved ideologically, in a self-destructive fashion, from coalitional to radical politics. Despite these problems, at no point during the 1950s did Iraqi nationalists support sectarianism, ethnic exclusivity, or xenophobic nationalism. Questions of Pan-Arab unity and ethnic identity were not central to their concerns.³⁰ Even if the Iraqi nationalist leadership did not always practice what it preached, its message of social reform and ethnic inclusion elicited a positive response from large numbers of Iraqis.

The ability of the Iraqi nationalist movement to mobilize many supporters during the period leading to the 1958 Revolution was a sign of hope for the future. This is especially true considering the state's constant repression, especially of the ICP; the escalation of attacks by Pan-Arabists; and, following President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir's embrace of Pan-Arabism in 1956, an increase in attacks by the Egyptian government. The Iraqi nationalist vision was based on the idea of mutual respect among Iraq's ethnic groups, social justice through redistributive policies such as land reform and progressive labor laws, and permeable cultural boundaries that facilitated rather than restricted discourse about social difference. In short, Iraqi nationalism offered a vision of the Iraqi political community as a "big tent" in which all but the very rich and the "merchants of politics" (*tujjar al-siyasa*) could find a home.³¹

Pan-Arabism, especially strong in the so-called Sunni Arab triangle of north-central Iraq, provided an entirely different set of symbols by which to mobilize the Iraqi populace. Pan-Arabism's vision of making Arab society whole again following World War II with the anticipated end of British and French colonial control was shattered by the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The establishment of Israel, which was viewed as an alien Other, reinforced a worldview according to which the Arab world was besieged and betrayed from within by imperialists and their allies, namely local political elites and minorities. According to the Pan-Arabist view, the Arab world could only regain its strength by hermetically sealing itself from the "impurities" of the external world.³²

The Palestine debacle fostered the creation of a set of cleavages that crosscut the symbolic universe of social reform. In this political vision, it was not redistributive social justice that would address the Arab world's

problems, but instead political solidarity based on "cultural authenticity" (*al-asala*). Despite largely ignoring social issues, Pan-Arabists faced their own internal cleavages. The Independence Party, for example, was no friend of the ex-Sharifian officers, such as Nuri al-Sa'id, who still dominated the Iraqi political elite. Although Independence Party members were drawn from the relatively well-to-do members of the white-collar middle class and small merchants and did not compare in social status with members of the traditional political elite, certainly they were distinguished from the Ba'athist Pan-Arabists, who were members of the lower middle class and had rural origins.

The third cleavage mentioned earlier raises questions about the role of intellectuals in social and political change. Did poets, novelists, and short story writers, artists, journalists, and student and labor leaders act as "organic intellectuals" and engage in a "war of position"? The new intellectual movements that developed during the late 1940s and 1950s and appealed largely to an educated audience were highly subversive in content, but they failed to provide well-articulated counterhegemonic models to challenge existing forms of political praxis. The focus on critique rather than on concrete alternative visions of society and strategies to enact those visions explains in large measure why intellectuals were initially so uncritical of the new military regime that came to power after the July 1958 Revolution. As Gramsci notes, a truly revolutionary strategy involves not only a critique of existing social conditions, but also a vision of the formation of a new, postrevolutionary society. Although the intelligentsia played a critical role in eroding the monarchy's legitimacy, it stood conceptually and ideologically naked when the monarchy was finally overthrown, and it was unable to encourage a transition to democratic politics and an ethnically inclusive political system. Instead, Qasim was given almost free rein to run society, which quickly produced an authoritarian rather than a democratic form of politics. Only NDP leader Kamil al-Chadirji, having learned from cooperating with the 1936 Sidqi-Sulayman government, pressed Qasim for immediate elections and a transition to civilian and democratic rule.

Nevertheless, many of the cultural and aesthetic contributions of Iraqi intellectuals during the postwar period proffered an implicit vision of a society in which all ethnic groups would enjoy cultural expression and be active agents in all facets of Iraqi society. The Free Verse Movement, for example, offered a critique of tradition that went far beyond poetry. As Terry DeYoung has so effectively argued, al-Sayyab's poetry challenged many prevalent assumptions. First, it rejected the romanticism that had dominated Arab poetry and the relationship between the individual and the na-

tion implied in that tradition. As such, it contested the notion that "cultural authenticity," ethnic purity, and a unitary Pan-Arab nation were the "natural" components of Iraqi collective identity and political community. Second, the Free Verse Movement challenged the assumed unity between the poet and nation. The intensity of the moment of contact between poet and demonstrators—for example, during the Wathba—could neither be sustained nor provide effective measures for changing the political order. As one keen observer has noted, the Free Verse Movement was much more than a revolutionizing of poetic form. It rejected the "platform poetry" of the prewar romantics who simply asserted the unity of the exhortative poet and the crowd that was moved to political action, but who failed to theorize means of sustaining this decisive moment, such as that which brought about the Wathba.³³ In this context, intellectuals were clearly moving away from the catchphrases and sloganeering of both radical Pan-Arabism and the ICP's more dogmatic ideological pronouncements. Although this broadening of political and intellectual culture was not organized around abstract criteria but rather viewed as a mechanism for more effectively challenging colonial rule in Iraq, it nevertheless suggested a greater pluralism in cultural expression through the incorporation of a much broader symbolic nexus than had heretofore been part of the Iraqi intelligentsia's universe. Third, the increasing economic deprivation and consequent rise in social class (as well as nationalist) consciousness, especially clear after the Wathba, threatened to encourage greater fragmentation of Iraqi society. The Wathba and the partitioning of Palestine that followed the breakdown of the agrarian sector, as well as the intensification of conflict within the nationalist movement itself, stimulated Iraqi intellectuals to investigate aesthetics and new symbolic universes that took account of the new political and social reality implied by these events. For al-Sayyab and al-Mala'ika, this questioning led them to reject Iraqist nationalism and embrace Pan-Arabism.³⁴ Thus the Free Verse Movement, as well as all new literary, cultural, and artistic movements, must be seen in political as well as aesthetic terms.

The new directions in postwar Iraqi cultural production resulted in not only great works of poetry, but also advances in many genres of literature, the arts, archaeology, film, and music. The sharp disparities in income among social classes and the intensification of violence between the state and the nationalist movement stimulated intellectuals to explore the interstices of the growing social and political contradictions of Iraqi society. Rather than make reformist concessions that might have ameliorated these social disparities, the state became even less responsive to demands for change. Rich new intellectual explorations such as the poetry of al-Sayyab,

al-Mala'ika, al-Bayati, al-Yusif, al-'Amara, and others constituted critical resources for building a new society and political community. However, the vituperative and ideologically rigid day-to-day politics under the monarchical state was still far removed from a complex and nuanced Iraq intellectual discourse. Much intellectual production during this period was politically contentious because it challenged and "reconstructed" or renegotiated tradition. Even if its goal was to create new forms of social, cultural, and political identity, this process initially resulted in further fragmentation through analyzing and rejecting much of what was derived from the past. As intellectuals grappled with such questions as the tension between individual rights and social responsibilities, the ability of tradition (*al-turath*) to address problems of "modernity," and the type of political and cultural identity needed to provide Iraq with societal unity, they likewise asked what types of historical memory were optimal in addressing these questions. This is one reason why writers, historians, and archaeologists not only searched deeply in Iraq's Arab heritage, particularly the 'Abbasid period, but also looked for inspiration to Iraq's pre-Islamic Mesopotamian heritage. This activity was immensely complex and, in the Wittgensteinian sense, involved many different "private languages."³⁵ That is, much of the discourse surrounding intellectual production was not readily accessible to the populace at large, both because a large percentage of Iraqis were illiterate in the 1950s and because the discourse encompassed concepts and conceptual frameworks understood only by the specialists who discussed them. The poetry of al-Sayyab, the sculpture of Jawad al-Salim, and the significance of new archaeological findings from the pre-Islamic period were far removed from the masses, even as the intelligentsia created an ever more intricate aesthetic and symbolic universe in order to unravel a wide range of complex questions.

Despite these shortcomings, intellectuals did create important ties to the public. One example was the institution of the coffeehouse. The development of the coffeehouse as a center of nationalist politics was an indicator of the institutionalization of the Iraqi intelligentsia during the postwar era. This institutionalization can be seen in the intelligentsia's growth in size, the broadening of its cultural production by challenging tradition and opening new areas of expression, and its increasing role in challenging the state. The association of specific coffeehouses with individual poets or literary groups was not a new phenomenon in the postwar era. For example, famous poets such as Jamal Sidqi al-Zahawi, Ma'ruf al-Rusafi, and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri had already lent their names to coffeehouses that they frequented, such as the Maqha al-Zahawi, the Haydarkhana (al-Rusafi),

Hasan al-'Ajmi (al-Jawahiri), and the Parliament (Husayn Mirdan and 'Abd al-Amir al-Husayri). Since a poet or group of writers that frequented a coffeehouse was usually associated with a particular political tendency, coffeehouses became quasi-public institutions in which the clientele was inculcated with political views and information. They helped expand the public sphere because people went to coffeehouses not just to drink coffee, chat with friends, read a newspaper, or play a game of backgammon, but also to discuss politics. Of course, politically active coffeehouses were also frequented by government informers, which required poets to develop finely honed skills of double entendre. Indeed, al-Sayyab and Buland al-Haydari each wrote a well-known poem about the persona of the informer. During the 1950s, the intelligentsia's experimental orientation led to the creation of new types of coffeehouses not directly connected to traditional literary themes and subject matter. The Swiss and Brazilian coffeehouses, for example, became focal points for the discussion of new intellectual currents such as existentialist thought.³⁶

The coffeehouse linked intellectuals to the masses in other important ways. The coffeehouse provided illiterate Iraqis the opportunity to hear newspapers read aloud. For the literate poor, the coffeehouse provided access to newspapers, which were a luxury that they could not afford. Information shared within the coffeehouse helped spread nationalist and republican sentiments. Poetic themes, which often were coded in double entendres, fostered aesthetic sensitivities not just among the poets who had to hide their messages, but also among the audience that had to decipher the multiple levels of meaning in the poetry. For both the poet and audience, new cultural production and interpretive sophistication were necessary outcomes of the political atmosphere in which the coffeehouse functioned. Form and content acquired an increasingly sophisticated structure as poet and audience sought to conduct their intellectual and political business. In this sense, the coffeehouse became an important component of Iraqi civil society because it promoted not only opposition to the monarchical state, but also a greater appreciation of nuance, double entendre, and ambiguity in literary discourse. The coffeehouse became the public space par excellence for developing the "hidden transcripts" used to resist the state. Not surprisingly, demonstrators often retired to a specific coffeehouse after taking to the streets to protest government policies.³⁷

The coffeehouse could not have expanded its cultural and political importance in the postwar era were it not for the increasing importance of the intelligentsia itself, which resulted from three interrelated factors. As noted earlier, the breakdown of the agrarian sector, which led to the growth of

urban areas; the expansion of the educational system; and the increase in white-collar employment (civil servants, teachers, clerks, and so on) led to the rise of an effendi class.³⁸ Facing economic uncertainty, rapid social change, and a sense of dislocation as they moved to urban areas, and cognizant of the political system's pervasive corruption, this group was in the vanguard of nationalist protest. Although the military ultimately deposed the monarchy, it was the Iraqi intelligentsia's constant critique and laying bare the inequities of the political and social system that progressively chipped away at the monarchical state's legitimacy and authority. The expansion of the intelligentsia during the 1950s would lay the foundations for efforts undertaken by the Ba'th Party in the 1970s to restructure political and social memory as part of its project to rewrite history.

The political socialization that occurred in the coffeehouse represented only a small part of the intelligentsia's role in the expansion of civil society and the erosion of the monarchical state's authority during the postwar era. The proliferation of newspapers that invariably featured a literary and culture page and whose journalists were frequently short story writers, novelists, and poets provided another vehicle by which the intelligentsia could influence Iraqi society. Newspapers also reflected the growing cleavage that had developed around defining the future of Iraqi political community. *Sawt al-Ahali*, the NDP organ, and *al-Qa'ida*, *Ra'yat al-Shaghila*, *Kifah al-Sha'b*—and, later, *Ittihad al-Sha'b*—the ICP's newspapers (in some instances representing party factions), reflected Iraqist nationalist views, while *al-Istiqlal*, the Independence Party's paper, and the Ba'th Party's newspapers, *al-Afkar* (*Ideas*) and *al-Hurriya* (*Freedom*), and a subsidiary newspaper, *al-Amal* (*Labor*), which began publication in 1954, represented Pan-Arabist thinking.³⁹ Because resources for publishing books were limited, newspapers were critical not only for disseminating political views but also for literary expression. The large number of newspapers and journals established during the postwar era is an indicator of the level of cultural production in Iraqi society during this period. Although the number of newspapers was no doubt exaggerated because many were forced by the police to close and then reappeared under new names, the resumption of the publication of newspapers itself demonstrated the tenacity of nationalist intellectuals in assuring their message's dissemination.

One of the most active organization in journalistic production was the Iraqi Communist Party. The ICP had its greatest journalistic successes in southern Iraq, where it launched a group of newspapers directed at the party's traditional constituencies, including *Sawt al-Kifah* (*The Voice of Struggle*) in 1951 and *Ittihad al-Ummal* (*The Workers' Union*) and *Nidal*

al-Fallah (*The Peasant's Struggle*) in 1952, whose purpose was to help create a peasant's organization, *Jam'iyat Tahrir al-Fallahin* (Society for the Liberation of the Peasantry). Two years later, *Sawt al-Furat* (*The Voice of the Euphrates*) began publication. Two of these newspapers continued publishing until June 1958. Both were repressed by Qasim, then reappeared clandestinely. In November 1962 *The Workers' Union* began publishing again as *Wahdat al-Ummal* (*Workers' Unity*), and in January 1963 *Sawt al-Furat* reappeared. The party also established newspapers to represent the interests of women (*Huquq al-Mar'a / Women's Rights*) and students (*Kifah al-Talaba / The Student's Struggle*), as well as two papers in Armenian to represent the Armenian community.⁴⁰ In light of the numerous strikes, student demonstrations, and rural challenges to landowner prerogatives, all of which the British asserted were the work of the ICP, the distribution of these newspapers undoubtedly contributed to the party's success in mobilizing protest against the state.

Intellectuals were also active in professional syndicates and cultural organizations. Teachers, lawyers, journalists, and artists all belonged to professional syndicates and their attendant clubs, where members could meet to discuss professional, cultural, and political matters. These organizations frequently became involved in politics.⁴¹ There were also many student organizations at the university level. Complementing the syndicates were many intellectual associations formed during the postwar years, such as the Society for Modern Art, the Iraqi Writers Association, and the group of communist intellectuals associated with *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida* (*New Culture*), which first appeared in 1953. Considering the wide range of institutions and organizations within which the Iraqi intelligentsia functioned during the postwar era, the Iraqi intelligentsia acquired a more corporate sense of identity, which enhanced its impact on social and political affairs. Thus the ICP's *The Workers' Union* referred to radical intellectuals as "*al-Muthaqqifun al-Ahrar*" (free intellectuals) who would join the alliance of workers, peasants, "*kadihun*" (literally "toilers," i.e., the leaders of the ICP), and the masses to overthrow the existing system. The reference to intellectuals in group terms—as "free intellectuals"—was an indicator that a significant portion of the intelligentsia was indeed assuming a greater corporate identity.

Of particular importance was the short-lived journal *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida*, which published two issues in 1953 and 1954 before being closed by the government of Fadil al-Jamali. Although it later became affiliated with the ICP, the list of its founding members read like a veritable who's who of the Iraqi intelligentsia, such as the short story writers 'Abd al-Malik Nuri

and Fu'ad al-Takarli, the poets Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, and Kadhim al-Samawi, the novelist Gha'ib Tu'ama Farman, the critic Muhammad Sharara, the playwright Yusuf al-'Ani, and, from the university, leftist professors such as Faysal al-Samir, Salah Khalis, and Ibrahim Kubba. The title of the journal, which first appeared in November 1953, indicated a desire to break with the past and its founders' belief in the central role of culture in bringing about political and social change. Its inaugural issue stated that its aim was to provide "a journal of scientific thought and free culture."⁴² Although the journal's emphasis on publishing writings of practical value was commendable, a difficulty that plagued Iraqi nationalist politicians and intellectuals was their rejection of the past, which resulted in the continued neglect of traditional Arab culture. Although *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida* played a critical role in intellectual discourse when it reappeared after the July 1958 Revolution, its editorial board and contributors never seemed to realize that tradition remained important to the lives of many Iraqis, especially those of the politically active middle class.

Despite its rejection of the existing social and political system, it is difficult to characterize the postwar Iraqi intelligentsia as composed of "organic intellectuals" in the Gramscian sense. A key problem was the lack of intellectuals who were also active politicians and who could thus act as a bridge between intellectual creativity and political action. There were important exceptions. One was the famous communist leader Fahd (Yusif Salman Yusif), one of the founders of the ICP. Another was Kamil al-Chadirji, one of the founding members of the Ahali Group and founder of the NDP. Interestingly, both had backgrounds as journalists. Originally from the southern Iraqi city of al-Nasiriya, Fahd served as a journalist for the National Party newspaper prior to becoming a communist. Although his execution in February 1949 cut his life short, Fahd nevertheless left behind extensive writings on political and social affairs. He was especially sensitive to Iraq's multiethnic composition and was in the forefront of (male) writers who called for women's rights.⁴³

One of Fahd's most important legacies for the 1950s was the introduction of the idea of the national front into Iraqi politics, which was pursued with great vigor by the communist movement both before and especially following Fahd's death. Because the communists could not openly participate in politics, the NDP under Kamil al-Chadirji's leadership dominated the two important national fronts formed during the 1950s. The first was the United Electoral Front, formed to contest the June 1954 elections. The second, the United National Front, was formed in February 1957 and aimed to rid Iraq of Nuri al-Sa'id, dissolve the National Assembly, withdraw Iraq from the

Baghdad Pact, commit the country to positive neutrality, implement democratic freedoms, end martial law, and release all political prisoners.⁴⁴

The ICP achieved prominence by the late 1940s in large measure because of Fahd's organizing skills and his tireless efforts to expand its cadres. Following Fahd's execution in 1949, none of his successors matched his stature, as either an intellectual or a party leader, and constant police repression combined with the lack of an effective leader led to the ICP's fragmentation. By the mid-1950s a number of factions had developed within the party, the Qa'ida and Ra'yat al-Shaghila being the most prominent.

Another important intellectual and political activist was Kamil al-Chadirji, founder and head of the NDP. When he was a young man, al-Chadirji's reformist impulses led him to join the National Party. He subsequently joined the Ahali Group, and then accepted a ministerial portfolio in the Sidqi-Sulayman government in 1936. Despite the failure of the Sidqi regime, al-Chadirji's commitment to reform only intensified. As a result of his unceasing activities on behalf of a more politically participatory society and greater equity in the distribution of wealth, he was twice imprisoned during the 1950s.

Apart from his political activities, al-Chadirji was an accomplished photographer, as evidenced in *The Photography of Kamil Chadirji*, which was published posthumously by his son, Rifat.⁴⁵ He was likewise very interested in architecture, which could be seen in his house in Baghdad, which incorporated modern Western styles, including Bauhaus. al-Chadirji was well versed in literature and art as well as Western political philosophy. The newspapers he edited, *al-Ahali* and *Sawt al-Ahali*, both concentrated on Western and Soviet literature almost to the exclusion of Arab literature.

Few intellectuals were simultaneously politically active and efficacious, and those who were, such as Fahd and al-Chadirji, faced attacks not only from the state, but also from other quarters. For example, the credentials of the ICP and the NDP in supporting Arab causes were constantly being impugned. However, a careful analysis of the postwar era demonstrates that both Fahd and al-Chadirji were sympathetic to Pan-Arab concerns, although not according to the romantic, nostalgic, and corporatist model that traced its lineage to al-Husari, al-Sab'awi, and al-Sabbagh. For Fahd, support for the Palestinian Arabs had less to do with ethnicity than with the ICP's view of Zionism as a tool of imperialism. The party's formation in 1946 of the League for Combating Zionism ('Asabat Mukafahat al-Sahyuniya) reflected this logic through its inclusion of both Arabs and Jews, among other groups. Nevertheless, the ICP remained suspicious of nationalism and only admitted insensitivity to Pan-Arab concerns in 1957, when it joined the

United National Front. The party's ambiguity toward Pan-Arabism and its continued inclusion of Jewish members during the late 1940s, after the founding of Israel, would later be used to great effect by the Ba'ath Party to create a historical memory that impugned the ICP's patriotism by associating the party with sympathy for Zionism.⁴⁶

For his part, al-Chadirji opposed the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and strongly supported strengthening the Arab League.⁴⁷ Already in 1946, *Sawt al-Ahali* was publishing editorials attacking Anglo-American pressures for the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state. Members of the NDP joined with other parties, particularly the Independence Party, in forming the Committee for the Defense of Palestine (Lajnat al-Difa' an Filistin), which sent protests to the American and British ambassadors in Iraq and called, in May 1946, for a general strike to express Iraqi discontent with Western policy toward Palestine. When the 1948 Arab-Israeli War broke out, al-Chadirji published a front-page editorial in *Sawt al-Ahali* entitled "Palestine," in which he called for a vigorous defense of Palestinian rights, including military intervention by the Arab states.⁴⁸

Perhaps al-Chadirji's major accomplishment during the postwar era was his effort in the 1950s to unite various political parties and organizations into a national front to oppose the monarchical state's dictatorial policies. al-Chadirji realized after the 1948 Wathba and the 1952 Intifada that a single party could not bring about significant change.⁴⁹ Already having joined with the Independence Party in 1946 to promote the Palestinian cause, al-Chadirji was the central actor in organizing a national front, which contested the parliamentary elections of June 1954, probably the closest approximation to free elections in modern Iraqi history.⁵⁰ Despite constant police coercion, the National Electoral Front (al-Jabha al-Intikhabiya al-Wataniya) was able to win 10 of the 135 seats.

The 1954 elections highlighted the growing tensions within the political elite. The relative freedom under which the elections were held was largely the result of the crown prince 'Abd al-Ilah's resentment of Nuri al-Sa'id because of his control of parliament through the Constitutional Union Party (Hizb al-Ittihad al-Dusturi).⁵¹ 'Abd al-Ilah believed that by exploiting an opportunity when Nuri was out of office and abroad he could increase the number of independent candidates in the new parliament, thereby eliminating the party's absolute majority. The elections were the result of not only 'Abd al-Ilah and Nuri's personal rivalry, but also their policy differences over whether Iraq should form a union with Syria. Although Nuri warned 'Abd al-Ilah from London that his party needed to retain between seventy-

two and eighty seats if serious political instability were to be avoided, the crown prince ignored the advice.

The parliamentary elections of June 1954, during which the monarchy relaxed its control over the electoral process, allowed opposition parties able to form the National Front and win ten seats in the elections.⁵² What particularly unnerved Nuri and the traditional political elite was the vigor of the National Front's campaign and the fact that the seats it won were in Baghdad and Mosul, Iraq's two most important cities. Further, Nuri's party lost its parliamentary majority. The new parliament only met once, in July 1954, and was promptly dissolved. August elections created a new parliament, which Nuri's party once again dominated.

The National Front's strong showing in urban areas, where the state was least able to rig voting results, had the ironic consequence of forcing 'Abd al-Ilah to dissolve the new parliament and turn to Nuri to form a new government, as the monarchy had repeatedly done during past crises. The flagrant manipulations of the new elections stripped whatever legitimacy the parliamentary system had maintained, especially following the arrest during the June campaign of several National Front candidates who were not released until the elections were over.

The June 1954 elections demonstrated that, under the appropriate conditions, the democratic election of civic-minded representatives in Iraq could occur. Further, the coalition that formed the National Front included political parties whose agendas and interests were divergent. The participants included the NDP, the Independence Party, the ICP, and the Peace Partisans, a front organization for the communists. The NDP and the Independence Party were the only declared political parties because the ICP was still an illegal organization.

A detailed analysis of the 1954 elections points to a number of important conclusions about prerevolution Iraqi politics. First, despite the continuity of authoritarian politics since the Bakr Sidqi coup of 1936 (except for the brief interregnum of the 1946 Tawfiq al-Suwaydi ministry), once repression abated in 1954, the politically active urban populace was able to quickly organize a campaign and engage in sophisticated political discourse and activities. Second, opposition parties were able to mount an effective campaign and win seats in strategic districts in Iraq's major urban centers. Third, the National Front included both Iraqist nationalists and Pan-Arabists who maintained their solidarity despite efforts by Pan-Arabists both within and outside the political elite to split the organization. Not only do these facts belie the idea that prerevolution Iraq was bereft of any democratic political

process, but they also point to the development of the foundations of civil society among sectors of the urban middle class. The elections challenge the notion promoted by the Qasim regime and especially the Ba'athist regimes that political disorder and decay caused by imperialist domination necessitated military regimes and/or one-party rule to "protect the people."

The election results were all the more impressive because the authorities tried vigorously to suppress the National Front's campaign, which enjoyed widespread support not only in Baghdad and Mosul, but in cities in the south such as al-Najaf and al-Hilla and in Kurdish areas such as Sulaymaniya in the north. Large and spirited crowds appeared at campaign rallies, making the elections not only the freest but also the most spirited in modern Iraqi history. Banners appeared on houses in support of the National Front's candidates, and cars with megaphones patrolled city streets calling for voters to vote for the organization's candidates. Calls for an end to "feudalism" (*al-iqta'*) and for distribution of land to the peasantry were profoundly frightening to the monarchy's supporters.⁵³

Promonarchy newspapers criticized the National Front as unconcerned with Arab affairs and cited as evidence the absence of any reference to the liberation of Palestine in its charter. The hidden text was that the National Front's candidates were Iraqist nationalists (and comprised primarily of Shi'is and other minorities) and therefore not true Iraqi patriots. This point underscores the manner in which the traditional political elite (like the Ba'ath Party after it) was quick to provoke sectarianism as a way of dividing the political opposition. Second, it is important to note that the Independence Party joined the National Front despite the predominance of Iraqist nationalist forces, and did not withdraw under attacks designed to cast aspersions on its Pan-Arab credentials. In light of the party's strong Pan-Arabism, its position demonstrated that its primary commitment was to democratic reforms. In short, the 1954 elections indicate that ideologically diverse forces could cooperate, even under stressful conditions.

The electoral success of the National Front encouraged additional attempts at cooperative political action.⁵⁴ An important stimulus for creating a new national front stemmed from nationalist opposition to the Baghdad Pact, which was signed in 1955. The Tripartite Invasion of Egypt by Great Britain, France, and Israel following the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal was the catalyst that brought the idea to fruition. Armed uprisings in 1956 in the hotbed of revolution, al-Najaf and its nearby suburb al-Hayy, which accompanied demonstrations in support of Egypt throughout Iraq but which failed to effect any change in national policy, made the necessity of joint action even more urgent. The army's reticence in suppressing the al-

Najaf and al-Hayy revolts was, at the same time, a positive development in the eyes of the opposition political parties. Soon contact between the National Front and opposition elements within the military was established.

Once again Kamil al-Chadirji played a central role in opposing Nuri and the political elite. First, because it was a legal political party, the NDP was able to lead a national front. As the weakest opposition party, the Independence Party could not play a leadership role, while the ICP and the Ba'ath Party were still illegal. Second, al-Chadirji made it clear that the NDP would only participate in a national front directed by a truly collective leadership. His insistence that no party try to subordinate the front to its own interests was intended as a message to the communists who had first approached him about creating it. Third, he emphasized that the front should be as inclusive as possible and not reach out only to parties on the left. Finally, and very significantly, in light of later attempts to characterize Iraqist nationalists as insensitive to Pan-Arabism, al-Chadirji stressed that the front should recognize the legitimacy of such concerns.⁵⁵

The announcement of the front's creation, secretly printed by the ICP, was enthusiastically welcomed throughout Iraq.⁵⁶ At al-Chadirji's insistence, the front was led by a "Supreme Committee" (al-Lajna al-'Ulya) consisting of the four main parties—the NDP, the ICP, and the Independence and Ba'ath parties—and an executive committee, which included not only the National Front's four main parties, but also representatives of smaller parties and independents whose responsibility was to forge links with local organizations and disseminate information to affiliated groups throughout the country.⁵⁷

It has been argued that given the failure of electoral politics and the persistence of police repression, the only alternative to the monarchy was military intervention. This argument makes it seem as though the nationalist movement had, by the late 1950s, reached its apogee in terms of strength and that the army was, in effect, forced to seize power. Taken to its logical extension, this model becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for authoritarian rule in Iraq. In other words, the military interventions of 1936, 1941, and 1958 all demonstrated, to those who supported these interventions, that the fractious nature of Iraqi politics necessitated authoritarian rule by the military.

What this model neglects is that the nationalist movement's constant chipping away at the monarchy's legitimacy paved the way for the military's seizure of power in July 1958, and that its constant challenges to state prerogatives provided the military with the idea of seizing power itself. In 1936 and in 1941, the army opposed certain factions of the political elite but still envisioned itself as conceptually distinct from the machinery of the

state. It was only after the failed campaign in Palestine in 1948 that the army began to envision a complete restructuring of the state, that is, the creation of a republic. However, it was the Wathba, which was organized by nationalist forces and forced the Salih Jabr government from power, that spread the idea among army officers that they could overthrow the monarchy. This issue is not just one of historical detail, but it is linked to a broader argument about whether military, and hence authoritarian, rule was preordained for the modern Iraqi state.

Materials that have come to light since the revolution point to the manner in which the constant street demonstrations eroded the political will of the monarchy and its supporters. Even the head of the secret police, Bahjat 'Atiya, indicated in a secret report just prior to the revolution that the state faced a tenacious enemy.⁵⁸ By 1956, Nuri al-Sa'id was completely discredited along with most of the political elite. Reports prior to the revolution indicate that 'Abd al-Ilah was resigned to the impending overthrow of the monarchy.⁵⁹ Indeed, on the morning of July 14, as the Rihab Palace was being shelled by rebellious army units, 'Abd al-Ilah refused to order the palace guard to return fire, opting instead to surrender immediately and to sue for safe passage for the royal family from Iraq.⁶⁰

The constant pressure by nationalist forces, combined with the divisions within the political elite between reformers such as Fadil al-Jamali and authoritarians such as Nuri and 'Abd al-Ilah, undermined political authority to such an extent that the *ancien régime* fell with hardly a shot fired on July 14, 1958. Clearly, the nationalist movement established the necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for the revolution. Although the nationalist movement did not speak with one voice, the formation of a national front by its moderate core, namely the NDP and the Independence Party, indicated the possibility of reconciling competing interpretations of Iraqi political community. However, it was the more radical extremes of the two competing models of political community—the communists and especially the Ba'athists—that created the strident politics that later produced such violence and suffering for the Iraqi people. Likewise, much of the state-sponsored violence that characterized the Ba'ath Party in 1963 and again after 1968 could already be seen in embryonic form during the late 1940s and 1950s. Public hangings, torture of political dissidents, the stripping of citizenship from opposition figures, the promotion of political divisions through sectarianism, censorship, the public licensing of typewriters, "good conduct" certificates for entering the university, and rule by decree instead of through established constitutional laws and regulations were all policies later perfected by the Ba'ath Party.⁶¹

Despite the steady decline into authoritarianism, resulting in an increase of political violence and abuse of human rights, there were also developments that pointed in the opposite direction. The tremendous strides in innovative cultural production, which, for the most part, promoted tolerance, cultural diversity, and humanistic values, did not produce a correspondingly tolerant, participatory, and democratic politics prior to 1958. However, this cultural production did provide a historical memory that democratic forces could draw upon in their efforts to change the course of future Iraqi politics. It also set the stage for further advances in cultural production following the 1958 Revolution. That this legacy represented and continues to represent such an implicit threat helps explain why Saddam Husayn and the Ba'ath Party were so keen to erase this historical memory.

The state's institutions had virtually atrophied by the 1958 Revolution. Apart from the crown prince, 'Abd al-Ilah, Nuri, and a small circle of supporters and the secret police, the institutions of the state did not comprise a coherent structure. The political elite was divided between reformers and hard-liners who refused to consider any political change. The army could not be trusted to support the monarchy and thus was denied access to ammunition for tanks, cannons, and small arms without the explicit permission of Nuri and 'Abd al-Ilah. Although there were many outstanding lawyers in prerevolution Iraq, the law was not applied in a consistent or equitable fashion. This was especially true in political cases, which were decided by the palace and Nuri.

Despite the loss of what Gramsci called the "trenches of civil society," by which he meant the support of the state's inner core by its outer defenses such as the educational, legal, and religious systems, the monarchy did make some tentative steps toward structuring political consciousness and historical memory. In this respect, it demonstrated some sensitivity to the need to spread hegemonic forms of thought. The official description of Iraq produced by the monarchy in 1939 is one example. By May 1953, a directorate-general of propaganda was active in the Ministry of the Interior.⁶² The *Army Journal* was founded in 1939 to extol the military's virtues and its role in Iraq's social development and defense, and the army established its own press to disseminate information "on military subjects."⁶³ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg states that the monarchy briefly experimented with a Ministry of Guidance during the 1950s, which officially became the Ministry of Guidance and Information in 1958.⁶⁴

The creation of institutions and media to structure the way in which the populace viewed history, culture, and politics was another indicator of the nationalist movement's impact. The use of propaganda reflected less an in-

novative strategy by the state than a response to nationalist challenges to its prerogatives. The enactment of the Labor Law of 1936, even though it excluded agricultural workers, was a tacit recognition of the increased strength of the labor movement, and particularly the power of unions and syndicates, which were first formed in 1924.⁶⁵ The law's amendment in 1944 to permit workers to organize, and in 1954 to settle worker-management disputes and create a minimum wage, which was raised again in 1957, also demonstrated a recognition of workers' increased political power in certain sectors of industry. Creation of the Social Security Law in 1956, which applied to government departments and, in the private sector, the oil industry, no doubt reflecting the law's strategic importance and the power of labor to influence it, reflected the same dynamics, namely an attempt to co-opt nationalist forces that posed a significant threat to the state.⁶⁶

What were the structural impediments to the creation of a democratic polity on the eve of the 1958 Revolution? First, the tremendous disjuncture between urban and rural life represented a serious constraint. The conditions of rural society, where peasants lived almost as serfs and tribal shaykhs ruled semi-autonomous regions, offset the impact of the dynamic and progressive developments that were occurring in urban areas, especially Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra.⁶⁷ Realization of the fact that fewer than 1 percent of the populace owned more than 46 percent of the total cultivatable land was a serious impediment to change led all reform-minded groups to call for land reform as a *sine qua non* for social change. Complementing the rural landowning class was the small elite of urban merchants and even smaller industrial bourgeoisie. Members of this social stratum were often extremely wealthy and loath to endorse any reforms that might undermine their economic and political power.

However, to attribute the problems of social change solely to the power of landowners and the urban mercantile and industrial bourgeoisie to impede such change ignores a number of important considerations. Focusing solely on the social class issue ignores the continuity of sectarianism as a core component of the political process. Although parties such as the NDP and ICP fought to overcome sectarian divisions, the major institutions of the state such as the parliament, the army, and the post of prime minister remained firmly under Sunni Arab domination and control. It was not until 1948 that Iraq finally appointed a Shi'i, Salih Jabr, prime minister. His appointment had less to do with redressing sectarian differences than with the political calculation that his pro-British sentiments combined with his professional status would facilitate reformulation of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in a manner that would satisfy the political elite. The appointment in

1952 of another Shi'i, Muhammad al-Sadr, a respected religious figure whose government lasted only four and a half months, was simply a response to that year's Intifada, a tacit recognition of large-scale Shi'i dissatisfaction with political and social conditions. Put differently, Shi'is were called upon to serve as prime ministers only when it suited the needs of the Sunni-dominated elite. Manipulation of sectarianism was not limited to the Shi'a but also affected the Kurds. After the creation of the Arab Union with Jordan in response to Egypt and Syria forming the United Arab Republic, Jamal Baban was appointed prime minister to assuage the fears of his fellow Kurds that they would be submerged in the new union.

Two additional lessons from the postwar period help explain why authoritarian rule triumphed over a participatory model of political community. Since the onset of World War I in 1914, Iraq had been characterized by almost continuous periods of conflict and disorder. It is not difficult to comprehend how the urban middle classes could yearn for order and stability. In other words, certain sectors of the populace, the middle classes in particular, were increasingly prone to support authoritarian movements because of the strong desire for some sort of predictability in daily life. This attitude would be even more prevalent in 1968, when the second Ba'thist regime came to power after a decade of unparalleled turmoil.

A second factor influencing postwar political development was the increasing resort to conspiracy theories to explain the travails of Iraqi politics. The foundations of this thinking can be found in Sati' al-Husari's educational philosophy during the 1920s. The Sunni Arab middle class's interpretation (particularly in Baghdad) of the 1933 Assyrian uprising as a British conspiracy to divide Iraq and the view of the Bakr Sidqi's coup d'état as a Kurdish plot to appropriate Sunni Arab political prerogatives exemplified the development of this thinking. The al-Muthanna Club's promotion of anti-Jewish feelings was not just a manifestation of a racially oriented ideology, but also an effort to find simple explanations for complex problems. The lack of trust among different sectors of the political elite, economic deprivation, and the failure of political institutions, especially those insuring fair and free elections, continued to exist after 1958. Thus Saddam Husayn and the Ba'th Party were not the progenitors of a conspiratorial and bunker mentality, but rather were the heirs to that tradition who refined it to new heights of paranoia and xenophobia.

Nevertheless, the period between 1945 and 1958 witnessed an incredible outburst of organizational and cultural activity. Developments in literature and the arts were to place Iraq in the forefront of much intellectual development in the Arab world. Iraqis had demonstrated that they were politically

sophisticated and able to participate in democratic elections. The proliferation of political parties, clubs, and civic and artistic associations was impressive in light of the state's hostility to any organization beyond its control. In newspapers, journals, and monographs, Iraqis expressed a strong sense of nationalism, indicating a commitment to the nation and a desire for political community. Although authoritarian rule was to triumph once again after the overthrow of the monarchy, a powerful historical memory of the post-World War II years remained that democratic forces opposed to the Ba'th Party could draw upon to mobilize in their attempt to remove it from power after the Iran-Iraq and Gulf wars and 1991 Intifada had dissipated support for the regime.

5 The Crucible

The July 14, 1958 Revolution and the Struggle over Historical Memory

If the army and the Ministry of Defense were the mother of the Revolution, then the Ministry of Guidance and the Iraqi State Broadcasting System constitute the infant Revolution's nursery.

Committee for the Celebration of the July 14th Revolution

Early on the morning of July 14, 1958, tanks of the Iraqi army's Twentieth Brigade rolled into Baghdad and surrounded the royal family at Rihab Palace. Despite the royal guard's desire to resist, the crown prince, 'Abd Allah, quickly decided to surrender and sue for safe passage out of the country. As the royal family emerged from the palace, a captain in the attacking party opened fire with his machine gun, causing other troops to fire as well, and everyone in the royal family except the crown prince's sister was killed. An urban mob subsequently seized the bodies of the crown prince and King Faysal II and dragged them through the streets of Baghdad. The following day, the hated Nuri al-Sa'id was discovered trying to escape the city disguised as a woman. Whether he was immediately shot or shot himself is disputed. Following a secret burial, Nuri's body was disinterred by those in control of the street and paraded through the capital as well. After two days of urban unrest, the army intervened to reestablish public order. In a matter of hours and with hardly any struggle, the Hashimite Monarchy had come to an end. The ease with which the monarchy slipped in the annals of history was indicative of the complete lack of support it had come to enjoy by that fateful morning in July of 1958.

The July 14, 1958 Revolution created great expectations among the Iraqi people, the bloody events of the first day notwithstanding. Yet within a few months, the new regime was beset by internal struggles and dissension that spread to the populace at large. Why did the revolution experience so much internal conflict? Why did the revolution fail to adopt a more democratic character? Why, after entering the new government as cabinet ministers, were the nationalist politicians who had fought the monarchy so tenaciously unable to force the new military regime to hold open elections?