Chapter 5

Oppression and Resistance in Post-Colonial Iraq

> [T]he artificially-imposed discourses and institutions of constitutional monarchy, elitist ideology, and especially Saddam's brand of Baathism have historically fought so hard to take root in the Iraqi cultural sensibilities that they provoked a heterogeneous counter-culture of resistance. (Al-Musawi 2006: 8)

Re-thinking Post-Colonial Iraq

The Revolution of 1958 marked a fundamental turn in Iraqi politics. It saw the nation proceed from the Colonialism of the British and the hegemony of their installed Hashemite monarchy towards the emergence of a Post-Colonial Iraq (1958–2003). It also saw the emergence of various Post-Colonial political discourses which seemed to carry with them the promise of a new Iraq. Clearly, however, there were a number of competing visions of what this new Iraq should look like. While the events of the revolution and the important political schisms which followed are addressed later in this chapter, it is critical to note here that while Post-Colonial Iraq made many initial steps towards a more equitable and democratic life, most of this period is characterized by the ascension of a number of repressive regimes culminating in the rise of the Baath party and the self-elected presidency of Saddam Hussein.

While the Iraqi people suffered under the weight of these oppressive regimes, in the West the rule of several Iraqi dictators, but especially Saddam Hussein, fitted very neatly with already existing notions of Oriental despotism. This was especially true during times of conflict such as the Gulf War of 1991 during which Saddam was painted as an evil madman, likened to Hitler and compared to the megalomaniacal and bloodthirsty kings of the ancient Near East (Keeble 1998, Philo and McLaughlin 1995, Toth 1992). He was dubbed 'The Beast of Baghdad' as 'Countless stories were needlessly repeated throughout the mainstream media of his brutality … [while] Tabloid magazines published sensational stories detailing his alleged sexual crimes and perversions' (Kellner 1995: 208). This continued throughout the 1990s, especially when

Saddam violated various UN restrictions and Iraq was subsequently subjected to missile strikes by the United States, Britain and France in 1993 and again in 1998 (Richardson 2004: 157–71). By focusing on the desire to punish the Oriental despot, the press were able to evoke 'an imperialist and indeed racist ideology of relations between nations, which contributes to the continuity of imperialist and neo-Colonialist relations in practice' (Fairclough 1995: 102).

While the events of September 11 2001 are not the focus here, it is worth noting that they provided the US Administration with clear evidence that the fundamental paradigm underpinning relations between the West and the Orient was a 'Clash of Civilizations' (Tomanic-Trivundza 2004: 480). This is perhaps best evidenced by US President George W. Bush's declaration of a 'War on Terror' – a clear interpretative framework that enabled him to contrast what he saw as the righteous forces of the West against the terrorizing hordes of the non-Western world. As part of the War on Terror, the US government began building their case to attack Iraq based on two central allegations that were later proven so abjectly false: that Saddam supported terrorism and had links to Al-Qaeda, and that he was harbouring Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which he was likely to use or supply to others. This assertion became especially clear in President Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address, which focused much of its attention on Iraq. Towards the end of the speech, the President claimed that

> Before 11 September 2001, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents and lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons, and other plans – this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take just one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known. We will do everything in our power to make sure that day never comes. (Bush 2003d)

The Western mainstream media began beating the drums of war. They painted a typically Orientalist picture of Iraqis as degenerate, primitive and untrustworthy, yet cunning and vicious (Brown 2006: 105). As Said noted in an essay published in the lead up to the war, this one-eyed view of Iraq enabled 'the dehumanization of the hated "other"' by reducing their 'existence to a

few insistently repeated simple phrases, images, and concepts. This makes it easier to bomb the enemy without qualm' (Said 2004 [2002]: 217). It also helped to assure Western audiences that the war was legitimate and, more problematically, it 'drew on an imagined and vaguely racist legacy of the way "the West" has historically positioned itself as being responsible for "civilizing the world"' (Richardson 2007: 191).

Central to all of this was the demonization of Saddam. Familiar stories re-emerged as Western media audiences were bombarded with images and articles about his many wives and lovers, his blood-lust and his brutal political strategies. More bizarrely, the media took a peculiar interest in the number of surgically-enhanced body-doubles Saddam apparently had scattered across the country, his sexual perversions, the excessive decadence of his palaces and the endless catacombs and bomb-shelters that would protect him from even the most deadly air raids (Paz and Aviles 2009). The crimes of his sons, Udday and Qusay, were dutifully recounted while others focused on Saddam's alleged tendency to have anyone executed who dared to challenge his authority or question his motives. In this way, the image of Saddam Hussein and his regime fitted well with the age-old discourse of Oriental despotism. Like the excesses and brutality of the Persian kings and other Asiatic despots found in the work of Montesquieu and Chardin for example, Saddam's despotism was that of arbitrary power exerted over an unwilling and terrified populace.

For scholars such as Kanan Makiya, the tyranny of the Baath is indicative of the broader failings of the Iraqi people themselves who, along with all Arabs, had not grasped notions of modernity, liberty, equality and justice (Makiya 1998 [1989]). This is made explicit in his *Cruelty and Silence* in which he claims that

> Men like Saddam Hussein … are indigenous creations of modern Arab political culture, which until now has failed to produce anything better … [Arabs] have failed to evolve a genuinely convincing language of rights in politics … [They] have become fossilized, backward-looking and steeped in a romanticism of 'struggle' which is conducive to violence … [They must]

> begin to realize that they are overwhelmingly responsible for the deplorable state of their world. (Makiya 1993: 282)

Taking such notions even further, Said Aburish opens his work *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* by connecting the rule of Saddam to Iraqi history. In a few short pages, he reduces thousands of years of Iraq's complex political past down to a lineage of blood-thirsty and dictatorial regimes. For him, the rise of Saddam

> has to be understood in the context of the history of Iraq … Saddam as an individual may be unique, even demonic, but he is also a true son of Iraq. Even his use of violence to achieve his aims is not a strictly personal characteristic, but rather an unattractive trait of the Iraqi people reinforced by their history … [and] the violence and cruelty which accompanied every change in the governance of the country throughout its history … [Together] the turbulent history, harsh environment and multi-stranded culture of Iraq have produced a complex and unique conglomerate which lacks the ingredients for creating a homogenous country and a commitment to the idea of a national community. (Aburish 2000: 1–3)

Aside from their assertion that a culture of unchanging authoritarianism was a product of the failings of the Iraqi people throughout history, such works develop and promulgate a remarkably one-eyed view of the Post-Colonial era in Iraq. It is important to acknowledge from the start that while this chapter does offer a more nuanced view of the Post-Colonial period, it is no way a defence of the tyranny of the Baath and the brutal megalomania of Saddam. Specifically, the first section examines the quashing of Iraq's civil society and the tight restraints exerted over the nation's media throughout the period. It also addresses the ways in which various Post-Colonial regimes, but especially the Baath, were adept at manipulating the discourses of democracy in order to mask their tyranny and coerce people into patriotism. Moving beyond this, however, the second section documents the various clandestine opposition groups that began to emerge across Iraq's divergent ethno-religious and political divides who resisted Baathist oppression and agitated for democratic change. They produced their own media outlets which proved effective in voicing the various frustrations and grievances of Iraqis

of all backgrounds and shades of opinion, giving way to a renewed public sphere.[1] The Post-Colonial era, therefore, alternative history of Iraq from the mid-twentieth through to the early twenty-first century in which one finds a sophisticated political culture deeply concerned with the issue of democratic governance.

State Propaganda and the Discourses of Democracy

As far back as 1951 the fledgling Arab Baath Socialist Party (*Hizb Al-Baath Al-Arabi Al-Ishtiraki*)[2] had been gathering momentum in the Iraqi armed forces. Although Baathist ideology developed in Damascus around 1940, it emigrated to Iraq in 1949 and developed a loyal following in Iraq under the leadership of Faud Al-Rikabi, a young Iraqi engineer from Nasiriyya (Baram 1991: 9–13). The early message of the Baath in Iraq was relatively similar to Post-Colonial movements elsewhere: Iraq and the broader Arab region would never reach their potential in the modern world if they continued to suffer the inequities and suppression of foreign occupation. Disseminated via Baathist organs such as *Al-Hurriya* ('The Freedom'), *Al-Afkar* ('The Idea') and, their later subsidiary, *Al-Amal* ('The Labour'), this message understandably appealed to many Iraqis, particularly members of the military and the intelligentsia, who were yet to experience total independence from the British occupation and its installed Hashemite monarchy (Davis 2005b: 96). By 1952 a number of Baathist-leaning cells within the military had emerged, constituting the 'Free Officers' movement, and these were later inspired and somewhat radicalized in a series of major steps taken by Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt towards his vision of the 'United Arab Republic' (Stansfield 2007: 92).

Among the more influential converts to the early doctrine of the Baath were two of Iraq's most senior military officers, Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qasim and Colonel Abdus-Salam

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[1] Earlier work by the author includes a set of detailed tables that document the most significant media outlets of Post-Colonial Iraq, both those controlled by the state and by the various political and ethno-religious opposition movements (Isakhan 2009a: 251-6).

[2] *Baath* translates to mean 'Awakening', 'Renaissance' or 'Renewal' and the party will henceforth be termed the Baath or ABSP.

Arif (Tripp 2000: 144). Together, the forces loyal to these two men had gathered enough momentum to storm Baghdad on 14 July 1958, seizing control of key government buildings, including the national radio station and the royal palace. While Arif used the radio to announce, 'Citizens of Baghdad, the Monarchy is dead! The Republic is here!' (Arif cited in Mackey 2002: 157), his soldiers fulfilled his pronouncement by murdering all but one member of the royal family. The bodies of the Regent Abd Al-Ilah and the young King Faisal II were promptly sequestered by the angry civilian mob that had followed the military into the palace and dragged through the streets of Baghdad. The next day the body of the newly-deposed Prime Minister, Nuri Al-Said, was seized by another mob after he was discovered trying to flee Iraq dressed as a woman (Dawisha 2009: 171–2).

The revolutionaries were not a homogenous entity, however. They represented a fundamental schism which had long split secular Iraqi political movements into two main camps: those supporting the more left-wing Qasim who had garnered the support of much of the military and the members of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) under the loose ideology of Iraqi nationalism; while others followed Arif who adhered to more of a Pan-Arab approach, attracting the orthodox members of the emerging Baathist movement (Fernea and Louis 1991). Given Qasim's superior rank and broader initial support, he was the natural heir to the events of the *coup d'état* and he quickly established a series of lofty goals for his incumbency, including his desire to

> increase and distribute the national wealth … to found a new society and a new democracy, to use this strong, democratic, Arabist Iraq as an instrument to free and elevate other Arabs and Afro-Asians and to assist the destruction of 'imperialism', by which he largely meant British influence in the underdeveloped countries. (Curtis 2004: 82)

While such goals were never fully realized, Qasim's leadership did foster the development of a nascent public sphere made up of a myriad of political parties, professional associations, labour movements and intellectual groups who fervently debated the political events and ideologies of

their time. Qasim also oversaw the formation of the Sovereignty Council (*Majlis Siyadat Al-Thawra*) and the Iraqi cabinet and he took unprecedented steps to counter Iraqi sectarianism and sexism, including the involvement of Shias, Kurds, other ethnic and religious minorities and women at various levels of government (Davis 2005b: 116–9). This diverse political climate was also reflected in the Iraqi media sector where the heavily partisan newspapers of Iraq generally enjoyed considerable autonomy and popularity. The early 1960s saw an upsurge in newspaper production across Iraq, with over 20 in Baghdad alone. Approximately one-third of these Baghdad papers had pro-Communist tendencies, including the re-launched *Ittihad Al-Ummal* ('The Worker's Union') as *Wahdat Al-Ummal* ('The Worker's Unity') in 1962 and, in 1963, the re-appearance of *Sawt Al-Furat* ('The Voice of the Euphrates') (Batatu,1982 [1978]: 35, Rugh 2004: 46–7). With the arrival of television sets in a number of coffeehouses following the 1958 Revolution, the illiterate and poor Iraqi majority gained a new insight into the machinations of politics, both domestic and international. While Qasim initially used this new medium to broadcast the trials of corrupt members of the former regime, the television later became a format to continue the work of countering sectarianism and to encourage national unity (Tripp 2007: 45).

However, Qasim was ultimately undermined by his inability to form effective alliances with his own power base in the ICP and the NDP, as well as by his failure to realize the importance of Pan-Arab ideology to many Iraqi citizens. This created something of a power vacuum in which the disgruntled members of the ABSP were able to gather significant momentum with their vision of a strong Iraq as the leader of a new Pan-Arab alliance. The ABSP repeatedly tried to assassinate Qasim; in 1959 the first attempt involved a young and relatively unknown Baathist by the name of Saddam Hussein. Eventually, the ABSP was able to once again establish loyal cells in the Iraqi army and on 8 February 1963 they seized Baghdad. General Qasim was executed the following day and the image of his body, lying prostrate in a pool of his own blood, was beamed out across Iraq on state television. It appears that the

Baathists had also learned the political power of the television and it was Qasim's final appearance on Iraqi TV which was to be his most memorable.

The first ABSP government of Iraq was thus formed in 1963 under the leadership of Prime Minister Hasan Al-Bakr with Qasim's partner in the 1958 coup, Colonel Arif, installed as President. In events that served as something of a preamble to the tyrannical rule of Saddam Hussein, the Baath Party promptly set about utilizing their newfound powers to imprison, torture and execute what was left of Iraq's nascent opposition movements, especially their long-time foes in the ICP (Stansfield 2007: 93–4). The power of the ABSP was short-lived, however. By the end of the same year, Arif had arrested many of the senior members of the Baath and announced that the military would henceforth be administering the affairs of the state (Goode 1975: 107). In terms of political developments, the events of 1963 – the violent disposal of Qasim, the purge of Iraqi opposition by the Baath and the ascension of the military under Arif – signified the real beginning of authoritarianism in Iraq (Haj, 1997). This trend was to continue after Arif was killed in a helicopter accident in 1966 and his brother, Abdur-Rahman Arif, succeeded him (Batatu 1982 [1978]: 1027–72). Throughout their reign, the Arif brothers also enacted a series of restrictive press laws including Press Law No. 53 which imposed heavy censorship on the press and the tight control of media licences.

The political climate fostered under the consecutive regimes of the Arif brothers did little to encourage the establishment of moderate and legitimate political movements and arguably paved the way for the violent military *coup d'etat* in which the ABSP ascended to authority in 1968 (Dawisha 2009: 183–9). This time Hasan Al-Bakr (now installed as President) made sure that once the military had served its purpose in overthrowing Arif, it would be purged of any potential threats to the new regime (Stansfield 2007: 94–5). A brief struggle for power between the two allies in the coup – the military and the Baath – broke out, with each of these bodies controlling one of the two major newspapers in Iraq at that time, *Al-Thawra* ('The Revolution') and *Al-Jumhuriyya* ('The Republic'), respectively. This struggle for power was promptly

decided in favour of the Baath, and served as another valuable lesson for the party regarding the power of the press.

They acted quickly. One of the Baath party's first acts was to jail, charge and then execute Aziz Abdel Barakat who was both the head of the Journalist's Union and the publisher of the independent *Al-Manar* ('The Lighthouse'), one of the most professionally run and widely distributed dailies in Iraq at the time. Following this, in 1969 the Baath Party established a publications law which effectively made the media the fourth branch of the newly established government. This saw the Iraqi media industry quickly transform into one that was 'more controlled, monolithic, mobilized and almost completely stripped of any critical approach' (Bengio 2004: 110). This meant that by the early 1970s Iraq had only five daily newspapers, each of which was heavily influenced, if not completely controlled by the state. In addition to their own paper, *Al-Jumhuriyah*, they took control of *Al-Thawrah* and the English-language *Baghdad Observer*, and added the Kurdish language *Taakhi* ('Brotherhood') in 1969 and *Tariq al Shab* ('The Path of the People') in 1973 (Rugh 1979: 32).

In terms of the Baath's actual views on democracy, the proceedings of the Eighth National Conference of the ABSP in 1965, are particularly instructive. The party declared that:

> Popular democracy, as understood by the Baath, rises on complete voluntary mutual responsiveness that can materialize between the party and the masses once the party maintains an opening with them and abandons all air of superiority … From this it follows that there can be no room for contradictions between the party's concepts and the concepts of the masses, but rather harmony and concurrence. (*Program of the Arab Baath Socialist Party* 1965: III)

Here, the Baath cleverly invoked the notion of popular democracy while maintaining that such democracy can only work as long as it does not contradict the party's agenda. To make sure that no such contradiction emerges, the conference proceedings state further that 'The party might be compelled, especially in the early stages of the revolution, to feign terror and coercive guidance with the object of crushing the enemies of the revolution' (*Program of the Arab Baath Socialist*

Party 1965: III). In terms of the freedom of the Iraqi public sphere to criticize the party, the Baath warn that while 'the masses [have] the right of constructive criticism within the limits of the nation's progressive line of destiny' such criticism 'cannot become an end in itself, nor can it be allowed to proceed unchecked to the limit of undermining the nationalist socialist line itself' (*Program of the Arab Baath Socialist Party* 1965: III).[3]

These ideas continued after the 1968 coup. From the very beginning of their ascendency the Baath sought to construct themselves as a force for democratic change in Iraq, their 1968 constitution claiming the nation was now a 'popular democratic state' (*Al-Jumhuriyya* 1968). As far as Baathist official policy was concerned, their message to the people was that Baathist democracy was something far greater than Western models as it was not only more stable, but more in tune with Arab sentiment. This is particularly evident in the state press, where newspapers like *Al-Thawra* dutifully ran editorials that reinforced the Baathist vision of democracy, claiming that 'the assumption that democracy means freedom of speech seems ridiculous to Iraqis' (*Al-Thawra*, 1969). The same editorial goes on to claim that the interpretation of democracy to mean 'the freedom of forming parties' was a 'bourgeois assumption' and that 'The socialist revolution and the rule of the one socialist party [the Baath] have made nonsense of this unbalanced assumption' (*Al-Thawra* 1969).[4] The Baath regularly used the media to wage attacks on Western liberal democracies while providing little in the way of rational critique or viable political alternatives. The Baath also utilized the press to differentiate themselves from their predecessors, employing the rhetoric of Oriental despotism to explain away the dictatorships of Qasim and the Arif brothers and contrasting them against an image of the Baath as the people's champion against oppression (Bengio 1998: 64).

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[3] These translations are taken from Roy E. Thoman's *Iraq Under Baathist Rule* (Thoman 1972: 32).

[4] The translations of *Al-Jumhuriyya* and *Al-Thawra* found in this paragraph are from Ofra Bengio's *Saddam's Word* (Bengio 1998: 57, 61).

Concurrently, the little known Saddam Hussein was fast developing a reputation as a ruthless politician and cunning strategist that belied his quiet and aloof nature and his humble rural background. Having played a relatively small but quite strategic role in the ascension of the ABSP to power in 1968, Saddam now dutifully laboured behind the scenes, brilliantly transforming the Baath from a nominal party to a nation-wide phenomenon (Tripp 2000: 195–9). It is now well known that Saddam's rise to power was marked by terror and coercion, that he went on to commit grievous crimes against his own citizens, especially the many religious and ethnic minorities of Iraq and that he was one of the cruellest and most tyrannical despots of modern times (Cordesman and Hashim 1997: 111–8). What is perhaps less well known is that Saddam was the master of a highly developed and multi-tiered propaganda machine. As has been shown in Chapters 2 and 3, he developed his own particular cult of personality by aligning himself with Iraq's Mesopotamian and Islamic heritage. He also managed to build himself a reputation as a political revolutionary, a brilliant strategist, a paternal figure who cared deeply about his nation and a visionary who could lead Iraq – and indeed the entire Arab world – into a modern and prosperous future. He was a powerful and charismatic politician, wielding a rhetoric that appealed directly to the 'everyday' Iraqi.

In this way, Saddam had garnered his own loyal following and when, in 1979, he pressured Bakr to stand-down Bakr had little choice but to abdicate the Presidency to his young protégé. Having witnessed firsthand the power of the media in the rise of the Baath Party to power a little over a decade earlier, Saddam was all too aware of the utility of the press and quickly set about modelling them after earlier totalitarian examples such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Bengio 2004: 110). Although the nation retained its five daily newspapers under Saddam's rule, he was quick to quash any lingering notions of freedom of the press by making sure that the entire media industry came under the authority of the government and that every working journalist was an active member of the ABSP. This meant that each of Iraq's papers soon became state-run propaganda machines, dutifully reciting official policy and praising governmental action. He ensured that this occurred through careful and clandestine

monitoring of the media as well as more banal and overt practices such as insisting that his photograph be featured daily on page one and that each of his speeches was printed in full. Saddam was also careful to prevent Iraqis from too much exposure to external media by periodically jamming news broadcasts from outside Iraq and imposing a five year prison sentence on anyone owning a satellite dish.

Saddam was also keen to engineer a new image of himself as an enlightened and liberal-minded leader, one familiar with sophisticated political models such as democracy. To do so, in the very earliest days of the regime he began creating an aura of radical political change: he allowed several communist works to be translated into Arabic, he wrote his own neo-Marxist editorials and he courted left-leaning intellectuals and activists, inviting them to play an active role in the new Iraq. By shoring up his revolutionary credentials amongst the left and the broader Iraqi community, Saddam was gradually able to shift debate towards the centralization of power. As he became increasingly powerful and dictatorial, Saddam was able to mirror earlier Baathist attempts to manufacture and manipulate a particular image of democracy that suited his own agenda and garnered support for his rule. To do this, Saddam argued that a forward looking Iraq must be centred around a government of 'democratic centralization', a term ultimately used to describe the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Baath (Dawisha 2009: 228–31). Along these lines, the state media dutifully catalogued Saddam's claim that 'Our party has implemented democracy … drawing on noble and eternal sources and origins compatible with the conscience of the people' (*Al-Iraq* 1979).[5] In another speech, published in *Al-Thawra* under the headline 'Democracy: A Source of Strength for the Individual and Society', Saddam claimed that

> There is no contradiction between democracy and legitimate power. Let no one among you imagine the democracy weakens him, or robs him of his dignity and legitimate sphere of control. This is not true. According to the well-known balance between democracy and centralism, there is no

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[5] As translated in Bengio's *Saddam's Word* (Bengio 1998: 62).

> contradiction between the practise of democracy and legitimate central
> control. Only those of poor understanding could imagine such a contradiction
> between guardianship and comradely dealings, or between preservation of role
> and the position of leadership. (*Al-Thawra* 1977)[6]

To further promote his democratic credentials in 1980 and again in 1984, Saddam conducted Iraq's first Post-Colonial elections for the National Assembly. These elections were designed to serve several key Baathist purposes. They helped to placate domestic Shia and Kurdish grievances and to provide a modern alternative to the rise of Shia theocratic power in Iran. They were also expressly designed to confirm Saddam's alleged commitment to democratization, to garner consent for his war with Iran and, ultimately, to further re-affirm his empery over the Iraqi people. In his studies of these elections, Amatzia Baram documents the fierce competition that existed among the electoral candidates, who themselves came from a variety of different political and ethnic backgrounds, because winning a seat brought with it significant power, prestige and career prospects (Baram 1981, 1989). As Baram points out, throughout the elections the Iraqi media were critical in promoting the elections, in advocating and closely scrutinizing the policies and platforms of the different candidates and in reporting the results. In the lead up to the elections, around 1500 biographies of the candidates were published in the press, including demographic data as well as details about an individual's revolutionary struggle and their length of membership and allegiance to the Baath.

The results are particularly interesting. In both elections a significant proportion of Shia were elected (43% in 1980 and 46% in 1984), as well as smaller numbers of Kurds and women. This, coupled with the fact that the elected candidates had powers such as the ratification of the budget and international treaties, supervision of certain state institutions, and were apparently free to debate domestic and foreign policy issues, meant that the elections had at least achieved the guise of being democratic. In reality, however, the National Assembly was virtually powerless, being at the mercy of the highly centralized Revolutionary Command Council and

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[6] This translation is taken from Kanan Makiya's *Republic of Fear* (Makiya 1998 [1989]: 80).

serving as little more than a rubber stamp for the policies of the state. In addition, Shia, Kurdish and female representatives rarely ascended the political ladder. Nonetheless, Saddam took great pride in these quasi-democratic moments, even appearing on Iraqi state television on the evening of the 1980 election making spontaneous visits to the homes of poor Iraqi families 'to inquire whether they had voted in that day's parliamentary elections' (Davis 2005b: 237).

Immediately after the Iran-Iraq War, however, Saddam was faced with thousands of men who, on returning from the frontline, found few employment opportunities awaiting them. Many of these citizens – particularly the already disenfranchized Shia and Kurds – began to revolt against Saddam's authority and called for democratic reforms (Keeble 1997: 12). Surprisingly, Saddam reacted by co-ordinating further parliamentary elections in 1989, seemingly because he believed that some form of public debate over democracy would enable his citizens to voice their grievances without overwhelming his authority. Not taking any chances, however, Saddam implemented even tighter restrictions over these elections than their predecessors, requiring 'all candidates to have contributed to the war against Iran and to believe that it had resounded to the glory of Iraq' (Bengio 1998: 68). These elections enabled Saddam to label himself 'the engineer of democracy' or 'the shepherd of democracy' and to make public statements such as 'All democracy to the people, all liberty to the people, all rights to the people' (*Al-Thawra* 1989).[7]

Due to the economic cost (not to mention the military and civilian cost) incurred by the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam urgently needed funds. On 2 August 1990 he decided to invade Iraq's oil-rich neighbour, Kuwait, which had long been viewed as little more than an outpost of Basra, unfairly cut off from Iraq first by the Ottomans and then by the British on the basis of its important strategic value as an East-West trading port (Rahman 1997). During the ensuing Gulf War, the lip-service that Saddam had paid to democratization in the 1980s were promptly sidelined and the first anniversary of the Gulf War gave *Al-Qadisiyya* ample opportunity to attack the United States for having misunderstood Iraq's rich history, complex culture and

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[7] As translated in Bengio's *Saddam's Word* (Bengio 1998: 62).

unique politics. It asserted that 'We have Saddam Hussein and they have their democracy … Let them enjoy their democracy … but we are content to have an Arab leader, a Muslim seeker of justice' (*Al-Qadisiyya* 1992).[8]

Immediately following the first Gulf War, the Baath came under intense pressure, both from the heavy international sanctions placed upon it by the international community and by a number of internal rebellions which posed a significant challenge to the embattled and weakened regime. As will be discussed later in this chapter, in the north the Kurds mounted a *Rapareen* ('Uprising', in Kurdish) while in the south the Shia launched a parallel *Intifada* ('Uprising', in Arabic) of their own. In response to these rebellions, Saddam wrote and published a series of seven articles that appeared in *Al-Thawra* between April 3 and 14, 1991. The articles included discussions of Shia and Kurdish roles within Iraqi society and directly addressed some of their grievances. He was forced, for the first time, to acknowledge and confront Iraq's ethnic diversity and to discuss it in an open and public fashion; he was also forced to make at least token references to the need for democracy and dialogue. In Eric Davis' extended discussion of these articles he points out that

> A significant, albeit implicit, admission in the articles is that Iraq is characterized by an authoritarian and repressive state. Saddam justifies this authoritarianism by arguing that any nation-state undergoing a material and cultural renaissance must pass through a transitional period characterized by violence and ill-defined citizen rights. According to Saddam, Western countries confronted this situation during their own development into prosperous and stable nation-states. (Davis 2005b: 245)

The implications of such admissions were remarkable. For the first time, Saddam not only acknowledged various problems within Iraq, but also admitted that the Baathist state was not the ultimate form of Iraqi government. Instead, the Baath were a necessary – if chaotic, authoritarian and repressive – stage of transition towards a more open and tolerant society. Iraq

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[8] As translated in Bengio's *Saddam's Word* (Bengio 1998: 69).

was not yet a stable and robust nation and to get there, Iraqis were encouraged to continue the struggle for liberty, equality and democracy.

Despite such promising rhetoric, Saddam sought to tighten his grip on the Iraqi media by promoting his eldest son, Udday Hussein, to the position of the Head of the Iraqi Journalists' Union,[9] leaving him responsible for the censorship and management of most of the nation's media (Daragahi 2003: 47). Specifically, there were six official daily newspapers which all came under the jurisdiction of the newly appointed Udday: *Al-Jumhuriya*, *Al-Thawra*, *The Baghdad Observer*, the military paper *Al-Qadisiyya*, *Al-Iraq* ('The Iraq', a renamed version of the earlier Kurdish run newspaper, *Al-Taakhi*), and Udday Hussein's own personal paper *Babil* which was established in 1990. Udday's influence also extended over several official weekly papers and radio stations, as well as a handful of television channels, all of which were tightly controlled by the state (Hooglund 1990: 199–200, Hurrat and Leidig 1994: 98–9, Rugh 1979: 32, 2004: 30).[10] The result of having his son in such a prestigious position was that Saddam could continue to manipulate the media at will.

In 1995, once again under increasing domestic pressure to democratize, Saddam conducted Iraq's first Presidential elections since the revolution of 1958. Only one candidate, Saddam Hussein, stood for election, however, and the poll took the form of a nation-wide referendum in which his constituents were asked the simple question: 'Do you agree that Saddam Hussein should be the president of the Republic of Iraq for another seven years?' (cited in Y. M. Ibrahim 1995). As with earlier elections, these were little more than a cursory nod to democracy, a carefully constructed mask designed to obfuscate growing Baathist

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[9] In 2000, the Iraqi Journalists' Union awarded Udday Hussein the rather suspect honour of 'Journalist of the Century' (Tabor 2002).

[10] It should be noted here that, although Udday took control of most of Iraq's media in the 1990s, the result of the international sanctions against Iraq meant that much of it eroded dramatically. This is especially true of newspapers, with their quality dropping both in terms of journalistic style, the number of pages and even the paper on which they were printed.

authoritarianism. The campaign involved endless glorification of Saddam and, although he never appeared publicly prior to the election, he paid an army of supporters to march through the streets declaring '*Na'am, Na'am, Saddam*' ('Yes, Yes, Saddam') (cited in Y. M. Ibrahim 1995). On election day, Baathist loyalists rounded up and drove voters directly to the polling booths that were themselves covered in colourful pro-Saddam propaganda. Saddam won 99.96% of the 8.4 million votes cast. Immediately after the elections, Iraqi state television screened a grand ceremony in which the triumphant leader was sworn in for another term. The Baath party celebrated the victory, with the Deputy Leader of the Revolutionary Command Council, Izzat Ibrahim declaring:

> It is an immortal day in the history of Arabism and Islam … It is a blow to the states that have harboured enmity toward Iraq and raised unjustified doubts about the legitimacy of its regime or the right of its people to choose the form of government they like. (Ibrahim cited in *New York Times* 1995)

Following the events of September 11 and the onset of the 'War on Terror', Saddam staged another sham Iraqi election in 2002, this time trumping his own personal best and winning 100% of the vote. Here, *New York Times* journalist John F. Burns reported on a number of 'small but remarkable' protests that broke out across Baghdad. He claimed that the protests were 'the most visible sign of a new and potentially seismic trend: a willingness among ordinary people to speak up' (Burns 2002). Despite this, the official state media welcomed the result: *Al-Thawra* claimed it as a sure sign of Iraqi unity behind the authority of their leader (*Al-Thawra* 2002); *Iraq Daily* claimed it a better example of democracy than the bungled 2001 US election which brought President Bush to power (*Iraq Daily* 2002); while one journalist at *Babil* opined that 'this pure and mature democratic practice in a besieged country, which is exposed to aggression every day, is the best proof of the ability, vitality and courage of this people' (*Babil* 2002).

Along these same lines, the official Iraqi press continued in its absolute and unwavering support for Saddam in the lead up to the Iraq War of 2003. When, in 2002, President Bush

offered Saddam the ultimatum of complying with UN weapons inspectors or facing the consequences, *Al-Thawra* accused Bush of exploiting 'the international body as a tool serving and giving legitimacy to his aggressive schemes against Iraq' (*Al-Thawra* 2002). The invective continued as the war got closer. In January 2003, *Al-Iraq* claimed that the 'Zionists Rumsfeld, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice' were 'stupidly and arrogantly continu[ing] to make statements they have learned off by heart' (*Al-Iraq* 2003c). When Bush issued Saddam with his final ultimatum on 17 March 2003, commentators on *Iraqi TV* taunted the US President, calling him an 'idiot,' a 'failure' and 'foolish', and critiquing his speech as being premised on 'false assumptions' and an 'incoherent argument' (*Iraq TV* 2003a).

During the combat phase of the war itself, the state-run Iraqi media used a variety of rhetorical techniques to garner wide support for the Iraqi army, to instil confidence in the populace and to undermine the coalition troops. These included: converting the conflict into a religious war and emphasizing that the Iraqi people were protected by God; invoking history to illustrate the wonders of Iraqi civilization and its ability to withstand attacks from invading forces; constructing the war in true ABSP fashion as a 'people's war' and claiming that the Iraqi forces were not only ready for the coalition forces but that they would turn the invasion into a blood-bath despite the odds (*Al-Iraq* 2003b, *Al-Thawra* 2003, *Iraq TV* 2003b, 2003c). One particularly scathing article in *Al-Iraq* drew parallels between the looming US invasion and that of the British nearly a century earlier. It blamed the British for

> deceiving the Arabs and exploiting their revolution against the Ottoman empire, after promising them help to free their lands and set up a unified Arab state … Britain, instead, issued an ill-fated document providing for the fragmentation of the Arab homeland into small states under a British mandate … history shows that in Iraq, tyrants and Colonialists dug their own graves … Our historic witness is the graves of the English Colonialists. Does the meek lackey [UK Prime Minister Tony] Blair remember this, in order to bring it back to the mind of his master Little Bush, at a time when they are tasting defeat at the hands of the Iraqis. (*Al-Iraq* 2003a)

Despite such bravado, by the end of March most of the Iraqi media had begun to struggle under the constant bombing of their facilities. By early April, the Iraqi Satellite TV channel had ceased broadcasting, but many of Iraq's domestic TV and radio stations remained on air, playing patriotic music and broadcasting religious sermons, images of people chanting pro-Saddam slogans and extracts from speeches by Saddam Hussein and other senior Baath members. Finally, with the fall of Baghdad on 9 April 2003, Saddam Hussein's reign over Iraq came to an end, the last of his loyal media now silenced as the coalition forces toppled his statue in Firdos square and took control of the country.

Counter Discourse and Clandestine Opposition

At the official level, Saddam's leadership effectively eroded much of Iraq's long established civil society. The ranks of the nation's numerous opposition movements began to thin as strict punishments, including execution, were handed out to those affiliated with political parties other than the ABSP. The Baathist state also utilized the media not only to promote and maintain its incumbency but to generate a complex matrix of discourses that served to obfuscate state tyranny. Despite their control and manipulation of the nation's media sector, most Iraqis remained cynically aware of state doctrine and learned to maintain a veneer of Baathist loyalty while either 'reading between the lines' or rejecting outright the propaganda they were so routinely fed. Further, the years of ABSP hegemony also saw various ethnic and religious political factions begin to gather momentum. While Saddam's regime can be seen to have been both brutal and despotic, there was also a strong culture of clandestine dissent and opposition. A variety of counter-discourses emerged, characterized by diverse debates, passionate critiques of the regime and the advocacy of a more open and democratic Iraq.

Perhaps the most subtle and nuanced of these counter discourses emanated from within Iraq. Despite the fact that many Iraqi academics, journalists, artists and poets were commandeered by the state to write about and promote Baathist ideology, some managed to utilize subtle imagery, clever analogies, allegory or double entendres to expose the authoritarian and repressive culture of the Baath and force their fellow Iraqis to ponder alternatives such as

democratic rule. This was especially true in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War when articles began to appear in papers such as *Al-Iraq* and *Al-Qadisiyya* which delicately but deliberately criticized life under Saddam, postulated on the merits of democratic governance, and called for free and fair elections (*Al-Iraq* 1989c, *Al-Jumhuriyya* 1980). In the mid- to late-1980s articles by Iraqi scholar and neo-Marxist, Aziz Al-Sayyid Jassim attacked the Baathist bureaucracy and the sham heroes and revolutionaries it had brought to the fore, sowing the seeds of dissent (Al-Musawi 2006: 85–7). Another Iraqi writer and critic, Muhammad Mubrarak, went as far as arguing that the *Hadith* 'Differing opinions among my nation are a grace [of God]' should become the epithet of all those who wanted to 'build a genuine democracy' in Iraq (*Al-Iraq* 1989a). Other journalists at *Al-Iraq* argued that democracy was 'vital for the progress of the people and for establishing law and justice in their midst' (*Al-Iraq* 1989b). While *Al-Qadisiyya* maintained that 'only backward peoples were afraid of freedom; not so the Iraqis, who were entitled to full democratic freedom' (*Al-Qadisiyya* 1989: 5).[11]

In the 1990s, following the defeat of Iraq in Kuwait, some journalists began to push the envelope even further. At *Nab Al-Shabab* ('The Youth'), the weekly Udday-controlled newspaper of the Youth Union, journalists got away with candidly criticising Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and promoting opposition figures such as Ahmad Chalabi. As one writer for the paper, Mohamed Bedewi Al-Shamari, commented years later, 'We criticized the government's behaviour … We criticized the checkpoints, the limited freedoms of the people, the actions of the Baathist security officers. We called on the government to respect the people's rights' (Al-Shamari cited in Daragahi 2003: 47).

Aside from the subtle critiques offered by journalists working for the state, the Baathist period also saw the emergence and strengthening of various political parties from across the vast number of religious and ethnic divides. For example, the Kurds were politically active in Iraq from as early as 1946 when famed guerrilla leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani established the first

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[11] These translations are taken from Bengio's *Saddam's Word* (Bengio 1998: 39-40, 62-4).

Iraqi political party based purely on ethnicity: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) (Stansfield 2003: 66–7). It was not until 1970 that the Kurds were able to gain semi-autonomy from the Baathist government, however, and in 1974 the Baath passed an autonomy law which would see the region governed by an elected legislative council (McDowell 2000 [1996]: 327–37). Realising that the law would set a dangerous precedent by allowing free and fair elections in Iraq, the Baath quickly amended it to clarify that the elections were in fact nominations, to be held under full Baathist supervision with all candidates to be approved by the central government. During the early 1970s, the KDP mouthpiece, *Al-Taakhi* ('Brotherhood'), wrote critically on several social and political topics making it understandably popular across Iraq. *Al-Taakhi* was especially vocal when it came to Kurdish nationalism, arguing that 'The Kurdish movement in Iraq is the movement of Kurds anywhere. It is a national movement, not any different from the national movements of other peoples' (*Al-Taakhi* 1972).[12] Such rhetoric put the Baath in the uncomfortable position of having to enter debates they would normally choose to avoid and they frequently used their own newspapers to rebuke and rebuff the rebellious northern Kurds.

When the KDP was defeated by the Iraqi army in 1975, the left-leaning urban members of the party had formed their own political organization, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) with Jalal Talabani[13] as their leader. However, the KDP quickly re-grouped under the leadership of Barzani's son, Massoud Barzani[14] and the rivalry between the two factions re-ignited (Stansfield 2007: 67–8, 79–86). During the Iran-Iraq War, the Kurds were caught in the cross-fire with Iran supplying sporadic military assistance and, by 1987, the Kurds again controlled much of northern Iraq. The Baath, fearing the re-emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region, waged a brutal attack on Kurdistan known as the *Al-Anfal* ('The Spoils of War'). The campaign

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[12] This translation is taken from Bengio's *Saddam's Word* (Bengio 1998: 116).

[13] Jalal Talabani remains the leader of the PUK today and also serves as the State President of Iraq.

[14] Today, Massoud Barzani is both the President of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and he remains the leader of the KDP.

saw an estimated 100,000 non-combatant Kurds killed, including, in 1988, Saddam's infamous authorization of the use of chemical weapons for the purpose of genocide, killing some 5,000 Kurdish civilians and maiming a further 7,000 in Halabja (Rose and Baravi 1998). Despite such egregious acts, the resolve of the Kurds remained strong and, when Iraq was defeated in Kuwait in 1991, the Kurds waged a *Rapareen* ('Uprising' in Kurdish) against the central government that resulted in many Kurdish deaths but also gave the people limited autonomy within the Iraqi state (Tripp 2000: 253–9). This newfound autonomy brought with it several elections, an independent parliament and the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in 1992 (Anderson and Stansfield 2004: 155–83).

The following era in Kurdish history – from the end of the Gulf War in 1991 to the Iraq War of 2003 – saw Iraqi Kurdistan not only wrest autonomy from the central ABSP government, but also develop a significantly active public sphere. The region was home to a gamut of non-official political parties aside from the KDP and PUK including the Iraqi Kurdistan Toilers Party, the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Iraqi Kurdistan. All of these parties controlled their own partisan media outlets and the media landscape swelled to include approximately 200 newspapers and magazines, two satellite TV stations, 20 local TV stations and 10 Radio stations. These media outlets, ranging from the sophisticated efforts of the KDP and PUK through to the tawdry ventures of smaller parties, were not only highly critical of Saddam and his Baghdad-based government, but also often asserted an alternate vision of Iraq that advocated democracy. Foremost among these were the newspapers *Brayati* ('Fraternity', run by the KDP), *Al-Ittihad* ('The United', PUK) and the regions first independent newspaper, *Hawlati* ('Citizen'), which was widely esteemed for its objectivity and for its unreserved criticism of various Kurdish authority figures (Osman 2002). Iraqi Kurds also enjoyed unfettered access to satellite TV, while internet access was readily available at the region's three university campuses and the many internet cafés that dotted the cities. Collectively, the Kurdish public sphere from 1991 onwards was relatively free to debate

Kurdish issues, to promote Kurdish history and culture, and to foster various civil society movements.

Despite the fact they have always been the majority in modern Iraq, the Shia have long been marginalized by the central Sunni-led government and consequently produced a number of active opposition movements. This arguably began with something of a Shia political renaissance that occurred in Iraq around the 1950s under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr Al-Sadr who founded the enormously popular *Hizb Al-Dawah Islamiyya* ('The Islamic Calling', or more commonly referred to as *Dawah*, the 'Calling')[15] in 1957. Although Baqr Al-Sadr called for the establishment of an Islamic Republic, his vision was of a state ruled not by clerics, but by the combination of *Shariah* (Islamic law) and *Shura* (consultation), an important distinction which has long divided many Iraqi Shia scholars from their contemporaries in Iran (Abdul-Jabar 2002, Litvak 1998, Nakash 2003 [1994]). This line of thinking was to have a substantial impact on the Shia politics of the second half of the twentieth century. For its part, Dawah repeatedly challenged the central government, with several assassination attempts on Saddam Hussein and other senior ABSP members. Saddam banned the organization and, in 1980, he ordered the arrest, torture and execution of Baqr Al-Sadr for having supported the Shia-led Islamic Revolution in Iran (Anderson and Stansfield 2004: 124–7).

The persecution of Dawah by the Baathist state had several important consequences for Shia politics in Iraq, all of which have become very significant in the politics of the Re-Colonial era. During the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, many senior members of the party fled to Tehran and in 1982 formed the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)[16] under the

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[15] The Dawah party is currently led by former Iraqi Prime Minister, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari and its Secretary-General, Nuri Al-Maliki, is also the current Prime Minister of Iraq.

[16] The SCIRI changed its name to the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) in 2007 and is currently led by Sayyid Ammar Al-Hakim. Due to the fact that this study mostly concerns the period prior to the name change of SCIRI to SIIC, the party will be referred to as SCIRI throughout.

leadership of senior Iraqi cleric, Ayatollah Mohammad Bakir Al-Hakim (Baram 1998: 52). From the safety of Iran, SCIRI was free to express their grievances with Saddam, setting up a number of radio stations that broadcast into Iraq and which spoke directly to the Iraqi Shia population, advocating the overthrow of the secular Baathist regime. They also reasoned rightly that a more democratic order in Iraq would provide considerable power to the majority Shia population.

As with the Kurds in the north, the southern Shia population also waged a considerable *Intifada* ('Uprising' in Arabic) at the conclusion of the Gulf War, beginning with a series of anti-Baathist demonstrations that saw several party members killed in Basra (Bengio 1992: 7–8). Eventually, both the Dawah and SCIRI parties joined the fractured revolt and made the error of attempting to galvanize the mostly secular and leftist resistance behind their religious vision. This meant that the Shia uprising lost much of its initial impetus and when Saddam turned his forces against the rebels they were soon vanquished (Tripp 2000: 253–9). Nonetheless, both the SCIRI and Dawah parties continued to wield significant power across the Shia south. During the 1990s, the Dawah movement continued under the authority of Baqr Al-Sadr's brother-in-law, Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq Al-Sadr, a charismatic and militant leader who sought to revitalize the Shia and engage them in political agitation against the state. Saddam reacted predictably and had Sadiq Al-Sadr assassinated in 1999 (Ehrenberg, McSherry, Sanchez, and Sayej 2010: 317). Meanwhile SCIRI continued in Iran under the leadership of Hakim whose writings on democracy qualified SCIRI as a legitimate part of the US approved 'democratic opposition'. A statement issued by the Ayatollah in May 2001 demanded 'the humanitarian and legal rights for all Iraqi people … those rights that the regime has confiscated without distinguishing between the Sunnis and Shiites, and between Arabs and Turkomen, for the regime has usurped all the rights of the Iraqi people' (Al-Hakim 2001: 319).

In addition to the writings of these key religious figures, throughout the 1990s and in the lead up to the 2003 invasion, a number of expatriate Iraqi Shia began calling attention to the widespread suffering of their brothers and sisters in Iraq, especially in the wake of the massacre

that followed the intifada of 1991. In July 2002 three prominent Shia expatriates, Mowaffaq Al-Rubaie, Ali Allawi and Shaib Al-Hakim, penned a manifesto entitled the 'Declaration of the Shia of Iraq' which states:

> Iraq's political crisis … is entirely due to the conduct of an overtly sectarian authority determined to pursue a policy of discrimination solely for its own interests of control, a policy that has ultimately led to the total absence of political and cultural liberties and the worse forms of dictatorship. (Al-Rubaie, Allawi, and Al-Hakim 2002: 313–4)

It goes on to argue that 'the sectarian issue in Iraq will not be solved by the imposition of a vengeful Shia sectarianism on the state and society' and articulates the Shia's firm commitment to national unity and aversion to the creation of a separate Shia state (Al-Rubaie, et al. 2002: 314). Their demands included: 'The abolition of dictatorship and its replacement with democracy', the 'Creation of a democratic parliamentary constitutional order' with 'Full respect for the national, ethnic, religious, and sectarian identities of all Iraqis,' and the 'Reconstruction of, and support for, the main elements of a civil society' (Al-Rubaie, et al. 2002: 315).

Opposition to Saddam's leadership was not limited to those who resisted him on the basis of their Kurdish ethnicity or Shia religiosity. Many of the dissident ex-Baathists and members of the armed forces began to form various opposition parties of their own, many of which were backed by the US and UK. These include the *Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* ('The Iraqi National Accord' or INA), founded in 1991 and headed by Dr Iyad Allawi[17] and the Iraqi National Congress (INC), founded in 1992 and led by Dr Ahmed Chalabi.[18] Both of these parties controlled a handful of media which issued blatant anti-Saddam, pro-democracy propaganda.

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[17] Allawi was a member of the US-installed Iraqi Interim Governing Council from 2003 and later served as Interim Prime Minister from June 2004 until April 2005. More recently, Allawi's secular nationalist *Al-Iraqiyya* list won the most seats in Iraq's 2010 elections but he was not able to form a government.

[18] Chalabi supplied suspect information to the Bush administration regarding Iraq's alleged stockpile of WMD (J. Klein 2005: 25). He later served as Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister throughout much of 2005, but failed to win a single seat following the December 2005 election.

They sought to give a common voice to Iraq's divergent opposition groups, to erode Saddam's support from within Iraq, to promote alternative heads of state (Allawi or Chalabi), to work in the favour of US regional interests and to mobilize dissent against the incumbent regime. Their central platform was to usurp the regime and establish respect for 'human rights and rule of law within a constitutional, democratic, and pluralistic Iraq' (Katzman 2000: 2). They both waged a number of successful terrorist attacks on the ABSP before Saddam reacted by having several senior members executed and by all but crushing the rebellion (Baram 1998: 55–7, Stansfield 2007: 145–8).

On a smaller scale, throughout the Baathist period, the once powerful ICP continued to publish their newspaper *Tariq Al-Shab* ('The Way of the People') and their theoretical journal *Al-Thaqafa Al-Jadida* ('The New Culture'). These newspapers enabled them to be very critical of the regime, even criticizing it for the 'total lack of democratic freedom within Iraq' (Salucci 2005: 61). Several important pieces appeared in *Al-Thaqafa Al-Jadida* in 1992, including one by Ali Ibrahim which argued that, for Iraqis, democracy was no longer 'an abstract term but a specific political structure expressed in a supremacy of the law, a multi-party system, parliamentary life and organization, press and party freedoms' (A. Ibrahim 1992: 17). For Sad Salih, democracy was central to the ICP's broader agenda of 'mobilizing the mutual cooperation among the party's political, cultural and popular organizations in the Arab world for the cause of democracy and the respect of human rights' (Salih 1992: 20). Lutfi Hatim agreed; for him 'democracy should be the most important component of the Party' and

> When the time comes, the pragmatic position of the Iraqi Communist Party today will give the Iraqi democratic movement the position of being an active Arab force for the creation of a democratic Arab solidarity which will restore self-confidence to the Arab citizen … and which will increase the demand for

democratic rule and peace, based on the rejection of military aggression,
respect of neighbours, and destruction of military bases. (Hatim 1992: 74)[19]

There is a final category of counter discourse that was critical in resisting and critiquing the Baathist regime, that from among the large expatriate Iraqi community. While this is not the place for a thorough discussion of the varying locations and complex politics of the Iraqi Diaspora, it is worth mentioning that many of Iraq's most noted activists, poets, writers, artists and intellectuals fled Iraq during the Baathist epoch. From the safety of exile, they found new and larger audiences within Iraq, across the Arab world and among the international community. They felt free to criticize Saddam and to advocate democracy and a whole collection of cross-sectarian, cross-political and cross-religious political opinions emerged.

Arguably the epicentre of Iraqi dissident opposition was London, where several important expatriate papers were produced including the organ of the Union of Iraqi Democrats, *Al-Dimuqrati* ('The Democracy') and the Shia-run *Al-Tayyar Al-Jadid* ('The New Movement'). Another important paper was the highly esteemed independent pan-Arab daily, *Azzaman* ('The Times') which was founded in London in 1997 by Saad Bazzaz[20] and quickly grew to include international editions issued from Bahrain and North Africa (Zengerle 2002). Many Iraqi expatriates and dissidents also chose to write for other journals such as the London-based Pan-Arab daily of record, *Al-Hayat* ('The Life'). In the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, many Iraqis spoke with renewed confidence about the tyranny of the Baath and began to discuss the options facing the nation beyond his oppression. One such Iraqi writer, Jabbar Yassin, felt free enough to air his grievances with the 'bloody political machine' of Saddam Hussein and 'the cultural genocide being carried out in Iraq' (Yassin 2002). He also raised

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[19] The translations of *Al-Thaqafa Al-Jadida* found in this paragraph are from Tareq Ismael's *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Ismael 2008: 279-80).

[20] Saad Bazzaz is the former editor of the Baathist *Al-Jumhuriyya* and later he was the manager of the Iraqi National News Agency and the Ministry of Information, overseeing the production and broadcasting of all Iraqi radio and television (Zengerle 2002).

pertinent questions about the future of Iraq and the role of Iraqi intellectuals in the formation of 'a republic of tolerance' (Yassin 2002). Another Iraqi dissident, Bahr Al Uloom claimed that the re-building of Iraq from the ruins of the Baath regime would require a robust and egalitarian democracy premised on a constitution that included respect and rights for all of Iraq's diverse peoples, free and fair elections, and the adoption of an appropriate legislative and constitutional framework. He concluded by stating that, while all Iraqis have common interest in seeing 'the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime and the establish[ment of] a democratic system', it is Iraqis which 'hold the ultimate responsibility for building their own country' (Al-Uloom 2002).

One particularly prominent Iraqi expatriate was Ghassan Al-Atiyyah who had once served as a Professor of Politics at Baghdad University and had worked for the United Nations. From London, he published the *Malaf Al-Iraqi* ('Iraq File') and wrote several articles for *Al-Hayat* as well as Middle Eastern English-language papers such as Beirut's *The Daily Star*. In one such article, Al-Atiyyah advocated 'democratic change' in Iraq and openly discussed the 'choosing of a post-Saddam regime' which would bring about a 'pro-Western and democratic Iraq' (Al-Atiyyah 2002b). In another article, Al-Atiyyah engages with broader questions about Arab democracy arguing that the central problem with it is

> the way Western powers dealt with the region [they directly] cultivated and consolidated undemocratic practices. This not only took place during the Colonial era, but continued even after the Arab states gained independence, when Britain and the United States – the two most influential global players in the Middle East – made fighting communism their number one priority in the region, at the expense of democracy. (Al-Atiyyah 2002a)

In another critical article he poses the question, 'What would Iraq be like without Saddam?'. He then moves forward to lambast the Iraqi opposition for its petty divides and rivalries arguing 'that it is precisely because there is no common vision of what a post-Saddam Iraq should look like that the current regime has been able to survive so long' (Al-Atiyyah 2002c). He adds that Iraq's political elites have routinely marginalized the will of ordinary Iraqis in favour of prioritizing their own agenda, that they have failed to draft an appropriate and liberal political

framework for post-Saddam Iraq, and that their shortcomings may well pave the way for a new military dictatorship to rise from the ashes of the Baathist era. His searing indictment of Iraqi opposition politics and his insight into the looming political melee in Iraq beyond the US invasion conclude with words that ring painfully true a decade later:

> Achieving democracy requires a readiness to compromise and an acceptance of wide participation. There is an opportunity today for creating a democratic future for Iraq. But this will require that senior opposition figures demonstrate leadership … Waiting for America to establish democracy in Iraq on behalf of the opposition is a dangerous gamble. America wants to have an effective and stable government in power in Baghdad that doesn't threaten its neighbours. Democracy is not an American priority. (Al-Atiyyah 2002c)

Conclusion

In discussing Post-Colonial Iraq it is important to note that, despite the withdrawal of the British and the usurpation of the Hashemite monarchy, Iraq did not emerge as a genuine democracy with legitimate opposition parties, a functioning parliament and a free press. While many of Iraq's Post-Colonial regimes promised such institutions, these were generally empty promises designed to gain political advantage rather than broaden participation. Similarly, Iraq's media industry, so often used for authoritarian purposes, served more as the duty-bound propaganda machine of each ensuing regime than the watchdog of a functioning democracy. There can be no defending the hegemony of Arif, Bakr or Saddam, each of whom, in their own way, brought Iraq closer to models of governance aligned with notions of Oriental despotism.

Of all Iraq's Post-Colonial regimes, the Baath was the most adept at manipulating the national discourses of democracy to their advantage. By doing so, however, Saddam effectively created the environ in which a wide range of subversive and clandestine political movements emerged both within and outside Iraq. It is important not to over-determine the extent to which these various opposition groups were democratic by any definition of the term. Similarly, it cannot be ignored that certain Shia, Kurdish and other political parties have proven themselves very capable of utilizing the rhetoric and institutions of democracy in their own quests for

power (especially since 2003, see the following chapter). Nonetheless, at the very least this complex web of oppositional politics and their respective media outlets indicates that, to paraphrase Foucault, a complex matrix of intersecting discourses arose in opposition to the centralized power structures and constructed knowledge of the dominant episteme (Foucault 2005 [1969]). Whether premised on ethnicity, religiosity or political dissent, these opposition movements constituted a lively public sphere that asserted alternative visions of a democratic Iraqi state.