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# Iraq today in the thoughts of al-Wardi: The rule of the preachers

## **ABSTRACT**

*In an effort to situate Ali al-Wardi's larger body of scholarship, this article places him within his Iraqi and international intellectual milieu, highlighting the role of his book Preachers of the Sultan for its grounding of his later works, while at the same time asserting the seriousness with which he took the scholar's role as an activist to bring knowledge to the public by which to better inform the grounding for, and exercise of, democratic politics. In particular, it highlights the empirical grounding al-Wardi captured through his explication of the Iraqi 'split personality' (izdiwajiyah) as well as the unique role preachers play in dividing the social community through the justification of political power and promotion of sectarianism.*

## **KEYWORDS**

democracy  
sectarianism  
split personality  
critical theory

Ali al-Wardi's unique inquiry of Iraq and its peoples, as well as his efforts to craft and promote the learned capacities of his countrymen as an activist public intellectual feature his contributions within the constellation of Iraq's intellectual firmament. Although this prominence diminished in recent decades, due to both political opposition from the Ba'thist regime as well as the caprice of western scholarly fashion, al-Wardi's corpus resonates today as much as it did at the 1950s' zenith of his public renown. Al-Wardi's impact across a wide spectrum of engagement, traversing multiple academic disciplines in addition to informing cultural production beyond the walls of the academy,

saw him stimulate a robust challenge to the received wisdom and intellectual trends of his era. His sophisticated and distinct exegesis provided a grounded basis whereby Iraqis, and scholars of Iraq, could engage with the country without becoming ensnared within ideological or theoretical limits. Bringing together methods and an array of categories of analysis from the Arab and Islamic tradition, as well as the modern academic understandings he mastered through Ph.D. studies in the United States, al-Wardi proffered a distinctive yet exhaustive reading of Iraqi society. Moving beyond simplistic binaries, he laboured to analyse and highlight the modalities of how Iraqis had shaped their society over millennia, while acknowledging the breaks on comity and social harmony represented by sectarianism and tribal or other particularist narrow associations. Critically, he asserted that such breaks were the direct result of political machination to the benefit of narrow yet identifiable institutions and interests. Beyond theorizing, al-Wardi identified the techniques, grammars and modalities whereby such breaks on popular perception and action came to serve political power.

Unwilling to merely identify and untangle such phenomena, al-Wardi worked tirelessly to put his vision into the growing Iraqi public space. Embracing new media, publishing in popular and accessible outlets and identifying young (potential) opinion-makers for their capacity to engage and take on board the challenge of interrogating orthodox portrayals of Iraqi society, al-Wardi came to impact a wide range of Iraq's growing intelligentsia and creative class. Embracing small-'d' democracy as a requirement for Iraq's progress as a political project, al-Wardi believed it the vehicle to most favourably allow Iraq's heterogeneous society to avoid the tribulations of communal discord and its attendant social ills. With the end of the Ottoman Empire so fresh in contemporary memory, as well as Iraqis' robust opposition to British imperialism, the indigenous commitment to the range of varied political institutions encompassing the modern state allowed for strong social forces to consider alternative avenues for a progressive future. Ecumenical in his associations, al-Wardi provided a platform for the broader efforts of progressive social and political challenges to Iraq's *ancien régime* and its political class. Arab nationalists, communists, socialists and liberals all were challenged and increasingly compelled to respond to the cogency of his published works and public talks, especially as his ideas were amplified through a new generation of opinion-makers and students as well as from the creative class' production of novels, music and poetry. This made his location within Iraqi society singular, as a man seen by the powers of the day as being in opposition to governmental authority, whether that be Iraq's monarchical, republican or Ba'thist regimes. No matter who the holder of power was, he maintained a scrupulous ethical and intellectual position in relation to Iraq's combative political forces. While unnerving power, and challenging the notions of all sides contesting for power, al-Wardi avoided the more common instinct to polarize. This reflected his commitment to social comity and the principles underlining the potential of democracy and a broader social fabric meshing with the state.

While exhaustive in his scope, al-Wardi's unique challenge focused on the role played by political operators and attendant public enablers of the current social and state-based political authority. Within this analysis al-Wardi singled out Iraq's clerical class for its specific role in buttressing power, noting that this was not a modern phenomenon. He devoted special attention to the *rijal eldin* (clerics), for the nefarious role their vernacular expression carried when commenting on day-to-day social and political events. The authority of

legal *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and arbitration of sharia (Islamic law) afforded clerics, al-Wardi argued, opportunities too susceptible to the mobilization of this authority on behalf of political power and the temporal benefit of the clergy.

In this intervention, al-Wardi's vast body of work will be cropped in order for his insight towards Iraqi political praxis to be utilized to provide a reading of the contemporary landscape as well as to encourage scholars to further engage with the work of this great Iraqi scholar. While his generation's challenges were sizeable, they nonetheless occurred under a more positive disposition looking forward to a boundless future. Today's Iraq finds itself in a less sanguine environment, though al-Wardi's contribution emerges as salient as at the point of its original expression. As it emerges from more than three decades of Ba'hist dictatorship, attendant warfare and international isolation though economic sanctions, and especially with the decapitation and ruination of the Iraqi state through Anglo-American invasion and occupation, Iraqi society needs to re-engage with the challenges his exposition posed. The political project with which al-Wardi was so seized, marrying Iraq's society and diverse peoples to its political state through an honest appraisal of its unique society, is as critical today as it was when he was writing. Scholars and civil society actors of a new era would benefit greatly from his prodigious scholarship as they face the challenges of a new millennium and fashion positive responses to enormous challenges. Beginning with al-Wardi's foundational examination of human nature within the Iraqi environment, this article will move on to how he built up from this grounding to propose a conceptual apparatus for the explication of Iraqi society, his own commitment to promote critical engagement with such concerns within the popular discourse of Iraq, before concluding with some interpretive analysis of contemporary Iraq based on the categories and central thesis found within al-Wardi's own scholarship. As we shall see, predicated on his conception of human nature, al-Wardi's project had three major dimensions – to the understanding of Iraq, to the development of critical theory in the Arab world and to the development of a consciousness in social reform.

## **UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE**

The first basis of al-Wardi's unique methodology was his open expression of the grounding of his analysis in an enunciation of human nature. His considered view of human nature, while broadly applicable, was especially focused on its manifestation in the particular environment of modern Iraq. Rather than sublimating such foundational assumptions, he laid them bare for his reader. More than an ethical consideration, it was central to his exposition, argumentation for the analytical components of his work as well as being critical for the reader's understanding of the Iraqi social environment.

From his formative years, al-Wardi had toiled to earn a meagre livelihood to support himself and his family. It stands to reason that working in street-level souks, dealing with people from all walks of life, hearing their laments and witnessing their praxis, must have intensified the 'curiosity of the child' for understanding the broader world and especially the domain of political elites to which his humble origins did not promote entry. Such experiences grounded him in the human condition, making him 'street savvy'. This critical sensibility, when then coupled with a natural passion for reading, cultivated his early mental rooting and allowed for an understanding of the 'Why and How' that generated the 'What' he had heard and seen in his immediate social

surroundings (al-Haidarî 2006: 22–25). This, of course, is a necessary condition for the existence of mental acuity and criticality, and one which al-Wardi was reflective on from his earliest days (al-Wardî 1956: 104). This critical interrogation was then applied to the world he found around him. For example, in his telling, he once asked a man the reason why he was publicly glorifying Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, who ruled the Caliphate from 656 to 661. When the man responded that it was a divine injunction (most likely as he was taught), al-Wardi then questioned the man whether he always followed what God had enjoined. Al-Wardi's effort to identify the consistency of belief and practice was rebuffed as the man turned his back and walked away (1956: 285). As with his physical environment, al-Wardi's critical analysis extended to the scholarship he engaged with regard to the social beliefs and praxis of their authors. This was further revealed in his critique of the Egyptian historian Ahmad Amin's analysis of extreme sects within Islam, which Amin identified as those believing in Ali's divine nature (apotheosis). Al-Wardi situates these religious beliefs, and religious beliefs generally, within the temporal unfolding of events that led to their emergence, their 'place' within historical social reality (1956: 66–67).

Intrigued by the contradictions of social reality that he had experienced first-hand in his native Baghdad, followed by those he found in textual efforts to portray the world while reading, al-Wardi would consider the social and historical underpinning of Iraqi society, eventually finding most persuasive the works of the German scholar Max Weber and the Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun. Weber proposed that humanity antecedes and constitutes social structure – that is, society is comprised of individual people and the results of their social interactions; while Ibn Khaldun, as also seen in the later work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, proposed that social structure forges and coerces the individual mindset (al-Wardî 1956: 46; Bhasker 1998: 212). In other words, 'society is the externalization of human beings, and human beings are the internalization in consciousness of society' (Bhasker 1998: 213–14). While Ibn Khaldun was well-known to al-Wardi's Baghdad and recognized within western social theory, al-Wardi argued that his insights were not given enough weight in contemporary accounts. To al-Wardi's reading, Ibn Khaldun was providing a more sophisticated layering of social interactions than was espoused by those fixated on the rural-urban binary alone.

The Khalduni school differs from the western school of sociology as it is preoccupied mainly issues related to Islamic civilizations, such as the tension between religion and the state, the struggles between Arabs and non-Arabs, and the urban and Bedouin conflict. [...] To compare Ibn Khaldun's sociology with that of the modern we will find that there is a clear distinction [...] Bedouin vs. urban has more than a simple binary as its explanatory basis. This is not given enough consideration by his modern interpreters nor modern sociology as taught in the university. A great many of our learned people look down on the Khalduni science of sociology as they consider it as an outmoded science whose time has past. [However,] as they look at modern sociology today, those who will reimagine Ibn Khaldun through their infatuation with modern theories, do not understand that despite being from the pre-modern era that Ibn Khaldun still retains much that is useful and possessing significant scientific value [...] we should study Ibn Khaldun from a practical point-of-view that will aid us to better investigate today's Arab society. This is because if we compare

the conditions of Khaldun's time and today, we will find them similar [...] we do not deny that modern sociology has great value in understanding society in general, but that does not mean that we can forfeit Khaldun and his conceptualizations. I will not be exaggerating in saying that Khalduni contributions constitute a school in themselves [...] and that the Khalduni school is much more rounded in understanding current events.

(al-Wardī 1962: 244–45)

Thus, al-Wardī, in his historically informed analysis, considers the human essence as found in the Qur'an, reflecting on its six pillars of Arabo-Islamic civilization: first, its status as a container of oppositions (Qur'an 76:3, 90:10), which the German philosopher Hegel had proposed in his own work (al-Wardī 1956: 26); second, Qur'anic statements of self-interest and immediacy, and those who are oblivious to social consequences or public interest (al-Wardī 1956: 78; Qur'an 17:11, 100:3-6, 100:8, 70:21); third, a totality of social customs that forged the human mindset thereby placing limits on thought, which in turn diminishes human capacity for self-reflexivity and independent thinking (al-Wardī 1956: 133; Qur'an 5:104, 7:28, 10:78, 26:74, 31:21, 43:22–23); fourth, how it discusses the individual's self-made image or one's 'ego', a source of social evil as it results in dismissing the 'other-ness' and self-proclaimed status at the expense of the rest of people (al-Wardī 1956: 109; Qur'an 7:12, 12:53, 28:78, 39:49); fifth, a discussion of social justice as it is pitched against those who are self-seeking and who personally gain from the prevalent social structure (al-Wardī 1956: 125, 128–29; Qur'an 43:23–24, 17:16); and sixth, that absolute truth is unknowable (al-Wardī 1962: 134, 146), though humans tend to self-rationalize instead of employing their latent ability for self-reflection – the Qur'an refers to self-rationalization as *jadāl*, which lexically denotes hollowness (Qur'an 18:54, 56, 40:5, 16:111, 43:46, 6:50).

Al-Wardī's awareness of the coercive influence of the cultural system in moulding a mindset resistant to social change allowed him, to a significant degree, to step out of cultural closure, which he labelled as a 'possible act of genius', though, it must be noted, he never called himself genius (al-Haidarī 2006: 173). The British philosopher Roy Bhaskar, much like al-Wardī, would later persuasively and systematically argue a similar possibility. Bhaskar explained the concept of 'epistemic relativity', which proposed that 'All beliefs are socially produced, so that all knowledge is transient, and neither truth-values nor criteria of rationality exist outside historical time' (Bhaskar 1998: 235–36). Bhaskar's work was the philosophic seed of critical dualism in social theory, and he served as a mentor to Margaret Archer, whose seminal work *Culture and Social Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (1966) attempted to present a generalized theory of the dialectical relationship between the cultural system and the socio-cultural system that is human praxis. Thus, predating the emergence of 'critical realism' by some decades, al-Wardī, in a similar manner as Archer, decoupled the two systems through a focused delineation of human nature as it actuated in historical time.

## UNDERSTANDING IRAQ

Ali al-Wardī's life's work was centred on critically analysing the social dynamics which drove the historical trajectory of Iraqi political development. His work can be broken down into three component parts: social dynamics, historical trajectory and political development. His social dynamics bridged

micro and macro levels of analysis, from the social-psychological level to the structural level. Underlining al-Wardī's entire body of work was his own innovative melding of modern social theory with insights of the Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun. He brought to bear influential scholars of social theory such as Kimball Young, who had identified the role of social learning and its origins as predating cultural learning on human society, and George Herbert Mead, considered to be the father of symbolic interactionism in sociology and social psychology. Young and Mead, beyond their own contributions to his thought, allowed al-Wardī to revisit Arabo-Islamic thinkers and to look to basic categories of enduring human experience and social interaction. It must be made clear that al-Wardī was in no way arguing that human nature broadly, or 'Iraqiness' in particular, could be distilled to an established essence, nor that it was unchanging across time. Rather, he was formulating categories and common facets of interaction and expression which could be found empirically within modern Iraqi society and which he identified as being both unique and historical in their formation. Moreover, as nodes around which those attempting to assess Iraq's social and political machinations could map their analysis, these aspects of human character could provide the basis for a challenge to the absences and silences found in ideological and theoretical models proposed by contemporary social theory.

According to al-Wardī (1971: 297),

From the beginnings of my writing in 1951 through today I have tried to explain Iraqi society through two hypotheses: one, the split-personality; and two, the struggle between Bedouinism and urbanism. Later, a third hypothesis of social contradictions emerged. [...] However, I am admitting that all three hypothesis are not entirely my own creation. Each has been adapted from a very well known scholar of sociology. The first has been adapted from [Robert] Maclver [(1882–1970)], the second from Ibn Khaldun, and the third from [William] Ogburn [(1886–1959)]. I adapted and changed each of their notions, more or less, to make it more fitting towards the Iraqi social conditions and the nature of its formation. [...] I want to emphasize that these hypothesis are interconnected, bundled closely with each other, though they could each be considered different approaches to the same subject, that of Iraqi society in its current condition, their combination is my own.

Ibn Khaldun's philosophies and analysis were well acquainted to Iraqi intellectuals, especially his focus on human association and social stability. Al-Wardī (1962: 244–45) asserted that

[...] today the educated look down on the Khalduni study of sociology as they consider it to be outmoded [...] as if, they think, all modern theories of sociology are superior. They don't realise that the theories of Ibn Khaldun still, although they are old, hold weight in their seriousness and relevance. [...] The Ibn Khaldun school differs from all modern schools of sociology, as he makes an important distinction: The central issue of the Khalduni school [...] is the struggle between nomads and urbanites, and this is something no modern sociology gives any attention to.

Moreover, al-Wardī was able to recognize Ibn Khaldun's own analysis as being based on cultural and social factors rather than being divine in orientation.

To proffer an alternative reading of Iraqi social life, al-Wardi utilized Ibn Khaldun's framework and the insights it afforded to realign and pragmatically ground the tools provided by the modern education he had received. At its core, Ibn Khaldun's categorization of a rural-urban binary served both al-Wardi's characterization of Iraqi society over the *longue durée*, as well as his rendering of categories of a characteristic Iraqi personality. This allowed for an explanatory exposition that began to answer many questions left silent in other analyses. This is due to al-Wardi's chosen object of study – Iraq – and its not only possessing a clear urban civilization of global renown with an attendant hinterland, but also its standing at a crossroads that saw continued flows of nomadic peoples as well as the intervention of multiple conquerors and the attendant rise and fall of urban centres. Most salient to his analysis was the personality clash between the nomadic Bedouin and the settled peoples. Iraq's urbanites, themselves an amalgamation of Arabo-Islamic, Ottoman, Persian as well as the civilizations of classical antiquity, who had all left a cultural residue on urban life and society, represented a singularly unique society. With their greater social solidarity to group identity through kinship and focus on honour in order to enforce necessary social cohesion in an arid and often hostile environment, the region's nomadic Bedouin, whether inhabiting the immediate hinterland of the alluvial plain, or migrating across longer distances, constantly interacted with and challenged urban social stability. This was due to urban societies' capacity to develop different social values characterized by their differing leisure activities, economies and the resulting social interactions. Both forces were the outcome of socio-cultural factors, which al-Wardi detailed in anthropological terms, as informed by Young, MacIver, Ogburn and Mead, as necessarily predating Arabo-Islamic civilization. However, while existing as far back as the rise of Sumer, these two 'personalities' could be traced within an Arabo-Islamic idiom across the Abbasid and Ottoman periods. This raises the apparition of a 'folk' Islam or Islamic praxis carried through oral custom and tradition amongst the Bedouin population. Imbued with traditional Bedouin social values such as heroic exertion in warfare and ardent social solidarity with one's social formation, it offered a clear and unmitigated vision of the faith. Urbane sensibilities, especially as Iraq's urban centres served as locales of higher learning, rational sciences and Aristotelian philosophical enquiry, provided opportunity for a 'clash of cultures'. This was only exacerbated as Bedouin folk Islam maintained itself through tradition, while across urban Iraq seminaries and shrine cities, which housed the institutional clerical classes, developed with intense debate over contested schools of interpretation. Al-Wardi was able to disentangle these interchanged contestations – between Bedouin and settled urbanites, folk Islam and institutionalized clerical establishments – within the context of the cyclical turnovers of temporal authority which brought Bedouins into power over urban societies.

What needs to be stressed here, for it was the central focus of al-Wardi's concern when diagnosing the contemporary conditions underlying the formation of a modern state in Iraq, was the role played by the clerical class. As noted above, in his engagement with the social-psychological level, al-Wardi focused on what he identified as the Iraqi 'split personality' (*izdi-wajiyah*), referring to the split between Bedouin values on the one hand and Islamic principles on the other. Sectarianism, he argued, was characterized as the other side of the coin from the virtues of Bedouin culture. While the intense solidarities were lionized, they proved resistant to the broader

forbearance and tolerance at the core of the Islamic faith. Al-Wardî (1971b: 4) concluded that:

Sectarianism is not religious, but rather an aspect of attachment to a sect or a specific person. Thus the sectarian, in his zeal, is not concerned with the spiritual or moral principles of his sect, as these are beyond his faculties. All he is concerned with is his inspired feeling of loyalty towards his group and animosity against others. In other words, he perceives his sect exactly the same way the Bedouin regarded his tribe.

In his framing, therefore, al-Wardi was not privileging either side of the split, for each had its role in Iraqi social life. Rather, he was highlighting the danger posed by the fusion of Bedouin honorific impulses, the solidarity they motivated and the subgroup categories that divided society at the behest of clerical authority. In his seminal 1952 book *Preachers of the Sultan*, al-Wardi (1952: 20) wrote: 'the Arab Bedouin, in his subconscious glorifies power, pride and superiority in his actions, but consciously as Muslim, he preaches the fear of God and the equality of all people'. The 'split personality' constituted the primary unit in Iraq's national character, which was built on the contradiction between particularistic Bedouin values and universalistic Islamic values.

In terms of historic trajectory, al-Wardi examined the impact of twentieth-century modernization/urbanization on the social psychology of Iraqis, concluding that this produced a 'schizoid' conflict in the Iraqi personality. Analysis of the Iraqi character as caught in between tradition and modernization was considered in his 1965 *A Study into the Nature of Iraqi Society, The Personality of the Iraqi Individual: A Study of Iraqi Personality in Light of New Psychological Science* (1952) and, most notably, *Social Glimpses of Modern Iraqi History*, his seminal eight-volume work (1971–1979), especially in its first volume. A central question posed by al-Wardi was why social reality differed from one society to another and how social structure changes or endures. The key for him was 'human quiddity'. Embarking on that challenging question, he began with the primary Arabo-Islamic sources of history to analyse the unfolding of events in the totality of social reality, and in light of the disciplines of social science, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and political theory. From this perspective, al-Wardi concluded that the Qur'an was the driving motor of social change in the life of the Arabian Peninsula.

*Preachers of the Sultan* would prove to be his most controversial work, in which he presented his central theory about Iraq's political development. Here, al-Wardi examined his common theme of the 'split personality' (*izdiwajiyah*) of the Iraqi, the legacy of the pre-Islamic Bedouin culture and their clash with universalist Islamic principles. This double personality becomes much clearer in the countries that have a strong Bedouin influence, especially within the clergy. For example, he maintained that Iraqis experience a stronger split personality than that found in the rest of the Arab world, owing to two factors: first, as Iraq is geographically open and has continued to attract Bedouins who bring their particularist (tribal) values and universalist (Islamic) principles to Iraqi society; and, second, as Iraq has been the source of many religious, philosophical and scientific schools of thought, and all the advocates that come with these systems. For those reasons we should not be 'surprised



if we find the phenomena of the split-personality is very common among the people of Iraq. [...] It can be said that the split-personality diminishes when we get away from the desert and move to the urban centres' (al-Wardî 1952: 20). To this end, al-Wardî (1971: 10–11) emphasized that

the Bedouin values that permeated Iraqi society for hundreds of years would not disappear easily; only decreasing in conjunction with an increase in state and government authority [which was temporal in its orientation]. However, these values [would] always lay dormant in the Iraqi subconscious, looking for the opportunity to manifest.

The particularistic values manifest themselves as sectarianism under the influence of social breakdown.

For this reason, while al-Wardî (1965: 342) was hopeful for the future, he was derisive of his contemporaries and especially the hypocrisy of those succumbing to manipulate the divide for personal gain:

People don't seem to care who rules them or achieves prominence among them. Instead, they focus their efforts on winning the approval of their ruler; to avoid his wrath or to gain his patronage. Reality shows that this attitude is still with many people today. These people respect the arrogant dignitaries and those who have more important positions despite their dislike for them. [...] Democracy is not only a political system, but also a social system. If people are not used to democratic practices in social life they will not do any better in their political lives. Should these old ways of respecting the arrogant rulers continue, these rulers will continue in their old ways as well. [...] There is a well-known hadith 'as you are you will be ruled'.

In the interaction of these personalities, al-Wardî (1952: 36) provided a historically informed analysis of the relationship between the temporal authorities, the rulers and the clerical class, the purported institutionalized representatives of the holy:

A great number of Muslims, particularly those of Iraq were inflicted with the disease of psychological conflict during Umayyad rule. Practically, they lived under Bedouin values; however, they were intellectually influenced by Islamic values. Thus, subconsciously, there was a conflict between what they did and what they professed [...] the Umayyad's were openly Bedouin and did not give any attention to what the *faqih* [jurists] and the clerics had to say. Their concern was with strengthening their authority through the traditional Bedouin method – the sword. Thus, during the rule of the Umayyads there was a gap between the state and religion. The state was strong in Syria, maintained by the swords of the Arab tribes, while the carriers of religion and the *faqih* were propagating the tenants of their religion among the peasants, the masses and the professionals. Therefore, the state and religion were moving in different directions.

Al-Wardî was scathing in his analysis of the role played by the clerical/religious class, positioning them – historically and in his own time – as using the moral authority of religion to provide justification and cover for the quite often

corrupt temporal authorities across Arab/Islamic history. In his introduction to *Preachers of the Sultan*, he wrote:

It appears to me that the preachers among us are those who would support and justify the lavish lifestyles of the wealthy and the oppressors. [...] They will concentrate their proselytizing on the poor, searching for their faults to make their lives miserable, warning them of the perdition they will face in this world and at judgement. In my opinion the reason for this is due to the fact that all these preachers were and are surviving on the table crumbs of the rich and the oppressors. Thus their survival depends on satisfying the [ruling elite]. You will see them disregarding the oppression, looting and opulence of those people. In addition to all that, they ask God to bless them. It appears to me that the oppressors have found, in the preachers, the best help to keep their subjects occupied and unaware of the reasons for their condition. The people keep themselves busy concerned with God, unaware of the oppression the oppressors inflict upon them. [...] In this method, the oppressor will be comfortable as they remove from their shoulders the responsibility of these actions, transferring them to the shoulders of the miserable poor who spend all their time, day and night, trying to survive while constantly threatened by these preachers with the punishment of God. [...] The problem of these preachers is they take completely the side of the rulers against the ruled. [...] If the ruler oppresses his subjects [...] they [the preachers] say 'he tried and made a mistake, and every human being makes mistakes while God alone is faultless'.

(al-Wardī 1952: 11–12)

In this sense, sectarianism was not an aspect of religious faith, but rather a distracting admonition to impede clarity of thought and the enlightened self-interest privileged in an aspirational democratic society such as Iraq. Intrigued by the contradictions of social reality which he had experienced first-hand as a child and continued to witness as an adult, al-Wardī examined the social and historical underpinning of Iraqi society. Drawing on the works of the modern sociologists he engaged during the course of his studies, Max Weber and the great Ibn Khaldun, he explained Iraq in terms of the dynamic relationship between the person and society. In effect, he argued that the person is born into society and internalizes the beliefs, assumptions and values that legitimate the patterns of everyday life, that is, the social structure. In turn, society represents the externalization of the beliefs, values and assumptions of the person. The historical trajectory was based on the increasing rigidity and inflexibility of the social structure over time, and the growing contradictions between the values, beliefs and assumptions internalized by people, and the social structure.

## **CRITICAL THEORY AND THE ARAB WORLD**

In considering al-Wardī's contribution to the study of Iraqi society, one is struck by his published works as well as the personal contributions he made to Iraqi intellectual and cultural vitality. While his work was one of the first instances of the scholarly application of modern social science analysis to a society of the Arab world, it was also through his efforts to mobilize its content along with broader progressive intellectual engagement in society that al-Wardī's expression of what came to be known as critical theory was evident.

Not simply a denizen of the ivory tower, al-Wardi was an active participant within broader social debates in the emergent intellectual atmosphere of mid-century Baghdad. He purposefully identified future thought leaders from his popular course examining Iraqi society at the University of Baghdad, as well as from beyond the confines of campus.

Critical theory developed in the 1930s in the so-called Frankfurt school, a label given to an interdisciplinary group of neo-Marxist social theorists associated with the Institute for Social Research following its 1923 establishment at Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany. Critical theory as a system of thought sought to describe 'the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms' (Bohman 2013). Its revision of classical Marxism saw a break from singular focus on the working class. According to its founders in the first generation, it was based on three criteria:

It must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation.

(Bohman 2013)

This commitment to, in al-Wardi's case, the transformative potential of Iraq's youth to overcome imperialism, an often-regressive political regime and the perils of a conservative culture steeped in tradition was inherent in his research and pedagogy. As early as his days as a student at the American University of Beirut, he published a pamphlet entitled 'Improving the Conditions of Workers of the Arab World' (1943), in which he identified that the majority of workers in the Arab world are peasants, not industrial/technical labourers. He described how illiteracy and poor health and sanitation suffered by these peasants and especially the exploitative economic system they live under 'resulted in more damage to the Arab nation as a whole' (al-Wardi 1943: 56–57). To rectify this ill, he advocated for the possibility of granting land to peasants, a revolutionary idea for the time and place (1943: 59). While not impacting western scholarship on Iraq, for its misapprehension with his focus on *izdiwajiyah*, al-Wardi nonetheless had an immense impact on his contemporaries and future generations of Iraqi intelligentsia. This was due to the focus on injustice across his research project, for his focus on Arab history in general and Iraq in particular following their engagement with western imperialism and the advance of global capital markets and due to his use of pedagogy and communication to advance social consciousness. While al-Wardi himself was not a Marxist, such sensibilities exhibited a conscious commitment, or disposition, to aspects of intellectual engagement espoused by the Frankfurt school. Like that movement, al-Wardi was focused on the problems his work addressed as well as *izdiwajiyah* as an intersubjective conceptualization of the social relations between people. He encouraged broad public engagement, as well as select dynamic voices from across the political spectrum, to promote a pluralistic democratic environment. Thus, while belonging to no single faction or school of thought, al-Wardi gained an enormous cache amongst a wide range of political activists, intellectuals and the various producers from amongst an expanding cultural class. Al-Wardi's innovative framing and methodology, far from requiring constancy and adherence, allowed for a critique of modernity as imported from the European metropolis, of capitalist society as

it brought commodification and mass culture to Iraq, all while maintaining a commitment to inclusive social emancipation and recognition of the perceived pathologies of Iraqi society.

In the area of communication as a medium for raising social consciousness, al-Wardi's message was transmitted through his lectures, publications and participation in popular media. In his commitment to embrace common citizens in such deliberations, as well as the intellectual and cultural classes, al-Wardi stood out. He consciously had his works produced with lower-quality paper and bindings so that they would sell for cheaper and thereby be exposed to a wider audience. This allowed his interventions and the challenges they posed to germinate and bring prominence to aspects of social justice and pragmatic social change to a broad section of the progressive and liberal modernizing segments of Baghdadi society. As receivers, the Iraqi public further circulated his message in the civic and communal dialogue of Iraq. As his following grew, allowing it to impact and shape the considerations and ideals of al-Wardi's intended destination for his information, the future elite and opinion-makers of the emergent Iraqi polity were thereby impacted as would be evident in their politics, social discourse and cultural production (al-Musawi 2006: 44, 48, 86).

Al-Wardi (1952: 13) made it clear that he wrote this book, *Preachers of the Sultan*, to bring to the attention of the public the injustice they faced where intellectuals 'applaud the oppressor and spit on the faces of the oppressed'. Citing his own personal experience, and the misery he experienced at the hands of the oppressors and their henchmen, al-Wardi maintained that this experience made him realize the hypocrisy of the preachers, as they warn of God's punishment while supporting the oppressors of the everyday reality faced by all. To have published this book in 1952, in a conservative and religious society such as Iraq, involved real courage. His criticism of religion and suggestions highlighting the merits of secular values would bring the scrutiny of the powerful and, moreover, risk offending social mores. Indeed, his treatment of the celebrated Islamic Caliphates, most notably that of the Abbasid, violated certain taboos, given that he characterized the clerical class of that historical era as 'power-aggrandizing' and corrupt. For instance, in his treatment of the Abbasid dynasty, he commented that

The Abbasids came to power claiming to restore the tradition of the Prophet [...] to bridge the gap that was between the state and religion during the Umayyad dynasty, which is impossible [...] religion and the state are of two different natures that can't be reconciled fully. The state is based on oppression, exploitation and power, while religion is based on mercy, justice and equality. The Abbasid Caliphate tried to reconcile religion and the state but were not successful, except in appearance. Thus, they brought the *faqih* to their side and paid them handsomely, pretending to revere them and listen to their preaching. In reality they could do no more than that; in their practice they were no different from any other king due to the circumstances of compromises, oppression, and exploitation.

(al-Wardi 1952: 37)

A careful reading of *Preachers of the Sultan* reveals that the title was deliberately chosen to impress upon the reader that the import of Islam had long disappeared. The faith had been long replaced by an organized religion in which

'Preachers' sanctified the subject's observance in service of an oppressive regime. In return the 'Sultan' mawkishly refers to their ecclesiastical authority. The book is an analysis of Islamic history from primary sources elaborating the thesis that social justice and the empowerment of people, which is the import of Islam, did not take root in collective Muslim consciousness. This, al-Wardi argued, was because tens of thousands of peninsular Bedouins converted in name only, without changing their normative perspective following the conquest of Mecca and the surrender of Quraysh. Rather than developing educational mechanisms to cultivate a genuine Islamic collective consciousness, Muslim armies ventured into the far and beyond acquiring the treasures of foreign lands through conquest, which gave rise to concentrated wealth. Thus, al-Wardi challenged the accepted narrative of Islamic accession through the Umayyad dynasty's rise to power in 661. Rather, he argued that the Umayyad instrumentalized Islam, reducing religion to formalism and ritual, while allowing the dynastic ruler, or Sultan, to employ self-serving religious functionaries to rationalize whatever whim or act of oppression. Examples deployed by al-Wardi included clerics who went so far as to fabricate traditions which glorified the ruler in order to manipulate mass perception, thereby distracting the people from reflecting on their destitution and oppressive living conditions. Al-Wardi detailed how this historical pattern continued through the Abbasid and Ottoman empires, and to remove the hint of sectarianism he made plain how Shi'ites under the Safavids were no different. The present-day autocracy in the Arab world is arguably a continuation of the same pattern. 'Opposition is sedition, but [a] ruler's oppression is a forgivable flaw', say the Sultan's Preachers. In this fashion, political oppression and the social stagnation attendant to authoritarianism, which necessarily engendered revolts, which in turn saw brutal suppression by the state, were religiously rationalized by the Preachers, while their suffering flocks were left without succour.

*Preachers of the Sultan* sold well within the Iraqi context (15,000 copies) and provoked a meaningful debate, for, as expected, it was heavily criticized by the clerical class (al-Haidarî 2006). In response to the backlash from religious authorities, in 1956 al-Wardi published *The Comedy of the Human Mind*, engaging his religious and intellectual opponents in a single volume. Reflecting on his purpose, he began this book with a dedication and caution, writing:

I dedicate this book to those readers who comprehend what they read. However, for those who read the book and interpret it with [only] their preconceptions, God help us. I worry that they will do with this book what they previously did with its brother, *Preachers of the Sultan*. They picked out paragraphs and interpreted them as they saw fit, and rushed to public places shouting [...] It is time for them to learn that the time of crying has already passed, replaced by the time of careful reflection and methodical research.

(al-Wardî 1956: 5)

In addition, reflecting both his explicitly normative purpose and returning to his lifetime commitment to anti-clericalism, he added an epilogue entitled 'The Conclusion of the Comedy: Some Clerics'. In it he wrote:

I gave a lecture in which I made a comparison between the decay of Quraysh [before Islam] and the decay of the opulent-living in our

current age. It never occurred to me that somebody in the audience would exalt the Quraysh or sanctify opulence in any age. In the lecture I was asked about my views on the Prophet Muhammad [...] there is a difference between my belief in the Prophet [Muhammad] and the beliefs of the fanatical clerics. Their belief is influenced by the desires of those who live opulently, and thus, in return for payment they began to interpret history in the way the Sultan's dictated to them. They believed Muhammad loved the Quraysh and gave it preference to the other tribes. They believed [all] Quraysh were a godly people with all the features of honour and decency, whose only fault was idolatry, to whom God sent Muhammad to save them from that evil and to establish them as rulers of all people. This is their belief in the prophet and they bring numerous hadiths to support it. As for me, I believe Muhammad was nobler than that; his great message was not to establish the supremacy of one person or tribe over others. Rather, he was a social revolutionary and criticized his own people before criticizing others. [...] That is why the conflicts between the Prophet and Quraysh, and the battle between them, was one of life and death. Muhammad was from Quraysh, as were his disciples, but this did not prevent them from criticizing and rebelling against their own people. This is my understanding of what is called in sociology the 'decisive personality', those possessed of it transcend social boundaries and because of their open-mindedness will not ignore the weaknesses of their own people. The clerics in our society consider their own to be a superior people, and for that reason do nothing but glorify their beliefs while demeaning others. They see the excellence in sectarian, national, or tribal fanaticism and in their opinion excellence is defending the sect, right or wrong [...] People grow up in certain environments and get used to what is familiar among their people and tradition, and they see nothing else as right. For that reason they strive to convince everyone else of their ancestral belief. The decisive personality hates to tell people 'we found our people on one course and followed in their steps'. The Prophet had a decisive personality.

Upon my description of Muhammad the clerics got upset and began to create a commotion as they interpreted the decisive personality as a 'limited personality'. I don't know how they arrived at this explanation. The clerics interpret things to their liking, and become angry over their rash interpretations rather than being upset with themselves. This reminds me of the commotion after the publication of my book *Preachers of the Sultan* in which I said that Ali was a revolutionary, or *thuarah* in Arabic. The clerics returned the word to its etymological origin *thwer*, meaning oxen, and thus frenzied the mob for my supposed insult of Ali. God help this author when the mob turns against him. [...] One of these preachers described my impact in his Friday sermon: 'there are three issues that will lead to corruption in this country. They are gambling, prostitution and Dr. Ali al-Wardi.' The preacher forgot that his sermon and others are also a reason for corruption [...] They [the clerics] have committed all the evils religion forbids, however they have become the most wholehearted protectors of religion when they find it as a means to aggress others. I am sorry to say that the preachers use the dregs of society in their religious propaganda. [...] I am so grateful every time I remember the innocents the clerics killed in the name of God in the

old days, I thank God that I live in a new age. [...] The clerics represent religion in people's minds, and with every bad thing they commit they demolish religion without knowing. Humans interpret things at face-value, and religion became entrusted to the clerics, so if they become untrustworthy, then religion goes down with them. To God, the greatest sin is to do the opposite of what is said. I do not mean to say that all clerics are of this sort. Fairness requires us to admit there are a number of truly pious and decent people among them. I know a lot of those, and I have found them to be of the revolutionary sort, committed to reform, just like the disciples of the Prophet, however they are silent and their problems are because of their silence [...] the reformer does not care what people say about him as long as he believes in what he is calling for. Sometimes he will sacrifice his reputation, however time will guarantee the accolade of his memory. There is a difference between a charlatan and a reformer, the charlatan seeks reward from his people and does not care if his cause is wrong or right, and appears as if he is committed to reform. [...] It is time for the silent to start speaking.

(al-Wardi 1956: 295–99)

In his disdain for their unwillingness to engage open debate, their support for oppressive regimes in both the present and the past and their subordination of the population's obvious needs in return for material favour from temporal power, al-Wardi saw the clerics as having little or no conscience. This saw him champion independent thought unaligned to any particular ideological or political faction. Like the emergent Frankfurt school, he joined the public fray, embraced the institutionalization of democracy and worked tirelessly to bring change through a new generation of critical thinkers by which to remove the veil of public ignorance.

## **CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTIVISM IN SOCIAL REFORM**

While largely unknown to English-language scholars, al-Wardi's *Preachers of the Sultan* may today be the most politically relevant of his academic works. Moreover, its analysis appears highly prescient with regard to contemporary Iraqi developments. While his larger body of work – both academic and popular – should also be considered, they need to be seen in the light of this significant contribution. Central to al-Wardi's work was a project of critical sociology, using such analysis to find ways 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (Horkheimer 1982: 244). What suggests al-Wardi's work for inclusion in the critical tradition is his focus on the role of the individual and the group in relation to mediated constructions used to buttress and promote social and political power. In fact, his modest personal celebrity allowed for his own engagement through the 'new media' of his day. Al-Wardi acknowledged the capacity of new forms and encouraged the use of his ideas in popular manifestations such as poetry, music and the increasing exposition of modern Iraq in novels. He believed these cultural artefacts, produced in the new media emerging in Iraq, required progressives to craft alternatives to those produced by the emergent media industry of the state, the clerical establishment as well as foreign cultural entertainments. This was not merely due to their role as intellectual opponents or propaganda. Anticipating Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectical of Enlightenment* (1947), these outputs filling the new media space of radio and a growing national

print culture served to deflect attention from the problems so integral to everyday Iraqis with which progressives were seized. In his critical approach, he identified and criticized the cultural forces which shaped societal discourse, deconstructing these power bases to advocate for social change and popular empowerment as noted by the Iraqi scholar Muhsin al-Musawi in his *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict*. Whether he used critical sociology intentionally or by accident is unclear, but from his body of work it is clear that he was a critical observer. Aside from application and potential mobilizations for progressives, al-Wardi nonetheless saw cultural production as a site of continued contestation between Iraqis' 'split personality' (*izdiwajiyah*). Musawi notes that al-Wardi's conceptualization of Iraq extended to such cultural production, as al-Wardi argued that 'Arabic poetry is of double standards like its society, of a divided heart between Bedouin values and civilizational others' (al-Musawi 2006: 137–38).

Beyond his formal academic work, al-Wardi was a public intellectual, highly engaged with the critical debates of Iraqi society, promulgating his analysis and critique through the mass media (newspaper, radio, television). Al-Wardi, while a trained sociologist, was a polymath; while he was chiefly associated with sociology, he was invited, and sometimes volunteered, to lecture and teach in multiple academic departments, owing to his historically informed and broad-based knowledge, and while al-Wardi's academic output was significant, he was anything but the stereotype of the cloistered 'ivory tower' intellectual, separated from larger society by academic obscurantism. While never joining any of the Iraqi political parties, he was actively engaged in Iraqi political discussions and was insistent on encouraging the larger Iraqi public beyond intellectuals. Often, this effort would bring him into conflict with his society's powerful forces. Beyond engaging with his students, where in classes and public lectures he was always testing and developing theories in Socratic dialogues, al-Wardi would also be published in Iraqi newspapers and the popular press. Moreover, he would engage in participatory dialogues with the public in radio interviews and, most notably, a short-lived television programme, *You Ask and Al-Wardi Answers* (1960), an experiment which created a commotion and would be cancelled at the behest of the powerful. In response to efforts of social elites to suppress al-Wardi in his function as a public intellectual, he acerbically condemned his opponents as *jawlawzah* (henchmen), writing that

[...] the henchmen of the radio station [...] for no apparent reason, refused to approve the broadcast. The station, like all other cultural agencies in this country imitates the approach of the preachers. [...] These people attribute every problem in the breakdown of our society to bad morals, and thus they consider reform as a simple need to change morals which will cleanse our hearts of selfish desire, jealousy and envy, the result of which they claim will be happiness and the glory of our ancestors. [...] This is, in my opinion the silliest and most malicious fallacy to call for social change. Lately we have seen a phenomenon in our young generation, as they mock every preacher and thus the preachers are in one valley while the youth are in another. What is most strange is that the preachers themselves do not follow the advice they give: while they preach the cleansing of hearts from jealousy, selfishness and enviousness, inescapable aspects of human nature with the difference between people only in degrees, they are themselves most envious,



selfish and jealous people [...] as if subconsciously trying to keep people from sharing in their spoils. Our preachers let the opulent oppressors do what they like, concentrating their attention on the people to count their mistakes and make their lives miserable with the fear of God.

(al-Wardī 1952: 5–7)

In these episodes of al-Wardī's life, one can see that he was comfortable speaking to two audiences. In his academic publications, al-Wardī was appealing to Iraq's intellectuals, leveraging his theoretical complexity in service of moral suasion, to compel the privileged to advocate for social justice within Iraq. Conversely, as seen in his experiments with developing mass media, al-Wardī was willing and able to address the broader Iraqi public, to raise critical issues of social justice in a plain-spoken but morally rich manner. In this, one sees that al-Wardī's social justice commitments were not merely an intellectual exercise but were highly sensitive to the lived experience of those without the privileges he enjoyed as an intellectual. In doing so, he was attempting to have Iraqis question the ideas which the increasingly abundant media presented to them. Whether public affairs or entertainment, they possessed an ideological purpose or purposes, often in the interests of temporal power. In his exhortation of Iraqi youth, especially those intellectuals and activists he found out for their potential as leaders of the new Iraq, getting access to media and developing the skills to utilize them was important. This acknowledged that not all members of society have the same level of access to the media, or the same resources to compete for media attention. When journalists crafted their coverage, often based on the world-view and interests of state institutions and private power, this amplified issues already considered a priority to the detriment of issues which highlighted the need for social change. Media's role in holding the powers that be accountable saw al-Wardī require journalists to be critically aware of how established sources frame, shape, bias and colour different issues. Moreover, journalists should also bring new issues to the public's attention, often as a source of insight into culture and society, including the new expression of Iraqi national culture then proliferating.

## **CONCLUSION: ALI AL-WARDI IN RETROSPECT**

Ali al-Wardī died in 1995, having lived to see his country experience colonialism, political revolution, dictatorship and the impacts of ruinous wars. With the exception of Fuad Bali's partial translation of *Understanding Iraq: Society, Culture and Personality* (2008), al-Wardī's body of work has not been completely translated into English. While his work is frequently drawn upon by area studies scholars of the Middle East, and increasingly in more popular treatments of Iraqi culture and history, his enormous impact upon the latter half of twenty-first-century Iraqi intellectual discourse represents an astigmatism in the scholarly treatment of modern Iraq. In one sense, al-Wardī represents an early scholar in the mould of critical theory and critical sociology within the Iraqi and Arab context, presaging later intellectual developments within the region and, indeed, globally. Considering that his main body of work is now over six decades old, the continued relevance of al-Wardī's work speaks to the need for a critical approach to Iraqi society, informed by historical depth and complexity. This need for a historically informed, and culturally rich, analysis of Iraqi society is all the more necessary where much

popular, and even academic, work on the subject represents Iraq in a reductionist and orientalist manner, without concern for the historical experience which shaped the Iraqi personality. Moreover, al-Wardi represents an important example of a non-western intellectual engaging with the firmament of global desires for emancipation during the early postcolonial era. In spite of its sophistication and culturally grounded critical engagement with Iraqi and Arabo-Islamic societies, it also stands with humility when posed next to the positivist and modernist theories predominant at the time. Al-Wardi's intellectual project, therefore, represents the potential for an Iraqi engagement with its social and political present, for he is not limiting such efforts to a singular ideological, methodological or epistemic basis. He provides a robust and unique ontological framework, applying various social science concepts and hypotheses, a challenge to any scholar attempting to grasp modern Iraq and its peoples. Without privileging al-Wardi's own project, he continues to speak to the need for contemporary researchers and seekers of truth to forestall easy acceptance of the staid manifestations used to explain and justify those holding temporal power and wealth. The emancipatory potential of any attempts to explain contemporary Iraq without recourse to the siren call of 'The Preachers' would see such projects today channelling al-Wardi.

Contemporary efforts to conceptualize Iraq's current cataclysmic environment following the humanitarian devastation attendant with Saddamist Ba'ath rule, multiple wars with foreign states and the Anglo-American occupation's promotion of internecine conflict prove precarious to often-emotive causal explication and interested accounts of the empirical. In this uncertain period, an interregnum between the social and economic reordering of the republican efforts under Abdel Karim Kassem and the early Ba'ath period and the society Iraqis will build in future, the undergirding sociological tectonics identified by al-Wardi provide a departure for such interrogations. As was made plain over the last decade, knowledge of where power in Iraq lay proved illusory. Whether regional satraps, bureaucrats from imperious international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or instant experts proffered by academic or media institutions from outside, knowledge of Iraq and Iraqis was scant and often perilous to Iraqis themselves. That such knowledge was instrumentalized to reanimate a political project now bereft of indigenous sovereignty calls for a humble reassessment from without and an honest requirement for Iraqis to hold sway over the formation of a new political leadership.

Confusion reigns as a coherent political class has yet to emerge. As examined by Eric Davis in his *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (2005: 173–74), attempts were made by the late Ba'ath dictatorship to mobilize neo-tribal forces. However, such efforts under Saddam were dependent on state oppression and the economic distress induced by international sanctions. Moreover, while persuading certain loyalties, they have proved modern penumbras of their classical manifestations. As social organizations, they mimic the tribal affiliations and modalities of the late Ottoman and Mandate periods as addressed by al-Wardi. Rather than seeing mutual dependencies, whereby sheiks are dependent on and listen to their tribal followers, these groups are often hierarchical and fashioned around social networks more akin to organized crime syndicates than the blood ties and socio-economic affinities at the heart of Bedouin society. Shortly before his passing, al-Wardi warned against the state's revival of such groups; in an interview with Sa'd al-Bazzaz, he stressed the incompatibility of

tribalism and Islamic values (Davis 2005: 262–64). That al-Wardi presaged the reprobate outcomes of the state's ideological commitment to neo-tribalism, including the lack of an Iraqi accommodation with a value system capable of incorporating the material changes accompanying oil wealth, or the incorporation of women into the public life of a democracy, should come as no surprise. Why Anglo-American authorities embraced such social forces following the expected failures of Iraqi exiles to manage the occupation remains without explanation.

Indeed, following Anglo-American machinations, the 'Preachers of the Sultan' identified by al-Wardi have become today's sultans. It is a testament to the devastation of Iraqi society, the starvation of its intellectuals and the smashing of its historical memory that such a great number of apparitions litter its political landscape and are afforded access to power by foreign machinations. Spectres of defunct and often-felonious political actors, enthroned by American tanks after the US-led invasion in 2003, and provided legitimation by the preachers, it is no wonder such actors rely on legitimation techniques divorced from the day-to-day realities faced by regular Iraqis. Iraqis are left to decipher such actors, to the coercive stratagems they deploy, while genuine desires for responsible governance are cast aside. In this effort, mass media has become the erstwhile vehicle allowing justificatory preachers, with their control of the state's purse to fund their foreign-trained paramilitia allies who act as their henchmen, to enforce this emergent political regime. Much as al-Wardi warned, like earlier Muslim sultans, the newly enthroned have enriched themselves while drawing on religious/sectarian justifications for their rule. Moreover, in their personages, following the early dispatch of many Iraqi expatriates from the occupation-appointed ruling class, followed by many of the dependent neo-tribal sheiks, those who remain are largely derived from the classically identified 'preacher' groups and families. Afforded the opportunity to now put their efforts to use in the promotion and justification of their own position of authority, filling the vacuum created by the failures of the Anglo-American project, these 'preachers' have not proven shy. Rather than merely supporting the ruling elites, such actors have robustly seized the rentier state and promoted the maintenance of their privileges.

Al-Wardi categorically identified the lack of conscience of 'preachers', their capacity to justify all manner of perniciousness by political authority as well as their proclivity to enhance their own authority and interests through the promotion of sectarianism. Where the emergent Iraqi polity differs from the era depicted in al-Wardi's writing is in the preachers' opportunity to stand in for the power holders whom they had enabled in the first place. As the new state apparatus emerges, especially as assailed by regional firestorms, it will stand to reason that they will be challenged for power. As al-Wardi depicted, channelling Ibn Khaldun before him, political regimes have life cycles, and the re-consolidation of both political leadership over the state as well as state authority over the topography of Iraq will follow. The involvement of international and regional actors notwithstanding, the *bilad al-makhzan*, the area that is firmly under control of the government, and the *bilad al-siba'* (the land of insolence), the areas beyond state authority, will need to be re-established. The suffering Iraqi peoples, now joined by much of the devastated *Mashriq*, have been driven to such bleakness through the maliciousness of many hands. While al-Wardi did not live to see these desultory developments, where the critical perspective crafted in his work would have been a crucial, moral, 'voice

in the wilderness', the legacy of his critique remains in his legacy as well as those he influenced, this author included.

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