

THE BATH PARTY IN BAGHDAD: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS THROUGH WARS,  
SANCTIONS, AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE, 1950-2003

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By

Alissa Walter, M.A.

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# THE BA'ATH PARTY IN BAGHDAD: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS THROUGH WARS, SANCTIONS, AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE, 1950-2003

Alissa Walter, M.A.

Thesis Advisor: Judith Tucker, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

How did 50 years of oil wealth, non-democratic rule, wars, and sanctions shape state-society relations in the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad? This dissertation charts key trends in state-society dynamics during important periods of disruption: oil-fueled modernization (1950-1979), the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War (1980-1991), and the period of international sanctions (1990-2003). During these periods of change, I focus on specific points of interaction between the government and residents of Baghdad: the construction of new neighborhoods through state-subsidized housing, citizen petitions sent to regime representatives, and food rations distributed during sanctions. Drawing attention to the important role that 'ordinary' Baghdadis, including women and rural migrants, played in shaping the city and influencing the government, I show how residents of the capital advocated for their needs and, at times, challenged the authority of the regime. At the same time, the regime's governance strategies shaped how Baghdadis related to the government and one another. Four key conclusions emerge from this history of contentious interactions between state and society in modern Iraqi history: the continued importance of neighborhoods as a political and social unit, the limitations of Saddam's surveillance and influence over Baghdad's population, the complexities of defining 'resistance' and 'collusion' in Saddam's Iraq, and the influential role of women and rural migrants in the city's history. These conclusions are based on fieldwork in Erbil, Iraq and research in the following archives: the Iraqi Ba'ath Party archives; the Saddam Hussein collection at the National Defense University; the Constantinos Doxiadis Associates archives; and American, British, and French diplomatic archives. Drawing on these sources, I present new

arguments about the social, political, and economic consequences of Saddam's rule for the people of Baghdad.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation is nine years in the making, from my first day as a Master's student in Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University in 2009 to today, as I prepare to graduate from Georgetown's History Department.

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Joseph Sassoon has been a mentor since his History of Iraq class in the spring of 2011, during the final semester in my master's program, piqued my interest and ultimately converted my entire research program. As his research assistant and, later, as a collaborator and co-author, I have grown as a scholar by observing up close his work habits, writing process, and research methodologies. I remain grateful for his confidence in my scholarship and the opportunities he created to help me grow professionally through writing articles, presenting at conferences, and assisting with book projects.

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my writing, and ask larger questions of my sources. Rochelle Davis took me on as a research assistant while I was still a master's student, opening me up to the world of refugee studies and offering valuable practice in carrying out fieldwork—an experience I drew on in conducting interviews in Erbil for this dissertation.

I traveled to six archives around the world to research this dissertation, and this travel would not have been possible without the generous financial support of several grants. My research trips to archives in the UK, Greece, and France were funded by the Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TARII), a Dissertation Research Travel Grant from Georgetown University's Graduate School, and a Piepho Grant from the Georgetown University History Department. The Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Fund supported two years of my work in the Iraqi Ba'th Party archives and other US-based collections, and a Silas Palmer Research Grant from the Hoover Institution covered my relocation expenses to the Stanford area. My final year of dissertation writing was supported by grants from the American Association of University Women and the United States Institute of Peace. I am grateful for the generosity of these funders, without which this dissertation could not have taken its present form.

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My fieldwork in Erbil, Iraq in October 2016 was among the most memorable and valuable experiences of my research. The outbreak of fighting between Iraqi government forces and ISIS less than 30 miles from Erbil during my stay added an additional layer of anxieties to my fieldwork, and I'm indebted to my friends and colleagues who ensure that my trip was both safe and productive. Mélisande Genat was critical for providing my initial contacts and walking me through the basics of carrying out fieldwork in Iraq, and Sarah Ali was also a source of tremendous encouragement and practical information prior to my arrival. On the ground, Hoveen Sabah provided exceptional services as a research assistant and fixer in setting up interviews with a wide array of families from Baghdad living in Erbil. I could not have done it without him, and I'm grateful he stayed away from the excitement of battle long enough to help me before beginning his work with the war journalists covering the campaign against ISIS. Mustafa al-Tayar and Ali Ahmed joined our work as friends and informants themselves, helping to connect us to still more Baghdadi families.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Nodair and Luna –  
my rare gift and my beloved moon

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## 1. Introduction

What was Baghdad like on the eve of the US invasion in 2003? What were the legacies and consequences of decades of authoritarian rule for the people and city of Baghdad, and how did this contribute to the devolution of the city into score-settling and sectarian violence after the fall of Saddam Hussein?

A person born in Baghdad in 1950 would have witnessed dramatic changes to her city and her way of life over the course of her lifetime. Beginning in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a surge of oil revenues financed a massive modernization push and construction boom in the Iraqi capital. Ottoman-era wood and mud brick houses clustered along narrow dirt alleyways were knocked down to make room for highways, modernist office buildings, and western-style subdivisions to house the swelling ranks of professionals and public sector employees. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Baghdad's newspapers celebrated the professional and educational achievements of Iraqi women, facilitated by oil-financed governmental programs for free university, free healthcare, free childcare, and paid maternity leave.<sup>1</sup> Young people in Baghdad attended rock concerts, Iraqi magazines advertised miniskirts, and British embassy officials noted with a wink that a temporary shortage of whiskey and beer in the mid-1970s caused a small uproar among Baghdad's middle classes.<sup>2</sup>

In 1980, the outbreak of war abruptly changed the city's trajectory. Men virtually disappeared from the streets, conscripted into the army on seemingly endless rotations on the front lines with Iran, while women shouldered double duties as the heads of households and as breadwinners. New monuments commemorating the war and celebrating Saddam punctuated the city skyline, and air raid sirens scuttled women, children, and the elderly into newly-erected bomb shelters. For a brief

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<sup>1</sup> "First Iraqi Coed on the Achievements of Iraqi Women," *Baghdad Observer*, May 10, 1968, pg. 7; "Child and Maternity Care Centre Takes Care of 123,000 Iraqi Families," *Baghdad Observer*, July 30, 1968, pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom [Hereafter: *TNA*], Memo from the British Embassy in Baghdad to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, "Iraqi Scene," May 12, 1976, Foreign and Commonwealth Office [Hereafter: *FCO*] 8/2780: Internal Political Affairs; Achim Rohde, *State-Society Relations in Ba'thist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 120, 129.

two-year period at the end of the Iran-Iraq War, it seemed as if life might return to normal in Baghdad, but Saddam's decision to invade Kuwait in August 1990 doomed the city. US aerial bombardments during Desert Storm devastated Baghdad, blowing out its infrastructure and laying waste to bridges, roads, factories, and homes. From 1990 to 2003, UN sanctions hobbled the city's efforts to rebuild, and many Baghdadis scraped by with insufficient cash, food, or medicine. Beggars and criminals claimed the city streets, and Baghdad's growing numbers of vulnerable residents—widows, disabled veterans, the unemployed—vied for limited amounts of state assistance to get by. Saddam publicly endorsed a new “faith campaign” (*al-hamla al-imaniyya*) that promoted (and controlled) outward expressions of religiosity, which added pressure on women to leave the work force to make more jobs available for demobilized soldiers. By the time US forces invaded Baghdad on April 3, 2003 to overthrow Saddam's regime, Baghdad and its residents had been shaped and reshaped by these different periods of state-led development, wars, sanctions, and the quotidian dangers (and, sometimes, rewards) of life in a dictatorship. Once Saddam was gone, the city devolved into bloody internecine conflict that peaked between 2006 and 2010, violently upending the city's landscape and residents once again.

## **Historical Overview**

This dissertation focuses on the economically, ethnically, and religiously diverse capital city of Baghdad, exploring the history of interactions between the city's residents and the government through key periods of change. The time frame of this dissertation spans a period of 53 years, from 1950 to 2003, during which time Iraq was ruled by a series of different rulers who unwillingly ceded their power only in the event of coups or untimely natural death. The Hashemite monarchy, first installed by the British in 1920, oversaw Iraq's transition into the oil age. The last eight years of Hashemite rule, from 1950 to 1958, were characterized by a massive influx of oil revenues, which



the monarchy used to fund modernization and infrastructure development in the capital and throughout the country.

Economically, the Hashemite period prior to 1950 was characterized by a heavy reliance on agriculture, though it was not a particularly reliable, productive sector. In addition to issues of high levels of soil salinity, exacerbated by poor irrigation and drainage infrastructure, and unpredictable floods that could ruin harvests, inequitable systems of land ownership contributed to low output. In particular, southern Iraqi farmers suffered in a system that disproportionately concentrated land in the hands of powerful tribal sheikhs. Many landless farmers were caught up in debt bondage to their tribal leaders and lived in abject poverty. Because few farmers owned their own land, the region had few landlords willing to invest in costly irrigation infrastructure that would have improved output in the long run.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, the country suffered from the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few elites who were not investing their capital in large industrial or agricultural projects that would have contributed to employing the masses, and tax burdens also fell overwhelmingly to the poor as elites in parliament voted to exempt themselves.<sup>4</sup> As Chapter Two will further elaborate, the sudden influx of oil revenue in the 1950s was a boon to state budgets and revenues, but did not significantly change the structural weaknesses in the Iraqi economy or lead to immediate improvements in the quality of life for the masses. The Iraqi Development Board begun under Hashemite rule in 1950 promised to rectify these issues with the aim of rapidly modernizing the Iraqi economy, but many of its efforts fell short.

Military officer ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim brought Hashemite rule to an end with a violent coup; he established himself as Iraq’s ‘sole leader’ from 1958-1963 after he and fellow officers killed Iraqi

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<sup>3</sup> Hana Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 32; Joseph Sassoon, *Economic Policy in Iraq, 1932-1950* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 165-169.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 68-69; Abbas Alnasrawi, *The Economy of Iraq: Oil, War, Destruction of Development and Prospects, 1950-2010* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 24-25, 28.

prime minister Nuri al-Sa'id and members of the royal family, dragging their bodies through the streets. Initially supported by the Iraqi Communist Party, Qasim introduced a number of economic and social programs meant to steer the country towards a socialist economic path. These included experiments in rent control, minimum wage, agricultural land distribution, government-set prices for goods, the establishment of peasant unions and other cooperatives, and steps towards nationalizing some foreign companies.<sup>5</sup> Some of these efforts were short-lived or quickly modified, and many foreign companies and investors found that they could continue working in Iraq without significant economic risk. However cautious and inconsistent these economic changes were in practice, they represented a significant break with Hashemite-era policies and earned Qasim a reputation as a leader with concern for the ordinary citizen.<sup>6</sup>

A deadly officers' coup dispatched Qasim in February of 1963; that new government was briefly led by a contingent of the Ba'th Party. During their ten months in power, the Ba'th Party orchestrated a brutal crackdown on communists and other political enemies before they were replaced by 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif (r. 1963-1966), a Nasserite intent on unifying Iraq with Egypt and Syria. When 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif died in a suspicious helicopter crash, his brother 'Abd al-Rahman 'Arif (r. 1966-1968) briefly took over. This five-year period, often referred to as the "Arif brothers" regime, saw general continuity with many of the quasi-socialist economic and social practices of the Qasim period, including a nationalization program begun in 1964 and a somewhat lackluster land redistribution program, though these were framed as being in line with Nasser's vision of socialism, since the 'Arif brothers were rivals with the Iraqi Communist Party.<sup>7</sup> Prime Minister 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz tried to temper these nationalization efforts even further by introducing policies he called

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<sup>5</sup> Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 76-78.

<sup>6</sup> Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 149-150; 161-162.

<sup>7</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 101; Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 29; Alnasrawi, *Economy of Iraq*, 51.

“prudent socialism”: he stopped nationalizations and compensated large landowners for land seized for redistribution to peasants.<sup>8</sup>

The Ba‘th Party reclaimed power through yet another coup in July 1968 under the leadership of president Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr (r. 1968-1979) and vice president Saddam Hussein. Saddam bloodlessly pushed Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr out of office and assumed the presidency himself in 1979. He remained in power for 24 years until the US invasion in April 2003 forced him out. Ba‘thist economic policies in the 1970s were marked by nationalizations, most notably of the oil industry, avowedly populist measures like the creation of a robust social welfare system, and an increase in land redistribution without compensation for landowners.<sup>9</sup> In the 1980s, however, Saddam quietly steered the country towards privatization and market-based economic policies when the burdens of war made it difficult for the government to micromanage the economy.<sup>10</sup>

Though the country flourished economically in the 1970s due to oil prices reaching then-record highs, the costs of war and the devastations of sanctions severely hampered Iraq’s economy from 1980 onward. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) was one of the longest and most costly wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of both human lives and financial expense. Saddam declared war on Iran on September 22, 1980, in response to the Ayatollah Khomeini’s threat to export Iran’s recent Islamic Revolution to Iraq. Saddam believed that it would be a quick and easy task to remove the Ayatollah from power, especially given Iraq’s well-equipped military. Instead, the war dragged on for eight long years before the two sides finally signed a ceasefire agreement. In the end, Iraq and Iran agreed to a *status quo ante bellum*: no territory was exchanged and no leaders were removed from power. However, the human and financial costs of the war were ruinous: Iraq owed anywhere from \$50 - \$82 billion US dollars in debt, despite having begun the war with more than \$32 billion in foreign

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<sup>8</sup> Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 176-177.

<sup>9</sup> Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 197, 200; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 138.

<sup>10</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 239; Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 241.

reserves.<sup>11</sup> An estimated one million people were killed on both sides of the war and two million were wounded.<sup>12</sup>

The financial costs of the Iran-Iraq War directly led to Iraq's next ill-advised military venture. Gulf states had loaned Iraq billions of dollars during the Iran-Iraq War, and most countries forgave those debts at the war's conclusion. Kuwait, however, did not forgive Iraq's debts, and Saddam further reproached the Kuwaitis for depressing global petroleum prices by over-producing oil in the late 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Accusing the Sabah royal family of waging "economic warfare" on Iraq, he ordered Iraqi troops to occupy Kuwait and "annex" the country as an Iraqi province on August 2, 1990.<sup>14</sup>

In response to the global outrage that met Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, the UN Security Council passed resolution #661 on August 8, 1990 that placed a total economic embargo on Iraq, prohibiting Iraq from exporting any oil or importing any goods. These stringent international sanctions remained in place, with some important modifications, until April 2003. In the meantime, the United States and a coalition of 30 countries began to mobilize a joint military force to check Saddam's aggression in the Gulf. When Saddam refused to withdraw from Kuwait by the January 15, 1991 deadline imposed by UN Resolution #678, the US and its allies launched Desert Storm, carrying out air raids inside Iraq and using ground forces in Kuwait to combat Iraqi troops. After six weeks of active warfare, Saddam called for Iraqi troops to withdraw to Iraq on February 26, 1991. In the chaotic retreat that followed, thousands of Iraqi troops were targeted by coalition air raids and perished en route to the border in an incident known as the "highway of death."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 241; Dina Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34-35.

<sup>12</sup> W. Thom Workman, *Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Majid Khadduri and Edmund Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf, 1990-1991: The Iraq-Kuwait Conflict and its Implications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74.

<sup>14</sup> Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 287.

<sup>15</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 39.

Demoralized, returning soldiers sparked a mass uprising that spread across Iraq's northern and southern territories in March of 1991. The *intifada* protestors took aim at symbols and representatives of the Iraqi state and of the ruling Ba'ath Party, torching governmental offices, killing officials, and filling the streets with protestors. In the North, Kurdish protestors rallied around nationalistic cries for autonomy and independence from the government in Baghdad. In the South, Shi'i slogans and iconography quickly dominated the protests, adding a sectarian dimension to the uprising. In the end, Saddam brutally crushed the southern protests with helicopter gunships and reestablished control over these provinces. He also attacked the northern rebels, but Britain and the United States enforced a "no-fly zone" above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, fearful that Saddam would carry out genocidal acts against the Kurds, as he had already done in the late 1980s. In 1992, Saddam signed an agreement that recognized the semi-autonomous status of Iraqi Kurdistan to be administered by the UN and the Kurdistan Regional Government.<sup>16</sup>

For the next 13 years, Saddam presided over a country diminished both territorially and economically. The embargo prohibited Iraq from selling oil, which constituted 95% of Iraq's revenues from exports and 65% of its GDP, crippling the Iraq's economy overnight.<sup>17</sup> Iraq was particularly vulnerable to the economic effects of sanctions on its food supply: due to decades of lucrative oil revenues, Iraqi leaders had neglected the agricultural sector and relied on food imports paid for by oil sales.<sup>18</sup> By the late 1980s, Iraq was spending \$2 billion annually on imported food, which amounted to approximately 70% of the country's caloric needs.<sup>19</sup> As later chapters will discuss, the economic devastation of sanctions hit the Iraqi people, and especially the poor, much

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<sup>16</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 41-42.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Garfield, "Studies on Young Child Malnutrition in Iraq: Problems and Insights, 1990-1999," *Nutrition Reviews* 58(2000): 269; Mustafa Koc, et al, "Food Security and Food Sovereignty in Iraq," *Food, Culture, and Society* 10 (Summer 2007): 329.

<sup>18</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party*, 238-239.

<sup>19</sup> Garfield, "Studies on Young Child Malnutrition in Iraq": 270; Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 70.

harder than the elites. Some food prices rose by as much as 1800% within the first 3 months of the embargo due to scarcity caused by severe restrictions on imports.<sup>20</sup> The collapse of the Iraqi dinar, which fell from 706 ID to 1 US dollar to 3000 ID to 1 US dollar in 1996, wiped out the savings of the middle classes and rendered pensions and fixed public sector paychecks nearly worthless.<sup>21</sup> With shortages of food and medicine, infant and child mortality rates rose, and with children and youth dropping out of school to try to financially support their parents, illiteracy spiked to rates estimated to be as high as 42% nationally.<sup>22</sup> In short, sanctions crippled Iraq's economy with significant consequences for the health, wellbeing, and lifestyles of ordinary Iraqis struggling to survive in this diminished environment. From 1990 onward, Iraqis lived in a dramatically different economic and social reality than they had in previous decades.

UN Resolution #687, passed on April 3, 1991 after the end of Desert Storm, laid out new stipulations Saddam would have to meet in order for the Iraq sanctions program to be lifted. This included paying reparations to Kuwait, ending its programs of "weapons of mass destruction," and allowing weapons inspectors full access to monitor weapons facilities.<sup>23</sup> (Saddam never met these conditions to the UN's satisfaction, however, and Saddam's combative responses to the UN weapons inspectors laid the groundwork for the US invasion in 2003). The same resolution also provided a simplified and expedited mechanism for the UN Sanctions Committee to approve the import of food and medicine into Iraq, intended to alleviate the humanitarian impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi people.<sup>24</sup> Bureaucratic red-tape, disagreements about what constituted "essential civilian needs," and the ease with which a Sanctions Committee member could veto

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<sup>20</sup> Abbas Alnasrawi, "Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990-2000," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (April 2001): 209.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>23</sup> "Resolution 687 (1991," April 8, 1991, accessed February 21, 2018.  
<http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 70-71.

“suspicious” imports all meant that, in practice, Iraq experienced severe food and medicine shortages until the Oil-for-Food Agreement was signed in May 1996.<sup>25</sup> (Earlier iterations of an oil-for-food agreement were proposed as early as 1991, but had terms that were unpalatable to the Iraqi regime).<sup>26</sup>

The Oil-for-Food program outlined in UN Resolution #986 permitted the Iraqi government to sell \$2 billion dollars worth of oil every 6 months (the ceilings were later raised and eventually removed altogether), using money from those sales to purchase food, medicine, and approved goods for infrastructure and repairs.<sup>27</sup> However, as researchers Joy Gordon and Sarah Graham-Brown each document, significant humanitarian problems persisted even after the Oil-for-Food agreement was signed: the first food and medicine imports did not arrive in Iraq until a year after the agreement was signed, and there were often lengthy delays in processing import requests within the Sanctions Committee of the UN, even for food and humanitarian supplies that should have been fast-tracked.<sup>28</sup> Thus, despite increased governmental revenues beginning in late 1996 and a small improvement in Iraq’s economy overall in the late 1990s, periodic food and medicine shortages continued in Iraq through the end of Saddam’s regime.

While the full temporal scope of this study spans from the Hashemite era to the end of Saddam’s rule, most of my research concentrates on the period of Saddam Hussein’s presidency (r. 1979 to 2003). The reason for this is two-fold. On a practical level, the Iraqi Ba’th Party archives (described in greater detail below) contain files that overwhelmingly date from the 1980s and 1990s, ending in 2003. Though the archives should theoretically contain files dating back to 1968, the year when the Ba’th Party came to power, it is rare to find any documents from the period when Ahmad

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<sup>25</sup> Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 86-103; Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 75, 81-83.

<sup>27</sup> Office of the Iraq Programme Oil-for-Food, “In Brief,” November 21, 2003; accessed February 22, 2018. <http://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/inbrief.html>

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, *Invisible War*, 26-27; Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 284-285.

Hasan al-Bakr was President of Iraq. The reasons for this are unknown: perhaps these older files had been moved elsewhere or thrown out to make room for more current and relevant matters. In any event, I focus primarily on the period of Saddam's presidency because this is the time period that my sources date from. But the period of 1979 to 2003 is also the most relevant and interesting for my research purposes: Saddam oversaw two foreign wars and the decline of Iraq from prosperity to economic ruin. These periods of disruption jolted the status quo in state-society relations and, for this reason, they constitute the main focus of my research.

## **Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation is organized both chronologically and thematically, following periodization informed by major economic and foreign policy shifts rather than by changes in political administration. Chapter Two focuses on the period of oil-financed development from 1950 to 1979, demonstrating how a succession of Iraqi governments—from the Hashemites to the Ba'th Party—physically isolated politically troublesome populations on the city's outskirts and established pockets of middle-class supporters in the urban center, using state-subsidized housing to mark the city landscape with symbolic boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Chapter Three examines Baghdad's experiences during wars with Iran and then with Kuwait between 1980 and 1991. Here I explore how the advent of war with Iran in 1980 changed rhythms of time in the capital, reordering civilian life around invented regime holidays, newly-emphasized religious rites, and conscription cycles. War also left physical marks on the city, especially during the Gulf War bombardments in the winter of 1991. Most significantly, Baghdadis were socialized to accept warfare as routine and participate in the Ba'th Party's total mobilization for war, which had significant implications for how Baghdad women, men, and youths participated in the economy and life of the city.



Chapters Four, Five, and Six all address the period during which the UN imposed sanctions on Iraq from 1990 to 2003. Chapter Four examines petitions as one way that some segments of society tried to secure cash, housing, or food assistance by begging or demanding help from regime representatives. Following the fates of 117 petitions from the Iraqi Ba‘th Party archives reveals changes in Ba‘thist governance strategies developed in response to the political and economic pressures of the 1990s, including a reliance on neighborhood-level officials.

Chapter Five examines the government food rationing system introduced in 1990 as a lens through which to view changes in the regime’s local governance strategies. As the state grew weaker from the economic restrictions, the Ba‘th Party used subsidized food to increase the population’s dependence on the regime. Saddam also experimented with delegating more responsibilities for day-to-day governance of Baghdad and the distribution of rationed goods to neighborhood-level officials. Concentrating most state-society interactions at the neighborhood level promoted a thickening of local social ties, physically rooted Baghdadis and discouraged relocation within the city, encouraged neighborhood-based economic activity, and confirmed that the neighborhood was the most important geographic scale for Ba‘th Party organization.

Chapter Six turns its attention from the government to the people, discussing the informal and illegal strategies that some Baghdadis adopted to weather the challenges of sanctions. The rise in crime rates throughout the 1990s turned Baghdadis against one another, as the regime pushed neighbors and family members to inform on one another and even non-collaborators grew exasperated about the lack of security, exacerbating the atomization of society that Saddam had worked to inculcate. The confluence of rising crime rates and Saddam’s new faith campaign heightened social anxieties about unattached women and the growing phenomenon of prostitution, curtailing women’s freedom of movement throughout the city.

Within the 53-year timeframe of this study, I analyze how the legacies of authoritarian governance affected the people and spaces of the city from the top down, and how the activities of non-elite Baghdadis affected the regime, and their fellow citizens, from the bottom up, with the ultimate goal of identifying long-term factors that contributed to the implosion of Baghdadi society and the sectarian ‘cleansing’ of Baghdad’s neighborhoods after 2003. While further research is needed to fully explain the collapse of Baghdad after 2003, this dissertation identifies some of the economic, social, and political stressors that built fault lines into Baghdadi society over the course of nearly 50 years of authoritarian rule. In the end, I demonstrate how each successive period in Baghdad’s recent history saw an increase in the politicization of the city’s landscape and the erosion of social cohesion within the population. Below, I provide an overview of key themes and bodies of scholarly works that have influenced my analysis.

### **State-Society Relations**

This dissertation is a study of how non-elite Baghdadis interacted with the Ba’thist regime, and how the regime attempted to govern and manage different populations within the city, over the course of several eventful decades. In short, it is a study of “state-society relations,” and while few other historians of Iraq use this term explicitly, scholars have developed a variety of viewpoints about the precise nature of the relationship between Saddam Hussein’s government and the people of Iraq.

For an earlier generation of scholars, Saddam’s Iraq was a “totalitarian” system in which the Ba’th Party successfully penetrated all parts of society, suppressed the emergence of an independent civil society, and managed dissent through torture and intimidation.<sup>29</sup> Kanan Makiya is the most

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<sup>29</sup> Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xxix-xxx. Scholars have debated the exact nature of Saddam’s rule: was it “authoritarian” or “totalitarian”? Aaron Faust and Kanan Makiya both describe Saddam’s regime as “totalitarian;” Faust argues that Saddam “aspired” to “seek a monopoly over political power and thought” using “all means necessary,” which

closely associated with this perspective, popularized through his influential book, *Republic of Fear*, originally published under a pseudonym in 1989. Though rightfully drawing attention to the cruelties of Saddam's security apparatus, Makiya's depiction of state-society relations under Saddam ascribed tremendous power to the regime and tended to minimize the ability of ordinary citizens to maintain some autonomy in their daily lives. Even those who tried to survive life in Saddam's dictatorship by outwardly 'going through the motions' were ultimately unable to maintain a degree of moral independence from the regime, according to Makiya:

"The obsession with putting a mask on oneself in the workplace, in dealing with officials, in relations to neighbours and even within the family is so pervasive today in Iraq that inevitably the distinction implicit in the original act of deception gets blurred; the mask fits so completely, so tightly, that it can no longer be readily discarded...personality and character shrivel up."<sup>30</sup>

In the time since *Republic of Fear's* original publication in 1989, scholars have complicated this single-note depiction of life in Saddam's Iraq, adding nuance to both sides of the state-society dynamic. First, scholars have explored the mechanisms by which the Ba'thist regime infiltrated society, manipulated cultural production, and attempted to foster new ideologies, underlining that the Ba'thist penetration of society was not accomplished through fear and intimidation alone, but also through lavish rewards and willing collaboration. Second, researchers have taken a closer look at how different pockets of society functioned under Ba'thist rule and determined that there was more freedom of action than Makiya originally posited. Achim Rohde, for example, demonstrated that intellectual elites were able to maintain a degree of freedom and subvert censorship in art and literature in his book *State-Society Relations in Ba'thist Iraq*. Though Rohde's study focuses primarily on

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amounted to a "totalitarian strategy" (Aaron Faust, *The Ba'thification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015), 8). Sassoon, in contrast, has pointed out that the Ba'th Party did not fully penetrate all levels of state and society, and, most importantly, did not centrally manage the economy, and so argues that it is more appropriate to describe Saddam's regime as authoritarian (*Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 237). My analysis follows Sassoon's reasoning, and I contribute to the characterization of the Ba'thist regime as "authoritarian," rather than "totalitarian," by illustrating the limits of Saddam's control over local social and economic activity.

<sup>30</sup> Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 104.

the intelligentsia, he also notes that ordinary Iraqis also found ways to flout the regime's efforts to shape social norms and practices (for example, he notes the growth of underground social scenes that developed in response to the government's crackdown on bars and night clubs in the 1990s).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Saddam and his inner circle were not always clear or consistent in their efforts to reshape society, as can be seen in the confusion of policies around women's education and employment at the end of the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>32</sup> Iraqis found room to maneuver in these points of ambiguity.

Rohde's publication was a valuable contribution to the field in using newspapers, art, and literature to study how state-society relations functioned in practice under Saddam's rule. But the opening of the Iraqi Ba'th Party archives in 2010 allowed researchers to move beyond the study of Iraqi elites to understand how Saddam attempted to manage the masses. Joseph Sassoon's *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party* challenged Makiya's depiction of Iraq as purely based in fear, establishing that state-society relations were managed through a combination of both punishments and enticements.<sup>33</sup> A clear consensus now exists on this point, as Aaron Faust's *Ba'thification of Iraq* and Dina Khoury's *Iraq in Wartime* demonstrate the importance of both "terror" and "enticement" as tools of governance that Saddam masterfully manipulated to consolidate support and crush enemies.<sup>34</sup> Khoury further elaborates on this point, demonstrating that Iraq's wars with Iran and Kuwait gave the Ba'th Party ample opportunities to resocialize the population as soldiers and martyrs.<sup>35</sup> Through these wars, the Ba'th Party created an elaborate new hierarchy of merit within the population. Iraqis who were deemed "Friends of the President" or who received medals from the regime gained

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<sup>31</sup> Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, 117-118.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>33</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 206-207.

<sup>34</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 149-150; Faust, *Ba'thification of Iraq*, 16-17.

<sup>35</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 7.

material benefits and influence within the system, as both Sassoon and Khoury illustrate, while those who resisted or deserted the military faced grave consequences.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the use of punishments and rewards to create new political and social categories, the Ba‘th Party also attempted to indoctrinate the population to inculcate loyalty to Saddam. Sassoon demonstrates how Saddam built up an elaborate cult of personality, reinforced through Saddam-centric holidays, heroic accounts of his exploits, and the proliferation of his image on every imaginable surface.<sup>37</sup> Sassoon notes that, while “not all Iraqis endorsed the cult,” resistance to it “was mostly ineffective.”<sup>38</sup> Faust’s *Ba‘thification of Iraq* offers an explanation for why it was so difficult for Iraqis to avoid complicity in Saddam’s cult of personality: the Ba‘th Party so thoroughly penetrated all levels of social and state institutions that Iraqis could not avoid interfacing with the regime. This forced Iraqis to, “at least outwardly, subordinate their social, economic, cultural, familial, and individual bonds to Hussein and the Ba‘th Party.”<sup>39</sup> Sassoon also details the extensive indoctrination training that Ba‘th Party members underwent, even at the lower levels of the party.<sup>40</sup> In the end, outwardly submitting to the regime eventually creates internal changes, Faust argues, and helps explain how Saddam fostered a genuinely large base of support. As he writes: “how many times did Iraqis participate in the regime’s liturgy before the Hussein Ba‘thist universe began to become their own?”<sup>41</sup>

While Faust provides a convincing explanation for the process by which the regime “Ba‘thized” state institutions and civic organizations, he does not provide a thorough account of how actual Iraqis responded to these regime initiatives, despite his promise to answer the question,

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<sup>36</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 210; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 161.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Sassoon, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 200-201.

<sup>38</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 190.

<sup>39</sup> Faust, *Ba‘thification of Iraq*, 6, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Sassoon, “The Iraqi Ba‘th Party Preparatory School and the ‘Cultural’ Courses of the Branches,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 1 (2014): 27-42.

<sup>41</sup> Faust, *Ba‘thification of Iraq*, 67.

“What was life like for...ordinary citizens?”<sup>42</sup> Dina Khoury, a social historian, goes further in illustrating the impact of Ba‘thist policies on ordinary people. Specifically addressing the periods of the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars, she explores how mobilization for war created new social categories, changed gender norms, and altered how citizens interacted with the regime. For example, the regime’s practice of punishing entire families but rewarding only individuals redefined both legal and social concepts of kinship, and governmental policies towards war widows redefined women’s rights within their families.<sup>43</sup> Khoury also points to moments when Iraqis defied the regime, whether through deserting from the military or joining in the *intifada* uprising, underscoring that the regime did not successfully control society or thoroughly indoctrinate its citizens as much as once believed.<sup>44</sup>

This dissertation contributes to this body of literature on the nature of state-society relations between Saddam’s regime and the residents of Baghdad by drawing attention to quotidian points of interaction between the government and the city’s residents. Most scholars have examined large-scale indoctrination efforts or national policies that affected large segments of the population: Saddam’s promotion of tribal networks in the 1990s, for instance, or the efforts of the Ba‘th Party’s General Federation of Iraqi Women to mobilize women into the work force during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, this dissertation explores mundane points of interaction and exchange between society and the regime. Picking up one’s monthly food rations, writing letters to party representatives about medical expenses, securing housing for one’s family: these are the routine exchanges between citizens and the Ba‘thist regime that shaped state-society relations on a daily

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<sup>42</sup> Faust, *Ba‘thification of Iraq*, xv.

<sup>43</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 173-174.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>45</sup> Amatzia Baram, “Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Tribal Policies 1991-96,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (Feb. 1997): 1-31; Jacqueline S. Ismael and Shereen T. Ismael, “Gender and State in Iraq,” in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, edited by Suad Joseph (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 194.

basis. Though this dissertation will also address moments of big policy shifts or external shocks that disrupted state-society dynamics, I am more interested in exploring how the routine governance of Baghdad created social, political, and economic differences across the city landscape. The social and political consequences of daily life and governance under the Ba‘th Party have not been closely studied before, and the legacies of these state-society dynamics have implications for understanding the post-Saddam era.

### **Studying Non-Elites: Subalterns and Gender in Iraqi History**

In studying state-society relations, “society” is a broad term that must be further defined and narrowed. Many scholars have approached the study of state-society relations in Iraq by taking a national geographic scope, but selectively focusing on the interactions between the government and a specific population: Kurds, Shi‘a, Jews, tribes, or women, for example.<sup>46</sup> Others have explored the social backgrounds of significant political movements within Iraq, following Hana Batatu’s groundbreaking work, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*.<sup>47</sup> Though studies of the Communist Party or the Shi‘i Da‘wa Party fall less clearly under the rubric of state-society relations, they illuminate how different political parties or organization tried (or failed) to build a base of popular support within different segments of the population.<sup>48</sup>

This dissertation takes a different methodological approach: rather than delimit which segments of society to study on a national scale, I instead geographically restrict my study to one city

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example: David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010); Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi‘ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi Press, 2003); Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi‘is of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Faleh A. Jabar and Hoshasm Dawod, eds. *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2003); Nadje Sadiq al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*.

<sup>48</sup> See Tareq Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Johan Franzen, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (London: Hurst and Company, 2011); Jabar, *The Shi‘ite Movement in Iraq*.

and define “society” in broad terms. Focusing on “ordinary” or “non-elite” Baghdadis, I include in my analysis anyone who was in the lower or middle classes and who did not hold a leadership position within the Ba‘th Party. This includes: women, men, youth, the elderly, the ill and disabled, rural migrants to the city, criminals, students, the uneducated, blue-collar workers, professionals and public-sector employees, political independents, low-ranking Ba‘th party members, and Iraqis of all ethnic and religious identities. I do not take these various kinds of non-elites as a monolithic group, but rather explore how these different kinds of Baghdadis interacted with the regime and with each other at different points in Iraq’s history. Though my analysis encompasses a wide spectrum of the population, I place special emphasis on two overlapping groups: low-income Baghdadis (including rural migrants) and non-elite women. As Chapters Two and Six elaborate, rural migrants were a numerically significant but socially marginalized part of Baghdad’s population, and female rural migrants suffered at the intersection of both class- and gender-based stereotypes. By focusing on the roles of these populations in Baghdad’s development, I hope to expand the understanding of state-society relations in Ba‘thist Iraq beyond the elites and middle classes, bringing a subaltern approach to Iraqi history and contributing to a growing trend in Middle Eastern history to telling “untold histories” and “recovering voices” that had been silenced in the historiography.<sup>49</sup>

Studying non-elites is a challenging task for any researcher looking to write history that incorporates a “bottom up” perspective. As subaltern scholars have acknowledged, it is not possible to fully present the actions and mindsets of non-elites in a way that is fully constituted and separate from dominant discourses. Gyan Prakash writes that it is an “illusion” to think that “the subalternist scholar can accomplish what the elites could not—that is, understand and describe subalternity in

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<sup>49</sup> Selçuk Aksin Somel, Christoph K. Neumann, and Amy Singer, “Re-Sounding Silent Voices,” in *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, edited by Amy Singer, Christoph K. Neumann, and Selçuk Aksin Somel (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6-7.



itself, in all its externality to power, free of distortions produced by elitism.”<sup>50</sup> According to the philosopher Antonio Gramsci, subalterns are those who are necessarily “subject to the initiatives of the dominant classes; even when they rebel, they are in a state of anxious defense.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, subalterns live in a web of power dynamics intricately related to and dependent on elites and dominant political forces; they do not exist autonomously. Challenges for subaltern scholars multiply when most of one’s historical sources were produced by the state or other elites, as is the case for this dissertation. In this case, not only were the lives of subalterns influenced by the landscape of power relations in which they lived, but the historical records they left behind were also mediated by these dynamics. How can one hope to write history that includes perspectives “from below” when most available sources about their lives are written “from above”?

First, some of the sources consulted for this study do permit limited insight into the lives of non-elite Baghdadis. The work diaries of urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis contain photographs and eyewitness observations of low-income neighborhoods in Baghdad, including the large *sarifa* hut communities on the outskirts of Baghdad. British, English, and French diplomatic staff also made observations about the social, political, and economic goings-on around their embassies. In memos and reports collected from the 1950s through the 1980s, foreign diplomats offered their interpretations about public gatherings, social trends, marketplace activities, and the activities of underground political movements. Though filtered through the perspectives of these elite outsiders, one can gain some information from these sources about the living conditions in Baghdad and major trends taking place in the life of the city.

The Ba’th Party archives also contain some direct evidence of how non-elite Baghdadis lived. Petitions and other kinds of letters written by Baghdadis and sent to regime representatives are a

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<sup>50</sup> Gyan Prakash, “The Impossibility of Subaltern History,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 2 (2000): 288.

<sup>51</sup> Marcus Green, “Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci’s Concept of the Subaltern,” *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 2.

valuable historical source for understanding non-elite life, and constitute one of the few instances when it is possible to read a source written by an ordinary citizen. The archives also contained a handful of personal diaries written by Iraqi soldiers during the Gulf War with Kuwait, providing an even ‘purer’ view into the mindsets of these ordinary conscripts, since these diaries were written for private consumption. However, as subaltern scholars caution, while one can use an array of sources and strategies to examine some of the thoughts and activities of non-elites, the “positivistic retrieval of the subalter[n]” is an impossible task.<sup>52</sup>

Instead, subaltern scholars employ a methodology that focuses on identifying deviance, discord, and tension that non-elites produce within the framework of dominant powers: subalterns are visible in history through their “intractability” and “[resistance] to complete appropriation.”<sup>53</sup> What distinguishes subaltern methodology from a class-based analysis is the attention paid to power relations, both between subaltern and dominant populations, but also between different subaltern groups.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, “subalterns” are not a static group; subalternity refers to one’s relative position vis-à-vis dominant powers: thus, depending on the situation, a middle-class woman can either occupy a subaltern position relative to the men in her family or dominant position relative to the poor.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the challenges in incorporating subaltern methodologies in a history based primarily on regime documents, this dissertation strives to highlight the ways in which many non-elite Baghdadis refused to be totally appropriate and subsumed by the Ba’thification culturalization process or by the logic of Saddam’s security state, while avoiding the scholarly pitfalls described by

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<sup>52</sup> Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1482.

<sup>53</sup> Prakash, “Impossibility of Subaltern History”: 287.

<sup>54</sup> Edward Said, “Foreword,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), vi.

<sup>55</sup> Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 23.

Spivak. Throughout the following chapters, I illustrate the heterogeneity of Baghdadis' responses and interactions with the regime, demonstrating that Saddam's regime only partially succeeded in establishing hegemony over Baghdad's civil society, and identifying the disturbing dynamic that non-elites created at different points in time for the Ba'thist government. By exploring the intersections of class and gender, I also illuminate some of the social hierarchies that existed within Baghdad society—fissures that became more apparent as citizens began to compete with one another for access to resources during the scarcity of sanctions and discriminatory narratives about rural migrants and poor women resurfaced. Overall, this dissertation is an effort to present how non-elites of Baghdad interacted with Saddam's government and with one another, contributing to the politicization of the city's neighborhoods and the breakdown of social cohesion.

Relatedly, my analysis also highlights the importance of gender in understanding state-society relations in Baghdad. There is a rich body of literature on the history of Iraqi women during the Ottoman, Hashemite, and post-Colonial Periods. My research in the Ba'th Party archives confirms many of the findings of earlier works of scholarship that illustrate how Iraqi women were pushed to accept a new "patriarchal bargain" under "state feminism," in which women gave up their political freedoms in exchange for opportunities, rights, and protections unilaterally conferred by the state. By mobilizing women into party organizations, schools, and the work force, Saddam symbolically replaced male kin and became the supreme patriarch responsible for Iraq's women.<sup>56</sup> As Saddam proclaimed, "Women will not be liberated by women's assertions.... Women can only be liberated by liberation of the entire society, political and economic. Since the [Ba'th Party] is the leader of

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<sup>56</sup> Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 30; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (Sep. 1988): 274; Suad Joseph, "Elite Strategies for State-Building: Women, Family, Religion and State in Iraq and Lebanon," in *Women, Islam and the State*, edited by Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 179.

social change...responsibility falls on its shoulders.”<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, rights and opportunities that are unilaterally granted can be unilaterally rescinded, and Saddam largely abandoned the program of state feminism by the end of the Iran-Iraq War. The Ba‘thist regime fluctuated in the kinds of gender roles and norms it promoted: while Saddam advocated an equality between the sexes in the 1970s, wars and sanctions prompted the regime to articulate new notions of masculinity and femininity that it expected the population to follow. Men, as Rohde and Khoury demonstrate, were pushed to assume the role of defenders of the homeland, as well as defenders of innocent women and children. Women had to heed more conflicting signals: the regime switched from mobilizing women as soldiers and laborers at the beginning of the war and then, by the late 1980s, to pushing women to assume more domestic roles at home.<sup>58</sup>

Most studies of Iraqi women have taken a “top-down” perspective, focusing on elite women or on the codification of laws pertaining to women by ruling elites, partly because the limitation of sources about non-elite women prior to the opening of the Ba‘th Party archives.<sup>59</sup> Two exceptions stand out: Yasmine Husein al-Jawaheri’s sociological study of Iraqi women under sanctions based on her fieldwork in Baghdad in the 1990s, and Khoury’s social history, *Iraq in Wartime*, which examines the gendered effects of war in redefining masculinity and femininity across Iraq’s population.<sup>60</sup> In this vein, I move beyond the study of elite women’s experiences to understand the ways non-elite

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Ismael and Ismael, “Gender and State in Iraq,” 194-195.

<sup>58</sup> Achim Rohde, “Opportunities for Masculinity and Love: Cultural Production in Ba‘thist Iraq during the 1980s,” in *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, edited by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 189; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 77-78.

<sup>59</sup> See: Efrati, *Women in Iraq*; Orit Bashkin, “Representations of Women in the Writings of the Intelligentsia in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 53-82; Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Nadjé al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009); al-Ali, *Iraqi Women*.

<sup>60</sup> Yasmin Husein al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008); Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*.

women interfaced with the regime and the various types of economic activities they undertook during the sanctions years.

Women, I demonstrate, often took the lead in trying to secure vital resources for their families during times of hardship. One way that they did this was by petitioning the regime; women wrote half of all the petitions examined in Chapter Four, playing up cultural notions about the vulnerability of their sex in order to secure assistance for their families. Female-headed households appear to have been particularly likely to engage with the regime this way, saddled as they were with caretaking responsibilities of their surviving children and faced with new barriers to the labor market in the 1990s. This kind of communication challenges common unspoken assumptions that political speech and direct communication between citizens and the state is primarily a male form of speech.

Likewise, low-income women also took many economic risks in order to afford life in the capital city—risks that often contributed to their social marginalization. For instance, women made up a significant percentage of the flow of rural migrants to Baghdad from the 1930s onward. A governmental survey of the *sarifa* shantytowns in 1956 even found that women made up a slight majority within those communities, though observers at time believed that this might have been because men avoided the survey enumerators out of fears related to taxation or military conscription.<sup>61</sup> These women played an important economic role in the city, bringing buffalo milk and vegetables to local markets, though their reputations suffered from their willingness to work in settings where they mixed with strangers.<sup>62</sup>

Skipping ahead to the 1990s, low-income women and female heads of households were again scrutinized out of the belief that the difficult economic conditions of the sanctions years

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<sup>61</sup> Government of Iraq, Ministry of Economics, Principal Bureau of Statistics, *Report on the Housing Census of Iraq for 1956*. Baghdad: Ar-Rabita Press, 1956, 15.

<sup>62</sup> National Archives and Records Administration of the United States [Hereafter: *NARA*], “Census of Distribution, 1956,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, May 25, 1957, 487.00/4-2335, Box 2039, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; Khalis H. Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” Vol. 1. Ph.D. diss., University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1974, 438.

would push many women into commercial sex work, as I explore in Chapter Six. Prostitution indeed became a more visible practice in Baghdad during this period, and the regime's crackdown on and public execution of sex workers was partly an effort to push women back into 'proper' gender roles and economic activities in order to restore social stability to the city. But while fears about rising rates of prostitution in the 1990s tended to view low-income women as *perpetrators* of crime, middle class women were seen as potential *victims* of crime who required protection from kidnapping and traffickers. As a result, middle-class women saw a reduction in their freedom of movement in the city and in the types of acceptable clothing they could wear in order to mitigate their risk of victimization. This dissertation contributes to the study of women in Iraqi history by focusing on the intersection between gender and class, moving beyond studies of elite women's organizations or cultural production.

### **Urban History: Oil-Financed Development and the 'Localization of Governance'**

The geographic focus of this dissertation is on Baghdad, Iraq's diverse and cosmopolitan capital city. Restricting the boundaries of this study in this way permits analysis of how state-society relations functioned in Ba'thist Iraq in the 'best' possible scenario for the regime, where the government enjoyed the highest concentration of resources, power, and influence. State ministries, security services, and municipal offices were all based there, along with the military base at Camp Rashid and the headquarters for the Popular Army. Numerous prison complexes, most infamously Abu Ghraib prison and *Qasr al-Nihaya* (ominously, the "Palace of the End"), reminded Baghdadis about the consequences of disloyalty to the regime, and Saddam's presidential palaces stood as gleaming examples of the power and wealth of his government. In contrast to the semi-autonomous Kurdish zone in the North or the rebellious provinces in the South, Baghdad's population did not mount protests against the state during the 1991 *intifada* due in part to the regime's overwhelming presence in and control over the capital city. Studying state-society relations in the capital, then,

permits analysis of Saddam's regime at its strongest, while still including a broad ethnic, religious, and socio-economic sampling of Iraq's population.

In my analysis, Baghdad includes the built landscape of the city, the diversity of communities and social networks constructed within its neighborhoods, and state efforts in development and surveillance within the capital. As Gyan Prakash has argued, the study of cities should be approached "as a spatial form of social life and power relations, not just as a site of society and politics."<sup>63</sup> As the following chapters elaborate, Baghdad was not just the setting of state-society interactions, but the city's built and human landscapes were points of contestation and negotiation between the regime and the city's residents. How housing would be built and distributed, how neighborhoods would be governed, which areas received the priority in repairing broken infrastructure, how crime would be monitored: all of these issues were guided by political considerations that affected how ordinary Baghdadis related to the regime and interacted with one another. At the same time, Baghdadis themselves were important agents in shaping the city through their daily social and economic activities. As architectural historian Caecilia Pieri noted:

"This urban space is not only a spatial or geographic entity—it is the very basis, the product and also the *producer* of collective memories and collective behaviours. Even if, in the case of Baghdad, these collective memories and the urban process have been largely determined by political factors, on the ground any urban policy always results, one way or another, in a human and daily appropriation of it."<sup>64</sup>

This dissertation makes two significant contributions to the literature on Baghdad's history and architecture. Chapter Two examines the impact of oil-financed and state-led development on the direction of Baghdad's growth and the formation of politicized neighborhood identities. Chapters Four and Five highlight the importance of neighborhood-level authorities in Baghdad,

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<sup>63</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, "Introduction: Histories of Oil and Urban Modernity in the Middle East," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 1. Original citation: Gyan Prakash, introduction to *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*, edited by Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>64</sup> Caecilia Pieri, "Baghdad Architecture, 1921-1958: Reflections on History as a "Strategy of Vigilance,"" *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 8, no. 1&2 (2006): 17.

demonstrating how the ‘localization of governance’ contributed to each district operating as a ‘little city’ within the metropolis.

The modernization of Baghdad through state-led development and oil-financed housing created geographic zones of inclusion and exclusion across the city landscape. New neighborhoods were built to group together pockets of would-be political supporters and public sector professionals in the city center, while politically troublesome populations were marginalized on the outskirts of the city. Saddam City was the largest and most infamous of these silos for problematic populations. Three decades after its creation, this district was still imagined—and governed—as a place where deviants lived, despite Saddam’s efforts to appropriate the neighborhood in his own name.

Scholars influenced by the philosopher Michel Foucault have drawn attention to the role that state-led and international development can play in disciplining how people move and work in the city, relate to the state, and even function within their own families—despite the fact that development projects are often presented as apolitical in nature and uniformly positive for those involved.<sup>65</sup> Baghdad’s modernization schemes were no different in this regard: through the work of urban planners, architects, and politicians, new neighborhoods were constructed with the goal of facilitating surveillance, managing political threats, and consolidating support for the government in power. In this way, Baghdad’s development mirrors some of the same trends that Timothy Mitchell observed in late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Cairo or that James C. Scott identified in development schemes in southeast Asia: building wide, orthogonal roads and other infrastructure projects

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<sup>65</sup> James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machines: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 11; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 105.



primarily facilitated surveillance, taxation, and policing for the state, rather than serving the social or economic needs of the population.<sup>66</sup>

However, Baghdad's modernization process differed from many other parts of the globe in that it was financed by oil revenues, which had the effect of permitting Iraqi governments to impose modernization schemes unilaterally and turn state-subsidized housing into a social welfare benefit for the population. In this respect, the history of Baghdad's development is best situated within scholarship on oil-financed development in the Gulf States. Until now, Baghdad has not been included in this literature. This may be due to the fact that the developmental gains Baghdad made through oil wealth were erased by its war with Iran between 1980 and 1988—precisely the same period during which Gulf States were translating the windfall of revenues they received after the 1973 OPEC embargo into showpiece development projects. Though the fates of Iraq and the Gulf states diverged sharply after 1980, there are meaningful parallels between Iraq's use of oil funds to manage politically sensitive populations and similar practices in places like Kuwait City and Riyadh. Chapter Two draws attention to the intersections between Baghdad's development and the historiography of Gulf cities, arguing that Baghdad's development from 1950 to 1979 is best understood in context with other oil rentier states. For example, historian Farah al-Nakib wrote the following about the modernization of Kuwait City:

“...from 1950 onward centralized planning became a key state strategy of social control and served as a bulwark against the substantial economic, political, and social upheavals brought about by oil. Oil disrupted every aspect of life in Kuwait, and total state-led planning as advocated by [Kuwaiti Emir] Abdullah al-Salem could help weed out future threats to state stability and control.”<sup>67</sup>

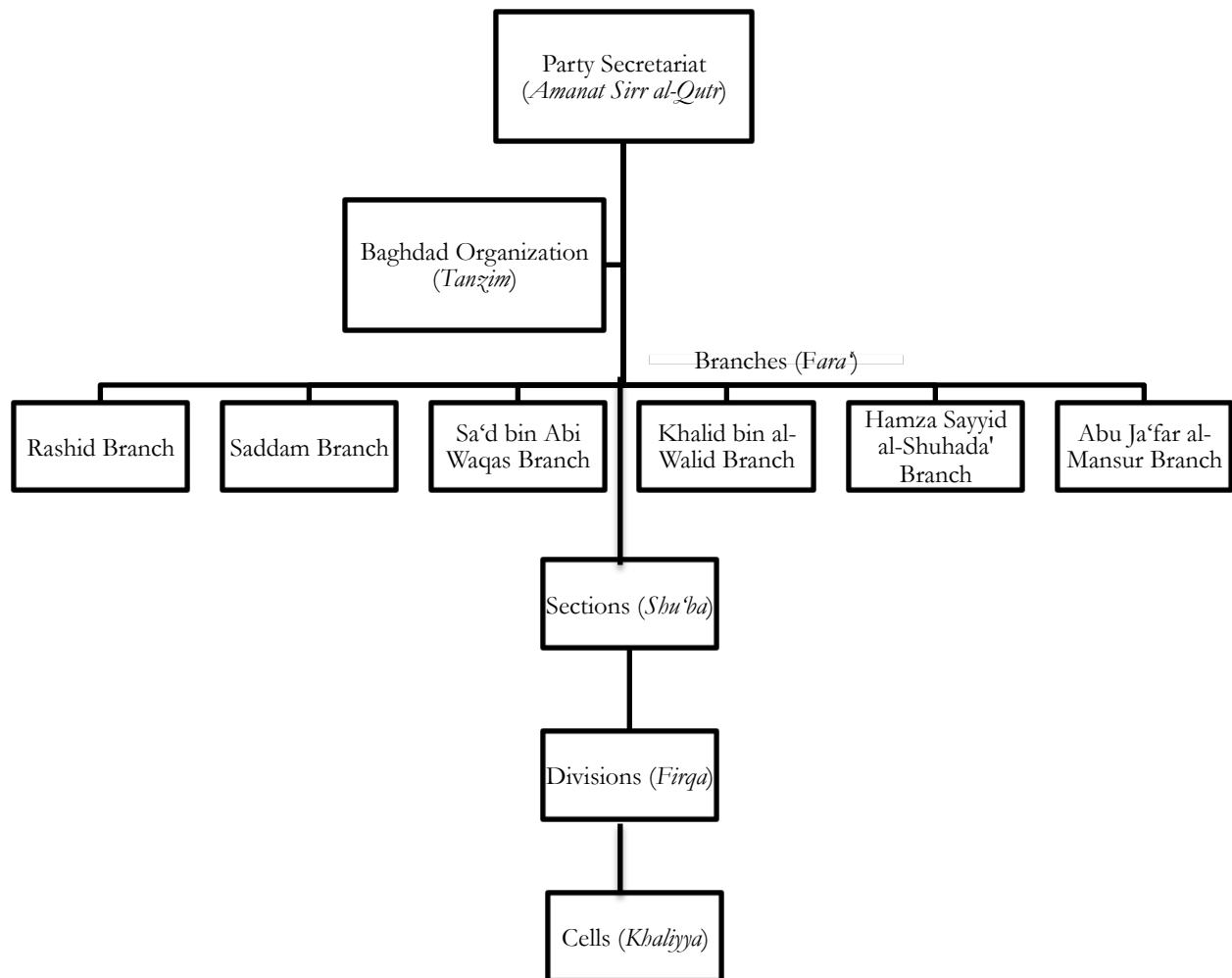
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<sup>66</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xi; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>67</sup> Farah al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 6.

This description could aptly describe the intersection between oil, security, and state-led planning in Baghdad, and not by coincidence: both Iraq and Kuwait oversaw a significant increase in oil production in the early 1950s that led to an influx of large amounts of oil revenues to the state, and both even hired the same British urban planning firm to draw up designs for their capital cities. This dissertation aims to demonstrate how the oil-financed modernization of Baghdad from 1950 to 1979 paralleled and even influenced development trends in neighboring gulf cities, especially in regards to state-subsidized housing.

Next, this study employs some microhistory methodologies in confining the scope of this study to one metropolitan area and, within that city, examining how state-society relations functioned within neighborhoods. Choosing the neighborhood as the primary unit of analysis maps onto the Ba‘th Party structure: the smallest organizational unit of the party, the cell (*ḵhaliyya*), operated within a radius of a few city blocks; the next level, the division (*firqā*), corresponded to a neighborhood; the level above, the section (*shu‘ba*), was assigned to a large district; and Baghdad was then divided into six major jurisdictions, or branches (*furua’*, sing. *fara’*), named after historic places or figures (see Figure 1 below). Neighborhoods, then, formed the basic building blocks of the Ba‘th Party apparatus in Baghdad, and, in turn, constituted the most important municipal structure for Baghdadis’ daily lives.



**Figure 1. Structure of the Iraqi Ba'th Party in Baghdad<sup>68</sup>**

The practice of organizing and governing Baghdad according to its neighborhoods has a history that far predates the Ba'th Party; their party structure was only the most recent iteration of a strategy dating back centuries. An Iraqi historian of Baghdad notes that, as far back as the Abbasid period (9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), the city was composed of distinct communities, each centered

<sup>68</sup> Party hierarchy diagram adapted from Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 37. Baghdad branch names identified from numerous documents in the Iraqi Ba'th Party archives, including: General Director of party secretariat to the Deputy Representative of the party secretariat, [no memo subject], September 3, 1990, Ba'th Party Regional Command Center Records [Hereafter: BRCC] 005-3-5-0397.

around a local market and governed by a neighborhood “chief” who was responsible for resolving disputes in his community.<sup>69</sup> Khoury observed a similar organizing structure operating in Baghdad in the late 1700s, when the city was divided into distinctive quarters (*mahallat*, sing. *mahalla*), each led by a respected elder known as a *shaykh* or, in later periods, as a *mukhtar*.<sup>70</sup> (The city was broken down into even smaller sub-neighborhoods, known as “*al-‘akd*,” composed of just a few houses and named after prominent families or individuals who lived there).<sup>71</sup> These neighborhood leaders played important municipal roles as intermediary authorities; they collected taxes from residents in their neighborhoods, for example, and were responsible for maintaining the peace in their jurisdictions.<sup>72</sup> Some neighborhoods were even separated from one another physically by thick walls as a flood prevention measure, ensuring that if one neighborhood flooded that damage would not spread to other areas.<sup>73</sup>

One’s neighborhood was thus an important identifying marker, both socially and legally; Ottoman subjects from Baghdad identified themselves to rulers according to the quarter they belonged to.<sup>74</sup> In the 1930s, the Hashemite regime legally codified the position of *mukhtarun*. Law #84 of 1931 established that a neighborhood *mukhtar* would be elected by residents in each neighborhood (presumably only the male residents, since women did not gain the right to vote in Iraq until 1980) and was responsible for forwarding citizens’ concerns to government

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<sup>69</sup> Muhsin Muhammad Hasan Jabiri, *Mukhtarun Baghdad* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Ufsit Hassam, 1985), 30; Muhammad Makiya, “Al-Mahallat al-Baghdadiyya,” in *Baghdad*, edited by Muhammad Makiya (London: Alwarraq Publishing, 2005), 267.

<sup>70</sup> Dina Khoury, “Violence and Spatial Politics between the Local and Imperial: Baghdad, 1778-1810,” in *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*, edited by Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 188.

<sup>71</sup> Jamal Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamih Madina fi Dhakirat al-Sitinat* [Baghdad: Features of a City in Memories of the 1960s], (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-‘Arabi, 2002), 21. Haydar refers to these as “*akd*,” a word that can mean “the middle of a thing,” according to Lane’s Lexicon, while Khoury refers to these as “*aqd*,” a word that means “necklace,” and which referred to the clustering of houses around a small enclosed space. See: Khoury, “Violence and Spatial Politics,” 188.

<sup>72</sup> Makiya, “Al-Mahallat al-Baghdadiyya,” 274; Khoury, “Violence and Spatial Politics,” 188.

<sup>73</sup> Ahmad Susa, “Rayy Baghdad Qadiman wa Hadithan,” [Baghdad Irrigation, Past and Present], in *Baghdad*, edited by Muhammad Makiya (London: Alwarraq Publishing, 2005), 140.

<sup>74</sup> Khoury, “Violence and Spatial Politics,” 188.

representatives. Significantly, the *mukhtar* could not be an employee of the state or of the municipality, underscoring their intermediary role as liaisons between state and society.<sup>75</sup> Since there were 54 designated neighborhoods within the eastern Rusafa district alone, this meant that there were well over one hundred such intermediary *mukhtarun* authorities helping manage the governance of the city during the Hashemite period.<sup>76</sup> This system bears strong resemblance to the Ba‘thist style of rule: every resident identified the name and number of their *mahalla* in official correspondence with the regime, and, as later chapters will discuss, neighborhood *mukhtarun* played important municipal roles in supervising and managing affairs in their area on behalf of the government.

Because important aspects of day-to-day governance took place at the neighborhood level, neighborhood identity continued to be reinforced as a significant legal and social identity marker throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An Iraqi researcher commissioned by the Ba‘thist government to write a history of important *mahallat* in Baghdad observed that, from the Ottoman to the Hashemite era to the present, “Baghdad was not one city, but rather a group of cities [*Baghdad lam takun madina wahida, wa annaha majmu‘a min al-mudun*]” with each neighborhood boasting its own particular identity and complex social and economic networks.<sup>77</sup> However, while some names of Baghdad’s historic *mahallat* remained stable over time, the social compositions and reputations of Baghdad’s neighborhoods did not.<sup>78</sup> Flows of people into and out of the city, changing economic fortunes, government coups, and foreign wars rewrote the human and built landscape of the city many times in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, just as Khoury identified significant demographic and political shifts in Baghdad’s landscape in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup>

One purpose of this dissertation is to continue the story of how neighborhood identities

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<sup>75</sup> Jabiri, *Mukhtarun Baghdad*, 39.

<sup>76</sup> Muhammad Makiya, “Baghdad al-Sitiniyat,” [1960s Baghdad], in *Baghdad*, edited by Muhammad Makiya (London: Alwarrak Publishing, 2005), 95.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Imad ‘Abd al-Salam Ra’uf, *Al-Usul al-Tarikhyya li-Mahallat Baghdad* (Baghdad: al-Muthanna, 2004), 5.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>79</sup> Khoury, “Violence and Spatial Politics,” 188, 191.

changed, how local governance functioned, and how neighborhood authority figures interfaced between Baghdad's non-elite citizens and the government apparatus. The scale of my analysis reflects the historic and contemporary importance of neighborhoods as the primary way in which Baghdadis orient themselves and the ways in which a series of governments have managed the city's population.

I refer to neighborhood-level authorities as “intermediary” figures in the sense that they occupied a liminal space between space and society, operating in both worlds simultaneously. Neighborhood *mukhtarun*, rations agents, local Ba‘th Party officials, and popular committees played a larger role than previously recognized in day-to-day governance and even policy decisions. It is true, as Sassoon asserts, that in important matters, “decision making...became mostly concentrated in the president’s hands,” as Saddam often preferred to personally weigh in on matters large and small.<sup>80</sup> But local authorities could also play important roles in influencing the outcome and application of those decisions. As Khoury also observed, “...directives coming from [the Ba‘th Party] secretariat were often shaped by the practices of its cadres working on the ground.”<sup>81</sup> When sanctions limited the capacity of the state to monitor the population and distribute resources to the needy, it called on neighborhood-level officials to take on these tasks, since they were already intimately familiar with the goings-on of their jurisdictions. The consequences of delegating decision-making responsibilities to neighborhood-level regime officials are explored in Chapters Four and Five: increasingly, one’s ability to access state resources depended on one’s standing and relationship with local party officials, contributing to geographies of inclusion and exclusion across Baghdad’s districts.

Highlighting the roles of neighborhood-level authority figures places Ba‘thist governance in a larger historical context. Prior to the rise of the modern state apparatus, Ottoman and Hashemite rulers could not have hoped to govern Baghdad without the assistance of on-the-ground partners.

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<sup>80</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 172.

<sup>81</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 54.

The rise of a strong, central government financed by oil revenues and supported by a vast security apparatus in the post-colonial period should have made it easier for the Ba‘th Party to manage the city’s population directly, without delegating decision-making or surveillance responsibilities to community leaders. A distinct shift can be observed in the archives during the Iran-Iraq War, when the regime began to create new neighborhood-level institutions, like economic surveillance committees, to assist in the work of monitoring the population at a time when most of the state’s economic and human resources were mobilized to fight Iran.<sup>82</sup> The regime’s increasing tendency to lean on intermediary officials to carry out the day-to-day tasks of governance thus represents a modern iteration of an older strategy used by Ottoman and Hashemite governors.

### **Resistance, Deviance, and Collaboration**

A final goal of this dissertation is to complicate the usual binary of “resistance” and “collaboration” through which state-society relations in authoritarian contexts is often analyzed and contribute to ongoing conversations about complicity and culpability in Saddam’s Iraq.<sup>83</sup> Though the words “resistance” and “collaboration” rarely appear in this study, each chapter portrays a wide array of behaviors exhibited by Baghdadis in relation to the government. For example, many Iraqis gladly received state housing, food, or cash assistance, but equally large numbers deserted the military despite the threat of gruesome punishment. Baghdadis joined the Ba‘th Party in droves in the late 1990s to gain preferential access to governmental resources, but many also bought and sold goods illegally on the black market. Families resented sending their husbands, fathers, and sons to fight in endless tours of war, but vied to have their loved ones recognized as “martyrs” of the regime if one lost his life in battle in order to receive material rewards. Shrewdly, a large percentage of Baghdadis pursued multiple strategies at once: for example, requesting housing or cash from the government

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<sup>82</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 81.

<sup>83</sup> Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler’s Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 23.

even as they sold goods on the black market or received remittances from relatives who had illegally escaped abroad. In short, while some actions fell into clear-cut categories of willing collaboration or outright political opposition, most people fell into murky zones in between.

In discussing actions that defied the regime in some way—such as cross-border smuggling or desertion from the military—I employ the terms “deviance” or “non-compliance.” Defining “resistance” is a difficult exercise: one can choose to look at the motivations behind an action, the nature of the act itself, the risks one faced in performing an oppositional act, or the impact of an action in deciding when to apply this classification.<sup>84</sup> As numerous subaltern scholars and historians have pointed out, determining one’s motivation—especially when there are no surviving written records, like a personal diary, to record them—is nearly impossible, and historical actors may have had multiple motivations that guided their behavior.<sup>85</sup> Rather than get bogged down in determining the precise boundary that separates resistance from other kinds of obstructive acts, I use the term “resistance” only for those organized political groups with avowed oppositional aims, such as the outlawed Da‘wa Party. Otherwise, I focus instead illegal or “deviant” activity—actions that were clearly at odds with the legal, social, and political order at the time, but which were carried out for any number of reasons and with varying amounts of risk to the individuals involved. The effects of these deviant actions destabilized Baghdad, eroded social cohesion and security, and provoked harsh responses from the regime. In short, crime and deviant acts share some of the same political and social effects as organized resistance and may be considered part of the same spectrum: both are forms of non-compliance that challenge the myth of the regime’s total control on society and the actual capacity of the state to stop deviant behavior in practice.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>85</sup> Spivak, “Subaltern Studies,” 11-12; Prakash, “The Impossibility of Subaltern History”: 288; Drapac and Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration*, 39-40.



## Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is based primarily on archival research. Because the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 directly contributed to the accessibility of Iraqi historical sources for researchers, I will elaborate on the ethical and methodological considerations that informed my research.

### *Non-Iraqi Archives*

Chapters Two and Three rely in part on US, British, and French diplomatic archives to provide the economic, political, and social contexts for Baghdad's oil-financed modernization process from the 1950s to the 1970s, as well as for the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. Iraqi documents from the Hashemite monarchy period are reportedly held in the Iraqi National Library and Archives in Baghdad, despite the loss of some of this collection to fire and looters in 2003.<sup>86</sup> However, access to this collection is rumored to be more difficult since the firing of the former library director, Saad Eskander, in 2015, and in any case, research travel to Baghdad remains difficult because of the continued security problems and the difficulty for non-Iraqis securing a visa. For this reason, it was unfortunately necessary to rely primarily on foreign sources to study this period.

The Doxiadis Associates Archives in Athens, Greece, which contain the papers and architectural plans of urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis, were a valuable source of information for researching housing and development in Baghdad during the 1950s. Doxiadis's slum clearance plan, Western Baghdad housing development, and the master plan for Baghdad's housing contained important information about his role in shaping how Iraqi governments distinguished between housing for rural migrants and housing for the middle classes. However, as I discuss in Chapter One, many of Doxiadis's plans for new neighborhoods in Baghdad did not come to fruition. Instead, the important sources for my analysis were his travel diaries, made between 1955 and 1958, that contain

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<sup>86</sup> Mona Damluji, et al, "Roundtable: Perspectives on Researching Iraq Today," *Arab Studies Journal* 23, no. 1 (2015): 237.

photographs and contemporaneous reflections on the city of Baghdad as he observed it in person. Though he was only a partially informed observer of the patterns of life he observed in Baghdad, his photographs capture Baghdad's streetscapes, informal roadside cafes, clothing, and consumer goods that help researchers better understand how ordinary Iraqis from both the lower and middle classes were living in the capital in the early 1950s. Film reels shot in the streets of Baghdad, depicting both the water buffaloes sinking into muddy, unpaved streets and the construction of flashy new hotels along the Tigris, help transport the viewer through time to a key moment of transition in this metropolis. His firsthand encounters with Baghdad's shantytowns and development projects help modern researchers better understand the growth pangs that Baghdad endured in the middle of the century.

#### *Published Iraqi Sources*

The British Library and the Library of Congress have microfilms of Iraqi newspapers, which I consulted for this dissertation. The main Ba'athist newspaper, *Al-Thawra*, provides an interesting contrast to behind-the-scenes documents in the archive, as the regime's public discourse did not always match its internal discussions. More frequently, *Al-Thawra* was simply silent about sensitive events: as Chapter Three points out, governmental newspapers rarely confirmed Iranian missile strikes or acts of terrorism in the capital in the 1980s, allowing rumors to fill the information vacuum instead. The *Baghdad Observer* was an English-language Ba'athist newspaper; this periodical is useful for gauging how the regime wanted to be perceived by foreign audiences. Unsurprisingly, this paper frequently boasted of Iraq's economic prowess and (alleged) developmental feats, even when it was crippled by sanctions. At other times, there are deliberate misdirections: at the exact time when Saddam ordered Iraq's southern marshes to be drained and its residents to be forcibly displaced, *Baghdad Observer* highlighted a number of infrastructure modernization projects taking place in the marsh region, ostensibly for the Marsh Arabs' benefit. Because of the propaganda and

manipulations by government censors, I found the Iraqi Ba‘th Party archives to be more valuable than official publications.

The Cairo University Library and the British Library both have unpublished dissertations by Iraqi graduate students that were particularly helpful in studying Baghdad’s housing and architecture. I am indebted to these students’ on-the-ground research in Baghdad in the 1960s and 1970s, which sometimes serve as valuable historical sources about the time period, as well.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, many scholars have published books in Arabic about various aspects of Baghdad’s past that I have made use of. First, there is a rich body of literature on Baghdad’s architectural legacy from the Abbasid period through the modern era, showcasing the distinctive features of the city’s historic buildings and houses. I have drawn on some of these books to inform my understanding of the historic construction of Baghdad’s neighborhoods. However, many of the books written by architects and architectural historians focus primarily on building materials and on the city’s visual history without including much discussion about the political and social factors that influenced the growth of the city, and so must be studied in conjunction with the social science dissertations mentioned above.<sup>88</sup> Next, there is a special genre of books about Baghdad written by residents of the city who combine their personal memoirs with scholarly considerations of the city’s architecture, history, or folkloric customs.<sup>89</sup> I cite from some of these memoirs throughout my

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<sup>87</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad”; Muhammad Hussein Awni, “Urban Case Studies: Baghdad, Iraq: Low Income Dwelling Surveys and a Site and Services Proposal,” M.A. Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1979; Saad Salim al-Jassar, “Social Indicators and Housing Policy in Baghdad, Iraq,” M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1977; Bassim Alansari, “Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad,” Ph.D. diss., Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1979.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example: Salima ‘Abd al-Rusul, *Al-Mabani al-Turathīyya fi Baghdad* [Historic Buildings in Baghdad] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Media, 1987); Kamal Latif Salim, *Sumwar Baghdadiyya* [Baghdad Photos] (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Nadha, 1985).

<sup>89</sup> See, for example: ‘Abbas Baghdadi, *Baghdad fi al-Tsbrinat* [Baghdad in the 1920s], (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu’un al-Thaqafiyya al-‘Ammā, 2000); Najem Wali, *Baghdad: Sirat Madīna* [Baghdad: Biography of a City], (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2015); Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamih Madīna*; Amin Mumayyiz, *Baghdad Kama ‘Ariftuha* [Baghdad as I Knew It] (Baghdad: Afaq ‘Arabiyya, 1985); Fahmi Mahmud Shukri, *Bab al-Shaykh wa-l-Shaykhliyya ‘Abr al-Tarikh* [The Bab al-Shaykh and Shaykhliyya Neighborhoods Throughout History], (Amman: n.p., 2007); Naji Jawwad, *Baghdad: Sira wa Madīna* [Baghdad: A Life and a City], (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya lil-Dirasat

dissertation. Unfortunately, because these personal histories of Baghdad tend to highlight the experiences and perspectives of the elites and focus on the (politically safer) period of the Hashemite monarchy, they are less relevant for the purposes of my study. Still, memoirs—like interviews—help to bring the city’s past to life, and I draw on these sources as much as possible. Unlike dry governmental memos or geometric architectural renderings of the city by urban planners, Baghdadis evoke the city’s past using all five senses:

“I was scouring the fragments of my diary [*kunt nahban li-adaqq shadharat dhikrayati*] about the neighborhood, I heard the voices of my friends and relatives who had died, and my anguish provoked me [*atharat ‘adhabī*], smelling the scent of our old house that I loved.... [...] I arrived in the neighborhood before the rooster’s crow, and in the dim light my eyes flooded with tears as I recalled the sounds of the roosters blending with the dawn, mixing with the sounds of the mosque’s *mu’azzin*, calling us to prayer with the last stars of the night.”<sup>90</sup>

I try here to blend these approaches used by past generations of Iraqi scholars and writers: combining analysis of Baghdad’s physical development, demographic transformations, and the memories of Baghdad’s residents about life in post-colonial Iraq.

### *Interviews*

Baghdadis’ memories of life in the capital under Saddam constitute the most vivid source I can access, and arguably the most important for understanding the ‘society’ half of state-society relations. As imperfect as memory is, there is perhaps no other way to reconstruct the experiences of daily life: the smells and crowds in the markets, the pangs of grief during war, unexpected giddiness at recalling high school romance during the sanctions, the sound of bombs exploding nearby. As

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wa-l-Nashr, 2000). For books on folkloric customs, see: See, for example, ‘Aziz Jasim al-Hajjiyya, *Baghdadiyat: Taswir lil-Haya al-Ijtima’iyya wa al-‘Adat al-Baghdadiyya khilal Mi’a ‘Amm* [Baghdadiyat: Pictures of Social Life and Baghdad Customs Over One Hundred Years] Volume 5 (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Media, 1985); ‘Abd al-Hamid al-‘Alwachi, *Min Turathina al-Sha’bi* [From our Popular Heritage] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Guidance, 1966); Basim ‘Abd al-Hamid Hammudi, *‘Adat wa Taqalid al-Haya al-Sha’biyya al-Iraqiyya* [Customs and Traditions from Everyday Iraqi Life] (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu’un al-Thaqafiyya al-‘Amma, 1986).

<sup>90</sup> Anwar ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Nasiri, *Suq al-Jadid: Mahalla Mudi’a min al-Janib al-Gharbi bi-Baghdad* [Suq al-Jadid: A Luminous Neighborhood in Western Baghdad], Volume 2, (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu’un al-Thaqafiyya al-‘Amma, 1997), 9, 11.

one Baghdadi memoirist wrote, “We ‘read’ our cities in our memories [*naqra’ mudunna fi al-dhakira*]. We examine her texts stored in the book of days. Cities change, but the past continues burning like a lantern illuminating present moments.”<sup>91</sup>

In order to learn more about Baghdadis’ memories and lived experiences, in October 2016 I traveled to Erbil, Iraq to interview roughly a dozen internally displaced people (IDPs) who were originally from Baghdad but who are currently residing in the comparatively safer Kurdistan region. I also worked with a few research assistants in Baghdad who carried out approximately two dozen interviews on my behalf with current residents of the city. These interviews served as ‘deep background’ in my research, clarifying questions that arose from my work in the archives and explaining how systems of food distribution worked. Though I seldom cite directly from these interviews, they nevertheless constituted an important source of information that informed my arguments and improved my understanding of the city’s history.

#### *The Saddam Hussein Collection*

One archival collection produced through the events of the US invasion of Iraq is the Saddam Hussein collection of documents and audio recordings from the Iraqi presidential offices. These were formerly housed at the Conflict Records Research Center at the National Defense University, though the collection closed in 2015 due to lack of funding. The Saddam Hussein Collection contained approximately 50,000 pages of translated memos and documents from Saddam’s offices and from the Ba’th Party and, more valuably, audio and transcripts from meetings that Saddam had recorded. Problematically, the Arabic transcripts were often garbled from computer formatting issues, and the accompanying translations sometimes contained errors. However, the audio files provide crucially different insights into the operation of Saddam’s government, especially when compared to the Ba’th Party archives (described below).

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<sup>91</sup> Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamih Madina*, 7.

Saddam's audio recordings capture the president and his inner circle of advisors speaking extemporaneously on subjects about national security or economic woes. In these colorful and wide-ranging conversations, Saddam reminds us what he was capable of. For example, Chapter Six quotes at length from one discussion between Saddam and community leaders from Baghdad's Saddam City neighborhoods in which he advocates that homosexuals be murdered.<sup>92</sup> In another conversation, he calls for corrupt merchants to be burned alive.<sup>93</sup> These recordings are thus a vital complement to the more formal and sanitized Ba'th Party memos, reminding us of the brute force that accompanied the Ba'th Party bureaucratic management of the country.

### *The Iraqi Ba'th Party Archives*

The Iraqi Ba'th Party archives contain over ten million pages of bureaucratic memos, administrative reports, party personnel files, and police and judiciary documents. Most of these documents date from the 1980s and 1990s, continuing up to the moment the Ba'thist regime fell in April 2003. Most of these documents came from the headquarters of the Ba'th Party Regional Command headquarters, located inside the present-day Green Zone, which were identified in the immediate aftermath of the US invasion of Baghdad.

The collection and safeguarding of these documents was spearheaded by Iraqi ex-patriot and scholar Kanan Makiya through the auspices of the Iraq Memory Foundation, in an arrangement approved by the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq and funded in part by the US Department of Defense. These files were initially stored in Iraq until Makiya successfully appealed to relocate the records to the United States in 2005, owing to the escalating violence in Iraq.<sup>94</sup> In 2008, the Iraq

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<sup>92</sup> "Saddam and Saddam City Tribal Leaders Talk," audio transcript, undated (1991), Conflict Records Research Center [Hereafter: CRRC] SH-SHTP-A-000-891.

<sup>93</sup> "A Dispatch by Saddam Hussein Discussing the Effects of Sanctions after the Mother of All Battles," undated (1990s), CRRC SH-MISC-D-001-055.

<sup>94</sup> Bruce Montgomery, "Immorality in the Secret Police Files: The Iraq Memory Foundation and the Baath Party Archive" *International Journal of Cultural Property* 18, no. 3 (August 2011): 315-316.

Memory Foundation turned over the files to the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University, and the collection opened to researchers by 2010. The Government of Iraq is still the legal owner of these documents, and the return of the original paper documents has been a repeated point of discussion and negotiation since the collection was opened. At the moment, the original paper documents are still in the United States, but researchers can only access digital photographs of the documents that are stored on local computer servers on site in the Hoover Institution archives. In order to protect the identities of those named in the documents, researchers cannot make copies of these files. I found that re-typing these files in their original Arabic onto a secure location on my computer was the most effective system of note taking, allowing me to accurately reference the files and double-check translations at a later date.

I worked in this collection full-time for ten months from November 2015 to August 2016, and returned to access the collection intermittently throughout the remainder of 2016 and 2017. I worked primarily in the boxfiles dataset, known by the acronym *BRCC*, that were originally large binders found in the Ba‘th Party’s headquarters that contained most of the archive’s bureaucratic memos related to day-to-day governance. The boxfiles collection is estimated to contain 2.7 million pages of documents held within 6,420 boxfiles.<sup>95</sup> These are searchable through a rudimentary index originally put together by Iraqi Memory Foundation staff members. Identifying relevant documents is a tedious and time staking process: the digital photographs of the Ba‘th Party documents are not text searchable, so one must often spend hours clicking through hundreds of digitized pages of memos before identifying documents related to the index’s search term. Because of this, it is a nearly impossible task to systematically identify all relevant documents on a particular topic, and so the conclusions presented here must be considered preliminary until more researchers continue the work of plumbing this vast collection. I was able to hone my searches by focusing my queries on

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<sup>95</sup> Collection Overview, “Register of the Hizb al-Ba‘th al-‘Arabi al-Ishtiraki in Iraq,” Hoover Institution Library and Archives, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c84j0cg3/>, accessed February 8, 2018.

thematic topics in the index (prostitution, rations, crime, letters, etc.) and also by searching the names of the different Ba‘th party branches, divisions, and sections associated with Baghdad. In the end, I transcribed more than 3,000 pages of documents that informed the conclusions of this study.

The Ba‘th Party archives offer both rewards and challenges for the researcher. On the one hand, it is one of the few available archives anywhere in the world that offers behind-the-scenes insights into life in a post-colonial, authoritarian regime. However, the fact that these archives are not censored or redacted can give a false sense that the documents present a complete and accurate picture of Ba‘thist governance. As scholars of Iraq have noted, the Ba‘th Party documents create an illusion that the Iraqi regime was almost always internally consistent, impartial, and procedural. Khoury wrote, “[The Ba‘th Party archives] is more a picture that the state and the party wanted to believe than it is reality. In other words, these documents represent the party’s creation of its own world.”<sup>96</sup> One clear example of the somewhat artificial reality presented in the Ba‘th Party archives is the near total absence of violence in its pages.<sup>97</sup> Despite the fact that torture, execution, and cruel prison conditions were routine practices in Saddam’s Iraq, the Ba‘th Party archives rarely refer to such actions. Memos simply mention if someone has been “arrested [*alqa’ al- qabd ‘alay*],” followed sometimes by information about the length of her prison sentence or the fact of her execution. Only in exceptional circumstances do the archives admit to the blood spilled and the pain inflicted in the name of maintaining order.<sup>98</sup>

There are ethical considerations in using this archive, as well, especially around the notion of consent. To begin, many of the Iraqis identified in the archives did not consent to, and certainly did

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<sup>96</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 17.

<sup>97</sup> Ann Laura Stoler has noted that many colonial archives have the tendency to erase violence, and arguably this applies to many post-colonial regimes, as well: *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 33, 160.

<sup>98</sup> One major exception is in the correspondence between Saddam Hussein and his appointed governor of Kuwait, his relative ‘Ali Hasan al-Majid. Majid included frank depictions of his violent treatment of the Kuwaiti population, often scribbled by hand in the margins. See Joseph Sassoon and Alissa Walter, “The Iraqi Occupation of Kuwait,” *Middle East Journal* 71, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 615.



not have access to, the dossiers collected on them by the Ba‘th Party’s security services and party officials. Targets of surveillance operations, people named in informants’ reports, suspected political opposition group members: none of these people assented to have the details of their lives recorded and filed away in this archive, and many were likely unaware that such files about them existed. (That some Iraqis *did* seek to identify themselves to the regime is discussed in Chapter Four). These individuals likely never would have imagined that a graduate student would one day be scrutinizing their personal information for her dissertation.

Simultaneously, the decision to move this archive from Iraq to the United States generated intense controversy; some have described this relocation as “looting” or “theft” of documents that form a significant part of the Iraqi historical heritage.<sup>99</sup> As the decision to move the archives to the US was made within a small circle of elite actors, there was likewise no meaningful consent on the part of the Iraqi people to have this collection moved out of the country. There is also the problem of access. Not only are the archives no longer inside Iraq, but they are nearly on the opposite side of the globe in one of the most expensive areas of the United States. Because of the restrictions on making copies of the documents, carrying out research in this collection is a time-intensive process that even American researchers find difficult to afford for more than a few weeks at a time due to the high costs of living in the Stanford area. My extensive research in these archives was only made possible by competitively securing grant funding, and many grants for dissertation research are only available to US citizens. The archives are thus embedded into different layers of power dynamics and privilege: the Ba‘thist regime, who collected information on its citizens, and the context of foreign relations, in which the US gained possession of this archival collection through war.

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<sup>99</sup> For more on this controversy, see Bruce Montgomery, “US Seizure, Exploitation, and Restitution of Saddam Hussein’s Archive of Atrocity,” *Journal of American Studies* 48, no. 2 (May 2014): 559-593; Michelle Caswell, “‘Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back’: Cultural Property and the Fight over the Iraqi Baath Party Records,” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 211-240.

On a personal level, working in this collection was often an emotionally fraught experience that raised still more ethical questions. In particular, the letters and petitions I analyze in Chapter Four often contained heart-wrenching details of humanitarian deprivation in the midst of sanctions and, at times, hints about the torture, corporal punishment, and other forms of state violence many Iraqis suffered at the hands of Saddam's police, jailers, and intelligence agents. Bearing witness to the suffering of others, even when this violence took place decades ago, carries with it its own set of moral considerations. In this, Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, written about the ethics of war photography, was an instructive guide. In her thoughtful ruminations, she identifies many problematic aspects of consuming images and stories of violence done to others. What draws us to witness this pain—are we simply voyeurs of a gruesome experience? Are we looking only in order to feel relief that we have escaped a similar fate? Do we desensitize ourselves by viewing this violence and not taking some kind of action in response? In the end, she offers this as a tentative conclusion:

“Still, it seems a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one's sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others. [...] Such images [of war or violence] cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers. Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable? Is there some state of affairs which we have accepted up to now that ought to be challenged? [...] It is felt that...one has no right to experience the suffering of others at a distance; denuded of its raw power; that we pay too high a human (or moral) price for those hitherto admired qualities of vision—the standing back from the aggressiveness of the world which frees us for observation and for elective attention. But this is only to describe the function of the mind itself. There's nothing wrong with standing back and thinking.”<sup>100</sup>

I share this excerpt not to suggest that there is something inherently virtuous about witnessing the violence Iraqis suffered that is recorded in the Ba'th Party archives. Rather, Sontag highlights some of the moral questions I have asked myself over the course of my research: who—if anyone—has the right to witness the human tragedies described in this archive, and can a non-Iraqi researcher be

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<sup>100</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 114, 117, 118.

an adequate storyteller of their pain? What is the purpose of sharing the stories of these ordinary Iraqis: is it morbid curiosity, a political statement, an effort to assign blame?

I have benefitted from the course of events that brought these archives to the United States and granted me access to the materials. I highlight these problematic dynamics of power and privilege associated with the Ba‘th Party archives in order to locate my own positionality in relation to the research presented here. As subaltern scholars have urged, scholars must remain cognizant of the power dynamics inherent in carrying out their research, especially when examining the lives of non-elites, guarding themselves against deigning to “speak for” subalterns in the same way that state officials did, or presenting her research as “objective,” without acknowledging her own privilege.<sup>101</sup> Without a personal stake in the events described within the Ba‘th Party archives, I aim to critically engage with questions about the causes and consequences of both Ba‘thist governance strategies and the varied responses of Baghdadis to the regime in a way that complicates the tidy sectarian narratives that dominate Iraq’s political scene today.

The ethical quandaries surrounding the Ba‘th Party archives have forced scholars of Iraq to take individual positions about whether or not to use these materials. While acknowledging and agreeing with many of the critiques raised about the relocation of these documents to the United States, I disagree that the original sin of moving these materials means that scholars should never carry out research in the collection. As Khoury has also insisted, “use of the archive [does not] lend legitimacy to the manner of their acquisition or to the continued presence of the originals at the Hoover Institution or at other locations in the United States.”<sup>102</sup> In my view, boycotting these archives and willfully leaving their contents to languish in obscurity serves no higher good. Through virtue of my access to these records at a time when many Iraqis cannot see them, I showcase the lives of ordinary Baghdadis in order share some of the contents of this vast archive with the people

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<sup>101</sup> Spivak, “Subaltern Studies,” 8-9.

<sup>102</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 15

of Iraq until the time these documents are made more widely accessible. It is my hope to eventually translate my book manuscript into Arabic in order to share my findings with a wider audience of Iraqis.

From 1950 until 2003, the people of Baghdadi weathered periods of excruciating economic deprivation, wanton acts of state violence, the tragedies of war, and paranoia and social atomization under authoritarian surveillance. There were also moments when the city's inhabitants reveled in newfound material comforts, the thrills of modernization and economic progress, and the solace of peacetime. It is my hope that my research on the history of state-society relations in Baghdad honors and accurately portrays their experiences and restores proper emphasis on the role of these many 'ordinary' people in shaping the history and development of their city.

## 2. Slums and Subdivisions: Managing Social Classes through Oil-Financed Housing

“The winter rains transform the whole [shantytown] area into a huge swamp and render communication almost impossible. Moreover numerous ditches full of filth, human defecation [sic] and garbage are frequently seen all over the area. [...] The inhabitants of this area are greatly involved in the life of Baghdad and have become an essential element in the functioning and growth since they are the labourers, policemen, street-cleaners...and guards of Baghdad. The great lack of health facilities, poor housing and low standards of living in this area breed automatically diseases, delinquency and immorality, & thus are endangering [the] social life and health of Baghdad City.”

-Urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis, describing shantytowns in Baghdad in 1958<sup>1</sup>

This chapter demonstrates how urban planning and housing policies were used to manage politically sensitive populations in Baghdad during the ‘oil boom’ years from 1950 to 1979. Two housing policies in particular—one targeting rural migrants, the other targeting a growing cadre of public sector workers—are key for understanding the political motivations that transformed Baghdad’s urban landscape during these three pivotal decades.

When newfound oil wealth allowed Iraqi and British political elites to reimagine the Iraqi capital, they saw vast potential in the environs around the old city of Baghdad as a blank canvas on which to expand and develop new neighborhoods with modern housing.<sup>2</sup> The footprint of the city was relatively small, and Baghdad’s location on a wide flood plain meant that new neighborhoods, parks, and commercial centers could be built into the sparsely inhabited land surrounding the capital. And build they did: by the 1970s, only 7% of Baghdad’s population still lived in the ‘old quarters’ of the city with its tiny alleyways and Ottoman-style houses; well over 90% lived in the new middle-class subdivisions, affluent suburbs, workers’ neighborhoods, and silos for the poor that were built from scratch from the 1940s onward.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines the histories of two different types of neighborhoods that sprang up in Baghdad after the 1940s: neighborhoods to re-house and permanently settle rural migrants, and

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<sup>1</sup> Doxiadis Associates Archives [hereafter *DAA*], *Iraq Reports R-QB*, 400-433, *Jan-Jun. 1958*, vol. 97, citation number 23976, pgs. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> *DAA*, *Iraq Diary*, vol. 1, 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Awni, “Urban Case Studies,” 12.

neighborhoods constructed by and for public sector employees. In the first instance, housing settlements were geographically situated and designed by the state to manage, control, and monitor a poor population viewed as politically troublesome and socially destabilizing. As the quote by urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis above indicates, rural migrants were a particularly vexing population for the Iraqi government and the consultants they hired: migrants were simultaneously “essential” for the economic functioning of the capital city, and yet they also “endangered” the metropolis with the crime and disease widely believed to be emanating from their communities.

The strategies used to contain and neutralize the threats posed by rural migrants stand in contrast to housing policies that targeted the professional classes. In this case, the state turned housing into a new standard benefit used to reward the growing ranks of public sector employees who made up the staffs of new government ministries, professional associations, and the officer corps. The result of these two different housing strategies for managing allies and potential troublemakers was a new urban landscape in which largely homogenous communities were structurally separated into ‘good’ districts and ‘dangerous’ districts, creating residential silos differentiated by vocation, income, and background. Though the vocationally homogenous natures of Baghdad’s professional neighborhoods was gradually diluted with time, Baghdad’s newly-built neighborhoods contained markers of political belonging or exclusion, politicizing housing and making it a new point of negotiation between state and society.

The period of this study spans four political administrations, though there was nevertheless remarkable continuity in housing policies between these regimes. As described in Chapter One, the Hashemite monarchy oversaw Iraq’s transition from a primarily agricultural to a primarily oil-based economy between 1950 and 1958. The Hashemite era was notable for its political instability: Iraq had 59 different governments in power between independence in 1920 and the overthrow of the

king in 1958, each one lasting for an average of just eight months.<sup>4</sup> One researcher suggests that these frequent political disruptions were “one of the factors behind the uncontrolled growth and lack of improvement in the city [Baghdad]” that later necessitated state intervention into Baghdad’s housing sector.<sup>5</sup> Though slow to realize the political and social importance of addressing Baghdad’s housing crisis, the Hashemites were responsible for inaugurating an oil-financed housing program in 1955. ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, whose bloody coup removed the Hashemites from power in 1958, espoused a populist message that appealed to Baghdad’s poorer residents, as well as to members of the Iraqi Communist Party, promising to provide jobs, housing, and other social benefits. Though the ‘Arif brothers and the Ba’th Party who succeeded Qasim were vehemently anti-communist, they also tried to appeal to the poor by using oil money to expand social welfare services and housing assistance programs. Thus, despite the political turmoil of these oil boom years from 1950-1979, each of these different governments tried to use Iraq’s newfound oil wealth to neutralize political threats and consolidate support through subsidized housing schemes.

In comparing the development of new neighborhoods for rural migrants and public sector employees, I add several contributions to existing literature about Baghdad’s built environment. Up until this point, scholarship on Baghdad’s modern history of architecture and urban planning has focused primarily on analyzing the high modernist master plans and architecture designed by Iraqi Development Board, Hashemite government ministries, international consultants, and foreign and Iraqi architects.<sup>6</sup> My goal instead is to move beyond an analysis of these *designs* and instead examine the multiplicity of actors and factors that influenced the construction of its new neighborhoods in

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” 320; Justin Marozzi, *Baghdad: City of Blood, City of Peace* (New York: Allen Lane, 2015), 311.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” 320.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Caecilia Pieri, *Bagdad: Construction d’une Capitale Moderne (1914-1960)* (Beirut: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2015); Lefteris Theodosis, “‘Containing’ Baghdad: Constantinos Doxiadis’ Program for a Developing Nation,” *Revista de crítica arquitectónica* (2008): 167-172; Panayiota Pyla, “Back to the future: Doxiadis’s Plans for Baghdad,” *Journal of Planning History* 7, no. 1 (February 2008): 3-19.

*practice*, to borrow an approach advocated by urban theorist Henri Lefebvre.<sup>7</sup> The actual construction of Baghdad's new neighborhoods rarely aligned with the idealized visions and plans produced by urban planners, but instead involved messy interactions between multiple government institutions, housing cooperative unions, individual homeowners, and Iraqi laborers who collectively reshaped Baghdad's landscape in a piecemeal fashion through competing concerns and priorities. Furthermore, the political objectives that informed the formation of new neighborhoods have rarely been examined in depth: work has only recently begun to understand how "histories of urban space...inform our understanding of state-society relations in Iraq," and especially for Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> I argue here that a succession of Iraqi governments transformed housing into a new form of political leverage through the construction of middle-class subdivisions and low-income housing.

Second, I add Baghdad to existing literature on oil-financed urban development in the Gulf, demonstrating continuities and linkages between Baghdad's development from 1950 to 1979 and the development of places like Kuwait City and Riyadh, which are more readily identified with oil-based construction booms and their associated social and political issues than Baghdad has been. Though there are now a few studies of the historical impact of oil on Middle Eastern societies, few have explored the effects of oil on Baghdad's social and political development.<sup>9</sup> The history of Baghdad's new housing policies and urban development corresponded with, and in fact helped establish

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<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre, "Spectral Analysis," in *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*, edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 143.

<sup>8</sup> Arbella Bet-Shlimon, "State-Society Relations in the Urban Spheres of Baghdad and Kirkuk, 1920-58," in *State and Society in Iraq: Citizenship under Occupation, Dictatorship and Democratisation*, eds. Benjamin Isakhan, Shamiran Mako, and Fadi Dawood (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 50. Dina Khoury has also analyzed the interplay between urban development and state-society relations in Iraq, albeit for an earlier period ("Violence and Spatial Politics," 188). For the post-2003 period, see Mona Damluji, "'Securing Democracy in Iraq': Sectarian Politics and Segregation in Baghdad, 2003-2007," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* (2010): 71-87.

<sup>9</sup> Fuccaro, "Introduction: Histories of Oil," 2. Recent studies of the effects of oil on state-society relations in other parts of the Gulf include: Arbella Bet-Shlimon, "Kirkuk, 1968-1968; Oil and the Politics of Identity in an Iraqi City," Ph.D. diss, Harvard University, 2012; al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*; Pascal Ménoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).



precedents for, key trends in government-subsidized housing in the Arabian Peninsula. Baghdad's experience during the oil boom years helped establish a trend, later continued in other Gulf states, of using state-subsidized housing and residential land to forcibly relocate problematic populations outside city limits and to win over public sector employees with housing benefits.

Finally, my chapter contributes to discussions about power, space, and governance. A rich body of theoretical and historical literature has demonstrated that the rise of modern states in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries corresponded with an increased political will and technical ability to monitor and regulate bodies and public spaces, noting that urban development—often accompanied by orthogonal roads, commercial and residential zoning laws, and new building code regulations—facilitated governmental monitoring of populations.<sup>10</sup> Baghdad, too, was subject to top-down interventions to permit authorities to better monitor and regulate spaces in the city and the bodies of its residents, as this chapter will explore.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, states do not possess the ability to enforce that spaces will be used in the ways that they are intended.<sup>12</sup> Nor, as I will show below, did the state actually carry through with initial plans to micromanage and administer its new housing program; considerable opportunities were left to Baghdadis themselves to shape new neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> Through the state distribution of

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 95; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 68; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 2; Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 39.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the regulation of bodies through state building in Iraq, see Omar Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Aparna Parikh, "Neoliberal Islands: Gated Spaces, Permeable Boundaries and Urban Hygiene in Mumbai, 1990-2013," M.A. thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 2013, pg. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Though this chapter will focus primarily on two types of state-led interventions into housing, it is worth pointing out that Baghdad's neighborhoods have been repeatedly reshaped over the years as a result of popular action, as well. Two tragic moments in Baghdad's recent history serve as examples: the bloody *farhud* riots in 1941 that targeted Jewish homes and shops, and in post-2003 Baghdad, the militias and criminal gangs who were responsible for the sectarian 'cleansing' of many neighborhoods and the displacement of thousands of Baghdad families from their homes. These two examples of displacement through popular terror illustrate some of the complex ways in which neighborhoods and housing can be a point of conflict and contestation between social groups as well as between state and society. For more on the Farhud, see Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda (eds.), *Al-Farhud* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2010); Abbas Shibliak, *Iraqi Jews*

subsidized housing and residential tracts, residents of Baghdad were able to capitalize on these new policies and benefits to create and re-create community networks, appropriate new spaces, and push the government to deliver desired resources.

The historical processes of formally rehousing Baghdad's rural migrant population and of providing subsidized housing to public sector workers demonstrates how Iraq's newfound oil wealth enabled governments to turn housing into a new instrument to manage state-society relations. There are two important distinctions to note: *how* new residences were distributed to these two target populations, and *where* these two groups were housed within Baghdad. In the case of rural migrants, new housing was imposed through violent displacement, and they were moved to the far margins of the city. In the case of professionals and public sector employees, the state presented subsidized housing or residential land as a benefit in desirable parts of the city, and workers had considerable flexibility in constructing their homes according to their own designs. However, in both cases, the government succeeded in creating distinct silos within Baghdad's landscape, grouping pockets of political allies close to the halls of power, and isolating troublesome populations where they could be more easily monitored and controlled. As a result of these different strategies for housing rural migrants and the professional classes, the city of Baghdad developed new physical and imaginary landscapes that demarcated social, political, and economic differences between Baghdadis.

### **Baghdad on the Eve of the Oil Boom**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Baghdad was a provincial frontier town in the Ottoman Empire with a population of only 100,000.<sup>14</sup> Although the city boasted a glorious past—Baghdad was the opulent capital of the Abbasid Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century—by the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had shrunk

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(London: Saqi Books, 2005). For more on how post-2003 violence altered Baghdad's neighborhoods, see Damluji, "Securing Democracy in Iraq."

<sup>14</sup> Caecilia Pieri, "Urbanism in Bagdad before the Planning: A Codification between the Fates of the Arbitrary and Urgent Needs (1920-1950)," *DC Papers, revista de crítica y teoría de la arquitectura* (1) 2008: 267.

in status and size as a relatively minor economic center, periodically decimated by floods or plagues, or both at the same time.<sup>15</sup> The core of Baghdad was divided into two halves, Karkh and Rusafa, split by the Tigris river, and connected to each other by only one bridge in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Two other historic districts, Adhamiyya and Kadhimiyya, host important religious shrines that attracted Sunni and Shi'i pilgrims. Though they are now integral parts of Baghdad's urban fabric, they existed at the turn of the century as suburbs separate from the city center, separated from Karkh and Rusafa by orchards.<sup>17</sup> Formal housing in these four 'old quarters' of the city largely consisted of Ottoman-era row houses built out of mud bricks and wood, with intricate screened balconies known as *shanasbil*, constructed around private family courtyards and sharing outer walls with neighboring houses.<sup>18</sup> Around this small urban core, flat alluvial plains stretched out wide, sparsely inhabited because of the devastating risk that floods posed to anyone outside of the protective bund built on Baghdad's eastern side to stop the unpredictable overflowing of the Tigris.<sup>19</sup>

"Baghdad is a city that has been born many times [*takarrarat wiladat Baghdad marrat 'idda*]," as one Iraqi memoirist wrote, and a new chapter in the life of the city began during the First World War.<sup>20</sup> In the midst of this conflict, the British colonized the Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra to create the newly-unified mandate of Iraq and, shortly after, they installed the

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<sup>15</sup> Susa, "Rayy Baghdad," 130-131.

<sup>16</sup> Karkh and Rusafa developed distinct identities in part because residents relied primarily on boats to visit the other half of the city. The British and Hashemites were responsible for building a series of steel bridges across the Tigris by the 1950s, designed to facilitate the movement of troops and weapons from one half of the city to the other, but which also enabled the regular movement of Baghdadis to both eastern and western districts. Makiya, "Mahallat Baghdad," 271; Pieri, "Baghdad Architecture," 10.

<sup>17</sup> Makiya, "Baghdad al-Sitiniyat," 97.

<sup>18</sup> 'Abd al-Rasul, *Al-Mabani al-Turathiyya fi Baghdad*, 24; Muhammad Makiya, "Al-Duwar al-Baghdadiyya wa-l-Turath al-Sakani," [Baghdadi Houses and Residential Heritage], in *Baghdad*, edited by Muhammad Makiya (London: Alwarraq Publishing, 2005), 278-280.

<sup>19</sup> Pieri, "Urbanism in Bagdad before the Planning": 267.

<sup>20</sup> Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamih Madina*, 8.

Hashemite monarchy as its formal rulers while British advisors wielded influence behind the scenes. Baghdad was chosen as the new capital of Iraq, and the British began to put their mark on the city as they built homes and institutions to facilitate their indirect rule, altering the landscape to reflect their new political and economic dominance and to transform the once sleepy town into a suitable capital city.<sup>21</sup> It was also necessary to repair the damage caused to the city during World War I, when some of Baghdad's buildings were damaged and then looted in the aftermath of battle.<sup>22</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, British and Hashemite elites built new "ministries, clubs, train stations, bridges, military hospitals, industrial facilities, and warehouses, along with post-offices and airports ensuring good communication throughout the Empire."<sup>23</sup> The famous al-'Alwiya social club was built in 1924 along a posh stretch of the Tigris by the Abu Nuwwas entertainment district, later flanked by some of Baghdad's finest international hotels.<sup>24</sup> The British also took steps to improve Iraq's infrastructure, especially irrigation works, in order to stimulate the flagging agricultural sector.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, they oversaw modest growth in Baghdad's industrial sector: the capital gained a textile factory in 1926, a cigarette factory in 1929, a cement factory in 1936, and a dairy processing plant in 1955.<sup>26</sup>

Precisely because of the weak rural economy and of British revitalization efforts in the capital, rural migrants began to set up informal settlements in and around Baghdad in the 1930s as

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<sup>21</sup> Pieri, "Urbanism in Bagdad before the Planning": 267.

<sup>22</sup> Marozzi, *Baghdad: City of Blood*, 284-285.

<sup>23</sup> Pieri, "Baghdad Architecture": 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamib Madina*, 66, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Susa, "Rayy Baghdad," 139.

<sup>26</sup> Sabih 'Abd al-Mun'im Ahmad, "Al-Aathar al-Ijtima'iyya lil-Hijra al-Dakhiliyya ila Minatiq al-Sina'a fi Madinat Baghdad ma' Dirasa Tatbiqiyya li-Usar Ba'd al-'Ummal al-Muhajirin," [The Social Effects of Internal Migration to Industrial Areas in the City of Baghdad, with an Applied Study with the Families of Some of the Migrant Workers], M.A., Cairo University, 1969, 423-424. Industry always remained a weak sector in Iraq's economy, however: less than 10% of Iraqis were employed in industry between 1953 and 1969. See: Aziz Alkazaz, "The Distribution of National Income in Iraq, with Particular Reference to the Development of Policies Applied by the State," in *Iraq: Power and Society*, edited by Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1993), 198-199.

they sought new work opportunities.<sup>27</sup> Most of these migrants came from southern Iraq where ineffective land reform laws had created gross disadvantages in favor of large landowners.<sup>28</sup> These rural migrants swelled the population of Baghdad to roughly 750,000 by the end of World War II, but only a fraction of the city's residents lived in durable housing.<sup>29</sup> As will be discussed below, in the 1950s a staggering 50% of Baghdad's homes consisted of improvised reed or mud huts that formed sprawling shantytowns on the edges of the city.<sup>30</sup>

The gradual pace of changes to Baghdad's landscape made in the first two decades of Hashemite rule suddenly accelerated after World War II. Oil had been discovered in commercial quantities in 1927, but two world wars interrupted the development of Iraq's oil fields, and foreign companies originally controlled Iraq's oil sector. In 1950, increased global demand and the development of new Iraqi oil fields marked beginning of Iraq's 'oil boom' years. In 1952, a 50/50 revenue-sharing agreement was signed between the Iraq Petroleum Company and the Iraqi government, flooding state coffers with new revenue.<sup>31</sup> Iraq's financial fortunes only improved in the following years: in 1955, the Iraqi government signed a new agreement with oil companies that further increased the government's revenue rate by 17%.<sup>32</sup> That year, state oil revenues topped 73 million Iraqi dinars (the equivalent then to \$204.4 million USD).<sup>33</sup> Saddam Hussein oversaw the complete nationalization of Iraq's oil industry between 1972 and 1975, granting the Iraqi government complete control over all of the country's oil revenues at a time when the 1973

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<sup>27</sup> Ahmad, "Al-Aathar al-Ijtima'iyya lil-Hijra al-Dakhiliyya," 445.

<sup>28</sup> Pieri, *Construction d'une Capitale Moderne*, 192.

<sup>29</sup> DAA, *Iraq Diary 1955*, Vol. 1, citation number 23873, pg. 2.

<sup>30</sup> NARA, "Sarifa Dwellers in Baghdad," American Embassy in Baghdad to Department of State, November 29, 1958, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; DAA, *Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 96; DAA, *Iraq Reports DOX-QBE, 1-5, July 58 – Jan 59*, vol. 122, citation number 23996, pg. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Abbas Alnasrawi, *The Economy of Iraq: Oil, War, Destruction of Development and Prospects, 1950-2010* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), pg. 2.

<sup>32</sup> NARA, "Economic Review, Iraq, 1955," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, February 29, 1956, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., NARA, "Marketing Areas in Iraq," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, June 29, 1956, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was driving oil prices to record heights.<sup>34</sup> In 1980, at the height of Iraq's oil wealth, annual petroleum revenues reached \$26.3 billion dollars.<sup>35</sup>

For Hashemite leaders, the windfall of cash was an opportunity to rapidly modernize, invest in large-scale development and infrastructure projects, and 'catch up' with the western world: another rebirth for the city of Baghdad. King Faisal I had originally committed the Iraqi government in 1927 to the principle of dedicating oil profits for development, but this had only limited impact until oil revenues increased in the 1950s. Once significant oil profits began to flow in, there were renewed calls to use the money for modernization. Dr. Salih Haidar, a top official at the Iraq National Bank, published an article in 1950 calling for public works planning in order to take advantage of the windfall of oil revenues, and Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id began to channel funds from the Iraq Petroleum Company into public works projects.<sup>36</sup> This notion was popular with the Hashemite's British allies, as well. One British official predicted: "If the oil revenues are spent wisely and well, the country may be transformed, within fifty years, from a poor, backward, semi-feudal state into a prosperous and progressive modern nation."<sup>37</sup> Thus there was broad consensus for the formation of a national Development Board in 1950, which received 70% of state oil profits to fund modernization and improvement projects in the country. The Development Board was overseen by the Prime Minister and staffed with representatives from key Iraqi ministries, as well as British and

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<sup>34</sup> Alkazaz, "Distribution of National Income in Iraq," 211.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Ahmed Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 1997), 127.

<sup>36</sup> *TNA*, Foreign Office [Hereafter: FO] 371/82424, FO to the Baghdad Embassy 15312/16/50, October 21, 1950.

<sup>37</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/104687, economic report, 1953.

American consultants, and was tasked with initiating large-scale development projects informed by technocratic expertise.<sup>38</sup>

Iraq was hardly unique in viewing oil money as a fast-track to modern development; the Kuwaiti royal family also rolled out an oil-financed development scheme in the 1950s, and Saudi Arabia followed after the OPEC oil strike in 1973. Like Baghdad, Kuwait City was being reimagined in the 1950s by foreign high-modernist urban planners invited by the ruling Sabah family. Even the same British firm, Minoprio, Spencely, and P.W. Macfarlane, was hired to carry out a master plan of both Baghdad and Kuwait City.<sup>39</sup> What set Kuwait and Iraq apart was that Kuwait's oil money went straight into the pockets of the Sabah royal family, who then positioned themselves as being personally responsible for providing housing, education, and health care for Kuwaiti citizens (and Kuwaiti citizenship became a hotly contested legal category as a result).<sup>40</sup> In Iraq, in contrast, oil revenues were sent to Development Board. Thus instead of a new personalized social contract between an emir and his subjects, the Hashemite monarchy tasked the Development Board and various ministries, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Development, with overseeing the distribution of oil rents to society. With a larger population than Kuwait's by several factors, there were also no promises that the Hashemites would be providing for citizens' needs from 'cradle to grave.'<sup>41</sup> Rather, the Hashemites selected certain populations as the targets of its spending. As this chapter will explore, housing specifically became one of the principle ways the government distributed oil money to Baghdad's population because it provided the regime with the opportunity to strategically design the city in accordance with its political priorities—a logic that also informed urban planning in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>38</sup> *DAA, Iraq Diary*, Vol. 1, citation number 23873, pg. 3; *TNA*, FO 371/104687, economic report, 1953; Johan Franzen, "Development vs. Reform: Attempts at Modernisation during the Twilight of British Influence in Iraq, 1946-58," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 90.

<sup>39</sup> al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 6, 99.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

## Baghdad's Housing Crisis

The rush to rapidly modernize Iraq had unintended social, economic, and political consequences that contributed to a critical housing shortage in Baghdad. Worsening agricultural labor conditions in Iraq's southern provinces had already increased the flow of rural migrants to Baghdad and other major cities in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Development Board's subsequent interventions into the agricultural sector only backfired. Between 1950 and 1955, British advisors on the Development Board encouraged an exclusive focus on the agricultural sector and related infrastructure, like dams, canals, and irrigation systems, in an effort to entice farmers to remain in their fields and thereby stem the flow of migration to the cities.<sup>42</sup> A series of laws were passed in 1952 and 1954 intended to improve labor conditions and land ownership laws in the southern province of 'Amara, from which most of the rural migrants in Baghdad had fled.<sup>43</sup> However, these laws failed to significantly reduce the grip of large landowners over farmland or to correct the abuses of the agricultural labor system.<sup>44</sup> A lauded new Development Board program to resettle tenant farmers on undeveloped state land (known as the 'Miri Sirf' program) was also small and ineffective: by the end of 1954, only 9,729 families had been resettled on their own plots of land, and farmers abandoned their new lands within less than five years on average because they were not given sufficient resources or access to credit to make their farms profitable.<sup>45</sup> A drought in 1955 only

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<sup>42</sup> Franzen, "Development vs. Reform": 90-91.

<sup>43</sup> *NARA*, "Food and Agriculture Report, Iraq, 1954," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, May 3, 1955, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>44</sup> *TNA*, FO 624/209 Memo, December 1, 1952; *DAA*, *Iraq Diary*, Vol. 1, citation number 23873, pg. 203; Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 6; Michael Eppel, *Iraq from Monarchy to Tyranny* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2004), 148; Franzen, "Development vs. Reform": 77.

<sup>45</sup> *NARA*, "Food and Agriculture Report, Iraq, 1954," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, May 3, 1955, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, "The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, c. 1870-1958," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 4 (1983): 500-501; Sassoon, *Economic Policy in Iraq*, 145, 173; Hassan Mohammed Ali, *Land Reclamation and Settlement in Iraq* (Baghdad: Baghdad Printing Press, 1955), 79.



worsened conditions for farmers and accelerated their migration to cities.<sup>46</sup> With the failure of land reclamation schemes, tenant farmers came to Baghdad seeking construction work and other unskilled jobs now abundant because of oil-financed development projects.<sup>47</sup> In fact, there was such a shortage of labor in Baghdad that wages in Baghdad rose 13% in 1955, even though the legal minimum wage had not increased, and urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis later found it necessary to build vocational schools to train construction laborers for his housing program because there were not enough trained workers in the city for all of the developing projects going on.<sup>48</sup>

As Baghdad's population grew through rural-to-urban migration from roughly 750,000 after World War II to almost one million in the late 1950s (and over two million by the mid-1960s), high demand on Baghdad's limited housing stock pushed homes out of reach for many.<sup>49</sup> Costs of living rose seven percent in just one year, from 1955 to 1956, hitting unskilled workers the hardest.<sup>50</sup> Land speculation drove up the price of residential land in Baghdad from 500 fils per meter in 1949 to five dinars in 1955, a ten-fold increase in just six years.<sup>51</sup> The city grew so rapidly that the municipality of Baghdad divided the city into two administrative zones: the central, densely-populated districts near the Tigris river constituted one department, and the city's rural outskirts—now the subject of intense land speculation and development ambitions—formed another.<sup>52</sup> The result of this intensive

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<sup>46</sup> NARA, "Economic Review, Iraq, 1955," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, February 29, 1956, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>47</sup> Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> NARA, "Economic Review, Iraq, 1955," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, February 29, 1956, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; Andrew Alger, "Homes for the Poor? Public Housing and the Social Construction of Space in Baghdad, 1952-1958," working paper 2018, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Khattab al-'Ani, *Jughrafiyyat al-'Iraq al-Zira'iyya* [Iraq's Agricultural Geography] (Cairo: Arab League Press, 1972), 90; Fadil al-Ansari, *Sukkan al-'Iraq: Dirasa Dimughrafiyya-Jiyughrafiyya Muqarina* [Iraq's Population: A Demographic-Geographic Comparative Study] (Damascus: Maktabat Atlas, 1970), 50; 'Abd al-Razzaq 'Abbas Husayn, *Nasha'at Mudun al-'Iraq wa Tatannurha* [Growth and Development of Iraq's Cities], (Baghdad: Ma'had al-Buhuth wa-l-Dirasat al-'Iraq, 1973), 77.

<sup>50</sup> NARA, "Annual Labor Report, Iraq, 1956," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, June 1, 1957, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>51</sup> DAA, *Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 169.

<sup>52</sup> Makiya, "Baghdad al-Sitiniyat," 95.

urban growth and development was that most of the lower and lower-middle classes simply could not afford a two-bedroom house in Baghdad.<sup>53</sup>

Modernization of the city had also contributed to the housing shortage. In a span of three years, from 1954 and 1957, the number of cars registered in Iraq doubled, not only increasing traffic in the capital but also helping to ferry thousands of new migrants to the city.<sup>54</sup> (Iraq imported so many cars in the 1950s that it was reportedly difficult to make a profitable living as a taxi driver because of all the competing cabs).<sup>55</sup> To address the growing traffic congestion in Baghdad, the Hashemite government ordered large thoroughfares to be built. Previously, Baghdad had only one multi-lane road, Rashid Street, which was built by the Ottomans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1945, three new major streets cut through the old districts of the city: al-Nahr, al-Kifah, and Shaykh ‘Umar streets.<sup>56</sup> These sliced through the dense alleyways of Karkh and Rusafa, razing homes and marketplaces to the ground and displacing tens of thousands without plans in place to help rehouse them.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the demolition of these old markets and workshops meant that, for the first time, many Baghdadis had to commute to their jobs, no longer living and working in the same neighborhood, worsening traffic and unsettling communities.<sup>58</sup> Decades later, Iraqi architect Muhammad Makiya still mourned these roads as “wounds” [*jurub*] that “mangled the body of the city” [*nabashat jism al-madina*], and a Baghdadi memoirist lamented that the construction of these new roads caused many residents of the old city to move out of their historic homes, disrupting the social

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<sup>53</sup> Awni, “Urban Case Studies,” 5.

<sup>54</sup> *NARA*, “Questionnaire from the American Automobile on Vehicle Registrations in Iraq,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, December 15, 1955, 987.6211/4-256, Box 5378, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; *NARA*, “Motor Vehicle Registrations, Iraq, 1957,” 987.6211/4-256, Box 5378, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>55</sup> The father of famed Iraqi writer Najem Wali got his start as a taxi driver shuttling migrants from the southern district of ‘Amara to Baghdad, though he complained about competition from other taxis. Wali wrote about this in his memoir, *Baghdad: Sirat Madina*, 16-17.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” pg. 361-362; Makiya, “Al-Mahallat al-Baghdadiyya,” 271.

<sup>57</sup> *DAA, Iraqi Diary*, Vol. 3, 1956, citation number 23875, pgs. 143-148.

<sup>58</sup> Shukri, *Bab al-Shaykh*, 53.

fabric of the community.<sup>59</sup> (In contrast, Iraqi writer Najem Wali, who belongs to a younger generation and who came of age with the city in the 1960s, argues that “modern Baghdad... was born with the birth of [Rashid] street.”)<sup>60</sup> The continued work of building new side streets to intersect these main thoroughfares led to the continual work of demolition; in 1955, as many as one thousand households had been made homeless by recent government-mandated tear-downs, prompting one Iraqi Development Board member to advocate that one of the first priorities of their new housing initiative be to rehouse these displaced families.<sup>61</sup>

The private sector did not meet the lower classes’ demand for affordable housing. Wealthy Baghdadis were building new, modern houses in spacious neighborhoods in outlying areas like al-Mansur and al-Harthiyya.<sup>62</sup> Though this new construction led to a ‘boom’ in the housing sector, it added only wealthy houses to the city’s housing stock.<sup>63</sup> American Embassy officials noted,

“Private housing has been booming for several years in Baghdad, to a lesser degree in other cities, but it has been primarily for upper class dwellings. Little has been done about middle class housing and virtually nothing for the lowest income groups, except for a few small workers’ housing projects which have been good but have hardly scratched the surface.”<sup>64</sup>

The movement of the wealthy to new suburbs precipitated a decline in the overall affluence and maintenance of the neighborhoods in the city center. They rented out their houses in Baghdad’s old districts to the working classes and recently-arrived rural migrants, many of whom converted the lower floors to shops and work spaces.<sup>65</sup> Many of these large, Ottoman-era homes began to fall into disrepair as multiple families crammed into one home to save money.<sup>66</sup> One scholar found that only

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<sup>59</sup> Makiya, “Al-Mahallat al-Baghdadiyya,” 270; Fahmi Mahmud Shukri, *Bab al-Shaykh*,” 54.

<sup>60</sup> Wali, *Baghdad: Sirat Madina*, 97: “Baghdad al-hadith... wulidat ma‘ wilada hadha al-shari‘ [al-Rashid].”

<sup>61</sup> *DAA, Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pgs. 98-99.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” pg. 363.

<sup>63</sup> *NARA*, “Recent Major Government Housing Developments,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, September 14, 1955, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Pieri, “Baghdad Architecture”: 11.

<sup>66</sup> Government of Iraq, *Report on the Housing Census of Iraq for 1956*, 11.

40% of houses in Baghdad were assessed to be in “good” condition; the rest, especially those in the old quarters, were in need of demolition or extensive repairs to bring houses up to code in terms of access to electricity and plumbing.<sup>67</sup> Thus, not only was there an overall shortage of available houses in Baghdad, even much of the existing housing stock was deemed uninhabitable.

Despite the apparent urgency of Baghdad’s housing crisis, neither the Development Board nor the Municipality of Baghdad had undertaken sustained efforts to regulate the growth of Baghdad, implement basic zoning regulations, or devise long-term solutions to informal settlements until 1955, well after the start of the oil boom and the start of the Development Board’s modernization activities. This was even despite the fact that the Development Board had “more money than it could use”: in 1951, the Development Board’s budget was 9 million ID, but less than half of that was spent that year.<sup>68</sup> In fact, the Development Board’s first five-year plan did not include housing at all in its budget despite the obvious need.<sup>69</sup> In Baghdad, only one government-financed housing scheme had been constructed prior to the 1950s: 800 low-cost houses built by the Ministry of Social Affairs.<sup>70</sup> The houses were built with few amenities: there was no piped water, the streets in front of the houses were still unpaved ten years later, and there was often more than one family crowded into the 3 small bedrooms.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, the state was willing to spend lavish amounts of money to hire star architects from the West to turn Baghdad into a showcase of Iraq’s newfound wealth and potential. Major contracts were awarded to architectural celebrities—Walter Gropius to design Baghdad University, Le Corbusier for an Olympic Stadium, Frank Lloyd Wright for an opera house, and Gio Ponti for building the Ministry of Development and the Development

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<sup>67</sup> al-Jassar, “Social Indicators and Housing Policy,” 60.

<sup>68</sup> *TNA*, FO 624/209, Memo by M.C.G. Man, September 23, 1952.

<sup>69</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/104687, economic report, 1953.

<sup>70</sup> *DAA*, *Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pgs. 23-24.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*,

Board's headquarters—even while there was a major lack of affordable housing.<sup>72</sup> (However, because the monarchy was overthrown shortly after, most of these architectural showpieces were never built).

By 1955, criticism of the Development Board converged on a single point: not enough was being done to provide short-term, quick relief for the middle and lower classes. One Iraqi official warned that, “It would be a great tragedy if political disaster were to overtake the country because it had not been able to spend the increased income from oil royalties in a way that pleased the mass of the people.”<sup>73</sup> Lord Salter, a British member of the Iraqi Development board in 1955, urged creating a public housing scheme that would “allay public discontent” and “provide quick benefits” to the urban poor.<sup>74</sup> Development Board officials saw a public housing scheme as a two-pronged approach for remedying the politically and socially destabilizing influence of rural migrants: not only would these schemes settle migrants in permanent dwellings located in areas of the government's choosing, but unskilled laborers would be hired from amongst the migrants to pour concrete for these new housing schemes.<sup>75</sup> In response, in 1955 the Development Board announced that it added housing as a new priority for its 1955-1960 five-year development plan.

To spearhead its new housing initiative, the Development Board hired the Greek urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis to develop new neighborhoods in Baghdad (and other parts of Iraq) and to develop a master housing plan for Baghdad.<sup>76</sup> His work would dovetail with the 1954 master plan for Baghdad created by the British firm Minoprio, Spencely, and P.W. Macfarlane: their work demarcated main roads, while Doxiadis was expected to provide more detailed plans for the internal

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<sup>72</sup> Pieri, “Baghdad Architecture, 1921-1958,” 13-14; Marozzi, *Baghdad: City of Blood, City of Peace*, 320.

<sup>73</sup> *TNA*, FO 624/209, memo from D.J.D. Maitlan, October 11, 1952.

<sup>74</sup> *TNA*, T 236/5138, “Summary of Lord Salter's Report on Iraq,” April 1955.

<sup>75</sup> Alger, “Homes for the Poor?,” 16.

<sup>76</sup> *NARA*, “Recent Major Government Housing Developments,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, September 14, 1955, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

development of each neighborhood and for the future directions of the capital's growth.<sup>77</sup> He was selected, in part, because of his emphasis on the social considerations of urban planning, rather than just being a "plain housing engineer."<sup>78</sup> As a Greek national, he was also considered a politically neutral choice in the charged Cold War environment.<sup>79</sup>

The financial allocations for Doxiadis's housing program indicate the Development Board's political priorities in addressing Baghdad's housing crisis: 6 million ID were earmarked for "slum clearance," 1.5 million ID for workers' housing, and 1.25 million for "government employee housing."<sup>80</sup> These three categories corresponded with the three most pertinent political and social demographics within Baghdad that the housing project was meant to reach: slum dwellers, workers, and public sector employees. Below, the rest of this chapter will explore the political priorities that informed government-subsidized housing schemes: first, efforts to monitor, control, and regulate the bodies of the poor, and then moves to consolidate support from the growing ranks of state employees and Baghdad's middle classes.<sup>81</sup>

### **Managing Threats: Displacing Rural Migrants to Revolution City**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Baghdad's poorer residents could be divided into two categories: the unskilled and skilled laborers who had grown up in the city and who rented rooms in aging Ottoman-era homes in the city center, and the recently-arrived agricultural workers who set up informal shantytowns on the fringes of the city. These shantytowns consisted of reed huts (*sarifa*, pl. *sara'if*) and mud huts (*kukh*, pl. *akwakh*), and both types were commonly referred to in English as 'sarifas.'

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<sup>77</sup> Pyla, "Back to the Future," 8.

<sup>78</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/104685, Foreign Office, December 9, 1953.

<sup>79</sup> Pyla, "Back to the Future," 6-7.

<sup>80</sup> At the time, 1 Iraqi Dinar was equivalent to \$2.80. *NARA*, "Recent Major Government Housing Developments," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State," September 14, 1955, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>81</sup> Theodosis, "'Containing' Baghdad," 168.

In reality, there was considerable overlap and blurring between these two communities of the urban laborers and the rural migrants.<sup>82</sup> Not only did rural migrants construct large sarifa settlements on the eastern and western edges of the city, but their reed and mud huts were sprinkled in between buildings in the densely-built urban center, making them an undeniable part of the city itself.<sup>83</sup> Despite the desires of Iraqi politicians and foreign consultants to tackle the housing needs of Baghdad's populations one by one, the reality was that the 'formal' and 'informal' neighborhoods of the city could not be cleanly divided, nor were 'legal' and 'illegal' living arrangements always easily identified or dealt with; the conversion of dilapidated houses into multi-family dwellings for the working class was often done without official permission, for instance, just as many sarifa dwellers were illegally squatting on state land.<sup>84</sup> As rural migrants settled into sarifas or mud huts, they too took on urban occupations as peddlers, construction laborers and other types of unskilled workers, doormen, and even police officers and soldiers.<sup>85</sup> Many of the urban poor who lived in modest but permanent structures within the city were descendants of past generations of rural migrants, and those born and raised in Baghdad's sarifas had never known life in the fields. And, since nearly 45% of the sarifa population in 1955 was composed of children under the age of 13, the generational assimilation to city life was occurring very quickly.<sup>86</sup> The logic used by Iraqi politicians and the foreign and Iraqi urban planners and architects tapped to manage housing and neighborhoods for the poor distinguished between these two groups of low-income Baghdadis, however: sarifa dwellers

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<sup>82</sup> The state's approach to workers' housing in Baghdad merits its own study, building on the scholarship of Arbella Bet-Shlimon on the interplay between the state, municipality, workers' unions, and the Iraqi Communist Party for workers' housing in the city of Kirkuk. However, without current access to archival sources for the Iraqi Communist Party and various companies that operated in Baghdad, further exploration of the topic of workers' housing must be set aside for the moment. See: Bet-Shlimon, "Kirkuk, 1918-1968."

<sup>83</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 432-433.

<sup>84</sup> Mona Fawaz also makes this argument for Beirut in "The State and the Production of Illegal Housing: Public Practices in Hayy el Sellom, Beirut-Lebanon," in *Comparing Cities: Middle East and South Asia*, eds. Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 197-198.

<sup>85</sup> *DAA, Iraq Reports R-QB, 400-433, Jan-Jun. 1958*, vol. 97, citation number 23976, pg. 8; *DAA, Iraq Reports R-QB, 434-444, Jul - Dec. 1958*, vol. 127, citation number 24001, pg. 85.

<sup>86</sup> *DAA, Iraq Reports R-QB, 400-433, Jan-Jun. 1958*, vol. 97, citation number 23976, pg. 8.

were viewed as an imminent threat to the political and social stability of the city who required urgent housing intervention, while urban laborers were viewed as an integral and organic part of the metropolis whose housing needs were seen as less of an urgent matter.

Large camps of sarifas first became noticeable in Baghdad beginning in the 1930s; the largest of them was east of the bund that demarcated the edge of safety against floods.<sup>87</sup> The precariousness of this location was confirmed in 1954, when the Tigris overflowed and destroyed nearly every single reed and mud hut on the city's eastern outskirts, leaving tens of thousands of people homeless.<sup>88</sup> According to Doxiadis, those flooded out of their huts temporarily moved into the center of the city and "lived in the streets" before they eventually re-built their *sara'if* and *akwakh* again east of the bund.<sup>89</sup> Permanent settlement in this area was only made possible after the new Tharthar dam, built in 1956, effectively eliminated the threat of floods to Baghdad.<sup>90</sup>

From the 1930s through the 1950s, the sarifa settlement located east of the city was known as "the Capital" (*al-'Asima*)—renamed Revolution City after the 1958 coup (*Madinat al-Thawra*), Saddam City in the 1980s and 1990s (*Madinat Saddam*), and, after 2003, as Sadr City (*Madinat al-Sadr*). In the mid-1950s, the *al-'Asima* settlement was estimated to be 5 kilometers long, 2 kilometers wide, and inhabited overwhelmingly by rural migrants from the 'Amara region who numbered as many as 200,000.<sup>91</sup> Three other major areas of Baghdad also hosted large sarifa communities: Tal Muhammad in Karrada Sharqiyya, Shakriyya in the southwest of the city, and Washash in Kadhimiyya.<sup>92</sup> By 1957, a housing census indicated that fully one-fifth of Baghdadi residents were sarifa dwellers and that reed sarifas made up nearly half of the housing stock in the city, while an

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<sup>87</sup> Pieri, *Construction d'une Capitale Moderne*, 192.

<sup>88</sup> DAA, *Iraq Reports DOX-QBE*, 1-5, July 58 – Jan 59, vol. 122, citation number 23996, page number unknown.

<sup>89</sup> DAA, *Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 46-47.

<sup>90</sup> Susa, "Rayy Baghdad," 142-145.

<sup>91</sup> DAA, *Iraq Reports R-QB*, 400-433, Jan-Jun. 1958, vol. 97, citation number 23976, pg 2.

<sup>92</sup> DAA, *Iraq Reports DOX-QBE*, 1-5, July 58 – Jan 59, vol. 122, citation number 23996, pg. 6.



additional 50,000 Baghdadis lived in poorly-built, one-room mud huts.<sup>93</sup> Despite the impermanence of their building materials, these communities had become an enduring part of the landscape: according to statistics from 1959, nearly 50% of the sarifa residents in Baghdad had lived there for more than ten years, and 12% had lived there for more than 25 years.<sup>94</sup>

The sarifa settlements were informal and self-supported in the fullest sense: they had no piped water, no electricity, no paved roads, and no sewers. Rains turned the roads into muddy sinkholes used both by swimming children and by the nearly 5,000 water buffalos who resided alongside humans in *al-‘Asima*.<sup>95</sup> Malaria-infected mosquitos and cholera-causing bacteria multiplied in the stagnant water. Human and animal waste was clearly visible (and odorous) in the ditches, vacant lots, and stagnant pools of water, and garbage gathered in heaps or was burned by residents, since the city did not collect garbage there.<sup>96</sup> The municipality did not invest any essential community services in the sarifas, such as schools, mosques, or health clinics—but did build police stations, underscoring how Baghdad elites viewed rural migrants as security risks. These police stations were positioned on the top of flood walls along the eastern bund where officers were able to monitor the population from on high.<sup>97</sup>

Although the growth of these informal settlements was initially tolerated to a certain degree, the Hashemite government increasingly saw rural migrants in Baghdad as a political threat that needed to be managed. The memory of the 1948 *Wathba*, in which mass demonstrations against the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty forced the agreement to be rescinded, underscored the latent political threat that

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<sup>93</sup> NARA, “Sarifa Dwellers in Baghdad,” American Embassy in Baghdad to Department of State, November 29, 1958, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; DAA, *Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 96; DAA, *Iraq Reports DOX-QBE, 1-5, July 58 – Jan 59*, vol. 122, citation number 23996, pg. 4.

<sup>94</sup> DAA, *Iraq Reports DOX-QBE, 1-5, July 58 – Jan 59*, vol. 122, citation number 23996, pg. unknown.

<sup>95</sup> DAA, *Iraq Reports R-QB, 400-433, Jan-Jun. 1958*, vol. 97, citation number 23976, pgs. 15-16; DAA, *Iraq Reports DOX-QBE, 1-5, July 58 – Jan 59*, vol. 122, citation number 23996, page number unknown.

<sup>96</sup> DAA, *Iraq Reports R-QB, 400-433, Jan-Jun. 1958*, vol. 97, citation number 23976, pgs. 4-5.

<sup>97</sup> DAA, *Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 46-47.

the low-income masses could pose to the monarchy and pushed British and Iraqi officials to try to pre-empt future unrest through housing and other development projects.<sup>98</sup> In 1952, a British embassy official cautioned that, “one spark would set the country ablaze.”<sup>99</sup> Middle- and upper-class Baghdadis also shared the regime’s wariness about these new arrivals: rural migrants were denigrated as “*ma’dan*”—southern Iraqi marsh dwellers—or gypsies, both rumored to have criminal proclivities. (As Chapter Six will explore, these negative stereotypes persisted for decades after their arrival to the city). In response, the government developed new plans for rehousing the sarifa settlers in the city, but in a way that aimed to neutralize the political threat they posed.

The first planned step was to bulldoze the existing improvised settlements, and the second step was to construct (or require residents to construct for themselves) new housing according to set building codes and on land chosen by the government. Both of these phases were disciplinary, meant to forcibly relocate the poor to the margins of city life to better regulate and control them. However, Doxiadis’s slum clearing and rebuilding plans were interrupted by the 1958 Revolution before most of the work could be carried out. The work of resettling Baghdad’s rural migrants did not take place under the Hashemites, despite the fact that they laid the groundwork for studying and remedying the problem. This work was undertaken instead by the post-colonial regimes of ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, the Ba’th Party, and the ‘Arif brothers. With each new coup and regime that followed, the political considerations that influenced the rehousing of the sarifa dwellers shifted, with implications for how the neighborhoods were built on the ground.

The rehousing of sarifa dwellers is often misattributed to ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, Iraq’s ruler from 1958 to 1963.<sup>100</sup> This misattribution is due to the fact that he counted the sarifa residents as one of his few reliable sources of political support and that he loudly advocated for their re-housing,

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<sup>98</sup> Bet-Shlimon, “State-Society Relations,” 88.

<sup>99</sup> *TNA*, FO 624/209, memo from D.J.D. Maitlan, October 11, 1952.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Bakr Mustafa Salim, *Al-Sara’if fi Baghdad* (Baghdad: Shatri, 2005), 36; Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamih Madina*, 35; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 218-219.

though he actually carried out very little of this work.<sup>101</sup> He was the one responsible for renaming the *al-‘Asima* sarifa community as Revolution City, in homage to the July 1958 coup that put him into power, and during which time large numbers of sarifa dwellers flooded the streets to cheer the downfall of the monarchy.<sup>102</sup> But plans to replace reed and mud huts with permanent housing were not implemented on a large scale under his watch, despite this promise made on the first anniversary of the revolution: “On the day when I lay the foundation stone of the villages to be built for the shack dwellers, I will personally handle a pickaxe and demolish the first shack or two. Flourishing projects will rise in the place of these shacks.”<sup>103</sup>

Instead—and illustrating a key point of this chapter’s argument—he focused his efforts on building new housing for army officers, another group he relied upon to remain in power, and arguably the more politically important when compared to the sarifa dwellers. In his five years in power, Qasim broke ground for two neighborhoods for army officers: one in west Baghdad, called “Qasim City” (later renamed as *Hay al-Dhubbat*, or Officers’ Neighborhood), and another on the east side of the city known as “Officers’ City [*Madinat al-Dhubbat*].”<sup>104</sup> US Embassy officials rightly pointed out that, “While it is the announced intent of the [Government of Iraq] to provide adequate housing for all segments of the Iraqi population, housing for government employees, particularly army officers, has received top priority. This can only be construed as a measure to win loyalty to the regime.”<sup>105</sup>

Other efforts by Qasim to address Baghdad’s acute housing crisis were aimed at lower-middle-class Baghdadis, rather than at the sarifa dwellers. He distributed subsidized residential land

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<sup>101</sup> NARA, “Support for Qasim Among the Lower Classes,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the State Department, September 17, 1972, 787.00/8-162, Box 2085, 1963-63 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>102</sup> Salim, *Al-Sara’if fi Baghdad*, 36.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, “Qasim’s Inauguration of Housing Projects,” July 16, 1959, FO 371/141103, translation by the British Embassy in Baghdad.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.; Salim, *Al-Sara’if fi Baghdad*, 35.

<sup>105</sup> NARA, Weekly Economic Review, December 14-18, 1959, No. 51,” December 28, 1959, 887.00/1-359, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

in Baghdad to various groups of public sector employees, and the fact that 65% of these employees were able to build their houses without taking loans from the bank to do so confirms that the beneficiaries of this policy were not the poorest of the poor, but the lower-middle classes that the regime hoped to win over as loyal supporters.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, he introduced rent control policies that were also aimed to help lower-income workers who rented rooms in individual houses, which effectively lowered rents for most Baghdadis by 15-20%.<sup>107</sup> Again, this policy was not aimed at sarifa dwellers who, as squatters, typically did not pay rent on their homes.<sup>108</sup>

Rather than focus on rehousing sarifa dwellers, Qasim instead introduced policies to encourage rural migrants to make their home in Baghdad. Thus, instead of eliminating Baghdad's shantytowns through a rehousing scheme, Qasim was responsible for the expansion of the problem of informal housing in the capital. He rolled back Hashemite-era restrictions on rural-urban migration (as questionably effective as they were), and he also granted limited legal protections to the squatters, stipulating that, "persons can live on any unwallled and uninhabited piece of ground and can only be moved if the owner builds on the property."<sup>109</sup> These policy changes led to the visible growth of sarifa communities during his years in power, which led to Baghdad's poor being dubbed the "sons of Qasim."<sup>110</sup> Officials in the American Embassy offered their own theory about why Qasim did not act on his promises to rehouse Baghdad's squatters: Qasim needed only to distribute a small number of houses to members of the sarifa community, which he did with great publicity, in order to inspire hope amongst the rural migrants that they would one day receive a

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<sup>106</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," pg. 447.

<sup>107</sup> NARA, "Rentals Reduced by New Law," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 8, 1958, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>108</sup> Pieri, *Construction d'une Capitale Moderne*, 193.

<sup>109</sup> NARA, "Support for Qasim Among the Lower Classes," American Embassy in Baghdad to the State Department, September 17, 1972, 787.00/8-162, Box 2085, 1963-63 CDF, RG 59; NARA, "The Sarifa Population of Baghdad," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, September 24, 1962, 787.00/8-162, Box 2085, 1960-63 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>110</sup> NARA, "Support for Qasim Among the Lower Classes," American Embassy in Baghdad to the State Department, September 17, 1972, 787.00/8-162, Box 2085, 1963-63 CDF, RG 59.

house of their own. He had enough political loyalty from this population that they gave him the benefit of the doubt and did not object to the slow pace of housing distribution.<sup>111</sup>

Ultimately, the rehousing of Baghdad's sarifa community did not come from a leader who championed their cause, but by leaders who—like the Hashemites—feared their political power. The push to finally rehouse Baghdad's sarifa dwellers took place during a spasm of violence under the Ba'th Party's brief administration from February to November 1963. The Ba'th Party rehoused Baghdad's rural migrant population not as a populist gesture, but in a naked attempt to crush and contain the Iraqi Communist Party.

In the span of their brief ten-month reign in 1963, Ba'th Party militias were responsible for torturing and killing thousands of Communists, reportedly even using Baghdad's new train line—constructed as a gleaming example of the city's industrialization and modernity in the 1950s—as a “death train,” trapping hundreds of suspected communists inside without food or water as they were transported to a prison in the south of Iraq.<sup>112</sup> The Ba'th Party identified sarifa dwellers as supporters of Qasim, whom they had just deposed, and suspected that large numbers of Communist-sympathizers lurked within their ranks.

The immediate catalyst for slum clearing was a Communist-led coup attempt against the Ba'th on July 3, 1963. Just four days later, on July 7, an order went out hastily calling for the immediate evacuation of the large sarifa on Baghdad's western edge, in an area known as Washash, and the relocation of those families to the Revolution City neighborhood on the eastern edge. Others were moved to the Shu'la district (“the torch,” in Arabic) on the far outskirts of Baghdad's northwest border.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party*, 107; Wali, *Baghdad: Sirat Madina*, 80.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” pg. 441.

In overseeing the clearing of Baghdad's sarifa communities and their forced displacement to the outskirts of the city, the Ba'th Party ensured that the communities would be built according to a logic of surveillance, domination, and control that isolated the rural migrants from the rest of the urban landscape. Within the few short months of Ba'thist rule in 1963, as many as 100,000 sarifa dwellers were forcibly relocated to Revolution City or Shu'la and over 55,000 reed and mud huts destroyed.<sup>114</sup> The police and army were called in to oversee the evictions and demolitions, which left behind "hills of debris in the very flat areas of Baghdad."<sup>115</sup> Witnessing the initial order to clear the Washash sarifa, an observer from the British embassy in Baghdad wrote: "This step was undertaken with no warning or apparent preparation and the presumption is that, while the removal of the sarifas has long been contemplated, the present 'rush' job is to remove a potential source of danger in the event of possible disorders."<sup>116</sup> Former sarifa dwellers were initially given small plots of land and bricks to build their own houses. However, the cost of providing building materials to the new residents of Revolution City grew too costly, so families were instead offered cheap loans to buy materials on their own, with regulations requiring that new houses be built of permanent materials, rather than reeds or mud.<sup>117</sup>

In the end, the rapid destruction of sarifa camps and the relocation of their residents was the product of political goals. To blatantly underscore the political threat that the Ba'th Party saw in Baghdad's sarifa community, Ba'thist leaders hanged two of the Communist coup instigators from gallows in Revolution City as a warning to the population.<sup>118</sup> Revolution City's physical isolation and

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<sup>114</sup> *NARA*, "Joint Weeka No. 53," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 20, 1963, 1963/11/26 POL 2-1 Joint Weekas IRAQ, Box 3943, POL Iraq, Subj-Numeric 1963, RG 59; Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," pg. 446.

<sup>115</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," pgs. 441-442.

<sup>116</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/170439, Memo by E.F.G. Maynard, British Embassy in Baghdad, July 13, 1963.

<sup>117</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/186800, Memo by S.L. Egerton, British Embassy in Baghdad, December 31, 1965.

<sup>118</sup> *NARA*, "Execution of Twenty-One of July 3 Plotters," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 13, 1963, 1963/12/14 POL 26 Rebellion, Coups, Insurgency 6/1/63, Box 3945, Pol Iraq, Subj-Numeric 1963, RG 59.

its unrelenting grid pattern, unchecked by existing streets, parks, or other natural or built landmarks, prompted several contemporary observers to detect a logic of security, surveillance, and control in the design. Settled on a rigid grid on the edge of the city, it could be “more easily contained by the army than in less isolated” parts of the city.<sup>119</sup> US Embassy officials also noted that the flat outskirts of the city were ideal for facilitating police monitoring and control.<sup>120</sup> It was also meant to appeal to middle and upper classes as an improvement of ‘law and order’ by decisively dealing with a population viewed as menacing by many other Baghdadis.<sup>121</sup>

The decision to physically relocate the vast majority of Baghdad’s rural migrants in a single district on Baghdad’s eastern outskirts had implications for the future development of Revolution City and the rest of Baghdad. It entrenched the symbolism of the flood walls to the east of the city and, later, the Army Canal as a boundary between desirable and undesirable parts of Baghdad. Designed by Doxiadis and completed in 1960, the Army Canal was originally conceived as a way to introduce an attractive lushness to an otherwise flat and arid zone; it would bring green vegetation, provide a relieving visual interruption to the built space, and attract residents.<sup>122</sup> However, the Army Canal ended up serving instead as an important “psycho-social barrier,” separating the population of Revolution City from the rest of the city and contributing to its lack of integration.<sup>123</sup> In addition, many maps in the 1960s and 1970s did not even include Shu’la within the borders of Baghdad, and

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<sup>119</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/170439, Memo by E.F.G. Maynard, British Embassy in Baghdad, September 7, 1963; al-Jassar, “Social Indicators and Housing Policy in Baghdad, Iraq,” 106; Alansari, “Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad,” 12-13.

<sup>120</sup> *NARA*, “Joint Weeka No. 53,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 20, 1963, 1963/11/26 POL 2-1 Joint Weekas IRAQ, Box 3943, POL Iraq, Subj-Numeric 1963, RG 59.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Besim Selim Hakim, “Co-Op Housing: Baghdad, Iraq,” M.A. thesis, Harvard University, 1971, pg. 22.

<sup>123</sup> Alansari, “Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad,” 135-136.

even some statistical tables for 1960s did not include the large district of Revolution City in its statistics about city residents.<sup>124</sup>

This marginalization of rural migrants on undesirable land far from the city center was the deliberate outcome of a class-infused worldview, beginning with Hashemite elites: Minister Alawy, the chair of the Development Board's subcommittee on housing, argued that "low-cost housing should be built outside of the city. Different classes should not be mixed but classified in categories."<sup>125</sup> When Doxiadis visited an area inside Baghdad where the government had destroyed sarifas, he noted in his work diary: "To our right we have the densely built old city and some areas with demolished sarifas. I am told that the Government has demolished these houses because workers should not live so close to the center of the city. Now, therefore, everybody builds outside of the Band [bund, ie, the flood walls to the East of the city]."<sup>126</sup> Thus the forced displacement of rural migrants to the undesirable plains east of the city was by design in accordance to some elites' views of which classes had the right to live in prime urban land.

This attitude continued under many republican governments. By the time the Ba'ath Party returned to power in 1968, it was clear that Revolution City had become something of a dumping ground for Baghdad's urban poor, and especially for former rural migrants. Over 85,000 plots of land in Revolution City were distributed by the end of the 1960s, guaranteeing its composition as a dense, large district. The population grew steadily, outpacing governmental efforts (tepid as they were) to provide necessary infrastructure and services: Revolution City housed 353,000 people in 1965, 530,000 in 1970, and roughly 750,000 by 1976, which was one-fourth of Baghdad's population.<sup>127</sup> Most of the streets were still unpaved in the 1970s.<sup>128</sup> There was an insufficient

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<sup>124</sup> Makiya, "Baghdad al-Sitiniyat," 98; Mudiriyat al-Misaha al-'Amma, "Madinat Baghdad." Baghdad: Survey Press, 1964. Scale: 1:25,000. Library of Congress, G7614.B3 1964.I71, <https://lccn.loc.gov/2013594519>

<sup>125</sup> *DAA, Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 26.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>127</sup> Awni, "Urban Case Studies," 12, 32.



number of schools for the residents of Revolution City and in Shu'la: one researcher claimed that 160 schools were promised to have been built in Revolution City, but that only 62 schools were in operation, while another researcher put the number of operating schools there in the 1970s at a mere 24.<sup>129</sup> Less than 1% of the residents of either district had graduated from intermediate school, and surveys showed that illiteracy rates in both areas hovered around 43%.<sup>130</sup> Public amenities, like gardens and sports fields, were absent except for those that residents had built for themselves.<sup>131</sup> One sole library served three-quarters of a million people, and only one cinema was located in the vicinity.<sup>132</sup> There were no post offices anywhere in the district.<sup>133</sup> Though the newly-built houses in Revolution City and Shu'la had electricity and access to water, there was no sewage system in those districts well into the mid-1970s.<sup>134</sup> The gaping pits that Doxiadis had described in 1955, full of excrement, garbage, and rainwater, continued to dot the landscape of Revolution City nearly twenty years later.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, the ratio of doctors per population was significantly less than in the rest of the city.<sup>136</sup> Tellingly, the municipality did not skimp on security measures even as it neglected Revolution City's other community needs: six different police stations covered the district, with hundreds of police officers on the payroll, confirming that the government continued to see these residents as politically threatening.<sup>137</sup>

Resettling the sarifa communities on the eastern edge of the city had consequences for how they related to the rest of the city. Despite the fact that urban planners, politicians, and elites viewed the sarifa dwellers as disruptive and dangerous, they were in fact economically integrated into the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>129</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 453; Alansari, "Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad," 146.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 449.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 453.

<sup>132</sup> Alansari, "Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad," 150-151.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>134</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 450-451.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>136</sup> Alansari, "Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad," 156-160.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 152.

city and, to a degree, socially integrated, too. Residents in sarifas, especially the women, raised water buffaloes for milk, chickens for eggs, and grew vegetables for local markets. Residents also worked as domestic servants in the homes of wealthy Baghdadis, in a relationship one researcher called a “spatial symbiosis.”<sup>138</sup> By forcibly relocating sarifa residents to the far outskirts of the city, however, residents’ commute times and transport expenses increased significantly, making it more difficult for them to work, shop, and socialize in other parts of the city. The expenses of maintaining a durable house and its utilities, as opposed to the cheap costs of maintaining a reed or mud hut, also ate into poor families’ monthly budgets and curtailed their discretionary spending.<sup>139</sup>

Despite the violent disruptions and displacements to the original sarifa communities by the Ba’th Party in 1963, residents were able to take some actions to rebuild their social networks to remake the neighborhood on their own terms. The government had distributed housing plots to sarifa dwellers at random, meaning that family members who had once lived in proximity to one another were scattered throughout the large urban blocks of Revolution City. But it was common practice for families to (illegally) swap housing plots with other residents to ensure that they were able to still live close to family. One study showed that, despite the random distribution of plots, more than 50% of Revolution City residents lived near relatives, and as a result, certain city blocks became associated with the tribal networks concentrated there.<sup>140</sup>

Residents also took control of critical economic and social functions when the government was unwilling or slow to do so. For example, the state tried to create ‘modern’ market places in the form of brick halls with electricity and plumbing. However, an insufficient number had been built to serve the district’s needs. So a combination of official private businesses and informal markets and kiosks proliferated throughout the district. In contrast to the 15 governmental markets, there were

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<sup>138</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” 432-433, 438.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 454-455.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 456.

241 privately-run bakeries, 79 butchers, and 13 large popular markets that operated in main commercial streets.<sup>141</sup> Due to their informal nature, however, observers found the hygienic standards of the markets lacking. One scholar who conducted fieldwork in Revolution City in the 1970s made the following observation:

“... a horribly unhealthy open market has developed, where one can find all kinds of unhygienic cheap foodstuffs such as fish, meat, vegetables, low-grade fruit, sheep, eggs, together with second-hand household tools, etc. Swarms of flies and stagnant pools are found near the squatting sellers who are mainly migrants living in al-Thawrah [Revolution City]. The Directorate General of Health of the capital is little more than half a kilometer away from this primitive and dangerous market!”<sup>142</sup>

Residents also built coffee shops and mosques for themselves, providing community-gathering spots that were not part of the original urban design of the district.<sup>143</sup> There were 222 cafes operating in the late 1970s, testifying to the high unemployment rates that kept the cafes full of working-aged men at all hours of the day and night, but also to the organic way residents catered to the social needs of the community.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, the government did not have the absolute last word in dictating where and how rural migrants in Baghdad would live. Rural migration to the city still occurred, but it was often “clandestine” and against official rules meant to control internal migration. Even though it was strictly prohibited after 1965 to build any new sarifa or mud hut anywhere in the vicinity of Baghdad, some informal dwellings persisted in the city even up through the 1990s.<sup>145</sup> Thus while the Ba’th Party did exercise its power to forcibly displace Baghdad’s sarifa dwellers and create a vast silo to rehouse them on the outskirts of the city, the residents of Revolution City still had ways to reassert their visions for the community and, to some extent, reshape the physical and social contours of their district.

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<sup>141</sup> Alansari, “Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad,” 163-168.

<sup>142</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” 445-446.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>144</sup> Alansari, “Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad,” 150-151.

<sup>145</sup> Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” 417, 441-442.

Furthermore, the scheme to forcibly displace and isolate sarifa dwellers did not neutralize their political threat. Over the following decades, the dense streets Revolution City were a safe haven for deserters and draft dodgers, Communists, Shi'i political activists, and other types of political opponents.<sup>146</sup> The Ba'th Party regime's wariness towards Revolution City was repeatedly borne out over the following decades: to give just one example, in 1979 a Ba'th Party official was beaten to death by a mob in Revolution City and his hands were cut off by the crowd.<sup>147</sup> The tendency to view the residents of Revolution City as a security threat justified their marginalization on the edges of the city and informed the interactions between Revolution City residents and the Ba'th Party for decades to come.

### **Managing Allies: Creating Professional Silos**

As Qasim's ambivalent record in rehousing sarifa dwellers illustrated above, a series of Iraqi governments calculated that using oil funds to shore up support with political allies was at least as pressing as managing the political threats posed by the urban poor. The difference in approaches to core constituencies, such as military officers and public sector employees, and rural migrants is clearly illustrated through the development of new subdivisions built by and for professionals.

While Baghdad's sarifa dwellers were resettled on the margins of Baghdad, behind the Army Canal and eastern flood walls and psychologically cut off from the rest of the city, there was also a logic of separation at work in developing new middle class neighborhoods. However, the reasons for this separation and the mechanisms by which it occurred were tellingly different. Strikingly, many of the neighborhoods created in Baghdad after 1950 were built as vocational silos. Occupations still demarcate many of the city's districts today: Doctors' Neighborhood (*Hay al-Atibba'*), Police Neighborhood (*Hay al-Shurta*), Secret Police Neighborhood (*Hay al-Mukhabarat*), Workers'

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<sup>146</sup> NARA, "Joint Weeka No. 10," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, March 12, 1966, POL 2-1 IRAQ, Box 563 EconomicAid, 1964-66 Subject-Numeric, RG 59.

<sup>147</sup> TNA, "Iraq/Internal Disturbances," Memo by George Dickson, June 22, 1979, FCO 8/3402.

Neighborhood (*Hay al-Ummal*), Teachers' Neighborhood (*Hay al-Mu'amilin*), Engineers' Neighborhood (*Hay al-Muhandisin*), and at least three different neighborhoods for military officers (one in Adhamiyya, one in Yarmuk, and one in Zayuna), all of which indicate the names of the intended beneficiaries or the professional cooperative housing unions (*al-jama'iyyat al-ta'ammuniyya lil-iskan*) that were involved in building the original housing development.<sup>148</sup>

The impulse to build subsidized housing for key political allies began in earnest during the oil boom years of the Hashemite era. The Development Board's first efforts in housing, even before its big push in 1955 to address the needs of low-income Baghdadis, was to build new housing for Iraqi military officers. This was a politically-inspired project aimed at signaling the commitment of both the Hashemite monarchy and its British backers for the military.<sup>149</sup> The British Embassy also succeeded in securing a lucrative contract for a British firm to build 900 houses for the Iraqi officers, so there were financial motivations, as well.<sup>150</sup> A few years later, Doxiadis was commissioned to build subsidized housing for middle-class Iraqis, including for the Doctors' and Pharmacists' Union, in a scheme called Western Baghdad.<sup>151</sup>

This incipient trend towards state-constructed neighborhoods for middle-class professionals and officers proved to be an expensive and time-consuming enterprise for the government, however. Furthermore, there were moral fears that handing out free housing would lead residents to become lazy or unappreciative, or that the promise of free housing would only worsen the influx of rural migrants. The Minister of Development in 1955 stated that he "wants people to pay for their

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<sup>148</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 348-349.

<sup>149</sup> *TNA*, T 236/5138, British Embassy in Baghdad, May 22, 1953; *TNA*, FO 371/115797, "Supply of Steel for the Construction of Buildings and Housing for the Iraq Army," November 3, 1955.

<sup>150</sup> *NARA*, "Recent Major Housing Developments – May 1956," May 11, 1956, American Embassy in Baghdad to Department of State, 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; *TNA*, FO 371/115797, "Supply of Steel for the Construction of Buildings and Housing for the Iraq Army," November 3, 1955.

<sup>151</sup> *NARA*, "Economic Summary – Iraq – Second Quarter 1956," American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, July 31, 1956, 887.00/1-556, Box 4957, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59; *DAA*, *Report on the Development of Baghdad: A Contribution to the Ideas for the Development of the Capital of Iraq*, Periodical Report no. 2, December 1958, citation number 28978, pg. 1

houses and feel that they are the owners.”<sup>152</sup> He proposed a cost-sharing arrangement in which residents would pay 75% of the costs of construction, while others proposed simply distributing residential land on which recipients would construct their own house.<sup>153</sup> The updated Law “For Sale of Houses to Workers and Officials” passed in 1955 codified these new requirements that public sector employees would make regular payments, albeit at subsidized rates, for the houses or land that they received as a state benefit and set out the rules by which residents could sell, rent out, or bequeath their state-subsidized homes after a certain number of years.<sup>154</sup> This model of distributing residential land for nominal prices, rather than distributing already-constructed housing, was the model continued by all subsequent Iraqi governments, including the Ba‘th Party. Doxiadis also implemented the same ‘self-help’ policy in Riyadh a few years later, where he was hired as an urban planner by the Saudi government. There he argued that, “a man who pays for his own house acquires pride in ownership,” whereas providing free housing would “infantilize its beneficiaries, turning them into potential troublemakers and agitators.”<sup>155</sup>

Over time, the decision to rely heavily on professional unions to build housing was driven by an arrangement of mutual interest between workers’ unions and the government. Agricultural and Housing Cooperative Unions had formally existed since 1944 but grew in number and activity after the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy.<sup>156</sup> For example, only 11 housing co-operative societies existed in Baghdad by the time of the 1958 Revolution; that number grew to 55 cooperative housing societies by 1961, 120 by 1965, and 189 by 1969.<sup>157</sup> After Qasim came to power in 1958, professional unions were newly empowered and made access to affordable housing a top priority. Consequently,

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<sup>152</sup> *DAA, Iraq Diary*, Volume 1 1955, citation number 23873, pg. 164-165.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *NARA*, “Regulation No. 7 of 1955 For Sale of Houses to Workers and Officials,” translation provided by the American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, [1955], 887.00A/9-856, Box 4958, 1955-59 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>155</sup> Ménoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh*, 99.

<sup>156</sup> Hakim, “Co-Op Housing: Baghdad, Iraq,” 30.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 31; Al-Ashab, “The Urban Geography of Baghdad,” 348, 350.

a Directorate of Co-Operative Unions was created in 1959 and a bank was set up in 1959 to provide loans to co-operative housing societies.<sup>158</sup> This was much needed because, despite Qasim's promises to make housing cheaper, housing prices in Baghdad remained high, and by the 1970s, one scholar calculated that 75% of Baghdad's population could not afford the \$4500 it cost, at minimum, to build a two-bedroom house.<sup>159</sup>

By the 1960s, it was common for the state to allocate inexpensive state land to vocational union housing cooperatives—such as the cooperative housing union for doctors, police officers, or pharmacists—who then assisted workers in building their own housing themselves. The 'Arif and Ba'thist regimes continued this practice, recognizing that it would save money and administrative headaches to enlist professional unions to oversee the construction of new housing for their members after simply selling off subsidized parcels of state land.<sup>160</sup> Cooperative societies were tasked with selecting recipients of land parcels by lottery, who were required to begin construction on a house on that plot within five years. The recipient paid a low cost for the land itself (60 ID in 1974, the equivalent then of \$202), and was eligible for loans to cover the costs of building materials and building.<sup>161</sup> This system accounted for the rapid expansion of Baghdad's neighborhoods in the revolutionary period: by 1967, at least 43,051 plots of residential land in Baghdad were distributed by the government to housing cooperatives, and 28,858 new houses had been completed on these plots.<sup>162</sup>

Though the decision to delegate responsibility for subsidized professional housing to cooperative unions was primarily the result of expediency, there were important social and political effects to this policy, as well as political motivations behind it. This method of housing distribution

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<sup>158</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 348-349.

<sup>159</sup> Muhsin K. Chalabi, "Low Income Housing in Iraq," M.A. Thesis, University of New Mexico, 1975, 19.

<sup>160</sup> Hakim, "Co-Op Housing: Baghdad, Iraq," 30.

<sup>161</sup> Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 349.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 348, 350.

led to the creation of homogenous socio-economic pockets across Baghdad's landscape, clustering professionals of similar backgrounds into readily identifiable enclaves. As one scholar wrote:

“In its modern development Baghdad provides another peculiar phenomenon, namely the governmental residential suburbs. The government has deliberately created new social segregation. The new social stratification depends on the relative economic and professional status of the occupants. Particular professional groups are housed on particular sites. This is in complete contrast to the naturally developed traditional residential mahallah [neighborhood].”<sup>163</sup>

Observers noted political intent in the government's decision to cluster professional groups together. These homogenous neighborhoods could form reservoirs of support that could be mobilized in times of crisis, and grouping certain populations together made it easier to contain political threats. For example, scholars of Baghdad's cooperative housing schemes noted that this logic was at work in the creation of distinct neighborhoods for military and security forces: “the concentration of the army officers in one community, where they could be easily watched by the government” meant that they could be “more easily contained” if they tried to rise up to overthrow the rulers.<sup>164</sup> The same logic could be applied for the neighborhoods dedicated to police officers and secret police agents.

Additionally, the new professional neighborhoods were designed, in part, to socialize middle-class Baghdadis into the requirements of the modern era, as defined by Iraqi politicians and by Doxiadis (Doxiadis was particularly attentive to the social effects of housing settlements through his formulation of “ekistics,” a term he coined to refer to the “science of human settlements.”)<sup>165</sup> The methods of distributing housing and residential land first reinforced a patriarchal, middle-class view of family organization and participation in the labor market. Lotteries to distribute housing and residential land were according to the professional membership of the head of household, a legal designation that went to the father of a nuclear family except in cases of divorce or death.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>164</sup> al-Jassar, “Social Indicators and Housing Policy in Baghdad, Iraq,” 106.

<sup>165</sup> Pyla, “Back to the Future,” 6.



The houses themselves were also designed to enforce a new trend of residence according to nuclear families, as opposed to extended families—a trend that was meant to signal Baghdad’s modernity but which also exacerbated the housing crisis, since breaking up extended families into conjugal units required more houses to shelter the same number of individuals. The architecture of houses put together by Doxiadis and popular in mid-century Iraq were also designed to reinforce middle-class, patriarchal family norms. A promotional film for Doxiadis’s Western Baghdad housing development showcased how his houses would facilitate a modern, middle-class lifestyle for a nuclear family. In this film, a married couple and their three children appear clean and happy, living as a nuclear unit rather than with their extended family. The wife tends to the children, rocking her baby in a modern cradle. The father enjoys free time reading a newspaper in the house’s courtyard, while the family enjoys modern amenities like electric lights and an indoor latrine.<sup>166</sup> Likewise, promotional photos for an experimental housing community in Western Baghdad show a man in a western-style shirt posing in front of 1950s tailfin car with rows of clean, newly-constructed homes lining the street behind him, indicating the kind of middle-class, western comforts a homeowner could expect for himself.<sup>167</sup>

By far the largest effect and implication of this housing scheme, however, was to solidify the notion that housing was a standard benefit that many Baghdadis could expect and even demand from the state. Beneficiaries included military and security sector officers, public sector employees, politically-connected friends of the regime (including, under Saddam, Ba’th Party officials) and, starting with the Iran-Iraq War, families of martyrs. Housing was thus transformed into a new bargaining chip to influence state-society relations, with the state doling out favors to target populations and Baghdadis pressing the state to grant them residential land. It also gave individual

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<sup>166</sup> DAA, “Housing Program of Iraq,” 1958, citation number 29200, page number unknown.

<sup>167</sup> *Iraq: A Pictorial Record* (Cologne-Deutz, Germany: In Cooperation with the Iraqi Commissariat of the World Exhibition, Bruxelles, 1958), 91.

officials power over those requesting state housing in a situation ripe for exploitation and corruption. One American Embassy official reported, “The much-publicized construction of free government housing and the long waiting lists for such houses provide some key officials with an irresistible temptation,” and that people were paying bribes as high as 100,000 Iraqi Dinars for favoritism by the Ministry of Housing in reviewing their applications.<sup>168</sup> As Chapter Four will discuss, other Baghdadis wrote petitions to regime officials to press for housing benefits they believed they were owed. The grouping of professionals into vocationally homogenous neighborhoods was intended to discipline middle class, professional Iraqis into politically loyal, modern citizens. And, indeed, Baghdadis’ political relationship to the state was transformed when housing was made into a new point of contact and leverage between citizens and the government.

At the same time, residents had considerable opportunities to intervene in the formation of these new professional communities. Both the model housing created by Doxiadis and the patriarchal, middle-class family formation they were meant to support were disrupted by the lived experiences of Baghdadis. Residents of Doxiadis’s Western Baghdad settlement and other planned neighborhoods reacted against pedestrian-only zones and opened them for car traffic.<sup>169</sup> Houses that were designed according to western tastes were altered to continue Iraqi living styles; front porches facing the street were screened off for privacy, while shops built in planned communities to face pedestrian-only zones were rearranged to face street traffic.<sup>170</sup>

Across the city, the state’s development of key infrastructure was often in *reaction to* initiatives by individual homeowners, rather than dictating the course of their development according to a master plan. This is seen most clearly in the fact that streets were paved and water, sewer, and electricity lines connected only *after* houses were built, sometimes years after the fact. For example,

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<sup>168</sup> NARA, “Low Level Corruption in the Iraqi Government,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, September 13, 1962, 787.00/8-162, Box 2085, 1960-63 CDF, RG 59.

<sup>169</sup> Awni, “Urban Case Studies”, 38.

<sup>170</sup> DAA, *Diary of Iraq*, 1956, Vol. 9, citation number 23881, pg. 379.

Baghdad lacked a comprehensive sewage system well into the 1970s. Houses built in the 1960s typically each provided their own septic tank on their property. When sewage lines eventually were built to connect that new neighborhood, the recently-paved roads had to be dug up again in order to lay the sewer lines.<sup>171</sup> The decision to build Baghdad's infrastructure in this piecemeal fashion was due to the fact that individual recipients of subsidized residential land had considerable leeway in designing and constructing their own houses; the municipality therefore did not know what a community's utility needs would be until after all the houses were built.

In sum, a succession of governments from the Hashemite monarchy to the Ba'th Party looked for ways to distribute oil rents to middle-class Baghdadis by providing subsidized housing or residential land. In establishing housing as a new standard benefit for public sector employees, the state attempted to ensure that the formation of new middle-class neighborhoods was politically advantageous: clustering professional groups together facilitated monitoring and the management of state-society relations, and they used housing as a new incentive to shore up support. In practice, most Iraqi political leaders leaned away from micro-managing the construction of new professional neighborhoods through top-down urban design and construction, but opted instead to allow professionals to build their own houses under the oversight of housing unions. This limited the ability of the state to dictate how Baghdad's landscape would develop and undermined the master plans developed for Baghdad, though it was a trade off regimes were willing to make to save money and bureaucratic hassles. This hands-off approach gave Baghdadis opportunities to influence the layout and formation of their own neighborhood communities, even as they were still grouped in identifiable enclaves within the cityscape.

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<sup>171</sup> Hakim, "Co-Op Housing," 45.

## Conclusions: Real and Imaginary Geographies

The oil boom years of 1950 to 1979 transformed both the physical and imaginary landscape of Baghdad. The physical transformation was apparent to all observers: new highways cut broad swaths through the old city, suburbs and subdivisions sprang up and expanded the city's borders, glistening new hotels lined the Tigris River, and sarifas were razed and replaced by brick houses. At the same time, an invisible transformation also took place that was no less meaningful, as the social and political significance of Baghdad's neighborhoods and the status and relationship to the state they symbolized changed.

All cities have this 'imaginary geography' of significance, which changes with major political and demographic shifts. Scholars describe how Baghdad in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was imagined to exist in two socially distinct sectors: a cosmopolitan and diverse eastern half, Rusafa, and a rough-and-tumble western half populated by recently-arrived tribal elements from the desert, Karkh.<sup>172</sup> At that time, Baghdad's old city wall symbolically represented "the most potent dividing line between order and disorder for Baghdad," separating the city from the rural areas where "rebels" and "tribesmen" came to "threaten city folk" from the West.<sup>173</sup> In the 1950s the city's frightening imaginary frontier zone was located instead to the East, on the far side of the Army Canal where rural migrants built their sarifas and mud huts.<sup>174</sup>

What is interesting to observe is that the inhabitants of Revolution City were imagined and re-imagined as posing different kinds of threats over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from destabilizing rural migrants in the 1950s, Communists in the 1960s, and Da'wa Party members in the 1980s and 1990s. The residents of Revolution City remained a "geographically bounded group," to borrow from Farah al-Nakib's analysis of social and spatial difference in Kuwait City, but the precise

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<sup>172</sup> Susa, "Rayy Baghdad," 101; Khoury, "Violence and Spatial Politics," 194.

<sup>173</sup> Khoury, "Violence and Spatial Politics," 186-187.

<sup>174</sup> Alansari, "Althawra, Quartier de Bagdad," 135-136.

nature of the threat posed by the community east of the canal could be redefined according to the politics of the time.<sup>175</sup> Ironically, by cutting off Revolution City from the rest of Baghdad, it reaffirmed and reified this district's contentious and distinct role in Baghdad's political history. Creating a "hierarchy of spaces" for different social groups in Baghdad may have helped to reinforce the loyalty of favored groups, but at the same time it reinforced the oppositional nature of those living on the margins.<sup>176</sup>

Notably, Doxiadis repeated this practice of isolating rural migrants in city margins when he was hired as an urban planner for Riyadh in the 1960s. As in Baghdad, rural migrants had been streaming into Saudi Arabia's cities looking for employment opportunities created by the oil boom.<sup>177</sup> Once again, Doxiadis and state officials decided to engage in a practice of "slum clearance," forcibly removing migrants and destroying their informal housing in the city center. In Riyadh as it was in Baghdad, new urban infrastructure was used to separate and segregate unwanted rural populations: "Streets were built to identify, isolate, and control certain categories of residents; green spaces were used as boundaries," and rural migrants were rehoused "far from...the public's gaze."<sup>178</sup> The forced relocation of sarifa dwellers in Revolution City and Shu'la also mirrored contemporary developments in Kuwait City, where shantytowns constructed by former Bedouin were razed and inhabitants pushed out of the boundaries of the municipality to undeveloped state-owned lands.<sup>179</sup> The process of rehousing the residents of informal housing went much faster in Iraq, however, because residents were forced to build their own homes. In Kuwait, promised government-built housing was delayed for up to twenty years.<sup>180</sup> When the Kuwaiti Bedouin were

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<sup>175</sup> Farah al-Nakib, "Revisiting *Hadar* and *Badu* in Kuwait: Citizenship, Housing, and the Construction of a Dichotomy," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 8.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>177</sup> Ménoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh*, 83.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 19.

finally re-housed, they too were moved to the far margins of the city with ill-equipped houses lacking basic amenities and poorly connected by roads and transit to the city center.<sup>181</sup> Al-Nakib argues that the settlement of the Bedouin so far outside the city was meant to “[foster] the exclusion of the *badū* from that society.”<sup>182</sup> Thus the experiences of rehousing Baghdad’s sarifa communities in Revolution City both mirrored and contributed to the efforts in slum clearance in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as states leveraged their oil wealth to transform urban landscapes—a common goal to all three states despite the obvious differences in their political ideologies and government structures. In all three of these cities, rural migrants were imagined as political and social threats and, through oil-subsidized housing policies, were physically and symbolically marginalized in city life.

The imaginary geographies of Baghdad were also transformed through the construction of homogenous professional neighborhoods in Baghdad in subdivisions within the city. In contrast to the rural residents who were isolated on the city’s margins and neglected by municipal services, Baghdad’s professional groups were affirmed by name as important residents who rightfully belonged in the city. Naming districts after the cooperative housing union responsible for their construction reinforced the notion that middle class professionals had a “right to the city,” to borrow Henri Lefebvre’s famous phrase, though it was an illusory right that was permitted to function only in terms dictated by the state.<sup>183</sup> Though public sector employees gained a financially valuable benefit in subsidized houses and residential land, accepting to live in these new subdivisions meant participating in the politicization of the landscape and increasing one’s visibility to the state.

The decision to allow cooperative housing union members to build their own neighborhoods demonstrates the ultimately fictitious aspects of the master plans developed for Baghdad by Minoprio, Spencely, and P.W. MacFarlane in 1956 and by Doxiadis in 1959. As one

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>183</sup> Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City,” in *Writings on Cities*, edited and translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, 147-159 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

scholar has written, the impulse behind mid-century urban planning was a desire to construct a modern city according to ‘rational’ or scientific principles, clearly segmenting and labeling each part of the city according to its purpose:

“The [Doxiadis] master plan did more than prescribe Baghdad’s orderly expansion. Behind the preoccupation with visual order, uniformity, and regularity, was a larger goal to reinvent the old city as an efficient modern capital and make it a symbol and an instrument of modernization. [...] Such a preoccupation with formal clarity was of course typical of high-modernist urbanism, whose grand visions for the rational engineering of social life found fertile ground in the post-World War II era, especially in the postcolonial world....”<sup>184</sup>

However, in practice, a succession of governments from the Hashemites to the Ba’thists prioritized short-term expediency over meticulous, top-down planning. Distributing residential land, rather than administering the construction of housing, allowed for more spontaneity and idiosyncrasy in neighborhood development than the master plans indicated on paper. The creation of professional neighborhoods illustrates this point, as each individual resident determined when, how, and in which style his house would be built, leaving the municipality to play catch up. Furthermore, as illustrated above, the nature of the communities and the political subjects intended to be created through the development of new neighborhoods did not come to fruition. Revolution City, meant to settle and educate rural migrants into subdued and productive citizens, was neglected by the municipality and remained a political threat for decades to come. Despite its creation along a rigid grid on the edges of the city, surveillance and monitoring of Revolution City remained difficult for the regime to accomplish. Finally, as later chapters will address, the advent of the Iran-Iraq War severely tested the patriarchal, middle-class vision of a nuclear family supported by one male wage earner that new houses and professional neighborhoods were designed to support.

In sum, the construction of Baghdad’s new neighborhoods between 1950 and 1979 to house rural migrants and professionals constituted a new era in state-society relations that altered both the

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<sup>184</sup> Pyla, “Back to the Future”: 9-10.

physical and symbolic geographies of the city. Thanks to newfound oil wealth, Iraqi governments were able to turn housing into a new tool that it could leverage against politically threatening populations or use to bolster support with allies and supporters. In the process, the capital was marked by zones of inclusion and exclusion as rural migrants were forcibly displaced to the city's margins while professionals were grouped into identifiable communities in the city center.

Many trends begun during these 'oil boom' years had an enduring legacy for decades to come. Subsidized housing or residential land remained a standard benefit expected by public sector employees, just as it was in other Gulf cities, and an increasing number of other groups as the Ba'th Party continued the practice of using housing to shore up support with target populations. Housing also remained a coercive tool to be used against enemies: as later chapters will discuss, the Ba'th Party seized homes of suspected Iran sympathizers, opposition group members, and army deserters and redistributed them as gifts to friends. Forced displacement, once used against *sarifa* dwellers, was sometimes used against families who sheltered deserting soldiers. Housing cooperative unions remained a common way to build new neighborhoods, as Ba'th-era laws indicate.<sup>185</sup> Even more importantly, the Ba'th Party continued to focus on neighborhoods as politically important target populations; as I will argue in subsequent Chapters Four and Five, the Ba'th Party increasingly relied on neighborhoods and neighborhood-level officials to mobilize support, neutralize threats, and carry out policies. From the 1950s onward, neighborhoods were the scale at which most state-society interactions took place in Baghdad.

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<sup>185</sup> See, for example, Law #37 of 1978: "Cooperative Housing Union Law," <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/17537.html>.



### 3. Baghdad Becomes a Warzone: Transformations in Time, Space, and Society

Though Baghdad currently suffers from a reputation as a violent and war-torn city, from 1950 to 1979 the city was known instead as a privileged site of rapid modernization, cosmopolitanism, and oil-fueled economic development. Prior to the start of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, Baghdad itself had not directly experienced the hardships of sustained warfare for generations.<sup>1</sup> The city's closest prior brush with war was the short-lived Anglo-Iraqi War of 1941 when British forces invaded Iraq in the wake of a coup that temporarily removed the British-backed royal family from power—however, actual fighting in and around Baghdad was limited. Likewise, the surrender of Baghdad to British forces in 1917 during the initial colonization of Iraq happened swiftly without much fighting in the city itself. As French diplomats in Baghdad summarized the situation, prior to the Iran-Iraq War “the Iraqi people have had no experience with a foreign enemy,” and had not previously “experienced the reality” of war themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter explores how the eleven-year period from 1980 to 1991 was a defining, transitional moment in which Baghdad went from being a privileged site of oil-financed modernization and development efforts to a warzone. I focus in particular on the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), when Baghdad and its residents gradually acclimated to the new threats, challenges, and opportunities that came with the protracted conflict. Over the course of eight years, the Iran-Iraq War changed the rhythms of time in the capital, physically altered the city's landscape, and disrupted

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<sup>1</sup> While the city of Baghdad had not been involved in any major battles for generations, young men from Baghdad had had some exposure to the realities of warfare. For example, young men had been conscripted as part of compulsory military service to take part in the Iraqi army's clashes with Kurdish nationalist groups in the northern provinces of the country in the 1970s. Likewise, young Iraqi men had been conscripted to fight in wars with Israel in 1948, 1967, and 1973, though Iraq's role in these conflicts was limited. See Isam Khafaji, “War as a Vehicle for the Rise and Demise of a State-Controlled Society: The Case of Ba‘thist Iraq,” in *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, edited by Steven Heydemann (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000): 258-291 and Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime* for more on war and state-building in Ba‘thist Iraq.

<sup>2</sup> Centre des Archives Diplomatiques Nationales [Hereafter: CADN] 54PO/B/5, “The Iraqi Population During the War,” October 30, 1980.

the previous social order. “The modern city is...a distinct space of routines,” according to urban theorists.<sup>3</sup> Henri Lefebvre wrote that cities are marked by “the layout of places and their linkages,” “what happens and takes place in the street,” and “the *use of time* by inhabitants” (emphasis in the original).<sup>4</sup> As war changed these elements of space, social activity, and time, disrupting routines and changing the ways that Baghdadis related to the built landscape of the city, Baghdad itself was fundamentally altered.

As this chapter will discuss, the impact of the Iran-Iraq War differed from the impact of the Gulf War on the capital city. Changes to rhythms of time, the urban landscape, and social categories during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War were primarily—though not exclusively—the result of top-down efforts by the Iraqi regime to mobilize the population, consolidate support, and control the official narrative about the conflict. In short, the main effects of the Iran-Iraq War on Baghdad were social and cultural. In contrast, the blitzkrieg-style assault on Baghdad during the six weeks of the Gulf War (January – February, 1991) left no such time for gradual adjustment to wartime realities. The final section of this chapter illustrates how the primary impact of the Gulf War on Baghdad was physical and, by extension, economic, as US and coalition bombing campaigns on the capital devastated the city landscape. International sanctions, imposed in 1990 and in place until 2003, multiplied the destructive effect of the war as it hobbled reconstruction efforts.

Between the gradual social and cultural transformations of Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War and the overwhelming physical destruction of the Gulf War, Baghdad was profoundly and irrevocably changed by its experiences in wartime between 1980 and 1991. Many of the ways in which Baghdad’s physical spaces, social order, and rhythms of daily life were changed by these violent conflicts proved to be enduring, reverberating through the remainder of the 1990s and the

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<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased by Prakash, “Introduction,” in *The Spaces of the Modern City*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre, “Levels of Reality and Analysis,” in *Writings on Cities*, translated and edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 115.

post-Saddam period to the present.

## Overview of the Iran-Iraq War

As described in Chapter One, Iranian protesters removed Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi from power after months of protests in 1978, and the Ayatollah Khomeini took power in the newly proclaimed Islamic Republic of Iran in January 1979. Khomeini had vowed to ‘export’ the Islamic revolution, which directly threatened Iraq as its western neighbor and as a majority-Shi‘i country. Saddam believed that it would be a quick and easy task to remove the Ayatollah from power, especially given Iraq’s well-equipped military. In the summer of 1979, Saddam prepared to launch a war with limited aims: though formally fought over the contested ownership of the Shatt al-‘Arab waterway between the two countries, Saddam’s real goal was to nip the Ayatollah’s expansionist ambitions in the bud and assert Saddam’s regional leadership.<sup>5</sup>

When Saddam declared war was on September 22, 1980, it initially seemed to go according to his plan: Iraqi forces rapidly occupied a large swath of Iranian territory and “declared it had reached its objectives.”<sup>6</sup> Iran refused to surrender, however, and Iraq’s hold on conquered territory proved to be tenuous. Iran regained momentum, re-captured key cities, and put Iraqi forces on the defensive. Iraq was forced to withdraw from all Iranian territory by June 1982. In July 1982, Iranian forces invaded Iraq, and Saddam spent most of the next 6 years on the defensive. It wasn’t until April 1988 that Iraq had a major victory in recapturing its port city of Faw, regained the offensive momentum, and finally pushed Iran to the negotiating table to sign a cease-fire on August 20, 1988.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ofra Bengio, “Iraq,” in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume V, 1980-81: 579; Charles Tripp, “The Iran-Iraq War and the Iraqi State,” in *Iraq: Power and Society*, edited by Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1993), 101.

<sup>6</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed histories of the Iran-Iraq War, see: Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Workman, *Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War*; Pierre Razoux, *Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2015).

A myriad of social, physical, and economic changes accompanied this war that normalized violence and militarization in Iraq, altered the dynamics of state-society relations, and created a new repertoire of symbols, holidays, and rituals that governed civilian life.<sup>8</sup> In Baghdad, war set the capital city on a new trajectory. Showcase architecture and modernization programs in the capital city were replaced by bomb shelters, war monuments, and a newly militarized social order.

### **Protecting Baghdad from War: 1980-1982**

With the outbreak of war, the regime's first instinct was to shelter the capital city from any negative consequences. Newly confirmed as president of Iraq in 1979, Saddam promised to continue an aggressive development program for Iraq while simultaneously waging war in order to consolidate popular support for his rule domestically. As Saddam explained in a closed-door meeting with advisors, if any noticeable cuts were made in public spending, "merchants, intermediaries, and ultimately citizens...will realize that it is lower than last year and panic will set in."<sup>9</sup> This impulse to protect ordinary Iraqis from the hardships of war and to maintain an ambitious development plan was most pronounced in the capital city of Baghdad, where the regime concentrated its development and modernization efforts and tried to ensure an abundance of consumer goods.

There was an international audience for this performance, as well: creditors, business partners, and political allies sought assurances that Saddam's regime was strong enough to weather the war with Iran, especially after it became clear that it would not be the quick and painless war Saddam had promised. Saddam and other regime officials bragged about their construction projects and delivery of both "guns and butter" in the midst of the war in order to assuage his backers' fears.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the social effects of militarization, see Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*.

<sup>9</sup> Original source: CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-354, Recording of a meeting between Saddam Hussein and Ministers related to the Budget, Circa 1982. Quoted in Williamson Murray and Kevin M. Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 188-189.

Prior to the outbreak of war in 1980, the British Embassy in Iraq described Baghdad as a land of plenty:

“Infrastructural development begun in the early 70’s started to bear fruit, welfare services improved... there was a greater quantity and variety in the shops of imported consumer products. These were lapped up by a public whose income per capita had exceeded \$2000 by the end of 1979, and was rising steadily with Iraq’s oil revenue.”<sup>10</sup>

The aggressive pace of development and modernization continued into the war: the Saddam International Airport was among the grandest of Baghdad’s development projects that came to fruition, built during the early years of the war and opened to travelers in 1982.<sup>11</sup> Two new bridges were completed in Baghdad in the early 1980s, along with a new water purification system in the capital’s Karkh district and a number of new hospitals.<sup>12</sup> In 1982, construction began on a new expressway in Baghdad.<sup>13</sup> As if to underscore the regime’s confidence that the ravages of war would never come to Baghdad, it commissioned three projects to renovate historic quarters of the city—al-Khulafa’ street, Haifa street, and the famed Abu Nuwwas neighborhood—after the war had already commenced.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the regime contracted with French companies to build new housing developments in the Dura, Zafraniyya, and Saddam City neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup> Such projects clearly articulated the regime’s vision that their money was best invested in refining and improving Baghdad, rather than saving money to spend on possible post-war reconstruction needs in the capital should fighting or airstrikes take place there.

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<sup>10</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/4126, “Annual Review for 1980,” December 31, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/43, “Construction: Public Works – 1981,” May 1982.

<sup>12</sup> “Important Infrastructure Projects Built in Iraq over Past Ten Years,” *Baghdad Observer*, January 15, 1990, pg. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/5, Political Dispatch, August 11, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> Architects Collaborative, *Urban Design Study: Khulafa Development Project* (Cambridge, MA: 1982); Arthur Erickson Architects, *Amanat al Assima: Abu Nawas Conservation/Development Project* (Vancouver: Arthur Erickson Architects, 1981); *FCO* 8/4697, June 1982.

<sup>15</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/43, “Construction : Public Works – Year 1981,” May 1982.

Iraq's international business partners and allies evidently bought into the regime's confidence: as one British embassy official stated, "the level of economic activity has been surprisingly unaffected. There have been no signs of cutting back on imports or a slowing down on the development program."<sup>16</sup> The international media picked up this narrative: the *New York Times* ran an article proclaiming, "Despite War Cost, Iraq Pushes Development"; the Iraqi Minister of Industry boasted in an English-language newspaper in 1981 that the regime had "signed contracts worth 800 million dinars since the outbreak of the war."<sup>17</sup> Not to be outdone, the mayor of Baghdad announced in 1982 that two billion dinars had been spent on development projects in the capital alone since the start of the war.<sup>18</sup> One year into the war, journalist Patrick Cockburn described the city as follows, "Baghdad...is like a vast building site; its flat skyline interrupted by cranes and half-completed buildings, while the thump of pile-drivers can be heard on almost every street corner."<sup>19</sup> Baghdad's residents also appeared to "to react with apparent serenity" to the start of the war as development projects continued apace.<sup>20</sup> Cockburn observed the following in 1981:

"...it is clear that few people in Baghdad are very worried that the Iranian fighter bombers will resume the raids that they launched in the first week of the war last September. [...] The Iraqi government works hard to give the impression that all is business as usual. The airport is open again at night. [...] The blackout has been largely abandoned in the capital...."<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for the first two years of the Iran-Iraq War, the regime was largely successful in convincing both Baghdadis and its foreign allies that it could shield the country from war's negative effects. All of this began to unravel, however, as the war went on far longer than Saddam anticipated and the regime began to deplete its financial reserves.

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<sup>16</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/4168, October 13, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> Drew Middleton, "Despite War Cost, Iraq Pushes Development," *New York Times*, November 28, 1982; *CADN* 54PO/B/44, "Economic and Commercial News," June 1981.

<sup>18</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/5, Political Dispatch, August 11, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "Where Guns Fail, Saddam Provides Butter," *Financial Times*, July 16, 1981.

<sup>20</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/5, "The Iraqi Population During the War," October 30, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> Cockburn, "Where Guns Fail."

Even as the regime boasted that the Iran-Iraq War would not affect Baghdad's development and modernization projects, there were signs that the government's attempts to pay for both development and military costs were unsustainable. Politically and psychologically, an important shift occurred for the people of Baghdad in 1982 when the Iraqi armed forces went from being on the offensive to the defensive and the Iranian military succeeded in seizing some Iraqi territory. As one Iraqi scholar wrote in 1986,

"Writing about war and peace under the shadow of an ongoing war is different from writing about them in other circumstances. When you are living with war [*ma' ma'aishat al-harb*], and especially when the enemy army has the goal of occupying your national homeland, it makes writing about war something that is part of your everyday life [*haja yawmiyya*], even if you are trying to write about it from a tactical or analytical side. ...The guards of peace in the time of enemy aggression must seize every human, material, and moral ability to bring victory...defensive war affects the people."<sup>22</sup>

Though Iranian troops never came within the vicinity of Baghdad, the occupation of Iraqi territory meant that the capital could no longer afford to think of the war as something distant and inconsequential for life at home.

A major economic blow came in April 1982 when Syria cut off Iraq's access to its most important oil pipeline, severely curtailing its ability to export oil.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, Iraq's export earnings fell from \$26 billion in 1980 to \$6 or \$7 billion in 1983.<sup>24</sup> Oil production itself also fell off sharply due to Iranian attacks on Iraqi oil installations: within the first months of the war, oil production dropped from 3.24 million barrels a day to 0.55 million barrels per day, a decrease of nearly 85%.<sup>25</sup> Without income, the regime began to spend through its foreign reserves rapidly, and foreign investors also began to withdraw from Iraq as the war dragged on.<sup>26</sup> To stay afloat, Saddam

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<sup>22</sup> Nuri Najm, *Fi al-Harb wa-l-Salam* [In War and Peace], (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriyya lil-Tiba'a, 1986), 5.

<sup>23</sup> CIA Records Search Tool [Hereafter: CREST], "Iraq: An Economy under Siege," January 1984, CIA-RDP84500927R0003000020003-7.

<sup>24</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume VII, 1982-83, 588.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Volume V, 1980-81: 597.

<sup>26</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/4168, October 13, 1981; Cockburn, "Where Guns Fail"; CREST, "Iraq: An Economy under Siege," January 1984, CIA-RDP84500927R0003000020003-7.

began to take out foreign loans, most from Gulf countries. In 1982, Iraq was borrowing \$1 billion *per month* from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to pay for war costs.<sup>27</sup> As Isam al-Khafaji describes it, Iraq transitioned from a rentier state dependent on oil revenues to a rentier state dependent on foreign loans, offered in generous terms by Gulf rulers in exchange for Saddam's military protection against Iranian aggression.<sup>28</sup> Though these loans kept Iraq's economy from collapsing during the eight years of war, Saddam's assumption that these were 'grants' rather than 'loans' ultimately sowed the seeds of his war with Kuwait in 1990.

One by one, the regime began to renege on its construction contracts with its international partners. The crowning achievement of all the regime's frantic development and construction work was meant to be Baghdad's hosting of the Non-Aligned Movement summit in 1982, and the government had spent \$7 billion on infrastructure in the capital city to prepare for this honor.<sup>29</sup> But the regime's dream of insulating Baghdad from war officially came to an end in August 1982, when the organizers of the Non-Aligned Movement summit decided at the last minute to move the meeting from Baghdad to India because of the dangers posed by the war. Despite the regime's best efforts to protect Baghdad, it could ignore reality no longer. In November 1982, Saddam announced the start of a new austerity program, slashing expenditures in nearly every area apart from the war effort.<sup>30</sup> By 1986, all development work unrelated to the war stopped completely—and never resumed again to any significant degree under Saddam's rule, due to the economic restrictions imposed by sanctions in the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> From this point on, Baghdad's landscape would change because of war, rather than because of modernization schemes.

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<sup>27</sup> Murray and Woods, *Iran-Iraq War*, 188-189.

<sup>28</sup> al-Khafaji, "War as a Vehicle": 272-273.

<sup>29</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, "July Political and Religious Celebrations in Iraq," August 8, 1981; CADN 54PO/B/5, Political Dispatch, July 4, 1981; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 301.

<sup>30</sup> Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 301.

<sup>31</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume X, 1986: 376.



## War comes to Baghdad: Social Disruptions

The declaration of war against Iran led to a pronounced shift in how the Ba‘thist regime governed Iraqi society. As previous scholars have noted, war provided the regime with new motivation to expand the scope of its domestic surveillance, mobilize more citizens into state and party organizations and initiatives, and bind Iraqis ever more closely to the regime through a system of rewards and punishments based on new categories of privilege and belonging.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the very act of conscripting hundreds of thousands of soldiers and mobilizing civilians into new party organizations had unintended social and economic consequences for daily life in the capital city as ordinary people struggled to adapt to their abrupt introduction to the realities of total war.

### *New Categories of Citizens*

As Dina Khoury wrote in *Iraq in Wartime*, the Ba‘th Party militarized Iraqi society through its experiences in the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars, creating new social categories of “inclusion and exclusion” based on one’s participation in the war and transforming the way ordinary Iraqis interacted with the government.<sup>33</sup> This process began in the months before declaring war on Iran, the regime began to re-categorize Iraqi society according to new categories of belonging and privilege. Saddam had faced a conundrum: how could he justify waging war on another Muslim-majority country? His solution was to frame the conflict instead as one between Arabs and Persians, tying the current conflict to a long history of pre-Islamic and Islamic-era wars between Arab and Persian empires (Saddam’s preferred name for the Iran-Iraq War, *Qadisiyyat Saddam*, referred to the battle of Qadisiyya in 637 C.E. when Arab Muslim armies defeated Zoroastrian Persian forces).<sup>34</sup> To this end, Saddam encouraged students, academics, and journalists to publish research and tracts on

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<sup>32</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 6-7, 50; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 146-159.

<sup>33</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 2-3.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Davis, *Memories of State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 183, 187.

the historic enmity between Persians and Arabs, enlisting religious texts, historic sources, and even archeological artifacts to bolster this interpretation.<sup>35</sup>

The regime's first move was to single out 'Persian' Iraqis, whose identification documents prior to the colonial creation of modern Iraq had belonged to the Persian Empire, rather than to the Ottoman Empire (the regime used a derisive term, *Shu'ubi*, for these Iraqis that had *taba'iyya Iraniyya*, or an "Iranian nature.") Though many of these families viewed themselves as Arabs or Kurds (not Persians) and had lived within the modern borders of Iraq with Iraqi citizenship for generations, the regime viewed them suspiciously as crypto-Iranians who could form a fifth column.<sup>36</sup> Many saw this as an escalation of the regime's suspicion towards all Iraqi Shi'a, not just 'Persian' Iraqis, and a contributing factor to the rise of sectarianism in modern Iraq.<sup>37</sup>

A surge in deportations of 'Persian' Iraqis took place in April 1980, after an assassination attempt on a top Iraqi official, Tariq 'Aziz, reportedly carried out by an Iranian agent.<sup>38</sup> Right after, the regime issued a decree stating that any Iranian citizens in the country would be immediately deported, and later decrees stripped those Iraqis with Persian backgrounds of their Iraqi citizenship and confiscated their assets; houses of deportees were later distributed as gifts to regime insiders.<sup>39</sup> According to estimates at the time by the CIA, over 60,000 Shi'a with Persian backgrounds were deported by 1985, but scholars currently estimate that as many as hundreds of thousands were

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<sup>35</sup> 'Adnan Rashid al-Jabbari, *Al-Wathiqat al-Tarikhiyya fi al-Nizā' al-Iraqiyya al-Iraniyya* [Historical Documents in the Iraqi-Iranian Conflict] (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafa al-'Amma, 1995), 77, 80, 112.

<sup>36</sup> For a fuller account of the regime's shifting rhetoric regarding 'Persian' Iraqis, see Davis, *Memories of State*, 184-188.

<sup>37</sup> Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, 69.

<sup>38</sup> Ali Babakhan, "The Deportation of Shi'is during the Iran-Iraq War: Causes and Consequences," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues*, edited by Faleh Abdul-Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 193.

<sup>39</sup> Babakhan, "Deportation of Shi'is," 200; Murray and Woods, *Iran-Iraq War*, 134. For files related to the distribution of houses confiscated from deported Iraqis, see: Party secretariat to Saddam Hussein, October 5, 1988, BRCC 01-3266-0001-0206; Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, "Report," June 29, 1985, BRCC 01-2245-0003-0362,

deported over the course of the war.<sup>40</sup> Even in the final months of the war, when the threat of an insider attack was lessened, Ba‘th Party members were still being scrutinized and asked to produce their Iraqi nationality certificate in order to prove that they did not have Persian origins.<sup>41</sup>

The social disruption of these deportations was profound. For Baghdad’s majority-Shi‘i population, the process was designed to be terrorizing: deportations often occurred without any warning, in the middle of the night, and families were prohibited from taking their possessions with them.<sup>42</sup> Many of the deportees from Baghdad were merchants and shopkeepers, including a large proportion of jewelers, whose stores were shut down overnight and their goods confiscated.<sup>43</sup> Mixed families were targeted: Arab Iraqi wives of deported ‘Persian’ Iraqi men were not allowed to accompany their husbands into exile in Iran, and Arab Iraqi men married to ‘Persian’ women were offered a financial award for divorcing their wives.<sup>44</sup> As a result of these deportations, all citizens, Arab and non-Arab alike, were forced into new ways of conceptualizing what Iraqi nationality meant. A heightened sense of suspicion permeated society as the regime pushed citizens into viewing one another as potential Iranian agents, and even children were urged to inform on their parents and relatives. These deportations contributed to a process of redefining Iraqi political identities based on sect and ethnicity.<sup>45</sup>

Likewise, prisoners of war were also tainted by associations with the Persian enemy. Throughout the course of the war, tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers were captured and detained in Iranian camps where they were exposed to harsh physical treatment and relentless indoctrination efforts. Khoury reports that detainees were pressured to “convert” into supporters of Khomeini,

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<sup>40</sup> *CREST, Iraq’s Exiled Shia Dissidents*, June 1985, CIA-RDP86T00587R000200250003-8; Babakhan, “Deportation of Shi‘is,” 184.

<sup>41</sup> Table Evaluating Party Members, undated [1988?], BRCC 037-2-5-0115.

<sup>42</sup> Babakhan, “Deportation of Shi‘is,” 184.

<sup>43</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/3680, British Embassy in Baghdad, April 1980.

<sup>44</sup> Murray and Woods, *Iran-Iraq War*, 133.

<sup>45</sup> Davis, *Memories of State*, 193.

including under threat of torture. In order to survive, many Iraqi prisoners of war succumbed, at least outwardly, to the propaganda and indoctrination.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, their mistreatment did not end there: upon returning home, sometimes over a decade after their initial capture, Ba‘thist security agents monitored POWs closely, believing that they could be operating as undercover agents for Iran.<sup>47</sup> Many former POWs had difficulties reintegrating to their former lives in Baghdad, cast under suspicion as potential collaborators with the enemy and blocked in their applications to schools or jobs.<sup>48</sup>

On the flip side, the war created new categories of privilege: soldiers, martyrs, and recipients of medals of bravery all gained a new elevated status that included tangible material benefits alongside its social and political perks.<sup>49</sup> The regime started off lavishly rewarding families of ‘martyrs’ (soldiers killed in action) with ample monthly stipends, land and housing benefits, and even gifts of new cars.<sup>50</sup> As the number of martyrs rose and the Iraqi economy constricted, these rewards were scaled back somewhat and less consistently provided, though Iraqis came to expect (and demand) that such rewards be fulfilled (see Chapter Four).<sup>51</sup>

One function of these rewards, medals, and new social categories was to allow the regime to identify and maintain close ties with Iraqi families who had lost relatives to the war in the hopes of avoiding a scenario in which the death of a soldier would create popular resentment of the regime.<sup>52</sup> For this reason, the regime created special committees of neighborhood-level party officials called

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<sup>46</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 107-110.

<sup>47</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 155-156.

<sup>48</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 106; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 156.

<sup>49</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 157-159.

<sup>50</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/4126, “Annual Summary of 1980,” December 31, 1980; al-Khafaji, “War as a Vehicle”: 286-287; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 167-168, 149-150. Benefits for those wounded or disabled in the war were enumerated in a RCC decree: RCC Decree #356, April 26, 1986, *BRCC* 088-5-3-523.

<sup>51</sup> In 1983, the regime introduced a cap on martyrs’ benefits: Committee for Maintaining Ties to Families of Martyrs to the Baghdad Organization, “Forwarding Request,” May 5, 1986, *BRCC* 088-5-3-354. See also: Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 168-169.

<sup>52</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 69.

“Committees for Maintaining Ties to Martyrs’ Families,” who were instructed to regularly meet with families of martyrs in their jurisdictions, and new holidays and party events created during the war (described below) created new opportunities to involve these families in regime functions.<sup>53</sup> In theory, these meetings provided ordinary families with opportunities to share grievances and make requests—which were sometimes successful—while other families reported feeling overlooked and forgotten by the regime, despite these efforts. For example, a group of families of soldiers who were missing in action wrote to the regime to complain about the insufficiency of the pensions they received and, in general, their feeling that the regime did not care about them. They complained it took as long as two years to receive promised benefits and aid.<sup>54</sup> Others came to depend on the regime’s largesse, especially when their lost family member had been an important wage earner for the family, and thus strengthened their ties to the regime in practice, regardless of what their personal sentiments might have been about the war or the government.

### *Consequences of Mass Mobilization*

Though the regime tried to turn soldiers and martyrs into venerated social categories through top-down programs and policies, the reality was that mass mobilization set off a number of unintended social and economic disruptions that were keenly felt in the capital. The regime initially tried to limit conscription during the first few months of the war, before a series of military defeats in the winter of 1980-81 confirmed that this war would not be quickly won.<sup>55</sup> By 1981, the regime implemented a national draft, calling up nearly 200,000 conscripts by the end of the war’s first year.<sup>56</sup> With national conscription, the Iraqi military grew rapidly: from an estimated 250,000 at the war’s

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<sup>53</sup> Committee for Maintaining Ties to Families of Martyrs to the Baghdad Organization, “Forwarding Request,” May 5, 1986, BRCC 088-5-3-354.

<sup>54</sup> Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, “Meeting,” April 24, 1985, BRCC 01-2245-0003-0465.

<sup>55</sup> Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 147.

<sup>56</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume V: 599.

beginning in 1980 to 500,000 by 1984, and nearly one million by its end in 1988.<sup>57</sup> Over the 8 years of war, an estimated three million Iraqi men (25% of Iraq's total population) served in the military for at least some period of time.<sup>58</sup>

This conscription was mandatory for young men beginning on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, but eventually, conscription was expanded to include men up to age 54.<sup>59</sup> Youths younger than eighteen were encouraged to volunteer before compulsory conscription began, promising them “preferred status.” Non-Iraqis were recruited to join the military, especially Egyptians, who made up the largest group of foreign Arabs in the country at that time.<sup>60</sup> Though conscripts were originally supposed to serve two-year terms, the reality was that most soldiers served for the entirety of the war.<sup>61</sup> As Dina Khoury points out, “Almost every Iraqi family had one, often two or three, men serving on the front. It would seem that war, like death, was the great equalizer.”<sup>62</sup> Aware of the hardship mass conscription posed for the population, Ba‘thist authors encouraged the population to practice “patience [*sabr*]” and “steadfastness [*sumud*],” which form the “essential basis for victory [*asas muhim lil-nasr*].”<sup>63</sup>

As compulsory conscription into the official armed forces emptied Baghdad homes of adult men, the regime pressured women, teenagers, and older men to volunteer for the Popular Army militia [*al-Jaysh al-Sha‘bi*]. “We say without hesitation that all Iraqis are prepared—children, the elderly, men, and women, of all different backgrounds and occupations—to fight until they

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<sup>57</sup> Faleh A. Jabar, “The War Generation in Iraq: A Case of Failed Etatist Nationalism,” in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, edited by Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 123; Tripp, “The Iran-Iraq War and the Iraqi State”: 104; Hiro, *The Longest War*, 132, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Jabar, “The War Generation in Iraq”: 124.

<sup>59</sup> Hiro, *Longest War*, 196; CADN 54PO/B/5, dispatches from July 31, August 7, August 11, and September 1982; Bengio, “Iraq,” in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume VIII, 1983-84, edited by Haim Shaked and Daniel Dishon (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies), 474-475.

<sup>60</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VIII, 475.

<sup>61</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 95.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Sabah Sulayman, *Adwa’ ala al-Harb al-Iraqiyya al-‘Iraniyya* [Shedding Light on the Iraq-Iran War], (Baghdad: Al-Maktaba al-Wataniyya bi-Baghdad, 1981), 178.

accomplish what they must [*yuqatilu ila an yuhaqqiqu al-nata'ij al-matlub tabqiqha*],” Saddam proclaimed.<sup>64</sup> Though the Popular Army had existed since 1970, it was transformed during the Iran-Iraq War from a relatively small, ideological force of Ba‘thists tasked with protecting the regime to an alternate tool for mass mobilization with a prominent role in fighting the war.<sup>65</sup> Expanding the Popular Army was done in part to offset Iran’s numerical superiority, since Iran’s population size of 38 million in 1980 dwarfed Iraq’s population of 13 million. It was also done to consolidate the regime’s authority and surveillance over the largest possible swath of the population at a time when Saddam himself was consolidating his own authority as the country’s new president. Furthermore, as a coup-proofing measure, creating two separate fighting forces minimized the chances the military could overthrow Saddam.<sup>66</sup> Finally, it was designed to increase the population’s complicity in and support for the war: the regime gambled that the more actively involved the population, the more committed and supportive they would be to the war cause.<sup>67</sup> The Popular Army was often used for propaganda purposes: new recruits were sent off to the front in big, public displays in the capital attended by top regime and military officials, and returned back home in grand parades capped off with obsequious displays of loyalty to Saddam.<sup>68</sup>

For these reasons, there was tremendous pressure on a wide range of civilians to volunteer for the Popular Army and even attempts at forcible recruitment. Middle-aged and even elderly men, too old for conscription, were urged to enlist: the regime raised the maximum age of Popular Army volunteers to 65, purportedly “in response to popular demand” by an enthusiastic elderly population ready to serve their country.<sup>69</sup> In reality, ‘volunteer’ enlistment was often done coercively: there were

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Sulayman, *Adwa’ ala al-Harb*, 179.

<sup>65</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 146-147; Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VIII, 475.

<sup>66</sup> Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 134.

<sup>67</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume V, 582; Hiro, *The Longest War*, 89; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 99.

<sup>68</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “The Iraqi Popular Army and the General Mobilization Against Iran,” January 30, 1982; Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume X, 373.

<sup>69</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “The Iraqi Population During the War (II),” December 22, 1980.

reports that the regime conducted surprise raids on young men loitering in Baghdad to force them into enlisting, and volunteer drives at high schools made it more difficult for students to avoid recruitment.<sup>70</sup>

Women had been part of the Popular Army since 1976 (and they were also allowed to voluntarily enlist in the official Iraqi military, as well).<sup>71</sup> Tens of thousands of women were in the Popular Army, and in 1981, the Mayor of Baghdad opened volunteer recruitment centers in Baghdad specifically for women to encourage still more to enlist.<sup>72</sup> The inclusion of women in Iraq's fighting forces was highlighted in regime propaganda, contrasting the 'modern' and 'progressive' attitudes of Iraq with the new theocratic regime in Iran.<sup>73</sup> Saddam gave countless speeches with titles like, "The Party and Women's Freedom," "Women and the Building of a New Society," and "Liberating Women, Family, and Society," all of which highlighted how the Ba'th Party "freed" Iraqi women from the political oppression of previous political regimes, from oppression by Iraqi society and their families, and from the would-be oppression by Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>74</sup>

The result of regime recruitment efforts into the Popular Army was a massive secondary fighting force that grew to 400,000 in 1982 and 650,000 by 1985 and beyond by the end of the war, rivaling the size of the official armed forces.<sup>75</sup> However, as a fighting force, the Popular Army was a

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<sup>70</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VII, 476.

<sup>71</sup> Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, 87.

<sup>72</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, May 9, 1981. Women served in combat roles, as well as in medical and administrative positions, in Iraq's armed forces and popular army. See Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 183.

<sup>73</sup> The Ba'th regime had long promoted its progressive promotion of women's education, athletics, paid labor, and maternity leave policies as evidence of Iraq's modernity. As one author boasted, "When today we enter any [Iraqi] government office, we find in it the influence of women working there...sitting side-by-side with her male colleague, cooperating together..." (*'andama nadkbul al-yawm ayy da'ira hukumiyya najid fi-ha atharan li-imra'a tashghal wazifa...tujalis akbiha al-muwazẓif janban ila janf wa tata'wan*) 'Abd al-Rahman Sulayman al-Darbandi, *Al-Mar'a al-'Iraqiyya al-Mu'asira* [The Modern Iraqi Woman], volume 2 (Baghdad: Wazirat al-Tarbiya wa-l-Ta'lim, 1968), 12.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Saddam Hussein, "Al-Mar'a wa-l-'A'ila wa Mujtama' al-Thawra" [Women, Family, and the Society of the Revolution], in *Al-Usra wa-l-Numum al-Sukkani*, 44. Saddam originally gave this speech at a conference of the General Federation of Iraqi Women on July 3, 1988.

<sup>75</sup> Hiro, *The Longest War*, 89, 132, 195.



disappointment. Poorly trained for a period of only two months, these often reluctant recruits could not match the martial skills of the increasingly professionalized Iraqi military, and the presence of Popular Army units on the frontlines was often to the detriment of the battle's outcome. Scholars have referred to the Popular Army as "hardly more than an armed mob."<sup>76</sup> Though the regime continued to rotate Popular Army units to the front, it was often done to boost the morale of conscripted soldiers as a show of public support, or to provide manual labor and repair services on the rear lines.<sup>77</sup> The most effective use of the Popular Army was in tracking and apprehending deserters.<sup>78</sup>

As a public relations tool, the Popular Army was also less than a success. It was quickly dubbed the "unpopular army" (*al-jaysh al-la sha'bi*), owing to resentment over the regime's heavy-handed recruitment efforts: for example, a short-lived effort to force university students to spend their summers in the Popular Army was dropped because of widespread outrage.<sup>79</sup> There were other forms of pushback and resentment against these mass mobilization efforts. One strategy university students used to delay conscription was to purposefully fail their final exams and then enroll to re-take their classes the next year.<sup>80</sup> More ominously for the regime, desertion and absenteeism became serious problems. In December 1983, the regime instituted the death penalty for anyone caught deserting, and later threatened deserters with gruesome corporal punishments, including cutting off ears.<sup>81</sup> However, desertion rates remained high, underscoring the extent to which the population resented conscription demands.

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<sup>76</sup> Murray and Woods, *Iran-Iraq War*, 183.

<sup>77</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, "The Iraqi Popular Army and General Mobilization against Iran," January 30, 1982.

<sup>78</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 100; Murray and Woods, *Iran-Iraq War*, 183-184.

<sup>79</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VIII, 476; CADN 54PO/B/6, "Mobilization of Iraqi Students," June 29, 1986; CADN 54PO/B/6, "Monthly Summary for September," October 13, 1986; Bengio, "Iraq," Volume X, 372-373.

<sup>80</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VIII, 475.

<sup>81</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party*, 152-154; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 154-155; Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VIII, 475.

For those civilians unable to serve in the military or the Popular Army, the regime still tried to mobilize them into the war effort by pushing for cash donations or volunteer work for the nation. Students, workers, and farmers were urged to attend “indoctrination rallies” (*hamlat taʿwīya*) about the importance of the war effort and volunteer for manual labor projects benefitting military campaigns.<sup>82</sup> Others responded to calls for blood donations, while women were pressured to donate their gold jewelry for the war.<sup>83</sup> As political scientist Thom Workman points out, jewelry donation drives were particularly onerous, since jewelry gifted to women during their weddings was considered women’s personal property—not shared by her husband—and thus an important source of personal financial security.<sup>84</sup>

The sum effect of all these various mobilization efforts was to bring all citizens—young and old, male and female, party members and independents, rich and poor—into a single national project, whether willingly or under duress. At the same time, the consequences of mass mobilization had a direct impact not only on the soldiers sent to the front, but also for those left behind at home. Men aged 18 to 54 largely disappeared from the city as they served a seemingly never-ending series of rotations on the frontlines, leaving women to make up for the loss of wage earners while caring for their families on their own. Morale dropped under the weight of these burdens, notwithstanding admonishments by Saddam for mothers and wives to remain “steadfast” when communicating with their husbands and sons on the battlefield: “whenever [soldiers] hear encouraging words from a mother or from a wife, they become more and more brave.”<sup>85</sup> Despite regime efforts, French

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<sup>82</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume V, 582; Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume X, 372

<sup>83</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VII, 567.

<sup>84</sup> Workman, *Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War*, 161.

<sup>85</sup> Hussein, “*Al-Ummahat wa-l-Sumud*” [Mothers and Steadfastness], in *Al-Usra wa-l-Numum al-Sukkani*, 142. Saddam originally gave this statement on February 19, 1981 when meeting with the mother of a soldier; location of the meeting unknown.

embassy officials noted that, “There is no doubt... that the population has gained a certain weariness as each family has been tested.”<sup>86</sup>

Perhaps the greatest impact of the war’s mass mobilization was on the women of Baghdad. Women joined the paid work force in unprecedented numbers: female employees held 51% of all administrative jobs and comprised 31% of the public sector, in total making up 25% of the formal labor force in the country during the war.<sup>87</sup> The General Federation of Iraqi Women, the national Ba’th Party women’s organization, took advantage of the regime’s reliance on female labor to push for a number of new benefits and freedoms, including new rights related to inheritance, marriage, and divorce.<sup>88</sup> Childcare was provided as a state benefit for working women, and the regime invested more resources into increasing the female literacy rate in order to bring still more women into the work force.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, the economic burden of running a female-headed household was crushing for some, given the paltry salaries given to soldiers, inflation rates averaging 40-50%, and the fact that women were often significantly underpaid for their work in the labor force in comparison to men.<sup>90</sup> A petition from the wife of a POW illustrates the fate of many of Iraq’s female-headed households. Living in the Dura neighborhood of Baghdad, this woman was supporting ten children on her absentee husband’s monthly soldier’s salary of 87 ID (approximately \$260 at the time). She was threatened with eviction for falling behind on rent payments. In response to her petition, local party officials recommended that she be given a monthly stipend of 100-150 ID (\$300-\$450) until

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<sup>86</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, Political Dispatch, December 3, 1982.

<sup>87</sup> Hiro, *The Longest War*, 139; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 77.

<sup>89</sup> Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 302.

<sup>90</sup> Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War*, 159-160.

her husband returned.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately for many women, the regime steadily decreased the amount of aid it provided over time due to its own budgetary problems; the number of impoverished female-headed households increased steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

### *Crime and Class Divisions*

In many respects, the lifestyles of the upper, middle, and lower classes began to diverge more sharply during the war. The financial costs of the war, the physical destruction of much of Iraq's oil production and export infrastructure, and government-imposed austerity measures had noticeable effects on daily life in the capital. Rents in Baghdad increased by 200-300% over the course of the 1980s.<sup>92</sup> By 1982, staple vegetables in the Iraqi diet like cucumbers and eggplants increased in price by 600%, the price of chicken doubled, and by 1984, eggs cost \$19 per dozen.<sup>93</sup> Overall, inflation hovered between 40-50% throughout the eight years of war, eroding paychecks and savings. Restrictions and disruptions on imports forced the lower and middle classes to go without amenities that were previously affordable. The difficulty of obtaining spare parts made it increasingly expensive to maintain an air conditioner or a car, pushing these items out of reach for even many middle class families.<sup>94</sup> Things that were once basic staples in the capital—including cigarettes, infant formula, and candles (essential for the blackouts that increasingly plagued the city)—were now affordable only for the well-to-do and for those with access to smugglers.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Letter from a woman to the Vice President, January 9, 1989, BRCC 01-2535-0000-0605; Office of the Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, "Issuing an Opinion," February 13, 1989, BRCC 01-2535-0000-0597. See Chapter Four for more petitions.

<sup>92</sup> Ofra, "Iraq," Volume V, 582-583, 597; CADN 54PO/B/5, Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, April 24, 1982; TN4, FCO 8/3680, December 9, 1980.

<sup>93</sup> CREST, "Iraq: An Economy under Siege," January 1984, CIA-RDP84500927R0003000020003-7; CADN 54PO/B/70, Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, February 15, 1982.

<sup>94</sup> CADN 54PO/B/70, "Note for the Ambassador," April 19, 1982.

<sup>95</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume X, 376; CREST, "Iraq: An Economy under Siege," January 1984, CIA-RDP84500927R0003000020003-7; CADN 54PO/B/5, "The Iraqi Population During the War (II)," December 22, 1980.

As a result of these austerity measures and economic disruptions, social and political tensions began to flare: soldiers began to be posted at gas stations to maintain control as lines grew longer in the face of petrol shortages (cars could only fill up with gasoline every-other day according to the last digit of their license plate).<sup>96</sup> The CIA reported that shoppers “shouted antigovernment chants” when milk and yogurt were abruptly taken off the shelves and sent to the army instead. Even members of parliament, ordinarily obsequiously loyal to the regime, publicly voiced criticisms about rising prices of staples.<sup>97</sup>

To deflect blame from the regime, Saddam began to speak out against smugglers, hoarders, war profiteers, and black market agents as the causes of these consumer shortages. Black markets flourished during the war, and the regime publicized its efforts to counteract these trends and crack down on any perpetrators. The Ba’th Party established neighborhood-based “Economic Surveillance Committees” to coordinate monitoring of shops and marketplaces for selling smuggled goods or selling at prices above those set by the state.<sup>98</sup> Though a decree by the Revolutionary Command Council in 1984 threatened 15 years imprisonment and the confiscation of assets for any shopkeeper who sold goods for higher than set prices or who hoarded goods with the aim of war profiteering, it remained a widespread phenomenon in Baghdad during the war.<sup>99</sup> Adding to social tensions in the capital, citizens were pushed to inform on one another if they knew of “illegal economic activity.”<sup>100</sup> To add incentive, informants were promised 20% of all confiscated goods as a reward for actionable

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<sup>96</sup> Ofra, “Iraq,” Volume V, 582-583, 597; *CADN* 54PO/B/5, Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, April 24, 1982; *FCO* 8/3680, December 9, 1980.

<sup>97</sup> *CREST*, “Iraq: An Economy under Siege,” January 1984, CIA-RDP84500927R0003000020003-7.

<sup>98</sup> First Deputy to the Prime Minister to the party secretariat, “Popular Economic Surveillance,” December 19, 1985, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0496.

<sup>99</sup> Revolutionary Command Council decree #1315, December 17, 1984, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0487.

<sup>100</sup> Revolutionary Command Council Decree #39, “Popular Economic Surveillance,” January 22, 1984, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0045.

intelligence about hoarding or black market activities.<sup>101</sup> As Chapter Six addresses, these illegal economic practices developed during wartime only increased in the 1990s.

The social and political consequences of Baghdad's economic downturn was a new erosion in trust between neighbors—a trend that would be dramatically exacerbated during the years of economic sanctions from 1990 to 2003. Families and neighbors that had previously helped one another during moments of hardship or personal crises found that they had less to share with the spike in food prices and the overall costs of living. Rumors of black market dealings and the formation of new economic surveillance committees added a new aspect of life that was subject to surveillance and snitching, even by close friends or family members. The realities of new economic hardships meant that there were many more families willing to dabble in purchasing smuggled goods or seek out hard-to-find foods from the black markets, but the political stakes were high, and those who were less wealthy or who had fewer regime connections were more vulnerable to arrest and punishment. Resentment against the visible new wealth of war profiteers divided Baghdad's poorer neighborhoods from the wealthy. Though the wealthy, including the wives of top regime officials, were called upon to donate to the war cause with money and gold jewelry, there was no question that the burdens of war would be born primarily by the poor.<sup>102</sup>

## **Reordering Time**

Unable to deny the realities of war even in the cosmopolitan capital after 1982, Saddam pivoted to embark on an ambitious nationalist project designed to bolster support for the war and build a cult of personality around his persona. As a result, life in Baghdad was reordered around a series of new Ba'thist holidays, war-related media programming, and a deliberate reorientation towards Islamic rhythms of time, including religious holidays and pilgrimages. Military time became

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<sup>101</sup> Revolutionary Command Council Decree #97, January 22, 1985, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0484.

<sup>102</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VII, 568.

yet another way rhythms of life in the capital changed: conscriptions as a new rite of passage for youth, significant battles, and furloughs for soldiers all became new temporal reference points that restructured life for civilians in the capital as well as for soldiers in the field.

A flurry of new state and party holidays were introduced in the 1980s, partly designed to provide distractions from the tragedies and hardships of war.<sup>103</sup> At the same time, they functioned as highly scripted, ritualized occasions for the regime to build and maintain ties with the population while demanding outward displays of loyalty. As historian Aaron Faust argues, despite the artificiality of many of these ‘celebrations,’ one can only go through the motions of performing rituals of loyalty to the regime so many times before it starts to take a deeper hold.<sup>104</sup> Examining these holidays provides an opportunity to see how the regime tried to actively cultivate support for Saddam’s rule and for the War.<sup>105</sup>

In 1982 a political stunt became the occasion for a new national holiday. In November of that year, Saddam called for a popular referendum of his rule, meant to dispel rumors that the war had left Saddam vulnerable to a possible coup. In response, “millions” of Iraqis were reported to have turned out in the street chanting pro-Saddam slogans and declaring their fidelity to the leader.<sup>106</sup> However, British diplomats wryly noted that newspapers published lists of acceptable slogans in advance of these ‘spontaneous’ rallies, and observed party officials rounding up people to attend the parades. They estimated that in Baghdad only “tens of thousands” attended, rather than the millions claimed by the regime.<sup>107</sup> Government officials presented Saddam with oaths of loyalty written in their own blood, which soon became a standard way for any Iraqi citizen to signal fidelity

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 566.

<sup>104</sup> Faust, *Ba’thification of Iraq*, 67.

<sup>105</sup> Elie Podeh, *The Politics of National Celebrations in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VII, 565-566.

<sup>107</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/4697, “Speech of Saddam Hussein to Iraqi Cabinet, and Popular Demonstrations in Baghdad,” November 15, 1982.

to the regime.<sup>108</sup> This event became known as the *bay'a*, in reference to loyalty oaths given to leaders throughout Islamic history, and was celebrated annually on November 14 of each year.<sup>109</sup> This Saddam-centric holiday coincided in 1985 with the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (which rotates a few days every year since it is celebrated according to the lunar Islamic calendar). French diplomats sardonically noted that this overlap created widespread confusion among party officials about which man should be more celebrated.<sup>110</sup>

Not content with annual celebrations of the 1982 loyalty oath, Saddam's birthday became an official state holiday in 1983 known as "Saddam Hussein Day," celebrated on April 28. The French Embassy described these festivities with a tone of mild disbelief: celebrations stretched for two days, and all the main streets in Baghdad were covered in garlands, pictures of the president, and flags. Temporary museum displays commemorating the president's achievements were installed throughout the city in prominent locations. A plaza in the posh neighborhood of al-Mansur displayed 60 enormous portraits of Saddam. Children performed songs, dance recitals, and poetry in honor of the president, and state offices hosted numerous speeches. Despite the somber realities of war, Baghdad was nevertheless transformed into a "carnival atmosphere," and images of the capital in celebration were broadcast on television throughout the country.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, the entire month of July was devoted to celebrating the Ba'thist regime. State holidays had already included the establishment of the Iraqi republic (July 14) and the anniversary of the Ba'th Party's rise to power (July 17-30), but now expanded to include the anniversary of

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<sup>108</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VII, 565-566. Though it is rare to find an actual copy of a blood oath preserved in the Ba'th Party archives, memos referring to receiving them are plentiful. One copy of a blood oath from the 1980s can be seen at BRCC 01-3404-0002-0048.

<sup>109</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VII, 565-566.

<sup>110</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, "Monthly Summary for October and November," December 8, 1986.

<sup>111</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, "Celebration of Saddam's Birthday," May 5, 1985.



Saddam's ascension to the presidency (July 16). All three of these commemorations ran together into a series of public events, parades, speeches, and celebrations in praise of Saddam and his regime.<sup>112</sup>

While these state celebrations were meant to be distractions from the war, the regime also introduced new holidays to commemorate and honor those fighting as a means of controlling the public narrative about the war. The anniversary of the start of the Iran-Iraq War (September 22) was first celebrated in 1981.<sup>113</sup> Martyrs' Day, celebrated on December 1<sup>st</sup>, soon became one of the most important occasions. In 1993, the program of events for Martyrs' Day included dawn prayers in all mosques and churches, a 21-gun salute during evening prayers, media programs about martyrs, and recitations of patriotic poems and speeches in schools and state offices.<sup>114</sup>

Muslim religious holidays took on new cultural and political importance in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. In an effort to counteract Ayatollah Khomeini's framing of the Iran-Iraq War as one between a Shi'i state and an apostate regime, Saddam took conscious steps to not only bolster his religious credentials, but to actively participate in and appropriate Shi'i symbols and holy days for political purposes. According to French diplomats, Saddam's goal was to minimize divisions between Sunnis and Shi'a and "make sure that sectarian loyalties did not undermine people's sense of national devotion." In particular, he wanted to be sure that Shi'i soldiers, who made up the majority of Iraqi conscripts, remained loyal to the Ba'hist regime. Somewhat paradoxically then, Saddam praying in the Shi'i city of Karbala was meant to "neutralize" the religious aspect of the war even as it drew attention to Islamic rituals and practices.<sup>115</sup> The willingness of Saddam to wade into religious topics at all was a marked departure from the Ba'hist regime's earlier promotion of a secular Iraqi nationalism that tried to keep religion out of the political realm entirely: previously,

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<sup>112</sup> *CADN 54PO/B/5*, Political Dispatch, August 11, 1981.

<sup>113</sup> *CADN 54PO/B/5*, Political Dispatch, August 8, 1981.

<sup>114</sup> Party secretariat to the Military Office and the Leaders of Party Branches, "Celebrating Martyrs' Day," November 7, 1993, *BRCC 01-2214-0000-0119*.

<sup>115</sup> *CADN 54PO/B/5*, "The Iraqi Population During the War," October 30, 1980.

Saddam had “refuse[d] to take account of any communal particularities” and “advocated an ‘Iraqistan’ that transcends [religious and ethnic] antagonisms.”<sup>116</sup>

As soon as the war began, Saddam began to refashion himself as a pious president. In a highly orchestrated media event, Saddam prayed in public for the first time in a mosque in Baghdad during the first week of the war.<sup>117</sup> Two weeks later, he made a similarly publicized trip to Karbala to pray in a conspicuously Shi‘i setting.<sup>118</sup> Even in the midst of austerity measures, the regime noticeably increased its budget for building mosques, and Shi‘i areas were special beneficiaries of these construction projects.<sup>119</sup> Saddam hosted an Islamic conference in 1983, also designed to bolster his religious credentials while contradicting Khomeini’s allegations that the Ba‘thist regime was atheistic.<sup>120</sup>

Fitting with this approach, the Ba‘th Party pushed for religious holidays to become a more central feature of public life. For example, foreign observers noted that even in 1980 and 1981, many Baghdadis did not appear to observe the month-long Ramadan fast, and most restaurants in the capital remained open for the month, suggesting that businesses had plenty of non-fasting customers.<sup>121</sup> In 1982, the regime made an abrupt change to enforce public observance of the fast: no one was allowed to eat or drink in public during daylight hours.<sup>122</sup> In 1986, the regime went further and banned the sale of alcohol nationwide during the entire month. Bars and nightclubs were likewise ordered to close for the whole month, while restaurants could open at night—so long as they did not serve alcohol in the evenings.<sup>123</sup> Shi‘i religious holidays were also honored by the regime

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<sup>116</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “Islamic Politics in Ba‘thist Iraq,” March 18, 1981.

<sup>117</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “The Iraqi Population During the War,” October 30, 1980.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Hiro, *The Longest War*, 62.

<sup>120</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VII, 578.

<sup>121</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “July Political and Religious Celebrations in Iraq,” August 8, 1981; CADN 54PO/B/5, “The Iraqi Population During the War,” October 30, 1980.

<sup>122</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VII, 578.

<sup>123</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, “Monthly Summary from April – May 10,” May 17, 1986.

to an unprecedented degree. During occasions like Imam ‘Ali’s birthday, Imam Hussein’s birthday, and ‘*Ashura*, Saddam and other top regime officials made official state visits to Najaf and Karbala annually throughout the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>124</sup>

At the same time, the regime sought to ensure that only state-approved versions of Islam were practiced. Saddam opened a state-affiliated “Islamic Higher Institute” to train preachers and theologians who would be pro-regime; simultaneously, he closed 86 other religious centers while arresting, exiling, or executing those religious leaders deemed to be dissidents or associated with the outlawed Da‘wa Party Shi‘i opposition group.<sup>125</sup> He reorganized the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Religious Affairs in order to bring it more closely under his oversight, and increased the practice of dispatching intelligence agents and secret police to monitor mosques and sermons.<sup>126</sup> During Ramadan, both Sunni and Shi‘i clerics were urged to denounce Khomeini and his religious teachings on television.<sup>127</sup> At the same time as the regime was publicly promoting fasting during Ramadan, they specifically forbade public *iffars* (evening meals after the hours of fasting are over) out of security concerns related to any mass gatherings.<sup>128</sup> The pilgrimage to Mecca was also carefully monitored: only men who were older than 50, or relatives of war martyrs who had not done the pilgrimage more than once previously, were permitted to go, lest young pilgrims go and become ‘contaminated’ with religious ideas that would be threatening to the Iraqi regime.<sup>129</sup> (At the same time, Saddam himself made a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1986 in order to bolster his own image as a pious leader.<sup>130</sup>)

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<sup>124</sup> See, for example: CADN 54PO/B/5, Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, March 14, 1982; CADN 54PO/B/6, “Monthly Summary for September,” October 13, 1986.

<sup>125</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume X, 379; Jabar, *The Shi‘ite Movement*, 233. RCC decree #461 from 1980 made membership in Da‘wa a capital offense.

<sup>126</sup> Hiro, *The Longest War*, 62.

<sup>127</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “July Political and Religious Celebrations in Iraq,” August 8, 1981.

<sup>128</sup> Head of the Presidential Diwan to All Ministries, “Instructions,” April 8, 1988, BRCC 01-3581-0003-0274.

<sup>129</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume X, 380.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 379.

Of all the religious holidays, the Shi‘i- specific commemorations associated with the Islamic month of Muharram were the most worrisome to the regime. A day of public mourning for the death of Imam Hussein known as *‘Ashura* involves large, emotive public processions, and forty days later, hundreds of thousands of Shi‘a would make a pilgrimage to Karbala for a ritual march known as *Ziyarat al-‘Arba’in*. Both occasions constituted not only a security risk to the regime because of the large crowds they drew, but also because these processions had a history of turning into political demonstrations. In 1977, for example, the *‘Ashura* processions turned into a spontaneous anti-regime protest in Najaf and Karbala.<sup>131</sup> In the aftermath, 2,000 were arrested and eight religious leaders were executed.<sup>132</sup> As the regime attempted to secure the loyalty of Iraqi Shi‘a, it had to walk a fine line in regards to these high holy days. In response, the regime bolstered its surveillance and control of these rituals through informants and party cadres while simultaneously trying to spread the message that these two particular rituals were Persian inventions that were “foreign” to the true practice of Shi‘ism, and thus should not be practiced.<sup>133</sup> Despite the fact that thousands of Iraqis still gathered in Najaf and Karbala during these holidays—in 1983, as many as 120,000 participated in *‘Ashura* processions in Karbala and 450,000 completed the *Ziyarat al-‘Arba’in* pilgrimage—these rituals had an uneasy legal status under Saddam’s rule, as any public processions were actively discouraged and those who participated risked arrest.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, in addition to its efforts to appropriate religious holidays, the regime also intervened into pre-existing cultural and religious practices for major life events, including funerals, to match nationalist narratives. From the outset of fighting, public funeral rituals were forbidden: no public burial services were officially permitted, nor was it accepted for houses to be draped in black fabric or for women to engage in loud, public displays of crying and grief, as was the usual custom for

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<sup>131</sup> Jabar, *The Shi‘ite Movement in Iraq*, 208-209.

<sup>132</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 25; Workman, *Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War*, 77-78.

<sup>133</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 64.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

many Iraqi families. Instead, Saddam insisted that all fallen soldiers were “martyrs,” and as martyrs, they would immediately ascend to paradise after death. As he declared in a speech during the lead up to the Iran-Iraq War, “Whoever is martyred defending life does not reject life, but rather embraces life...and, in fact, [embraces] a better life. ...And so a martyr is considered to be alive [*yu’tabar al-shahid hayyan*]....”<sup>135</sup> As such, mourning rituals were inappropriate; families were instructed to celebrate these deaths instead.<sup>136</sup> Of course, such top-down instructions were unlikely to suppress parents’ public grieving for their children, and there is little indication from the archives that the state invested much energy in enforcing these instructions strictly for ordinary casualties. As Dina Khoury notes, “For most Iraqis, the first realization of the human costs of the war came with the procession accompanying the coffin of a fallen soldier or with the cries of women in the neighborhood who had been informed of a beloved’s soldier’s death.”<sup>137</sup> (In contrast, soldiers who had been executed for desertion or battlefield cowardice were usually delivered to their families in coffins marked “traitor,” and public funerals were, indeed, forbidden to these surviving families). What we see, rather, is the attempt by the regime to alter the rituals and practices of ordinary Iraqis as they came to terms with the costs of the war in their daily lives and to insert the regime’s framing of the war in place of organic social processes.

By the end of the Iran-Iraq War, public life in Baghdad was newly ordered around an increasingly full slate of state and religious holidays. The regime took an active role in creating a new repertoire of holidays, rituals, and symbols that re-organized the rhythm of life, and tried to appropriate existing holidays and rituals for its own political purposes. Incidentally, while the Ba‘thist regime significantly increased the number of holidays celebrated in Iraq, the trend to pack

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<sup>135</sup> Hussein, “*Al-Shahid min ajl Haya Afdal*” [The Martyr for the Sake of a Better Life], in *Al-Usra wa-l-Numum al-Sukkani fi Ahadith al-Ra’is al-Qa’id Saddam*, 117. Saddam originally gave this speech at the Abtal al-Qadisiyya military base on July 13, 1980.

<sup>136</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/3680, “The Gulf War, Phase One,” November 18, 1980; Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume X, 373.

<sup>137</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 67-68.

ever-more state and religious holidays into the calendar continued after the fall of Saddam. An article in *al-Monitor* reported that Iraq recognized 150 days of official holidays in 2013, more than perhaps any other country in the world.<sup>138</sup> The continuation of this trend after 2003 underscores the point that inventing or recognizing public holidays is an easy way for a government to shore up its popularity in the midst of difficult political or economic circumstances. The Ba‘thist regime used this to full effect during the 1980s, using state, party, and religious holidays to assert its own narratives about the war, to attempt to mitigate the influence political Islam, and to bolster Saddam’s cult of personality.

### **Altering City Space**

After mass mobilization dramatically altered Baghdadi society, and the regime took steps to reorder the ritualization of time, the war also left a physical imprint on the city. Physical changes resulted from two different forces: the destruction of Baghdad buildings by terrorist bombs and Iranian missiles on the one hand, and the construction of wartime memorials and tributes to Saddam by the regime on the other.

### *Terrorism and Sabotage*

In the months leading up to the Iran-Iraq War, Baghdad experienced a taste of the violence to come as bombs and grenade explosions unsettled the capital and normalized the risks of terrorism for Baghdadis for the first time in its modern history.<sup>139</sup> Between 1982 and 1984, car bombs hit the Baghdad headquarters of the Popular Army, blew out the first two floors of the Ministry of Planning, and killed as many as 100 people in an attack on the Security Directorate and

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<sup>138</sup> Shukuh Khikhal, “Iraq’s One Too Many Holidays,” *al-Monitor*, November 16, 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/11/iraq-holidays-disrupt-economy.html>

<sup>139</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/3680, Telegram from the British Embassy in Baghdad, June 14, 1980; *TNA*, FCO 83680, British Embassy in Baghdad, April 1980; *TNA*, FCO 8/4126, “Annual Review for 1980,” British Embassy in Baghdad, December 31, 1980.

Military Directorate buildings in the capital, to give just a few examples.<sup>140</sup> Official Iraqi state media blamed these attacks on “Iranian agents” and on “terrorism orchestrated by foreign countries [*al-irhab al-munazzim min qabl al-dunya*].”<sup>141</sup> Some who carried out these attacks may have been Iranian citizens, but others were likely affiliated with the Iraqi Da‘wa Party, an outlawed Shi‘i political opposition group.

The largest act of terrorism to take place in Baghdad in the lead-up to the war was an assassination attempt on a top regime official, Tariq ‘Aziz. According to British diplomatic reports, an unnamed suicide attacker rushed at ‘Aziz during his visit to Mustansariyya University in Baghdad on April 1, 1980, throwing a grenade and firing a revolver, ultimately killing himself with one of his own grenades. ‘Aziz emerged relatively unscathed with only an injured hand, though two university students were killed during the attack. On April 5, a funeral procession for was held for the two slain students. A large bomb went off in the crowd, injuring 200 and killing 52, constituting one of the worst terrorist attacks to strike Baghdad at the time.<sup>142</sup> In retaliation for the assassination attempt, and signaling that the regime would no longer tolerate any activism on the part of the Da‘wa Party nor any signs of disloyalty in the lead up to the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam brazenly executed Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and his sister days later.<sup>143</sup> When this failed to put an end to Da‘wa attacks on the capital, the regime increased its crackdown: RCC decree #461 in 1980 made membership in the underground Shi‘i party punishable by death, and thousands of alleged Da‘wa members languished in jail in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>144</sup> After an attack in 1983 on the Air Force

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<sup>140</sup> CREST, “Terrorism Review,” February 2, 1984, CIA-RDP84-00893R000100350001-2; TNA, FCO 8/4697, “Bomb Attack on the Ministry of Planning,” August 2, 1982; Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VIII, 483; Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 303.

<sup>141</sup> Najm, *Al-Harb wa-l-Salam*, 252.

<sup>142</sup> TNA, FCO 8/3680, British Embassy in Baghdad, April 7, 1980.

<sup>143</sup> Jabar, *Shi‘ite Movement*, 234.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 233.

Intelligence Office and a television station in Baghdad, the regime rounded up 70 members of a prominent Shi'i family associated with the Da'wa Party, the al-Hakims, and executed six of them.<sup>145</sup>

These attacks created a jumpy atmosphere of uncertainty in the capital. Ultimately, however, their effects were described as primarily “psychological, rather than political”: neither Saddam nor his regime were in any real danger of falling, nor did the Da'wa represent a true mass movement capable of rising up to unseat the regime.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, the routinization of terrorist attacks in Baghdad contributed to the transformation of the capital by warfare and violence, a process furthered by the even more imminent threat posed by Iranian aerial bombardments.

#### *Bomb Shelters and Air Raids*

In the initial days of the war, Saddam believed that Baghdad was unlikely to be directly affected by battles or air strikes given its relative distance from the Iranian border and the unlikelihood of a ground attack on a fortified and easily defensible city. As such, the regime did not invest in building bomb shelters in Baghdad as it prepared for war in 1980. Rather, basement-level restaurants and bars were designated as shelters in the unlikely event of an air raid.<sup>147</sup> Baghdad's air defense system was also shoddily prepared for. Civilian defense volunteers and Popular Army fighters were tasked with manning anti-aircraft equipment on rooftops, but a “combination of poor training and command and control made fratricide a serious threat to Iraqi pilots.”<sup>148</sup>

Though Iran's air power was significantly weaker than Iraq's, surprise airstrikes in and around Baghdad in the opening days of the war indicated that the capital was not safe from harm after all. Iranian air strikes nearly disabled an important power plant on the outskirts in Baghdad that

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<sup>145</sup> CREST, “Iraqi Opposition: Status and Prospects,” December 1983, CIA-RDP84S00927R000200130004-5.

<sup>146</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume VIII, 483.

<sup>147</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, “The Iraqi Population During the War,” October 30, 1980.

<sup>148</sup> Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 105.



resulted in unpredictable and lengthy blackouts in the capital for months after.<sup>149</sup> The strikes near Baghdad clearly caught the regime off-guard, but the capital settled back into a state of mostly calm and quiet—save for the occasional car bomb—from 1980 until 1983. Then a new phase of the war, known as “War of the Cities,” abruptly turned the residents of Baghdad into targets.

Beginning in 1983, Saddam began to launch Russian-made Scud missiles at Iranian cities. Initially, the goal was to hurt Iran economically by targeting major oil installations, factories, and infrastructure. By 1984, however, Iraqi airstrikes more often hit population centers, purposefully inflicting civilian casualties in the hopes of pushing Iranian leaders to the negotiating table.<sup>150</sup> Iraqi publications cheered the fact that, by sending bombs “deep into Iran,” Khomeini would be forced to recognize the superiority of Iraq’s air power.<sup>151</sup> Iran retaliated for each Iraqi sortie into its territory, making Iraqi civilian population centers fair game in this total war. The term “War of the Cities” refers to several periods of mutual airstrikes that lasted for months at a time until a *de facto* or explicit agreement between the two sides temporarily ended the civilian strikes. These periods of civilian bombing campaigns punctuated most of the war, taking place in February 1983, February-March 1984, March-June 1985, September-October 1986, January-February 1987, September-October 1987, and February-April 1988. Iraqi missiles initially could not reach far enough to target Tehran and Qom, so cities like Dezful, Ahwaz, Abadan, and others were Saddam’s first targets. As Iraq’s missile technology improved, Iraq focused its later attacks disproportionately on Teheran, as well as on Qom and Esfahan.<sup>152</sup> Iran used artillery heavily against Basra, owing to its close proximity to the Iranian border, and launched missiles and bombs at Baghdad, Mosul, Tikrit, and other Iraqi cities and border towns—though conspicuously avoiding the Shi’i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Razouk, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 327; Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 318.

<sup>151</sup> Najm, *Fi al-Harb wa-l-Salam*, 12.

<sup>152</sup> Razoux, *Iran-Iraq War*, 303, 436.

and majority-Kurdish areas in the North.<sup>153</sup> The damage inflicted was heavily lopsided against Iran: for example, the February-April 1988 “War of the Cities” campaign killed 1,500 Iranian civilians versus 300 Iraqi civilians owing to Iraq’s superior air force and larger supply of missiles.

However, despite the fact that Iranian civilians bore the brunt of the “War of the Cities” attacks, Baghdad was transformed during this new phase of war. Iranian attacks on Baghdad between 1983 and 1988 terrorized the Iraqi capital, habituated ordinary citizens to air raid alarms and airstrikes, and transformed the city landscape with new bomb shelters—and bomb craters. For the first time in recent memory, Baghdad became a warzone.

Once it became clear that Baghdad was no longer safe from Iranian airstrikes, the regime began to build a system of bomb shelters for the capital. The government contracted with Swedish and Finnish companies to build a series of shelters, which were completed by 1984—early enough in the war to help protect civilians during most of the “War of the Cities” attacks. The regime carried out full-scale practice drills in these new bomb shelters with 750 volunteers for 72-hour periods in order to ensure that adequate protocols were in place to provide food, water, and medical care to civilians in the shelter during attacks on Baghdad. The drills indicated that the existing protocols could use improvement: half of the participants complained there was not enough food, and the lack of tea, coffee, or opportunities to smoke left many volunteers with terrible headaches by the end of the three-day experiment.<sup>154</sup> The reports indicate that the regime was planning for shelters to hold as many as 1,500 people, and that it had built two different shelters in Baghdad’s Cairo neighborhood alone. Though a total count of all the designated and newly-built bomb shelters in Baghdad could not be located in the archives, one Iraqi official suggested that there were five major bomb shelters

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>154</sup> Ministry of the Interior to the Presidential Diwan, “Examining the Public Shelters’ Capacity,” September 16, 1984), *BRCC* 01-2767-0001-0436; Minister of the Interior to the Presidential Diwan, “Shelter Inspection,” June 9, 1985, *BRCC* 01-2767-0001-0391 to -0394.

in Baghdad each designed to hold 2,000 people each.<sup>155</sup> This was obviously inadequate to protect even a small percentage of the 3 million residents of the capital, but many basement-level structures were also designated as makeshift bomb shelters, though they would have provided less protection in the event of a strike.

Though Iranian cities were much more badly damaged by the “War of the Cities” than Baghdad was, some Iranian strikes on Baghdad were destructive. During a particularly deadly spate of airstrikes in May and June of 1985, as many as 200 to 300 Baghdadis were killed by Iranian missiles.<sup>156</sup> Eyewitnesses reported seeing explosions level houses and bury families in the rubble, and journalists estimated that a “huge explosion” in downtown Baghdad on one occasion caused “hundreds” of injuries.<sup>157</sup> Another explosion caused part of a highway to collapse, and another blast took out the top floors of Iraq’s state bank—though officials did not confirm whether missiles or terrorist bombs were the cause.<sup>158</sup> An internal memo from the Ba’th Party archives confirmed that Iranian missiles were to blame for a strike that damaged or destroyed 39 houses in Baghdad’s Muthanna neighborhood, killing 14 and wounding another 14. Party members were tasked with regularly visiting the surviving families over the next few weeks, who complained that the regime had been slow to provide aid or emergency housing to them.<sup>159</sup> (In contrast, when an intelligence officer’s house was destroyed by an Iranian missile during the “War of the Cities,” Saddam himself ordered that one of the houses confiscated from a deported ‘Persian’ Iraqi be given to him for free,

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<sup>155</sup> “War in the Gulf: Baghdad Scene; Baghdad Rescuers Search for Life with Little Hope,” *Associated Press*, February 14, 1991.

<sup>156</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, “Summary of Foreign Policy, May-June 1985,” July 13, 1985.

<sup>157</sup> “Toll High as Jets Hit cities in Gulf War,” *Associated Press*, March 12, 1985; Judith Miller, “Big Blast Rocks Capital of Iraq; 6<sup>th</sup> in 2 Weeks,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1985.

<sup>158</sup> Judy Miller, “Iraq, Iran Vent Frustration on Each Other’s Civilians” *New York Times*, April 7, 1985.

<sup>159</sup> Sa’d bin Abi Waqas branch to the Baghdad Organization, “Report about the Enemy Missile Strike Incident,” June 12, 1985, BRCC 01-2245-0003-0443 to -0446.

and he wrote the officer a check for 3,000 ID to furnish it).<sup>160</sup> After one large, unmistakable hit by an Iranian missile in Baghdad in September 1986 killed 34 Iraqi civilians, the regime took the opposite of its usual strategy by publishing the names of the victims and staging large, public demonstrations declaring revenge for their lives. An Iranian missile strike near a Baghdad elementary school that killed 32 children and wounded 218 was also publicly commemorated and mourned.<sup>161</sup> This missile strike on the school was used as the occasion to launch a fertility campaign encouraging women to bear more children to make up for those killed in war—a topic that will be explored below and in Chapter Six.

When Iranian bombs and missiles did strike the capital, confusion and deliberate misinformation from the regime multiplied the psychological impact of the explosions. The regime had a policy of rarely confirming the strikes or their origins, leaving an open question as to whether Iranian missiles caused the damage or whether terrorist bombs were to blame. This pattern was set early in the war: Baghdad's main power plant was nearly destroyed by Iranian strikes on the second day of the war, but three months later, British diplomats were still trading rumors about whether the 11-hour electricity cuts in Baghdad that resulted from the damage had been caused by an Iranian raid or by Da'wa Party sabotage, and the regime never officially confirmed the nature of the attack.<sup>162</sup> Likewise, French diplomats were unsure whether the explosions of a munitions depot near the Baghdad airport was the result of an Iranian strike or a terrorist attack, and the regime never clarified what happened.<sup>163</sup> Even in the midst of a particularly heavy phase of the "War of the Cities" in 1985, Saddam waited weeks before confirming that the explosions occurring in Baghdad were

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<sup>160</sup> Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, "Assistance," May 14, 1985, *BRCC* 01-3266-0001-0204; Party secretariat to Saddam Hussein, October 5, 1988, *BRCC* 01-3266-0001-0206.

<sup>161</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/6, "Monthly Summary for September," October 13, 1986; "Iranian Missile Killed 32, Baghdad Says," *Associated Press*, October 14, 1987.

<sup>162</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/3680, December 9, 1980.

<sup>163</sup> *CADN* 54PO/B/5, "Summary of May 1981," June 2, 1981.

coming from Iranian missiles rather than terrorist bombs.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, the main government newspaper, *al-Thawra*, rarely acknowledged any of these attacks. Researching copies of *al-Thawra* for the dates of known Iranian airstrikes or terrorist attacks reported by foreign embassy officials, one finds almost total silence. This also fits with the regime's policy against publishing casualty statistics from the Iran-Iraq War: it rarely confirmed attacks unless it could leverage these events for sympathetic international press coverage, as it did during the Gulf War.<sup>165</sup>

### *Monuments*

Iranian missiles and terrorist bombs were not the only instruments that changed Baghdad's physical landscape. The regime erected several new wartime monuments that re-routed the flow of traffic, created new landmarks by which residents oriented themselves, and indelibly reshaped Baghdad's skyline. Three grand monuments were erected in honor of the Iran-Iraq War: the Unknown Soldier monument, the Martyrs Monument, and the Victory Arches. Unusually, these were commissioned and constructed in the midst of the war, at moments when a ceasefire felt as elusive as ever. Constructing monuments in the midst of the war were yet another attempt by the regime to insist on its own vision and framing of the war and attempt to silence alternative and conflicting viewpoints.

The Unknown Soldier's monument was opened in 1982, the Martyr's Monument was opened in 1983, and in 1985, Saddam ordered the building of the Victory Arches to honor the "leaders and heroes" who defended the "honor, sovereignty, and dignity of the glorious Arab nation."<sup>166</sup> Many Iraqis found the Unknown Soldier and Martyrs' Monuments to be genuinely moving tributes to their loved ones in the war. However, the Victory Arches was the most infamous

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<sup>164</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, "Explosions in Baghdad," April 1985.

<sup>165</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume VII, 566.

<sup>166</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, August 11, 1982; RCC Decree #499, June 11, 1986, BRCC 008-5-3-109; Samir al-Khalil [pseudonym: Kanan Makiya], *The Monument: Art, Vulgarly and Responsibility in Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 23.

in a series of new wartime construction projects meant to celebrate Saddam himself. The Victory Arches feature two massive arms modeled from Saddam's own body, holding curved swords and surrounded by real helmets of Iranian soldiers killed in battle, forming a canopy over one of Baghdad's largest thoroughfares. Since the monument was commissioned and erected long before any actual 'victory' had been achieved, it is clear that the Victory Arches are rather a tribute to Saddam himself, cast to represent an early Arab Muslim knight battling against Persian enemies.<sup>167</sup> Likewise, Saddam built himself a new "Victory over Iran" palace in the vast presidential complex in Baghdad (in the 1990s, he also built a "Victory over America" palace in the same complex in response to the Gulf War), meant to bolster his cult of personality. He also commissioned Saddam University in his name (now rechristened Nahrain University) in Baghdad between 1987-88, and built a large clock tower in Baghdad with his portrait on all four sides.<sup>168</sup> These new moments to Saddam's cult of personality were the natural progression of a process Saddam began upon commencing his tenure as president, which was to plaster his likeness on most every available space throughout the city (while also encouraging private citizens and state employees to put up their own portraits of Saddam in their homes and offices). His reshaping of Baghdad's skyline in honor of himself earned him comparisons to Napoleon III by international observers.<sup>169</sup> Tellingly, Saddam found the financial resources to build these vanity projects even as all other development work halted in the capital.

Yet a slightly different impulse was behind one of Saddam's most memorable efforts to leave his mark on the capital city during the Iran-Iraq War: renaming the former shantytown after himself in the early 1980s.<sup>170</sup> Changing the name of Baghdad's largest district from Revolution City (*Madinat al-Thawra*) to Saddam City (*Madinat Saddam*) was a provocative step. Rather than give his name to a

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<sup>167</sup> al-Khalil, *The Monument*, 11.

<sup>168</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume XII, 1988, 505.

<sup>169</sup> al-Khalil, *The Monument*, 27-31.

<sup>170</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, Political Dispatch from the French Embassy in Baghdad, July 27, 1982.

neighborhood of Ba‘th Party loyalists and regime supporters, Saddam claimed an area that simmered with opposition to his rule. As the previous chapter described, many of the inhabitants descended from families of landless farmers who fled destitution in the southern province of al-‘Amara in the 1950s. The French described Saddam City as a “Shi‘ite neighborhood known for its hostility to power,” but the anti-regime undercurrents were not necessarily sectarian in nature: communists, common criminals, Kurdish opposition groups, and the Da‘wa Party all viewed Saddam City as a sanctuary, where the densely-populated streets and the district’s sheer size made it easier to escape detection.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, class-based grievances also fueled resentments within this neighborhood by a population who often felt overlooked by the state.<sup>172</sup>

Years later, Saddam reflected on his decision to re-name Revolution City after himself:

“I am the one who called it Saddam City. I never did that before, as far as instructing anyone to name certain places with specific names, especially since it was very costly. [...] I thought I would give Revolution [City] my name and say, ‘This is Saddam City,’ in order to generate passion, honesty, and equal treatment among the people. [Even those] who hate it will hesitate to describe it in an inappropriate way.”<sup>173</sup>

The final sentence in the above quote hints at what may have inspired the name change: by forcing the area’s residents to adopt his name, Saddam hoped to push grumblings and dissent even further underground and bind the area still closer to him. Renaming Revolution City was just the most visible of Saddam’s many efforts in the midst of the Iran-Iraq War to bring this district further under his control. The French Embassy noted that Saddam personally visited the district “several times” during the first month of the war alone as a show of force against sympathizers with Iran and political opposition groups living there, and Saddam continued to make conspicuous visits to that

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<sup>171</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, “Chronology of Events that Took Place in Iraq: February 1983,” March 9, 1983; “Social Reality in Baghdad,” 1989, BRCC 01-3751-0000-0388 to -0410.

<sup>172</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, “Chronology of Events that Took Place in Iraq: February 1983,” March 9, 1983; TNA, FCO 8/3680, May 8, 1980.

<sup>173</sup> “Saddam Hussein and Saddam City Tribal Leaders Talk,” audio transcript, undated (1991), CRRC SH-SHTP-A-000-891.

neighborhood several times a year throughout the war.<sup>174</sup> The regime's most potent fear about this district was the presence of Da'wa Party members who used it as a base to "carry out small-scale operations against the regime" in Baghdad, especially during mandated blackouts in the capital and other vulnerable moments.<sup>175</sup> In contrast to the memorials, clock towers, and proliferation of portraits of the president, renaming Revolution City was not so much about self-glorification as it was a threat: this district would remain under Saddam's control, or else face the consequences.

### **The Gulf War: Collapse and Disorder**

For a brief two years from August 1988 to August 1990, Baghdadis hoped to regain a sense of normalcy and return to peacetime. In many ways, they were disappointed. Soldiers who had cheered the end of the war were stunned to find that the regime kept them at their posts for months and even years after the war's end in an effort to avoid economic and social destabilization from mass demobilization. Women were urged to leave their jobs and apply themselves to childbirth and domestic chores instead to create job openings for returning veterans.<sup>176</sup> The regime promoted policies for war widows to be remarried as second wives, rather than provide a robust system of social welfare services for them.<sup>177</sup> Foreigners, mostly Egyptians who had come to fill jobs left by soldiers, were unceremoniously pushed out of their jobs and out of the country, sometimes through intimidation and violence.<sup>178</sup>

The regime was eager to jumpstart all of the many development and construction projects put on hold by the war. In addition to re-construction projects in Basra and Faw, Baghdad was set to be a primary recipient of the promised construction boom: the Ministry of Housing and

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<sup>174</sup> CADN 54PO/B/5, "The Iraqi Population During the War," October 30, 1980.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume XII, 516-517.

<sup>177</sup> Al-Khafaji, "War as a Vehicle": 277; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 174-176.

<sup>178</sup> Al-Khafaji suggests that as many as 1,000 Egyptians were murdered by Iraqis who saw Egyptians as "taking Iraqi jobs." The post-war violence pushed tens of thousands of Egyptians to return home. See "War as a Vehicle": 275-276.



Construction promised the capital a new sports stadium, new housing developments, shopping centers, and infrastructure improvements to its electrical grid, telephone lines, roads, and water treatment systems.<sup>179</sup> In reality, the economy was still hobbled by high inflation rates and billions of dollars in foreign debt. Prices in Baghdad, already stretched beyond the reach of many families, rose even higher after the war as returning soldiers increased competition for housing, food, and goods; even the governmental newspaper *al-Thawra* admitted that prices in Baghdad had “increased tenfold in a very short period.”<sup>180</sup>

Even as Baghdadis struggled to adapt to the rocky transition to peacetime, the regime began to move towards a new war—this time with Kuwait, Iraq’s southern neighbor. Saddam blamed Kuwait for committing “economic warfare” against Iraq by artificially depressing oil prices and failing to forgive Iraq’s wartime loans.<sup>181</sup> The news of war was met with incredulity and weariness by civilians and conscripts alike. Diaries of Iraqi soldiers from the Gulf War reveal low morale and a lack of support for the regime’s objectives: “We are defending Kuwait, but we don’t know whom we’re defending it for,” one wrote.<sup>182</sup> Another soldier lamented that his conscription into this war was a virtual death sentence: “I used to dream what youth dreams. I used to plan my future wisely and detailed; but this period has passed and everything in my life has been destroyed, and all the planning has disappeared. My life has become nothing but a black piece of cloth.”<sup>183</sup>

As men braced themselves to be recalled to duty and women once again prepared to take over their roles as heads of households, Baghdadis had every reason to assume that the capital itself

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<sup>179</sup> Party secretariat to the Baghdad Organization, “Suggestion,” December 13, 1989, BRCC 001-5-3-0198; “Public Sector Firm to Build 20 Power Sub-Stations, Stadium,” *Baghdad Observer*, January 11, 1989, pg. 2; “Baghdad to Mark Arab City Day,” *Baghdad Observer*, March 7, 1990, pg. 2; “New Telephone Lines to be Installed,” *Baghdad Observer*, January 29, 1990, pg. 2

<sup>180</sup> Cited in Bengio, “Iraq,” in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Volume XIII, 1989, 390-91.

<sup>181</sup> Khadduri and Ghareeb, *War in the Gulf, 1990-1991*, 95.

<sup>182</sup> Kuwait Dataset of the Ba’th Party Archives [Hereafter: *KDS*] file 09431, February 8, 1991, pg. 10; February 11, 1991, pg. 9.

<sup>183</sup> *KDS* file 08223, December 20, 1990, pg. 15.

would be shielded once again from the worst of wartime fighting. This reasoning held during the initial stages of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait: Iraqi forces entered Kuwait without facing any significant battles, and while Kuwaiti resistance groups continued to target Iraqi forces, these skirmishes took place more than 400 miles from Baghdad.

As the US began to build a 30-nation coalition to oppose Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, however, both Baghdadi civilians and the regime began to recognize the danger that Iraq's capital would be the target of American attacks. This was a dangerous scenario, indeed: while Iraq had enjoyed superior air power over Iran, whose paltry supply of Scud missiles had been provided by countries like Libya and North Korea, Baghdad was now faced with the prospect of air strikes from the world's most sophisticated military.<sup>184</sup> The regime had to prepare quickly to protect itself and the capital or risk falling from power.

Given the compact timeline of the Gulf War—the phase of active warfare with the US and its coalition lasted only six weeks—Baghdad's experience in the Gulf War was very different from its experiences in the Iran-Iraq War. Neither the regime nor Baghdad's residents had time to gradually adapt to the realities of this war with the US. While during the Iran-Iraq War physical damage to the city was limited to sporadic attacks by Iranian missiles or internal opposition groups, during the six weeks of the Gulf War, Baghdad must have appeared to be on the brink of utter annihilation.

From January 17 to February 23, 1991, nearly 60,000 US and coalition bombing sorties targeted Iraqi urban centers, focusing heavily on Baghdad.<sup>185</sup> Night and day air raids pummeled the capital with the most advanced weaponry in the world; "smart bombs" blew out bridges, roads, telephone lines, and 90% of Baghdad's electrical grid. An estimated 75% of Baghdadis lost access to

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<sup>184</sup> Jabar, "The War Generation": 133.

<sup>185</sup> "Damage Control—and Real Damage," *New York Times*, February 14, 1991; James F. Clarity, "War in the Gulf: Baghdad; from TV Reports in Iraq, News an Attack has Begun," *New York Times*, January 17, 1991.

clean water.<sup>186</sup> Food in the capital city spoiled without electricity, and food shortages in the shops—a result of wartime hoarding and the new sanctions imposed on Iraq at the start of the Gulf War—left many families with little to eat during the first weeks of the war. Water sanitation ceased to function in the capital, and sewage overflowed in homes and public sewer systems.<sup>187</sup> There were reports that residents in Baghdad had begun to cut down the city's few trees for heating in the chilly winter weather. Furthermore, many gas stations could not function without electricity, leaving residents with limited mobility.<sup>188</sup> Baghdadi soldiers fighting in Kuwait were terrified by the reports they heard about coalition raids on their home, a fear made worse by the regime's persistent tendency not to provide reliable information about attacks on the capital. One soldier wrote in his diary:

News comes from the radio or from those returning from their homes to join the regiments. One says they have destroyed Baghdad and demolished it and another says there is no water, electricity, or phone lines. Some of them turn the world black in your eyes. Others come to pacify you saying nothing has happened there—they have only bombed the military installations. Others say they have bombed the civilian buildings. You don't know who to believe and who is lying. All news are hallucinations. They are all lying. The truth is lost.<sup>189</sup>

As Baghdad was pummeled by bombs, sheer survival was the only real objective for either the regime or for Baghdad's terrified residents. Saddam took steps to ensure his personal survival and the survival of his leadership apparatus with safe houses and bunkers. Saddam's inner circle designated alternative office headquarters for every tier of the Ba'th Party, from top officials down

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<sup>186</sup> Gordon, *Invisible War*, 22.

<sup>187</sup> Secretary of Baghdad to the Ministry of Industry and Military Industrialization, "Running Purification Plants for Drinking Water in Baghdad," February 22, 1991, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0360; R.W. Apple Jr., "War in the Gulf: Combat Raids Said to Badly Delay Baghdad Messages to Front," *New York Times*, February 11, 1991.

<sup>188</sup> Elaine Sciolino, "War in the Gulf: Iraq Raids Said to Cut Power in Baghdad," *New York Times*, January 19, 1991; Dilip Ganguly, "War in the Gulf: Baghdad; Frayed Spirits of Residents as Raids Shake Confidence," *Associated Press*, February 22, 1991.

<sup>189</sup> Youssef Abdul-Moati, *Diary of an Iraqi Soldier* (Kuwait: National Center for Documents on Iraqi Aggression on Kuwait, 1992), 13-14, cited in Joseph Sassoon and Alissa Walter, "Diaries of Iraqi Soldiers: Views from Inside Saddam's Army," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, forthcoming.

to neighborhood-level party leaders, on the outskirts of the city or in areas far away from any known sensitive sites that were likely to be targeted.<sup>190</sup> In case the Americans knew the exact locations of important state and party offices, Saddam hoped that the majority of the state and party bureaucracy could survive an attack by moving into party youth centers or training institutes instead.<sup>191</sup> Rumors circulated that Saddam had built himself an opulent underground bunker during the Iran-Iraq War that included a swimming pool and chandeliers, and that he would wait out US aerial bombardments there.<sup>192</sup> Important or sensitive technology, including broadcast equipment, parts for electricity, water, and sewage plants, and even wheat processing equipment, were ordered to be stored in safe houses.<sup>193</sup> Sensitive papers were boxed up and stored in bomb shelters. In an effort to maintain some functionality even during war, instructions were circulated on how to hand-deliver memos from office to office to overcome the loss of electricity and telephone lines. Above all, Saddam made it clear that he expected all state and party employees to continue carrying out their duties as usual even in the midst of an aerial attack.<sup>194</sup>

To help protect Baghdad's residents, the government had carried out evacuation drills in the capital in December 1990, a few weeks before the US began its bombardments. This drill involved 1.4 million Baghdad residents from in and around the Saddam City neighborhood, deliberately chosen for the drill because it was one of the densest areas of the city.<sup>195</sup> According to newspaper reports at the time, the regime also broadcast instructions to the broader population in how to

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<sup>190</sup> Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, "Headquarters Building," August 20, 1990, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0621; Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, "Headquarters Building," December 25, 1990, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0609.

<sup>191</sup> Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, "Alternative Headquarters," January 28, 1991, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0560 to -0564.

<sup>192</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "War in the Gulf: Baghdad Refuge; Hussein's Nuclear-Proof, Buried Fortress," *New York Times*, January 23, 1991.

<sup>193</sup> Saddam Hussein to All Ministries, January 22, 1991, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0638.

<sup>194</sup> Presidential Diwan to All Ministries, "Alternative Headquarters," January 23, 1991, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0571.

<sup>195</sup> General Security Director to the Security Chief of Baghdad, "Evaluation of the Evacuation Drill of Saddam City," December 29, 1990, CRRS SH-IDGS-D-001-431.

protect their homes from air raids, chemical attacks, and even nuclear strikes.<sup>196</sup> In the end, the regime did not carry out any formal evacuations of the capital during the war, but instead encouraged residents to seek shelter with family and relatives living in other provinces.<sup>197</sup>

Though America's touted "smart bombs" were supposed to help avoid civilian casualties, many Baghdadis were killed in the coalition bombardments. The worst single incident took place on February 13, 1991, when a coalition bomb managed to penetrate a bomb shelter in the well-to-do neighborhood of al-'Amiriyya. Approximately 400 people were killed, nearly all civilians. A Baghdadi soldier fighting in Kuwait heard the news of this devastating incident and feared that his family had been killed; the anguish he recorded in his diary no doubt resonated with many Iraqis on the day of the bombing:

"The shelter which was bombed in Amyria is near our home. [...] Yesterday I didn't sleep. Not a wink of sleep. My rage intensified so much that it blinded me. [...] I swore by God to take revenge [on behalf of] my family—the most horrible kind of revenge. If I survive I will make all the attackers meat for the vultures. By God, I swear that my mind will never find rest until I have revenge for the blood that was shed."<sup>198</sup>

Party members and ministry officials immediately scrambled to the site to assist with pulling bodies from the embers.<sup>199</sup> Lists of victims names and, when possible, photographs of them from before the attack were compiled.<sup>200</sup> Notably, the regime removed its usual censorship rules for foreign journalists reporting on the al-'Amiriyya shelter out of a desire to provide damning evidence of the

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<sup>196</sup> Patrick Tyler, "Standoff in the Gulf: Baghdad Mounts Mock Evacuation, *New York Times*, December 22, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/22/world/standoff-in-the-gulf-baghdad-mounts-mock-evacuation.html>.

<sup>197</sup> "Saddam Hussein Reprimanding an Official," audio transcript, undated (December 1991), CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-230; Party secretariat to Members of the Regional Leadership, "Civil Defense and Evacuation Plan," December 30, 1990, BRCC 01-3630-0003-0627.

<sup>198</sup> Abdul-Moati 1994, 18-19, cited in Sassoon and Walter, "Diary of Iraqi Soldiers."

<sup>199</sup> Party secretariat to the Baghdad Organization, "Securing Elements," February 14, 1991, BRCC 028-1-4-0003.

<sup>200</sup> Office of the President to the Ministry of the Interior, "Al-'Amiriyya Shelter," February 17, 1991, BRCC 028-1-4-0006.

civilian casualties to the world as quickly as possible.<sup>201</sup>

The al-‘Amiriyya shelter bombing revealed the weakness of the Ba‘th Party regime in the midst of this lopsided war. One week after the airstrike, anger and complaints mounted: local residents in the al-‘Amiriyya area began to complain about the smells of burnt materials and decomposing bodies coming from the shelter as it took much longer than expected to remove all the remains. There were fears that the local water supply would be contaminated by the rot. Many who had sought safety in the bomb shelter had brought valuables with them; complaints poured in that many of these valuables had been stolen off of the bodies.<sup>202</sup> Worse still, residents were outraged that they had seen regime officials removing boxes of governmental papers that had been stored in the deepest levels of the bomb shelter even before they had retrieved all of the victims. Angry rumors circulated accusing the regime of caring more about its paperwork than it did about the 400 who had died.<sup>203</sup> The al-‘Amiriyya bombing marked one of the city’s lowest points in its modern history: the capital was smoldering, infrastructure was destroyed and nonfunctional, families were grieving their loved ones killed on the battlefield or in coalition airstrikes, and the regime appeared to be scrambling to maintain any semblance of control.

In the aftermath of this humiliating, destructive war, Saddam tried to repeat the same mobilization strategies he had used to consolidate support and re-frame the war as a victory. Holidays like Martyrs’ Day became increasingly propagandistic as the regime capitalized on such occasions to prop up Saddam’s cult of personality or the Ba‘th Party, rather than meaningfully grieve the dead. The anniversary of the al-‘Amiriyya shelter bombing, arguably one of the most emotionally-charged events in Baghdad related to the Gulf War, became an annual occasion for the

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<sup>201</sup> “War in the Gulf: Baghdad Scene; Baghdad Rescuers Search for Life with Little Hope,” *Associated Press*, February 14, 1991.

<sup>202</sup> Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, “Information,” February 22, 1991, BRCC 028-1-4-0014.

<sup>203</sup> Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, “Information,” February 23, 1991, BRCC 028-1-4-0020.

regime to issue boilerplate denunciations of “American imperialism.”<sup>204</sup> Likewise, various milestones of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and Gulf War were commemorated on an annual basis through state-run media and public rituals and displays. In preparation for the third anniversary of the Gulf War, for example, party officials began to solicit “stories of bravery” from citizens to feature in the media. They were especially interested in highlighting the heroic steadfastness and loyalty to the regime of Baghdadis and residents of central provinces in the midst of the 1991 mass uprising that took place in the aftermath of Iraq’s retreat from Kuwait.<sup>205</sup> These state commemorations, holidays, and anniversaries had the effect of managing the script of how these events were publicly remembered and discussed, silencing alternative experiences and making clear who it cast as the heroes and the villains in this state version of the war and uprising.

Saddam built new war monuments: *Al-Nida’* mosque on Cairo Avenue and *Um al-Ma‘arik* Mosque (‘Mother of All Battles,’ Saddam’s preferred name for the Gulf War) were both built to memorialize the invasion of Kuwait. This was part of a larger trend of Saddam “Islamizing” Baghdad public spaces in the 1990s, which, as Harith al-Qarawee argues, usually meant promoting Sunni symbols of Islam over Shi‘i ones in reaction to the participation of a large number of Shi‘a in the 1991 *intifada*.<sup>206</sup> As the regime attempted once again to stamp Baghdad with its own narrative framework about the war, however, ordinary Baghdadis also went through their own processes of interpreting the meaning of the conflict for their city and for their personal lives, and some of this process is possible to see in the treatment of certain public spaces. For example, the ruins of the al-‘Amiriyya shelter were spontaneously memorialized by Baghdad residents who left behind their own

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<sup>204</sup> General Union of the Iraqi Workers’ Unions to the President of the Union, “Al-‘Amiriyya Shelter,” October 19, 1991, BRCC 028-1-4-0062; Party secretariat to the Central Office for Vocational and Popular Organizations, “Anniversary for the Victims of the al-‘Amiriyya Shelter,” November 30, 1992, BRCC 028-1-4-0159.

<sup>205</sup> Party secretariat to the Military Office, “Record of the Mother of All Battles,” May 12, 1993, BRCC 01-2214-0000-0368.

<sup>206</sup> Harith Hasan al-Qarawee, “Sectarian Identities, Narratives and Political Conflict in Baghdad,” *Levantine Review* 4 (Winter 2015): 181.

messages and symbols of grief and remembrance.<sup>207</sup> Later, the regime turned the al-‘Amiriyya shelter into an official state monument, erasing citizens’ tributes and evidence of how this event was popularly remembered.<sup>208</sup> This small example reminds us that, while regime monuments are more easily identifiable, ordinary Iraqis were simultaneously undertaking processes of symbolizing, memorializing, and re-interpreting the city landscape in the aftermath of the war in ways that often undermined or diverged from state narratives.

In the end, the regime’s efforts to mobilize popular support in response to the Gulf War fell flat. The devastation of the city was too extreme to ignore, and the war itself was revealed to have been a tragic mistake that dragged Baghdad and the rest of the country into ruin. And with the stringent imposition of sanctions, the physical destruction of Baghdad was slow to be repaired. One vignette from the archives illustrates the difficult position Baghdad’s destruction created for poorer Baghdad residents and the regime alike. In 1996, more than five years after the end of the Gulf War, the regime ordered 117 families from the historic Batawin neighborhood to evacuate their homes, which had been condemned as unlivable as a result of Gulf War bombing and inadequate repairs in the years that followed. Local party officials intervened, pleading with top regime leaders to delay these evictions or first find the families suitable alternative housing. The local officials also pointed out that this neighborhood had produced many “martyrs and prisoners of war,” hinting that the regime ‘owed’ these families on some level.<sup>209</sup> The President rejected any calls for delaying these evictions, stating that these families had been given adequate time to repair their houses over the

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<sup>207</sup> Party secretariat to the Leadership of Air Defense, “Information,” May 20, 1999, *BRCC* 01-3219-0000-0424.

<sup>208</sup> General Union of the Iraqi Workers’ Unions to the President of the Union, “Al-‘Amiriyya Shelter,” October 19, 1991; *BRCC* 028-1-4-0062; Party secretariat to the Central Office for Vocational and Popular Organizations, “Anniversary for the Victims of the al-‘Amiriyya Shelter,” November 30, 1992, *BRCC* 028-1-4-0159.

<sup>209</sup> Rashid Branch to the party secretariat, “Report,” September 4, 1996, *BRCC* 01-3820-0003-0285.



years.<sup>210</sup> As a last-ditch effort, these families—including women, children, and the elderly—took to the streets to protest their evictions, though they shrewdly carried photos of Saddam with them in their makeshift demonstration to signal their overall loyalty.

The fact that these families took to the street is shocking in Saddam's Iraq, which usually met public opposition with swift retribution and viewed any efforts at mobilizing groups as deeply threatening. Remarkably, despite this public display of opposition and dissatisfaction, these families were not arrested, and local officials met with them to hear their demands. In the end, the protests did not amount to any concrete change: the eviction orders remained in force. But this episode reveals a key truth about the ramifications of the Gulf War on state-society relations for years to come: although international sanctions were designed to turn the population against the regime, this unusual public protest was not trying to bring down the regime; instead, these families were asking for *more* regime presence in their lives, through financial aid and housing assistance. As later chapters will explore, economic hardships resulting from the Gulf War tended to push Iraqis to become more dependent on the state, which in turn strengthened the party and the regime. Despite the regime's loss of popularity as a result of the Gulf War—Ba'ath Party membership fell precipitously in the early 1990s—Baghdadis were in desperate need of assistance for food, income, and housing. No one else but the regime could provide that.

## Conclusions

Over the course of the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars from 1980-1991, Baghdad and its residents were indelibly marked by their direct and indirect experiences with warfare. From the end of the Gulf War in 1991 until the invasion of US forces to remove Saddam from power in 2003, Baghdad

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<sup>210</sup> Head of the Presidential Diwan to the party secretariat, "Al-Batawin Group," September 17, 1996, BRCC 01-3820-0003-0279.

entered an uneasy period that was—for the most part—no larger marked by active warfare.<sup>211</sup>

However, the legacies of past wars continued to reverberate into the 1990s and, as subsequent Chapters Four through Six will discuss, the stringent international sanctions put in place on Iraq from 1990-2003 constituted an “invisible war” that wreaked its own havoc on the city of Baghdad, its people, and its economy.

Socially, Baghdad was a different city in 1991 than it was in 1980. Tens of thousands of men had vanished from the streets—killed in action, languishing as POWs in Iran, or missing in action—while many more were frustratingly kept in the military even after the end of these two wars. Women had been yanked from one extreme to the other: first encouraged and supported by state welfare policies to join the paid labor force, then pushed out of their jobs to make way for returning veterans and in response to the regime’s new promotion of public religiosity. The number of female-headed households increased significantly because of the number of war widows and, after the wars ended, the rising divorce rate in response to economic pressures and the difficulties of reintegrating veterans.<sup>212</sup> Many female-headed households faced poverty as opportunities for women in the paid labor force dwindled after the war.<sup>213</sup> Young people faced a bleak future of high unemployment, low wages, and a greatly diminished educational system. Crime began to increase noticeably in response to the economic downturn and as deserters and veterans alike struggled to process the violent traumas of war.

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<sup>211</sup> US aerial bombing campaigns in Baghdad, such as the “Desert Fox” campaign in 1998, kept Iraqis on edge and resulted in physical damage inside Baghdad. Whether or not this or other bombing campaigns in the 1990s resulted in civilian casualties is the subject of debate. See Monica Mehta, “Counting Casualties,” *Mother Jones*, January 27, 1999. Accessed April 6, 2018. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/1999/01/counting-casualties/>

<sup>212</sup> A significant increase in Iraq’s divorce rate was apparent by the early years of the Iran-Iraq War, which one researcher attributed to the increase in women’s education and employment, rather than to the stressors of war—though she pointedly did not mention this as a factor in her surveys. See: ‘A’ida Salim Muhammad Janabi, *Al-Mutaghayyirat al-Ijtima’iyya wa-l-Thaqafiyya li-Zabirat al-Talaq ma’ Dirasa Maydaniyya li-Zabirat al-Talaq fi Madinat Baghdad* [Social and Cultural Changes that Contributed to the Phenomenon of Divorce, with a Field Study for the Phenomenon of Divorce in the City of Baghdad] (Baghdad: Da’irat al-Shu’un al-Thaqafiyya wa-l-Nashr, 1983), 8.

<sup>213</sup> See Chapter Six for more petitions from female-headed households.

Once foreigners and women had been largely pushed out of the state bureaucracy, veterans took their place. Al-Khafaji argues that changing the composition of the bureaucracy from a heavily civilian work force to one with a significant number of war veterans had an impact on how the government itself functioned and responded to citizen requests. With so many veterans working in the bureaucracy, “it was natural to look upon those who could not or did not participate in the fighting as inferior,” Khafaji writes. “Women, intellectuals, and non-Iraqis working in Iraq belonged in this category. They were routinely reminded that they were able to live their ordinary lives only because of the heroes defending their honor.”<sup>214</sup> The effect was a promotion of martial masculinity by the state to the exclusion of other identities and demographics.

Physically, Baghdad resembled a disjointed time capsule: parts of the city had been frozen in time in 1982, preserving legacies of the once-promising construction boom meant to modernize the capital with a glut of oil revenue, while others parts of the city were stuck in 1991, preserving the destruction that rained down during Gulf War air campaigns. Lefebvre had written that cities are physically marked by rhythms and cycles of time: “time and space are intimately linked and measured in terms of one another.... Time is projected onto space through measures, uniformizing it and emerging in things and products.”<sup>215</sup> In this way, the stoppage or even reversal of time in Baghdad was demonstrated by the physical stagnation of its landscape: many observers shared the viewpoint that Baghdad had been sent back to the “19<sup>th</sup> century” through the Gulf War bombing campaigns.

The difficulties rebuilding the city during sanctions (much less the utter impossibility of embarking on a new modernization and development campaign) limited Baghdad’s ability to grow with its population. As the city’s residents increased in number from roughly 3 million in 1980 to 7

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<sup>214</sup> al-Khafaji, “War as the Vehicle”: 276.

<sup>215</sup> Kofman and Lebas, “Introduction: Lost in Transposition—Time, Space and the City,” in *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*, 31.

million by 2003, Baghdad's infrastructure and housing sectors stagnated. This led to a dramatic worsening of traffic congestion and housing prices that were increasingly out of reach for most Baghdadis. The deterioration of public services and building facades moved in lock-step with an increase in crime and the diminishment of social trust in the 1990s, a topic that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

After enduring 11 years of warfare from 1980-1991, Baghdad was no longer the gleaming, exemplary city that other Arab countries sought to emulate. From an outwardly secular city in 1979 with some of the best educational, health, and work opportunities in the Middle East and a robust social welfare system, Baghdad was, in many respects, ruined by war and sanctions by 1991. The city's landscape, social categories, and rhythms of time were indelibly marked by its experiences weathering the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars. For the 12 years that followed the end of the Gulf War until the fall of Saddam Hussein, it was left to ordinary Baghdadis to work out for themselves how to survive in this new, economically diminished reality.

#### 4. Petitioning Saddam: The Problems and Possibilities of State-Society Communication

Authoritarian regimes are characterized in part by their efforts to control speech in both the public and private spheres. This is often accomplished by censoring the media and ruthlessly suppressing dissenting voices through surveillance and intimidation.<sup>1</sup> Such practices were the norm in Ba‘thist Iraq, where the state constrained newspapers, TV stations, and radio channels to broadcast only regime-approved narratives, and where citizens regularly self-censored their speech, fearing denunciation by informants or arrest by secret police.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, observers of Iraq long assumed that ordinary citizens were not permitted to engage in contentious dialogue with the regime; acceptable public speech was believed to be limited to obsequious displays of sycophancy to Saddam or, at most, to mild criticism of misbehavior by low-ranking officials (discussed further in Chapter Five).<sup>3</sup> However, an examination of the Iraqi Ba‘th Party archives demonstrates that channels for direct communication did exist through which ordinary Iraqis could make pointed demands, requests, and critiques of the regime—and do so with considerable candor. This chapter examines the opportunities, limitations, and contrivances of petitions as a medium through which residents of Baghdad communicated directly with officials for assistance. Two questions guide this chapter: First, how did Baghdad residents and Ba‘thist officials each utilize petitioning to manage state-society relations in Saddam’s Iraq? Second, which factors determined which petitions were approved and which were denied, and how did those factors change over time? In addressing these questions, I also consider how the Iraqi case compares to practices of petitioning in other modern

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<sup>1</sup> Hank Johnston, “Talking the Walk: Speech Acts and Resistance in Authoritarian Regimes,” in *Repression and Mobilization*, ed. Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, and Carol Mueller (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 108; Somel, Neumann, and Singer, “Re-Sounding Silent Voices,” 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rohde, “Echoes from Below”: 552.

<sup>3</sup> Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, xi-xii; Faust, *Ba‘thification of Iraq*, 58; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 124.

authoritarian contexts, such as the Soviet Union or China, drawing lessons about how state-society communication operated in 20<sup>th</sup>-century dictatorships more broadly.<sup>4</sup>

## Methodology

This chapter follows the fates of 117 petitions written by Baghdad residents as they wound through the Iraqi bureaucracy. For the purposes of this analysis, a petition refers to any written communication sent to a regime representative that includes an explicit request. Half of the petitions examined here were submitted between May 1986 and March 2000, while the other half were submitted between June 2000 and October 2002 as part of People's Day (*Yawm al-Sha'b*), a Ba'th Party outreach initiative that will be discussed below.<sup>5</sup> These 117 petitions do not constitute a statistically representative sample owing to the challenges of the Iraqi Ba'th Party archive's organizational structure; it is not yet possible to execute a search using the archive's finding aid to readily locate all of the petitions contained therein. The petitions submitted between June 2000 and October 2002 were grouped together in identifiable boxfiles related to People's Day; with these, I made a concerted effort to record a representative sample of the types of requests made and the demographics of the petitioners who made them. However, I did occasionally omit petitions that were near duplicates to other requests already recorded or those that were very brief and included few details about the petitioner and his or her request. At the same time, because these petitions were filed together with others from the same party branch (*fara'*) or section (*shu'ba*) that hosted a

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Yigit Akin, "Reconsidering State, Party, and Society in Early Republican Turkey: Politics of Petitioning" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 3 (August 2007): 435-457; Martin K. Dimitrov, "What the Party Wanted to Know: Citizen Complaints as a 'Barometer of Public Opinion'" *East European Politics and Societies* 28, no. 2 (May 2014): 271-295; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Petitions and Denunciations in Russian and Soviet History," *Russian History* 24, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1997): 1-9; Keyuan Zou, "Granting or Refusing the Right to Petition: The Dilemma of China's *Xinfa*ng System," in *Socialist China, Capitalist China: Social Tension and Political Adaptation under Economic Globalization*, ed. Guoguang Wu and Helen Lansdowne (New York: Routledge, 2009), 124-137.

<sup>5</sup> Though People's Day began as early as 1998, all of the petitions submitted during People's Day events found in the archives date from 2000 and 2002, suggesting that petitioning became an increasingly important aspect of this party holiday.

People's Day celebration, it resulted in an over-representation of petitions from certain neighborhoods of Baghdad and a total absence of other Baghdad districts within my sample. Though this skew could not be avoided, it has one advantage of permitting an in-depth view of the petitions brought forth by a particular community at a particular time.

The other half of the petitions considered here were submitted between 1986 and 2000, prior to the introduction of People's Day. These were not grouped together in identifiable boxfiles or necessarily locatable through the archive's finding aid. Rather, I came across these petitions while researching other topics related to state-society relations in Baghdad; they appeared individually, tucked between bureaucratic memos and party correspondence about other matters. I recorded nearly all of these petitions that I found scattered throughout other boxfiles.<sup>6</sup> Though these petitions span a period from 1986 to 2000, they are disproportionately dated from the 1990s and early 2000s, with few from the 1980s. It is unclear whether this is because there was a genuine increase in petitioning activity in the 1990s or by pure chance. Though I focus here primarily on petitions submitted during the sanctions era, including petitions from the 1980s makes it possible to see how requests and responses to them might have changed over time.

### **The Value of Petitions for Understanding State-Society Relations**

Remarkably, modern Iraqi petitions have not yet been thoroughly analyzed by scholars, despite their importance for understanding how state-society relations functioned in practice under Ba'athist rule.<sup>7</sup> For instance, petitions reveal how the regime made choices about discretionary

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<sup>6</sup> My sincere thanks to Khaled Aounallah for his work helping me transcribe petitions with particularly egregious handwriting.

<sup>7</sup> Dina Khoury and Aaron Faust each discuss a few petitions, which helped alert me to their presence in the archives, though they do not dedicate special analysis to them. See: Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 154; Faust, *Ba'athification of Iraq*, 77, 114-115. Social historians have often turned to petitions to investigate the lives of non-elites. A good overview is Lex Heerma van Voss, ed., *Petitions in Social History* (New York: International Review of Social History and Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, 2001). For historians of the Middle East, Ottoman petitions have proven to be fertile grounds for scholarship. In addition to numerous

spending: whose problems were deemed worthy of regime assistance? The period of 1986-2002 covered by these petitions was marked by chronic instability, including two major wars, a popular rebellion that swept Iraq's northern and southern regions in 1991, and debilitating international sanctions from 1990-2003. In the midst of these disruptions, some Iraqis petitioned the government to save them from financial destitution, to provide urgent medical treatment, or to intervene in an employment or legal matter.

**Table 1. Topics of Petitions**

Topics of Petitions	Percentage of Petitions in Archival Sample
Financial Aid	27%
Martyrdom Benefits	13%
Legal Assistance	13%
Housing	12%
Rations	10%
Internal Party Petitions	9.5%
Informing on Other Citizens	7%
Denouncing Official Abuse	4%
Employment Problems	3%

But while the government was rather successful in maintaining a robust welfare system and responding generously to petitions in the 1980s, including throughout the Iran-Iraq War, the imposition of international sanctions in 1990 severely curtailed the regime's ability to use its largesse

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excellent articles, see: Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Ottoman Palestine* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Elena Gara, M. Erdem Kabadayi, and Cristoph K. Neumann (eds.), *Popular Protest and Political Participation in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Universitesi Yayinlari, 2011); Michael Ursinus, *Grievance Administration (Sikayet) in an Ottoman Province* (New York: Rutledge Curzon, 2005).



to maintain public good will.<sup>8</sup> Social spending, including in response to petitions, scarcely improved even after the passage of the Oil-for-Food deal in November 1995 increased state revenue flows. In an environment of restricted resources, the Iraqi government had to make tough choices about how it would prioritize its spending. Petitions provide one way to assess how Iraqis attempted to increase their share of government aid, and simultaneously show how the Iraqi regime decided which populations and which kinds of problems it would respond to.

Petitions also reveal what opportunities existed for citizens to approach the regime directly. In this, petitions share some characteristics with other forms of citizen-state communications, including letters to the editor published in newspapers, sycophantic letters, and in-person meetings with Saddam. The primary focus of this chapter is on written requests to the regime, however, because the archival paper trail they generated uniquely reveals how citizens presented their appeals and how the regime responded to their requests. For example, while Saddam encouraged citizens to write letters to state-run newspapers to provide ‘venting’ of public grievances and criticize corruption at lower levels of the government (a policy similar to practices in the Soviet Union and other authoritarian contexts), letters to the editor have drawbacks as historical sources.<sup>9</sup> Namely, they are curated, carefully chosen by the editors of government-controlled newspapers, and subjected to an editing process often invisible to the researcher. Petitioners, in contrast, never intended for their letters to be published. As the vast majority of these Iraqi petitions were written and signed in each case by a single author, these constituted a private performance intended only for the officials receiving them, rather than the entire Iraqi public. Furthermore, the archives preserve

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<sup>8</sup> The weakness of the state did not necessarily mean the weakness of the Ba‘th Party, however, as several scholars have shown. Eager to gain preferential access to food and financial support, party membership increased throughout the sanctions period. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*; 51; Faust, *Ba‘thification of Iraq*, 82-87.

<sup>9</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*. 124; Achim Rohde, “Echoes from Below?”; Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 93-94; Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 4.

the unedited, original texts of the petitions in almost all cases, in contrast to the edited letters that appeared in the newspapers.

Petitions share some qualities with another kind of letter found in the archives, which I call ‘sycophantic letters.’ These letters had no other stated objective than engaging in adulation, though an implicit goal was to improve one’s standing with the regime. Historians have referred to such acts as “gesture politics” by which citizens signaled their political allegiances.<sup>10</sup> For example, a routine display of commitment to the Ba’thist regime entailed sending oaths of loyalty to Saddam written in blood, a ritual that had its origin in the 1982 referendum of Saddam’s rule (see Chapter Three).<sup>11</sup> Such oaths were routine performances in Saddam’s Iraq: a newspaper clipping from 1993 showcased a poet who wrote a “love poem” to Saddam with his own blood, for instance.<sup>12</sup> The officials who received these kinds of letters dutifully dispatched memos acknowledging the receipt of a blood-inked loyalty oath and forwarded them to the president, an unremarkable event in the day of an Iraqi bureaucrat.<sup>13</sup> Others were more creative with their offerings: one man offered to donate his internal organs if any party leader needed a transplant.<sup>14</sup> This unusual offer was framed as “an expression of my great love for our party, its historic destiny, and its inspired leader.”<sup>15</sup> Another man sent a letter explaining that he had named his six children after Saddam and his family members—‘Uday, Qusay, Rana, Raghad, and so forth—as a sign of his devotion to his “beloved leader [*al-qa’id al-habib*].”<sup>16</sup> Such exaggerated professions of devotion are not unique to the Iraqi context; they are observed in many other authoritarian settings, especially where there is a strong cult of personality around the

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<sup>10</sup> Drapac and Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler’s Empire*, 82-83.

<sup>11</sup> Aaron Faust also mentions these blood oaths in *Ba’thification of Iraq*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Samir ‘Ulu, “Muhammad Muhammad al-‘Alim: I Write Love Poetry with My Blood,” *al-Qadisiyya*, November 29, 1993, BRCC 01-3607-0004-0013.

<sup>13</sup> Party secretariat to the Secretary of the President, “Oath Document,” September 10, 1986, BRCC 01-3796-0001-0341.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from a citizen to the leader of the Abu Ja‘far al-Mansur branch, “Donation,” May 29, 2000, BRCC 01-3866-0000-0269.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from a man to Saddam, [undated, December 2000], BRCC 01-3866-0000-0004 and -0005.

dictator.<sup>17</sup> Because these letters lacked a specific request, however, they rarely received responses from the regime and are therefore less useful for illuminating how the regime made decisions about granting requests and distributing resources.

Finally, it must also be noted that written petitions were not the only methods available to Iraqis who wanted to entreat the government with an urgent request. There is an ancient history of rulers meeting in person with common subjects to hear their complaints and requests. Ottoman sultans, for example, made a regular practice of receiving petitions from subjects during Friday prayers since the earliest days of the empire. The intimate nature of these in-person petitions powerfully symbolized the connection between the sultan and his subjects and his responsibility to provide justice for them.<sup>18</sup> Saddam well understood the potent political symbolism embedded in this ritual, and he was adamant about maintaining this tradition of meeting almost daily with ordinary Iraqis to disburse cash, housing, or medical treatments.<sup>19</sup> It was a popular public relations stunt designed to endear the population to Saddam and cement his cult of personality as a generous patriarch and father of the country.<sup>20</sup> Sassoon likened a meeting with Saddam to “winning the lottery,” since every person who met with the president was virtually guaranteed to receive some kind of gift or assistance.<sup>21</sup>

These personal meetings with Saddam existed simultaneously with the widespread practice of submitting written petitions; indeed, many people pursued both strategies at once. For instance, many written petitions begin by requesting in-person meetings with Saddam, but also include

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example: Sarah Davies, “‘Cult’ of the *Vozhd*”: Representations in Letters, 1934-1941,” *Russian History* 24, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1997): 143. Joseph Sassoon has written about how authoritarian leaders across the Arab world, including in Libya, Syria, and Egypt, have cultivated cults of personality that encourage such behavior within the population. See Chapter 6, “Leadership and the Cult of Personality,” in Sassoon’s *Anatomy of Authoritarianism*.

<sup>18</sup> Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 2-4; Akin, “Politics of Petitioning,” 437.

<sup>19</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party*, 124

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

detailed information about their request in case the meeting is not granted.<sup>22</sup> Written and oral petitions could also reinforce one another: one war widow mentioned that she had been lucky to meet with Saddam in person in 1991 and that he had promised her a house during their meeting. Disappointingly, the promised house never materialized, and she wrote a petition to Saddam years later to complain.<sup>23</sup>

These face-to-face meetings between ruler and ruled, and the seriousness of Saddam's commitment to holding them, help confirm that the regime saw important political advantages in receiving petitions of all kinds. Unfortunately, no paper trail of documentary evidence about these in-person meetings with ordinary citizens has yet turned up in the Iraqi Ba'th Party archives, making them a difficult subject to study. Yet it is worth bearing in mind that written petitions were just one strategy among many pursued by ordinary Iraqis looking for extra assistance from the regime, and that verbal petitions and written petitions served the same valuable function for both the petitioners and for the regime.

In sum, Baghdadis had a few different avenues by which they could communicate directly with the regime: letters to the editor printed in the newspaper, sycophantic letters and other gestures of loyalty, and the rare personal meeting with Saddam or a high official. Petitions, however, are uniquely valuable in analyzing the relationship between the state and society because the archives permit us to see both how citizens addressed governing officials and they responded to those requests.

### **Profile of Petitioners**

Petitioners represent a peculiar group within society: they are vulnerable enough to have special needs, yet trusting enough in the government to willingly identify themselves to the state.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example: Letter from a woman to Saddam, February 18, 1992, *BRCC* 01-3086-0001-0420; Letter from a man to Saddam, [undated, February 2000], *BRCC* 01-3866-0000-0004.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from a woman to Saddam, October 6, 1999, *BRCC* 01-3014-0002-0111.

What is striking about this collection of petitions is that we see a broad swath of the population readily approached the Ba‘thist regime with demands, critics, and requests; petitioning was not an activity that was only safe for regime insiders or elites to engage in.

First, Baghdadi petitioners were an economically diverse group of people. While many petitioners referenced their poverty and asked for financial assistance, others were well off but still required government intervention into a personal problem. Likewise, these petitions reflect a range of educational levels: some were nicely typed with sophisticated rhetorical flourishes, while others consisted of handwritten scrawl with rudimentary sentences riddled with spelling and grammatical errors. At least five female petitioners appear to have been illiterate owing to their use of a thumbprint instead of a signature, suggesting that someone helped them prepare their letter.<sup>24</sup> Such diversity indicates that petitioning was not strongly associated with any particular class.

Slightly more than half of all petitioners in this sample were women, and many of them were widows (or, less frequently, divorcées) who were more likely to be financially vulnerable without a male wage earner. In fact, women had some distinct advantages in petitioning. One key criterion the regime used to determine whether a low-income family merited extra financial aid was based on gender. It was government policy that families could be enrolled for a financial assistance program called the “Social Solidarity Funds [*sanadiq al-takaful al-ijtima’i*]” only if they had no male breadwinners in the family. Many Iraqi women understood this and incorporated gendered pleas to bolster their requests. One woman wrote:

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<sup>24</sup> See: BRCC 01-2535-0000-0521, 01-3616-0002-0156, 01-2170-0001-0774, 01-2170-0001-0499, and 01-3086-0001-0420. According to the United Nations Development Programme, Iraq’s adult literacy rate in 2000 was 74.1%, though this may have been higher in Baghdad. UNDP Human Development Reports, “Adult Literacy Rate (% ages 15 and older)” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/101406>, accessed March 24, 2017. There is no indication that Iraqis routinely hired professional petition writers or enlisted friends and relatives to write their petitions for them, except in these cases of adult illiteracy. This is a change from the early modern period: see Ben-Bassat’s discussion of the role of professional scribes in writing Ottoman petitions in *Petitioning the Sultan*, 50-51.

“My husband died and left my daughters in my care. [...] We are in a difficult situation and we are deprived of even the simplest needs for daily life because of our poor situation and *because we are women*.”<sup>25</sup> (emphasis mine)

Similarly, a young woman wrote a letter explaining that she was the only child of two elderly parents. Her family was struggling because they had no “breadwinner” (*ma'il*). By this, she meant there was no *male* breadwinner, since the petitioner herself was of working age.<sup>26</sup> Both of these women’s petitions were approved, demonstrating that even marginalized and disadvantaged members of society, such as widows, were often successful in negotiating with the regime.

Though women and men both petitioned the regime for all the same kinds of requests and wrote in nearly equal numbers, petitioners tended to frame their requests differently according to the traditional family gender roles idealized by the Ba’th Party in the late 1980s and 1990s. Men utilized patriarchal language by speaking “from the heart of a father” to another [i.e., Saddam], and underscoring their fatherly duty to financially provide for their families.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, women often placed themselves under the protection of Saddam’s “fatherly sympathy [*al-‘ataf al-abwiyi*].”<sup>28</sup> One widow wrote in her petition: “for you, your Excellency, are yes, the brother and yes, the father, and yes, the appointed one, after God Almighty.”<sup>29</sup> This paternalistic language fit with Saddam’s own cult of personality, which positioned him as a ‘father of the nation.’<sup>30</sup> It also harmonized with the

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from a woman, April 15, 1995, BRCC 01-3616-0002-0156. A similar petition written in 1997 from an all-female family can be seen at BRCC 01-3616-0002-0050.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from a woman, [undated, June 1997], BRCC 01-2123-0003-0109.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Petition from a man to the party secretariat, [undated, March 1995], BRCC 041-2-2-0186; Soldier’s petition to the Vice-President of the Revolutionary Command Council, January 19, 1989, BRCC 01-2535-0000-0585.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Petition from a woman to the Vice-President of the Revolutionary Command Council, [undated, May 1995], BRCC 01-3616-0002-0145.

<sup>29</sup> Petition from a woman to the Leaders of the Baghdad al-Jadida section, “Interview,” December 10, 2001, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0069.

<sup>30</sup> Sassoon, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism*, 204. This kind of patriarchal language can be found in many other authoritarian regimes centered on a single male leader: Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens”: 91; Fitzpatrick, “Petitions and Denunciations”: 5; Davies, “The ‘Cult’ of the Vohzd”: 133.

regime's shift in the late 1980s and 1990s towards traditional gender roles, away from the outwardly progressive state feminism it had championed in the 1970s (see Chapter Six).<sup>31</sup>

The vast majority of these petitioners were not party members, but political independents who felt secure enough in their standing with the regime to invite its scrutiny of their lives. So important was political affiliation that petitioners immediately identified themselves at the beginning of each letter: political independents invariably opened with "I am citizen [name] [*ani muwatin/a*]," while Ba'thists introduced themselves as "comrade [*rafiq/a*]" and indicated their party membership rank. Many political independents nevertheless had credentials that signaled loyalty to the regime: family members who were veterans or martyrs in one of Saddam's wars, recipients of wartime bravery medals, or members of the special card-carrying caste of "Friends of Saddam," and so forth.<sup>32</sup> These kinds of status markers were routinely offered up as evidence of devotion to the regime as petitioners implicitly (and, sometimes, explicitly) demanded that their request be granted because of their family's previous sacrifices for the state.

Those few party members who did write petitions through civilian channels usually did so because they were in a sensitive situation (such as a party official whose son deserted from the military), or because they were in conflict with their immediate supervisors and wanted to appeal to higher authorities (such as a party member who had been kicked out of a local Ba'thist women's group for misconduct and wanted to rejoin her cadre).<sup>33</sup> Ordinarily, party members had no need to submit ordinary petitions through the mail because they could make requests through internal memos sent up and down the party hierarchy. These 'internal party petitions' also turn up in the archives. For example, many party members wrote internal memos requesting special permission to

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<sup>31</sup> Rohde, "Gender Policies in Ba'thist Iraq," in *State-Society Relations in Ba'thist Iraq*: 75-118.

<sup>32</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 208-2011.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from a party member to the rations officials for the Hamza Sayyid al-Shuhada' branch, "Crossing Out Ration," November 25, 1994, BRCC 027-2-4-0353; Petition from a former party member to Saddam Hussein, [undated, June 2001], BRCC 01-3389-0000-0579 and -0580.

move to Baghdad in the 1990s. Fearing a wave of rural-urban migration to the capital during the Iran-Iraq War and, later, the economic downturn of the sanctions, Saddam had prohibited all non-Baghdad residents from moving to the capital unless they were party officials whose party work required them to live there or if they had been born in Baghdad before 1977.<sup>34</sup> Notably, these internal party petitions share many of the same attributes as the letters sent by ordinary citizens, including framing their requests as demonstrations of loyalty to the regime and emphasizing their financial neediness.<sup>35</sup>

Most petitions were authored and submitted by a single person. Out of the total 117 petitions in this sample, only eight were written as collective petitions with multiple signatories. This tendency for individuals to write petitions that were framed as personal letters is not unique to Iraq: a similar trend existed for petitions written in the Soviet Union, and it is an important indication of the political atomization that authoritarian regimes actively inculcate.<sup>36</sup> Terrified of mass movements, the Iraqi regime had long sown mistrust between Iraqi citizens by encouraging neighbors and even family members to inform on one another.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, Iraqis judged that it was safer to write private, individual letters to the regime rather than give any appearance of collective mobilization.<sup>38</sup> The exceptions prove the rule: all eight cases of petitions with multiple signatories involve small groups of citizens who either lived in the same apartment building or who worked in the same profession, where their collective interest in solving a common problem was clearly without political aim. Furthermore, none of these collective petitions had more than 20 signatories, so these were not attempts at mass mobilization. For example, two collective petitions

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<sup>34</sup> Bengio, "Iraq," Volume X, 1986, 374.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example: Letter from a party employee to the Ministry of the Interior, "Piece of Residential Land," January 2, 1993, BRCC 01-3086-0001-0698; Letter from a party official to the party secretariat and the Leaders of the Hamza Sayyid al-Shuhada' branch, "Piece of Land," [undated, April 1999], BRCC 01-3014-0002-0270.

<sup>36</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens": 80.

<sup>37</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ith Party*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Petitions and Denunciations": 7.



pertained to a group of residents living in state housing who appealed a threatened eviction.<sup>39</sup> One belonged to a group of female medical students who worked in a military hospital for the Ministry of Defense and who protested that they were not given fair benefits for their work as compared to men in equivalent positions, and another to a group of four women who complained about the rising price of sewing machines.<sup>40</sup>

One striking feature of these petitions is that the very populations most often overlooked by governments and scholars alike—the poor, the elderly, the ill and disabled, the unemployed, and women (especially widows and divorcées)—were some of the most insistent and persistent petitioners, demanding to be acknowledged by the regime. Significantly, none of the petitions sent to the regime were anonymous, which is a point of contrast to petitioners in the Soviet Union who omitted their names when writing anything critical of the state.<sup>41</sup> Iraqi petitioners were people who willingly identified themselves and their families to the government, supplying addresses and personal details that were guaranteed to be recorded and filed away.

The frequent, willful participation of marginalized populations in petitioning provides an interesting point of counter-balance to the rich body of theoretical literature about power, state building, and resistance, exemplified by scholars like James C. Scott and Timothy Mitchell. In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott argues that governments have a compelling interest to make the people and resources within their borders increasingly visible (in his parlance, “legible”), able to be monitored, and squeezed for tax revenue.<sup>42</sup> In this framework, members of society have an equally compelling interest to remain ‘invisible’ to the state to avoid taxes and the regulation of their bodies, labor, and

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example: petition from two women to Saddam Hussein, “Appeal for Help,” [undated, August 1999], BRCC 01-2129-0000-0310; a petition sent on behalf of residents in government housing to the leaders of the Martyr ‘Adnan Khayr Allah section, “Eviction,” June 28, 1999, BRCC 01-2129-0000-0524.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from a group of female medical students, [undated, June 2002], BRCC 01-3146-0000-0132 to -0133; People’s Day petition by four women, “Sewing Machines,” June 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0096.

<sup>41</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens”: 80-81.

<sup>42</sup> See: Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 95-128; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 80-122.

movement, and thus they employ a multitude of strategies to resist state control. In contrast, Iraqi petitioners saw the state as the foundation of a welfare system that could benefit their situation, and they therefore sought to draw the attention of officials to their plights, not hide from them.

Nevertheless, this theoretical framework remains compelling when members of society view the government as having a primarily extractive function, or when those individuals and groups have reason to fear state violence. In the paranoid atmosphere of Saddam's Iraq, one can imagine a long list of people who did not want to draw the regime's attention in any circumstance and thus who did not write petitions no matter how urgent their needs were, including political opponents of the regime, ordinary criminals, or military deserters.<sup>43</sup> In examining this bounty of letters from members of society ordinarily overlooked, the historian must still be mindful of the many 'silences' in the record—those who did not write letters to the regime, and those petitioners who left telling gaps in the information they did offer up.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, petitioning was available to all strata of society—so long as they were on neutral or positive terms with the regime. The popularity of petitioning indicates that a broad segment of Baghdadis maintained general trust in the responsiveness of the regime. As Martin Dimitrov has argued, citizens only send petitions and complaints to the government when “the public trusts the central government to intervene on its behalf,” and that, accordingly, a decrease in citizen petitions and complaints can indicate a crisis of faith in the government.<sup>45</sup> Despite the ruthlessness of Saddam's regime, a large and diverse portion of the public still looked to the government to meet their basic needs and provide for them during difficult times.

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<sup>43</sup> A shadowy background was not always an obstacle to petitioning, however: families of deserters from the army wrote to the regime frequently, usually to disown the errant relative and re-affirm their loyalty to the regime in the hopes of avoiding collective punishment. Dina Khoury discusses the tendency of the Ba'th Party to reward *individuals* for service to the regime, but punish whole *families* in the case of suspected wrongdoing. See *Iraq in Wartime*, 177.

<sup>44</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) eloquently explores the variety of 'silences' that are created in archives and in the writing of history.

<sup>45</sup> Dimitrov, “What the Party Wanted to Know”: 276.

## Limits and Possibilities of Speech

Petitions are both a distinct kind of political performance and a literary genre, with stable norms and scripts that often display linkages to pre-modern petitioning practices.<sup>46</sup> As such, the voices preserved in these petitions are not ‘natural,’ but mediated by “prevailing norms, institutions, and power structures.”<sup>47</sup> Analyzing the rhetorical strategies of Baghdad petitions reveals how ordinary people “constructed representations of themselves” to the state as well as how the regime expected people to perform their role as citizen/subjects.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the artificial ‘voices’ used in these petitions were the only acceptable registers in which Iraqis could speak when communicating with the regime.

Iraqis, like many petitioners throughout time and in different cultural and geographic contexts, struck a balance between deference and boldness by ascribing to Saddam the qualities they wish to see espoused: fairness, the power and capacity to intervene, concern for common people, and a commitment to justice. Parroting regime jargon was another common technique for signaling loyalty to the ruler, as is invoking blessings on their health and well-being.<sup>49</sup> In this way, Iraqi petitions fall squarely within the traditions of this time-worn literary genre.

The stability of certain scripts and rhetorical devices in petitions over time comes into stark relief when comparing Arabic-language petitions from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to those written in Iraq in the 1990s. For example, one study of medieval Arabic petitions shows that a typical petition was structured along the following template:<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Davies, “‘Cult’ of the Vozhd”: 136-137; Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens”: 92.

<sup>47</sup> J.E. Shaw, “Writing to the Prince: Supplications, Equity, and Absolutism in Sixteenth-Century Tuscany,” *Past and Present* 215 (2012): 65, cited in Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Eyal Ginio, “Coping with the State’s Agents ‘from below’: Petitions, Legal Appeal, and the Sultan’s Justice in Ottoman Legal Practice” in *Popular Protest and Political Participation in Ottoman Legal Practice*, 55; Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Van Voss, “Introduction,” in *Petitions in Social History*, 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey Khan, “The Historical Development of Medieval Arabic Petitions,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53 (1990): 8.

1. Invocation (“In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”)
2. Address
3. Blessing on the addressee
4. Exposition
5. Request
6. Motivation
7. Blessing on the addressee

Modern Iraqi petitions follow a remarkably similar format, though updated by intermixing Ba‘thist terminology and slogans with typical Islamic phrases of blessing. Taking a representative letter from the Iraqi Ba‘th Party archives as an example, we see the same structural elements in the same order as medieval Arabic petitions:

**[Invocation]**

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

**[Address and Blessing]**

Mr. President, Leader and Warrior for the Faith (*Sayyid al-Ra'is al-Qa'id al-Mujahid*), Saddam Hussein (may God protect and preserve him): Warm greetings.

Mr. President Leader (*Sayyid al-Ra'is al-Qa'id*),

**[Exposition]**

I am citizen [name omitted]. Our mother provided for our family with a pension from the state that was given to us after the martyrdom of our two brothers [names omitted] in the Glorious Battle of Qadisiyyat Saddam [the Iran-Iraq war]. However, this pension was cut off when my mother died in 1985. After this, my third brother was martyred in the Glorious Battle of Qadisiyyat Saddam. He was married and had one daughter. We still had two brothers remaining in military service. One of them was taken prisoner during the Pages of Treachery and Betrayal [the 1991 uprising] in the North of the country during the month of Ramadan 1991. My fifth brother was released from the army. He now lives with me and our younger sister. He has been without work ever since he was released from the army. There are three of us in the family (one boy and two girls), and we live together without any means of supporting ourselves except for the mercy of God.

**[Request and Motivation]**

I submit my request for aid to your Excellency and ask for assistance from our father and the father of all Iraqis [Saddam Hussein] so that we can have resources to live on, because we have no father and no mother [and no breadwinner] except for the one brother that lives with us, and he is without work and without a salary.

We place all of our hope and trust in your excellency that you will not abandon a family that has given three martyrs and a prisoner of war without resources and no way of supporting our lives.

**[Blessing]**

We send you our appreciation and our respect.

[signature]

[name]

[address]<sup>51</sup>

This woman accomplishes many important objectives required for a successful petition. She fluently appropriates regime jargon to signal her sacrifices to the regime and her loyalty to Saddam Hussein specifically. She calls Saddam by his full honorific title and invokes the requisite

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<sup>51</sup> Petition from an Iraqi woman to Saddam Hussein, [undated: February 1993], BRCC 01-3086-0001-0611.

blessing of protection, uses regime terminology for Iraqi battles (“The Glorious Qadisiyyat Saddam”) and refers to the combat deaths of her brothers as “martyrdom,” referencing a legal category designated by the Ba‘thist regime.<sup>52</sup> She positions Saddam as a generous patriarch (“our father and the father of all Iraqis”) who, given her own orphaned status, she strongly suggests is responsible for her family. Her exposition lays out the compelling sacrifices her family made in service to the country and underscores their financial destitution, signaling their loyalty. Indeed, the official who received her petition underlined in pencil the fact that three sons in the same family were all martyred in the Iran-Iraq war, which prompted party officials to recommend to the Office of the President that the family be granted a pension to “combat the difficulties of their life.”<sup>53</sup> Though the specific circumstances of this woman’s family and the high casualties they sustained make her petition unique, the format and formulae used in this petition are nearly identical to many others found in the Iraqi Ba‘th Party archives, with only minor variations in format among them.

Yet this woman’s flattering approach was not the only way Iraqis tried to cajole officials into granting their requests. The regime accepted a limited range of rhetorical approaches, including some criticism, and not all petitions relied on obsequious groveling that might be expected in a dictatorship. Borrowing from Sheila Fitzpatrick’s typology of citizen petitions in Soviet Russia, most Iraqi petitioners presented themselves either as a ‘suppliant’ or as a ‘citizen.’<sup>54</sup> ‘Suplicants’ presented themselves as downtrodden by circumstances out of their control. Their dominant trait was their destitution and their loyalty; the suffering they experienced was often in spite of their contributions to the glory of the nation and its leader. They typically asked for aid, be it for monthly financial assistance, help with housing, extra food supplies, or a medical procedure they couldn’t afford. In contrast, ‘citizens’ did not ask for charity; they used the language of rights, entitlements,

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<sup>52</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 164-172.

<sup>53</sup> Memo from the party secretariat to the Office of the President, February 17, 1993, BRCC 01-3086-0001-0607.

<sup>54</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Suplicants and Citizens”: 78-105.

and laws to make demands on the regime or to complain about wrongful government actions. Both kinds of petitions often included heart-wrenching details, though differently framed: ‘supplicants’ emphasized their misery and helplessness, while ‘citizens’ highlighted the devastating impacts a wrongfully-applied policy had on their family. ‘Supplicants’ tended to lavish the addressee with praise, particularly at the closing of the letter. ‘Citizens’ tended to dole out expressions of flattery more sparingly, relying on the correctness of their argument in the eyes of the law rather than their ability to sway the addressee with adulation. Two typical examples illustrate the difference. The following exemplifies the ‘supplicant’ approach, and depicts an official in nearly divine terms:

“All my hope is in God, and then my hope is in your excellency, that you will not turn me away empty-handed. [...] My husband has abandoned me because my children have an incurable illness. [...] Do not forget me, your excellency vice-president.... I ask for sympathy and compassion from God and from your excellency.”<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, a party member wrote the following petition using a ‘citizen’ approach, rebuking the regime for failing to act sooner:

I am [name omitted], a Ba‘th Party member with the rank of “advanced supporter” [*nasir mutaqaaddim*], and I have written to the party more than once to explain my health situation. I suffer from kidney failure, and I need a kidney transplant surgery because my life is in danger. The party will not be stingy in helping me [*lan yabkbhul ‘alayi bi-l-musa’ida*] because I have given enough to the party throughout my career as a comrade, and I have been in the party ranks for nearly 24 years. [...] I request that the party...pay for the surgery, at the very least.”<sup>56</sup>

Though both petitioners faced hardships, the bases of these appeals were entirely different. The woman in the first example asked for charity based on the difficulties of her personal circumstances and included many more flattering phrases and honorifics, even nearly equating the regime official with God. The man in the second example made bold demands of the party, attempting to shame

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<sup>55</sup> Letter from a woman to the Vice President of the Revolutionary Command Council, November 22, 1988, BRCC 01-2535-0000-0594.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from a party member, “My Health Situation and Help from the Party,” [undated, March 1993], BRCC 01-3086-0001-0606.

them into assisting him. Rather than showing deference, he strongly implied that the government owed him for his years of service.

In the end, there is no strong evidence that one rhetorical strategy was more effective than another in eliciting a positive response. Rather, analyzing the different rhetorical strategies employed by Iraqis disrupts presumptions about state-society dynamics under Ba‘th party rule. Far from universally exhibiting passive, silent resignation or cowering sycophancy while living in a “republic of fear,” many of these Baghdadi petitioners demonstrated boldness and agency when interacting with the regime, making claims to rights and entitlements under the law and entreating the government to do more to provide for poor and vulnerable segments of the population.<sup>57</sup> Fully one-third of all petitioners took a bolder ‘citizen’ stance in their communication with the regime. Some of these Baghdadis spoke up about the structural violence of international sanctions and, at times, even spoke out against the physical violence and punishments meted out by the regime itself. But even those who presented themselves as ‘supplicants’ engaged in an important political act by pointing out problems with the state medical system, drawing attention to the lack of affordable food during sanctions, or highlighting the inadequacy of government pensions to support a family. How effective were these petitions in challenging government behavior? The next section addresses both the possibilities and limitations of petitions as a vehicle for political action.

### **Petitioning as a Political Act**

Though authoritarian regimes seek to dominate speech in the public sphere and eliminate competing or dissenting voices, there are also important benefits to the regime in allowing some opportunities for citizen-initiated communication with the government. Looking at the practice of

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<sup>57</sup> This phrase borrows from the title of Kanan Makiya’s influential *Republic of Fear*, which revealed to a broad audience Saddam Hussein’s violent treatment of his own citizens, such as the gassing of Iraqi Kurds. Since then, many scholars have noted that Saddam did not rely solely on repressive levels of violence to govern Iraq, but balanced violent terror with a system of lavish patronage and rewards. See, for example: Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 193.



petitioning in other authoritarian contexts is instructive: in the case of China, Xi Chen argues that encouraging and receiving petitions is one way that authoritarian regimes increase their strength and resilience, since it allows the government to routinize bargaining between state and society, rather than rely solely on costly and unpopular repressive measures to manage social discontent and grievances.<sup>58</sup> Responding to petitions bolsters regime credibility, demonstrates state capacity to act, strengthens its proclaimed populist credentials, and provides the government with a tool to placate grievances. It also reinforces the notion that the president is the ultimate authority for dispensing justice and charity.<sup>59</sup> As Mustafa Kemal stated during the early years of his rule in Republican Turkey: “One of the easiest ways in which a government and a party can lose power is unresponsiveness to people’s complaints.... People’s appeals and complaints must always find a true echo in our state organization.”<sup>60</sup> Saddam and other Ba’th Party leaders understood that an implicit moral contract existed in petitioning: citizens expected some show of response to their queries, and the regime gained considerable benefits from maintaining a steady influx of petitions and the information they contained.<sup>61</sup> And so they chastised bureaucrats who were slow to follow up on petitions and citizen requests. The Ba’th party secretariat routinely sent follow-up memos to officials who waited too long to respond to petitions with a terse command: “Please answer quickly.”<sup>62</sup>

Another reason petitions are valuable to authoritarian regimes is that they help leaders gather information about public opinion, subversive political movements, anti-regime rumors, and abuse and corruption by lower-ranking officials. Martin Dimitrov asserts that petitions and complaints submitted by citizens were such effective forms of intelligence gathering in Communist Bulgaria that

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<sup>58</sup> Xi Chen, *Social Protests and Contentious Authoritarianism in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>59</sup> This helps explain why petitioning remains popular in authoritarian contexts and why the practice survived the transition into modern bureaucratic states. Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Akin, “Politics of Petitioning” 441.

<sup>61</sup> Ben-Bassat makes a similar observation regarding Ottoman petitions in *Petitioning the Sultan*, 5-6, 23-24.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Office of the party secretariat to the Ministry of Defense, “People’s Day,” September 10, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0233.

it fundamentally altered the way regime governed, allowing them to move away from Stalinist policies of mass repression towards the selective targeting of only those individuals confirmed to be acting against the state.<sup>63</sup> Though Joseph Sassoon has argued that the Iraqi Ba‘th Party never achieved the same level of quality intelligence gathering, the regime nevertheless approached petitioning as a potentially important source of information.<sup>64</sup>

Saddam himself was explicit about his goal of using petitions to monitor corruption by lower-ranking officials. In fact, Saddam occasionally seemed annoyed that petitions most often dealt with ordinary requests for money or resources, rather than sending actionable intelligence. In 1980, officials from the British Embassy in Baghdad attended a speech of Saddam’s in which he complained:

“I want you...to talk to those people who do not realise the importance of taking up the Head of State’s time by calling him on the phone or who have nothing better to do than to come and say, ‘Sir, I want a house or I want pocket money or I am sick or I want to be transferred’—all demands which are not appropriate. [...] Demands should be confined to those matters in which some injustice has been perpetrated by an official. I am most upset with the demands of those housewives who have no jobs and are on the telephone 24-hours a day imagining that it is Saddam Hussain’s job to listen to unfair demands. Out of every thousand petitions we receive only two [that] deserve attention.”<sup>65</sup>

In 1993, Saddam repeated this point in a sternly-worded warning to the officials and ministries who dealt with written petitions:

“Ministries and other administrations should deal with the citizens’ problems by studying the issues they present according to what the laws instruct, and to fix the problem according to what is permitted within the purview of their ministry. They should not raise the issue with the Office of the President unless it pertains to a

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<sup>63</sup> Dimitrov, “What the Party Wanted to Know,” and Martin Dimitrov and Joseph Sassoon, “State Security, Information, and Repression: A Comparison of Communist Bulgaria and Ba‘thist Iraq,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16 (Spring 2014): 3-31.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>65</sup> *TNA*, FCO 8/4126, Memo from British Embassy Baghdad, June 4, 1980; *TNA*, FCO 8/4126, “Annual Review for 1980,” December 31, 1980.

matter that relates to the interests of the presidency or pertains to addressing a lower-ranking official harming a citizen.”<sup>66</sup>

Petitions did occasionally produce the kinds of denunciations Saddam was looking for: one reported that a military officer in his neighborhood was stealing from and beating up other residents, all while wearing his uniform as an intimidation tactic.<sup>67</sup> An elderly widow complained that her rations agents regularly stole from her portions and, when she complained, they retaliated against her by beating her and breaking down the door of her house.<sup>68</sup> Yet if gathering intelligence on officials' misbehavior was the primary goal of receiving petitions, this strategy produced only limited results for the regime: denunciations of officials constitute a mere 4% of this archival sample. Rather, the regime relied much more heavily on a web of paid and unpaid informants to provide a critical supply of quality intelligence about wrongdoing by both civilians and officials.<sup>69</sup> Petitions could supply this information, but more rarely.

Nor were such denunciations always valuable to the regime. For example, a Baghdad woman sent an incendiary petition claiming that her son had been murdered by a member of the Iraqi military intelligence directorate (*mudiriyyat al-istikhabarat al-'askariyya*) over a personal dispute. She demanded both compensation for his death and an investigation into the circumstances of his killing.<sup>70</sup> Remarkably, her local party branch advocated on her behalf against this powerful military intelligence service, declaring that she “deserved help” from the state for this wrongful death.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Office of the party secretariat to the Leaders of All Party Branches, “Responsibility of State Administrations in Solving Citizens’ Issues,” September 12, 1993, BRCC 01-2214-0000-0259.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from a man to the leader of the Hamza Sayyid al-Shuhada’ branch, “Complaint,” [undated, December 2001] BRCC 01-2170-0001-0722 and -0723.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from a woman to the leader of the Baghdad al-Jadida section, “Interview,” [undated, January 2002], BRCC 01-3389-0000-0071.

<sup>69</sup> Dimitrov and Sassoon, “State Security, Information, and Repression”: 22-27.

<sup>70</sup> Woman’s petition to the Musa al-Kadhim branch, September 1, 2002, BRCC 01-3580-0002-0068;

<sup>71</sup> Musa al-Kadhim branch to the party secretariat, “People’s Day,” September 2, 2002, BRCC 01-3580-0002-0067.

Despite these credible allegations, Saddam intervened to stop the investigation and protect the intelligence member from any criminal proceedings against him.<sup>72</sup>

Citizens could also denounce one another for bad or illegal behavior, calling for the police to investigate their claims. These usually pertained to domestic disputes, whether between spouses or between parents and their children. These letters poured in: one woman wrote for help because her husband had mistreated her terribly, stealing her personal possessions, abducting their one-month-old child, and kicking her out of the house.<sup>73</sup> Two co-wives were locked in a bitter dispute, with the first wife writing to ask for legal assistance after her husband and his second wife had stolen her money and abducted her child.<sup>74</sup> A father came forward to complain that his daughter was being beaten by her husband.<sup>75</sup> A woman asked the authorities to arrest her son, a deserter from the army, who had assaulted her and her husband during a recent dispute.<sup>76</sup>

Officials followed up on each of these allegations, but the regime was careful not to be manipulated by these petitions for legal intervention. Each denunciation was thoroughly investigated by the police, security and intelligence forces, and party representatives. In several cases, the accused was cleared of wrongdoing after it was found that information from the original complaint was “not sound [*adam sibhat al-ma'lumat*].” In other cases, arrests were made based on the information provided through the petitions. More distressingly, the families suffering through interpersonal conflicts and domestic violence seldom received justice. Though the authorities did arrest the son who had assaulted his parents, most of the other cases were dropped because of lack of evidence or

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<sup>72</sup> Party Secretariat to the Military Intelligence Service, “People’s Day,” September 8, 2002, BRCC 01-3580-0002-0064; Memo from party secretariat to the Musa al-Kadhimi branch, “People’s Day,” October 29, 2002, BRCC 01-3580-0002-0061.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from a woman to the leaders of the Baghdad al-Jadida section, “Interview,” December 5, 2001, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0292.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from a woman to the leader of the Baghdad al-Jadida section, [undated, December 2001], BRCC 01-2170-0001-0125 to -0127.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from a man, [undated, December 2001], BRCC 01-2170-0001-0409.

<sup>76</sup> Khalid bin al-Walid branch to the party secretariat, “Recommendation,” December 17, 2000, BRCC 01-2077-0001-0292.

because the complainant retracted his or her statement, suggesting that the abuser maintained the upper hand in the end.<sup>77</sup> Though the Ba‘thist regime was often paranoid, solicited informants’ denunciations, and had no compunctions about making arrests (or worse), the petitions examined here indicate that the regime was selective in choosing which cases to pursue and did not blindly sweep up every person denounced by an informant or petitioner. Citizens could not easily use petitioning as a tool to goad the regime into settling scores for them.

Encouraging citizens to identify and denounce abuses of power had the effect of granting ordinary Iraqis a degree of power in an otherwise constrained political environment. Fitzpatrick argues that the denunciation of a fellow citizen or of an official, “morally repugnant though it may be, is actually one of the quintessential forms of individual agency and participation in a totalitarian state.”<sup>78</sup> I would modify this statement to argue that any form of petitioning, whether to request aid or denounce wrongdoing, is an essential form of participation in an authoritarian regime. As Eyal Ginio, Suraiya Faruqi, and Yuval Ben-Bassat have each suggested, all types of petitioning constitute a form of political activity. Analyzing Ottoman petitions, Ginio writes: “One of the main legitimate devices that was at the disposal of people from all strata of society, including commoners, was the submission of a petition...to the sultan asking for a redress of grievances. Such documents...served commoners to initiate a legal process that could change their fate for the better.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Ben-

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<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Security Affairs to the General Directorate of Police, “Request,” March 21, 2001, BRCC 01-2077-0001-0288. The case against the man accused of abducting his one-month old child was dropped for lack of evidence: The General Director of the Interior to the party secretariat, “People’s Day,” November 2, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0283. The man accused of stealing from his first wife was sentenced to six months only for not properly registering his marriage with his second wife in court. The other charges were not mentioned in the final report. Party secretariat to Rashid branch, “People’s Day,” June 23, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0113. The judge stopped the investigation into the man’s daughter who was being beaten by her husband because the couple had supposedly reconciled: Ministry of Security Affairs to the party secretariat, “People’s Day,” May 8, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0399.

<sup>78</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Petitions and Denunciations”: 7.

<sup>79</sup> Here Ginio is summarizing arguments also made by Suraiya Faruqi. See Ginio, “Coping with the State’s Agents”, 41; Faruqi, “Political Activity among Ottoman Taxpayers and the Problem of Sultanic Legitimation,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35 (1992): 1-39.

Basset states: "...common people often used the right of petitioning as a political tool to secure their rights by manipulating the system in their favor."<sup>80</sup>

This remains true for 20<sup>th</sup>-century authoritarian contexts: individual petitions were one of the few politically acceptable forms of direct state-society communication available to ordinary Iraqis. Even those whose petitions were denied nevertheless succeeded in alerting the regime to broader social or economic problems that affected many of the capital's residents and forced their leaders to acknowledge their very existence and right to petition. Though there were real limits to the power of petitions to influence regime policies, petitioning was one of the few sanctioned forms of political activity that Saddam's regime allowed Iraqis to undertake and, if approved, petitions could result in tangible and even life-changing benefits for individual petitioners.

In order to further evaluate the power of petitions to affect change, we must turn our attention from petitioners to the Ba'th party and Iraqi governmental officials who received their requests, following the fate of these petitions as they traveled through the complex Iraqi bureaucracy. The remainder of the chapter will analyze changes that took place during two different periods: the relatively informal approach to petitioning in place between 1986-2000, and the formalized petitioning process introduced by People's Day between 2000-2002.

### **Influencing the Outcome of Petitions: 1986-2000**

Given the importance of petitions for the regime, it is surprising to see that the Iraqi regime initially did not have protocols instructing citizens about where and to whom they should submit their requests. Nor did Saddam create or designate a single office within the government or party apparatus to be responsible for petitions. This is even more surprising when considering that Ba'thists were otherwise bureaucrats *par excellence*, and that Iraq was an outlier in comparison to the systematic approaches taken in other authoritarian regimes.

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<sup>80</sup> Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 22.

For example, communist Bulgaria exemplified the approach of many authoritarian countries in keeping careful statistics. In 1970, the Bulgarian Communist Party established a central office responsible for compiling extensive statistics about complaints, requests, and rumors. This office regularly produced internal party reports displaying trends in popular opinion derived from its analysis of these statistics.<sup>81</sup> The Soviet Union employed a similar system: under Stalin, petitions were systematically sorted according to a list of 50 categories, such as housing or salary requests. Each month, a central office would compile figures on how many petitions had been received on different topics, and what the outcome of the petition was.<sup>82</sup> Without such analysis, petitions lose their value as intelligence-gathering tools. The Iraqi regime still gathered intelligence on this topic through its network of informants, but it undoubtedly would have been aided by a more systematic approach to coding information received from petitions. Furthermore, a functional petitioning system benefits from creating a central office to ensure all petitions are tabulated and responded to within a set time frame. For this reason, the Chinese Communist Party created the *xinfang* system in 1951 that designated a single office for collecting petitions.<sup>83</sup> This system has remained in place, with a few interruptions, until the present.<sup>84</sup> In this streamlined system, the Chinese Communist Party pledges to respond to all queries within 90 days or less, despite the difficulty of doing so when the government received as many as 12.72 million petitions in a single year.<sup>85</sup>

Here, again, Iraq was unusual in its haphazard approach. Though Saddam Hussein welcomed citizen petitions, he never established a centralized office for handling petitions. Though this limited the regime's ability to mine petitions for statistical data, the flexibility of the Iraqi system

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<sup>81</sup> Dimitrov, "What the Party Wanted to Know": 277.

<sup>82</sup> Davies, "'Cult' of the Vozhd": 135.

<sup>83</sup> Zou, "Granting or Refusing the Right to Petition": 125.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>85</sup> Official Chinese policy urges officials to personally review all petitions addressed to them, no matter how many are received. Zhu Rongji, the Premier of China between 1998-2003, supposedly made an effort to read excerpts and summaries of all 800-1,000 petitions personally addressed to him each month. Chen, *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China*, 100; Zou, "Granting or Refusing the Right to Petition," 126.

had some advantages for both the regime and for the petitioners. Statistically, Iraqis enjoyed a relatively high response rate as compared to petitions in other authoritarian contexts. Taking the entire sample of 117 petitions as a whole, 44% of petitions were approved, 32% were denied, and 25% were inconclusive, usually because the paper trail ended abruptly. (The approval rate changed over time, however, which will be addressed below). Comparing these results to the Chinese *xinfang* system and to Soviet Russian petitions in the 1930s, the odds for Iraqis were very good. Zou found that most Chinese petitioners had low expectations that submitting a petition would result in any positive change in their situation: only 0.2% of petitioners reported that the *xinfang* system “directly” led to their problem’s resolution.<sup>86</sup> In 1930s Soviet Union, Fitzpatrick estimates that only 15-30% of letters received some kind of definitive decision, whether approved or denied. The rest had inconclusive paper trails.<sup>87</sup>

The higher Iraqi response rate may be attributed to the lower pressure Iraqi officials had to produce a ruling within a certain time frame and to the lower number of petitions that they received precisely because they did not have defined procedures or timelines for processing petitions. Though the lack of systematic filing of petitions means that we do not have a clear sense of how many petitions the government received in any given year, it was certainly not on the same scale as the millions of petitions that Chinese bureaucrats had to process on a short deadline. The smaller volume and lack of time pressure, combined with the fact that the processing of all petition requests occurred under the oversight and supervision of the Office of the Ba’th party secretariat, may have encouraged Iraqi officials to do due diligence in investigating the claims of Iraqi petitioners.

Despite a few apparent benefits, the overall result of this haphazard petitioning system was bureaucratic inefficiency and confusion that frequently frustrated both regime officials and petitioners alike. The lack of a defined bureaucratic process meant that a wide variety of party

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<sup>86</sup> Zou, “Granting or Refusing the Right to Petition,” 133.

<sup>87</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Suplicants and Citizens”: 101-102.



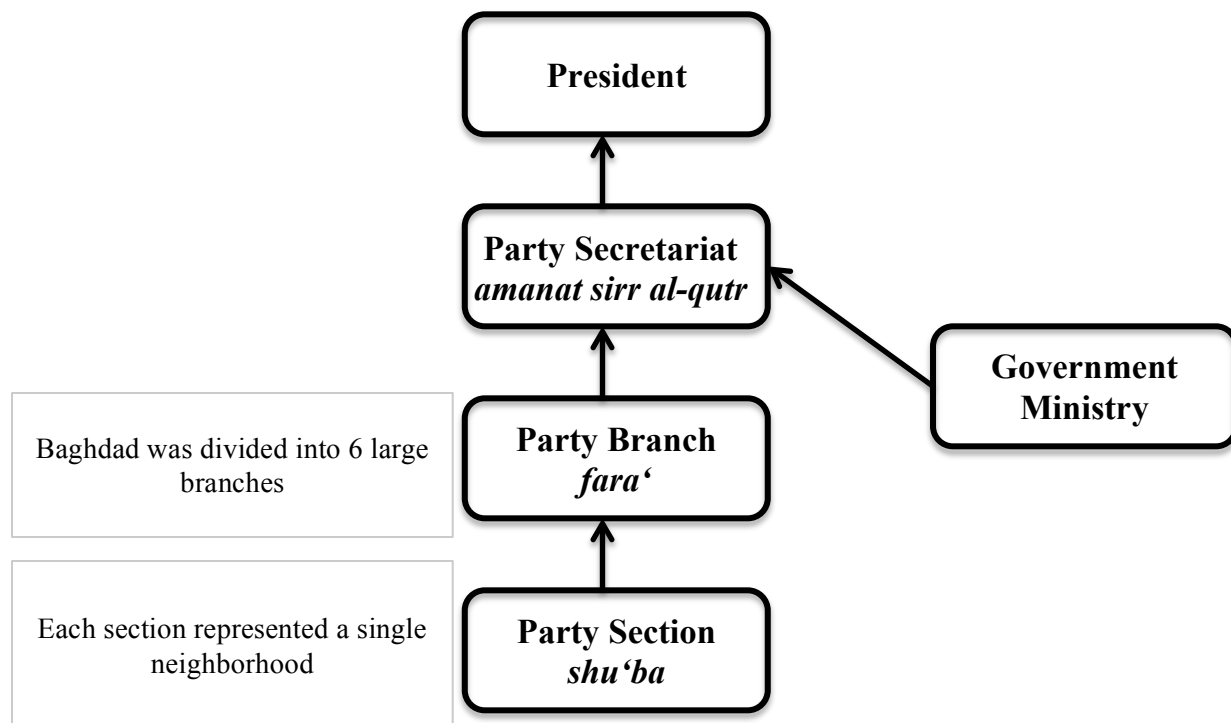
officials and government ministries were involved in handling petitions, and, because there was no single designated decision maker, there was considerable jockeying for influence (or dodging of responsibilities) when it came to processing petitions within the Iraqi state-party apparatus.

Analyzing which ministries and levels of bureaucratic officials attempted to influence the outcome of petitions reveals insights into internal dynamics within the state-party apparatus and how the wheels of government turned in day-to-day decision-making. Beyond this, it also reveals where small ‘cracks’ or ‘access points’ existed in the Iraqi bureaucracy that ordinary citizens sought to exploit, attempting to influence the outcome of their petition by strategically addressing their requests to the office they believed would be most responsive. Following the fates of individual petitions as they passed from one official or ministry to another illustrates how Iraqi petitioners attempted to amplify their voices and give their petitions the best possible chance of success. We also see how sympathetic officials championed or undermined the requests they received based on their own interests. The result was that some petitions ‘spoke louder’ than others, whether due to the petitioner’s own savvy manipulation of the system or the intervention of an official into their case.

In order to more easily explain the many actors within this bureaucratic apparatus, the figure below shows an organizational chart for the state and party actors relevant to the processing of petitions.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> For more information about the Ba‘th Party and Iraqi government structures, see Sassoon’s *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 34-56.



**Figure 2. Hierarchy of Authority in Ba'ṯhist Iraq for the State and Party Officials Responsible for Processing Petitions<sup>89</sup>**

The entire Ba'ṯh Party apparatus was overseen by the party secretariat, a central office through which all party correspondence was funneled. Government ministries were thoroughly infiltrated by Ba'ṯh Party members and were subject to party oversight, though their bureaucratic apparatuses were structurally separate. The government ministries interfaced with the Ba'ṯh Party hierarchy by way of the party secretariat. All correspondence between levels of the Ba'ṯh Party and government ministries was routed through the party secretariat; party organizations and government ministries were not permitted to communicate with one another directly.<sup>90</sup>

Approximately half of the petitions examined here were addressed to Saddam or another high-ranking leader. This is expected behavior under a regime like Saddam's in which he styled himself as an approachable leader, yet who was simultaneously a supreme ruler who could intervene

<sup>89</sup> Presidential Diwan to All Government Ministries, "General Instructions," Decision number 328/23/1, January 17, 1987, BRCC 01-2383-0004-0014.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

in any matter, no matter how small. In any authoritarian regime, petitions are one of the few ways ordinary people can ‘go over their heads’ of local authority figures by appealing to the highest authority in the land.<sup>91</sup>

What is striking, then, is that fully half of the petitions are *not* addressed to Saddam or a high-ranking official, but to a local representative from the Ba‘th Party. That suggests that Iraqi petitioning was not primarily a strategy employed in response to obstructive or punitive actions by low-ranking officials. Rather, there is ample evidence that Iraqis approached local party officials (whether at the *fara’* or *shu‘ba* level, representing their neighborhood or district) as potential advocates for their cases. It also demonstrates Iraqis’ awareness that local party officials often made decisions about distributing favors, punishments, and aid to people living in their own communities.

The involvement of neighborhood-level officials had advantages for both the regime and for the petitioners. From the side of the regime, local party representatives were important for gathering intelligence since they were the most acquainted with the particulars of the petitioners’ situations. The party secretariat often left decisions about petitions up to party branch leaders when it came to requests about food rations or granting financial aid, asking the local party branch to “issue an opinion [*bayan ra’y*]” on the subject.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the standing of a petitioner with the local Ba‘th party representatives mattered a great deal in determining whether their request would be granted or not. This could be a blessing or a curse, depending on the petitioner’s relationship with local party officials.

The empathy party officials displayed at times for the petitioners reminds us of how thin the lines could be that separated low-ranking party officials from their neighbors living in the neighborhoods they represented. In response to petitions from low-income families, local party

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<sup>91</sup> Van Voss, “Introduction,” 3, 6-7.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, party secretariat to the Abu Ja‘far al-Mansur branch, “Withholding Rations Card,” January 23, 1995, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0495.

officials frequently advocated for leniency and compassion. As one memo from a Baghdad branch stated: “We have no objection to restoring rations to the family...for humanitarian considerations considering that the family lives in a poor state and has no resources.”<sup>93</sup> When a group of families were threatened with eviction from government housing, their local party officials pled for leniency: “...out of humanitarian and social considerations for these families, the children, and the elderly, we ask...that they be allowed to remain in these apartments as long as these conditions [sanctions] on the country continue.”<sup>94</sup>

In rare occasions, local officials took the initiative to respond to petitions themselves through direct interventions. For example, a woman sent a petition explaining that she had previously received housing assistance from the state as a reward for her husband’s military service, but now the assistance had run out, and her family was being threatened with eviction.<sup>95</sup> Upon receiving her petition, local party officials decided to go ahead and buy off the rest of her house for her with their own funds.<sup>96</sup> This was a rare instance in which lower ranking Ba’th Party officials not only determined the outcome of the letter, but went ahead and acted on their decision without first consulting authorities further up the chain of command. The party secretariat scolded them for this behavior, “Please do not handle these petitions like that in the future because the request went against issued instructions and policies and is the specialty of certain ministries.”<sup>97</sup>

Party officials made similar efforts advocating for housing assistance for residents in their jurisdictions. In one example, a retired transit police officer (and the father of a distinguished war martyr) had lived in governmental housing owned by the Ministry of Transportation since 1982, but

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<sup>93</sup> Leaders of the Abu Ja’far al-Mansur branch to the party secretariat, “Request,” March 20, 1995, *BRCC* 041-2-2-0313.

<sup>94</sup> Rashid Branch to the party secretariat, “Call for Help,” August 23, 1999, *BRCC* 01-2129-0000-0309.

<sup>95</sup> Petition from a Baghdad Woman to the President of the National Council, February 10, 1990, *BRCC* 01-3787-0001-0513.

<sup>96</sup> Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, “Interview,” April 15, 1990, *BRCC* 01-3787-0001-0509.

<sup>97</sup> Party secretariat to the Baghdad Organization, “Interview,” April 22, 1990, *BRCC* 01-3787-0001-0506.

now that he was retired, the Ministry of Transportation wanted the housing back and was going to evict the petitioner (see Chapter Two for more on state-subsidized housing).<sup>98</sup> His local party representatives offered to purchase the house for him, ostensibly because of his son's distinguished service and martyrdom in the Gulf War, but also because the party officials themselves may have had some kind of personal relationship to this retired transit police officer.<sup>99</sup> This time, despite their advocacy, the Office of the President denied the request, determining that housing reserved for workers in the Ministry of Transportation could not be used as housing for families of martyrs.<sup>100</sup>

Though there were limits to the effectiveness of advocacy by lower party officials, these examples show some of the ways they tried to 'take care of their own.' These examples also underscore the fact that petitioners and lower-level party officials were neighbors living in the same jurisdictions who may have shared a number of commonalities in their backgrounds. With the dramatic drop in public sector salaries during sanctions, lower-ranking officials and ministry employees may have faced similar personal financial difficulties to those writing petitions. Even party members and ministry officials sometimes submitted petitions of their own for extra financial assistance.<sup>101</sup>

On the other hand, the influence of local authorities in deciding petitions was bad news for those who did not enjoy good relations with those officials. One man wrote to complain about abuse from a local party official, claiming that the dispute had escalated to the point where the party official threatened to kill him, threw the petitioner in jail for two days, spread malicious lies about

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<sup>98</sup> Letter from a retired police officer to Saddam, "Request for Help for a Family of a Martyr who had 8 Medals of Bravery," January 19, 1993, *BRCC* 01-3086-0001-0494.

<sup>99</sup> Party secretariat to the Office of the President, "Request," February 25, 1993, *BRCC* 01-3086-0001-0489.

<sup>100</sup> Office of the President to the party secretariat, "Request," March 15, 1993, *BRCC* 01-3086-0001-0488.

<sup>101</sup> Other requests by party members for financial assistance can be seen in the following petitions: Letter from a party member, "Report," September 14, 2002, *BRCC* 01-3389-0000-0458; Letter from a Party Member to party secretariat, "Improving Life," May 12, 1997, *BRCC* 01-2123-0003-0130; Letter from a party member to Saddam, [undated, August 2002], *BRCC* 01-3389-0000-0300.

the petitioner's son deserting from the army, and cut off the family's rations.<sup>102</sup> When confronted with the petitioner's allegations, the local party section defended the official in question, saying he was a "balanced man [*rajuḥ mutawazzin*]" and downplayed the severity of the conflict.<sup>103</sup> The party secretariat and government ministries investigated the situation and determined that, at the very least, the petitioner's son was not a deserter, and they ordered the full restoration of the family's rations.<sup>104</sup> Though the party did not chastise the local party official for abusing his position, the restoration of the petitioner's rations was an implicit critique of the official's over-reach of authority.

Highlighting the influential role of neighborhood-level officials in influencing the outcome of citizen petitions illustrates a larger truth about Iraqi petitioning under the Ba'th Party before People's Day began: personal connections mattered, to some extent, as did the ability to produce an empathetic response from the official reviewing the petition. Heart-rending details about one's poverty and desperation were likely to elicit special exceptions not only from local officials, but also from the office of the president himself. Saddam often personally approved requests to give financial aid to needy petitioners without first consulting with relevant ministries or investigating the veracity of their claims, actions that were very much in line with his approach to personal meetings with Iraqi citizens.<sup>105</sup> This is not to suggest that the entire petitioning system was based on personal favors; regime policies and rule of law were still generally the most important factor for determining petitions, though to a lesser extent than they would be after People's Day was introduced. This was

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<sup>102</sup> Petition from a man to the Secretary of the Council of Ministers, "Problem of an Iraqi Family," [undated, February 1995], BRCC 041-2-2-0341.

<sup>103</sup> Leadership of the Hamza Sayid al-Shuhada' branch to the party secretariat, "Request of the Citizen [name]," February 26, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0303.

<sup>104</sup> BRCC 042-2-2-0295

<sup>105</sup> See examples: Office of the President's Deputy to the party secretariat, "Request Referral," May 7, 1995, BRCC 01-3616-0002-0155; Office of the President's Deputy to the party secretariat, "Request Referral," August 17, 1996, BRCC 01-3616-0002-0074; Office of the President's Deputy to the party secretariat, "Request Referral," July 19, 1997, BRCC 01-3616-0002-0049. Saddam is not unique in this regard: other authoritarian leaders were known to respond sympathetically to petitions, especially in the cases of abuse by low-ranking officials: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129.

also due to the low political stakes of these interactions: most petitioners who wrote to the regime were not particularly important people, and thus did not merit being singled out for favoritism.

In sum, Iraq's informal approach to petitions allowed the regime a degree of flexibility in responding to requests, though it also created bureaucratic inefficiency and made it difficult to collect data. This flexibility allowed for special exceptions to be made for petitioners with especially heartbreaking stories, or for those who made a good impression on Saddam or their local party officials. Between 1986-2000, neighborhood-level Ba'th Party representatives were highly influential within the petitioning system, acting as advocates, decision-makers, and occasional obstructions for petitioners living in their jurisdictions. Over decades of experience living under Ba'th Party rule, many ordinary Iraqis learned which rhetorical strategies were most likely to be successful, and who within the vast state-party bureaucratic apparatus might be most inclined to support their cause. Petitioners used this knowledge to try to influence the outcome of their request, hoping their voices would be heard above the din of competing petitions and requests.

### **Petitions and People's Day: 2000-2002**

People's Day appears to have begun as a commemoration of November 13, 1997, the day when Saddam ordered UN weapons inspectors to leave Iraq.<sup>106</sup> According to a pamphlet from 1998, People's Day was first celebrated as a public outreach campaign that included community improvement projects, such as repairing tractors for farmers.<sup>107</sup> By 2000, petitioning became the primary focus of People's Day celebrations, during which time officials from neighborhood-level party sections (*shu'ba*) opened their offices to hear the pleas and complaints of residents from their jurisdictions. Internally, party officials referred to People's Day as the "special day for listening to

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<sup>106</sup> See the full text of Saddam's speech given on the anniversary of the Gulf War on January 17, 1998: <http://www.dhiqar.net/Merath/MK-Mo24.htm>, accessed March 27, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> People's Day Pamphlet, 1998, BRCC 01-3866-0000-0430.

the complaints of citizens.”<sup>108</sup> People’s Day was, despite the name, not always limited to a single day, nor was it necessarily limited to one day per year; some sections held two People’s Day celebrations in a single year.<sup>109</sup> The timing of People’s Day events seems to have frequently corresponded with the celebration of Ramadan, which harmonizes with a time-honored tradition of rulers in the Islamic world dispensing charity, receiving petitions, forgiving debts, and granting pardons during the holy month.<sup>110</sup>

During their People’s Day interviews with *shu’ba* party officials, residents filled out short forms with a summary of the problems with which they wanted assistance. The citizen’s handwritten form (sometimes accompanied by a more formal written petition the citizen had prepared in advance and brought to the interview) and a brief cover letter written by the party official were submitted together up the chain of the Ba’th Party hierarchy to the party secretariat, who then delegated the task of responding to the petition to whichever ministry was most appropriate to weigh in on the subject matter raised in the petition.

These new protocols solidified the notion that the party section was the appropriate place to send a petition or lodge a complaint, rather than submitting it to Saddam or another high-ranking official. When an elderly man wrote a petition directly to Saddam in 2002, asking for financial assistance for his “difficult circumstances” (accompanied by two of his original poems praising

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<sup>108</sup> See, for example, party secretariat to the Ministry of Health, “People’s Day,” January 3, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0063.

<sup>109</sup> The pamphlet referenced above referred to a People’s Day campaign in the municipality of Baghdad that lasted from January 12 – February 28, 1998. Judging from People’s Day petitions in the archives, one party section appears to have held a People’s Day event in both September and December of 2001.

<sup>110</sup> Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53. Most, though not all, of the People’s Day petitions analyzed here were received during Ramadan, a fact that was referenced explicitly in some petitions. See, for example: letter from a woman to the Baghdad al-Jadida section, “Interview,” December 10, 2001, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0069.



Saddam's foreign policy), officials called him on the phone to instruct him to meet with his local party representatives to discuss his petition instead.<sup>111</sup>

The formalized procedures of People's Day lent an even greater theatrical air to the process of petitioning, an act that had already required citizens to perform their loyalty and worthiness for assistance within narrow scripts. For example, the interviews conducted for People's Day added to the performative aspects of petitioning. What was previously usually only a written performance now added new elements of body language, appearance, speech, and rapport, which contained within them all the loaded signals of class, gender, education, and background that petitioners certainly would have tried to manipulate to their advantage to persuade their official audience. Though the idea of presenting petitions through an interview was not a new initiative—as discussed above, Saddam regularly met with ordinary Iraqis to hear their requests—it was rare to be selected to meet with the president. The chance to meet with a local representative was much easier to arrange, and oral petitions had added benefits for citizens with no or low literacy. The chance to present one's case in person to a regime representative struck many Baghdadis as an important opportunity to influence the outcome of their petition, and this may account for the apparent popularity of People's Day events. Unfortunately, the archives do not preserve detailed interview notes that would provide us a glimpse into how these encounters unfolded and how the performance of petitioning was embodied.

The heightened theatricality of petitioning during People's Day is also evidenced in the written scripts some petitioners were forced to adopt. For example, officials from the Baghdad al-Jadida section gave each petitioner a standardized form for submitting their request or complaint

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<sup>111</sup> Letter from a Retired Party Member to Saddam, [undated, December 2002], BRCC 01-3389-0000-0300 to -0304; Baghdad – Rusafa Organization to the party secretariat, "People's Day," December 17, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0296.

with sycophantic language already filled in, underscoring the type of rhetorical flourishes that the regime expected in citizen requests. The form appeared as follows:

To: The Comrade in Arms (*al-rafiq al-munadil*), Respected Secretary of the Baghdad al-Jadida Section

Subject: Interview

I am citizen \_\_\_\_\_ [blank space for name] living in \_\_\_\_\_ [blank space for address]. I bring my request to you, along with all of my hope and trust, that you will grant me the opportunity to appear before your generous excellency to explain my particular issues. I put my fate, and the fate of my family, in your generous hands. I place my hope in God Almighty and then I place my hope in your excellency because I am suffering from difficult circumstances, and they are:

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[blank space to explain problem]

I wait for help and aid from your excellency because I see in you the spirit of values, Islamic principles, and noble humanitarianism.<sup>112</sup>

Here the party dictated the very words the citizen had to use in framing their requests, forcing all petitioners to adopt the posture of a ‘supplicant.’

The irony was that, just as neighborhood-level *shu‘ba* leaders were becoming even more accessible to ordinary people through People’s Day interviews, the new petitioning protocols introduced by this party holiday steadily diminished the influence of these local officials in deciding the outcome of petitions. Rather than issue their own opinions, party section leaders were expected merely to collect and submit requests up the chain of command without comment. Instead, decision-making shifted towards government ministries instead.

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<sup>112</sup> Blank form for People’s Day Baghdad al-Jadida section, December 2001, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0041.

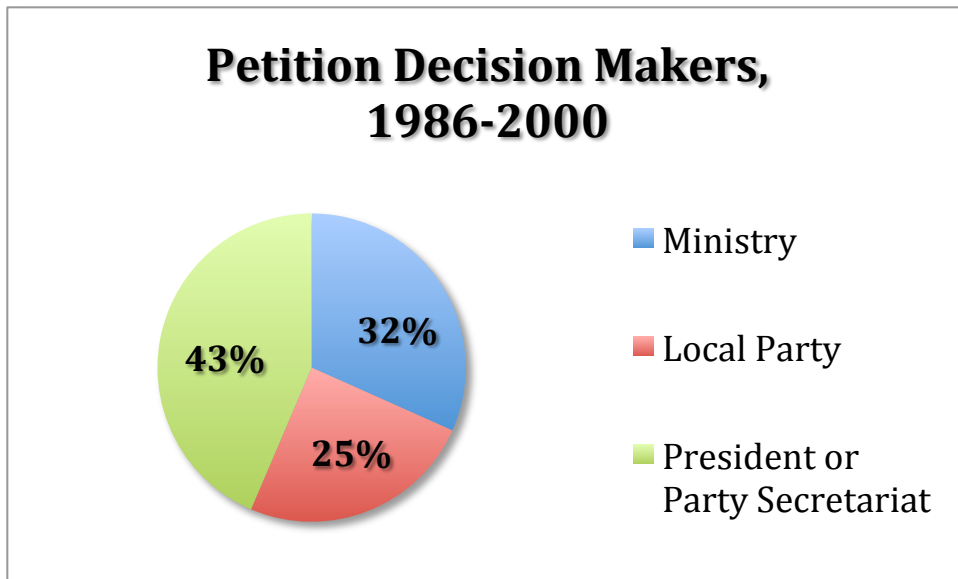


Figure 3. Petition Decision Makers, 1986-2000

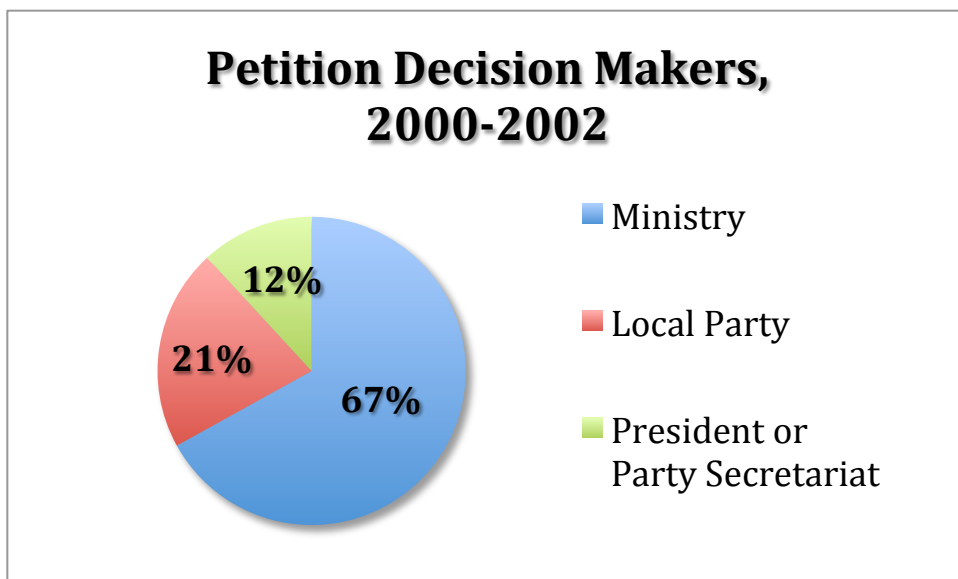


Figure 4. Petition Decision Makers, 2000-2002

As the charts above show, ministries took the clear lead as decision makers after the changes introduced by People's Day. Furthermore, these charts obscure instances when party branches advocated for a certain outcome of a People's Day petition, only to be overruled by a ministry. This

hierarchy of command may have existed prior to the year 2000, but it became starkly obvious after People's Day was introduced.

Shifting decision-making from local party officials to government ministries had tangible consequences. Government ministries used noticeably different criteria for determining outcomes of petitions than had been previously used by local party officials or even by the president himself. Rather than making decisions based on humanitarian reasons, ministries evaluated petitions based strictly on their eligibility under law. This illustrates a larger truth about petitioning in Saddam's Iraq: that *who* made determinations about petitions was closely related to *how* petitions were decided. Both Saddam and low-ranking officials benefited from maintaining a public image of paternalistic care for those in their jurisdictions. For low-ranking officials, it behooved them to appear powerful and influential enough to affect change, and their personal ties to their constituents predisposed them to be charitable in many cases. Bureaucrats working for ministries had no such incentives to make exceptions. Local residents may have been persuasive in their in-person interviews, but their performance was rendered impotent by the new protocols that shifted decision-making to ministries. Thus, through People's Day the regime retained the appearance of responsiveness to the population while steadily diminishing the likelihood that petitioning would result in a special request being granted for the citizen.

This trend towards the blind application of the law is seen clearly in ministries' rejections of petitions for inclusion in the Social Solidarity Fund. Ministry officials were very strict in applying the rules: virtually every family who received some kind of pension was denied inclusion in the Social Solidarity Fund, no matter how meager the pension.<sup>113</sup> This usually held true even for female-headed households. For example, a widow's request for financial aid was denied because she received her

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<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, "People's Day," February 13, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0480; Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, "People's Day," February 6, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0485.

late husband's pension of 5,000 dinars a month, although this amounted to a paltry \$2.50 USD monthly.<sup>114</sup> Those surviving on pensions were also prohibited from returning to public sector work as the regime tried to cut costs. For example, one retired employee of the Foreign Ministry asked for the right to return to work because he could not survive and support his family of five on his low pension—shocking even by Iraqi standards—of 65 dinars per month (\$0.03 USD).<sup>115</sup> His request was denied because of laws restricting the return of retirees to their jobs.<sup>116</sup>

Similarly strict policies were in place for the many petitions asking for a family member killed in a war to be classified as a 'martyr,' or to posthumously receive an award or higher party status that would grant the family more benefits and resources. Martyrdom benefits were the second most common topic of the petitions examined here owing to the large number of men who had been conscripted to fight in the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf War. For families who lost a soldier to battlefield or as a prisoner of war, many struggled to adjust not only to the emotional loss but also to the financial blow of losing a wage earner. As sanctions devastated the Iraqi economy, many families who had not previously been classified as families of martyrs wrote in to make their case. However, there was considerable confusion within the bureaucracy and among the population about how to classify martyrs and what entitlements families of martyrs were owed, as Dina Khoury has documented, and regulations were continually changing.<sup>117</sup> Low-income families often had a particularly difficult time navigating the Iraqi bureaucracy to attempt to claim benefits that they were owed, and many families never received much in the way of financial compensation.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Based on exchange rates in 2001. At the time, 1 Iraqi dinar = \$0.00050760 USD. <http://www.economywatch.com/exchange-rate/dinar.html> Party secretariat to the Rashid Branch, "People's Day," April 13, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0627.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from a retired public employee to Saddam, "Return to Employment," [undated, January 2002], BRCC 01-3389-0000-0452.

<sup>116</sup> Foreign Ministry to the party secretariat, "[Name]" January 15, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0447.

<sup>117</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 168.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

Typifying many of the petitions on this theme: a man sent a petition on People's Day in which he pointed out that, despite his son "giving his blood to defend the exalted country," he and his wife never received any martyrdom benefits apart from a measly pension of 1,000 Iraqi dinars per month (\$0.50 USD). Beyond this, he had seven other children to support who all lived together in a rented apartment that he struggled to pay for. To justify to his claim, he also submitted a photocopy of his son's death certificate. The petition was denied by the Ministry of Defense, who determined that the man's son had merely "died" but was not a "martyr." Though the Ministry did not provide additional details or explanation in this case, such determinations were often made when the cause of death was from a car accident, illness, or friendly fire while serving as a conscript.<sup>119</sup>

The result of the new People's Day protocols was a steady decline in the percentage of petitions that were approved. Petitions written between 1986 and 2000 had a 45% approval rate. Between 2000 and 2002, approvals declined to 34%. The reason for the decline is clear: government ministries were much stricter than either local party officials or the president in deciding petitions, denying nearly half of the appeals they received in this sample. People's Day, then, was a misleading campaign: though it purported to increase the regime's responsiveness to popular appeals and requests, the new system actually resulted in fewer approvals.

### **Declining Influence of Petitions**

Why did the regime decide to formalize the petitioning process through People's Day, and how did the function of petitioning in Saddam's Iraq change as a result? Formalizing petitions was a pragmatic political move for a regime eager to resume (or appear to resume) social welfare spending, but wary of its financial future and of the global political climate. The timing of the People's Day campaign had its roots in both political and economic factors. Politically, it was framed as a

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<sup>119</sup> Letter from an Iraqi man to the Director of the Administration of Ranks, "Request for Martyr Rights," undated (February 2001), BRCC 01-2077-0001-0232; Ministry of Defense to the party secretariat, "Martyr Rights," March 24, 2001, BRCC 01-2077-0001-0227.

commemoration of the 1997 ejection of UN weapons inspectors: a pointed reassertion of national sovereignty that, when paired with the new People's Day campaign, included a promise that the regime would take care of its people. It also coincided with the modest economic recovery after the passage of the Oil-for-Food program in 1996. With the loosening of restrictions, the state's practice of illegally selling oil and demanding bribes and kickbacks increased in 1997 and reached its peak by 2001.<sup>120</sup> The regime, along with corrupt businessmen closely connected to Saddam, began to enjoy an influx of billions of dollars from licit and illicit earnings.<sup>121</sup> Yet this wealth was not easily distributed to the rest of the population, many of whom suffered in devastating financial conditions from a combination of unemployment, high inflation rates, and the increased costs of food, clothing, and housing. People's Day was one mechanism for the regime to make a symbolic show of distributing wealth and favors to the population, performing gestures of responsiveness to the needs of society in order to maintain public good will.

Yet if People's Day was supposed to showcase the regime's largesse and a renewed commitment to social spending, why were so many more petitions rejected after 2000 than before? The point was that the theatrical performance of petitioning gave the regime the best of both worlds: it emphasized the symbolic propaganda of governmental responsiveness while actually minimizing the regime's financial responsibility for discretionary social spending. The archives indicate that People's Day succeeded: the high numbers of citizens who came to present their cases on People's Day suggests that the public bought in to this new petitioning process, despite the increasing unlikelihood of receiving a positive response. Petitioners could not have known right

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<sup>120</sup> Chang-Tai Hsieh and Enrico Moretti, "Did Iraq Cheat the United Nations? Underpricing, Bribes, and the Oil for Food Program," Working Paper 11202 *National Bureau of Economic Research* (2005): 23; Katerina Oskarsson, "Economic Sanctions on Authoritarian States: Lessons Learned," *Middle East Policy Council* 19 (Winter 2012): 88-102.

<sup>121</sup> Gordon, *Invisible War*, 94.

away that approval rates were diminishing, but it is interesting to consider whether People's Day would have remained a success in the long-term if cynicism about the project began to build.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of petitions as a form of political action in Saddam's Iraq. On the one hand, anyone could write directly to Saddam, but the Ba'thist regime always controlled the outer limits of possible 'conversation' that could take place. Political scripts and etiquette informed both the language and content of these petitions. 'Suplicants' embraced the role of submissive subject to reinforce the paternalistic power dynamics by which Saddam preferred to govern, hoping this would lead to a favorable outcome. Even those who petitioned as a 'citizen' could not level a real challenge at the authorities, however, and always had to defer to Saddam as the ultimate authority in the country.

How did People's Day affect the fate of petitioners themselves? The opportunity to meet with regime representatives undoubtedly provided some short-term psychological relief to petitioners desperate for help from the regime, even though the People's Day interviews turned out to be largely formalities. Yet even though People's Day protocols diminished the power of petitioners to persuade officials to grant them special exceptions, this had the benefit of producing more predictable outcomes, diminishing the influence of favoritism and personal ties in deciding petitions. The more even application of law after the year 2000 was good news for those suffering from abusive or corrupt local party leaders who had unfairly ruled against their petitions, but bad news for vulnerable families who would have benefited from leniency or compassion for their difficult circumstances.

Despite a decline in approval rates after 2000, petitioning was not pointless exercises in political theater with predetermined outcomes. Petitions remained an effective method for ordinary Iraqis to push the regime to acknowledge the existence of marginalized members of society and their



problems. Though the power of petitions to persuade officials appears to have diminished slightly over time, petitions still had the power to provoke action until the end of Saddam's regime in April 2003. And for those citizens who succeeded in persuading an official to grant them financial aid, housing assistance, funds for a needed surgery, or restore their rations, petitions could be a life-saving mechanism. In the face of stringent international sanctions, the collapse of the national economy, spiraling prices, and punitive, authoritarian government, many ordinary Iraqis seized petitions as an opportunity to speak up for themselves and—in many cases—they succeeded in making themselves be heard.

## 5. Food as Power: Rations and Local Governance in Baghdad

In response to the economic embargo imposed on Iraq in August 1990, Saddam introduced a national food distribution system meant to stave off widespread hunger and maintain order. This chapter examines food rations as a new point of interaction and contestation between the state and society. Similar to state-subsidized housing discussed in Chapter Two, subsidized food became a new tool by which Saddam's regime could consolidate support or punish and manipulate the population into compliance. This disciplinary aspect was most apparent in a collective punishment policy in place between 1994 and 1996, during which time whole families lost access to their food rations if one family member was accused of certain crimes. However, families facing these disciplinary measures did not suffer quietly, but challenged the regime and took action to get their rations restored. Neighborhood-level officials had important roles in play in managing the system on the ground and, uncommonly, also took steps to try to change the policy itself from the bottom up.

In short, the food rationing system encapsulated many trends in governance and state-society relations that characterize the sanctions period. Exploring the mechanisms of how the rationing system was created and managed shows how Saddam adopted new governance strategies to mitigate the sanctions' blow to the power and efficacy of the Iraqi state. Building on the arguments of Chapter Four, this chapter demonstrates that the day-to-day work of governing was increasingly delegated to intermediary authority figures during the sanctions period. Local authorities—including neighborhood-level party officials, rations agents, community elders (*mukhtar*, pl. *mukhtarun*), and popular committees (*majlis al-sha'b*)—occupied a transitional zone between 'state' and 'society,' as they were usually members of the same communities that they were tasked with monitoring. Entrusted with ever more authority during the sanctions period, local officials were not only responsible for distributing rationed food to their communities, but they also began to exercise greater influence in the bureaucratic chain of command, suggesting new policies and advocating for

certain outcomes for residents in their jurisdictions. A close examination of the mechanisms of the rationing system adds new dimensions to our previous understanding of how day-to-day governance took place in sanctions-era Baghdad, illustrating how a ‘localization of governance’ in the 1990s helped the Ba’th Party weather the challenges of sanctions.

### **The Political Necessity of Rations**

The most immediate risk that sanctions posed to the Iraqi regime was the threat of bread riots. As mentioned in Chapter One, Iraq was heavily reliant on food imports due to decades of neglecting its agricultural sector. By the late 1980s, imports accounted for as much as 70% of the country’s caloric needs.<sup>1</sup> The economic embargo caused severe disruptions to local markets and the country’s food supplies, threatening to trigger widespread unrest if the government could not quickly remedy the situation. Indeed, the 1991 *intifada* proved that state-society relations had reached a critically low ebb after the Gulf War. A food distribution system was vital to ensure the longevity of Saddam’s grip on power and to pin the blame for Iraqis’ suffering on the United Nations, rather than on his regime.<sup>2</sup> The Iraqi food rationing system was both a political and logistical success in providing at least 1,000 calories to every Iraqi per day at highly subsidized prices only weeks after the economic embargo began in August 1990, helping to assuage popular discontent and increase Iraqis’ dependence on his regime.

The Iraqi regime had two main political audiences for its rations system: one was Iraq’s international critics, and the other was its domestic audience. Internationally, Iraq’s leaders saw rations as form of defiance against the “American and Zionist enemies” Saddam blamed for sanctions. Rations themselves were an important piece of propaganda that highlighted the continued effectiveness of the government despite the damage it sustained from Desert Storm and the

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<sup>1</sup> Garfield, “Studies on Young Child Malnutrition in Iraq”: 270; Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 70.

<sup>2</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party*, 243.

sanctions. The very fact that government needed to distribute food to forestall mass starvation highlighted the humanitarian suffering caused by the UN embargo. Even with the food rations, reports of large-scale malnourishment sparked international outrage and criticism of the sanctions program.<sup>3</sup> In light of the mounting international criticism about the humanitarian impact of sanctions, the Iraqi government did win reluctant praise from international monitors for the efficacy of its rationing system. In a recording from a closed-door meeting of top Iraqi leaders, Taha Ramadan bragged that, “All the international organizations give a positive evaluation of the Iraqi ration card.”<sup>4</sup>

Domestically, Iraq’s decision to distribute rations came not only out of a humanitarian consideration to prevent the starvation of large numbers of Iraqis, but was also meant to stave off the social chaos and political opposition that would come as a result. The regime’s goal was to use rations to broaden its base of active or tacit supporters who depended on the government for sustenance and who therefore would not agitate for its downfall. To this end, Muhammad Zamam ‘Abd al-Rizag, the director general of the party secretariat, urged party members to exert the “furthest efforts” in setting up the rationing system in order to “combat the oppositional plans against our great Iraq, which will test our abilities to defeat the conspiracy.”<sup>5</sup> The success of the food

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon, *Invisible War*, 200; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party*, 243. This prompted the infamous exchange on the television program *60 Minutes* in which Madeleine Albright was asked if she thought the reported deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children due to sanctions-related malnourishment and hunger was “worth it.” Since this time, statistics about infant and child mortality in Iraq under sanctions has been questioned. For two different views on the subject, see: Richard Garfield, “Morbidity and Mortality among Iraqi Children from 1990 through 1998: Assessing the Impact of the Gulf War and Economic Sanctions,” *Campaign against Sanctions in Iraq*, March 1999; Sarah Zaidi, “Child Mortality in Iraq,” *The Lancet*, October 11, 1997, accessed February 23, 2018. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(05\)70470-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(05)70470-0)

<sup>4</sup> “Saddam and Senior Ba’ath Party Officials Discussing UN Sanctions on Iraq,” audio transcript, August 15, 1995, CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-010.

<sup>5</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all Iraq, “Cards,” September 12, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0465.

rationing system played a large role in shoring up functional support for Saddam and even increasing membership in the Ba‘th Party by the late 1990s.<sup>6</sup>

But in order to maintain its legitimacy over the long haul, Iraqi leaders had to ensure a consistent and reliable distribution of food every month—a difficult feat in the midst of an embargo. Some of these problems were related purely to the challenge of setting up and operating a national food distribution system on such short notice. For example, official rations cards had to be printed and distributed to each family in the country.<sup>7</sup> Despite the speed with which the rationing system had to be implemented, the party secretariat still took the time to chastise Baghdad party branches for not printing the cards carefully enough: Baghdad’s ration cards were “quickly ruined” because of poor quality printing, easily able to be copied and counterfeited, and “lacked beauty.” The party secretariat recommended that they cancel the old cards and start over, conscious of the costs of fraud and the importance of maintaining a professional-looking operation in front of the population—underscoring how important rations were for demonstrating the continued competence and effectiveness of the government despite the difficult circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

It was a constant challenge for the regime to provide consistent amounts of food in each month’s rations delivery in the midst of the embargo. The first few months of the rationing system saw several changes in the proposed amounts of food for each family as the state adjusted to the new blockade and responded to shortages. For example, the first proposal called for 8 kg of flour

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<sup>6</sup> George H.W. Bush gave a speech on February 15, 1991, stating: “But there's another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside, and to comply with the United Nations resolutions, and then rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.” This statement is widely believed to have encouraged the *intifada* uprisings of March-April 1991. “War in the gulf: Bush Statement; Excerpts From 2 Statements by Bush on Iraq’s Proposal for Ending Conflict,” Reuters, February 16, 1991. Accessed February 16, 2018. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/16/world/war-gulf-bush-statement-excerpts-2-statements-bush-iraq-s-proposal-for-ending.html>. Dina Khoury has also made the argument that sanctions “paradoxically helped the Ba‘thist regime, now greatly weakened, to survive until 2003,” and Joseph Sassoon likewise states that, “Saddam Hussein capitalized on the sanctions to increase support for his regime.” Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 40; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 244.

<sup>7</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all Iraq, “Cards,” September 12, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0465.

<sup>8</sup> Party secretariat to the Baghdad Organization, “Cards,” August 31, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0484.

and 2 kg of rice per person, which was quickly cut to 6 kg of flour and 1.5 kg of rice. The lower amounts listed below were characteristic of rations distributions for much of the early 1990s, before supplies improved somewhat after the passage of Oil-for-Food in 1996.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2. Monthly Food Rations, January 1991<sup>10</sup>**

<b>Family of One</b>	<b>Family of Two</b>	<b>Family of Three</b>
5 kg flour	10 kg flour	15 kg flour
1 kg rice	2 kg rice	3 kg rice
0.75 kg sugar	1.5 kg sugar	2.25 kg sugar
0.075 kg tea	0.15 kg tea	0.225 kg tea
0.5 kg oil	1 kg oil	1.5 kg oil
0.25 kg beans	0.5 kg beans	0.75 kg beans
3 boxes of infant formula	6 boxes of infant formula	9 boxes of infant formula
1 small packet of powdered soap	1 small packet of powdered soap	2 small packets of powdered soap

Iraq faced several periods of food shortages during the sanctions period, and these were more frequent and acute in the early 1990s before the beginning of the Oil-for-Food program. In February 1991, the government ordered flour mills to work 24 hours a day in order to produce enough for the country, but by September of that year, there was not enough white flour for rations, even after mixing it with “brown flour.”<sup>11</sup> Citizens complained that their bread was now “black” and

<sup>9</sup> “Food Needs for Families According to the Number of Family Members for the Monthly Emergency Plan,” August 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0235; Ministry of Trade to the party secretariat, “Inventory of the Families,” August 22, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0518; Party secretariat to Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” August 23, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0522.

<sup>10</sup> Calculated from the following memos: Ministry of Trade to party secretariat, “Inventory of the Families,” August 22, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0518; Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” October 24, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0427; Ministry of Trade to the General Company for the Trade of Grain, “Citizens’ Rice Rations,” January 15, 1991, BRCC 005-3-5-0227.

<sup>11</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Operation of Flour Mills,” February 10, 1991, BRCC 005-3-5-0194; Ministry of Trade to the Presidential Diwan, “Amount of Flour,” September 16, 1991, BRCC 005-3-5-0143.

that rations agents were skimping on providing the full amount of flour they were due each month.<sup>12</sup> In response to these shortages, rations agents in Baghdad stopped opening up their shops to distribute flour. Saddam angrily ordered that any rations agent violating orders would be punished and have their license cancelled immediately.<sup>13</sup> Just one year later, Baghdad was again suffering from a delay in wheat deliveries to the rations distribution centers due to a mechanical breakdowns in the flour mills (spare parts were very difficult to come by under sanctions).<sup>14</sup> Most families ran out of flour before they were eligible for more rations, leading to hunger among the poorest Iraqis and calling into question the ability of the government to keep their citizens from “hunger and deprivation [*min al-maja‘a wa naqs al-ghidha*].”<sup>15</sup>

These shortages fueled the growth of the black market, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six. The party secretariat bluntly referred to the “insufficiency of goods distributed through ration cards to completely meet the needs of families” and, at the same time, an inability of the government to increase the amount of rations it was providing.<sup>16</sup> It was an unsustainable position both for the population and for the party. In 1994, the government began turning to private sector flour mills in order to increase production and tried to switch all of the mills over to electronic scales to reduce fraud and inaccuracies, but citizens continued to experience shortages because black market dealers would bribe workers and transporters from the mills to sell off a

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<sup>12</sup> Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, “Amount of Flour,” September 7, 1991, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0144; party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, “Popular Supervision,” March 19, 1991, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0118.

<sup>13</sup> Presidential Diwan to the Ministry of Trade, “Food Agents,” February 9, 1991, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0184; Party secretariat to Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Food Agents,” February 15, 1991, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0189.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Trade to the State Company for Processing Grains, “Delay in Processing Flour,” August 19, 1992, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0074.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Trade to the Presidential Diwan, September 2, 1992, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0035.

<sup>16</sup> Party secretariat to the Furat Organizations, “Recommendation,” September 25, 1992, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0023.

portion of the flour, leaving less to distribute to the families.<sup>17</sup> Thus the party had to contend with a number of factors: shortages in productions and imported food because of the sanctions, a breakdown in the infrastructure for processing goods, and the pervasive phenomenon of theft and smuggling.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that these periodic shortages did not significantly diminish the legitimacy of the Iraqi government. The Iraqi government did not lose its standing with the population because it was successfully able to frame the shortages as the result of the UN-imposed embargo, and therefore as an external factor, rather than a deficiency within the regime itself. The Soviet Union had a similar experience even during much worse food shortages and starvation during WWII; the population perceived that the food shortages were the fault of external circumstances and therefore did not hold their own government accountable.<sup>18</sup> As previous scholars have noted, this is a defect of sanctions as a strategy to bring about regime change; because the pressure is coming from outside, both the regime and its population are likely to blame economic problems on external forces rather than on their own government.<sup>19</sup>

The success of the Iraqi rationing system is all the more apparent when comparing it to the experiences of rationing in Soviet-bloc countries and in China. The Iraqi food distribution system was remarkably efficient because of its utilization of neighborhood-level grocery stores and community leaders. Scholars have written how long rations lines in the Soviet bloc were such a constant feature of life that they became an important public meeting place and site of political discussion, and how a new occupation of “professional queuers” arose in parts of Eastern Europe

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Trade to the party secretariat, “Response,” August 10, 1994, BRCC 01-2968-0001-0013; Baghdad Organizations in Rusafa to the party secretariat, “Study about Flour Mills,” April 19, 1995, BRCC 01-3869-0003-0119.

<sup>18</sup> Lizzie Collingham, *Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 329.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Richard Hass, “Economic Sanctions: Too Much of a Bad Thing,” Brookings Policy Brief #34, June 1, 1998, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/economic-sanctions-too-much-of-a-bad-thing/> and Bijan Khajepour, Reza Marashi, and Trita Parsi, “The Trouble With Sanctions,” *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, July 21, 2013 <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/the-trouble-with-sanctions/>



where people were paid to wait in line on behalf of someone else.<sup>20</sup> In other cases, waiting in line for so many hours a day disrupted productivity and diminished human capital to a significant degree, as workers spent so long waiting in lines for rations that they had barely any time to sleep before their next shift began.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Iraqis faced few delays or difficulties in picking up their monthly rations. In their 1991 field research on the functioning of Iraq's rations system in practice, Drèze and Gazdar also noted that Iraqis waited in small or no lines to pick up their rations, in part because they were able to pick them up from their local shop at any time after the first of the month and because there were so many rations agents spread throughout the country.<sup>22</sup>

Another stark point of departure is the relative success of the Iraqi rationing system in preventing widespread hunger. In contrast, the experience of rationing in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was one of shortages so severe that death from starvation was a grim reality for many people. The limitations of the Chinese rationing system during the Great Leap Forward were even more disastrous, contributing to the deaths of 45 million Chinese.<sup>23</sup> Though not accounting for the significant differences between the Soviet, Chinese, and Iraqi cases, it is noteworthy that the Iraqi regime managed to reliably and consistently provide adequate food to the Iraqi population to ward off the specter of starvation for even the poorest of the poor. Undoubtedly, Iraq's small population played a role in the ability for the government to provide a nutritional safety net and distribute rations efficiently (Iraq's population in 1991 was only 18 million, in contrast to 149 million in Russia and 1.15 billion in China that same year).<sup>24</sup> But regardless of the reasons for Iraq's relative success in food distribution, the political ramifications of its success are critical for understanding

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<sup>20</sup> Katherine Verdery, "The 'Etatization' of Time in Ceauseau's Romania," in *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*, edited by Katherine Verdery (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 82-90; Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, "Introduction," in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, ed. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Collingham, *Taste of War*, 330.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Drèze and Haris Gazdar, "Hunger and Poverty in Iraq, 1991," *World Development* 20 (1992): 932.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine* (New York: Walker, 2010), 333.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank statistics, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

Iraqi state-society relations from 1990-2003. The successful implementation of food rationing by the Ba‘thist regime is one of the key reasons why both the party and the state were able to survive the pressures of international sanctions, despite the explicit intention of this sanction policy to force the removal of Saddam Hussein from power.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Localization of Governance**

Remarkably, the Iraqi government put an emergency food distribution system into effect within three weeks of the imposition of the embargo: by August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1990, the first delivery of rations had taken place as a stopgap solution to the shock of sanctions on local markets.<sup>26</sup> The Gulf crisis dragged on longer than the government expected, however, and by late September 1990, the party recognized that more than *ad hoc* emergency rations were needed. Beginning in October, they started to offer rations in a more systematic way, distributing set amounts of the same food at the same time every month.<sup>27</sup> Though it began in an improvised manner, the food distribution system developed in 1990 remained in place with few modifications for the next 13 years—and, in fact, to the present day.<sup>28</sup>

In order to rapidly implement the rations system, the Iraqi government utilized as many existing Ba‘th Party and state organizational structures as possible. The Ministry of Trade was tapped to oversee the entire rations system (a role it continues to play today). The Ministry of Trade

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Sassoon makes a similar argument in *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 243-244.

<sup>26</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0444; Party secretariat to the Ministry of Trade, September 11, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0472.

<sup>27</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” September 20, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0376.

<sup>28</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizations of the North, South, Euphrates Region, and Center, “Distributing Food Resources,” August 10, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0560. The Iraqi Ministry of Trade still provides monthly rations of non-perishables on a remarkably similar basis to the Ba‘thist system. Though it has cut down on the number of goods provided (soap is no longer included, for example), it continued to provide dry food goods to Iraqis from 2003 onward. In 2016, the Iraqi government made its first significant alteration to the national public distribution system by announcing that Iraqis earning above a certain income threshold will no longer be eligible for rations. This was driven in part by falling oil prices and in anticipation of IMF-driven austerity cuts to social spending. See the Memorandum of Understanding between the International Monetary Fund and Iraq, June 19, 2016: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2016/irq/06192016.pdf>

coordinated with two state companies, the State Company for Foodstuff Trading (*al-Sharika al-'Amma li-Tijarat al-Mawadd al-Ghidba'iyya*) and the State Company for Grain Processing (*al-Sharika al-'Amma li-Tasnia' al-Hubub*) to warehouse rationed food and distribute it to major silos and distribution centers. Ba'th Party branches (*fara'*, pl. *furua'*) were ultimately responsible for overseeing the distribution of food within their large jurisdictions. (Outside of Baghdad, a branch usually oversaw an entire province, but within Baghdad, the city was divided into a six different branches.) Actual distribution took place on a neighborhood-level, which involved district- and neighborhood-level party offices (designated as the party *firqa* and *shu'ba*, respectively; see Figure 1 in Chapter One).

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Ordinarily, decision-making in Saddam's Iraq was highly centralized, with the Presidential Diwan or state ministers issuing decisions that were communicated down the bureaucratic hierarchy to low-level employees and party officials. But the Ba'th Party archives indicate that officials at the bottom of the hierarchical chain of command had an especially important role to play in the rationing system and were entrusted to run rations distributions locally with little interference from above. The reason for this stems from the governance challenges faced by Saddam's regime in the wake of both international sanctions and the 1991 *intifada*.

The sanctions devastated the Iraqi economy and devalued its currency. Public sector paychecks fell to an average of \$2 - \$3 per month and unemployment, already high from the demobilization of millions of soldiers after Iraq's recent wars, surged in the midst of the economic downturn.<sup>30</sup> Predictably, many employees stopped reporting to work for these paltry wages, weakening the human resources of the state and diminishing the ability of the government to carry out its tasks with the speed or thoroughness required. For example, an estimated 12,000 teachers

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<sup>29</sup> Party secretariat to the Offices of the Northern, Southern, Furat, and Wasit Organizations, "Distributing Food Supplies," August 10, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0560.

<sup>30</sup> Alnasrawi, *The Economy of Iraq*, 93.

stopped reporting to work, crippling the public education system.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the *intifada* weakened the Ba‘th Party itself. In the aftermath of the Iraqi army’s retreat from Kuwait, violent protests swept the country over the span of a few weeks in March 1991. Many party offices around the country were attacked and party officials were killed.<sup>32</sup> Party membership initially dropped in the early 1990s as people tried to distance themselves from the weakened and unpopular regime (though membership rates increased again in the late 1990s as Iraqis sought preferential access to scarce resources).<sup>33</sup> The ruling party momentarily reeled from the structural damage to its offices, lower membership rates, and missing personnel. Rolling out a national food rationing system in this setting required using state and party resources as prudently as possible.

Therefore, rather than relying on the Ministry of Trade to carry out food distribution to each family, the primary institution responsible for overseeing the minutiae of day-to-day aspects of rations distribution were neighborhood-based popular committees. Popular committees had been around since the 1970s as non-elected municipal bodies intended to incorporate local elites into aspects of community regulation.<sup>34</sup> In 1995, the regime decided that committee members would be selected through local elections instead, meant to bolster the regime’s ‘democratic’ credentials.<sup>35</sup> Achim Rohde estimates that 60,000 Baghdadis served on Popular committees in the 1990s; he asserts that the Baghdad had as many as 700 committees that helped to offload the everyday work of governance from the regime, though these numbers may be inflated.<sup>36</sup> Popular committees in each neighborhood interfaced with local police departments, internal security and intelligence organizations, neighborhood Ba‘th Party organizations (representing the local *firqa* and *shu‘ba*), and

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<sup>31</sup> Gordon, *Invisible War*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 133-134.

<sup>33</sup> Faust, *Ba‘thification of Iraq*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, FCO 8/2538: Internal Affairs of Iraq, 1975, “The Arab Ba‘ath Socialist Party in Iraq,” pg. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Rohde, “Echoes from Below?”: 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

members of various relevant ministries, like health and transportation, to resolve local problems and help monitor the neighborhood for the regime.<sup>37</sup>

With the beginning of the rationing system, popular committees took on new responsibilities: they were tasked with giving each family a unique rations ID number and verifying the information families filled out on their rations card, notifying the regime of any suspected fraud. In essence, popular committees essentially helped carry out a national census within the first few weeks of the Gulf War, registering all Iraqi residents with their local officials. Each rations card listed a designated “head of household” (*rabb al-‘a’ila*), followed by a list of the names of all family members connected to that household (up to 20 people, sometimes including extended family members). Following the ideal family model promoted by the Ba‘th Party, the husband or father in each family was designated as the head unless the family was headed by a widow or divorced woman—a common situation, especially with the large number of war widows in Iraq at that time (and in the present) and the stress of war and sanctions on marriages.<sup>38</sup> A family could only be registered to receive rations in the area where they resided, ensuring that the popular committee could better monitor them for signs of fraud. For example, only families with young children could receive powdered milk in their rations. Because it was the only form of animal protein usually included in the monthly food distributions, some tried to falsify their registration information to include more babies on their card.<sup>39</sup> It was harder for a family to pull this off when the local popular committee members lived in their neighborhood and knew many of the area’s residents. Furthermore, if a family lost their rations card, the popular committee was responsible for replacing

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<sup>37</sup> For details about the responsibilities of popular committees, see RCC decree #25 from 1995, <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/2000.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” August 26, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0501.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.; Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” August 20, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0538.

their card while ensuring their old card could not continue to be re-used.<sup>40</sup> In sum, tasking popular committees with overseeing food distribution was an effective way to utilize existing quasi-civic institutions to manage rosters of recipients and monitor wrongdoing on a local level.

Following the same strategy, the Ba‘thist regime relied on local shopkeepers to carry out the actual distribution of rationed food and goods to nearby families, rather than use a centralized system. Unlike the popular committees, which had existed prior to the sanctions period, rations agents played an entirely unprecedented role in the Ba‘thist bureaucracy, one that occupied a critical position between the regime and the population and which proved to be a stable and reasonably lucrative career path during the sanctions period. Though rations agents were considered employees of the Ministry of Trade, the agents did not come from a bureaucratic background. Rather, they were shopkeepers and grocery store owners who served the communities they lived in, since as another cost-saving measure, rations distribution was usually based out of privately-owned grocery stores.<sup>41</sup> Both men and women worked as rations agents, and the documents indicate that women were well represented among their ranks. The agents were not necessarily members of the Ba‘th Party, but had to come from families with good or unobjectionable standing with the regime. There was also room for favoritism in selecting who would become rations agents and how large their jurisdiction would be; an official from the Ministry of Trade was reprimanded for designating his father as a rations agent and assigning him 150 families, whereas other rations agents nearby were assigned only 30-60 families.<sup>42</sup>

Once assigned to these new roles, the license to operate as a rations agent (*wikala*) often remained in the family, so that the adult children of an agent might take over the local distribution

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Trade to Party secretariat, “Loss of Ration Card,” November 26, 1990, BRCC 005-3-5-0346 to 0347.

<sup>41</sup> Party secretariat to Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” August 20, 1990 BRCC 005-3-5-0538

<sup>42</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of Trade, “Information,” November 29, 1992, BRCC 005-3-5-0001.

of rations if the agent became ill or retired. The practical reason for this was that rations centers were local grocery stores; there were a limited number of shops that were eligible for the position, and it was more stable for the entire system and Iraqi citizens to keep the rations based out of the same local shops. This was also a way to cultivate loyalty with the new class of rations agents who occupied a critical space between the regime and the population. Rations agents were expected to act as an arm of the regime in maintaining surveillance over the neighborhood, watching out for citizens trying to defraud the system. Even foreigners living in Iraq received rations: the party appointed a rations agent in each geographic district of the country responsible for overseeing the distribution of rations to non-Iraqi “Arabs and foreigners” using an identity card that had to be renewed every month. This had the advantage of helping the party better monitor the comings and goings of foreign residents in Iraq.<sup>43</sup>

With the important goods and responsibilities entrusted to rations agents, the regime established some safeguards to make sure they did not abuse their position. Popular committees were supposed to monitor the work of rations agents and make sure that they sold rations for the set price.<sup>44</sup> The party was aware that some agents were under-weighing goods for citizens and keeping the extra for themselves, however, and that many rations agents had bad reputations for cheating residents (see Chapter Six). Beginning in 1998, the Ministry of Trade introduced a formal process for responding to complaints against rations agents: they would submit the rations agent to a local referendum with all of the families registered to him or her. If the agent received less than a 50% vote of confidence, they would lose their job. This did not seem to be a frequent course of action. I found only two cases in Baghdad—interestingly, both involved female rations agents, potentially indicating a higher level of scrutiny of women serving in these public roles. In one instance, an agent

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<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Trade to the Presidential Diwan, “Recommendation,” November 26, 1994, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0691

<sup>44</sup> Party secretariat to Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Popular Supervision,” February 10, 1991, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0036

and her husband were accused of embezzling funds from voluntary donations they had collected to rebuild a local school. The neighbors also complained about the husband's "bad behavior [*su' tasarrufat*]" when distributing rations. The Rashid branch in Baghdad recommended cancelling her post, but when she secured 80% of the votes in a neighborhood referendum, she was allowed to keep her position.<sup>45</sup>

Thus a key feature of the Iraqi rationing system is that, though there were centralized aspects, most activity took place on a neighborhood level. Party *firqa* leaders, popular committees, and rations agents all lived in the same communities they served, and these were the individuals responsible for managing lists of recipients and monitoring food distribution. Though party branch officials and the Ministry of Trade were ultimately the ones who would answer to Saddam for the functioning of the system, they were not in touch with the day-to-day operations on the ground. Distributing rations on a neighborhood level placed these low-level state and party officials in an important position as intermediaries. They were expected to act as the eyes and ears of the regime in monitoring the population and enacting its policies, but this chapter will also show that these low-level officials could act as important advocates on behalf of their neighbors and the citizens in their small jurisdictions, too. As Khoury observed, "the [party] men and women who managed the lives and deaths of the population within their jurisdiction were proficient in the language of the party, but adept at framing it in local terms and within local constraints."<sup>46</sup> The neighborhood basis of distribution made the entire rationing system more "personalized" as a bureaucratic process; Iraqis knew or knew of the key individuals responsible for providing them with food each month. The neighborhood basis of rations also increased the ability of the state to monitor rations operations; the small scale of each rations shops made it easier to spot abnormalities, fraud, or mistakes.

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<sup>45</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of Trade, "Rations Agent," December 3, 1998, BRCC 01-3219-0000-0335; Ministry of Trade to party secretariat, "Rations Agent," June 7, 1999, BRCC 01-3219-0000-0333.

<sup>46</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 81.



Documents attest to the fact that rations card could be used to monitor movement, verify identities, and track down criminals. The strict registration requirements that Iraqis register in their own neighborhood helped the government monitor and limit the movements of Iraqi families and reassert some control over society.<sup>47</sup> As the next section will discuss, the localization of the food rationing system also gave Iraqi citizens increased opportunities to advocate for themselves, when necessary, by approaching their local rations agents, popular committees, or Ba‘th Party representatives whenever problems arose.

### **The Weaponization of Rations**

The food distribution system gave the Ba‘thist regime new means of carrying out surveillance on local populations through the work of popular committees and rations agents. After 1990, the vast majority of Iraqis were heavily dependent on the state to provide them with food, and for many, rations kept them from the brink of starvation. Even with the rations in place, many Iraqis I interviewed reported that they spent approximately 70% of their income purchasing food to supplement the goods they received from the government each month. Once the majority of Iraqis became reliant on the state for its survival, the regime took advantage of this dependency and used access to affordable food as a new weapon to coerce the population into compliance. Notably, they did not target populations based on region, ethnicity, or sect. Rather, they singled out three specific groups with questionable loyalty to the regime: deserters, opposition group members, and absentee public sector employees. From 1994 to 1996, the regime expanded this policy to collectively punish entire families of people accused of these three crimes. Here, I examine how ordinary Iraqis took steps to push back against this ‘weaponization’ of rations, advocating for themselves to the regime. In the next section, I explore the important function of neighborhood-level authorities in influencing the outcome of these cases.

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<sup>47</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 153.

Desertion and membership in an opposition group were serious crimes that the regime had been actively fighting against for many years, especially during the Iran-Iraq war when desertion was rife and collaboration with Kurdish separatist groups or Iranian-backed opposition groups amounted to treason. These crimes already had stiff punishments: since 1979, membership in any political party other than the Iraqi Ba‘th Party was punishable by execution.<sup>48</sup> During the Iran-Iraq war, deserters from the battlefield could also be killed, while those who failed to show up for duty or return from leave would be arrested.<sup>49</sup> Absenteeism from public sector jobs was a new phenomenon in the 1990s that developed because public sector paychecks had dwindled to an average of \$2 or \$3 dollars per month.<sup>50</sup> For such little pay, many workers quit without official permission, worked only sporadically, or simply stopped showing up to work. Though a less grave crime, absenteeism from work was an annoyance and encumbrance to the regime because it further weakened the state and its ability to govern at a time when the regime was barely able to hang on, prior to the economic relief brought by the Oil-for-Food program in late 1996.

From 1990 to 1994, *individuals* accused of one of these three crimes were liable to have their rations cut off. Cutting off rations as a form of punishment to individuals was not a unique, Iraqi invention; other countries with rationing systems have similarly used rations to punish certain categories of people or to modify behavior. For example, the Soviet Union cut off food rations to absentee factory workers during World War II, which was a very effective deterrent to workers in those circumstances.<sup>51</sup> But unlike the Soviet example, which was primarily motivated by economic considerations and the desire to maximize factory production during a total war effort, the Iraqi

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<sup>48</sup> Jabar, *Shi‘ite Movement in Iraq*, 214-215. Examples from the archives of executions for membership in an opposition group include: Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, “Incident,” July 16, 1992, BRCC 01-3086-0001-0068.

<sup>49</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 102-103.

<sup>50</sup> Original decree was in memo number 19038 on November 2, 1994. Cited in a memo from the Abu Ja‘far al-Mansur branch to the party secretariat, “Breach,” January 21, 1995, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0492

<sup>51</sup> Collingham, *Taste of War*, 330.

government's manipulation of rations had a primarily political goal. Cutting off rations to these individuals was designed to manipulate their behavior and push them back into compliance: rations would be restored if the individual turned him or herself into the authorities or got arrested. But cutting off rations to individuals from these three categories had only limited utility in changing behavior. After all, deserters and opposition group members already faced steep consequences for their behaviors, and the threat of execution or amputation was a much stronger deterrent than cuts to rations. This threat was more likely to be effective in convincing absentee public employees to return to work, but this category of people appear much less often in the archives and seem to have been a much lower priority for the regime.

Instead, following the observation by Lizzie Collingham that rations distribution could be used to signal who was included and who was excluded from the nation, the temporary exclusion of deserters, opposition members, and absentee public employees marked these individuals as disloyal to the regime and therefore outside the reaches of its beneficence.<sup>52</sup> Cutting off rations—rather than, say, a punishment like execution—provided these individuals with opportunities to rectify their standing with the regime in order to regain its favor and the material benefits that flowed from it. For the regime, the ideal outcome was for these individuals to turn themselves in voluntarily. This signaled their renewed commitment and loyalty to the regime, served as a good example to other Iraqis (and a propaganda opportunity the regime could exploit), and gave the regime a chance to push the individual to inform on other deserters, opposition members, or absentee employees as a demonstration of ‘turning over a new leaf.’ Memos always noted when a deserter turned himself in voluntarily (*nadiman*, literally, “repentantly”), as opposed to being returned forcibly after arrest, and this distinction usually resulted in more lenient consequences for the deserter.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Collingham, *Taste of War*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example: Ministry of Defense to *al-fardus firqa* leaders, “Approval,” February 12, 1995, BRCC 027-2-4-0295. Khoury also discusses this in *Iraq in Wartime*, 153.

As the 1990s wore on and the economic conditions worsened, the regime intensified its efforts to maintain law and order and its grip on power by resorting to increasingly harsh, punitive measures.<sup>54</sup> Through violent punishments, the regime hoped to regain a fearful respect and the illusion of control. This trend reached a climax in 1994, when Saddam's Regional Command Council passed a series of decrees introducing new punishments for ordinary crimes, like theft and sex work, as well for crimes against the state, like desertion, absenteeism, and political opposition.<sup>55</sup> These new decrees stipulated that thieves would have their hands cut off and their foreheads tattooed (or executed, in the case of armed robbery) and that pimps would be executed.<sup>56</sup> Saddam also introduced a chilling new punishment to stem high levels of desertion from the army: beginning in 1994, soldiers risked having their ears amputated.<sup>57</sup> As Dina Khoury points out, this punishment was only ever inconsistently applied; many doctors and even party officials were horrified by the penalty and did not carry it out.<sup>58</sup> However, the announcement of these new punishments signaled the regime's new and brutal resolve to enforce their control over the state and society in the face of evident weakness (for more on crime and punishments, see Chapter Six).

Following in this trend of escalating punishments, the regime decreed in 1994 that entire *families* of those accused of desertion, absenteeism, or membership in an opposition group would

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<sup>54</sup> Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Dina Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 146-147, 154-155.

<sup>56</sup> Decree #59 from 1994, "Severe Punishments for those who Commit Theft," <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16019.html>; Decree #114 from 1994, "Modifying RCC Decree #59 from 1994 (Theft)," <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16048.html>; Decree #109 from 1994, "Tattoo on the Forehead for any Person whose Hand was Cut Off as Punishment According to the Law for Cutting Hands," <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16046.html>; Decree #117 from 1994, "Prohibition of Removing the Tattoo," <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16059.html>; Decree #118 from 1994: "Decision to Punish by Execution Everyone who Ran Pimping Operations..." <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16049.html>. Accessed August 17, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Decree #115 from 1994, "Punishment by Cutting Off the Outer Ear."

<sup>58</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 154-155; "Status of Deserters for Wednesday, October 26, 1994" BRCC 027-2-4-1069.

also lose their rations.<sup>59</sup> Specifically, every relative listed on the same rations card as the individual in question would lose rations until the offender turned him or herself in, got arrested, or died.<sup>60</sup> Since extended families sometimes signed up together on the same card, this new policy of collective punishment could theoretically affect up to twenty individuals, though the average number of people in a family cut off from rations was usually between 6 to 10 people. Going a step further, these families were also sometimes evicted from their houses and forcibly displaced to another province, far from their communities and social networks of support.<sup>61</sup> Rations were restored only once the individual was arrested, turned himself or herself in, or died. Rations were reinstated three months after the individual was apprehended, a rule that seems to be put in place to make sure the individual did not flee again immediately.<sup>62</sup>

The goal of this new collective punishment policy was similar to its political objectives in punishing individuals: it stigmatized and punished disloyal families and marginalized them from inclusion in the national distribution of resources. It allowed the regime to demonstrate how dependent the average citizen was on the party for its daily bread and thereby prove its power and relevance, even during a low point for the regime. But it was more effective in pressuring individuals and families to change their behavior. Though the threat or reality of being cut off from rations was not enough to eliminate problems of desertion, opposition, or absenteeism, the regime's approach of collectively punishing families did lead to some success in apprehending suspects. In one

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<sup>59</sup> Council of Ministers to the party secretariat, "Deserters," February 2, 1995, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0164.

<sup>60</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of Trade, "Death of a Deserter," April 6, 1995, *BRCC* 041-2-2-0254

<sup>61</sup> From the Senior Ministry Agent to the party secretariat, "Displacement," June 3, 1995, *BRCC* 027-2-4-0258

<sup>62</sup> Ministry of the Interior to the party secretariat, "Rations," January 25, 1996, *BRCC* 01-3543-0001-0038; Ministry of Trade to the Rations Center of Ta'mim Province, "Withholding Rations," June 19, 1995, *BRCC* 01-3612-0001-0837.

example, a man turned himself over to the police after his family's rations were cut off, in addition to "continuous raids on his family" by the local party organization.<sup>63</sup>

Letters, petitions, and memos from the archives underscore that collective punishment policies put tremendous strain on Iraqi families, who were forced to choose between protecting their accused relative and suffering together, or betraying that individual in order to restore food rations to the rest of the family. Families of deserters, absentee public employees, or opposition group members who found themselves cut off from rations under this new policy had a bleak array of choices for how to respond. These cuts were devastating for most Iraqi families who relied on rations to provide a significant percentage of their monthly nutrition in the face of worthless paychecks, limited purchasing power, hyperinflation, and scarcity of goods. Fighting the punishment was rarely successful: one man erupted violently when he discovered his whole family was cut off from their rations because his son was absentee from his public sector job without official permission. The man tore up his rations card in anger, screamed at the officials, and threw the scraps of his rations cards at them before storming out. In writing up the incident, the local party officials noted that this man himself was an agent of the Ministry of Trade and that his "strange behavior" was "unbecoming [*la yatanasib*]," of his position, giving "an impression that he did not respect the government's instructions nor those who carry out their responsibilities." Not only did this man and his whole family lose their rations, but he probably also lost his job after this blowup.<sup>64</sup>

Some targets of the collective punishment policy successfully proved that they had been wrongfully targeted and managed to get their punishments lifted. For example, a woman from Jihad neighborhood in Baghdad tersely explained in a letter to the party secretariat that they had erred in cutting off her family's rations. Her local officials had informed her that her rations had been cut off

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<sup>63</sup> Official from the Organizations of Wasit and Maysan to the President's Assistant, "Surrender of the Agent," July 15, 2000, BRCC 089-3-4-0025

<sup>64</sup> Abu Ja'far al-Mansur Branch to the party secretariat, "Breach," January 21, 1995, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0492

because her son was illegally abroad in Jordan (the phenomenon of brain drain and illegal migration abroad was widespread during the sanctions years: as many as four million Iraqis lived abroad by 2003, despite travel bans).<sup>65</sup> However, this woman was well-informed about regime policies, and knew that illegal migration was not cause for cutting off a family's rations—only desertion from the military, absenteeism from a public sector job, or membership in an opposition group were grounds for this form of collective punishment. Furthermore, her son was in Jordan with official permission from the government: he had an Iraqi passport, paid all of the required fees for travel, had already completed his military service in Iraq, and received permission for his travel from the neighborhood *mukhtar* and local party officials. She ended her letter by reminding the party leadership that she was a good Iraqi citizen who was suffering under sanctions just like everyone else—and wrongfully cutting off her rations was “a moral affront even more than it was a material punishment.”<sup>66</sup>

For those families who did have a member guilty of desertion, absenteeism, or membership in an opposition group, they faced the difficult decision of whether to turn over their relative or continue to suffer without rations. One family from Saddam City in Baghdad had been exiled to Diyali province and had their rations cut off after their son deserted from the army. The soldier's father cooperated with the authorities to have him arrested, and the party decided to allow the family to return to their original home a few weeks later with their full rations restored.<sup>67</sup> In another instance, an impoverished family in Baghdad found themselves in this terrible situation: a son deserted from the army and remained in hiding for two years, cutting the family off from much-needed rations. The deserters' brothers were already in a difficult financial situation because their father had gone missing in action during the Iran-Iraq war. This deprived them of a breadwinner, and also did not grant them the perks and privileges that came with “killed in action” status (which

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<sup>65</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ith Party*, 246.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from an Iraqi woman to the party secretariat, undated (January 1995), BRCC 01-3439-0001-0486.

<sup>67</sup> Party secretariat to the President's Deputy, “Return of Exiled Family,” May 25, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0197

was considered “martyrdom” in Ba‘thist terminology). Perhaps it was the family’s poverty that finally pushed a young man in the family to tell the authorities about his brother’s hiding place and have him arrested for desertion.<sup>68</sup>

Cruelly, cooperation with the party did not necessarily mean that rations would be restored. In May 1995, the Rashid party branch in Baghdad forwarded a list of names of deserters to the party secretariat who had been arrested with their help of their own families. They requested that the party secretariat grant “amnesty” to these families from having their rations cut off because of their cooperation. The party secretariat wrote back to correct the Rashid Branch about its mistaken protocols and assumptions: families of deserters would only have their rations restored after a close examination of their cases. Simply writing “cooperated” next to the family’s name and address would not suffice.<sup>69</sup>

Others attempted to distance themselves from, or disown, the deserter in their family. One man from Saddam City wrote to the party secretariat to explain that he and his son had always had a difficult relationship. During one especially heated family fight, “shots were fired,” and his son fled the house and never returned. Sometime later, his son deserted from the army, but his family had lost track of him long before that and had no idea where he had gone. He pleaded: “Just sir, I am an old man, I have a big family, and I am too old to work. I do not know the fate of my son, and I am suffering in difficult circumstances.” He then ends his letter as most people did, with flowery praise of Iraq and its leader and curses on Iraq’s enemies for imposing the sanctions, while requesting that his family’s rations be restored. The local party branch also advocated on his behalf, recommending restoring rations to this family, on account of the “good information” they had heard about them,

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<sup>68</sup> Sa‘d bin Abi Waqas Branch to the party secretariat, “Arrest and Withholding Rations,” March 18, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0218

<sup>69</sup> Party secretariat to the Rashid Branch, “Cutting Rations,” June 11, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0122



but the Ministry of Trade ultimately denied their request, citing strict rules: until his son was apprehended, their rations would not be restored.<sup>70</sup>

Other families chose not to turn over their offending family member, but instead pled for mercy by writing letters to the regime. These families made their appeals in different ways. Some tried to demonstrate their loyalty and party credentials—noting that they had another son serving in the Republican Guard, or who served in the Iran-Iraq War, or who had received medals in combat, or that they were parents of martyrs. Others asked for mercy according to the uniquely difficult circumstances they were in.

Party members could expect some preferential treatment from the regime. A particularly awkward scenario arose for a party member with a mid-level rank of “Active Member” (*Adu ‘Amil*) whose son deserted from the police. As it would for any other citizen, the rations to his entire family were cut off after his son fled his post. The party member wrote two separate letters explaining the predicament he found himself in, insisting that his son had left the house a year prior and that he had no knowledge of his whereabouts. He suggested a compromise solution: that his son’s name simply be removed from his rations card, leaving his family’s rations otherwise intact. The party secretariat accepted his request, revealing some of the privileges Ba’thists could hope to enjoy even when their families embarrassed them by breaking the law.<sup>71</sup>

Though the regime was not always successful in its efforts to turn family members against one another, the difficult economic circumstances during sanctions sometimes pushed Iraqis to turn over their own kin in exchange for bread, sugar, and rice. This policy represented yet another effort by Saddam to refashion Iraqi family structures to assert himself as the ultimate patriarch. By coupling the punishment of cut rations to the threat of eviction and displacement, this policy of

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<sup>70</sup> Party secretariat to Saddam Branch, “Restoring Rations,” April 3, 1996, BRCC 024-2-4-0321 to -0333.

<sup>71</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, “Restoration,” January 25, 1996, BRCC 027-2-4-0353 to -0359.

collective punishment sought not only to sever social bonds within the family, but to sever bonds within neighborhoods and communities, striving to create social atomization that lessened the likelihood of mass opposition to Saddam's rule. The extent of the regime's efforts to insert itself into the most important foundation of society—the family—illustrates that Saddam believed a certain amount of social destabilization and fragmentation worked in his favor. By trying to turn Iraqis against each other, he might prevent Iraqis from joining together to turn against him. The regime did not always succeed in rupturing kinship bonds, of course, but these policies subjected Iraqi families to intense pressure and uncertainty, as those accused of desertion or absenteeism were left to wonder whether their families would disown them and leave them to fend for themselves in Saddam's capricious and often cruel justice system.

In each of the cases above, ordinary Iraqis adopted a variety of strategies to protest and petition when their rations were cut off: pleading for mercy, cooperating with the regime, disowning errant family members, or complaining about wrongfully applied policies. As these examples showed, none of these rhetorical strategies were guaranteed to work, including when families chose to cooperate fully with the regime and turn over their own family members to the police. As the section below explores, one of the most important factors for ensuring a favorable outcome was advocacy by a local authority, highlighting the increasingly influential role they played in day-to-day governance decisions in sanctions-era Baghdad.

### **Influence and Advocacy of Local Authorities**

Local authorities, including district-level party officials and the government-appointed neighborhood *mukhtar*, played pivotal roles in helping citizens in their jurisdictions appeal for relief in their punishments or to rectify errors with their rations.<sup>72</sup> In many cases, the decision of whether or not to restore rations to a particular family was left up to the local party leaders, rather than being

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<sup>72</sup> For more information about how *mukhtarun* were selected, see: Faust, *Ba'thification of Iraq*, 105.

decided by the Ministry of Trade or another senior official in the regime. This is counterintuitive, given the common description of Saddam's Iraq as a totalitarian regime where all decision-making was concentrated at the top.<sup>73</sup> These petitions indicate that, in some day-to-day matters, lower-level party leaders made the decisions that directly impacted the outcomes of citizens' problems and requests.

Certain intermediaries, like neighborhood *mukhtarun* and rations agents, could take action to influence the outcome of events on the ground—albeit at great risk to themselves. In a few extreme cases, these intermediary authorities were even willing to break the law in order to help out a family in need. In June of 1995, a neighborhood *mukhtar* had heard that the family of a deserter was about to be forced out of their home and exiled to another province as punishment. He was able to warn them in advance, and they fled to an “unknown location”—likely outside the country—before the police arrived.<sup>74</sup> The fate of that *mukhtar* is unknown, but another *mukhtar* was fired from his post because his own son had deserted from the army and he did not turn over his son to the regime.<sup>75</sup> This kind of behavior was very risky to the *mukhtarun* and agents willing to bend the rules behind the backs of the regime, and constituted the least common form of help from local intermediaries.

The most influential form of advocacy took place when lower-ranking party officials asked their supervisors for special exceptions to be made for residents in their jurisdictions. Baghdadis understood this and tried to leverage the support of their local officials whenever possible; many petitions included letters of reference from local *mukhtarun*, for example, in an effort to influence the outcome of their requests.<sup>76</sup> There is plenty of evidence that lower-level party members were uncomfortable with the firm line taken by the 1994-1996 policy of collective punishment against

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<sup>73</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 234; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 54-55.

<sup>74</sup> From the Senior Ministry Agent to the party secretariat, “Displacement,” June 3, 1995, BRCC 027-2-4-0258

<sup>75</sup> Party secretariat to the Province of Baghdad – Mukhtar Affairs, “Exchanging Mukhtar,” December 31, 1997, BRCC 01-3377-0000-0293.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, a letter sent to the regime in 2002 by a *mukhtar* on behalf of a man living in his jurisdiction, BRCC 01-270-0001-0658.

families of deserters. In some cases, local party branches advocated for particular families that had cooperated with them to receive lenient treatment. In June of 1995, the Saddam party branch in Baghdad sent the party secretariat five pages listing names of deserters that had been arrested. Next to the name of one family the Saddam branch officials wrote, “The family cooperated and we recommend not forcibly displacing them and not cutting their rations.” Next to another name, the branch officials noted that the “family is poor,” and for that reason alone they recommended not displacing them or cutting their rations.<sup>77</sup> In another case, branch officials from Baghdad advocated for reprieve for a family of a deserter on humanitarian grounds, citing the family’s poverty and the fact that they had no real resources to support themselves. Even though this family had also written an appeal to the party secretariat, it was the officials of the Abu Ja‘far al-Mansur branch in Baghdad who made the final decision to exempt this family from punishment because of their poverty.<sup>78</sup>

Pleas to exempt families for humanitarian reasons were not always accepted, however, even with the intervention of local officials. To give a contrasting example: a party member from a poor family asked that his family’s rations be restored, even though his son had deserted the army. The local party branch wrote a memo supporting his request and confirmed that he lived in “very difficult circumstances.” Despite their advocacy, the Ministry of Trade denied the request with a handwritten note in the margins saying there was “no precedent” for making that kind of exception (though that was not strictly true, as other examples from the archives attest).<sup>79</sup>

One particularly heart-wrenching petition demonstrates that Baghdadis were well aware that their local Ba‘th Party officials could play important roles as advocates for their cases, but also

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<sup>77</sup> Saddam Branch to the party secretariat, “Cutting Rations to the Families of Deserters,” June 21, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0013 through 0022.

<sup>78</sup> Abu Ja‘far al-Mansur Branch to the party secretariat, “Request,” March 20, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0313 to 0318.

<sup>79</sup> Khalid bin al-Walid Branch to the party secretariat, “Restoring Rations,” May 22, 1996, BRCC 027-2-4-0049.

illustrates the limitations of that help. Because this letter encapsulates many of the themes of this chapter, I quote it here in its entirety:

“My son [name omitted] volunteered as a soldier at al-Habaniyya military base.... He suffers from diabetes and from a severe mental illness [*mard nafsī badd*]. [...] I didn’t know about his desertion [from the military] until the commander of his base told me, because he had left our house to some unknown location and I hadn’t seen him since.

Quickly, I informed our local *firqa* official of his desertion, and he requested that I report my son’s whereabouts whenever I learn where he is. ...When my son arrived at my house, I reported him, even though he was in an afflicted psychological state at the time [*wa hūwa fī hala nafsīyya mu‘adhdhaba*]. I turned him over to the party. He was held at the al-Quds police station in the Ur neighborhood [of Baghdad], and after two weeks, I learned that he had been transferred...to his military unit at the al-Habaniyya base.

They considered him as “arrested,” [i.e., they did not treat him as if he had been turned in voluntarily] so I contacted my local *firqa* official again and requested that he provide me with a document stating that it was I, his father, who turned him in. I didn’t receive a response, so I returned to my local *shu‘ba* office and explained my request to the director. He informed me that a document had been issued from the party attesting that I, his father, had turned over my son, and so the party had decided only to flog him [*jalduhu faqat*] and that the party would not execute him, cut off his ear, or cut off the family’s rations [*lan yaqum al-bizb bi-‘idambu aw qata’ udhunu aw qata’ al-bissa al-tamwiniyya ‘an ‘a’lathu*] (even though the family’s rations are still cut off) due to the father’s cooperation and the fact that he has been detained. This document was sent to the party secretariat on November 13, 1994. This is what I heard and what I read in the document issued at that time.

After a while, I heard that the investigative committee [considering my son’s case] determined that he was “arrested,” and sent him to a military court and there they ruled that he would have his ear cut off on February 19, 1995. ...He is still in prison awaiting the sentence. I am humbly submitting the party document that decided he would only be flogged...on account of the fact that it was his father who turned him in.

I have three sons who participated in Qadisiyyat Saddam al-Majida [the Iran-Iraq War]. Of them, one was awarded a medal of bravery, and another was wounded on the Mother of All Battles [the Gulf War] more than once. I plead with you, sir, from the heart of an anguished father [*bi-qalb al-walid al-mu‘adhdhab*]... please open a door of hope.”<sup>80</sup>

The local *shu‘ba* of the Ba‘th Party verified the father’s version of the events and advocated that the family “not be evicted and not have their rations cut off [*‘adam tarbil al-‘a’ila...wa ‘adam qita’ al-bissa*]

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<sup>80</sup> Letter from an Iraqi man, undated [1995], BRCC 041-2-2-0186.

*al-tamwiniyya ‘anhum]*” because the father was “exceptional [*mutamayyiẓ*]” in his cooperation with the party.<sup>81</sup>

This letter illustrates both the potentials and limitations of relying on local Ba‘th Party officials as intermediaries. On the one hand, the father displayed a knowledgeable shrewdness in how he approached both his local *firqa* and *shu‘ba* officials to document his cooperation with the regime, and these local authorities responded to his request favorably, advocating for leniency for his family. Their advocacy was influential: the party secretariat agreed with their recommendation and ruled on March 22, 1995 that the family would not face consequences for the son’s desertion.<sup>82</sup> However, while their appeals on his behalf ultimately provided relief for the father and his remaining children in restoring their rations, the gears of the bureaucracy moved too slowly to spare his deserter son from imprisonment and suffering: the ruling by the party secretariat came four months after the father’s local officials documented his cooperation and a month after the son’s ear was scheduled to be amputated as punishment. The lengths to which this father went to spare his son a harsh fate at the hands of the authorities attests to the pressure that these policies of collective punishment put on Iraqi families. Local officials were imperfect advocates, but they were often the only authorities who could meaningfully intervene in the hope of rectifying a bad situation.

In other cases, local authorities could be obstructions to justice. A father from the al-Salam neighborhood of Baghdad ran into serious conflicts with his local *firqa* officials. His son had previously deserted from the army, for which the family had been punished, but his son had turned himself back in voluntarily to his unit. However, when he was home on authorized leave, the local *firqa* officials wrongfully arrested him as a deserter. The father rushed around in a frenzy to collect

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<sup>81</sup> Leadership of the Sa‘d bin Abi Waqas Branch to the party secretariat, “Cooperation of a Citizen,” March 9, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0195; Party secretariat to the Assistant to the President, “Exceptional Families,” March 15, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0192.

<sup>82</sup> Party secretariat to the Sa‘d bin Abi Waqas Branch, “Exceptional Families,” March 22, 1995, BRCC 041-2-2-0188.

documentation from his son's military unit attesting to his regular status to prove that he had not deserted. He tried for days to arrange a meeting with the director of the local *shu'ba*, but was repeatedly rebuffed. After five days of frantic efforts, a representative from the party knocked on his door and informed him that his son's ear had been cut off as punishment for his alleged desertion, and that the family was being evicted from their home and cut off from their rations. The father wrote his desperate plea to the party secretariat to rectify the situation.<sup>83</sup> When questioned by the party secretariat about the situation, the local party officials denigrated the father, stating that his testimony was unreliable because he had a "questionable character" and was known for harassing young schoolgirls in the neighborhood.<sup>84</sup> The party secretariat left the final decision about this family's fate up to the local party branch—the same officials who were in conflict with this man. Though the archives do not record the final outcome, it is unlikely this man or his family received respite from their problems.<sup>85</sup>

The examples above illustrate the influential role local authorities could play in determining the outcome of individual cases. However, lower-ranking party officials could be influential advocates on a larger scale, too: they sometimes advocated for changes in the policies themselves. Though these examples of lower-ranking officials suggesting policy changes are exceedingly rare and unusual within the larger context of the Ba'th Party archives, their existence has important consequences for understanding decision-making within the regime. Amatzia Baram had argued that "in Saddam's Iraq there was no way...[to] discreetly report some Iraqis' negative views of the president" and that "subordinates...could [not] contradict [Saddam's] goals, power or his

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<sup>83</sup> Letter from a Baghdad man to the party secretariat, [undated, 1994], BRCC 01-354-0002-0660.

<sup>84</sup> Khalid bin al-Walid branch to the party secretariat, "Issuing an Opinion," October 22, 1994, BRCC 01-3564-0002-0659.

<sup>85</sup> Party secretariat to the Khalid bin al-Walid Branch, "Issuing an Opinion," October 16, 1994, BRCC 01-3564-0002-0657.

judgment.”<sup>86</sup> However, the examples below attest that it was sometimes possible for even lower-ranking party members to implicitly criticize Saddam’s decrees, convey complaints from the population, and suggest changes in policies. Furthermore, the Presidential Diwan sometimes accepted these recommendations and implemented them.

In 1995, local party leaders began to advocate for changes in how, when, and why the party cut rations to certain demographics. For example, branch party leaders in Karbala and Dhi Qar provinces presented a list of complaints they had received during interviews with citizens in their areas about the logic of collective punishment. These policies, they said, unfairly blamed families for the errant behavior of one member—be it for desertion, fleeing the country, or absenteeism from work—but did not conversely *reward* the entire family for the especially good behavior of one family member.<sup>87</sup> The desertion of one young man from the army could ruin a family that counted amidst its ranks enlisted soldiers, veterans, martyrs, fighters who had won medals of distinction and bravery, and other “exceptional children [*abna’ mutamayyizin*].”<sup>88</sup> These party branch leaders called for a change in this approach, and recommended that the party start taking a more holistic assessment of whether a given family was “loyal to the party and the revolution” by looking at the actions of all of the family members and not just focusing on one bad element.<sup>89</sup> In response, the party secretariat asked those party branch leaders for a list of specific families that fit this description of having their rations cut despite their otherwise exceptional credentials of loyalty to the party.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam*, 10; Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence, “Regime Intent,” Chapter Four in *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD*, Volume I, 2004. [https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq\\_wmd\\_2004/chap1.html#sect4](https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/chap1.html#sect4)

<sup>87</sup> Dina Khoury has written about this inconsistent approach to punishing and rewarding families in *Iraq in Wartime*, 172-178.

<sup>88</sup> The Organizations of Babil and Karbala to the party secretariat, “Recommendation,” September 17, 1995, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0348.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizations of the Provinces of Babil and Karbala, “Recommendation,” September 26, 1995, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0341.



Just two months later, in November 1995, party officials from Maysan and Wasit provinces sent a bold list of policy recommendations that further critiqued the implementation of the collective punishment policy. In succinct bullet points, they argued that families should have their rations restored if they met any of the following conditions:

- 1) If the family is otherwise in good standing with the regime and has demonstrated their loyalty to the party
- 2) If any immediate family member had received a medal in the Iran-Iraq war or Gulf War
- 3) If any family member had been martyred in the Iran-Iraq War or Gulf War
- 4) If any family member had received commendation for fulfilling his or her national duty, whether in the Gulf War or otherwise.<sup>91</sup>

In other words, these provincial leaders echoed the critiques that the Karbala and Dhi Qar provincial leaders had also made: the policy of collective punishment was counteracting the regime's efforts to win over the support of the population and alienating families who otherwise supported the regime.

Remarkably, the regime began to introduce changes to the rations policy in February 1996. At that time, the Presidential Diwan did relax a few of its rules and clarified the conditions that could be met in order to restore rations to the families of deserters or absentee employees to minimize confusion. For example, if a woman divorced her deserter husband and maintained custody of her children, she and her children would continue to receive rations (though the rest of his family members would be cut off). It clarified that presenting the death certificate of a deserter was sufficient for the restoration of rations, and soldiers who went MIA during the 1991 *intifada* would not be regarded as deserters and their families would continue to receive rations.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Official of the Maysan and Wasit Organizations to the Office of the Assistant to the President, "Cutting Rations," November 2, 1995, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0353.

<sup>92</sup> Ministry of Trade to the party secretariat, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice and the intelligence and security organizations, "Ration Card Goods," February 12, 1996, BRCC 01-3439-0001-0408 through -0410.

Then, on June 8, 1996, the policy of collective punishment was abruptly dropped altogether: Saddam issued a decree ordering that rations be restored to all of the families who had been cut off as a form of collective punishment.<sup>93</sup> Rations would still be cut off to individual offenders, as Saddam clarified in a follow-up decree a few days later, but rations would never again be used as a form of collective punishments against entire families for the remainder of the Ba‘thist regime.<sup>94</sup> In fact, when families were collectively cut off from rations in September 1996, the Ministry of Trade scolded the responsible officials for contravening the presidential decree.<sup>95</sup>

Why did Saddam abruptly end this policy of collective punishment? From the outside, the most obvious factor is the signing of the Oil-for-Food agreement, which relieved financial pressure on the regime and helped guarantee its survival. The Oil-for-Food agreement was the single most important and decisive shift in external political factors facing the regime between the imposition of the sanctions in 1990 and the overthrow of the regime in 2003. It altered Saddam’s relationships with the outside world, and had implications for the regime’s governance strategies domestically. With the promise of new resources and revenue streams, the regime could return to its usual policy of balancing ‘sticks’ with ‘carrots’ to win over the population with promises of aid and services. It no longer had to resort to an unpopular policy of collective punishment through food rations. The timing is highly suggestive: on May 20, 1996, Iraq signed the Memorandum of Understanding to implement the Oil-for-Food Program according to UN resolution 986. Two weeks later, on June 8, 1996, Saddam revoked the policy of collective punishment through rations. The regime could only consider relaxing its restrictions on food rations once they were guaranteed easier access to food imports from abroad.

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<sup>93</sup> Presidential Diwan to the Ministry of Trade, “Rations,” June 8, 1996, *BRCC* 01-3612-0001-0880.

<sup>94</sup> Presidential Diwan to the Ministry of Trade, “Rations,” June 18, 1996, *BRCC* 01-3612-0001-0875.

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Trade to the party secretariat, “Information,” September 20, 1996, *BRCC* 01-3452-0001-0193.

Within the internal documents of the Ba‘th Party, however, changes to this policy were framed as the outcome of ‘bottom-up’ initiatives by both ordinary Iraqi citizens and the lower-ranking branch party officials who had advocated for these reforms. Saddam cited three factors in justifying his change in policy: a national referendum in October 1995 (in which Saddam allegedly won 99% of the vote) that demonstrated the “love and loyalty” of Iraqis for Saddam,<sup>96</sup> citizens’ complaints about the unfairness of collective punishment, and the advocacy of party officials to change the policy.<sup>97</sup> No mention is made of the Oil-for-Food program in any of the documents related to ending the collective punishment policy. Though Oil-for-Food agreement was clearly a crucial factor in changing this policy, internally, the Ba‘thists framed these changes as the ruling elites’ gracious and benevolent response to alleviate the suffering of the people, to reward Iraqis for their loyalty in the referendum, and to incorporate the suggestions of lower-ranking party officials. It was a convenient narrative that avoided the less flattering truth that Saddam’s political survival was tied to his agreement to allow weapons inspectors into the country and which encouraged information to continue travelling up the channels of the Ba‘th Party apparatus.

At the same time, mechanisms did exist for ordinary citizens, rations agents, and lower-ranking party officials to express displeasure with certain policies or government actions and advocate for changes from below. Examining how the collective punishment rations policy functioned in practice gives us a new window into how policies were made, enforced, and changed in Saddam’s Iraq. It demonstrates that the Presidential Diwan was not always smoothly directing policies from above; government ministries, local authorities, lower-ranking party officials, and even ordinary citizens could influence how policies were interpreted, enforced, and received.

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<sup>96</sup> Maysan and Wasit Organization, “Cutting Rations,” November 2, 1995, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0353.

<sup>97</sup> Presidential Diwan to the party secretariat, “Rations,” June 2, 1996, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0352.

## Conclusions

Domestically, the reputation of the Ba‘th Party was severely damaged by its disastrous defeat in Kuwait and by the 1991 *intifada* that challenged the regime’s control over the country. The economic embargo, combined with the massive damage inflicted on the country’s infrastructure, threatened the government’s ability to reconsolidate its control over Iraq and keep basic services running. Though helicopter gunships had worked with brutal efficiency to bring open rebellion to an end, the regime could not recover its support and reputation for capable leadership without providing electricity, clean water, and basic food. Among themselves, Iraq’s leaders were frank about the challenges they faced. ‘Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri confessed in a closed-door leadership meeting in December 1991, “We almost lost the Ba‘th Party for good; we did not have even a one in a million chance,” after the Gulf War and *intifada*. ‘Izzat asked Saddam, “Are we not supposed to be fighting the sanctions? Where is our plan? We have to stop this disaster immediately, because the sanctions are killing us. We have to boost the morale of our people and stop the negative results of the sanctions.””<sup>98</sup>

In response to these challenges, the ruling party hoped to use rations to shore up tacit support by increasing the dependence of Iraqis on the regime for their very physical survival. To a considerable extent, the regime succeeded: Iraqis of all social backgrounds, regions, and economic statuses received rations, and these critical food supplies provided the majority of monthly calories for most Iraqi families. At the same time, the regime was adept at using the rations coercively to discipline society: providing rations to “good” citizens and cutting off rations to disloyal Iraqis and their families. The policy of collective punishment was designed to try to weaken family bonds and community cohesion as the regime put pressure on relatives to turn in one another for criminal behavior that was very common at the time (desertion and absenteeism, in particular). Though this

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<sup>98</sup> “Ba‘ath Revolutionary Command Meeting 12/21/1991,” audio transcript, December 21, 1991, CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-461.

policy was only in place for two years, it illustrated the extent to which Saddam attempted to disrupt social solidarity and kinship bonds by pushing for loyalty to the regime above all else in an effort to further prevent Iraqis from mobilizing against his rule during a period of political and economic weakness.

The heightened role of ‘intermediaries’—rations agents, *mukhtarun*, popular committees, and local party officials—enabled the continued functionality of the regime despite the government’s weakened state in the early 1990s. But these local authorities were not simply the pawns of the regime: neighborhood-level Ba’th Party officials, rations agents, and *mukhtarun* sometimes advocated for members of their communities and even pushed back on the regime’s unpopular policy of collective punishment through rations. The overall outcome of these two trends—of the atomization of society and of the localization of governance—meant that politics became increasingly personal in sanctions-era Iraq, and state-society relations took place on an ever more local scale.

The decision to organize food distribution within neighborhoods, relying on neighborhood-level intermediaries and requiring each family to register with their local authorities in order to pick up their food each month, had important ramifications for the city of Baghdad. The neighborhood became an increasingly important unit of political organization within the capital; people had difficulty relocating within the city because of the process of ration card registration. The rations distribution system kept economic transactions local, with most Iraqis living within a few hundred meters from distribution centers. Problems with rations put citizens in increased contact with members of their local popular committees or Ba’th Party offices, while those same officials carried increased responsibilities to maintain a watchful eye on the residents of their jurisdictions.

The success of the rationing system was in large part due to the existing party and state infrastructure that was organized at the neighborhood level, but rather than simply existing at the

bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy, sanctions forced the regime to increasingly rely on these local officials to act as important decision makers. On political and economic levels, the rationing system increased participation in neighborhood-level systems. Though there was a certain amount of bureaucratic confusion and bungling behind the scenes, through the regular distribution of food through its neighborhood-level channels the state was able to maintain the appearance of effective state power in the face of severe economic challenges brought about by sanctions. But this shift towards neighborhood-level governance meant that, for Baghdadis, the face of the regime was increasingly their local officials, for better or worse. This personalization of politics through increasingly localized governance was a two-way street, however. While the proliferation of responsibilities and authorities at the neighborhood level represented an increase in the government's presence and surveillance opportunities in each local community, it also gave residents increased opportunities to establish a good rapport with officials, challenge punishments, and advocate for themselves.

## 6. Prostitutes and Black Markets: The Political and Social Consequences of Crime

A series of catastrophes—the ruinous economic costs of the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War bombing campaign that heavily damaged Baghdad’s factories and infrastructure, and imposition of economic sanctions from 1990 to 2003—hollowed out Iraq’s economy and destabilized Baghdad’s social order. One consequence of these economic and social shocks was a rising wave of crime that consumed Baghdad during the sanctions period as people turned to illegal means to supplement their withered paychecks and opportunistically took advantage of the state’s weakness. Criminal deviance had important social and political effects: rising crime rates contributed to new social narratives about ‘dangerous’ and ‘vulnerable’ populations in the city and tested the resilience of the Ba‘thist security apparatus, which recruited ever more citizens into surveillance operations to combat crime.

While a body of scholarship has studied the importance of organized political resistance organizations, such as the Da‘wa Party, the Communist Party, or Kurdish nationalist groups, comparatively less attention has been focused on other forms of deviance and non-compliance in challenging the authority of the Ba‘thist regime. Crime committed in Ba‘thist Iraq, though usually undertaken for economic motives, nevertheless had significant political effects: criminals defied the rules and systems imposed by the regime and revealed the diminished capacity of the state to maintain law and order in the 1990s. As Diane Singerman observed in her study of low-income Cairo neighborhoods, seemingly innocuous economic crimes, like participating in black markets, can be a form of “political activity” by implicitly critiquing the state for failing to provide essential services: what matters is the effect, not the intention, of the actor.<sup>1</sup>

Faced with an increasingly restive population, the Ba‘thist regime outwardly relied on public spectacles of violence and harsh new sentencing laws to scare Baghdadis into compliance, as

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<sup>1</sup> Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4-7; see also Drapac and Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration*, 38.

described in Chapter Five. Behind the scenes, the diminished capacity of the state meant that officials relied more heavily on citizen informants and neighborhood-level surveillance to identify criminals. But even once government officials became aware of criminal behavior, the justice system was not equipped or even particularly motivated to sentence all detainees to the full letter of the law. This chapter contributes to growing archival evidence that the Baʿthist justice system often operated capriciously: sometimes offering surprising reprieve to criminals, while other times meting out undeservedly cruel punishments.

The second half of this chapter examines the gendered effects of lawlessness in Baghdad. Public anxieties about rising crime rates focused on certain social categories: merchants and rations agents, young men (including returned soldiers), rural migrants in the city, and single women. Single women (including young unmarried women, divorcées, and widows) were sources of particular political and social anxieties, since they were seen as both vulnerable to victimization by crime and as possible criminals themselves engaged in illicit sex work. There was a class component to these anxieties around women's bodies, labor, and movement through the city: female rural migrants suffered doubly under gendered and class-based negative stereotypes. Managing women's bodies, then, became an urgent priority for both the state and for ordinary Baghdadis monitoring their neighbors' behavior.

### **Political Repercussions of Economic Crimes**

Social instability followed in the wake of Iraq's wars. In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, Baghdadis complained of an uptick in crime, especially as the city strained to reintegrate returning soldiers. Publicly, the regime began circulating the notion that it had managed to curtail theft by 71% and that the crime rate was down by 57% by 1989. Rather, these unlikely statistics—which contradict Iraqis' memories of this period and scholarly accounts of the rising crime from this



period—instead reflect the regime’s acknowledgment that crime and security were growing problems as it sought to assure the public that it had the situation under control.<sup>2</sup>

However unsettled Baghdad felt in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, it paled in comparison to the societal chaos unleashed by Iraq’s disastrous defeat in the Gulf War. The economic devastation brought about by economic sanctions, described in Chapter Four, upended the usual social and economic order of the city. With public sector paychecks falling far below costs of living, Baghdad’s men and women turned to both informal and, sometimes, illegal economic opportunities. Of course, a privileged few with close connections to the regime were able to take advantage of lucrative contracts, kickbacks, and oil smuggling; an estimated 7-9% of the population remained financially secure in part because of these lucrative connections.<sup>3</sup> For the vast majority of Iraqis whose income dried up under the sanctions, more improvisation was required to feed their families. These included crimes like rations fraud, black markets, smuggling, and sex work.

Though often pursued for reasons of financial self-interest, these economic crimes had the effect of challenging state authority. The boldness and frequency with which many lower-income Baghdadis and even public employees began to flout the law demonstrated a diminished respect for the efficacy and power of the state and an increasing fearlessness about the consequences for breaking the law. Many observers tied the increase in lawlessness to the 1991 *intifada*: by rising up against the regime, Iraqis had “broken the barrier of fear.”<sup>4</sup> This important psychological change went beyond an increasing boldness in expressing political opposition to ordinary crime. ‘Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, a leader within Iraq’s Revolutionary Command Council, saw that the danger of the sanctions was not just the disillusionment and resentment that would grow in a hungry population, but also the visibility of the regime’s diminished power and control. Rather than blame this shift on

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<sup>2</sup> “Crime Rate Reduced for the First Time, Colonel Says,” *Baghdad Observer*, March 6, 1989, pg. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Joy Gordon cites a 1995 FAO report for this statistic in *Invisible War*, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, xiv.

the *intifada*, though, he saw it as a consequence of the diminishment of the regime's stature and economic wealth from sanctions. In a private meeting with the president's inner circle, he complained:

“We have people stealing from each other, an increase in the market prices, tradesmen are out of control, and there are smugglers everywhere. We have been Ba‘thist for 23 years now; we have never had this many cases of stealing from the government and from citizens. However, when it did happen, we would punish them right away and it would be over with. We have never had corruption to this extent of pervasiveness between our citizens; this is all a result of the sanctions.”<sup>5</sup>

The Ba‘thist leaders were aware that new economic and security conditions were creating opportunities for fraud and profiteering, and that allowing this kind of crime to continue only made the regime look weaker. Though the criminals engaged in theft, fraud, smuggling, black markets, and sex work were not likely doing so in order to mount a political challenge to the regime, the cumulative effects of their actions had political consequences for the regime.

The fact that some of the greatest offenders were not common criminals, but rations agents who had been hired by the state, underscores the political ramifications of these crimes. Brazenly, given their official occupation, agents exploited their positions to sell off rations illegally, overcharge for goods, and display favoritism in their distribution. Rations agents in one Baghdad neighborhood were caught distributing spoiled milk and rotten flour in the rations and then selling their fresh food on the black market.<sup>6</sup> Another rations agent repeatedly stole an elderly woman's rations and, when she complained, he physically attacked her and broke down her doors and windows.<sup>7</sup> Rationed infant formula was especially prone to illegal sale because it was also usually the only source of animal protein included in the monthly rations, and milk and meat were expensive and hard to

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<sup>5</sup> “Ba‘th Revolutionary Command Meeting” audio recording transcript, December 21, 1991, CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-461.

<sup>6</sup> Leaders of the Baghdad Office, “Activities of the Economic Surveillance Committee for February 1991” BRCC 01-2947-0002-0128 to -0129.

<sup>7</sup> General Interior Director to the party secretariat, “People's Day,” March 3, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0057.

obtain for many families.<sup>8</sup> As a result, many families who were eligible for infant formula did not receive any because their shares had been illegally sold by their agents on the black market.<sup>9</sup>

Only two months after the emergency rations were first introduced, the head of the cabinet called rations agents a “parasitic class” (*tabaqa tufayliyya*) whose greed injured the middle and lower strata of society.<sup>10</sup> As state employees, the shady dealings of rations agents represented a serious form of corruption that threatened to make a mockery of the regime’s reputation for competent control. Therefore, Saddam responded to these crimes by announcing harsh new punishments for rations agents who broke the law. Just one month after sanctions began, Saddam issued new punishments for shopkeepers and rations agents caught selling goods for higher amounts than stipulated, threatening 15 years in prison and the confiscation of their assets.<sup>11</sup> The Revolutionary Command Council followed up in 1994 with a decree stating that any shops that resold rationed goods distributed would be jailed for one year and their shops and goods confiscated.<sup>12</sup> However, there is little evidence from the archives that these laws were frequently applied; even rations agents who were caught abusing their position were often allowed to remain in their posts, as Chapter Five discussed. In reality, the regime was highly dependent on local rations agents to keep the emergency food distribution system running; each neighborhood had only a limited number of shopkeepers who were able to take on the additional task of rations distributions, and changing agents threatened to disrupt food delivery to hundreds of individuals assigned to that center. Thus, these new laws were designed primarily to scare rations agents into compliance; aware of how seldom the full letter of the law was enforced, however, many agents continued to cut corners for self gain.

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<sup>8</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior - Office for Combatting Economic Crimes, “Citizen Letter,” December 15, 1991, BRCC 01-2208-0000-0451 through 0456.

<sup>9</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all of Iraq, “Popular Surveillance,” February 10, 1991, BRCC 01-2947-0002-0036.

<sup>10</sup> Head of the Presidential Cabinet to the party secretariat, “Situations of Exploitation,” November 3, 1990, BRCC 01-2947-0002-0387.

<sup>11</sup> Saddam Hussein, “Decision #365,” September 5, 1990, BRCC 01-2947-0002-0182.

<sup>12</sup> RCC decision #70, 1994. <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16026.html>

Shopkeepers were also involved in dishonest economic practices, such as hoarding goods to create artificial scarcity and drive up prices.<sup>13</sup> For example, one Baghdadi shopkeeper wrote a three-page letter complaining to the Ba‘th Party about the illicit activities he saw going on around him: neighboring shops would buy each other out of a certain product (packaged Turkish cookies, in one case) to establish a monopoly or create artificial scarcity that would raise prices above the official amounts set by the state.<sup>14</sup> This kind of price manipulation and profiteering was such a common problem that Saddam issued the following proclamation that made hoarding a crime punishable by execution:

“For the purpose of...causing the economic sanctions to fail...and to offer a sufficient amount of food for all citizens on an equal basis, and to eliminate those who are susceptible to bribes [*mutala’ibin*], who have weak character [*ashab al-nufus al-da’ifa*], and who are short-sighted [*ashab al-naẓra al-qasira*]...the Revolutionary Command Council has decreed the following:

- 1) Hoarding food for the purpose of selling it is considered a crime and as an act of sabotage [*takhrīb*] that violates national security.
- 2) This will be punished by execution, and all movable and immovable assets will be confiscated to all those who commit the crime stipulated above.”<sup>15</sup>

On at least one occasion, Saddam carried through with this threat to create a gruesome, cautionary spectacle of violence: Jordanian newspapers reported that in 1992, the regime executed 42 merchants accused of price manipulations and displayed their corpses in front of their shops.<sup>16</sup> Even in this case, though, the regime displayed inconsistency and leniency in applying its punishments: while 42 merchants were reportedly executed, they were from among a group of 550 merchants detained in a sweeping crackdown against corruption. The other 508 merchants mentioned in the

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<sup>13</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Economic Surveillance Committees,” October 29, 1990, BRCC 01-2947-0002-0112.

<sup>14</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior - Office for Combatting Economic Crimes, “Citizen Letter,” December 15, 1991, BRCC 01-2208-0000-0451 through 0456.

<sup>15</sup> Saddam Hussein, “Decision #315,” August 11, 1990, BRCC 01-2947-0002-0184 and 0186.

<sup>16</sup> Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, xvi.

article were spared this deadly fate.<sup>17</sup> The archives give another example of a shopkeeper who merely lost his license to sell government-subsidized goods for a period of four months as a punishment for overcharging.<sup>18</sup> In most instances, shopkeepers were simply too low of a political priority for the regime to go after every merchant guilty of minor corruption.

Rations agents and shopkeepers were not the only ones to abuse the system, though the regime was particularly preoccupied with these crimes given their official duties to enforce regime systems of price controls and food distribution. In addition, “a large number of citizens sold their rations” on the black market, including those who had a lot to risk by being caught.<sup>19</sup> One officer from the elite Republican Guards was arrested for selling food rations that he had received as part of his employment benefits: he was found trying to sell 18 bags of rice, 16 bags of large lentils, and 25 kilograms of milk out of his car to residents in Saddam City.<sup>20</sup> In another case, an employee from a state-run cooperative association for consumer goods stole 450 boxes of milk and vegetables from the cooperative grocery store and sold them directly to families in his neighborhood.<sup>21</sup> The examples above suggest that even high-ranking individuals were suffering enough from the economic circumstances that they were willing to risk engaging in illegal activities to earn extra money, underscoring the diminished respect for authority and the pressing economic needs (and opportunities for illicit wealth) that existed during sanctions.

Criminal activity also proliferated among ordinary Baghdadis. While these actions did not entail the kind of official corruption that Saddam was most worried about, the diminished respect

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Trade to the party secretariat, “Raising Prices,” November 17, 1989, *BRCC* 001-5-3-0052.

<sup>19</sup> Ninawa and Ta’imim branches to the Council of Ministers, “Lentils,” January 19, 2002, *BRCC* 01-2454-0002-0007; Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in all of Iraq, “Popular Surveillance,” February 10, 1991, *BRCC* 01-2947-0002-0036.

<sup>20</sup> Party secretariat to the Special Security Apparatus, “Information,” March 25, 1999, *BRCC* 01-3759-0002-0567.

<sup>21</sup> Party secretariat to the General Cooperative Union, “Information,” January 2, 1992, *BRCC* 01-2208-0000-0113; General Cooperative Union to the party secretariat, “Information,” February 4, 1992, *BRCC* 01-2208-0000-0111 and -0112.

for the rule of law still carried with it worrying political challenges. Families of all economic backgrounds were caught cheating the rations systems by registering fictitious, deceased, or relatives living abroad on their family rations card, or by registering in more than one neighborhood to receive double rations. Sometimes these deceptions included the cooperation of the rations agent, as well, who would split the extra rations with the family or accept bribes to look the other way.<sup>22</sup> One woman in Baghdad was caught collecting rations for three absentee family members for ten years, which meant she had received hundreds of extra kilograms of food. Assuming that the rations agent had either colluded with her to keep this secret for so long, or that the rations agent had been absolutely negligent in her duties to miss the fraud, both the woman and the agent were held accountable by the regime.<sup>23</sup>

Catching families who added fictitious or absent family members to their cards took tremendous resources for the regime to investigate. Ba‘th Party leaders offered the following instructions for how to catch fraudulent activity:

- 1) Form an investigating committee in each neighborhood where there are suspected to be fraudulent rations registrations.
- 2) The investigating committee should visit each registered family in the neighborhood and compare the information on their rations cards to their official identification cards.
- 3) The investigating committee should then examine the rosters held by each rations agent and compare this to the information held by the State Company for Foodstuff Trading and the State Company for Grain Processing.
- 4) A detailed list should be compiled of all the families found to have submitted false information. That list should be sent to the Ministry of Trade and to the local party branch for follow-up and punishments.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Party secretariat to the Organizational Offices in All of Iraq, “Inventory of the Families,” November 4, 1990 *BRCC* 005-3-5-0423

<sup>23</sup> Musa al-Kadhim branch to the party secretariat, “Information,” May 13, 2002, *BRCC* 01-3580-0002-0296.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Trade to the party secretariat, “Announcement,” June 8, 1991, *BRCC* 005-3-5-0164 and 0165.

This procedure was as exhausting as it was exhaustive in its efforts to catch rations fraud, involving time and attention from six different organizations (the investigating committee, rations agents, two state food companies, the Ministry of Trade, and the party branch office).

An easier strategy was to increase punishments, heighten the public spectacle of surveillance, and encourage citizens to denounce each other so that families would be intimidated into compliance. New protocols were introduced in 1995 that required heads of households to apply in person for a family rations cards at the start of each calendar year, bringing with him or her all of the official identify cards of each family member that would be registered on the same rations ticket.<sup>25</sup> It was a risky moment for anyone daring to present false ID cards. Families caught receiving too many rations had to repay the market value of all of the goods they wrongfully received on behalf of an absentee or deceased family member.<sup>26</sup> To incentivize the party officials to be vigilant, they offered a reward of 300 dinars for each wrongfully registered person on a rations card that the official caught.<sup>27</sup> This new initiative did seem to help root out rations fraud: beginning in early 1995, citizens were caught registering absentee family members and were made to repay all of the rations they had wrongfully received under their names while they were abroad.<sup>28</sup>

Theft also increased significantly during the sanctions period in response to both scarcity of goods and diminishing purchasing power. It became such an issue that the regime instituted barbaric punishments to try to deter thieves: in 1994, Revolutionary Command Council decree #59 stated that thieves would have their right hand cut off through a surgical operation and, if caught a second

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<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Trade to the Presidential Diwan, "Recommendation," November 26, 1994, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0691

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Party secretariat to the Leadership of All Party Branches, "Travel Outside of the Country," December 19, 1994, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0596

<sup>28</sup> Party secretariat to Karkh Organization in Baghdad, "Withholding Rations," February 1, 1995, *BRCC* 01-3439-0001-0674

time, their forehead would be branded with an “X.”<sup>29</sup> Though this barbaric punishment was not consistently enforced, the government stoked fears by occasionally broadcasting such amputations on state television.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the considerable risk, theft was rampant. One enterprising individual from the Rashid area of Baghdad managed to tap into an unmetered section of the drinking water system near the water purification plant and steal large amounts of water that he would then put into a tanker and sell. By the time he was caught in 2002, he had been carrying out the operation for more than ten years.<sup>31</sup> Attacks on warehouses of food were a significant risk, as Joseph Sassoon noted, requiring armed guards to protect silos and storehouses from theft.<sup>32</sup> Petty theft and car theft was also on the rise as people looked for valuables to sell on the black market. In one stunning example, an air force officer was caught removing the metal doors from bomb shelters in Baghdad in 1999 and selling the iron in local markets, disrupting notions about the kinds of people likely to be engaged in theft.<sup>33</sup>

Black markets were supplied not only by local thieves, but also by international smuggling operations. The smuggling of oil was one of the most publicized forms of corruption that Saddam and his inner circle were accused of during the Oil-for-Food years, and the Volcker Commission eventually determined that Saddam’s government received \$1.8 billion in illegal surcharges,

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<sup>29</sup> There were a few exceptions stipulated in the decree. The thief’s hand would not be cut off if the value of stolen goods did not exceed 5,000 Iraqi dinars or if the theft took place between husband and wife. <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16019.html>. However, as Makiya points out, inflation had so devalued Iraqi currency that this amounted to only \$12. *Republic of Fear*, IX-X.

<sup>30</sup> One of these broadcasts, which showed the hand amputation operation, has been archived at the Hoover Institution: *Video Documents: The Era of the Ba’th Regime*, Hoover Institution, #0026, undated.

<sup>31</sup> Party secretariat to the Municipality of Baghdad, “Violation,” February 5, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0414.

<sup>32</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party*, 243.

<sup>33</sup> Party secretariat to the Leadership of Air Defense, “Information,” May 20, 1999, BRCC 01-3219-0000-0424.



kickbacks, and other illicit sources of revenue related to petroleum sales.<sup>34</sup> But the profits from smuggling oil were limited to the top elites in the country and a few agents acting as go-betweens; this kind of money or smuggling operation did not trickle down to ordinary Iraqis. Food smuggling operations, on the other hand, presented lucrative opportunities to those connected to the right networks and contributed to the goods available on the black market. Smuggling was a more politically serious crime, since it often involved profiting smugglers and merchants in the neighboring enemy countries of Iran and Syria, and a lot of smuggling networks ran through the Kurdish zones that were cut off from central Iraq under the “No Fly Zone” rules of the 1990s. As such, the regime threatened “life imprisonment or the death penalty” for their acts, especially if they were linked to a foreign enemy or opposition group.<sup>35</sup> However, food shortages throughout Iraq made turned smuggling into an irresistible temptation: as party leaders in Kurdistan noted, “the sanctions turned many people into traders.”<sup>36</sup> In one small example, the Jamila Markets in Saddam City were discovered to be selling rice to Kurdish merchants, who would then smuggle the rice into Iran. As a result, the local price of rice jumped, creating a windfall for merchants.<sup>37</sup> Because of the scarcity of meat in Iraq and the high prices people would pay for it on the black market, animals were frequently smuggled or stolen and resold domestically, such as two hundred sheep who were caught being smuggled at the Syrian border.<sup>38</sup> One Ba‘th party report suggested that smugglers were the main purchasers of rationed food that was being illegally sold on the black market. Smugglers

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<sup>34</sup> Volcker, Paul, Richard J. Goldstone, and Mark Pieth. *Manipulation of the Oil-for-Food Programme by the Iraqi Regime*. Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme. October 27, 2005. [www.iic-offp.org](http://www.iic-offp.org). Joy Gordon also explains the corruption of the Oil-for-Food program from both the Iraqi and UN sides in *Invisible War*, Chapter nine, “The Oil for food Scandal.”

<sup>35</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 244.

<sup>36</sup> Leadership of the Irbil Section to the Leadership of the Irbil Branch, “Suggestion with the title ‘So that We Do Not Forget,’” December 11, 1993, BRCC 01-2696-0002-0611.

<sup>37</sup> Party secretariat to the Directorate of General Security, “Information,” June 12, 1999, BRCC 01-3759-0002-0257.

<sup>38</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the interior, “Smuggling Sheep,” August 11, 2001, BRCC 01-3391-0000-0004.

bought up large quantities of food rations from Baghdad and other provinces and then smuggled them into Turkey through the Kurdish autonomous region, even though it was prohibited to bring food rations into that zone. Turkish exporters would then sell Iraq's own food rations back to the Iraqi government—facilitated in part by the fact that Oil-for-Food money could only be spent on importing food from abroad, rather than on Iraqi-grown food.<sup>39</sup>

The proliferation of crime and the relative ineffectiveness of announcing harsh punishments in deterring delinquency pushed the regime to mobilize an increasing number of ordinary citizens to monitor their neighborhoods and inform the regime of criminal behavior. As Chapters Four and Five illustrated, the tasks of day-to-day governance were increasingly delegated to neighborhood-level officials. So too were community leaders and individuals increasingly recruited to assist the state security services. In the fall of 1990, Saddam revived the institution of “Popular and Economic Surveillance Committees [*lġjan al-raġaba al-sha'biyya wa al-iqtisadiyya*]”, used before and during the Iran-Iraq War, to meet weekly in each neighborhood and monitor the activities of shopkeepers, rations agents, and market vendors.<sup>40</sup> This committee was usually the first to report the presence of a black market or identify a corrupt rations agent. The Ba'th Party also began to recruit citizens and party members to serve as night watchmen (*al-hurras al-layliyyin*) in their neighborhoods, hoping this would have a “big effect” psychologically, assuring citizens that they were safe despite the fact that the regime had “limited possibilities” in intervening effectively to bring down the crime rate.<sup>41</sup> It was recommended that families pay a small fee for the services of a locally-recruited night watchman, responsible for patrolling an area with one thousand homes under the supervision of the neighborhood popular committee.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ninawa and Ta'mim branches to the Council of Ministers, “Lentils,” January 19, 2002, BRCC 01-2454-0002-0007.

<sup>40</sup> Presidential Decree, “Popular Surveillance,” October 11, 1990, BRCC 01-2947-0002-0044.

<sup>41</sup> Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, “Suggestion,” June 6, 1991, BRCC 01-2150-0000-0261.

<sup>42</sup> Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, “Suggestion,” October 21, 1991, BRCC 01-2150-0000-0231.

Saddam also revived tribal kinship networks—a nearly defunct social concept in urban settings like Baghdad for much of the post-colonial period—to help carry out policing of their members.<sup>43</sup> While the Ba‘th Party had worked aggressively in the 1970s to minimize the social and political importance of tribes, then viewed as a rival to the Ba‘th Party’s influence, Saddam abruptly changed course in the 1990s and increased his cooperation with loyal tribal shaykhs in order to help control the population in the wake of the 1991 *intifada*.<sup>44</sup> To this end, tribal leaders were given special permission to carry guns, and, in exchange for their cooperation, the regime did not intervene in internal tribal affairs.<sup>45</sup> While tribes’ new roles in maintaining law and order were most pronounced in rural and border areas, Saddam also relied on tribal leaders to help police Saddam City in Baghdad, a district where tribal identities had maintained prominence due to the recent rural migration of many of its inhabitants.<sup>46</sup> This reliance on tribal shaykhs to monitor criminal activity was just one additional way that the regime tried to maintain adequate surveillance of the population despite its diminished economic and human resources during the sanctions years.<sup>47</sup>

These new local surveillance techniques were in addition to the Ba‘th Party’s usual practice of encouraging, paying, or even blackmailing Iraqi citizens into informing on one another.<sup>48</sup> The Ba‘th Party archives contain numerous examples of Iraqis writing letters to the regime informing officials of illegal activity taking place in their communities. The creation of new neighborhood-level surveillance bodies, like the economic surveillance committees or night watchmen, is illustrative of a larger trend during the sanctions years of relying on local officials and cooperative citizens to help

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<sup>43</sup> Amatzia Baram, “Neo-Tribalism in Iraq,” 12.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Party secretariat to All Party Organizations, “Instructions,” May 17, 1995, BRCC 029-1-3-0400

<sup>46</sup> “Saddam Hussein and Saddam City Tribal Leaders Talk,” audio transcript, undated (1991), CRRC SH-SHTP-A-000-891.

<sup>47</sup> Faleh A. Jabar, “Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Totalitarianism, 1968-1998,” in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, Faleh Abdul-Jabar and Hosham Dawod, eds. (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 81.

<sup>48</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 122-123.

carry out the duties of the regime. While the announcement of harsh new laws was intended to scare Iraqis into compliance, the regime ensured that an increasingly large number of informants and officials would monitor conditions on the ground.

### **Gendered Anxieties about Crime**

In the brief window of time between the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the beginning of sanctions, Iraqi women experienced a whiplash of changing social, economic, and political expectations about their labor, their bodies, and their family roles. These changes were brought about, in part, by gendered notions of criminality. Young men returning from war were identified as an especially destabilizing segment of society, prone to crime and immoral behavior. Women were called on to solve this problem of male volatility in a variety of ways: leaving the work force to boost male employment rates, marrying at a young age to help ‘settle’ and stabilize men in domestic roles, and dressing and behaving modestly so as not to be corrupted by these youths. This section explores the rise of gendered narratives about criminality and vulnerability to show how they led to tangible changes in the way women were able to move through the city.

Young men—both demobilized soldiers and deserters from the army—were blamed for the increase in crime at the end of the Iran-Iraq War. State media described young veterans as “wild” and “violent” and prone to causing street fights.<sup>49</sup> In internal memos, the Ba‘th Party identified children who had lost one or more parents in the Iran-Iraq War as especially prone to “delinquency and criminality,” owing in part to the poverty and social burdens experienced by many female-headed households.<sup>50</sup> As sanctions further eroded Baghdad’s economic vitality and social cohesion, the Ba‘th Party recorded more and more complaints about youths loitering in public squares,

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<sup>49</sup> Jabar, “The War Generation in Iraq”: 131-132; al-Khafaji, “War as a Vehicle”: 275.

<sup>50</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 175, citing BRCC 01-2124-0000-0274.

drinking alcohol, smoking, stealing, and generally “acting like thugs [*bi-‘ummal ghangha’iyya*].”<sup>51</sup> In security reports from the Ba’th Party archives, young men were often the ones caught for selling unauthorized goods on the black market. For example, a group of youths were arrested for selling “indecent” materials on a street corner in Baghdad Jadida—a phenomenon common enough that that an exasperated Director General of the Interior complained he had discussed the issue “many times” with the local police and directorate of security without them taking any action.<sup>52</sup> In a separate incident, a group of young men were arrested who had a list of complaints against them, among them theft, smuggling, drinking alcohol, desertion from the military, and sodomy, confirming that the regime often viewed unemployed young men as the epitome of all forms of lawlessness plaguing Baghdad at that time.<sup>53</sup>

Young men were also linked to a rise in drug trafficking and drug use in Baghdad (despite the fact a *Baghdad Observer* article proclaimed in 1989: “luckily Iraq is free from both drugs and punks.”)<sup>54</sup> Drug trafficking became a more visible problem in Iraq during the sanctions years, though it had existed in Iraq for decades. Since at least the 1950s, Iranians smuggled opium into Iraq by posing as Shi’i pilgrims and bribing border guards; Karbala served as Iraq’s drug trafficking hub at that time, with trucks running opium from the Shi’i shrine cities to customers in Baghdad.<sup>55</sup> By the 1960s, the government created a Narcotics Control Unit to catch the smugglers shipping opium through Iran and Turkey to Iraq.<sup>56</sup> So while drug trafficking and use was not new to Iraq, during the period of the sanctions, its visibility increased, and with it, the official response grew harsher. In the

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<sup>51</sup> Rashid Branch to the party secretariat, “Unnatural Behavior,” March 5, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0684.

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of the Interior to the General Directorate of the Police, “Information,” October 6, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0275.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Mutallib Branch to the party secretariat, “Information,” April 2, 2002, BRCC 01-2083-0000-0244

<sup>54</sup> “Iraq Marks World Day against Drug Abuse,” *Baghdad Observer*, June 27, 1989, pg. 2.

<sup>55</sup> NARA, “Seizure of Smuggled Opium,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, December 1959, 487.119/1-755, Box 2039, 1955-59 Central Decimal File, RG 59.

<sup>56</sup> NARA, “Narcotics Control Unit Established,” American Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 10, 1966, 1964/6/16 SOC-Social Conditions IRAQ, Box 3226, Subject-Numeric 1964-1966, RG 59.

1990s hashish, opium, and unspecified “narcotic pills” were increasingly abused in Baghdad.<sup>57</sup>

Internal Ba‘th Party documents identified drug smuggling and abuse as symptoms of the “oppressive sanctions” that created “negative effects” on Iraqi society.<sup>58</sup> A study of “Social Realities in Baghdad” identified the phenomena of youths taking narcotic pills and drinking alcohol as major problems in the capital, especially among military deserters.<sup>59</sup> Numerous police reports note that young men arrested for theft, fraud, pimping, or sodomy had drugs on them.<sup>60</sup> The notion that young men were a uniquely criminal element of society fed directly into gendered notions about women’s vulnerability to victimization by crime or corruption by criminals.

In response to male unemployment and the socially destabilizing effects of demobilizing soldiers from the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars, Ba‘th Party leaders reversed earlier state feminism policies that had encouraged female employment and education.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the regime promoted early marriage and fertility campaigns that were designed to create room for men in the labor market and to stabilize society by coupling off unemployed youths. By 1986, Saddam began to encourage women to leave their jobs to make room for returning soldiers by cutting paid maternity leave and other state welfare policies that had supported female employment.<sup>62</sup> Relatedly, the government encouraged women to bear more children—at least five—through a new national fertility campaign

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<sup>57</sup> “Information,” party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, June 3, 2001, BRCC 01-3081-0002-0519; “Information,” Ministry of Health to the party secretariat, November 5, 2002, BRCC 01-3389-0000-0200.

<sup>58</sup> “Detention of a Hashish Smuggler,” party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, November 11, 2000, BRCC 01-3081-0002-0531.

<sup>59</sup> “Analysis of Social Realities in the City of Baghdad and the Role of Party Organizations,” BRCC 01-3751-0000-0401; party secretariat to the General Directorate of Security, “Information,” September 23, 1999, BRCC 01-2129-0000-0155.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, “Arrest of a Gang,” party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, June 30, 1999, BRCC 01-2129-0000-0233; “Information,” party secretariat to the Directorate of General Security, September 23, 1999, BRCC 01-2129-0000-0155.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 16, 28; Bassam Yousif, *Human Development in Iraq: 1950-1990* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 127; Nadjé al-Ali, “Reconstructing Gender,” 744.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 22; Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, 93.

designed to offset the high casualty rates Iraq suffered during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>63</sup> Saddam began to give speeches about the importance of increasing the birth rate. In fact, he gave so many talks on these themes that they were collected into a book and published under the title *The Family and Population Growth in Speeches of the Leader President Saddam Hussein*. In one such speech he proclaimed, “Some think that the annual population growth rate in Iraq of 3.2% is a high rate and should be decreased. However, we believe that this rate should remain as it is, and if there is a possibility of increasing it, it should be increased.”<sup>64</sup>

To encourage women to participate in the fertility campaign, the state began to restrict access to birth control towards the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and issued awards to women with large numbers of children.<sup>65</sup> When a party official in Baghdad wrote to Saddam asking for permission to marry a second, younger wife, he framed his request in terms of the fertility campaign: although his first wife had given birth to six children, she was now too old to conceive again. Saddam approved his request.<sup>66</sup> As another tactic, the regime also pushed young couples to wed early, hoping this would contribute both to higher birth rates and that increasing the number of married youths would have a stabilizing effect on society: young women would have a proper and productive sexual outlet within the confines of marriage, and young men would act more responsibly, unlike the problem of youths loitering in the streets and disturbing the peace. Baghdad Ba‘th Party officials issued a list of recommendations to encourage early marriage and reduce wedding costs (*hamlat al-taw‘ya lil-taqlil al-*

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<sup>63</sup> CADN 54PO/B/6, “Monthly Summary from April – May 10,” May 17, 1986; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 254-255; al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 22.

<sup>64</sup> Hussein, *Al-Usra wa-l-Numunw al-Sukkani*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Bengio, “Iraq,” Volume X, 1986: 371.

<sup>66</sup> Certain authorities had to ask for official permission to marry in Saddam’s Iraq: military officers and Ba‘th Party officials were among them (Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 43, 144). Secretary to the President for Party Affairs to President Saddam Hussein, January 28, 1988, BRCC 01-3266-0001-0002; Secretary to the President to the Regional Command, “Letter,” February 1, 1988, BRCC 01-3266-0001-0001.

*mahr wa tashjia‘ al-ṣawaj al-mubakkir*).<sup>67</sup> The party encouraged preachers in mosques to popularize the idea of reducing dower costs paid from the husband to his wife, removing a financial barrier to marriage, and offered cash incentives for marriage and bearing children.<sup>68</sup>

The imposition of sanctions in August 1990 shifted the regime’s espoused gender roles once again. Women were still encouraged to marry early and leave the labor force, but the fertility campaign was quietly dropped as families struggled afford to care for many children. Instead, Saddam pushed for new gendered strategies for enduring sanctions that further committed women to domestic roles. In internal documents and meeting transcripts, Saddam articulated a clear vision for “proper” gendered responses to the challenges of the sanctions. In a closed-door meeting, Saddam described that an exemplary Iraqi man should continue to work, no matter how paltry his paycheck became, serving as the breadwinner for his family. If he was conscripted, he should serve dutifully, rather than desert. He should earn his money licitly, rather than through smuggling or black market deals. The ideal urban woman living under sanctions had quite a few more expectations to meet: she should stay home with her children, leaving her job to make room for a man. She should sew her family’s clothes, rather than spending money on expensive imports. She should find ways to make her rations stretch for the entire month, and never purchase food on the black market. When she does purchase consumer goods, she should try hard to buy locally-made products for reasonable prices.<sup>69</sup>

Embedded in these gendered rhetorical admonishments was the assumption that male labor and economic activity was more “essential” for family survival. In contrast, female consumption was considered to be more frivolous and had to be vigilantly monitored. Party and media rhetoric

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<sup>67</sup> Baghdad Organization to the party secretariat, “Suggestions for the Campaign to Raise Awareness about Reducing Dowers and Encouraging Early Marriage,” April 5, 1988, *BRCC* 01-2383-0004-0297; Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam*, 303.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> “A Dispatch by Saddam Hussein Discussing the Effects of Sanctions after the Mother of All Battles,” (undated), *CRRC* SH-MISC-D-001-055.



admonished women for purchasing fancy clothes, jewelry, or makeup during sanctions.<sup>70</sup> Saddam lashed out at upper-class women for maintaining expensive tastes during sanctions:

“...If we see a women’s suit that’s priced over 500 dinars, we will burn the face of the merchant in whose shop we find it. We will burn him totally. [...] Let the wife of the merchant who did not become rich on his own merit, as well as Saddam Hussein’s wife, and the wife of the minister, dress in the same way like the wife of the common citizen. Are we not at war? Are we not under siege?”<sup>71</sup>

He went on to recommend that women sew their family’s clothing as a solution to shortages in the marketplace and as a way to respectably engage women’s time:

“[The merchant] will...not import suits anymore, but fabric, which we manufacture and sew in Iraq. [...] Even later, when we start to import, this experience will not go to waste this way, Iraqi women will be busy with something fruitful and fulfill their interests with new priorities in their lives. [...] ...Your sister and mine, as well as your mother and so-and-so’s mother...they will all sew their children’s clothes.”<sup>72</sup>

The new gender roles espoused by the regime and the economic shifts brought about by sanctions impacted middle- and lower-class women differently. Arguably, middle class women were among the groups most affected by sanctions. Beginning in the 1990s, one’s social class—as determined by educational level, nature of employment, and cultural sophistication—no longer necessarily corresponded with one’s level of wealth. As Yasmine Husein al-Jawaheri found in her survey of Baghdad households in the 1990s, many middle class men and women fell into poverty as their public-sector jobs, once desirable and prestigious, no longer paid the bills. As ‘respectable’ people with college degrees, however, they felt uncomfortable taking informal jobs as taxi drivers, market vendors, or house cleaners to supplement their income. Women were especially limited by social mores that deemed some work unacceptable, such as retail sector jobs, because it would put her into contact with strangers. In contrast, women who had always belonged to the lower classes were more accustomed to working in markets or as housekeepers, and there was no corresponding

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<sup>70</sup> Nadjé al-Ali, *Iraqi Women*, 148.

<sup>71</sup> “A Dispatch by Saddam Hussein Discussing the Effects of Sanctions after the Mother of All Battles,” undated, *CRRC SH-MISC-D-001-055*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

social stigma with taking on menial jobs.<sup>73</sup> Lower-class women had more opportunities to work outside the home, contribute to the family income, and maintain a level of financial independence. Thus sanctions had the effect of marginalizing middle-class and educated women within the economy and within their own families, as they became “fully dependent on male providers” for financial support.<sup>74</sup>

Even as the regime pushed Baghdadi women (especially middle-class women) to stay home, rising crime rates played an arguably even greater role in changing the way that women accessed the city. Media and rumors circulating in Baghdad during the sanctions period highlighted the vulnerabilities of young women to victimization by crime. Rohde and al-Jawaheri both describe a growing panic in the 1990s about the problem of girls being kidnapped in broad daylight by criminal gangs.<sup>75</sup> Baghdadi women I interviewed about this period also remember being fearful about walking in public and traveling back and forth to school or jobs, worried they might be abducted and sexually assaulted.<sup>76</sup> Many of these rumors centered on the infamous behavior of Saddam’s son, ‘Uday, who had a fearsome reputation as a sexual predator who would snatch young women from the streets.<sup>77</sup> Fears about kidnapping encapsulated concerns about the declining efficacy of the state to provide law, order, and security, and about appropriateness of women in public spaces where they could be vulnerable to attack.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 36-37.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 116-117; Rohde, *State-Society Relations in Ba’thist Iraq*, 111.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews with the author, Erbil, Iraq, October 2016.

<sup>77</sup> For example, *The Guardian* wrote up a profile of ‘Uday in 2003 with the headline, “Uday: Career of Rape, Torture and Murder,” outlining many of the stories that circulated widely about his cruelty and criminal misbehavior. Suzanne Goldenberg, “Uday: Career of Rape, Torture, and Murder,” *The Guardian*, July 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/23/iraq.suzannegoldenberg>

<sup>78</sup> Though few and far between, there were some investigations into kidnapping gangs that appeared in the archives. One file contains detailed notes from an investigation into women who were kidnapped, raped, and forced to work as prostitutes for a criminal gang in Baghdad. See BRCC 01-2129-0000-0212 through -0245 from 1999.

Relatedly, many more women began to wear *hijab* head coverings and more modest ‘*abaya*’ robes in an effort to safeguard themselves from attack, as well as in response to the increase in outward signs of piety by the regime and elements of society during the 1990s.<sup>79</sup> ‘*Abaya*’ robes had the additional benefit of covering up clothing underneath, making it less necessary to buy new outfits or keep old clothes in good repair during a time when new clothes were unaffordable to many. Simple clothing was also a sign of moral purity: Saddam argued that women were liable to “deviate” and allow themselves to be “seduced” by men if they coveted unaffordable makeup and clothing.<sup>80</sup> Thus, whether women were responding to the regime’s faith campaign that encouraged more modest clothing, anti-sanctions propaganda that encouraged less conspicuous consumption, or fears about female victimization that made women dress more cautiously, the combined effect was to increase rates of veiling and limit women’s freedom of movement in the city.

Narratives about female vulnerability and victimization by crime had the tendency to reinforce threatening stereotypes about rural migrants in the city, and female rural migrants occupied a particularly marginalized position in Baghdadi society as they suffered at the intersection of negative narratives around gender and class. During the sanctions period, the regime doubled down in its efforts to stem the illegal influx of migrants into Baghdad. Many people came to the capital in search of work opportunities in the midst of the national economic downturn, but the Ba’th Party saw such migration as a security threat and outlawed migration to Baghdad. As discussed in Chapter Two, rural migrants had long occupied an uneasy status within the capital; despite their important economic contributions to the city as unskilled laborers, middle- and upper-class Baghdadis viewed them cautiously, and the regime saw them as a potentially politically disruptive force, especially since Baghdad’s weakened economy could not absorb so many unemployed, poor residents. After the

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<sup>79</sup> Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 116-118.

<sup>80</sup> “A Dispatch by Saddam Hussein Discussing the Effects of Sanctions after the Mother of All Battles,” undated, CRRC SH-MISC-D-001-055.

events of the *intifada*, the regime had even more reason to suspect rural migrants from the rebellious southern provinces of being political troublemakers. Yet clandestine migration from rural zones to Baghdad continued in the 1990s, and the city even began to see the return of sarifa huts built on the outskirts of the capital.<sup>81</sup>

In this charged environment where the bodies of both women and rural migrants were seen as potentially destabilizing and disruptive, female rural migrants came to epitomize fears about prostitution and criminal gang activity more broadly. Not surprisingly, female rural migrants became the target of harsher forms of public discourse and policing than urbanite Baghdad women, and the new outcroppings of sarifa communities on the city's edges were viewed as sites of illegal sex work, drugs, and alcohol consumption.<sup>82</sup>

Among the ranks of ordinary rural migrants living on the outskirts of Baghdad were members of an ethnic minority, the *ghajar*, who are commonly (if inaccurately) referred to as “gypsies” in English. Though Saddam Hussein had extended important new rights to the *ghajar*, including the right to Iraqi citizenship in 1979, they were marginalized and discriminated against, suffering from stigmatized stereotypes that they regularly engaged in drinking, dancing, and running informal bars and brothels.<sup>83</sup> In my interviews with Iraqis, the *ghajar* were associated with both with the sarifa dwellers of the 1950s who demonstrated in the streets during the 1958 coup, and with Baghdad's red light activities, and thus represented a source of political disruption and social corruption.<sup>84</sup> Salafist preachers in Iraq preached against the immorality of the *ghajar* in Friday sermons; in one incident, a preacher incited a group of his congregants to throw a grenade into a

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<sup>81</sup> See references to sarifas in Baghdad during the sanctions era in the following sources: Branch Leadership to the party secretariat, “Settlement of Shepherds,” June 8, 2002, BRCC 01-2083-0000-0181; party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, “Information,” June 19, 2002, BRCC 01-2083-0000-0228; Ministry of Trade to the Sa'd Branch Rations Center, “Restoring Rations,” May 17, 1995, BRCC 027-2-4-0481.

<sup>82</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, “Information,” June 19, 2002, BRCC 01-2083-0000-0228.

<sup>83</sup> Ronen Zeidel, “Gypsies and Society in Iraq: Between Marginality, Folklore and Romanticism,” *Middle East Journal* 50(2014): 75, 77.

<sup>84</sup> Interview by the author with an Iraqi woman in the United States, May 2014.

“gypsy party” (*haflat al-ghajar*).<sup>85</sup> Though the regime disapproved of the salafist preacher’s actions, they too were concerned about rural migrants’ effects on society, and wary about gypsies as a particularly corrupting population. For example, investigation into the kidnapping of a young girl by a criminal gang in Baghdad in 1999 claimed that the girl was later sold by the gang to a “gypsy” woman (*al-ghajariyya*) for 200,000 dinars.<sup>86</sup> In a later memo related to the case, the “gypsy” descriptor was dropped and she was simply called “the accused...of practicing pimping (*samsara*),” making it unclear how accurate the term “gypsy” was in the first place or if it had been used pejoratively to denigrate her.<sup>87</sup>

The reality is that *ghajar* populations were tremendously vulnerable to abuse and to accusations of prostitution, based on popular stereotypes about the community in Iraq. One case from the archives illustrates this point. In 1998, three party members who were leaders of a party *firqa* in Baghdad showed up late one night at the home of a *ghajar* family in their district. They claimed they had been authorized to inspect the house after receiving complaints that the 13-year-old daughter was working as a prostitute. According to a letter of complaint later written by the girl’s father, they took her to the *firqa* headquarters, where they beat the girl and forced her to have sex with them.<sup>88</sup> (Given the socially stigmatizing nature of the attack, one is inclined to think that the father’s statement was truthful). The party investigated the claim. The *firqa* leaders named in the attack said that they had been tasked with investigating complaints about a number of brothels in the area run by a gypsy family. They claimed that the father of this *ghajar* family was known to be a

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<sup>85</sup> Rashid Branch to the party secretariat, “Information,” August 25, 1999, BRCC 01-3759-0002-0044. Such persecution and violent attacks on Iraqi gypsies has increased dramatically since the fall of the Ba’thist government in 2003. “Gypsies Call for Greater Rights,” IRIN March 3, 2005 <http://www.irinnews.org/report/24925/iraq-gypsies-call-greater-rights>.

<sup>86</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, “Kidnapping of a Girl,” March 14, 1999, BRCC 01-2129-0000-0575.

<sup>87</sup> Party secretariat to the Rashid Branch, “Kidnapping of a Girl,” July 1, 1999, BRCC 01-2129-0000-0571.

<sup>88</sup> Letter to the Special Security Apparatus, undated (1998), BRCC 01-3377-0000-0253; party secretariat to the Leadership of Rashid Branch, “Assault Incident,” May 17, 1998, BRCC 01-3377-0000-0247.

bad character (*'ansar say'a*) who operated three brothels and himself was married to four women through an informal, illegal tribal marriage practice (*ẓawaj 'urfī*). Furthermore, he had been making threatening calls to the party members. When they raided his house, they claimed that everyone inside fled except for two male customers and one gypsy girl. They admitted to bringing the girl to the *firqa* headquarters, but claimed not to have touched her. Instead, they accused the gypsy girl of trying to “discredit” the party members by spreading false rumors about her treatment in order that the gypsies not be evicted from the area. In the end, it appears that the party members were not punished, though the final fate of the *ghajar* family is unknown.<sup>89</sup> Though discerning what version of the events actually took place is too difficult to untangle, this case reveals how attitudes towards *ghajar* intersected with popular fears about brothels, sex work, and morality. Though women of all classes were seen as potential victims of crime in sanctions-era Baghdad, lower-class women were especially vulnerable to accusations that they themselves were criminals. The next section explores how prostitution came under renewed scrutiny during the sanctions period precisely because of anxieties around gender, class, and lawlessness.

### **Single Women, Surveillance, and Sex Work**

Women's bodies, labor, and movement in the city were a new source of anxiety during the sanctions period not just because of fears about female victimization by criminals, but also because singled or unsupervised women themselves were viewed as dangerous to society. These fears were exemplified in a new emphasis on prostitution. As the economic situation worsened, fears escalated that even ‘respectable’ women could be corrupted and forced into sex work. The influx of rural migrants increased moral and security anxieties about the operation of pimps, madams, and sex traffickers in the city. As such, Baghdad experienced an increased preoccupation about the activities

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<sup>89</sup> Rashid Branch leadership to the party secretariat, “Assault Incident,” May 28, 1998, BRCC 01-3377-0000-0245.

of unattached women, including young unmarried women, widows, divorced women, and women living away from home—that is, any woman who was not under the watch of a male guardian, and thus who represented a potential source of social disruption.

The Ba‘th Party had always engaged in surveillance of the population, but the archives suggest that women’s movements in the city increasingly came under scrutiny of the security services as fears about prostitution grew. In 1992, for instance, the party maintained surveillance on a group of apartments rented out to female university students who had come from other provinces to attend the University of Baghdad. Local party members had noted that some of the students did not return to their apartments until the early hours of the morning, alleging that “immoral activities [*mumarisat la akhlaqiyya*]” and “amorous liaisons [*mawa‘id gharamiyya*],” and possibly even prostitution, were taking place. Interestingly, rather than taking legal action against these students, they recommended that the female student cooperative association appoint older female students with good reputations to act as “guards” to monitor the younger students, indicating that this surveillance was more an expression of anxiety about unattached females than an investigation into actual criminal activity.<sup>90</sup>

Even older women and respected professionals were subjected to this kind of monitoring. A female party member assigned to the Iraqi embassy in Yemen was recalled to Iraq after her husband passed away in 1993, leaving her working in Yemen alone without a male guardian. When she refused to come home (perhaps to avoid the difficulties of life in Iraq under the sanctions), officials accused her of engaging in prostitution and thereby of impugning the reputation of Iraq abroad, leading to her being kicked out of the party and fired from her job.<sup>91</sup> However, the woman was not

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<sup>90</sup> Party secretariat to the Office of Students and Youth, “Information,” January 11, 1992, BRCC 01-2208-0000-0227.

<sup>91</sup> Yemen Section to the Leadership of the Organization for Iraqis Abroad Branch, “Information,” January 15, 1993, BRCC 033-4-2-0358. Thanks to Sam Helfont for alerting me to this document.

arrested, suggesting that allegations of her work as a prostitute were not credible, but rather an expression of the fears the regime had of leaving a single woman in this sensitive role overseas.

This was not the only time that women's movements were the subject of diplomatic negotiations. In the 1990s, the Jordanian government complained about Iraqi women traveling to Amman to work there as prostitutes. The Iraqi government saw indications of additional criminal activity, suspecting that these women were also facilitating cross-border smuggling and black markets.<sup>92</sup> In response, the Ba'th Party issued a decree prohibited Iraqi women from traveling outside the country unless they were accompanied by a close male relative (*muhamam*) or if they were at least 45 years old.<sup>93</sup> Here, the literal movement of Iraqi women was criminalized, as it represented too great a threat to the social, political, and economic order. This incident also reveals the way that social anxieties about women's movement and labor paved the way for the introduction of new laws that took aim at 'deviant' forms of female employment, including smuggling and prostitution.

Commercial sex work occupied an uneasy legal standing in Iraq throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the British first established its mandate in Iraq, it opted to legalize and regulate the practice of prostitution, but outlawed it shortly after, bowing to domestic pressures to end the legalization of prostitution throughout its empire.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the illegal movement of foreign sex workers into Iraq continued under British and Hashemite rule, along with the practice of local prostitutes, and flourished in particular around the pilgrimage traffic in Iraq's Shi'i shrine cities.<sup>95</sup> In the 1960s, Basra also enjoyed a reputation for the best nightlife in Iraq; Kuwaitis and other Gulf Arabs often traveled

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<sup>92</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, "Information," June 5, 1993, BRCC 01-3086-0001-0018.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*, 201.

<sup>94</sup> Liat Kozma, *Global Women, Colonial Ports* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2017), 53.

Paragraph 232 of the Baghdad criminal code passed in November 1918 explicitly outlawed prostitution, procurement, and the operation of brothels. <http://www.iraqlid.iq/LoadArticle.aspx?SC=070420103753319>

<sup>95</sup> Kozma, *Global Women, Colonial Ports*, 81.



there for holidays that could include visits to the city's underground red light districts.<sup>96</sup> For much of the post-colonial period, Iraqi governments largely tolerated the discreet operation of brothels in Baghdad, despite the fact that King Faisal II passed a law outlawing commercial sex work in 1956, and 'Abd al-Karim Qasim re-affirmed its illegality with an updated law in 1958.<sup>97</sup> There were periodic moments of crackdowns, as when an informal red light area in the central al-Maidan district of Baghdad was razed by Hashemite officials in 1951, disbursing sex workers throughout the city and pushing the sex trade further underground.<sup>98</sup> Before that, during the brief coup d'état that put Rashid 'Ali al-Gaylani in power in 1941, he formed a "morality police" squad to curb underground prostitution.<sup>99</sup> But throughout the 1970s and 1980s, elite Baghdadi men, military officers, and officials connected to the Ba'thist regime were known for frequenting high-end brothels and night clubs, even if prostitution itself was usually carried out away from the public eye.<sup>100</sup> By all accounts, sex work became much more visible in the 1990s as poverty reduced many families to undertake unsavory economic activities, and the rise of female-headed households through wars and divorce left women and children especially vulnerable to financial destitution, prompting a stronger response from the regime.<sup>101</sup>

In response, the Ba'th Party passed a law in 1988 that recommitted the government to cracking down on prostitution. It was the first law to broach the subject in thirty years, brought about by new anxieties at the end of the Iran-Iraq War about the destabilizing influence of returning

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<sup>96</sup> Basra's experiences with modernization and the changes the city underwent over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the new availability in the 1960s of pornographic films, are described in the fictionalized memoir of Muhammad Khudayyir, *Basrayatba: The Story of a City* (New York: Verso, 2008), 138-142.

<sup>97</sup> "Mukafabat al-Bigha" [Combatting Prostitution], Law #79, June 18, 1956, <http://www.iraqlid.iq/LoadLawBook.aspx?SC=200420108658686>; "Mukafabat al-Bigha" [Combatting Prostitution], Law #54, November 1958, <http://www.iraqlid.iq/LoadLawBook.aspx?page=1&SC=&BookID=11877>.

<sup>98</sup> Memoirist Jamal Haydar blamed the creation of this red-light district on the arrival of the British in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Haydar, *Baghdad: Malamih Madina*, 22. See also: Al-Ashab, "The Urban Geography of Baghdad," 369-370.

<sup>99</sup> Haydar, *Malamih Madina*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam*, 52; al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 114.

<sup>101</sup> Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 114.

veterans and the rise of female-headed households. This 1988 law clarified the legal definitions of prostitution (*bigħa*) pimping (*samsara*) and brothels (*bayt al-da'ara*), all of which were prohibited by law. Pimps and madams were sentenced to a maximum of seven years in prison, along with the owners and managers of nightclubs, brothels, or hotels where commercial sex work took place. Anyone who forced another person into sex work was subject to harsher prison sentences, especially if that person was under eighteen years old. Furthermore, those convicted would lose their homes: neighborhood popular committees were tasked with evicting and displacing families who were accused of pimping, prostitution, or managing brothels.<sup>102</sup>

Notably, the 1988 law subjected sex workers themselves to relatively light sentences: they were to be sent to a “reform house [*dar al-islāh*]” for a period ranging from three months to two years. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was responsible for managing “behavioral, cultural, and professional rehabilitation programs [*baramij al-ta’bīl al-sulūkī wa-l-thaqafī wa-l-mibnī*]” that would enable women to “earn an honest living [*tamkinhunna min kasab ‘ayishhunna bi-wasila sharifa*].”<sup>103</sup> They could be released after meeting one of the following conditions: if they agreed to pay a fine and remain under the care of a husband or other male guardian, if they got married, or if the court decided that they could live an “honorable life.”<sup>104</sup>

Tellingly, the 1988 law tended to conceive of prostitutes as female, rather than male, despite the fact that men are technically included with the regime’s 1988 definition of prostitution (*al-bigħa*), which was: “fornication [*zīna*] or sodomy [*al-luta*] in exchange for money with more than one

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<sup>102</sup> A memo addressed to the Presidential Diwan from April 1990 complained that neither the police nor the local popular committee had evicted a Baghdad family accused of “promoting indecency” despite numerous complaints. Party secretariat to the Presidential Diwan, “Report,” April 24, 1990, BRCC 01-3787-0001-0411. The responsibility of popular committees to evict people accused of prostitution can be found in RCC decree #25 from 1995, paragraph 50. <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/2000.html>. Accessed August 17, 2016.

<sup>103</sup> “*Mukafahat al-Bigħa*” [Combating Prostitution], Law #8 of 1988,” <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/7416.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

person.”<sup>105</sup> However, the original Arabic text of this law clearly refers to “prostitutes” using female grammatical terms, and the stipulation that a sex worker could be released from a reform house into the custody of male guardian further confirms that the law was addressing female prostitutes. (Punishments for men caught in sexual liaisons, whether with paid sex workers or in private relationships, were dealt with through separate laws and will be addressed below). In the 1980s, then, the regime viewed women’s bodies and labor as something that could be manipulated and managed: women could be enticed into the formal work force, pushed out of the labor market, encouraged to have more babies and marry early, and—should a woman take a wayward path into paid sex work—she could be reformed through governmental programs.

By the mid-1990s, the regime’s approach to women’s bodies and sex work in general hardened. Many have pointed to the mid-1990s as a turning point in this campaign against prostitution, marking a shift in the regime’s conservatism towards sex work that aligned with its “faith campaign [*hamlat al-iman*]” promoted during those same years.<sup>106</sup> As Achim Rohde documented, the faith campaign of the early 1990s increased the public piety of the regime, leading to the outlawing of alcohol, the closing of bars, and periodic declarations against “excessive make-up,” belly dancing, and pornography.<sup>107</sup> “Honor killings” against women suspected by their family of engaging in pre- or extra-marital sex, even if raped, were briefly legalized by the regime in 1990, and unofficially tolerated to a greater degree than previously throughout the rest of the decade.<sup>108</sup>

This crackdown on women’s movement, bodies, and sexual activities extended to new laws against commercial sex work. A law passed in 1993 issued much harsher penalties for those who organized and facilitated commercial sex work: instead of a mere seven year prison sentence, pimps

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon, *Invisible War*, 38; Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 187; Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, 111; Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam*, 303, 322.

<sup>107</sup> Rohde, *State-Society Relations in Iraq*, 109-118.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 113; Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, 102-103.

and madams could now face the death penalty for their crimes, and in 1994, it was ruled that their property would be seized, as well.<sup>109</sup> Prostitution was not technically a capital offense, but law #234 passed in 2001 made the crime of “sodomy” punishable by death.<sup>110</sup> Though this does not explicitly relate to commercial sex work, files in the Ba‘th Party archives indicate that it was used to punish men who were discovered in a brothel raid in 2002 (it is unclear whether these men were customers of female sex workers or if they were engaged in sexual activity with other men; the specific law invoked suggests the latter).<sup>111</sup> This 2001 law coincides with an infamous spate of alleged public executions of prostitutes, pimps, and madams that was committed by the *Fida’iyyu Saddam* militia overseen by Saddam’s son, ‘Uday.<sup>112</sup>

The hardening in regime responses to commercial sex work in the 1990s illustrates some of the ways by which the Ba‘thist government tried to maintain control through the management of women’s bodies. Even apart from the harsh punishments outlined above, the mere accusation of prostitution could be used to keep people in line. For example, in 1998, a corporal in the security services was fired from his job because his aunt was accused of prostitution, and in 2002, a police officer was arrested and sentenced to five months in prison for being caught with a “woman with a bad reputation and bad behavior”—and an additional six months for embezzling funds from the police to pay for her services.<sup>113</sup> Commonly, individuals or families already suspected by the regime of theft or forms of immoral behavior would have prostitution or pimping added to a list of their

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<sup>109</sup> RCC #155 from 1993: “Regarding Combatting Indecency and Prostitution,” <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/14431.html>. Accessed August 17, 2016; RCC #118 from 1994: “Decision to Punish by Execution Everyone who Ran Pimping Operations...” <http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/16049.html>. Accessed August 17, 2016.

<sup>110</sup> RCC #234 from 2001: “Regarding the Death Penalty for anyone who Commits Sodomy with a Male or a Female,” <http://www.iraqlid.iq/LoadArticle.aspx?SC=190520138285285>.

<sup>111</sup> Ministry of the Interior to the party secretariat, “Information,” February 18, 2002, BRCC 01-2170-0001-0758.

<sup>112</sup> US Department of State, “Iraqi Women under Saddam’s Regime: A Population Silenced,” March 20, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/wi/rls/18877.htm>; al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 114-115.

<sup>113</sup> Party secretariat to the Saddam Branch, “Information,” December 12, 1998, BRCC 01-2110-0001-0001; party secretariat to the al-Tahadi Branch, “Information,” July 30, 2002, BRCC 01-3694-0000-0033.

crimes; for example, women who were known to gamble were also placed under police surveillance as suspected prostitutes—these two activities were seen to go hand-in-hand.<sup>114</sup> In a multi-page report about the crimes of a Baghdad family, they were described in the following way: “every member of this family practices thievery, abuses citizens, gambles, drinks alcohol, engages in pimping, takes drugs, and sells stolen goods on the black market...”<sup>115</sup> It seems unlikely that this charge was always accurate, but rather it served as a short hand for communicating that someone had a criminally bad character and served to support the recommendation of the investigatory committee that this family should be evicted from their home because their presence in the community had become “harmful to society.”<sup>116</sup> By increasing the consequences for commercial sex work, the regime added one new way of criminalizing social behavior and leveraging the threat of jail time to keep control.

At the same time, there are important nuances to how cases of alleged sex work were handled; exceptions could be made, and that the harsh laws described above were not consistently applied. Accusations of prostitution were easily forwarded to the regime, but they were often followed up on with surveillance and careful investigation rather than immediate arrest. In the case of a woman from the Rashid district of Baghdad accused of prostitution, the investigating judge ordered that the woman’s house be placed under secret surveillance. At the end of an eight-month investigation, they found no evidence that she engaged in prostitution and the charges were dropped.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, a group of neighbors wrote a joint petition complaining that a divorced man was acting as a pimp and operated a brothel out of his home. The complaint was forwarded to the police, and in the meantime, the man fled and went into hiding. Despite his appearance of guilt, the

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<sup>114</sup> Khalid bin al-Walid Branch to the party secretariat, “Information,” July 16, 1995, *BRCC* 01-2393-0001-0138.

<sup>115</sup> Report of an investigatory committee, December 27, 1992, *BRCC* 01-3086-0001-0190 to 0193.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Party secretariat to the Rashid Branch, “Information,” June 15, 1999, *BRCC* 01-2129-0000-0293.

investigating officials continued their work and eventually concluded that there was no basis for the charge and that there were “no negative indications” about this man or his family.<sup>118</sup> Whether this man was the victim of a smear campaign by his neighbors, or the beneficiary of corrupt police work that let him off the hook, it is impossible to tell. But these cases indicate that, while the regime considered the crimes of prostitution and pimping as grave offenses, it was possible to be investigated and found innocent of the accusations.

Furthermore, even for those who were found guilty of prostitution or pimping, the penalties were often much more lenient than the RCC laws would indicate.<sup>119</sup> In 1997, after the RCC had passed its harsh new decrees, a woman was investigated and found guilty of illegally operating a hair salon at her house that also functioned as a bar and brothel, including during the holy month of Ramadan. Guilty on three counts, she was sentenced to only ten days in jail, evicted from her house, and ordered not to engage in prostitution or pimping again, even though stipulated punishments called for at least seven years imprisonment and possible execution.<sup>120</sup> In another example, the regime targeted a large and well-known brothel in 1999. Investigators found that the large number of young men were coming and going from the house day and night and contributing to “chaos [*fawda*]” in the neighborhood and security concerns. It compiled a list of eight men and women known for working in this establishment, but ordered that they each be sentenced to only six months in jail, despite the fact that RCC decree #118 from 1994 stipulates that these individuals should be executed for organizing prostitution.<sup>121</sup> The case of a raid on a brothel in 2002 further

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<sup>118</sup> Rashid Branch to the party secretariat, “Statement [in favor of] Eviction,” April 23, 2001, *BRCC* 01-3389-0000-0650 (including related documents from -0638 until -0650). Petition can be found at *BRCC* 01-3389-0000-0651.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, “Arrest of a Bad Person,” March 20, 2001, *BRCC* 01-2077-0001-0305

<sup>120</sup> Party secretariat to the Ministry of the Interior, “Request for Information,” September 17, 1997, *BRCC* 01-2843-0001-0503.

<sup>121</sup> General Manager of the Interior to the Directorate of the Police, “Brothels,” June 7, 1999, *BRCC* 01-3219-0000-0291.

demonstrates the legal ambivalence of these crimes in the eyes of the regime. The Rashid Branch in Baghdad had received reports that a particular apartment housed young female runaways from the countryside who were taught to be prostitutes, suggesting that some kind of trafficking was taking place. The police carried out a raid on the building. Instead of runaway girls, they found men with alcohol inside the apartments who subsequently confessed to “prostitution” and “pimping.” But the judge reviewing the case sentenced some of the men under the anti-sodomy law #234 of 2001, indicating that the men had also been accused of engaging in sexual acts with one another.<sup>122</sup> Despite the severity of the accusations, the detainees received penalties of just six months in prison or a fine, rather than the death penalty stipulated by the anti-sodomy law.<sup>123</sup>

One episode in particular helps illustrate how the new laws were primarily intended to be public demonstrations of the regime’s continued power and capability: in 2001, a group of neighbors wrote to the regime to complain that a woman and her two daughters were working as prostitutes out of their apartment. The mother had previously been arrested for sex work, for which she served only a short six-month prison sentence. Why, they wondered, had she not been executed?<sup>124</sup> Though officials had evidently chosen to treat this woman leniently during her prior arrest, the regime could not afford to appear weak now that people were complaining. The petition pushed the regime to act: the three women were subsequently arrested and turned over to a court “in accordance with RCC

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<sup>122</sup> RCC #234 from 2001: “Regarding the Death Penalty for anyone who Commits Sodomy with a Male or a Female,” <http://www.iraqlid.iq/LoadArticle.aspx?SC=190520138285285>.

<sup>123</sup> Ministry of the Interior to the party secretariat, “Information,” February 18, 2002, *BRCC* 01-2170-0001-0758. These laws were sometimes fully enforced, of course: another case saw two men sentenced to life in prison for “practicing sodomy.” Ministry of Justice to the party secretariat, “People’s Day,” February 25, 2002, *BRCC* 01-2170-0001-0665.

<sup>124</sup> Collective petition, “Statement Proving the Practice of Pimping and Prostitution,” 2001, *BRCC* 01-2077-0001-0072.

decree #118 from 1994” and that “legal measures were taken,” indicating that the women were likely executed for their crimes according to the punishments stipulated by this law.<sup>125</sup>

The cases above indicate that the new harsh penalties against commercial sex work were meant primarily to scare the public into submission; behind closed doors, judges and officials continued with earlier practices of lightly punishing sex workers to push for their reform. Scholars previously established this pattern of compassionate treatment or inconsistent punishments in the case of deserters from the military.<sup>126</sup> Desertion was a much more politically serious crime than prostitution; if military officers and Ba‘th Party officials were willing to occasionally look the other way when apprehending deserters, it is not surprising to see that prostitutes were not always punished to the full extent of the law, either. While leaders hoped tough new sentencing laws would reduce overall rates of illegal commercial sex work, monitoring the activities of pimps and brothels was not an urgent priority for Iraq’s security forces. Furthermore, the judicial system retained a degree of independence in Saddam’s Iraq, and a compassionate recognition of the difficult economic circumstances many of Iraq’s women were enduring may have influenced some judges to hand out comparatively lighter sentences than what the new laws required.

In sum, there was increased anxiety on the part of Baghdadis and the regime about unmonitored female movement, labor, and sexual activity that corresponded with an increase in female-headed households in the 1990s. Harsh new laws against commercial sex work were designed, in part, to scare women into maintaining proper forms of employment and, ideally, maintaining traditional domestic roles within the home as wives and mothers. However, the persistence of female sex work throughout the 1990s despite the risk of execution or imprisonment attests to the difficult financial circumstances women, and especially women in female-headed

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<sup>125</sup> Assistant Director from the party secretariat to the Khalid bin al-Walid Branch, “Information,” May 28, 2001, BRCC 01-2077-0001-0065.

<sup>126</sup> Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 154-155; see: “Status of Deserters for Wednesday, October 26, 1994” BRCC 027-2-4-1069.



households, found themselves. Behind the scenes, judges and party officials tacitly acknowledged the difficult economic realities women were facing by sometimes giving sex workers more lenient sentences than the new laws required.

## Conclusions

In 1991, reports of homosexual activity in Saddam City reached the president, and he called a meeting with the neighborhood's tribal and community leaders to discuss the issue. In this meeting, Saddam expressed his anger that they did not execute the homosexuals themselves but rather merely reported the crime, after which apparently no further action was taken. This remarkable audio recording encapsulates key themes from this chapter, and is worth quoting excerpts from the transcript at length:

Unnamed tribal leader from Saddam City:

"Mr. President, the tribal leaders in Saddam City have come to express their loyalty and their faithfulness to you until death. [...] When the citizens of [Saddam] City noticed the increase of homosexuality and sin, they brought it up to the attention of... the under secretary of the interior affairs. [...] We came today, Mr. President, asking your forgiveness for any misunderstanding which may have occurred from the people of [Saddam] City. [...] Mr. President...we know that you are angry with us, and therefore, we beg you. We are your children and you are our father..."

Saddam:

"...Men who dye their hair green and red do not know the values [of Arabism]. It is a shame and sin that you actually allow those people to live. You must slaughter them with your own hands, those kinds of people who dye their hair and wear lipstick like women. I say you must slaughter them and I take responsibility for it."

Tribal Leader:

"We are afraid of the outcome from the citizens.... We are afraid that would be a crime."

Saddam:

"I take full responsibility for it and it is not a crime. [...] I am seeking your help with the issue of those who dye their hair and wear women's clothes. This is shameful for Iraqis and against Islam. [...] Iraqis are not like that, Iraqis are real men. [...] I am blaming you if, God forbid, something shameful occurred and nobody is executed—I must blame you."

Tribal Leader:

“Master, there is a more important issue than that... There is someone from among our citizens, a deserter soldier...[who] spends his day stealing from homes and hurting people. [...] This person is an escapee and commits all these horrific crimes. When we make a report at the [police] station...the case freezes and he is forgotten.”

Saddam:

“Enough hurt and pain. He must serve in the army. [...] ...Turn him over to the police and say to him ‘We have an order from Saddam Hussein that you must arrest this person, or we will report you.’ [...] You should use the same method for the homosexuals. [...]

I know the real honorable men and the shaykhs from the tribes, when they perform their duties right, they develop a higher sense of knowledge and awareness, to the point where they are able to recognize who is a stranger and who is not. More than a police officer, they will actually alert the police to troubled and sinful areas.”<sup>127</sup>

This exchange, recorded in Saddam’s presidential office, illustrates some of the key social and political effects of Baghdad’s crime wave that began at the end of the Iran-Iraq War and persisted throughout the sanctions years.

First, young men—both as deserters and as sexual criminals—were singled out as destabilizing, criminal forces that threatened the stability of the city. The identification of young men as criminal elements relates back to the valorization of martial masculinity during wartime. Though the regime had pushed young men to fulfill idealized masculine roles as defenders of the country and as breadwinners and protectors of their families, thousands of men had deserted the battlefield and still more found themselves listless and unemployed at home. Rising crime rates was viewed in part as a failure of these Iraqi youths to be “real men,” just as Saddam also viewed the homosexuals in Saddam City as abdicating their masculinity. Second, the lawless environment in Baghdad provoked new, gendered fears about criminality and victimization. While women were often at the center of social and governmental efforts to increase surveillance and stop sexual crime, men were also expected to adhere to prescribed gender roles as responsible heads of their households. Gay men,

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<sup>127</sup> “Saddam Hussein and Saddam City Tribal Leaders Talk,” audio transcript, undated (1991), *CRRC SH-SHTP-A-000-891*. The translation has been lightly edited and adapted from the audio transcript translation provided by the archive.

like female prostitutes, violated both these social norms and regime laws restricting certain sexual activities.

Third, the conversation above provides yet more examples that the harsh new punishments called for by the regime were not always implemented in practice. Though Saddam himself urged that homosexuals be executed, as Iraqi law also stipulated, neither the tribal shaykhs in Saddam City nor the official who initially received the complaint had yet acted on these instructions, and the tribal leaders expressed reluctance at doing so. Nor, as the tribal leaders complained, had the deserter in their community been arrested in accordance with the law. That the police had to be nudged into action by the president himself indicates that pursuing these criminals was often a low priority for local law enforcement.

Finally, the regime's reliance on community leaders, neighborhood-level authorities, and citizen informants to carry out surveillance and police work is clearly evident in this exchange. Not only did Saddam expect these shaykhs to identify criminals, but he also urged them to carry out punishments. Pointedly, he indicated at the end of their conversation that community leaders knew "more than the police officer" what was happening in their neighborhoods; the regime relied on their intelligence gathering to stay informed. By leaning on these community leaders to mete out justice, maintain security, and keep the regime informed of any agitators, the regime was able to maintain both the appearance of control and the capacity of the state and party to actually deliver on its policies and security concerns.<sup>128</sup>

In sum, though Baghdad's increased crime rate was primarily motivated by economic factors, it had a wide array of social and political consequences. New narratives emerged about which populations were 'destabilizing' and which populations were likely to be 'vulnerable' to crime, and rural migrants and women tended to suffer consequences as a result these new discourses. Because

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<sup>128</sup> The regime explicitly lays out this strategy in CRRC SH-IDHS-D-000-370, Security Brigadier General to the Coordination and Tracking Director, "Clans – Required Role," circa 1991-1992.

the regime did not have the capacity or political will to consistently monitor the activities of the population or strictly enforce all of its laws, there was considerable variation in how punishments were applied.

## 7. Conclusions

These chapters tell the story of Baghdad's most recent life cycle: its revitalization in the 1950s with oil-fueled infrastructure and development plans, its carefree years in the 1960s and 1970s buoyed by generous social welfare programs and state investments in health and education, its weary decade of warfare from 1980 to 1991, and the grueling breakdown of the city under the pressures of sanctions in the 1990s.

Over the course of these five eventful decades, state-society relations evolved in the capital city as both residents and regimes adapted to these changing economic and political circumstances. The chapters above explored how the regime turned housing and food into new tools of political leverage to consolidate support and minimize dissent. For their part, ordinary Iraqis developed a variety of coping strategies to manage the burdens of war, sanctions, and authoritarian rule. Some of these strategies were pro-regime, such as writing petitions or joining the Ba'th Party to secure more resources, while others were anti-regime, such as deserting from the military, engaging in theft, or practicing commercial sex work. Through these interactions between state and society, the spaces, rhythms of time, and social networks of the city were transformed, altering the very nature of the city and the relationships between its inhabitants, its rulers, and its physical landscape.

This dissertation is one of the few studies of state-society relations in Iraq to emphasize the roles of non-elites, and the first work of scholarship to focus on the social and political development of post-colonial Baghdad. As such, my research makes significant contributions to urban history, the study of state-society relations, and theories of resistance within Middle Eastern historiography, with an important emphasis on gender and subalterns woven throughout my analysis.

### Urban History: Baghdad as a City of Neighborhoods

Historians of pre-modern Baghdad have long recognized the social, political, and economic significance of the city's *mahallat* as functional, quasi self-regulating communities within the city from

the Abbasid era to the Ottoman period. Until now, the strong centralization of Iraq's post-colonial governments obscured the fact that neighborhoods remained the most significant organizational unit in both the structure of the Ba'th Party governance apparatus and in the lives of Baghdad's residents. Though Saddam may have had "totalitarian ambitions" to mobilize all Iraqis into the Ba'th Party apparatus, these Ba'thification efforts and state-building projects were not centralized, but deployed within each individual neighborhood within the burgeoning metropolis. Although Saddam is often cast as a micromanaging leader involved in the minutiae of daily governance decisions, the reality is that Ba'thist rule relied on an ever-increasing number of low-level bureaucrats who were entrusted with monitoring activities on the street, carrying out functions of the state, and making decisions about the distribution of resources in each *mahalla*. Despite the dramatic changes that Baghdad experienced from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the end, the city remained at its essence a "collection of cities," not one single city.<sup>1</sup>

As the preoccupations of war burdened the state bureaucracy from 1980 to 1991, Saddam created an increasing number of neighborhood-level bodies to aid in the work of surveillance and resource distribution. As I demonstrate in Chapters Four and Five, neighborhood-level Ba'th Party officials became important decision makers as the regime delegated more and more responsibilities to those best acquainted with happenings on the ground. The concentration of government services and authorities within each Baghdadi's neighborhood helped to solidify one's sense of identity in the neighborhood and to confirm each city resident's rightful place within the urban sprawl. As Ilana Feldman observed in her study of bureaucratic practices in Gaza, "intimate connections with people and place are forged in significant part through regular practices of living," which include "the quotidian formations of place that emerge out of the everyday practices of government services."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ra'uf, *Al-Usul al-Tarikhiyya li-Mahallat Baghdad*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 157.

Thus the very provision of governmental services at the neighborhood level served to reify one's place within the city. At the same time, the 'face' of the government was very often the local representatives in one's own neighborhood. That Baghdadis most often addressed their petitions and appeals to their local *firqa* or *shu'ba* officials—ideally with a letter of endorsement from the neighborhood *mukhtar*, as well—illustrates that city residents were indeed familiar with interfacing with these intermediary authorities to take care of both routine and emergency governmental matters. Though positions like the *mukhtar* have a centuries-old tradition of aiding premodern rulers in managing Baghdad's residents, these figures continued to exercise important roles even in a sophisticated, highly bureaucratized regime like Saddam's.

A neighborhood is not a fixed, stable unit that can be easily discussed across the different decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however. As Chapters Two and Three illustrate, the physical structures of Baghdad's landscape were torn down and remade many times over. Oil-fueled modernization schemes justified razing Ottoman-era homes and widening narrow alley streets to make way for automobile traffic. Rural migrants made their own mark on the city, nearly doubling the footprint of the formally-built city with the vast expanses of their *sarifa* huts on the city's eastern outskirts. They claimed undesirable land along railroad tracks and in swampy tracts with their mud and reed houses while simultaneously filling the city's markets with their locally-raised vegetables and ox milk. Old, historic neighborhoods in Baghdad's center expanded beyond their mud flood walls, and new suburbs sprang up on Baghdad's western edge. Neighborhoods changed names and gained new inhabitants as more Iraqis came to the capital to take advantage of work and educational opportunities. When the Ba'th Party forcibly displaced most of Baghdad's *sarifa* dwellers and ordered them to build durable housing in Revolution City, a new kind of district was born—one which was built primarily according to security concerns, and which could conceivably expand indefinitely to absorb an ever-larger number of residents who fell under the same suspicion as

being potentially politically troublesome and socially undesirable in the eyes of the city's elites.

Through the car bombs and terrorism of the Iran-Iraq War and the devastating bombing campaign of the Gulf War, the city's landscape changed once again, crumbling into rubble that was difficult to repair under the restrictions of sanctions.

However, throughout these many changes, Baghdadis continued to find ways to reconstitute the meaning and boundaries of their local neighborhood and actively participate within it. The enduring significance of neighborhood identity was due, in part, to the way that the Ba'th Party continued to rely on neighborhoods as the building block of their entire governing apparatus in Baghdad. The structure of Ba'th Party cells, branches, sections, and divisions adapted to the growth and change of Baghdad's cityscape and evolving neighborhood communities by periodically restructuring the jurisdictions of each level of the party hierarchy and adding or dividing divisions in response to the city's growth. In this way, city neighborhoods remained the most essential building block of Baghdad even as Baghdad itself changed in sudden and dramatic ways over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

That neighborhoods continue to be a salient organizing force in the city is evident in the ways that communities delimited the boundaries of their neighborhoods with cement blast walls during the worst years of militia violence following the fall of Saddam, redefining who 'belonged' and who was an 'outsider' according to the new sectarian political logic that replaced the Ba'thist system.<sup>3</sup> The post-Saddam period is certainly noteworthy for the extraordinary levels of violence and displacement—as many as 400,000 Baghdadis lost or fled their homes in response to the terror campaigns waged by these militias. However, the remapping of Baghdad's neighborhoods post-2003 was the continuation of a longer historical trend, witnessed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in building

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<sup>3</sup> Damluji, "Securing Democracy in Iraq"; Sana Murrani, "Baghdad's Thirdspace: Between Liminality, Anti-Structures and Territorial Mappings," *Cultural Dynamics* 28, no. 2 (2016): 189-210; Caecilia Pieri, "Walling Strategy: Can T-Wall Murals Really Beautify the Fragmented Baghdad?" *Ibraaz.org*, June 2014, accessed February 27, 2018. <https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/96/15>



and redefining the city's neighborhoods according to real or imaginary markers of inclusion or exclusion based on political considerations or demographic background.<sup>4</sup>

### **Governance and State-Society Relations: “Seeing like a State”?**

Much of my intellectual training has been influenced by Foucauldian concepts of power, including as interpreted by scholars like Timothy Mitchell and James C. Scott. In these bodies of work, the state is compared to an all-seeing Panopticon, where modern states arrange infrastructure and city blocks to maximize their abilities to monitor, tax, and conscript their citizenry. As Scott wrote in *Seeing like a State*:

“...I began to see legibility as a central problem in statecraft. The premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity. [...] [In modern states], officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices...and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored.”<sup>5</sup>

In Chapter Two, I demonstrate that Iraq's modern governments, from the Hashemite monarchy to the Ba'th Party, engaged in this type of state-building behavior through the construction of new neighborhoods designed to discipline political allies and rural migrants. Surveillance efforts intensified under Saddam, who expanded the domestic secret police apparatuses. Drafting up to one million soldiers for the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars necessitated intensive bureaucratic processes to register and monitor the deployment of all eligible men between the ages of 18 and 54, as described in Chapter Three. In Chapter Five, I describe how the Ba'th Party bureaucratic apparatus carried out an impromptu census of the entire national population in order to register each family for a rations card during sanctions, increasing the ability of the state to monitor the comings and goings of its citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> Mona Damluji, “Securing Democracy in Iraq”: 76-78.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 2.

Yet in many ways, this dissertation challenges these ideas about modern state-building, raising questions about what the “state” is and what it can really “see” in everyday practice. Throughout these chapters, I demonstrate that the Iraqi “state” is not a unified entity, but a complex, hierarchical bureaucracy with influential actors at every level. In particular, I highlight the role of neighborhood-level authorities who operated within a liminal space between state and society. As evidenced from the Ba‘th Party archives, there were moments when these *mukhtarun*, rations agents, popular committee members, and party representatives experienced tension about their loyalties to their communities and their obligations to the state’s top leadership. In day-to-day matters of governance, then, “the state” does not exist on high, separated from and with a clear view into society, but rather operates within webs of power relations that are embedded in the very same communities that Saddam sought to regulate.

While the personalization of politics through the creation of an ever-increasing number of local, intermediary authorities in each Baghdad neighborhood expanded the presence of the regime in the city, this did not necessarily result in an increase in the regime’s influence over society or an improvement in the quality of the government’s surveillance capabilities. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, even as Saddam appointed more and more neighborhood-level authority figures to aid in the day-to-day governance of the city, crime rates worsened, security decreased, and the regime did not succeed in catching or deterring a large number of deserters, criminals, smugglers, black market dealers, or sex workers.

Nor was the recruitment of an ever-growing number of Iraqis as informants a sure way to guarantee that important intelligence would reach the right authorities or that the quality of information was sound. Though Saddam sought, and largely achieved, the effect of seeming to the population to have spies on every corner, informants in every home, and a nearly omnipresent security apparatus, the regime was aware of its own limitations. These lessons were brought home

forcefully for Saddam when he was caught by surprise by the events of the 1991 *intifada* and later discovered that his own generals had lied to him about the status of Iraqi forces during the Gulf War.<sup>6</sup> Saddam depended on having thousands of individual sets of eyes on every street and in each local community, but this meant that surveillance was then a highly contingent and personalized process, fraught with limitations, personal biases and animus, faulty memory and inaccuracies.

Furthermore, Saddam intended that the widespread co-optation of ordinary Iraqis into the work of surveillance would atomize society, rupturing bonds of neighborly and familial care in favor of loyalty to Saddam. While Saddam did succeed in creating an atmosphere of paranoia and wariness, in which no one could be quite certain about who to trust or who was an informant, the regime did not so fully dominate society that all interpersonal bonds disappeared. Within these small circles of trust, people repeated whispered rumors, told mocking jokes, and kept secrets for one another, risky as it was. This final layer of opacity in society, protected from the penetrating gaze of the state, is what allowed both ordinary crime and organized resistance to continue even under Saddam's watch.

An additional aspect of my analysis challenges the suppositions of Scott's "seeing like a state" thesis and related theoretical arguments by other scholars. The goal of modern states, Scott argues, is to make society "legible," while populations are oppositely motivated to remain "invisible" in order to avoid conscription, taxation, and other forms of state regulation, and engage in "hidden transcripts" and "weapons of the weak" in order to do so.<sup>7</sup> As Scott writes: "An illegible society, then, is a hindrance to any effective intervention by the state, whether the purpose of that intervention is plunder of public welfare."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sassoon, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism*, 210, 239.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 3; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 78.

However, the petitions written by marginalized members of Baghdad's society undermine this characterization of non-elites in non-democratic settings as seeking to remain "illegible." Rather, as the Iraqi case shows, countless types of non-elites—the poor, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, widows, and divorcees—tried to get the attention of state representatives in order to secure resources. As I argue in Chapter Four, an important caveat must then be made to Scott's theories: when citizens view the state as having a primarily extractive function, then they indeed try to remain invisible to the state. However, when citizens view the state as the source of vital welfare benefits, then they may insistently provide personal identifying information to regime officials and actively pursue strategies designed to increase the visibility of their plight.

### **Resistance, Collusion, or Non-Compliance?**

In this project I have eschewed discussions of organized resistance and armed revolt against the Ba'thist regime in favor of discussions about the political ramifications of non-political crimes, such as theft or sex work. I chose this approach not to diminish the significance of organized resistance and armed revolt against Saddam—the actions of the Iraqi Communist Party, the Shi'i Da'wa Party, the crowds of protestors during the 1991 *intifada*, and even foiled coup plots against Saddam constitute important aspects of state-society relations in Saddam's Iraq, especially on a national level.<sup>9</sup> These forms of resistance have already been the subject of insightful scholarship by historians and political scientists, and some of these, like the *intifada*, did not directly affect events in Baghdad to a significant degree. Furthermore, there is a tendency when analyzing formal resistance organizations to cast historical actors in clear roles as resisters or collaborators. However, most Iraqis did not belong to any formal opposition organization, but yet found themselves caught up in difficult situations that fell somewhere between these two poles of resistance and collusion as they

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<sup>9</sup> The significant social and political effects of organized resistance and regime punishments are the subjects of Lisa Blaydes's forthcoming book, *States of Repression: Identity and Political Behavior in Iraq under Saddam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

tried to maintain a degree of personal or political autonomy from the regime without falling under suspicion of disloyalty.

In an effort to understand some of the ways Iraqis could quietly defy Saddam's regime, I explored a range of non-political crimes as expressions of deviance or non-compliance. Though crimes like theft, smuggling, black markets, rations fraud, and sex work were often carried out for economic reasons, they nevertheless had important political and social consequences by defying state laws and proscribed gender norms. Certain communities, like Saddam City, experienced a crackdown in law enforcement as crime rates spiked under sanctions. For many Baghdadis, though, the very existence of a crime wave revealed the diminished capacity of the state to enforce law and order, and this in turn may have encouraged new crime as individuals weighed the relative risk of getting caught when police and domestic intelligence officials were clearly overburdened in their duties. Though most of the crime that plagued the streets of Baghdad in the 1990s was not political in its aims, the cumulative effect of these crimes was to challenge the authority of the state and the ability of Saddam to reconsolidate control after the events of the *intifada*.

Complicity or collusion with Saddam's regime is another sensitive topic that had tangible consequences in the post-2003 era: the de-Ba'athification policies enacted by L. Paul Bremer III in May 2003 led to the overnight dismissal of an estimated 15,000 to 30,000 bureaucrats and as many as 100,000 intelligence officers.<sup>10</sup> In the blood-letting that consumed Baghdad from 2006 to 2010, many former members of the Ba'ath Party fled to Jordan or went into hiding. But during Saddam's era, membership in the Ba'ath Party and collusion with the regime were not exactly one and the same. As the petitions in Chapter Four show, there were a large number of political independents who sought to bolster their standing with the regime through wartime medals, volunteering for militias, donations to wartime charity drives, and sycophantic oaths of loyalty. Other political independents

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<sup>10</sup> Sharon Otterman, "Iraq: Debaathification," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 22, 2005.

volunteered to operate as informants, in yet another effort to curry favor with Saddam. At the same time, party membership became a virtual requirement for many professions, to the extent that Saddam and other Ba‘th Party leaders lamented that many of the lower-level members lacked enthusiasm for the party and were ignorant of the party’s history or aims.<sup>11</sup> Saddam himself began to advocate for a more restricted party membership base in the wake of the *intifada* in order to weed out those who lacked a deep commitment to the Ba‘th Party, though membership actually ballooned in the late 1990s as many Iraqis joined the party in an effort to gain preferential access to aid. All of this portrays the murkiness of defining collaboration or complicity—especially in light of the fact that many families pursued both pro-regime and anti-regime survival strategies simultaneously during the sanctions years. Though the post-Saddam political environment in Iraq created clear categories for who was a Saddam supporter and who was a resistor, the evidence presented here shows the need for more nuanced theorizing about what the notions of resistance and complicity look like in post-colonial authoritarian regimes.

### **Baghdad’s Subalterns: Intersections of Gender and Social Class**

Scholars of Iraq previously recorded how elite and non-elite women were conscripted into state-building efforts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: for example, in the way that Saddam initially promoted state feminist programs that bolstered the public sector work force, but later reversed course and pushed women into domestic roles after the end of the Gulf War and throughout the sanctions period. While my research provides additional validation of these findings from the Ba‘th Party archives, I further our understanding of the intersections of gender and class in Iraqi history by exploring the roles of rural migrants in the city’s development and through discussions of gendered narratives around crime and sex work.

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<sup>11</sup> Sassoon, “Iraqi Ba‘th Party Preparatory School”: 30.

Since at least the 1930s, rural migrants encamped on the outskirts of Baghdad were identified as a politically destabilizing force and the source of disease, immoral behavior, and other social ills. The threatening nature of rural migrants was differentiated by gender: the Ba'ath Party was more likely to view rural men (as opposed to rural women) as political actors and, by extension, as potential supporters of the Iraqi Communist Party. Both the Hashemites and Iraq's post-colonial regimes feared the potential of rural men to mob the streets in protests, as occurred during the 1948 *wathba* and again during the 1958 revolution. As such, men's labor, movement, and political activities were scrutinized by the regime. At the same time, female rural migrants were successful in integrating themselves into the economic life of the city as market vendors, peddlers, and domestic workers.

The movement of rural women throughout the city and their mixing with strangers contributed to stereotypes about their involvement in the city's sex industry, however, and these narratives resurfaced during the sanctions years when many women sought additional work opportunities outside the house to contribute to family income. During the 1990s, gendered narratives of crime and social deviance affected the way non-elite men and women could move through the city. The regime had promoted hyper-masculine ideals for the roughly three million Iraqi men who served in the armed forces over the course of the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars, urging them to see themselves as protectors of Iraq as well as protectors of Iraqi women and children. But the experiences of war affected many of these men in negative ways, and their sheer numbers rendered this "war generation" as a potent and destructive social force. In his sociological study of Iraq's "war generation," Faleh Jabar concluded that "the macabre experiences on the war front left deep scars in the minds and souls of the war generation," leading to "restiveness and violent behavior" when they returned to a disappointing civilian life marked by high levels of

unemployment.<sup>12</sup> Saddam had little patience for these unemployed veterans and deserters who had failed to honorably fulfill their duties on the battlefield or provide for their families upon their return; these restless young men were derided as thieves, drug addicts, and sexual assailants and frequently targeted by police and security services.

Women were repeatedly mobilized to serve as the remedies to men's social and economic woes: women were beseeched to keep the economy running while the men were away, to bear babies to 'replace' the men who had died on the battlefield, and to relinquish their jobs for them when they returned from war. Even when Saddam was espousing the importance of female education and employment, there was a patriarchal logic at work that prioritized first the well being of Iraqi men, and advocated for women's advancements only when it was seen to benefit the male workforce. In the same way, women were again expected to alter their behavior to help stem the rising menace of crime in the 1990s: the onus was placed on women to avoid victimization by wearing modest clothes and remaining at home to engage in domestic responsibilities. Low-income women who could not adhere to these new norms because they needed to work outside the home were stigmatized as potential criminal elements themselves.

These two examples—of the influential role of *sarifa* dwellers in the development of mid-century Baghdad and of the gendered narratives of criminality in the 1990s—serve as correctives to previous histories of state-society relations in Iraq that have focused overwhelmingly on the actions of cultural elites or of state-affiliated women's organizations. While previous scholars have focused on the way non-elite women and rural populations have been the *targets* of state-building efforts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I instead shed light on the way that these non-elite actors navigated the cityscape themselves. Despite state efforts to settle rural migrants in undesirable neighborhoods on the city's margins or to stamp out Baghdad's red light districts, marginalized populations developed their own

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<sup>12</sup> Jabar, "The War Generation in Iraq," 129, 131-132.



strategies for maneuvering through city spaces. Though the Iraqi Ba‘th Party archives only report those cases in which people were caught building illegal sarifa huts or operating underground brothels, the frequently lenient sentences meted out for these crimes suggests that underprivileged men and women could often quietly carry out even illegal economic activity without detection or harsh recrimination from the regime. Despite previous scholarly depictions of Saddam’s security apparatus as reliably harsh and far-reaching, examining the activities of Baghdad’s subalterns reveals that there was considerable autonomy that existed on the margins of society and of the city. As I demonstrate throughout these chapters, the ordinary people of Baghdad were important actors in shaping the city and influencing the regime, and the government could not fully dominate them despite its stringent efforts.

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KDS – Kuwait Dataset of the Iraqi Ba‘th Party Archives (Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, USA)  
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