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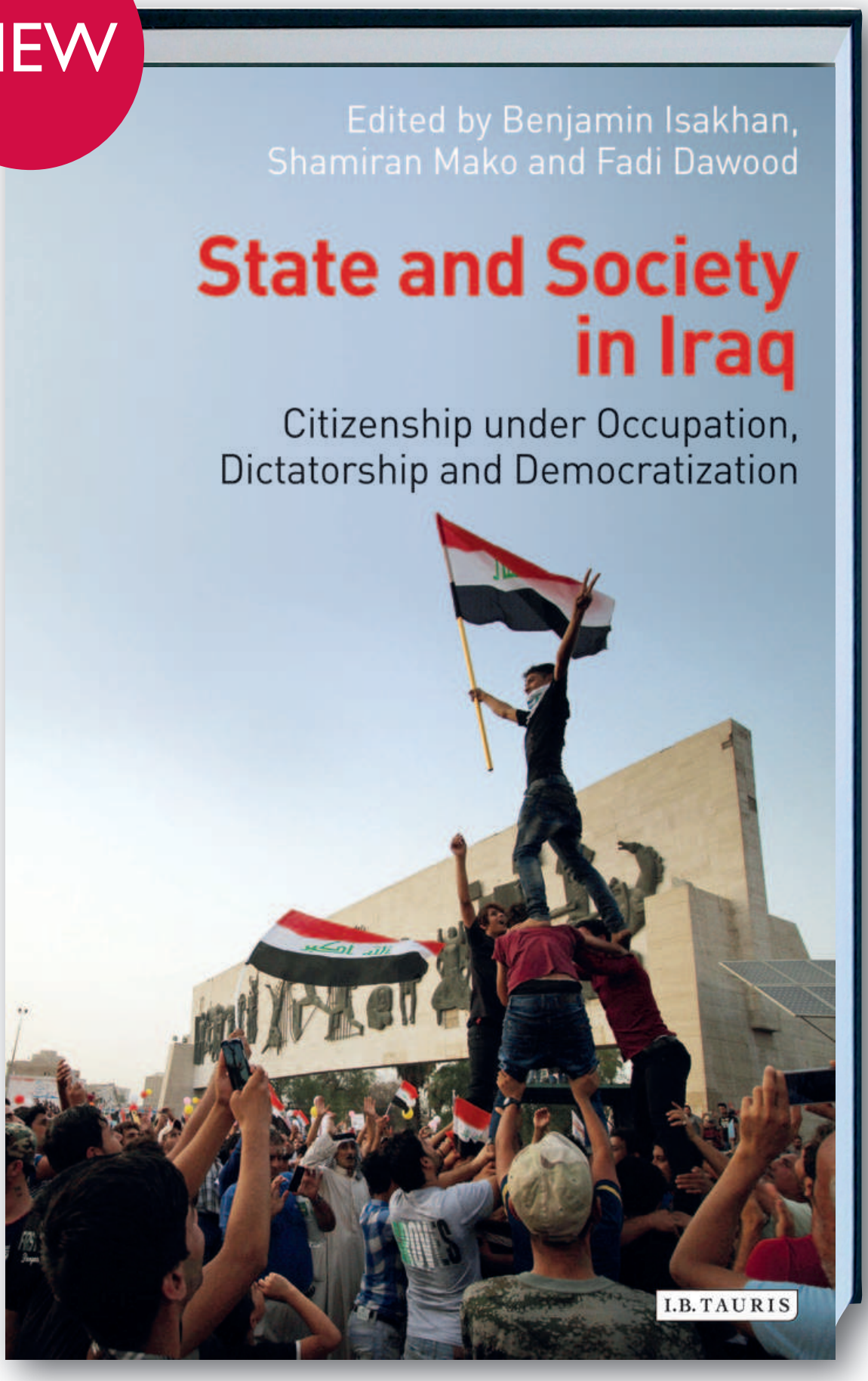

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Introduction: State–Society Relations in Iraq: Negotiating a Contested Historiography

Benjamin Isakhan and Fadi Dawood

At no time since the founding of the modern nation of Iraq in 1921 has the country faced a greater set of deep-seated and intractable challenges to its fragile state–society relations. In June 2014 the Sunni Arab terrorist network known in English as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) conducted a series of highly coordinated and brazen attacks across parts of central and northern Iraq. They captured several key cities, such as Mosul and Tikrit, effectively expanding their existing strongholds to control vast swathes of territory across both western Iraq and northern Syria. With their roots in earlier iterations of Islamist terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq, ISIS had effectively harnessed the chaos that engulfed neighbouring Syria following its descent into civil war from 2011. Later that same year the complete withdrawal of US troops from Iraq after nearly a decade of military occupation presented ISIS with a unique opportunity to expand on a scale that they could not have imagined only 12 months earlier. They knew all too well that the US-led intervention to oust the Baʿthist regime in 2003 had not led to the promised democracy and stability, but to a series of bitterly fought disputes over resources and power. It had unleashed a deadly sectarian conflict, particularly between the Sunni Arab minority who had dominated the Iraqi state prior to 2003 and the Shiʿa Arab majority who had ascended to unprecedented degrees of political power in the

wake of regime change. ISIS therefore sought to exploit the ever-widening gap between the Sunni Arab parts of Iraqi society and the new Iraqi state.

Although much has already been written about the extraordinary military capabilities of ISIS, their ideological fervour and their cruel fundamentalist vision,[1] little attention has been paid to the extent to which they pose a distinct challenge to state–society relations in Iraq. Indeed, the rise of ISIS has brought to the fore some very old and very troubling questions about the complex and contested history of the Iraqi state. As just one example, ISIS have brought back into focus the very legitimacy of the nearly century-old borders imposed by the British and the French in the clandestine Sykes–Picot Agreement following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Within days of their advance across Iraq, ISIS had in fact bulldozed parts of this border and declared their new 'Islamic State'. In doing so, ISIS exposed the weakness of Baghdad, not only in its capacity to maintain its borders but also to enforce security across Iraqi territory. Consequently, the central government in Baghdad effectively controls less territory today than at any time since the ink dried on the Sykes–Picot agreement; the state of Iraq has devolved into three distinct zones.

The first is the 'Islamic State', which is governed by the strictest interpretations of Salafist doctrines and Sharia law. While there is much derision amongst the international community concerning its declaration to be either 'Islamic' or a 'state', it is important to note that ISIS have established the semblance of a functioning state – albeit a highly volatile, inconsistent and nightmarishly cruel one. Across the territories they control, ISIS have replaced many of the civic and administrative structures of the Iraqi state with their own institutions, a vast tyrannical jihadist bureaucracy that combines strict Islamist ideals with the provision of minimal public services. ISIS have fixed power lines, installed sewerage systems and painted pavements, operated public transport services and collected rubbish, provided jobs and security and set up makeshift schools and hospitals.[2] They have also imposed the rule of law, establishing kangaroo Sharia law courts in which 'infidels' (non-Muslims, those who refused to publicly endorse their ideology and even those accused of petty crimes like drinking alcohol) have been tried and, in many cases, executed. What is more, ISIS have the means to enforce the rule of law and dominate the use of coercion and punishment across their territories.

The second is Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds of the former Ottoman Empire did not warrant a mention in the Sykes–Picot Agreement and the Kurds have been trying to create and independent enclave ever since. Although they have controlled parts of northern Iraq for centuries, when Saddam brutally cracked down on the Kurds following their uprising after the Gulf War of 1991, the international community enforced a no-fly zone that allowed the Kurds to manage a semi-autonomous region constituted by Iraq's three northernmost governorates.[3] With the rapid expansion of ISIS in 2014, the Kurds took the opportunity to seize the 'disputed territories', including the strategic city of Kirkuk, and to threaten once again to secede from the rest of the country.[4] Given the strength and loyalty of the Kurdish armed forces (*peshmerga*) and the passion of the Kurdish people for their own state, it is very difficult to imagine that the Kurds would take a step backwards on their long journey towards independence.

This leaves Baghdad in effective control of roughly one-third of the country, stretching south to Basra, across the Shi'a Arab heartland. While the ISIS advance has galvanised the Shi'a Arabs and brought a renewed sense of solidarity, which is perhaps best captured by the sudden rousing of various Shi'a Arab militias into a relatively united force who surged north to stanch the ISIS advance, the community remains deeply divided along complex political and religious lines. Further, the Shi'a Arab militias pose a sequence of critical challenges to the integrity of the Iraqi state for several reasons. Firstly, they are avowedly sectarian in nature and have been responsible for enacting deadly retribution on Sunni Arab civilian populations;[5] secondly, they operate largely independent of Baghdad's control and owe their allegiance not to the state but to their respective religio-political hierarchies; and thirdly many are armed, trained and in some cases directly commanded by the Iranian regime.

It is a mistake, however, to see the current conflict in Iraq as purely constituted by the three grinding tectonic plates of ISIS, Kurdistan and the Shi'a Arab militias. Iraqi identity is, and always has been, a complex and contested issue with both the often discussed separation into the three dominant groups of 'Arab Sunnis', 'Kurds' and 'Shi'a Arabs'[6] and the imposition of a collective 'Iraqi' identity by the state (such as under the Ba'th) being widely resisted in Iraq. Instead, Iraq is home to a complex array of divergent, intersecting and often competing notions of identity and myriad

social strata. Firstly, identity politics in Iraq is convoluted by the vast number of religious and ethnic divides that do not neatly dissect the nation into a series of mutually exclusive groups. Beyond the three most prominent groups mentioned above, Iraq has historically been home to a number of smaller 'racial and religious minorities … [including] Turkomans, Persians, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Jews, Yazidis, Sabeans, and others'.[7] Secondly, within and across each of these broad categories are more intricate differences, with many sectors of Iraqi society capable of being further broken down by political allegiances, tribal affiliations, class hierarchies, gender differences and urban versus rural parochialisms. What is evident here is that Iraq is a complex ideological landscape, home to a large swathe of highly politicised efforts by a number of competing or overlapping factions to assert notions of a historically legitimate 'identity'.

The complexity of Iraq's identity politics is also highlighted by the deadly ISIS advance and everything it has unleashed. Most of the myriad Iraqi people have nothing invested in the power struggles of marauding zealots, opportunistic separatists or rampaging militiamen. It would be an understatement to say that since the ISIS onslaught, Iraq has witnessed a profound fracturing of its delicate cultural mosaic and that the most vulnerable citizens – the small ethno-religious minorities and especially the women and children – have suffered immensely. Christian, Assyrian and Yazidi populations have been particularly targeted in a number of gruesome campaigns. In the Sinjar Mountains, Yazidis have been slaughtered en masse, with thousands more fleeing for their lives. In Mosul, Christians were given stark ultimatums to flee, convert or face their death. Women, including girls as young as 14, have been forced into marriage, gang raped or sold as sex slaves. Boys as young as 12, if not systematically executed, have been kidnapped, indoctrinated, armed and trained to serve as child soldiers. This says nothing of the thousands who have fled their homes to become internally displaced or to huddle in refugee camps across borders. It also says nothing of Iraqis who have endured unimaginable suffering and who continue to live in fear for their lives from the next suicide bomber, coalition airstrike, fake police checkpoint or sectarian vendetta.

There is simply no way to fully comprehend all of this – the deadly ISIS advance, the Kurdish seizure of the disputed territories, the rousing of

Shi'a Arab militias and the unspeakable humanitarian tragedies unfolding across Iraq – without coming to terms with the complex history of state–society relations in this deeply fragmented nation. However, most pundits have framed recent events in terms of their immediate past and without a rich contextual backdrop to their evolution. They have pointed to the failings of the al-Maliki government and his rising authoritarianism, to the violent sectarianism that has gripped Iraq, particularly since the civil war of 2006–8, to the failures of the Iraqi political elite to author a new and cohesive national narrative after the ousting of the Ba'thist regime, to the catastrophic mistakes made by the US-led occupation following the 2003 intervention and further back to the legacy of Saddam's brutal dictatorship.

It is undeniable that these issues have all played a significant role in shaping contemporary Iraqi politics, and while some are therefore discussed in this volume, this book moves beyond facile short-sighted analysis to place the complex and contested nature of state–society relations in Iraq today within a broader and deeper historical analysis than is typically offered. The central arguments and the key contributions of this book are twofold. Firstly, the book aims to situate Iraq's current crisis within its broader contextual background, arguing that a unique set of historical events has converged to provide the catalyst that triggered the current chaos. While acknowledging that not every constituent element of Iraqi society can be captured in a single volume,[8] the argument here is that no assessment of the situation brought on by ISIS and no attempt to resolve it is complete without an appreciation of the *longue durée* of Iraq's complex state–society relations. Secondly, this book argues that the rise of ISIS is just the most recent signal that traditional methods for dissecting the complexity of Iraqi politics have mostly been premised on outdated notions, leading to reductive insights and simplistic visions. Beyond the overwhelming emphasis on failed occupations, cruel megalomaniacal tyrants and bloodthirsty ethno-religious factions are an Iraqi people who have routinely agitated against the state, advocated for legitimate and accountable government and called for inter-communal harmony. As demonstrated by the contributors to this volume, the Iraqi people can no longer be considered the docile objects of history, passive spectators to their own dominion. Instead the book articulates a wide variety of multifaceted and intersecting narratives that together

demonstrate the complexity of state–society relations in Iraq, its nuances and diversity, its advances and setbacks, its challenges and achievements. It is in the aggregate of these stories that we find the seeds of a future Iraq in which the relationship between the Iraqi state and the broader society moves beyond traditional patterns of oppression and cruelty, of dangerous rhetoric and divisive politics, towards a sustained and genuine engagement with the complex matrix of socio-cultural relations that constitute the broader citizen body.

Framing State and Society in Iraq

The political historiography of state–society relations in Iraq has typically occurred along three fundamental lines of scholarly enquiry. The first is what might be termed a structuralist state-centric paradigm that emphasises the formal relationship between the state and its official institutions and other traditional sites of power (tribes, etc.) or key oppositional political parties. In this work, power is held by certain elites who dictate their respective vision to society. This model dates back to the work of Thomas Hobbes who emphasised the need for an all-powerful and all-encompassing state – a *leviathan* – to govern the otherwise bellicose and chaotic nature of human society.[9] In this new state, Hobbes believed that people ought to cede their personal freedoms to the state, creating a direct relationship between the isolated individual and their government; there would be no need for 'society' which would only breed factionalism, parochialism and dissent.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century such notions were challenged by prominent scholars such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. For Marx, disparities in socio-economic class created protagonists of political change; the state was a 'superstructure' designed to entrench and further the political and economic interests of the dominant class.[10] Providing a more nuanced view of state–society relations, Max Weber defined the state according to his oft-cited minimalist criterion: 'the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory'.[11] However, Weber was also sensitive to constituent layers of political power in a given society (social stratification) that included Marx's class divisions but also emphasised traditional

modes of power such as patrimonialism. In a patrimonial political system, authority is stretched upwards from the traditional and pre-modern familial and tribal hierarchies to the state, whose ruler is severely constrained by such power relations.

Despite their emphasis on class divisions or patrimonial networks, Marx and Weber shared with Hobbes the assumption that the state was the primary agent of political power. This went on to have a profound influence on studies of state–society relations from the middle of the twentieth century. For example, 'modernisation theories' tended to overstate the relationship between the centre (the state) and periphery (society), believing that the policies set in the capital had a direct and linear impact on shaping the broader society.[12] Other state-centric approaches emphasised the role of key state institutions, arguing that the state not only governed, it also shaped people's social interactions – society – via the complex and intersecting apparatuses of law, bureaucracy, executive power and the (perceived) legitimate use of violence to maintain order.[13]

Until recently, the bulk of scholarly studies of Middle East politics have (explicitly or implicitly) adopted one or another of the frameworks outlined above.[14] The same can be said of studies of Iraq. Perhaps most notably, Kanan Makiya's towering indictment of state violence, coercion, torture and oppression under the Ba'thist regime led him to conclude that Saddam's Iraq had 'aimed at the manufacture of a Hobbesian world'.[15] For Makiya the Ba'thist leviathan had completely annihilated political opposition and civil society and had instead built a 'Republic of Fear' that no one dared to criticise. Providing more nuanced critiques, several seminal studies of Iraq's political history have been conducted along Weberian and Marxist lines. The first is the work of the famous Iraqi political sociologist Ali al-Wardi, whose seven-volume *Aspects of the Social History of Modern Iraq* analysed the contours of Iraqi political culture. Al-Wardi argued that Iraq's modernisation had been superficial and that the nation was a fragmented social order riven by a fundamental schism between the state (and the civilised values of modernity) and traditional patrimonial sites of power (such as tribal and familial hierarchies).[16] Along similar lines, Hanna Batatu conducted an overtly 'classic sociological class analysis – an analysis that draws essentially upon the insights of Karl Marx and Max Weber'[17] to examine the relationship between the state and the various

opposition movements that emerged among the political classes, especially the communists. Two further examples are worth mentioning here. The first is Charles Tripp's Weberian analysis of the power and influence of patrimonial networks (patrons, tribes) on the Iraqi state.[18] The second is Adeed Dawisha's more explicit adoption of Weber's approach to his study of governance, national identity and democracy through the course of the twentieth century.[19] While each of the above provide rich insights into the machinations of political power in Iraq, their utilisation of Weberian and Marxist approaches led to an understanding of the Iraqi state as little more than a mechanism for the few to enforce their vision on the passive many. In such accounts, power is contested between the state and other key actors and institutions – tribes, political opposition movements – with little mention of how the broader Iraqi society received, engaged, interpreted or resisted this process.

The second key approach to state–society relations is what we can refer to as a post-structuralist approach in which power is conceived as nonlinear, a complex and ongoing negotiation between state and society. The origins of this model can be found in the works of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who saw the state as much more than an instrument via which the bourgeoisie engaged in physical or ideological coercion. For Gramsci, the state was embroiled in an ongoing, overlapping and untidy process of maintaining its authority (or 'hegemony') over the complex matrix of political, social, religious and cultural sites of power that constitute the wider citizen body.[20] Key to the political negotiations that constitute hegemony was the role of intellectuals, with Gramsci differentiating between the 'traditional' intellectual who is bound to the ideas of the ruling class and the 'organic' intellectual who promotes counter-hegemonic discourses. However, it was Michel Foucault who developed further the notion that competing discourses constitute state–society relations. Throughout his work, Foucault downplayed the role of the state, its formal institutions and dominant ideologies as agents of political change to emphasise instead the power held and exerted by the myriad decentralised networks that make up a given society.[21] In a lecture delivered in 1976, Foucault put this more clearly by contending that:

> In a society such as ours there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body,

> and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association.[22]

The post-structuralist approach to state–society relations ushered in detailed critiques of the notion that the Middle Eastern state was an all-powerful leviathan or that it was a product of purely class struggles or patrimonial networks. Indeed one does not have to subscribe to all of Nazih Ayubi's conclusions to see that his central argument was that behind the façade of state power across the Middle East lay a complex discursive struggle for hegemony.[23]

This process of discursive negotiation between the state and society has been central to several studies of Iraq. Focusing on the top-down manipulation of discourse by the Ba'th, such studies demonstrate the extreme lengths the regime went to in order to enforce the regime's hegemony. By manipulating discourses as diverse as state media and Mesopotamian folklore the Ba'th sought to inculcate a shared sense of national identity, to indoctrinate the people towards patriotism and to gain the consent of the people and maintain power.[24] Eric Davis broadens this analysis to document the complex and dynamic interplay between such state-sponsored discourses and the role played by various 'organic' intellectuals in offering competing memories. In his cogent analysis, Davis juxtaposes the Ba'thist sponsored 'Project for the Writing of History', in which Iraqi writers, historians, academics and artists were commandeered by the state to help re-engineer the past for Ba'thist purposes, with the proliferation of counter-hegemonic discourses – oppositional literature and intellectual production – during the Ba'thist period. A similar focus on such counter-hegemonic discourses and oppositional narratives can be found in other analyses of various scholarly works, media, literature and poetry which offered alternative, even hybridised, versions of what it meant to be an Iraqi.[25] While all of these studies emphasise the political significance of these counter-cultural trends in Iraq, it must be remembered that such discourses typically circulated in elite intellectual and literary circles and it remains unclear as to the extent to which such discourses either played a role in shaping the Iraqi state or penetrated the fabric of the broader society.

This points to a third model of Iraqi political historiography, which has sought to emphasise the dynamic interplay between the state and the broader society. This model has its origins in the work of Joel Migdal, who proposed a 'state-in-society' approach in which the state is viewed not as above or separate from society but rather as just *one* entity within society that structures social relations in a given polity. The state is therefore often in direct competition with other socio-political entities – the social class or family, the tribe or village, the ethnic or religious group – that enforce rules and structure behaviour.[26] Migdal's approach therefore deviates from the structuralist, state-centric approach and from the post-structuralist discursive approach to emphasise the need to

> look back and forth between the top reaches of the state and local society. One must see how the organisation of society, even in remote areas, may dictate the character and capabilities of politics at the centre, as well as how the state (often in unintended ways) changes society.[27]

Migdal's state-in-society approach has been adopted to varying degrees by several seminal studies of Middle East politics.[28] The same can be said for various studies of modern Iraqi political history. Both Peter Sluglett and Toby Dodge point out that although there are several key reasons the British failed in their attempt to build a modern state structure in Iraq, principal among them is their failure to understand the complex and delicate nature of Iraqi society.[29] The British sought to impose state institutions on a society that they did not understand and did not consult with, and they artificially empowered a small and carefully chosen band of Sunni Arab urban elites to inherit this new state and rule on behalf of the Empire. 'Thus in mandatory Iraq', as Peter Sluglett concludes, 'social forces were not greatly engaged with the state … the state was not firmly rooted in society and was thus "up for grabs" to the highest or, more relevantly, the most militarily effective, bidder'.[30]

Several recent studies of the Ba'thist period have followed along similar lines. In her nuanced work, Dina Khoury demonstrates how, under the Ba'th, the practice and discourse of war became a way of governing that not only transformed the state (its policies and key institutions) but also shaped the contours of Iraqi society, regulating 'the inner emotional self of

the Iraqi individuals as he or she experienced the war'.[31] Along similar lines, Achim Rohde demonstrates the complex 'ways in which state and society interacted on the ground, namely: in public discourse, as regards the regime's gender policies, social norms, concepts of masculinity and femininity as well as the arts'.[32] While Rohde employs a Gramscian/Foucauldian approach to his analysis, he does so in order to capture the perspectives of ordinary Iraqis rather than the discourses circulated among the elite intellectual classes.[33] Contrary to the notion that Ba'thist Iraq was dominated by an all-powerful leviathan, that power rested in class divisions or patrimonial networks, or that the only contrast to Ba'thist hegemony was intellectual discourse, studies such as Khoury's and Rohde's reveal the degree of political bargaining that occurs between any state and the broader society.

Finally, it is worth noting that several recent studies of Iraqi state–society relations have called for a historiography 'from below', an embrace of plural memories, low-brow culture and grassroots politics. In his study, Fanar Haddad analysed the rise of sectarianism as a dominant discourse following the 1991 uprisings and the 2003 intervention. His focus on seemingly mundane symbolism and banal cultural products (such as certain YouTube videos and militia songs) demonstrated how sectarianism rapidly transformed into a form of mass group identity where the symbolism of the 'sect' clashed with the symbolism of the new Iraqi 'state'.[34] Similarly, Sargon Donabed's historiography of the Assyrians of Iraq illuminates the complex relationship between the state, its varying regimes and its segments by highlighting the overlapping boundaries of identity and political dissidence at the grassroots level and by juxtaposing the Assyrian experience alongside that of Iraq's dominant communities, namely the Arabs and Kurds.[35] In terms of grassroots activism, Benjamin Isakhan has documented the rise of various spontaneous civil society networks, unions, protest movements and media outlets that sprung up in the wake of the 2003 intervention to fill the gap between the promise of a new and democratic state and the realities of occupation, violence, and the steady return to authoritarianism under the government of al-Maliki.[36] Such a focus on 'politics from below' is also central to a recent work entitled *Writing the Modern History of Iraq*.[37] Here, the editors argue that Iraqi historiography ought to move beyond the analysis of formal sites of state politics and its institutions, as well as traditional sites of power (tribal, sectarian, ethnic)

to develop a fuller appreciation of the multitude of actors and layers of politics that have shaped Iraqi history.

Chapter Summaries

This edited collection therefore builds on such works to examine the shifting and complex nature of Iraqi state–society relations over time. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on as yet unstudied primary sources and offering fresh empirical insights, the contributors explore the complex nature of Iraqi state–society relations via an investigation into the dynamic interplay between four interconnected sites of power: the Iraqi state and its formal institutions and networks of power (such as the military, the state education system, the electoral commission); formal socio-religious institutions and networks that are typically independent from the state but wield significant power over their constituents (such as religious institutions, ethno-nationalist movements, oppositional political parties, tribal hierarchies); civil society movements and grassroots activists who can be both formal institutions or informal networks who seek to fill the void between the state and society by agitating for change and advocating on behalf of their constituents, sometimes on an ad hoc basis (such as student movements, protestors, cultural clubs); and the discourses espoused by individuals and groups who do not necessarily organise, meet or advocate in any physical sense but who create counter-hegemonic narratives (such as historians, novelists, intellectuals). By closely examining the relationship between the constituent layers and multiple dynamics that have shaped, and continue to shape, Iraq state–society relations, this volume provides unique insights into the political and social movements that influenced Iraqi politics from its inception as a modern nation state through to the period that has followed the US-led intervention of 2003. More broadly, this book examines the roots of the most significant problems facing the contemporary Iraqi state – sectarianism, authoritarianism, violent Islamism, ethnic separatism – and argues that no effort to overcome these deep-seated and intractable problems will succeed without an understanding of their past.

In Part I of the volume ('Colonial Rule and the Making of Modern Iraq'), the contributors address the founding of the modern state of Iraq.

This began with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the British decision to unite the three previously autonomous *vilayets* of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul into the modern state of Iraq in 1921, installing the Hashemite king, Faysal I. In the process, the British colonial officials not only imposed borders, they also installed their own political institutions in a system of direct colonial rule over what had been a confederation of tribes, ethnic and religious enclaves, and local power holders. Rather than growing organically out of society (indeed Iraqi society was not consulted in the process), the new Iraq was hastily given the trappings of European statehood: a centralised administration with a national parliament pliant to British interests; a national military; important state-wide institutions such as that of education; a functioning economy integrated into the international market; an independent judiciary and legal system; as well as the important symbols of statehood such as a flag, national anthem and so on. Despite, or perhaps because of, such top-down state building, the Iraqi body politic remained distant, diffuse and decentralised without a stake in the process or a united purpose or direction.

Naturally, sites of resistance emerged from the very beginning. In his chapter Fadi Dawood focuses on the Assyrian and Armenian Christians in the Baʿqubah refugee camp that was established at the end of World War I. He documents how the British fear of Assyrian–Armenian violence led them to deliberately invest in traditional tribal and religious leaders. In doing so, the British inadvertently created a power vacuum that was promptly filled by new political movements that offered a counter-narrative to the British-backed religious and tribal heads and advocated violent revenge against the communities that had attacked them.[38] Along similar lines, Arbella Bet-Shlimon's chapter examines how further fragmentations in Iraqi society were caused by mass urbanisation, industrialisation and changing demographics (such as a sudden mass of urban poor) in Iraqi cities such as Baghdad and Kirkuk. While Baghdad forged ahead as the political and mercantile capital with its symbolic projections of a proud and prosperous Arab state, the multi-ethnic people of Kirkuk resisted the British created state and the authority of the Sunni Arab political elite of Baghdad.

Other resistance took the form of specific critiques of the newly imposed state institutions. For her part, Hilary Falb Kalisman focuses on

the Iraqi education system and documents the fact that many Iraqis were infuriated by its poor quality, claiming that the British had deliberately created a system that would provide just enough education to transform them into servants of empire, but not enough to create a class of educated Iraqis who could eventually govern the state independent of their colonial overlords. When Iraqis took over the education system the quality gradually improved, fuelling a virulent civil society that, not surprisingly, endorsed various anti-imperialist ideologies and called for independence from British hegemony. The problem, however, was that such anti-British sentiment was promptly quashed by another of Iraq's newly created institutions, the military. In his chapter, Ibrahim Al-Marashi demonstrates how, well before the rise of the Ba'th in 1968, the Iraqi military under the Hashemite monarchy had become both a key symbol of Iraqi nationalism and strength while at the same time being a Sunni Arab dominated instrument of state-sanctioned exclusion deployed to coerce religious and ethnic minorities, tribal groups or political parties into forced acquiescence. Resistance nonetheless persisted. As Hilla Peled-Shapira documents in her chapter, the rapid improvement in Iraq's education system had also spawned seminal Iraqi authors such as Shakir Khusbak and Ghaib Tuma Farman. Such authors developed an alternative narrative to that promulgated by the Iraqi state, exposing its contradictions, persecutions and violence with a particular focus on the 1952 Intifada, in which the Iraqi Communist Party and other left-leaning opposition groups staged mass protests before being violently suppressed by the state.

The suppression of such political opposition movements would ultimately spell the end of the Hashemite monarchy. A plethora of different independence movements sprung up across the Middle East after World War II seeking to end European influence. Among the most prominent of these political movements in Iraq was the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, which had especially wide appeal in some intellectual circles and among the rank and file of Iraq's military. In July 1958 the Ba'th and other key political movements had gathered enough momentum to storm Baghdad in a violent coup that saw all but one member of the royal family murdered. The period following the 1958 revolution is covered in Part II of this volume ('Republican Iraq: State–Society Relations under Authoritarian Rule'). Despite its bloody birth, under the leadership of Brigadier General

Abd al-Karim Qasim, the Republican period began as an epoch of promise, witnessing a flourishing of political parties, professional associations, labour movements and intellectual groups who fervently debated the political events and ideologies of their time. However, as Jordi Tejel demonstrates in his cogent chapter for this volume, Qasim's relationship with Iraqi civil society gradually deteriorated. For example, when Qasim reacted to the student protests of December 1962 by arresting hundreds of students and lecturers, he effectively eroded his own support base and presaged the collapse of his regime. A few months later, in February 1963, the Ba'th seized power in another bloody coup in which Qasim and hundreds of his supporters were executed.

While the Ba'th held power briefly in 1963, it was not until they staged another violent coup in 1968 that they managed to take the reins of the state. From the earliest days of their rule, but especially from the ascendency of Saddam Husayn in 1979, the Ba'th developed their own potent cocktail of extreme violence and oppression mixed with more subtle forms of co-optation and indoctrination, a savvy propaganda machine designed to coerce people into patriotism. One such example is documented by Amatzia Baram's contribution to this volume, in which he demonstrates how the Ba'th commandeered intellectual discourse by encouraging Marxist intellectuals to publish. This gave credibility to their claim of being a secular and revolutionary political party and legitimated them in the eyes of certain members of Iraq's educated elite.

Beyond cleverly manipulating intellectual discourse, the Ba'th also deployed their mixture of brutal suppression and subtle co-optation in their relationship with many of Iraq's significant ethno-religious factions. In this volume two distinct examples are documented. In the first, Samuel Helfont demonstrates how the Ba'th went to great lengths to try to infiltrate the powerful Shi'a religious seminary (*hawza*) in Najaf. Ba'thist records indicate that the regime coerced a number of religious students and senior scholars to work for the state by spying on their brethren. The rewards for such cooperation were high and included being granted freedoms and privileges denied other Shi'a Arabs. This enabled the Ba'th to crush any resistance from within the Shi'a Arab religious establishment via their vast network of loyalists and spies inside the *hawza*. The second example of the Ba'th's complex relations with ethno-religious groups is that of the

Assyrian Christians – taken up here by Alda Benjamen and Sargon George Donabed. The authors begin by noting that in the early 1970s the Assyrians and several other groups (such as the Kurds) were formally accorded significant rights such as the ability to teach in their own languages. However, despite such early and official overtures to the Assyrians, it was not long before they felt the heavy hand of the Ba'thist state in their everyday lives. As just one example, when rural tribal Assyrians became involved in Kurdish rebellions against the Ba'thist state, the Ba'th destroyed many Assyrian villages, forcibly removed populations and bulldozed farms and churches.

Part III of this book ('Communal Strife and Re-emergent Authoritarianism in Post-2003 Iraq') moves forward to analyse the period that followed the US-led intervention in 2003. After toppling the Ba'thist regime, the coalition undertook an ambitious and unprecedented statebuilding project in which they would attempt to turn Iraq into a liberal democracy, underpinned by free market capitalism and constituted by a citizen body free to live in peace and prosperity. To build this new Iraqi state, the US began by uprooting the old one via a wholesale de-Ba'thification of Iraq. As cruel as the highest echelons of the Ba'thist state had been, ousting those who served it was to have a series of immediate and devastating consequences: it marginalised the ruling Sunni Arab minority; it forced thousands into unemployment and poverty; it prevented experienced bureaucratic and administrative personnel from helping to stabilise Iraq; and it brought about the disbanding of every tier of the Iraqi army, which in turn created an immediate upsurge in violence.[39]

From the ashes of the Ba'thist state, the coalition authorities worked closely with a handful of carefully selected Iraqi elites, most of whom had been in exile for decades, to devise an entirely new Iraqi state. Driven by a top-down model of state building, they set about revitalising Iraq's judiciary, investing millions in reforming various arms of Iraq's sprawling bureaucracy and created various public oversight mechanisms that, in theory, would prevent the abuse of power.[40] In their chapter, Marc Lemieux and Shamiran Mako analyse the cornerstone of the US-led state-building plan, the three provincial and three national elections that have occurred since 2005. Lemieux and Mako point out that the failures of Iraq's democratisation was caused by a mixture of complex variables: ethno-religious political

parties born of the struggle against the Ba'thist state, the ill-conceived and ham-fisted coalition approach to top-down state building and the failures of the Iraqi political elite to accept institutional reforms and unite behind a narrative that spoke to a united and prosperous future for Iraq. Principal among such causes of democratic failure, however, is that at every stage in the process both the Iraqi political elite and the occupational authorities failed to engage the broader Iraqi society in managing the transition from dictatorship to democracy. It is little wonder that cruel visions soon emerged to fill the vacuum between the state and society. Between 2006 and 2008 Iraq rapidly descended into a dark and unprecedented period of violence, dominated by the sectarian civil war fought between the Sunni and Shi'a Arabs.

Although things were much more peaceful in the Kurdish north, the two key political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), sought to utilise their influence over Baghdad not only to press for increasing degrees of autonomy, but also to try to bring the oil-rich but ethnically diverse province of Kirkuk under their jurisdiction. Although the Kurds are discussed several times throughout this book, Gareth Stansfield's chapter is the only one dedicated exclusively to this important sector of Iraqi society. Stansfield's chapter primarily concerns the emergence of the Kurdish autonomous zone after the Gulf War of 1991 and the fact that since then, and especially after the intervention of 2003, the Kurdish Region has emerged as a bastion of relative peace and freedom.[41] Although there have been many criticisms levelled at Kurdish politics ever since 1991 including the domination of the two main parties, allegations of nepotism and corruption and occasional crackdowns on dissenters and protestors, Stansfield also points to positive developments in Kurdish state society relations, including the rise and prominence of the Gorran ('Change') political party from 2009.

However, Baghdad did not follow the positive political developments of the north. Indeed, one key legacy of the US effort to bring democracy to Iraq has been that many elements within Iraq's Shi'a Arab political elite have viewed democracy through the lens of cynical majoritarianism, manipulating it to catapult themselves to power. This has had a further legacy, enabling the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to utilise his incumbency to maintain the veneer of democracy while becoming

increasingly dictatorial and authoritarian. Al-Maliki deployed a host of different strategies towards these ends: violent crackdowns on Iraqi civil society; blatant sectarian rhetoric; the creation of a shadow state loyal to himself; the concentration of military and political power in his own hands; and the routine intimidation and undermining of Iraq's key state institutions and mechanisms of public oversight including the judiciary, the electoral commission and those responsible for investigating corruption.[42]

In his chapter, Benjamin Isakhan traces the impact of al-Maliki's autocratic approach on Iraq's delicate state–society relations with a focus on the period following the US withdrawal at the end of 2011. He documents the long list of grievances held by the Sunni Arab minority including their political marginalisation since 2003, the continuing de-Ba'thification, mass unemployment, insufficient infrastructure and public services, the arrest and detention of thousands of Sunnis without trial, the overly harsh treatment of female prisoners and – most dramatically – the issuing of arrest warrants and later death sentences for several high profile Sunni politicians. Isakhan demonstrates how the failure of al-Maliki's government to address such grievances led to mass social unrest in Sunni Arab parts of Iraq. When al-Maliki reacted by violently suppressing legitimate protests against his regime, he further antagonised the Sunni Arabs and thereby created the political and security vacuum that was to be exploited by ISIS.

Together, the chapters presented in this volume trace the complex nature of state–society relations in Iraq and the crucial role successive periods of Iraq's political history played in shaping both the state and society. In terms of colonial Iraq, the focus on issues of societal fragmentation, exclusionary state building, the emergence of a culture of dissent and its frequent quashing by the state demonstrate how early Iraqi state formation sowed the seeds of both violent dictatorship and the myriad ways in which Iraqi society learned to resist state cruelty. In terms of Republican Iraq, the chapters collected here not only demonstrate the tyrannical nature of state–society relations under the Ba'th but also demonstrate the complex ways in which Iraqi's of many different backgrounds subverted state doctrine. The legacy of state–society relations under such a brutal dictatorship clearly had dramatic consequences after the toppling of the regime in 2003 in terms of ethnic separatism, violent sectarianism and a steady return to authoritarian forms of power

under the government of al-Maliki. The contributions concentrating on post-2003 Iraq demonstrate such consequences but also importantly point to the ways in which the failures of US-led top-down state building coupled with a power-hungry elite further fractured Iraq. While the Kurdish north has forged ahead on its road to independence, the failures of Baghdad to engage the Sunni Arab population have led to the rise of ISIS and its profound and violent challenge to state–society relations in Iraq.

The chapters therefore demonstrate that foreign intervention, war, authoritarian rule and ethno-sectarian conflict make Iraq an unfortunate case study through which to interrogate the complex matrix of consent, negotiation, resistance and counter-discourse that constitute state–society relations. The fresh empirical insights offered in each of the chapters means that the volume does not simply trace important historical developments in Iraq, it also makes a substantive contribution to the literature on Iraqi politics and, more broadly, to the study of state–society relations. The key lesson is that the deep fracturing of Iraq's complex state–society relations cannot be repaired by military force, by imposed institutions, by centralising power or by suppressing the web of socio-political forces that shape society, but by inculcating a sense of collective identity towards the notion of a cohesive, peaceful and prosperous future – despite all the challenges and differences.

Notes

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3. Gareth R. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).
4. Benjamin Isakhan, 'The Iraqi Kurdish response to the "Islamic State": political leverage in times of crisis', in Gareth R. Stansfield (ed.), *The Kurdish Question Revisited: Essays on the Transformation of the Kurdish Situation in the Middle East* (London: Hurst, 2016).

5. Kareem Fahim, 'Government allies are said to have slaughtered dozens of Sunnis in Iraq', *New York Times*, 29 January 2015. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/world/middleeast/government-allies-are-said-to-have-killed-dozens-of-sunnis-in-iraq.html?_r=0 (accessed 17 June 2015).
6. Throughout this volume certain authors refer to the 'Arab Sunnis', 'Kurds' and 'Shi'a Arabs' as if they are monolithic groups. The editors and the authors are sensitive to the many nuanced disputes and differences within each of these groups with several such difference discussed at length: Sunni Arab tribesmen vs Islamists; the entrenched Kurdish political dynasties of the KDP and PUK vs the recent momentum of the Gorran movement; the Shi'a Arabs of the *hawza* vs secular Shi'a Arab student protestors in Baghdad. Nonetheless, the broader collective terms are sometimes used for the sake of brevity and to capture overarching political and historical movements and moments that were primarily driven by one distinct group.
7. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 13.
8. There are several key elements of Iraqi society that are unfortunately not captured in adequate detail in this volume. Foremost among these are the women of Iraq, who make up approximately half the population and, in addition to the trials and tribulations endured by male Iraqis, have faced their own gender-based challenges throughout Iraq's complex history. In addition, the manifold factions that constitute Iraqi society are not covered equally. For example, while the Kurds (roughly 20 per cent of the Iraqi population) are mentioned many times throughout the volume, they are the primary focus of only one chapter. Conversely, the Assyrian Christians (whose already small numbers have dwindled substantially in recent years) are the primary focus of two chapters and mentioned in a few others. The reason for these absences and/or inconsistencies is twofold: firstly, the volume does not purport to cover every aspect of Iraqi state–society relations or to do so equally proportional to population; secondly, and more importantly, the volume focuses on critical and as yet under-explored elements of Iraqi state–society relations across the three time periods.
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10. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* [1843], ed. Joseph O'Malley, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
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17. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 5.
18. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 5–6.
19. Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 2, 9.
20. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [1929–35], ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (New York: International, 1971).
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23. Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1995).
24. Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968–1989* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
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30. Ibid., p. 215.
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