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DESTROYING THE SYMBOLS OF BAAHIST IRAQ

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Since the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces in 2003, the Iraqi people have not only suffered a devastating death toll and witnessed the erosion of every aspect of their civil infrastructure, they also have endured an extraordinary period of cultural and historical destruction. This began during the battle phase of the war, which saw untold degrees of “collateral damage” to sensitive historic and cultural sites across the nation. This was followed, in the very earliest days of the now more than seven-year occupation, by a period of looting and arson in which many cultural and historical sites were destroyed. Key institutions such as the Iraq National Museum (INM) and the Iraq National Library and Archive (INLA) were targeted, as well as other sites like the Bayt al-Hikma and the al-Awqaf libraries, Iraq’s Museum of Modern Art, an Abbasid-era palace, an Ottoman-era mosque, and the Hashemite Parliament House. In addition, many Iraqi civilians and foreigners have become involved in highly co-ordinated black market operations that systematically loot sensitive archaeological sites across Iraq and smuggle the antiquities out of the country and on to the highly lucrative international black market. The ongoing hostility between varying factions within Iraq has



Figure 1.1. A defaced mural of Saddam Hussein at Camp Speicher (al-Sahra Air Force Base). Photo by William N. Kent, Winter 2006.

also had ruinous consequences for Iraq’s cultural heritage with artifacts, symbols, and monuments being caught in the crossfire or deliberately targeted by opposing ethno-religious sectarian groups.

None of this tragic tale will come as a surprise to members of TAARII and regular readers of this publication, many of whom are involved in documenting and analyzing the ongoing cultural and historical destruction of

Iraq. By now, a whole host of scholarly studies exists on this topic including the work of leading Iraqi and international scholars, archaeologists, historians, cultural and heritage workers, diplomats, government officials, and military officers.¹ What is curiously absent from the existing literature on the cultural and historical destruction of Iraq, however, is the contemporaneous program to symbolically De-Baathify the nation in which key monuments, state buildings, murals, and statues have been defaced or destroyed. Indeed, while the consequences of what might be called the “bureaucratic” or “militaristic” dimensions of Iraq’s De-Baathification have been discussed in much of the literature, the symbolic dimension of De-Baathification and its consequences for national identity and social cohesion has remained an under-studied and underappreciated factor.

Current research by the author therefore seeks to address this lacuna. Firstly, it aims to catalog some of the more significant examples of the symbolic destruction of Baathist Iraq since 1991, and especially since 2003. Secondly, the study aims to speculate on the implications that the symbolic destruction of Baathist Iraq have had on the socio-political landscape of the nation since the fall of the former

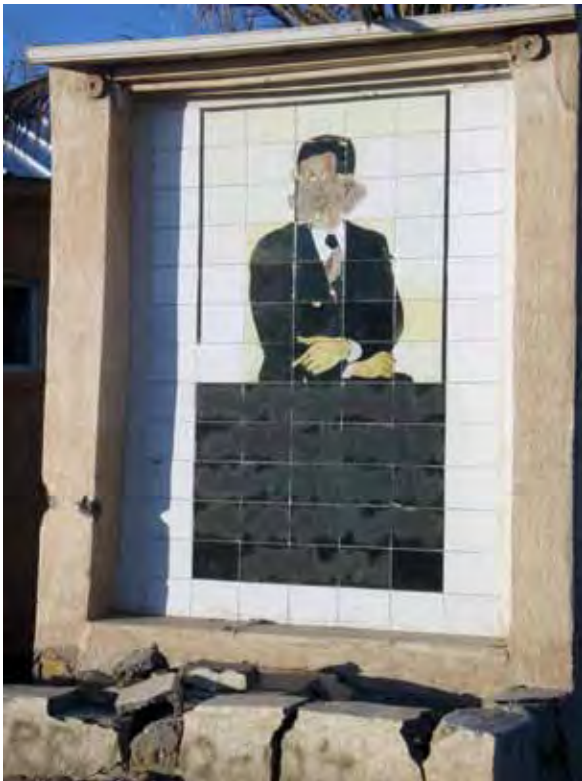


Figure 1.2. Another damaged mural of Saddam Hussein at Camp Speicher (al-Sahra Air Force Base). Photo by William N. Kent, Fall 2006.



Figure 1.3. The beginning of the dismantling of the Victory Arches, Baghdad. Photo by William N. Kent, Spring 2007.

regime. Finally, this research project aims to conclude by suggesting that Iraq needs to openly and honestly engage with its Baathist past and that such engagement may well provide the means by which a new post-Baathist Iraqi national identity can be developed.²

However, in order to come to terms with the significance of the destruction of Baathist Iraq, it is necessary to begin by briefly detailing the role that Iraq's cultural heritage has played in building national identity and social cohesion since the rise of the Baathist regime in 1968.³ Premised on their unique brand of secular nationalism, the Baath undertook an extensive and sustained cultural campaign in which the successes of nations past became a symbol of Iraq's potential as a united and prosperous state. This is particularly true of the rule of Saddam Hussein who spent a sizeable amount of

the nation's oil wealth to revive Iraqi folklore. He utilized the political power of popular culture to create national unity behind a distinctly "Iraqi" identity, one intimately connected to the glories of Iraq's history.

As part of their "Project for the Re-Writing of History," the Baath commandeered Iraqi authors and commissioned them to write works that sought to align Iraq's long and complex past with contemporary Baathist ideology. The Baath extended this project into the lived environment of the Iraqi people, erecting giant murals in which Hussein was situated amongst a curious pastiche of deeply nationalistic imagery including ancient Mesopotamian, classical Islamic, and modern military motifs. This increased during the Iran–Iraq War of the 1980s when the symbolic cultivation of Iraqi nationalism included the erection of several grandiose monuments that celebrate the alleged "victory" of Iraq over Iran, including the Martyr's Memorial, the Unknown Soldiers Monument, and the Victory Arches.

However, it is crucial to note at this point that Iraqi identity was (and is) far from monolithic and that official state narratives of "Iraqi" identity were



Figure 1.4. Another view of the dismantling of the Victory Arches, Baghdad. Photo by William N. Kent, Spring 2007.

widely contested. To cite just one well-known example, the Kurds adamantly resisted the “Arabization” of Iraq and their perpetual marginalization by the central Sunni Arab dominated state. Indeed, Baathist uses and abuses of Iraqi heritage must be understood as indicative of a tyrannical government and a megalomaniacal leader who was desperately trying to manipulate the fabric of cultural history to build legitimacy and maintain hegemony beyond its coercive power. At the same time, however, the entire symbolic nation-building project of Baathist Iraq did engender degrees of (admittedly uneven and often resisted) national identity and social cohesion. It is important to note that every aspect of their campaign was distinctly “Iraqi.” In other words, none of the different symbols or monuments that were appropriated or developed throughout the rule of the Baath were specifically designed to emphasise Sunni Arab, Kurdish, Shia Arab or another identity, but to emphasize a collective “Iraqi” identity.

However, all of this was to change dramatically with the military invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003. Here, the Coalition had set about a deliberate campaign to target the symbols of the Baathist epoch. As one British army officer put it: “Part of the directive was to destroy and dismantle anything which was part of Saddam Hussein’s regime.” In fact, Coalition forces did this with a kind of marauding efficiency. An entire epoch of state-produced symbols, monuments, and motifs was burnt, bullet ridden, or torn asunder. Indeed, a simple “Google image” search reveals thousands of photos in which Coalition soldiers can be seen ripping down statues, using sledge hammers on giant murals, vandalizing billboards, using buildings for target practice, and even urinating on monuments dedicated to Saddam. There is also a great deal of evidence

to suggest that Coalition soldiers have returned home with “souvenirs” from Baathist Iraq. The worst example of this are the British troops who smuggled out of Iraq a nine-foot statue of Saddam Hussein and resurrected it in the officers’ mess at their military base in Taunton, England.⁴

The next chapter in this tale is well known. In a carefully choreographed moment co-ordinated by the Coalition’s Psychological Operations Unit, one of the first things that the Coalition forces did when they rolled into Baghdad on April 9, 2003, was to target the giant bronze statue of Saddam in Firdos Square. Apparently jubilant Iraqis and U.S. troops seemed to work side-by-side to climb the statue and place first a U.S. and then an Iraqi flag over the face of Saddam. Finally, the statue was torn down and the severed head was dragged through the streets as Iraqis ostensibly continued to celebrate the fall of their former dictator. However, it is by now widely understood that these scenes do not represent the spontaneous actions of a people’s liberation, but were instead a very deliberate media stunt designed to promote the legitimacy of the war across a sceptical globe.

This was followed by an extensive project to symbolically De-Baathify post-Saddam Iraq initiated when Lewis Paul Bremer III was installed as the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) on the May 13, 2003. Indeed, Bremer’s first official act — written only three days after his arrival — was to issue “Order Number 1: De-Baathification of Iraqi Society.” Predictably, the order sought to disestablish the Baath party by “eliminating the party’s structures and removing its leadership from positions of authority and responsibility in Iraqi society.” While much has been made of the consequences of such De-Baathification, what is rarely mentioned is the blatant symbolic dimension to De-Baathification found

in this order. For example, Clause 4 decrees: “Displays in government buildings or public spaces of the image or likeness of Saddam Hussein or other readily identifiable members of the former regime or of symbols of the Baath Party or the former regime are hereby prohibited.”⁵

The effect of such De-Baathification meant that whatever elements remained of the Baathist state were now the official property of the CPA. This became immediately apparent as the Coalition began to set up a number of key military bases at Baathist sites such as in Saddam’s palaces and various government buildings. One such example occurred in January 2004 when the Coalition used the Baghdad Martyr’s Memorial as a military base. This site serves as a people’s shrine dedicated to the 500,000 Iraqi soldiers who died defending their country in an unpopular, lengthy, and brutal war. Comparable perhaps to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or other war memorials in Washington, as well as ANZAC memorials here in Australia, one cannot help but balk at the insensitivity of turning such a monument into a military base for use by a foreign occupying power.

The same can be said of the Coalitions use of the mausoleum dedicated to the “Father of Pan-Arabism” and the co-founder of the Baath Party, Michel Aflaq. This Syrian-born, French-educated Christian is widely respected across the Arab world not only for his enormous contribution to Arab political philosophy, but also for his egalitarian values and deep respect for Islamic ideals. The site comprises a tomb and a statue built by Saddam Hussein upon Aflaq’s death in 1989. As part of their program to symbolically De-Baathify Iraq, the Mausoleum was initially slated for demolition by the CPA before the decision sparked an outcry among Iraqi and international intellectuals.

Today, Aflaq's mausoleum, which falls inside the Green Zone, has reportedly been turned into something of a shopping mall-cum-recreation center-cum-makeshift barracks for Coalition soldiers. It houses a barbershop and pirate DVD stall among other retailers, as well as a "foosball" table and gym equipment. Directly underneath Aflaq's grave, soldiers sleep in cramped plywood quarters. As with the use of the Martyr's Memorial, one only has to imagine the use of comparable historical sites in other nations — consider a foosball table in the Lincoln memorial — to begin to come to terms with how such actions might offend the Iraqi people.

More recently, the democratically elected Iraqi government took initial steps towards furthering this process of symbolically De-Baathifying Iraq. In early 2007, the Shia- and Kurdish-dominated government organized the "Committee for Removing Symbols of the Saddam Era" and drew up extensive plans to destroy many of the symbols of their Sunni-dominated Baathist past. In fact, the dismantling of the Victory Arches began in earnest in February of 2007 and ten-foot chunks were cut out of the monument and carted away while some reports indicate that numerous U.S. troops and Iraqi bystanders removed parts of the monument as personal souvenirs. Such events were widely contested within Iraq, with Mustafa Khadimi, the founder of the Iraq Memory Foundation, saying of the Victory Arches, "We need to use these two swords as proof to further generations to show what happened to Iraqi people." However, it was not until the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, challenged Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki on the decision that the project was promptly brought to a halt. According to media reports, the reason for Khalilzad's intervention was "due to concerns the dismantling of the monument might further deepen the rift

between Iraq's Shiite majority and its Sunni minority."⁶ What is particularly interesting here is that the destruction of Iraq's cultural heritage was stopped — by the Coalition of all groups — in order to prevent the further breakdown of social cohesion and national identity in Iraq and to eschew more ethno-sectarian violence. This indicates at least tacit acknowledgement of the role such monuments have played in creating a unified Iraqi identity and that their destruction can contribute to deepening ethno-religious sectarian divides.

It is this connection between the symbolic destruction of Baathist Iraq and the consequences it may have had on the nation's socio-political order that most needs to be addressed. More work desperately needs to be done in order to understand the complex inter-relationships between national memory and identity politics in Iraq. As we have seen, most Iraqis had learned about the past through a Baathist lens, a tyrannical kaleidoscope of state propaganda, a history re-written to both justify oppression and coerce people into patriotism. This was underpinned by a very complex cultural-discursive campaign in which the ideology of the Baath was embedded into festivals, monuments, history books, and state buildings. This evolving research project therefore seeks to interrogate the role that the destruction of Iraq's Baathist monuments and symbols may have played in decreasing the Iraqi brand of nationalism that the Baath had managed to promulgate to varying degrees of success since the 1970s.

Today, Iraq not only faces the enormous challenge of re-constructing its infrastructure, implementing the rule of law, and enforcing security, it also faces the task of re-building the less tangible notions of a collective national identity and social cohesion. While this project certainly does not advocate what might be called a "Re-

Baathification" of Iraq or even a return to a secular nationalist government, it does argue that the Coalition and the incumbent Iraqi government have a responsibility to develop appropriate national discourses that are egalitarian and inclusive.

In doing so, Iraq could learn much from other twentieth century examples in which people have attempted to forge new versions of national identity that openly engage with both the traumas and the achievements of the past. For example, South Africa has many useful parallels to Iraq in that it was under heavy sanctions from the international community and that it was rife with cultural, religious, and ethnic tensions. However, the symbolic nation-building campaign that followed the end of Apartheid and the nation's bold engagement with the sufferings of the past helped it move towards reconciliation and reconstruction. In the case of post-Soviet Russia, the nation had the task of re-defining itself not only politically, economically, and ideologically, but also symbolically. To do this, many of the Soviet-era monuments were successfully transformed from icons of the Soviet Union to symbols of a united Russia.

With a new Iraqi government soon to emerge from the March 2010 elections and a significant scaling-back of Coalition troops to occur later this year, the Iraqi people have perhaps never been in greater need of a detailed understanding of the ongoing challenges and intractable problems they face. Much rests on Iraq's ability to deal with its past. This means that the Baathist epoch — as with every other era in Iraq's national history — needs to be engaged honestly and openly. The terror, coercion, and violence need to be acknowledged and the guilty brought to justice. Beyond this, however, Baathist Iraq needs to be understood in its moderately successful attempts to build a vision

of a united and prosperous future. The nation needs to move beyond simplistic approaches like total De-Baathification and away from reductive political ideology that emphasizes schisms rather than breaks them down. Indeed, if Iraq is to ever develop a post-Baathist national identity then it must come to terms with both the failures and successes of the former regime. Such an open and critical engagement with the past could not only create avenues of intercommunity dialogue, help placate ethno-religious violence and sectarianism, and facilitate the establishment of an inclusive political order, it could also ensure that the Iraqi people are not destined to repeat a past that has been largely torn down and destroyed.

¹ Some of the better literature on this topic can be found in the following edited

collections: Geoff Emberling and Katharyn Hanson, *Catastrophe! The Looting and Destruction of Iraq's Past* (Oriental Institute Museum Publications 28; Chicago: Oriental Institute Museum, 2008); Peter G. Stone and Joanne Farchakh-Bajjal, *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq* (Heritage Matters 1; Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008); and Lawrence Rothfield, *Antiquities Under Siege: Cultural Heritage Protection After the Iraq War* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008).

² I am indebted to various people and institutions for the ongoing development of this research. The genesis of this project occurred while I was working as a Research Fellow for the Griffith Islamic Research Unit at Griffith University, Australia. They not only supported my research but also provided funding for me to present the preliminary findings at several conferences across Australia and the United States in 2009. I must also thank Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi of Columbia University for inviting me to present a paper at the Middle

East Studies Association in Boston and Professor McGuire Gibson at the University of Chicago for providing some funds for me to present parallel papers in Chicago and New York. I am also grateful to TAARII, and particularly Stephanie Platz and Orit Bashkin, for hosting me whilst in Chicago. Finally, I am grateful for the ongoing support of my current institution, the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University, Australia.

³ Baathism originally developed in Damascus around 1940 and emigrated to Iraq in 1949 before the party began to gather momentum in the Iraqi armed forces. The Baath Party was to go on to play a crucial part in the 1958 Revolution and held power briefly in 1963 before ascending to dominance in 1968.

⁴ "Saddam Statue Erected In Somerset," *Sky News*, June 5, 2003.

⁵ L. P. Bremer, "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1: De-Baathification of Iraqi Society," May 15, 2003.

⁶ B. Dehghanpisheh, "Iraqis Not Happy, Saddam's Swords Coming Down," *Newsweek*, February 20, 2007.

IRAQ'S DISPLACED — BEYOND "TOLERANCE"

SUMMARY OF THE REFUGEE STUDIES CENTRE POLICY BRIEF #4*

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Between November 2002 and March 2003, the humanitarian aid regime prepared for an estimated 1 million "refugees" to flee Iraq in the aftermath of the Anglo-American invasion — *Operation Iraqi Freedom* — to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. However, six months after the fall of the Iraqi regime, few Iraqis had fled their country. The international aid regime had miscalculated and poorly understood the Iraqi peoples' response. In 2004, the camps were dismantled; pre-positioned food and other items were removed. Three years later, the world was caught off-guard as hundreds of thousands of Iraqis fled their homes in 2006 and 2007, seeking to escape

a collapse in security and deadly sectarian violence. Although estimates vary widely, about 2 million Iraqis fled their homes but did not cross national borders and between 1 and 2 million Iraqis traveled to Jordan and Syria, settling largely in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Amman. Others moved to Cairo and Istanbul, and many traveled much farther. UNHCR and other NGOs raced to set up reception centers and to provide emergency aid and measures for temporary protection.

Today we find that many Iraqi refugees maintain their distance from the UNHCR — for reasons including loss of faith in the willingness of politicians and officials to assist them, and

from fear of repatriation and its consequences. This report considers some of the key issues confronting them and those who remain "internally" displaced (within Iraq's national borders). It suggests that the displacement crisis has reached a critical stage — one in which, as international interest in Iraq declines, refugees will be expected to return and to reintegrate into a society profoundly marked by war and lack of security, civil conflict, and economic uncertainty. The report suggests that mass return is unlikely — that very large communities of Iraqis will continue to live under difficult circumstances in a series of Middle Eastern countries and that continuing displacement with-

in and from Iraq may stimulate further movement of long-distance migrants. It considers briefly the implications for states, refugee agencies, and NGOs, recommending careful consideration of policy options in order to avoid errors of judgement like those that contributed to the migration crisis of 2006–2007.

U.S. policy considers the military “surge” of 2007 to have returned stability to Iraq and improved security dramatically. The international aid regime has supported this view and in April 2009 the UNHCR declared that security had improved to the extent that people originating from most regions of Iraq should no longer be viewed as refugees. These developments raise a series of problems: Can displaced Iraqis return to their homes with confidence? Is it plausible to expect mass returns? What are the implications for refugees? Are their circumstances likely to change?

The U.S. government holds the position that security in Iraq is now such that U.S. troops may be pulled out and redeployed elsewhere, e.g., to Afghanistan. The facts on the ground, however, do not support this picture. In July 2008, the International Crisis Group (ICG 2008) observed that it would be wrong to assume that massive returns are imminent. In the same year, Amnesty International also warned that worldwide media coverage of increased “voluntary returns” and improved security did not alter the true picture — a worsening refugee crisis exacerbated by the failure of the international community to respond in a meaningful way. Other organizations have warned that some Iraqi problems may not only inhibit return but also prompt new displacements. Most important are chronic problems of political tension in Iraq’s northern governorates and intensely violent episodes which affected Baghdad and other cities throughout the summer and autumn of 2009. The reality is that the crisis for Iraq’s refugees and internally displaced is worsening and will remain

a problem requiring international attention for years to come.

The volatile situation in Iraq and the surrounding countries presents UNHCR with a particularly difficult task: to facilitate voluntary return of IDPs (internally displaced persons) and refugees *under appropriate circumstances*. However, is it possible to identify such conditions today? There is compelling evidence to show that very large numbers of IDPs are unable to undertake even short journeys to their original homes. Furthermore, the Iraqi government has done little to assist IDPs or refugees. It is difficult to identify any concrete steps taken by government on behalf of displaced Iraqis. Even U.S. officials recognize these problems, noting that serious efforts on the part the government “are all but non-existent.” A recent UNHCR study (2009) articulated the deep sense of alienation from the Iraqi state and the sense of abandonment which many refugees in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon felt.

It is clear that whatever the size of the refugee population, *very few* are returning to Iraq. A recent UNHCR report (2009) indicated that Iraqis in exile had no intention of returning “under any circumstances.” These findings raise awkward questions for the UNHCR within Iraq, where the agency is still officially preparing for imminent return of “large numbers.” The most striking aspect of this situation is the reluctance of refugees to return *despite their difficulties*. Most have so far enjoyed basic physical security but face serious problems in relation to income, employment, housing, health, and education in the host countries of the Middle East where they are regarded as temporary guests or visitors.

Although mass return is unlikely to occur voluntarily, recent studies suggest that third country resettlement is emerging as a durable solution. For most Iraqi refugees, settlement in the Arab states is not an option. Most refugees in Arab host countries feel they

are marooned, faced by the prospect of long-term exile (some refer to becoming “Palestinized”) and declining interest from governments and support networks. In 2008, some 17,800 Iraqis were settled in third countries in programs supported by UNHCR; the pace of resettlement has since accelerated, with significant numbers of Iraqis admitted to the U.S. In October 2009, UNHCR estimated that some 500,000 Iraqis refugees were in need of resettlement. However, in the current climate of opinion vis-à-vis Iraq, resettlement options are most likely to diminish unless the international humanitarian aid regime reconsiders the way forward.

This brief report identifies key principles for consideration by policy makers — in government, in migration agencies, and in the humanitarian networks. It does not promote policy in detail, for this requires careful elaboration in each state in which Iraqis have sought security. It suggests, however, that unless certain principles underpin policy in general, governments and agencies will shortly be confronted with new and unwelcome emergencies.

1. It is essential to recognize formally the scale and seriousness of displacement within and from Iraq, and the possibility of further mass movements related to profound problems of insecurity, especially in the country’s northern regions.

2. False expectations of return may induce IDPs and refugees to make impractical or even dangerous journeys to inhospitable locations. There must be no attempts at forced repatriation.

3. Any realistic prospect of mass return can only be associated with sustained efforts by the government in Iraq to support displaced people — by tackling problems of access to land and property, employment, income, and general welfare.

4. Robust arrangements for protection of Iraqis in exile are essential: local “tolerance” is at best a short-term

measure. Relevant agencies should consider how to liaise with governments of the Middle East to produce an integrated approach.

5. Notwithstanding the reluctance of some states to accept Iraqis, resettlement programs are essential if refugees are not to be isolated and marginalized in the Middle East, leading more to enter irregular migration networks — with all their associated dangers.

Much more research is needed to discover the scale of current displacement, the changing circumstances and patterns of movement of Iraqis, and the implications for governments and NGOs within and beyond the Middle East. This should address current realities with full seriousness, avoiding partial or partisan approaches and the temptation to “distort” or to ignore unwelcome realities.

For more information, please visit <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/PDFs/RSCPB4-Iraqs-refugees.pdf>.

* This report summarizes the Forced Migration Policy Briefing #4 of the Refugee Studies Centre of the University of Oxford, which was presented at a one-day event in April 2010 in collaboration with the Regional Human Security Centre (RHSC) in Amman, Jordan, under the patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND IRAQI PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. TROOPS IN IRAQ (2003–2009)

ROCHELLE DAVIS AND OMAR SHAKIR*

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the proposal of a new counterinsurgency doctrine in late 2006, culture has been named as key to the success and failure of U.S. military operations. However, little research has been conducted to understand how Iraqis themselves perceive the U.S. efforts in the realm of cultural awareness and sensitivity. With TAARII funding, we conducted and analyzed over forty interviews with Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria, and the U.S. on the subject of their experiences with U.S. troops in the culture realm. We explore in this research how Iraqis characterize interactions with American troops, whether they feel that soldiers took Iraqi culture and norms into consideration in their day-to-day interaction, and whether they find such efforts significant in the context of military occupation. This research is one component of a larger research project on cultural training and the U.S. military.¹

The Iraqi narratives that emerged from our research shed new light on the contemporary debate on culture and the U.S. military. Interviewees pointed to a gradual deterioration in both the quantity and quality of interactions from 2003 to 2009. Many interviewees

said that they took a wait-and-see approach in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, but their opinions shifted with the accumulation of what they felt were undeserved humiliations and violent assaults that befell them or their families. Iraqi feelings of dehumanization and disenfranchisement, in turn, produced fear and in some cases resistance to the U.S. troops, who were seen by all Iraqis we interviewed as occupiers, even if the Iraqis were pro-invasion, and pro-U.S. Anger at the nameless, faceless soldiers who manned checkpoints and invasively searched homes and stole things from them was coupled with the fact that everyone we interviewed had a family member going about their daily life who was injured or killed by American troops (in their car, on their roof, in their home or garden, walking down the street, etc.).²

At the same time, however, almost all of our interviewees brought up examples of honest and decent servicemen and women with whom they had personal interactions. In describing their experiences, Iraqis expressed a nuanced understanding of the American troops, couching their discussions about their interactions in terms of regular troops

versus Special Forces, officers versus enlisted, and professional soldiers versus new recruits. The Iraqi interviewees exhibited a remarkable ability to understand, relate to, and even empathize with the plight of the individual soldier, whose conduct they tied to legitimate feelings of fear and insecurity. They expressed the belief that soldiers learn from their experiences and improve their conduct over time, and yet they are constantly being rotated and new recruits are taking their places.

In the context of the bloodshed and mayhem of the invasion and the occupation, Iraqis largely reject the importance ascribed to cultural sensitivity or cultural knowledge, emphasizing instead basic human values and the need for the U.S. to respect Iraqis as individuals and as a country. In spite of acknowledging the variation within the U.S. military and positive experiences with some U.S. troops, the vast majority of Iraqis attributed the behavior of the U.S. servicemen and women to an institutional and contextual root, and assign blame to the overarching U.S. system of military and governmental domination and control. Many found the question of culture insignificant in the context of a brutal occupa-

tion and unrelenting sectarian violence, challenging prevailing notions about culture, power, and war and the foundations underlying the approach that seeks to win “hearts and minds.”

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¹ For more on this subject, see Rochelle Davis, “Culture as a Weapon System,” in Middle East Report (MERIP) No. 255, July 2010 (<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer255/davis.html>); and Rochelle Davis with Dahlia

Elzein and Dena Takruri, “Iraqi Culture and the US Military: Understanding Training, Experiences, and Attitudes,” in *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, edited by John Kelley, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean T. Mitchell, and Jeremy Walton (University of Chicago Press: 2010), pp. 297–310.

² We acknowledge that these are the stories that Iraqis reported to us, and we did not request other proof of their experiences.

TRANSCRIBING AN UNWRITTEN LANGUAGE: IRAQI-ARABIC

KAMALA RUSSELL AND ATOOR LAWANDOW*

In the spring term, 2010, Kamala Russell and Atoor Lawandow of the McNeill Language and Gesture Lab at the University of Chicago held a series of three workshops entitled “Transcribing an Unwritten Language: Iraqi-Arabic.” The workshops were held at the Landhal Center in the Social Sciences building. The aim the workshops was, first, to open up a discourse between people who work on Arabic language in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and those working in linguistics and other related social sciences about the issues and problems related to transcribing spoken Iraqi-Arabic (IA). Secondly, the workshops also aimed to act as a way of introducing the university community to the McNeill Lab’s Iraqi-Arabic data corpus, i.e., its size, how it was collected, and how it is currently being used by the Lab in different research studies. This, it is hoped, will encourage those wishing to work on IA to utilize the data in the future.

The McNeill Lab is a gesture and psycho-linguistics lab in the Psychology department at the University of Chicago. The project in which we deal with Iraqi-Arabic is the Rapport Project that hopes to study the gesture and non-speech behavior that enables, or disables, rapport across

different cultural groups.

The first workshop was an introductory discussion about IA. Attendees were given handouts of transliterated simple phrases for conversation, which they practiced together as a group. This activity was incorporated into the workshop after seeing that many of those who attended were eager to practice speaking IA, especially given the fact that during the spring term Levantine and Egyptian-Arabic classes were being offered at the university and many were curious to see how these different dialects compared. Additionally, given most of the attendees’ previous but varying knowledge of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), they were interested in seeing how IA differs grammatically and phonologically from it by seeing it in transliteration and practicing speaking it.

The second workshop intended to introduce the basic grammatical peculiarities of IA, and to discuss their transcription and transliteration. The discussion of the phonetic and phonological difficulties in transliterating IA was expanded into one about the orthography appropriate for the transcription of certain aspects of the morphology. These grammatical constructions and morphemes often do not exist in MSA or Classical Arabic, and there are questions as to how to spell

them or whether to represent them as bound or unbound morphemes. For example, in IA, *akhadhuliyyaha* (“they took it for me”) consists in a base verb, inflected for a person, a morpheme directing the action towards the person it is inflected for, and an object pronoun. It would be glossed as such: 3rd.pl.took.for.1st.sg.it.fem.sing. In Classical Arabic, the “for me” morpheme is unbound, and the object pronoun would typically take a different form. Therefore, it was decided through the course of this workshop that it was best to consider these morphemes as bound ones that agglutinate together to form one IA word.

The final workshop focused on the question as to whether saying that IA is an “unwritten” language might be a misleading statement. IA is encountered in a written form through different media: Internet, email, print, etc. The workshop explored how these mediations influence IA transcription conventions in an academic context. Attendees were presented with a variety of these media, from the scholarly and “respectable” to the non-academic and “low culture.” Examples such as screen-grabs from Arabic messaging boards on Youtube and Facebook where chat-Arabic (Dardasha Arabic) often appears were presented to workshop attendees.

Another source presented in this workshop as offering an alternative transcription of IA was the scholarly work of al-Shaykh Jalal al-Hanafi al-Baghdadi (1914–2006), who was an Iraqi Islamic scholar, journalist, writer, and musician. Al-Baghdadi undertook the collection of popular sayings from Baghdad beginning in 1935, which then culminated in his two-volume work, *Baghdadi Adages* (*Amthāl Baghdādiyya*), in 1962. What is useful about this work is that al-Baghdadi transcribes the proverbs in IA and then provides a brief explanation of them in MSA, so one may find in this work a possible transcription convention for many commonly-used

IA words and phrases.

Another medium showing IA in written form that was presented in this workshop were United Nations propaganda leaflets dropped by U.N. Coalition Forces in different parts of Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War. Like the al-Baghdadi source, these also provide an alternative transcription style for IA. What was interesting to notice about these leaflets was that IA was inscribed alongside cartoon drawings, and it made references to popular culture and current events from that time. Thus a study of a combination of multiple media in which IA appears would probably yield a balanced picture of IA culture.

The workshops were very successful in what they had aimed to achieve. They were generally attended by undergraduate students of Arabic and Persian, although their backgrounds were different, and graduate students from the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Linguistics and Near Eastern and Languages and Civilizations departments.

For copies of the handouts used in this workshop, visit taarii.org.

* Kamala Russell is a third year in the Linguistics Department in the College and Atoor Lawandow is a MA student in the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, both at the University of Chicago.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERMARRIAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS ON TAARII'S IRAQI ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Preliminary analysis of the life histories of more than 130 Iraqis living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen suggests that political identities generated by intermarriages become a site of conflict at times of heightened tension when sectarian and ethnic identities prevail and national identity is marginalized. The famous Iraqi saying, "Women are the roots of plants," refers not only to the fact that women nurture their own groups, but also to the importance of women's marriages in creating new and lasting relations among groups as in the case of out-marriages.

The questionnaire used in TAARII's Iraqi Oral History Project includes a section on the marriages of every male and female in the narrator's extended family for four or five generations. Analysis of the data on marriage patterns suggests that endogamous marriage was predominant between 1900 and the 1940s, and that mixed marriages were limited to the Ottoman-trained elites during that period. These were all Sunnis of Arab, Turkish, Kurdish,

or Turcoman origins. The male partners were generally educated at the military school in Istanbul, were high-ranking officers in the Ottoman army and later in the Iraqi army, or were high-ranking officials. In most cases, the partners' extended families lived in the same quarter and inter-married with each other.

The following is an illustrative case. Salwa is a 90-year-old Sunni Arab woman who comes from a prominent family of high-ranking state officials. Her mother's family, the descendants of Arabized Georgian Mamluks who turned Muslim Sunni, belongs to what can be called the old aristocratic administrative class. All the male members born before the foundation of the Iraqi nation-state lived part of their lives in Istanbul, were educated in the military academy there, and occupied high-ranking positions in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Iraqi state. One of Salwa's grandmother's contemporary relatives was a general in the Ottoman army and served as the

Minister of Defense in the years 1910 to 1911 and later held a high-ranking government position. In the 1930s, his brother became a high-ranking official in Iraq. Her father's family, who are of Arab-Iraqi origin, lived in Diyarbakir, in present-day Turkey, for generations. Her paternal grandfather and his brother were sent to Iraq on a mission from the Ottoman government: the first to settle the Turcoman along the northern Iraq-Iran borders, and the second to settle the Arab nomads along the southern Iraq-Iran borders.

As was the practice in late Ottoman period and in the early days of the Monarchy whereby old prominent administrative families married into families of their social class, Salwa's father's family and her mother's family married out into Turkish families and into old prominent bureaucratic-landed Sunni sada families from Baghdad, such as the al-Gailanis, an Arab family, and al-Haydaris, a Kurdish family. Later, they married into affluent Sunni merchant families, such as

al-Shahbandars and the Chalibis, who later changed their name to al-Qadi. The descendants of two half-brothers also intermarried. Salwa herself is married to a Sunni Arab of a prominent merchant-landed family whose family was a neighbor of hers.

Marriage establishes a socially significant relationship of affinity between spouses and their families. In marrying out into families of the same class, the old elite families, who were ethnically heterogeneous and homogenous by sect, created and maintained intergroup alliances, thereby solidifying and increasing their network of allies and extending their political and social ties outward.

Until the 1950s, marriage was predominantly arranged by the family. Once a young man came to marriageable age, the family's grown up females began the search for a "proper" spouse for him from a pool of prospective candidates. In their search, preference was given to young women who were considered "of [their] own sort," socially and often in terms of religion. Preference was also given to potential partners drawn from the pool of the family's acquaintances.

The city morphology based on mahallah (neighborhood), whereby the different Baghdadi ethnic and religious groups tended to live in separate quarters and extended families in the same mahallah next to each other, quite often sharing the same courtyard, encouraged endogamous marriages. The mahallah culture made it possible for the affluent and prominent families of Hayderkhana, a homogeneous neighborhood where Salwa's family lived, to marry out of their ethnic group. Similarly, it made it possible for residents of other heterogeneous mahallahs to marry in.

Starting from the early 1950s, the number of intermarriages among the various socio-religious and ethnic groups began to increase — especially within the middle class. Several factors

helped to bring this about: the change in the city's morphology, the empowerment of women through education, and the emergence of a public sphere (clubs, societies, political parties), where men and women from different ethnic backgrounds, faiths, and sects could meet and get to know each other. Young, educated Iraqis began to break away from arranged marriages and opt for love matches.

Another case illustrates this pattern. In the 1950s, Wafa, a Sunni from a middle-class family, was a student of mathematics at Teachers' College in Baghdad. In her second year, she met Hussein, who was studying English literature at the same college. Hussein was a Shiite from a middle-class, educated family. Wafa and Hussein were both members of the communist party and took part in cultural activities organized by the party and their academic departments. They had much in common, fell in love, and got married despite the disapproval of each of their families.

Despite the long-term, gradual increase in the number of intermarriages, mixed unions are still met with disapproval, although less so by the middle class, who consider themselves more tolerant to differences. Quite often couples that are contemplating intermarriage are pressured by their families, relatives, and friends not to consummate the marriage. Women are sometimes harassed by their families to prevent the marriage, and are denounced if the marriage is consummated.

In another case, Nisrin, a 55-year-old Chaldean woman, comes from a working-class family. She grew up in 'Aqd al-Nasara, the Christian mahallah. In her youth, she made friends with her next-door neighbors, an Assyrian working-class family. She liked their eldest son, but when he proposed to her, she was hesitant to accept. "Chaldeans don't like to marry their daughters to Assyrian men for fear that he

would divorce her one day. The Assyrian church allows for divorce," Nisrin explained. His mother kept inviting her to nice meals and convinced her that she should marry her son. The couple eloped and got married in the Assyrian church. Her family was outraged and denounced her. The couple had to move to another mahallah, hoping that time would take care of her family's wrath.

A study of intermarriage in Northern Ireland shows that the number of intermarriages decreases at times of heightened tension.¹ The same can be argued in the case of Iraq. During the Iraq-Iran war, the state viewed the marriages of Iraqis of Arab descent and Iraqis of supposedly Persian descent in political terms and encouraged the annulment of such marriages. Likewise, the eruption of the sectarian conflict in 2006 between Shiite and Sunnis in Baghdad and the attempt of each party to create its homogenous territories forced many Shiite-Sunni couples to divorce. An interesting case illustrates this: Khadija is a 55-year-old Sunni woman married to Muhammad, a Shiite university professor. They have two daughters, aged 22 and 24. In 2006, the family had to leave Baghdad and come to live in Amman. In Jordan, they applied for resettlement in a European country through UNHCR, Jordan, and were accepted by Holland. Khadija and her two daughters left Jordan for Holland in December 2009 with the understanding that Muhammad, who was then teaching at a private university in Amman, would follow them at the end of the academic year. Four months later, the wife filed for divorce. A sheikh in Holland whom she consulted issued her a fatwa stating that "a Sunni woman married to Shiite lives in adultery."

¹ Hastings Donnan, 2000, "Private Acts and Public Violence: Interfaith Marriages in Northern Ireland," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 2(2): 15-32.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

DR. STEPHANIE PLATZ

TAARII Members may be aware that each year we aim to make it possible for several Iraqi scholars to participate in international conferences. Our intentions have sometimes been frustrated by the difficulty of obtaining visas to the U.S., making it a challenge to plan successful panels. This year, we were pleased to have been able to sponsor a panel at the World Congress of Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) in Barcelona. TAARII Board Member, Dina Khoury, chaired "Iraq in the 1990s: Cultural and Political Trends," which included presenters Ali Bader, Haider Saeed, Dhiaa Al-Asadi, and Joseph Sassoon. Please look to the spring issue of the TAARII Newsletter (6-1) for selections from the papers presented. The same issue will provide a condensed version of a TAARII-sponsored lecture by Jeff Spurr at the Center for Middle East Studies of the University of Chicago in April. The lecture, "Devastation and Controversy: Consequences of the U.S. Invasion for Iraqi Archives and Archival Documents since 2003" chronicled damage done to

specific collections, the state of efforts to rehabilitate existing institutions, and case studies of ongoing controversies over seized documents.

On a positive note with respect to Iraqi collections, we are happy to report that the TAARII library is growing in Amman, where it resides temporarily until we are able to relocate to Baghdad. Last June, twenty-five additional boxes of donated books arrived from the U.S. TAARII Library Fellow, Katie Johnson, is cataloging the collection in both English and Arabic. We will be using the Library of Congress system on our shelves and will also establish an online public access catalog (OPAC) to display TAARII records. A WorldCat template will be filled for each item, which will be added to the overall catalog and uploaded to the Online Community Library Center (OCLC) through the Digital Library for International Research, which has generously assisted us in the endeavor. We hope that soon our catalog will be available online. TAARII Fellows, Research Affiliates, and Members are welcome to

use the library for their research while in Amman.

In 2010, we carried out our first survey of TAARII Fellows to assess whether or not our fellowship programs and services are meeting the needs of the scholarly community to the best of our ability. We were happy to discover that all of those who responded to the survey do read our newsletter and that those who have been able to participate in TAARII conferences and events have found them valuable unanimously. We plan to continue to survey our membership regarding ways that we can better serve the Iraqi Studies community. In the meantime, we plan to continue our existing programs, including a U.S. university lecture tour in 2011 and a 2011 TAARII Fellows conference in Beirut, to examine to consequences of the Sanctions regime for Iraq.

We hope to see as many readers as possible at our first TAARII reception at MESA in San Diego in November 2010. Please check the TAARII website for the date and time.

For information on how to become a TAARII member, visit www.taarii.org.

NEW TAARII PROGRAM: RESEARCH AFFILIATES IN JORDAN

TAARII is pleased to announce the creation of a Research Affiliate status, for U.S. scholars working on Iraq, while based in Amman, Jordan. As increasing numbers of American researchers undertake Iraq-related research in Jordan, TAARII aims to support their needs and work and to include them in the broader, TAARII community.

For more information about the benefits of the Research Affiliate status and details of how to apply, visit the website, www.taarii.org.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS, COMMENTS, & SUGGESTIONS

To submit articles, images, or announcements in either *English or Arabic*, please email Katie Johnson at katie@taarii.org for submission details. The deadline for the spring issue of the TAARII Newsletter is **December 1, 2010**.

For all other inquiries, comments, and suggestions, please visit our website, www.taarii.org.

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The annual deadline for submission of applications to the *U.S. Fellows Program* is December 15, 2010, for projects beginning as early as March 2010. The annual deadline for the *Iraq Fellows Program* is December 15, 2010. Applications from U.S.-Iraqi collaborative teams are welcome on a ROLLING basis. Teams of individual U.S. and Iraqi scholars wishing to collaborate may request up to \$14,000. For additional information, please visit the TAARII website: www.taarii.org. To submit a collaborate proposal, contact info@taarii.org.

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ABOUT TAARII

TAARII has been formed by a consortium of universities, colleges, and museums, which comprise its institutional membership. Each institution names a person to act as its representative on the Board of Directors. Individual Members elect additional Directors. The Officers, along with two members of the Board of Directors, comprise the Executive Committee, which is charged with assuring academic integrity, organizational oversight, and financial and programmatic accountability.

TAARII is a non-governmental organization and is incorporated in the state of Illinois as a not for profit organization and has 501(c)3 status with the Internal Revenue Service.